

Kevin Andrews: If I was Prime Minister



Kevin Andrews getting water for himself and Tony Abbott during Question Time in the House of Representatives Chamber at Parliament House in Canberra. Picture Kym Smith

Greg Brown, The Australian, 11:41AM November 2, 2017

Liberal MP Kevin Andrews has declared Australia needs to return to “strong” and “decisive” leadership as he refused to endorse Malcolm Turnbull as party leader. Mr Andrews, a former defence minister and staunch loyalist to Tony Abbott, used an interview on Sky News to describe actions he would take if he was prime minister, which includes a full audit on the eligibility of parliamentarians following the government’s citizenship woes.

“This is going to continue to fester politically until it is resolved,” Mr Andrews said. “Australians are looking for strong and decisive leadership. If I was the prime minister I would be ordering, requesting, the AEC for example, to immediately undertake an examination of every MP and senator and to report as soon as possible back to the government.

“As a matter of principle, if we want to stop the further erosion of confidence in probably our most significant institution, namely the parliament, then we have to address the issue.”

read more

A new force awakens Tony Abbott
Rise of right's new vanguard DENNIS SHANAHAN
PM savages Parry for citizenship delay GREG BROWN

Mr Andrews was later asked if it would be a mistake for the party to replace Mr Turnbull as prime minister. "What we require is strong, decisive, stable leadership. That is what the Australian people are calling out for and I think the last decade of this merry-go-round has been destructive," Mr Andrews said. "But what the country requires, what ordinary Australians are asking for is strong, decisive and stable leadership. "However we do it we have got to find a way back to that."

Mr Andrews would not say if this would require asking Mr Turnbull to stand aside for Mr Abbott. "We should not be concentrating on the internal affairs of the Liberal Party and the Coalition," he said. "I will proclaim the way in which Australia should be going forward and I will leave it to commentators to ... commentate."

However, Mr Andrews may need new advice if he does become prime minister, with the Australian Electoral Commission saying it does not have the authority to conduct eligibility checks. "The eligibility of candidates is addressed in Section 44 of the Constitution. The Attorney-General's Department administers the Constitution and the AEC cannot disqualify a candidate relying on the operation of section 44 of the Constitution," the AEC said in a statement on the homepage of its website.

"The AEC is subject to the requirements of the Electoral Act. Section 172 of the Electoral Act sets out the only grounds upon which the AEC is able to reject a nomination of a candidate. Those grounds do not include disqualifying a candidate under the Constitution. Any disqualification of a candidate due to the operation of section 44 of the Constitution can only be determined by the High Court after an election."

The commission also notes there is "no data source available that would enable comprehensive candidate eligibility inquiries to be made in a timely and accurate way". "The difficulty of such a task would also be exacerbated by the requirements of the election timetable specified in the Electoral Act, which provide for candidate nominations to be made less than a week prior to the start of early voting," it said.

Mr Andrews challenged Mr Turnbull for the Liberal Party leadership in 2009 in a move that paved the way for Mr Abbott to become party leader in a spill.