

**Written evidence submitted by Rt Hon Dame Eleanor Laing MP,  
Chairman of Ways and Means (CVR 112)**

I am writing on behalf of the Deputy Speakers regarding your current inquiry into Procedure under coronavirus. I write to address your first point in particular: the effect which current rules on time limits on speeches have on participation in debate.

As you are aware, this has been a long-standing matter of interest to Deputy Speaker teams. I attach a letter which was sent to your predecessor committee from the then Chairman of Ways and Means, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, myself (then First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means) and Dame Rosie Winterton (then Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means) in relation to its inquiry into time limits on speeches in the Chamber.

I forward it to highlight that the current Deputy Speaker team (myself, Rosie and Nigel) agree entirely with what this letter outlines in relation to time limits. Our position remains that Standing Order No. 47 should be amended so that backbench speeches with a five-minute time limit or below should not be granted injury time.

Thank you for inviting us to give oral evidence to your Committee on Monday 12 October 2020. Please do let me know if we can be of any further assistance.

**Appendix: Letter from the Chairman of Ways and Means to the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, May 2018**

*(Reproduced from Procedure Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19, [Time limits on speeches in the Chamber](#), HC1157, Appendix)*

**Interventions on time-limited backbench speeches—Standing Order No. 47**

I am writing on behalf of the Deputy Speakers regarding the present regime around adding ‘injury time’ for interventions on time-limited backbench speeches.

As you are aware, the current practice is to stop the clock when an intervention is made and add a minute to the time available, with a maximum of two minutes being added. Including the time taken when the clock is stopped for the original intervention, this can sometimes result in a total of four minutes being added to that Member’s speaking time. As occupants of the Chair we strive to provide time enough for colleagues to deliver considered speeches, opportunity for challenge or support through interventions and the chance for as many colleagues as possible to participate in each debate. The potential of four additional minutes to every time-limited backbench speech makes speech lengths more difficult to control or predict.

Eleanor, Rosie and I found it very helpful to discuss this matter with you and members of the Procedure Committee recently. Thank you for your inquiry into this subject.

Following consideration of this interesting matter we would like to suggest that backbench speeches with a five-minute time limit or below should not be granted injury time if the Member speaking takes an intervention. This change would not prevent colleagues from taking interventions but would allow the Chair to better control total speech lengths when time is already tight.

Where injury time still applies we would recommend that the maximum number of interventions attracting injury time should be one, rather than two. We believe these changes would help the Chair to maintain the balance for Members outlined above.

I hope this summary is useful. Please do let me know if you have further specific questions or if I can be of any further assistance to your inquiry.

*May 2018*