

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE — EXTENDED SITTING HOURS

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [1.09 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of the Standing Orders be suspended so as to enable the Legislative Council to sit beyond 8.45 pm on this day's sitting and take members' statements at a time ordered by the house.

If I may, I will explain the circumstances. It is not unusual at this time of year for the government to have a number of pieces of legislation that it would like to pass before the house rises for the Christmas break. Last week, Hon Stephen Dawson and I spoke with other parties, circulated a list of what those pieces of legislation were and had conversations with the respective parties about how we might accommodate those. I note there are a couple of new members of the house, but a range of options are available to us. For example, we could sit an extra week or add some additional hours to different days. This happens regularly and has done so for the 21 years that I have been a member of this place. It is not unusual.

What I try to do in my role here is see whether we can reach agreement, and if we can, move a motion to the effect of what I am doing now. The general view was that we could probably complete the Electoral Amendment (Finance and Other Matters) Bill 2023, which we are dealing with today, if we added a couple of extra hours. The proposition was that we would move the motion I just moved, which would enable us to add an extra hour or so. I spoke with the Leader of the Opposition, the opposition Whip and then with each member of the crossbench. Members might even have seen me doing that. For example, I sat with Hon Ben Dawkins behind the chair right there and had the conversation with him, in which he indicated to me that he had no intention of holding up the bill. That was what he put to me. That was the view of others. For example, Hon Dr Brad Pettitt said, "Yes, fine, as long as we are doing that for this bill, and we are not locking ourselves into doing it for every bill," which reflected the agreement. The motion comes before us today because the commitments expressed to me are that members of this house are happy to sit later tonight knowing that the intention is to complete the bill tonight, then get on and deal with the rest of the bills in front of us. I moved the motion today to allow us to sit late. It is my intention to not call for members' statements until we finish the Electoral Amendment (Finance and Other Matters) Bill before us, because that is the indication that people gave to me when I had the conversations with them last week.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition) [1.12 pm]: I accept everything that the Leader of the House said about the history of this, and that there is a precedent for us to sit at varied times and dates on the basis that the government has a series of legislation that it wants to get through. This happens pretty much every year. The opposition—both the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Hon Colin de Grussa, and I—was consulted and we took it to our party room. Members indicated that they would prefer to sit later on existing sitting days than add on sitting days, and that was reflected to the Leader of the House.

I have a different memory of the conversation with the Leader of the House about what we agreed to today, which I think was that the opposition agreed to an extra hour today. The Leader of the House and I have discussed this. We are happy to accept that we have variance in what we agreed. The debate has effectively moved on from that. The opposition will support the motion, based on a conversation and an email distributed to various members of the opposition and crossbench last night. Hon Ben Dawkins and I had a conversation a couple of weeks ago about whether this would be a good bill to filibuster. I presume he was left in no doubt about my position on that, which was an emphatic "no". The opposition, led by Hon Martin Aldridge and Hon Tjorn Sibma, takes the view that we will ask the questions that need to be asked. We are not necessarily going to extend the bill for the sake of it. We discussed this and put this in place. We are absolutely prepared to sit late to do the job that the opposition is designed to do.

I am surprised that Hon Ben Dawkins distributed an email last night to, I think, 13 recipients, 11 of whom were members of the opposition. Interestingly, it was not sent to me, probably as a result of the conversation we had when I said I was not interested in filibustering this bill. That conversation included the line, "We should all go hard, I reckon. I am disinclined to allow this bill to pass before Christmas." I do not know whether Hon Ben Dawkins thought that 11 members of the opposition would receive this and not pass it on to the Leader of the Opposition. I thought that was probably a fairly optimistic position to take. If it had not been passed on, I suspect my position as Leader of the Opposition might be under some peril. The reality is that that concerns me. The argument that the Leader of the House and I might have had about whether we agreed to one extra hour or multiple extra hours is now completely set aside because the opposition has no intention of filibustering this bill until Christmas. In fact, it is not a good outcome for the people of Western Australia, the Parliament or anybody sitting here. Hon Ben Dawkins may have nothing else to spend his time on, but the reality is that everybody else here is missing school, award ceremonies, community meetings and all of those things that are in the lead-up to Christmas. We will do our job as an opposition, led by our members. We will do our job to hold the government to account. We have not let this bill through easily. We have been at it for a week, during which we finished the second reading debate and almost finished clause 1. I do not think anybody can argue that the opposition is rolling over on a particular bill—and we are not

supporting the bill. We are not supporting the bill, but any suggestion that we are going to sit here and talk for the sake of talking is ludicrous. It demeans and diminishes the Legislative Council and, unfortunately, Hon Ben Dawkins has particularly embarrassed himself with this. If he thinks that the opposition cannot take a unified position or that he can play us against each other or the government, common sense will reign. We will take the government on. We do not need his support or permission to do that. We will take the government on, but that leaves us with no alternative position but to support the government's motion before the house today because we do not intend to filibuster this bill. Hon Ben Dawkins can do it. He can take us for 24 hours, but the opposition will not be talking for the sake of talking. We will ask the questions that need to be asked. The opposition supports the motion before the house today.

The PRESIDENT: This motion requires an absolute majority, and having counted the number of members present, an absolutely majority is achieved.

Question put and passed with an absolute majority.