

# NSW campaign funding laws change just in time for byelection

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The state's electoral funding laws have been changed at the last-minute to cover byelections, a week before the Liberal Party faces a potentially bruising battle in Wagga Wagga.



*Independent candidate for Wagga Wagga, Joe McGirr is seen as the Liberals' biggest threat in the seat. Photo: Emma Hillier*

The Berejiklian government had to rush in a regulation last week to change the laws to ensure candidates will be able to receive public funding if they contest the byelection.

Voters will go to the polls on Saturday in Wagga Wagga but the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, is increasingly worried that the party will face a backlash that could cost them the seat.

Ms Berejiklian fears a combination of former [MP Daryl Maguire being forced to quit in disgrace](#) and the bitter leadership spill in Canberra could result in protest votes against the Liberals.

She has been visiting the seat at least weekly since the byelection was called last month and there is a roster for government MPs who are expected to turn up and campaign for the Liberals.

The government has also made a string of announcements, totalling at least \$100 million, including a \$50 million redevelopment of Tumut hospital and \$10 million for the Riverina Conservatorium of Music.

A high-profile independent candidate, local doctor Joe McGirr, is seen as a major threat to the Liberals and several sources have said that local Nationals are campaigning for Dr McGirr.

"The Nats have very different party rules to the Libs and so there is no doubt that some of McGirr's supporters on the ground would be National Party members," one senior government source said.

The Liberals candidate, Julia Ham, was pre-selected after a bitter Coalition dispute over whether the Nationals should have been allowed to contest the seat.

It is understood that Ms Berejiklian and the NSW Nationals leader and deputy premier, John Barilaro, have agreed that if the Liberals lose Wagga Wagga, the Nationals will run in the general election in March.

A senior Liberal source said they would not win Wagga Wagga on the primary vote and would rely on preferences.

In an odd twist, the Liberals are hoping Labor poll well and finish second, which would get them over the line.

"We are hoping Luke Foley can do something unusual and finish second, not third in a country seat," the source said.

"This is not about Julia Ham or McGirr. This is about whether the loose confederation of warring tribes in Canberra will do any damage to the NSW Liberal brand."

Dr McGirr said Wagga Wagga residents were "cynical" about the Liberals and had labelled the government's cash splash a "buy-election".

"I think there are a lot of people who are very annoyed with the Liberals and also annoyed that Nats were not allowed to run," Dr McGirr said.

Wagga Wagga's local paper, the *Daily Advertiser*, published polling on the weekend which showed Ms Ham's primary vote at 27 per cent, with Labor's Dan Hayes on 21 per cent and Dr McGirr on 19 per cent.

Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack has said he would have liked the Nationals to run a candidate.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/nsw-campaign-funding-laws-change-just-in-time-for-byelection-20180902-p5019l.html>