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The Editor
The Northern Daily Leader
PO Box 525
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Dear Editor

The lack of balance in a story quoting Senator John Williams' press release as fact in relation to my position on Coalition Amendments to the Federal Government's Youth Allowance legislation (NDL, Saturday, 31 October, 2009, page 24) does little for the credibility of your paper, particularly on such an issue as our young people. The fact that no contact was made with me to verify the nonsense in Senator Williams' press release indicates a tabloid approach to journalism.

For those parents and students interested in the facts:

1. The four Amendments made by the Coalition to the Youth Allowance legislation were moved as one, even though they dealt with two different issues which indicated in itself how interested they were in the actual issue.
2. Two Amendments were to reduce the Start Up Scholarships that will go to every student every year who complies with the Independence Test for Youth Allowance or the Family Income Test for Youth Allowance (of less than \$139,000) by nearly 60%. This reduction was apparently to fund those students (mainly city kids) who access Youth Allowance but still live at home. So much for Senator Williams' rubbish about standing up for country children.
3. Senator Williams suggests that all country students currently in a gap year but living within 90 minutes of a university will miss out. He instances towns like Inverell, Glen Innes and Tamworth as examples in relation to the University of New England. The fact is those towns will be able to comply with the so called 90 minute transition provisions as there is no public transport to the UNE from those centres which would allow daily attendance, a proviso Senator Williams conveniently left out of his statement.
4. The Coalition Amendment would have meant that due to the reduction in the Start Up Scholarship (\$700m), \$160m would have come from country students. They then intended to replace that with a scholarship arrangement that amounted to \$120m for country students. And they wonder why I wouldn't vote for it.
5. At the conclusion of the debate after the Amendments were defeated, the National Party voted with the Government to support the Bill. Talk about hypocrisy.

Senator Williams may well have generated fear in many New England residents over the issue but he has done nothing to enhance any credibility he may have had in terms of representation.

May I respectfully suggest your paper check the facts before printing rubbish.

For those parents and students concerned about the changes, please contact my office.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Windsor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Tony Windsor MP
Member for New England

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