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RUMBLE IN THE URBAN JUNGLE

🕒 September 5, 2013 📁 Feature Story



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It's a seat where the well-heeled, progressive, largely Anglo latte belt collides with the multicultural, aspirational and socially conservative outer suburbs. It was once Labor

heartland but is now regarded as a bellwether seat that will determine who forms government. So who will win Reid?

In the blue corner: Craig Laundry

A couple of years ago, third-generation Strathfieldite Craig Laundry says he had a “lightbulb moment” after returning home from a job that was much better remunerated and less demanding than the one he’s since been tirelessly pursuing.

“I had never been a member of the Liberal Party but I was increasingly frustrated with the quality of political debate,” Laundry recalls. “I came home, turned on the news, looked at my three beautiful children, turned to my wife and said, ‘What are we going to give them?’ So I turned my back on a career in the family business in an attempt to give back to an area that I call my home and where I’m raising a family.”

The family business in question was the \$400 million Laundry Hotel Group and Labor has accused Laundry of downplaying his pubs and pokies background. “I haven’t whitewashed it,” insists Laundry. “The first interview I ever did I said you learn a lot by picking up glasses, clearing ashtrays and talking to people. I’m proud of my family’s success and the part, which is for others to judge, I played in it.”

When it comes to why the good people of Reid should vote Liberal, Laundry stays relentlessly on message – the Australian people are crying out for stable, honest and competent government, which will restore business and consumer confidence.

“The government creates the environment that business operates in and with the chaotic [Labor] government business confidence is shot, consumers aren’t spending and, at the same time, on the expense side there is the carbon tax. So what do small and family business owners, the backbone of Reid, do? The work longer hours themselves without pay and lay off casuals. Youth unemployment in the 18-24 age group in Reid is running at 19.4 per cent.”

So what will Laundry deliver in the event he finds himself part of an incoming Abbott government? “It’s time to stop playing games and get the WestConnex built. Work would start on that in the first 12 months. Reid is the most multiculturally diverse seat in Federal Parliament and we need appropriate aged care for those first-generation migrants who arrived in the 1940s and 1950s. We also need better ways of teaching English as a second language to young arrivals.”

On gay marriage, Laundry is on a unity ticket with his Labor opponent. “My personal view is that marriage is between a man and a woman. I’m Catholic and that is one of the teachings I’ve been raised with. [But] it is not my role to shove my view down anyone’s throat. I have a lot of friends who are gay, some of them agree with me, some disagree but they are friends and we enjoy a debate from time to time.”

In the red corner: John Murphy

While the only time John Murphy has really captured the national media’s attention during his long political career was in 2008 during Stroganoffgate (he complained to Parliament his wife got an inadequate portion of beef from the parliamentary cafeteria), he says, “I’ve worked hard and think I can fairly say I’ve been a very good local member.”

That’s true enough, though it’s unlikely to be enough to save Murphy given the predicted caning voters are going to administer to the ALP on September 7. Nonetheless, like his opponent, Murphy enthusiastically runs through the head office-approved talking points when asked why disenchanted Labor voters should back his party on September 7.

“I think they should be very worried because My Abbott is not releasing his budget figures... and clearly Mr Abbott is going to have to make some massive cuts when he comes in and he owes it to the people of Australia to tell them where he is going to make those cuts.”

Like Laundry, Murphy says infrastructure is of vital importance, though he focuses on information superhighways rather than physical ones. “[Local voters] want to see national broadband, fibre to the home, not

the node. That is a very important infrastructure initiative of our government and one that will drive our economy for decades to come.”

Murphy, one of the few remaining members of the socially conservative Labor old guard, can't have been pleased with Kevin Rudd's Damascene conversion on gay marriage, having publicly stated Reid is home to a large number of Christian and Islamic voters for whom state-sanctioned same-sex marriage is a “step too far.” Nonetheless, despite pointing out that “60 per cent of my electorate believe marriage should be between a man and a woman,” Murphy declines to express any disappointment in his colleagues saying, “I realise other people have [differing] views and, whether it is Kevin Rudd or anyone else, I'm not going to in any way criticise them because I'm sure they've formed their views in good conscience.”

Courageously, Murphy has been a long-time proponent of more media diversity and it is worth pondering how different this election may have been, for both him and his party, had his views carried more weight.

“I've always been very concerned at the concentration of media ownership in Australia and spoken out many, many times in parliament,” he says. “At the moment we have a very savage campaign being run by News Corp to drive the government out. The government is not perfect, no government ever is, but to just decide from day one, as the Daily Telegraph did, and say ‘these people should be kicked out,’ well. I don't think that is fair.”

The minor parties

It's hard to see the minor parties having much impact in Reid. The Greens may be a force to be reckoned with in Balmain or Newtown but they struggled to get into double figures with their primary vote in Reid in 2010.

The Greens

Pauline Tyrrell, Deputy Mayor of Canada Bay Council, is flying the flag for the Greens and their platform of fighting climate change, pouring money into public health and education and taking a more humane approach to asylum seekers. Pro public transport and cycleways, Tyrrell is opposed to motorways, such as the WestConnex, on the grounds they attract more cars and add to air pollution.

Katter's Australian Party (KAP)

KAP candidate **Bishruel Izadeen** is an aircraft maintenance engineer who migrated with his family to Australia from New Zealand a decade ago. His bio on the KAP site states: "I have an interest in the Country's interest" and "I believe Bob Katter is a ramrod of a man who speaks on real issues affecting our way of life without fear or favour."

Palmer United Party (PUP)

PUP candidate **Nadeem Ashraf** is a local small business owner. Given its policy platform of redirecting money away from cities to regional Australia, it's unclear what PUP has to offer those living in Sydney but some Reid voters may be attracted to Palmer's compassionate refugee policy.

Democratic Labor Party (DLP)

Emily Dunn is a local doing an Arts-Law degree who "feels strongly about health for young families, for working people and for the elderly." Her party opposes same sex civil unions, euthanasia and abortion.

Words: Nigel Bowen

