

Tony Windsor MP

Federal Member for New England
PO Box 963 Tamworth NSW 2340

Ph (02) 6761 3080

Fax (02) 6761 3380

Email Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au

Media Release 22nd March 2002

Windsor uses suspension of standing orders to raise importance of Public Liability Insurance Conference

Independent Federal Member for New England, Tony Windsor used the Parliamentary Procedure of suspending standing orders to raise the importance of finding a solution to the Public Liability Insurance crisis at next week's Public Liability Insurance Summit.

Mr Windsor used this procedure to elevate the issue in the Parliament that this week has seen more focus on political point scoring than achieving outcomes on issues impacting on the very fabric of the nation like Public Liability Insurance.

Mr Windsor told the Parliament, "We have had a month sitting in this parliament and there has been a lot of issues discussed, from boat people to the Governor General to what Wayne Carey actually did in someone's home to a whole range of issues, and the most important issue that is currently before the Australian people – (it may not be viewed as such in the eyes of this parliament; judging from the activity that has occurred in the last month, it definitely has not been) – is public liability insurance and insurance generally.

Mr Windsor believes that the debate on Public Liability Insurance needs to be addressed at a federal level and that it needs a national solution.

In an expression of his disappointment with the lack of attention being paid to the issue of Public Liability Insurance in the Parliament, Mr Windsor told the House, "I am rather disgusted that we have had a month of sittings, we have had a rush of Bills coming through the House at the moment and other than a few Independent Questions at Question Time, the issue of insurance has not been raised by the government or the opposition. There has been a constant plea by the Treasurer, by the Leader of the House from time to time, that "We are very keen to address real issues. Let's get away from who was where in 1992", but there has been no attempt by either side of the Parliament to actually address this issue of great importance to real people in our community. It is a disgrace that that has not taken place."

Speaking of his desire to have the Parliament debate the issue, Mr Windsor went on to say, "As the House would be aware, I have tried to use the processes of the chamber, and I have listed this issue as a matter of public importance on three occasions this week so that debate could take place in that forum of the parliament. This has not been granted as a matter of public importance and we have fiddled around with where everybody was in 1992.

The Parliament itself should start to listen to what the community is saying. They are not particularly concerned about who was where in 1992, but they are concerned about whether they are going to have their annual show on next year, whether they will have their art show, their fundraisers, their various community events. They are concerned about how they actually afford to pay for those events next year. Some are very concerned about even operating illegally at the moment in terms of not being able to receive insurance from anybody. It is not just a matter of insurance premiums being too high; it is a matter of some very worthy charitable and voluntary events not being allowed to take place because insurance companies will not cover them at all," Mr Windsor told the Parliament.

Further information from Tony Windsor on 0427 66 8868 or 0412 916 040

MR WINDSOR — I move

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would enable me, to move the following motion forthwith.

“That the House’s program be altered to allow Members to debate the serious issue of public liability insurance to guide the Federal representatives before they attend the inter-governmental Summit scheduled on the issue for Wednesday 27th March 2002.”
and

- 1 That this House recognises the widespread distress being caused by the insurance crisis and requires a multi faceted approach by all levels of Government and the community to solve this dilemma.
- 2 That this House recognises the comments made by the Prime Minister in Question time last week “that there is not one level of government that can tackle the problem
- 3 That this house notes with alarm the Treasurer’s reply in Question time today that the only Federal Government role will be to facilitate talks on the issue.
- 4 That this House acknowledges that Under Section 51 Clause 14 of the Australian Constitution, Insurance is very much a Federal issue and demands that the Prime Minister takes a leadership role in relation to the National Insurance Summit being held next Wednesday March 27, 2002

- 5 That this House acknowledges that this is the last opportunity for this house to send a message to the Government and the States, the views of our constituents prior to the Insurance Summit

- 6 That this House recommends that a Joint Select Committee of Federal Parliament be established to address this important issue of Public Liability Insurance with the widest possible terms of reference.

- 7 That this House recognises and acknowledges that until a permanent and systemic solution to the Public Liability Insurance crisis is found, the Government must implement emergency measures to allow public life and events to continue without fear of unreasonable public liability exposure.

Mover.....

Seconder.....

The Deputy Speaker (Hon I R Causley) Is the motion seconded?

Mr Andren – I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr Windsor – We have had a month sitting in this parliament and there has been a lot of issues discussed, from boat people to the Governor General to what Wayne Carey actually did in someone's home to a whole range of issues, and the most important issue that is currently before the Australian people – it may not be viewed as such in the eyes of this parliament; judging from the activity that has occurred in the last month, it definitely has not been – is public liability insurance and insurance generally.

This issue is particularly having a disastrous effect on country people. I am not suggesting that it is restricted to country people, but the impact on country people is going to occur first. Unless the government, and particularly the Prime Minister, takes a more prominent role in relation to this debate, we are going to see the demise of society as we know it in country communities and in many major city communities as well.

This debate needs to be addressed at a federal level. It does need a national solution. I am fully aware of the states position in relation to tort law and workers compensation legislation and those sorts of things where the States do have a role, but I think to raise the status of the Summit next week, we really need the Prime Minister to play a lead role in relation to this. The Australian community do not want to see a talkfest in relation to this debate, and that is a great concern that many people have – and I do not want to denigrate anybody that will be attending; I would imagine they are all going to be there hoping that something will be achieved. But unless the leaders of this nation – the Prime Minister, the Premiers – come together and try to address this problem, we will just see another talkfest. We cannot, in my view, allow that to happen.

I am rather disgusted that we have had a month of sittings, we have had a rush of Bills coming through the House at the moment and other than a few Independent Questions at Question Time, the issue of insurance has not been raised by the government or the opposition. There has been a constant plea by the Treasurer, by the Leader of the House from time to time, that “We are very keen to address real issues. Let's get away from who was where in 1992”, but there has been no attempt by either side of the Parliament to actually address this issue of great importance to real people in our community. It is a disgrace that that has not taken place.

As the House would be aware, I have tried to use the processes of the chamber, and I have listed this issue as a matter of public importance on three occasions this week so that debate could take place in that forum of the parliament. This has not been granted as a matter of public importance and we have fiddled around with where everybody was in 1992. The Parliament itself should start to listen to what the community is saying. They are not particularly concerned about who was where in 1992, but they are concerned about whether they are going to have their annual show on next year, whether they will have their art show, their fundraisers, their various community events. They are concerned about how they actually afford to pay for those events next year. Some are very concerned about even operating illegally at the moment in terms of not being able to receive insurance from anybody. It is not just a matter of insurance premiums being too high; it is a matter of some very worthy charitable and voluntary events not being allowed to take place because insurance companies will not cover them at all.

I am aware that there is other business to go through the parliament, but I would urge the government and the opposition to start addressing this issue. If it does mean we have to sit for a few more hours tonight, so be it. This is the most important issue before the parliament. We will not be back for seven weeks. This parliament must express the concern of its constituents to the federal delegation that will be attending the summit next week. Those views must be expressed today so that hopefully the Prime Minister – and, if not the Prime Minister, then the Treasurer and the Assistant Treasurer – may be able to guide the views of this chamber that summit debate next week.