

It'll be an upset to Dai for in Fowler



Independent candidate for Fowler Dai Le gets a selfie with voters at pre-polling in Cabramatta. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Damian Shaw

MIRANDA DEVINE

YOU won't hear her name on the ABC, which is too busy elevating the so-called "teal independent" women who are strategically targeting safe Liberal seats.

But Dai Le, 55, the deputy mayor of Fairfield City council, is aiming for a massive upset in one of the safest Labor seats in the country – running as an independent in the Western Sydney electorate of Fowler.

Judging by the reception from locals at a pre-poll booth in St Johns Park on Tuesday, Ms Le, a Vietnamese refugee who arrived with her parents at age 11, has a good shot of stealing Fowler, which boasts a whopping 14 per cent margin and has never once been out of Labor's hands.

Despite a shoestring budget, Ms Le is in tune with her multicultural community where almost one in five



people have Vietnamese ancestry, 60 per cent are born overseas and three-quarters speak a language other than English at home.

Her secret weapon is the popular mayor Frank Carbone, a former Labor polmie turned independent, who is by her side on the hustings each day, and features prominently in her campaign literature. During last year's harsh lockdown, Ms Le and Mr Carbone spoke up fiercely for Western Sydney.

"Our community was marginalised, demonised and treated like second-class citizens," Ms Le said of the travel restrictions and draconian testing rules which hit western suburbs workers hardest. "Cabramatta and Fairfield were like ghost towns. This wasn't happening in the eastern suburbs. Nobody was defending us, from either party."

And that is something Labor candidate Kristina Keneally would never understand, Ms Le said.

"She wasn't here when we were locked down. She didn't go through that," Ms Le said.

It is a point not lost on Edmond Kalaita, 83, from Bossley Park, who was among about 2000 people who voted early at St Johns Park on Tuesday.

"She's not living here," he said, gesturing at a poster of Ms Keneally. "Dai Le has been in the council for a long time. I think the local will win."

Joe, 66, from Mount Pritchard, was blunter.

"I think (Ms Keneally) has just been dropped into a very safe seat. It's an insult," he said.

"I'm voting for the one who's here. She's the local."

"She works hard."

Lifelong St Johns Park resident John McCutcheon, 82, said Fowler was "a powerful, strong seat" but Ms Keneally's candidacy was "bad luck for Labor".

Jules, in her 30s, was one of the few voters willing to speak in the pre-poll queue who didn't care that Ms Keneally was from out of town.

"You can hear from her accent she's from America," she said of Ms Keneally.

But Jules was more turned off by the "mean girls" saga in which Ms Keneally was accused of ganging up on the late Senator Kimberley Kitching.

"I'm not sure if it's true but I don't like the bullying," she said.

Ms Keneally was nowhere to be seen on Tuesday, though she popped into St Johns on Monday.

But in a sign that her victory in the deep red seat is not a sure thing, Labor deployed its big guns in the electorate on Tuesday. Kevin Rudd and his former sidekick Chris Bowen strolled around the nearby Greenway Plaza shopping centre.

More jobs to go in coal plant closure

EXCLUSIVE

JAMES MORROW
FEDERAL POLITICAL EDITOR

JOB losses from the early closure of the Eraring Power Station will be 40 per cent higher than previously anticipated, with around 1400 workers now predicted to join the unemployment queue when it shuts in 2025.

Initial estimates had suggested that around 1000 workers would be jobless, but that figure has been revised upwards in modelling by the Institute of Public Affairs, which also found that hitting net zero emission by 2050 would halt the construction of 89 coal, gas, and oil projects at a cost of \$274 billion to the nation's economy.

The study, which examined the effect of the closure of other major power stations found that Eraring's closure is likely to cause a 0.7 per cent increase in local unemployment, or around 1400 jobs directly as a result of the shutdown.

The analysis also cautioned that this is likely to be a "conservative" estimate "because Eraring is a much larger coal-fired power station that the average station analysed (in previous research)".

"The Hunter Valley is the canary in the coal mine for what happens when resources jobs and investment are destroyed by net zero and there is nothing to replace them" Daniel Wild, Director of Research at the IPA, said.

"The promises of billions of dollars of investment in so-called 'green energy' and all the 'green jobs' that come with it simply do not exist," he said.

Nationals Senator Matt Canavan (pictured) also warned of the prospect of higher power prices.

"We can already see the impact of coal power station closures," he said.

"Wholesale prices have more than doubled since Liddell shut just a quarter of its power generating capacity, they'll go to the moon if they go too soon with Eraring."



Libs give regions \$90m pledge

CLARE ARMSTRONG

A CASH splash in the Central Coast and Hunter region on local roads and a green energy technology partnership totalling \$90 million will be unveiled by Scott Morrison, highlighting the critical importance of regional NSW seats this election.

The Prime Minister will today announce a \$40 million commitment to improve roads

throughout the region and help the Central Coast Council address the significant maintenance backlog created by recent heavy rain as well as increased traffic. He will also unveil \$50 million to create a business and research partnership with the University of NSW and the University of Newcastle, creating 1600 jobs over four years.

The universities will work with 27 industry partners to

develop world-leading technology in solar, hydrogen, storage and green metals and rapidly deploy new technology solutions.

Mr Morrison said the \$40 million roads investment would support Central Coast residents, while also creating local jobs. "A strong economy means we continue to improve roads across the Central Coast, helping residents get home sooner and safer," he said.



Gladys Berejiklian.

New gig 'silences' Glad

JAMES O'DOHERTY

GLADYS Berejiklian has been largely absent from the Liberal Party's election campaign because her new job at Optus means she cannot be "too political", Liberals say.

Ms Berejiklian has told former colleagues that her new job has prevented her from campaigning for the re-election of MPs in must-win Sydney seats.

Some Liberals are frustrated

she has been hamstrung in helping MPs keep seats, believing she is the party's best asset in electorates being targeted by independents. Ms Berejiklian attended close friend Trent Zimmerman's campaign launch last week but reportedly declined to speak.

Mackellar MP Jason Falinski said it was "disappointing" that she has not been on the campaign trail, "because of her popularity".

The Daily Telegraph sought comment from Ms Berejiklian.