

Labor MP Tim Hammond quits for family reasons, creating byelection in WA

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The Labor Party faces a byelection in the seat of Perth after first-term MP Tim Hammond announced he was leaving politics because of the difficulties of being separated from his young children.

“I thought I had an appreciation of how to manage my duties as a federal member of parliament in a way that did not have such an impact on my family,” Hammond said. “I got that wrong. I just did not anticipate the profound effect my absence would have on all of us.”

His children are aged six, two-and-a-half and seven months.

“As a direct result of me being away from home, the strength of the relationships that I have built with my children have suffered in a way that is simply unsustainable for us as a family, and me as a dad,” he said.

Hammond, 43, elected in 2016, was already a shadow minister and was seen as having a very bright future in politics. He said he would leave politics entirely, ruling out any future tilt at state parliament. He planned to go back into the law, representing the sick and dying, and Aboriginal victims, while being “at home every night”.

Hammond is well respected on both sides of politics. Finance Minister and fellow Western Australian Mathias Cormann said he was “genuinely sad” to hear Hammond would be leaving.

“While we are political competitors, we are also friends and colleagues involved in the same profession focused on making a positive difference to our community and to our country. Tim is a very decent, highly capable individual with a bright future in whatever he decides to do next,” Cormann said.

“It is our state’s loss that Tim will now not continue to pursue his federal political career to its full potential,” he said.

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The electorate of Perth is considered a safe Labor seat and is on a margin of 3.3%.

Labor was already waiting anxiously on the High Court's decision on the status of ACT Senator Katy Gallagher, which is expected to indicate whether three House of Representatives Labor members and one crossbencher will have to face byelections as a result of dual citizenship issues when they nominated in 2016.

Hammond said he would resign "in the near future" after discharging obligations to his electorate and staff. He said he very much regretted that a byelection would be an inconvenience for his community. "The decision to cause a byelection now is the thing that gave me the greatest angst," he told reporters.

In a detailed statement explaining his decision, he said that "as much as I have tried desperately, I just cannot reconcile my life as a federal member of parliament with being the father I need and want to be".

"I am not saying that the life of a Western Australian federal member of parliament is unmanageable. Many of my colleagues make it work. But it is time to be brutally honest and admit that I am not one of them."

Hammond said he had "sought professional advice and assistance to try and preserve our family unit in a way that I felt confident would not suffer from my absence. But my time from home simply means that the strength of my relationships with my daughters and my son has been compromised."

He said he had privately agonised over his decision for many months.

In a [Perth radio](#) interview he said the baby in his family had been "an unexpected but wonderful blessing that wasn't on the cards when I was elected almost two years ago".

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He said he had spent many years seeking to become an MP. But now “it just wasn’t working”. It was very important to him as a professional person that he give the job 120%.

At a news conference Hammond said the travel – which is often mentioned in relation to MPs from WA – was just one part of it. It was not so much the travel per se – it was just “about absence”. To do his job properly, he had to put down his bags and immediately get out again, to fulfil his obligation to the community.

He said Opposition Leader Bill Shorten had been “understandably surprised”, wanting to make sure he had thought through his decision.

Shorten said that he was disappointed Hammond would not be part of the next caucus, “but as a husband and a father, I’m glad he’ll be with the people he cares about most in this world”.

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 their academic appointment.

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