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Former prime minister Malcolm Turnbull. Picture: AAP Image/Dan Himbrechts

Andrew Bolt: Liberal Left exits a good start for party

Andrew Bolt, Herald Sun, March 3, 2019 7:22pm

Subscriber only

Malcolm Turnbull gone, Julie Bishop and Kelly O'Dwyer going, and now Christopher Pyne, too. Know what some Liberals call that? A good start.

The election will do the rest. Check Sportsbet's seat-by-seat odds. They tip that from the ruins of this Morrison Government after the May election will crawl a Liberal party where conservatives will again have the numbers and most of the talent.

The Liberal Left has destroyed not just the party but itself, and that's why some of its leaders are now deserting — and slamming the door in fury.

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Take Turnbull, who after losing his leadership last year immediately quit parliament, forcing the Liberals to an unnecessary by-election that he helped to ensure they'd lose. Or take Bishop, the former foreign minister, who on Sunday named MPs she says betrayed her in the ballot to replace Turnbull, saying they should have asked: "Who could beat Bill Shorten? ... I could."

But only 10 of Bishop's colleagues agreed with her. The other 74 preferred Scott Morrison or Peter Dutton, because many remembered she was better at hurting her own than hurting Labor. As Sunday's headlines again demonstrate.

Or take Defence Minister Christopher Pyne, a talented man despite two years ago indiscreetly bragging that the Liberals' Left was "in the winners' circle" under Turnbull. Pyne planned to stay if the Liberals looked like winning the election. Quitting now publicly announces they won't.

True, some conservative ministers are also quitting: Michael Keenan and Steve Ciobo.

But in this Liberal party that's been almost paralysed by division, the Left is losing most, and Sportsbet punters bet they'll lose even worse in the election. Sportsbet is, of course, no sure guide, although Andrew Leigh, economist and Labor's shadow assistant treasurer, writes in his book *The Luck of Politics*: "Every time, betting markets have been found to perform at least as well, and usually better than, the polls."



Christopher Pyne has recently announced he will depart. Picture: AAP Image/David Mariuz

This time Sportsbet's odds in each individual seat suggest the Liberals will lose key conservatives once touted as leadership material, including Dutton, Attorney-General Christian Porter and Health Minister Greg Hunt, as well as warriors such as Michael Sukkar and rising star Nicole Flint.

To make this huge loss of talent worse, NSW faction bosses dumped Jim Molan to an unwinnable position on the Senate ticket. (Note, Hunt could still survive thanks to his deep ties to his electorate, and Dutton has a huge fighting fund.)

But if this is bad, check the carnage on the Liberal Left.

The Left has already lost Turnbull, Bishop, O'Dwyer and Pyne to retirement, with fighter Craig Laundry set to follow them and Liberal rat Julia Banks. Sportsbet tips the election will then take out many Liberal Left MPs, including Sarah Henderson, Warren Entsch and minister Ken Wyatt, a conservative on some issues but not the indigenous ones likely to be a battlefield with Labor.

But it's when we check who'll probably survive the election that an even clearer picture emerges. Sportsbet's odds suggest the conservatives won't just retain sidelined veterans such as Tony Abbott, Eric Abetz, Kevin Andrews and Connie Fierravanti-Wells, but also the key pillars of this government, Prime

Minister Scott Morrison, Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Finance Minister Mathias Cormann.

(Yes, I know Morrison is ideologically flighty.) The Liberals could lose key conservatives including Greg Hunt, right. Steve Ciobo, left, has already announced he is leaving.

Add to them frontbenchers with intellectual grunt, Alan Tudge, Dan Tehan, Zed Seselja and Stuart Robert, plus Angus Taylor, yet to realise his supporters' hopes.

Giving conservatives more hope are young MPs of talent and drive: Amanda Stoker, James Paterson, Andrew Hastie and James McGrath.

Other prominent MPs who backed the disastrous Turnbull experiment could rediscover their buried conservative principles. Think of Communications Minister Mitch Fifield and Senate president Scott Ryan. Hello, Alex Hawke.

But who on the Liberal Left will survive — once again, if Sportsbet is correct?

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Not many of proven talent. Trade Minister Simon Birmingham is articulate, but Foreign Minister Marise Payne is mute and Environment Minister Melissa Price an embarrassment. Tim Wilson is a rising star, but Trent Zimmerman is better at factional deals than persuading the public. Julian Leeser, maybe. Jason Falinski is smart, but not yet lost to conservatives.

I know, this blizzard of names may mean little to you. But to insiders it will suggest the Liberal Left will be smashed in the cataclysm to come. That should

give the brawling Liberals a chance to finally unite again into something like we saw under John Howard and Robert Menzies — a party that's conservative at heart but open to liberal (small l) debate and reforms.

A party its members will recognise.