

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee— Additional Budget Estimates February 2009

Parliament Portfolio, Department of Parliamentary Services

Answers to Questions on Notice

Topic: Perceived risks of building occupants, reason for scanning

Question P10, Hansard reference F&PA 32

Senator PARRY—The question is: what is the perceived risk of a senator, a member or a staff member entering on the daily basis, who have obviously gone through some form of security clearance in the first instance in order to be here? There must be a perceived risk, otherwise we would not be doing this. So what is the perceived risk?

...

Mr Kenny—We might have to take this on notice because you are asking about things that go back quite a long time. Certainly I can recall coming into this building and being scanned before 2001. So, regarding the process by which those decisions were taken, the risk assessments that were made and all the analysis—I would presume by agencies outside this building as well—we would have to go through our files.

...

Senator FIFIELD—Indeed. Anyway, it would be useful to go back to find out what the rationale is— whether it is because of perceptions of discrimination or whether it actually goes to genuine issues of security. **Mr Kenny**—As I said, we can take the history on notice. What I can tell you is that I am not aware of there being any distinction based on the side of the House or the side of the building. That is based on recalling discussions at the security management board, which, as the Clerk of the Senate said earlier today, is the committee under our legislation responsible for providing advice to the Presiding Officers on security in the building.

Answer

1 Entry screening requirements have evolved over the years. Prior to 11 September 2001 (9/11), holders of parliamentary photographic passes were not subject to security screening and pass verification, owing to the perceived relatively low-threat environment existing at the time. Following the events of 9/11, a heightened security threat assessment saw the introduction across Commonwealth agencies of increased security and access control arrangements. One of the arrangements put in place at Parliament House was the security screening of all persons (excluding Senators and Members) entering the building. Another was the requirement to electronically verify passes upon entry to the private areas of the building. The screening of Senators and Members was not thought to be necessary following the implementation of the new access control measures implemented immediately after 9/11.

2 In December 2002, the Presiding Officers wrote to the party leaders in both Houses (including the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition), certain Ministers, Party Whips, and independent and minor parties Senators and Members, outlining additional security measures to be put in place at Parliament

House as a result of the Presiding Officers' accepting the recommendations contained in the Review by the Parliamentary Service Commissioner of aspects of the administration of the Parliament, including security matters.

3 Only two responses raising concerns to the matters outlined in the Presiding Officers' letter were received and, on 5 February 2003, the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives made statements in their respective Chambers informing Senators and Members of the additional security measures to be put in place, which included the screening of all persons entering Parliament House, including Senators and Members. The Presiding Officers' decision to implement a range of additional security measures had earlier been supported by the Appropriations and Staffing Committee on 18 November 2002.

4 The reasons given by the Presiding Officers for this decision included the perception—voiced by a number of Senators, Members and staff—that there was inequitable treatment of building occupants. Also, screening of individuals, and their personal equipment and luggage, provided an element of confidence that prohibited items are not being introduced into Parliament House and reduced the concern that an item may have been placed into an individual's belongings, either by accident, by design or by coercion. The Presiding Officers reasoned that the same risk applied to the luggage and effects of Senators and Members. The Presiding Officers expressed the view that one of the greatest challenges in security was the need to reduce the level of apathy of some who work at Parliament House.

5 The introduction of security screening of Senators and Members commenced on 10 February 2003

6 The Parliament House Security Management Board has recently approved a security risk review to be conducted by the Attorney-General's Department (Protective Security Coordination Branch). The review will examine the appropriateness of the current protective security measures and risk-mitigation strategies in place at Parliament House, in the context of the current alert and threat levels. It is expected that, following this review, the Security Management Board will be able to report to the Presiding Officers on the appropriateness of security arrangements, including any further mitigation strategies to be considered, or areas where current security arrangements may be altered.