

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 23-27 February 2015

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: Outcome 1: Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Answer to 1067

Senator: Senator the Hon Penny Wong

Question reference number: 18

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Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 April 2015

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator WONG: Did you prepare this answer? It is 1067. I asked Senator Abetz.

Senator Abetz: Answers are normally ministerial answers. The department provides advice, but the nature of the advice is not disclosed.

Senator WONG: That is not what I am asking. I did not ask that question. There is a statutory requirement about a report from the PSC for the appointment of a secretary. I asked—a pretty reasonable question—you on notice, question 1067. The answer you provided is, "The Prime Minister has regular conversations with senior officials in his portfolio on a range of matters, including significant appointments." With respect, Minister, it reads like some smart-alec response from a ministerial adviser. It is a legitimate question about the compliance with the statutory process.

Senator Abetz: It is.

Senator WONG: I do not know whether it was drafted in your office or in the department, but it is really not an appropriate way to respond to a legitimate question.

Senator Abetz: It is not as responsive as it might be. I would concede that, but I think you are asking the department about whether they had drafted the answer.

Senator WONG: Yes, I did. Did you prepare this answer?

Senator Abetz: And that is what I was responding to. In fairness, what departments usually do is provide draft answers—but then, as we know especially from Senator Conroy's time in a certain portfolio, they can be changed in ministerial offices. But, as to how they are changed and what the changes are, ultimately the minister takes responsibility.

Senator WONG: I agree with that, but what has been asked and answered—and I know because I had to answer—was whether the answer had been changed, not the content but which answers had been changed.

Senator Abetz: Whether there had been a change but not the nature of the change?

Senator WONG: Yes. I wanted to know the date on which this was provided to the relevant minister's office—the Prime Minister and/or Senator Abetz—and whether the answer was changed subsequent to the first draft being provided.

Senator Abetz: We will take that on notice.

Senator WONG: Can anyone tell me the answer to the primary question?

Ms Kelly: I am just hoping that there is an officer in the room looking for that.

Answer:

A draft response to Parliamentary Question No 1067 was provided to the Prime Minister's Office on 29 November 2014.

The response to a Parliamentary Question on Notice is a matter for a Minister rather than their Department.