

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: Government Staffing Committee

Senator: Senator Sam Dastyari

Question reference number: 30

Type of Question: Hansard

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

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator DASTYARI: Not a problem. What I was not clear about was the government staffing committee. The minister spoke about the role that they had, with particular reference to ministerial staff. But are they actually playing a role with electorate staff as well? Are they making recommendations in relation to electorate staff or just in relation to ministerial staff?

Senator Cash: My understanding is that the government staff committee has been established to make recommendations to the Prime Minister about the appointment of government staff by ministers.

Senator WONG: So minister's electorate staff as well?

Senator Cash: My understanding is it is in relation to ministerial staff only; however, I am happy to take that question on notice.

Senator DASTYARI: If you can, Minister. It is just that there were a couple of media reports to the effect—and they could clearly be wrong—that the government staffing committee is also ticking off on all electorate office staff as well.

Senator Cash: I apologise, Senator Dastyari: could you repeat the question?

Senator DASTYARI: There was a media report—I can pull it up if you like—on 5 October stating that the government staffing committee was actually looking at not only ministerial staff but also approving all electorate office staff for new MPs.

Senator Cash: I will have to take that question on notice.

Senator DASTYARI: Okay.

CHAIR: If it helps, Senator: I can confirm that no-one has had any involvement in the appointment of my staff in my office.

Senator WONG: That could be a good or a bad thing, Minister!

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Senator SMITH: I can add to that that I have had no external influence in relation to my staff either.

CHAIR: So I presume the answer is no.

Senator DASTYARI: We have had a few things to say about the Australian today—I guess we have a few things to say about the Herald as well.

Senator WONG: This is actually Fairfax.

CHAIR: Would you like my opinion on Fairfax? I am happy to share that!

Senator WONG: I think we can probably guess it, as a member of the coalition.

Maybe, Minister, you could take on notice Senator Dastyari's question—unless you know. But is the staffing committee involved in any appoint of electorate staff, or decisions to appoint electorate staff? In particular, is there any involvement by the staffing committee in decisions to appoint the electorate staff of new members of parliament, which is what is reported publicly?

Senator Cash: I will take those questions on notice.

Answer:

The Government Staff Committee does not approve electorate office appointments.