

Labor leads 53-47% in Newspann as Shorten struggles with medical transfer bill

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The government goes into the resumption of parliament this week trailing Labor 47-53% on the two-party vote in [Newspann](#), unchanged from a fortnight ago.

The poll comes as Labor's stand on the legislation to facilitate medical evacuations hangs in the balance, with Bill Shorten having indicated he would like to find a compromise and speculation about a Labor retreat from its earlier support.

Shorten receives a briefing on the implications of the bill from the secretary of the Home Affairs Department, Mike Pezzullo on Monday. Shadow cabinet and caucus will discuss Labor's position.

The opposition has been under concerted attack from the government over its backing for the legislation, which passed the Senate last year with ALP support.

Shorten is worried about Labor being wedged, because border protection is always a politically vulnerable area for the ALP.

Scott Morrison says the government will not shift from outright opposition to the bill, which is based on a proposal originally coming from independent Kerry Phelp but subsequently refined.

Newspann, published in The Australian, has Labor's primary vote up a point to 39%; the Coalition's vote remains on 37%. The Greens are on 9%; One Nation is polling 5%, down a point.

Morrison has increased his lead over Shorten as better prime minister by 2 points to 44-35%.

Morrison's satisfaction rating is up 3 points to 43%; his dissatisfaction rating has fallen 2 points

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to 45%. Shorten has a net approval rating of minus 15, a worsening by 2 points.

The tactical battle over the medical transfer amendments will dominate the run up to Tuesday's first day of the sitting. On another front, the opposition is trying to muster the numbers for extra sitting days to consider measures from the banking royal commission.

In comments on the medical transfer bill Opposition spokesman Shayne Neumann said on Sunday: "Labor has always had two clear objectives - making sure sick people can get medical care, and making sure the minister has final discretion over medical transfers."

The bill provides that where there a dispute between the two doctors recommending a transfer and the minister, the final say on medical grounds would be in the hands of a medical panel.

The minister could override medical decisions only on security grounds ("security" is as defined in the ASIO act).

Passage of the legislation, which would require support from Labor and all but one of the crossbench, would be a big rebuff for the Coalition.

But the government has managed to turn the heat onto Labor, claiming the legislation would undermine Australia's border protection.

The briefing Shorten will receive will put more pressure on the opposition, because Home Affairs will presumably reinforce the argument it advanced in advice to the government.

The government has now declassified this advice – which last week it provided more informally to The Australian.

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The advice, which has some sections blacked out, says: “The effect of the Bill will undermine the Australian Government’s regional processing arrangements.

“Conduct which would come within the security exception to transfer based on the minister’s reasonable belief that the transfer would be prejudicial to security, does not include all criminal conduct”.

“Ultimately, the amendments provide that the approximate 1000 transferees currently located in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Nauru could have access to a transfer to Australia within weeks of any Royal Assent,” the advice says.

“It is not expected that the Minister’s ability to refuse transfer on security grounds will significantly reduce the number of potential transfers”.

Neumann said on Sunday: “Labor has great respect for our national security agencies and we’ve always worked cooperatively with them.”

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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