

A weary trudge to the polls

BOB IVES and Rosemary Varty have more in common than political aspirations, media fatigue and an unmatched knowledge of the lie of Melbourne's eastern suburbs.

As they enter the closing days of the Nunawading re-run election campaign, the Labor and Liberal candidates also share a fear of an incalculable factor that threatens to confound the pollsters.

It's not how the voters in the hair-trigger seat are going to swing, but how many of them are not going to vote at all.

Motivating the 119,000 people on the rolls to turn up to perform their democratic duty has emerged as a major problem for party strategists.

In spite of the lashings of campaign hoopla, not much short of a full-scale state poll, many constituents appear unaware that they are in the province.

Others too have become so weary of elections, they have already signalled their reluctance to cast yet another ballot.

Mr Ives, the Labor candidate who got the nod in the lucky dip result after the state poll, admits that the outcome this time could hinge on a large number of what he describes as "freakish developments."

Among these unlikely considerations, he says, is the number of flat-dwellers who have moved from the electorate since the March 2 poll.

"There are a lot of people who, despite the best efforts of the electoral office and the parties, don't know they are in Nunawading," he says.

By KEN MERRIGAN

The Liberals' Ms Varty, accepts that the voter turn-out on polling day looms as a problem — but she disagrees that the campaign requires more excitement to get people interested.

"It's not a case of exciting, it's a case of informing — to get them to understand that they're in the province and getting them to vote," she says.

"So you've just got to try to make as much contact with as many people as possible."

It's that need that has her standing under a broly outside Box Hill State School on a wet afternoon. What's good for the neighborhood gardens is hell for a campaigner, soggy pamphlets in hand, trying to engage anxious mums in polite banter.

Running for office twice in six months is not what you'd describe as an enjoyable experience, she admits. It's something you do as a responsibility to party members and the constituency as a whole.

"What's changed is that you are now getting Labor voters who've voted Labor for 30 years coming up to you," she says.

She recalls the man who approached her in the rain at Mooroolbark last week to say he had voted Labor all his life, but no more.

"They see issues in terms of how it affects them, particularly working class or working type people who save for a long time and suddenly find, if they've been paying into superannuation, they're going to be hit on that super," she explains.



● Ms Varty

Government taxes, state and federal, have emerged as a critical issue, she says. So too has the matter of who controls the Upper House, which will be decided at the re-run poll.

Ms Varty, 52, an accountant, accuses Labor of spending more money on its campaign than it could justify and still not addressing the issues that matter.

"They have not concentrated on the issues here in the province," she says. "Unless they concentrate on issues that affect people, then how are they going to win?"

Although readily agreeing that



● Mr Ives

she is the front runner, she will not speculate on her winning margin.

And, as for the hypothetical possibility of a loss, well ... the experience of campaigning solidly since January would not stop her doing it again.

"The sort of experience I've had, I would think would make any future campaign a soda," she laughs.

Mr Ives, 46, a former college lecturer, says many people in Nunawading resent being dragged back to the polling booths again after a fair result was achieved.

"Where this differs from the last election is that we have set the

agenda, the issue of leadership, and this time John Cain has been much more forward," he says.

The Premier, he believes, has shown tremendous strength and judgment under pressure.

"The obverse side of the ALP and John Cain having control of the Upper House is Jeff Kennett having control," he says.

If Mr Ives feels any strain from the prolonged electioneering, it doesn't show. He laughs easily and often.

He also claims a high recognition factor as a result of his emphasis on grass-roots campaigning.

An issue being canvassed by his opponents is legalised brothels — a prospect Mr Ives admits is disconcerting to people who moved to the leafy suburbs for a better lifestyle.

"The intrusion of brothels is symbolic of something they moved to the suburbs to escape," he says.

But he points to opinion polls showing strong support for regulated brothels as the lesser evil to illegal ones controlled by criminal elements and infested by drug abuse.

The legislation allowing the legalised brothels could only be passed with the support of the Opposition.

Mr Ives says he can't say what the determining factor will be in the election re-run, adding: "If it all finishes the right way, it will be a most worthwhile and unique experience."

As for whether Labor or Liberal voters are more likely to ignore the poll, he is no more certain.

"I would put my faith in Labor voters — but only because I know them better than Liberal voters," he says.