



Online poll offers Howard best advice on how to win Some hair, some colour and to the 'average working voter' he's the man — but in reality, there's more bad news



CANBERRA — Maybe if John Howard dyed his hair and grew it shoulder length he would have a better chance of reversing his ever-declining chances of winning a fifth term as Australian prime minister.

In an on-line poll by Advanced Hair Studio — hair restorer to the likes of cricketer Shane Warne — Howard finally topped Labor Leader Kevin Rudd in a contest to see which look appealed most to voters.

The embattled Prime Minister won, with locks tumbling over his collar in a look designed to appeal to alternative lifestyle voters, beating Rudd's best with a conservative, slightly shaggy hairdo tailored for the "average working voter".

Real life is less kind to Howard.

Yesterday internet gambling agency Sportingbet Australia delivered more bad news, with punters swinging away from the Government to shorten odds on a Labor win to A\$1.34 while ballooning the Coalition's odds to A\$3.25.

Nor are the nation's mums happy with the support they get from Howard. Despite Treasurer Peter Costello's plea for an extra baby for the country to offset the impact of a graying population, a survey by women's marketer The Heat group showed 55 per cent did not believe the lot of women with children had improved in the past decade. And while 67 per cent of women intended to return to work after having children, nine out of 10 who tried said they had been sidelined after taking maternity leave.

Further, a Galaxy poll yesterday

reported that Labor looks like winning four key marginal seats in New South Wales, and the latest Reuters poll trend — analysing the three main polls — showed Labor leading by a margin of 13.2 percentage points.

Howard is now under pressure to shift his focus away from his record of 11 years of uninterrupted growth and look to the future. A widely expected further rise in interest rates next week will add to the urgency.

With polls indicating that most voters believe Howard is past his use-by date, and Rudd campaigning on the theme of new leadership for the nation, the Prime Minister is now swinging to an emphasis on employment.

Latest figures show unemployment at a 33-year low of 4.2 per cent, down from 8.2 per cent when Howard won power in 1996.

"My most fervent goal in a new term would be to get unemployment down to 3 per cent," he said.

In Melbourne yesterday, Howard built on the theme by promising more than A\$2 billion on another 100 technical colleges across Australia as a key plank in programmes to boost the skills of the Australian workforce. At the other end of the country Rudd continued to push the environment, a key election battlefield and one in which Labor has a clear lead.

While Howard's environmental focus remained on the defence of his refusal to ratify the Kyoto protocols on climate change, Rudd added to Sunday's announcement of a A\$1 billion plan to harvest urban stormwater and build desalination

plants with a A\$200 million plan to ease pressure on the endangered Great Barrier Reef. The plan is aimed at reducing farm run-off and other pollution.

And as the combined total of election promises by both sides nears A\$100 billion, attention is being paid to their costings.

Under charter of budget honesty legislation, the federal Finance Department has been asked to cost five Government promises, and eight by Labor.

On the fringes, the campaign has taken some strange twists.

The Family First party dumped candidate Andrew Quah, 22, after he appeared in two images on the internet — in one holding his genitals, and in the other partly dressed.

And the newly-formed Liberty and Democracy Party has condemned an on-line newspaper poll on its candidate for the Australian Capital Territory, Lisa Milat, sister-in-law of Ivan Milat, the infamous backpacker killer.

The poll gave two options for readers' responses to whether they would vote for Lisa Milat: yes, there's no reason to believe she's a psychopath like her brother; and no, her relationship to one of Australia's most notorious serial killers scares me.

"Lisa Milat is a law-abiding and upstanding citizen and a proud mother of two," the party said.

"The fact that her husband is the brother of convicted killer Ivan Milat should not be used in any way to imply that Lisa could be a psychopath.



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