




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (10.34 pm): I rise to oppose this motion. I oppose adjourning for two weeks. We face extraordinary times. COVID-19 is an extraordinary threat to Queensland, Australia and the world. If anything, we should be sitting more. We should sit tomorrow, Friday and next week because as this medical crisis ramps up we may not be able to sit. If the legislation before this House were not important and not relevant, the government would not have put it before this House, but it is before the House. The fact that we may go into a lockdown period is why we should not adjourn debate for two weeks. We should debate every bill we can so that the governance of Queensland continues.

Over a period of time, we have seen extraordinary abuses of power by this Labor government. We saw that today. Those need to be highlighted. If the fourth estate could only look at what has happened, it would see that every debate is being guillotined. Tonight I am guillotined in trying to talk about COVID-19, something incredibly important to the future of the state. We are told we cannot sit because there is some sort of threat, yet tomorrow thousands of children and teachers will go to school. This parliament will not sit.

Clearly the government has sent a message, by not sitting for two weeks, that the legislation before this House is not important enough to bring on debate. If it were important enough, the House would be sitting as a matter of urgency to get as many things passed as it possibly could before COVID-19 is upon us and we are not able to sit. There is no reason at all to adjourn this debate, apart from the government's fear of scrutiny of its actions. The people of Queensland should be afraid of its actions.

This parliament was formed with Queen Victoria's blessing so that we could rule and govern ourselves. The parliament exists to hold the executive accountable by the people of Queensland for its actions. That is the purpose of its existence—to pass legislation for self-governance under the scrutiny of an opposition of the executive's actions in terms of how it controls the budget.

My concern is that if we remove scrutiny of the executive and if the legislation before this House is not important enough to debate, what is the point of the executive? They have simply assumed all power and control of everything in lieu of this House's scrutiny. The people of Queensland should be afraid of that. That is the first point.

The budget and expenditure will not be scrutinised. Ministers will not be accountable for their portfolio actions, because the House is not sitting. There is absolutely no reason to put off sitting for two weeks. The comments are that it is to do with COVID-19. That is the reason we should be sitting every day before we go into a lockdown, before there is a medical crisis, before we have to do the things that we do not want to do in a democracy in terms of restricting people's movements and rights. That is the reason why the House should be sitting, why the government should be scrutinised and why the legislation before this House, particularly in relation to youth justice, should be passed.

People are under attack in their own homes. I know of a lady in Cairns, an area that I know Mr Speaker knows well, who has been broken into while at home on four occasions by the same person, who is about to be released again. She is absolutely terrified. The youth justice amendment legislation

is something that we could debate tomorrow. We could debate it on Friday. We could debate it on Monday or any other day before the adjournment. This is important reform. If it were not an important reform, why did the Labor government get the *Cairns Post* to tell everybody that it is all okay, that we will pass this bill? We cannot pass this bill if this House does not sit.

Under this motion this House is not due to sit for two weeks. I am gravely concerned that in that two weeks the medical emergency of COVID-19 will start to overtake the process of this House. An extraordinary power has been centralised into the executive's hands and that is the reason why legislation that is before this House should be brought on and debated in quick time.

There have been conversations tonight about trust. Trust needs to be earned. This government has not earned the trust of the victims of crime in North Queensland. It has not earned the trust of the opposition by acting in a decent manner. It has guillotined debate. It has restricted us from speaking. It changed the Electoral Act in 18 minutes. It is looking to make further changes and centralise more and more power into its hands without the scrutiny of this House by shutting this House's debate down, by adjourning this House's debate for two weeks, when in actual fact we have potentially only, according to what was briefed to us today, maybe two to four weeks before the COVID-19 medical emergency will require the very powerful restrictions that were discussed in this place tonight. Under those restrictions it may be difficult for this House to meet. We will now be in your hands, Mr Speaker, under the leadership of the Leader of the House and the government's advice, as to whether this House can, in fact, sit under those circumstances.

This motion tonight is not only irrelevant, because the power has already been usurped and it can be changed at the drop of a hat without any debate or discussion, but we are now completely dependent on the fourth estate to hold this government to account because no other voices will be heard. This motion means that no other voices will be heard for two weeks. As I said, the problem with silencing our voices right now is that we may not get to speak again this side of an election.

Under the motion that was passed earlier tonight, the ability for this House to be deferred until 17 September rests in the Speaker's hands under the advice of the government. This motion is not only irrelevant; it shows a centralisation of power to the executive and complete contempt for the people's house and complete contempt for the democratically elected members of this House who have constantly had their voices guillotined and silenced by this government because it does not like a dissenting voice.

I can in no way support this motion that says that this House should not sit for two weeks for two principle reasons: one is the urgency of legislation before this House which should come on tomorrow, Friday, or Monday or Tuesday of the following week. We should do as much as we can as urgently as we can because we all know that a medical and an economic crisis is going to sweep this state as COVID-19 grows in our community.

That is the reason why the very important legislation before this House should be debated every day we have the opportunity to debate it. As the government and executive act on behalf of the people of Queensland, spending taxpayers' dollars to try to provide them a safe and healthy environment to live their lives, the opposition should have the opportunity to scrutinise their actions on behalf of the people of Queensland, to hold them to account for the things that they are going to do. Instead of that scrutiny, instead of that opportunity for this House to hold the executive to account, we face an executive that is drunk on power and wants to run away with controlling the state. It has passed some incredibly powerful legislation, which I understand in the medical crisis we are in is important, but it centralises power and control in an extraordinary manner and then we have two motions passed tonight that are very dangerous for the democracy of Queensland.