



18 October 2021

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
MP for Mt Albert
By email

Dear Ms Ardern,

ROLE OF ELECTORATE AGENT FOR WEDDING PLANNING – REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION

1. We write regarding the reporting by the *New Zealand Herald* over the weekend that your electorate agent, Barbara Ward, visited the Bushmere Arms, in Gisborne, in early May and on 5 July 2021 to assist with your wedding plans, and subsequent reporting of your Office's denials that the use of Ms Ward for wedding planning may have inappropriately used parliamentary resources. In a subsequent story, the *NZ Herald* reported: "*A spokesman for the Prime Minister said no parliamentary time or resources were used to plan the wedding, and the staffer was working in her capacity as a long-standing friend.*"
2. As New Zealand's largest taxpayer organisation, enjoying the support of more than 150,000 subscribed members and supporters, we take a keen interest in ensuring taxpayer resources are properly accounted for – in particular the use of public resources by Members of Parliament¹ who enjoy a privileged position. We take no position on the particular angle run by the *NZ Herald*, relating to what appears to be private contractual dispute about a cancellation fee.
3. We seek from your office confidence that Parliamentary resources have not been misused in this instance, and therefore ask for more details about Ms Ward's visits to Gisborne. As you know, it is unusual for an electorate agent to travel with or for their MP, except for occasional visits to Wellington. Specifically answers to the following:
 - (a) On what date was the first visit to the Bushmere Arms (referred to in the *NZ Herald* as "early May")?
 - (b) Does Ms Ward work full time in your Mt Albert office? If not, what are her usual days of work?

¹ See, for example, our comments on Claudette Hauiti (<https://bit.ly/3FW981S>) and our criticism of National Ministers for using Ministerial limos for Ministers campaigning in the Northland by-election in 2015.

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- (c) For each of the visits to Gisborne/the Bushmere Arms (that is, early May, and Monday 5 July, and any other visits) please clarify whether Ms Ward was otherwise in Gisborne for work reasons. Was any of the travel booked through Parliamentary or Ministerial Services? If so, what were those costs, and for those costs which have been reimbursed on what date(s) did those reimbursements occur?
 - (d) We note the statement from your office said: "*[Ms Ward's] costs are being met privately and the time involved is either outside of work hours or annual leave*". Please clarify, what visit(s) were annual leave, and what were 'outside of work hours'?
- 4. Given your very public commitments to openness and transparency, we ask for you to please provide reasons if your office is unwilling to provide any of the information sought.
 - 5. Thank you for your assistance.

Yours faithfully,

New Zealand Taxpayers' Union Inc.



Jordan Williams
Executive Director

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