



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BUSINESS

SPEECH

Thursday, 6 February 2003

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 6 February 2003
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Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.31 am)—I move:

That the following changes to the standing orders be made with effect from 10 February 2003:

SITTING AND ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

Days and hours of meeting

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40 Unless otherwise ordered, the House shall meet for the despatch of business on each—

Monday, at 12.30 p.m.

Tuesday, at 2 p.m.

Wednesday, at 9 a.m.

Thursday, at 9 a.m.

From the termination of the last sitting in the second week of sittings, the House shall stand adjourned until 12.30 p.m. on the third Monday after the termination, unless the Speaker shall, by writing addressed to each Member of the House, fix an alternative day or hour of meeting. The 4-weekly cycle will then be repeated.

Quorum during sitting

When want of quorum noticed, House counted - House adjourned

45 Subject to standing order 45A, if any Member draws the attention of the Speaker to the state of the House, the Speaker shall immediately count the House; and, if a quorum be not present within four minutes, the Speaker shall adjourn the House till the next sitting day: Provided that if the Speaker is satisfied that there is likely to be a quorum within a reasonable time the Speaker shall announce that he or she will take the Chair at a stated time; but if at that time there is not a quorum present the Speaker shall adjourn the House to the next sitting day.

45A On sitting Mondays and Tuesdays, if any Member draws the attention of the Speaker to the state of the House between the hours of 6.30 p.m. and 8 p.m., the Speaker shall announce that he or she will count the House at 8 p.m., if the Member so desires.

Adjournment and next meeting

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48A At 9 p.m. on a sitting Monday or Tuesday, at 7.30 p.m. on a sitting Wednesday and at 4.30 p.m. on a sitting Thursday the Speaker shall propose the question—That the House do now adjourn—which question shall be open to debate. No amendment may be moved to this question:

Provided that:

(a) if a division is in progress at the time fixed for interruption, that division, and any division consequent upon that division, shall be completed and the result announced;

(b) if, on the question—That the House do now adjourn—being proposed, a Minister requires the question to be put forthwith without debate, the Speaker shall forthwith put the question;

(c) a motion for the adjournment of the House may be moved by a Minister at an earlier hour;

(d) any business under discussion and not disposed of at the time of the adjournment shall be set down on the Notice Paper for the next sitting, and

(e) if the question—That the House do now adjourn—is negatived, the House shall resume the proceedings at the point at which they had been interrupted:

Provided further that, if at 9.30 p.m. on a sitting Monday or Tuesday, at 8 p.m. on a sitting Wednesday or at 5 p.m. on a sitting Thursday, the question before the House is—That the House do now adjourn—the Speaker shall interrupt the debate, at which time—

Minister may extend debate

(f) a Minister may require that the debate be extended until 9.40 p.m., 8.10 p.m. or 5.10 p.m., as appropriate, to enable Ministers to speak in reply to matters raised in the preceding adjournment debate; at 9.40 p.m., 8.10 p.m. or 5.10 p.m., as appropriate, or upon the earlier cessation of the debate, the Speaker shall forthwith adjourn the House until the time of its next meeting, or

(g) if no action is taken by a Minister under paragraph (f) the Speaker shall forthwith adjourn the House until the time of its next meeting.

New business

New business

103 No new business may be taken after 9.30 p.m., unless the House otherwise orders.

When division may be taken

193 A division shall not be proceeded with unless more than one Member has called for a division. If one Member only calls for a division, that Member may inform the Speaker that he or she wishes his or her dissent to be recorded in the Votes and Proceedings and in Hansard and the Member's dissent shall be so recorded:

Provided that, on sitting Mondays, any division called for in the House on a question, other than a motion moved by a Minister, prior to questions without notice being called on or during presentation of petitions or private Members' business, shall stand deferred until the grievance debate has concluded or been postponed.

Provided also that, on sitting Mondays and Tuesdays, any division called for in the House between the hours of 6.30 p.m. and 8 p.m. on a question, other than a motion moved by a Minister, shall stand deferred until 8 p.m.

I present a copy of the related routine of business diagram. One of the great challenges that members of parliament face is to persuade our voters and our taxpayers that we are giving them value for money. We have to let them know we are hard at work in this place. At the same time we have to attend to a myriad of constituency and portfolio duties elsewhere. And somehow we have to do all that without the stamina of supermen and superwomen. I think the proposals that I present today are for far more civilised sitting hours without limiting the capacity of this chamber to get on with the work of the parliament.

I will remind members of precisely what is proposed. The proposal is for 9.30 finishes on Monday and Tuesday evenings, nine o'clock starts on Wednesday and Thursday mornings and a five o'clock finish on Thursday afternoons, with no quorum calls or divisions between 6.30 and eight o'clock on Monday and Tuesday evenings. As I said, I think this is a very sensible and intelligent change to our sitting hours.

The proposal that the government now presents came to us from the Procedure Committee. It was, I understand, a unanimous recommendation of the Procedure Committee. I want to thank the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the member for McPherson, and the Deputy Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the member for Chifley, for their work here. I also thank the member for Moore, who made the suggestion to the Procedure Committee. I should also mention in this context the member for Grey, who has been a consistent campaigner inside the parliament and inside the coalition party room for more civilised sitting hours.

This change to procedures is a modest but significant indication of the government's determination constantly to look at the way this parliament works to try to ensure that things are done better. I encourage the Procedure Committee to continue to look at the way this parliament works and to continue to come up with constructive suggestions. I indicate that the government will continue to take them seriously.