

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings November 2014

Communications Portfolio

Department of Communications

Question No: 1

Program No. 1.1

Hansard Ref: Page 5 - 20 November 14

Topic: CicoMilne Pty Ltd consultancy

Senator Urquhart asked:

Senator CONROY: Are you aware of who the individual consultant engaged by the company with Mr Milne's name is?

Mr Clarke: In regard to the structure of the company, I have no more information than the answer we have given in response to question No. 603.

Senator CONROY: What did you hire the minister's best mate to do on departmental money? What did he actually do?

Mr Clarke: Provided advice on NBN transition issues.

Senator CONROY:

Mr Clarke: My recollection of Mr Milne's CV is that he has a wide range of relevant experience.

Senator CONROY: So he had been previously employed by NBN Co? The answer is no—here's a hint. What was his previous experience in NBN Co transition issues?

Mr Clarke: I do not have his CV in front of me. I am happy to take that question on notice.

Senator CONROY: You just quoted from it. You just told us that he had a wide—according to your recollection of his CV. One minute you can remember his CV, and the next minute your memory is faulty on his CV.

Mr Clarke: No. I think that is an unfair proposition. I recall the engagement of Mr Milne and I recall, since I am ultimately responsible—as you are saying—for the expenditure of public funds, being satisfied that he had relevant experience for the task.

Senator CONROY: Who suggested his name to you?

Mr Clarke: I cannot recall the process.

Senator CONROY: Do you want to take it on notice?

Mr Clarke: I am happy to take that on notice.

Senator CONROY: my questions. Did Mr Robinson or anyone else in your department suggest Mr Milne be employed on a contract to help with NBN transition issues?

Mr Clarke: I will take on notice the question as to the process by which Mr Milne came to our attention as a suitable adviser.

Senator CONROY: And not just in terms of if no-one in the department suggested his name. Where did his name come from? Did it come from the minister's office or from the minister himself? Could you also give us a detailed breakdown of what Mr Milne did, not just 'helped with NBN transition issues'. What did he actually do?—because he was also employed by NBN Co, which seems to be a remarkable coincidence, and then got appointed to the board.

Mr Clarke: I will take that on notice.

Answer:

On 25 September 2013, Mr JB Rousselot, Dr Zygmunt Switkowski and Mr Justin Milne were employed by the Department as special NBN advisers for a period of one month.

The Minister for Communications and Dr Switkowski raised with the Department the likely role that these people would play in NBN Co's transition to implement the Government's policy.

It was agreed that their early engagement would best support transitional activities.

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The services to be provided by the contractors was *Advice to the Commonwealth on NBN Transition issues*. All three also provided the Commonwealth Private Interest Declarations.

The Department determined that the best way to engage them would be through a short term contract for services that allowed them access to necessary documentation and materials to provide advice on NBN transition issues.