




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.28 pm): I rise to make my contribution to the appropriation bills. For everybody in my electorate, the Appropriation Bill is where government have taken your money and decided where to spend it. It outlines their priorities and shows the direction they are heading in. This government have shown the direction they are heading in because they are clearly spending a big chunk of Queensland taxpayers' money in the next four months rather than apportioning it out across the next four years. That shows where their priorities are. Something is coming up on 26 October that falls in the middle of this budget appropriation—that is, the election. Clearly, they want people to think about what they have got in the short term.

We have various crises that have been caused by this aging Labor government in its 10th budget. We have a cost-of-living crisis. Queenslanders have been enduring the steepest cost-of-living pressures in the country, with a 19.9 per cent increase in electricity bills which is almost triple the national average. When people are thinking about what is happening in this budget, they need to understand that one of the things that is happening is that in the long term our electricity bills are skyrocketing here in Queensland.

Across 2023 Queensland saw a 6.7 per cent increase in health costs. That is the highest in the nation. Sometimes we do not want Queensland to be coming first, but we have the highest cost for health in the nation. We had a 4.2 per cent increase in transport costs, which is also the highest in the nation. We had an 8.4 per cent increase in rent costs and an 18.5 per cent increase in insurance costs. These cost increases are forcing families to make devastating choices between which bills to pay and it is significantly impacting on the quality of the lives of Queenslanders.

Why have insurances gone up? One big reason insurances have gone up is that we have had a youth crime crisis. Under the current government we have seen a 115 per cent increase in unlawful use of a motor vehicle, which is when someone takes your car, and a 54 per cent increase in unlawful entry, which is when you find in your house someone you did not invite in who is trying to grab your car keys so they can take your car. People in my community have been terrorised by this crime for far too long. We had various ministers come to Toowoomba and they had a great big talkfest but absolutely nothing happened except crime continued to go up.

We have also had a 50 per cent increase in theft. The one thing Queenslanders want their government to be able to do is to reassure them that not only is their property safe but also their person is safe. However, we have had a 220 per cent increase in assaults. That is unacceptable. I grew up just east of London and it was a pretty violent place. It was one of the reasons I did not want to stay there. I see Queensland starting to head in that direction. It is unacceptable and has to be fixed.

The number of victims of offences against a person has increased dramatically from 25,000 in 2014, when the LNP were in government last, to 81,166 in 2023. That is a 213 per cent rise. What is driving that? Could it be that going into the last election the government made promises about how many officers would be available to deal with these kinds of crimes and they have fallen short by 1,500 police? They are 1,500 below the promise. There are not enough police out there on the beat. I have asked the minister questions in this place. I have asked how many people are on the roster in Toowoomba. Everybody in Toowoomba knows that the roster is down, but the government will not answer the question because they are afraid the community will find out just how thin the blue line has become in Toowoomba.

Queenslanders tell me what their priorities are. They want to be safe in their home and they want to see the end of the cost-of-living crisis, but the crises continue. We have a health crisis with 45 per cent ramping, 60,000 patients on the elective surgery waiting list and a waiting list to see a specialist approaching 300,000 patients. Let me tell you that if you live in Toowoomba that specialist is probably not in Toowoomba because they will not give an increase in the clinical service capabilities of our hospital, even though there is a new one being constructed. I am pleased to see some measly funding going towards that. I see the health and hospital budget capital expenditure has blown out by more than the money they are spending on the hospital. There was \$1.3 billion allotted for our hospital and the blowout is \$1.4 billion. That is the money of Queenslanders being wasted by this government.

We also have a housing crisis. We have seen a fantastic proposal from the LNP on how to deal with the housing crisis. The Premier would not answer the question this morning about whether someone should be able to rent out a room when they have taken advantage of the LNP's proposed stamp duty reductions. Of course they should be able to rent out a room, which is going to be a lot better than the tent in a park that someone is living in. Why shouldn't someone be able to live in that new home? Why shouldn't they help that person pay their mortgage off and get a roof over their head at the same time? It is absolutely ridiculous to suggest that is not a good idea.

In Toowoomba we have an organisation called Protea Place which looks after 2,000 vulnerable women in our area. These are women who find themselves facing DV, who are unexpectedly homeless or who are divorced in the late stages of their life. This government has had meeting after meeting, seven high-level meetings, and a couple of proposals but there is not a single cent in this budget for that service. That is very disappointing.

I want to address a couple of things because people seem to get a little confused about what 'fully costed' means. 'Fully costed' is how much something is supposed to cost, but of course when Labor say 'fully costed' what they are really trying to say is, 'That's the old rubbish we put in our document so we can make things add up. What's actually going to happen is later on we'll come back and tell you how much it's blown out by.' 'Fully costed' means, 'We haven't yet admitted that we're incompetent and it's going to blow out.' Cross River Rail has had a \$4.15 billion blowout, the Coomera Connector has had a \$1.5 billion blowout, and the Logan and Gold Coast Faster Rail has had a \$3.15 billion blowout. When they say 'fully costed', what they mean is, 'Except for when we're so incompetent we actually didn't allocate enough money to build it and we're going to blow that out.'

When they say 'fully funded', what they mean is, 'We will borrow more to be able to pay for this in the future. You will have to pay interest on the money that we're going to borrow so we can fully fund this.' Over the last 10 years this government have borrowed \$100,000 million more than they have collected. That is how much more they have spent to not be able to deliver health services, to cause our housing crisis, to cause the crime crisis, to not have the police on the beat and to not have the facilities we need. They have spent \$100,000 million more than they collected. For anybody who is out there and wants to look it up, that number has 11 zeros in it.

Just to be clear, when we say 'revenue', that is money that Labor will take out of a Queenslanders' pocket. That is what they mean by 'revenue' when they talk about the budget. When they talk about 'debt', that is what Labor have taken out of the next generation's pocket because that debt has to be paid back by someone and that someone is going to be your younger family members. That \$100,000 million is a lot of money. That is not the full size of the debt; that is just what they have borrowed over and above the debt they started with when they came to office.

As we go through the budget, it is really important that we think about what we are trying to achieve to make the lives of Queenslanders better. I can honestly say that borrowing \$100,000 million is probably not going to make their lives better if it is squandered, wasted and blown out by the incompetent government that we see sitting opposite.

What are some things I would like to see being done in Toowoomba? I would like to thank the minister for making sure that the \$2 million for the funding of the Highfields fire station remained in the budget. That is a good thing. It was there last year. We have not been able to spend it. I do not hold the

minister responsible for that. There is a block of land that is the most suitable block of land and we need to work together to get that job done. For 30 years the people of Highfields have been paying an A-class levy and getting a different level of service. They have paid the money and they now deserve the fire station that will give them the appropriate coverage.

We have a turf club that has fantastic night racing but the lights there are a decade past their use-by date. Money was in the budget last year. It did not get the job done and it seems to have evaporated this year. This is generating \$92.1 million value-add in gross state product in our region. We need the lights. They need to be upgraded because they are out of date and they are falling down. If one race meeting goes dark because the lights fail, we lose \$5 million in revenue so it would be a really good idea to spend the money, fix the lights, get rid of the obsolete ones and put new ones in.

In relation to road and public transport infrastructure, I spoke yesterday about the public transport situation. That is disgraceful and something that needs to be fixed in terms of disability access. With regard to our roads, we spent \$2.7 million on doing one of the most awful jobs of consulting with the community. Not a single inch of bitumen was laid. There was a spend of \$2.7 million and a load of community angst, and the whole thing just got thrown out. I refer to the north-south transport corridor, which was completely mishandled by an incompetent government. It is an example of why we should not trust those opposite with the money when they are taking it out of our pockets and suggesting they are going to spend it well.

We have an absence of a 30-year water plan for Toowoomba. We have a pipeline that is going to take water away from Toowoomba, but we actually need a solution for our community to grow with sustainable water. We need to get on track with a couple of things.

We have heard about Olympic legacy. I would like to see an equestrian centre at the showgrounds in Toowoomba. Queensland does not have a facility at which it can hold a Queensland state titles. They are held in Tamworth because Queensland does not have a facility. It is about time we took a serious look at what legacy we could get out of that. More importantly, we do not have adequate changing facilities and toilet facilities for women and disabled at our local grassroots sporting grounds. If you want to leave a legacy from the Olympics you should fund that, because that will make a fundamental difference to the fitness, health and enjoyment of the people in the community that I am privileged to be able to serve and represent.

As we go through this budget, we need to think about what are the alternatives. One of the alternatives we have heard about is our policy around the housing crisis that has been caused by this incompetent government. It is a fantastic policy. It will abolish first home buyer stamp duty on a new dwelling. That is a great thing. It will allow a buyer to get a mate to come and rent a room to help pay the mortgage, plus house someone. Why would someone build a new home and have to have empty rooms while someone is in a tent in the park and unable to find somewhere to rent? If you are not sure about how many rentals are available in Toowoomba, put your name on a list and see if you can find one. There are not a lot available. If someone builds a new house with some empty rooms, I am sure it would be most welcomed by someone to go into that place and have somewhere to live.

The government have tried to make us forget about the blowouts. They try to pretend these blowouts have not happened. We were talking about the billions of dollars—altogether \$13 billion on the headline. People need to think that that is \$13,000 million. That is a lot of money. That is a lot of money that came out of Queenslanders' back pocket and has been given to the government—entrusted to the government—to make people's lives better, and the government has failed miserably. Ten budgets in and they are failing miserably.

There is an opportunity coming for the people of Queensland to make a choice. They will be able to make a choice on 26 October. They can look for an old, tired, incompetent Labor government that has not delivered, that has caused crisis, that has allowed people to enter houses with knives in their hands and take residents' cars, that has not delivered the road infrastructure they need, that has not been able to keep them safe and that has not even been able to house them. It has not even been able to house them! There are people living in tents. People out on the streets in Toowoomba are getting knifed, killed in my main street, because this government cannot secure Queensland.

The choice then is to vote for the LNP. We will make Queensland safer. We will help you get a house. We will fix the health crisis. It is time to show the Labor door in 2024. Everybody has had enough of them!