

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 the Hon Penny Wong

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Question:

Senator WONG: I have just found—what did you call it: the statement of standards? There are a couple of things I want to ask about it. It actually refers to the Government Staffing Committee—with capital letters, so it is a proper noun—so I guess it really does exist. So are we able to take it any further as to who is on it now?

Senator Abetz: Sorry, on the?

Senator WONG: The Government Staffing Committee. It is actually referenced in the Statement of Standards.

Senator Abetz: Yes, and from what I can recollect it is chaired by Minister Andrews and has the Special Minister of State, Senator Ronaldson, on it; and the chief of staff of the Prime Minister's office, the deputy chief of staff of the Prime Minister's office and the chief of staff of the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

Senator WONG: So the COS and DCOS of the PMO and the COS of the DPMO.

Senator DASTYARI: A question that got taken on notice while you were here went to some media reports that the Federal Director of the Liberal Party, Brian Loughnane, was actually on the committee. But you are saying that is not the case?

Senator Abetz: No, he is not a member of the committee.

Senator DASTYARI: Well, we have defamed both the Australian and Fairfax today!

Senator WONG: Has he attended any meetings of the committee?

Senator Abetz: It would stand to reason that a number of people attend the meetings.

Senator WONG: So we have a distinction between people who rock up and members—is that how it works?

Senator Abetz: Of course. And it often happens that you might get advice, or a minister might want to come along to prosecute his or her case, but the actual committee that formally advises the Prime Minister is that handful of people that I mentioned.

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Senator FAULKNER: Does the committee have any regular attendees other than the members?

Senator Abetz: I don't know. I will take that on notice.

Senator FAULKNER: Thank you.

Senator WONG: And could you take on notice how many meetings has Mr Nutt attended and how many meetings has Mr Loughnane attended.

Senator Abetz: I will take that on notice but, unless there is some sort of materiality in dragging people's names through the Hansard, I am not sure that serves any useful purpose.

Senator WONG: They are part of the group that is making recommendations to the Prime Minister—

Senator Abetz: No, they are not.

Senator WONG: So they just rock up to hold hands?

Senator Abetz: The five people that I mentioned are the decision-makers.

Senator WONG: So the Federal Director of the Liberal Party just turns up to have a cup of tea?

Senator Abetz: I have taken that on notice.

Answer:

Does the committee have any regular attendees other than the members?

Yes.

And could you take on notice how many meetings has Mr Nutt attended and how many meetings has Mr Loughnane attended?

Mr Nutt has attended all meetings in his role as a member of the Governance team of the Prime Minister's office.

Mr Loughnane has been invited to attend on an occasional basis given his experience both as a former Chief of Staff to a Cabinet Minister and in the private sector.

Mr Loughnane has attended less than a quarter of the meetings.