




Speech By
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**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL; REVENUE
AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.14 pm): I rise to make my contribution on the 2025 budget, the first under this new government. I start by observing that it is clear that the LNP has found itself between a rock and a hard place. They are clearly so desperate to exorcise Campbell Newman's ghosts that they are terrified of accusations of widespread cuts, but, at the same time, they are fundamentally incapable of putting public services and infrastructure ahead of corporate profit and political self-interest. So what do we end up with? A budget that is both boring and surprising, depending on who you ask. I will suggest it is both. It is boring because there is nothing in there that will fundamentally improve the lives of Queenslanders or the natural environment on which we all depend. It is surprising only because the self-professed smart economic managers in the LNP are, in fact, piling on the debt, albeit while continuing to blame Labor for that fact.

I hate to break it to everyone here, but they are both to blame. In this budget, the LNP merely carries on Labor's legacy of letting big mining corporations bleed the state dry, instead of making them pay their fair share in royalties to fund the things Queenslanders really need. On Tuesday I felt like the Treasurer was addressing someone outside the chamber during his speech, and I am not talking about the good people of Queensland. I am talking about the Queensland Resources Council and all their good mates and political donors in the fossil fuel lobby. To quote him: 'They'—meaning Labor—'collected more'—talking about royalties—'in two years than we will collect in four.' I think the Treasurer was bragging when he said that. Someone had better tell the guy that strong economic management actually includes a solid revenue stream. Instead, it seems that the LNP is content to rely on the ordinary people and small businesses of Queensland to prop up the state through petty fines, rego fees and payroll tax. Heaven forbid that our big gas companies—those same companies that pay nothing in corporate tax—foot the bill for Queensland's budget.

Let's not forget that in the last term it was Labor that was too weak to properly raise royalties, even on coal, so while the LNP has not wound back this progress yet—let's see—we can still see that that short-term sugar hit that applied to super high coal profits has, in fact, fallen off a cliff and so has Queensland's budget revenue. If either major party had the guts—excuse me, I withdraw, that is unparliamentary—had the temerity, had the ticker to raise royalties to 35 per cent as the Greens have proposed, we would have an extra \$61 billion over the next four years to give Queenslanders what they deserve. We could be running universal school meal projects. We could have a publicly owned housing developer, free psychology sessions and a better public transport network, but instead the LNP is absolutely intent on propping up coal and gas.

Here is where it gets really embarrassing. It is 2025. Climate disasters continue to ramp up across the globe and yet this budget takes Queensland backwards on renewable energy and the necessary transition. In response to the unravelling global climate and the urgent need to cut emissions to zero, the LNP's response is to build not one, not two, but three gas-fired power stations and to extend the life

of polluting, expensive unreliable coal-fired power stations out beyond 2040. The first of those gas-fired power stations is set to cost \$1 billion, with half a billion going out the door just this year, and so far we have no idea what the others will cost us. Every dollar of that will be charged back to households via higher power bills, all just to avoid investing in renewables and enough energy storage to make the transition. They are ploughing \$931 million of public money into burning more coal and gas, including via CleanCo. This is the government owned corporation that is supposed to be building renewables for the state. They have abandoned Labor's too-slow renewable energy targets and, to top it off, the budget papers reveal they have decided to simply stop checking on our progress on renewables. Right there in black and white it says that the percentage of renewables in our generation mix is now 'a discontinued measure'. This is emerging as a classic approach for this government: do something terrible, like ditching the renewable energy target that the vast majority of Queenslanders support, and then sweep it under the rug to cover the embarrassment.

I have to wonder whether that is exactly what is happening with the extraordinary transparency downgrade in QTRIP in this budget—that is, the register of all public transport projects in Queensland. In the LNP's budget, QTRIP is incredibly stripped back. In fact, it seems any projects that have not been contracted have no cost figures associated with them at all. It even omits figures on publicly available information like funding that is currently allocated to as yet uncontracted projects. Again, this is the government claiming to be trustworthy economic managers, the antithesis of Labor's uncoded chaos, they tell us, so why the secrecy when it comes to transport spending? We do know they have cut cycling infrastructure grants to local governments by \$11 million and pushed out—delayed—a number of transport infrastructure projects as though we are not headed towards a 2032 Olympics deadline.

It is a similar story on housing. The LNP has spent the last eight months presiding over an effective criminalisation of homelessness in Brisbane and Moreton Bay, endorsing unlimited rent increases that are crushing people across the state and rewriting the rules to kick more and more people out of social housing. They then turn around and try to tell us that they are tackling the housing crisis. Forgive me for my scepticism. Looking at the budget, the LNP's crisis housing funding drops off a cliff, from \$153 million this financial year to just under \$30 million in 2026-27. That is a reduction to one-fifth. We have to ask: is that because they are hoping that their cruel policies will just kick people off the social housing waiting list and make enough people permanently ineligible for crisis housing support that they will have solved the budget problem?

Their solution to the failure on renewable energy transition is to just stop measuring it. Their solution to the failure in the housing crisis is to just stop counting. What neither major party will admit is that you cannot fix the housing crisis without taking on the big banks and banning unlimited rent increases. You cannot coax private developers and property investors into providing more affordable housing with endless handouts and special deals. The rent will keep rising; housing prices will keep rising. This is where I almost have to laugh because what else are we to do in the face of such absurdity? The LNP's answer: they have up to 1,000 dreams. The LNP's offer to first home buyers locked out of the market is their so-called Boost to Buy scheme. They will take on up to 25 per cent equity in an existing home and buyers under the income threshold can get in with a two per cent deposit. Here is the thing: the Treasurer has said that Boost to Buy is limited to only 1,000 applicants over two years. There are 1.8 million people renting in Queensland, so the LNP's home ownership scheme may help up to 0.05 per cent of Queensland's renters—up to '1,000 dreams'. Do they realise how absurd it seems: up to 1,000, the Treasurer crows, in a pool of 1.8 million renters?

We do have some obvious echoes in this policy of federal Labor's inadequate Help to Buy plan, which the Greens criticised at the time for being so comically narrow that it offers little more than false hope for the vast majority of people struggling to afford a home. This is what happens when a government cannot bear to release the private property industry's vice-like grip on housing provision. Relying on the profit-driven private sector for any solution that will make an impact will be inflationary on housing. Instead, we should be creating a publicly owned property developer in Queensland to actually buy and develop land for the benefit of Queenslanders in perpetuity. That is effectively what makes this budget so boring; there is a total lack of ambition to create a better life for all Queenslanders.

The most exciting thing the LNP has done since winning the election, I would argue, is to begrudgingly adopt 50-cent fares and club sport vouchers. That is two ideas they lifted from Labor, who took them from the Greens in the first place. As compensation for a 22-year delay in meeting minimum school funding requirements, families get what? They get 100 bucks a year for school expenses. That is 100 bucks a year. I do not know when the Treasurer last looked at a school book list, but that is less than half what it costs for one of my children in grade 1, so families are going to buy one shoe and half a textbook. Oh the largesse, the opportunities people will have!

Meanwhile, teachers are rallying out the front of Parliament House for fair wages and conditions and nurses and midwives are prepared to strike because the LNP refuses to value their work properly. That is not to say that Labor did much better. Let's not forget who froze nurses' and teachers' wages before they froze their own during the COVID pandemic. It is good to see them all out at the union rallies again, but we all know there are limits to Labor's allegiance to workers. It is a little contingent on political expediency and convenience. It was great to see Labor pick up the Greens' plan for publicly owned bulk-billed GP clinics before the last election, even if they only put up a quarter of the 200 public health clinics that we proposed. We are still, of course, waiting for the LNP to do anything of the sort.

According to the major parties, there is never enough money to pay teachers or nurses properly or to fund public health care or education, but seemingly frugal governments turn profligate when it comes to things that they apparently do care about. Up to 1,000 first home buyers can get help over two years, but there is \$3.8 billion for new Olympic venues. Free school meals are a ridiculous fantasy, but building and expanding prisons, including for children, is a multibillion dollar priority. Renewables are irresponsible, but an extra \$400 million or so to extend Callide coal-fired power station is not.

The thing is the LNP has not been able to deliver a budget that is either responsible or ambitious because their eye is not on the ball. They have shifted their focus from economic management to culture wars. They are too busy going after young trans people, social housing tenants, homeless people in parks or First Nations people seeking basic acknowledgement of their sovereignty and humanity; they are so busy with that they refuse to learn the lessons of the federal election when Australians rejected Dutton's Trump-style culture wars and they can barely concentrate on governing as a result.

If they were not so distracted, maybe they would have addressed some of the basic, glaring funding needs that this budget ignores. In my electorate that includes funding for new school buildings, particularly at Indooroopilly State High School and Toowong State School. These schools, especially Indooroopilly State High School, have been struggling with severe overcrowding for years now and enrolments are only projected to increase. At Indooroopilly, even with an oval full of demountables, kids are still missing out on specialist learning spaces, they nearly lost their library recently and I have heard a lot of them are avoiding the bathrooms altogether because the lines are so long.

Indooroopilly State High School enrolments are likely to exceed 3,000 soon, yet the department is only just consulting on new buildings, and this budget offers precisely nothing. It is deeply ironic to me that the government can move so quickly when it comes to punishing children or stripping away their rights to gender-affirming care or rushing through laws to lock more of them up in Queensland's youth detention centres in violation of their human rights, but when it comes to the basic core work that they are elected to do, like ensuring we have enough classrooms for students to learn in, they are moving at a snail's pace.

We are still waiting for funding to fix the Taringa train station in my electorate. I see there is some funding for security upgrades at Indooroopilly station, which is something that the LNP candidate promised at the last election. I have to say I almost wish the LNP was trying as hard to win back Maiwar as they were to keep the member for Moggill in place because the list of pork-barrelling just over the boundary is quite extraordinary to behold. After years of advocacy I am obviously pleased to see funding for the Sylvan Road bikeway and to progress the Toowong to West End green bridge in this budget, although again I wish the LNP would move as quickly on public and active transport as they did on evicting people from social housing or ditching their treaty commitments.

I want to share my disbelief—even anger—at the complete failure to do anything to keep Toowong Private Hospital open. This is a vital mental health facility that has been treating people for decades now. People are terrified that next time they or their family members need critical help it just will not be available. This facility also takes a huge number of overflow patients from the RBH, which I understand is the busiest mental health public hospital facility in the state, so it will directly impact on our state's mental health facilities. There is precedent for the state government to absorb these costs, as we have seen the New South Wales government do.

Part of me wishes there was more to say on the budget. Unfortunately, it seems we are waiting for next year to see if Queenslanders' lives can be offered genuine, transformative change and the things they need.