

'Doyle's failure to get traction has created the vacuum'

GLENN MILNE SAYS TALK OF A KENNETT RETURN REFLECTS FEARS OF A POLL LOSS



THE news today that senior Liberals have again raised the prospect of Jeff Kennett returning to lead the state party is obviously a strike at the heart of Robert Doyle's leadership.

The question it raises is this: Is it a serious proposition about promoting Kennett or is it more about destabilising Doyle? The answer is: a bit of both.

There is no doubt that the leaking of the "bring back Kennett" discussions is designed to test the scenario. The proponents of the idea want to shake the Liberal tree in Victoria which they see as root-bound and dying.

There is a real fear in Liberal Party ranks that, under Doyle, the Opposition could go backwards at the November election next year.

Contemplate that for a moment. Steve Bracks already has a majority of 18. If the Liberals lose seats, it's likely to be another eight years at least until they are in a winnable position again. A total of 16 years in the wilderness.

That's the prospect driving the Kennett Mark II scenario. That and what some senior Liberals describe as an absolute sense of despair in the Melbourne business community over what they see as the lethargy of the Bracks Government.

"Bracks is starting to soften," says one. "There's no real enthusiasm for him. There's lots of concern in Melbourne that Victoria is continuing to slide in relation to the other states."

This sentiment was apparently rife at a recent Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry meeting attended by Doyle. If Doyle's ear was attuned he might also have picked up the evident frustration among those present about his failure to capitalise on what business



Another Liberal Lazarus? Talk of a Kennett comeback may force Liberal MPs to ask who might replace an unelectable Doyle.

sees as Bracks's "do nothing" economic policies.

Doyle must also understand that the renewed talk of a Kennett return will further destabilise his shaky leadership. These cycles, of course, are self-fulfilling; Doyle's failure to get any traction with the electorate has created the vacuum that has in turn invited the speculation about Kennett.

But that speculation itself will now further weaken Doyle. In turn he'll become less credible in the eyes of the electorate. And that will inevitably lead to the next phase of destabilisation.

In that context it doesn't matter whether Kennett



Robert Doyle

rejects the proposition of a return out of hand. The simple fact that some

Liberals are even contemplating it will do the damage. The Kennett bandwagon — real or imagined — is about forcing Liberal MPs to confront the question: If Doyle is unelectable, then who else? The answer is not immediately obvious. In fact it's not obvious at all.

Doyle is a creature of the Peter Costello-Michael Kroger axis in Victorian Liberal politics. Any thought of a Kennett comeback would have to be with their agreement. Here are the thoughts of one member of that camp on the issue.

"This is just a Ron Walker fantasy. Does anyone want

him to come back? Not that I'm aware. You have to remember he lost disastrously and he's still vastly unpopular in the regions that cost us the election.

"We're now a generation past that sort of arrogant leadership. You've got to have a conversation with the electorate, not talk down to them. There wouldn't be a seat for him anyway. Nor would he win it.

"This is an attack on Doyle rather than any serious promotion of Kennett. Jeff would be so far yesterday's man, he'd be thrashed."

That sounds like a "no".

Make it safe, make it soon

Prof IAN OLVER says the debate over the anti-cancer drug Herceptin should worry everyone



AN oncology clinic can be draining at the best of times, but there is a new problem to face.

We must tell women with early breast cancer about Herceptin, a drug we believe will improve their chances of survival if given after their chemotherapy.

We must then tell them that it will cost them \$60,000 for a year's treatment.

This is adding an extra burden after the shock of the diagnosis, the surgery and the chemotherapy.

And if they can't pay, there is the feeling of helplessness that we can give advice, but not treat.

Herceptin is a new treatment for breast cancer that is funded by the Government for advanced disease only.

Herceptin is novel because it can select breast cancer cells for killing.

This reduces the potential for side effects in comparison with chemotherapy.

At a conference of cancer specialists in the US in May, first results of three large trials of Herceptin in thousands of patients with early breast cancer were released.

They showed that one year of Herceptin given after chemotherapy in early breast cancer significantly improved the chances of the cancer not returning.

Few specialists had ever seen such strongly positive results for a new treatment.

There was a down side: some receiving Herceptin developed heart problems.

So what happens now?

The Government can't register a drug for a new use until the drug company submits an application to the Therapeutic Goods Administration and that has only just occurred, using data from preliminary reports.

Provisional approval can't be given on preliminary data.

Herceptin raises difficult questions.

Should we be able to fast-track new drugs on strong preliminary results?

Can we expect the Government to pay for all high cost drugs?

And how much should drug companies be allowed to charge for a new drug?

Herceptin is everybody's problem. If we can find a good model for making Herceptin available to patients with early breast cancer in a timely manner, then this can be used for the many high cost drugs to follow in other cancers.

Prof Olver is the chairman of the Medical Oncology Group of Australia

'Slothful parents are at fault'

DERRYN HINCH CHEWS THE FAT ON CHILDHOOD OBESITY



OK, I'LL admit it. When you lose weight, especially a lot of weight, you get judgmental. You go for your morning walk and are mentally derisive of the tubs and tummies you see in your neighbourhood.

I am as guilty and, suddenly, as righteous as anybody.

There have been times when I have crashed my bathroom scales at more than 100kg. Now I walk most days in the Botanic Gardens and I hover around 82kg.

To be honest, I don't feel that much better, but my doctor tells me I am. And my suits sit better on the old frame.

Obesity is now a major problem in this country. Child obesity. Adult obesity. It wasn't always thus. When I was a kid, we played outside and ran around from dawn until dusk.

We were never given money for playlunch, which is why the current debate about junk food in tuck shops is fairly academic to me. If you don't want your kids to eat junk food, then don't give them the money to buy it. Pack them a lunch.

Some years ago I wrote a book called *The Derryn Hinch Diet Book* and it sold 50,000 copies. It made me \$80,000. I lost 20kg. That's \$4000 a kilo.

I mention it today for

several reasons. When Mrs Doubtfire was named as Victorian Police Commissioner, I made the point that Christine Nixon could not possibly pass the physical test demanded of other officers. I still believe that is true.

Now the world's biggest retailer says it doesn't want to employ fat people.

America's Wal-Mart plans to make physical exercise a part of every worker's day.

Wal-Mart claims slimmer and fitter staff would tackle obesity and promote good health. It would reduce absenteeism, cut costs on healthcare payouts and flush out lazy workers. And I believe they are right.

Obesity is not something to be taken lightly. It is a chronic problem. You can talk about policing tuck-shops at schools, but that ain't gonna change things. Kids do not exercise as much any more. After school in my day, we would run and run until we were exhausted.

We would play outdoors until called inside for dinner. And then play outside again until dusk. I didn't know any fat kids.

Now, it is sad that youngsters are besotted with laptops and computer games.

But the issue of obesity is not new. I remember decades ago being invited to the opening of Disneyland's

new Disney World in Florida. I had never seen so many fat American female bums in bermuda shorts.

But when you see the size of sandwiches and the piles of French fries in America, that shouldn't surprise you.

The issue here is not children. It is parents. Look at a fat child and a slothful parent, I believe, is at fault. Children mirror us. If you are a couch potato, what chance does your child have?

Shoo them outside. Get them running and jumping and skipping. And they will live longer than you will.

Lead by example. Sounds like sense to me.