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— Rear Window

## Offshore junkets veiled by MPs' tardy disclosure

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Columnist



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While federal public servants are barred from hospitality of any great expense, no such prohibition exists on politicians. All they have to do is disclose the largesse on their register of interests, promptly, within the month.

Nonetheless, keeping on top of this paperwork is evidently beyond many. And with the adherence to the disclosure scheme policed by parliament itself, no real censure routinely follows the breach.

Last December, six federal MPs visited Taiwan on a trip funded by that government. Four promptly declared the visit on the public register of members' interests. Liberal National Party member **Terry Young** and Labor member **Libby Coker** did not. At least, not until after they were contacted on Wednesday [<https://openpolitics.au/analysis/social-media-posts-expose-more-undeclared-junkets>] by ex-Liberal staffer turned accountability campaigner **Sean Johnson**, of Open Politics.

Say cheese! A group photo of the delegation published on Terry Young's Facebook page.

The trip itself was no secret, with Young for one posting happy snaps of the whole thing on Facebook ("Nice to see a country that has electronic voting in parliament," he enthused). Though, if anything should prompt full disclosure of its particulars (not to mention adherence to parliament's own rules), it's a trip by Australian parliamentarians funded by a foreign government.

At the time the delegation — which also included Labor's **Meryl Swanson**, and Coalition MPs **Barnaby Joyce**, **Scott Buchholz** and **Gavin Pearce** — prompted a fierce rebuke in Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece *The Global Times*, which described the visit as "reckless". This, of course, was some three months after US speaker **Nancy Pelosi**'s own visit to Taiwan, and all the hullabaloo that prompted. Though the US Government paid for Pelosi's trip.

Our own parliamentarians' Taiwan visit – courtesy of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office of Australia – is the third undeclared overseas junket to ensnare politicians this week alone. As reported by *The Australian*

[<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/politicians-trip-up-over-travel-with-a-jet-lag-in-declaring/news-story/d1785506da276b0ca9d9698d236ad4ad>], sponsored trips by Labor senator **Deborah O'Neill**, Liberal senator **David Van** and Labor MP **Peter Khalil**

(the Labor members to Washington DC, Van to Egypt) were also not promptly declared.

Complicating the disclosures of O'Neill and Khalil was the fact that both initially paid for the trips themselves, only to be later reimbursed by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China. Which, at least, is a more creative excuse for tardy disclosure than the ubiquitous "administrative errors" plaguing so many other offices.

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