

PRAYERS

Motion

Resumed from 18 September on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That a revised form of prayer, as contained in the schedule to this motion, be adopted by the Council.

Schedule

Almighty God, we ask for your blessing upon this Parliament. Direct and prosper our deliberations to the true welfare of Western Australia and its people. Amen.

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [2.17 pm]: Thank you, Mr President. I thought for a moment you were going to pass lightly over that item of business.

I will take the last couple of minutes available to indicate that I will conclude my remarks by moving a motion of discharge and referral to a standing committee. Before I do at that, may I indicate to the house that there is some support within the community, particularly within the Christian religious community, for the changes I have proposed. I will give honourable members a flavour of that. I wrote to Maria Parkinson, from Catholic Women's WA Inc, who replied —

I respond to your email ... re proposed change to the current prayer recited in the Legislative Council. Catholic Women's League WA State President Karyn Kammann surveyed the members of our State Council and nine members have responded.

The majority would like to see the Lord's Prayer said first and then the other prayer—all are happy with the “new” prayer you have suggested and in particular because the wording is more modern and the concepts easy to understand.

I also wrote to the Uniting Church in Australia. Rosemary Hudson Miller responded —

I am generally in support of this ...

She also indicated that one of their officers would be in touch with a more lengthy response. She asked if she could share the idea with other members of the Christian community, and I said, yes.

I then wrote to the Right Reverend Kay Goldsworthy, the Assistant Bishop of Perth, and received the following response —

The removal of the terms “man” and “men” where they stand for all human beings is in my view essential in all forms of modern Australian English, including in all Christian prayers. Modern translations of the Bible (such as the widely-used New Revised Standard Version, first published in 1989), all follow this principle. “Man,” “men,” “brothers,” and even the male pronoun ‘he’ for an individual human being of unspecified gender are not used unless the reference is unequivocally to a male person.

The Prayer Book used by the vast majority of Anglicans in Western Australia is A Prayer Book for Australia, authorised in 1995. It never uses “man” or “men” unless the reference is to a male person or a group of males.

The Right Reverend Goldsworthy concludes with a comment that is worth sharing with honourable members —

I would also affirm that the version of the prayer that you are proposing is appropriate for a multi-faith Parliament. Its address to “Almighty God” and its simple closure without a Christian/Trinitarian invocation (“through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever” — as some classic Christian prayer forms have it), is acceptable to people of all the major monotheistic religions. Jewish, Christian and Muslim believers would be able to pray the version of the prayer which you are proposing.

I also received a wonderful handwritten letter from a woman, who self-identified as being 73 years old, who tells me that she was educated in Scotland. She stated that she was taught that —

... in the English language, that there are many words which convey the same meaning, although they can be used in many contexts to mean the same and not offend.

She is opting for one of the versions of the prayer that I suggested to you, Mr President, and to members of the house earlier in my remarks—that is, replacing the word “man” with “humanity”. This person, who I will not name because she has not given me permission to make her name public, took the trouble to write to me, and I appreciate that she has opted for that solution.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 16 October 2013]

p4881a-4884a

Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Col Holt; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Nick Goiran; President

I understand that the government is willing to support a referral to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges to further consider this question about whether the prayer needs to be replaced; and, if it does, what form is appropriate. I take this matter, without making any sort of pun, as an act of good faith on the part of all members who are prepared to give this subject serious consideration. I feel strongly that the prayer reflects poorly on members of the house by its use of such outdated language when no other major institution in our community finds that sort of language acceptable today.

Discharge of Order and Referral to Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges — Motion

HON SALLY TALBOT (South West) [2.21 pm]: — without notice: I move —

That motion 1, “Legislative Council Prayer”, be discharged and referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges to inquire into and consider whether the current Council prayer should be changed and, if so, recommend an appropriately worded alternative.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [2.21 pm]: In brief response, the government supports the referral of the matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. A number of members on the government side of the chamber were keen to participate in a debate in this current form, but not necessarily in terms of the motion on notice; that would not have provided the appropriate outcome. When dealing with something like the prayer, which is a part of the everyday procedures of Parliament, it is only appropriate that it be referred to the Procedure and Privileges Committee. As a committed Christian, I personally would have enjoyed the opportunity to debate this motion. However, it is not about me; it is about my colleagues on this side of the chamber. That is why I asked for collective views on the referral motion. We unanimously agreed with the referral. I understand it coincides with the opinion of members from the National Party as well. It is only appropriate that such an issue about the prayer be addressed and considered by the Procedure and Privileges Committee. For that reason, the government will be supporting the motion. Lastly, I thank Hon Sally Talbot for her cooperation in this matter.

HON LYNN MacLAREN (South Metropolitan) [2.23 pm]: The Greens also support the motion for discharge and referral of the prayer matter to the Joint Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. I will make a few comments in support of the motion. I do not sit on the Procedure and Privileges Committee. At this stage, it is probably worthwhile to indicate the direction or at least some things I would like the committee to consider. Members would be aware that Hon Giz Watson had previously moved that we just have a moment of silence instead of a prayer. This matter was also debated in New South Wales. The Greens had a nice debate in the Parliament around this question of, if we have a prayer, what it should consist of and how it should be incorporated, particularly in the multi-faith society that we have become in Australia.

In the Western Australian Legislative Council, I am aware that prior to 1975, as Hon Sally Talbot mentioned in her speech, we had a form of prayer that was non-gender specific. The honourable member did not have to hand the prayer that we used to say in the Legislative Council; however, I have subsequently obtained that prayer. I seek leave to table it.

Hon Sally Talbot: Is it very long?

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: It is just a couple paragraphs. I did not see it in *Hansard*. Briefly, it states —

PREVENT us, O Lord, in all our doings with Thy most gracious favour, and further us with Thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in Thee, we may glorify Thy holy Name, and finally by Thy mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Clearly, the gendered language is not there. It is quite a neutral prayer. Reviewing the prayer and modernising our practices is something that we would support. We commend the government for agreeing to send this to our committee. I wanted to make some final comments about how surprising I found it as a member coming into this chamber that we had two prayers—a special prayer for the Legislative Council and then the Lord’s Prayer. As someone who grew up in a Christian church, I am very well aware of that prayer, its history, its tradition and the ritual it evokes. Given my initial thought that Parliament was a secular organisation, I was surprised we would have the prayer every day. I think it is fair to say that members of the public who come and join us are also surprised about the practice. Maybe if we all went to a private Catholic school or another religious institution, it is something we would do every day; but given that a lot of people attend public schools, it is not undertaken every day.

Again, it was quite a surprise to me. I certainly had not done it since I attended church. It made me think about why our government has taken the prayer on board—that is, taking some time at the beginning of our sitting day to reflect on perhaps a higher power. It is a very worthy thing for the Legislative Council to be doing because we all have such busy lives working in different political purposes. To come together and have one thing to focus on

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 16 October 2013]

p4881a-4884a

Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Col Holt; Hon Jacqui Boyde; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Nick Goiran; President

as a common purpose means it is one point in the day when we have an opportunity to feel as one with each other. I then began to look more compassionately and favourably on the ritualistic practice of getting together to focus on one common good to remind ourselves that we are here for a greater purpose; namely, to serve the people. By using all our wisdom, we are here to serve and look after the state of Western Australia. However, as Hon Sally Talbot pointed out, given that it is a Christian prayer with gendered language, it is true that there are barriers. The Procedure and Privileges Committee needs to develop a proposal for a new practice to overcome these barriers of gender and these differences in religious practice and of faith. After all, we represent the state of Western Australia. Taking into account that our population is very diverse, it is good to move forward to consider the prayer.

I have a query about when the Procedure and Privileges Committee should report back to the house. Will it conclude this business quickly so that we know we have achieved something by reflecting on this time-honoured practice? We should amend the motion to allow the Procedure and Privileges Committee to report back by the middle of next year or thereabouts. Given we already have letters from all organisations, we could do it quickly. I do not know what members would think was a fair time to report back, but I seek that provision.

Hon Peter Collier: Perhaps we could report progress and the committee could report back in six months.

The PRESIDENT: The motion as it stands does not set a time limit. But can I just say, as Chairman of the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges, that it would be an item that we would proceed to inquire into and review as soon as we possibly can. It is up to the will of the house. If the house wishes to amend the motion to that effect, the way to do that is to provide an amendment; if the house does not do that, I will just put the question.

Hon LYNN MacLAREN: Thank you, Mr President. I have raised the issue that it be an open-ended inquiry, and I appreciate the fact that you have said, as chairman of that committee, that there is some interest in pursuing that line sooner rather than later. I have no need to amend the motion as it stands at the moment. I think the will of the house is that the committee undergo its work quickly and with due diligence. We look forward to hearing what the committee comes up with. Hopefully people who are not members of that committee will have the opportunity to make submissions to that committee. I support the motion to remove the gendered language in the prayer, and I also support the motion that this matter be sent to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges with a view to reviewing whether the prayer is appropriate for this chamber on a daily basis.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.32 pm]: I rise briefly to indicate the support of the Nationals for this motion to send this matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. I thank Hon Sally Talbot for raising this issue in this house. For me, this issue is about the need for this house to look at how we conduct our procedures and our prayer to reflect the changing nature of this chamber as it reflects the changing nature of the society that we represent. The house has had the opportunity to hear the arguments that Hon Sally Talbot has presented. The right thing for the house to do now is send this matter to a committee of this house that can look at this issue in greater detail and conduct an inquiry that can gather all the viewpoints, both within the chamber and potentially also outside the chamber. I am sure there will be 36 opinions about the form that the prayer should take. To have that debate on the floor of the chamber probably is not the right thing to do. It is, therefore, appropriate that this matter be referred to a committee appointed by this house. So I indicate on behalf of my colleagues that the Nationals will be supporting this motion.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral) [2.34 pm]: I also rise today very briefly to support the motion that this matter be sent to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. I thank Hon Sally Talbot for raising this issue. Gender barriers is an ongoing issue, and both women and men are responsible for managing a way forward as our society grows and as female representation in this Parliament hopefully grows—and hopefully in the federal government cabinet as well. I agree that our Parliament now represents a greater proportion of female members of our community. That is a good thing. Both men and women bring good things to the table. It is, therefore, important that we in this Parliament continue to look at our procedures and make sure that they are not archaic and are inclusive.

As a female member of this Legislative Council, I would encourage all female members of Parliament, women who are chief executive officers or work in the corporate world, my daughter, and my daughter's teachers, to feel confident about the fact that they can bring meaning to the processes of the Parliament and to the job that they do. All women need to feel a degree of confidence about that. I acknowledge that some women may not feel confident or comfortable about the wording of the prayer that we are using. Some women may be offended by the word "mankind". However, we need to get past that. I have never found the wording of the prayer to be offensive. I have always considered myself to be included in the word "mankind", because to me it is about

Extract from Hansard

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 16 October 2013]

p4881a-4884a

Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Col Holt; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Nick Goiran; President

humanity. However, I acknowledge that is not how everyone perceives that word. Therefore, it is good that we will be looking at the wording of the prayer.

However, I, as a female member of Parliament, as a mother, and as an aunt, would like my daughter to feel confident that she has a place of value in our society and not feel offended or not included by a word. In order for true gender barriers to be broken down, we need to take a global picture of how we think about this issue. We all need to take responsibility for that. We need to get past feeling offended by one word that we feel is not inclusive. I therefore hope the committee can look at that process as well.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [2.38 pm]: I rise to indicate, obviously, my support for the referral motion and also for the substantive motion that was before the house. I also want to thank Hon Sally Talbot for raising this motion. This is a matter that Hon Sally Talbot has raised previously. I also want to remind members that this matter went to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges when we did the two-year review of the standing orders—that is how long it took for that review—and that at that review, there was consensus among the members of the committee about this matter. We need to bear in mind that that was a slightly larger committee, because members were co-opted to it in order that the house could be represented more fully, because we were dealing with all the standing orders at that time. However, there was one person who expressed very strong objection to even considering changing the prayer, and that was, of course, Hon Norman Moore, who said, “That’s it; if you even talk about this, I’m going to leave the room.” So the other members of the committee, who comprised me, Hon Giz Watson, Hon Wendy Duncan, Hon Helen Morton and Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm—I am not sure whether the President expressed a point of view—kind of walked away from it —

Point of Order

Hon NICK GOIRAN: Mr President, I am reluctant to raise a point of order on what has been a useful and constructive debate to date, but I am not sure that it is appropriate for the Leader of the Opposition to divulge to the rest of us who were not present during those committee proceedings what Hon Norman Moore may or may not have said; and I think it is particularly unfair to raise that in circumstances in which Hon Norman Moore has no opportunity to respond.

The PRESIDENT: The motion before the house is a referral motion, which normally is a very narrow debate—the matter either goes to the committee, or it does not. But I have allowed this debate to run a little broader than that, because some members have raised other issues in relation to what they want the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges to consider, so I am prepared to allow some flexibility in that context. But I think perhaps the Leader of the Opposition should move on from the history of the standing orders review and relate her remarks more closely to this motion.

Debate Resumed

Hon SUE ELLERY: I will always accept your advice, Mr President. However, I note two things: first, this matter of the prayer was before the standing orders review, so it is directly linked. Second, so that Hon Nick Goiran does not think I have stepped outside what was agreed should be the way we would conduct ourselves during that standing order review, I will tell him that we agreed that we could discuss everything we discussed with our respective groups. Also, we made a decision not to apply the normal provisions of not revealing deliberations held during the standing orders review; nevertheless, I will move on.

I think it is useful for the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges of the current Parliament to consider the wording of the prayer. It is useful to, of course, remind the house of the point Hon Sally Talbot made, which is not that she is asking the house to consider not having a prayer. We are asking the house and the procedure and privileges committee to consider the nature of the wording of that prayer and whether it is appropriate for us to adjust it to be more inclusive in its language and, to take up Hon Colin Holt’s point, which was that we should ensure that the house is reflective of the Western Australian community.

The point I think Hon Sally Talbot made in her earlier contribution was that the prayer has changed over time, so it is not a new thing for this Parliament to change the wording of the prayer. That has happened several times over the history of the Parliament. We are not asking the procedure and privileges committee to do something that has never been done before, because it has been. It is appropriate that we review the way we conduct ourselves from time to time. I think it is a good thing for the house to ask the procedure and privileges committee to look at the wording of the prayer and whether it is appropriate to consider a change. That committee will no doubt look at the words that have been submitted by Hon Sally Talbot. They seem perfectly reasonable and elegant to me, but the committee may well want to look at other alternative wording, and I am relaxed about the committee doing that.

Extract from *Hansard*

[COUNCIL — Wednesday, 16 October 2013]

p4881a-4884a

Hon Dr Sally Talbot; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Col Holt; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Nick Goiran; President

I also want to pick up on what Hon Sally Talbot said in her contribution when we last sat, which was, I think, that the Australian senate committee—I am sure the procedure and privileges committee will look at what it did—had reached the view that for those people who hold dear the expression of a prayer at the beginning of a session, it is very important to them. For people such as me who do not participate in the prayer—although I know right now my mother will be looking down expressing horror, good Catholic girl that I was—it is a time for reflection. It causes me no offence that others want to use that time to say a prayer. I am relaxed about people doing that, although, as the point has also been made by others, no other public institution does this. Nevertheless, the proposition before the house and that we seek to refer to the committee is not that we abolish the prayer; it is that we look at an alternative, more inclusive, gender-neutral form of words. That is not a bad thing for us to do, so I am happy to support the proposition that the motion be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

Question put and passed.