



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Labor at risk of wearing “Pork Barrelling” label too

The Labor Government risks losing credibility on the “pork barrelling” issue if it persists with a Coalition look-alike marginal seat funding strategy in election periods according to the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor was referring to the so-called “Better Regions Program” announced in the recent Budget which the Labor Government is using to fund its election promises.

“The \$176M Better Regions Program has striking similarities to the former Government’s Strategic Opportunities Notional Allocation (SONA) funding guidelines which allowed the Coalition to fund election promises without any due process of evaluation.

“The Labor Government is essentially saying that anything goes during an election campaign and that there is no need for any due process.

“This is almost a re-run of what Coalition Ministers said in relation to scrutiny of their election promises,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes there needs to be further scrutiny of this sort of process and how it complies with the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997 in terms of expenditure of public funds.

“The Labor Party was very critical of the handling of the Regional Partnerships Program and the abuse of process and the programs own guidelines but it seems through its own actions to agree that circumventing any guidelines is acceptable at election time.

‘It’s an election promise therefore it’s beyond scrutiny and ‘OK’.

“The question needs to be asked, why is expenditure of public funds to community groups and individuals somehow immune from scrutiny because the promise is made during the election cycle?” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said he would be raising that question with the Australian National Audit Office which amongst other things was scathing of the abuses of the Coalition’s Regional Partnerships Program.

“If the answer from the ANAO to that question is that the winners can spend taxpayer’s money as they see fit without any process or scrutiny, then surely that capability should be removed.

“I will also be raising this issue with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

“If the Labor Government wants to maintain any moral high ground on the pork barrelling issue, they will need to demonstrate that they are not mimicking those they quite rightly condemned for misuse of public funds,” Mr Windsor said.

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