

BY-ELECTIONS: NATIONALS LEADER JOHN BARILARIO'S PLEA TO ANGRY RURAL VOTERS: 'TRUST ME' OR BOOT US OUT

The Sunday Telegraph October 1, 2017

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EMBATTLED NSW Nationals leader John Barilaro has issued an eleventh-hour plea to disaffected voters to “trust” him to fix problems in the bush ahead of an expected slaughter in a one formerly safe seat and a solid kicking in another.

Cuts to health, police station mergers, power bills, water-sharing, and job losses in the forestry industry are expected to deliver a battering to the Nationals in the seats of Murray and Cootamundra.

The Coalition by-election campaigns in the seats ahead of the October 14 vote have been hijacked by the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party, which is taking advantage of anti-government sentiment with an “It’s OK to say NO to the Nats” slogan.

Mr Barilaro said voters should defer their anger to the 2019 State elections when they should be able to judge his work to change a process where Macquarie Street was making decisions without real input from regional communities.

“I have been working hard to address this, and I am asking voters to trust me. If we don’t deliver, then kick us out in 2019,” he said.



A protest outside the Griffith Base Hospital. Picture: Supplied

With the Nationals facing the prospect of potentially losing a Cabinet position in the event of losing both seats, sources last week claimed Mr Barilaro had sent a warning to the party office that it was “on notice”.

Mr Barilaro, who took over the leadership after the party lost Orange to the Shooters party in November last year, denied the claim.

“No truth in this at all,” he said.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian, who visited Cootamundra last week, is scheduled to return to Murray in the coming days to face cynical voters still angry over the downgrading to Griffith Hospital.

The Government has pledged \$35 million towards identifying the health needs of the community, with Mr Barilaro promising a new hospital once the necessary planning had been undertaken.

The Shooters, who say they are attracting former Nationals voters who believe the once farmer's party is now too "left", are [counting on farmer Helen Dalton to win Murray](#), previously held by Education Minister Adrian Piccoli.

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The Nationals had been desperately trying to woo Ms Dalton back to the party after it initially rejected her membership application for having run as an independent against Mr Piccoli in 2015.

The Shooters, which has begun selecting candidates for its 2019 State campaign, have put up publisher Matthew Stadtmiller in Cootamundra, held by Katrina Hodgkinson who retains heroine status in the electorate for standing up to the Government over its greyhounds ban.

Shooters MP Robert Brown said the anger in Murray was comparable to that felt in Orange over greyhounds and council amalgamations.

"The Nationals are not the Nationals of old, but as they were recently described, Liberals in tan pants," he said.

"The anger out here is palpable."

Griffith Base Hospital surgeon Dr Jayachandran "Jaya" Narayanan said the hospital had been "run into the ground", forcing patients to travel several hours to other regional hospitals for treatment for ailments such as broken bones.

"We have lost orthopaedics and there was recently a plan to move pathology to Wagga without any discussion with clinical staff," he said.

"We protested and that decision was reversed."



*The Shooters are counting on farmer Helen Dalton to win the seat of Murray.
Picture: Facebook*

“When you work in a country hospital, you have to deal with everything that comes through the door from a bleeding brain to a ruptured heart, but there is a lot we don’t do such as broken bones and so these patients have to go elsewhere.”

By-elections will be held in Murray, Cootamundra and Blacktown on Saturday, October 14.

<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/byelections-nationals-leader-john-barilaros-plea-to-angry-rural-voters-trust-me-or-boot-us-out/news-story/8047f15d8421350285307ab45c901fd9>