

Surely Clive Palmer is one souffle unlikely to rise twice – although predictions are hazardous when we're talking about a man dedicated to buying votes.

It beggars belief that Palmer, discredited in the political shambles and business disasters and disgraces of the last few years, can be starting out again, planning to run candidates in "all seats" in the House of Representatives and for the Senate.

The comings and goings into, out of and within the Senate this term have made that house a travesty.

The changes to the Senate voting system will curb the ability of "rats and mice" – micro parties and independents - to win seats at the election. But any voters so angry about the more conventional parties that they are tempted to look Palmer's way again might like to consider the shenanigans on Monday.

Senator Brian Burston, formerly of One Nation, after his acrimonious divorce from Pauline Hanson told the Senate just after 10am that he was sitting as an independent.

He was one of three senators making statements about their new affiliations. Tasmania's Steve Martin, who was on the Jacqui Lambie election ticket but had sat as an independent, reported he'd joined the Nationals since the full Senate last met; Fraser Anning, formerly of the One Nation ticket who'd also been an independent, put on record that he had now moved to the Katter's Australian Party.

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An hour or so after his declaration, Burston had publicly re-partnered - as had already been anticipated. Now he “leads” the United Australia Party (UAP) in the Senate - its sole member. In today’s Senate, you don’t need company to have a party.

The UAP is the new iteration of the Palmer United Party, which made a splash at the 2013 election but had drowned by 2016.

It will be recalled by those who follow these things that Palmer had originally wanted to use the UAP moniker, ripping off the name of the major conservative party of the 1930s and early 1940s.

But someone had grabbed a similar name ahead of him and so we had PUP, three of whose candidates reached the Senate on Palmer’s popularity and money, while the man himself won the Queensland seat of Fairfax. Then the PUP family imploded, just as the Hanson clan has done in this parliament.

Palmer, welcoming Burston as his face in the Senate, said he looked “forward to a long and happy relationship with him”. Clive is not a man who learns from experience.

Palmer also doesn’t like “name” parties these days. “The structure of one-person parties has been shown to be a failure. It is not about Derryn Hinch, Jacqui Lambie, Clive Palmer, Pauline Hanson, Cory Bernardi or Bob Katter, that’s not what matters,” he said in a statement. Never mind that Palmer has huge billboards of himself around the place over the slogan “MAKE AUSTRALIA GREAT”.

“What matters is that we need to unite the country to do what’s best for all our citizens”. Palmer claimed to have had a big response to his new party.

Whatever the truth of that, having a parliamentary representative means the UAP doesn’t need the 500 members otherwise required for registration. It’s a two-way street – Burston knew any prospect of his being re-elected would be better if he had a rich backer. When Hanson wanted someone else to head the next NSW Senate ticket, he was shopping around.

View from The Hill: Clive Palmer's back on the trail, with Brian Burston in tow

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Palmer thrives on hyperbole and publicity. His Monday news conference with Burston was typically farcical, with its clashes with the media and plenty of blather. Palmer praised Burston's "courage" – Burston publicly fell out with Hanson over her breaking the deal with the government to back the company tax cuts – and his "foresight to stand up for the people who elected him, to aim for their aspirations".

The Labor member for Herbert, Cathy O'Toole broke protocol and joined the fray, confronting Palmer about the fallout from the collapse of his company Queensland Nickel in 2016. Later Palmer said he was "discussing with my political advisors" the possibility of contesting Herbert.

Among his declarations Palmer said that "Australians are sick of parties based on vanity". Let's hope so.

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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