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From: LUCAS, Caroline
Sent: 04 May 2021 16:54
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Integrity and honesty in Westminster
Attachments: Letter to Mr Speaker.pdf

Karen Bradley MP
Chair, Procedure Committee

Dear Karen,

As leaders from six opposition parties in Parliament, we met last week with Mr Speaker, further to sending him the attached letter, in order to express our deep concern that the standing and reputation the House of Commons is being endangered by the lack of truthfulness in statements by the Prime Minister.

During the meeting, it became even clearer that our current parliamentary rules are no longer fit for purpose. We are therefore writing to follow up with you, as Chair of Procedure Committee, about the key concerns we all share.

From a procedural perspective, these include the following:

- The Ministerial Code is being reviewed by the Cabinet Secretary but responsibility for upholding the Code, and determining whether it has been breached, sits with the incumbent Prime Minister. It is therefore not a suitable means of holding a Prime Minister to account if required.
- There is no independent means of accountability with regards the core Nolan principle that holders of public office should be truthful
- Erskine May 22.8 sets out that responsibility for information and answers given to the House rests with ministers themselves – not with the role of the Speaker. Should the Speaker become aware that the House has been knowingly misled, the Speaker's role is constrained.
- Options such as a referral to the Committee on Standards and Privileges are not independent and have limited impact when the government of the day has a substantial majority.
- When Ministers mislead in the Chamber, the mechanisms available for formal corrections(written PQs to clarify inaccuracies on the record or Point of Order or UQ) are concerned primarily for self-correction when accidental errors have been made. They are not easily understood or accessible to member of the public and do not tend to link back to the original error/omission.
- There are not suitable objective mechanisms for instances where Ministers or MPs have deliberately misled Parliament and refuse to retract their statements. Nor is there a means to address occasions when Ministers and MPs wilfully repeat misleading statements.

We believe the overall effect of these failings not only undermines the reputation of Parliament as a whole, they also erode confidence in our democracy.

There are examples of better practice to draw on, for example the Scottish model of correcting record for inadvertent errors is more transparent and high profile. We would therefore like to request an opportunity to meet with you and explore what role your Committee might play in reviewing the current rules governing integrity and honesty in Westminster, and hopefully bringing them into the 21st Century.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Lucas MP
Ian Blackford MP

Ed Davey MP
Liz Saville Roberts MP
Colum Eastwood MP
Stephen Farry PM