

Jumping beyond May 18, we know a good deal more about how a Shorten government ministry would look than the shape of a re-elected Morrison government.

A rash of ministers quitting politics at the election has left some significant holes to be filled if the Coalition managed to hang on.

This would provide opportunities for up-and-comers, but it raises a lot of questions about who'd be responsible for what. And that's leaving aside the need to reshuffle some incompetents.

The loss of cabinet minister Kelly O'Dwyer means we don't know who'd fill the key portfolio of jobs and industrial relations. Morrison would also be in search of a minister for women, a post held by O'Dwyer. Michaelia Cash second time round perhaps?

Indigenous affairs, which has been the responsibility of Nationals Senate leader, Nigel Scullion, would be vacant, as would human services and digital transformation, the outgoing Michael Keenan's patch.

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Morrison has already nominated Linda Reynolds as defence minister if he wins – she'd replace Christopher Pyne, another retiree.

It was a promise driven by politics – Morrison wanted to promote a woman. When Steve Ciobo, who held defence industry, announced he was quitting, he stepped down from the ministry immediately, unlike most departees, who stayed until the election.

This enabled Morrison to elevate Reynolds from a parliamentary secretary into the defence industry job and cabinet (with the defence portfolio promise for later, if there was a later).

Morrison could then boast a record number of women (seven) for a federal cabinet.

If he wanted to retain that number he'd have to find another woman to replace O'Dwyer. One possibility would be Sussan Ley, now a parliamentary secretary, who previously served in cabinet (but is now fighting for her seat of Farrer against an independent challenger).

In a new Morrison government there would once again be women in both foreign affairs and defence, as was the case when Julie Bishop was foreign minister and Marise Payne defence minister. Payne would stay in her present foreign affairs post.

Pyne's job of leader of the house, very important in managing tactics, would have to be filled. Maybe Christian Porter? (We can assume, in the event of a government win, it would be likely attorney general Porter and home affairs Minister Peter Dutton would have kept their seats.)

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If the Coalition hung on, presumably Michael McCormack would survive as Nationals leader, and consequently as deputy prime minister, despite the pressure he has been under.

The most obvious elevation to a Morrison cabinet would be Arthur Sinodinos, a one time cabinet minister who has only recently returned to parliament after a long illness.

Reshuffles are always unpredictable but it would be outrageous if environment minister Melissa Price were not moved. In the campaign she had been gagged and kept in the political equivalent of a dark room. One option would be to bring energy and environment together again under one minister.

A question mark is whether Morrison would give a cabinet spot to Tony Abbott (again assuming Abbott survived). Abbott would want defence – but that has been promised.

A notable feature of the campaign is that Morrison has had fewer frontbenchers at his appearances than has Bill Shorten. This is a function of gaps, poor performers, and the difficult fights some ministers are having in their seats, which are keeping them tied down.

A Liberal prime minister selects their frontbench team, with the exception of the Nationals, who are chosen by their own leader. The number of spots going to the Nationals depends on the proportion of seats they have. Portfolios are allocated by the PM, with some of those going to Nationals automatically, and others a matter of negotiation.

In Labor the factions get their allocations according to their proportions in the caucus, and choose their people. Shorten would have leeway to secure the odd “captain’s pick” in the factional line up.

If she wasn’t chosen on the right’s factional ticket, there’s no doubt Shorten would want Kristina Keneally in his ministry. She’s had a prominent role as “bus captain” in the campaign, and at press conferences.

The Labor leader chooses the portfolios. Shorten has already announced Pat Dodson would be his minister for Indigenous affairs (now he’s shadow assistant minister).

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The reason we know more about a post-election Labor ministry is that most of its occupants are already “shadowing” the jobs they’d hold. Chris Bowen pointed out recently that half of the shadow cabinet had been in the same roles for the past six years.

But while most “shadows” would slot into similar roles in office, there’d be some shuffling at the edges.

For example, who would be put in charge of home affairs? Defence spokesman Richard Marles would be an obvious choice, though he mightn’t want the switch.

Bowen has produced some interesting statistics about how experienced a Labor cabinet would be. If Labor were elected, “we would come into government with the most experienced incoming cabinet in 50 years,” he told the National Press Club.

“When the Hawke government was elected, there were three cabinet ministers that had sat at the cabinet table previously. When the Howard government came to power in 1996 there were also three with prior cabinet experience.

“And with Labor’s victory in 2007, there were just two cabinet members who could draw on their experience sitting around the cabinet table.

“If Labor forms a government 16 out of 21 of us in the cabinet would have served at the cabinet level before.”

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.

Authors: Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

View from The Hill: Lots of ministry spots to fill if Morrison wins, while many Shorten ministers would return

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

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