



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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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Tuesday, 13 September 2016	<b>Source</b> House
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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> Albanese, Anthony, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler) (17:59): I do indeed second the amendment moved by the Manager of Opposition Business. We have had barely a week of sittings, and the parliament has been reduced to a shambles by this mob opposite. We had three years of minority government; it functioned well. We were in control not just every day, not just every hour and not just every minute but every second—every second of every sitting day we controlled the agenda in this House. The other mob: three days and it fell apart.

So upset were they with each other, they were running for the doors just to get away from each other. I thought to myself, 'What is the precedent of people running from parliament?' I say this in the hope that those brilliant producers at *Insiders* will be listening and will get out the footage of the gazelle who ran away from a division to try to avoid voting during that parliament. They ran away from the parliament.

Yesterday we had scenes in the Senate where people were not running anywhere, but perhaps they should have been. I think Senator McKenzie regrets not running from the parliament. That embarrassing performance—the depiction of a government without an agenda and whose senior members were incapable of giving a stump speech about their achievements one year into the government—said it all.

The real problem here is that the Leader of the House and the Government Whip and the people who missed the vote missed the vote. They missed a vote. What should have happened then? Should there have been some punishment for the Leader of the House? Perhaps. Should there have been some punishment or penalty against the Chief Government Whip? That has happened. That is a rotating door. She is the third one they have had during their first term of office, so we know there are lots of precedents for that. No, they have not done that. There was no action against the Leader of the House, no action against the Chief Government Whip, no action against the ministers who missed the vote and no action against the backbenchers who missed the vote. The action is against the parliament itself. They come in here and they say, 'We know the way to avoid missing a vote in parliament: we will stop the parliament sitting!'

This year we will sit for 51 days in total. We sat for three days—one day of which was ceremonial, and the second day of the actual sittings did not work out too well. So we are back here this week and then we are off again for another three weeks. This is a government in search of an agenda and in search of a reason for existence. 'What is the purpose of Malcolm Turnbull?' is what people are asking.

The SPEAKER: The member for Grayndler will refer to members by their correct titles.

**Mr ALBANESE:** The current Prime Minister. They are asking: what is the purpose of a change in prime ministers if the agenda is exactly the same as the former Prime Minister's and if there is nothing new coming through?

During the last parliament we sat here and had debate after debate about the unprecedented, so-called proroguing of the parliament. We came in here and we had speeches, just to fill time, about the Governor-General's speech in this chamber. The Federation Chamber, which is usually used for such purposes, was not even used. We have this pretence of a new government, to the extent of having had that proroguing of the parliament. But the Leader of the House has had very different views. This is what he used to say:

The people of Australia expect us to serve our electorates and legislate, not to spend 18 weeks here when we should be spending 20 or 21 or 22 weeks.

That was the Leader of the House, the member for Sturt. There are too many things he said, really, to go through. One of them was:

... the first point to be made is that, yet again, this government is squibbing on transparency and accountability and trying to avoid the parliament.

Well, it is all coming back now, just like, in the past, when he said:

Why doesn't it have to sit? There are two reasons. Firstly, it does not have a plan for the future for the Australian people. Secondly, it cannot rely on its numbers in the House.

That was the member for Sturt. Well, we did all right starting at 70. They start at 76. Imagine how bad it would be—just imagine it! They would struggle to get through prayers in the morning.

The Leader of the House is a big supporter of reform when he does not have to do anything about it. This is what he said to that esteemed institution, the Institute of Public Affairs. Now, you would not say something that was untrue to the Institute of Public Affairs, because they would pick you up on it. On 30 January 2013, he said:

I have long articulated the need for the creation of a 'take note' session to follow Question Time. The session would consist of a thirty minute period following Question Time which would allow a number of Members to speak on the significant matter of the day.

That is what he had to say at that time. He made it very clear, and he spoke about it complementing the matter of public importance.

So, I say: today is an opportunity to make that vision of the member for Sturt a reality. He can do it. He can do it by voting for it—voting for what he said very clearly on the record. He, of course, has also backed other reforms such as supplementary questions. He has backed a range of reforms. We are not putting them all forward here, but we are putting forward the best ones. He should take up this opportunity.

What is good about it is that he can even claim credit for it. He can say, 'I thought of it first.' This is an opportunity, member for Sturt, to be in the vanguard of reform because the truth is that this is a parliament that is in need of some proper reform. We have got the Seinfeld Senate over there—a Senate about nothing, meeting about nothing, with no business. We have got an agenda here one sitting week after we dealt with standing orders to change the sitting times and introduce reforms so that people could essentially leave and there would not be votes, divisions or quorums called after 7.30 on Mondays and Tuesdays—something that was not controversial and something that has been welcomed. Probably government members are not aware that that change actually took place.

If you are going to fix the problem, the position of the Leader of the House does not really fix it, because it is 8 o'clock and the problem you have got is that you cannot keep people till 5 o'clock. So, if you are going to solve the problem, we really should be knocking off straight after question time! I have got a bit of Italian heritage and the concept of a nap in the afternoon in Mediterranean countries is very civilised. *La dolce vita*. Get on board, member for Sturt. I challenge him to actually go the full hog—do what is necessary. You then will not lose a vote. But your heart is not in this half-hearted measure. Be a reformer. Be a visionary. Have some ticker and vote for the Pyne vision.