

Question: 5
Topic: President's postage expenditure
Asked: 8 February 2016

Senator McALLISTER: Yes. That is fine. Can I ask about some specific items of expenditure. The answer to question on notice 2872 indicates that \$948 was incurred in postage back to Australia of conference materials and gifts received by the President during the MIKTA conference in South Korea. Can you just explain that line item?

Dr Laing: That amount was, as it says, postage of material back from the MIKTA conference. The MIKTA conference was the new interparliamentary forum that I explained earlier, comprising Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia. Normally these things are covered by the post, but this was an expense that the post would not cover, and therefore the credit card was used to pay for that postage. The fact that we do not really know what the post will cover and what they will not cover when it comes to things at the margins is another indication that there is some need to rationalise and clarify the whole system.

Senator McALLISTER: Do you have any information about why the post would not cover this particular collection of materials?

Dr Laing: No, we do not have any information. We will have a look and see if we do.

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Senator LUDWIG: Did post ask to post it back?

The President: I think they volunteered. It was a huge amount of volume and weight, and obviously I could not leave it there. Everything just ended up in my room and post cleaned it out and sent it back. That is my understanding.

Senator LUDWIG: No. My question was: did you ask post to send it back by DHL or did they do it on their own volition?

The President: I think they did it on their own volition. I really cannot recall. It is something I did not really get involved in. It was just done for me.

Senator LUDWIG: Perhaps you could check.

Dr Laing: Senator, I do need to check the basis of this. I have been handed some information that such postage would normally be covered by the Senate department, so I may have inadvertently misled the committee. I will have a look into exactly who covers what and advise the committee accordingly. My apologies for that.

Answer:

The Australian Embassy in Seoul arranged for the material to be delivered to the President and, on the advice of the President's Office, the cost was charged to the Senior Adviser's corporate credit card. It has been the practice of the department to cover the cost of postage of items gathered during overseas

trips taken by the Presiding Officer, as an item of official business related postage in accordance with the *Parliamentary Entitlements Act 1990*. This has occurred on a number of occasions.