

'Stunning victory' assures Libs of government, says Kennett

By DAVID BROADBENT,
state political reporter

The State Opposition Leader, Mr Kennett, yesterday claimed that the Liberal Party's "stunning victory" in Nunawading province meant it was now certain to win government at the next general election.

He said the Liberals now had the backing of private business groups to establish a top-level "think tank" to develop new policies that would catapult the party into government.

After vote counting ended yesterday the Liberal candidate, Mrs Rosemary Varty, had 48.9 per cent, the ALP's Mr Bob Ives 39.4 per cent, and the Democrat, Mr Michael Nardella, 2.6 per cent. The Call to Australia Party candidate, Pastor Al Watson, had 2.6 per cent and the NDP candidate, Ms Jenny Cotterell, 2.5 per cent.

In two-party terms, the result after preferences are distributed is likely to be a vote of about 54 per cent for the Liberals and 46 per cent for Labor. This would be a swing of about four per cent since the state election.

The election result means numbers are tied in the Legislative Council, with 22 ALP members, 17 Liberals and five Nationals. The appointment of a Labor Party President will give the Opposition a majority on the floor of the upper house.

Mr Kennett said the Liberal vic-

THE LATEST COUNT		
	Votes	%
Smith (ind)	410	0.4
Watson (CTA)	2539	2.6
Ferwerda (DLP)	1300	1.3
Ives (ALP)	38,114	39.4
Kapphan (ind)	69	0.1
VARTY (Lib)	47,379	48.9
Nardella (AD)	4434	4.6
Lumsden (ind)	178	0.2
Cotterell (NDP)	2419	2.5
Formal votes	96,842	
Informal	1938	
Total votes	98,780	2.0
Votes to come	4000-5000	

tory, which shattered Labor's hopes of controlling the upper house, has thrown the leadership of the Premier, Mr Cain, into doubt. "Mr Cain said this election was going to test my leadership but now he is the one whose future is in very real doubt," Mr Kennett said.

He said the election of Mrs Rosemary Varty was "a major victory for commonsense" and claimed there had been a 6.5 per cent swing to the Liberal Party. "This was no normal byelection result," he said.

"There has been a massive swing to the Liberal Party and we still expect to win this election on the primary vote. The Government threw absolutely everything at us and outspent us by 20 to one but we won this election on our terms."

Mr Kennett said the voters had totally rejected the Government's campaign of "vilification and personal insult". "This is a massive

rejection of the idea that any government can freely spend taxpayers' money on propaganda and a campaign of personal vilification."

He said the Liberal Party would use its Legislative Council numbers responsibly, but would use them "to protect the interests of Victorians when it is necessary".

Mr Kennett told a press conference yesterday that he was sick and tired of media speculation about his leadership and suggested some political reporters should think about their own role in informing the public.

"My leadership has never been under question and you people (the press) underestimate the strength and determination of the Liberal Party and the ability of its members and our preparedness to work hard."

Mr Kennett said the biggest losers were the Australian Democrats, whose vote was halved and who had "lost their integrity and independence" by directing their preferences to Labor.

Mr Cain said yesterday that there had been a swing of a little over four per cent to the Liberals. He said it was clear that Nunawading voters had taken the "opportunity to register a protest, and I accept without reservation what the electorate has decided".

"I had hoped people might not register a protest but I cannot remember there ever having been so many single-interest, minority

groups campaigning against the Government. We had the mountain cattlemen, the police, the dairyfarmers, the railwaymen and a lot of others working against us."

Mr Cain said he was disappointed but not unduly worried by a "typical byelection result". He said he had learned how to govern without an upper house majority.

The successful Liberal candidate, Mrs Varty, said she had always been confident of victory and had expected a swing of about six per cent. "The result is a clear message to Mr Cain and one which he must heed," she said.

For the ALP candidate, Mr Ives, the result was a bitter end to four months' campaigning. He won the seat in the 2 March general election after his name was drawn from a ballot box to break a tied vote. Yesterday he said he would now have to begin to "pick up the threads of my life".

Mr Kennett said: "I would hope that the spanner will now be seen as a major marketing tool for the Liberal Party."

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Kennett entitled to display new optimism

The Opposition Leader, Mr Kennett, has had a fine win in Nunawading and is entitled to sound a new and enthusiastic note of optimism about his party's chances of regaining office in three years.

What looks like being an average byelection swing to the Liberals does not affect Labor's hold on government but does keep effective control of the Legislative Council in the hands of the Opposition.

The Liberal victory also puts paid to any realistic challenges to Mr Kennett's leadership in the foreseeable future. Mr Kennett said yesterday he had never been under threat and lashed out at media and Labor Party people who, he said, were inventing speculation about his leadership.

The fact is that several members of the Liberal Party had made it clear that a narrow victory at the weekend would have put Mr Kennett under new pressure. But with the poll result, all such talk has ended

NEWS ANALYSIS

David Broadbent

Mr Kennett ran a very good campaign in Nunawading and is entitled to take most of the credit for his party's success. He decided the style and tactics of the Liberal campaign and stuck to his program religiously, despite being massively outspent by the Government.

Of course, he had a lot going for him in the campaign. Labor has been troubled by internal difficulties since the 2 March state election and has obviously paid for some of the serious problems affecting the Hawke Government in Canberra.

There could hardly have been a worse week for the Cain Government than that running up to the Nunawading poll — a week

in which the ALP attempted to censor the Premier, rail workers called a snap strike and the Federal Government backed off its commitment to major tax reform.

In the same week the Cain Government was caught off guard by the Opposition's use of a special one-day sitting of the upper house to accuse Labor of secretly establishing an illegal borrowing authority to solve deficit problems.

The Nunawading result will in no way diminish the Cain Government's responsibility for the quality of administration in the state but will certainly inject new enthusiasm into the Liberal Party.

Mr Cain's dream of being the first Labor Premier to control both Houses of Parliament has vanished. In its place is the reality that during the next few months he will have his hands full sorting out the serious problems he faces within his party over who is running it.