

Yet another new Senate crossbencher was sworn in this week. But like a number of other recent arrivals, Tim Storer is not in the clothes he wore when he was elected.

Storer, from South Australia, replaced a former senator from the Nick Xenophon Team (NXT), [Skye Kakoschke-Moore](#), a casualty of the citizenship saga. Storer had been fourth on the NXT ticket. By the time he arrived in Canberra, he had fallen out with the party and so he is an independent.

As a free floater, he has become a key to the government's suddenly improved prospects of passing its tax cuts for big companies, which would take their tax rate from 30% to 25% by 2026-27. Settling into his new surrounds, Storer had the adrenaline hit of being targeted by government, opposition and vested interests ahead of the tax vote, due next week.

These A\$35.6 billion worth of business tax cuts – part of the government \$65 billion 10-year package and applying to companies with turnovers above \$50 million annually - were effectively dead last year. Now, because of the Senate's goings and comings, they're seen to have a good chance of passing, with the crossbench negotiations being run by the infinitely patient and usually effective Mathias Cormann, Finance Minister and Senate leader.

With Labor and Greens opposed to the cut, the government needs nine of the 11 non-Greens crossbenchers. If Storer had stayed with the NXT, the legislation would still be dead, because the NXT, opposed to cuts for large companies, would have retained the numbers to stop it. Without him, the NXT has gone from three to two senators and so lost its veto power.

This Senate is without doubt the strangest in our history. Of the 20 original crossbenchers (including nine Greens) elected at the 2016 double dissolution, only 12 are still there.

Two Greens (Scott Ludlam, Larissa Waters), two from One Nation (Malcolm Roberts), Rod Culleton), two from the Nick Xenophon Team (Nick Xenophon, Kakoschke-Moore), [Bob Day](#) (from the now defunct Family First) and [Jacqui Lambie](#) (Jacqui Lambie Network), are out of the parliament. All but one were felled by various parts of

the Constitution's section 44. Xenophon (whose citizenship received a tick from the High Court) resigned to try his fortunes in the South Australian election, a move that [didn't turn out so well](#).

Since the 2016 election, there has been movement between the Liberal party and the crossbench. Cory Bernardi quit the Liberals, and now sits as an Australian Conservative. Lucy Gichuhi, the next on the Family First ticket, replaced Day – she sat first as an independent and then joined the Liberals.

Of the 11 on the current non-Greens crossbench, only five were sitting there at the start of the term – two Hansonites (Pauline Hanson, Brian Burston), Stirling Griff from the NXT, Derryn Hinch of the Justice party, and Liberal Democrat David Leyonhjelm.

Five of the other six came into parliament since the election: Rex Patrick (NXT), Peter Georgiou (One Nation), Fraser Anning, a One Nation replacement who immediately declared himself an independent, Steve Martin, who replaced Lambie but sits as an independent, and Storer. Only Bernardi was elected in 2016.

Martin was a gift for the government – he quickly announced he supports the tax legislation, to which Lambie was opposed. In his [maiden speech](#) this week, Martin quoted a headline in his local paper, the Advocate, describing him as “Bradbury of the Senate”, a reference to the Australian speed-skater Steven Bradbury who won Olympic gold in 2002 when all the other racers crashed out. “We now have a small army of Bradburys in this chamber, thanks to section 44 of the Constitution,” he said, in what's becoming a popular joke around the upper house.

The Coalition and Labor have had their parliamentary exits and entries, but we'll avoid further complicating the story except for noting a couple of points.

The Coalition now has the same numbers (30) as after the election - the acquisition of Gichuhi cancelling out the loss of Bernardi. But within the Coalition, the Nationals lost one to the Liberals, after the High Court struck down Fiona Nash, who was replaced by Liberal Jim Molan.

Storer wasn't the only arrival this week. Amanda Stoker, from the Queensland Liberal National Party, was sworn in to replace former attorney-general [George Brandis](#), the new High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

In the tax negotiations, by Thursday the government had seven of the required nine votes in the bag. Pauline Hanson had been brought on board. One Nation was previously opposed, but Hanson was persuaded by funds for apprenticeships and influenced by the Trump cuts, saying "a lot of the companies [in the US] now are actually starting to employ more people".

Only Hinch and Storer are needed now. Storer has an extraordinary opportunity to win concessions in his first parliamentary fortnight.

If the government clinches the legislation it will be a major victory - with its own irony. The citizenship crisis, that caused the Coalition so much grief, will have facilitated the passage, through bringing in key new players (notably Martin and Storer) more open to the policy or to negotiation than those they replaced.

Passage would complicate Labor's situation. The ALP has yet to announce what it would do about the cuts already legislated for small and medium sized businesses - it is expected to want to confine these to smaller companies. Given all it has said, presumably it would commit to repeal this second tranche, using the savings for other things. But could it get the repeal through a post-election Senate? And before the election, an undertaking to repeal would make for bad relations with big business.

Senate president Scott Ryan (whose predecessor, Stephen Parry, quit in the citizenship crisis) tweeted on Thursday that the Senate now has its complete membership for the first time since Ludlam's resignation last July.

But nobody should become too complacent. The High Court is considering the future of Labor's ACT senator Katy Gallagher, who [did not have her renunciation](#) of British citizenship confirmed until after she nominated. That judgement will decide whether we see another "Bradbury" arrive.

Grattan on Friday: New players in Bradbury Senate a gift to government's company tax cut prospects

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

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