

LCQ5: Broadcasting of Chief Executive's televised statement

Following is a question by the Hon Audrey Eu and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (December 21):

Question:

At the end of last month, the Government made use of the evening prime-time slots of three commercial television stations to broadcast the statement of the Chief Executive (CE). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether the television segment was produced by the Information Services Department; if not, the reasons for the authorities' engaging outside production companies to produce it; the amount of expenses involved and the government department which bears the expenses;

(b) of the reasons for CE deciding to use the evening prime-time slots of those television stations to broadcast the statement; whether such time slots had originally been allocated to the Government free of charge, and the amount of advertising costs for the use of these time slots when converting them into advertising time; and

(c) whether currently there is any policy regulating the use of electronic media by CE and principal officials for political publicity; if so, of the details; and whether the authorities will, in their future production of political publicity programmes which involve criticisms on other persons, consider providing a similar amount of time in the programmes, for those who have been criticised to have a fair chance to respond?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) Since the Information Services Department (ISD) does not have the

manpower and equipment necessary for the production of short videos for broadcast, the video in question was produced by an outside production company at a cost of \$93,000. The bill was paid by the ISD.

(b) As the democratic development in Hong Kong has entered a crucial stage in December whereby the Legislative Council would need to make a decision that would determine whether there would be a big step forward on constitutional development or the status quo be maintained, the Chief Executive (CE) felt that at this critical juncture, he had the responsibility to explain personally the Government's policy to members of the public in a clear and direct manner, and to let them know how important the matter is to the democratic development in Hong Kong. The ISD had discussed with the three commercial television stations and had obtained their consent to broadcast CE's statement at mutually agreed time slots, which were outside the prevailing time slots assigned for the broadcast of Government programmes. The television stations did not charge any fee for the broadcast of the short video.

(c) Constitutional development is currently an issue that is receiving the greatest attention of the Hong Kong community. The CE's televised statement on this issue is entirely different from political publicity, and the two should not be mixed together. The televised statement was made by CE to discharge his duty as the head of the Government in explaining government policies to members of the public and canvassing their support. It also reflected the "people-based" policy objective of the Government. Depending on the profile of the audience, the nature of the issues involved and other relevant factors, we will make use of the most effective channel to convey the messages of the Government. This is what a responsible government should do as part of its normal activities.

We notice that after the broadcast of CE's statement, the television stations also invited people holding different political views to express their opinions in the same programme.

Thank you Madam President.

Ends/Wednesday, December 21, 2005