



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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Windsor supports calls by O'Farrell for review of political donation laws

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor, has supported calls by Deputy Leader of the NSW Liberal Party, Barry O'Farrell, for a review of political donation laws in Australia.

Mr Windsor said Mr O'Farrell was quite correct to be concerned about the loss of confidence in our political system and the way in which political donations are made and in some cases hidden from public scrutiny.

The use of 'associated entities' as a channel for funds to political parties without being identified was commonly used and the removal of the requirement of media returns after each election are also of concern to Mr Windsor.

"Recently, the Federal Government increased the minimum political disclosure from \$1,500 to \$10,000 with multiples also allowed under the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity And Other Measures) legislation.

Rather than enhancing the integrity of the process, the Commonwealth has actually made it easier to hide the money trail.

The issue of public disclosure by media prior to these legislative changes was that it only gave a check on the process of disclosure," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes by removing that media return requirement another check has been removed as to who is paying the piper, who is pulling the strings and who is getting something for donating money. The donation is not observed.

"In New England, the only way that you could find out the potential spend of a Party candidate, for instance, was to look through the media disclosure, because a Party candidate would inevitably have a nil return.

Some people in the public arena might think: 'He didn't spend anything. Isn't he a great candidate?

That's the sort of candidate we want—someone who stands on their own resolve.'

But that is not the reality of the situation," Mr Windsor said.

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Mr Windsor said there are people donating a massive amount of money, essentially through associated entities that is then finding its way to the candidates which needs to be accounted for publicly.

“Some donated money goes into media for promotion of that candidate, but we do not know who is pushing the buttons of that particular candidate.

In the past, as an Independent, I have had to disclose my donors, so everyone was well aware of how much was donated and who was donating to my campaigns.

I have always been happy to disclose this and donors to my campaigns have been aware that this would be the case.

But a Party candidate does not have to do that and now I won't have to declare anything under \$10,000 either,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes the broader electorate would rather know who is paying the piper so that they can make their adjudication on the issues that come before the parliament and see what is going on.

“Amendments need to be made requiring each candidate, regardless of party affiliation, to file an individual return that indicates their donors and expenditure.

I think most people would view that as fair; I think they would view that as happening now.

But when they see a massive campaign taking place in the media and on television screens, and they look up a particular candidate's disclosure form and it says 'nil', they wonder how that happens.

Parliamentarians know how that happens, but I think one of the things that must come out of this process is that people really do need to know what is going on in the so-called democratic institutions of our Nation's Parliaments,” Mr Windsor said.