

# Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

## ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates 26 May-6 June 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

**Department/Agency:** Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Outcome/Program:** 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

**Topic:** Cabinet attendance

**Senator:** Senator the Hon Penny Wong

**Question reference number:** 101

**Type of Question:** FPA, Tuesday 27 May 2014, page 111-112

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 11 July 2014

**Number of pages:** 2

### Question:

Senator WONG: If we can just get this dealt with, there were two matters that you, minister, have declined to answer. I do not propose to revisit all of the matters, but just—for the purposes of subsequent procedure in the Senate—would ask that you do as is required under the continuing order the Senate. The two matters which I understand that you have declined to answer are whether or not the Prime Minister's chief of staff attends cabinet meetings and what the process was associated with the appointment of the cabinet secretary. That is my recollection. I just want to confirm that you are declining to answer those matters. Correct? I will take that as a yes.

Senator Abetz: For the purposes of Hansard, can I say that:

...as a general rule, whether ministerial staff were present at any particular meeting is not a matter of legitimate interest to a parliamentary committee. Ministerial staff are accountable to their ministers rather than to the parliament.

So spoke Senator Ludwig on 8 February 2010 at Senate estimates, F&PA, page 78. So, let's be very clear about this. He also indicated that again on page 79 of that Hansard of 8 February 2010 when Senator Ronaldson was making enquiries about who was in attendance at cabinet meetings and staffers. It is interesting that oppositions try to ask but, when in government, it becomes very clear that they do not answer. I will take that on notice and—

Senator WONG: Minister, can we just stop. Are you making a claim under clause 3 of the public interest immunity claim order of the Senate?

Senator Abetz: I will take the question on notice and then, in my response, you will find that out.

Senator WONG: Sure. Are you taking both of those questions on notice?

Senator Abetz: Yes.

Senator WONG: So you are not declining to answer at this point?

Senator Abetz: No.

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**Answer:**

**Cabinet attendance**

It is longstanding practice not to disclose the names of those staff or officials who may attend Cabinet and Cabinet sub-committee meetings. It is a decision for the Prime Minister as to who attends Cabinet and associated meetings.

**The appointment of the Cabinet Secretary**

The Prime Minister may appoint a Cabinet Secretary to manage the flow of business to the Cabinet and determine the forward Cabinet and Cabinet committee program.

This appointment is at the discretion of the Prime Minister.