

## Wentworth goes to the polls on October 20

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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The byelection for Wentworth, Malcolm Turnbull's former seat, will be held on October 20.

The announcement by the Speaker, Tony Smith, came ahead of the Liberals choosing their candidate on Thursday. Rolls will close on September 24 and nominations will close September 27.

The byelection is crucial for Scott Morrison who will face a very difficult test in the initial days of his prime ministership. The outcome in the byelection will set the political tone for the rest of the year.

Morrison will encounter a lot of anger in the electorate at the removal of Turnbull as prime minister. Turnbull was very popular and had grown the Liberal vote substantially, to a [17.7% margin](#) in 2016. On what is known of his arrangements, Turnbull would be back from New York in the final days of the byelection – whether he would campaign for the Liberal candidate is not known.

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**Read more:** [\*\*\*View from The Hill: Wentworth looks scary for Liberals having trouble explaining why they sacked its PM\*\*\*](#)

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Labor's candidate, Tim Murray, has already been campaigning, and high-profile Kerryn Phelps, who has a medical practice in the electorate, is set to run. Phelps could attract a strong vote from disaffected Liberal supporters.

In the Liberal preselection all eyes will be on whether a woman is selected, after one of the frontrunners, Andrew Bragg, pulled out, saying the candidate should be female.

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**Read more:** [\*\*Bragg drops out of Liberal preselection battle, calling for woman candidate\*\*](#)

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The two leading women in the field are Katherine O'Regan, who has been a political staffer and is chair at Sydney East Business Chamber, and Mary-Lou Jarvis, a vice-president of the NSW Liberal Party.

Earlier this week Morrison, [asked on 2GB](#) – in the context of the push for a female candidate – whether he was “a merit person or not”, said: “I’m a merit person and the party members will decide our candidate in Wentworth.

“It’s [the preselectors’] choice ... Just like it has to be, in every single seat in the country.”

Wentworth is a well-educated, well-off electorate.

In the 2016 census, of those aged 15 and over, nearly half (46.8%) had attained the level of bachelor degree or above, compared with 23.4% for NSW as a whole.

Professionals made up 40.7% (NSW, 23.6%) and managers 20.8% (13.5%, for NSW).

The median weekly income was \$1,242 for a person (\$664, for NSW); for a family it was \$3,231 (\$1780 for NSW).

*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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