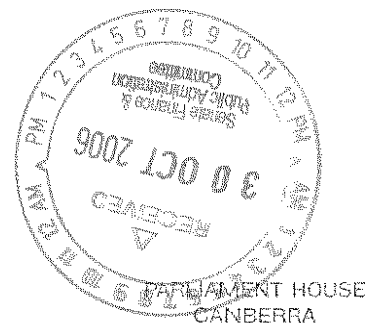


PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE



Senator Ursula Stephens  
Senator for New South Wales  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

27 OCT 2006

Dear Senator Stephens

*Ursula,*

I refer to the question you asked me in the Senate on 19 October 2006 about Parliamentary Security Service (PSS) treatment of Micah Challenge participants seeking to enter Parliament House in the preceding few days.

I am advised that Micah Challenge participants entered Parliament House on a number of occasions during 16, 17 and possibly 18 October, and that some of the particular events you mentioned took place on some of those occasions. However, I am also advised that other elements of your comments do not accord with the recollections of PSS and other security staff of the Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS).

It would seem, on the advice that has been provided to me, that the person who gave you information which you then included in your statement in the Senate has conflated a number of different events.

I should first point out that there are Presiding Officers' *Guidelines for Protests and Demonstrations in the Parliamentary Precincts, Federation Mall and Adjacent Areas*, which followed the recommendations of a joint parliamentary committee some years ago in a report entitled *The Right to Protest*. During the year, many different groups routinely obtain permission to conduct protests, and in obtaining authorisation, advance notice is naturally provided to both the Australian Federal Police and the Parliamentary Security Service.

The Micah Challenge event in the Authorised Assembly Area on 16 October had not sought approval for their protest, and had taken both the AFP-Protection contingent and the PSS by surprise. This probably meant that PSS officers dealing with participants in this event were uncertain about the group's intentions generally, and accordingly may have been more sensitive than usual to the actions of the participants in seeking to enter Parliament House.

There was at least one occasion when PSS officers refused to allow the Micah Challenge participants to bring bulk mail into the building through the Main Front entrance. This is because bulk mail is required to enter Parliament House through the Loading Dock, where it undergoes individual screening by PSS officers trained in detecting "white powder" and other suspicious contents. Although unsealed mail such

as postcards could be adequately screened through the Main Front entrance, it would have had to be screened in small batches, which would have unduly delayed other people seeking to enter the building through that entrance.

You may know that for at least the last two years, individual items of mail or packages for any building occupant, including Senators or Members, has no longer been accepted at the Main Front, Senate, House of Representatives or Ministerial entrances unless the addressee or a personal staff member of the addressee comes to the item. In other cases, all such items are re-directed to the Loading Dock, where specialist equipment for mail screening exists.

Because of their uncertainty about the intentions of the Micah Challenge participants, PSS officers also initially asked the participants to cloak their folders of material before entering the building. I understand that this request was withdrawn following an explanation about the intended use of the material and consultation by PSS officers with a senior Security Section manager.

There were several occasions on which Micah Challenge participants were delayed in seeking to enter Parliament House. In some cases some or all of this delay was caused by PSS officers seeking advice from supervisors, and I would not criticise the PSS officers for seeking that advice in any case in which they are personally uncertain about how to deal with a particular issue. The PSS officers concerned have advised me that in no case did seeking advice cause delays of half an hour, and in particular they do not accept that on any occasion there was "at least half an hour of questioning" before they called for supervisors.

I am advised that, in other cases, some or all of the delay was caused by the Micah Challenge participants having to wait while sponsors came from the private areas of the building to sign them in with Unaccompanied Visitor passes.

As to the suggestion in your statement to the Senate that "the event had already been approved by security weeks in advance", that is not the case. As previously mentioned, the usual approach for protests in the precincts was not followed. The only aspect of the event that had been approved in advance by anyone on behalf of the Parliament was the Speaker and I agreeing sometime before to an associated art exhibition being held in the Presiding Officers' Display Area.

Indeed, this event was itself a cause of some difficulties at the Main Front entrance, because although the exhibition had been approved, there had been no prior indication that part of the exhibition involved "living statues" created using fabric and paint on the day. It is hardly surprising that PSS officers, confronted by visitors seeking to enter Parliament House with large pieces of fabric and cans of paint, delayed the visitors while they sought confirmation that these items could safely be allowed into the building.

I understand that, in conflating various events, the person or people who spoke to you about this said that they had felt 'intimidated'. However, neither anything in your description of events, or anything in the events as described by the PSS officers, reasonably merits such a description.

I regret that some of the Micah Challenge participants were inconvenienced by some aspects of the security arrangements in place in Parliament House. However, I

suggest that future events planned for in and around Parliament House would run more smoothly in all respects if the organisers contacted DPS staff in advance to discuss all aspects of their planned events. This would avoid inconvenience both for Micah Challenge participants and for Parliament House security staff.

I appreciate this is a complex matter, but had I been provided more information, I would have been in a better position to respond in the Senate. Please always feel free to call on me, telephone me or write to me on any such matters of concern – I always endeavour to follow up such matters as swiftly as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul Calvert". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Yours sincerely".

(Paul Calvert)