

Question: 1

Topic: Changes to Senate Chamber security

Written: 4 March 2015

Senator WRIGHT asked:

1. Please confirm that there is now an armed AFP officer stationed in the attendant's room of the Senate Chamber during question time.
 - a. Please advise of the process used to make this decision (i.e. who was involved in the decision making process, when the decision was made and why?)
 - b. What prompted the decision?
 - i. Was there a particular incident which prompted the decision?
 - c. What evidence is there to suggest this measure is necessary?
 - d. What weapon is the AFP officer carrying while on duty in the attendant's room?
 - i. What is the state of the weapon?
 - e. Is it only one officer in the attendant's room at this stage?
 - i. Is increasing the number of officers under consideration, or has it been under consideration?
 - f. What sort of incidents is this officer aiming to prevent or respond to?
 - i. What advice is this based upon?
 - g. What brief has this AFP officer been given?
 - i. Is the officer able to make a decision about how to respond to any given incident or will they be required to report to an officer in command?
 - h. Are there concerns for the security of the Senate chamber outside the hour of question time?
 - i. Has there been discussion about the presence of armed officers outside of question time?
 - i. Those who wish to enter the public galleries are subject to extensive screening prior to entry, regardless of whether they are entering during question time or not. Was the change to security arrangements made on the basis that weapons may be concealed during this screening process and somehow be brought into the chamber undetected?
 - i. If not, on what basis was the change considered necessary?
 - j. What sorts of weapons may be concealed in this manner?
 - k. If this is a concern, what is being done to tighten the screening processes for those wishing to enter the public gallery during question time, or indeed, at any other time?
 - l. Will there be any circumstances where the armed officer may enter the public gallery with a weapon?
 - i. If so, please list the circumstances.
 - m. Will there be any circumstances where the armed officer may enter the Senate chamber with a weapon?

- i. If so, please list the circumstances.
- n. Who made the decision to station the AFP officer in the attendant's room of the Senate?
 - i. Were any other locations considered?
- o. There is a longstanding tradition in the Westminster system that arms are not to be carried in the Parliament. Is the decision to place an armed AFP officer in the Senate therefore considered a significant deviation from established norms?
- p. Is there a security plan in place for the event of an incident in the Senate chamber?
 - i. Will senators receive a briefing on the security plan in the event of an incident in the Senate chamber?
 - ii. If so, when?

Answer

An AFP officer has been stationed in the Attendants' Booth in the Senate Chamber at certain times since 9 February 2015, for the purposes of responding to serious security incidents should they arise.

The decision was made by the President, following the National Terrorism Public Alert System level being raised from medium to high in September 2014. While this measure does depart from past practice it has been considered necessary in the current security environment.

The AFP officers undertaking this duty operate according to a specific standard operating procedure developed for this role, which takes account of parliamentary privilege.

Given the sensitive nature of security arrangements, the President has offered to provide any further information about this security measure through private briefings to senators, which regularly occur.