



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

MOTIONS

Assistant Minister for Health

Censure

SPEECH

Wednesday, 5 March 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Nash, Sen Fiona

Source Senate
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Responder
Question No.

Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate and Assistant Minister for Health) (14:42): I rise to take part in this debate and will acknowledge some of the comments that have been made by Senator Wong, particularly her comments relating to her having asked questions 'time and time again'. I would say to the Senate that the reason I have stood 'time and time again' was to ensure that the facts were placed on the table and to ensure that the facts surrounding this issue were brought forward.

Honourable senators interjecting—

A government senator: Come on girls, give her a crack.

The PRESIDENT: Order on my left! I asked for Senator Wong to be heard in silence, as I do for any speaker who stands on their feet. Senator Nash is entitled to be heard in silence as well, and that applies to all members of the Senate.

Senator NASH: The opposition has been inferring that there was a conflict of interest regarding my former chief of staff and his role in my office. As I have explained to the Senate and to the Senate estimates committee time and time again that there was no conflict of interest, perhaps it might assist senators if I again run through the processes that were put in place to ensure there was no conflict of interest. Every step of the way in this process, with every question that has been asked of me relating to this issue, I have acted in good faith and I have provided to the Senate and the Senate estimates committee the facts. I will again, to assist senators opposite, go through the steps I undertook to ensure there was no conflict of interest regarding the former chief of staff in my office.

I proposed Mr Furnival to my office in a temporary capacity to help with the transition arrangements of my staff. He was initially proposed by me for two months to help set up my office. His role as a former government relations practitioner is on the public record and I was aware of this. I also say to the Senate that there is no rule against somebody who has previously worked in government relations becoming a member of staff. Under the code of conduct for staff, he advised me of his private interests. I put him forward to the government staff committee shortly following the swearing-in. The committee came back to me and indicated I needed to obtain a series of undertakings, which I did. I have outlined those for the Senate previously. I have outlined them for the Senate estimates committee previously.

I refer senators to the *Hansard* record. Those undertakings have been outlined on several occasions to senators. I say to senators opposite, to be very clear: at the outset of his time of employ with me, my former chief of staff's wife undertook to maintain a series of undertakings in relation to the company. I have put this on the record time and time again, but I will do so again for senators.

Ms Cain undertook that APA would make no representations to me, no representations to Minister Dutton, and no representations to my health department nor indeed to any other minister of the Commonwealth in relation to the health portfolio. That was upheld. We have had several weeks now of questioning from the opposition relating to this matter—the matter being the conflict of interest perceived by them, in the role of my former chief of staff, which does not exist. At no time has any opposition senator provided any evidence to the Senate or to the Senate estimates committee about the existence of a conflict of interest. They have not because there is none. There was no conflict of interest. The appropriate undertakings were put in place. They were adhered to. I invite those opposite to consider the facts. There was no conflict of interest. (*Time expired*)