

## Senate row over Fair Work scrutiny

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Labor has angered the Coalition by moving to scale back scrutiny of the national industrial umpire, following years of debate over the Senate's right to question the judge who heads the tribunal.

Labor senator Gavin Marshall is seeking an upper house vote to overturn an order issued two years ago that forces Fair Work Australia president Geoffrey Giudice to appear before estimates committee hearings each time they are held.

Justice Giudice has sought to avoid appearing before them on the grounds that he is a judicial officer, but Liberal senator Mary Jo Fisher won crossbench support in October 2009 for an order that he attend.

Rule of Law Institute chief executive Richard Gilbert expressed



Geoffrey Giudice

concern that Senator Marshall's move could introduce some "optionality" into the attendance of public servants such as the FWA president before committees.

Senator Marshall said that since 2009 the Coalition had not needed

Justice Giudice to attend because its questions could be answered by Fair Work Australia's general manager.

Senator Fisher said Justice Giudice was a public officer and should appear before every estimates hearing to answer questions on the operations of the organisation, although not on tribunal decisions.

Greens workplace relations spokesman Adam Bandt said the Coalition sought to politicise the role of the president, which has the status of a Federal Court judge.

Opposition workplace relations spokesman Eric Abetz said he feared there was a deal done between Labor and the Greens to prevent scrutiny, saying if the minor party "were to be consistent with all their other demands for transparency and accountability, they would vote with the Coalition".