

REGIONAL PARLIAMENT, ALBANY SITTING

Motion

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Nollamara - Leader of the House) [12.36 pm]: I move -

That unless otherwise ordered, this House adopts the following arrangements for the sitting of the Legislative Assembly in Albany in 2004.

- (1) Subject to an appropriate proclamation being issued by the Governor, the Assembly will sit in the Albany Town Hall on Tuesday 23 March 2004 from 2.00 pm and on Wednesday 24 March 2004 from 9.00 am.
- (2) The extended stage of the Albany Town Hall will be the meeting Chamber, the auditorium will be regarded as Chamber galleries, and the whole building will be regarded as parliamentary precincts.
- (3) The Leader of the House will provide to the Clerk by 12 noon on Tuesday 16 March 2004, for distribution to members, a schedule of Government Business to be considered on the following Tuesday and Wednesday.
- (4) Private Members will provide to the Clerk by 11.00 am on Monday 22 March 2004, for distribution to members, a schedule of Private Members' business to be considered on the following Wednesday.
- (5) Questions without notice will be taken on Tuesday after Prayers, Petitions, Papers, Notices of Motion and Brief Ministerial Statements and on the Wednesday at 2.00 pm.
- (6) A Matter of Public Interest under Standing Order 145 may be taken after Questions without Notice on the Tuesday if notice of the proposed matter is provided to the Clerk by 11.00 am on Monday 22 March 2004.
- (7) Private Members' business will have precedence on the Wednesday from 3.20 pm to 4.50 pm and Government Business will have precedence at other times.
- (8) Members' Statements under Standing Order 147, will be taken on the Tuesday at 5.50 pm and on the Wednesday at 4.50 pm.
- (9) Statements of up to 5 minutes may be made by the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, and the Leader of the National Party after Members' Statements on the Wednesday.
- (10) In relation to any procedural matter arising as a result of the Albany sitting and not adequately dealt with under the Standing Orders, the Assembly acknowledges that the Speaker will issue an appropriate ruling to resolve the matter to the extent necessary and possible.
- (11) Standing Orders are suspended accordingly to the extent necessary to effect these arrangements.

On 23 and 24 March next year, we will have the first ever sitting of the Parliament - that is, the Legislative Assembly - outside of Perth. It is proposed that the Legislative Assembly sit in Albany on those two days. It is clearly an historical event and one that I trust will go very well. With this variation to standing orders we are seeking to put in place some of the procedures required for this special event. The Clerk and others have already done a lot of work and I am very appreciative of the way they are pulling together so many details. However, a lot more work needs to be done and there will be a need for further discussion between the key players early next year when we determine some of the matters that might be brought on for debate on those two days and how we might handle that.

The sitting will be housed in the Town Hall, which is a fine building and will lend itself quite well as a venue for the conduct of the Parliament. Obviously, there will be some restrictions in the layout. There is also the issue of access and facilities available to members and some restrictions on the rooms available - clearly we will not have offices and a lot of other things. Therefore, we will need to make allowances in the way we operate, and, to some extent, these variations that we are now debating are cognisant of that. Clearly, another issue is resourcing for members for the conduct of that sitting of the Legislative Assembly. We will not have direct access to the Legislative Assembly Papers Office. Although electronic communication means that we will be able to handle many things quite effectively, there will be some limitation if members were to want a particular copy of an Act for example. Clearly, in Albany, it will not be available in paper copy when the normal storage of such things is back in Parliament House in Perth, and it will be those sorts of limitations with which we seek to deal.

The timing laid down through this variation to standing orders is that we will sit on the Tuesday from 2.00 pm until 6.00 pm and then allow two hours for a dinner break, given that members will have to go to restaurants or elsewhere in order to get a meal. The Legislative Assembly will then sit through until 10.00 pm so that people in Albany and the surrounding areas who are perhaps at work during the day and wish to witness the Parliament in session, will have that opportunity in the evening. On the Wednesday it is proposed to sit from 9.00 am until lunch. Again, because of the need to cater for the members' lunch break, we are allowing for an hour and a half greater than normal with the conclusion of the sitting at about 5.20 pm, which means that members can go off and do things if they are staying in Albany or they still have time to return to their electorates if they wish. On the Thursday, a student Parliament will be conducted, which I know you, Mr Speaker, are taking a leading role in making sure that the educational opportunities for people in the region are enhanced through the sitting of the Parliament in Albany.

The issues addressed in this variation to the standing orders means that time for matters of public interest will be fixed on the Tuesday, according to the normal rules, and private members' business will be conducted on the Wednesday. This sessional order requires that notice of those matters be given by 11.00 am on the preceding Monday - it is a bit more notice than we would normally give - because of the shortage of resources such as not having the usual staff and having to work through phones and faxes. Obviously, for the Opposition and members on both sides who may wish to get involved in government business we are requiring that the government business be determined by 2.00 pm on the preceding Tuesday so that members who need to take down files from their offices have ample notice. We are placing some constraints on the business that we deal with, by requiring that more than the normal notice be given because of the difficulties that members may experience in not being here in the Parliament with the normal facilities. We are also allowing for members' statements on the Tuesday and Wednesday. This will give the opportunity for as many members as possible to contribute to the proceedings of the House while we are in Albany. A suggestion has come from the member for South Perth, which I think has already been discussed by both the Liberal and National Parties, and the Government, that we would prefer to have more members speak for shorter periods. It is not within this variation to the standing orders to restrict the speaking times of members. However, given the positive attitude that has been displayed by all members, I am fairly confident that we can reach a behind-the-Chair arrangement that members will not use the full time that will be allocated to them. That will obviously fit in with the items that we will choose to deal with for both government business and non-government business. That choice will obviously be made some time in February-early March prior to our going to Albany. In discussing what that business will be, I am confident that we will come to some arrangement to provide an opportunity for a fairly large number of members to speak at various times; and, therefore, for all of us to keep our comments perhaps a little shorter than we do under the current time arrangements.

Allowance will also be made for adjournment statements by the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the National Party for five minutes if they wish to make some closing comments in wrapping up the proceedings on the Wednesday. I presume that, given the normal hospitality of the people of Albany and the surrounding areas, members will wish to express their thanks for the contribution that has been made by the people in Albany, and they will have an opportunity to do so at that time.

As I have already indicated, on the Thursday, given that the hall will have been set up, there will be an opportunity for students from the schools in Albany and surrounding areas to be involved in a student Parliament, which will further their understanding of the workings of the Parliament and will be an important part of the parliamentary sitting in Albany. I am looking forward to that. I again thank those members who have put in a lot of work already. A lot more work of an administrative nature will need to be done to ensure that the sitting of the Parliament in Albany works smoothly. I am sure that although members may differ in their views from time to time, the proceedings in Albany will show the better aspects of the workings of the Parliament and we will not put on display the behaviour that we at times show in this Chamber when we do not behave as well as we should.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [12.41 pm]: I will try to cover all of the aspects of this motion in the time allocated to me. On behalf of the Liberal Party, we support the first regional sitting of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. We are delighted that the Premier has obviously taken note of the comments that we made at our regional party meeting in Geraldton about a year or 18 months ago. We said at that time that as soon as we resumed Government, we would be proceeding with this initiative. Therefore, we are quite happy that the Premier has taken up and brought forward our initiative and is encouraging the Parliament to do this. It is important at certain times during decades that the Parliament hold a sitting in the very important regional areas of Western Australia. Albany is a very important regional area of Western Australia, and so too is Kalgoorlie, and other regional areas in the north west, the south west and the central parts of Western Australia. I am sure that a parliamentary sitting in those regions will also happen over the next few years. We therefore support and look forward very much to the regional parliamentary sitting in Albany next March.

I need to put some comments on the record of *Hansard* so that we can look back at some stage and see what members have said on this motion to hold a regional Parliament in Albany. I agree with the Leader of the House when he said that what we should be doing as a regional Parliament is debate not just one or two government Bills but perhaps bring on three or four different types of Bills covering different aspects of legislation that we need to deal with so that a greater number of members can take part in the debate. I am more than happy to come to an arrangement with the Leader of the House behind the Chair at a later stage on that matter, because if we are to go to Albany as a showpiece to the people of Albany and the surrounding areas, it is important that rather than have a lead speaker on a Bill talk for one hour, which may be very interesting and important, a greater number of members speak and cover more than just one or two Bills. If we can reach an arrangement whereby a member can speak on a Bill for a set amount of time, and even reach a behind-the-Chair arrangement for set speaking times to encourage perhaps six or eight members to speak on the same Bill, that will be very beneficial. I have found that if members have a set time limit on their speeches, they tend to say the most important things early on rather than ramble on - as some members do in this place, and I deplore that sort of action. Therefore, I am in total agreement with the Leader of the House on that matter. Obviously the Leader of the House and the Government are worried about what the Opposition may do at the sitting in Albany. I assure the House that the Opposition will behave very responsibly when we are in Albany.

Mr C.J. Barnett: As always.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, as always, as the Leader of the Opposition has said. However, of course we will have the opportunity for a matter of public interest on the Tuesday, and for private members' business on the Wednesday. I am pleased that we have been able to work out a time frame for those matters, because those matters are an important part of parliamentary procedure, as they provide the only opportunity that is available to the Opposition to have its say. As we have always said, the Government will have its way, but it is essential that the Opposition have its say; so we will have our say. I was a bit worried when the Leader of the House said that he needed to have the subjects for the matter of public interest and private members' business by 11.00 am on the Monday. I would have thought any minister worth his or her salt could have dealt with an MPI and private members' business in the normal time frame. However, if ministers are not up to the job, fair enough; we will help them out once again by giving them the subject of the MPI and of the private members' business on the Monday. We might also want to bring on more than one piece of private members' business, and I will be asking the Leader of the House to come to the same arrangement on our private members' business that we will be making on the government Bills, because we might want to cover two or three different subjects, and so long as we have given the Government notice, it should be possible for us to do that. I do not see any reason that we cannot have more constrained speaking time on those subjects, and even adjourn the debates rather than take a vote, but we will need to come to an arrangement about that matter at a later date.

I believe the people of Albany and the surrounding areas will benefit very much from a parliamentary sitting in that town. Many people cannot travel to Perth to see how the Parliament works. Some people may say that is a good thing; others may say they would like to have the opportunity to see how the Parliament works. The people in Albany and the surrounding districts will see at first-hand the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia conduct normal parliamentary business, albeit with time constraints and set procedures. They will be able to experience the true flavour of how the Parliament works. They will see question time. I am sure question time will probably go quite smoothly in Albany. I would hope, Mr Speaker, that you will not have to abandon question time because there is too much interruption from both sides of the House. I am sure we will have a very good question time on both those days, and that we will get short questions and short answers so that members can ask as many questions as possible.

Mr R.N. Sweetman: Hopefully we will get short questions and even shorter answers.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Absolutely. That is the way it should be.

We believe there will be a lot of benefit from holding a regional parliamentary sitting in Albany in March of next year. Another aspect of holding a sitting of the Legislative Assembly in Albany is resources. I and other members on the opposition benches have a concern about the accommodation and meal costs. We have not finalised a solution to that problem, and we need to do that fairly soon. Country members who attend parliamentary sittings in Perth get unlimited travel allowance to travel from their electorates, which are spread out throughout the whole of Western Australia, to Perth. Country members also have their accommodation paid for while they are attending Parliament in Perth. If there is to be a regional parliamentary sitting in Albany and other parts of Western Australia, the same sorts of arrangements need to be in place. The problem is that, as yet, there is no agreement on where those funds will come from. I believe that they should come from the Parliament and that the Parliament should get the funds from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. The Parliament will be sitting in Albany because the Premier has moved it. The idea has come from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. Therefore, I do not believe that members should have to apply for part of their imprest account in order to travel for Parliament. It is unreasonable. Moreover, members who apply for funds from their

imprest account must apply to the Premier. Members of the Opposition really go through the hoops when they try to apply for funds from their imprest account. One of my colleagues in another place was told that imprest travel would not be approved because the application was made too soon. He had the impression that he should apply nearer the time. That is pretty disgraceful. I do not want to see that happen to members who travel to Albany.

If the Parliament is to be held in Albany, the Parliament has the responsibility to ensure that accommodation and travel costs are covered. However, I do not believe that the Parliament should take the money out of its existing budget. I believe that it should come as a special allowance through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and basically from Treasury. That is the simplest and the most correct way of doing it. Members will have to travel to Albany prior to the parliamentary sitting. They will have to arrive on the Monday before the Tuesday sitting and, I suggest, come back to Perth on the Thursday. I also suggest that those members who stay for the sitting of the student Parliament will have to come back Thursday afternoon or maybe even Friday. Members will therefore incur extra costs as a result of staying in Albany.

The reason I am saying this today is that we have the motion before the House. I am hopeful that somebody will take some notice of my comments. An extra allocation needs to be made to the Leader of the Opposition's budget and also to that of the Leader of the National Party. The Opposition is at a disadvantage. Every minister can take as many staff as he or she wants because the costs for that will come out of the ministerial office accounts. Every minister will have media advisers, a policy adviser and probably chief of staff and, I suggest, other people travelling with them. There are 14 ministers. If we add up all those extra people who are speaking collectively on behalf of the Government, the Opposition is at a tremendous disadvantage because it has a very limited budget with which to run the Leader of the Opposition's office.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I suggest there will be at least 30 to 40 government staffers in Albany.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Without a doubt. I suggest that it might be even more than that. We know that the Department of the Premier and Cabinet has blossomed out with an exorbitant number of staff. All the media people will be in Albany. We are told they are policy advisers but I am informed they are media people who do work for government members but not for members on this side of the House. They spend time and taxpayers' money on promoting government backbenchers in regional areas. I know it and you know it, Mr Speaker, and the Leader of the House knows it.

We must therefore ensure that some extra funding will come to the Leader of the Opposition's office. Unlike the Government, the Opposition does not have a staff of thousands in Perth from which it can take 30 to 50 people to Albany; that is the number we are talking about which includes all the ministers' staff and in particular the staff in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. They will be like an army. From the Leader of the Opposition's office we can probably take only two or three staff because we must maintain the office at Parliament House so that we can link with the Bills and Papers Office and the Library. If we need to gather any information, we must keep a good working staff at Parliament House to do it. The Opposition will probably be able to take only three staff to Albany. I believe that is not fair and equitable. I hope that imbalance will be addressed. I do not expect Parliament to pay for that portion of the budget but I expect the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to pay, because that department pays for all ministerial office staff. It will be interesting to see what the total figure is at the end of this financial year. We will not know how many of those staff will be in Albany unless we conduct a head count. I suggest that it will be between 30 and 50 people.

If there is to be equity between the Government and the Opposition for this first-ever regional parliamentary sitting, the Opposition must be properly funded for not only travel and accommodation but also the only assistance the Opposition has; that is, from what is known as the LOOP office which is the Leader of the Opposition's office. Opposition members will not be able to take their part-time research officers to Albany because who will pay for them? Nobody will pay for their accommodation other than individual members - I include government members. Nobody will pay for their travel costs to Albany unless members are expected to pay. In any event, I believe that many research officers would not want to travel to Albany to spend time away from their families. They would not see it as part of their job. When they were employed it was on the basis that they would be based in members' electorate offices to do research work. The job is for only two days a week, which hardly counts as a full-blown research job. That is the best we can do. It is essential for us to rely - as we do when we are sitting here - on the Leader of the Opposition's office and its limited staff.

I hope that the Leader of the House takes note of these comments and takes them to the Premier. I hope that at the end of the day the Premier will agree to fund Parliament for members' expenses in Albany, and that the Premier will also include additional funds for the Leader of the Opposition's office and its staff in order to assist opposition members. I also venture to hope that the Leader of the National Party's office will have extra funding so that National Party members are adequately funded while they are in Albany. If National Party staff are taken away from Parliament House, nobody will be dealing with necessary matters on a day-to-day basis.

These inequities will remain unless we can sort them out. I have great faith in you, Mr Speaker. I am sure that you will use every endeavour to try to ensure that the funding will come through so that members are not disadvantaged and so that they can travel to Albany, be accommodated there and be covered for all the extra costs they incur. I have the same faith in the Leader of the House. I hope that he will take this message to the Premier and, with conviction, tell the Premier that he must find some extra funding for not just the Parliament, but also the opposition officers so that we are not disadvantaged.

We very much look forward to the regional parliamentary sitting in Albany next year. All members will have the opportunity of the unique experience of sitting in Parliament other than in the building we are in at the moment. I have taken an active role, as you know, Mr Speaker, representing the Liberal Party in the discussions held. I thank the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk of the Legislative Assembly and the staff who have done most of the hard work in making arrangements. They have travelled to Albany and produced a very viable solution regarding premises for the Parliament. The stage and the seating plan are different from our current arrangements; in fact, they remind me of the House of Commons or Parliaments in the eastern States as members will not have the benefit of a desk in front of them, so they will need to be neat and tidy. As in federal parliament, members will go to the microphone at the Table to deliver speeches. We can all do that. I am confident that government members, the Leader of the Opposition and all members on this side of the House will handle that situation efficiently and professionally. It will be an experience to conduct Parliament in that way. The first regional sitting of the Legislative Assembly will be of great interest to people not only in Albany, but also in the rest of Western Australia. I am sure it will be televised and covered by radio stations. The rest of Western Australia will see through television coverage especially what they can expect in other regional areas over the next few years.

I support the motion before the House. I will endeavour to give every bit of cooperation possible to the Leader of the House. A lot ultimately falls on his shoulders, and on my shoulders, in the smooth running of the House, and that will particularly be the case in Albany. I give a commitment to do everything I can to cooperate and to ensure that a successful parliamentary sitting takes place in Albany. I look forward to working with you, Madam Deputy Speaker; Mr Speaker; the Clerks; the Leader of the House and, indeed, my colleague the member for Stirling of the National Party who is very much involved in the Albany area. I look forward to a conclusion being reached on the final arrangements in the early part of next year prior to going down to Albany.

MR M.G. HOUSE (Stirling) [1.03 pm]: As one of two members in this Chamber representing the city of Albany, I am pleased that the regional sitting will be held in Albany. It has been a privilege to be part of the committee working on this regional sitting of Parliament. I commend the Government for its choice of Albany, which was the first official settlement in Western Australia.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: It was the first white settlement or European settlement.

Mr M.G. HOUSE: Does the Leader of the House want me to recap everything just said by the member for Hillarys, or would he rather I made this speech short and to the point? The Leader of the House is asking for trouble.

Mr J.C. Kobelke: As Minister for Indigenous Affairs, I need to clarify that point.

Mr M.G. HOUSE: Does the Leader of the House want me to recap everything the member just said?

The people of Albany are pleased that the sitting of Parliament to take place in March next year will be in Albany. I am sure local people will respond in a friendly and welcoming way to members of Parliament. Like other members of this Chamber, I look forward to being part of that sitting; I am sure it will be very successful. I agree with the Leader of the House and the member for Hillarys that cooperation will be needed on a number of issues. Until this time, the committee has been able to resolve those matters. I am sure that as the date approaches, and during the sitting, we will be able to resolve those issues to ensure that all members of Parliament get a fair go.

I also mention that the Youth Parliament will be held on the Thursday of that sitting week. This is an extremely good idea and will be beneficial for the young people of the region. Young people will have the opportunity to see Parliament sitting in Albany, and the Youth Parliament will be a particularly important component of the regional sitting. It is a positive move to encourage young people to take leadership roles and to be part of the democratic process. I look forward to the regional sitting of Parliament in March.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [1.07 pm]: Madam Deputy Speaker -

Mr M.G. House: Where did you spring from - they went and got you!

Mr P.B. WATSON: I find it rather ironic that the member for Stirling asked where I have been: most times when I look across the Chamber, I cannot see him.

Mr M.G. House: I was doorknocking in your electorate yesterday, and they don't like you!

Extract from *Hansard*

[ASSEMBLY - Wednesday, 3 December 2003]

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Mr John Kobelke; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr Monty House; Mr Peter Watson; Deputy Speaker

Mr P.B. WATSON: The next time the member does it, I will come down and introduce him so people know who he is. It is great to have banter with the member for Stirling. We get on well; we have adjoining electorates, share a sense of humour and attend many functions together. The member for Stirling is a great representative of his electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think you are about 40-all at this time. I would like the member to continue his speech.

Mr P.B. WATSON: We have to give a bit and take a bit.

The people of Albany are very proud to have the first regional Parliament in Albany, which is a special place as the first settlement. Anyone who thinks the sitting should not be in Albany should know it was the first settlement -

Mr J.C. Kobelke: It was the first European settlement.

Mr P.B. WATSON: It was the place of the first European settlement in this State. Albany is the world's best kept secret.

I also refer to the Youth Parliament. A group is travelling around schools in Albany and the regions - I have been lucky enough to sit in on some of the sessions - showing how Parliament works and where the Speaker sits; they even have a question time. That has been a good feed-in for the Youth Parliament.

I know the people of Albany will welcome members with open arms. It is the best time of the year to be in Albany. In April, May and June, the wind drops and the fish start to bite.

Mr M.G. House: It's being held in March.

Mr P.B. WATSON: That will be a preview. March is one of the best times in Albany. Everybody there will welcome the Parliament with open arms. Regional sittings are a great coup for country areas, especially for schoolchildren in some remote areas who do not get a chance to see Parliament. This is a great chance to bring Parliament to the people.

Mr D.A. Templeman: You lobbied hard to get it there.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes, I lobbied very hard: I lobbied the top off a cappuccino, as the member once said.

Mr M.G. House: Why didn't the member for Mandurah lobby for Mandurah? Was he not good enough?

Mr P.B. WATSON: I am a better lobbyist. I support the regional Parliament's coming to Albany.

Question put and passed.