

PROCEDURE AND PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

Fourth Report — Amended sitting schedule for the Legislative Assembly — Tabling

MRS S.J. PRICE (Forrestfield — Deputy Speaker) [3.00 pm]: I present for tabling the fourth report of the Procedure and Privileges Committee of the forty-first Parliament entitled *Amended sitting schedule for the Legislative Assembly*.

[See paper [1226](#).]

Mr S.J. PRICE: The sitting hours of the chamber have been a constant source of people's conversations for many Parliaments now. For the majority of time, everyone has focused on sitting Tuesdays. The Procedure and Privileges Committee has been very mindful that the long sitting hours can be physically and mentally taxing for members of Parliament and parliamentary staff, and that the late nights are certainly not family friendly, nor may they be considered the best time for consideration of very important legislation. As members know, the sitting program for each year varies, but I have to say that the Western Australian Parliament probably has the most comprehensive number of weeks and days of sitting of any Australian Parliament.

When members read the report, they will note that the appendix contains a review of the sitting schedules of other Australian Parliaments. To give members a brief overview of some programs in other states, as we know, the Western Australian Parliament this year has a sitting schedule of 19 weeks, which works out to be 57 days; New South Wales has a schedule of 16 weeks, which works out to be 45 days; Victoria has a schedule of 14 weeks, which is 39 days; and the unicameral system of Queensland has 13 weeks, which works out to be 40 days. Obviously, we are the hardest working Parliament in the country.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr S.J. PRICE: As a result of the considerations of the committee, and through the research that it undertook, it observed that the Parliament of Western Australia is one of the few Australian Parliaments that still schedules late-night sittings, with the majority of other Parliaments concluding business by 8.30 pm. Based on research and feedback from numerous surveys conducted in this Parliament and in previous Parliaments, the committee came up with the proposal that this house sit one hour earlier on a Tuesday. That would mean that we would commence from 1.00 pm rather than 2.00 pm on a Tuesday and that, in the words of the report, we would “dispense” with the dinner break and that the house would conclude business at 7.00 pm instead of 10.00 pm. Collectively, overall, that would result in a reduction of one hour in the hours on that day. However, in recognising that, the Leader of the House and the government will still be able, when required, to extend the hours on a Tuesday. For example, if we want to sit late on a Wednesday, the Speaker makes an announcement, and a dinner break is scheduled, and we come back after dinner and carry on. The same sort of approach will be taken for the Tuesday. Question time would still remain at 2.00 pm. There are other considerations in the report on which the government and the Leader of the House can go away and think about before they come back to make a recommendation or a motion for some time in the future.

I should also highlight that the committee is made up of members of the government, the Liberal Party and the Nationals WA and that this recommendation has been unanimously agreed to by all members of the committee. The recommendation of the report is —

That the house adopts a Temporary Order for the remainder of 2022 to the following effect —

That the House amend its regular sitting hours on Tuesdays from 1.00 pm to 7.00 pm.

On that, I commend the report to the house.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.06 pm]: I rise to support the comments made by the Deputy Speaker. This Parliament assumes that members who are also parents have full-time carers who can take responsibility for caring for children. Many members, including myself, have childcare responsibilities. That is a social change in particular. Now, in the great majority of families, both parents work and both parents properly share those caring responsibilities. However, this chamber recognises only a time when, one, there was a great majority of male members in this chamber; and, two, those members did not have childcare responsibilities and had a partner to do it. As we see in this chamber today, there has been a dramatic shift. I think that this change represents the beginning of changes that we need to bring into our work practices, because at the end of the day, we are not only a Parliament, but also a workplace. I think that the recommendations for change in the fourth report of the Procedure and Privileges Committee reflect modern parenting practices and parental responsibilities. On that basis, I fully support the recommendation of the committee.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [3.07 pm]: I also would like to add a couple of comments to the tabling of the fourth report of the Procedure and Privileges Committee. Firstly, I thank the Procedure and Privileges Committee staff for the research done to cover all the different Parliaments across Australia. It is fairly clear that, apart from the federal

House of Representatives and the Senate, when they are not in an election year during which they sit considerably fewer weeks, the Western Australian Legislative Assembly, and generally the Legislative Council, sit for about 19 weeks, made up of 57 sitting days. In fact, WA sits the most number of weeks and days in comparison with other jurisdictions. From that perspective, I think that we do our fair share of hours.

I take on board the comments of the Leader of the Liberal Party about modernising our work practices to some extent. Having been a member previously of the privileges committee, I know that surveys have been conducted during the last Parliament and previous Parliaments to which there was a relatively strong response to a suggestion to change the hours of sittings and other certain things. Somehow those suggestions did not make it through, but our new Speaker has addressed the matter of sitting hours and put it on the agenda.

From an opposition perspective, I guess the number one priority is to have the opportunity to hold the government to account. There will be one reduced hour, but we recognise that question time will stay the same, as will matters of public interest and the like, so there will not be any changes in that respect. We recognise that this is a trial and we reserve the right at the end of it to make our thoughts clear. The 90-second statements are a good way to end the day, basically by cutting off any business that might be overhanging at the time. As we know, the Speaker can extend any given day, as has been indicated amongst the papers here, with time having been extended or run over the 10.00 pm closing time. From my perspective, the trial is an opportunity just to see how it goes and how everyone adapts to it. As I said, the opposition will obviously be reassessing at the end of the trial period and reserving the right to make sure that we have those opportunities to hold the government to account.