



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Minister not honest about Government's capacity to guarantee Telstra Services if fully privatised

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor is pleased that the Minister for Communications, Senator Richard Alston is paying as much attention as he is to the survey on Telstra services and full sale being conducted by him and fellow country Independents, Peter Andren (Calare NSW) and Bob Katter (Kennedy Qld).

“Senator Alston has put out three media releases and answered a ‘Dorothy Dixier’ question in the Senate maligning the survey.

If it was of no significance to the Government, then why all this attention,” Mr Windsor asked.

Mr Windsor believes that Senator Alston is worried about the result showing country people believe that Telstra services are NOT up to ‘scratch’ and further that they don’t want Telstra sold so that they can maintain pressure on it to keep country Australia competitive with metropolitan areas when technologies improve further.

“Senator Alston, in his rush to denigrate participatory democracy – taking part in a survey to gauge the feeling of the community - is at odds with the Prime Minister’s statement in the Parliament regarding the potential to influence Telstra services if sold.

In reply to a question I asked the Prime Minister during the last sitting of Parliament at the end of August on the ability of this Government being able to bind future Governments to any decision they may make he replied, ‘We should always operate under the assumption that a law passed by one parliament can always be repealed by another parliament and I would not try and pretend otherwise’.

The Minister is therefore not being totally honest with the community when he basically tells Australians to trust the Government to look after our best interests and the National Party who purport to represent country people appear to be falling in behind the Liberals again.

The country Independents are just representing the views of our electorates and instead of just going on verbal representations, we are confirming the feelings of our constituents through the survey – something of which the National Party should also be mindful,” Mr Windsor said.

“We may all trust the current Government and believe everything that it says but that does not mean the next Government is bound by current decisions.

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How can Senator Alston lie straight in bed when he says future advances in telecommunications technologies will be accessible to regional Australians and all existing consumer protections be locked in by legislation.

Remember, John Anderson said similar things about the sale of Kingsford Smith Airport and two days after the sale, Senator Nick Minchin – the Minister for Finance said “that a future Government would be open to try to change existing regulations (Fin Review 27/6/02 Pg 18) and then went on to say ‘..Obviously we can’t bind future Governments’

Senator Alston suggests that the country Independent’s survey does not ask the correct questions and poses some of his own including

“would you support the sale of the remainder of Telstra if all of the following occurred:

- The Federal Government guarantees in law that Telstra cannot fall into foreign hands
- All existing consumer protections and other safeguards continue to be locked in by legislation
- It is ensured that future advances in telecommunications technologies are accessible by people in regional Australia.

“Senator Alston may like to refer again to his Prime Minister’s words regarding the capacity of this government to influence the decisions of future governments.

The simple question that should be asked of Senator Alston is ‘How long can you guarantee the guarantees?’” Mr Windsor said.

“Rather than trying to belittle and set the scene to ignore the country Independent’s survey of their constituents, Senator Alston should wait for the results and truly listen to the people.

He might then be viewed with less scepticism by people he appears to have already forgotten about,” Mr Windsor said.