

be'. It is with this hope that the government has introduced this bill. I commend the bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Mr MANZIE (Attorney-General)(by leave): Mr Speaker, I move that so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Director of Public Prosecutions Bill (Serial 277) and the Director of Public Prosecutions (Consequential Amendments) Bill (Serial 278) - (a) being considered together and 1 motion being put in regard to, respectively, the second readings, the committee's report stage and the third readings of the bills together; and (b) the consideration of the bills separately in the committee of the whole.

Motion agreed to.

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS BILL (Serial 277) DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS (CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS) BILL (Serial 278)

Bills presented and read a first time.

Mr MANZIE (Attorney-General): Mr Speaker, I move that the bills be now read a second time.

Crime has become the focus of media and hence public attention. Considerable pressure has been placed on those politicians, particularly Attorneys-General, who are responsible for determining whether to prosecute or discontinue a prosecution, whether to institute an appeal against leniency of a sentence, whether to accept a plea to lesser or fewer charges, or whether to grant immunities from prosecution. Prosecutorial decisions made by politicians can become subject to distortion or misconstruction if they are drawn into the ambit of political debate. It is not to the point that such debate may be misconceived or allegations of bias totally groundless. In either situation, public confidence in the administration of the criminal law can be eroded. If there is any such concern in the Northern Territory, I hope this bill will reinforce in the community this government's commitment that the administration of justice will remain free from party political bias.

Decisions on whether or not to prosecute politicians, police officers and senior public servants cause particular difficulty. The public often finds it difficult to understand or accept that, in his prosecutorial role, the Attorney-General acts completely independently from government. While I can assure members of this Assembly that I would never shirk from any responsibility as Attorney-General to prosecute if necessary a colleague or any member of this Assembly, the end result is that Attorneys-General often find themselves damned if they do decide to prosecute and damned if they don't, and public confidence can diminish.

Directors of Public Prosecutions, of course, are not immune from the impact of community and media pressures. Nor indeed, many would argue, should they be, as community attitudes can and should be taken into account in appropriate circumstances. There can be little doubt, however, that independent law officers will be seen as less susceptible to extraneous influences and allegations of political bias than are politicians.