




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (7.54 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the 2024 budget bills. This budget is criminally short-sighted. Communities across the state are suffering and it feels like the major parties just do not get it. Rents are up. Mortgage costs are higher. Over the last year Queensland has had the biggest increase to energy, insurance and health costs in the country. Supermarket price gouging, interest rates and school fees add extra pressure while wages continue to lag behind. It is a perfect storm, but it is one that is not going to end anytime soon without real change, and this budget offers no hope of that. What does it offer? Short-term relief. As the member for South Brisbane put it, it is like an umbrella in a hailstorm—a bandaid on a bullet wound, maybe.

Almost every cost-of-living measure in this budget is set to expire just as this Labor government seems to think it is going to be turfed out. Discounted public transport fares, one-off energy rebates, more sports vouchers and cheaper rego will all be gone next year while the cost-of-living crisis and the housing crisis are not going to disappear next year. Labor has apparently given up on making any real change. Labor's short-term royalty sugar hit is effectively over.

After just a couple of years of play fighting with the QRC, Labor is already backing down from its pathetic, predictably brief attempt to make mining companies pay a fair share. Over a three-year period these mega profitable gas companies will hand over 60 per cent less in total royalties. In coal companies it will be 70 per cent less. They are back to robbing Queenslanders absolutely blind. That is the part that Labor is not saying out loud: they will not commit to real change. They cannot commit to real, long-term changes because they will not make corporations pay their fair share to fund it.

A 35 per cent mining royalty rate, like the Greens proposed, would have raised an extra \$21 billion last year. With that kind of revenue we could have permanently made public transport free, funded hundreds of thousands of public homes and abolished school fees by fully funding our state schools. Imagine that. Instead, Labor is letting coal royalty revenue crash from \$15.4 billion in the 2022-23 financial year to just \$4.8 billion in 2025-26. That is billions of dollars ripped out of Queensland's schools, hospitals and housing just as Labor's election sweeteners run out.

Mr Head interjected.

Mr BERKMAN: Let me be very clear: this is not inevitable. It is not just geopolitics, international trade patterns or the winds of change, as Labor would have us believe. The major parties want us to believe that it is impossible for good times to last, but they hold the levers. In Norway, 55 per cent of all revenue from oil and gas goes to fund things that people in Norway really need. Here, over the last 10 years big mining corporations have exported \$634 billion worth of Queensland resources—those are our resources—and paid only nine per cent of that in royalties. In fact, to go to the tinfoil hat brigade

over here, you could cut fossil fuel exports by 10 per cent over the next year and still make an extra \$19 billion in royalties by increasing the rate like the Greens have proposed. Instead, Queenslanders are looking down the barrel of a huge revenue crash and a worsening cost-of-living and housing crisis.

In the last year, wait times for social housing have increased. Queenslanders with high needs are now waiting 21 months—almost two years—on average for social housing. I understand that is the longest wait time in Queensland's history. Even under the LNP, before these clowns took power, average wait times were 8½ months—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Pause the clock. I will get some advice. Member for Maiwar, you have the call.

Mr BERKMAN: Before Labor took power, under the LNP wait times were about 8½ months. Yes, wait times are longer now because we are in the middle of a health crisis—

Mr KELLY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I would suggest that the member has not used correct titles in his contribution. I would ask for your ruling in relation to that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will take some advice. Member for Greenslopes, thank you for your point of order. I did not hear the member for Maiwar refer to any member in particular by an improper title but I remind the member for Maiwar to please ensure that he uses proper titles when referring to all members in every context.

Mr BERKMAN: Of course, Deputy Speaker. The member for Greenslopes is a delicate petal, isn't he, but I will carry on. Yes, wait times are longer because we are in the middle of a housing crisis and again the government wants to outsource—

Mr KELLY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I am far from a delicate petal but I do take offence and ask that that be withdrawn.

Mr BERKMAN: The irony.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar, would you withdraw, please? The member has taken personal offence.

Mr BERKMAN: I withdraw. Tell me: who sold off hundreds of social homes? Who supported tax concessions for big investors while underfunding social housing? Who folded to the REIQ again and again, preserving the right for landlords to kick out tenants at the end of their lease even when it makes them homeless? Who repeatedly refused to limit rent increases despite calls from not just the Greens but also organisations like QCOS? This government did! Members over there should not put on their sad faces and tell us it is unfortunate that Queenslanders have landed in housing stress when they did nothing to stop it. In fact, they have actively made it worse by putting the property lobby ahead of renters and first home buyers.

Every year, like clockwork, this government tells us that there is record spending on social housing but in reality there are now fewer social homes per Queenslanders than a decade ago. Queensland has the lowest proportion of social housing of any state. The only extra money for social housing in this year's budget looks to be the \$380 million in federal money that the federal Greens secured from federal Labor through negotiation.

The expanded stamp duty discount will obviously be welcome news for some first home buyers, but the major parties' handouts to investors are pushing up house prices at such a pace that it will not go far. Based on the LNP's weak response today—let's call it that—we are in for even worse if they win the election, as Labor seems to have already concluded they will. Seriously, this is an incredibly complex shared equity scheme capped at 1,000 people statewide. We have criticised Labor's own limited scheme for being a lottery, but there are some extraordinarily long odds coming from the LNP. It is depressing to watch both major parties tinker at the edges of a fundamentally broken housing system.

Ms Boyd: Oh!

Mr BERKMAN: Are they really going to try to put up an argument that it is not a fundamentally broken housing system? I hear the groans from the member for Pine Rivers. I wonder how many people are close to homelessness in her electorate.

The same goes for community safety. How many times does the government have to double-down on funding more police and more prisons before they will realise it just does not work? The government has committed \$1.28 billion over five years to its so-called Community Safety Plan but what do they mean by that? They mean half a million dollars for 900 more cops; \$8.5 million for 1,000 new tasers; \$7 million to expand the GPS trackers on kids—a program that so far has been a spectacular failure; an undisclosed amount of money for helicopters and drones for police; and over

\$820 million for new youth prisons so they can succeed in their goal of locking up more and more Queensland kids. Continued investment in expanding police force and surveillance infrastructure can never be effective as prevention.

I acknowledge that the government has also announced some funding for early intervention services, community-led programs and health care to support vulnerable kids before offending occurs. Obviously we welcome that, but the funding discrepancy is so incredibly stark, as always, especially when we know that the police will only ever be responders to those issues. The budget suggests that the only way to better community safety is to lock up more and more people, criminalise more and more people and presumably, at some point, just throw away the key and close our eyes.

In an open letter from dozens of frontline organisations, the government were told, 'We can never imprison our way to a safer community.' In fact, the evidence is very clear that Queensland's criminal legal system is making crime worse. We are hiring more police to put more children in prisons and in watch houses from which they emerge traumatised, alienated from the broader community and robbed of time with crucial services such as health and education. We have the highest rates of detention of children in the country and by their rationale we should be the safest state in the country. They might as well be pouring petrol on the fire and pretending it is water.

What a familiar story that is because they have been doing the same thing on climate change for years. I have said before and I reiterate that the Energy and Jobs Plan is a huge step forward for Queensland. Building huge amounts of publicly owned renewable energy and supporting workers is exactly what we need to transition Queensland's energy system off dirty coal and gas. Labor's clean energy plan comes close to what the Greens proposed at the last election and we are obviously happy about that. Again, in this space the thought of an LNP government is a terrifying one. The LNP now seems so confused and so far behind on climate that it is becoming cringe-worthy. They want to ditch major energy storage projects and build nuclear power instead. They all coincidentally vacated the chamber and 'missed' the vote on the motion from the Katters to drop climate targets, which is a pretty effective wedge, I have to say, based on the federal LNP's comments this week that even a 43 per cent emissions reduction is too much. We can all laugh at Peter Dutton not seeming to know what the Paris agreement is, why it is called that or whatever, but it gets a lot less funny when we remember the crisis we are facing.

Not only is this Labor government still approving new coal and gas mines; they are spending public money to prop up fossil fuel corporations. This budget locks in \$520 million in subsidies for coal and gas companies to greenwash their operations through the Low Emissions Investment Partnerships program—sounds pretty schmick, doesn't it? It means \$70.6 million of public money is being used to clean up mining corporations' mess at abandoned mine sites. Queensland Labor is giving \$21 million in taxpayer dollars to gas companies to open up new gas fields, which is pouring fuel directly onto the fire. More coal and gas projects means more global greenhouse gas emissions, which will heat the atmosphere and drive dangerous climate change for Queenslanders and for everyone else. It is an absolute disgrace that our taxpayer dollars are contributing to that and making it happen.

The most exciting thing about this budget are the little glimmers of green that are shining through. For Queenslanders struggling with the cost of living, 50-cent fares is a big win. The trial sounds awfully familiar to something that the Greens proposed back in 2017. Unfortunately, Labor is copying old homework because, since 2020, we have been calling for them to make public transport free and I will tell the House why. In 2024-25, the state government will pay 92 per cent of the cost of public transport in Queensland—92 per cent. Fares will cover just eight per cent. The government is probably spending more on their privatised ticketing system, the cost of which is still secret, than if they just made fares free. At 50 cents a fare it may well be cheaper to just switch off the fare machines, ditch ticketing altogether, ditch enforcement and ditch the hassle for Queenslanders.

Clearly, the government is half-heartedly taking on Greens policies because we are threatening their seats. Yes, I am looking at the member for Greenslopes, the poor petal. For years now we have been calling for the expansion of free meals programs to every state school and for programs to make club support free for kids. In this budget there is some more money for school breakfasts and a temporary increase to sports vouchers. The Greens are already breaking up the status quo and we are not about to stop here. Clearly, the more people who vote Greens in Queensland the more Queenslanders will get out of this busted Labor government.

I would love to see Labor pick up some of our other ideas. How about freezing rents and giving tenants the right to a lease renewal? What about raising state school funding to at least the needs-based minimum or—what a crazy thought—how about actually raising mining royalties for all coal, gas and other resources?

I am really disappointed that, at a local level, this state budget does not include any funding for new buildings at Indooroopilly State School. They are desperately needed. The community has been begging for them, yet all we have instead in this budget is \$1.2 million for a new security fence. Maybe I missed something, but I have not seen any students learning in a security fence any time recently. Indooroopilly is projected to exceed capacity by almost 900 students next year, as I understand it, even with its tight enrolment restrictions. Recently one of the parents at the school told me that her daughter is avoiding drinking water at school so she does not have to spend her entire lunch break lining up to go to the toilet. The students have already lost their student support rooms, play areas and time in specialist learning spaces such as science labs. This budget confirms that there is no funding for Indooroopilly High. There is no indication of when and how the government will fund additional infrastructure for Toowong State School, where students have again lost half of their oval to demountables. This is their only sizeable play space. They need a permanent solution at these schools. I call on both Labor and the LNP to commit to urgently fund new buildings if they win the next election. I know a lot of parents in my community would like to hear similarly.

The people in my community would also like to know why there is no funding allocated in this budget to make Taringa station accessible or for the bus lanes—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Pause the clock. Sorry, member for Maiwar. Member for Buderim, you accidentally clicked on a microphone. Thank you for turning it off.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I will finish by saying that the *Guardian* called this budget a 'going out of business sale'. There are a couple of ways that we can interpret that. Maybe Labor does not believe it can win the election, so it is spending the inheritance. We deserve more as a state.