



DEPARTMENT of the
HOUSE of REPRESENTATIVES

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ALUMNI *Newsletter*



Clerk's Message

Dear Alumni

I am pleased to be able to provide a message for your newsletter. I trust that you have been able to avoid the worst of the turmoil of 2022.

Since my last message, the report of the Australian Human Rights Commission's Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces (Jenkins Report) has been finalised and presented in the House (30 November 2021). I understand that some of our former staff were interested in contributing to the inquiry process, and I thank you for continuing to take an active interest in the prosperity of our workplace.

The Jenkins Report contains 28 recommendations to be implemented over two years. The parliamentary departments are involved in implementing the recommendations, and once they are fully implemented the parliamentary service is likely to have expanded through the establishment of new offices involved in various support functions for persons working at Parliament House and other parliamentary workplaces. For those of you interested in following progress, this page on the Parliament's website might be of interest [https://www.aph.gov.au/About Parliament/Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Leadership_Taskforce).

You will understand our strong focus on the general election due soon. Based on public statements, we anticipate dissolution of the House shortly after the Treasurer hands down the Budget, scheduled for 29 March. Our staff have been contributing to the many reports from House and joint parliamentary committees presented already this year, with more likely in Budget Week.

Another sign that the end of the Parliament is soon, is the number of members making valedictory remarks, and I flag that some long-serving members you might have worked with are leaving; Mr Warren Snowdon (Lingiari: 1987) and Mr Joel Fitzgibbon (Hunter: 1996) made remarks in the last sitting week, and Mr Kevin Andrews (Menzies: 1991) and Mr Tony Smith (Casey: 2001) are expected to make remarks in Budget Week. Should you wish to reminisce, you can tune in for these sessions [https://www.aph.gov.au/Watch Read Listen](https://www.aph.gov.au/Watch_Read_Listen).

Depending on meeting requirements, we are hoping it will be possible to hold an alumni reception during the election period. Until then, be safe and – to quote a former Clerk – choose optimism!

Claressa Surtees
Clerk of the House



months of 2022, there is the terrible situation in Ukraine, and as we write, the devastating floods along the eastern part of the country. We hope that all members of the Alumni and families are safe and well.

2021 did not prove to be the return to normal that we had all hoped for, and there still remains a degree of unease in many parts of the community. While the focus has not been so much on infection numbers but rather hospitalizations, the virus continues to circulate and daily infections here in the ACT continue to be at (for us) high levels. Hopefully you are all well, and that the virus has not had too negative an effect on you and your family.

The last AGM was held in November 2019, and in the absence of a further meeting, we have continued as co-chairs, with Jim Pender (newsletter) and Dean DaCosta (secretary) also continuing in their roles. We have given a great deal of thought to when we should hold the next AGM and have a get together, and with an abundance of caution, have decided to postpone any decision until after the election has been called. The Clerk has indicated she is very happy to continue to support the Alumni and we thank Claressa and DHR staff for their ongoing support and assistance.

Until then, stay safe, look after yourselves, and we will be in touch when dates have been set.

Joanne Towner and Mike Salkeld

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A message from the co-chairs

There is an old Chinese curse that goes along the lines of "May you live in interesting times". Well, we certainly are doing that. 2021 gave us Omicron, new lockdowns, boosters, RATS and now in the first

Where are they now?

We find one of our Alumni colleagues to see what he is up to.

KEITH JOHNSON

Hello, I'm Keith Johnson

I began work in the Department of the House of Representatives in 1998 but how this came to be is another story...

During the 1970s and 80s I worked in various departments of the ACT Government, having moved from Sydney to Canberra with the Commonwealth Office of Education in 1969. Amongst these roles was the position of Administrative Officer with the ACT Advisory Council. The Advisory Council was not a legislative body but a selection of members of the community who provided advice to the head of the ACT Public Service. The organisation would eventually be disbanded and replaced with the ACT House of Assembly.

The ACT House of Assembly was also an advisory but not a legislative body. The elected members appointed one of its number as a President and the remainder participated in various committees. It had a Clerk and Deputy Clerk and I held the positions of Administration Officer and Serjeant-at-Arms from 1980 to 1986.

During my time at the Assembly, one of the people to act as Clerk for a period was Jim Pender - who I had met through another colleague - who also had relocated to Canberra from Sydney, albeit a few years after me.

The ACT House of Assembly was the forerunner to self-government in the ACT and was prorogued in 1986. I then returned to the ACT Public Service. When self-government was announced by the Hawke Labor Government in 1989 an election was held for members of the ACT Legislative Assembly and positions to support the Assembly were advertised. I applied for and

was successful in filling the position of Serjeant-at-Arms in 1989 and I remained in that position until 1996 when I took early retirement. Don Piper had an early stint as Clerk and eventually Mark McRae was appointed as Clerk with Tom Duncan his Deputy.

After some time of doing nothing much in retirement I received a call from Jim Pender who at the time was Clerk Assistant (Table). Jim asked me if I would be interested in doing some proof reading of Parliamentary records from Hansard with another retired fellow. I questioned Jim as to how long this 'reading' would take and Jim advised that it could take up to 12 months depending on how quickly we got through it.

During my 'reading' period there was another attendant attached to the Table Office (Trevor Nairn) who was retiring and I was asked if I would be interested in taking on the position of Table Office Attendant which I did. The Table Office needed their own attendant rather than relying on attendant staff attached to the Serjeant's Office. This was for a variety of reasons, including the need for documents to go into, or be retrieved from, the Chamber immediately. There was also a need for immediate delivery of papers to a member's or Minister's Office with no time to wait for an attendant to arrive. Another task in those days was the archiving of *Votes and Proceedings* in the House of Representatives basement, a fairly time-consuming task!

In the 1990s all Ministers, Members and senior officers were delivered the days' *Notice Paper* and *Daily Programme* (the 'Blue') by the Table Office Attendant and invariably these documents did not arrive in the Table Office at the same time so a lot of my



▲ Keith Johnson

time prior to the House sitting was taken up delivering these documents around the building. In addition to the days' sitting papers, the program staff prepared procedural documents for those Ministers who were presenting legislation and these needed to go to those recipients urgently.

I thoroughly enjoyed my years working in the Department and particularly the Table Office. Parliament House itself is a beautiful building and truly a great place to work. However I thought since I was approaching my 79th birthday it was time to give it away. Even now though, after 12 months in retirement, I sometimes wish I was still there! However after living in Canberra for 50 years my wife Margaret, and I, decided to move to Port Macquarie NSW to enjoy the sun and the surf. 🌿

FURTHER INFORMATION

For any further information on alumni events or information please contact email - DHRalumnisec@gmail.com, Alumni.reps@aph.gov.au or go to the blogspot - <http://dephouseofrepsalumni.blogspot.com.au/>.