



Speech By  
**Hon. Yvette D'Ath**


**MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE**

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Record of Proceedings, 18 March 2020

**MOTION**

**Order of Business**

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Leader of the House) (11.55 am), by leave, without notice: I move—

That this day's sitting of the House be suspended until the Speaker, after consultation with the government, directs that the bells be rung.

As we have heard throughout this and the past few weeks, we are not in a situation of 'business as usual'. We are in unprecedented times that require an unprecedented response. Over the last 24 hours I have been in contact with other leaders of the house and managers of opposition business in Victoria and the federal parliament to ascertain how they are managing their parliaments going forward. As we have heard this morning, the Prime Minister acknowledged it is important that we have cooperation across all states and that we have consistency from the premiers and the Prime Minister about how we deal with and act on the advice we have been given in relation to issues such as social distancing and how we respond to this emergency crisis.

I acknowledged yesterday the cooperation of the Manager of Opposition Business, but we believe it is important that this House concentrates on what it is absolutely essential to do to address and respond to this health emergency. That is what the people of Queensland expect us to do. There are a number of matters here, and one is social distancing. Right now we are not fully practising the advice we are giving the broader public. Because of this beautiful historic building and this chamber, we are very much restricted in the space in which we can do business and the number of members in parliament this week. I acknowledge the efforts of the Clerk in relation to reducing the number of staff in the parliamentary precinct to reduce risk, but the reality is that we are not fully complying with this advice. We must lead by example and follow this advice, and that means changes in the way we are doing business.

We must also acknowledge that it is not business as usual, and those matters in this parliament that it is not absolutely essential to deal with should be adjourned and dealt with at a later time. The government needs to make sure that every single minister is doing what they have to do every moment of the day to respond to this health emergency and that they have the ability to do that—not necessarily sitting here debating stuff that is not of an emergent nature. We also need to ensure that members are not being put at unnecessary risk.

There is going to be disruption. Every single business is feeling disruption. Out of necessity we are going to have disruption to this chamber and the way the parliament operates. We have to be realistic and we have to be responsible in the way we respond. Today I understand that Victoria will move a motion to suspend all non-government business and only deal with absolutely essential government matters in relation to the health emergency.

There is full bipartisan support and agreement between the Morrison government and the Labor opposition in the federal parliament to suspend all non-government work. There is mass pairing to ensure the minimum numbers required in Canberra. They have agreed on a list of urgent bills. They

have agreed that the only members required in the chamber to speak on those bills are the minister and relevant shadow ministers. Where possible, they will cognate debates and suspend the parliament the moment that important legislation is dealt with while awaiting Senate outcomes.

I respect the Manager of Opposition Business also following the lead of the federal government and federal Labor opposition in question time today by providing a list of the ministers required to be in the chamber. There will be no quorum calls or procedural motions. This is bipartisan agreement in terms of how the federal parliament will operate next week. This is showing leadership to the people of Queensland. That is what they expect from us.

Let us recognise that right now the government and its ministers have a lot of important work to do to respond to this health emergency, that we need to keep everyone in this parliament precinct safe and following the health advice. To do that, we propose to suspend business and come back to deal with an emergency health bill that will have a number of elements in it from various ministers. I understand that those ministers, including Minister Hinchcliffe and I, have provided briefings to shadow ministers on these matters. This is not about catching anyone out. This is an important piece of legislation. We are providing briefings so that we can let the opposition know what needs to occur to ensure the supply of items in our shops and how to respond across various issues such as local elections and further health initiatives.

I appreciate that the opposition would like to see non-government time proceed and that its members think that is important to Queensland's democracy. I do not argue that in a normal circumstance that is a very important part of our democratic system. We have ensured that question time continued yesterday and today, because we respect the opposition's right to hold the government to account and to ask the important questions in relation to its response on this health emergency, but let us also acknowledge that the only work this chamber should do is in response to that health emergency. We should not put ourselves in a position going forward where we do not follow that health advice as we should.

We are seeking to suspend sittings. We hope to come back later this evening or this afternoon with that bill. We ask for the opposition's support and cooperation in proposing that only ministers and relevant shadow ministers speak to that bill. We have limited the number of members in this chamber so that we follow the health advice on social distancing principles outlined by the Chief Health Officer, the national Chief Health Officer, the Prime Minister and the Premier of this state. I do really request that the opposition considers and supports the government's motion in regard to suspension.