LATIMER HOUSE PRINCIPLES WORKSHOP

SESSION TWO: INDEPENDENCE AND SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

Parliament House, Melbourne

26 October 2026

Introduction

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

On behalf of my co-reviewers of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System, Rachael Thompson and Clare Ozich, I thank the Parliamentary Research Unit at Deakin University for the invitation to participate in today's workshop.

These are the first public remarks we have made since the the review commenced in April this year.

An important part of our work relates to the safety and security of Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff.

For that reason I want to acknowledge at the outset our profound sadness at the harm caused to Dr Helen Haines outside her Indi electorate office one week ago.

Everyone who has had the opportunity to work with Dr Haines appreciates the contribution she makes to the parliament. Her integrity, compassion and commitment to good outcomes is present in every interaction with parliamentary colleagues and staff.

We are so very sorry about her current circumstances and wish for her the best possible recovery. Our thoughts are with her family, friends, staff, volunteers and parliamentary colleagues.

Independent review

Our review is one of the most comprehensive examinations of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System ever undertaken.

We are asked by the Special Minister of State to make recommendations that ensure arrangements that support parliamentarians and staff are effective, fit for purpose and meet community expectations.

This work includes undertaking statutory reviews of the

Parliamentary Business Resources Act
Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act; and
Members of Parliament (Staff) Act

We are also reviewing the implementation of the Australian Human Rights Commission's Set the Standard report, including whether current arrangements support a diverse parliament and staffing cohort.

And, as mentioned, we are reviewing arrangements that support the safety and security of parliamentarians and their staff.

The review is supported by a dedicated taskforce in the Department of Finance whose functions are separate from the rest of the agency.

Previous reviews have looked at the system in part, often in constrained timeframes and in response to particular events.

Our key objective is to recommend better ways to support Commonwealth parliamentarians and their staff with a modern, flexible and efficient system that helps keep them safe, gives them the support and resources they need to do their job, and delivers appropriate transparency and accountability.

We have been asked to report to the Special Minister of State before the last quarter of 2027.

Our report will be tabled in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Since our appointment we have consulted with current and former Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff, including former ministers and staff, current and former Commonwealth agency heads and officials, parliamentary officials in Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, and academics and representatives of civil society, both in person and online.

We have established a website, published an issues paper, invited submissions, and engaged in a great deal of consultation with parliamentarians and staff at Parliament House, together with local consultations in Perth, Burnie, Launceston, Hobart, Adelaide, and here in Melbourne. Next week we will consult in Sydney and Brisbane. Next year we will conduct regional consultations in the Northern Territory, north Queensland, regional New South Wales and regional Victoria.

I have mentioned a few unusual features of our review - it's comprehensive, it's long, it's well resourced and its origin was not a parliamentarian losing their job for misbehaviour.

There is a another unusual feature, and that is the reviewers.

The three of us are former longterm staffers for Labor, Liberal and Greens parliamentarians in Commonwealth and state parliaments.

Between us we have worked for at least 22 parliamentarians, including three Prime Ministers and four Opposition Leaders, Senate Leaders and Senate Opposition Leaders, Ministers, Shadow Ministers, minor party Leaders in the Commonwealth and Victorian parliaments, a state health minister, a Western Australian Senator, and as electorate officers for a Victorian Premier and backbencher.

We have long experience of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System.

It's telling, I think, that until the office of the Special Minister of State coined the term, no one really described the web of legislation and regulation and administrating agencies as a system at all.

We have embraced the term because Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff should be supported.

Importantly, we believe they should be <u>better</u> supported.

Latimer House Principles

I want to reflect on the relevance of the Latimer House Principles to the review.

While this session is titled Independence and Support for Members of Parliament, we see four principles as particularly relevant.

Let me comment briefly on each of them.

Principle 3: Independence of parliamentarians

While we understand the principle to be constructed in the negative - that is, parliamentarians must be able to carry out their functions free from unlawful interference - we think positive measures are also required to fulfil this objective.

Parliamentarians must be sufficiently resourced to carry out their democratic business, inside and outside the parliamentary chamber.

And they must be free from all threats of harm.

Principle 7: Accountability mechanisms

Adequate resourcing in the form of staff and access to independent information and analysis is required to enable the executive to be properly held to account.

Principle 8: The law-making process

As with principle 7, resources are required to support the participation of every parliamentarian in a robust law-making process, including training for new members.

Principle 9: Oversight of Government

As with the other principles, the participation of parliamentarians in oversight requires the provision of adequate support to effectively participate in scrutiny functions inside and outside the parliament.

You will note from my comments that we don't think advancing any single principle wholly falls within the remit of the review.

But we feel very strongly that the objective underlying the Latimer House Principles - strong and enduring democracies across the Commonwealth of nations - wholly aligns with our task.

We also recognise that questions about what decisions should be made by the Executive and what decisions should be made by the parliament with respect to resourcing is a matter with which we must contend.

Some submitters to the review, including the Centre for Public Integrity, have urged us pay particular attention to this issue.

While this review is caused, in part, by statutory review requirements contained in three separate pieces of legislation, the review in this form was commissioned by the executive, not the parliament.

The Acts of Parliament we are reviewing are administered by Commonwealth agencies, not parliamentary departments.

And we are directly supported in our work by public servants, not parliamentary officials.

Nevertheless, we bring to this task a clear understanding of the need to support the work of the parliament - and defend it, where necessary.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to end where I began.

Last week's attack on Dr Haines outside her electorate office has shocked and saddened everyone.

There have been more reported security incidents at electorate offices around the country this week.

The House of Commons has tragically been witness to the murder of two serving Members and the alleged murder of a former Member over the past decade.

The Australian Federal Police recorded over 1,000 threats directed at Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff in the last financial year alone.

We know from our own experience, and have heard during our consultations, that Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff are increasingly concerned about their own safety and the safety of their colleagues.

In 2021 the Set the Standard report by then Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins presented the opportunity to reset the safety culture at Australian Parliament House and other Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces.

It's undeniable that progress has been made in that regard.

Yet improving standards of behaviour, increasing psychological support, enhancing training and acknowledging the role of leaders in culture-setting - each essential to improving parliament as a workplace - is not enough.

No parliamentarian or staffer should fear for their safety just for doing their job.

We need to find ways to make Commonwealth parliamentarians and staff safer at work - not just in relation to responses to threats but in the way administrators provide offices and services and support safer work practices.

This can only happen if the Commonwealth Parliamentary Support System is actually focused on the needs of parliamentarians and their staff.

Making recommendations to help achieve that end is the job before the review.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to join you here today.

Thank you.