

## ADVISORY PAPER NO. 6 – OPPOSITION TIME

### Recommendations of the Needs Assessment Report

- **There should be a settled Parliamentary Timetable with recognized opportunities for the Opposition and also for debate on Committee Reports (page 11).**
- **The Opposition should become more persistent in their questioning of Government and utilize the opportunities that already exist for so doing (page 14).**
- **All Members of the Opposition should participate in debates and question time (page 14).**
- **The Government must recognize that the role of an opposition is to oppose. This means that the Opposition should be given the opportunities to do this (page 14).**

1. There are as many approaches to giving Opposition time in a Chamber as there are Parliaments following the Westminster model. They have adapted the procedures originally inherited from the British Parliament to their local conditions.
2. Standing Order 20 (2) states that “*Government Business shall have precedence on every day except on Wednesdays when private Members’ Business shall have precedence.*” In Advisory Paper No. 1 it is suggested that the Assembly sit on Thursday each week which if accepted makes this Standing Order a nonsense. Consequently, it is suggested that the Standing Order be amended to read:

2.

**“(2) Government business shall have precedence on every day except the last Thursday of the month when Private Members’ Business shall have precedence.”**

3. Some other means additional to that in paragraph 2 of giving the Opposition opportunities which the National Assembly might contemplate are:

- 1) Changing the provisions of Standing Order 20 (2) to ensure that at least part of a day’s sitting is devoted to Opposition or private Members’ Business (note a “*Private Member*” means a Member other than the Speaker or a Minister);
- 2) Making the Estimates or budget debate open to any matter of public affairs which a Member wishes to raise, that is, an open debate (see Advisory Paper No. 5);
- 3) Introducing an adjournment debate at the end of each day’s proceedings - a debate on the motion “*That the Assembly do now adjourn*” which would be limited in total time and also in speech times (in Australia there is half an hour for this debate with each Member having 5 minutes only (no extension of time is permitted)). Members could raise any matter of concern;
- 4) Not limiting Members so much in submitting matters of public importance for discussion, that is taking away the requirement for the matter to be “*urgent*” as is provided in Standing Order 11 (see discussion below):

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- 5) Making it easier for Private Members to ask questions of Ministers (see Advisory Paper No. 2);
- 6) Debating Committee Reports and responses to Committee Reports (see Advisory Paper No. 8 for a discussion on this proposal);
- 7) Introducing a period of time for a “*grievance debate*”;  
and
- 8) Permitting a period of Private Members’ Statements.

4. When the Assembly is, as is proposed in Advisory Paper No. 1, sitting for about 40 days a year, it is unlikely that “*urgent*” matters will coincide with sittings but it should be available to the Opposition and indeed Government backbenchers to raise matters of concern for discussion. The discussion could be limited to a particular time. The Australian example is a maximum two hours on each day. There are no other opportunities for private Members as for example when Committee Reports are being considered (see Advisory Paper No. 8). With time limits on speeches this generally allows for 2 or 3 Members from each side of the House to participate.

The thing to note about most of these proposals is that while Private Members can raise the matters there is no resolution at the end of the proceedings. The one exception is the “*grievance debate*” where the question at the conclusion of the debate is “*That grievances be noted*”. In each proposals the call is alternated from side to side.

In order to provide an opportunity for Private Members in Guyana to raise matters the following Standing Order which combines features from some of these examples is proposed to be substituted for Standing Order 11:

**11 Matter of Public Interest**

- (a) A Private Member may give written notice of a matter of current public interest proposed to be noted to the Speaker by 11 a.m. on the Thursday it is to be moved. The matter must be within the power of the National Assembly to act on.**
- (b) If a matter has been proposed, the Speaker, at 9.15 p.m., shall interrupt any business before the House and call upon the Member proposing the matter to move the motion.**
- (c) If the motion is not disposed of before 10 p.m. the Speaker shall interrupt the debate and put the question that the motion be noted.**
- (d) If more than one notice is received for the same day the Speaker shall select the matter to be proposed.**
- (e) A maximum of four Members shall be permitted to speak with each Member being entitled to speak for a period not exceeding 10 minutes or 5 minutes if speaking in reply in the case of the Member giving written notice.**

5.

5. The concept of Private Members' statements was a product of the Canadian Parliament where Private Members were given an opportunity to make 90 second statements. In 15 minutes 10 Members could make a contribution. In a smaller House like the National Assembly this process could be introduced with a little more time given to Members.

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