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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

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SPEECH

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Date Monday, 27 February 2012
Page 1891
Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

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Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (12:47): Firstly, let me acknowledge the work of the member for Shortland's daughter in her night shift. It is not only your daughter who is working that night shift but also paramedics of Australia and policemen, people who work in the water industry, truck drivers and others in transport working late at night, child protection workers, firemen, and the list goes on. These people all contribute out of hours to this nation. That is not what we are here for. I will give you some background. There are two people in this room who have been here since 1990: the member for Banks, Mr Melham, and me, the member for McMillan. From 1990 we have been through many nights where the parliament sat through the early hours of the morning and into the very, very early hours of the morning.

We thought that with this new parliament those days were gone—finished, history, it will not happen again—but we had an occasion a few months ago where we filibustered into the night, and that is all you could call it. On a very serious issue in this parliament we filibustered into the night and it was totally unnecessary. But with this parliament as it stands, as a hung parliament, you cannot give leave to your team to go home while the small team bats on. We are all here, we are all in it, and a vote can be held at any time, called by one side or the other, so we have an obligation to be standing in this House on behalf of the constituents who elected us. We accept that. So, why can't we come to a resolution whereby the parliament, in good commonsense, comes forward as we have here? Why didn't it go through the Procedure Committee, or to the whips, or to the leadership or to the Prime Minister to get this outcome? The reason is that it would not have happened, because people have vested interests and they do not want to take away the opportunity to take account of what is happening on the other side at any given time and call a vote. That leaves us with only one option now, as Dr Washer very expertly put it. If you want a technical reason for what we are doing, read Dr Washer's speech. If you want a reason for what we are doing—out of common sense and because of the real world we live in—listen to what I am saying. The members of this House do not perform well after 11 o'clock. I have been here since 1990 and I have never seen backbenchers or frontbenchers performing well at all after 11 o'clock at night. In fact, on occasion—and I am looking at you all at the moment—some of your performances have been atrocious after 11 o'clock at night. That was the inspiration for this bill: that this parliament should not be looking at very serious legislation that is before this House and that impacts on every person in our community, often the children and the generations ahead, at that time of night. I say that having heard the evidence put forward by Dr Washer and having listened to the concerns of reasonable members of parliament in this place.

I know the general public will say: 'What are they complaining about? They have it easy.' I spoke to a woman this morning who said: 'I have had two lives, Mr Broadbent. I have had a life in the Public Service, where I was getting ministerial briefs up to people like yourself all the time.' I said, 'That would have been hard work.' And she said: 'It was hard work, and intense sometimes. But I've got this other life now, where I'm actually watching, very close hand, what politicians do. I have a changed opinion of you as a group.' I said, 'Thank you very much.' It is not known, other than by those closest to us—our staff, our family and the other occupants of this building—what politicians actually do, the work they do on the behalf of their constituents and the time that can often take. That is extremely important. So is the business of government. I want to make the business of government so important that we knock off at a reasonable time and come in the next day with a greater opportunity to do the best on behalf of this nation that we can possibly do as individuals.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!