

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates 24-28 February 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Agency

Outcome/Program: Program

Topic: Mr Alistair Furnival

Senator: Senator the Hon Penny Wong

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Question:

Senator WONG: We may come back to it. Just to confirm, Minister, there is nothing in the statement of standards that actually reflects the delegation of the enforcement of the code to ministers, is there?

Senator Abetz: Look, I would have to refresh myself as to the statement—

Senator WONG: You have taken on notice the questions that I asked prior to the break—is that right?

Senator Abetz: If I can just have another look at this—

Senator WONG: Perhaps one of the many staff listening—do you have it in front of you?

Senator Abetz: The implementation of the code, I would suggest to you, clearly refers to the setting and implementation of standards across government. It is a different concept to the day-to-day monitoring in each minister's office. That is what I was trying to say before, and I think that puts it extremely succinctly.

Senator WONG: Okay. We talked prior to the break about what was disclosed to the government staffing committee, and you cannot answer any of those questions. But I want to ask now about the statement of interests. This is the statement of interests which staff are required to fill out—correct?

Senator Abetz: Yes.

Senator WONG: Can you tell me: did Mr Furnival complete such a statement?

Senator Abetz: I am advised that he did, but I will need to take that on notice.

Senator WONG: And was that statement provided to the staffing committee or to the Prime Minister's office?

Senator Abetz: Look, I will have to take that on notice. It clearly is provided to the minister; whether it goes to the Prime Minister's office or not I will need to check up.

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Senator WONG: Did the statement of interests to disclose the relevant shareholding and directorship?

Senator Abetz: Once again, I will have to take that on notice. I have not seen the document. One assumes so, and everybody knew of his involvement.

Senator WONG: Was there any change to the statement of interests over the period of his employment?

Senator Abetz: I will take that on notice as well.

Senator WONG: As I said, the Prime Minister has made a range of assertions in the House of Representatives today. In order to make those, he must have satisfied himself as to a number of the questions I am asking you. You are his representative here in the Senate; if you are not able to answer them, it really does beg the question as to whether the Prime Minister in fact did satisfy himself of these details before he told the House of Representatives that action had been taken.

Senator Abetz: Once again, I will have to take that on notice. As to what happened at question time today, believe it or not, I was not watching House of Representatives question time—that is not one of my habits, I confess. What occurred in question time today I cannot assist you with, other than to suggest that chances are the record will speak for itself.

Answer:

Compliance with the Statement of Standards for Ministerial Staff is the responsibility of the employing minister. Senator Nash has outlined the undertakings provided at length to the Senate and the Additional Estimates hearings of the Community Affairs Legislation Committee in February 2014.