



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Grants Allocation, Future Fund

SPEECH

Thursday, 15 March 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 15 March 2012
Page 1891
Questioner
Speaker Joyce, Sen Barnaby

Source Senate
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Senator JOYCE (Queensland—Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (15:06): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation (Senator Wong) to questions without notice asked by Senators Sinodinos and Cormann today relating to the ministerial code of conduct and to the appointment of the next chair of the Future Fund.

There is a Yiddish proverb that says, 'a half truth is a whole lie,' and when people are evasive, misleading and nefarious we find that what they are doing is covering up the issue. The premise of Minister Wong's response was that no recommendation was given as to who should be the head of the Future Fund. Quite obviously, and apparently, this is not correct. This is not so much a question about the capabilities of the former Treasurer of Australia, the person who actually took us out of recession, the person who was appointed by the Labor Party—the Hon. Peter Costello. This is not a question about Mr David Gonski, a very respected businessperson. It is absolutely a question about the honesty in the answer delivered by Minister Penny Wong.

Sometimes you do not have to see the truth to know the truth. Quite obviously there was a recommendation and, quite clearly, Minister Wong has said on a number of occasions in both the printed media and in this chamber that no recommendation was given. But we have found out conclusively that there was an oral recommendation given. If she believes that is not the case, then she is calling David Gonski a liar. If she believes that Peter Costello does not have the 'requisite capabilities', then why did the Labor Party appoint him to the Future Fund?

We have a litany of inconsistencies. A minister who has been held up in the past as being of more honourable character than maybe some others has now sullied her own name and created questions about whether she has misled this place or the general public. It is quite evident that the statements of Mr Gonski are completely incongruous with the statements of Minister Wong. If Mr Gonski did not give a recommendation, as she states, then that clearly indicates that Mr Gonski did not give a recommendation that Mr Gonski should be the leader of the Future Fund. So he did not recommend himself and I would suggest that he knows himself better than anybody else. So he obviously did not believe that he had the requisite capabilities to be the leader of the Future Fund and we have clearly found that he recommended, in an oral form, that Mr Costello be the head of the Future Fund. Yet this is not the story that Minister Wong is telling us. So this is yet another sign of the complete lack of capacity for the truth that is so self-evident in the Labor Party.

On the requirement of the presentation of documents, they have hidden and slithered and sleazed away from delivering the truth so we can all see it. When Minister Wong was asked about the presentation of documents, we got yet another statement. She said the chamber voted against the presentation of documents. You can see even in her words that she is avoiding the facts, that she is hiding the truth. The chamber? No, the Greens and the Labor Party voted against the presentation of documents. In a later little dissertation of her own, she referred to the great Peter Costello. Well, if it is the great Peter Costello, then surely this is the same great Peter Costello that she says does not have the 'requisite capabilities to be head of the Future Fund'.

The Australian people now have a situation where Minister Wong has become, in a funny way, very similar to a former President of the United States, George W Bush. They had a selection criteria as to who was going to be the Vice-President of the United States. They made a person who was head of a giant oil field service company in Dallas the selector. That person's name was Dick Cheney. Later on President Bush rang up Dick Cheney and told Dick Cheney to select himself. It is strange, isn't it, how after a period of time there is this almost Orwellian place where we find it very hard to tell the men from the pigs and the pigs from the men. But we have arrived at this spot now. To be honest, it is not about Mr Gonski and it is not about Mr Costello; it is about the Labor Party, it is about Minister Wong and it is all about lies.