

Mirabella scores spectacular own goal as she attempts Indi comeback

Written by The Conversation USA

Former Liberal frontbencher Sophie Mirabella has delivered an early blow to her campaign to regain Indi with an unsubstantiated claim that the seat missed out on A\$10 million in hospital money because it elected independent Cathy McGowan.

Mirabella, who lost the seat in 2013, made the assertion in a Sky TV forum on Thursday night.

She told a questioner: "I had a commitment for a \$10 million allocation to the Wangaratta Hospital that if elected I was going to announce the week after the election ... that is \$10 million that Wangaratta hasn't had because Cathy got elected."

But no evidence for the claim was produced and Mirabella was quickly on the back foot over it.

The claim put Treasurer Scott Morrison on the spot when he campaigned with Mirabella on Friday.

Asked at their joint news conference at Wodonga whether behind the scenes the money was being considered before the 2013 election, Morrison said: "There was no public commitment and that means that is not an election commitment and it is not something that the government would have proceeded with on the basis that there was no public commitment."

All the public commitments made by the Coalition before the last election when Mirabella was the member and candidate had been followed through on, he said. "We have met those commitments."

Mirabella told the news conference it was decided locally that the hospital matter was such an important issue, not to fall into the pork-barrelling arguments "but for me to wait till after the election. Now I lost the election. I left it to the new member to carry on the campaign to get funding for hospitals."

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She said if she were elected this time she would “fight damn hard to get that money in a Turnbull Coalition government” and she was sure McGowan would make the same commitment.

The “real question” was who was going to be able to get that funding for local needs from a Turnbull government.

Labor is capitalising on the affair by asking the auditor-general, Grant Hehir, to investigate. In her letter to Hehir, opposition health spokeswoman Catherine King wrote: “Punishing the people of Indi for electing an independent MP is not legitimate grounds on which to base decisions about the expenditure of a significant sum of taxpayer money.” She asked him to report his findings to parliament “at your earliest convenience”.

Mirabella is involved in another controversy. The Benalla Ensign reported that at the recent opening of a new wing of an aged care facility [Mirabella pushed McGowan out of the way](#) to stop her having her photo taken with Ken Wyatt, assistant minister for health and aged care and the plaque to mark the occasion. McGowan got a photo with Wyatt but not in front of the plaque, the paper said. Mirabella has said: “I emphatically reject reports I pushed Cathy McGowan.”

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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