




Speech By
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APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; STATE FINANCIAL INSTRUCTIONS AND METWAY MERGER AMENDMENT BILL

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (4.36 pm): Queenslanders are facing a series of interconnected crises. The housing crisis and the cost-of-living crisis are bringing people to their knees. While things are getting tougher and tougher for everyday people, big corporations continue to make huge profits and continue to rip off Queenslanders. While a handful of big companies are allowed to trash our climate more and more every year, our government continues to allow fossil fuel extraction and continues to contribute to overseas conflicts, like Israel's assault on Gaza.

In the midst of all of this, this budget is literally all that Queensland Labor has to offer everyday Queenslanders. In the midst of a housing crisis, the government has no plan to fix social housing wait times or any plan to give renters long-term security in their homes. In the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, the government has unveiled a series of temporary, flashy measures—like cheaper public transport and rego—rather than measures that will actually make people better off in the long term. While our government rolls out the red carpet for developers and big business, it is letting Queensland revenue from royalties stall while our health and education systems are underfunded.

I am standing here today to tell the Treasurer and the Premier that everyday Queenslanders are not going to fall for this. Queenslanders are crying out for the government to step in and deal with these crises in a systemic way, and the government have said that this is all they can do. People's hope for the future is at an all-time low, and these crumbs that Labor are doling out are not going to help.

Queensland's coal royalties have collapsed because this government has squandered the opportunity to share the immense wealth from Queensland's resources boom with regular Queenslanders. Royalties from gas companies will crash by almost 60 per cent over five years and royalties from coal companies will crash by 70 per cent in three years. This means more money stays in the pockets of multinational mining corporations instead of funding our housing, health and education systems.

What the Treasurer announced two years ago as increased coal royalties was always just a temporary bump. Despite the pretend public fight with the Queensland Resources Council, behind closed doors the mining industry has been cheering. The so-called progressive royalties scheme introduced in 2022 was only ever designed to kick in when coal prices remained astronomically high. The government always knew that coal prices would fall and the royalties would fall with them.

The government's only press release said that the new progressive royalty regime will minimise impacts on the coal industry. The coal industry must be pleased to have its political wing, the Labor Party, running government. When the government minimises the impacts on the coal industry, we minimise funding for the services that everyday Queenslanders need. If the government had introduced

a 35 per cent royalty rate like the Greens have proposed, we would have raised an extra \$21 billion last year. With that money we could have abolished school fees by fully funding state schools, permanently made public transport free and built hundreds of thousands of new public homes.

The cost-of-living and housing crises are breaking people. Queenslanders are struggling like never before. People are sleeping in tents and cars, and thousands more are just one rent increase away from homelessness. For those who have scraped together just enough to buy their own home, rising interest rates are making it harder and harder to meet mortgage repayments. After Queenslanders pay their rent or mortgage, food, electricity, phone, health care and school costs, there is often very little left. Queensland leads the nation with the highest increases to energy, insurance and health costs over the last year. Queenslanders will enjoy electricity rebates, but there is nothing to stop the privatised electricity retailers from ripping people off once the rebates end. We will get cheaper public transport, but only for six months. There is more money for homelessness services, but still long wait times for social housing. Short-term money here and there is not going to cut it. This budget is like giving Queenslanders an umbrella in a hailstorm.

Let's look at what is in the budget to address the housing crisis. Twenty-one months: that is how long, on average, Queenslanders with high or very high needs are waiting for social housing in our state. The target was 12 months—still unambitiously high—but 21 months is the longest wait time in recorded history. It has been steadily increasing in recent years, despite all of the ways the government has been trying to hide this. Despite the numerous flashy housing strategies released in the past nine years, these basic facts speak for themselves. The number of social homes has barely increased. Labor has been in government for nine years and there are now fewer social homes per Queensland resident than there were in 2015. It is three years since the government announced its Housing Investment Fund, touted as a multibillion dollar investment through some pretty disingenuous accounting, and not a single new dwelling built under that program is housing a single person. The government's housing policies have been a failure. The proof is right here in the budget. Queenslanders are waiting nearly two years for social housing. How many people have been evicted or forced out of their homes by massive rent increases while waiting in Labor's housing purgatory?

We are pleased that, after huge pressure from the community and the housing sector, there is more funding for emergency temporary accommodation while people wait for permanent homes, but the millions of dollars poured into hotels and temporary fixes will never solve the underlying problem, which is the rapidly rising cost of housing thanks to huge rent increases and tax concessions for investors. It is now going to take years to build the scale of public housing that we need to fix this mess. In the meantime, Queenslanders desperately need bold action to bring down the cost of housing like an emergency rent freeze. Labor's refusal to limit rent increases or give renters a guaranteed right to lease renewal is unconscionable when they are making people wait nearly two years for social housing. Where are these people meant to go? We are seeing exactly where—people sleeping in their cars or in tents in parks.

The housing crisis is breaking people. More and more people are sleeping in tents and cars and thousands more are just one rent rise away from homelessness. This is literally all Labor has to offer—the Help to Buy scheme that will drive up the cost of housing. There is hardly any new public money for public housing. The stage 2 rental reforms are done with no rent cap. This budget is all Labor has.

We know that the government can cap rents. In fact, just a few weeks ago we legislated rent caps for people in manufactured homes. The government had rightly recognised the pressure that has been put on people in manufactured homes, particularly people on fixed incomes, facing huge rent increases. The manufactured homes caps are still too lax, capping rent at the increase of the consumer price index or 3.5 per cent, whichever is higher, but the government are content to kick the other 1.7 million Queensland renters under the bus.

The justification the minister gave at the time regarding the manufactured homes rent cap is that rents have risen faster than wages. This is also the case for over 1.7 million renters in Queensland. In the last three years rents have risen three times faster than wages, but Labor and the LNP will not do anything to take on the development industry. Both Labor and the LNP will not do anything that would actually cause property prices to fall, and this means they will not do anything about out-of-control rent increases or the fact that renters can be turfed out of their home every six months. This means that Labor and the LNP are incapable of doing anything about the housing crisis. Labor's budget is tinkering around the edges of a broken system. While Queenslanders are struggling like never before, year after year, the government announces record spending on social housing, but Queenslanders can see right through this when wait times keep blowing out and the rent keeps going up.

Let's look at education funding. After a decade and a half of arguments about needs-based funding, we know what funding our state school system needs to do its job. This means that we know quite accurately how badly Labor is underfunding this system. The education department itself has said that state schools should receive a minimum of 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard, SRS. Because the Commonwealth kicks in 20 per cent of funding at the moment, Queensland should be kicking in 80 per cent, but we are far from that. The Queensland government kicks in just 70.5 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard. This means that Queensland state schools receive 90.5 per cent of the funding they need. This means more pressure on teachers and staff and increasing pressure on families to pay huge out-of-pocket expenses to cover the funding shortfall. Families are paying hundreds, if not thousands, every year for basics like stationery, textbooks, software, excursions, uniforms, and art and sports programs. Every year, thousands of Queensland families go into debt to cover costs for their kids' state schools. We have even heard from parents who have had no choice but to borrow money from friends and family or even go without basics themselves to have enough to cover the costs at their kids' school.

How can this government think it will fix any of the systemic issues in our state education system—like the teacher shortage, overcrowding or school disciplinary absences—when our state schools are wilfully underfunded by almost 10 per cent? There is a marginal increase in funding for state schools, but the budget notes that negotiations with the federal Labor government for the next National School Reform Agreement are still underway. After nine years of Labor government, we are still nowhere near a fully funded state school system.

There is huge pressure on our health and hospital system, with little plans to change that. We are pleased to see an increase to Queensland Health's operating budget—\$4.3 billion over four years, with funding for priority investment areas like free vaccinations for Queenslanders. Some initiatives, like the Queensland Community Pharmacy Scope of Practice Pilot, are shadier. At any rate, this brings the total health budget from \$24.1 billion in the current financial year to \$26.7 billion in the next. To put that in context, this increase of less than \$2 billion is less than one-tenth of the \$21 billion we could have raised as a state if we had meaningful royalties rates. Imagine how many more doctors and nurses we could employ, or how many free GP clinics we could run, if the government was properly taxing mining corporations. I think about the doctors and nurses who helped me in hospital and think about how additional funding and additional staffing would help them.

What this budget proves is that if you want real, positive change, you are going to have to fight for it and you are going to have to vote for it. It is clear that Labor will never take action because it is the right thing to do; they take action when they are forced into it. It is clear that pressure works. Labor is terrified of what happens when ordinary people get organised to fight for changes that will improve their own lives. Here in Queensland, we have gained a taste of what that collective power looks like. After years of the Greens campaigning for free public transport and pressure from the community paying huge amounts of money for public transport, this budget contains 50-cent public transport fares for six months. Of course, the government should just make it free, but this change is as a result of pressure from the Greens and pressure from the community, forcing the government to act. After years of campaigning, my community stopped the Gabba stadium redevelopment, saving a park and billions of dollars in public money, thanks to collective action.

All of the good stuff in this budget is Greens policy. Collective community pressure has helped secure cheaper public transport fares, more money for school meals and more money for kids sport—policies lifted directly from our policy portfolio. We would like to see a lot more funding to guarantee meals for all state school kids and sport for all Queensland kids but it is clear that Labor, terrified of losing the election, has realised Greens policies are popular and effective and they have started to implement them. Labor members are under threat from the Greens in seats like McConnel, Greenslopes, Cooper and Miller. It is no wonder that they are pushing the government to pick up even more Greens policies. This is how we will win a rent freeze; this is how we will win fully funded and free state schools; this is how we will win tens of thousands of new public homes; and this is how we will win an increase to royalties in the mining sector—by making the political establishment feel the pressure.

The Greens will be taking this pressure up to Labor and the LNP in the lead-up to the state election. Instead of temporary short-term sugar hits, this government could invest in the things that will genuinely make life better for Queenslanders. Instead of lining the pockets of energy retailers, they could bring the energy system back into public hands. Instead of wasting millions of dollars on a private ticketing system and an exclusive private deal with Airtrain, this government could make public transport permanently free. Instead of bumping up the stamp duty thresholds—as if anyone will be able to keep up with skyrocketing mortgage payments—this government could take on the real estate lobby by freezing rents, taxing vacant land and building a heck of a lot more public housing.

We have seen what the government will do when it feels the pressure. Now it is over to us—the Greens and the community—to exert that pressure. The small gains we have seen on cheaper public transport and more money for meals and sport for schoolkids shows that we can make a difference and force the government to listen to us. If we want a rent freeze, cheaper energy from a system that is back in public hands and a hospital and school system that can actually do its job, it is time to stand up and tell the government that it works for Queenslanders—not the mining industry.