




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (12.26 pm): If one needed any further proof that what was handed down by the Treasurer on Tuesday was a bad budget it was the contribution from the Deputy Premier who spent all but probably two minutes talking about Labor. As the Leader of the Opposition said, what do those opposite stand for? What are their values? They could not even speak for 15 minutes on what their budget delivers for Queenslanders. They were too caught up in the politics, which sums up this budget perfectly.

I rise to speak on behalf of Queenslanders—the families, the workers, the small business owners, the students—who were hoping that this budget might bring them some relief, some direction or at the very least some honesty. Instead, what they got was a budget full of broken promises and bottlenecks delivered by a bumbling Treasurer—a budget that absolutely slashes cost-of-living help, a budget that guts infrastructure to the tune of \$13 billion, a budget that builds stadiums and venues without the roads, trains or transport infrastructure to help Queenslanders get to them. It is a budget that is literally taking Queenslanders nowhere except deeper into debt and deeper into traffic. This budget will literally make it harder for Queenslanders to get ahead and get around. This should have been the moment that the LNP stepped up and finally delivered on their promises, their chance to show Queenslanders they understand the pressures families are still under and outline a plan for Queensland's future. Instead, their pile of blue documents exposes their true priorities: cutting support for working families, delaying infrastructure and hiding the true state of Queensland's fiscal position. I must say that this is absolutely not a boring budget as some have described or as they would want you to believe; it is a very bad budget.

The future of our great state is not looking particularly bright under those opposite. In their first budget, delivered by the Treasurer on Tuesday, they had said to Queenslanders they would deliver cost-of-living relief for as long as there was a crisis. Clearly, they now think the cost-of-living crisis is all over, but I would urge them to talk to families who are struggling to pay the power bills, to the single mum rationing groceries, to the pensioner wondering if they can afford both medication and their rent this week. So many people have told me how disappointed they were that energy rebates were not continuing, including Shaydee, who said—

I was hoping the LNP government would deliver some energy rebates but, nope, we will still struggle.

Unfortunately for the Premier and Treasurer, you cannot just declare the cost-of-living crisis over and expect everyone to agree. This budget rips away energy rebates, it abandons rego discounts and it walks back investment in essential services. It slashes the infrastructure pipeline by \$13 billion and delays congestion-busting infrastructure projects. It provides more questions than answers when it comes to health. There are no timeframes for delivery of our major hospital builds and expansions. Why should local communities be left in the dark about when they are getting the beds they need? Let us be clear: this budget will leave Queenslanders stuck—stuck in traffic, stuck in emergency department waiting rooms and stuck struggling to make ends meet.

We must also speak about debt. I know those opposite have not wanted to speak about debt. When it suits them they will tell you that they are fiscal conservatives, that they are bringing spending under control and that they are managing the books responsibly. They promised debt would be lower under an LNP government but now the debt projections are higher than when Labor left office. At the heart of this budget is a ticking debt bomb. It was always going to end this way. The LNP promised that they would lower debt, that they would get to a surplus, that there would be no new taxes and that they would not cut anything. It was a magic pudding. We always said that and the budget confirms it.

The warning that S&P Global released about Queensland's financial health after the Treasurer handed down his budget underscores the gravity of this situation. The state's deficit has surged by \$1.7 billion, reaching \$8.6 billion for the next fiscal year, raising concerns. S&P's government ratings director said that this budget 'highlights a sharp deterioration in the state's finances' and the risk to the credit rating 'remains elevated'. The government is now projecting that in 2028 gross debt will be \$27 billion, although that is actually lower than projected in MYFER because there is now a smaller infrastructure pipeline than the Treasurer outlined back in January. The government's deception is not just reckless; it is expensive.

Talking about deception in MYFER, let us not forget the Treasurer's \$23 billion black hole scare campaign from MYFER in January. He claimed Labor left \$23 billion in underfunded legacy issues, but five months later that figure has magically dropped to \$16.6 billion. Where did it go? No-one knows. No minister could tell us whether they have received any of that money. It was clearly funny money. We said that at the time and economists and rating agencies agreed. Queenslanders paid the price literally, with a ratings outlook downgrade and millions in extra interest repayments. We all had to sit through a lot of whingeing, whining, finger-pointing and excuses in the Treasurer's budget speech, but when Labor left office Queensland had a stable credit outlook and lower debt projections. The ratings agencies did not believe the Treasurer when he delivered MYFER and Queenslanders should not believe him now when he says the budget delivers for them. If the LNP want to talk about economic vandalism, they need to take a long hard look in the mirror.

Let us talk about the so-called savings target from this out-of-depth Treasurer. In a bumbling attempt to make the LNP's spending promises balance, he told Queenslanders he could save \$7 billion through Queensland Government Consulting and that included \$757 million in the financial year about to end, yet he has not even established the consulting firm. Now he is trying to move the goalposts through bizarre assumptions and future growth, rather than deliver real savings. Instead, he managed to find \$2½ billion in savings from employee expenses between 2026 and 2028 compared to his budget update. As the *Courier-Mail* reported today, the LNP's projected growth in employee expenses does not accord with what they are telling frontline public servants. They keep saying they are going to grow the front line and provide nation-leading wages but none of that is in this budget. It is not just a joke around the Public Service; it is becoming a joke across the whole state.

One of the most telling features of the budget is what it does not say, particularly when it comes to women. I was very interested to see the Women's Economic Security Statement. It is four pages long and includes a single image of a woman in a caring role. I compare that to Labor's 46-page women's economic security statement. While they have been able to put together only four pages, all of the good ideas in there are Labor policy anyway. It is a complete copy and paste of Labor policies. I suppose we should give them some credit for continuing a women's economic statement, unlike Tony Abbott who, as the federal minister for women, scrapped it altogether.

Make no mistake: this is not a genuine statement of policy. There is no plan to close the gender pay gap, there is no targeted support for women in male dominated industries and there is no real vision for women's economic security. In fact, in their service delivery statement for the Office for Women, the words 'gender equality' have disappeared. It would seem that those opposite do not consider achieving gender equality in Queensland a priority anymore. Welcome to Queensland in 2025 under an LNP government.

The LNP do have one policy: a \$20 million program over four years to support women returning to work. What will this mean for Queensland women? It is estimated that around 35,000 Queensland women access paid parental leave every year and we assume that most of them, at some point, will return to work, yet the LNP have allocated only \$5 million each year for this package. That works out to be a payment of around \$140 per woman per year. That is not even enough to buy one cup of coffee a week. That is not a plan; that is an insult. They say that you can buy a laptop with that. I do not know where they shop! That shows just how out of touch they are. Women need real policies that reflect the value of their work, support their ambitions and remove barriers.

Like the Leader of the Opposition said today, there is a lot in this budget we agree with because a lot of it was our ideas. They are always buckling under pressure from us. It took a leak and pressure from our Labor team for the LNP to reverse their decision to cut puberty health education, which teaches consent and talks about red flags and relationships for kids in years 5 and 6. I am very glad that they intervened to continue that.

I am glad they have committed to or, let us say, repackaged our Labor Women and Girls' Health Strategy. I have to say that I remain concerned given that we found out about the puberty health program being cut from an email from a director of Queensland public health outlining an internal review by the Department of Health into the initiatives, which was leading to a shift in government priorities and funding. What else have they reviewed and what other priorities have shifted? What else has been cut? I am glad that, on paper at least, they still seem to support the majority of the voices of the 12,000 women and girls who contributed to our Women and Girls' Health Strategy. We have that, we have 50-cent fares and we have \$200 FairPlay vouchers, which are all Labor initiatives. The Premier may have finally buckled under public pressure to keep those initiatives, but let us not pretend that they were his ideas.

Talking about Labor's commitments, I was pleased to see a couple of projects in my electorate of Waterford maintain their funding. In my 10 years as the local member for Waterford, one of the things I am most proud of is the huge Logan Hospital expansion. It is good to see that continuing although I would like to see more detail. It is also good to see the Loganlea train station relocation will continue, but again I would appreciate more detail. All of these are Labor projects. Thank you, Queensland Labor, for always delivering.

While the LNP delivers a budget of broken promises and bottlenecks and leaves people behind, Labor will always put Queenslanders first. We will continue to fight for real relief, practical support, energy rebates, FairPlay vouchers and affordable housing. We will invest in transport that gets people moving to where they need to go, not stadiums that sit empty because people are stuck in traffic trying to get there. I do not know how many times I have heard the Premier talk about generational infrastructure; in fact, their first budget delivers generational congestion. The LNP has delivered cuts and chaos, but today, through our opposition leader, Labor has laid out a plan to tackle the real pressures facing Queenslanders. The initiatives announced by the Leader of the Opposition today are part of Labor's commitment to delivering a fairer and more secure future.

We will extend the build-to-rent land tax concession indefinitely, building on our original 2023 announcement to drive investment and increase housing supply. I am so pleased that we are matching the New South Wales government's commitment so that we can really try to encourage investment here in Queensland to deliver the housing we need. I was also pleased to see the announcement of \$10 million in new funding for our community services sector, helping neighbourhood centres and charities meet the growing demand for families doing it tough. If you spend time with any of those organisations doing emergency food relief, they will all tell you they are seeing unprecedented numbers of families, many of whom are seeking support for the first time. They might like to declare the cost-of-living crisis is over, but if you go to any neighbourhood centre or talk to anyone at Meals on Wheels or anyone delivering emergency food relief, you will see that the cost-of-living crisis is far from over.

We also know that to build the housing we need we first need the skills. We will guarantee free TAFE, which is something that I was proud to do when I was the skills minister, as well as the core apprenticeship program because skilling Queenslanders for the future should never be up for debate. We will advocate nationally for the Activate Australia's Skills campaign to fast-track the recognition of qualifications and get more qualified workers on the tools faster. Labor stands for action, not excuses; delivery, not delay.

Our vision for Queensland is clear: where no child misses out on sport or lunch because of the cost; where women are safe, respected and economically secure; where health care is accessible and affordable; and where regional communities are backed with real infrastructure, not empty promises or an empty QTRIP. Queenslanders deserve fairness, opportunity and a government that listens. Instead, they have a Premier who is obsessed with spin, a Treasurer who hides from scrutiny and a budget that fails to meet the moment. They promised a fresh start and they have delivered a stale re-run of broken promises. Queenslanders, though, are paying attention, and so are we. This budget might take us nowhere, but Labor has a plan to take us forward and we will not stop fighting until we do.