



NEWS RELEASE

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Independents in Key Marginal Seats Join Forces and Ask:

Will the Real Health Minister Stand Up at Today's National Press Club Address

Across health there are hundreds of community groups advocating for improvements in health. For four women across 3 states the lack of any real action in maternity reform has led them to stand as independent candidates.

Michelle Meares, Amy Bell, Sally-Anne Brown and Rebecca Jenkinson are standing in the seats of Robertson, Macquarie, Corangamite and Dickson respectively. These seats are ultra marginal and these women are united by a common passion to improve maternity care for Australian women rather than seeing health services dominated by the self interest of the Australian Medical Association (AMA).

Maternity reform was the first cab of the rank in Rudd's health reform plan. Nicola Roxon announced funding midwives through Medicare for the first time. "This legislation had the capacity to greatly improve care for women across the country and was initially well received." says Rebecca Jenkinson, teacher, mother of 2 children and independent candidate for Dickson.

Whilst consultation with a range of stakeholders has occurred it has been clear to those participating that the medical lobby has controlled the decisions within the reforms. "Nicola Roxon has put the self interest of the doctors union above the needs of Australian families as they continue to suffer, especially in rural and remote areas." said Sally-Anne Brown a nurse and midwife from rural Victoria, running in the electorate of Corangamite.

"In the last month we have come to the conclusion that Nicola Roxon is not really Australia's Health Minister and Peter Dutton is not the shadow minister. The real minister is Dr Andrew Pesce, President of the Australian Medical Association." said Michelle Meares, IT consultant and mother on NSW's

Central Coast. “Despite unprecedented support from the women of Australia for maternity reform, Minister Roxon turned her back on them caving to pressure from the AMA that has resulted in legislation being snuck through, signed off by the Governor General the day before the election was called.”

The Determination (National Health Collaborative arrangements for midwives Determination 2010) passed on the election eve requires medical sign off or agreement before women can receive a Medicare payment for private midwifery care. This legislation gives doctors the power of veto not only over the practice of midwives but also the choices pregnant women make.

“This move looks likely to contravene Australia’s commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). How can the women of the ALP introduce legislation that prevents a woman from making decisions about her own body, giving veto to medical practitioners” said Sally-Anne Brown. Amy Bell, mother and nurse from the Blue Mountains region adds “Women have asked us to step up and represent the voices of women on this issue and they are standing behind us all the way.”

Rebecca Jenkinson is also dismayed that Shadow Health Minister, Peter Dutton has also refused to take a stand on this issue. “As a member of his electorate I am aware of the women that have met with and written to Peter Dutton. We are yet to see any positive protection from the coalition for the rights of women to make decisions. We can only assume that Minister’s Roxon and Dutton believe the AMA has more currency than Australian families”

All candidates report great support on the ground. For too long maternity care has been thought of as a ‘soft issue’. One only needs to see the catastrophic effects of postnatal depression, family breakdown and child abuse to know that how we support new families, especially mothers matters greatly. Amy Bell adds “Maternal suicide is the leading cause of death in the first year after birth – we have to look at more positive ways to support women.”

These candidates join together to ask when will Nicola Roxon and Peter Dutton (who are speaking together today at the National Press Club) be honest enough to announce that the AMA is the real driver of health policy in Australia.

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