

J.S. 2/11.

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Standing Committee on Procedure
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Parliament House
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RE: Inquiry into Question Time Procedure

Submission on Questions without Notice

Parliamentary Secretaries should be obliged to answer questions.

There is no longer any possible justification for the exclusion of Parliamentary Secretaries from the provisions of S.O. 98(a) and (b) Questions to Ministers.

There is a long and involved history behind the evolution of Assistant Ministers/Parliamentary Secretaries to the current status they hold.

The short version is that the decision of the Government to permit Parliamentary Secretaries to receive additional remuneration necessitated substantial changes to their legal status.

Formerly they were not sworn to administer a department of state, nor were they provided with any salary of office. Their staffing entitlements were minor.

Now Parliamentary Secretaries are sworn to administer (as are cabinet and non-cabinet ministers) one or more Departments of State, they receive substantial remuneration and they are assisted by large numbers of staff—in some instances more staff than ostensibly more senior ministers.

In law they have authority co-extensive with the most senior cabinet minister to direct the public affairs of the department/s of state which they administer. In practice they no longer work only as assistants to a senior minister. A number now carry both policy and administrative responsibility for discrete areas of public administration.

It is no longer consistent with the House's obligation to hold the Executive to account to permit ministers with such powers and duties to remain immune from having to account to it for the carriage of their ministerial responsibilities.

Yours sincerely

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