

Yes, ex-minister, you're hired ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Larry Anthony, the Howard government minister who presided over the rapid expansion of private child care providers, yesterday joined the board of the industry's biggest operator.

ABC Learning Centres, which now controls more than 20 per cent of Australia's child care market, announced the appointment of the former children and youth affairs minister who lost his seat in the October election.

While Mr Anthony's appointment was announced only yesterday, he has already been active in his new role.

During a visit to Canberra last week, he met his successor in the portfolio, senator Kay Patterson, whom he briefed about his new role in the private company.

The expansion of the private child care sector under the Coalition government has provided a windfall for private operators with child care payments increasing from about \$1 billion at the start of the decade to \$1.4 billion last year and an estimated \$1.53 billion this year.

During that time, ABC has emerged as the largest operator and, following its takeover of Peppercorn Management last year, it now operates more than 53,000 of the 229,000 long-day care places in Australia, giving it 23 per cent of the market.

In the child care industry, the government subsidy is paid directly to the operator, meaning that ABC received about \$150 million directly in subsidies last year, but this year the company should receive about \$350 million.

Mr Anthony follows at least four former ministers who have found work in areas related to their portfolios.

Mr Anthony lost his seat of Richmond in northern NSW at the election last October, and in November he appeared at the annual general meeting of ABC Learning Centres in Brisbane where chairwoman Sallyanne Atkinson, a former Liberal politician, said he was "a friend of the company".

At that stage, Mr Anthony denied he was seeking a role with the company, but yesterday he said he had been approached last month about a board position.

Mr Anthony denied there was a conflict of interest in his joining the ABC Learning Centres board so soon after being the minister in charge of regulating the child care industry.

"Unlike some others who've left politics and gone straight into business, I didn't volunteer to leave politics," he said.

"I was expecting a parliamentary career, but that didn't happen. So I'm pursuing a business career."

- reprinted from the Australian

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[2]

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