



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Standing and Sessional Orders

SPEECH

Tuesday, 13 September 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker Albanese, Anthony, MP	Question No.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (16:59): I do indeed second the amendment. I do so with some level of surprise that the Leader of the House has brought forward such retrograde changes to the standing orders. I remember well, after the 2010 election, the group hug when Christopher Pyne, on behalf of the coalition, signed the document, *Agreement for a better parliament: parliamentary reform*, on 6 September 2010. That is what our amendments go to with regard to the selection committee.

During the period 2010 to 2013 we had literally hundreds of debates and votes—determinations—by this parliament about what the members of the House of Representatives thought of issues that were relevant to their electorates and issues that were relevant to the nation. At the time, the Leader of the House said this in a media release the day after the event:

The 'Agreement For A Better Parliament' negotiated between the Coalition, Labor and the Independents will amend parliamentary standing orders to establish a more independent Speaker, limit the power of the executive, increase the ability of parliament to scrutinise legislation, enhance the role of private member's business and the committee system and make question time more useful and relevant.

Now, which of those positive enhancements has the Leader of the House decided is not convenient?

As a result of the changes that occurred through the selection committee and through private members' business—I quote from the preamble, which was signed by Christopher Pyne, the Leader of the House, on behalf of the then opposition:

... there will be a need for recognition by all to allow more MP's to be involved in various roles and debates, to allow more community issues to be tested through private members voting ...

These were indeed very positive amendments.

They were also amendments that gave respect and standing to the crossbenchers to more fully participate in the activities of the parliament. In my view, that resulted in very good legislation, because you had consultation and you had engagement. As a result of that, we were able to pass some 595 pieces of legislation through this House without losing a single piece of legislation during that period. It was a result of a cooperative approach that respected the fact that each member of this House is representative of their electorate, has a mandate to carry out those duties as the representative of their constituency and should be treated with some respect.

When I was leader of the government in the House of Representatives, with 70 votes on my side on the floor of the House of Representatives, we did not lose a vote. In three years we did not lose a vote. This mob with 76 could not survive three days without losing a vote. That is what this shabby sort of changes to standing orders are designed to do. It is a shabby manipulation of the standing orders, so that, as the Manager of Opposition Business indicated, even if they do lose a vote, they will come back to it at another time. We know, in terms of the wording of that particular standing order, that it refers to a new division in the case of confusion, error or misadventure. We know they are confused about their policy approach; we know that they are committing errors and we know that it is a misadventure when you leave the parliament while parliament is still conducting its business. We saw that on the last sitting Thursday.

I can understand that the Leader of the House, the whip and others who missed out on voting in those procedures on that Thursday are embarrassed and humiliated. I feel their pain. I went through three years being concerned. I needn't have bothered, because we on this side were organised about how we ran the parliament. People were happy to turn up to work and turn up to vote. We consulted and we organised legislation, but those on the other side have proven themselves to be incapable of doing so.

I do think that the Leader of the House should perhaps reconsider some of the more draconian measures that are being put forward in these standing order propositions. After all, given the Senate performance yesterday, his performance on that Thursday looks good. I am sure he has sent a card and a note to Senator McKenzie, thanking her for taking some of the pressure off him about his performance of his duties.

So I say to the Leader of the House, if you think it is smart to get a political outcome through a manipulation of rules, you should think back to the geniuses who came up with the Senate reform proposals that resulted in there being fewer coalition senators, fewer Greens senators and more crossbench senators and that reinvigorated the One Nation party in the other chamber. Think about what happens when you think you can put in a political fix rather than engage in issues of substance and negotiate your position. You should have the confidence in your position to be able to argue things on their merits; you should have confidence in your own party room, that your members will actually turn up to votes; and you should have confidence in the power of your arguments not to be frightened of having a Selection Committee that operates properly, that chooses private members' business in an appropriate way, chooses motions to have votes on and allows for a determination in this parliament of issues that have been brought by honourable members. You should not be frightened of being able to test the power of your case, if you actually have an agenda.

For a government that had no business in the Senate and has no sense of purpose—that does not have an agenda—I would have thought that voting on private members motions and bills through a Selection Committee process might help you out. It might give you something to do. You might get that sense of purpose from non-government members. If you do not proceed like this, what people will do, what you will find, very simply—it is not up to me to give advice to the crossbenchers or other members, but I have had a bit to do with them over the years—is that private members' motions get converted into private members' bills, and they will end up being just a lot of bills before the parliament. That is what will happen. Whenever you try to do a manipulation and a fix you find that there is always a way around them. I note that my friend the member for Kennedy had two private member's bills before the parliament this week. He has worked it out—he has been around this place for a while—and other people will work it out too. There are ways of getting the same outcome.

I will conclude with this: so opposed are the government to ideas that they have even knocked off the Library Committee. I await the reason for knocking off the Library Committee, but that just shows that this is an attack on the independence of this parliament, because the Library plays a very important role. (*Time expired*)