

**Senate Economics Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Treasury Portfolio

**Additional Budget Estimates**

2015-2016

**Department/Agency:** ATO

**Question:** AET 38

**Topic:** Backgrounding of journalists

**Reference:** Hansard – page 69

**Senator:** Ketter. Chris

**Question:**

**Senator KETTER:** In your opening remarks, Mr Jordan, you indicated you feel strongly about the debate that is taking place in respect of the tax system. It has become apparent in the last 12 months or so that there has been a lot of backgrounding of journalists happening in relation to, primarily, taxation matters. Have consultants been paid by the ATO to involve themselves in backgrounding journalists?

**Mr Jordan:** I am not aware of that—from us, do you mean?

**Senator KETTER:** By the ATO, yes.

**Mr Jordan:** I can take that on notice. I am not specifically aware of consultants backgrounding journalists on our behalf.

**Senator KETTER:** So you do not have an organisation managing media for you?

**Mr Jordan:** We have a contract with a firm, Newgate, that provides some advice to us in terms of media and other things—a fairly wide range of topics.

**Senator KETTER:** And you are not aware of whether those consultants actually then speak to journalists as well?

**Mr Jordan:** I presume as matter of course they speak to journalists. That is sort of their business, so I presume they do. I do not specifically instruct them to do things on my behalf.

**Senator KETTER:** I understand your concern about the public debate, and you have a legitimate interest in that. How appropriate is it for the agency to be engaging media management companies to provide preferred journalists with information?

**Mr Jordan:** I am not sure if we go about it in that way, but it is very appropriate for us to use whatever resources we think necessary to ensure the community is confident that the ATO is appropriately exercising its powers and collecting, wherever possible, the right amount of tax for the benefit of the community here in Australia.

**Answer:**

38. a) The ATO engages Newgate Communications to provide media, reputation and issues management advice and strategies on a case-by-case basis as required. Under the current work order, 'Newgate Communications provides a variety of services which include facilitation of meetings between ATO executives and media representatives'.
- b) No.
- c) As above.