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Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — A strong and accountable Parliament and an accountable government are very important parts of a democratic system such as the one we have in Victoria. I was interested to read some time ago the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on strengthening government and parliamentary accountability in Victoria, which was tabled in April last year.

The coalition was represented on the committee at that time — and I think it still is — by the members for Scoresby and Benalla, and Mr Dalla-Riva, a member for Eastern Metropolitan Region and Mr Rich-Phillips, a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region in the other place.

The terms of reference required the committee to focus on six matters: the operation of parliamentary committees, question time procedure, standards of parliamentary behaviour, overseas travel, the so-called modernisation of Parliament and the process of dealing with petitions. I gather the latter has been the subject of a separate report by the Standing Orders Committee.

The recommendations of the committee largely mirrored the matters raised in the report. Unfortunately there were a number of issues which were not addressed and which I consider to be essential to the maintenance of a strong democracy, issues which go to an effective legislature and issues which I suspect that many of us grapple with daily in a Parliament that is not entirely independent of the executive.

The sorts of things I am talking about are things like the sitting calendar which, contrary to established practice in many parts of the world, tends to be fragmented — a week here, a week there — rather than several blocks of weeks at a time when we can really focus on the legislative process to the exclusion of other matters. It also creates difficulties with the investigatory committee process, particularly when those committees wish to engage in hearings away from the parliamentary precinct, to take the Parliament out into the community and improve consultative process. The calendar makes it difficult to do that sort of thing. And it also makes it difficult, when there are not blocks of time, for members to concentrate on their duties outside the house.

Unfortunately the report also ignored the work-life balance, the family friendly issue which has been frequently mentioned by this government. While I acknowledge the sitting hours and practices are probably better than they may have been in the old days, they still are not particularly family friendly. I also express concern at the recent

changes to the security arrangements where spouses are now precluded from obtaining a security pass. If my wife wishes to visit me during the sitting day or in the evening, she has to go through the process of obtaining a pass to get in rather than simply being able to come in. I do not think that adds to it, too. But I digress from my comments on the report.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

Mr MORRIS — I might say to the member for Bass, some people enjoy my company.

I will not have time to address another issue to the extent that I would like to — that is, the pattern of dealing with legislation. It tends to be a bit of a sausage machine: introduced one week, dealt with the next. It precludes proper consideration, particularly by the wider community. I know that there is often extensive consultation prior to issues coming into the house in the form of legislation but it precludes the community from seeing the words written on the paper. Quite often the words written on the paper in terms of legislation are very different from the consultation documents.

The PAEC report addressed the issue of question time; but not the issues in question time that I see as a concern. The discussion in the report related to the issue of supplementary questions and so on. I was amused by the government response to that: that the current arrangements are operating satisfactorily.

It is important that we strengthen Parliament. It is important that we strengthen accountability and the report goes some way to doing that.
