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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

Thursday, 9th July, 2009

The House met at 11.17 a.m.

PRAYERS

(The Speaker in the Chair)

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

The Speaker: Hon. Colleagues, the House is called to order. I have examined and approved the Votes and Proceedings of Wednesday, 8th July, 2009.

Executive Session

The Speaker: The House will now resolve into an Executive Session to discuss few issues concerning the workings of the House.

Sitting Suspended: 11.20 a.m.

Sitting resumed: 1.40 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Speaker: The only announcement we have will be done by the Chief Whip.

Report of the Executive Session

Hon. Emeka Nkem Ihedioha (Aboh Mbaise/Ngor Okpala): This morning the House resolved into Executive Session where we deliberated on a publication in the newspaper and some issues credited to Hon Bitrus Kaze.

In the course of considering the publication made against the Hon. Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, the Leadership of the House and Members condemned the publication and the author, Hon. Kaze. In condemning it and for the unity of this country in appreciation of the times, the House resolved to treat the matter internally.

In so resolving, however, the House agreed that Hon. Bitrus Kaze should publicly withdraw the publication having been satisfied that the accusations levelled against the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the Leadership of the House are indeed incorrect. However, for us to proceed, we have agreed that Hon. Kaze will immediately withdraw this publication publicly. The House has also cautioned that henceforth

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no Member of this House should take issues regarding the House to the Media any further.

Other issues that were considered by the House are strictly for internal consumption and we wish the House and indeed all Members the very best.

We salute the magnanimity and candour of the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, Leadership and Members in resolving this matter and taking it holistically as one people and one House with a common purpose.

PRESENTATION OF PUBLIC PETITIONS

The Speaker: Thank you, Chief Whip. Any Member who has a Petition may rise and present his Petition.

Unfair Compensation

Hon Sani Sale Minjibir (Minjibir/Ungogo): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a Petition written by my constituents in the wards of Rijinzaki, Tudun-Fulani, Bacharawa and Kadawa all in Ungogo Local Government praying this honourable House to look into the Unfair Compensation paid for their farmlands acquired for the construction of Western Bypass/Ring Road in Kano State.

With your permission, I will lay the Petition on the Table.

Petition laid.

The Speaker: In the absence of any other Petition, the Petition is hereby referred to the Committee on Public Petitions.

Petition accordingly referred to the Committee on Public Petitions.

The Speaker: Will any member of Information Committee give us some information on why Nigerian Television Authority chose not be here today?

Hon Daniel Dino Melaye (Kabba/Bunu/Ijumu): Mr. Speaker, the Radio, Television and Theatre Art Workers Union of Nigeria (RATTAWU) are on strike. Radio, Television and Theatre Workers including the NTA and Radio Nigeria are Members of RATTAWU. They are on strike because their arrears of monetisation that is due to them between 2003 and 2005 has not been paid.

They are on strike because other sectors of our national life have already been paid the monetisation

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arrears in 2003 and on two different Appropriations, the National Assembly tried to make provision for them so that these monetisation arrears would be paid but I speak to you, they have not been paid from 2005 till date and all efforts to lobby the government to pay them these arrears have been unsuccessful.

That is the reason they are on strike. This House, as the House of the people, must rise in support of RATTAWU Workers to make sure that the Federal Government meets their own part of the bargain by paying these monetisation arrears. Even if that money is paid today, there would be no value for money because of the inflation rate from 2005 to date.

The Speaker: Is the Monetisation arrears provided in this year's Appropriation Act?

Hon. Dino Melaye: It is in the final figure, Sir.

Hon. John Halims Agoda (Ethiopia East/Ethiopia West): Point of Order, Mr. Speaker!

The Speaker: If it is not, I doubt if the government can pay now. We would talk more about that after our sitting. Hon. Halims Agoda has a Point of Order before I go into Presentation of Bills.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Little Things That Matter in the Life of a Nation

Hon. Halims Agoda: Mr. Speaker, my Point of Order is Order VIII, Rule 4 of our Revised Standing Orders and I am urging this House to kindly suspend sub-Rule 3. With your permission, I read:

1. The matter for discussion shall, if possible, be referred to the Speaker prior to the commencement to the day's sitting and the Speaker shall refuse to allow the claim unless he is satisfied that the matter is definite and urgent.

I will go to Sub Rule (3) which says:

If the claim is allowed by the Speaker and the leave of the House is given by majority of all Members present, the matter shall stand over till the next Legislative Day.

This is the aspect that I want the House to suspend so that we can quickly take it. Having read that, I want to passionately appeal to the House to kindly listen to me and see the very essence of the small issue I want to raise in my Motion titled: *Little Things That Matter in the Life of a Nation*.

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What I am trying to draw out is that the action we take as leaders is bound to have effect that will create the issue of confidence or disharmony among the citizens of our country. You are all aware that ASUU has been on strike for the past three weeks and our University students, for no fault of their own, have been sent home.

Many of them are frustrated doing one thing or the other. To add to that, I was touched by the recent insensitivity of the Minister of Education who is supposed to propose the way forward for the ASUU crisis. I returned from China two days ago and in the course of our official business, the Nigerian Community in China held discussions with us to know what is happening in the country and the efforts we are putting up in the building of our nation. Many of them were disappointed and made reference to a situation where ASUU is on strike and all the Universities are under the lock, yet the Minister of Education who is supposed to show concern organised one of the largest parties in Nigeria with taxpayers' money.

I am therefore urging the House to consider the matter as one of Urgent Public Importance.

The Speaker: Hon. Colleagues, the Question is that we consider this matter as a matter urgent enough for us to suspend our rules.

The first Question is that this House do consider the matter as one of Urgent Public Importance.

Question put and negatived.

Hon. Austin Nwachukwu (Ehime Mbano/Ihite Uboma/Obowo): Point of Order, Mr. Speaker!

The Speaker: What is the Point of Order, Hon. Nwachukwu?

Hon. Austin Nwachukwu: Mr. Speaker, my Point of Order is Order VIII, Rule 4 of our Revised Standing Orders at page 25. It has become necessary for me to raise this Order because of the situation regarding the Health sector in the country right now.

Striking Medical Personnel in the Health Sector

If you read today's newspapers, you would have seen that they are all awash with various captions of Nurses, Midwives and Paramedical staff of our hospitals that are on strike since Monday this week. My dear Colleagues, if you allow me I would like us to discuss this matter because the health of our citizenry is very important to us as parliamentarians.

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I have on the front page of *Leadership* Newspaper a caption titled: *Strike - 10,000 Patients Stranded* and that is coming from the University Teaching Hospital, Calabar where twelve people were said to have died yesterday. Also the *Daily Trust* Newspaper has a caption titled *Patients Shut out at Kano Hospital* and that over eighty people are on danger list; people with dialysis and kidney sclerosis.

So, I feel that we should be able to take this matter because it touches on the health aspect of our citizenry and our country Nigeria. If you allow me, Mr. Speaker, we should take this matter today because it is very urgent and people are dying.

In the National Hospital here in Abuja, a Colleague of mine, a doctor, told me that his son went there and could not be attended to because nobody was there. We should, please, consider this matter before more harm is done to our health sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved: That this House do consider the Matter of striking medical personnel as a Matter of Urgent Public Importance.

The Speaker: The second question is that Hon. Nwachukwu is seeking the leave of the House to consider the matter right now.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved: That this House do consider this matter immediately.

MOTION

Urgent Need to Arrest the National Strike Action by Nurses and Midwives in the Country

Hon. Austin Nwachukwu: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the show of solidarity for this Motion to be taken right away. The House:

Notes the ongoing strike by Nurses and Midwives in the country;

Disturbed that the death toll this strike will cause is monumental;

Worried that many Nigerians desiring medical care are now worse off;

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Concerned that many lives have already been lost in the various Teaching Hospitals and other Public Health Institutions all over the country;

Still Concerned that in the last one year over 400 people died in our National Hospital here in Abuja.

Further concerned that the continuation of this strike will further worsen the health sector to the disadvantage of the Seven Point Agenda of Mr. President.

Resolves to:

- (i) Mandate the Minister of Health to immediately take steps that will, as a matter of urgency, arrest the ongoing strike by Nurses and Midwives;
- (ii) Urge the Committee on Health and Legislative Compliance to investigate and unravel the circumstance surrounding the strike action and the rate of deaths recorded in the National Hospital in Abuja and report back to this House as soon as possible.

I so move.

Hon. Abdul Ningi (Ningi/Warji): Mr. Speaker, I rise to second the Motion moved by Hon. Austin Nwachukwu.

Question proposed.

Hon. Austin Nwachukwu: The importance of this matter need not be over-emphasised because as we all know Health is Wealth. If we are not well enough I do not think any one of us will be here today to attend to this onerous task of serving our nation in making laws because it is said that two good heads are better than one.

You also know that the people that actually propagate health services are the nurses. In our hospitals the doctors will diagnose but it is the nurses that will actually administer the treatment to the patients and as such these people whose duty it is to take care of sick ones are not there to provide such services. And what do we have? The rate of death has been increasing at an alarming rate.

As I said earlier, in the University Teaching Hospital, Calabar 10,000 patients were stranded between Monday, 6th July and yesterday and you know

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what that means. There is a particular case of one with dialysis that requires frequent and intermittent attention but what we have now is that the patients will die because nobody will be there to attend to them.

At the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital in Kano about twenty one patients are reported to be on danger list and if we are not careful, they may lose their lives. I also want us to look into the area of Abuja National Hospital as part of my prayers.

Early last year precisely on the day of the PDP Convention on the 8th of March, 2008 my dear father who told me all the parables I tell you went to that hospital for medical attention and was left in the ambulance for two hours without being attended to and what happened. The person who was supposed to conduct the CT scan was said to have gone to Gwagwalada; he was supposed to be on duty but he left for Gwagwalada. That left my father to remain at his own mercy and eventually he died before they could rescue him.

As if that was not enough, our former Senate President, Evans Ewerem was taken to the same National Hospital in Abuja; he died and that was the end. The father of our own hon. Colleague here, Hon. Hembe was then there and he also died.

About two weeks ago the Deputy National Vice Chairman of PDP, South East Zone took his father to the same National Hospital; he came back with his corpse. As we speak now, he is now in the mortuary. So, I call these deaths too many.

Apart from this strike action, we should also look into what is happening at the National Hospital, Abuja. A lot is going on there because they are not living up to their expectations. Based on this, we should look into it. If you say *go and bring suya*; it is from the body of a cow. If you are not well enough you cannot do anything and I know that when anybody is upright in health, there is nothing you cannot do but once you are sick you cannot perform optimally to the nation.

I hereby call on my Colleagues to support me so that we allow this Motion to go through.

Hon. Abdul Ahmed Ningi (Ningi/Warji): Let me begin by commending Hon. Austin Nwachukwu for bringing this unique Motion. Let me also thank you very much for providing this leadership.

When the issue has to do with Health and the fact that the strike has also affected our National Hospitals, it is a strike like no other. It is not about NTA; we can live without NTA and to some extent it is not about Education. We can also live without it but when it is

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about health, it is talking about somebody dying the next minute, hour or the next day. People are dying left, right and centre and it should be of paramount concern for all of us.

Nigeria is a poor society. The economy is in the hands of less than 5 *per cent* of the population. What that informs us is that an average Nigerian cannot go to a private hospital to take care of his needs and we are all here representing people in trust. The people entrusted us with the mandate and, therefore, whatever affects the people must be the primary reason why we are here.

The issue in Kano is so disturbing. All you need to do is to go to Kano and see the number of casualties that are lying on the ground without being attended to. The National Hospital is not an exception.

ASUU and NTA are on strike and we seem to be hopeless and helpless in the situation. The innocent recommendation by Hon. Austin Nwachukwu is a way forward and a step in the right direction and Members should give it the much needed attention it deserves. We, as representative of the people, must come in handy when the need arises. This is the time to identify with the downtrodden.

As I said, 80 *per cent* of Nigerians can neither provide health for themselves nor for their family. If my father falls sick, I have the capacity to be able to take him to a private hospital and so also all my extended families but what about other people who voted us into power? We should provide leadership and you have shown that this House has provided this leadership.

I urge my Colleagues to support this very important Motion.

Hon. Mohammed Ali Ndume (Damboa/Gwoza/Chibok): First, I thank Hon. Austin Nwachukwu for bringing this very important Motion. This is just one of the problems that we have in this country and this honourable House is supposed to say something if it cannot do anything about it.

As my Colleague, Hon. Halims Agoda mentioned, about 50 universities in this country have been shut down and about a million of our youths are now roaming the streets and the government is not doing anything about it. RATTAWU is also on strike and those that we represent cannot see us because the TV houses and to some extent some Radio houses are now closed. This is going on right now and this government is not doing anything about it. What has worsened this matter is that the only place our citizens can go and get prescription is now closed. Is the Aso Rock Clinic going to be on strike? If it is on strike, what will

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happen? We should be serious about this matter and we should take appropriate action. This House had reacted to so many national issues and it just ended up being a resolution; that is the end of it. Nobody is held responsible and no head of MDA is being reprimanded for this or her action or inaction.

We passed so many resolutions and none has ever been implemented. This is a very serious issue. I believe and it is true that we may have questions to answer in the days ahead if anybody dies today or from the time these nurses embarked on strike because we have been given that responsibility.

Hon. Farouk M. Lawan (Shanono/Bagwai): Mr. Speaker, I obviously want to support the prayers of this Motion and I do so with all seriousness knowing how important the issue of health and medical services are in this country.

Let me seize this opportunity to share the experience of what I know is happening in Kano where medical workers are on strike and as a result of that many people are dying. Many people are also dying in Abuja and in other parts of this country.

I strongly believe that we have a responsibility to make sure that whatever the differences there are between the Unions and the Government we should ensure that these differences are resolved as expeditiously as possible. Even before this strike started, our people were suffering because of the very decayed infrastructure in our hospitals. We have not paid enough premiums to human life and human health in Nigeria. Therefore, any step that will worsen this situation must be quickly addressed. This particular strike had led to the loss of so many lives and is responsible for the worsening ailments of so many people and I believe that it is timely for us to intervene immediately so that this matter can be quickly resolved.

I disagree with my Colleague, Hon. Abdul Ningi, who said that NTA can go on strike and that we can live with the strike in the Education sector. I do not believe we can live with the strike in the Education sector because Health and Education go together.

To round up, this House once again has a responsibility to lead the way in resolving these issues by appealing to these workers to go back to work so that our Health sector can continue to attend to those who are sick, dying and in various stages of ailments.

We should go beyond just passing a Resolution today. We should ensure that this particular Resolution is passed between today and tomorrow. Not only that, we must ensure that the contents are communicated to the Executive Arm of Government and if it calls for

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intervention by the Leadership of this House to make sure that these matters are resolved, I believe it would be important for us to do so.

Once again, I call on my Colleagues to support the Prayers of this Motion so that we can pass it and by so doing we would have added our voice and ideas to a very important issue.

Hon. Igochukwu N. Aguma (Port Harcourt I): I am categorically saying that I am a Member of PDP but indeed I am embarrassed to belong to a Party that is not delivering the dividend of democracy and appears to be insensitive at this point in time; we must call a spade a spade.

Everybody knows the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) is on strike; it affects everybody. Presently, our roads are not motorable. As I speak to you, we cannot even ease ourselves and relax at home whenever we can find thirty minutes of electricity in a day and watch television. The worse of it all is that we can no longer protect the Right to Human Life guaranteed by the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, the Ministers heading these agencies should be summoned immediately. You represent an Arm of Government that is also part of the government in power. You have your own account to give tomorrow; you must call them to order.

I would like to amend the Prayers in the Motion and add that the Ministers of Education, Communication and Information and Health should immediately be summoned to report to you and give you a full briefing on the situation today as regards what they are doing because the economy of this country is grinding to a halt. I believe this is about the first or second time our President is attending G8. Even if Mr. President is confronted with these questions, he will have no difficulty in saying that he has released monies to these Ministries through the Accountant-General of the Federation to do their work; yet they are not doing their work.

The Speaker: I think I should just put the Question on this. On the issue of the Amendment proposed by Hon. Igo Aguma while I appreciate the confidence in the Office of the Speaker to be able to wade into this matter, the procedure of the House is that the Committees should also be given the opportunity to handle the matter first.

Hon. Abike Dabiri Erewa (Ikorodu): Mr. Speaker, I am proposing an Amendment *that a timeframe of one week be given to all the Committees concerned.*

Amendment put and agreed to.

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The Speaker: Hon. Friday Itulah, please proceed with your Amendment.

Hon. Friday Itulah (Esan North East/South): My Amendment is that we plead with *the body concerned to call off the strike while the Committee is negotiating with them.*

Hon. Ogbuefi Ora Ozombgbachi (Ezeagu/Udi): I do second the Amendment moved by Hon. Friday Itulah.

Amendment put and agreed to.

Main Question as amended put and agreed to.

The House:

Noted the ongoing strike by Nurses and Midwives in the country;

Disturbed that the death toll this strike will cause is monumental;

Worried that many Nigerians desiring medical care are now worse off;

Concerned that many lives have already been lost in the various Teaching Hospitals and other Public Health Institutions all over the country;

Still Concerned that in the last one year over 400 people died in our National Hospital here in Abuja;

Further concerned that the continuation of this strike will further worsen the health sector to the disadvantage of the Seven Point Agenda of Mr. President.

Resolves to:

- (i) Mandate the Minister of Health to immediately take steps that will urgently arrest the ongoing strike by Nurses and Midwives;
- (ii) Urge the Committee on Health and Legislative Compliance to investigate and unravel the circumstances surrounding the strike and the rate of death recorded in the National Hospital, Abuja and report back to this House within one week;
- (iii) Call on the Nurses and Midwives to call off the strike pending the investigation by the House Committee on Health.

PRESENTATION OF BILLS

The Speaker: The next Business of the Day is the Presentation of five Bills. The Clerk is invited to read the Short Titles of the Bills.

National Arbitration Centre (Establishment) Bill, 2009

National Arbitration Centre (Establishment) Bill, 2009 (HB. 282) – presented by Hon. Dimeji Sabor Bankole and four Others; *read the First Time.*

National Arbitration Commission (Establishment) Bill, 2009

National Arbitration Commission (Establishment) Bill, 2009 (HB. 283) - presented by Hon. Dimeji Sabor Bankole and four Others; *read the First Time.*

Nigerian Institute of Arbitrators and Conciliation (Establishment) Bill, 2009

Nigerian Institute of Arbitrators and Conciliation (Establishment) Bill, 2009 (HB. 284) - presented by Hon. Usman Bayero Nafada and four Others; *read the First Time.*

Federal Arbitration and Conciliation Bill, 2009

Federal Arbitration and Conciliation Bill, 2009 (HB. 285) – presented by Hon. Bala Ibn Na'Allah and four Others; *read the First Time.*

Institute of Mediators and Conciliators (Establishment) Bill, 2009

Institute of Mediators and Conciliators (Establishment) Bill, 2009 (HB. 286) – presented by Hon. Emeka Ihedioha; *read the First Time.*

The Speaker: There is information which I feel the Chairman, Committee on Education should address the House on.

Hon. Farouk M. Lawan: Mr. Speaker, I feel it is important that I give a briefing on what the House is doing to intervene as regards the current strike action by ASUU, SSANU and NASU.

Even before the commencement of the strike action, this House became proactive. Specifically, the Committee on Education decided to interact with the two sides by inviting the Hon. Minister of Education and getting a comprehensive briefing on the issues that

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were creating some disconnect between the ASUU and the Government.

We also met with ASUU. As I speak today, the Committee on Education has met three times with ASUU, the last being two days ago where we went through their grounds and the concerns that led to current strike action.

On behalf of this House, we have pleaded with ASUU to go back to classes while we organise the roundtable between the two sides. We have interacted twice with the Minister of Education. As I speak today, the two sides are going to meet with the Committee later today so that we can try to iron out the differences.

From the briefing that we got from the two sides, it is very clear that the issue is a very long one. Actually, it started in 2001. Government set up a negotiating panel chaired by Deacon Gamaliel Onosode and they have been on this matter for almost three years. The main issues were related to increase in salaries and allowances by ASUU, the issue of autonomy and better funding for the Universities.

Government has already started implementing some of those issues. For instance, the government has substantially addressed the issue of autonomy because

as I speak today, the appointment of Vice Chancellors of our Universities is done almost solely by the Governing Councils and the Universities Community. It does not need to go through the Minister of Education or even for names to be sent to the President as it was in the past for him to choose a Vice Chancellor. The whole process begins and ends within the University environment and that is part of the autonomy that ASUU has been agitating for.

On the issue of funding, from the discussion we held with the Minister of Education, the government has also recognised the need to improve the funding. One of the requirements is that the Government should set aside 26 *per cent* of the budget to Education and this should be at the Federal, States and Local Governments. Of course, we can only legislate for the Federal Government but once the Federal Government decides on that, it will also perhaps be a catalyst for the States and Local Governments to follow.

Even this House was required, from the draft agreement, to take certain legislative actions on some of those issues. I am aware that there is a Bill that is currently before the Committee that has passed First and Second Readings on the Floor of this House and that is

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the one limiting the intervention by ETF to only Universities and other Tertiary Institutions.

One of the demands of ASUU is that instead of the funds available to ETF being distributed so thinly to all levels of Education in Nigeria, those funds should be restricted to only Universities and Tertiary institutions so that it can make a difference.

These are already on course but the main issue that is still outstanding essentially is that of the increase in salaries. And from the figures available to us, the amount of money required to fund ASUU is about ₦42 billion whereas the entire amount required to fund the increase in our tertiary Institutions would be about ₦78 billion. This is the issue that is still lingering but we are bringing the two sides together so that through dialogue, we believe we can resolve these matters.

There was a breakdown at the stage when the agreement was to be reached. It took a long time, as I mentioned earlier, for the agreement to be negotiated but at the time the agreement was to be signed, Deacon Onosode decided not to proceed with the process until he has sought a commitment from the Federal Government that whatever was signed would be implemented. We would continue as a House and a Committee to intervene and make sure that these issues are resolved.

The points I want to make is that as responsible representatives of the Nigerian people, we are trying to intervene to make sure that our Universities are reopened as quickly as possible. Prolonged closure of our Tertiary Institutions is worsening the already bad situation of education in Nigerian and it is creating hardship for parents, teachers, our children and the society as well. I believe that nothing that can resolve this matter should be left undone.

Therefore, we are on this matter and we would continue to brief this House on the progress that we are making.

The Speaker: That was just a briefing. We are not supposed to react to it.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Baba Shehu Agaie (Agaie/Lapai): Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that this House do stand adjourned till Tuesday, 14th July, 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

Hon. Ogbuefi Ora Ozomgbachi (Ezeagu/Udi): Mr. Speaker, I salute all my Colleagues who have

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stayed right from the Executive Session till the end of today's proceedings.

Resolved: That the House do stand adjourned till Tuesday, 14th July 2009 at 10.00 a.m.

I do second the Motion.

The House adjourned accordingly at 2.40 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.