

# High profile independent has Liberals nervous in Wagga Wagga byelection

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A high-profile doctor who secured a swing against the Liberal Party in the Coalition's 2011 landslide win will run as an independent in next month's byelection in Wagga Wagga.



*Independent candidate for Wagga Joe McGirr announces he will run in the September byelection. Photo: Emma Hillier*

The former director of emergency medicine at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, Joe McGirr, has confirmed he will run, in a move that will put extra pressure on the Liberals to hold the seat.

Although Wagga Wagga has long been a safe Liberal seat, senior party sources have said that Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, is worried about a voter backlash after the Daryl Maguire scandal.

Snow Valleys councillor Julia Ham has been preselected for the Liberals. It is understood Ms Berejiklian made it clear she wanted a woman for the seat.

Ms Berejiklian has made several trips to Wagga since Mr Maguire, who was [secretly recorded](#) trying to broker property deals with a Chinese developer, resigned in disgrace from parliament.

One party source said: "Gladys is genuine when she says she is worried. I think there are plenty of people in Wagga who are pretty unhappy with us and that is a concern."

Another senior government source said the Liberals had been "quite nervous" about the possibility of Dr McGirr running, although he is not the only independent in the race.

Wagga City councillor Paul Funnell will also contest the byelection, which the Liberals now believe will split the independent vote and make it more difficult for Dr McGirr.

When Dr McGirr ran against Mr Maguire in 2011, he secured 30 per cent of the primary vote.

Dr McGirr's new campaign website says Wagga Wagga would be best served by an independent.

"Like many, I have been appalled at the way politicians have treated the community – the time taken for the previous member to resign, no National party candidate, a snap election," his website says.

"Where is the accountability? One Liberal member goes, another one is put in."

The Wagga byelection caused tensions within the Coalition, after the Nationals indicated they wanted to contest the seat. [The party's executive ultimately decided against it.](#)

The Labor candidate, Dan Hayes, ran in 2015 and secured a 15 per cent swing against Mr Maguire.

A senior Labor source said: "We can't win it but if we can get a swing, I think we will be pretty happy." Labor frontbenchers have also been making regular trips to the Riverina.

The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers have also preselected their candidate and will run IT worker Seb McDonagh. The Greens will also contest the seat, running academic Ray Goodlass.

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