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12 February 2003

MEDIA STATEMENT

Andren Brings on Iraq Vote

The Independent Member for Calare, Peter Andren MP moved to close the debate on the Prime Minister's statement on Iraq to bring on a vote on his amendment that the House insists that in the absence of specific, unambiguous and unanimous support of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, Australian defence forces not be involved in any military action in Iraq.

It's my absolute conviction that the imminent outbreak of hostilities in Iraq in coming weeks was of too great importance to the Australian people and world peace for the debate to be adjourned for completion in the next sitting in March.

The Australian people deserve a vote on the grounds for committing our defence forces to this crisis rather than a debate without any guaranteed conclusion.

The ALP moved to replace my amendment (committing our defence forces to action only under the unanimous sanction of the permanent members of the UN Security Council) with yet another open ended, non-committal motherhood statement.

The vote will now be that my amendment of Australian involvement only under UN sanction be reinstated.

Despite its rhetoric, the Opposition has never locked itself into a unanimous Security Council vote as a prerequisite for our involvement, and like the Government, is desperate to avoid this vote.

I have ensured that the question must be considered by the House tomorrow, where I will be seeking a division of Members.

The vote will demonstrate which of the Members of this Parliament are truly committed to the position that Australian involvement in Iraq is only to proceed as part of a UN resolution of this crisis.

If Labor does not support me it means it is voting down not only my amendment but its own.

I am gravely aware of the fact that I have had to bring the debate to an early close but I cannot allow such an issue of life and death to be buried in the technicalities of the political process.

I and Tony Windsor and whoever else supports this amendment will presumably be joining us on the YES side to allow MPs to support my amendment that reflects the overwhelming will of the Australian people.

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