

Call for inquiry into half-baked Scone sale

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Federation has secured a promise from the NSW Labor Opposition to establish a parliamentary inquiry into the sale of TAFE campuses after the under-the-counter sell-off of the Scone college.

At a community forum organised by the teachers union on Wednesday evening, Opposition Leader Jodi McKay included the call for a full inquiry in a list of demands requiring the Berejiklian Government to also refer the sale process to the Auditor General and to reinvest the money from the sale into the region.

The meeting at Scone RSL was told that only part of the \$4 million from the sale will not be invested in the region and that the Government cannot guarantee TAFE would be able to lease part of the site as it will be wholly controlled by Racing NSW.

The forum was told that the amenities available for TAFE course delivery would be significantly reduced, and that students and teachers would be left with just one classroom and no longer have access to a library, teacher offices, lunchroom, student amenities, nor be able to operate farm machinery or run horses.



Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos decried the contempt of the community shown by the Government and its hasty timing of the sale announcement on Tuesday — the day before the forum and the resignation of local member Michael Johnsen.

“That this decision was made yesterday, quickly followed by the resignation of the sitting Member of Parliament speaks volumes,” he said. “It was clearly a decision made knowing the disgraced local member would be forced to resign.”

Mr Gavrielatos said public assets, such as TAFE colleges, belong to the community and the government of the day is merely the custodian for the period they hold office.

He told the forum — which included Ms McKay, Greens MLC David Shoebridge, Assistant General Manager of NSW Public Services Troy Wright, Shadow Minister for Skills Jihad Dib, President of the Country Women’s Association Bronwyn Dunston, Upper Hunter Shire Councillor Lee Watts and NSW Farmers Scone President Tom Hunt — that educational institutions were at the heart of communities.

“Well, they’ve just ripped out part of your heart,” he said. “There’s a skills shortage, so rather than expanding the provision, rather than talking with local industry to see what’s required in this and surrounding towns to secure the skills required to rebuild after fires and floods, rather than having those conversations ... this Government has shut down this TAFE.”

In a statement before the forum, Mr Gavrielatos said the sale sets a precedent that puts all TAFE colleges at risk of being shut down and sold off.

“At a time when we should be expanding the role of TAFE in regional areas, the NSW Government has sold off the campus to private interests,” he stated.

“The Berejiklian Government claims the sale is necessary to fund additional capital infrastructure but in reality, it is forcing TAFE to cannibalise existing facilities to fund connected learning centres.”