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## **Andren rejects extra staffer as party election ploy**

The Howard government will spend over \$15M allocating an additional staff member to all 226 federal MPs and Senators for the upcoming election year, according to Peter Andren, Independent Member for Calare.

Mr Andren has rejected the extra staff allocation as totally unnecessary and a party-political rip-off of the taxpayer.

“The Special Minister of State announced the extra staff for all federal pollies yesterday – that’s 226 employees, at a wages cost of between \$8 and \$11 million. With superannuation, computers, work stations and office renovations the total cost would be more than \$15 million,” he said.

“This is a shameful waste of \$15 million in an election year that will give incumbent MPs an extra person to stuff envelopes with their campaign material courtesy of the taxpayer.

“As an independent member of parliament I am allocated an additional staff member in recognition of the fact I have no party machine to do my job for me. This has been the practice since independent Senator Brian Harradine successfully secured an extra staff member in the 1980s.

“Party MPs and Senators will now be able to employ 4 electorate staff, and independents 5. I will not be taking up the extra staff allocation,” Mr Andren said.

“This is the latest in a steady stream of increases to MP entitlements in the past 12 months leading into the election year. Last August the casual staff budget was increased to provide for extra staff around election time.

“Also in August the government agreed the taxpayer should pay the cost of MPs travelling to ‘political party executive meetings’ anywhere in Australia!

“On top of recent outrageous increases to printing entitlements and communications allowances this is a disgraceful extension of taxpayer-funded parliamentary entitlements to benefit party campaigning not constituent support.

“These privileges – as I call them – are supposed to help an MP do their job, not fund party political material and incumbent MPs’ election campaigns.

“There’s now a \$150,000 electorate printing allowance, half of which can be rolled over at the end of the year for a \$200,00 campaign war chest, around \$50,000 on postage and websites, and now up to \$50,000 for an extra staffer. This gives an MP an extra \$300,000 for the election year.

“With millions of dollars in corporate and individual donations to the big parties each year they are milking the taxpayer for tens of millions more.

“It is a creeping, hypocritical shoring up of the crumbling edifice of the major party system at the taxpayer’s expense.

“What chance the independent candidate trying to compete against a major party MP funded by secret donations, big business, the unions, and to a rapidly increasing degree, the taxpayer,” Mr Andren said.

**For further information: 02 6332 6229 or 0419 612 891.**