

Interpretation of principle of political neutrality of civil service

On the interpretation of the principle of political neutrality of the civil service by some people at the public meeting at Chater Garden last night (August 2), a spokesman for the Government reiterated that according to the Civil Service Code, civil servants shall uphold the principle of political neutrality, meaning that civil servants shall serve the Chief Executive and the Government of the day with total loyalty and to the best of their ability, no matter what their own political beliefs are. When civil servants express their views, they should ensure that their views would not give rise to any conflict of interest with their official duties, or might not be seen to compromise the important principle of maintaining impartiality and political neutrality when discharging their duties. Civil servants shall at all times ensure that their behaviour would not impede their performance of official duties in a fair and professional manner.

The spokesman stressed that Government officials' explanation of political neutrality to the public has all along been consistent.

In response to a question by a Legislative Council member in the Legislative Council on June 9, 2004, the then Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joseph Wong, said "The principle of political neutrality that civil servants should uphold comprises the following key elements: (1) the civil service's political neutrality is built on its allegiance to the Government; (2) it is every civil servant's duty to be loyal to the Chief Executive and the principal officials of the day; (3) it is the role of civil servants to evaluate the implications of policy options and to tender clear and honest advice in the process of policy formulation; (4) once a decision has been taken by the Administration, civil servants should support and implement the decision fully and faithfully irrespective of their personal preferences and should not make known their own views in public; and (5) civil servants should assist the principal officials in explaining policy decisions and in gaining support of the Legislative Council and the public."

At a motion debate on Maintaining the Political Neutrality of the Civil Service at the Legislative Council meeting on November 28, 2007, the then Secretary for the Civil Service, Miss Denise Yue, also stated that, "The most fundamental principle for the political neutrality of the Civil Service is that civil servants should assist the Chief Executive and the politically appointed officials of the day in formulating policies, implementing decisions taken and administering the public services under their charge • whatever their political assertion • with full loyalty. This is also the constitutional obligation of the Civil Service."

At a motion debate in the Legislative Council meeting on June 5 this year, the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joshua Law, also said that "The political neutrality of the civil service means that civil servants shall serve the Chief Executive and the Government of the day with total loyalty

and to the best of their ability, no matter what their own political beliefs are. They shall not allow their own personal political affiliation or beliefs to determine or influence the discharge of their official duties and responsibilities. They shall implement decisions and administer the public services under their charge in a just and fair manner."

The spokesman urged all members of the public to stay united and work together at this difficult moment to uphold the core values of the civil service so as to enable civil servants to continue to discharge their duties impartially.