

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates Hearing 27 May-6 June 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: CFMEU

Senator: Senator the Hon Abetz

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Question:

Senator ABETZ: Has the Prime Minister condemned the CFMEU in relation to these findings by the Victorian Supreme Court? If not, why not?

Senator Conroy: I would have to check with the Prime Minister about that. But let me make it clear: all Australians, including members of the CFMEU, should comply with the laws of the land.

Senator ABETZ: The local Leader of the Opposition in Victoria had great difficulty in coming out with that statement until 24 hours after it was put to him. I am just wondering whether the Prime Minister is suffering from the same difficulty.

Senator Conroy: As I just said, I am comfortable with making it clear that all Australians should comply with the laws of the land, and I am here representing the Prime Minister. Let's be very clear about this.

Senator ABETZ: But she is willing to share the stage with such people and accept their funding for election purposes—is that what we are to believe, Minister?

Senator Conroy: You are making a number of suppositions. I have said that I would take that on notice, Senator Abetz.

Senator ABETZ: The Prime Minister has previously said that we need a tough cop on the beat, that lawlessness has to be condemned wherever it appears et cetera, yet on this occasion, with 30 contempt charges and links to a notorious bikie gang, we have the Prime Minister willing to be associated with an organisation that has such a person in its vice-presidency. I assume also that the Prime Minister approved of the \$21 million haircut given to the building and construction inspectorate in the last budget, which all seems to suggest that a tough cop on the beat is no longer going to be there. But, Minister, if you could take all that on notice, given that we will not be getting an answer today, that would be very helpful

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Answer: On 5 September 2012, the then Prime Minister made the following comments in relation to the dispute between Grocon and the CFMEU:

‘What is happening in the streets of Melbourne is grossly unacceptable. It’s breaches of state law. It’s illegal actions and picketing and everybody should take a step back and get this dispute resolved ... There’s no excuse ever for unlawful conduct and no-one should be engaging in that conduct. At the end of the day industrial disputes are resolved by people being prepared to sit round a table and get them resolved and be willing to take a step back from the brink.’

The decision to achieve savings of \$24 million over four years through efficiencies in the Office of the Fair Work Building Industry Inspectorate was taken by the Government as part of the Budget. These savings were redirected to support the Government’s investment in the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, further funding to the Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman and funding for the workplace bullying individual right of recourse.