

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications

Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings 2015

Communications Portfolio

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 156

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Hansard Ref: Page 13, 30/11/2015

Topic: Ms McNeill - Reporter

Senator Abetz, Eric asked:

Senator ABETZ: Why was she an 'alleged' attacker? Why don't we take that at face value when the Israeli defence forces tell Ms McNeill that that is exactly what she had done?

Mr Scott: As I recall, in that very episode there was a strong defence of the actions undertaken by the Israeli military made by an official spokesman. You can pick a word out of a story if you like, but fundamentally I think Ms McNeill is doing a good job in a difficult story under extraordinary scrutiny. This reporter is, based on my experience at the ABC, under more scrutiny than any other foreign correspondent reporting from any part of the world has ever been. I think she deserves a fair go and I think she deserves to be judged on the quality of her reporting. Some of her reporting on the refugee crisis I think has been absolutely outstanding. She has brought to bear insights into the horror and the complexity of what is happening in parts of the Middle East at the moment. I know that there are some observers who provide daily or weekly commentary, and possibly reports, to you, Senator, on her reporting, but I do believe that she is entitled to a fair go.

CHAIR: Can I just clarify, Mr Scott: through your response there, are you implying that Senator Abetz does not have the right to ask you these questions?

Mr Scott: Not at all. I have never said that Senator Abetz is not entitled to ask these questions. All I am saying is that, before this reporter set foot in the Middle East, there was a campaign against her personally taking up that role. I am saying that she is highly recognised and acclaimed for her reporting, she has significant experience in the Middle East and she deserved that appointment—and she should be judged on her work. Senator Abetz is asking legitimate questions about her work, and I am saying that that program needs to be looked at fairly in its own right and also fairly in the context of the other reporting that she is doing.

Senator ABETZ: Can you tell us by whom this personal campaign is being run against her and why. Take that on notice for us.

Mr Scott: Sure.

Answer:

A personal campaign against Ms McNeill's appointment commenced soon after the announcement by the ABC in February 2015, that she would take up the Middle East correspondent post. This criticism commenced before she filed any reports from the Middle East - <http://www.aijac.org.au/news/article/should-the-abc-have-given-advocacy-journalist-so>.

There were also articles critical of Ms McNeill in pro-Israeli publications prior to her taking up the role.

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The campaign has included newspaper articles and editorials, TV interviews, complaints from advocacy groups and personal attacks on Ms McNeill on social media. Much of the criticism has been without substance or reference to any of the stories Ms McNeill has filed since taking the posting.