

It's certain – Australians off to the polls on July 2 for double dissolution

Written by The Conversation USA

Australians will go to a double-dissolution election on July 2 after the Senate voted 36-34 on Monday night to defeat the government's legislation to resurrect the so-called cop-on-the-beat Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC).

The government needed six of the eight non-Green crossbenchers but independents Jacqui Lambie, Glenn Lazarus, and John Madigan as well as the Australian Motoring Enthusiast Party's Ricky Muir voted against the second reading stage of the legislation. Those voting with the government were Family First's Bob Day, Liberal Democrat David Leyonhjelm, the Palmer United Party's Dio Wang, and independent Nick Xenophon.

This will be the first double dissolution since Bob Hawke's winter election of 1987.

But the election will not be formally called until after parliament sits for the week of the budget, which is on May 3. The parliament has to pass supply that week to carry the government through the election period, and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten will give his parliamentary budget reply on the Thursday. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has until Wednesday, May 11, to call the double dissolution but is more likely to do so the weekend before.

Turnbull announced on March 21 the parliament would be recalled this week to give the Senate three weeks to consider both the ABCC bills and a bill to toughen trade union governance.

But the defeat of the ABCC legislation for the second time, making it a double-dissolution trigger, came on the first day of the new session. The Registered Organisations bill was reintroduced into the House of Representatives earlier on Monday but it is already a trigger, so does not have to proceed further now. Turnbull had insisted both measures had to be passed to avoid a double dissolution.

The House of Representatives was already due to get up on Tuesday and the Senate is also expected to rise quickly, once it has dealt with the government's legislation to abolish the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal, which was in the lower house on Monday.

The government starts what is a 74-day campaign with two polls published this week showing it trailing or level with Labor. Newspoll has Labor leading the Coalition 51-49% while the Fairfax-Ipsos poll has them 50-50.

Governor-General Peter Cosgrove's opening of the session on Monday morning – after he prorogued the parliament last week – saw an extraordinary attack by Labor's deputy Senate leader Stephen Conroy, who compared Cosgrove's behaviour to that of then-governor-general John Kerr, who sacked the Whitlam government.

Conroy told the Senate: "What we've had today is the ghost of 1975 revisit upon us. The long dead arm of Sir John Kerr crawl out of his grave – crawl out of his grave to participate in a travesty of democracy in this country. What we saw is a blight on our democracy today."

Referring to the Senate's recall, he said: "We've seen a democratically elected decision [for the Senate not to sit this week] overturned by the Queen's representative."

"We've seen today a governor-general overturn the will of this chamber, a democratically elected chamber ... A tawdry political stunt and the governor-general has demeaned his office."

Conroy said a strong governor-general "would never have agreed to this ... If the Queen had been asked to interfere in the British parliament in this way, there is no way on earth this would have happened".

Shorten publicly rebuked Conroy, saying in a statement his attack was "intemperate and unnecessary".

"The governor-general has one of the most important roles in our democracy and that should be respected by everyone," Shorten said. "Senator Conroy should confine his criticisms to the government."

Turnbull said Conroy had “disgraced himself” with “appalling remarks”.

Cosgrove had an unfortunate moment when, as he shook hands with party leaders, he passed by the outstretched hand of deputy Labor leader Tanya Plibersek. Later he rang Plibersek to apologise, saying he had not seen her hand.

Update

The Senate last night passed the legislation to scrap the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal, which the government had introduced earlier in the day.

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.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/its-certain-australians-off-to-the-polls-on-july-2-for-double-dissolution-57991>