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# Planting the seed: The Importance of Parliamentary Procedure Education for Members of Parliament and the Opportunity to Inspire During Induction Processes

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**Abstract:** Members of parliament are elected from the community and do not necessarily enter parliament with an understanding of the legislative process or parliamentary law and procedure. There is no requirement for members of parliament to be qualified in parliamentary procedure nor to attend courses or training sessions on these topics; to do so is of the members' own motivation and initiative. This article examines the role of a member through three categories: representative, political and parliamentary, and argues that the parliamentary role is not given equal attention as the other two. The Northern Territory Legislative Assembly is used as a case study, and other illustrations are drawn from the federal and Western Australia jurisdictions. As members are not employees, parliamentary departments and Clerks have limited power in influencing a member's engagement with parliamentary education. Recognising these limitations, this article ultimately encourages the importance of inspiring members to engage with, learn and seek further education in parliamentary procedure and that the parliamentary role is more integral to the representative and political roles than first assumed. It is identified that the induction process of a new parliament is an opportune time to sell this message.

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## INTRODUCTION

Coghill,<sup>2</sup> Lewis,<sup>3</sup> and Steinack,<sup>4</sup> among other notable researchers have analysed the training members of parliament ('MPs') receive for their unique role, which does not come with a clear job description and has many barriers to effective prioritisation of education.<sup>5</sup> Current literature focuses on training of an MP's whole role. This article explores the attention given to MPs' training, understanding, and engagement with parliamentary procedure and its role on the Chamber floor of lower Houses or unicameral parliaments. The rules of debate are complex and are not easy to pick-up *correctly* through exposure alone, despite some believing it may be.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is important we consider how MPs are taught parliamentary procedure and what priority they give it compared to their representative and political roles. To help explore current approaches to integrating parliamentary procedure into induction programs for MPs in Australia, a case study approach will be adopted with the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory forming the focus of this article. Ultimately, this article contends that whilst there are ample opportunities for MPs to improve their procedural knowledge, parliamentary departments can help build incentive for MPs to do so by emphasising the importance of parliamentary procedure during induction programs.

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<sup>5</sup> Colleen Lewis, 'Barriers to Prioritising Education and Training for Parliamentarians: Role Complexity and the Media'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(3) 2012, pp. 699–714.

<sup>6</sup> Katrin Steinack, 'Between Apathy and Enthusiasm: An International Comparison of MPs' Attitudes Towards Parliamentary Training'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(3) 2012, pp. 547–548; Colleen Lewis, 'Why are Professional Development Standards for New and Returning Federal MPs so Inadequate?'. Accessed at: <<https://theconversation.com/why-are-professional-development-standards-for-new-and-returning-federal-mps-so-inadequate-62956>>.

## MEMBERS' ROLES

This article will categorise an MP's role into three sections and examine the emphasis they place on each. MPs have a unique occupation that is constitutionally founded and multifaceted in practice and purpose. Their jobs, and how they execute them, can be broken down into different categories to conceptualise their reality. For example, Wright<sup>7</sup> prescribes MPs with six personality types: lickspittles, loyalists, localists, legislators, loners and/or loose cannons. Müller<sup>8</sup> suggests a binary grouping of MPs based on utility function as either a 'populist' or a 'policy success-seeker'. MPs can also be simply grouped as legislator, scrutiniser, and representative.<sup>9</sup> As other authors have categorised and grouped MP roles, this article will discuss MPs in relation to their representative, political and parliamentary roles.

- **Representative role:** MPs are elected as a representative for a community of people, which is the cornerstone of democratic society. Being a good representative is important for an MPs' re-election, public image, and success. It is not uncommon for the representative identity to be the top-ranking priority.<sup>10</sup> Steinack's article supports that MPs highly value their representative role and can be resistant to training for fear of it impacting their representative duties.<sup>11</sup>
- **Political role:** 'MPs are essentially party animals and enter the House with a natural tendency to support their party'.<sup>12</sup> Even MPs' votes on bills and motions can be more aligned with their party than their personal or electoral interests. For example, the Labor party immediately removes MPs from the party for

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Wright, 'What are MPs for?'. *The Political Quarterly* 81(3) 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Markus Müller, 'Motivation of Politicians and Long-term Policies'. *Public Choice* 132(3/4) 2007, p. 274.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis, 'Why are Professional Development Standards for New and Returning Federal MPs so Inadequate?'

<sup>10</sup> Wright, 'What are MPs for?', p. 302; Ken Coghill, Colleen Lewis and Katrin Steinack, 'How Should Elected Members Learn Parliamentary Skills: An Overview'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(3) 2012, p. 510.

<sup>11</sup> Steinack, 'Between Apathy and Enthusiasm', pp.548–550.

<sup>12</sup> Phillip Norton, 'Learning the Ropes: Training MPs in the United Kingdom', in Colleen Lewis and Ken Coghill (eds), *Parliamentarians' Professional Development: The Need for Reform*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016, p. 188.

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crossing the floor.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, MPs have interest and incentive in protecting their political identity.

- **Parliamentary role:** MPs are elected to participate in parliament on behalf of their constituents. Official parliamentary duties include learning and applying parliamentary procedure; participating in robust debate; passing legislation; working in committees and undertaking inquiries; scrutinising legislation and government, or the opposing party; and upholding Westminster traditions. The scope of this article will consider Chamber procedure only.

However, these categorisations are not exclusive of each other. The duties of an MP are not isolated tasks and the representative, political and parliamentary responsibilities occur concurrently. There is clear overlap between the representative and political roles. MPs advertise themselves based on their political party, values, community agenda and policy positions and this is (theoretically) why a constituent votes for their MP. Therefore, for an MP to act in the interests of their political role can mean they are likely acting in the best interests of the majority of their constituents. Naturally, the representative and political roles are intrinsically linked. Political messaging is crafted to appeal to the public and is intertwined with an MP's representative roles and interests. Is there overlap with the parliamentary role too? The NT case study below discusses why parliamentary procedure competes for an MP's attention against the representative and parliamentary roles. However, examples from Western Australia and the Australian House of Representatives, discussed below, demonstrate how parliamentary procedure is much more linked to the representative and political roles of an MP than MPs may realise.

Norton states that:

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<sup>13</sup> Territory Labor, 'Australian Labor Party, Northern Territory Branch, Constitution and Rules (as at May 2023)', 2023, p.15. Accessed at: <<https://www.territorylabor.com.au/media/1273/alp-nt-2023-constitution-rules.pdf>>.

*[t]he most significant challenge facing a new MP is not how to adapt to party norms and expectations, but rather gaining an understanding of the services, rules and procedures of the House.<sup>14</sup>*

This article contends that the parliamentary role is not always given the attention it requires in comparison to the other two. It seeks to explore the parliamentary procedure training options currently available and how to improve MP's parliamentary knowledge and training engagement. The case study of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory will be examined to analyse why this attention imbalance between roles may exist.

## CASE STUDY: LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

### *The Northern Territory Context*

**Question:** What do you get when you have a hairdresser, AFL football player, policeman, veteran, ex-Mayor, financial advisor, CEO, university lecturer, general manager, Aboriginal engagement officer, business owner, four teachers, three councillors, two tradesmen, two lawyers, and three public servants?<sup>15</sup>

**Answer:** A House of parliament!

The Northern Territory (NT) has a small and transient population of approximately 250,219,<sup>16</sup> but a strong sense of community. It has a relatively young parliament,

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<sup>14</sup> Norton, 'Learning the Ropes', p. 188.

<sup>15</sup> These professions represent the diverse backgrounds of the members of the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Northern Territory (as at January 2024). Territory Labor Members. Accessed at: <<https://territorylabor.com.au/our-team/territory-members/>>; Country Liberal Party Members of the Northern Territory Government. Accessed at: <<https://www.clp.org.au/our-team/>>; Wheeler Centre, 'Ngaree Ah Kit'. Accessed at: <https://www.wheelercentre.com/people/ngaree-ah-kit/>>; Mark Turner, LinkedIn Page, 14 January 2024. Accessed at: <<https://au.linkedin.com/in/markturnernt>>; Kezia Purick, LinkedIn Page, 14 January 2024. Accessed at: <<https://au.linkedin.com/in/keziapurick>>; Yingiya Mark Guyula, 'Biography'. Accessed at: <<https://www.yingiya.net/bio.php>>; Wikipedia, 'Robyn Lambey'. Accessed at: <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robyn\\_Lambey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robyn_Lambey)>.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance, 'Territory Economy'. Accessed at: <<https://nteconomy.nt.gov.au/population>>.

formed after commencement of the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978 (Cth)* and is still developing its procedure and precedent. Each electorate has approximately 5,000 constituents, but geographically these electorates span from a land mass of five<sup>17</sup> to 442,868 square kilometres.<sup>18</sup> The latter is larger than Germany with the current incumbent winning their seat by only seven votes.<sup>19</sup> The diverse community cross-section represented by the 25 MPs in the Assembly contextualises why parliamentary knowledge is a foreign concept to most new MPs, emphasising the importance of prioritising parliamentary procedural training.

MPs in the NT are given important parliamentary roles early in their political career. Customarily party Whips guide newly elected MPs into the Westminster system and on parliamentary practice.<sup>20</sup> However, in the NT, the position of Whip is often given to a new MP. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly, the last three Government Whips were MPs for 0 months; 2 and a half years; and 8 months each prior to becoming party Whip.<sup>21</sup> The first of these three became Speaker, and the second of these was Deputy Speaker before Whip. Additionally, an MP was appointed as a minister only 13 months into his political career.<sup>22</sup> The concept of senior parliamentary positions such as Whip and

<sup>17</sup> Northern Territory Electoral Commission, 'Division of Port Darwin'. Accessed at: <<https://ntec.nt.gov.au/electoral-boundaries/legislative-assembly-divisions2/division-of-port-darwin>>.

<sup>18</sup> Northern Territory Electoral Commission, 'Division of Barkly'. Accessed at: <<https://ntec.nt.gov.au/electoral-boundaries/legislative-assembly-divisions2/division-of-barkly>>.

<sup>19</sup> Northern Territory Electoral Commission, 'Barkly'. Accessed at: <<https://ntec.nt.gov.au/elections/past-elections/legislative-assembly/2020-territory-election/results/barkly>>.

<sup>20</sup> Norton, 'Learning the Ropes', p. 188; Christopher Johnson (ed), 'Comparative Study: Induction of New Members'. *The Table* 74(1) 2006, p.154.

<sup>21</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, 'Office Holders First to Fourteenth Assemblies (1974 to Current)'. Accessed at: <<https://parliament.nt.gov.au/members/previous-assemblies>>; Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, 'Members First to Fourteenth Assemblies (1974 to Current)'. Accessed at: <<https://parliament.nt.gov.au/members/previous-assemblies>>.

<sup>22</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, 'Northern Territory Government Ministries (Labor Party) Fourteenth Assembly, 8 September 2020–Present'. Accessed at: <<https://parliament.nt.gov.au/members/previous-assemblies>> ('Former Ministries – First to Fourteenth Assemblies, 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly'); Anabel Bowles, 'NTPA, CLP hit out at Brent Potter's promotion to Police minister in Cabinet Reshuffle'. *NT NEWS*, 31 October 2023. Accessed at: <[https://www.ntnews.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?sourceCode=NTWEB\\_WRE170\\_a\\_GGL&dest=https](https://www.ntnews.com.au/subscribe/news/1/?sourceCode=NTWEB_WRE170_a_GGL&dest=https)

minster being held by highly experienced MPs is not the case in the NT. MPs with sound procedural knowledge are limited in a small parliament and procedural education is even more paramount. How the NT context impacts on an MP's involvement with their representative, political and parliamentary roles will now be considered.

### *Representative Role in the Northern Territory*

MPs want to be seen as representing their community, through community engagement, social media and activities reported in the news. NT MPs have strong community connections and involvement as evidenced on social media or in most adjournment statements. They attend school assemblies,<sup>23</sup> community events,<sup>24</sup> international societies,<sup>25</sup> awards nights<sup>26</sup> and local park runs.<sup>27</sup> This level of engagement has become the norm and somewhat expected of MPs and a 'badge of authenticity and commitment'.<sup>28</sup> Significant time and energy is put into this representative priority, at the expense of other roles, including their personal one which is not discussed in this article.

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[www.ntnews.com.au/news/northern-territory/tpa-clp-hit-out-at-brent-potters-promotion-to-police-minister-in-cabinet-reshuffle/news-story/2fa2ec8eaf0d9b3f405cd4a552e9cb6b8&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium](https://www.ntnews.com.au/news/northern-territory/tpa-clp-hit-out-at-brent-potters-promotion-to-police-minister-in-cabinet-reshuffle/news-story/2fa2ec8eaf0d9b3f405cd4a552e9cb6b8&memtype=anonymous&mode=premium)

<sup>23</sup> J. Bowden, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 1 December 2021, p. 2884; G. Maley, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 16 February 2023, p. 5773; J. Burgoyne, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 10 November 2020, p. 332.

<sup>24</sup> L. Finocchiaro, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 30 November 2022, p. 4865.

<sup>25</sup> L. Finocchiaro, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 13 May 2021, p. 1859.

<sup>26</sup> B. Potter, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 12 October 2022, p. 4874.

<sup>27</sup> E. Lawler, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 10 November 2020, p. 334.

<sup>28</sup> Wright, 'What are MPs for?', p. 306.

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### *Political Role in the Northern Territory*

Politics are an inherent party of an MP's role. Politics certainly dominated in the NT minority government 12<sup>th</sup> Assembly, so much so that an iconic book has been written about it: *Crocs in the Cabinet*.<sup>29</sup> A recent example of politics being prioritised over parliamentary procedure is on 30 August 2023, the government agreed to the second reading of the opposition's Bail Further Amendment Bill 2023.<sup>30</sup> This enabled consideration in detail to commence. The government then defeated the bill during the third reading. An accepted parliamentary principle is that agreeing to the second reading is to be accepting the concept of the bill, which the government did not. The government may have used this tactic for political gain; an opportunity to scrutinise the opposition. The lack of an active committee system in the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly may also be attributed to political preference.<sup>31</sup> Evidently, NT MPs have strong affiliations with their political role to the extent it can impact on their parliamentary one.

### *Parliamentary Role in the Northern Territory*

Aboriginal people represent approximately 30% of the NT population.<sup>32</sup> Unique to the NT is the flexibility given to parliamentary procedure to accommodate Aboriginal culture. For example, pursuant to the 14<sup>th</sup> Assembly's Sessional Order 14,<sup>33</sup> after the Assembly adjourns it may continue with adjournment statements (not an adjournment debate). In practice, given the House is no longer meeting, decisions of the House such as leave for a non-minister to table a paper<sup>34</sup> cannot be granted during an adjournment

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<sup>29</sup> Ben Smee and Christopher A Walsh, *Crocs in the Cabinet. Northern Territory Politics: An Instruction Manual on how Not to run a Government*. Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Northern Territory, *Minutes of Proceedings for Meeting Number 87 on 30 August 2023*, 30 August 2023, p. 537.

<sup>31</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, 'List of Committees'. Accessed at: <<https://parliament.nt.gov.au/committees/list>>.

<sup>32</sup> Department of Treasury and Finance, 'Territory Economy'. Accessed at: <<https://nteconomy.nt.gov.au/population>>.

<sup>33</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, 'Sessional Orders and Orders of Continuing Effect'. Accessed at: <<https://parliament.nt.gov.au/business/standing-and-sessional-orders>>.

<sup>34</sup> Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, 'Standing Orders (4<sup>th</sup> Edition)'.

statement. Members have been denied their opportunity to seek leave to table a paper in this time.<sup>35</sup> However, when the Member for Mulka has sought leave to speak in Yolngu Matha, his Aboriginal language, under Order of Continuing Effect 3 during an adjournment statement, the House and Speaker are happy to forego the technicality that granting leave on this occasion is not possible and allow him to speak in Yolngu Matha.<sup>36</sup> The intersection of Westminster parliamentary procedure and Australian Aboriginal culture is one example where parliamentary procedure in the NT is not always adhered to. This article does not argue that in this case parliamentary procedure should have prevailed, but notes in the NT context MPs are willing to not uphold procedure in all circumstances. There are other examples of Aboriginal culture prevailing parliamentary procedure in the NT parliament that were publicly broadcast at the time. However, these occurrences were not captured in *Daily Hansard* and the NT broadcast is not publicly available for review. Consequently, these examples will not be discussed in this article. This raises an issue worth discussion on the accessibility of the parliamentary broadcast and the accuracy of the *Daily Hansard* in its editing style. This discussion is not within the scope of this article.

Clearly, MPs' representative and political roles are highly valued in the NT, and parliamentary procedure is leniently applied in matters of Aboriginal engagement. But legislation is passed and parliamentary debate is occurring. So why does the parliamentary role in the Chamber need more recognition and attention?

## **WHAT IS PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

### *What is Parliamentary Procedure*

Parliamentary law, including relevant provisions of the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* and enabling legislation, determines the framework of parliamentary

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<sup>35</sup> M. Turner, Northern Territory, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 28 October 2021, p. 2682.

<sup>36</sup> Y. M. Guyula, Northern Territory, *Draft Daily Hansard*, Legislative Assembly, 29 November 2023, p. 93.

procedure.<sup>37</sup> It is not easily changed, protected by (i) referendum or bill process and (ii) respect for upholding parliament's strong foundation.<sup>38</sup> In comparison, procedure consists of the rules and arrangements made by a House for discharging its constitutional functions within that legal framework.<sup>39</sup> Parliamentary procedure does not have one source, location, or reference point, but is established through legislation, Speakers' rulings, standing and sessional orders, conventions, Westminster tradition, and the practice of a given House.<sup>40</sup> Whilst each House shapes practice to suit its particular needs or preferred manner of operation,<sup>41</sup> the general principles of Westminster parliaments are similar. Parliaments tend to maintain core principles but differ in how items of business and rules are executed. Unlike the Constitution and enabling legislation, the House is free to modify its procedure by an order of the Assembly or by simply moving a suspension of standing and sessional orders to temporarily remove any rules that stand in the House's way of achieving its immediate goal. Parliamentary law is the toolbox and parliamentary procedures are tools, which are most useful when understood how to be used.

### *Why is Parliamentary Procedure Important?*

Parliamentary procedure protects democracy and ensures parliament operates in the manner intended by the MPs. Poor parliamentary knowledge can lead to unintended outcomes. Parliamentary laws and procedures 'are followed because they are part of tradition, because they are reasonable, and because they are essential to the working of a democratic system.'<sup>42</sup> Respecting these principles protects opposition and independent (minority) voices, allowing their criticism of government administration.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Charles Gordon (ed), *Parliamentary Practice: Erskine May's Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*. London: Butterworth & Co., 1983, p. 207.

<sup>38</sup> W. Ivor Jennings, *Parliament*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1948, p. 53; Gordon, *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, p. 207.

<sup>39</sup> Gordon, *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, p. 207.

<sup>40</sup> Gordon, *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, pp. 209–215.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon, *Erskine May's Parliamentary Practice*, p. 207.

<sup>42</sup> Jennings, *Parliament*, p. 53.

<sup>43</sup> Jennings, *Parliament*, p. 50.

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The minority is only protected by the shields and swords of parliamentary procedure to the extent that the members of the minority know how to use them. The rules of each House are subject to change by the will of the House, ‘but the essential principle remains unchanged; the practice of the House protects minorities from oppression by overpowering majorities’.<sup>44</sup> Each MP has the right to participate in the parliamentary process and represent their constituents. Correct application of parliamentary procedure protects democratic principles, which is why it is imperative procedure is appreciated, respected and understood. Poor procedural knowledge impacts the House’s integrity in upholding democratic principles, and misunderstanding can have undesired consequences for MPs’ representative and political roles, as illustrated in the examples below.

#### **LEGISLATIVE RISK EXAMPLE**

If parliamentary procedure is not entirely understood, important bills may not pass in time due to avoidable procedural mistakes. On 12 June 2013, the Western Australia Legislative Assembly government introduced the Insurance Commissioner of Western Australia Amendment Bill 2013. The purpose of the bill was to provide a payout of dividends and it was vital for the bill to pass through both Houses of the Parliament before the end of financial year, with only seven sitting days remaining for both Houses.<sup>45</sup>

On 20 June 2013, the Leader of the House moved a suspension of standing and sessional orders (SSSO motion) to allow the bill to move to the third reading without further debate or amendment, ensuring time for the bill to pass through the Legislative Council before the end of financial year.<sup>46</sup> Whilst the division results on the SSSO motion were 28 ayes and 15 noes, the government failed to achieve an absolute majority of 30 as required for a SSSO motion.<sup>47</sup> Much to the Treasurer’s shock, the government did not pass the bill through both Houses before the financial year

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<sup>44</sup> Jennings, *Parliament*, p. 54.

<sup>45</sup> Parliament of Western Australia, ‘Insurance Commission of Western Australia Amendment Bill 2013’.

<sup>46</sup> J. H. D. Day, Western Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 20 June 2013, p. 1969.

<sup>47</sup> The Speaker, Western Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 20 June 2013, pp. 1970–1971.

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concluded.<sup>48</sup> Had the government appreciated the absolute majority requirements for a SSSO motion, this could have been avoided. This demonstrates the legislative risk of a bill not passing in time due to procedural oversight.

#### **POLITICAL RISK EXAMPLE**

Misunderstanding or poor appreciation for the importance of parliamentary procedure can lead to undesired political outcomes. On 16 March 2016 in the Australian House of Representatives, both the government and opposition wished to move identical amendments to the Treasury Legislation Amendment (Repeal Day 2015) Bill 2016. Politically, both sides wanted their party's name on the record as the party that introduced these amendments. They were so keen that the broadcast footage shows both MPs talking over each other trying to seek the call before the Clerk had finished reading the bill a second time.<sup>49</sup>

The Speaker gave the call to the government minister, who sought leave to move all the amendments together. When leave was not granted, it appears that the minister failed to understand that the leave was required to depart from standing orders that require amendments to be read separately and allow him to read them together. Not having the procedural understanding of what he had sought leave to do, and failing to recognise he had other options, he sat down. The opposition member then stood for the call and sought leave to move the amendments together, which was also denied. However, he then continued with the opportunity missed by the government minister and moved each amendment individually. The *Parliamentary Record* reflects that the opposition's amendments were accepted by the House. Legislatively, there was no negative impact as the bill passed with the amendments desired by both parties; however, it does not appeal to a government member's political interests that the amendments are officially recorded as being those of the Opposition's.

With such political and legislative risks at stake, for an MP to prioritise their parliamentary role also supports their political and representative roles, resulting in

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<sup>48</sup> T. R. Buswell, Western Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 20 June 2013, p. 1971.

<sup>49</sup> 'House of Representatives [Part 1] 16/03/2016' (*Parliament of Australia*, 2016), at 0:13:05.

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less political and legislative mistakes. Can parliamentary departments increase MP engagement with their parliamentary role?

## CREATING INCENTIVE AT INDUCTION

### *Gaining Parliamentary Knowledge*

Increasing an MP's engagement with their parliamentary role can both improve the effectiveness of parliamentary debate and support MPs' representative and political interests. This message is best delivered to MPs in the induction process, to inspire MPs to continue to engage with parliamentary procedure education throughout their political careers.

As discussed above, MPs have limited knowledge of the complexities of parliamentary procedure when entering parliament. There are opportunities for MPs' parliamentary knowledge to improve. Most MPs are introduced/re-acquainted with parliamentary procedure at their initial induction after election, organised by their respective parliamentary departments.<sup>50</sup> After the induction, the Clerk of each House is well equipped and available to assist MPs in understanding and applying parliamentary procedure. Additionally, there are opportunities for further education through courses and conferences, for example via the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the CPA Parliamentary Academy<sup>51</sup>

Parliamentary procedure is complex; such that Clerks make a career out of their parliamentary expertise; therefore, ongoing training is important for continued improvement. However, it is the MPs that shape the parliament, its procedure and how it operates. MPs are responsible for the standing and sessional orders they create and amend, and their practice on how they apply them.<sup>52</sup> Greater MP education and understanding of parliamentary procedure empower the MPs to execute their parliamentary role more effectively, which in turn serves their representative and

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<sup>50</sup> Christopher Johnson (ed), 'Comparative Study: Induction of New Members' (2006) 74 *The Table* 132.

<sup>51</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, *Online Parliamentary Professional Development Courses 2022/2023* (2022).

<sup>52</sup> Charles Gordon (ed), *Parliamentary Practice*. London: Butterworth & Co., 1983, p. 207.

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political interests. Yet, exploring these opportunities for further parliamentary education is at the MPs' own discretion; the uptake of ongoing training in parliamentary procedure is at the will of the MPs themselves. Is mandatory training the answer to ensuring MPs are adequately trained in parliamentary procedure? A deeper discussion on mandatory training of MPs is beyond the scope of this article but the work of Lewis<sup>53</sup> and Steinack<sup>54</sup> provide some useful and relevant insights.

These authors explore the strongly held perception that parliamentary departments are apolitical bodies and as a result are distinct from MP offices and their staff. There is no direct employer of an MP, and all usual performance reviews are by the media, constituents, and fellow parliamentarians, both publicly and privately. MPs are aware of their special position, with one interviewee of Steinack's study saying:

*... I won't wear my pass around my neck only because I think I'm not a bloody employee. I won't put my pass through the automatic thing. I'm not clocking in. (...) I'm a member of parliament. This place exists to facilitate my role for my constituents.*<sup>55</sup>

Parliamentary departments have no direct control over the performance of MPs in executing parliamentary procedure correctly in the Chamber. Clerks may only guide or advise MPs when asked, during and outside meetings of the House. While initial orientation programs for new MPs attract high participation rates, attendance for follow-on sessions providing more thorough information is notoriously low.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the best opportunity a Clerk has to create incentive with MPs to engage with and care about parliamentary procedure and continue to attend training sessions offered is in the induction process.

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<sup>53</sup> Colleen Lewis: 'Compulsory Professional Development for Members of Parliament', in Colleen Lewis and Ken Coghill (eds), *Parliamentarians' Professional Development: The Need for Reform*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Steinack, 'Between Apathy and Enthusiasm'.

<sup>55</sup> Steinack, 'Between Apathy and Enthusiasm', p. 549.

<sup>56</sup> Steinack, 'Between Apathy and Enthusiasm', p. 547.

### *Induction to Parliament*

While still valuable in its own right, much of the exiting literature discussing MP training from the last decade and explores training for MPs' role as a whole,<sup>57</sup> their representative, political and parliamentary duties; however, very few study specifically MPs' education in parliamentary procedure. Further research specifically into the knowledge, understanding and training of MPs in parliamentary procedure would be a useful addition to the literature currently available.

In 2006, The Table published an editorial on how 22 jurisdictions induct their MPs after a general election.<sup>58</sup> It shows that induction processes are often seminars run for one to two days.<sup>59</sup> Training content is broad and covers topics from payment, staffing, entitlements, and the department through to parliamentary procedure.<sup>60</sup> Time constraints allow only the basics of parliamentary procedure and the swearing-in process to be covered. In the same article, the NT Legislative Assembly reported it holds a one-day induction with briefings on procedural and corporate matters.<sup>61</sup> Generally these content-heavy inductions are not memorable.<sup>62</sup> Carina Alves member of the States of Jersey Assembly reflects on her induction process, which was much longer than a few days:

*... we had two weeks of what was deemed 'training.' But for me, having been a teacher, it was just being 'talked up' for two weeks.*

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<sup>57</sup> See e.g. Colleen Lewis: 'Barriers to Prioritising Education and Training for Parliamentarians: Role Complexity and the Media' *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(2012), pp. 699–714; Colleen Lewis: 'Compulsory Professional Development for Members of Parliament', in Colleen Lewis and Ken Coghill (eds), *Parliamentarians' Professional Development: The Need for Reform*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016; Abel Kinyondo: 'Return of Training Investment in Parliaments: The Need for Change in the Pacific Region', *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(3) 2012, pp. 576–593; Lam Duc Nguyen: 'Training for Elected Representatives in Vietnam: Context, Approach, Process'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(2012), pp. 640–657.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, 'Comparative Study'.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, 'Comparative Study'.

<sup>60</sup> Johnson, 'Comparative Study'.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson, 'Comparative Study', pp. 114–115.

<sup>62</sup> Coghill, Lewis and Steinack, 'How Should Elected Members Learn Parliamentary Skills', p. 515.

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*And it was exhausting ... I learned a lot, but you can't take everything in when it's like that ... it did help, but it was intense ...*<sup>63</sup>

Some parliaments reported supplementing their traditional induction process with other learning techniques. For example, mock-sittings run by parliament staff are reported to have been undertaken in the Australian Senate with positive feedback.<sup>64</sup> Notably, parliamentarians who participated in mock-sittings during induction were superior in performance of their parliamentary role to those of senators who had not been offered role-play.<sup>65</sup>

Induction training is for all MPs, yet to make training accessible to all students it is regularly targeted at the lowest common denominator, the new MPs.<sup>66</sup> A Steinack interviewee shared it can be 'pretty boring for somebody who has spent 18 months working as a shadow ministerial advisor',<sup>67</sup> likewise for an experienced MP. Whilst this study was on attitudes to MPs' training on their whole role, it highlights why it is important to sell the significance of procedure in initial induction processes. New MPs must take parliamentary procedure seriously, and experienced MPs can be reminded that there is opportunity for improvement in their application, strategy and use of parliamentary procedure.

### *The Opportunity to Create Incentive*

Rarely does the Clerk and procedural support team of a parliament have all MPs together with the opportunity to provide parliamentary procedure education. The start

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<sup>63</sup> Carina Alves, Buchere Phillip Brighhtone, Alyson Queen, Mateo Lagimiri, Carly Maxwell and Cherie Morris-Tafatu, 'Parliamentary Professional Development: Participants Discuss their Experiences'. *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 45(1) 2022, p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> Coghill, Lewis and Steinack, 'How Should Elected Members Learn Parliamentary Skills', p. 515; Ken Coghill, Peter Holland, Ross Donohue, Kevin Rozzoli and Genevieve Grant, 'Professional Development Programmes for Members of Parliament'. *Parliamentary Affairs* 61(1) 2008, pp. 73–98.

<sup>65</sup> Coghill, Lewis and Steinack, 'How Should Elected Members Learn Parliamentary Skills', p. 515; Coghill, Holland, Donohue, Rozzoli and Grant, 'Professional Development Programmes for Members of Parliament', pp. 73–98.

<sup>66</sup> Steinack, 'Between Apathy and Enthusiasm', p. 551.

<sup>67</sup> Steinack, 'Between Apathy and Enthusiasm', p. 551.

of parliamentary term secures an opportunity to inspire MPs to take their parliamentary role as seriously as their representative and political priorities. As noted above, MPs are not employees; induction processes are overwhelming; MP procedural introductions are brief overviews which cannot teach all procedural nuances; and only MPs have the power to mandate their own training. The key message that MPs need to be sold during induction is:

*Parliamentary procedure is important. Parliamentary procedure must be taken seriously. Parliamentary procedure can have a significant impact on your representative and political priorities and, if used properly, will be advantageous.*

In order for induction experiences to be meaningful and high impact, MPs need to utilise the knowledge available to them at induction and take opportunities to further their procedural education, both initially and throughout their parliamentary careers. Through this process, greater application of parliamentary procedure can be developed and in turn support a robust and effective parliament. While some parliaments may already emphasise the value of parliamentary procedure during induction, this article highlights its importance and impact.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article commenced with a reminder of the three core priority roles for MPs – representative, political, and parliamentary – and used these roles as a basis for exploring the value of, and need for, targeted training programs for MPs. It builds from an understanding that the political and representative roles come naturally to most MPs, and both support an MP's public image. But reminds the reader that parliamentary procedure is also critically important, as demonstrated through discussion and examples. Lack of understanding of parliamentary procedure on the part of MPs can impact the other goals of an ambitious MP on the Chamber floor and in the broader community. For this reason, this article has argued that further thought needs to be given as to how to prioritise and integrate parliamentary procedure into induction training programs. This is because induction programs are an opportunity to encourage MPs to seek further procedural training and recognise its importance. However, responsibility to invest in parliamentary knowledge rests solely with MPs and their self-interest and motivation to do so. During induction seminars, parliamentary departments are encouraged to emphasise parliamentary procedure as a priority as it is a key opportunity for MPs to recognise the importance of their parliamentary

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education and seek further training. If parliamentary departments invest in and assist MPs in recognising the value of procedure, the priority imbalance between the three identities may balance out.