



● A confident Mrs Varty casts her vote on Saturday flanked by the State Opposition Leader Mr Jeff Kennett and the Member for Deakin Mr Julian Beale.

Voters rap Labor

The State Government suffered a major rebuff on Saturday when Nunawading Province voters chose the Liberal candidate, Mrs Rosemary Varty, as their representative in the Upper House.

In electing Mrs Varty to hold the second province seat, voters destroyed Labor's chances of holding a majority in the Legislative Council, which would have enabled it to pass legislation unhindered.

Instead voters opted to give Mr Jeff Kennett the role of "safeguarding" the Legislative Council by a two-party preferred majority of about 4.5 per cent.

While it is doubtful that the by-election had any deep significance for the Federal Government, Liberal surveys taken during the campaign showed a high level of voter concern at the twin federal issues of taxation and the assets test.

It seems certain that some voters were affected in the last weeks of the campaign by the Federal Government's backdown

on tax reforms, just as some voters must have been affected by the milk and petrol shortages early in the campaign and the train strike last week.

Voters, too, can be assumed to have been concerned about the extension of the eastern freeway and Mr Cain's government would be foolish not to heed this.

The government has attempted to promote the tendencies of a by-election to register a protest vote as the main reason for the 4.5 per cent swing to the Liberals.

The Labor candidate, Mr Bob Ives, had several factors going for him.

In the March state election Mrs Varty had the benefit of the "donkey vote" but this time around Mr Ives was ahead of Mrs Varty on the ballot paper and predicted that it would be worth two per cent to Labor.

In the bid to hold its month-long control of the two Houses of Parliament the ALP spent \$328,000, which sent its \$600,000 debt for past elections spiralling.

At the same time an estimated \$1,700,000 was spent on publicity for

State Government instrumentalities and programs.

By handing Mr Kennett and the Liberals the right to safeguard the Upper House, the voters demonstrated the conservative nature of the electorate.

Labor had promised to bring about a series of Upper House reforms if it won the poll, including proportional representation and abolition of the Council's right to block supply.

They enlisted the support and the preferences of the Australian Democrats, who recorded an 8.02 per cent vote in the province at the state election, but this time the Democrat vote dropped to only about 4.7 per cent.

The Democrat vote in the Province at the state election helped take Labor to its 0 one vote victory.

Perhaps the lesson for the Democrats may be that when a single "middle-party" directs preferences to one or another of the major parties the voters may feel they may just as well stay with the big boys.