

Mr Dan Barron-Sullivan; Deputy Speaker; Mr Tony McRae; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Alan Carpenter; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Christian Porter; Ms Sue Walker; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker

SELECT COMMITTEE INTO ENERGY SITUATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

MR D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN (Leschenault) [2.58 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to enable the following motion to be considered forthwith —

- (1) That a select committee be appointed —

Nothing less than a select committee —

to inquire into and report on the energy situation in Western Australia and particularly the effect on energy infrastructure of government decisions and actions.

- (2) The house directs that ministers will substantively respond to committee requests for information or make themselves available for examination by the committee —

That includes the Minister for Indigenous Affairs —

within 48 hours of a committee request.

- (3) The committee has power to report from time to time as it considers necessary and standing order 278 is varied to enable the committee to present a report at any time to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly if the house is not sitting on that day.

- (4) The committee will finally report by Thursday, 14 August 2008.

I will not speak for long on this motion; it speaks for itself. Before the Leader of the Opposition was unfortunately sent from this chamber, he said something incredibly accurate; that is, when the Premier is caught out, he reverts to personal attacks; it is all he can do to try to cover up a situation. When the Leader of the National Party asked the Premier a question and the Premier revealed that he had known of the situation about which I had asked the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, the Premier landed himself in one of the biggest cover-ups we have seen for a long time. The cover-up concerns the gas crisis that is currently affecting industry and households in Western Australia.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: The motion is very clear. It is a very broad motion. It will enable this matter and a range —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Just a moment, member for Leschenault. I ask members to take their conversations outside, as they are competing with the member who has the call and making it very difficult for both the Hansard staff and me.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: The motion was worded very deliberately to be broad and all-encompassing.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, member for Darling Range!

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: There will be a two-month gap when this Parliament will not sit. If we wish to keep the government to account, we cannot do so for another two and a half months. It is hard enough getting answers out of the government during question time now, but for two months we will not even have that opportunity. People in the community are saying that they need an opposition to keep the government to account. They do need an opposition. Members on this side of the chamber—Liberal Party members, National Party members and Independents—do want to keep the government to account. While Parliament is not sitting, they cannot do so. If we had confidence in the Premier and in the government that they were managing this crisis as well as possible, I would not be raising this motion for the suspension of standing orders and saying that we need to establish a select committee of inquiry. However, we have heard today the minister distort the situation. We have heard the Premier indicate that, as a result of the minister's decision, he knew about the delay to the operation of a major gas plant by Apache Energy, and that in effect he knew about this cover-up. I also know that the registered lobbyist I referred to has connections with the particular group referred to, and that the group's opposition to the project is the reason the minister gave in writing for objecting to it and for not allowing consent under section 18 of the Aboriginal Heritage Act. Therefore, the minister has held up for six months a vital piece of gas infrastructure that would ultimately lead to greater diversity in the supply of gas through to the south west region.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

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Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: The minister held up the project for six months. The Premier confirmed today that he knew about it; he has been part of it. I will ask one very simple question. There is no greater single issue in Western Australia at the moment than the gas crisis. Western Australians and this Parliament expect the Premier to be open, honest and accountable about every single aspect of the energy sector and the current gas crisis. Having found out that the Premier knew about something as important as this issue and that his minister had delayed the gas plant by six months, yet had not reported it to the Parliament or been honest and open with the community, I have to say that surely there is a better way of holding the Premier to account. For two months the Legislative Assembly will not be sitting. We will not have an opportunity to raise motions or ask questions of the government and so on.

Mr A.J. Carpenter interjected.

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: A select committee could inquire into just about anything to do with the gas industry that it wanted to inquire into. It could even haul the Premier in and ask him questions, which he would then be obliged to answer truthfully and openly, to find out exactly what is going on. I am not the only member who has been talking over the past few days to a range of industry groups and so on. I note that there were some industry members from the south west in Parliament earlier on. A number of people in business are questioning how gas allocations are being made, how the priorities are being determined and why they have had spikes —

Point of Order

Mr A.D. McRAE: I have waited now for more than four to five minutes and the member for Leschenault has, since about the fifty-ninth second, been engaged in the merits of the substantive motion that he proposes to move, which go directly to the causes for which he says a select committee should be established. I respectfully suggest that they are not part of the argument for the suspension of standing orders and I ask that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, give him directions in that regard.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Further to that point of order, the member for Riverton must have been listening to a different debate from the one I have been listening to. The member for Leschenault has been discussing the urgent need to suspend standing orders because Parliament will not be sitting for seven weeks. He has made that point a number of times during that five-minute period. The point of order is spurious and should be withdrawn.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I appreciate the member for Riverton's comments. However, the member for Leschenault has drawn attention to the fact that the Legislative Assembly will have a break. He has been a member of this place long enough to know the rules and I ask him to continue speaking to the motion and the reasons for the suspension of standing orders.

Debate Resumed

Mr D.F. BARRON-SULLIVAN: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. If the member for Riverton had been listening, he would have heard exactly those same arguments.

The very simple point is that without a select committee of inquiry into this issue over the next two months, we will not be able to get any truth from this government about what is going on. Without that select committee we will not be able to find out what the government is doing to ensure the fair distribution of available gas supplies; we will not be able to know what the government is doing, if anything, to prevent spiking of gas prices to Alinta's customers; and we will not have any idea about what else is going on in the energy sector, except for any propaganda that comes through from the government's press offices.

I do not want to go on any longer. The objective of this motion is very simple: it is to ensure accountability to the people while this Parliament is not sitting. It is a very simple request. Members will note that I have not referred to the constitution of the committee. I would be quite happy to have three Labor members, a Liberal member, a National member and an Independent member so that it would be balanced. I am not saying that we want it stacked this way or the other way. We need to ensure that we keep the government to account and we need to ensure that we have the answers and so on. On the basis of what we have heard today, we are not getting the full story. I have one simple question for the Premier: in view of what he has admitted today, what else about the gas crisis is he covering up?

Point of Order

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I seek your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have listened to stuff that is ridiculous.

Dr K.D. HAMES: What point of order is it?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: It is not against the member for Dawesville; it is against the member for Leschenault.

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Dr K.D. HAMES: What is the point?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Sit down; I am on my feet!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is the point of order, Premier?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: The point of order is whether or not the cover-up allegation is unparliamentary.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dawesville should resume his seat while I am dealing with the point of order.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The member for Kalgoorlie is standing too.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Dawesville sought the call. He needs to resume his seat while I hear the Premier's point of order.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: My point of order is that I am assuming that asserting —

Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan: What standing order are you referring to?

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: I am assuming that asserting that "the Premier is engaged in a cover-up" is against the parliamentary standing orders.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Further to that point of order, if the Premier wants to debate the substance of the motion, he should allow the motion to go forward and we can have that debate. It is not a point of order currently to debate the argument.

Mr A.J. CARPENTER: Yes, it is. I am seeking it as a point of order.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: It is not a point of order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The motion before the house is for the suspension of standing orders. That is what I am interested in hearing debated.

Debate Resumed

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.10 pm]: The opposition supports the suspension of standing orders to allow debate on this specific motion, without necessarily supporting all the contents of the motion. We think standing orders should be suspended for two reasons. One, as mentioned by the member for Leschenault, is that there will be a long break of Parliament starting from today and the gas supply system is still in the midst of a crisis. I therefore believe that having some action taken to address certain issues is extremely important at this time. The member for Leschenault has raised two issues that he believes are essential to be investigated during this long break from Parliament. One of those issues is the section 18 issue that was referred to by the member for Leschenault. Having in the past been a Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I have some sympathy for the comments from the current minister about the minister who is required to deal with the application. I guess the query I have is that given that this is not Nullywah country, as I understand it, who went to the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee and suggested to it that this other group needed to be consulted, and was that person Mr Dowding, as has been referred to?

However, a far more important issue is the whole management of the gas crisis in Western Australia. Our shadow Minister for Energy, who is unfortunately paired so that he could attend another event, has called for a royal commission. As members know, I chaired an inquiry by a committee of this house into the Esperance lead scandal. That inquiry was supported by the government. There were suggestions that government inspection routines had failed and that this had led to the lead pollution in Esperance. A similar situation may well exist now. It is important that we suspend standing orders so that we can put something in place to investigate this issue while it is still fresh and there is still an opportunity to go to the site and do a number of things. We have seen pictures of the state of the pipe that exploded. There was a report from a person who supposedly worked at the site that the pipe that was carrying the gas was almost worn through, which led to the explosion.

We have had problems in getting information from the minister on the management of this matter. Emergency meetings were held just yesterday between the Australian Hotels Association and the minister's representatives to try to work out what is going to happen this week, next week and the week after that in the hotel industry and a range of other industries in which people are today losing their jobs. We should suspend standing orders to allow us to debate the sort of investigation that needs to be put in place to get to the bottom of this issue. We need a system that will allow a committee to talk to ministers and, more importantly, to government departments, such as the Department of Industry and Resources, as well as to those that are responsible for undertaking inspections. We need to make sure that the inspections were done properly. Not only that, but we also need to ensure that inspections are done properly in other areas in which a failure to do so could have

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disastrous results for this state. We are approaching a seven-week parliamentary break yet we have not been given any knowledge of whether those government departments are doing their work and are up to scratch to meet not only this crisis, but also any potential crisis that has not yet been considered. The inquiry into the Esperance lead pollution found a systematic failure of government departments and industry to do their jobs properly. Suddenly, we have another problem. Who knows how many more problems there will be in this state before a proper system is in place and there is proper funding of those departments to investigate matters? It is like medicine: one has to do preventive medicine to avoid the disease at the end of the day.

The Leader of the House ought to suspend standing orders, and not necessarily because he supports the establishment of a select committee. I know the government has not supported the establishment of select committees in the past. While I do not agree with the government, I have to say that the parliamentary committee system, which was involved in investigating the Esperance incident, works very well. Standing committees of this house could do the same again and could co-opt other members of Parliament to provide them with expertise. Our shadow Minister for Energy believes that a royal commission will be required to properly investigate this matter and to ensure that proper inspections occur to prevent disasters in the future. The Leader of the House ought to accept the motion to suspend standing orders so that we can make sure that the Minister for Energy is not just sitting on his tail and letting things progress in other areas that should be dealt with properly.

MR B.J. GRYLLS (Merredin — Leader of the National Party) [3.13 pm]: The Nationals also support the call for the suspension of standing orders to allow the motion to be debated. We are also very concerned that the information flow to members of Parliament will be extremely restricted over the course of the parliamentary break. At the moment no effort has been made by the Premier to brief the National Party on the events at hand. The Independents have confirmed to me that the Premier has also made no effort to keep them informed on what is happening on a daily basis. We are the people to whom members of the public come to find out what is happening. The Premier seems to be calling for bipartisan support from all parliamentarians to help work through the gas crisis, but when his answers to our questions seem to hide certain facts, he does not fill us with a great deal of confidence that bipartisanship is occurring. The Nationals support the suspension of standing orders.

I have asked two questions on the gas crisis. Yesterday I asked about the possibility of bringing LNG tankers south and building a regasification plant to process that product. The Premier said he is so busy that he has not had time to consider that idea. That idea has been put to me many times in emails and when I have spoken to members of the public. If the Premier is too busy to consider that suggestion, maybe it is something that a committee could look at. Apache Energy seems to have been moving towards developing a new plant that could offer some diversification into gas facilities, but that plant has been rejected because of a section 18 notice. Once again, this issue has not been raised in public by the Premier. That does not give me great comfort that the Premier is being absolutely open and accountable on all issues relating to this matter. Maybe it is only through putting in place a bipartisan committee of the Parliament over the parliamentary break that the community will be given some hope and faith that everyone is working towards resolving this crisis and making sure that we can get to the bottom of why it has occurred.

DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [3.15 pm]: There is one significant reason for suspending standing orders to have the debate outlined by the member for Leschenault; that is, we are going into a seven-week break. Parliament is the appropriate forum in which to find out information and to hold the government to account. We can tell that the parliamentary process has been effective because every day over the past two weeks we have asked the Premier and the Minister for Energy questions about the gas crisis and every day they have become angry, upset, cranky and arrogant, because they do not like —

Mrs J. Hughes: The Premier has been on the radio every morning talking about it.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: He has not been giving answers. The Premier goes on the radio every morning and gives the message that he wants to give. He does a two-minute interview to tell people what he wants them to hear and not what they need to know.

Mrs J. Hughes: Have you listened?

Dr S.C. THOMAS: Yes, I have listened. The member should be listening, because he tells people what he wants them to hear and not what they need to know. That is why the parliamentary process has been particularly good at getting answers out of the government. It does not always work. We ask a question and often get the answer that the Premier wants to give rather than the one that answers the question he was actually asked. At least there are some occasions on which we get a little information. Once in a while we get a bit of the real story.

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Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order, members!

Dr S.C. THOMAS: He probably tells the member for Kingsley a wonderful story about what a good job he is doing. The member might agree with that. Lots of people in the state of Western Australia do not.

We need to suspend standing orders because this is a worthy debate. For the next seven weeks, the government will do its best to avoid proper and adequate scrutiny of its actions and will try to avoid being held responsible. We have already seen that. Committees are in charge of the repair of this incident. The government has put itself at arm's-length deniability. It has stepped back and said that it will make these committees responsible; it is not the government's problem or responsibility. It is only the sort of process that Parliament offers that enables members to ask questions and hold ministers and the Premier to account. Holding the Minister for Energy to account is a very difficult process; it is like trying to hold quicksilver.

Mr C.J. Barnett: You wouldn't want to hold the Minister for Energy, I can assure you of that.

Dr S.C. THOMAS: There are a lot of lines that I am not going to use.

It is important that we suspend standing orders because we need to put a mechanism in place to get some answers, and hopefully some honest answers, from the government. I suspect that a committee might be able to do that in the period before Parliament resumes after a couple of months. This is a worthy motion. We should suspend standing orders to try to get some real answers. I hope the government will support this motion.

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine) [3.20 pm]: I do not support the suspension of standing orders. I want to put a couple of issues that I was not able to raise yesterday evening because the matter of public importance was brought on. In saying that, I will express why it is that I will not support the suspension of standing orders. I do not think it is necessary; however, I am concerned about the lack of information flowing. Robert Taylor yesterday essentially paraphrased me in *The West Australian*. The concerns I have with the questions that are not being answered are essentially about what the issue is, if indeed it is a maintenance issue. In any of these issues there are two phases: there is a phase of response and there is a phase of recovery. We have heard lots about the phase of response, but at the moment we have a gas pipeline that is essentially like an umbrella. Each spoke of the umbrella feeds into one single pipeline. Luckily, thankfully and God willing the pipeline has not been affected at this stage. However, I think the suspension of standing orders is not necessary. I do not support it because I do not think it is necessary at this stage to have a committee of inquiry. As chair of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee I know which way it will be coming! However, the Premier needs to advise us on issues. Do we have an energy plan in this state; and, if so, where can we read it? I will paraphrase some of the issues that Robert Taylor raised yesterday.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order. Member for Yokine, you get to speak only on the suspension of standing orders, not on side issues of the substantive debate.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: I do not think that I need to support the suspension, but I need to say that the Premier needs to put these issues on notice and needs to answer the questions. I do not think he is doing that at the moment. He is answering questions on the response but not on the recovery. I do not see that a committee would assist at this time. Instead of the Premier and the opposition trading insults across the house, we should get on with the issue and deal with the response and the recovery to ensure that we have an energy supply in place. I agree with members on the other side of the house that this house is here to hold the government to account, so instead of trading insults, we should get on and do that. I will not support the motion.

MR C.C. PORTER (Murdoch) [3.22 pm]: In speaking in support of the motion, I say that the member for Yokine has hit upon precisely why this motion should be supported, and that is the flow of information; not merely the flow of information but the gathering of information. As I understand the position, as representatives of the people in our individual electorates, standing collectively as a Parliament, we are to be the recipients of information on issues such as this. We are also to guide which information should be sought; that is our job. If there is a seven-week period during which the government fails to receive and provide information to the Parliament, without any guidance on which information should be sought, we are being derelict in our duty as a Parliament.

There are several ways in which we might fix that problem. The first is to sit during the break, which many members may not be particularly happy about. Another possibility is that which the member for Leschenault has suggested, which is to set up a select committee. It would be the job of that select committee to receive information that would flow naturally to the executive of this Parliament by virtue of the way in which these crises play out, but it could also direct the executive of this Parliament to which information should be sought.

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I will provide one example of an instance in which there would be something very specific that this Parliament, through mechanisms such as question time if we were sitting or a select committee if we were not, might be quite keen to direct the executive to receive information about. It is the one thing that staggers me as the member for Murdoch about this entire situation; that is, the idea that the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority is investigating, at least in part, itself, and the concept that the executive of this Parliament sees absolutely no difficulty with that situation. This is an issue about which this Parliament should be directing the executive. I accept the suggestion by the member for Leschenault that over the seven-week break the best mechanism to achieve that would be through a select committee.

Let me very briefly use an example to explain why it would be very important to direct the executive to receive information about this issue. I am not an engineer. I was not even a fitter and welder. My hands are soft, like pillows. However, it strikes me that there is something strange about the situation that we are being presented on the investigation into how this occurred. There is immediacy in that, not just in recovery, but in ensuring that it does not occur next week at another facility. Let us have a bit of a think about two broad possibilities that even a non-engineering expert such as I could suggest as to how this occurred, keeping in mind that we have an independent body in NOPSA that regularly checks these facilities —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member is straying into the substantive debate. He needs to draw it back to the suspension of standing orders.

Mr C.C. PORTER: I will very briefly explain why it is important that we should direct the executive to seek the information. NOPSA provided a report to Apache Energy, which presumably said that everything was fine and that it would fix this. There are two basic reasons that the accident could have happened: either because the report was deficient or it was not followed. However, we are asking the body that produced the first report, which may or may not have been appropriately delivered, to report to us on its own report. It is outrageous. An independent body must do that. We must suspend standing orders to allow a select committee to impress upon the executive of this Parliament that that is what must happen. This motion should be supported fulsomely.

MS S.E. WALKER (Nedlands) [3.26 pm]: I support this motion to suspend standing orders. I do so because I think it is the right of every member—in fact, it is the duty and obligation of every member of this Parliament—to know and understand what is happening with this current issue. I will find it extraordinary if the government does not vote for this motion. This morning the Minister for Police and Emergency Services stood and moved a motion for a joint select committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People. This is an example of why we should be suspending standing orders. He moved the motion to put people on that committee to oversee an act that does not deal with individual cases of children and does not allow for an audit of individual files of the department. It was a whimsical committee. The Minister for Police moved that motion, yet here we have a motion moved by the member for Leschenault that is asking for a select committee to investigate what is going on with this current issue. It is a national issue and an issue that all of us on behalf of our electorates should be supporting.

I am not saying that the Premier is not handling it properly, because he seems to be handling it properly. My electorate office has not received any complaints, but that is not the point. I am supporting the motion to suspend standing orders because the only committee I have ever been on was the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, which looked at disaster management and went overseas. The government needs to answer myriad questions on these matters. If this government has a minister who could move a motion this morning to establish a committee for parliamentarians who are leaving, and in an area that has no teeth, we should be able to get the government to vote on establishing this inquiry, which is of the utmost importance to not only Western Australia but also the nation.

MR J.C. KOBELKE (Balcatta — Leader of the House) [3.29 pm]: The motion before the house for the suspension of standing orders is to establish a select committee. I will address why it is not necessary or appropriate to suspend standing orders for this purpose. In doing so, I hope that I have the opportunity to answer some of the statements made by members opposite, even though some of them went to what the committee might look at were the suspension to be carried. The government does not believe it is appropriate to suspend standing orders, because suspension means that the house should deal with something forthwith rather than at some later time and that, therefore, there is something special about it. The issue then is what is special about the motion that we might deal with or the issue that it is purported it should address. Clearly, we have major issues with gas supplies in Western Australia. Those issues are being given a great deal of attention by the Premier and the Minister for Energy. The suggestion that a parliamentary committee can somehow help at this stage really shows how out of touch the member for Leschenault and the opposition are with how government works and what can be done to add value. I believe that our committees do an excellent job. They provide us with reports

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that inform the community and government so that responses can be made. They generally look into either a problem that has occurred in which the facts need to be ascertained or into an area of need in which something should be done. If we were to suspend standing orders, nothing in the motion provides any clarity on what the committee is to do. It is so bland and wide in what would be the potential terms of reference that there is no direction at all for what the committee should do.

The second reason I do not believe we should suspend standing orders, aside from the inadequacy of the motion, is that we have a situation that is in train and evolving every day. Some members referred to ascertaining the distribution of energy. It changes from day to day as the current situation is managed. It may be appropriate in one, two or three months to go back and see whether those daily allocations were fair, equitable and well managed. To think that an inquiry could be set up that will interfere when there are a lot of people putting a huge effort into managing this major concern, this huge loss of the potential for gas, shows how wrong-footed the proponents of this motion are. The member for Leschenault has a track record of taking facts, misrepresenting them, juxtaposing them and making accusations, as he did today, about the motives of people. His accusations are totally unrelated to the facts. To my knowledge, the member for Leschenault has always worked this way. He misrepresents facts. He said that the government was not being honest with the community, that the Premier knew about something and was therefore part of some conspiracy. To say all this while speaking in support of the suspension of standing orders just shows the depths to which the member for Leschenault and members of the opposition have sunk. They are totally discredited in the community. Instead of trying to build some credibility with the community so that people can see that they are getting on with the job, we have this absolute nonsense of making accusations against the government without foundation and without any facts to support them, and they say we need a committee to sort it out. At this stage we do not need a committee to sort it out. The Premier, the Minister for Energy and a lot of industry leaders are meeting on a daily basis to deal with this very serious situation. At some later point it may be worthwhile to have a committee inquiry and we may find that the process could have been handled better. To try to interfere at this time will not shed light or add value to it.

Mr C.J. Barnett: What if the government's been negligent, which I believe it has?

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: If the government has been negligent, that will be shown in the process. When we get to the end of the process, we can come back and measure it.

Mr C.J. Barnett: No.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Is the member saying that at the end of the process the government will be seen to be incompetent and everything would have worked out well?

Mr C.J. Barnett: No, because the work that has been done will be of a technical nature. What if the government has been negligent in its handling of the portfolio? A committee will not look after that.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Why would that not be more evident after the event rather than right in the middle of it?

Mr C.J. Barnett: It seems to be quite evident right now.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: The member has not answered my question.

Mr C.J. Barnett: There are reasons the government has been deficient, if not negligent, in its management of the energy portfolio.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Why would that not be more evident towards the end of the process rather than right at the front of it?

Mr C.J. Barnett: Why would you hide from that? Why would you hide from Parliament scrutinising the performance of the government in the energy portfolio that has made the state more vulnerable —

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I accept that part of the interjection because it shows exactly what I was saying. We have an opposition that simply wants to stir things up and muddy the waters. It is not about helping the people of Western Australia and the leadership by getting on and dealing with a very difficult and serious situation. It simply wants to stir things up. When I gave the member for Cottesloe an opportunity to answer my question by way of interjection, he would not give a single fact as to the basis for some fears or apprehension that things are not going well. We would only want to set up some sort of inquiry at this stage if there was clear evidence that the matter was not being managed well. Otherwise, it is just interference. It is political grandstanding by members opposite who are stirring the waters and muddying them up. We have an opposition that has sunk so low that it wants to grasp at straws. If it can destroy things and make things worse, it might look better. That is what this is about.

Mr Dan Barron-Sullivan; Deputy Speaker; Mr Tony McRae; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Alan Carpenter; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Christian Porter; Ms Sue Walker; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker

A further point I need to make, and almost the last point, is that the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority has clearly been given the authority to do this sort of work and carry out a technical inquiry. The suggestion by members opposite that they no longer have any confidence in the process, when we are part of the way through the process, supports exactly what I said a moment ago. It is an attempt to undermine good government and the proper working of authorities. If at some later stage there is evidence to show that an authority such as NOPSA or some other government agency has not carried out its inquiry adequately or that there was some potential conflict of interest, that is the time to raise those matters. To try to raise them now in the middle of the process simply undermines the credibility of NOPSA and stops it doing its work. We have an opposition that is so low and so bereft of talent that its approach is to try to destroy everything. It wants to pull everyone down and question their credibility and bona fides. That is all we have had from people opposite, rather than saying that they have a major issue. There are roles for NOPSA, the Premier and the Minister for Energy to engage in making sure that they fulfil their responsibilities—in the case of NOPSA, to help determine the cause of the matter and, in the case of the government and our agencies, to help us deal with the consequences of this major accident.

Dr K.D. Hames: You are hiding.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Again, the point is that —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper): I have been sitting here listening to the minister's speech. He is on his feet speaking to the question of whether standing orders should be suspended. He is getting into matters of fact. Perhaps the minister may wish to agree to the suspension of standing orders so he can debate those matters. If he does not want to do that, he should say why standing orders should be suspended. The interjections from across the chamber are further pointing the minister in the wrong direction.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Mr Acting Speaker, you are quite right. The matter before us relates to the suspension of standing orders. I do not believe that any case has been made for the suspension of standing orders so that this matter can be dealt with. Further, I do not believe that sending this matter to a committee would serve to help the state of Western Australia through this difficult situation. At some later stage matters might quite appropriately be sent to a committee.

I wish to answer the interjection that we are trying to hide something. The Premier is being quizzed by journalists almost every day. He is open to the public on radio and television. When it comes to accountability and answering questions, we hear this absolute nonsense that we are hiding. We only have to compare Premier Carpenter with former Premier Richard Court. Former Premier Richard Court never held a press conference. He never put himself in a situation in which he was asked questions that he would not be able to answer. He had a standard procedure. Once a week he would come out to 6PR to record a 60-second grab. His car would be outside with the engine running. He would jump in the car and be taken away before he could be asked a second question. I have stood next to Premier Carpenter on numerous occasions when he has answered question after question from journalists for 10 or 20 minutes and sometimes up to an hour. Any suggestion that we are running away is absolute nonsense and again confirms what I have said: We have an opposition so low that it makes wild accusations without any basis —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, I hope you are coming to a conclusion or else I will sit you down very shortly. You are moving away from the reasons standing orders should be suspended. You are moving into a critique of the opposition. The debate is about the motion before the house.

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Very clearly, the point is that there is no basis for the suspension of standing orders. I went a bit further with my remarks because I thought it was appropriate to address a number of the points that were made. I have put that on the record. We clearly have an opposition that has no leadership and no credibility. All it is seeking to do is pull other people down so it might look good. That is not the approach by which the opposition can rebuild its standing and be held in some esteem by the people of this state. We do not support the suspension of standing orders.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr M.J. Cowper): As this motion without notice is to suspend standing orders, I will need to satisfy myself that there is an absolute majority present and if I hear a dissenting voice when I put the question, I will be required to divide the Assembly.

Question put.

The ACTING SPEAKER: There being a dissentient voice, the house will divide.

Division taken with the following result —

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY - Thursday, 19 June 2008]
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Mr Dan Barron-Sullivan; Deputy Speaker; Mr Tony McRae; Dr Steve Thomas; Mr Alan Carpenter; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Brendon Grylls; Mr Bob Kucera; Mr Christian Porter; Ms Sue Walker; Mr John Kobelke; Acting Speaker

Ayes (18)

Mr C.J. Barnett
Mr D.F. Barron-Sullivan
Mr M.J. Birney
Dr E. Constable
Mr B.J. Grylls

Dr K.D. Hames
Ms K. Hodson-Thomas
Dr G.G. Jacobs
Mr R.F. Johnson
Mr J.E. McGrath

Mr C.C. Porter
Mr D.T. Redman
Mr G. Snook
Dr S.C. Thomas
Ms S.E. Walker

Mr G.A. Woodhams
Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr A.J. Simpson (*Teller*)

Noes (28)

Mr P.W. Andrews
Mr A.J. Carpenter
Dr J.M. Edwards
Ms D.J. Guise
Mrs J. Hughes
Mr J.N. Hyde
Mr J.C. Kobelke

Mr R.C. Kucera
Mr F.M. Logan
Ms A.J.G. MacTiernan
Mr J.A. McGinty
Mr M. McGowan
Ms S.M. McHale
Mr A.D. McRae

Mr M.P. Murray
Mr A.P. O’Gorman
Mr P. Papalia
Mr J.R. Quigley
Ms M.M. Quirk
Ms J.A. Radisich
Mr E.S. Ripper

Mrs M.H. Roberts
Mr T.G. Stephens
Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr P.B. Watson
Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr S.R. Hill (*Teller*)

Pairs

Mr G.M. Castrilli
Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr J.H.D. Day

Mr F. Riebeling
Mrs C.A. Martin
Mr J.B. D’Orazio

Question thus negatived.