

Analysis / Politics

Marles' silence on his mystery golf buddy speaks volumes about Labor's ministerial standards

Few people are digging into the identity of the defence minister's US golf links host.



DEFENCE MINISTER RICHARD MARLES (IMAGE: AAP/MICK
TSIKAS)

Let's imagine for a moment that Australia's golf-mad defence minister Richard Marles was hosted at one of the United States' most exclusive courses by, say, an executive of Northrop Grumman, the giant US defence conglomerate that will likely benefit hugely from the AUKUS deal. Let's throw into the mix that a senior US defence official was along for the ride.

It would be a terrible look for the Albanese government and its deputy prime minister.

None of the above may have happened when Marles was "hosted", as he describes it, by an unnamed member of the top-tier Baltusrol Golf Club on the eve of AUKUS talks in Washington, [as we reported last week](#).

The trouble is, we don't know just who hosted, paid and had several hours of one-to-one time with Marles when the \$368 billion deal was taking shape in December last year.

Marles simply refuses to say who the mystery host was at this millionaires' club. The minister saw fit to declare on the parliamentary interests register

that the round of golf took place yet refuses to name his host, thereby making the declaration useless in terms of transparency.



playing a
Richard

There is also a case that by refusing to name the source of hospitality and declaring the game 29 days after the deadline, Marles is in breach of the [Albanese government's ministerial code of conduct](#), which stipulates in section 3.3 that "Ministers must declare and register their personal interests, including but not limited to pecuniary interests, as required by the Parliament from time to time".

Marles can be grateful for the lack of interest from Australia's major media outlets in probing integrity questions, especially when it comes to defence. The minister and the Albanese government can also be grateful for the moral void of the Coalition, which means it has no standing when it comes to integrity questions. (Pity about the country, though.)

So far *Crikey* is the only media outlet to raise questions, though we are not the only party.

[Open Politics](#), a website dedicated to political transparency, has also zeroed in on Marles' mystery golf round.

According to Open Politics' Sean Johnson, Marles' office refused to answer any questions on the Baltusrol round (which we will not call "Golfgate", though others might).

Johnson has discovered a document released under FOI in response to another party

seeking details of Marles' trip to the United States. The document, however, is heavily redacted and has blanked out anything to do with the day of the golf game. Johnson told *Crikey* he had lodged his own FOI request seeking details on the day. Let's see what that brings.

"I am also looking for answers from (Special Minister of State) Don Farrell who, following revelations about politicians not disclosing overseas junkets, issued a reminder to all MPs and senators a couple of weeks ago of the need to comply with the register of interests," Johnson said.

In the absence of an effective fourth estate, Sean Johnson plays a heroic role as a one-man band documenting the federal Parliament's transparency failures.

Johnson has a background as a Liberal Party staffer, but in the vein of former Liberal figure Michael Yabsley, he later turned his energies to political integrity, casting his gaze across all political parties as well as independents. Along the way he has worked alongside Gary Sturgess, the one-time adviser to former NSW Liberal leader Nick Greiner and architect of Australia's first anti-corruption commission, the NSW ICAC.

Open Politics' most recent project was a four-year analysis of declarations made by individual MPs to the federal Parliament's register of interests.

It found that nearly 30% of federal parliamentarians had accepted sponsored overseas travel and hospitality since the 2019



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s US

election, raising questions about undue influence peddling from foreign and commercial interests.

Leading destinations were the United States, Israel and Taiwan, which collectively accounted for 62% of trips, while a large majority (64%) was funded by foreign governments or foreign organisations.

The analysis also found that nine sitting MPs — 13% of recipients — did not declare their trips to the interests registers as required by parliamentary rules.

For Johnson the dispiriting conclusion was that none of the offenders faced investigation, despite the register resolutions stating that a senator or MP who doesn't declare their interests can be found guilty of serious contempt of Parliament.

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David Hardaker has an extensive career as a journalist and broadcaster, primarily at the ABC where he worked on flagship programs such as *Four Corners*, *7.30*, *Foreign Correspondent*, *AM* and *PM*. He spent eight years reporting in the Middle East and can speak Arabic.

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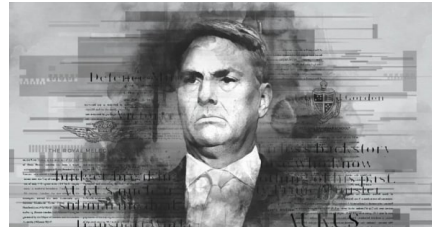
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Drandy  20 hours ago

Is Marles in the wrong party?

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agatek  17 hours ago

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No. Unfortunately, the LNP has no monopoly on questionable behaviour.

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Munin  15 hours ago

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Alas, no.

He is DPM of the Right one.


↑ 0 ↓  Reply

ADAM FORD  20 hours ago

“Leading destinations were the United States, Israel and Taiwan.”

So the United States and two major US allies that are actually of minor geopolitical relevance to Australia.

What pathetic, craven leaders we have.

↑ 5 ↓  Reply

agatek  17 hours ago

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Horne's assessment of them was spot on when he made it and it still stands.

↑ 0 ↓ [Reply](#)

agatek 

17 hours ago

Usually, when someone refuses to answer questions they do so because a truthful answer would confirm certain assumptions made about certain events at a certain time and in certain circumstances. Were the suspicions unfounded there would be no need to refuse to answer. After all, we're not talking about confidential government deliberations or similar where details can't be disclosed. It might all be perfectly innocent, but considering the time, the circumstances and the involved – at the very least it was stupid and it's a bad look. However, knowing how obliging our democratic governments are towards vested interests and adding to it the politicians' unwillingness to admit when they've done something they maybe shouldn't have I wouldn't be surprised if it was much more than just a bad look. And this is AUKUS – a very big trough with several names already lined up, as we've heard already.

As the politicians themselves are fond to say: if you've got nothing to hide you have nothing to fear.

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Chris Gulland 

13 hours ago

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Perhaps we could have the Porter blind trust disclosure rule for ministerial junkets.

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Tony Simons 

16 hours ago

Will Marles follow Prissy Pyne and become a defence lobbyist?

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Munin 

16 hours ago

 Reply to **Tony Simons**

Follow? He already is.

↑ 0 ↓ [Reply](#)

Michael Smith 

12 hours ago

It wouldnt matter what Party Marles was in. Both pretty corrupt now. Mostly focussed on using the wealth of Australia and their lawmaking power to set themselves up with lucrative syncures when they retire. The unknown party was probably a potential future employer and the golf cart ride part of the job interview. It will probably cost us a motza. Being a job interview he probably thinks he is entitled to keep the details to himself and not disclose them to his current employer, the good ol' Australian taxpayers. Bless them.

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