

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: Acting Cabinet Secretary

Senator: Senator the Hon John Faulkner and Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins

Question reference number: 15

Type of Question: Hansard

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 17 January 2014

Number of pages: 3

Question:

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: I would also ask Minister Abetz if he could take on notice what selection process is being envisaged to permanently fill this role, given that the Prime Minister chose to establish it as an acting role.

.....

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: You mentioned that Mr Fox was particularly experienced. He had experience as an adviser to Prime Minister Howard in his previous bureaucrat roles, did he not?

Ms Kelly: I believe that is correct.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Can you tell me how Mr Fox was selected for this role?

Senator Abetz: We will take that on notice, but I think I have got a fair idea.

Senator FAULKNER: If you have got a fair idea, couldn't you share it?

Senator Abetz: No. Ministers do not have hunches.

Senator FAULKNER: We would not ask you to share it if you had an unfair idea, but given that you have got a fair idea or no idea—

Senator Abetz: We will take that on notice. I will surprise myself as to whether I am right or wrong.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Can you also outline for us the nature of Mr Fox's role as he is placed within the Prime Minister's office? Is it solely as cabinet secretary, or are there other functions that he performs?

Senator Abetz: I would have thought that would keep him pretty busy. We can find out for you on notice. I do not think he makes the coffee.

Ms Kelly: We are not aware that he performs any other functions, but we can take it on notice and confirm that.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Senator WONG: You have taken on notice the selection process. Is that right?

Senator Abetz: Yes.

Senator WONG: I did not catch whether Senator Collins asked whether there was an advertisement process.

Senator Abetz: I do not know whether that has occurred or not.

Ms Kelly: In relation to the acting appointment?

Senator WONG: Yes.

Ms Kelly: I am not aware of a process. Again, I can confirm that.

Senator WONG: So there was no—

Senator Abetz: Usually for acting positions it is because there has been a change of circumstance and you need to appoint somebody pretty quickly. So you usually do not advertise for acting positions. I have already had that in my department where people have resigned or left and you appoint an acting person whilst you go through the selection process.

Senator FAULKNER: What is not clear because of Mr Fox's current situation, which is that he is seconded from PM&C to MoP staff. He is a member of Mr Abbott's staff. Fair enough: that is clear and easily understood. What is not clear is whether the plan—and you might be able to assist in this—is to have a public servant act as cabinet secretary or be the cabinet secretary or a MoP staffer be the cabinet secretary. Can you assist us with that?

Senator WONG: Or a member of the executive.

Senator FAULKNER: I assumed that a member of the executive is ruled out—or a member of the executive. Correct. I assume if it is a member of the executive that they would have been appointed.

Senator Abetz: Yes. Allow me to take that on notice. I understand differing governments have had differing arrangements in relation to cabinet secretary. I will take that on notice. As you know, nobody from the executive has been sworn in.

Senator FAULKNER: Yes. I had assumed that, but you can correct me. I asked you whether it was likely to be a MoP staffer or a public servant, effectively. Are you able to confirm it will not be a member of the executive, or are you unable to confirm that either?

Senator Abetz: A member of the executive, as in a senator or member?

Senator FAULKNER: A member of the executive council.

Senator Abetz: Look, you never know what might happen in the future. But as far as I know that is not the intention.

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Senator FAULKNER: Okay. My question on notice is, I think, clear. If you are able to provide an answer, I would appreciate it.

Answer:

The Prime Minister will appoint the Cabinet Secretary as consistent with longstanding practice.

Mr Fox is the Acting Cabinet Secretary. Mr Fox was asked to fill the position on an acting basis in light of his experience as a senior public servant across a number of portfolios including his substantive position in the Ministerial Support Division of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Cabinet Office reports to the Prime Minister and works closely with the Prime Minister's Office, but has a separate status and location as consistent with longstanding Coalition practice. Mr Fox is the Acting Cabinet Secretary. He does not perform any other functions in the Prime Minister's Office.

The Cabinet Secretary will be a MoPS Act Employee consistent with longstanding Coalition practice.