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6 February 2003

Labor Ducks for Cover on War Vote

The Labor Opposition has confirmed it is deeply divided on the Iraq War issue by failing to seek assurances from the Prime Minister that the current debate will be allowed to run its full course, including consideration of an amendment seeking no Australian involvement without UN Security Council support.

The amendment was moved by Independent Member for Calare Peter Andren today during his speech in reply to the PM's statement.

"I wanted to ask the Prime Minister today whether he'd allow the debate to continue to its conclusion including a vote on my amendment. However the Opposition said it already had its questions organised and I would have to wait my turn.

"I wrote to Opposition Leader Simon Crean (attached) suggesting there was no more important question today and saying he should ask it.

"Labor completely ignored the question, and instead simply asked the PM if he would convey to George W. Bush the concerns of the Australian people. What we need is a vote of Parliament locking us into the position people are demanding: that there be no involvement in an Iraq war without unanimous UN Security support.

"I expect the debate on Iraq will now be adjourned without consideration of my amendment. Both the Government and Labor will therefore avoid a vote.

"It seems the Labor Party, as it did with a similar amendment I moved last September, will again side-step the difficult issue of committing itself to a vote on this matter.

"It only confirms the ALP is still leaving open the option of supporting military action if one of the five permanent members of the Security Council vetoes a strike, despite all Simon Crean's bold statements this week.

"If the Government and Opposition are to be believed in their rhetoric about the importance of UN Security Council endorsement of any action, then they will allow this amendment to be fully considered.

"To do otherwise would be to betray the Australian electorate," Mr Andren concluded.

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