



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Parliament told ‘Real’ people’s views on Airport Security

The views of ‘real’ people from the New England electorate on airport security were passed on to the Federal Parliament by their representative, Tony Windsor MP yesterday.

Speaking in the Matter of Public Importance debate on Airport Security, Mr Windsor relayed the views expressed by people in a street poll conducted by the Northern Daily Leader on the issue and reported in their Tuesday 15th August edition.

As part of his speech, Mr Windsor told the Parliament, “A lot of people have argued about a range of matters in respect of security. I would like to offer a contribution from today’s *Northern Daily Leader*, which asked—as I am sure they have in many regional newspapers—whether security at our airports is up to scratch.

Helen Green, from Tamworth, said:

No. Security needs to be tighter. We definitely need more security in country areas.

Andrea Fox, from Tamworth, said:

Yes, it is. If they (terrorists) want to get through, they will.

Jodie Thompson, from Quirindi, said:

Probably not generally speaking. It needs to be tighter.

Tania Kasch, from Kootingal, said:

No, I don’t think it is. If people can get on planes with nail files or knives, no.

Christina Tattam, from Tamworth, said:

In some ways, yes. There are areas that need to improve, though. I would like to see more security guards and more cameras.

Paul Kelly, from Narrabri, said:

No, I think there should be more security. You only have to look at what happened in London. Security at regional airports should be increased.

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Mr Windsor told the Parliament, ‘... the key point is that we (Australia) seem to have an illogical way of determining which airports or which aircraft are possibly at risk. I have raised this issue a number of times. One time, I was given a briefing by the appropriate departmental people, which did not tell me much, on the risk assessment process applied to our airports.

Essentially, the logic goes, as I understand it, that some airports or aircraft are more at risk than others. And when you ask about that risk assessment process—and I think the minister said of it today that it is constantly changing, and I do not disagree with that at all—obviously the answer comes back that, because it is about security, you cannot talk about the process.”

Mr Windsor went on to tell the Parliament, “It is not a matter of whether there is enough money to be able to secure the airports. There are decisions made, on this very airy-fairy definition of risk assessment, that are in a sense financial decisions. It is expensive to do that. Everybody would agree with that; I would agree with that. But if it is expensive, why protect Sydney airport? If there is no risk, why protect Sydney airport? Why not have every airport in Australia treated the same?”

Mr Windsor’s speech to Parliament follows

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE 15th August 2006
Aviation Security

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (4.06 p.m.)—I would like to speak to this matter of public importance, which is an issue that I have raised on a number of occasions before. I do not think the matters that have been raised on other occasions—up to three and four years ago—have been sufficiently addressed. I think the member for La Trobe gave an inkling—probably inadvertently—as to why some of the issues about regional airport security have not been addressed. He highlighted the amount of money that would be required to do that. I think he gave an estimate that it would cost something like \$400 million to secure our airports from terrorist attack.

He also made the point, in terms of the Labor Party calling for a homeland security minister, that the Prime Minister was currently that, and that in his view he was doing a great job. He also said that the main focus of the Prime Minister's job is—as it should be, and I do not vary from that—the security of the nation.

That brings me to my key point, which is that we seem to have an illogical way of determining which airports or which aircraft are possibly at risk. I have raised this issue a number of times. One time, I was given a briefing by the appropriate departmental people, which did not tell me much, on the risk assessment process applied to our airports. Essentially, the logic goes, as I understand it, that some airports or aircraft are more at risk than others. And when you ask about that risk assessment process—and I think the minister said of it today that it is constantly changing, and I do not disagree with that at all—obviously the answer comes back that, because it is about security, you cannot talk about the process.

What I can talk about, and what I think demonstrates the illogical approach to security at airports, is that I can board a 50-seat Dash 8 Qantas aircraft in Tamworth and carry virtually anything I like onto that aircraft. I proceed to Sydney, where I disembark from that aircraft and am screened going into Sydney. And then, on some occasions, I can board the very same 50-seater aircraft again and be screened in terms of my luggage et cetera. The question is: why are different airports being treated differently? Why is the aircraft, the 50-seater aircraft that I—

Mr Forrest interjecting—

Mr WINDSOR—The member for Mallee says there is no risk at Tamworth. I suppose he would say that to the people in America, where some of the aircraft that carried out the September 11 atrocity came from some regional airports, that there was no risk to them. I sincerely hope—and I have a great respect for the member for Mallee—that those words that there is no risk at regional airports do not come back to haunt him.

The process, as I said, in my view is very illogical. Why is Sydney airport at risk when Tamworth and Wagga and other airports are not at risk? Who has determined that? And I think the member for La Trobe gave an inkling of the answer, as I said, today. It is not about risk assessment or potential risk. Obviously, a terrorist with half a brain, when he or she views the Australian scene and sees a number of airports with Dash 8 aircraft on them, will see that some are screened and others are not. If that were the choice of weapon, obviously they would probably avail themselves of a hire car and drive to one of those places.

There seems to be this logic that it is only the big aircraft that can do damage. I do not believe that and I think history says that that is not necessarily the case. But it also says to me that these people, these murderers that are carrying on their activities around the world, will make choices based on the ease of access to ways and means of destroying Australian people and various pieces of infrastructure. They are probably more intelligent—more intelligent than some of us would think—than that they would all blunder into Sydney or Melbourne and be detected by some form of detection there and not even consider a regional airport. As the member for Mallee says, there is no risk, apparently, at regional airports! I sincerely hope it is on page 8 of the al-Qaeda handbook on terrorist attacks that regional airports are not at risk.

I think the government really has to look at this issue. The member for La Trobe talked about the money issue—that it would cost \$400 million to secure our airports. Since the government has been in power—and I respect the government's economic management, and the way in which it has been able to create surplus

budgets et cetera—something like \$33 billion has been returned to the taxpayer through tax cuts alone since 2001.

It is not a matter of whether there is enough money to be able to secure the airports. There are decisions made, on this very airy-fairy definition of risk assessment, that are in a sense financial decisions. It is expensive to do that. Everybody would agree with that; I would agree with that. But if it is expensive, why protect Sydney airport? If there is no risk, why protect Sydney airport? Why not have every airport in Australia treated the same? If we are going to protect some airports from terrorism, and if terrorism is deemed by the government to be a threat to this nation and the people who live within it and who we need to protect—and we heard the debate today about a gate left open and all the semantics that went on in terms of whether that gate was open or not open—

Mr Danby—It's still open.

Mr WINDSOR—Irrespective of whether it was open or not, the whole debate was about the security of that gate and the possible impact on people. So there is obviously recognition within the government, and the opposition for that matter, that there is a threat to the Australian people from terrorist activity. If there is not, we should not have any protection at any of our airports. But the way in which it is structured at the moment, and the way in which people will look at our airports, is obviously that some are protected and others are not. They have similar aircraft on them, in many cases. Obviously, if there were a terrorist threat, people would be making their own determination as to where they were more likely to be caught.

A lot of people have argued about a range of matters in respect of security. I would like to offer a contribution from today's *Northern Daily Leader*, which asked—as I am sure they have in many regional newspapers—whether security at our airports is up to scratch. Helen Green, from Tamworth, said:

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Paul Kelly, from Narrabri, said:

No, I think there should be more security. You only have to look at what happened in London. Security at regional airports should be increased.

That is a bit of a snapshot of what real people are actually thinking about security. Obviously they recognise that there is a risk, because we are being told at government level and internationally that there is a risk. People who use regional airports would like to be treated as equal citizens to their city cousins, not as second-class citizens.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—The discussion is concluded.