

## Procedural Information Bulletin No. 96

*For the sitting period 9 to 11 May 1995*

### DEPUTY PRESIDENT

On 9 May the President announced that he had received a letter, signed that day, from Senator Crichton-Browne resigning the office of Deputy President and Chairman of Committees. Nominations for that post were then called for, and the Opposition nominee, Senator Reid, was the only senator nominated and was declared elected. This preserves the convention that the President comes from the government party and the Deputy President from the Opposition parties, a convention which has been in place since 1981 but which was departed from in the period 1990 to 1993.

The standing orders make no provision for the resignation of the Deputy President and Chairman of Committees. On the rare occasions on which such a resignation has occurred in the relatively remote past, resignations in writing have been directed to the President. There is no reason for a resignation not being made orally in the Senate, but in those past cases the senators concerned had been appointed as ministers and it is obviously undesirable that a Deputy President should also hold ministerial office for a period until the Senate next meets.

### NEW SENATOR

Also on 9 May, Senator Jacinta Collins was sworn in as the appointee of the Victorian Houses to replace Senator Zakharov, bringing the Senate back to its full number.

### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The order of the Senate relating to unanswered questions on notice provides that, a senator having asked for an explanation of failure to answer a question within 30 days, if an explanation is provided a motion may be moved to take note of the explanation, and if no explanation is made any motion may be moved relating to the

failure to answer the question. Usually the responsible minister makes some statement relating to the failure to answer the question within the time specified, but it is often difficult to determine whether the statement amounts to an explanation of the failure to answer the question. In practice, this judgment is made by the senator requesting the explanation.

On 11 May, Senator Ellison having asked for an explanation of answers not being provided in response to two questions, and Senator McMullan having made a statement, Senator Ellison moved a motion for an order that answers to the questions be tabled on or before a specified date. This motion was agreed to. This has now become one of the usual types of motions moved on these occasions.

## LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

The legislative time of the three days of the sitting period was almost exclusively taken up by lengthy consideration in committee of the whole of the Health Legislation (Private Health Insurance Reform) Amendment Bill 1994, continued from the last sitting period. The bill passed on 11 May with 63 amendments, including government, Opposition and Democrat amendments.

## SENATE'S APPROPRIATIONS AND STAFFING

The Appropriations and Staffing Committee presented on 11 May its 22nd Report, on the appropriations for the Senate for 1995-96. The report revealed that the appropriations for the Department of the Senate determined by the Committee had been reduced by the Minister for Finance before inclusion in the appropriation bill as introduced into the House of Representatives, without the consultation required by successive resolutions of the Senate. This situation has occurred on some occasions in the past, and the Senate has repeatedly declared that, if the Minister for Finance wishes to suggest any change to the amounts determined by the Committee, a process of consultation should occur. On this occasion, however, the reductions in the amounts are not minor as in the past but significant, as part of the government's efforts to reduce public expenditure. The Committee has reported that it will be pursuing the matter of appropriate funding for Senate committees, which were to receive most of the funds left out of the bill by the minister.

## ESTIMATES

The estimates of expenditure accompanying the 1995-96 budget were referred to the Legislation Committees on 10 May. The resolution of referral continued the practice of recent times of specifying dates on which the committees are to meet to examine the estimates while leaving the committees free to sit on other days.

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

The following committee reports were presented during the period:

<b>Date tabled</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Title</b>
10.05.95	Scrutiny of Bills	Seventh Report and Alert Digest No. 6 of 1995
11.05.95	Appropriations and Staffing	22nd Report