




Speech By
Tim Mander

MEMBER FOR EVERTON

Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

MOTION

Amendments to Sessional Orders

 **Mr MANDER** (Everton—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.06 pm): I speak against the motion to amend the sessional orders. We have one fundamental issue with the amendment—that is, we do not trust the government. We do not trust them. At the beginning of this week we entered into negotiations with the Leader of the House in good faith. We recognised the seriousness of the situation that we are facing in this state. It is important that we have bipartisan support so we can tackle the issues that are an incredible threat to the health of Queenslanders and the economic future of Queensland.

We will not stand by and see the very foundations of the Westminster system of government undermined. Our bottom line through all of this is that parliament should continue to meet. We will negotiate what form that looks like. That is why we said we were happy with the changes this week—whether that be in terms of quorums, sitting in different seats and so on. We even gave the government notice of which ministers we would ask questions of today so that they need only send in those ministers because we want the parliament to continue to operate. In times of emergency and crisis it is even more important that parliament sits.

We are opposed to this amendment because we do not trust this government. The balance in the trust bank of the Labor government is extremely low. In fact, it is in overdraft. When we look at the integrity issues that have plagued this government—whether it is those related to the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, the health minister and his dodgy polls; the list goes on and on—we find it very difficult to trust this government. This amendment, which has just been circulated, says—

"Change to sitting date or time

- 1B. (1) Notwithstanding standing order 49, sessional order 1(a) or the House having already adjourned to a specified time and date, the Speaker, upon advice from the government of the state ...

It says 'upon advice from the government'. It is the government that runs this place. It is the government that advises the Speaker on what should happen. That is what we are concerned about. I agree with the Manager of Opposition Business. There is no chance in the world that we will be back here in a fortnight's time—no chance in the world. They will look for every opportunity they can to avoid scrutiny.

The Prime Minister himself this morning in his address listed the essential services that would not be affected by the crowd control measures that have been brought in—and one of those was parliament. The parliament is an essential service. It is incredibly important that we meet regularly as planned so that we can address the issues of the day whatever they might be. Of course we have this crisis at the moment that we need to constantly reassess, but there are other issues that will not go away because of the coronavirus crisis. In fact, we could argue that they would be more pressured—with regard to domestic violence, with regard to crime—

Mr Boyce: Magnified tenfold.

Mr Weir: Unemployment.

Mr MANDER: Unemployment—I take those interjections. Those types of issues are incredibly important. We simply do not trust this government.

Our bottom line is that we want parliament to continue to meet. We are open to negotiate on what that may look like—whether everybody comes or how many people we have in the chamber at a time—but the institution of parliament must continue. As the Manager of Opposition Business said, why would we not be meeting tomorrow? We are all here. So what chance is there that we will be back here in a fortnight?

Again, with regard to levels of trust, right through the week we have been operating on 10 minutes notice and 15 minutes notice on incredibly important issues. Of course the bill this afternoon was one of those. It is very difficult for us to trust this government at the moment, because most of us on this side of the House believe that any change that a Labor government bring in is to their advantage. They will only bring in legislation if it is to their advantage.

This amendment, which says, ‘upon advice from the Government of the State’, says to me that they want to dictate when we meet. They want to determine what is happening. It will not take much for them to say, ‘We don’t want to meet,’ because there will be another crisis—whether it is in youth justice, domestic violence, high unemployment, escalating debt. All of those things will continue to take place whether the coronavirus is here or not.

Mrs D’Ath: And you think the Speaker is going to approve that, do you?

Mr MANDER: ‘Upon advice from the government of the state’—that is what the amendment says. The Speaker has little option but to follow the advice of the government. That is what this amendment is saying.

Mr Harper: Are you not taking the coronavirus seriously?

Mr MANDER: I take that interjection. We take the coronavirus incredibly seriously. That is why parliament should continue to meet so we can debate these things, so we can reassess. It was quite obvious in this afternoon’s health briefing that the Labor backbenchers had not been briefed about anything. They had more questions than we had about the coronavirus. Both sides of the House should be looking to make sure that the parliament meets. That is how important it is.

We are now being constantly bombarded in our offices—I am sure Labor members are as well—by businesses that are going broke. They are going broke as we speak. It is so important that we continue to meet so we can look at strategies and policies to address this ever-changing environment that we have at the moment. It is literally changing by the hour. That is why it is important that we meet.

The Leader of the House is asking us to trust the government. I am sorry, Attorney-General, but your record does not—

Mr SPEAKER: Put your comments through the chair.

Mr Harper interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: The member for Thuringowa will cease his interjections. I remind members who are on warnings that there will be zero interjections from you.

Mr MANDER: The Attorney-General is asking us to trust her and to trust the Palaszczuk government. We simply cannot do that. The principles of the Westminster system of government are that the opposition is here to keep the government accountable. It is to ask the right questions. Leading into a state election—coincidentally, I think 17 September is the last sitting week before the election. That is a coincidence, isn’t it? It is the last sitting week before the election. We do not trust that this government is acting with pure motives. We have all of this legislation that has been—

Mr Saunders interjected.

Mr Hunt interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Maryborough and member for Nicklin, you are both warned for quarrelling across the chamber. One more, members, and I will ask for silence and we will listen in silence, if that is what you would like to do.

Mr MANDER: Once again, I repeat: we will be opposing this amendment, not because we are being difficult, not because we do not believe that there should be a bipartisan approach to tackling this coronavirus epidemic. We will oppose this because we believe it undermines the foundational principles of the Westminster system of government—and that is that parliament must continue to meet. That is even more important in a unicameral system when we have no upper house—no senate, no house of review. It is incredibly important that we continue to meet. Unfortunately these amendments put that at risk.