

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates Hearing 21-24 May 2012

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.2 Official and Ceremonial Support

Topic: State Coach Britannia - correspondence of the former Government

Senator: Senator the Hon John Faulkner

Question reference number: 62

Type of Question: FPA P20, 22 May 2012

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 6 July 2012

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator FAULKNER: Yes, and I appreciate that. My question went to officials. I acknowledge that of course ministerial staff are in a different position, as are members of parliament. What Senator Evans says I recall to be correct, too. I think at least two members of the current parliament have visited the coach in its development, and that is a matter of record and they have had their photographs taken there. So it is not a matter of any uncertainty or controversy. But I do say to you, Senator Sinodinos, that I am not dealing with the characters of individuals here. I am dealing with the facts. The facts are as I have outlined them. My concern remains the nature of the expenditure of nearly a quarter of a million dollars, \$245,000, to be precise, during the life of the Howard government. I have expressed those concerns previously. I will not go back there, but perhaps Senator Sinodinos away from the committee can reflect on that as an example of appropriate governance or otherwise and appropriate expenditure or otherwise in the circumstances. An 80th birthday present for Her Majesty now that she has already celebrated her 86th birthday strains credulity to say the least.

One thing that might be helpful in this regard, so we can have full clarity and revisit this issue at the next estimates round, I ask the department to take on notice the question of any other correspondence on this matter prior to the current government coming to office. I do not expect you to answer that now, but I ask officials and the minister to reflect on that. That might also assist Senator Sinodinos' reflections on this matter.

Ms Leon: I will take that on notice....

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Senator FAULKNER: If you are able to provide any further information or illuminate how that could be the case, I might place that on notice and we will come back to these matters at the next estimates. I thank you for tabling this correspondence and I look forward to seeing the correspondence that occurred, if it is able to be provided, during the life of the Howard government as well so that we can fill out the picture. If PM&C cannot provide it, I am sure Senator Sinodinos will have kept copies in his back pocket.

Answer:

Attached are copies of all the correspondence held by this Department (see summary below) between the office of Prime Minister Howard or this Department and Mr Frecklington relating to the State Coach Britannia:

- 20 March 2006 – letter from Mr Frecklington to Prime Minister Howard;
- 5 September 2006 – letter from Mr Frecklington to Mr Andrew Kefford, Senior Adviser, Prime Minister Howard's office;
- 25 October 2006 – letter from Mr Kefford to Mr Frecklington;
- 24 November 2006 – letter from Mr Frecklington to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet;
- 24 November 2006 – remittance advice from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to Mr Frecklington; and
- 29 August 2007 – letter from Mr Frecklington to Prime Minister Howard.