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THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON CARETAKER CONVENTIONS MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE HOBART ON TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2026.

The Committee met at 2.02 p.m.

CHAIR (Ms Badger) - Welcome to today's hearing of the House of Assembly Select Committee on Caretaker Conventions. Thank you for your attendance. We've got online joining us, Mr Garland, myself, in the room as Chair, Ms Badger; Mr Winter, Deputy Chair; and Mr Vermey as well. We have our Secretary and Hansard here for the broadcast as well. If you could please state your name and the capacity in which you are appearing before the Committee?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Hello, I'm Sharee Minnikin-Smith, and I'm here today as a witness.

CHAIR - Thank you. As you are aware, this is the second time that you have appeared before the Committee. With that in mind, you don't have to take the statutory declaration again, as you've already done it on your first appearance. However, I will just remind you of some procedural information regarding the Committee and this hearing. This hearing is covered by parliamentary privilege, allowing individuals to speak with the freedom without fear of being sued or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament. This protection is not accorded to you if statements that may be defamatory are repeated or referred to you outside of the parliamentary proceedings. This hearing is public. The public and media may be present. Should you wish for aspects of your evidence to be heard in private, you must make this request to the Committee at that time.

With all of that, if you like, you are welcome to make a short opening statement.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Thank you, Chair and Committee Members. Thank you for inviting me to appear again, for considering my further written submission, updated chronology and supporting documents. Since my previous appearance, I have carefully reviewed my text messages, employment records and instruments of appointment. Reconstructing the hours, travel and events of this period has been difficult and deeply distressing. However, it has also helped me identify matters concerning my employment arrangements that I believe require clarification.

My instrument of appointment shows that from 13 November 2023 until 10 April 2024, I was formally appointed as an adviser in the Office of the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, Leonie Hiscutt MLC. I performed duties for that Office for approximately two weeks. After that, the messages record that I received substantial day-to-day directions from Ms Jane Howlett, while my formal appointment remained with Ms Hiscutt's Office.

When the House of Assembly election was called, I was not instructed to return to the Legislative Council Office. I continued undertaking work at Ms Howlett's direction. I was not given a written variation explaining that arrangement of clearly identifying who held formal responsibility for directing and supervising my work. The messages record directions involving stakeholder contact, diary and email access, community engagement, extensive travel, door-knocking, social media content and campaign-related activity. They also show me

reporting completed work, seeking approval and responding to requests outside ordinary working hours.

I acknowledge that I was a Liberal Party member and that I volunteered for the party, as I had volunteered for many community and charitable organisations. However, I was also a paid parliamentary employee. I was not given clear guidance identifying when I was acting as an employee and when I was supposedly acting as a volunteer.

At the time, I understand that I was doing my job and following the directions given to me. Where my chronology refers to activities involving other candidates or community members, those references are included only because they form part of the duties I was directed to perform. I do not suggest that those people knew about my formal employment or reporting arrangements, and I will make no allegation against them.

The chronology also demonstrates the extent of the workload. On nine documented dates alone, the records indicate approximately 106 hours of activity and approximately 2220 kilometres of travel. From the 13th to the 15th of March 2024, they record approximately 42 hours and 812 kilometres over three consecutive days. These are examples only and do not represent the total work or travel undertaken throughout my employment. I worked hard and I tried to complete every task asked of me.

Once Ms Howlett had been elected and appointed as a minister, the demand for services remained clearly evident. I acknowledge that Ms Howlett works hard and maintains a demanding schedule, however, this raises an important question about whether it was reasonable or safe to expect an employee to sustain the same level of demand and pressure without clear boundaries, reporting arrangements and adequate support.

On the 1st of May 2024, while travelling to Agfest for work purposes, I fell and broke my arm in three places and sustained significant shoulder injuries. I commenced workers' compensation leave, although my records indicate that work-related contact continued during that period. Following my injury, I underwent physical rehabilitation. During the months that followed, I also received psychological treatment in relation to the distress I was experiencing. I explained to management that following my injury and the pressure of the working arrangement, I did not believe I could continue taking instructions from Ms Howlett or meet her demanding schedule. Following discussions with management, I recall being instructed to resign.

On the 27th of May 2024, I emailed the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) recruitment and management stating that I would not be able to accept the position as an adviser to minister Jane Howlett and that I formally resigned as of that day. My understanding was that another position would be sought for me. I subsequently received a telephone call from human resources advising that I would receive my final payslip and that my employment was ending.

I was later advised to retract my resignation because its consequences were not what I had understood or intended. My employment was subsequently reinstated under a different instrument. From the 3rd of July 2024, I was formally appointed as an electorate officer for Mark Shelton MP while continuing to work physically from Ms Howlett's electorate office in Sorell. This further illustrates why I am seeking clarification about the relationship between the office named in an instrument of appointment and the working arrangements operating in practice. I cannot know the intention behind the decisions concerning my appointment.

I asked the Committee to examine:

- why I was formally appointed to one office while being directed to perform substantial work from another person, including election-related activity;
- why I was not returned to the Legislative Council Office when the election was called or after parliament resumed; and
- whether the distinction between publicly funded duties and voluntary campaign activities was properly communicated.

I do not always show outwardly the full extent of the distress I'm experiencing. I tend to continue working, meet expectations and try not to let people down, even when I'm under significant pressure.

After raising my concerns through the channels available to me, I expected greater understanding, clearer support and a safer response. I remain extremely disappointed that the significant time, effort and commitment I gave to the role were not properly recognised.

I hope my evidence assists the Committee in establishing clearer appointment and reporting arrangements, proper boundaries between publicly funded work and election campaigning, and a safe process through which parliamentary staff can question directions or seek independent advice without placing their employment or wellbeing at risk. Thank you.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for sharing that. Just before we get started, as a reminder for yourself and members as well, of course, the House has permitted us an extension of our terms of reference to encompass the 2024 election as well. We are empowered to look at caretaker conventions and other matters and policy around that space as well, but there are still some matters in relation to the workplace there, some of which you've just briefly touched on, which are just out of our scope but everything else is right and we have that removal of doubt around 2024 as well.

Before I hand over to other Members, there was just one point of clarification I was hoping we could touch on from your last hearing in relation to an email that came from your parliamentary account. We heard from yourself, our understanding of it, that you were directed to send that from your parliamentary account. However, Ms Howlett's evidence and the text messages that were provided by yourself later on didn't say that it was directed but it had come from your parliamentary account and how could that be corrected. I was wondering if you could please start with a clarification in that space or any correction of the record that has to happen?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I recall at the time Ms Howlett wanted that particular document to be sent to the Tasman Peninsula, but the information that I received did not have a letterhead. I think you would have seen in the further text messages I provided that I was questioning that and that I'd copied - I think Ms Howlett had commented in a way that, you know, she still wanted it to go ahead, so I copied and pasted the letterhead so that was able to be sent. Then, obviously, through telephone calls, she still wanted it to be sent. Then when I realised - and she knew at the time that I was working from the laptop that would have come from the parliamentary email but I sent it, I guess, out of - you know, I was instructed to send

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it. It was late at night and it was just before the election, so there really wasn't any point, but she still wanted it to be sent. So, I just sent it and then realised, 'Oh no, it's from my parliamentary email.' So, I contacted her but I didn't hear anything. I contacted management and was told not to worry about it, nothing will happen.

CHAIR - Thank you. You spoke about it in your first hearing as well and again today and we heard a bit from Ms Howlett as well in relation to - obviously, you've done a fair bit of work for the Liberal Party prior to your employment under [Ministerial and] Parliamentary Services. In terms of helping us better differentiate between what might have been, if any, volunteer work versus employment work, would you have any kind of estimate or perhaps you could take it on notice, in terms of how much volunteer hours or work you would have been doing for the Liberal Party prior to taking up employment?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yeah, okay. It really wasn't that long before. I think it was Ms Howlett's suggestion when I was working for the Director of the Liberal Party that I became a Liberal Party member. I hadn't had anything really to do with politics. So I took that on and further on I became Secretary of the Prosser Branch, but never at that time - I thought that it would continue to be more of an instructive membership rather than me voluntarily wanting to be a member of the Liberal Party. I took on the role as I would any other community charitable organisation and I did it well. Like I said, it wasn't until I was burnt out that I decided to resign from that position.

CHAIR - You wouldn't have, off the top of your head or readily at hand, the rough hours you might have volunteered for the Liberal Party back in that time?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It wasn't a lot because it was all around Ms Howlett's work schedule. It was already, it was - everything that I did was for her. So, it wasn't really, I wouldn't say - it was probably one Saturday where there were other members that were doorknocking in Brighton, so maybe that you could call it voluntary, but it was still a request from Ms Howlett.

Mr VERMEY - How long were you an actual Liberal Party member?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I'd say it would be from 2023. I haven't paid my last year's membership.

Mr VERMEY - Did you attend Branch meetings and stuff, just as yourself to go along?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I attended with my husband most of the time.

Mr VERMEY - When that email was sent, you didn't directly - you sent it from the account, but it was a mistake; you didn't mean to actually do that. That was just a mistake, wasn't it?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yeah, I take responsibility, but it was still directed by Ms Howlett, and you can tell why -

Mr VERMEY - We've all made mistakes.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, absolutely.

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Mr WINTER - Thanks for being here. I just want to echo what the Chair said in terms of, you've been through a lot, and I'd love to ask you a wider range of questions, but we've got to stick to our terms of reference, which is why we will focus on just those issues. But I really appreciate you being prepared to share them. I understand the Premier's made a commitment now to investigate some of these things and certainly I hope that you're able to get some resolution through that process and also through this process.

The crux of the issue that the Committee's dealing with now is the evidence from Ms Howlett, who gave evidence that you were merely volunteering for her and that you weren't working for her. That's sort of the crux of what I want to understand today. So, if we go back to your original appointment, working for Ms Hiscutt formally; you signed an instrument of appointment in November. Can you explain to the Committee what the conversation was and at what point you were told that you should take direction from Ms Howlett if that happened at all?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It wasn't clear. I assumed when I was appointed to that position that, like I said, I would be returning to the Legislative Council when parliament resumed in 2024. I started asking questions, but I didn't really get any clear answers and, like I said to you, I reached out to Ms Hiscutt a couple of times and it was more or less just that she was on leave, so if I received any phone calls that they'd be diverted to me, but I never received any.

Mr WINTER - Your evidence was that for the first two weeks of your appointment, you were in the Legislative Council, you're physically in the parliamentary building and then in your text messages that you've provided there's correspondence with Ms Howlett who says, 'Have you set up your desk and office in Sorell?' Can you talk to the Committee about how that conversation happened and how it was that you transitioned from being here in parliament to out to the Sorell Office?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, I was told that I could work in Jane's Office, Ms Howlett's, sorry, for the time that Ms Hiscutt was on leave, that it would be closer to home and, like I said, I'd be taking instructions still though from Ms Hiscutt's Office, but if there was any work that Jane - or Ms Howlett - needed, that I would perform those duties. So, my understanding was I'd be still performing the duties for Ms Hiscutt but at times, if I ever had time, that I would help Ms Howlett out.

Mr WINTER - But then from that point onwards, Ms Hiscutt said that she'd divert the phone to you -

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - but you never received any phone calls.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

Mr WINTER - So from the point in time when you transitioned and worked from Sorell, did you ever perform any duties for Ms Hiscutt?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

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Mr WINTER - Okay, so you've given us evidence in the past that 100 per cent of your work was done for Ms Howlett and you've now provided evidence with a lot of text messages. It documented 106 hours of campaign activity, 2,200 kilometres of travel, working exclusively for Jane Howlett. Is that correct?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, that's correct.

Mr WINTER - Ms Howlett, in her evidence to us, said:

Ms Minnikin-Smith was employed by Ministerial and Parliamentary Services. To be clear, in regards to her activities in her role at that time, she was not employed by me. She volunteered her services.

Is it correct to say that you were volunteering your services to Ms Howlett?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Not at all.

Mr WINTER - Do you believe that it's plausible that Ms Howlett might think that you were simply volunteering your time rather than working in a work capacity performing those functions?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - When I was obviously tired, she would say to me that things will get better; it won't be like this after the election. So, yes, I guess I didn't know any better, and I just performed the duties that she wanted me to do.

Mr WINTER - Do you think there's any possibility, though, that Ms Howlett legitimately thought that you were simply volunteering to help her rather than doing what you thought you were doing, which was working for her?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Well, I actually find it quite offensive that she would think that.

Mr WINTER - So, we've received that evidence from Ms Howlett that you were simply volunteering, but, again, you've provided evidence that there's an SMS text that says and I quote:

We have to do everything to keep our jobs.

Was there any other conversation around this actually being your job, to work for Ms Howlett?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - All the time. Yes, constantly, all the time, and I was asked if she was elected, would I continue on with her? That's why I spoke to management about it; I simply did not have any more in me to work for her under that demand.

Mr WINTER - There's a -

CHAIR - You can go one more -

Mr WINTER - Actually, I'll start a new line of questioning so you -

CHAIR - I'm just interested - you were obviously permitted to work in the Sorell Office. That's indisputable, based on what you've provided for us. I am just trying to play out how this might work, and I'm not sure how it works in terms of ministerial and Liberal staffing. Is it common for people to be working in different Members' offices, as you were, but working for a different Member? I'm thinking, is there a case where, although you were physically in the Sorell Office, there was an assumption that you were doing some online work for Ms Hiscutt at the time, and what you were doing for Ms Howlett was voluntary. Is that sort of common practice, where people are office-sharing and therefore there could've been a blurred line? Or it doesn't normally happen?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No, I've never seen that happen. All I've seen happen - what I thought would happen to me - is that if someone wanted to move on to another office or a different position, for whatever reason, that that's what happened. At the time, I was, you know, saying that it didn't need to be misunderstood; I just did not have any more capacity in my personal life to be able to work those hours for Ms Howlett.

CHAIR - Yes, and some of the evidence that you've provided over an extensive period of months is very much within work hours. You are getting requests from Ms Howlett that are quite clearly work-related. For example, there's one around obtaining some ABC and Southern Cross details to pass on to other people in the office. Is it, then, perhaps also common practice - I would assume that it is not a job that a Liberal Party volunteer would ever be doing in terms of coordinating media for an MP. Is that something also where other staff might be assisting a different MP in terms of who they're employed under to be doing on a day-to-day basis?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

CHAIR - No. Thank you.

Mr WINTER - In terms of that transition from when the writs were issued and Ms Howlett had to resign from being a Member of the Legislative Council, did anything practically change for you? You've been taking direction from Ms Howlett but then she was no longer a Member of Parliament at all. Did anything change, or did she continue giving you direction?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - The only thing that changed was, I would have to pull up while I was driving to upload a Facebook post. I didn't have an office to work from. So, I worked from my car. Like I said, if I was in transit, I was made to pull over and upload a Facebook post. Yes, I worked from many, many places over the Lyons electorate and on a broad spectrum.

Mr WINTER - The chronology shows that as early as the 14th, 16th and 20th of November 2023 - so that's within days of your starting date - Ms Howlett was instructing you to set up computer access at the Sorell Office, set up diary permissions, and then to send out regional Cabinet lists. Do you believe, at your appointment, that Ms Howlett thought you were going to be directed by her from that point in time?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Well, I started to wonder, like, the first two weeks, that I was receiving messages. Like I said, I was told that I would be working from that Office over the

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summer break, but it was more to access her emails and to be able to provide her with a database of invitations to one of the, I think it was the Southern Regional Cabinet.

Mr WINTER - Did anyone ever raise concern about these arrangements with you? Someone from the Premier's Office or MPS?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No-one.

Mr WINTER - No-one said to you, 'Look, you appear to be working for someone who's not even a Member of Parliament.' That was never raised?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Never, no.

Mr WINTER - I want to move on to some of the evidence around the Prosser election campaign as well, which was the election held soon after, so in May 2024. In your evidence, you provided evidence around your MPS contract, and you started working for Ms Howlett now after the election. She was appointed to be a minister, and you were appointed to work for her. Can you outline to the committee what your involvement was with the election campaign for Kerry Vincent in the electorate of Prosser?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Oh, back to the question before that, when you said, 'Did anyone from the Office -' There was one time and that's this time. I was asked by Ms Howlett to locate the Prosser database, and that was for Mr Vincent, who was a candidate for Prosser at the time. So, I just provided that, as I was instructed to do anything else for her, and it was just after that that Ms Howlett was - I think there was a couple of weeks before that she had to wait before she was actually formally elected, and then knowing what ministerial roles, or if she was going to get a ministerial role, that she said to me, 'While I'm sorting that out and sorting staff out, can you do this, do that, for Mr Vincent?' That was instructed by her.

Then I received a phone call from management, and I'd been asked to go in there, which I think I recall it was for the instrument appointment.

Mr WINTER - The Executive Building?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, the new one. I explained that I'd been instructed by Jane to be somewhere else for Mr Vincent, and then I was asked the question, 'What are you doing that for?' I said, 'I'm doing what Ms Howlett asked me to do.' Then she said, 'Oh, that's not okay.' I didn't really think anything of it, to be honest with you. Then it wasn't until she rang me back and said that she was going to talk to the Premier's Chief of Staff, because I shouldn't be doing that.

Mr WINTER - Do you know why you shouldn't have been doing that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No. I do now, yes.

Mr WINTER - What's your understanding of what the concern was?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - That I was being paid by [Ministerial and] Parliamentary Services, but, again, I'm actually working for another candidate of the Liberal Party.

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Mr WINTER - That's Mr Vincent?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

CHAIR - So you were also, for a time, Secretary of the Prosser Branch or group, whatever it's called?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

CHAIR - What timeframe was that, that you were in that role?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It really wasn't that long.

CHAIR - We might take it on notice, the exact dates, if we can, or thereabouts. That would be great.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, if you don't mind.

CHAIR - But it was not during the time of the Prosser election? I guess what we're trying to rule out is where - obviously you're in Ms Howlett's Office, and she might've said to you while you were there, and she's looking at you, 'Can you get me this Prosser database?' thinking it was something you might be able to do as Secretary and then was a blurred role.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No, it definitely wasn't for that. No.

Mr WINTER - Is the database a DPAC database or a Liberal Party database?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Ah. Um -

Mr WINTER - Did you access it from the parliamentary or from the DPAC -

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I accessed that from Ms Howlett's - I already had it from Ms Howlett. She'd already -

CHAIR - For her election campaign, not for her work?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes. For the election.

CHAIR - We might take it on notice as well, if you can find out for us whether that was a DPAC or a ministerial database or whether it was from the Liberal Party.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Sure.

Mr WINTER - You were just talking about the concerns that were raised with you by management. Can you be a bit more specific about who management was that were raising these concerns?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Am I able to say names? Is that okay?

Mr WINTER - Even if it's a bit more - the position title or -

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Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - The Manager of the Premier - female - she was the one that

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Mr WINTER - In the Premier's Office itself?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, the Premier's Office. She was the one that said that it wasn't okay. And I said, 'Well, what would you like me to do?' She said, 'I'll get back to you. I'm going to talk to the Premier's Chief of Staff.' I never heard anything. When I spoke to the Director of the Liberal Party, he also raised concerns because I'm actually assuming he thought I was volunteering, I wasn't getting paid, but I think - and then that phone call didn't come to anything after that either. So, either the Liberal Party or DPAC - I never heard anything. So, I was just - I don't take Mr Vincent accountable for any of this. He never instructed me to do anything. It was all from Ms Howlett.

Mr WINTER - Was there a period of time you were working exclusively on the Prosser campaign?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Well, I was, yes, because that's what Ms Howlett -

Mr WINTER - About how long?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I would say probably four weeks.

Mr WINTER - So, four weeks, and you were being paid by Ministerial and Parliamentary Services and exclusively campaigning for Prosser, is that correct?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - That's correct, yes.

Mr WINTER - Who instructed you to do that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Ms Howlett.

Mr WINTER - But, at the same time, there were concerns raised with you by the Premier's Office about whether this was the right thing to be doing?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - Do you think Mr Vincent was aware that you were being paid by Ministerial and Parliamentary Services?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I don't think he was. We didn't discuss anything like that. He never asked questions and, like I said, I just did what - Jane often would I guess - I guess because I knew the area, that's now why I'm thinking that's why they put me there. That's why I'm saying it. I wasn't asked by Mr Vincent at all. It was Jane - Ms Howlett - that would instruct me to go with him. There were times where she would override that because she needed me. There were times when I had agreed to go with Mr Vincent and then I would get a phone call from Ms Howlett to say, 'No, I need you'.

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CHAIR - Just for the clarity of evidence as well, at no point has there been any policy that was raised with you in relation to how you may or may not differentiate between being a member of a political party and being an employee under the State Service?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

CHAIR - Nothing like that? Thank you.

Mr WINTER - You said for about four weeks you were exclusively working on the Prosser campaign. What sort of campaign roles were you doing at that time?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It was mainly just calling into businesses - all the businesses that I'd been with Ms Howlett - and clubs.

Mr WINTER - Part of the evidence you've provided is around a workplace injury that occurred. Are you able to talk about what you were doing that day and the circumstances around the injury, if you're comfortable doing that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, sure.

CHAIR - Provided it was part of campaigning.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Once again, you know, the plan - and you can see by the text message the night before that evening where I didn't answer the message to Ms Howlett because I was extremely tired. I wanted to have dinner with my family because it'd been days and weeks since I'd pretty much spent much time with them. So I didn't answer her message and then I received a question mark, I think it was before 6 a.m. in the morning as if to say, 'Why didn't you answer me?', and then I left home earlyish to meet Mr Vincent, and I travelled with him to meet Ms Howlett at Agfest.

Mr WINTER - And there was a workplace injury -

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - On the way. We stopped to get something to eat at Ross, but I didn't make it to get something to eat because I fell and broke my arm in three places.

Mr WINTER - That was while you were with Mr Vincent?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - There's a workplace workers' compensation during that period of time. How did you handle the workplace workers' compensation issue?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It was difficult because Mr Vincent dropped me off at the Launceston General Hospital and when I spoke to the Director of the Liberal Party he said, 'It's okay. We'll take care of you.' I had to put his name down on the paperwork when I went in. It wasn't long after that that Ms Howlett - I don't think I took the phone call, but a little while later I was in emergency in a cubicle and having scans and an X-ray and I received a call from the Manager of the Premier abusing me because I shouldn't have put the Director on the forms and then I was to change them to DPAC and her contact from then on. My husband got a call from her to say to come and get me, so he drove up late at night. They paid for our accommodation

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for the night because it was quite late by the time he got there. We left early the next day because I was in so much pain and we drove to the Hobart Private Hospital, where they continued to do more scans and found that I had two other breaks, so that was three. They found one at the Launceston General Hospital and then they found another couple.

Mr WINTER - I'm sorry, I have to keep asking questions about this. Just around the form that you signed, was this a workers' compensation form?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - So, you were instructed to put down the Liberal Party in the first place and then scrap that form. Is that correct?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, that's correct.

Mr WINTER - Do you know what the reason or the concern was?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I do now.

Mr WINTER - I'm sorry I'm asking you to keep talking.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Once again, I was being paid by [Ministerial and] Parliamentary Services and I was campaigning for the Liberal Party.

Mr WINTER - And that was for Mr Vincent that day?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr VERMEY - Nothing really there. I just wanted to check if you were working for Jane over that period of time but there were certain times with Kerry Vincent at that stage - I don't think he - he wasn't a minister at that stage, was he, but I'm trying to make sure, minister or what to say -

CHAIR - Candidate.

Mr VERMEY - Well, candidate - but, the roles. How long were you actually working with him or assisting him? I'm not sure - if there was four weeks with her, but you were with him and he thought that you were a volunteer, I'm just a bit not sure of the timeframe on those.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - So, it would have been around here, if you look at the chronology, Ms Howlett was elected the 9th of April [2024]. A couple of days later, the ministerial portfolios were announced, so it would have been around mid-April, or early April, to the election, which was early May. For the Prosser.

CHAIR - For the Prosser election?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - Ms Minnikin-Smith, are you aware of the specific regulations about Legislative Council elections and the need to keep expenditure caps?

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Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, I am now.

Mr WINTER - Did you assist at all with Mr Vincent's electoral expenditure declaration to the Electoral Commission?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Sorry, do you mind - I don't understand that.

Mr WINTER - With the Legislative Council elections, there's a maximum limit that candidates can spend. Did you assist him with producing the expenditure?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

Mr WINTER - Do you know whether the expenditure of your time was included in his declaration to the Electoral Commission?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I don't know.

Mr WINTER - That's fine. I understand. In terms of the overall picture here, you've given us evidence now that the Premier's Office was aware of the highly irregular work that you were doing, so you were appointed by Ms Hiscutt but then almost immediately sent to Sorell and campaigned almost exclusively for, well exclusively, for Ms Howlett. Then after the state election was held, you were then almost immediately deployed to work for Mr Vincent, who also wasn't a Member of Parliament.

You've outlined some of the evidence around the Premier's office being aware of this situation and raising concerns about it, certainly to the point that you went to work for, or to assist, Mr Vincent. Were there any other conversations you had where people raised concerns with you, or you raised concerns, about these workplace arrangements?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I only raised concerns with management.

Mr WINTER - Was that the Premier's Office?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, the Premier's Office. It was just the Manager of the Premier.

Mr WINTER - It's just that one occasion that you've raised earlier?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I mean, I did raise quite a few times about situations that happened, but if you're asking about wondering whether I should be doing those duties, it was the once that she said she'd get back to me.

Mr WINTER - Sure, but you didn't hear back from that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

Mr WINTER - Was there a specific person within the Department of Premier and Cabinet or MPS that facilitated the arrangement where your salary was paid under Ms Hiscutt's allocation, but actually Jane Howlett was controlling your schedule and directing your employment?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I have payslips with her name on it, and I'm not sure. I can take that on notice.

Mr WINTER - With the person's name on it?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - Sure. I didn't really want you to name the person just then. Was there a specific person that was directing all that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - The payslips?

Mr WINTER - Well, the situation where you were employed under the allocation of the Leader of Government, Ms Hiscutt, but you were actually taking direction from Ms Howlett. Was there someone who oversaw that or directed that it would occur?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No, it was the Manager and Ms Howlett, and they were the only two. Whenever I did raise concerns after I was deployed, I guess, but that didn't go anywhere either.

Mr WINTER - Sure. I know there's some evidence in your chronology around your employment status following your workplace injury. I don't want to ask you any specifics, because I only want you to be able to answer what you are comfortable talking about in public. Are you able to explain, as much as you feel comfortable, around what occurred with your workplace contract following your workplace injury?

CHAIR - Mr Winter, can you frame the question, Mr Winter, in terms of the relevance as well for caretaker and how you're framing it up in relation to the terms of reference? I think I know where you're going, but I'd just like, for the record, for you to speak it.

Mr WINTER - We're trying to understand what role you were actually performing versus what role you were being paid to perform here. So, I was just seeking some clarity from you, as much as possible, around what occurred following your workplace injury, which was still within that election period, Chair.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - At home, the day after, I was receiving text messages from Ms Howlett to call constituents that were inquiring about, you know, different circumstances of whatever.

CHAIR - You've spoken a few times about the demands of anything that happens with an election campaign, whether you're employed or voluntary, and I can certainly empathise with you working on the road across Lyons.

Did you ever speak about any of those concerns and the workload with anyone in the Premier's Office or any other body like that, whereby you'd raised concerns about - even some of the evidence you've provided is around some of the boundaries of the employment that you were doing as well. I guess I'm trying to think whether there was any other instance beforehand where you had raised any issues, not just whether you were working for the MP or on a campaign, that this could've been picked up on, that you were in fact, as you were telling us,

directed to be doing something outside of the scope of your employment? Were there any other conversations that were had with the Premier's Office or anyone else that perhaps could have picked up on this?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I'm not sure, because the only person that I could talk to was the Manager of the Premier's Office in the Executive Building. Afterwards, when I was on workers' compensation leave and the issues around my employment and being let go and not another position and all that, I did make an inquiry to the Head of HR, but I didn't receive a phone call back.

CHAIR - Sure. In terms of the timeline from their perspective, there were concerns raised in relation to the Prosser election. Nothing prior to that. And you would say that there wasn't a conversation where they could have picked up on it. Then there were your inquiries after your workplace injury. So, in terms of if they had any awareness of it, perhaps that would've been the first time that they were realising it themselves, from the Premier's Office perspective.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Well, I'm not sure, because I went to many events with Ms Howlett with other MPs, so I'm not sure whether they picked up on it or not. I don't know.

Mr VERMEY - When that happened - the broken arm, you were then working for Mr Vincent then, or did he just happen to pick you up and take you to the hospital?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Like I said, I wasn't aware that I was working for Mr Vincent, because all my instructions were from Ms Howlett.

CHAIR - To be clear, you were never employed in any way or assigned with Mr Vincent formally?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

Mr VERMEY - There was a crossover of time, you know, there's four weeks with him, and that was the campaign. I don't know the mix over it, that's what I'm trying to establish, and because he picked you up and took you - you were with him then or he just happened to be in the area when -

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No, I met him and went in his car.

Mr VERMEY - But you'd broken your arm at that stage?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - He was there when I broke my arm, yes.

Mr WINTER - Ms Minnikin-Smith, we received a - you won't have seen this as yet - but a response from the Premier in relation to questions we asked following Ms Howlett's and your evidence you've provided. One of the questions we asked the Premier was: 'Who had authority to direct the day-to-day work of Ms Minnikin-Smith while in her role in MPS?' His answer is:

Generally, members direct the day-to-day work of MPS employees, however if a staff member is employed in a ministerial office, the Chief of Staff directs their day-to-day work.

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Is that an accurate answer to the question, in your view? Or what is the answer to the question of who had the authority to direct the day-to-day work of yourself?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Well, there was no-one else because I recall that Ms Howlett - I sent an email to the Manager of the Premier at one point and I didn't receive an email back questioning and then Ms Howlett -

Mr WINTER - What was the email, sorry? That was asking who was giving you direction or?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - There was an incident - Swansea, where a constituent had - I wasn't there, so I can't really speak for what actually happened - but there was an incident at Swansea and I wasn't present, but I was in Swansea at the time because I was organising the attendees list for an event. There was a situation that - well, we had to just make sure who was attending the event anyway. Then I was questioned when the MPs started to arrive of who - and the attendance list of who was attending. Then, with that situation that'd happened, Ms Howlett was questioned on it, and I believe somehow I was put in that - but I don't know how because I didn't even understand what was going on. But anyway, after that, Ms Howlett said that she'd had a conversation with the Premier and she'd sorted it out and I'm like, 'What was there to sort out, because I wasn't involved in it, so I don't know what you're talking about.' So, another situation where I was made accountable for something that I had no clue about. So I sent an email to the Manager of the Premier's Office and Ms Howlett - I cc'ed her as well - to outline how I was disappointed with being accused of something that I had - I wasn't privy to any of it and I just wanted to make it clear. I don't understand why the Premier wanted to speak to me because Ms Howlett said that the Premier wanted to speak to me, 'but it's all okay, I've sorted it out'. Anyway, it was a bit of a -

CHAIR - I just want to clarify, in terms of further to the Premier's answer to the question that the Committee put to him in relation to who directs the day-to-day work of MPS employees, how many other people were you working with or who you should have been working with, perhaps is the right way to phrase it, in Ms Hiscutt's Office? I assume that Legislative Council Leaders of Government business don't have Chiefs of Staff.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No, there were two other workers.

CHAIR - And what about with Ms Howlett when you first started in those first few weeks?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - One other.

CHAIR - And there was no Chief of Staff at that point in time?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

Mr VERMEY - I was just going to ask, was Vince Taskunas sort of helping you around that time? When you were talking about Chiefs of Staff and things -

CHAIR - Who, for the record and those listening online, became Chief of Staff.

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Mr VERMEY - Yeah, I think, and he'd been part of the Liberal Party and of assisting and I wasn't sure if he may have been helping with directing you around -

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

Mr VERMEY - where you might have been and how to help you get around different people?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No, because I'd broken my arm. He did leave me a voice message. I probably could take that on notice if you'd like the date?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It was a few weeks after Ms Howlett had been elected.

Mr WINTER - I'm trying to get clarification on that question. To your knowledge, who had authority to direct your day-to-day work while you're working in MPS?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It was Ms Howlett. I was told it was her. I was told by management that it was her, that she -

Mr WINTER - You were told by management. At what point in time did they tell you that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - When I started asking questions.

Mr WINTER - When was that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - That would have been, it was the end of 2023.

Mr WINTER - Yeah. So, you were told at the end of 2023 that you should take direction from Ms Howlett?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes. It was quite early.

Mr WINTER - Was that through that Manager within the Premier's Office as well?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - So, the Manager from the Premier's Office told you to take direction from Ms Howlett?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Uh-huh.

Mr WINTER - And once Ms Howlett resigned from Parliament to become a candidate for Lyons, was there any further conversation about whether you should take direction from Ms Howlett?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It was just assumed.

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Mr WINTER - There was no communication - you just continued as before without an office.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I just continued as before without an office.

CHAIR - I'm conscious of time.

Mr WINTER - Did you do any work for Kerry Vincent on a Saturday or a Sunday or was it exclusively on weekdays?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - I wouldn't say it was work because it was up to me whether I wanted to go along with him to anything on a weekend. I think I did once and my husband was with me anyway, so it wasn't -

Mr WINTER - That was more of a social or volunteer thing.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, it was more a social, yeah, so, it wasn't -

Mr WINTER - Your submission doesn't show any work for Mr Vincent during that - it shows that you were doing a lot of work for Mr Vincent during that period of time. Do you consider any of that to be volunteer work or was that all work as well?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No, I assumed it was still work for Ms Howlett because there was an event for Mr Vincent at Brighton, and it's probably in here - maybe, I'm not sure. Once again, I was instructed by Ms Howlett and then also the Manager from the Premier's Office to attend the event and I pretty much worked at the event by handing out sandwiches and -

Mr WINTER - Did you do work for Mr Vincent on weekdays though?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - If you'd call it work, well, I did, yes.

Mr WINTER - You did. What sort of work was that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - It was in the car, like I said, calling into businesses.

Mr WINTER - Sure. That was a Thursday, from memory, or maybe Wednesday before Agfest?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - It would have been a weekday, anyway, with Agfest starting.

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes.

Mr WINTER - The final question, if I have time, Chair. Contracts are standard across MPS and one of the contract points is around conduct and 4(j) outlines that:

A member of MPS must not make improper use of information gained in the course of employment or the status power authority derived from

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employment in order to gain or to seek or gift a benefit to advantage themselves or any other person.

You've given evidence that you were directed to support Mr Vincent, which, to my mind, is in direct contrast to what the MPS and in the *State Service Act* actually requires you to do. Did you ever raise concern about being directed to act against your contract or the *State Service Act*?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

Mr WINTER - In terms of that conversation you had with the member of the Premier's Office, did they raise any of those issues specifically around the reasons they held concerns for you to undertake that role with Mr Vincent?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - No.

CHAIR - Alright, thank you very much again for appearing before us. I just have to read you the statement after evidence again.

What you have said to us here today is protected by parliamentary privilege. Once you leave the table, you need to be aware that privilege is not attached to comments you may make to anyone, including the media, even if you are just repeating what you said to us today. Do you understand that?

Ms MINNIKIN-SMITH - Yes, I do.

CHAIR - Thank you very much again.

The witness withdrew.

The Committee adjourned at 3.00 p.m.