



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

TONY WINDSOR MP
INDEPENDENT
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND

Shop 5
259 Peel Street
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

All Mail: PO Box 963
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

Ph: (02) 6761 3080
Toll Free: 1300 301 839
Fax: (02) 6761 3380
e-mail: Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au
Web Page: www.tonywindsor.com.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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Higher Education Reform Package Not In The Interests Of Country People

The Independent Member for the New England, Mr Tony Windsor, has opposed the Government's Higher Education Bill in Parliament today.

Mr Windsor said, "I believe that the legislation is destined to fail in the Senate due to the refusal of the Government to accept reasonable amendments in the House of Representatives. It was disappointing that the Government guillotined the debate on the Bill and would not allow Opposition and Independent amendments to be moved and I question what the Government has to gain by refusing to listen to fair Parliamentary debate."

"The Government's Higher Education Bill is unusual in that it seeks to link the Government's workplace relations agenda to educational outcomes by introducing the capacity to threaten university funding if the university detours from the path laid down by the workplace relations portfolio. This desire to interfere in non academic issues within universities also impacts on the academic outcomes parents and young Australians hope for in a university education by threatening the certainty of funding that is essential to a stable learning environment."

"Most people, including the government, would recognise that there has been a withdrawal of something like \$5 billion in funds since 1996 from the tertiary education sector. Very early on in the discussions on this reform it was said by the Minister and others that the intention of the reform process was to improve the lot of universities so that they would be better off under this reform than they are at present. Sadly, that is not the case."

"Universities are one of our important mechanisms for providing equality of opportunity in our society and I am concerned that regional universities are going to lose out in these reforms due to a lack of parity with other levels of education in indexation of funding and new mechanisms aimed at limiting course mixes."

"One of the reasons country people are struggling to attract doctors and other professionals is a recognised lack of regional training component and regional curricula, the reform package seems to fly in the face of these concerns by seeking limitations on course mix."

"The Government cannot complain about Senate obstructionism when it refuses to allow debate in the House of Representatives", concluded Mr Windsor.

For further information contact Tony Windsor, Ph (02) 6761 3080