




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

Record of Proceedings, 23 August 2018

MOTION

Amendments to Sessional Orders

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (12.22 pm): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this motion. The very fact that I managed to get the call is a bit of a bonus in the circumstances, because we are debating this motion that would limit the amount of time that is available for debate on effectively every bill. I think that is especially consequential for the crossbenchers.

Mr Power: The Greens voted for this in Victoria.

Mr BERKMAN: I will take that interjection from the chief protectionist of the Economics and Governance Committee. I have spoken to my colleagues in Victoria about their reflections on this process now, and they have some very real concerns about it and what it means not only for the capacity of the crossbench to contribute but also for the consideration in detail of bills.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Maiwar, I believe you may have not been using a member's correct title. I ask that you remember the standing orders, given you now have an opportunity to make a contribution.

Mr BERKMAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I appreciate your guidance. To be clear, right now we have a system where every member has the opportunity to speak on any piece of legislation. This is a vitally important part of our democratic representation of this state and each of our electorates. When the government need to keep things moving, they have ample capacity to do that. We all know what a gag motion is and we all know what a guillotine motion is. There is always the opportunity for the government to do that. They have a majority so they are always successful. Those motions are not that common because of the longstanding convention that every member of this House should have a right to speak on issues that are important to them and important to their electorates. There is a sensible convention against shutting down debate.

When the government move a motion to gag or guillotine debate, they have to wear the political consequences of that. It is important that the political cost be worn by the government and for each of their decisions to be subject to the same sort of scrutiny. What is being proposed here is a procedural trick to switch from a free vote with the possibility of a gag or guillotine to an automatic guillotine on 100 per cent of bills. Yes, there is a genuine argument for getting legislation through this place more quickly and, yes, there is no doubt that the opposition is to blame for the recent logjam—let us be clear about that. There is also an argument for making debate in this place more predictable. I entirely agree with the comments of the Leader of the House that we need to make sure that our contributions are actually meaningful and that we are not just grandstanding and wasting everyone's time, wasting parliament's time and wasting the resources of the people of Queensland.

The answer is though for government to simply be honest with Queenslanders about what they are doing by moving a gag motion when they need to do it. All of that is possible under the existing rules. Instead, they are trying to hide behind a procedural trick to move for an automatic guillotine on

100 per cent of bills. This proposed process goes too far. It risks fulsome debate on all bills, and it particularly puts at risk consideration in detail, which is a vitally important step in the process. After we have all had the opportunity to contribute in the second reading debate—or after some of us have had the opportunity, if this goes through, which it probably will—when we get to the details of each bill, the nitty-gritty of what we are doing here, legislating, we will lose the opportunity to have our contribution.

We all need to remember that Queensland is the only large state in Australia without an upper house to keep a check on the executive government of the day. Both Labor and the LNP have a record of ramming through major changes to our laws with almost no notice. These changes will make that much, much easier. They can toss in major amendments at the last moment. They can railroad any bill, ram it straight through parliament, and do so with the cover of an automatic guillotine.

For people outside parliament watching this, it might seem like a minor procedural detail, but it is a really key part of the system that is designed to lock you out of how our state parliament works. For those of us in here, I would ask you all to consider very carefully what this means for consideration in detail and what this means for the growing number of Queenslanders who cannot bring themselves to vote for the major parties anymore.

I see nothing in this proposal that protects the crossbench's opportunity to have a say on legislation. I would propose an amendment to this motion. If we are going to follow through with what Victoria has done, let us do it completely. Back in 2015, Victoria took the opportunity to get rid of Dorothy Dixers. Question time does not need to be an opportunity for government backbenchers to ask questions of ministers who then give answers that could be put out in a press release. It is completely unnecessary. So I would propose that we move an amendment to the motion after clause (4) to put in an additional sessional order 10 after sessional order 9 which simply says, 'Government members may not ask a question without notice.' I would ask all opposition members, all of the crossbench and all government members to think about this.

(Time expired)