



Deals of the Week

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EXCLUSIVE

Shock decision after Brittany Higgins' alleged rape in Parliament House by a Liberal colleague

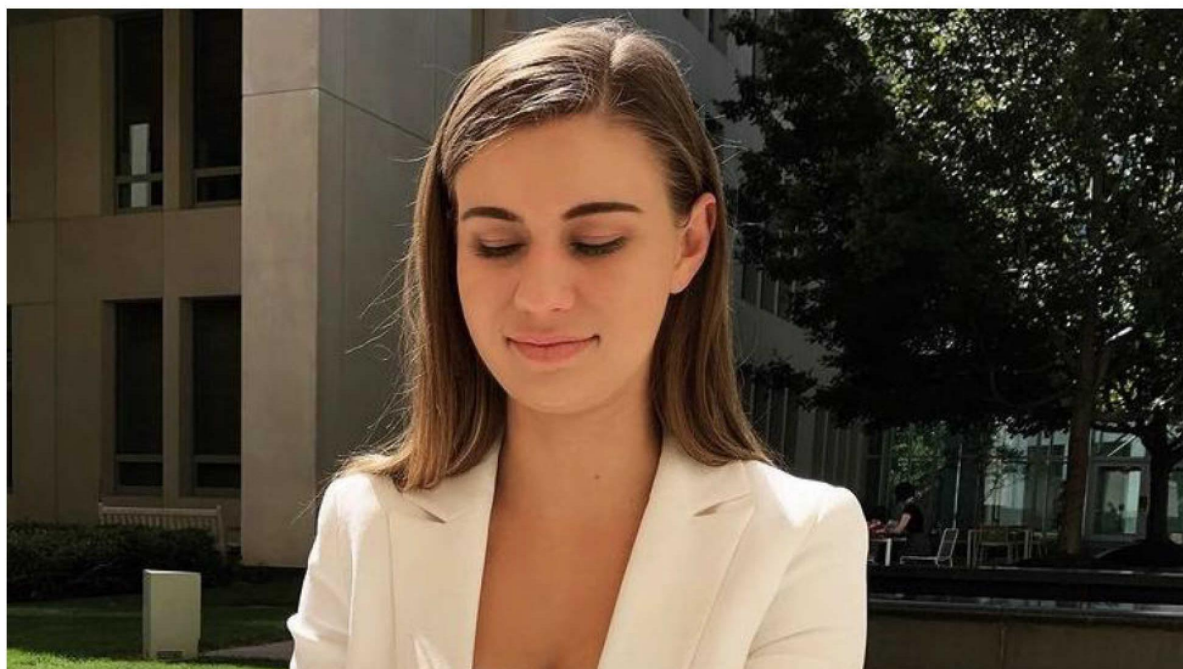
When senior Liberal Party figures learnt of Brittany Higgins' sexual assault claim, they made a decision that has now been labelled a mistake.

Samantha Maiden



@samanthamaiden 4 min read February 15, 2021 - 10:59AM

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Brittany alleges she was raped at Parliament House by a colleague but claims she felt she had to choose between going to the police and keeping her job.

Defence Minister Linda Reynolds has conceded it was a mistake to make her media adviser — who alleged she had been raped — attend a meeting just days later in the

same room where she says the assault occurred.

Brittany Higgins was just 24 years old and less than a month into her new job working for the defence industry minister [when she says she was sexually assaulted in Senator Reynolds' private office by another Liberal staffer after a night out drinking](#).

It was just weeks before Prime Minister Scott Morrison called the 2019 election.

Ms Higgins told news.com.au that while the whole ordeal was horrifying, she still could not believe she was called into that room to discuss the incident.

“I think the weirdest part is when Linda decided to talk about the incident she decided to bring me back into her ministerial office,” Ms Higgins told news.com.au.

“That was the first time I had been back there. So I was sitting having this meeting about my choices, about what had just happened to me ... I barely even remember the conversation on the basis of, ‘Oh my God, it was the couch’.

“She was saying words. I am sure she was saying very many lovely words. But all I knew was the couch. I kind of thought that maybe they just hadn’t considered it?”

Brittany Higgins on her first day at work at Parliament House.

One of Brittany's Instagram posts from Parliament House.

In a statement, a government spokesperson said Senator Reynolds now accepts that was an error.

“During this process, the Minister and a senior staff member met with the staff member in the Minister's office. Given the seriousness of the incident, the meeting should have been conducted elsewhere,” a spokesman said.

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During the meeting, Ms Higgins said Senator Reynolds expressed horror at what had happened to her but also wanted to be clear whether she intended to go to the police or not.

“Standard lines. She said ‘I felt physically ill,’ All that sort of thing. And then it kind of turned to, ‘As women, this is something we go through’,” Ms Higgins said.

“She said, ‘If you choose to go to the police we will support you in that process, but we just need to know ahead of time. We need to know now’.”

According to the government spokesperson, Senator Reynolds told Ms Higgins that whatever she chose to do, she would be supported.

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“The Minister stated to the staff member that her only concern was for the staff member’s welfare and stated there would be no impact on their career,” the spokesperson said.

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“The Minister encouraged the staff member to speak with the police in order to assess the options available to them. At this meeting, the staff member indicated they would like to speak to the Australian Federal Police, which the Minister supported and the office facilitated.

“After the incident, the Prime Minister’s office provided support to the Minister and her office in assessing the breach of the Statement of Standards for Ministerial Staff.

“Subsequently, the Minister was informed that a complaint had been made to the AFP. The Minister and her office continued to provide support to the staff member through this period.”

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Brittany alleges she was raped at Parliament House by a colleague but claims she felt she had to choose between going to the police and keeping her job.

Brittany alleges she was raped at Parliament House by a colleague but claims she felt she had to choose between going to the police and keeping her job.

Ms Higgins claims, after the meeting, the alleged rape was never discussed again.

“No. [I felt] It was this taboo thing. It was never spoken about again,” she said.

Ms Higgins then returned to work, where she worked long hours in the office she was allegedly assaulted.

“I would walk past everyday. It was this weird ghost I was kind of facing,” she said.

Ms Higgins said Senator Reynolds barely knew her.

“I was just this sudden problem for her. That's what I felt like,” she said.

“I felt like they were ticking a box. That they had to have this conversation with me in order to say on the record ‘We told her she could go to the police’.

“But as soon as Linda Reynolds had that meeting, she never brought it up with me again. And then everyone else just started kind of going, ‘Well, you can go to the Gold Coast? You can go home. You can take a payout and go home or you can come with us to WA (where Senator Reynolds is based)’.

“And I asked them. I said, ‘Well if I got to the Gold Coast, (if we are in) opposition or we win, what happens then?’ They said ‘you won’t come back’.

“That was when I fully internalised that I didn’t have options. And that there was a choice here.”

Ms Higgins did speak to the police including the AFP unit at Parliament House. Two female officers who spoke to her elevated the issue to the Belconnen based Sexual Assault Unit.

Ultimately, she informed police she would not pursue a complaint — it was just two days after the Prime Minister called the election.

Brittany Higgins at a Liberal Party event.

A government spokesman said the offer of assistance to Ms Higgins remains.

“The Government takes all matters of workplace safety very seriously. No one should feel unsafe in a workplace,” a spokesman said.

“The staff member was notified that should they choose to, they were able to pursue a complaint, including a complaint made to the police, and that to do so was within their rights. They were informed that they would be assisted and supported through that process.

“The staff member was told that if they did choose to pursue a complaint, they would have the full and ongoing support of the office and the Minister. This offer of support and assistance remains.”

Where to find help

If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual abuse or family violence contact:

- National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service 24-hour helpline **1800 RESPECT** on **1800 737 732**
- 24-hour Emergency Accommodation helpline on **1800 800 588**
- Safe At Home helpline on **1800 633 937**
- National Violence and Abuse Trauma Counselling and Recovery Service on **1800 FULLSTOP (1800 385 578)**. They also have a specific line for the LGBTIQ+ community called the Rainbow Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence Helpline on **1800 497 212**
- SHE (free and confidential counselling and support) on **6278 9090**
- Sexual Assault Support Services on **6231 1811**, or after hours **6231 1817**
- Family Violence Crisis and Support Service on **1800 608 122**
- Bravehearts – Sexual Assault Support for Children on **1800 BRAVE 1**
- Kids Helpline is for young people aged 5 to 25 on **1800 551 800**

Don't go it alone. Please reach out for help by contacting **Lifeline** on **13 11 14**

- Men who have anger, relationship or parenting issues, should contact the **Men's Referral Service** on **1300 766 491** or the **Don't Become That Man** helpline on **1300 243 413**

Brittany Higgins will be interviewed at 6.30pm tonight on The Project by Lisa Wilkinson

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