

Mr Mark McGowan; Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr David Templeman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Bowler; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Janet Woollard; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Colin Barnett

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE — EXTENSION

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: Mr Speaker, I want to draw your attention to the fact that we just had the answer to a question that must have gone for at least eight minutes. Regularly, the opposition is goaded by both the Premier and the Treasurer, and the Premier's performance —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members continue to demonstrate why I finished question time today. The Leader of the Opposition is trying to make a point of order. He is not being enabled to do that.

Mr M. McGOWAN: As I said, the opposition is goaded. The Premier points and rants and screams abuse at members of the opposition —

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: — which he did! And at that point question time is closed because the opposition objects. Mr Speaker, I think it is a little unfair that the opposition loses questions when the government behaves in that manner, and I would like you to reflect on that.

The SPEAKER: We move to orders of the day.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I move that order of the day 3 be now taken.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: I have a point of order! This point of order is in regard to your decision to close down question time after three questions had been asked by the opposition. It is my view that that is an incorrect decision because the opposition has not been given the opportunity to ask more than three questions, and because, as the Leader of the Opposition highlighted, the answers by ministers exceeded normally expected answering times by up to eight minutes. I ask you to reconsider closing question time and allow another question from the opposition.

The SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, I am not going to do that; I am not going to do that at all. I indicated very early in today's question time what I would accept in this place, and I indicated to members—I think everybody in this place would have heard me today—that if this sort of behaviour continues, I will close question time. In my considered opinion, that sort of behaviour did once again arise and I have closed question time.

Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN: Point of order, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: I am not going to take any more points of order.

Dissent from Speaker's Ruling

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [2.46 pm]: I move —

That this house dissents from the Speaker's ruling in closing question time after only three opposition questions.

Ruling by Speaker

THE SPEAKER (Mr G.A. Woodhams): Member for Midland, you have been in this place longer than many people in this place. You have been in many question times, as many people in this place have. What is afforded the Speaker in this place, member for Midland, and for all members—some will know and some will not know—is the discretion to run question time for as long as he or she wants. In the last Parliament—and in previous Parliaments—question time was extended to 45 minutes by the previous Speaker, Hon Fred Riebeling. I have followed in that tradition to enable question time to run for as close to 45 minutes, as much as I possibly can, and I have always enabled that. Members, today I indicated that I would close question time down if certain behaviour continued—it did, and I note that the time was possibly around 2.42 pm or 2.43 pm. Certainly, members, after that it would have been the time of the last question at any rate by my reckoning. It is my discretion; it is not a ruling. It is a discretion I have.

Point of Order

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: Mr Speaker, can I ask you to accept a point of order?

The SPEAKER: I will certainly accept a point of order, member for Balcatta.

Mr Mark McGowan; Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr David Templeman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Bowler; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Janet Woollard; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Colin Barnett

Mr J.C. KOBELKE: I accept your ruling and I understand that is the standing orders. The point of order goes to the standing order relating to questions being asked and the answers given. That goes generally to relevance, and you rule on that. But there is an issue of timing, because yesterday—as I do every day—I time from when the question is asked until the finish. The Minister for Transport took over 10 minutes on a dorothy dixer. Today, the Minister for Transport answered a question and took nine minutes. The Premier took nine minutes. The answer to the last question, on which you closed question time down, again a dorothy dixer, took nine minutes. It seems to me that measuring question time by the time allowed is not the issue; it is whether the opposition can ask questions. If the ministers simply filibuster, as I have pointed out with the time taken, that is denying the opposition the opportunity to ask questions, and I raise that as a point of order for your consideration, Mr Speaker.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Further to that point of order. I have been in this place a very long time, the same as the member for Balcatta —

Several members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That was a classic example of why question time goes longer than it does and why we do not get more questions. Comments made by the member for Balcatta do not exactly relate to the standing order. Question time is at your discretion, Mr Speaker. Quite simply, if members opposite want to get more questions, as you have said many times, all they have to do is stop interjecting. I am subject, together with other ministers on this side of the house, to a total barrage of interjections, and when about 10 people start interjecting and shouting it makes it impossible for a minister to answer a question quickly.

Standing Orders Suspension — Motion

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland) [2.49 pm] — without notice: I move —

That so much of standing orders be suspended as is necessary to allow question time to be recommenced for another 20 minutes.

Point of Order

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I have moved the motion that order of the day 3 be now taken.

Several members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Mr Speaker, you gave me the call, and the member for Mandurah took a point of order after I had moved that motion.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the House, with the greatest respect, I had not asked the house whether that motion be agreed to. I then accepted the point of order from the member for Mandurah.

Debate Resumed

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The member for Balcatta has highlighted the fact that government ministers are now taking an extended period to answer dorothy dixers. I accept, Mr Speaker, that you have been relatively generous in the amount of time that is allowed for question time, but time and again ministers abuse the privilege by giving lengthy answers of eight or nine minutes, especially to dorothy dixers. One of the worst offenders is, of course, the Treasurer, who gets asked basic dorothy dixers and strays on relevance, as does the Minister for Transport. The commentary that they run has little to do with the questions they were asked. They bring in lots of material that would be better supplied by way of a brief ministerial statement or, indeed, a long ministerial statement given the time that they take.

The other matter I want to raise in calling for the suspension of standing orders is that the Premier, for the second day in a row, stood up with the intention of deliberately goading the opposition. That is not to say that that kind of robust activity does not occur regularly in this place, but when the Premier leans across the table, points his finger at the Leader of the Opposition and says in a loud voice —

Several members interjected.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: I am imitating the Premier. I am demonstrating what the Premier was doing.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I expect to hear the member for Midland in silence. The reason for that is that she has raised a very serious issue. I expect it to be treated in that way.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The Premier, in a deliberate strategy, leant across towards opposition members and goaded us. Yesterday we heard him ask the same question over and again of the Leader of the Opposition and

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members sitting on this side of the house. It was only natural that he should get a robust response. In my long term in this house, as you have referred to, Mr Speaker, I have seen that when the person on their feet invites a response from those sitting opposite, it is generally accepted and members sitting opposite are not penalised for having responded once goaded. There is also a general convention that if the questioner continues to goad and there is no response from the opposition, the person on their feet moves on. Yesterday, the Premier did not do that. When it became clear that he was not getting a further response from the opposition leader, he continued to repeat the same question louder and louder and pointed his finger at members sitting opposite. Of course, he got the wall of noise that he anticipated.

I do not think that three questions are sufficient. I do not think that it is fair to say that the opposition has been treated appropriately in this instance and that we have had the opportunity to raise the questions that we would like to have raised. Quite clearly, there is a deliberate strategy by the Premier to goad members opposite by asking questions of the opposition over and over again, which he is not entitled to do. He has been angry and belligerent in his approach to the opposition, and he has received the response that would generally be expected. Ministers—particularly the Treasurer, to some extent the Premier and certainly the Minister for Transport—come into this house on a daily basis and take seven, eight or nine minutes, or longer, to answer dorothy dix questions. I put it to you, Mr Speaker, that we find that to be an abuse of question time.

I do not intend to speak for a long time. When the Premier came to government, he said that he intended to have new standards in office. Indeed, I well recall the editorial in *The West Australian* at the time, in which he said that he would not have dorothy dixers as such and that they would not be used to attack the opposition. He has offended that very principle himself in recent times.

I think it is only fair that the opposition have a further 20 minutes of question time. I acknowledge the difficult position that you are in, Mr Speaker, but I do not think we can, for a second day in a row, put up with the strategy that the government has employed. We do not want that to continue. That is why we have taken the extraordinary step of seeking to have a further 20 minutes of question time today.

MR M. MCGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [2.55 pm]: It is an unusual step that the opposition has taken to seek additional time for question time, but we must remember that the most important element of accountability in the parliamentary process is the question time period during each sitting day. Everyone in this place should understand that the requirement for ministers to answer questions from the opposition is the most important part of government accountability. When that process is truncated, it is a serious issue. That process has been truncated because of the behaviour of ministers with their abusive, aggressive and at times bizarre ranting and screaming across the chamber at opposition members. I include the Premier's behaviour in that. I watched him during his response to the question asked a moment ago when he screamed abuse across the chamber at me and implied that we were all unpatriotic Western Australians. He was red-faced as he ranted, screamed and pointed at us from across the chamber. It elicited a response from the opposition, because it is natural that people will respond to that sort of abuse and will not sit quietly. And when members on this side respond, they are called to order and question time is truncated and members do not get to ask their questions. We need to look at the cause and effect. The strange, unusual ranting by the Premier and other ministers promotes that sort of reaction, and then question time is closed.

Mr C.J. Barnett interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: There he goes again, Mr Speaker.

The other thing I want to point out is that some ministers—I know it has been discussed regularly by members in this place—take so long to answer the most simple of questions, and they use graph after graph. I think that standing orders should be amended so that ministers are banned from using graphs in this place. The former government used them; this government uses them. I make this commitment: if we are elected to government, we will ban the use of graphs in this place. That is another policy. That is about the twelfth policy in the past two months. I think that policy would have bipartisan support, with the exception of a couple of ministers.

That sort of behaviour by ministers to extend their answers simply exasperates members of the house. It promotes the behaviour of members on the back bench on both sides of the house because it does not allow for the free flow of questions and answers in this house, which is what should happen. As you will recall, Mr Speaker, the Procedure and Privileges Committee presented to this Parliament 18 months or two years ago a report on how to deal with these issues—to have shorter questions and answers, to try to promote the free flow of ideas, and to have perhaps eight or nine questions from each side during question time on a daily basis, rather than the five questions or, on this occasion, the three questions that were asked. I think there are ways to manage this, if only the government would accept the recommendations of the Procedure and Privileges Committee.

Mr Mark McGowan; Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr David Templeman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Bowler; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Janet Woollard; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Colin Barnett

To return to the original point, question time is about accountability. Removing the capacity of opposition members, in particular some regional members who had some questions to ask —

Mr C.J. Barnett: Look at the behaviour of your members.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Look at your own behaviour. Watch a video of yourself in question time.

Mr C.J. Barnett: How many times do your members get named? They continually interject. Look at their behaviour last night; it was appalling.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Government members were sitting there embarrassed watching the Premier's behaviour in question time. It was unbecoming —

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: The Premier is outed now and he is a bit embarrassed. He is embarrassed at being caught out. Government members were sitting there embarrassed by the Premier's behaviour —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Leader of the Opposition to come back to the substantive motion that the member for Midland has moved.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I just say that question time is the most important part of the day and I think that some ministers, in particular the Premier, should have a look at a video of themselves during question time; they should be embarrassed.

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [3.01 pm]: I certainly think the opposition is being entirely too precious over this issue. A few of us have been in this place for a while and I recall what question time used to be in the old days and, of course, we see what it is like on both sides of the house. I recall that in the earlier days, question time used to go for 30 minutes, not 45 minutes; that was the standard time. I am fairly certain—I am not positive—that we did not have supplementary questions in those days, or if we did —

A government member interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: No; therefore when we had a 30-minute question time there were no supplementary questions and the opposition would get maybe four or five questions. We would have four ready; five was the most that members got up. Now, how many questions are being asked, if we include supplementary questions? Five. The opposition got five; normally we would get a lot more than that. The time allocated for questions was extended by Hon Fred Riebeling from 30 to 45 minutes, and in doing that he allowed supplementary questions. But what most slows the opportunity for ministers to speak? It is the opposition and the noise it makes. We used to do just the same in opposition; we used to get in strife on the opposition side just the same. I have to say that Hon Fred Riebeling was far quicker with his calls to order—naming and formally calling people to order. He would run us up to our three pretty quickly and it was a good tactic, because it would shut us up pretty quickly. The opposition has a few serial offenders and we only have to look at those members who racked up three calls to order pretty quickly—yes, I see the smile from the member at the front, who is one such serial offender—but there are three or four others who are the same.

I have with me today the times taken for answers. The time taken for answers is actually 30 minutes, not 45 minutes. We have to ask why that is so. The remaining 15 minutes is the time that ministers are sitting on their seats when the Speaker stands up and calls the opposition to order. There is 15 minutes of calling the opposition to order and 30 minutes of answers. I will just tell members some of the times taken for answers. I certainly try to keep answer times to a minimum. Some of us are a bit more verbose, but not very much.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Let us go through these times.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Warnbro!

Dr K.D. HAMES: This will be difficult because I have names and not seats. The member for Midland asked a question of the Minister for Transport. His answer was four minutes one second; we would think that is not unreasonable. The time taken for the answer to the supplementary question was one minute and 31 seconds; that

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is very reasonable. The answer to the question to the Premier took six minutes and 21 seconds, but there was no supplementary question; therefore his time was only marginally longer than the time taken for answers to the question and supplementary question to the Minister for Transport. The answer to the question from the Leader of the Opposition to the Minister for Corrective Services took two minutes and nine seconds; therefore it was very brief. There was a supplementary question—that was, in reality, the fourth question—and it took two minutes and 50 seconds to answer. The question to me was answered in a very brief two minutes and 40 seconds; I thought that was very impressive! I was a little more verbose in answering the question from the shadow minister; I took five minutes and four seconds, with no supplementary question. Therefore, the answer to the shadow minister's question was within the average time of five to six minutes. The answer to the question to the Treasurer took six minutes and 14 seconds. That is almost the same as the Premier's answer, but again there was no supplementary question. Therefore it took five to six minutes per answer; that is not unreasonable. The Leader of the Opposition will well recall —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr M. McGowan: You got that wrong!

Dr K.D. HAMES: Yes, but it is the answer; I only have the figures I have.

The Leader of the Opposition will well recall Hon Jim McGinty giving an answer to a question in this house on health. Earlier a member said how long the answer went for.

Mr T.K. Waldron interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: It went for something like 13 minutes; that is an extraordinary length of time to chew up question time.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Dr K.D. HAMES: I understand the motion; I understand the aggro.

Mr P. Papalia interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Warnbro!

Dr K.D. HAMES: The reality is that there are things both sides need to do. One is that our ministers need to shorten their answers.

Mr P. Papalia: How reliable are those stats?

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, you are perhaps underlining or not underlining the case that some members in this place are making. I formally call you to order for the second time today.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I think it is reasonable for ministers to keep their answers short, and indeed the Premier has advised us to do that. However, short does not mean to get out and spend two minutes answering a question. If there are a lot of interjections from the opposition that require a response, it is reasonable for a minister to go for five or six minutes, but we need to do our best to keep those questions short. The Leader of the Opposition needs to try to curtail his serial offenders. There are only about five members, a core group, who are getting up to two or three formal calls every single question time. I think the Leader of the Opposition needs to do something to keep those members under control.

Mr R.H. Cook: So it is all our fault?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Did I say that? I have just given two options.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I thought the Premier was stirring the opposition up very nicely, and it responded. I have seen leaders of Labor governments doing it on large numbers of occasions in the past, so stop being so precious; toughen up.

MR B.S. WYATT (Victoria Park) [3.08 pm]: As the member for Midland pointed out, time and again we have had ministers giving what should be brief ministerial statements in question time, and using question time to outline whatever issue the government wants to get up on the day. The previous Speaker, Hon Fred Riebeling, on a number of occasions when ministers in the former Labor government went on too long would refuse to give the

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government the call, and questions would therefore then stick with the opposition. Ultimately, Mr Speaker, you have not seen fit to pursue that path.

A number of members pointed out the good example of the Treasurer. Today the Treasurer, in answer to a question about the Curtin Business School—CCI survey, ended up talking about the role of the private sector in Western Australia's energy system. There were absolutely no particular questions in that survey relating at all to that issue. The Treasurer was not asked about the Oates report; the Treasurer was not asked about the Premier's view on merging utilities; and the Treasurer was not asked about whether the public sector should build \$10 billion worth of infrastructure over the next few years. It was a question about a survey.

I mention the Treasurer, in particular, over the last few question times: on 28 February he took seven minutes in response to a dorothy dix question; on 29 February he took 10 minutes to give an answer. The government says that question time is 45 minutes; just under a quarter of that time is taken up by the Treasurer in response to one question. Nearly a quarter of the 45 minutes that the government wants for question time is taken up by the Treasurer answering one question. The Deputy Premier says he wants there to be 30 or 35 minutes, so the government would be comfortable with the Treasurer taking a third of question time in answer to one question. This year alone, the Treasurer has answered eight questions at just over seven minutes per answer. I do not think, in light of the fact that the government has said that it wants 45 minutes for question time, that that is acceptable.

It was pointed out that the time taken to answer is the opposition's fault, but the Premier deliberately goads the opposition; it is not a matter of being precious. One example was on 22 March—last Thursday—because when the Premier gets going, when he gets the purple on, he certainly gets out of control. The Premier said to the member for Girrawheen who, Mr Speaker, you had already called to order: "Has she gone dumb? Cannot talk? Cannot see, cannot hear, cannot talk?" He then called the member for Girrawheen a monkey. When the opposition obviously responds, the Speaker calls the opposition to order. There is abuse from the Premier, but the member for Albany—a member of the opposition—gets called to order. The Premier, who time and again is abusive and nasty during question time, is never called to account. Mr Speaker, as you have pointed out, as it apparently is acceptable in question time now for the Treasurer to take 10 minutes to answer a question—nearly a quarter of the time that you want allocated to question time—you have to expect that the opposition will move dissent to those decisions.

MR C.C. PORTER (Bateman — Treasurer) [3.11 pm]: I will make my comments brief —

Several members interjected.

Mr C.C. PORTER: I think one of the confusions —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr C.C. PORTER: I have not had time to laminate.

However, I think one of the difficulties is that the numbers being bandied around about how long people speak for are either gross or net, depending on who is using the numbers. When people talk about —

Several members interjected.

Mr C.C. PORTER: See, this is the problem! I am not pointing a finger or shouting; I am just talking. When people say, as they did earlier, that the Treasurer spoke for over nine minutes, which I heard one member opposite say, the fact is that I spoke for six minutes and 14 seconds; nine minutes was the gross time between the question being asked and the completion. Six minutes and 14 seconds is the net figure; nine minutes is the gross figure. The difference between gross and net is the time in which interjections require you, Mr Speaker, to calm proceedings and speak. On occasion, interjections might be prompted, but I do not recall today speaking for nine minutes, because I did not. For three of those nine minutes, I had to be seated so that you could calm proceedings, and I thought that my answer actually was quite dull. I did not think that there was anything in it that would necessarily fire the opposition up or warrant one-third of the total time being taken by you, Mr Speaker.

To conclude these brief comments, the timing of members on this side of the house on their feet, when we consider it as a net figure, is entirely reasonable. It looks like a good third of all the time is being taken up by interjections and the necessity to calm proceedings.

MR J.J.M. BOWLER (Kalgoorlie) [3.13 pm]: Although I may not support the motion, I certainly support the sentiment behind it and the proceedings that have led to this debate.

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Why do we have Parliament? There are two basic reasons why we have Parliament: the first is that we pass good legislation for the orderly running of the state and the second is that Parliament is there for the accountability of the government, inspection and openness. The very heart and core of that is question time. I have been increasingly frustrated and, Mr Speaker, I have been to see you on more than one occasion in the past year or so. I am getting to the stage that I will not bother coming to question time unless I am going to ask a question myself, because it is just so frustrating. It is becoming increasingly frustrating for me. I do not know whether I am getting old and grumpy, but I believe there are mistakes on both sides. As in any dispute, not all the fault is on one side.

There are now far too many supplementary questions. When I came into this place 11 years ago, in some question times there would be two supplementary questions and sometimes there would be one—maximum. Now, every question from the opposition has a supplementary and, invariably, if we listen closely to the answer to the first question, the supplementary question was answered in the minister's first answer anyway. However, it is up to the opposition to decide whether it wants to have two questions on the same issue or to have more questions.

Secondly, there are too many interjections but, more importantly, the answers from the ministers are far too long. The federal government now limits answers by ministers to five minutes maximum. In January I went to the Parliament in Wellington, New Zealand. I think in that question time there must have been 14 primary questions and another 25 subsidiary questions and it was all over in half an hour. However, the important thing is that the people of New Zealand, I believe, were better served by that question time than the people of Western Australia are being served by our question times.

I am just one Independent member in this Parliament and I am saying to both sides—and you, Mr Speaker, as the umpire in the middle—that what has developed is not good for the people of Western Australia. I urge both sides to reconsider where they have come from, where they are going and to look to a better future.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Leader of the House) [3.15 pm]: I am not going to move the gag motion; I just think it is important, as a member who does this job on this side of the house and who has done the job that the member for Midland is doing on the other side of the house, to know that some of the comments we have heard during this debate are very important. The member for Kalgoorlie made some very important comments.

Certainly, I remember how Hon Fred Riebeling as Speaker handled question time. I had quite a lot of time with Hon Fred Riebeling and I got on very well with and respected him. Question time is at the discretion of the Speaker, which is something that members must never forget. Question time is not a prerogative of the opposition, the government or anybody; it is the Speaker's prerogative to have that discretion. If the Speaker feels that behaviour in the house is so bad that it warrants calling off question time, that is his prerogative. The same thing happened, certainly, when Hon Fred Riebeling was the Speaker. I remember quite clearly that before Hon Fred Riebeling was the Speaker, we virtually had no supplementary questions under the two previous Liberal Speakers—Hon Jim Clarko and Hon George Strickland. I think Hon George Strickland allowed some supplementary questions —

Mrs M.H. Roberts: He certainly did.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: But he did not allow the number of supplementary questions that are allowed today; I can tell the member that for certain.

Hon Fred Riebeling trialled it and he was a Speaker who had a lot of innovation in mind and wanted to put things in place to try to improve the way the house runs. Sometimes, with the best will in the world we can try to improve something and sometimes that can go awry. Hon Fred Riebeling would never allow more than three supplementary questions. He would time and again call me from the seat that is now occupied by the member for Midland and say, "Member for Hillarys, manager of opposition business, I am not going to allow more than three supplementary questions. Can we make sure your members do not ask a supplementary on every single question?" We, the then opposition, tried to comply with that and we thought, at the end of the day, that we were doing quite well because we had supplementary questions on two or three questions. But that was not a guarantee, and certainly we as an opposition accepted that. As the manager of opposition business, I accepted that and I thought that it was fairly generous compared with what happened before. Therefore, I have no problem with that.

As you and other members in this house quite rightly said, Mr Speaker, every single question from the opposition has a supplementary question—every single one!

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Mr P. Papalia: Yes, all three!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I did not interject on members opposite.

The maximum number of questions we normally got was five, although sometimes we got six questions if we were lucky, but that was six genuine questions that did not include supplementary questions. Therefore, what I am saying, Mr Speaker, is that the opposition today, I think, does very well under your guidance and oversight of this chamber. However, other members are quite right in what they have said about what extends question time and why we run out of time. I will give the house some figures, which are not very complimentary, I have to say. These are statistics from question time for the year 2011, which was 63 sitting days. These statistics are from question time only; they do not include people being formally called to order in other debates. This is what takes the time.

Mr M. McGowan: The Procedure and Privileges Committee came out with a report that suggested four-minute answers and one-minute questions. If we implemented that, all of this would be avoided.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: It is all very well, when people move from this side to the other side of the house, to say they are all in favour of certain changes to the way things happen —

Mr M. McGowan: It's a government-controlled committee!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The Leader of the Opposition asked the question; I am giving him the answer. I have to tell the Leader of the Opposition that it was led by him —

Mr M. McGowan: It's led by the Speaker!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The debate was led by the Leader of the Opposition, the actual suggestion was put by him because he declared in the house that he would take it to the Speaker's privileges committee —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We need better behaviour in this chamber. In days gone by I was guilty of misbehaving and was formally called to order. I want members opposite to listen very carefully to the real culprits during 2011—not necessarily this year, but 2011. The number one person who was formally called to order was the member for Cannington. He was called to order 24 times out of 63 sitting days. That is during question time only.

Mr P. Papalia: Seriously, so what? What a revelation!

The SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Obviously some members do not understand the reason I am putting these facts. The bad behaviour we have seen during question time elongates question time.

The member for Cannington was followed closely by the member for Girrawheen. She was called to order 24 times as well. The list goes on: the member for Cockburn, 24 times; the member for Warnbro, 23 times; the member for Albany, 20 times; the member for Victoria Park, 18 times; the member for West Swan, 14 times; the member for Willagee, 11 times; the member for Joondalup, 11 times; the member for Mandurah, 10 times—I think that is a very generous one—the member for Bassendean, 10 times; the member for Pilbara, nine times; the member for Collie–Preston, eight times; the Leader of the Opposition, seven times; and the member for Forrestfield, six times. The list goes on and on. Every member of the opposition has been formally called to order during question time. Some are recidivist offenders day in, day out when this house is sitting. If members opposite want a better question time, then the Leader of the Opposition should have a word to his colleagues and say, “You may not like the answers but just keep quiet.” I used to keep members quiet when I was occupying that seat over there, very often because I wanted more questions and I did not want —

Opposition members interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Mr Speaker, need I say any more? They do not want to listen to reason. They know the truth and they cannot handle it, particularly some who are huge recidivist offenders in this place. Quite frankly, I am staggered that more members of the opposition have not been excluded from the chamber for their behaviour.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [3.22 pm]: Apparently once a week I get called to order in question time! Once a week I am called to order in question time and that makes me a serial offender. That once a week that I

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have done that causes the truncation of question time! I want to make a point regarding the way ministers answer questions. I particularly draw members' attention today to the Premier. I refer to the way he regularly answers questions. He does not actually go to the standing orders and explain, as he is required to do under the standing orders, the government's performance or explain the government's policy, or explain the future agenda of the Liberal Party; instead, he asks questions of the opposition. He says, for example, "Do you support —

Mr C.C. Porter: Why don't you answer them?

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: That is a very good interjection. I will take the interjection from the Treasurer. He says, "Why don't you answer it?" Once a week I do and I get called to order! That is one of the issues that arises. I thank the Treasurer for that, because the Treasurer today did the exact same thing. He did not talk about the agenda of the Liberal Party in government; he talked about the agenda of the opposition. He talked about the policy of the opposition. He talked about the opposition's position regarding —

Dr K.D. Hames: You do not get called to order for interjecting; you get called to order for serial interjecting.

Mr W.J. JOHNSTON: What the Treasurer did in question time today was ask, "Why does the opposition not tell us what its position is on electricity reform?" Why does the minister not come in here and suspend standing orders and ask us that? The Premier stood today and asked us where the Labor Party stood on the GST. He did not tell us where he stood back in the 1990s when he signed the agreement. He asked us where we stand today on the agreement he entered into! He was the one who entered the agreement, and we are asked to explain ourselves! I do not understand that. If the Premier had some courage he would come in here and debate these issues rather than hide behind the cowardice that is represented by the activities of the Liberal Party in this chamber. He does not allow a proper debate. Not once has the Premier invited a debate on policy issues in this chamber; issues that are so critical. When the Premier was in opposition he went on in great detail over a number of years about how the Parliament of Western Australia needed to debate the issue of rock art in the Pilbara. Not once, since he has had the capacity to bring that debate on in this chamber, has he been prepared to come in here and actually debate the issue—not once! He comes in here and demands that we tell him in question time where we stand on GST, but does he have the fortitude to come in here and hold a debate on the GST? Never. The Treasurer challenges us on electricity reform. Where is the debate? Bring the debate on! We are ready for it. The government hides behind its procedures. It knows exactly what it is trying to do.

When government members have respect for this place, respect for the Chair of this chamber and respect for the proper details of answering questions and being accountable—not for the opposition's opinions, for their own behaviour, their own attitudes, their own delivery and failures, and weak performance and second-rate ministers—when they come in here and answer those things in question time and bring on the policy debate at the end of it, fine, but while their cowardice continues in the way it is now, this is what happens. The government's deliberate strategy to undermine the role of Parliament continues here. We need to see proper activity by the government and proper accountability to the people of Western Australia. If the government wants a debate on GST, it should move a resolution. I am ready for the debate. If the government wants to debate the carbon tax or debate the minerals resource rent tax, it should bring on a resolution. I will debate it right this second! Right now I will debate it. But do not come in here and hide behind question time or hide behind the ancient procedures of this chamber, which we should all respect. Remember, when we consider supporting this suspension of standing orders, the more senior someone is in the Parliament, the more those great traditions of the Parliament falls on their shoulders. When members have been here for as long as the Premier, or if they have the high office of Treasurer, these are the roles that demand proper behaviour in this chamber. Do not come in here and hide behind procedures. Call on a debate! If the government wants to debate any of these great and pressing issues, suspend standing orders. The government has the numbers—do it. Then we can have a debate. Do not hide behind the cowardice that we saw today.

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [3.28 pm]: I would like to follow on from the member for Kalgoorlie about the process and procedure within this house. I was recently very privileged to travel to London with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and go through the processes of the Westminster system. We observed the sittings of the House of Lords and the House of Commons. It was really interesting to witness 23 questions go through in half an hour in the House of Commons. That is bit different from the way we do things. Supplementary questions are asked by different people, one after the other, so there is a very straight line where the question is coming from. My contribution to some of the noise in here is that sometimes our behaviour is not something we are proud of. Sometimes it is the frustration of listening to the waffle and the inability of ministers to put their points across. That was very evident in the answering of questions in the House of Commons, where answers were sharp and precise. Of course there were interjections across the chamber. At the

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time, the Prime Minister had borrowed, along with his daughter, a police horse and used it for his own personal use. When he spoke, there were “clip-clops” and “neighs” and all that sort of thing going on, exactly as occurs here. But it was under much more control. The answering of the questions by ministers lifted the standard. The answers were short, sharp and to the point from the ministerial side. They did not have to say, “What did you mean?” or listen to nine and a half minutes of waffle, as we heard today. What did the minister actually say? Can we analyse it when it is in *Hansard*? Not a great deal at all. It is in the answering of questions that the opposition becomes frustrated, because we have heard the minister talking, but there is no content in the answer. Mr Speaker, I think that is something you have to address with the government of the day.

As part of the CPA program we had to analyse the habits of the Speaker. When he brushed his eyebrow it could mean that he was likely to do something. He was very intense in the way he went about his business. If he did stand, there was deathly silence; there were no extra comments such as those we hear in this place. Respect was shown to him because he had the respect of the government as well as the opposition. He did not appear to be favouring one side by suppressing the comments of members on one side while not calling those opposite to order. Even in this debate here today, Mr Speaker, when a lot of noise came from the government side, you, yourself, did not take exception to it. We in this house need to look procedurally at how we do things. In the House of Commons members can ask 23 questions in half an hour, and we cannot ask four in three quarters of an hour. There is something wrong with what we are doing. As the member for Kalgoorlie said, it is exactly the same in the New Zealand House of Representatives. Members can ask far more questions, and I think that is what the public deserves. Yes; I have been an offender and I make no apologies for that.

We need to retrieve some semblance of order and be given some decent answers to our questions so that we know what the government of the day is doing, and we have to work very hard within the whole of the Parliament to make sure we are not seen as the fools we are sometimes made out to be among the general public.

MR E.S. RIPPER (Belmont) [3.37 pm]: I have been in question time in a variety of capacities and I must say I am seeing question time from something of a new perspective from this seat. In government I certainly did my share of sledging the opposition from the position of Deputy Premier when answering a question. I also was severely interjected on.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Do you remember saying, “Barnett’s black hole”? You banged on about that for about 18 months.

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I do remember—not quite that phrase, but it went on for a long time. I certainly remember attacking for some length of time the member for Vasse for going to a meeting in a car park with Noel Crichton-Browne. I remember also the member for Vasse continuously shouting at me through most of my answers.

Mr T.R. Buswell: Surely not!

Mr E.S. RIPPER: But I have to say this: I think we have got into a vicious cycle. Lengthy answers cause more interjections from the opposition, more interjections from the opposition cause more lengthy answers, and that brings more interjections, and so the place deteriorates. We all have to conclude that a question time in which there are only three opposition questions is a failure for not only the opposition but also accountability.

Mr R.F. Johnson: What about when there are six?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: When there are six questions that is good.

Mr R.F. Johnson: When you get three plus three?

Mr E.S. RIPPER: I am trying to give a fairly non-partisan speech here, Leader of the House, from the perspective of the different roles I have had. Three questions from the opposition is a failure; and it is a failure of accountability. Having looked at the way question time operates in this place I am of the view that the rule that says question time will last for a certain number of questions is a more efficient rule than the rule that states question time will last for a certain length of time. When we were in government, the number of questions was the limit and, quite frankly, if ministers answered at length, question time just went on and on and on. The member for Balcatta, who was then the Leader of the House, used to respond to that by timing our answers and coming to us after question time and saying, “Eric, you spoke for nine minutes in answer to that question; you have to shorten it.” I recommend to you, Mr Speaker, that you consider re-introducing that rule on the number of questions as the guiding determination for how long question time will last, because then ministers will have a natural incentive to keep their answers short, and that will draw forth fewer interjections from the opposition and, therefore, there will be less further lengthening of the answers.

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The other thing I want to say is that I think there has been some rule creep. I was in this place before we had brief ministerial statements. Brief ministerial statements were introduced to lessen the number of lengthy dorothy dixer questions and answers. Instead, they have become just an addition to the dorothy dixer questions and answers. I was also part of a committee that recommended the introduction of supplementary questions. Supplementary questions were supposed to be related to the answer that was given, and they very definitely were not to be read. How can they be related to the answer if they are read? They were to be made up on the spot in response to what the minister said.

Finally, I want to refer to three other things, which I think all members should take account of. All of us have a responsibility here to contribute to the proper running of the house. Some things are just a bad deterioration of behaviour. Firstly, for example, it is not right for any member to speak while the Speaker is on his feet. Secondly, it is not right for anyone to respond to the Speaker when they have been formally warned or when the Speaker has made a statement. That is grounds for immediate expulsion from the house for a lengthy period. Thirdly, it is not right to interject when someone is taking a point of order. Fourthly, it is grossly improper to take a vexatious point of order that is actually a debating point. That is the way they operate in the Parliament of Bangladesh, where the Prime Minister has the right to cut off the microphone of any opposition speaker, so the opposition is driven back on points of debate masquerading as points of order. There are other opportunities for the opposition. I say to the Speaker that it would be worthwhile considering, perhaps with the Procedure and Privileges Committee, re-introducing the rule that question time last for a certain number of questions rather than a certain period of time. I ask all members of the house to think about their responsibilities to promote the efficient functioning of the house and let us not have these vexatious points of order; let us not speak back to the Speaker when there has been a formal warning; and let us not do the other things that ultimately contribute to this place not performing its accountability role.

MR P. ABETZ (Southern River) [3.37 pm]: As a relatively new member to this house I have experienced question time only as it has taken place in this Parliament. I guess I need to say that when school groups come to Parliament and I host, say, the leaders of a school and we have lunch here, I always say to the principals, “If you want to teach your kids how not to behave, bring them into question time”. I am embarrassed as a member of Parliament about what takes place in question time in this chamber. I believe that the public wants to look up to us as members of Parliament and as leaders of our community. But unfortunately, as members of Parliament, we are often referred to as politicians, and politicians rank fairly low in our society. It reminds me of one of the first school groups that I hosted when I came to Parliament. The group was from, I think, Thornlie Christian College, and I went out into the courtyard to talk to them. I told them what I did before I became a member of Parliament and one of the young boys asked, “Mr Abetz, did you say you have been a pastor for 25 years?” And I said, “Yes”. With an all-knowing look on his face he said, “Well, my dad says pastors tell the truth and politicians lie, so how come you can now be a politician?” That is the sort of thinking that sadly pervades much of the public thought. As members of Parliament, we bring that largely upon ourselves in part by the way we conduct ourselves. I think the media also has a responsibility to report what we actually say rather than what they like to make out we say. But that is another story in itself.

I believe that as members of this house we have a responsibility to act politely and with integrity. Certainly we can be vigorous in our debate, but surely common decency ought to prevail. What I see happening at question time is all too often something that really does not benefit us as members of Parliament. When I look to the Speaker, I find the Speaker incredibly tolerant. I think if I were in the chair, I would have thrown out quite a few people many times. The Speaker has an incredibly difficult job because of the way in which people conduct themselves in this place. I urge members to treat each other with respect. We have differences of opinion and that is not a problem; that is what makes this place function.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Would you include in that, ministers heckling the other side of the house in provocative ways?

Mr P. ABETZ: I think that all adds to it, which is not helpful. There needs to be integrity in the sense that ministers answer the questions as concisely as possible. However, ministers often start answering a question and before they are one sentence into it, interjections are already being made when opposition members do not know even what is about to be said. It is just crazy.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Do you think dorothy dixer questions should be used as opportunities to sort of bash up the opposition?

Mr P. ABETZ: They should not be used to bash the opposition, but used to expose folly if something foolish has been said. By all means, it is fine to use dorothy dixer questions to expose folly.

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In closing, it could be very interesting to watch question time in the new Queensland Parliament; it might be a very short question time!

MR A. KRSTICEVIC (Carine) [3.46 pm]: I feel compelled to say a few words on this. You know, Mr Speaker, that I have spoken to you previously about the behaviour of certain members in this house and the fact that little respect is shown to people when they are on their feet and speaking, especially during question time. Over the last three and a half years or so you have cut short question time on probably a handful of occasions—maybe two or three; it has not been a lot; that is for sure. I know that you have threatened to cut short question time on many occasions and the opposition has never taken those threats seriously, but on the one or two occasions that you have done it, they get all wound up and upset. I agree that question time is critical, but I also believe that when the opposition asks questions, in a lot of cases they are not really interested in listening to the answer if it is not the answer they want to hear.

I heard members talk about dorothy dixers. I do not think they are dorothy dixers in a lot of cases. I say that because when we listen to members of the opposition talk on radio or give interviews in the newspapers, they misrepresent or change the facts around. Dorothy dixers are an opportunity for the minister to try to correct those mistakes. I know that when I listen to the answers—which is very difficult on a lot of occasions because members opposite do not give us the opportunity to listen because they are too busy interjecting and stopping the minister from expressing the truth—a lot of good information is expressed by ministers. They show facts and figures and charts and graphs, which are very valuable because, as we all know, a picture paints a thousand words. I would rather see a picture than hear a thousand words. In that respect, I think dorothy dixers are very, very important.

Even during the course of this debate we still hear frivolous interjections and people making comments. Opposition members are not really interested in having a fair and legitimate debate on this issue and trying to come to a resolution. The whole reason for this motion is that the Speaker cut short question time by a couple of minutes and people are upset about that fact. I have not been here in previous Parliaments, but people tell me that when the Liberal Party was in opposition, we were similar to the opposition as it is now. That sometimes scares me, because I am not very impressed by the way opposition members behave on certain occasions. I hope that if we ever find ourselves in opposition in the future, we will not have the same standards that I have observed in this house.

The member for Belmont made some good points about the behaviour of members on this particular occasion. I think it is important for people to respect this Parliament and respect the Speaker. All too often members have disrespected the Speaker by talking or not abiding by his rulings. On one occasion I remember a member walking out while you were on your feet, Mr Speaker.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Does all the fault lie on this side of the house in your view?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The fault also lies on our side of the house for letting the opposition get away with so much of that bad behaviour and by not bringing it to the Speaker's attention earlier.

Mr T.G. Stephens: So chucking toilet paper around the chamber, for instance—is that a reasonable thing to do?

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: The Speaker made a ruling on that and said that is not appropriate, and that has not happened since that day. The Speaker is doing his job. Occasionally, members will try to stretch the bounds and the Speaker on all occasions has made the right decision and has not allowed that behaviour to continue.

Mr T.G. Stephens: So when the Premier calls people monkeys, is that reasonable?

Point of Order

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That accusation has been made twice. That was probably recorded by Hansard this time. That is not true. I do not ask for an apology, but I want to place on the record that I did not refer to a member of Parliament as a monkey and I have checked the *Hansard* to that effect.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Just on a further point of order, I think the member for Belmont made a point just a few minutes ago that points of order should not be used as debating points. He indicated it was grossly improper to do so and I think the Premier should reflect upon that fact.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Further to the point of order, I think the member for Pilbara breached standing order 92 by reflecting adversely on the Premier by saying that he said something that he did not say.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members. Member for Carine, please continue your comments.

Debate Resumed

Mr Mark McGowan; Speaker; Mr Rob Johnson; Mr David Templeman; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr John Kobelke; Dr Kim Hames; Mr Ben Wyatt; Mr Christian Porter; Mr John Bowler; Mr Bill Johnston; Mr Mick Murray; Mr Eric Ripper; Mr Peter Abetz; Mr Tony Krsticevic; Mr Paul Papalia; Dr Janet Woollard; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Colin Barnett

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: Today we heard some facts represented about the length of questions and answers. In some cases the questions are taking longer than the answers; that also needs to be taken into account. Again, I think members are right on supplementary questions. I think I have heard that they should not be read. On every single occasion supplementary questions have been read by opposition members. If an opposition member has a supplementary question, the Speaker should rule accordingly that the question needs to be related to the answer that was given. At the same time, maybe the opposition should try to let the ministers answer the questions and just see what happens. Maybe they will be given short answers and supplementary questions can be used once answers have been completed, as opposed to members interjecting.

I also urge the Speaker to look at the standards being displayed in this Parliament and what is happening during question time. The Speaker should make sure that people on both sides are doing the right things and respecting Parliament, the Speaker and each other.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [3.48 pm]: I fully concede up-front that I have been called 23 times in whatever number of months it was. I think I have reflected —

Mr M.W. Sutherland: You are always shouting across the chamber. You are the worst culprit—the worst one! You never stop.

Mr P. PAPALIA: Thanks, Michael.

The SPEAKER: I think you know the way you should address other members in this place, member for Warnbro, and I will give you the opportunity to address the member for Mount Lawley in the appropriate way.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I thank the member for Mount Lawley. I concede that I interject. Like other people here, I have reflected on this matter in discussions with visitors to Parliament and with friends and also with people who are guests —

Mr J.M. Francis: It is embarrassing for guests.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I do not concede that. I always say to visitors that being in opposition is not what I would have chosen, but being in opposition is incredibly instructive and educational. Being in opposition builds one's capacity to empathise with people in this place who are deprived of positions of power or privilege. When I sat on the government side of the house—I was there for 18 months as a backbencher—I looked aghast at the opposition and thought, "Oh, my goodness. I cannot believe they behave in such a way. It is bringing disrepute upon us all. How terrible. How embarrassing. I wish they would behave only in a respectful fashion to the ministers and the Premier." Having been in opposition for some time, I recognise that what motivates the opposition is being frustrated by ministers who refuse to answer questions, and the manipulation of question time. That is what prompts the opposition's behaviour to deteriorate. Members interject because they feel disempowered.

Mr V.A. Catania: Are you saying that the opposition behaves badly?

Mr P. PAPALIA: Yes. When I was sitting where the member is, I felt exactly the same as the members for North West and Carine, who suggested in a fairly dismissive manner that the opposition always behaves badly. The reason oppositions behave in that manner, as the member for North West well knows, is because of the frustration generated by the lack of prompt, concise and honest answers to questions being responded to in a respectful fashion. The government employs dorothea dixers as a mechanism to enable its very few heavy hitters to have a free hit at the opposition during question time, because if the opposition interjects, opposition members are repeatedly called to order and consequently question time is shut down. Everyone knows that what happens in question time is a complete distortion.

I was elected in a by-election and because I was not part of a group of new politicians coming into this place who were educated at the same time about how Parliament runs and correct parliamentary behaviour, the Clerk organised for the father of the Parliament, Hon Max Trenorden, to speak to me about the way Parliament operates. What he told me was a learned view of the way Parliament operates, from someone who has been around for a long time, regardless of whether all members agree with him at all times. Hon Max Trenorden said to me—this is often cited as being the truth—that Parliament is about the opposition having its say and the government having its way. The reality is that if the opposition is deprived of having its say, it will get frustrated. The opposition has its say on behalf of the people of Western Australia. If people in the community have a grievance, they seek redress from the opposition when the government is not fulfilling its part of the bargain. That happened when government members were in opposition. The role of the opposition in the Westminster

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system is to hold the government to account. Government members cannot complain if the opposition asks embarrassing questions or attacks ministers who are not performing their role to the extent that they should.

Dr K.D. Hames: This debate is not about us complaining. We're not complaining.

Mr P. PAPALIA: There are people who have complained in the course of this debate. Government members cannot complain when the opposition is prevented from performing its proper role in opposition because that role is truncated as a result of question time being manipulated for political purposes by government members asking dorothy dixers and ministers giving lengthy responses.

Mr J.E. McGrath: You blokes were world champions at dorothy dixers!

Mr P. PAPALIA: I am not suggesting that similar types of behaviour did not occur before; I am saying that what is happening comes as no great surprise. The only way to resolve the issue and reduce that sort of behaviour is to do what the member for Belmont suggested, which is to make question time ruled by the number of questions asked, not by time, because otherwise the government can manipulate the time by extending responses to dorothy dixers. That truncates question time by reducing the ability of the opposition to hold the government to account, and that is not what Parliament is for.

DR J.M. WOOLLARD (Alfred Cove) [3.54 pm]: I will not support this motion. I sought the Speaker's attention today to ask a question after the third question was asked in this house. I believe that it was after the third question was asked when the Speaker told members that if the level of noise continued as it had done, question time would finish early. Usually I wait until the third or fourth question has been asked by members on both sides of the house before I stand up but today I stood up early because everyone could see that the Speaker had had enough and that question time would not go for the length of time that it usually goes for. I am not a serial offender, but what happened today on both sides prevented me from asking my question, and my questions are just as important as the opposition's questions. The opposition has said that it asked only three questions today. I wanted to ask only one question. Today is not the first day that I have wanted to ask just one question but have been unable to do so because question time has been cut short. Today it was shown that it has been cut short because of the length of time ministers take to answer the questions and the number of interjections from the opposition.

There is a lesson to be learnt by everyone in this house. We have possibly 17 sitting weeks left this year; I do not have the chart in front of me. We are not being accountable to the community if we allow those 17 weeks to be wasted, which is what is happening. Question time, government business time and private members' business is being wasted. I have been waiting to debate a bill that has been on the notice paper as private members' business since last November. I would like to debate that bill anytime, but no time has been given to debate it because of instances like today when time is wasted. I once worked out how much it costs for us to sit in this house for an hour, and it is an astronomical figure. The amount of time that is wasted is unacceptable.

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: The member for Cockburn is one of the prime examples of a member who wastes the time of the house. I have mentioned wasting time in question time, government business time and private members' business. What time did the house rise last night?

Mr B.S. Wyatt: What time did the house rise or what time did you leave?

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: I left at the usual time because I had a committee meeting this morning and I take my committee responsibilities very seriously, unlike some members of this house who are quite happy to sit until the early hours of the morning. If the house is to look at ways to not waste time during question time, perhaps it is also a good time to look at having professional sitting hours. Maybe if we had professional sitting hours and members were not here until one o'clock in the morning, we would not have the type of misbehaviour that occurred today during question time. Maybe if members were not so tired and irritable the business of this house would be conducted more professionally and more work would get done. There is much important legislation to come before this house and we have only about 17 weeks left of the parliamentary year, yet time is being wasted. Look at the debate last night on the Teacher Registration Bill. If someone were to read what members had to say during that debate —

Mr A.J. Waddell: It was new information.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: It was not new information that was being presented.

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Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The motion that I moved called for additional time for questions; it was not about the matters that the member for Alfred Cove is now canvassing. I ask you to draw her attention to the motion.

The SPEAKER: I am sure that the member for Alfred Cove will do that. I have given a little latitude to members to address this particular motion to suspend standing orders. With respect to the time, members, I know that at 4.00 pm we would normally expect private members' business to take place in this place. However, under standing order 61 the business in front of the house at the moment takes precedence, so the motion that the member for Midland has moved will continue at this point, as opposed to moving into private members' business.

Debate Resumed

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: The member for Midland is being a bit hypocritical when members look at what has been said during this debate and suddenly she stands up to call me to order for not sticking to the motion when all sorts of things have been discussed.

Mr Speaker, as per your directions, I will get back to the motion that is before the house.

The motion we are debating relates to extending question time. Mr Speaker, as I pointed out before, I think it was after the third question had been asked that you made it very clear that question time would not be continuing today unless the noise and the interjections were kept down in this house. As the member for Warnbro said earlier, I remember very well the former member for South Perth repeatedly standing up in this house and saying that the opposition will have their say, but the government will have their way. When time is wasted during question time that wasted time reflects on all of us as members. We have to accept now that we have maybe 17 sitting weeks left this year, and there may not be another sitting in 2013 before the next election. The government has legislation it wants to put forward and the opposition has legislation it has put on the table for private members' business. We have to look at what is happening in this house, and the time wasting has to stop.

Coming back to the motion for an extra 20 minutes of question time today, if we are going to look at question time, I remember—as Mr Speaker would remember—when members opposite were in government, often in answer to questions asked by members of the current government when they were in opposition, Labor ministers would stand up and say no. Maybe the government needs to look back and think about those times, and rather than repeat the answers that they have already given during the first question and that they repeat during the supplementary question, do the same as Labor members did when they were in government—that is, say, “I have answered that question”, and they would sit down. By asking the same question by way of a supplementary, members opposite are not allowing more questions to be asked. I would like time in this house as an Independent to be able to ask questions. The Independents get the opportunity to ask a question after four or five questions have been asked from the opposition side of the house and four or five on this side of the house. This is not only affecting Labor members—Labor may have missed out today with only three questions, but the Independent members missed out completely. Labor does not miss out, as I do every few weeks when I try and get a question. Even when question time goes on for longer, I am not able to get a question. It affects members on both sides. It is no good asking for additional time now, when the opposition is part of the cause of this problem. The information that the Minister for Health and the Treasurer put forward today from someone who was out there measuring the time taken to ask and to answer questions showed that two-thirds of the time taken was by the ministers and one-third of the time came from interjections from the opposition side of the house.

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: Maybe if you stop wasting the time of the house with your interjections —

The SPEAKER: Member for Albany, I formally call you to order for the second time today. If you want to make a contribution in this place, I expect it to be better than that and you know it should be as well.

Dr J.M. WOOLLARD: I was disappointed not to ask a question today. I hope that question time tomorrow will be a more controlled question time. We all accept that interjections and some banter across the house is part of the process of this Parliament, but when it results in only three questions from each side of the house in 45 minutes, then the community as a whole, as the member for Kalgoorlie said, is missing out because of members opposite. My question would have been an important question on the government's actions, but when

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opposition members continually interject and waste time during question time, they are not able to do the job they are meant to do. I remind members again that we possibly have only 17 sitting weeks left to get through some very important legislation.

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot) [4.06 pm]: I want to make a couple of fairly brief comments about the motion to suspend standing orders moved by the member for Midland. I will make these comments wearing a number of different hats. Before anyone says “diddums!” I think that, apart from the member for Riverton, I would probably be the most interjected-upon government backbencher.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: It is like feeding the chooks! Mr Speaker, you know exactly what I am talking about! Every time I stand up to make a comment, I get interjected upon. They cannot help themselves.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Mr Speaker, once again, I will stand here and seek your protection so that I can make my comments and be heard in silence.

I do go home sometimes thinking I must be at the top of the list for the number of interjections made on government backbenchers. I also make these comments wearing a hat as one of the Acting Speakers.

Several members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: This is the point I am trying to make. I can stand here —

Mr P.B. Watson interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: The longer it takes for them to be quiet, the longer it will take for me to make my comments. I think that I deserve, like every other member in this house, the right to be heard in silence without being castigated and yelled at. When I look back at some of the comments I have heard thrown across this chamber during divisions and debate, which perhaps whoever occupies the Speaker’s chair does not always hear, quite frankly it is bloody disgraceful! I have heard members opposite call members of the government Nazis and jackbooters during law and order debates and during divisions. These comments have not been heard by the Speaker or reported in *Hansard*, but everyone in this chamber knows what I am saying is true.

Several opposition members interjected.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: That is just offensive. The members think that is funny. It is just absolutely bloody offensive and they should be ashamed of themselves.

The SPEAKER: Member for Jandakot, I do not think you are helping yourself in making the point with the words you are choosing to use.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: You are absolutely right, Mr Speaker. I apologise, but you can sense my frustration on this issue.

I want to reflect on my maiden speech at which time I made the observation that in my previous career as an officer in the Royal Australian Navy—there are a number of former military officers in this house—I always considered the community’s expectations and their impression of the standards expected of certain professions in society. I made the reflection in my first speech in this house that military officers, doctors and certain other professionals are held in far higher esteem than others, and that at the bottom of the list of the community ranking of respect, there are always lawyers, journalists, used-car salesmen and politicians. I made the point that during my time in this house, I would like the level of regard in which the community holds politicians to be raised. I do not think it will ever be raised to the level of regard in which other professions in the community are held, but it should be. It would be a good thing if we could endeavour to raise our standards. As I look around the house at what I consider to be some of the worst offenders, I can say with a heavy heart that some of them come from professions that were held in much higher esteem prior to them entering this house. I will not name those particular members, because they know exactly whom I am talking about.

Having said that, in my reflection on what I think is a very difficult job for you, Mr Speaker, in basically refereeing this place, I would like to think that when I sit in that chair, I act with utmost impartiality. If I ever err in favour of one side of the chamber, it is always in favour of the opposition.

Several members interjected.

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Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I think that is a fair and right thing to do in the interests of a balanced democracy and healthy parliamentary debate. That is why, on a number of occasions when I have been in the Speaker's chair, no-one would have blamed me if I had named members and asked them to leave the chamber. I have never done that. I have called members four times. I am not quite sure where that stands under the standing orders; I assume it is within my right to do that while I sit in the Speaker's chair. I do not know whether that is necessarily the way that things should be done, but that is the way I chose to do it at the time. I make that point because there must be consequences for bad behaviour. There must be consequences when people refuse to listen. Mr Speaker, what you did during question time today was to give more than fair and adequate warning that if the behaviour that we saw today continued, you would act in the way that you did. I stand here in full support of your action. I also say that as an Acting Speaker.

The last observation I would like to make on the issue of question time is that I have noticed—I think I am pretty right—that in reflecting impartiality from that chair, Mr Speaker, whenever you call for questions at question time, you always give the first question to the opposition. On most occasions, you also give the last question to the opposition. That means that when the number of questions are weighed up, most questions by far go to the opposition. I think that is the right choice when you use your discretion during question time. I congratulate you for doing that.

In closing, as I said, I am bitterly disappointed sometimes at my own behaviour, but mostly at the behaviour of many members in this house, especially during question time, to the point at which I have had to apologise to my visitors in the Speaker's gallery on behalf of every member in this place for their behaviour. I think that is a slight on all of us.

Mr C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [4.13 pm]: I will make only a couple of brief comments. The government obviously does not support the motion to suspend standing orders so as to extend question time. Mr Speaker, as you made clear, the duration of question time is entirely at the discretion of the Speaker, but, in a practical sense, it is actually in the hands of the opposition of the day. I have spent time on both sides of this house over a number of years and the number of questions that are asked is essentially in the hands of an opposition. If an opposition member asks a question and members then engage in interjection, it will prolong the answer.

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bassendean!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I have been both Leader of the House and leader of opposition business over the years, and I know that if the opposition wants to ask more questions, it needs to keep its troops quiet. The opposition asks questions and does not ask lots of supplementary questions, and it gets through. But if an opposition member asks a question and members immediately launch into multiple interjections, it will slow down the whole process.

The second point I want to make—it has been made by a number of members—is that the continual automatic asking of supplementary questions limits the number of questions that can be asked, because a supplementary question is a second question. If the opposition wants to ask more questions, it should not ask a supplementary question to every question. That is the major reason that the opposition does not get more questions asked. I agree with members about the length of the answer. I think that answers often are too long, and I have said to ministers, as has the Deputy Premier, that they should keep their answers shorter. I do not have any difficulty with that. That might be something that this house reviews for the next Parliament. I do not think anyone would particularly object to that.

There are times when members might lose the plot. I admit to doing that once; I was thrown out of Parliament when I lost the plot because I was so outraged by the then government's approach on drugs. I felt embarrassed to be thrown out. I made the comment at a function that night and I got a round of applause. Every now and again, people are going to lose it.

For goodness sake, question time is the time for politics in the Parliament. We are members of political parties; we have different points of view. There is a combative environment and a rivalry going into an election. Surely we do not want to sanction not having a bit of robust political debate in this chamber. Members opposite asked how dare I, as the Premier, throw a question to the opposition leader. How dare I not? This is where politics is played out. If the opposition wants to challenge the government, the government is entitled to challenge the

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opposition. That is the time when it happens. All of us can do a better job in respecting the rulings and at taking the lead from the Speaker. That is the way it works.

We will not continue with this debate any longer. We have made our point. This was a very poorly thought out motion by the leader of opposition business. It was silly to bring on such a motion. We saw the behaviour during question time. It was no different from the behaviour we see during question time after question time. Members in this house have been a little precious. I will not go through it, but I have been called more names and had more insults and more abuse directed at me than has any other member in this house, and never more so than when Geoff Gallop was Premier. To the best of my knowledge, I have never particularly cared about that; I have accepted it as part of the hurly-burly of political debate, and that is what members should do.

Mr P.B. Watson: A typical bully; you can't take it.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: If the member reads *Hansard*, he will find dozens of examples of abuse being thrown at me when I was on both sides of the house. People wanted to take points of order and I told them to let it go.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is true.

Mr P.B. Watson: My hero!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am just making the point. That is the politics of it. If members cannot take a bit of rough and tumble, they should not be in here. Members should follow the lead of the Speaker and engage in political debate, but if they are so precious, they should not stand for politics; they should not take on public office. We all come under scrutiny, whether it be in this place or through the media or public analysis. There have to be rules of engagement, but question time is a time for politics in this house. That is the time when it should be played out.

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Ayes (25)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr P.B. Watson
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr F.M. Logan	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr M.P. Whitely
Ms A.S. Carles	Mr M. McGowan	Ms R. Saffioti	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr T.G. Stephens	Mr D.A. Templeman (<i>Teller</i>)
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire	
Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr P.C. Tinley	
Mr W.J. Johnston	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr A.J. Waddell	

Noes (29)

Mr P. Abetz	Mr V.A. Catania	Mr A.P. Jacob	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr F.A. Alban	Dr E. Constable	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr C.J. Barnett	Mr M.J. Cowper	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr J.H.D. Day	Mr J.E. McGrath	Dr J.M. Woollard
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr A.J. Simpson (<i>Teller</i>)
Mr I.M. Britza	Mr B.J. Grylls	Ms A.R. Mitchell	
Mr T.R. Buswell	Dr K.D. Hames	Dr M.D. Nahan	
Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr C.C. Porter	

Pairs

Mr A.P. O’Gorman	Dr G.G. Jacobs
Mrs C.A. Martin	Mr W.R. Marmion

Question thus negatived.