A union's called on the federal government to withdraw funding from three states it says are intent on destroying the TAFE system.

Victoria recently cut funding to TAFE colleges, NSW has flagged an overhaul, and a new report says about half of Queensland's TAFE colleges should be closed.

The Australian Education Union's TAFE secretary PAT FORWARD says federal tertiary education and skills minister CHRIS EVANS must remind states what they stand to lose.

Queensland's Skills and Training Taskforce has released its final report into the vocational education and training sector.

It recommended closing about half of the state's 80 plus campuses, saying 13 of those are currently empty and others have few students.

AAP RTV tnf/crh
Believers step up for Obama

THE VERDICT

PAUL TOOHEY
US CORRESPONDENT

BARACK Obama has been returned to power as the 44th President of the US in a stunning victory that reaffirms his strong moral mandate of protecting the most vulnerable citizens, ending America’s wars and rebuilding at home.

The hard-fought win is even more remarkable as it comes in tough times for America, where joblessness is high and the economy remains bleak.

He appeared on stage in Chicago with wife Michelle and daughters Malia and Sasha as “Here I am baby, signed, sealed, delivered; I’m yours!” blared in the background. Ten thousand supporters gave a thunderous welcome as the President gave an acceptance address that will be remembered as one of his great speeches.

He is no longer a one-term aberration but a historic American president.

“We are an American family and we rise or fall together as one nation and as one people,” Mr Obama said.

The President said political campaigns were sometimes seen as just a battle of egos. But he said the volunteers on his campaign made him believe that ordinary people still believed in change.

“That’s what politics can be. That’s why elections matter,” he said.

Challenger Mitt Romney had been reluctant to admit defeat early, but just before 1am on Wednesday he rang the President to concede and then addressed supporters at his Boston headquarters.

“I wish all of them well, but particularly the President, the First Lady and their daughters,” he said. “And I pray that the President will be successful in guiding our nation.”

Mr Obama appears to have claimed the popular vote, but control of the White House is decided by which candidate can gather 270 or more electoral college votes out of a possible 538 across the 50 states.

As expected, collecting votes from the 12 key swing states was the key to victory.

Mr Obama’s most urgent task is to unite the country that has been bitterly divided on the best way forward.

Mr Romney was devastated by teams of relentless grassroots campaigners in the swing states such as Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Florida, who never lost faith that they could drag the true believers who gave President Obama his momentous election in 2008 back to the ballot boxes in 2012.

Mr Obama campaigned on the line that people now knew him and knew he would always try his hardest for them. This election was not about his race. It was about people putting their faith in a decent man and giving him a second chance.

Mr Romney treated voters shabbily by failing to reveal details in his policy and asking them to trust him as a businessman.

But the wider Republican movement also came across as seriously out of touch with mainstream America on issues of equal pay for women, women’s sexual issues, gay politics and the immigration policy.

Predictions of low enthusiasm among Obama supporters proved unfounded as African American voters turned out in huge numbers, as did supposedly disconnected younger voters.

But it was the emerging base of Latino voters, particularly in Colorado and Florida, who signed up with the Democrats in their hundreds of thousands and made the difference.
WHAT HAPPENS NOW

- The Democrats are projected to hold on to the Senate and Republicans to retain the House of Representatives, raising the likely prospect of more partisan gridlock in a divided US congress.
- Some 33 of the Senate’s 100 seats were up for grabs, with 23 of those being defended by Democrats, giving Republicans a slim chance of gaining four seats and seizing control of the chamber.
- Obama will push for higher taxes on the wealthy as a way to shrink a choking debt and to
  steer money toward the programs he wants.
- If Obama cannot end gridlock in Washington, his second term will be reduced to veto threats, empty promises, end runs around Congress and legacy-sealing forays overseas.
- Barack Obama’s presidential inauguration will be held in Washington DC on January 21, 2013.
- A week of festivities will include the presidential swearing-in ceremony and a night of inaugural balls and gala events.

FRESH MANDATE: President Barack Obama speaks at his election night party in Chicago.
Two-term Democrat presidents post WWII

US presidents elected for a second term

Barack Obama Twitter followers

Four-year presidential terms since the first in 1789

Mitt Romney’s estimated personal wealth

New York time when US TV networks started to declare a win for Obama

Barack Obama’s approval rating a year ago

Times the winner of the popular vote has lost the election
WHAT THEY SAID ...

“...This happened because of you. Thank You.”
- BARACK OBAMA VIA TWITTER

“...More than anything, I want to thank you all for everything. I am so grateful to every one of you for your support and your prayers.”
- MICHELLE OBAMA VIA TWITTER

“...Michelle, I have never loved you more. I've never been prouder to watch the rest of America fall in love with you too.”
- BARACK OBAMA IN VICTORY SPEECH

“...The nation has chosen another leader so Ann and I join with you to pray for him and for this great nation.”
- MITT ROMNEY CONCEDES DEFEAT

“...This ... Is America. 2012. The old days, the old ways, officially gone. This is who we are now. Sorry, world, that you even had to worry...”
- US FILM MAKER MICHAEL MOORE

“...We left nothing in the locker room. We fought to the very end. And I think that’s why we will be successful.”
- ROMNEY BEFORE THE RESULT

“...On behalf of the government and people of Australia, I offer warm congratulations to President Barack Obama on his re-election and wish him every success for his second term in office.”
- PRIME MINISTER JULIA GILLARD

“...Having a president with a new mandate will allow him to drive the economy in a way that I think will see them (the US) come out of what have been pretty dark days.”
- IMMIGRATION MINISTER CHRIS EVANS

“...Second term for Obama is great news for the US and peace and security in the world.”
- SA GREENS SENATOR SARAH HANSON-YOUNG

“...All that travel, hard work and campaigning was worth it ... and now its time to work even harder...”
- WILL.I.AM VIA TWITTER

“...I just cannot believe that the majority of Americans would believe that incurring more debt is good for our economy, for our children's future, for job creators.”
- SARAH PALIN
Barack Obama has been given his mandate after a long and brutal struggle. Now the members of Congress, in the lower house and the Senate, have to respect the will of the people and let him govern. And they have to do so from day one of his new term. Congress is stalemated by a Republican-controlled lower house and a Democrat-controlled Senate. It has made an international disgrace of itself by dragging its country through the ideology-driven debt-crisis battle of late 2011.

There are no signs that Republicans will be willing to work with Obama in getting new laws through. And that is a problem in the short-term as the US faces an inevitable date with what has been called the fiscal cliff. At midnight on December 31, the provisions of the Budget Control Act will be enacted. The act is the agreement that was struck this year between Democrats and Republicans to avert the debt crisis of last year.

In short, if no other deal is reached before December 31, it would automatically trigger $1.2 trillion in cuts to defence spending and other government programs, and cause a huge jump in tax levels as Bush-era tax cuts and temporary payroll tax cuts come to an end. While the tax hikes and defence savings would instantly lower the deficit, it is widely agreed the sudden jolt would plunge the US deep into recession, as people stop spending and businesses cut two million jobs in response to pay higher taxes. The US credit rating would be further downgraded and there would be renewed fears about the reliability of US treasuries, on which the American economy is built.

The Congress has to act. But Republican House majority leader John Boehner isn’t up for any plan that would assist Obama’s plan to increase taxes for those earning $250,000 or more. Obama doesn’t want massive government cuts; the Republicans don’t want higher taxing of the wealthy.

The fiscal cliff has played little role in the presidential campaign. The Congress could, if it wanted, simply repeal the act; Boehner has suggested some form of bridging law to buy the country some time.

Both proposals involve delaying dealing with the issues of taxes and deficit reduction. Once again Obama would preside over a lame-duck presidency, as he has done since the mid-terms of 2010.
PRESIDENTIAL CHALLENGES

- Uniting the country – most states are so decidedly Democratic or Republican they were not even contested this year
- Reducing a $14 trillion Federal Government debt
- Stubbornly high unemployment at 8.2 per cent (14.4 per cent among African Americans and about 11 per cent for Hispanics)
- The “fiscal cliff” of tax increases and spending cuts plus the expiration of numerous Bush-era tax breaks
- Selling “Obamacare”, his taxable health-care reform, to a sceptical electorate
- Cost of higher education – more Americans now have outstanding student loans than credit card debts
- Scheduled withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan in 2014
- Ongoing unrest in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, and preventing Iran building a nuclear bomb
- Relationship between US and China
- Continuing drone strikes and further fracturing relationship with Pakistan
- Further immigration reform
- Social security reform (untouched in his first term)
- Oil (resistance to reforms around off-shore drilling); natural gas (impacts of fracking) and coal (industry opposition to eliminating lucrative federal subsidies).
- Republican-controlled House of Representatives
ROBB CHALLENGES RESEARCH FUNDS FOR ‘QUESTIONABLE’ STUDIES

Link grants to innovation: Libs

PATRICIA KARVELAS
NICOLAS PERVITC11

GRANTS to research issues such as the history of emotions in Europe from 1100-1800 should instead be spent on projects supporting productivity and innovation, the opposition said yesterday.

Opposition finance spokesman Andrew Robb said in a tight fiscal environment it was critical that Canberra put a premium on quality when it came to supporting research.

“Under this government we have seen grants thrown at all sorts of questionable projects, when money could be better spent.”

The Australian reported yesterday that the Coalition had heeded the call of Nobel laureate Brian Schmidt and would in government cut the red tape that has experienced researchers endlessly applying for grants.

Mr Robb said many projects supported by the Australian Research Council looked to be of limited value, using as another example a study into the emotion and morality of climate change by the University of Queensland.

“We should be focusing on research that produces innovation, that will help drive growth and productivity and genuine medical and scientific advances. We should be backing our strengths.”

Mr Robb said the blanket freezing of research grants created enormous uncertainty.

“Instead of cutting everyone off at the knees, it should weed out the unjustifiable, in order to support the genuinely meaningful,” he said.

“The rash decisions we see are the direct result of a government which for five years has proven incapable of living within its means.”

The Coalition has identified several recent grants awarded by the research council it views as wasteful, including $578,792 to research the history of an ignored credit instrument in Florentine economic and social and religious life from 1570-1790.

Also cited is a $65,000 grant on a study on who reads Thomas Keneally’s work and $24.25 million for researchers in the Perth-based ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions (Europe 1100-1800).

A study of Charlotte Bronte and the Romantic imagination cost $70,000 and one on the early history of the moon cost $210,000.

A spokesman for Innovation Minister Chris Evans said the ARC competitive grant selection process also operated under the previous Coalition government.

“The scientific community should be concerned that the opposition spokesperson in charge of the Liberal Party’s razor gang is looking at saving in science and research funding,” he said.

“The Liberal Party has a track record at cutting funding to science and research spending.

“In contrast, the Gillard government is investing record amounts in research and researchers to help deliver solutions to national problems. This investment will continue to grow in real terms over the forward estimates.”

Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions director Philippa Maddern defended the centre’s role as contributing to modern day wellbeing and better political and social decisions.

Professor Maddern said part of her team’s seven-year $24.25m research grant was dedicated to examining how people’s behaviour in Europe between 1100-1800 reflected on modern Australia.

A study of the reasons for suicide and community reactions during this period helped fill gaps in understanding for psychiatrists today.

“We need that information so that we can better prevent suicide today,” Professor Maddern said.

“What is the Coalition saying? They don’t want suicides today to be better prevented? I hope not.

“Understanding our past can really help us to modify our future in a better way.”
SOME RECENT AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL GRANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Recipient</th>
<th>Project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$24.25m</td>
<td>ARC Centre of Excellence for the History of Emotions</td>
<td>Researching 'how European societies thought, felt and functioned from 1100-1800, comparing it to today’ William Blake in the 21st century: poetry, prophecy, the history of imagination, and the futures of romanticism These blessed ‘censi’: The history of an ignored credit instrument in Florentine economic and social and religious life from 1570-1790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$636,904</td>
<td>Melbourne University</td>
<td>Fiddling while home burns: climate change and fiddler crabs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$578,792</td>
<td>University of WA</td>
<td>Investigation of the early history of the moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$340,000</td>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>Sending and responding to messages about climate change: the role of emotion and morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$210,000</td>
<td>Curtin University</td>
<td>A cultural history of West Australian popular music 1945-2010</td>
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<tr>
<td>$197,302</td>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$120,000</td>
<td>Curtin University</td>
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Source: ARC

Historian Philippa Maddern defends a $24m grant to study how behaviour in Europe in 1100-1800 reflects on modern Australia
Soldier
‘one of the very best’

MAX BLENKIN

HE was a young man who selflessly protected our nation on the frontline in Afghanistan.

Yesterday, the amazing young life of 24-year-old Corporal Scott Smith was fittingly celebrated among some of the best vines in the world at Lyndoch in the Barossa Valley.

Australia’s latest casualty from the conflict in Afghanistan, Cpl Smith, who was serving with the Special Operations Engineer Regiment, died in the explosion of an insurgent improvised explosive device during an operation in northern Helmand province on October 21.

In yesterday’s service, Special Operations Engineer Regiment commander Lieutenant Colonel Scott Corrigan paid homage to Cpl Smith.

“This young man was made of something special, he made a huge impression on everyone in the unit from the outset,” he said.

“Our best soldiers always give the bit extra.

“They are selfless and put themselves in harm’s way to protect others; Scott was one of the very best.” As a combat engineer, Cpl Smith and his fellow combat engineers performed highly dangerous work to prepare the way for others to execute and complete their mission.

“He was the guy who others relied on,” Lt-Col Corrigan said.

“He paved the way and he saved the lives of countless people, through his immense courage, bravery and professionalism. We will struggle to fill the void left by his loss.

“It was a privilege granted to us to have known Scott and we will honour him forever.”

Cpl Smith, who was born in the Barossa Valley but was based at Holsworthy Barracks in Sydney, is survived by his partner Liv, his parents Katrina Paterson and Murray Smith, and his sister Roxanne.

Cpl Smith joined the Army in February 2006. He was the seventh Australian soldier to die in Afghanistan this year and the 39th since combat operations began in late 2001.

The funeral service was attended by acting prime minister Senator Chris Evans, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, SA Premier Jay Weatherill plus defence chiefs, family members and friends.
COURAGEOUS: Soldiers carry the coffin of Corporal Scott Smith, inset, at Lyndoch yesterday.

Picture: SGT ROB NYFFENEGGER
AUSTRALIA'S latest casualty from the Afghan conflict, combat engineer Corporal Scott Smith, has been farewelled at a military funeral in South Australia's Barossa Valley.

Cpl Smith, 24, who was serving with the Special Operations Engineer Regiment, died when an improvised explosive device went off during an operation in northern Helmand province on October 21.

The funeral service was attended by acting Prime Minister Chris Evans, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, SA Premier Jay Weatherill, defence chiefs, family members and friends.

In the service, Special Operations Engineer Regiment commander Lt Colonel Scott Corrigan paid homage to Cpl Smith.

“This young man was made of something special, he made a huge impression on everyone in the unit from the outset,” Colonel Corrigan said.

“Our best soldiers always give the bit extra, they are selfless and put themselves in harm’s way to protect others — Scott was one of the very best.”

Cpl Smith and the combat engineers prepared the way for others.

“He was the guy who others relied on, he paved the way and he saved the lives of countless people, through his immense courage, bravery and professionalism,” Colonel Corrigan said.

“We will struggle to fill the void left by his loss. It was a privilege granted to us to have known Scott and we will honour him.”

Cpl Smith is survived by his partner, Liv, his parents, Katrina Paterson and Murray Smith, and his sister, Roxanne.

He was the seventh Australian soldier to die in Afghanistan this year and the 39th since combat operations started in late 2001.

“Special”: Scott Smith was praised by his commander.
Solemn farewell: Major General Gus Gilmore pays his respects to Corporal Scott Smith
FAREWELL

Soldier’s bravery hailed

AUSTRALIA’S latest casualty from the conflict in Afghanistan, 24-year-old combat engineer Corporal Scott Smith, has been farewelled in a moving military funeral in South Australia’s Barossa Valley.

Corporal Smith, who was serving with the Special Operations Engineer Regiment, was killed by an improvised explosive device during an operation in northern Helmand province on October 21.

The funeral service was attended by acting prime minister Senator Chris Evans, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, SA Premier Jay Weatherill plus defence chiefs, family members and friends.

Special Operations Engineer Regiment commander Lieutenant-Colonel Scott Corrigan paid homage to Corporal Smith. “He was the guy who others relied on, he paved the way and he saved the lives of countless people, through his immense courage, bravery and professionalism,” he said.

Corporal Smith, who was born in the Barossa Valley, was the seventh Australian soldier to die in Afghanistan this year and the 39th since 2001, when combat operations started.
REIA digs in its heels over licensing

Everyone agrees that red tape needs to be cut. But just try it, even in a bastion of the private sector such as real estate.

After prodding by the Council of Australian Governments, the National Occupational Licensing Authority is attempting to streamline the way property agents are licensed.

Property is not the only sector for reform. The state-based licences of the electrical, plumbing, gasfitting, refrigeration and air-conditioning occupations are also on the table.

Next year NOLA will turn its attention to the licensing of the building industry, valuers and conveyancers.

So far, the creation of a national licensing framework for real estate has proved the most difficult.

Last week, the Minister for Finance and Deregulation, Penny Wong, and the Minister for Skills, Chris Evans, attended a meeting in Parliament House over the new licence regime for all industries.

Next year NOLA will turn its attention to the licensing of the building industry, valuers and conveyancers.

Property is not the only sector for reform. The state-based licences of the electrical, plumbing, gasfitting, refrigeration and air-conditioning occupations are also on the table.

Next year NOLA will turn its attention to the licensing of the building industry, valuers and conveyancers.

The logic is simple.

This reform is an important part of the COAG commitment to improve labour mobility and productivity and cut red tape," Senator Wong said in September.

“National trade licensing system is expected to save licence holders millions in fees each year and deliver significant benefits to the national economy.”

But the original proposals, detailed at right, brought howls of opposition, not just from the industry but also from consumer groups and the media, normally critical of the real estate agents.

REIA president Pamela Bennett "strongly" supports national licensing but with the highest standards maintained, not reduced.

Bennett, who is also REI Queensland chairman, has been in the industry for 37 years. "The Prime Minister wants a well-trained and highly skilled workforce and we are in agreement," she says.

Several years ago, the REIA fought to keep out of the regime that licences financial planners. Today it argues that the responsibilities of its members are not so different from those of financial planners.

"You are dealing with people making the biggest investment in their life. We should be in the financial services legislation; that is a benchmark," says Bennett.

The REIA is holding out to retain diploma-level qualifications; to keep compulsory professional training, and to maintain licences for all industry sectors.

For many readers a key issue will be NOLA’s proposal to abandon the licensing of agents who deal with commercial and primary production property.

The Australian chief executive of Colliers International, John Kenny, says reforms are needed, where highly sophisticated major property owners such as Westfield and AMP are caught in unnecessary licensing.

Westfield Group subsidiary Westfield Shopping Centre Management needs a licence to manage property for the group.

The Shopping Centre Council of Australia estimates that within its highly regulated industry, the cost of licensing is about $6 million a year.

Its members spend $3.65 million a year on renewing licences, on professional development and the cost of auditing trust accounts.

Big sophisticated traders should also be free of a system designed for those who sell suburban homes.

But most commercial property sales are less than $1 million and between small occupiers or investors.

In the year to June 2012,44 per cent of commercial sales were less than $500,000; another 23 per cent were between $500,000 and $1 million; and 76 per cent of farm sales were under $500,000 says RP Data.

Mr Kenny says that beyond the big property groups, most commercial property agents should be licensed.

“Commercial agents generally have significant sums of their clients’ money under their administration in transactional and property management trust accounts,” he says.
"You would expect that most of those clients who outsource these functions to commercial agents would prefer the agents were regulated to some degree rather than full deregulation."

Just how this plays out is not clear. The new rules are due for implementation in 2013 and the other industry groups are readying for the change.

"We are keen to see national licensing" says the chief executive of the National Electrical and Communications Association, James Tinslay.

Bennett says the REIA would rather maintain the status quo than reduce its standards.

"We don't want to hold up the process, we are a better fit for the second tranche," she says.

She could have the support of state governments. The Baillieu, Newman, Barnett and Weatherill governments are known to have concerns and their consent is needed.

But those close to the process believe many concessions have been made, particularly on the retention of commercial licenses.

NOLA is preparing final proposals for the approval of federal and state treasurers.

This year’s debate over real estate licensing has set the scene for what could be an even tougher argument over the licensing of builders, valuers and conveyancers next year.

“We are gravely concerned that a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to raise the professional level of builders in this country may be lost by dumbing down the pathways to professional qualifications,” says the chief executive of the Australian Institute of Building, Rob Hunt.
QLD: States 'bent on destroying TAFES': union

The Queensland government said any move by the federal government to cut funding would have devastating results.

State Education Minister John-Paul Langbroek said the federal government contributed more than $300 million a year to Queensland's vocational education system, while the state government contributed more than $700 million.

"It would be a terrible outcome for our TAFEs and the whole sector (if federal funds were axed)," Mr Langbroek told reporters on Wednesday.

"The union making statements like that will create fear and uncertainty among the people they claim to represent."

AAP peb/tnf/psm/