

<b>Member</b>	Kim Wells	<b>Electorate</b>	Rowville
<b>Period</b>	1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024		

<b>Regulation 6 - Expense allowance and electorate allowance</b>	
Total amount paid to member for electorate allowance	\$10,726.92
Total amount paid to member for expense allowance	\$0.00

<b>Regulation 7 - Motor vehicle allowance</b>	
Total amount paid to member for motor vehicle allowance	\$5,522.94
Member did not receive the motor vehicle allowance in the previous quarter and member has elected to receive the motor vehicle allowance for this quarter	No

<b>Regulation 9 - Parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance</b>	
Total amount paid to member for parliamentary accommodation sitting allowance	\$0.00
Suburb in which the member's parliamentary accommodation is located	n/a

<b>Regulation 10 - Travel allowance claims</b>					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Town or city in which accommodation was located	Value of the accommodation

Total number of nights for travel allowance claims 0  
Total amount paid to member for travel allowance \$0.00

<b>Regulation 11 - Commercial transport allowance claims</b>					
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid	Mode of transport	Value of transport
11-Jul-24	09-Aug-24	Airport Parking, UK Parliament Opening & War Graves	\$181.00	Airport Parking	\$181.00

Total number of nights for commercial transport allowance claims 29  
Total amount paid to member for commercial transport allowance \$181.00

<b>Regulation 12 - International travel allowance claims</b>			
Date from	Date until	Reason for travel	Total amount paid
11-Jul-24	09-Aug-24	Parliamentary Business and Electorate Business Flights for opening of the UK Parliament. Parliamentary meetings and war graves in Belgium and France	\$4,603.44
11-Jul-24	09-Aug-24	Opening of UK Parliament, visit to war graves France and Belgium	\$3,028.83

Total number of nights for international travel allowance claims 29  
Total amount paid to member for international travel allowance \$7,632.27  
See attached travel report for further details



**TRAVEL REPORT**  
**OPENING OF UK PARLIAMENT**  
**AND**  
**WAR GRAVES IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM**

**11 - 18 JULY 2024**  
**2 - 3 AUGUST 2024**

**Kim Wells MP**  
State Member for Rowville

### Itinerary:

<b>Southampton</b>	<b>11 – 14 July 2024</b>
<b>London</b>	<b>15 – 18 July 2024</b>
<b>Lille, Villers-Bretonneux and Menin Gate</b>	<b>2 – 3 August 2024</b>

**The aim** of this Parliamentary Study trip was to watch and study the Westminster Committee System. In particular Public and Accounts and Governance and Oversight Committees, to take back learnings from them in a report. Further, I was organizing to meet Members of Parliament who were members of the relevant committees to get their views of what changes they were planning to improve the work of the committee.

Further, I always find it important to discuss the workings of the committee with staff members who have a longer-term view of necessary changes, because of their extensive time serving on the committee and their permanence as an employee of the Parliament.

The second part of the trip was to visit the Australian War Graves in Belgium and France and pay my respects to those who have fought to defend our country.

This information and experience I would use to share with the local RSL in Glen Waverley and our retirement villagers in the Rowville Electorate.

## **OPENING OF UK PARLIAMENT**

**The reality** was very different to my Parliamentary plans. British Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, called a snap general election on the 23/5/2024 for the 4/7/2024. Consequently, all my well thought out plans were cancelled, as MPs were back in their constituencies campaigning.

Further, a tour of Parliament was also cancelled due to the security shutdown of Westminster, as the 17/7/2024 was when the King was booked to open Parliament. Just when I was planning to be a spectator on the streets, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) came to the rescue with an actual ticket to the Opening of Parliament by the King.

**The Report:** The British Election was called by Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak on 23/5/2024 and was set down for Thursday, 4 July. All the opinion polls had the Opposition Leader, Labour's Keir Starmer winning by a mile and not even a miracle was going to save the Conservatives.

Before I headed to London, I had various briefings on the political landscape in Southampton, where I met with a group of undecided voters including Elaine Chadwick and Roy Wood who gave their opinions of a tired, conservative Government and an incoming Labour Government, who had promised the world to everyone, with many people suspicious that they would be unable to deliver what they had promised.

I arrived in London on Monday 15/7/2024, and no one was surprised by the results, even Conservatives acknowledged that 14 years in Government was a very long time, and numerous Prime

Ministers in that time didn't help. Yet Labour people were bothered by the changes to a wealth tax a Labour Government would introduce.

Young professional London workers, Charlie, Witchurch and Alex Stott who were Conservative voters also acknowledged that the mood for change was overwhelming and despite the Conservatives making usual promises, nothing was going to change the overall result.

They pointed to the Rwanda solution for illegal migrants, a strange idea, and even Conservatives thought this was a dumb idea, and potentially unpopular.

In Australia, we send illegal boats and migrants to offshore processing centres in the Pacific, but these have Australian supervision for health, education and visa processing. It would appear that under the Rwanda situation, migrants were being sent there, and left to the Rwandan Government to supervise.

The second policy was for the Government to introduce a National Service in order, in part, to reduce the youth crime rate. Many in the military who I spoke to were totally opposed to these policies as they claim they only want young men and women to join the military service because they want to be there, not because they have to be there.

The result was no surprise. Labour won 411 seats, a massive increase of 209. Conservatives won 121 seats, down 244 from 365 seats. The Liberal Democrats won 72 seats up from 11 and strangely, the Scottish National Party won only 9 seats, down from 48, with most of their losses going to Labour.

After the disappointment of missing out on a visit to the Parliamentary Committee, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) were allocated 4 tickets for Members of Parliament across the Commonwealth. Coincidentally, the 4 were all from Australia; David Basham from the South Australia House of Assembly, and Helen Dalton and Joe McGirr both from the New South Wales Legislative Assembly.

We were met at Portcullis House, near Parliament House, by Sarah Dickson from the CPA, to go through the usual security checks and greetings. From there we walked underground, connecting Portcullis House to the Parliament, an easy walkway for the MPs from their offices to the Parliament. When the division bells ring, they have 8 minutes to get into the Chamber, compared to our 4 minutes.

We had more security checks and then went around to the side entrance to wait for more security and then into the Royal Gallery where we would be seated for the Opening of Parliament, closest to the King's entry into the Gallery. We were seated by 10 am, with the doors being shut at 10.30 am.

The procession of various dignitaries into the Royal Gallery is like nothing I have ever seen before. Firstly, the Yeoman Guard, dressed in their ceremonial uniform, followed by the Household Cavalry, all standing along the Gallery. This was then followed by the King's Crown, the Cap of Maintenance and Sword of State, all arrived separately with allocated dignitaries performing a specified task. Then the Lord President and Lord Speaker arrived and met with the Lord High Chancellor.

At 11.15 am, the King and Queen arrived in their horse-drawn carriage at the Sovereign Entrance and were met by the Lord Great Chamberlain and Earl Marshall. Then at 11.27 am (on the dot) the King and Queen entered the Royal Gallery on their way to the House of Lords. At 11.30 am he was seated on the throne and commanded the Lady Usher of the Black Rod to summon the Speaker and the Members of the House of Commons. Once they arrived, the Lord High Chancellor presented the King's Speech to the King which he then read. The speech is written for him by the incoming Government and outlines the plans for its term in office and what it wishes to achieve.

The speech lasted only about 20 minutes and the King returned back through the Royal Gallery.

**Tour of Parliament** is always an interesting experience, because in the Federal or State Parliament, we have allocated seats for each Member of Parliament. In the House of Commons there are 650 MPs, but only seats for 427 and in the House of Lords there are 799 Lords but only 400 seats.

Therefore, due to Parliament sitting at 3 pm after the King's speech, a heap of furniture, chairs and benches had to be moved out in preparation.

Parliamentary debate was then focused on the King's speech, and more urgent legislation would be introduced later in the week or early the next week, and then will lay over the summer break.

When the Prime Minister was giving his address outlining his government's plans, they had what is called "interruptions". That is when a backbencher can ask a question of his speech midway through the address, as long as he/she has the call of the Speaker. The backbencher is allowed to ask a question regarding rural communities, education or health, for example.

This certainly disrupts the flow of the Prime Minister's speech, and I am sure there are many other ways information can be gleaned from him, rather than through constant "interruption", especially when it's his first address to Parliament.

**Security around Parliament** I have visited Westminster on many occasions and have met with MI5 – the security service which deals with domestic counter intelligence. Their role is to design security measures to keep the main infrastructure of the UK safe, including Parliament House. Other areas include the security of power, gas, bridges or sporting facilities.

On a previous visit with DPS representatives, we examined the bollard systems in place around Westminster which we copied for the Victorian Parliament. These have worked exceptionally well in Melbourne. However, with the opening of Parliament at Westminster, they have now included long steel gates, which run along the road against the bollards and are hardly noticeable when they are locked away. Therefore, when there is an official event, the gates can simply be unlocked and swung around to be used as a road block, strong enough to prevent a truck or any large vehicle storming the road to Parliament. In front and behind these road blocks, police were lined up in case of a terror attack.

I wish we didn't need these road blocks around our Parliament, but we live in a different, more violent world. The advantage of these road blocks is that they can be swung around in less than a minute, whereas the alternative is spending a day setting up plastic road blocks full of water, being lifted into place and then having to be removed after a protest or similar event. This system is incredibly expensive and ineffective, and a waste of resources, whereas the UK system is effective within minutes.

### **Briefing with Josh Drake-CPA**

The 4 Australian MPs met with Josh to discuss several Parliamentary issues, including issues and policies raised in the King's speech. The new Labour Government has a policy of devolving of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This will be an interesting development, because Scotland has wanted all-out independence for decades, and I am guessing this policy was very popular with the Scots as Labour picked up a large number of Scottish National Party seats.

The House of Lords is now seeing more changes, especially when a Labour Government comes to power. Labour has committed to abolishing all Heritage Peer Lords' right to sit in the House of Lords. Rather, the number will be greatly reduced, and they will be appointed by the Government. This will ensure a healthy majority of its own in the House of Lords.

Brexit is still a point of contention, despite the UK having moved on without the EU, but the Government is wanting to make trade deals with the EU to ensure their products reach the European markets. Over the days I was in London, everyone had an opinion on Brexit. It appears people who lived closer to London wanted to stay, those in rural areas wanted to leave. Migration into the UK was a red-hot issue, especially with older Brits.

Evidently the issue of NATO and the UK commitment to the Ukraine was an election issue, but Keir Starmer shut down any doubt quickly that the UK would not see out the Ukraine war and was absolutely committed to NATO.

**Compulsory Voting** I still consider Australians incredibly fortunate to have compulsory voting, because once the vote is completed, no-one can argue with the results. In the UK and US, where you have turnouts of around 50-60%, it's hardly representative of the true population. Further, I am always amused when, in the UK or US, people say, "but yes, if more Republicans or Conservatives had gone out and voted, we would have won!" Really?

Thank goodness for compulsory voting, and I doubt whether anything was going to change the massive swing to the UK Labour Party.

But still interesting views with the argument put forward that it's a democratic right not to vote. I can't accept that, as there are many, many countries around the world where people would do anything to have a free and fair vote.

## **WAR GRAVES**

I have an excellent relationship with the Waverley RSL, just outside my electorate in Glen Waverley and have an incredible respect for those men and women who fought to defend our country, and also other members who fought for their native country, like South Africa.

The RSL do an outstanding job commemorating ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day as well as many other events and include a wide section of the community to be part of these important events.

Further, I have visited numerous Retirement Villagers in the Rowville electorate, who also commemorate Anzac Day and Remembrance Day and will use my visit to the War Graves in France and Belgium and will share this experience with them and the RSL.

We visited the **Military Cemetery at Britannique de Marfaux**, just outside the town of Hautvillers in France. War cemeteries like this are scattered all over France and Belgium and the relevant Governments, local villages and the Commonwealth War Graves, do an exceptional job coordinating the upkeep and maintenance of the graves of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice.

This War Grave Cemetery is very different to the many I have seen in other areas, as on one side of the road it has British, Australian and New Zealand graves, with marble cut head stones, surrounded by plants and well-kept lawns. For those who are unknown, the headstone reads, "A Soldier of the Great War". There are hundreds and hundreds of these white headstones in this cemetery. The cemetery pays the respect that these men deserve. But where it is so different, as our guide Brice Georget pointed out, is that outside the hedge, on the other side of the road are where the Germans are buried in their cemetery.

Black wooden crosses signify where 4 Germans are buried in the one grave, and again there are hundreds of black wooden crosses in this cemetery. A further irony again, the Jewish soldiers who fought for Germany in World War 1, have their own separate cement headstone and are not buried with the other German soldiers.

As with the British and Allied soldiers, there are many unknown German soldiers, but I was surprised by the number of soldiers who were named and had the date of their death. I had spoken to Brad Battin, MP for Berwick, about my plans to travel around France and Belgium to visit the War Graves and he suggested we attend the Last Post at Menin Gate in Ieper in Belgium.

This experience was not one to be missed and the advice Brad had given me was invaluable. We contacted the Last Post Association in Ieper in Belgium about the details of how they run their event and organized to lay a wreath on the night we were there.

### **Ieper – Last Post**

The first thing we had to clear up was the confusion around the name Ieper and Ypres, because we were assuming it was two different places. However, the French call it Ypres and the Belgians call it Ieper – quite simple really. We were met at Menin Gate Ieper, by Youri van Miegroet, who explained the significance of the ceremony.

The Last Post has been performed at Menin Gate continuously, every night, since 1928 except during the Second World War. Ironically, on the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1944, the Polish armoured division liberated Ieper, and that very evening the Last Post was again performed at Menin Gate.

Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing is dedicated to British and Commonwealth soldiers who were killed during World War 1, but the whereabouts of their graves are not known. The memorial is managed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who do an extraordinary job managing war graves across the world.

Almost 55,000 soldiers' names are on the Hall of Memory, meaning 55,000 soldiers are missing or were never identified. Incredibly sad.

The members of the Last Post Association pointed out examples where, later, a soldier had been identified and the name is then consequently removed from the Hall of Memory. Typically, the Australian War Memorial has by far the best record of assisting with DNA matches with families. This work is incredibly tedious and painstakingly slow but must be done.

The Last Post is played at 8 pm each night, and we were required to be fully briefed by 7.30 pm. We could not believe the size of the crowd that had gathered, with many British people attending to pay homage to this significant War Memorial.

An orchestra plays most nights and on the night we attended, there was a band from Yorkshire playing. They had organized a video of themselves playing a piece and submitted it to the Last Post Association for their consideration. Once selected, and a date agreed on, the band organizes itself to attend and play.

Understanding the significance of this War Memorial, made the laying of the wreath so much more important. A very moving experience.

**Villers-Bretonneux** is located in Northern France.

Thousands of Australians travel around the world to pay respects to Australian soldiers who fought in World War 1 and 2 and other wars, for Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. Villiers-Bretonneux is one of those locations.

Villers-Bretonneux was captured by the Germans as they advanced towards the regional city of Amiens. If they achieved their goal and drove onto the French coast, splitting the British and French armies, the Allied cause might have been lost.

The fate of Amiens hung in the balance, as two Australian brigades were given the task of retaking Villers-Bretonneux through a swift night-time counter attack. One brigade would assault from the south, while another would attack from the north.

The assault began at 10 pm on 24 April 1918. The 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the south were held up by German machine guns, before the Australians linked up east of the village. After dawn on 25 April, Australian and British troops were involved in fierce fighting to clear the Germans from the village. Some Germans escaped Villers-Bretonneux through nearby woods.

Later, on the morning of 25 April, three years to the day after the Anzacs landed at Gallipoli, French and Australian flags were raised over Villers-Bretonneux.

Driving into Villers-Bretonneux is a very strange experience because there are Australian flags flying everywhere over various buildings. A sign says, "Do not forget Australia", and its sister city is Robinvale in Victoria.

The gratitude of the residents of Villers-Bretonneux is quite extraordinary and makes every Australian visiting the area feel very proud.

The drive to the Australian National Memorial in the French countryside is breathtaking and its location for the memorial is very fitting, surrounded by stunning farm land.

The memorial honours over 46,000 Australian soldiers who lost their lives in World War 1 and is a very impressive building. Unfortunately, 1,200 Australian soldiers lost their lives recapturing the town of Villers-Bretonneux, a very sad chapter in our history, but a very grateful town will never forget the heroic efforts of the Australians.

From the carpark, a short walk up through the hundreds and hundreds of marble headstones, takes you to the very impressive memorial. There are two imposing flag poles, one proudly displaying the flag of Australia, the other the flag of France, which separate the headstones of the memorial.

Behind the memorial is the Sir John Monash centre, commissioned in 2006, completed in 2017 and opened in 2018 to commemorate 100 years since the end of World War 1.

This is one of the most impressive war museums you could possibly visit. The information, the videos and stories of ordinary men and women “doing extraordinary things on the battlefields of the western front” (quote from Sir John Monash Centre) are so appropriate.

The visits to the War Graves have been very moving and one can't help thinking about the pointless loss of lives due to war. However, being an Australian one feels very proud that we did more than our fair share in the war effort.

My grandfather, Alex Backman, was part of the Charge of the Lighthouse Brigade in Palestine in World War 1, and I now regret not (politely) pushing him to talk more about his experiences at war. An opportunity lost.

Lest we Forget.

ACCOMODATION:

London, 3 nights, \$1,379.34

Lille France, 1 night \$330, 25

COMMERCIAL TRAVEL:

Train around London, \$16.88

Paris to Lille \$56.30

Hire Car – 2 days

Lille, Menin Gate, Villers-Bretonneux - \$424.17