

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates

2015 - 2016

Department/Agency: Treasury

Question: SBT 4-5

Topic: Mr Phil Gaetjens

Reference: Hansard page no. 30 - 21 October 2015

Senator: Dastyari, Sam

Question:

Senator DASTYARI: Thank you for explaining to me the role of a senator, Minister Cormann! I am making the point that the specific questions we have relating to this may be best asked of the corporate group. If you want to go through it all now, we can. But I am not sure if that is the best use of time. I have one or two very quick questions. Mr Phil Gaetjens rejoined Treasury at a band 2; is that correct?

Senator Cormann: He is the Treasurer's chief of staff.

Mr J Fraser: Phil Gaetjens was on leave without pay to fulfil his role as Secretary of the New South Wales Treasury. He has rejoined Treasury and moved to the Treasurer's office as chief of staff.

Senator DASTYARI: So he was never in Treasury?

Senator Cormann: He was always in Treasury.

CHAIR: So he was on leave without pay?

Senator Cormann: Yes, leave without pay.

Senator McALLISTER: Has he been promoted?

Mr J Fraser: He was promoted to band 3 as part of the process of being appointed to the Treasurer's office.

Wednesday, 21 October 2015 Senate Page 31

ECONOMICS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Senator McALLISTER: He was promoted to band 3 from his previous position?

Mr J Fraser: Correct.

Senator McALLISTER: What was his previous position?

Mr J Fraser: Band 2.

Senator McALLISTER: So he has been promoted to band 3. Does that involve a substantive position in the executive structure of your organisation?

Mr J Fraser: No.

Mr Lonsdale: Mr Gaetjens is working as chief of staff in the Treasurer's office, so he is not part of the executive committee in the Treasury.

Senator McALLISTER: Is it usual for a staff member who is appointed to a ministerial office to be promoted simultaneously?

Mr Lonsdale: We would have to go back and check that.

Mr J Fraser: I believe it happened quite a bit in the 1980s and early 1990s, but I cannot remember precisely.

Senator DASTYARI: So he got promoted while he was on leave?

Mr J Fraser: No.

Senator Cormann: He did not get promoted while he was on leave. He has for a long time been a Treasury officer who was away on leave without pay while fulfilling other responsibilities, including working as the secretary of the department in New South Wales.

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

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He has come back to take on the role of chief of staff in the Treasurer's office. In that context, he has received a promotion. I do not think there is anything unusual in this. I am sure that in more recent history there are other examples of that. But if you want us to take that on notice we are happy to do so.

Senator DASTYARI: Yes, take it on notice. He was a federal Treasury official. He left federal Treasury—

Mr J Fraser: No, he went on leave.

Senator DASTYARI: He physically left. He went on leave without pay to be seconded to the New South Wales Treasury. Obviously during that period of time he was paid by the New South Wales Treasury. That is a matter for them. That is a matter for their budget estimates, not ours. He then went from the New South Wales Treasury to become chief of staff—

Senator Cormann: He resumed his position with Treasury and—

Senator DASTYARI: How long did he resume his position—

Senator Cormann: It is not a matter of how long. He resumed it. He officially came back and was seconded to the Treasurer's office, which is where he is working—

Senator DASTYARI: When you say that he came back, did he ever physically come back? Did he start working at—

Senator Cormann: No.

Senator DASTYARI: He has never been in the office—

Senator Cormann: He never left the Treasury books. He was always on the Treasury books. He rejoined the Treasury—

Senator DASTYARI: We are in a surreal world now. I am just trying to get my head around this. Phil Gaetjens, who is a well-respected Treasury official—

Senator Cormann: Thank you for that.

Senator DASTYARI: got a position in the New South Wales Treasury. He went to help them. He got seconded to that—

CHAIR: This is the third time you have gone through this, Senator Dastyari.

Senator DASTYARI: He went there.

Mr Lonsdale: Just to be clear. It was not a secondment. Mr Gaetjens took leave without pay—

Senator Cormann: Which is what we have said a number of times now.

Mr Lonsdale: to take up a position in the New South Wales Treasury.

Senator DASTYARI: Was that for about a year? How long?

Page 32 Senate Wednesday, 21 October 2015

ECONOMICS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Senator Cormann: I would have to you take that on notice. I am not across all of the forensic detail of Mr Gaetjens

Answer:

1 and 2. It is not unique for a Treasury staff member to have been promoted prior to, or while on leave without pay, to work in a Minister's Office. It has also been the case that senior Treasury staff have previously moved into a Chief of Staff position. Treasury staff across a range of classifications have undertaken temporary assignment to Ministerial Offices in different of roles.

Senate Economics Legislation Committee

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3. While on leave without pay, Treasury staff remain employees of the Treasury. Mr Gaetjens was on leave without pay for around four years.