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PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

26 October 1984

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Dear Willie,

I have recently been considering the handling of the report which the Select Committee on Procedure published just before the Recess on the question of possible limitations being placed on the length of Member's speeches on the Floor of the House [First Report from the Select Committee on Procedure (Session 1983-4): Short Speeches].

In their report the Committee propose an experimental Sessional Order for the duration of the 1984-5 Session whereby the Speaker could in certain debates (Second Readings, Opposition Days and full-day debates on Government Motions) announce a 10-minute limit on speeches between either 7 pm and 9 pm or 6 pm and 8 pm. This would be a modified revival of the experiment undertaken in the 1979-80 Session, following a report by an earlier Select Committee on Procedure. The Committee has come down against any general limitation on the length of speeches and against the proposal that a list of Speakers in a debate should be 'published' beforehand.

These recommendations seem mild and uncontroversial, and the enquiry appears to have aroused very little concern amongst back-benchers. Nevertheless, it seems desirable for the House to have an early opportunity to consider the report, partly because a number of Second Reading debates to which the recommendations might apply will take place early in the new Session, and partly in the light of the need to maintain good relations with the Committee, which will shortly be moving on to matters of more substance.

I have therefore arranged for the necessary debate to be held on Wednesday 31 October, the date of prorogation. The subject is of course a 'free vote' one, and there is no need to express a Government view.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister, other members of Legislation Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

John Biffen

JOHN BIFFEN

Viscount Whitelaw CH MC
Lord President of the Council

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