




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (6.22 pm): First and foremost, I would like to thank the good people of Toowoomba North for expressing their will for whom they want to serve and represent them in this House. This was my sixth attempt at an election and my seventh attempt to represent the seat. When I first ran, I lost the preselection. When I was preselected I ran against Kerry Shine, a formidable opponent and now councillor who, at the time, had a 60 per cent margin. In that campaign in 2009 I lost, but slowly, slowly I would like to think that I have worked hard to serve and represent the people of Toowoomba North. A lot of what I learned about how to campaign and how to represent my electorate was learned from Kerry Shine. As much as I do not agree with much of his politics, his work ethic in the community was always respected by me.

At this election I would like to thank the people of Toowoomba North. My primary vote is now up at 57 per cent. It is very humbling to know that, for nearly six out of 10 people who cast a ballot, the first name they put down was mine. The TPP is 66.5 per cent, so I am very pleased. I commit that I will not let down the people of Toowoomba North. Out of interest, compared to Toowoomba North, my colleague in Toowoomba South lost both the primary vote and the TPP vote for the first time. I do not want to cast too much shade. He was a little distracted with trying to be Treasurer of the state.

I also congratulate the Speaker, Pat Weir, my neighbour to the west. Six out of 10 people in Pat's electorate put his name first. He has one of the safest seats in Queensland at a margin of 73.6 per cent overall. That is a credit to how well respected he is in the community, how well he represents their views and how much they trust him to come to this place. It is great to see him in the high office of Speaker.

I would like to congratulate the Hon. David Crisafulli, our Premier and Minister for Veterans and the Hon. Jarrod Bleijie, Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations. These two guys work so hard to let the people of Queensland know (a) what our plan is and (b) that we will not let them down. It is a credit to that team, who worked every corner of the state every hour of every day. They were up early and in bed late, going from location to location to let the people of Queensland know their voices were being heard.

The people of Queensland knew they were facing a crisis around safety. Our Making Queensland Safer Laws—and I will talk a little bit about those later—were something they wanted. The reason they were developed is that that is what the people of Queensland were telling us. They were telling me that as I did my community corners and they were telling the Premier and Deputy Premier and all of the other ministers as everybody was travelling around the state. It is a great credit to those two, who now lead us in government. I look forward to serving as we go forward.

I would also like to acknowledge the volunteers and my family. I know we normally do these things at the end, but the dinner break is going to split my speech so I will talk a little bit about the electorate when I come back after dinner. I will move now to thank both my family and the volunteers.

I thank my wife, Sue, who moved continents so we could spend our lives together and lives inland when she would rather be swimming in the ocean in the morning. She has made a lot of sacrifices for us to spend our lives together. I really do appreciate the sacrifices she makes not only during the campaign but at times when I am away. This job takes you away from family a lot, as everybody knows. To everybody's family and partners but most particularly to my wife, Sue: thank you so much for your support. To my children: Brianna and her partner, James; Shannon; Mason and his partner, Mia; and Jordan and his partner, Jess—thank you so much for supporting and helping support Sue on different occasions when I am away so much. It is very much appreciated.

I will not name all of the volunteers who stand with me every fortnight when I do my community corners. In fact, I am not going to name any, because if I name one I am going to get shot by about 100. I will just say that you know who you are. You work hard not only around election time but all through the term, standing with me as we go out to listen to the community, as we go to shopping centres and do community corners and engage with the community, I would very much like to say thank you for your unwavering support of me and keeping me grounded. Sometimes when I think I have had a really good week, when I go back they will let me know the things I have not got done. They will let me know the things they would like to see change. That keeps it very real for me and I appreciate that. I think the results we have achieved over the six different elections I have run for shows just how solid that team has been in supporting me. To all of the volunteers, thanks very much.

There are a couple of people who will unfortunately not get to hear this: my mum and dad, who are no longer with us. Mum gave me my values and dad taught me the value of hard work. Mum was always a community member and community advocate. She fought hard for the things she wanted. She was a tough East London girl who brought me up east of London in Essex. My dad was an Australian who found himself in England in the 1960s. When he was over there in the sixties my football team, Tottenham Hotspur, was riding high. They were super successful, so as a young kid I was brought up to support Tottenham, which has been painful. It has been 41 years since they won something in Europe and today that changed. I think it is time for the dinner break, so I will congratulate Ange Postecoglou on our return from dinner.

Sitting suspended from 6.30 pm to 7.30 pm.



Mr WATTS: Just before the break, I was explaining to people how my dad, who was born in Singleton, found himself in the UK in the sixties and he started supporting Tottenham Hotspur. Today is a very special day for the Spurs. I have been a lifelong supporter and I was 16 the last time they won in Europe. I watched Ange Postecoglou when he coached Brisbane Roar and I enjoyed his football, but I never thought I would be standing here talking about him. He said—

Usually in my second season I win things. That's the whole idea. The first year is about establishing principles and creating a foundation. Hopefully, the second year is going on to win things.

These words resonated in the world of football. One of the things I would say Australia is great for is that a lot of immigrants come here and make Australia home. A lot of those families that came here from Greece and Italy in particular established themselves here and they now form part of the rich culture of Queensland. Something that Postecoglou and David Crisafulli have in common is that they both come from immigrant families. The philosophy of laying groundwork before delivering results is obviously clear. It has been very successful with my team Tottenham, and I am wearing their tie today.

The immigrant culture of hard work, saying what you are going to do, forming a plan, building a foundation and getting on and doing it is exactly what David Crisafulli is doing here in Queensland. We are very fortunate to have him as our leader. A lot has been said about promises made to the electorate, and one of those promises was that we would make people safer. As we know, Adult Crime, Adult Time is now here and the community is safer because of those Making Queensland Safer Laws, particularly the second tranche that passed this week. I am sure there will be more because one thing the electorate told us very clearly is that we need to make sure the citizens of Queensland are safe and their property stays in their possession, and that is one of the priorities of this government.

As we were going into the election, people were talking about health services and how Queensland needs a world-class health service. Sadly, we saw ambulance ramping and the then Labor government suggested that what they were doing would make it better in the future, but that turned out to be a falsehood. In Toowoomba the proposal was to build a split campus where the old campus was going to have some empty floors running which would be fully air-conditioned. The whole plan was going to cost \$300 million or \$400 million a year to operate and it would be a poorer service.

We are very fortunate that the health minister, Mr Nicholls, fixed that and we now have an opportunity for a new hospital to be built on one site. It is going to be hard work to fund all of that, but I know there is a Hospital Rescue Plan in place for the Toowoomba Hospital. I hope that will be a university hospital where we can do some good teaching and develop people for South-West

Queensland into the future. I think it is a good plan, and luckily the construction was not too far down the line so that we can use what we have and adapt and expand it. Therefore, in terms of community safety, that is a tick and, in terms of health services, that is another tick.

Cost of living is always going to be difficult. There was a lot of talk going into the election about the 50-cent fares but what we found afterwards was that Labor had not funded that—it was just a smoke-and-mirrors scheme. The cabinet considered it very carefully and it is now an ongoing reality for the people of Queensland to try to help with the cost of living. We look forward to some of those fares being introduced into Toowoomba after we have gone through a process of working with the council and developing a new public transport network.

In terms of economic development in our region, Toowoomba always punches well above its weight. We have benefited from the industries that are around us, both the agricultural industry and the gas industry, and being a service delivery hub for those areas. We have a small business minister who is making sure that people can navigate their way through the state government support system that is available to them, whether that is mentors, the business concierge or accessing different opportunities and learning experiences. We have seen a couple of trade missions in our area, and we will benefit from Hong Kong and China trade because they are big export markets for us. I think all of that is great.

One thing that will change Toowoomba forever is the Olympics. A lot of my constituents say, 'Do we really need the Olympics?' The simple fact is that the Gabba is going to reach its use-by date whether we have the Olympics or not. By building a new stadium as part of the Olympics, the federal government are going to contribute some money. If we were not doing the Olympics, in 10 or 15 years we would be paying for the whole thing ourselves, so it is actually cheaper to do it right now. That seems like a good idea. I suggested it should be located in Toowoomba but others wanted it in Brisbane.

We are very fortunate that the minister went up to Toowoomba and announced that Toowoomba would be hosting the equestrian. The agricultural society, with Damon as the CEO and Shane as the president, are very excited about that prospect. We will be getting on with that and we will make sure that facility is available as soon as possible so we can start hosting Queensland and national championships there.

At the moment, Queensland equestrian championship events, open or age group, are held in Tamworth because Queensland does not have a facility. This is a serious piece of legacy that needed to be built for Queensland. With it being built in Toowoomba, it will be great for the equine industry in our region because it will deliver a real opportunity into the future. The people of my electorate are very excited, even though the actual facility is in Pat Weir's electorate. As people get there, they will need some connectivity on a couple of roads so a priority will be getting the business case done for the Boundary Street connection road and that northern corridor from Highfields that also connects up from the range crossing to where the equestrian event is.

In the lead-up to the election we also spoke about making sure we got some safety upgrades around our schools. Some of the road networks are a bit undercooked and need improvement. Stuart Street near Toowoomba State High School has a particularly funny junction where there have been a lot of accidents in the wet and fog. There are also some opportunities for us to tidy up some school roads around Newtown and Highfields. I will be working with the P&Cs to make sure we get that done.

I want to go back to crime briefly because it is something that has deeply affected people in Toowoomba. We have put the legislative penalties in place for the judiciary to use, but I want to be clear that this is not just a punishment process. We need to have community-led, place-based intervention and early, and we need to have diversionary and post-incarceration programs. There is a whole suite of things on offer here. We understand this is complex. We understand this is difficult.

The first thing is to make the people of Queensland and Toowoomba safe. The next thing is to make sure that people who might be vulnerable to entering into that system are getting diverted away and/or getting early intervention and support, and for those who have been in the system, when they get out, instead of getting out on a Friday and getting 72 hours of nothing, moving back to the circumstances that caused the problems for them in the first place—although making bad choices is one of those issues—we will have a support program in place to make sure they do not fall back and they can make better choices.

In the couple of minutes I have left, I will say a couple of very quick things. I would like to thank very much my stepdad, Dave Mason. He raised me and taught me a lot of good values that I carry with me. I love him dearly, so much so that I named my son after him—Mason Watts. My son carries both my fathers' names. He is my only surviving parent, and I miss him dearly. I am very pleased to be able to say his name in this place and thank him for all the things he did for me when I was a young fellow, even though he was not a Spurs supporter. Nobody is perfect, are they!

I would like to raise a couple of things quickly in and around the electorate that people are talking to me about. A 24-hour manned police station at Highfields is something that I think people will want as time goes on. The need is there, and we have the personnel to do it. The Highfields fire station is an absolute must. People are paying an A-grade levy there, but at the moment we are not getting the service we deserve. That is negligence on behalf of the previous government over a number of years and it is time to get it fixed.

There is an opportunity for us to do a little bit more work with women's sporting facilities, particularly changing rooms. Our changing rooms are dilapidated and we have situations where umpires and referees who are often young females or in their early 20s are sharing rooms with 40- and 50-year-old blokes while they are getting changed into their kit. It is not just the players; it is the umpires and referees as well. We also need to make sure our facilities are accessible for those with disabilities.

With that, I would like to say thank you very much to the people of Toowoomba North for electing me for the fifth time.