

## **Newspoll: bleeding has stopped but wound hasn't healed**

David Crowe, The Australian, 12:00AM March 20, 2017

Malcolm Turnbull has bandaged a gaping wound but is a long way short of a lasting recovery.

Voters are showing him the way to restoring his strength. Will he heed them?

The Prime Minister has widened his personal lead over Bill Shorten, lifted the Coalition's primary vote and improved his personal ratings after his bold moves last week on energy security. While the "Snowy 2.0" plan was lampooned as a vision straight out of a television satire, it was also praised by experts as a practical fix for the electricity grid. It had the great benefit of building on a national icon.

Now Turnbull needs more big ideas.

The Coalition has increased its primary vote from the shocking low of 34 per cent in the last Newspoll, but its 37 per cent today still spells defeat at an election.

History suggests it will take dramatic action to build on this gain. Paul Keating lifted Labor's primary vote from 34 per cent in February 1992 and won the next election, thanks to John Hewson and the Fightback! plan for a consumption tax. John Howard recovered from a primary vote of 35 per cent in May 2001 by listening to voters, scrapping fuel indexation and toughening his stand on asylum-seekers.

A similar boost for Turnbull will not happen by itself. As the federal budget nears, he and Scott Morrison will need to clear the slate of unpopular policies. This means scrapping the "zombie" welfare savings that are blocked in the Senate and giving up on the Medicare payments freeze for doctors — an option clearly signalled by Health Minister Greg Hunt yesterday.

It also means dropping the \$48.7 billion company tax cut.

Bill Shorten uses this policy at every press conference to contrast Labor's focus on families with Turnbull's help for the big end of town. It drags the government down every day.

Turnbull took the tax cut to the election but cannot get it all through the Senate. He will need to legislate what he can get, abandon the rest and assure voters he has listened to the parliament they elected. This will infuriate big business but the policy appears doomed anyway. This Newspoll and the eight before it show the government is headed for defeat on its current settings, making the tax cut look like a 10-year fairytale.

Talk about a cabinet reshuffle or a homeland security ministry is beside the point when the government's problems are its policies more than its personnel.

There are real pressures on Labor. It has a convincing lead and is supremely confident but it has an unpopular leader. Shorten's personal satisfaction has fallen for the fourth straight Newspann in net terms, which suggests Turnbull's attacks are paying off.

Yet Turnbull has nothing to brag about. History shows how hard it is to get a government out of the casualty ward. Nobody survives a primary vote this low without drastic action.