

NSW Premier Mike Baird: 'I'm determined to stay as long as I possibly can'

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I'M NO TOTALITARIAN: MIKE BAIRD

One year after his election victory, NSW Premier Mike Baird says he has responded to concerns raised over the WestConnex motorway and Sydney's lockout laws.

Mike Baird has scotched suggestions he plans to quit politics shortly after the 2019 state election, declaring: "I'm determined to stay as long as I possibly can. That's my desire."

In an interview marking a year since the Coalition's re-election, the Premier acknowledged there was community anger over a host of issues including council mergers, WestConnex motorway, lockout laws, TAFE reform and tougher protest laws for mining and coal seam gas.

Mr Baird conceded "there undoubtedly is" capacity for electoral backlash on the hot button council amalgamation issue.

But he insisted the government was taking decisions for the long-term good.

"Don't you want from your political leaders and government [for] them to take the decisions they think are right and in the long-term interests of the state?" he said.

"And on the basis of that they're prepared to lose political popularity, they're prepared to spend political capital, they're prepared to face consequences because they are doing what they think is right?"

"Ultimately, I think that's what we're doing".

In an abrupt end to his post-election honeymoon period, Mr Baird has been mocked on social media as "casino Mike" over the state's 1.30am lockout and 3am last drinks laws as they exclude the Star casino - a major tax source.

Conservative radio commentator Alan Jones has declared Mr Baird has "gone mad", is a "bully" and running a totalitarian regime over amalgamations and lockout laws.

There have been protests over the loss of people's homes for the WestConnex motorway, cuts to TAFE and increased police powers to quell protests at mining and coal seam gas sites.

Mr Baird said that "there are labels and approaches that people will put on you. Ultimately the question is how the broad community judges you."

Baird on council amalgamations



Save Our Councils Coalition gather at Strathfield Town Hall. Photo: Dallas Kilponen

"Council amalgamations was always going to be a difficult reform. It's not often that you get politicians voting themselves out of a job.

"Certainly in that context there's always naturally going to be resistance. There's all types of scare campaigns.

"It's quite simple really. You have two-thirds of councils with expenditure greater than revenue and that means rates are going up unreasonably high on an annual basis.

"So if we get to a position where there's less councils, smaller head offices, you've got more capacity for additional services, more infrastructure and downward pressure on rates for the long term."

Baird on lockout laws



Reclaim the Streets to Protest Lockout Laws. *Photo: Michele Mossop*

"What did we see two years ago? We saw these unbelievable scenes of violence ... every single weekend we seemed to get these images.

"We had the senseless loss of life. We had community outrage, asking for a response. "And the government responded and responded with these laws that have had a huge impact. That is a massive reduction in violence.

"All I've done with that is say, look it would take a fair amount to change my mind.

"But I'm open to [changes]. I've asked for an independent review and I've got someone eminent [Ian Callinan] to consider all the evidence and all the facts and bring forward recommendations.

"I'd like to see that evidence [that the laws have destroyed Sydney's late night culture]. I think it's a relatively short period of time in terms of an additional hour or two in relation to what was available previously."

Baird on ICAC's future

"It's clear that some serious questions have been raised in relation to ICAC and we look forward to the [ICAC Inspector David Levine's] response.

"Because what's important for the state is that we have an ICAC that's strong and [the community is] happy about the way it's going about its business and exercising its powers.

"Obviously I'm supporting the Commissioner [Megan Latham]. But what we need to do is to respond to some of the serious concerns that have been raised.

"How those powers are used. That is the critical issue. That's what the inspector is considering.



ICAC commissioner Megan Latham at the parliamentary inquiry. Photo: Peter Rae

Baird on his key achievements since the election



Mr Baird at the final tunnel breakthrough for the North West Rail Link in January. Photo: Dominic Lorrimer

"Infrastructure is finally being built.

"Have a look at the hospitals coming out of the ground, have a look at the tunnels going in for rail lines, the [Sydney metro], look at the convention centre, the roof going up. It's all coming to life across here and across regional NSW as well.

"Importantly, that's ... linked to the economic performance, because in the context of where we are now NSW is back leading the nation.

"That puts us back into the budget position. The budget has significantly improved, not just in terms of the operating balance but also debt. Net debt has come down massively.

"That gives us the capacity to actually put [money] into where we need it. So things such as the Gonski agreement which we've signed up to. The NDIS and the difference that's going to make to 50,000 additional families across the state."

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