



Senate F&PA Committee
 Tabled Document

Inquiry: Budget Estimates
 2016-17
 Date/Time: 5/5/16
 Witness Name: Senator
 McAllister
 Organisation:

Abbott adviser in funding row

EXCLUSIVE

MICHAEL McKENNA
 ANTHONY KLAN

A former adviser to Tony Abbott is among the biggest donors to sacked Turnbull cabinet minister Stuart Robert's fundraising vehicle that secretly bankrolled the campaigns of independent candidates in this year's Gold Coast council elections.

Simone Holzzapfel, media adviser to Mr Abbott during the Howard government years,

donated \$114,000 in 12 separate payments to Mr Robert's "Fadden Forum" over two months ahead of the 2013 federal election.

Ms Holzzapfel, who has lobbied for a mining company at the centre of the scandal that led to Mr Robert's sacking as a minister, also worked for independent Gold Coast mayor Tom Tate on his successful campaign for re-election in March.

She is a long-time lobbyist for the ASF Group — which is involved with two Chinese state-owned companies bidding for a

Continued on Page 16

Abbott adviser in campaign fund row

Continued from Page 15

new casino on the Gold Coast — and represents a number of developers from the tourist strip.

When asked about the donations from Ms Holzzapfel, Mr Robert said he would not comment.

"I don't comment specifically on fundraising," he said, before adding the Fadden Forum raised "lots" of money every year.

The "Fadden Forum" has become the focus of revelations that Mr Robert funnelled at least \$70,000 into the campaigns of three Independent council candidates on the Gold Coast and its hinterland.

This week, Liberal National Party president Gary Spence conceded the payments were "inappropriate" but defended the party's state executive in refusing internal calls for Mr Robert to be disendorsed ahead of the federal election.

The LNP yesterday issued a statement saying it was "not aware of any other similar donations" to non-LNP candidates during this year's local government elections.

In recent weeks investigations by *The Australian* have uncovered widespread concerns among Gold Coast council candidates about funding and assistance apparently received by rivals.

A number of candidates appeared to have unexpectedly slick, well-funded and very similar campaigns, leading to claims a number of candidates had effectively run as a block but not informed voters.

Councillors and other candidates contacted by *The Australian* have strenuously denied those claims.

In 2004, similar allegations prompted a Crime and Misconduct probe that found a string of candidates had presented as "totally independent" with self-funded campaigns, but in fact

received money from two candidates who were in turn exclusively funded by property developers.

Local Government Association of Queensland chief executive Greg Hallam yesterday said the LNP's funding of the cam-



The Australian
Wednesday 4/5/2016
Page: 15
Section: General News
Region: Australia Circulation: 104,774
Type: National
Size: 252.00 sq.cms.
Frequency: MTWTF

Brief: DPLAUTO2
Page 2 of 2

PARLIAMENTARY
LIBRARY
Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) licenced copy
or Copyright Act 1968 (Cwth) s. 48A copy

paigns of independent candidates was a first in council politics.

"This is a new development, something we haven't seen before," he said.

"Clearly people need to know as to where the candidate's funding is coming.

"There are proposals before the state government review for continuous online reporting of donations and this development gives some succour to that possibility."

Ms Holzzapfel — who worked as a media adviser for Mayor Tate until 2013 — confirmed her donations had been made to the Fadden Forum.

She said any suggestion that the donation came from a client was wrong.

"I donated because I wanted my former boss (Mr Abbott) to become prime minister and that is my right to do," she said. "Any suggestions anyone benefited from it (the donations) are false."

Gold Coast Mayor Tom Tate yesterday said he didn't care about the source of campaign funding for elected councillors whom he hoped to work with and draw support for his agenda.

In Queensland, mayors are elected separately and, in the case of the Gold Coast, Mr Tate and the candidates for councils campaigned as being independent of each other.

Newly elected independent councillor Kristyn Boulton is among the candidates that received backing from the Fadden Forum, with a \$30,000 donation to her campaign. Mr Tate said Ms Boulton was "high quality, (a) hard worker".