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State of Consensus Government

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak today about the state of consensus government in our Territory. Yesterday we witnessed hundreds of people coming here to demonstrate against Cabinet's proposed Board Reform Initiative. A few weeks back we again had the gallery full with seniors and others opposed to the proposed changes to supplementary health benefits. These two issues and the way in which this government has conducted themselves speaks volumes about what is wrong with consensus government.

In the ranks of the Regular Members we have got to come to work every day and seek consensus amongst ourselves in order to move on with our issues and bring them to the forefront. We have a very capable, intelligent, and experienced group of Members and I'm proud to be part of the team that we've developed amongst the Regular Members.

The most beautiful part of this is that we're all free to express our feelings. Of course, Regular Members do not always agree with each other, but we respect each other and Members are free from intimidation, fear, or reprisal. Consensus is alive and well with Regular Members, as many recent motions and yesterday's theme day have shown.

The problem is the government's inability to get over itself. All 19 of us serve in this House in real roles. We call ourselves and our system of government consensus. But then why does Cabinet act and behave like a majority government and think like a political party, throwing blind devotion behind the Premier and the Deputy Premier.

I personally don't think it's too late to save our system of government. If we don't take the necessary steps to improve it, party politics will arrive in our Assembly. Many may say it's already here with Cabinet having no genuine free votes, Cabinet solidarity, and Cabinet Ministers unable to speak their mind. If we had true consensus government, Mr. Speaker, what happened yesterday would have been avoided. We would have better decisions being made, adversarial debate would be minimized, Ministers could represent and speak for their constituents without fear.

Yes, decisions may be harder to arrive at, but at the end of the day, those decisions would indeed reflect the true feelings of the people that we represent. Mahsi.