

Paying for clothes

Why did a MP earning a good six figure salary with an intelligent and capable wife need a rich man to buy clothes for them both? Why when he accepts free clothes for his wife did he not automatically register the gift? He would of course have known of his wife's good fortune.

Any MP knows that gifts and grants worth thousands of pounds all need to be registered promptly. It is not as if he forgot, as he registered his own gift of clothes. He decided a gift to his wife did not need the same prompt treatment, then his office decided rightly they did need to register this.

This is a bigger issue because we were promised greater transparency and honesty from the new government. Labour in Opposition were eternally vigilant for the slightest error or questionable judgement by Conservative Ministers and MPs . We were promised a new puritan era of government staying well within the tight rules. I remember being challenged because I had not declared an article I had written for the FT. They were so disappointed when I explained that I refused payment so there was nothing to declare.

The U.K. does not give the PM's wife a national role as First Lady with official engagements and an admin office to organise events. We have a royal family to do that. Only occasionally does a PM's wife accompany her husband when he has a work engagement. She is not the focus of attention and it would be a distraction if a PM 's wife wanted to make her fashion sense the talk of the journalists rather than the event they were attending. A PM 's wife can dress well from any store or mail order retailer at affordable prices and can wear suitable garments on more than one occasion. There is no need to rely on a donor for a fancy wardrobe. Mrs Starmer has her own senior role in the NHS paying her a salary.

This is one of those gifts that comes with a big political price. It jars with many voters when it is the background to taking away £300 of heating help for pensioners. Well paid Labour MPs charging taxpayers for energy bills on their second homes also sits uneasily with the present news.