



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Ministerial Staff: Code of Conduct

SPEECH

Thursday, 13 February 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Brandis, Sen George

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator BRANDIS (Queensland—Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate, Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister for Arts and Attorney-General) (18:10): Mr President, I seek leave to make a five-minute statement.

Leave granted.

Senator BRANDIS: What Senator Wong and the opposition have just done is a disgraceful act. Senator Wong advised me moments ago, just before our new colleague Senator O'Sullivan was about to be sworn in, that she would seek leave to make this statement. She has taken the opportunity to do so in the absence of Senator Nash, who, like the rest of the government, was given no notice, beyond a few seconds, of this statement and has made the most serious allegation that one can make about a colleague in this place—that is, that Senator Nash, a minister of the Crown, has misled the Senate, according to Senator Wong, not once but twice.

Senator Wong, you are an experienced parliamentarian. You, Senator Wong, well know the gravity and weight and seriousness of the allegation you now make, and you make it on virtually no notice and in the absence of the person against whom the allegation is made and without the decency of giving her the opportunity to respond in terms to your allegation. Nevertheless, Senator Wong, your having decided to pull this stunt irrespective of all of the decencies and the protocols of this place, I can tell the Senate—and remind those who may be listening to the broadcast this evening that may not have heard Senator Nash's detailed and specific responses to the questions asked of her today and yesterday by members of the opposition—that Senator Fiona Nash, the Assistant Minister for Health, has throughout these events conducted herself in a totally honourable and proper way. All the disclosures that were required to be made according to the Prime Minister's guidelines have been made, as Senator Nash assured the Senate not once but twice, both yesterday and today, and not a scintilla of evidence has been produced by the opposition to refute what Senator Nash has said.

Furthermore, what Senator Nash has also been able to refute comprehensively and in detail is the suggestion that there was a conflict of interest between her chief of staff, Mr Alastair Furnival, and his position by reason of an alleged shareholding in a lobbying firm. As Senator Nash pointed out in question time today, Mr Furnival had no managerial involvement in the lobbying firm and the lobbying firm had no involvement whatsoever in the taking down of the website about which the Labor Party complains. As it happens, not only do I know Senator Fiona Nash and know her to be a person of perfect integrity but I also happen to know Mr Alastair Furnival. I have known Mr Alastair Furnival for 30 years, and I can vouchsafe his absolute integrity as well.

Senator Wong, shame on you. You should know better. There is a place and there is a time to make serious allegations and cast serious aspersions on the integrity of a Senate colleague, but it is not at the end of the week, after 6 pm on a Thursday afternoon, with virtually no notice to the person against whom you wish to make these scurrilous allegations and without giving the person against whom you make these scurrilous allegations the opportunity to defend themselves. Your behaviour is unprincipled, it is unparliamentary, it is despicable and you should be ashamed of yourself.