

HOUSE REVIEW



Selected features of House of Representatives business

Sitting period 6 – 8 October 2020 (no. 32)

The sittings featured the introduction of the Budget bills for 2020-2021. The House was informed of the resignation of a Member and the dates fixed by the Speaker for the by-election. The sittings also featured condolence motions on the deaths of a former Member and Minister, the Hon John Fahey AC, and a former Senator and Minister, the Hon Susan Ryan AO. While Budget week traditionally sees a large number of visitors, Parliament House was again closed to the general public.

Resignation of a Member

Proceedings commenced on 6 October with the Speaker informing the House that he had received a letter from the Hon Dr John McVeigh resigning his seat as the Member for Groom. On 8 October the Speaker informed the House of his intention to issue a writ for the by-election on 26 October, with the polling date to be 28 November and the writ to be returned on or before 3 February 2021.

Agreement for Members to contribute remotely to parliamentary proceedings

As occurred at the commencement of the previous sitting fortnight, on 6 October the Leader of the House presented an [Agreement for Members to contribute remotely to parliamentary proceedings](#), signed by himself and the Manager of Opposition Business. From 6 October until the conclusion of sittings for 2020, Members unable to be physically present because of COVID-19 may participate in certain proceedings in the House via an official parliamentary video facility.

Eleven Members made contributions remotely during the week.

Arrangements for the operation of the Chamber

Once more, special seating arrangements enabled distancing between Members, and the Whips organised pairs so that the total numbers present for divisions were reduced. There were seats available in the Chamber for 80 Members, and there were up to 36 pairs for divisions. A total of 114 Members attended, in person, across the sitting week. Throughout the week, questions were put by the Chair in such a form that Members might not need to move across the Chamber to vote.

Deaths of the Hon John Fahey AC and the Hon Susan Ryan AO

On 6 October the Prime Minister moved in succession two motions of condolence in relation to former parliamentarians. The first motion acknowledged the death of the Hon John Fahey AC (Member for Macarthur from 1996 to 2001 and Minister for Finance and Administration). The Leader of the Opposition seconded the motion and responded. The Speaker relayed to the House remarks he had received from former Treasurer the Hon Peter Costello AC. All Members and others then stood, in silence.

The second motion recorded the House's deep regret at the death of the Hon Susan Ryan AO (Senator for the Australian Capital Territory from 1975 to 1988, and Minister for Education and Youth Affairs and Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women). The Leader of the Opposition seconded the motion, and all Members and others again stood in silence.

Each condolence motion was referred to the Federation Chamber and other Members made contributions to the debates. On 8 October the Speaker reported to the House on the debates and both motions were agreed to.

Suspension of standing orders to facilitate the presentation of the Budget and reply

On 6 October the Leader of the House, pursuant to notice, moved to suspend standing orders to facilitate the presentation of the Budget that evening and the opposition's reply on 8 October. Such a motion is moved each year to prevent the automatic adjournment of the House from taking effect prior to the Treasurer's speech, and the Leader of the Opposition's reply, and to remove the limit on new business being taken after the normal time for the adjournment so that the remainder of the Budget bills can be presented following the Treasurer's speech. The motion further provided that, on completion of the reply on Thursday, the House would automatically stand adjourned until 10 am on 19 October.

The Manager of Opposition Business moved an amendment to also permit any motion for the suspension of standing orders without notice relating to the passage of the Commonwealth Electoral Amendment (Ensuring Fair Representation of the Northern Territory) Bill 2020 during the current sittings, to be carried by a simple rather than an absolute majority. (The bill—a private Senator's bill—is still before the Senate.) The Leader of the House raised a point of order on the relevance of the amendment. The Speaker allowed the amendment to stand. It was agreed to and the motion, as amended, was also carried on the voices.

Budget

The Budget is usually presented in May but was postponed to October by the Prime Minister earlier in the year because of the impact of COVID-19. Supply bills were passed in March to fund expenditure on an interim basis. On the afternoon of 6 October the Speaker made a statement outlining the usual arrangements and courtesies for the Budget speech and the Leader of the Opposition's reply.

Shortly after 7.30 pm on Tuesday the Treasurer presented the main appropriation bill (Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021), which appropriates revenue for the provision of ordinary annual services of government, and its explanatory memorandum. He moved the second reading and made the traditional Budget speech. Debate was adjourned and the Assistant Treasurer then presented the Budget papers and a ministerial statement. The Minister also presented the two other appropriation bills in the Budget package: Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 2020-2021, which includes appropriations for new policies, and Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Bill (No. 1) 2020-2021 and their explanatory memoranda. He moved the second reading of each bill and debate was adjourned as usual. In accordance with section 56 of the Constitution, the introduction of each bill was preceded by the Speaker reporting a message from the Governor-General recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the bill.

Debate resumed on the second reading of the main appropriation bill on the evening of 8 October, with the Leader of the Opposition speaking in reply. When the House returns later in October, the second reading debate will continue.

As the supply bills passed in March provided appropriations for proposed expenditure based on seven-twelfths of the estimated 2020-2021 annual appropriations, the bills introduced this week propose appropriations for the remaining five-twelfths of the estimated expenditure for 2020-2021, as well as proposed expenditure for new measures.

Legislation

Introductions

Twelve bills were presented during the week, including one government bill from the Senate.

On 7 October the Assistant Treasurer introduced the Treasury Laws Amendment (A Tax Plan for the COVID-19 Economic Recovery) Bill 2020 and the Economic Recovery Package (JobMaker Hiring Credit) Amendment Bill 2020. They relate to taxation measures and the operation of the Coronavirus economic response announced as part of the Budget. On 8 October, the House agreed to postpone business listed on the Notice Paper to enable the resumption of debate on the Treasury Laws Amendment (A Tax Plan for the COVID-19 Economic Recovery) Bill 2020. Following a short debate, questions to finalise the bill were carried on the voices.

The subjects of other bills introduced during the week, unrelated to the Budget, included the Export Market Development Grants program, construction of housing on Indigenous held land, and the Cashless Debit Card program.

Passing the House

During the week five bills were passed by the House.

On 7 October debate resumed on the Transport Security Amendment (Serious Crime) Bill 2019, which aims to reduce criminal influence at airports, ports, and offshore oil and gas facilities. The opposition's amendment to the second reading was negatived and the second reading was passed on the voices. During consideration in detail, opposition amendments were defeated on division and government amendments were carried on division. The bill, as amended, was agreed to. Leave was granted for the third reading to be moved immediately and the question was carried on the voices.

Statements by the Speaker

On 8 October the Speaker made statements relating to private Members' business and the Selection Committee, and media rules and the appropriate use of material from the official broadcast.

Ministerial statement and reply—Rural and regional Budget outcomes

Also on 8 October, the Deputy Prime Minister, by leave, made a statement relating to Budget outcomes for rural and regional Australia. The Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development responded.

Parliamentary committees

During the week, 14 committee reports were presented. Leave was granted for statements to be made by committee chairs and deputy chairs on reports of inquiries into topics that included: the Working Holiday Maker Program; COVID-19 and homelessness in Australia; the listing and re-listing of certain terrorist organisations under the Criminal Code; Australia's family law system; and matters relating to two treaties with Hong Kong. In some cases, take note motions were moved and reports were referred to the Federation Chamber for debate.

On the afternoon of 6 October, prior to the presentation of the Budget, the Deputy Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit made the annual statement concerning the draft budget estimates for the Australian National Audit Office and the Parliamentary Budget Office for 2020-2021. This fulfilled the Committee's responsibilities under the *Public Accounts and Audit Committee Act 1951* and the *Parliamentary Service Act 1999*.

Federation Chamber

The Federation Chamber met on 7 and 8 October. Members made statements on the condolence motions for the Hon John Fahey AC and the Hon Susan Ryan AO. Debate continued on motions to take note of committee reports relating to the Working Holiday Program, homelessness in Australia, and improvements in family law proceedings.

Matters of public importance discussions

Topics for the one-hour discussions after Question Time concerned government announcements and delivery, the Budget and creation of jobs, and plans for child care and support for families.

Interaction with the Senate

On Budget night, the Senate sitting was suspended from 6.30 until 8.30 pm to enable Senators to attend the Chamber and hear the Treasurer speak. At 8.30 pm in the Senate, the Minister for Finance tabled the Budget statement and documents, and moved that the Senate take note of them. He also tabled particulars of proposed and certain expenditure and moved that they be referred to the Senate's legislation committees for consideration of the estimates. The presentation of these details on Budget night enables Senate committees to examine [Budget estimates](#) while the Budget bills are still before the House. This expedites consideration of the bills once they have passed the House and are formally considered by the Senate.

During the week there was the usual message traffic between the Houses.

On 6 October the Payment Times Reporting Bill 2020 was returned from the Senate with amendments. The House agreed to consider the amendments immediately and, on the motion of a Minister, the amendments were made. Opposition amendments were lost on division.

On 8 October a message from the Senate returned the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020 with a request for an amendment and informing the House of amendments made by the Senate. A Minister moved that the requested amendment be considered immediately, and the motion was carried on division. A message from the Governor-General recommending an appropriation for amendments to be moved by a Minister was then reported. The requested amendment was agreed to on division after the question was closed. The amended bill was returned to the Senate where it was amended by the Senate and read a third time. The bill will be returned to the House for its consideration of the Senate's amendments at a future sitting.

The House will meet next on 19 October 2020. The Senate met for an additional sitting on 9 October and its eight legislation committees will conduct hearings on the estimates of government expenditure between 19 and 30 October.

Further information on the work of the House

[Bills and legislation](#), bills, explanatory memoranda, amendments, speeches, and a tracking option

[Live Minutes](#), a real time summary of House decisions and proceedings. When used in conjunction with the [Daily Program](#), the Live Minutes are a simple way to track the House's work each day

[Votes and Proceedings](#), the official record of the proceedings of the House of Representatives

[House of Representatives Practice](#) 7th ed., 2018, the most authoritative guide to House procedure

[House of Representatives Standing Orders](#), as at 19 September 2019, the rules of procedure for the House of Representatives