




Speech By
Jarrold Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

MOTION

Amendments to Sessional Orders

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (9.46 pm): I oppose the amendment to the sessional orders. I premise my comments by saying that what I am about to say is no reflection on you, Mr Speaker. The sessional orders that are being amended give the power to 'a Speaker', so the comments that I am about to make are no reflection on you, Mr Speaker. The comments I am about to make are on the role of the Speaker, regardless of who is sitting in the Speaker's chair at the time that this sessional order would be requested to be used by a government.

This is an extraordinary power to give to anyone. The reason I am so concerned about it is that under this amended sessional order the government could advise the Speaker to do what they want to do. I am going to say what I think is going to happen or what could happen under this amended sessional order. I think tonight the government will move the special adjournment and we will not be back tomorrow. A minute ago the Leader of the House said that she will move the special adjournment so that we are here when we are meant to be here in a couple of weeks time. Earlier today at the health briefing, they said that coronavirus or COVID-19 is only going to get worse. Let us consider what they have done in this week's sitting, that is, there have been no debates today, they suspended the House and we are not sitting tomorrow.

Do members really think we will be here in two weeks time? Is COVID-19 going to be fixed by then? Is the economic reality that we are facing going to be gone? Will everything be fixed? No, it will not! Therefore, for the Leader of the House to say that she will move the special adjournment and we will all be here in a couple of weeks time is rubbish. We will not be here in a couple of weeks time. If the advice today is not to sit and that is why we are finishing up, I cannot see how, in two weeks, the health advice will be that it is all better and parliament can now sit. All the health advice, both federally and across the state, is that it is only going to get worse.

The reason the Leader of the House will move the special adjournment is so that when the media question why they are giving the Speaker such a power tonight, they will be able to say, 'Oh, but we might be sitting next week; it's only backup.' This sessional order change could mean that the government could go to the Speaker and say, 'We do not want to sit until 17 September 2020.' For six months we might not sit in this House. What concerns me is that, as members may recall, the Premier stood in the parliament this morning and said that this crisis could last for six months.

Incidentally we have an amendment to a sessional order giving the power to the government to direct the Speaker to stop parliament for six months. All these little bits we heard today are leading to one road. What the Leader of the House did not say is that the Constitution of Queensland Act also says that the House cannot go for longer than six months without sitting. So we have six months from the Premier this morning. We have the health advice today saying this could go for six months. We now have a sessional order amendment which just happens to be six months. The government want to escape scrutiny and accountability for six months.

Colleagues, this could be your last sitting until the election. This could be our last sitting of this parliament until the election. I see Minister Lynham shaking his head and laughing. How is it that what I am saying could not happen? If it cannot happen, then why did they put 17 September in the sessional orders?

The Leader of the House also says federally they have this power and no-one has ever abused it. Federally, they have a Senate. I cannot believe Minister Furner did not remind the Leader of the House. He knows all about the Senate. All we have is this House and a ceremonial house a few metres down the corridor. Our committees are government controlled. The chair of the committees, other than the PCCC, are government controlled. The only thing that separates a corrupt government and the people of Queensland is this parliament. This parliament stops it.

Gordon Nuttall would not have gone to jail had it not been for parliament. The former member for Redcliffe would not have stood at that bar had it not been for this parliament. For the government to dismiss this parliament as their little plaything for the next six months is disgraceful—absolutely disgraceful. They will cancel committee meetings and, at a whim, in two weeks the Leader of the House can inform the Speaker, 'Please advise honourable members that this sitting is not happening.' They could advise the Speaker to do it the next sitting, and on and on they could do this.

Mrs D'Ath: What if the Chief Health Officer said it should not sit? Do you care?

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection. The Chief Health Officer and federal Chief Health Officer did not say parliament should be suspended. The government did suspend it today. You suspended the House. The Leader of the House says, 'We are not suspending it.' Five hours ago they did. The Leader of the House moved a notice of suspension. If we were not going to have a special adjournment in a minute, we would be back here tomorrow sitting. It concerns me greatly.

This House is important and to some members on this side, including the crossbench, this House is still important. We are not going to use a scare campaign of the COVID-19 to escape accountability and integrity, as this government have done. They are using the coronavirus to escape integrity and accountability. Since the Palaszczuk government was elected, we have seen nothing but accountability and integrity shown the door in this place.

This Parliament needs to sit. We have seen these issues and this is why we need to sit not only tomorrow but also in two weeks and for the next six months. As I said today, we can sit with limited people. We can do the same deal as the federal government did with limited people in the House. We can do all that. We can abide by the 1.5-metre rule. The government said today that it is hard to abide by the 1.5-metre social distancing rule because this is an old place. I will tell the Leader of House something: it did not stop the ministers lining up at the buffet at lunch standing next to each other or at the bar tonight. Where is the 1.5-metre rule? It is a guise. The government is conning the people of Queensland under the coronavirus scare campaign that parliament ought not to sit. Parliament should be sitting. I tell you why. More than ever we should be sitting because if these are the tactics of this government this week, God help us and God knows what is going to happen in the next six months.

Absolutely the Queensland public would expect us to sit. How else are we going to debate the youth justice crime wave across the state, air conditioning in state schools, the Cross River Rail and the member for Toohey—all these issues that need to be debated in this place? If it was not for this place, Gordon Nuttall would have got let off and Scott Driscoll would have got let off. It is this House, it is this parliament and it is these members that stand between a corrupt government getting away with their corruption and a good government. We will do everything we can on this side of the House to make sure that the people of Queensland are informed of this. This is so wrong, so wrong, and members should not support it.

(Time expired)