

## Philip Ruddock will quit parliament at the election

Written by The Conversation

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Father of the House of Representatives Philip Ruddock will leave parliament at the election, resolving one of several NSW Liberal preselection rows.

He is to become the government's special envoy for human rights, a post that will have him actively promoting Australia's candidacy for membership of the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2018-20 term.

Ruddock, 72, entered parliament in a byelection in 1973. He was immigration minister and later attorney-general in the Howard government. In the immigration portfolio he presided over the controversial "Pacific Solution" to deter asylum-seeker boats from coming to Australia.

Former prime minister Tony Abbott made Ruddock chief government whip but then sacked him, believing he had not been active enough in protecting Abbott's back.

Later Abbott appointed Ruddock, together with then-parliamentary secretary now assistant minister Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, to conduct consultations and report on citizenship and community engagement.

Ruddock has been under preselection pressure in his seat of Berowra from Julian Leeser, who is director of government policy and strategy at Australian Catholic University. Previously Leeser was executive director of the Menzies Research Centre, the Liberal Party's think-tank. He was an adviser to Ruddock when the latter was attorney-general.

Ruddock has had a long interest in human rights and said in a statement on Monday that he had developed a network internationally of those dedicated to their advancement. He will start his envoy work while still in Parliament but will not be paid for it.

He said that, for him, this was a singular opportunity "to serve Australia's interests in advancing our quest to change the death penalty around the world".

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His role would require periods abroad between now and the election, which would mean he would not be able to give time to campaigning nationally and locally, he said. So he had decided not to seek re-endorsement. The position had been raised with him last year, he said.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said Ruddock's role would be consistent with the practice of past governments in appointing special envoys to support Australia's international campaigns, for example its bid for election to the Security Council.

"He will also promote our broader human rights agenda, including global abolition of the death penalty, for which he has worked tirelessly over many years."

Former prime minister John Howard said Ruddock's greatest contribution was as immigration minister, when he implemented the government's "highly successful border protection policy" with "tenacity and consistency". "In the process he endured many vicious and unreasonable attacks on his motives and instincts." Howard noted that only Billy Hughes served longer in the House of Representatives.

Other Liberal veterans under preselection pressure are former speaker Brownyn Bishop, 73, and NSW senator Bill Heffernan, 72. Bishop's future is unclear; Heffernan has indicated to colleagues that he will not seek another term.

*Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.*

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