



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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At it again !!

Windsor to refer another act of political pettiness to Inquiry

A Government directive to a school in the New England electorate to not allow the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor to officiate at the opening of that school's extensions despite the Government not being able to send a representative to do the honours should be seen as an act of political pettiness that has caused much unnecessary anxiety for the school involved. Mr Windsor will also be referring the matter to the current Senate Inquiry.

The O'Connor Catholic College in Armidale followed appropriate protocols after receiving Federal funding for their new facility and wrote to the Minister to invite him or his representative to do the honours of opening it.

The school received a response from the Minister apologising that he would be unable to attend and that he could not locate a member to perform the role.

The school then wrote to Mr Windsor as the local Federal Member informing him of the Minister's inability to attend or find a Government member and inquiring as to his availability and willingness to perform the opening to which he was honoured to be asked and duly agreed.

Mr Windsor then received a second letter from the school approximately one month later indicating that they had been advised that, 'according to protocol', Mr Windsor was 'not entitled to perform this function.'

It was explained in the school's letter that 'Recently, the School Liaison Officer from the Office of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Science and Training made the school aware of these requirements and informed the school that a 'suitable' member of Parliament was unavailable.'

"I am amazed at this situation and I really feel for those at the school involved.

O'Connor Catholic College has followed what I would see as the appropriate protocols and has now been dragged into this act of political pettiness that has caused them much unnecessary anxiety.

I would like to point out that the Federal Government funding was substantial at about \$290,000 but it was not the only money used to build the new facility as the total cost was \$700,000.

The Government has absolutely no right to dictate to a school or any community group or individual the terms and conditions that apply to an event such as this when the Minister or his representative had declined the offer.

I have written to the Minister for Education, the Hon Brendan Nelson seeking an explanation. I look forward to receiving it as I'm well aware that no such protocol exists. An apology to O'Connor Catholic College would also be appropriate under the circumstances.

I will also be referring this situation to the current Senate Inquiry looking into the Regional Partnerships Program and associated matters.

This situation smacks of the Senator Sandy Macdonald scandal of trying to bully a community organisation into preventing a local Member from performing their duties which is currently being investigated by the Senate Inquiry.

Schools and community groups should not be subjected to these games.

It's certainly not the behaviour I would expect from Government Ministers or their staff," Mr Windsor said.

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