

No dream job: Steven Ciobo appointed as Julie Bishop's parliamentary secretary

Author : Robin Davies

Date : December 22, 2014



Following Tony Abbott's pre-Christmas frontbench [reshuffle](#), Queensland MP Steven Ciobo replaces Brett Mason as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. This is mostly an overseas aid job, give or take the occasional consular crisis, though for Ciobo it will be a part-time one: he will, unlike Mason, also be Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade and Investment. [According](#) to Abbott, this is "in recognition of his work on the recent G20 in Brisbane".

Ciobo is undoubtedly a vigorous conveyer of the Coalition's messages. Here, for example, is what Mr Ciobo said about the latest aid cuts in a recent [interview](#):

The Labor Party and the Greens keep opposing us, so we need to find the money somewhere. We cannot be in a situation where we keep borrowing money from overseas to then pay out overseas. We keep borrowing a billion dollars a month just to pay the interest on the debt that Labor left behind.

That's straight from the Coalition's [hymn sheet](#), regardless of the fact that the government is not borrowing from overseas or borrowing very much in comparison to many other OECD governments. This year's hymn sheet, that is. Last year's was a little different. In a December 2013 [parliamentary debate](#) on overseas aid, Ciobo said:

As the Minister for Foreign Affairs recently noted, Australia will continue to provide development assistance worth around \$5 billion every year. At that level of funding, Australia is likely to be the eighth largest donor in the world. I repeat: Australia is likely to be the eighth largest donor in the world.

The government's decision to increase the aid budget in line with inflation over the forward estimates will provide certainty for Australia's aid program and the NGO community, after years of broken promises by Labor. Having promised to increase overseas aid spending to 0.5 per cent of gross national income by 2015-16, the Labor Party broke this commitment not once, but twice, pushing this time frame out to 2017-18.

Having diverted millions of dollars in aid funding to support its effort for a seat on the United Nations

Security Council, the Labor Party felt free to break the very promise that was central to its campaign. That, of course, was: Australia, we do what we say. That was the central tenet of Labor's campaign for the security council. When it comes to the Labor Party and overseas development assistance, recent history has shown that that is not the case and Labor does not do what they say.

Such is the short game of politics. Ciobo, like his senior minister Bishop, cannot claim consistency, and enters his new field with a large credibility deficit. However, he appears to be regarded as a promising younger member of the outer ministry. He will certainly have his work cut out defending the government's aid cuts, implementing them, and managing their consequences during and beyond 2015.

Robin Davies is the Associate Director of the Development Policy Centre.