

Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates Hearing – February 2010

Department of Finance and Deregulation

Finance and Deregulation Portfolio

Outcome 3, Program 3.1

Topic: Printing and Communications Entitlement

Question reference number: F32

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Senator Ronaldson asked:

Senator RONALDSON— ... I turn briefly to the new entitlements regime, which was finalised last year on 22 December in ministerial circular 2009/32. I want to have a discussion with you about the definition of ‘party business’, which as you are aware excludes political fundraising. I would like to get an answer on the record as to what that means in practical effect. For example, if I am running a town hall meeting with a gold coin donation to cover costs of hall hire and coffee and biscuits, would I be permitted to advertise that meeting using the printing and communications allowance?

Senator Ludwig—If there are particular circumstances that you want me to look at, we might put them on the record and I might take them on notice to have a considered look. But I might ask you just to clarify it in some respects. When you say ‘some of the information’ I might want you just to expand some particular points so that I understand what the balance is. I may find you saying that one again, because it just struck me as a bit more information you might have to describe.

...

Senator RONALDSON—...So we have got the town hall community meeting scenario. What about in the situation where I was holding a breakfast, for example, with Mr Abbott at \$15 per person to cover costs—not a fundraiser, but a meet the community function, like a community cabinet type function. I am assuming that, given that I was not actually raising any funds for the campaign itself, I would not be captured, but I am interested in getting your view on it. Also, in a situation where there was even a nominal profit; for example, if you had budgeted for 40 people to come to a function at five bucks a head and 60 turned up, because it was generally advertised. I am happy for you to take that on notice, because it obviously is important to members and senators on both sides of the political arena. I will leave it up to you, Ms Clarke, whether you want to do it now or later.

Ms Clarke—We will take on notice the detailed questions, but the general principle even before the reforms came into being has been that where you are just covering the costs with a donation it was not considered to be fundraising. That question has come up in the past. But we will take on notice the questions you have asked in those specific instances. I think we will answer them as well, but we will also put them out in the questions and answers document that the minister circulates and that way they will get around to everybody.

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Answer:

Subregulation 3AA(11) of the *Parliamentary Entitlements Regulations 1997* (PE Regulations) relevantly defines 'Party Business' as:

- (a) ... the production, communication or distribution of material that:
 - i) is, or contains, how-to-vote material; or
 - ii) solicits subscriptions or other financial support for a member, political party or candidate...

A function which seeks a fee for attendance to purely cover the anticipated costs of hosting the function (i.e. that does not operate at a profit), would not be seeking to provide financial support for a Senator or Member, political party or candidate, and therefore would not constitute 'Party Business' as defined under subregulation 3AA(11) of the PE Regulations.

A Senator or Member could therefore access the printing and communications entitlement to claim the costs of printing and distribution of material pertaining to that function, provided that all other requirements under the PE Regulations for accessing the entitlement have also been met.