

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

BILLS, CONSIDERATION PRIOR TO ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Standing Orders Suspension

MR KOBELKE (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [2.39 pm]: I move -

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2001 and the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill 2001 to be dealt with prior to the adoption of the Address-in-Reply and pass through all remaining stages in one day.

This motion is designed to enable the House to deal with two specific pieces of urgent legislation: The Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill and the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill. Members will be aware of the urgency attached to these Bills from the second reading speeches given yesterday. The Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill must complete its passage through the Parliament by the start of June. If that does not happen, funds may not be available in some designated areas to meet the Government's commitments. That was spelt out in the Treasurer's speech. This matter is urgent. We cannot have a situation in which the Government cannot pay its bills because it is waiting for Parliament to pass the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill.

The Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill is urgent for a different reason. It requires that we fund a liability of \$93 million, \$36 million of which falls next year. If the approach taken is the same as the last time supplementation was required, it will mean that funds are supplied after the event. It can be done retrospectively. The reason for the urgency is that business needs certainty. It will save money if interest does not have to be paid on carrying costs. Business needs to know that a levy will apply from a specific date, such as 25 June. That being the case, the Bill must pass through Parliament by the beginning of June. There is no intention in this motion to remove the precedence of the Address-in-Reply debate, as was done by the previous Government from time to time. The Government proposes that these Bills be dealt with this afternoon. Standing orders would then be resumed, giving precedence to the Address-in-Reply.

The Opposition has suggested that these Bills be progressed through the House after the forthcoming two-week break. If that were done, there would still have to be a suspension of standing orders as the Address-in-Reply still would have precedence. If the Bills were dealt with in three weeks, the Legislative Council would have to deal with them on a very urgent basis. We should take special steps to expedite the passage of the Bills through this House and then ask our colleagues in the other place to expedite the Bills in the first week of sitting after the recess. The Bills would then be cleared by the end of May.

There are many examples of previous Governments suspending the Address-in-Reply to progress legislation. On 6 and 7 July 1993 the former coalition Government suspended the Address-in-Reply to debate and pass four pieces of legislation that it considered urgent. The legislation was the Supreme Court Amendment Bill, the Judges' Salaries and Pensions Amendment Bill, the Local Government (Superannuation) Amendment and Repeal Bill and, interestingly, the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill. The last Bill is of the same form as that which the Government is now seeking to amend.

In April 1995 the former coalition Government suspended the Address-in-Reply to debate the Industrial Relations Amendment Bill - part of its second wave industrial relations legislation changes. As the then Opposition we did not support the legislation, but, in the spirit of cooperation, we supported the suspension of the Address-in-Reply in order for the Bill to be debated. I have canvassed members on both sides of the House to determine who wishes to speak on the Address-in-Reply. I appreciate that one or two members wish to speak today and will be disadvantaged and inconvenienced by the suspension of standing orders. I apologise for that. More members have asked me whether they can speak in the next sitting week rather than today. I do not believe that the proposed suspension will disrupt the key intent of the standing orders that gives precedence to the Address-in-Reply. Many members had indicated that they wish to give their Address-in-Reply speech when the House resumes its business after the break. It is not an unusual practice to ask for a suspension. The Bills are subject to considerable urgency and need to be progressed through Parliament with haste. It is the Government's intention that the two Bills progress to the other House as soon as possible to give that House time to consider them when Parliament resumes in two weeks. That is the only purpose of the suspension of standing orders and the precedence of the Address-in-Reply.

MR BARNETT (Cottesloe - Leader of the Opposition) [2.45 pm]: It does not take long, does it? How many times did members on this side of the House sit and listen to self-righteous speeches by other members, particularly the now Premier, about parliamentary standards, the role of Parliament and the need for proper timing to conduct proper debates? How many times did we have to endure that? These issues are important. The Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill relates to the collapse of HIH Insurance.

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

The collapse of the company has created exposure in workers compensation insurance of many millions of dollars. My colleague the member for Kingsley is well attuned to the problem. My understanding is that the broad solution is to impose a levy of 5 per cent across all policies covering that area. This would be an increase in tax. It may well be warranted and supported by members on this side of the House, given the circumstances. It would be an increase in tax of 5 per cent - one dollar in 20. On the first full day of the session, the Government introduced and second read a Bill that seeks to impose a tax - not a tax on HIH Insurance, but on all small business constituents. They are the people whom the Government said it would represent in this Parliament. Members talked about representing their small business constituents - businesses that are a major provider of employment in this State. On their second full day in Parliament, the new backbenchers are going to allow a 5 per cent tax to be put through without any scrutiny or realistic opportunity for members on this side of the House to look at the issue. The member for Kingsley, who is handling the Bill, is aware of the details and has started the process of talking to employers and insurance groups. What opportunity has any member of this House had to talk to their small business constituents? They have not had a single opportunity. This is not just a piece of government machinery; it is not a form of Treasury advance arrangement. This is about imposing on employers in this State a 5 per cent tax for workers compensation. It is not a trivial matter. It is not something that members of Parliament, particularly newly elected members, should just sit and accept. New members have a direct accountability to their constituencies - the small businesses and the people they employ. We all know that the labour market is tight and that there are economic problems. For many employers, whatever the merits or otherwise of this legislation, the imposition of a 5 per cent - one dollar in 20 - tax will no doubt drive some of them to the wall. It will be the straw that breaks the camel's back. It will affect employment. Members of Parliament, at a minimum, should be talking to their constituents and to the minister handling the issue. They should be thinking about it properly. None of the members would have had the opportunity to do so; certainly, no-one on this side of the House, whether they be Liberal, National Party or Independent, has had any opportunity to talk to the interest groups, let alone individuals.

The decision to suspend standing orders should be related to the importance of the Bill. The Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill is a taxation Bill. It is not a machinery of government Bill; it is not a trivial amendment or correction of an anomaly from a previous piece of legislation. It does not deal with minor amendments. It is not an omnibus Bill. It is a significant decision to solve a problem that is not of the making of the Government or the Opposition. The Opposition agrees that the issue needs to be addressed. The implication for all employers and policyholders in workers compensation in this State is very significant. I am certain that anomalies will arise between different categories of workers compensation, sectors of the work force, industry and employers in different types of financial arrangements. There is no doubt about that. Some cases involving compensation for accidents in the workplace are proceeding, but some are yet to proceed.

The Minister for Labour Relations should not sit there and grin. He should do his job properly. He has a serious and difficult issue to deal with. The Opposition recognises that. However, the minister's first action should not be to take for granted this Parliament, the Liberal Opposition, Labor backbenchers, small businesses, larger employers in this State or the hundreds of thousands of people who are covered by workers compensation. This is not a trivial issue.

The Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill 2001, which relates to Treasury funding for the ongoing operation of government, is the type of Bill that Government's of both persuasions have brought forward. This Bill is internal to government - it is a machinery arrangement - and has no great policy implications. When those Bills come forward there is a bit of debate about the state of the budget and whatever else. It does not contain the same sort of serious issue as the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill 2001. It is internal to government and there can be general debate about it, as is generally the case with budget Bills.

The workers compensation issue is not just about government. It concerns hundreds and thousands of employers and employees. Many businesses, in particular in regional and rural areas, are under severe stress. Every elected representative has the responsibility to talk to his constituents. Members should be given a fair opportunity to look at the issues, consider the Bill and come back to this Parliament.

I refer to Standing Order No 59, which refers to the priority for the Address-in-Reply -

Bills may be introduced and taken to the stage that the motion "That the bill be now read a second time" has been moved but no other business that is not of a formal or procedural nature will have priority until

-

- (a) after 4 sitting days . . . have been dedicated exclusively to the debate on the Address in Reply; or

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pandal; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

- (b) immediately following a general election after 7 sitting days (including opening day) have been dedicated exclusively to the debate on the Address in Reply.

This Parliament has returned following a general election. The Deputy Premier, along with members of this side of the House, played a significant role in redrafting the standing orders. I worked cooperatively on standing orders and reform when I sat on that side of the House. It was done in a bipartisan way to improve the operation of this Parliament, to set up standing committees and to simplify procedures. The Deputy Premier was passionate, quite rightly, about the need to do that. The standing orders state that the Address-in-Reply at the beginning of the parliamentary year should go for four days before other matters are dealt with. After an election, it should be seven days.

When the Minister for Labour Relations raised this issue, he discussed it with the member for Kingsley and briefly with me. The Opposition recognises the importance of the Bill. It is prepared to suspend the Address-in-Reply once there has been a reasonable, albeit short, opportunity to talk to interest groups - the financial sector, small business and other constituencies. The Opposition does not support the suspension of the Address-in-Reply on day two of Parliament to deal with a matter concerning a significant tax increase to the community, whether or not it is justified.

As I told the Minister for Labour Relations, the matter can be dealt with after the recess. This House is scheduled to have a two-week recess. The Government could make it a one-week recess while the Centenary of Federation celebration is on in Melbourne. The Opposition will wear that. Even though it will be difficult, the Opposition will be prepared, certainly by the Wednesday, to debate this issue following a full week's break. That is not unreasonable. Alternatively, the Government could stick to the two-week break and - I think the member for Kingsley would agree - the Opposition would be willing to debate the Bill on the first Tuesday. While the Opposition is reluctant about a tax increase, it will be satisfied to deal with the Bill at that point. There will be issues and anomalies that must be raised and dealt with. It will then be dealt with in an efficient way; hopefully then it will progress through the Chamber on that Tuesday. That is not an unreasonable position. The Government has the choice. The Opposition will agree to the suspension of the Address-in-Reply, but not on day two of Parliament.

Mr Ripper: It is actually day three.

Mr BARNETT: There was no Address-in-Reply of any consequence on opening day, as members know.

Several members interjected.

Mr BARNETT: This is the second full day of Parliament. The opening day of Parliament is largely ceremonial. The Address-in-Reply is given by one member; this year it was given by the new member for Kimberley, and members applauded her for that. This is the second full sitting day of Parliament. If this debate were brought on during the Tuesday following the one-week break, the Opposition would be allowing it to be debated on the third day. At least the Opposition would have been given a week in which to look at the issues. Alternatively, the Government can leave the two-week break in place, after which the matter will be dealt with. That is not unreasonable.

Dr Gallop: You briefed your member here three weeks ago.

Mr BARNETT: This Bill was brought into the Parliament. The Premier can talk about the issue. The collapse of HIH Insurance has been widely canvassed and reported in the media. The legislative solution - the 5 per cent tax increase - proposed by the Government was introduced to Parliament yesterday during the second reading speech. It was the first opportunity that the details of, and justification for, the legislation were made public. It was the first opportunity, as the member for Kingsley rightly pointed out, for industry groups to find out about the 5 per cent levy. What will they say to every member of Parliament? They will ask why they had not been told about it. The first thing this Government will do is to introduce a 5 per cent tax. The second thing it will do is not tell anyone about it. The Government will try to ram this legislation through Parliament today by suspending standing orders instead of having the decency to show respect for its constituency or even a modicum of respect for proper parliamentary process.

The offer is open to the Government. The Opposition does not support the suspension of standing orders today. The Bill can be debated when the Parliament comes back in two weeks - immediately it comes back if the Government wishes - or, if there is only a week's break, the Opposition would be prepared to debate the Bill perhaps late on the Tuesday afternoon or evening. That is not unreasonable. I am sure that our colleagues in the upper House will similarly cooperate with the passage with the Bill if they are satisfied. I cannot be more reasonable than that.

Mr Masters: Hear, hear!

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Thursday, 3 May 2001]
p192b-204a

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pendal; Mrs Cheryl
Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

Mr BARNETT: The same should apply to the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill, even though it is a less contentious Bill that does not directly affect the outside community. Again, propriety suggests that it should be dealt -

Mr Ripper: We absolutely must pass the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill.

Mr BARNETT: I suggest it should be dealt with in the same way. I am Treasury spokesman for this side and handle Treasury information. I saw the Bill for the first time yesterday. I have not had an opportunity for a briefing by Treasury. That has not been offered to me, has it?

Mr Ripper: No, but you can have one at any time if you wish.

Mr BARNETT: Gee, thanks mate! Will that be before or after afternoon tea? This is the reality.

I understand the pressures and financial problems of government. I was there for eight years. I understand the needs of Treasury. The Opposition will cooperate with that. However, the Bill should be dealt with on the Tuesday following the break.

Mr Ripper: By the way, did you ask for a briefing?

Mr BARNETT: I received a copy of the Bill only yesterday. I did not know that the Government would try to slam it through Parliament today.

Mr Ripper: You were told yesterday. Did you ask for a briefing?

Mr BARNETT: Did the Treasurer speak to me yesterday?

Mr Kobelke: I spoke to you about it yesterday and I told you that tomorrow we would suspend standing orders to get the Bill through.

Mr BARNETT: For HIH Insurance. Yes. Did the Treasurer speak to me yesterday?

Mr Ripper: No. The Leader of the House spoke to you.

Mr BARNETT: Does the Treasurer not think that it is his responsibility? It is. The Minister for Labour Relations did speak to me and I do not doubt what he said. My focus was on the issue of HIH Insurance because the member for Kingsley had approached me about it. The Minister for Labour Relations had spoken about it to the member for Kingsley. She did discuss it with me. The urgency of that Bill was in my mind. That was the only thing the member for Kingsley and I discussed. The minister may have referred to the other Bill. Frankly, if he did, I did not take any notice of that comment, because I had no reason to assume anything other than that the standing orders would apply.

If members have not yet read the standing orders, they state that when a piece of legislation is introduced and is second read, it will lie on the Table for three weeks - not three sitting weeks. Why would I ask for a briefing yesterday? I had every expectation, if I wanted to talk to Treasury officials about that Bill, that I would have three calendar weeks. That is the reality. My focus is not on the Treasury matter. The Treasurer now says I have to respond to this today. He has a problem. He has to do his job. If he has a problem with the Treasury financing issue - I do not doubt that he has - he as Treasurer should have spoken to me last week or the week before. He knows I would have been sympathetic and supportive to his cause. It is no good his second reading the Bill without even saying a word to me, and his now wanting to push it through at three o'clock on a Thursday afternoon. What an appalling approach to management and an absolute arrogant disregard for the functions and operations of this Parliament. He has not got off to a good start.

Dr Gallop: A bit like the way you misrepresented your party yesterday.

Mr BARNETT: We are talking about Parliament. How many times did the members opposite stand over here and lecture the former Government about Parliament? They have had a chance to think about the offer, which is to come back in two weeks. We will then suspend standing orders and, assuming we agree with the legislation, as I believe we will, we will facilitate its passage. However, we want to consider the implications of and anomalies in the legislation. Some members from the Liberal Party and the National Party have already raised issues of concern to them. There are issues that perhaps the Government is not even aware of. They should be considered before a money Bill - a tax Bill - leaves the Legislative Assembly. Money Bills originate in this House. It is here that the Treasury function has to be administered and tackled, not in the upper House. These Bills have to be dealt with by the two ministers in this place and they have to be dealt with properly. My offer is a reasonable one. Members opposite have had time to think about. Is there a response before I sit down?

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

Mr Kobelke: I will reply during my right of reply, but the Treasury's advance has to go through. Delaying the supplementation will make it much more complex for business. It will go through. We will consider the complaints and issues raised by members and I will give a detailed answer when we debate the matter.

Mr BARNETT: How can we raise issues today?

Mr Ripper: The issue has been around for months.

Mr BARNETT: No, it has not.

Mr Ripper: Of course it has.

Dr Gallop: Courtesy of your federal colleagues who could not regulate the industry.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Hopefully the Leader of the Opposition has the information and I ask him to continue with his comments.

Mr BARNETT: I have made what I consider to be a reasonable and generous offer. The offer is fair to not only members of Parliament but also the community, particularly the small business community. The Government has that choice: It can deal with the legislation on Tuesday in two weeks when we will agree to suspend standing orders, or it can bring Parliament back a week early. If the Government is worried about the passage of the legislation through the upper House, it has the capacity to bring the upper House back earlier, too. The Government has an issue with some urgent legislation. It should not compromise this Parliament, the members of Parliament and the community; it should deal with the issue at hand, which is how to get the legislation passed by the Parliament in a reasonable and efficient manner. We are being cooperative and I hope that the Premier or Minister for Labour Relations will indicate before I sit down whether -

Dr Gallop: We want to hear the other people on that side of the House. You are not the only person on that side. What about the National Party and the Independents? We want to listen to what they have to say.

Mr BARNETT: I am giving the Premier an opportunity.

Dr Gallop: Yours is not the only party on that side of the fence.

Mr BARNETT: I have made a fair and generous offer, and the Premier can accept -

Dr Gallop: I want to hear from the National Party.

Mr BARNETT: The Premier can accept that offer now. He knows what the issues are.

Dr Gallop: Come on, let them speak!

Mr BARNETT: Mr Speaker, I am trying to make myself heard.

Mr Pental: Mr Speaker -

Mr BARNETT: I am sorry, I have not finished. There are other speakers but -

Dr Gallop: You are trying to stop them making a speech.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition is trying to continue with his comments. Perhaps members on my right will allow him to do so.

Mr BARNETT: The offer is fair and reasonable. The Premier has the opportunity to accept it or reject it. That is his choice. If he decides to accept the offer of our agreeing to debate this matter in one of two weeks, this debate can now finish and we can continue with the Address-in-Reply.

Dr Gallop: Do you speak on behalf of those people?

Mr BARNETT: I speak on behalf of the Liberal Party. That offer is there. The alternative for the Premier is to not accept the offer and for debate to continue. Members will express their views on the merits or otherwise of suspending standing orders and the merits or otherwise of the HIH legislation. I am sure they will speak at some length about their not being given the opportunity to discuss this issue. I think the Premier would be well advised to accept this offer to deal with this issue properly and fairly in a week or two weeks.

Mr Kobelke: I ask the Leader of the Opposition to put something on the record. If these Bills do not pass today, what guarantee can he give on behalf of his Liberal colleagues in the other place to cooperate with the standing orders to ensure that both Bills are passed by the end of May?

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

Mr BARNETT: As the minister knows - I speak only on behalf of the Liberal Party - if the Liberal party room agrees to the legislation, we will cooperate with its passage. However, the minister and I know that members in this House cannot reflect on members in the other House or comment on them or implicate them in any way in our discussions.

Dr Gallop: What sort of leader are you?

Mr BARNETT: I am answering the question and I ask for some decency and courtesy to allow me to complete it. What I am saying is that, as the leader of the Liberal Party, I will use all of my endeavours with the members in the upper House to ensure that the Bill passes according to time. However, I cannot dictate rules to the other House. That is the best I can offer. That is our position.

MR TRENORDEN (Avon - Leader of the National Party) [3.09 pm]: I have gross concerns about the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill 2001. My major concern is that I have not had time to investigate this legislation, and some members would know that I have some experience in the insurance industry. I wish to put on the record some issues which the Government, and certainly the back bench, should be thinking about. A \$93 million workers compensation liability has been placed on this State following the collapse of HIH Insurance. That money will be replaced, according to this Bill, with a 5 per cent levy on employers. I want to ask questions of the industry - the minister will not be able to answer them - to try to get some answers. Where did the HIH reserves go? If the reserves were the prudential requirement of HIH -

Ms MacTiernan: Ask your federal colleagues.

Mr TRENORDEN: I am asking the minister. The minister is the one who is trying to ram this legislation down our throats. Where have those reserves gone?

Ms MacTiernan: Good question! Part has gone into your campaign funds.

The SPEAKER: I draw to the attention of the House and members who intend to speak on the motion that we are discussing the proposal to suspend standing orders, not the content of the legislation. I know the Leader of the National Party is about to return to that issue, and I urge him to do that.

Mr TRENORDEN: I would never contest your rulings, Mr Speaker, but I was on that topic. Neither I nor members of the National Party have the information to answer some simple questions, so I put them into the stratosphere. I will not take long to do that. If the legislation is passed, we will take 5 per cent of the workers compensation premium and put it into the supplementation fund, and ask the employers of the State to replace it. Why? The figure is only an actuarial projection. It is not an actual \$93 million loss, but an actuarial projection over seven years. The Government is asking us to tell taxpayers we want \$93 million because an actuary said that that is the figure as workers compensations is a seven-year process. Somebody has come up with this figure and our constituents have to pay for it. Is that fair? I have not had the opportunity to ask these questions. Who gains under that scenario? The creditors of HIH will gain. The taxpayers of Western Australia will not gain, nor will the workers who were hurt in the process; but the creditors of HIH will.

As Leader of the National Party, I will not agree to such legislation until I know where the taxpayers stand, particularly the employers. At the moment, it is likely that I might penalise the wrong people. I have heard quite a few of the maiden speeches delivered today. Members talked about fairness and equity. That goes to the core of the matter. Why should the employers pay? If the Government believes in the argument I have put forward, it should take the money from the consolidated fund. Why take it from the employers? The Government did it with the Teachers Credit Society, so why not do it here? Why hit the employers? Why are they being singled out because one insurance company has collapsed? Was it their fault? The Premier can turn up his nose. However, the reality is that this could bite him. There is no way that I or other members of the National Party can support the rush to pass the Bill, because it is a \$93 million liability that will run for seven years. I want time to investigate it fully.

I indicated to the Leader of the House that I was not fully informed about the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill, but I have consulted my colleagues, and I agree that the processes of the House should be followed. Therefore, I will not support the Government on that either. It is early days. It is the first week of the sitting. As a government member rightly pointed out, we will be here for four years. Let us go through the processes correctly. The only way the Government can justify the speedy passage of the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill is if it knows it will be sent to a compliant upper House. Is the Government saying it will go through the other place quickly? Otherwise, we are wasting our time. If we are wasting our time, we should simply go through the normal and correct procedures for running this place.

MR BOARD (Murdoch) [3.13 pm]: The Government has been caught out because it is doing something incredibly undemocratic. It knows that and government members are not proud of it. The Government is

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pendal; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

denying the new members - including its own - the opportunity to have a say in this legislation. It won an election that it did not expect to win. It was caught out. It delayed the start of this Parliament. Why did the Government delay the start of the Parliament to 1 May? It could have started the Parliament much earlier. In that case, it would not be in this position.

Mr Kobelke: When you were elected in 1993, you didn't sit until June.

Mr BOARD: It has been nearly three months since the election. The Government had three months in which to recall the Parliament, yet on the second full day of the sitting it tries to ram through a piece of legislation that will impact on every employer on this State. I have listened to the speeches of new members of Parliament. They say they want to represent small business. What say have they had in this? What chance do the new members have to speak on this legislation? If they speak in this debate, they lose their right to make a maiden speech. The Government is denying new members the right to speak on the legislation and also make a maiden speech. Why? Because it was caught out.

Mr Kobelke: Who has not made a maiden speech?

Mr BOARD: Some members in this Parliament have not yet made their maiden speeches; for example, the member for Alfred Cove. She must vote on a Bill when she has not had the opportunity to make her maiden speech. The Government wants to ram through important legislation that will have an impact on all Western Australians, particularly employers. It will show that the Government was caught out. The Leader of the Opposition offered a good compromise. We can come back early and then suspend standing orders and delay the Address-in-Reply to help the Government deal with this issue. Why deny members of Parliament the opportunity of representing their constituents? The maiden speeches have been made with dignity. I am proud of what the members have said in this House about how they aim to represent the thousands of people in their electorate and how they will be in touch with those people. They have spoken about how they will let their voters have a say and will consult with them. The Government has talked about arrogance. It went to the election talking about arrogance. Yet, on the second full day of the parliamentary sitting, it is being arrogant, and it knows it. It is not proud of this. It ought to accept the compromise and uphold the democratic right of members to have a say and represent their constituencies.

MR PENDAL (South Perth) [3.16 pm]: We have been asked to deal with a very serious matter. I have consistently voted against motions to suspend standing orders or to apply the guillotine. Why? I have said it before and I will say it again: Every time the Parliament acts precipitously by bending or even breaking and setting aside its own rules - and that is what we have been asked to do today - errors happen. I hesitate to mention this phrase, but it is as though the days of WA Inc never happened. Everyone was hoping we had reached the point at which that issue was in the past. Elections have been won or lost on the merits of that. Yet, WA Inc was about this very issue. The royal commission reports and the subsequent Commission on Government reports are all about the weaknesses within the parliamentary system, incidents in which the system was held up to abuse or, when it was not being abused, where it was stretched beyond the point that anything should be stretched beyond. This is not something we should do lightly. We have been asked not just to suspend a set of standing orders that have served us for 100 years, but also to set aside a set of standing orders that were passed and approved by this House as late as last year.

This morning I had a discussion with a journalist about the role of Parliament and the upper House, and whether we should find ways to expedite things through Parliament. I made the point, without knowing what we would be dealing with this afternoon, that Parliament has the responsibility not to speed things up but to slow things down. That might sound odd to many people, but the reality is that every time we stick by the rules and abide by the time-given limits imposed by our standing orders, we have at least a reasonable chance of passing laws that will not reverberate on us. There is another way out of this process. If standing orders are suspended today and two important pieces of legislation are rushed through this House, they will arrive in the upper House two weeks from next Tuesday. This is a dangerous action that will haunt the new Government, elected quite properly and fairly on the basis of accountability. What will members have achieved by suspending standing orders, passing the two Bills and sending them to the other House? We will have achieved nothing because the upper House cannot debate them any earlier. Getting the Bills out of here quickly will be to no advantage. Common ground may be found if the Bills are left on the Assembly's Notice Paper and the Government gives us due notice that they will be dealt with on Tuesday fortnight. There can then be an arrangement that the Bills will pass through all stages on that sitting day and go to the other House. Unless I am told otherwise, or unless someone informs me that we will run out of money before then, the sense of urgency that the Government is placing on the matter simply does not exist. The Government will lose nothing by deferring these decisions today and obtaining some sort of guarantee from the Opposition that the Bills will be dealt with in an expeditious manner on Tuesday fortnight. It is not as though we have painted ourselves into a corner.

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pendal; Mrs Cheryl
Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

I disagree with the Leader of the Opposition on only one point. He indicated that the issue of the indemnity legislation was something of which we all needed to take close account, and I agree with that, but he went on to imply that the other Bill was not as important. I disagree with him there. What does the other Bill seek to do?

Mr Barnett: I have not looked at it.

Mr PENDAL: It is a Treasurer's Advance; however, I do not even know the amount of money we are dealing with - that is how remiss I would be to agree to its speedy passage through this place.

Mr Cowan: The amount is \$300 million.

Mr PENDAL: Only \$300 million! Governments have fallen on lesser amounts than that.

Mr Cowan interjected.

Mr PENDAL: I realise that, and that is partly what I am saying in response to the Leader of the Opposition. Members will be forgoing their rights to make a speech on the Supply Bill, and I remind the new members, no matter which side they are on, that the Supply Bill is like the Address-in-Reply.

Mr Ripper: No, it is not the Supply Bill, it is the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill.

Mr PENDAL: No, with respect, I have just dealt with that matter while the Treasurer was having a talkfest with the Leader of the House. Earlier it was mentioned that it was hoped that the new Government had not caught the same disease that brought the last one down. I interjected and expressed the hope that the Treasurer had been inoculated against that sort of behaviour. The Treasurer, who has carriage of the Bill, was quoted from page 2868 of *Hansard* dated Wednesday, 18 August 1993 as saying -

The proper remedy is for this House to sit longer.

Whoops! He went on to say -

The Opposition -

That is, the same group of people in government now, except they were sitting on this side of the House -

- is happy to sit next week -

So not much changes -

- or even the week after -

A government member: What did the Government at the time do?

Mr PENDAL: I am starting to think that not even that changes.

Mrs Roberts: People are not consistent.

Mr PENDAL: Exactly, the minister is quite right. I have the luxury of always being beautifully consistent. Sometimes I think I should have traded-in that consistency, but the minister is not going to divert me with that sort of interjection. I repeat what the current Treasurer said when he was seeking to get the House to see the seriousness of the matter members were confronting in 1993 -

The Opposition is happy to sit next week or even the week after, if that is what is required. Perhaps the Government is not happy to debate these matters next week or the week after. Perhaps the Ministers would rather be travelling elsewhere instead of defending the Government's performance and the decisions it has made in the Parliament.

Its pretty damning stuff. It was not even said halfway through the previous Government's term when the now Treasurer was beginning to rise to his present dizzy heights. The comments were made a few months after the member went into opposition. He felt as passionately about it then as I continue to do now through that consistency about which I have just been reminded.

The Government cannot have forgotten the lessons of the Commission on Government. I hope that not just the Labor members but members on both sides of House learnt a lot from the Commission on Government and the Royal Commission into Commercial Activities of Government and Other Matters because it always takes two to tango. The Government's preparedness to come into this place on the second full day of the session and say that it wants to set aside all of those rules that are intended to avoid WA Inc situations will stain the record of this Government for many years to come.

Finally, I reiterate the point I made earlier: We simply do not need to be discussing this motion to suspend standing orders. Does anyone suggest that we are going to run out of money before Tuesday fortnight? A few

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pendal; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

minutes ago I tried to have a private conversation with the Premier on the matter. He did mention the date but I could not hear it in the din.

Mr Trenorden: July.

Mr PENDAL: If we are to run out of money in July, that tells me we are not going to run out of money in the middle of May, therefore we should proceed with other business. We have now spent an hour and a half dealing with a motion to suspend standing orders that should never have been moved. Had the suspension been necessary because the services of the State were going to come to a halt by next Tuesday or Wednesday, one may have handled the whole thing differently. I for one would appreciate the chance to speak on the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill. I am very concerned about the other legislation we are dealing with as a result of the HIH collapse. For all those reasons, I ask the Government to back off slightly and say that it will not proceed with the suspension as long as there can be some type of agreement. When members return to this place in a fortnight we can all agree then to deal with both of the matters with as much dispatch as possible. What will that achieve? The interesting thing is that it will have been almost three weeks to the date since this legislation was introduced and therefore the sense of betrayal against the standing orders will simply not be an issue.

MRS EDWARDES (Kingsley) [3.28 pm]: The Government obviously is facing another test of its accountability. I refer to HIH Insurance Ltd and the legislation to introduce a levy on the employers' indemnity supplementation fund. I was concerned at the comment made earlier by a member of the Government that we should agree to rush the legislation through this House and not worry about whether there are any problems with it, because any problems can be fixed in the upper House. The Legislative Assembly is where the Government is formed. The comment was an absolute disgrace. I would never have heard such a comment from members of the Government when they were on this side of the House. The Opposition has offered - as did the current Treasurer when he sat on this side - to come back early if the matter is so urgent that it cannot wait until Tuesday fortnight. The Government thought it was fine to brief me Thursday week ago and to give me copies of legislation without the second reading speech on Tuesday afternoon. It also apparently was fine for the Government to bring in the legislation and make the second reading speech to this House only yesterday. I had asked for several assurances to be incorporated into that second reading speech. The information went out to the industry sector only yesterday, and I indicated at the time that I wanted to talk to both small businesses and industry to gauge their concern.

Obviously people in the industry are aware of the issue. The minister has already flagged the five per cent levy. The method of implementation is a concern for industry. I spoke with members of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Combined Small Business Association. They did not think that the Government would bring the matter on today. They have not had a chance to examine and comment on it. So much for the Government's views on consultation. The Government thinks it is all right not to consult when it is happy with an expected outcome. Neither industry nor the Legislative Assembly is ready to deal with this legislation. The Government has failed in its first test of accountability in this House.

MR COWAN (Merredin) [3.30 pm]: The operations of the current Government can be likened to the operations of the previous Government; in other words, clear lines have been drawn. Unfortunately, that conclusion can be reached within three days of this Parliament's sitting. Most keen observers of Parliament usually come to that conclusion only after a Government has been in office for a reasonable time. The operations of the Government bear no resemblance to the principles that were espoused by the members of the Labor Party when they were in opposition. The current principles reflect those of the Executive of this State. In other words, the members of the Cabinet and the ministry dictate to those people, who provide the numbers to the Executive to give it the privilege of being there, that they can go ahead with this proposal. That is disappointing, given the issue of principle stated by those members who had the privilege of delivering their maiden speeches; namely, that their priority lay in representing their constituencies before anything else. That is a nonsense because government members have given the priority to the Executive of this State.

I suggest to the Leader of the House that it would have been appropriate for him to give a clear indication to the House, as Governments are wont to do, that at times it is necessary to debate some government business before the Address-in-Reply is completed. That requires the suspension of standing orders. There is no question about that. It would have been appropriate for the Leader of the House to indicate to all members that they can expect this matter to be brought before the House for debate when we next return to Parliament. Members like to know what is on the Notice Paper and they like to think that the Notice Paper is an accurate reflection of the business that will be conducted by the House. However, a motion is now before the House to suspend standing orders. That motion was moved two and a half hours before this Parliament, according to convention and standing orders, would have risen for the week.

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

The Leader of the House has been unable to tell us whether he wants to deal with the matter today, although I assume that he does. Given that this debate may last for some time, we will have approximately an hour and a half to debate two important issues, unless we again defy standing orders and rise after 5.30 pm. The first issue is whether we ask employers in this State to contribute \$93 million to the Government, and the second is the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill. That Bill provides for payments of an extraordinary or unforeseen nature in anticipation of, or in addition to, the relevant appropriations made by Parliament. I will not dwell on the substance of that Bill, although every day we have heard comments by members of the Government about budget blow-outs. I am sure that some of the issues to which those ministers refer have been of an unforeseen or extraordinary nature. I can think of a number of them, including payments to the dairy industry and to cover locust infestations, drought and transport matters, and to provide support for the timber industry and its rationalisation or adjustment. Those issues were not anticipated when the budget was produced. That is why we have the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill.

I agree with the member for South Perth that to deny members the opportunity to debate those two important issues by limiting the debate to one and a half hours is something that members of this Parliament should oppose strongly. I am disappointed that, within three days of its operation as a Government in Parliament, the Government has introduced a motion that indicates that the Executive wants not only to get its business done but also to dominate its party members and deny them the principles they espoused in their Address-in-Reply speeches. The new members are not in this Chamber only to support the Government. They want to support the Government, but not to the extent that they must compromise their principles and deny their electorates the opportunity to be heard through them as their spokespersons. Mr Speaker, the Government is denying them that. The best way to deal with this in your reply, Mr Speaker, is to indicate that you might deal with this when we come back in two weeks, but not today.

MR RIPPER (Belmont - Deputy Premier) [3.37 pm]: I will explain why the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill is so urgent. The Government can spend money only on the authority of the Parliament. The authority of the Parliament is given through two processes. The first process is the budget. The Government can spend money on the authority of the Parliament as expressed in the Parliament's approval of the budget. The Treasurer's Advance Account is the second mechanism that allows the Government to spend money. If the Government wants to spend money beyond the budget, it must use the mechanism of the Treasurer's Advance Account. That is the mechanism through which the Government spends moneys when unforeseen or extraordinary circumstances arise, or when budget blow-outs occur in government agencies.

This Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill is urgent because retrospectively we are seeking to double the Treasurer's Advance limit for the past financial year. The Parliament approved a Treasurer's Advance limit of \$300 million for 2000-01. The Bill proposes to retrospectively double that to \$600 million. I agree that that is an important issue for the Parliament. However, it is also an important issue for the Government and the State. The previous limit on the Treasurer's Advance Account has virtually been reached because of the budget blow-outs that I mentioned during question time. If we do not quickly retrospectively increase that limit, the Government will run out of authority to make expenditure beyond the budget.

Mr Cowan: You knew all of this. You could have orchestrated the sittings of the Parliament to manage this.

Mr RIPPER: Wait a minute. I have been advised by Treasury that if we do not increase the Treasurer's Advance limit, in the first week of June the Government will lose the capacity to make unforeseen and extraordinary expenditure or to fund budget blow-outs. One can understand why any Government and any Treasurer would not want the State to be in a position where we can spend within budget but we do not have the capacity to spend beyond budget.

There is still some time before the first week of June, but the Government wants to take a prudent approach, bearing in mind that it does not have a majority in the upper House and that in the past the upper House has been known to delay consideration of legislation. If we delay the legislation here, particularly because we cannot seem to get a definite guarantee from the Leader of the Opposition about the behaviour of his members in the other place, we run the risk of not knowing whether we can get that Bill through both Houses of Parliament in time to ensure that the Government retains spending flexibility until 30 June. Those are the stakes.

I do not back down from the statements that the member for South Perth quoted. Of course, parliamentary consideration, and adequate time for it, is important. However, I put the other side of the argument: The Government must have the ability to make unforeseen and extraordinary expenditure. The position that we are in is not the result of this Government's spending; it is the result of decisions made by the previous Government to spend beyond budget. The previous Government spent up to the limit of the Treasurer's Advance and created a position whereby the Treasurer's Advance limit will not sustain us throughout the entire financial year. If the previous Government had not made all those decisions for additional expenditure between the time it brought

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pendal; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

down the last budget and the time it called the election, we would not be in this position. I hope that in this place and in the other place there will be no unnecessary delays of this Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill. If there are unnecessary delays, the State will lack the capacity to respond to a natural disaster, for example, or to some other extraordinary or unforeseen circumstance, or, indeed, to respond to the spending blow-out in the hospital system. Think about that. Think about the position the State would be in if the Government could not respond to the spending blow-out in the hospital system. That is a serious matter and that is why the Government has taken the extraordinary step of asking the Parliament for urgent consideration of this Bill.

MR JOHNSON (Hillarys) [3.43 pm]: I will not go over the ground that has already been debated by members on this side of the House. We are only asking for what is reasonable; that is, the opportunity for our members to examine the Bill and to talk to the small businesspeople in our community. I am a member of a businessmen's association. None of the people in that association has seen the Bill. I want the opportunity to have the Bill in front of me, to talk to them and to ascertain their views. What the member for Merredin and the member for South Perth have said is absolutely right. This goes back a few years to days we prefer not to remember.

Dr Gallop: We agreed to similar things when we were on the other side.

Mr JOHNSON: I am glad the Premier interjected, because he is the next line of attack. I remind the Premier that when he was a member of the Commission on Government joint parliamentary committee, he agreed with every recommendation. He said that if he ever got into government he would implement all of them. He said those words.

Mr Kobelke: Not every recommendation. He never said that.

Mr JOHNSON: Yes, he did, other than one.

Mr Kobelke: Wrong again.

Mr JOHNSON: I will dig them out for the Leader of the House. He is the next one to whom I will refer, along with my good friend the Treasurer, I am sorry to say, because I have always found him to be a fairly decent person - he knows that - and the member for Midland. Those three members sat on the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee for a long time. That committee examined all the standing orders of this House. Those three members know that the government members who were on that committee at that time, including the Speaker, bent over backwards to accommodate all the things they wanted in those standing orders.

Mr Ripper: I hope I am not breaching parliamentary privilege, but you will remember that the committee always considered that there was a safeguard if there was a problem, and that was the possibility of suspending standing orders if the structure that we created resulted in any difficulties.

Mr JOHNSON: I do not think the Treasurer is breaching standing orders by saying that. However, I want him to think back and remember the points that were brought up during those countless meetings.

Dr Gallop: We remember them.

Mr JOHNSON: No, the Premier does not remember them, because he was not there. His colleagues sitting on either side of him remember them.

Dr Gallop: We agreed to this sort of thing when we were on the other side of the House.

Mr JOHNSON: No. These standing orders were developed with a massive amount of input from the Treasurer, the Leader of the House and the member for Midland. They were convivial meetings at which many agreements were made. There was give and take on both sides. That was the attitude. At the end of the day, we all wanted updated standing orders of which we could be proud and on which we could work today. These are the updated standing orders. They do not go back 100 years. They were updated last year. The Opposition has already offered to come back a week early to accommodate the Government if it considers this matter is so urgent. We will come back a week early - not a problem. Those opposite often made that offer to us.

Mr Ripper: I do not ever remember your accepting it.

Mr JOHNSON: We never saw the need for it because we did not show the hypocrisy that members on the other side of the House are showing today. This House has standing orders by which we are supposed to abide. There are many ways to accommodate the needs of -

Several members interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: Mr Speaker, if my colleagues would give me a chance to speak, I would appreciate it. They have had their say; I want my say now. We are prepared to accommodate the Government as much as we possibly can for the good running of this House. We have offered to come back a week early. I am sure many government members do not want to do that, but we will do it. Even if we do not come back a week early but

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

come back at the stated time, various members have already said that by then the Government will have control of the upper House and it will be able to do what it wants for the next four years.

Mr Ripper: Thirteen out of 34 is not control.

Mr JOHNSON: When have the Greens (WA) ever voted against the Labor Party? The Government will have enough members in the upper House after that date to be able to pass its legislation. However, it should at least do the right and proper thing by this Parliament, the people of Western Australia and, in this instance, the small businesspeople, of whom there are thousands, and give us all a chance to see the legislation. The Opposition and the Government's backbenchers should be given an opportunity to talk to those small businesspeople, because the Government's backbenchers would not have a clue what the effects will be because they have not had a chance to look at the legislation. Do not treat them like the vegetable patch. I am sure they are intelligent members of Parliament who will welcome the opportunity to carry out their responsibilities in the way they are charged to do as members of this House.

MR AINSWORTH (Roe) [3.49 pm]: My concern about the process that the Government is proposing is twofold. First, I am concerned about distortions of the standing orders, which will work against what many of us have worked hard to achieve in this place; that is, to get a better set of standing orders and a better procedure in this place so that the community at large regains some of the respect it has lost for the conventions of this place and the people in it. More important for me and my electorate is the issue of the second Bill that is proposed to be brought forward quickly - that is, the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill - because some of my constituents who are in small business have been impacted upon severely by increases in their workers compensation premiums in the past year or two. Increases of 100 per cent or more have occurred in some cases. The increases have been quite horrific, and have caused some people to decide that it is easier not to be in business than to bear these costs and try to absorb them, when they are working in an industry in which they cannot pass on those costs. It is a disgrace to suggest that the Opposition should agree to rush through a piece of legislation in this House in the dying hours of the first week of the Parliament. This would preclude those people from even being aware of what the Government is proposing, let alone having an opportunity to have a good look at the Bill and convey their concerns to the Government. The House should not even be considering this sort of motion today. As regards the other piece of legislation, the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill, it has been made clear by other speakers that with the willing cooperation of this side of the House, there is still ample time to get that piece of legislation passed by both Houses by 1 June. That would certainly not leave the Government without sufficient scope in its budget to cater for extraordinary items.

Mr Kobelke: That is not true.

Mr AINSWORTH: That is certainly the indication that has been given to me. Unless the urgency is greater than the Leader of the House has led this House to believe, then that is true.

Mr Kobelke: We will run out of money if it does not go through before the end of June.

Mr AINSWORTH: My major concern is the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Amendment Bill. At the very least members of both sides of the House should be given time, first, to become more aware of the implications of that legislation, but, more particularly, to advise their constituents, who are the ones who will foot the bill if the legislation is passed. We need to give those people the courtesy and the right to have a say as to what they believe should happen before they are handed a fait accompli by a Bill being rammed through this place.

MR KOBELKE (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [3.52 pm]: I was hoping the Leader of the Opposition would return so that we could achieve some resolution on this matter. It is certainly not the intent of the Government to use any form of guillotine, so unless there is an element of cooperation, we are going to be here for a very long time tonight. The issue is genuine, and the Treasurer has clearly put on the record the problems the Government has had with the Treasurer's Advance, which it became aware of only in recent weeks. Therefore, there was not a lot of lead-time.

Mr Barnett: What an insult that is to the Under Treasurer.

Mr KOBELKE: The Leader of the Opposition should listen for a moment; I am not going on with the cant we have had from some of the members opposite. There is no breaking of precedent here. The Labor Party agreed, while in opposition, when the previous Government did this, so there is no precedent, but there are substantive issues, and those members opposite who have raised those issues have done so very genuinely. The issue is that the Labor Party has had huge problems with the upper House. I am going to seek, by way of interjection from the Leader of the Opposition, a clear undertaking that if this motion is now withdrawn, when Parliament resumes in two weeks at least the Liberal Party members will put both Bills through the House that day. They might also

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

use all their good offices with the members in the other place to ensure that in that week, or the following week, we put both Bills through the upper House, so that they are passed before the start of June.

The issue with the Treasurer's Advance is that when I was a member of this House, as was the member for Merredin and others, in the early 1990s, a ludicrous situation occurred in the upper House. The Corporations Bill, legislation that was required across the whole of Australia, was rejected by the other place. To the Government's embarrassment, later we came back in the days between Christmas and New Year to deal with it, such was the outcry from business and the community at the stupidity of the then Liberal-National Party coalition in blocking absolutely essential legislation. The legislation now before the House is also absolutely essential. There is no argument about that. We cannot decline to give nurses the pay increase because the Opposition has not passed the legislation. It must go through. We understand proper process, and if the Opposition needs more time, the Government will give it, along with any briefings that are required. However, the Government requires a clear undertaking that, on the first Tuesday upon which Parliament resumes, the legislation will go to the other place and get cooperation from Liberal and National Party members there, so that the special provisions in the standing orders may be used to move it through faster than it would normally proceed.

Mr Cowan: We have never been able to exercise any influence over the other place.

Mr KOBELKE: The Government was taking unusual steps here so that, by proceeding in unusual ways, it could persuade the other place to do the same.

Mr Cowan: There is no way the Government is going to get this Bill, or both Bills, through the upper House in this way. It is not going to happen. The Opposition will see to it that that does not happen unless the Government introduces time management. The minister will have no advantage whatsoever in doing anything other than saying, while he is on his feet, that this is a motion that everyone can perhaps agree to so long as we are prepared to implement it in two weeks. If the minister gave an undertaking, he would lose nothing.

Mr KOBELKE: That was the point of my remarks. I do not wish to delay the House. That is the first point I will come back and ask the Leader of the Opposition to respond to by way of interjection.

Mr Cowan: The other point is that both of those Bills, particularly the Employers Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill, would normally take at least two or three days to debate. That in itself is bad enough, but to bring it on for today is just nonsense. It is bad management.

Mr KOBELKE: I will briefly comment on the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill. The member for Kingsley has had briefings on it and I do not think she has any problems with it. I offered briefings as soon as the decision was made, before the legislation was finally drafted. There was a delay in the drafting, so there was not a lot of notice of the draft legislation. The issues, and the Government's method for their resolution, have been made public for some time and briefings have been available. I accept there are real concerns about it, but I put it to the House that there is no other viable solution. The alternative solutions will cause more pain for business. The Opposition may need to ascertain that for itself, which I understand, because there are real issues with it. I put it to the Opposition very genuinely that the longer the delay in giving certainty to industry, the more problems that will be created. Any delays will build up extra interest bills, which business will pay. At the end of the day there will be more cost and more uncertainty to industry, but because it is a very important matter, which will impinge directly on business, the Opposition wishes to reassure itself as to the facts, which I appreciate. Time will be allowed for that purpose, but I argue very firmly, once again, that any delay will cause uncertainty and potential extra costs to business. The Government needs to give business, as soon as possible, absolute certainty, so that when business people sit down to sign up for workers compensation premiums, they will know the basis upon which they are doing that, and the full potential cost. I reiterate that the total workers compensation premium bill in this State is in excess of \$600 million. Approximately half of that is paid on 30 June. That is the reason for the urgency. In June when business people negotiate with their insurers, they will need to know the basis upon which they will be signing. The urgency is not that they cannot do it after 30 June. The last time this levy was put in place in the 1980s, it was done with that retrospective element. It will work that way, but it is better for business to know the situation up-front, and that is the reason for the urgency. I made that clear in my speech.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition if he is willing. The Government will withdraw the motion if it can get a very clear undertaking that the Opposition will expedite this legislation. We will not use time management, but we will ensure that members speak to the point and, if necessary, we will sit late so that the Bills go through on the first Tuesday that we come back. The Opposition must use its good offices to the fullest extent to ensure that we have cooperation of the opposition members in the other place, so that they use the various devices available in their standing orders to make sure that the legislation is passed before the start of June.

Mr John Kobelke; Mr Colin Barnett; Speaker; Mr Max Trenorden; Mr Mike Board; Mr Pental; Mrs Cheryl Edwardes; Mr Hendy Cowan; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Ross Ainsworth

Mr Barnett: What the Leader of the House is saying is acceptable to the Opposition. There are genuine concerns about the Employers' Indemnity Supplementation Fund Amendment Bill, but the member for Kingsley has already said publicly that, in broad term, she, and therefore by implication the Opposition, will be supportive of it.

However, issues and anomalies need to be looked at. When we return on Tuesday 22 May, we are prepared to cooperate with the passage of the Bill. I am not aware of all the issues but I will use my best endeavours, if we are satisfied with the Bill, to assist its passage through the upper House. The Government has some time available to it on the Bill and it is not as serious a matter as it imagines. Once the Opposition indicates its support, the industry should be satisfied with the passage of the Bill. There are some issues with the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill but the Opposition will support its passage. The Government would be wise to put that Bill through as the first item of legislation for that day. I anticipate that it will go through the upper House, but I cannot commit members of the other place. I can encourage Liberal members to assist with the passage of that Bill. I think that is reasonable. We recognise the problems with the Treasurer's Advance Authorisation Bill. It seems that the Bill has a fair bit to do with trying to settle the nurses' pay issue and paying for increases in salaries. The Government should be up-front about it if that is the problem it has to face. It should try to accommodate the issue rather than bleat about blow-outs in the budget. This Bill is largely about the nurses' pay dispute. The Opposition is happy to come back in one week but if the Government wants to have a two-week recess, that is fine. It will not make much difference. The Bills will be debated and dealt with properly and will not be delayed. I will do what I can to assist the passage through the upper House in due time.

Mr KOBELKE: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his response by way of interjection. I want to make two points. The legislation is not only about the extra money that is required to pay the nurses. It is a crucial part, however. Even before the deal is done, we must realise that the money has run out. The Bill is not just about the nurses' dispute. I am worried about the Opposition's qualification that its undertakings will be carried out if it is satisfied. That provides an out for the Opposition if it decides it is not satisfied. The member for Kingsley, the Opposition's spokesperson, was given copies of the Bills to take into the Liberal party room. She received briefings on the matter before it was even cleared through Cabinet. From the earliest possible date, I sought to be totally open and to provide whatever data was available to ensure that the Opposition was part of the loop and that it would get whatever briefings it required due to the urgency of the matter.

Mr Trenorden: There was no consultation with me.

Mr KOBELKE: I apologise to the member for Avon. Due to the rush I did not approach him personally about the matter.

Mr Barnett: The Opposition is not complaining about the minister's role. The minister is dealing with a difficult issue.

Mr KOBELKE: On that basis, I seek approval to withdraw the motion for the suspension of standing orders.

The SPEAKER: According to Standing Order No 119, there cannot be a dissenting voice for the motion to withdraw.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.