

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Budget Estimates Hearing 25-29 May 2009

Question: PM14a-c

Topic: PM's website

Type of Question: Hansard, F&PA 25 May p77

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 July 2009

Number of pages: 2

PM14a:

Senator CORMANN—I would like to understand whether the change reflects a change in priorities, a change in speed of implementation or a concern that things might not be progressing as fast as what might have been thought on 22 October. On the website, rather than 'Fixing our hospitals', the headline now is 'Improving our hospitals', and the section which used to talk about 'significant progress towards implementation' now says, 'While immediate action is important we are now talking about developing a longterm reform plan for the health system by mid-2009.' So 'significant progress towards implementation' has become 'development of a plan'. I would have thought that 'significant progress towards implementation' is much more ambitious than 'development of a plan'. This is the Prime Minister's website on 25 May 2009, as opposed to the Prime Minister's website on 22 October 2008. Why would that change have been made? Clearly it is a watering down of the language. It is a less ambitious target now. I understand why the target is less ambitious—we are one month away from the delivery deadline. I just want you to talk me through: when were the decisions made to make that change, who made the decisions, why were they made and are they a reflection of your being concerned that things are not progressing according to schedule when it comes to the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission process?

Mr Mrdak—In relation to when the changes were made to the description of the measures on the website, I will take that on notice and get back to you as soon as I can.

PM14b:

Mr Mrdak—I would presume that the changes to the text, given the timing that you mentioned, would well reflect, as Ms Cass has indicated, the substantial progress the government made in relation to the COAG outcomes late last year in relation to health and the agreements that have been reached about further work to be undertaken by jurisdictions, with the Commonwealth, going forward from those health announcements. In relation to your third point, my understanding is the health minister in the last couple of days has publicly made

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some statements in relation to this question of hospitals. I do not think I could add much further to what she has had to say publicly. In relation to the website changes and amendments, my presumption would be that would relate to the outcomes of the COAG work and the changed nature of the reform agenda going forward, as a result of those breakthrough NPs. I will check in relation to the website.

PM14c:

Senator CORMANN—As you take these things on notice, can you review the different versions on the website? What I am seeking is whether you have been given any specific directions from government that would change the target from what was to be achieved by the middle of 2009—significant progress towards implementation of the reforms versus finalising a long-term reform plan for the health system?

Answer:

PM 14a and PM 14b: The updated website was published on 10 November 2008. The Web Services team of the Department initiated an update of the website across the whole of the Department to remove outdated information and reflect the government's progress in key areas. The revised information reflected the substantial progress made to that date through COAG towards a National Healthcare Agreement (including the Commonwealth's investment of an extra \$1 billion in 2008-09 to relieve pressure on public hospitals) and the establishment of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC) to develop a long-term reform plan for the health system.

The changes were suggested by the Department, and do not reflect any concern about the NHHRC process.

PM 14c: No.