



Victorian politics

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'Final straw': former Victorian Liberal MP quits party after Moira Deeming preselection

Andrew Elsbury says he feels 'no longer in tune' with party membership

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A former MP for Melbourne's western suburbs has quit the [Liberal party](#), citing its decision to preselect a candidate with a history of attacking transgender rights as the "final straw".

Andrew Elsbury, who represented the Liberals in the Western Metropolitan Region from 2010 to 2014, quit the party on Wednesday, after [Moira Deeming](#) was preselected to replace [outspoken MP Bernie Finn](#) in his former electorate.

"It's been a death by a thousand cuts, but that has been the final straw," Elsbury told Guardian Australia.

“I feel that I’m no longer in tune with the party membership here in the west, so it’s best for me to walk away.”

Deeming, a teacher and Melton councillor, is [anti-abortion](#) and a [vocal critic of Victoria’s Safe Schools program](#), which aims to prevent bullying against LGBTQ+ students, and of recent changes to the state’s law that provide greater protections for transgender people.

She is also a close friend of Finn, who was [expelled from the parliamentary Liberal party in May](#) due to his social media use, which included a post calling for abortion to be banned, even for rape survivors. He compared the premier, Daniel Andrews, to Adolf Hitler in another post.

Finn, who now sits on the crossbench, will be running as a Democratic Labour party candidate in the same seat at the November election.

Finn publicly endorsed Deeming ahead of the preselection vote, which involved about 40 party members. She won more than twice the number of votes as her nearest rival in Saturday’s vote and is believed to have had the backing of the outgoing state party president, Robert Clark, and his allies.

Members of the administrative committee were approached for comment but declined, citing party rules.

Elsbury, a Liberal member for almost 25 years, described Deeming as Finn’s “anointed successor”.

“Bernie introduced Moira to the Liberal party, he’s had her under his wing for years,” he said.

“So to think that we’re going to have any change in the Liberal party, which is desperately needed in the west - we are dying, our vote is collapsing - we needed to have a clean break, to be able to move on. That opportunity is gone.”

All 11 lower house seats that make up the Western Metropolitan Region are held by Labor, the majority by comfortable margins.

In the upper house, the region is represented by five MPs, none of whom are Liberals, after Finns’s expulsion. Elsbury said this has allowed Labor to take the area for granted.

“We’ve got so much that needs doing out here,” he said, citing lack of infrastructure in the growing region as the most pressing issue.

“We need an MP who is representative of the region, who takes the issues that are important to ministers and to the parliament to highlight where there is a failure. We can’t afford a purely ideological individual.”

It comes as it was revealed Deeming was rejected as a Liberal candidate for the federal election in the lower house seat of Gorton, amid concerns her views could distract from then prime minister Scott Morrison's campaign.

In March, the Victorian Liberal branch's administrative committee voted for Deeming to run in the very safe Labor seat in Melbourne's western suburbs but before she was formally endorsed, the group was warned against it. Another vote was conducted and a different candidate picked.

Just days later, Katherine Deves was handpicked by a special committee, which included Morrison, to run in the seat of Warringah, but lost to independent Zali Steggall. Deves became a lightning rod for criticism [over her comments about transgender people](#) during the campaign.

Two sources have told Guardian Australia there was an attempt to overturn Deeming's latest nomination but it was unsuccessful.

Privately, Liberal MPs and internal party figures have argued voters in the west are more socially conservative than in other parts of the state, and that they would agree with Deeming's views.

But Elsbury disagrees.

"We really need to have bread and butter issues taken care of before we go off on a vanity project," he said.

The opposition leader in the upper house, David Davis, said the Liberals were a "clearly a very diverse party and we have our own internal party processes".

In Australia, the national counselling and referral service for LGBTIQ+ people, [QLife](#), is 1800 184 527. The crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In the UK, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123. Other international suicide helplines can be found at [befrienders.org](#)

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