



IS GEOFF SHAW SURE OF HIS COMMITMENT TO FRANKSTON

Peter Adamis 8 June 2014

Geoff Shaw whether you like or dislike him is not the issue. Victorian parliament has not seen a member of his popularity, infamy or most talked about since the Geoff Kennett era. Both people political leaders are political posturing to demonstrate just how tough they are towards recalcitrant members of parliament, to their supporters and to the Victorian people.

Yet one must admire Geoff Shaw for his no no-nonsense approach and taking them all on, no matter who they are. The Liberal Party cannot control him as he is he is own man and despite his Christian values and morals, his opponents are not letting up on bringing about his downfall. One could surmise that he is the recipient of far too many parliamentary secrets, secrets that would embarrass both parties. According to some Liberal and labor observers, "Geoff Shaw has both parties by the balls" and with only a few months to go towards the Victorian State election anything is possible.

In depth analysis. A collection of recent articles from online resources has been compiled t provide readers with an in depth analysis and background regarding Geoff Shaw.



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FRANKSTON PEOPLE DIVIDED ON MP GEOFF SHAW

June 8, 2014 John Elder, Farrah Tomazin

Geoff Shaw may not be a team player in a political sense, but he's well regarded by the footy team he plays for, the Frankston Districts Tigersharks. *Photo: Ken Irwin.*

Two young women are walking down Wells Street, Frankston: happy faces, nicely turned out and unfailingly polite. Excuse me, proud youth of this battling town, what do you think of Geoff Shaw? "He's a c---," says Jenny, 23. She's an apprentice carpenter. Why is that? "In the last election I was handing out vote cards for the Greens. He shook my hand and as he walked away, he wiped off the hippie germs on his pants." Jenny's friend Chrissy Ashurst, 23, a student youth worker says "He's absolutely pathetic ... what's he done for Frankston? I see so many shops closed down and empty."

Jenny and Chrissy are also unhappy that their local member has honesty issues, tried to bully Denis Napthine to appoint a favoured judge or magistrate (nobody knows for sure) has a history of pushing people around (taxi drivers), and in recent months has focused his coercive talents on the running of the state of Victoria.

"So there's that, too," says Chrissy. Marching past is a man in his 70s, wraparound sunglasses, razor burn and thin lips. His opinion of Shaw? "He's great!" says Ian, 70. Why is that? "He's got balls. He stands up for what he believes in. The rest are a pack of wimps." There are two things to learn here about Frankston: it's a profane and divided town, at least when it comes to Mr Shaw, who this week faces expulsion or more likely suspension from Parliament for bad behaviour outed more than two years ago.

Last week, as his beatific face, New Testament beard and all, stared from the front pages, day after day, the man himself virtually shrank away, no longer the brawling gladiator who caused all this constitution-rocking trouble. The big question though isn't Where is Geoff Shaw? but How in the sweet Lord's name did he get elected in the first place? The short answer, according to the true believers: he took the job with two mighty hands and made Frankston relevant, where previous representatives "did virtually nothing".

A local Liberal Party identity who claims to have her finger on the pulse believes Shaw is the best local member "Frankston has ever had", a sentiment echoed by half the locals interviewed for this story. This Liberal woman was running hot with outrage on Shaw's behalf until we checked the spelling of her name. "I can't put my name to this. I want to. I really do. Someone needs to stand up for Geoff. But I have a number of business deals hanging in the balance at the moment. I can't associate with this sort of thing."

Shaw's spiritual home, the Peninsula City Church, likewise denied him. "No comment." Similarly distancing themselves are the party members who say Shaw joined the Liberals only months before preselections opened, with the sole purpose of running as a candidate. Nonetheless, they admit, the local accountant "scrubbed up well", had charisma and "ticked all the right boxes" - a small business background, wife and children and links to the local church and community groups. As one insider told *The Sunday Age* last week, "There were certainly no alarm-bells back then ... He'd go around to the little old ladies and totally charm them. It turns out he did quite the con job."

Shaw's ascension came down to a mixture of circumstance and blustering righteousness: former Frankston mayor Rochelle McArthur was the early favourite to win the preselection ballot, but pulled out after her husband became seriously ill. What made Shaw an attractive replacement was his evangelical Christianity. It won him the backing of influential people in the party's hard right, including controversial upper house MP

Bernie Finn, then party vice-president Sandra Mercer Moore, and south-east powerbroker Inga Peulich.

Indeed, the day of the Frankston preselection, Finn was spotted outside the convention venue talking to delegates as they entered - odd for a politician who represents the western suburbs. Finn says he helped Shaw campaign before the 2010 poll, but insists he had little to do with his preselection. He was at the Liberal convention, he says, simply because a staffer, who happened to be a preselection delegate, needed a lift, not because he was actively lobbying on Shaw's behalf. "I'd heard he was inclined to be on the conservative side, and that's always welcome," says Finn. "But I have no influence in Frankston."

There's no doubt, however, that Shaw found a parliamentary ally in Finn, who has similar views on topics such as abortion and gay rights, and also has a tendency to attract headlines. In fact, during the last sitting week of parliament, as Labor and the government traded blows over Shaw's misconduct, the independent MP abandoned his post to sit alone in the public gallery of the upper house, to watch Finn deliver a colourful speech blasting the ABC, calling for federal Immigration Minister Scott Morrison to be awarded a knighthood, and insisting that "the climate change industry is a scam".

Perhaps, he felt lonely for some like-minded company. Whatever the circumstances of Shaw's preselection, one thing is certain: he's always had the loner quality of the class oddball. He wasn't the only Christian conservative in the class of 2010 - an election many Liberals didn't think they would win - but he was certainly the most overt. In his inaugural speech to Parliament, the new backbencher created his own version of the "welcome to country", telling the chamber: "In taking my place in the Legislative Assembly it is appropriate for me to acknowledge the original owner of the land on which we stand - God, the Creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the Bible."

His biblical piety was on display again when he erected a roadside sign in 2012, pleading for his estranged wife to reunite with him. The sign declared: "Please Forgive Me, Sally; I Love You" and cited a biblical reference, Psalm 42: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you." Since then the controversies have come thicker than a plague of locusts: comparing homosexuality to dangerous driving and murder; allegedly abusing a mother who had called his office seeking help for her disabled child; intervening in a bizarre road rage dispute; scuffling with protesting taxi drivers on the steps of Parliament.

The tipping point, however, was the misuse of parliamentary entitlements, which came to light when former employees blew the whistle, revealing Shaw had authorised them to use his taxpayer-funded car and fuel card to make statewide deliveries for his hardware business. It was a light-the-fuse moment for the relatively new Baillieu government. With the benefit of hindsight Liberal MPs now admit they should have established the facts, condemned Shaw's actions, and required him to pay back whatever money was owed.

Instead, Baillieu continued to defend his MP as "a good local member" while key advisers from his private office shielded him from the media glare. For Shaw, it wasn't enough. Aggrieved at having the matter referred to the Ombudsman - and encouraged by the anti-Baillieu forces to fuel leadership tensions - Shaw defected from government to sit on the crossbench, precipitating Baillieu's demise. Still, the path of appeasement continued. When Shaw deliberately walked into a taxi-driver protest and ended up in a

scuffle on the steps of Parliament last year, he demanded an immediate inquiry by the privileges committee. He got one.

When Shaw grew sick of Speaker Ken Smith, the man who referred Shaw's actions to the Ombudsman, it was Smith who fell on his sword. And when Shaw began agitating to wind back Victoria's abortion laws, describing them as "some of the worst in the world", Napthine initially left the door open, telling *The Sunday Age* he would assess any bill on its merit. If the government had a healthy majority, things would no doubt have been different. But Napthine's survival for the past 15 months has rested on an unwritten pact with a "rogue" MP who has had a taste of power and wants more.

It wasn't until last Tuesday, when Shaw threatened to bring down the government after Napthine refused to guarantee he would not be sanctioned for the misuse of his car, that the Premier decided he'd had enough. "I will not be held to ransom by some rogue MP from Frankston," he declared. Former state MP Gary Rowe, who was once Napthine's parliamentary secretary and one of the preselection candidates who ran against Shaw four years ago, was not surprised. "Napthine tolerates fools to a point, and Shaw has obviously gone too far," he said.

Others are more sympathetic, pointing to the break-up of his marriage early in his parliamentary career as a turning point. One Liberal MP told *The Sunday Age* he believed Shaw had clearly "cracked under the pressure". "The only thing that surprises me is that it's taken so long." If Shaw at least appears disloyal to the party that nurtured him, it's worth noting he was never a lifelong devotee of the Liberal Party, and clearly not a team player, not as far as politics goes.

On the footy field it's a different matter. Shaw plays for the Frankston Districts Tigersharks, in the over-35s reserves - in recent weeks he's been on the bench with a groin injury. His coach, Shane Dawes, who went to school with Shaw but didn't become friendly with him until recent years, describes a player who has an awkward kicking style but is good on the mark, takes plenty of ribbing from teammates in good humour, isn't given to grand-standing or throwing his weight around and will talk about his political woes when asked.

"I remember him winning a best and fairest award 20 years ago when he was playing at Langwarrin. He's one of the boys." Dawes feels Shaw has been given a rough time in the media, especially during the marriage break-up when he was wearing his pain like a red flag. "He didn't do himself any favours talking about it on the radio ... but it might have been kinder to leave him alone." President of the Tigersharks Phil Jones describes Shaw as a man with a heart. "My wife died four years ago and he was constantly on the phone and sending emails, seeing how I was coping. He's pretty decent."

It's also accepted that Shaw is passionate about Frankston, where he has lived since the age of seven. He did the rounds as a paper boy, attended St John Primary School, John Paul College, and completing a bachelor of business and accounting at Chisholm Institute. Before politics, he was a bouncer at Frankston's 21st Century nightclub and started an accounting company with his now-estranged wife in the early '90s.

But even then, controversy engulfed him. In 1992, he was found guilty of unlawful assault from his stint as a bouncer, leaving a man with broken ribs and cuts. Despite the bad news and biff factor, business people in downtown Frankston largely remain Shaw enthusiasts, less interested in his transgressions than the fact that "he pops in and says hello" and "works hard". In September, Fairfax Media visited the likes of Bob Sacco who runs Mamma Giovanna Pizza to gauge the love for Shaw.

"I feel the same way as I did six months ago," said Mr Sacco. "If he done something wrong they should charge him. But they dropped the charges, so what's the problem? I tell you. He's a football between Labor and Liberal. It's not fair. I tell you something else. He runs in the next election I think he'll get re-elected." Three years into his parliamentary career, Shaw is now branded with all the cliches associated with politicians on the nose: "embattled", "rogue", "controversial", "besieged". Come this week, there may be another: "banished".

On Tuesday, Labor leader Daniel Andrews will attempt to find Shaw in contempt of Parliament for misusing his taxpayer-funded car for commercial gain, and will seek to expel the independent MP. It's an extraordinary move - the last time a politician was permanently cast from Spring Street was 1901 - but Andrews insists "enough is enough".

However, some MPs from both sides of politics fear banishing Shaw would set an unhealthy precedent, and may not hold up to a legal challenge. He's not the first politician to breach entitlement rules and probably won't be the last. As one senior source admitted: "We can't just get rid of someone because they're a tool."

Boiled down, the privileges committee was split along party lines: Coalition MPs found he misused his car and should repay \$6838 in costs, but could not prove he "wilfully" contravened the MPs code of conduct. Therefore, unlike the four Labor MPs on the committee, they ruled he was not in contempt of Parliament.

Labor's expulsion plans depend largely on whether former Liberal speaker Ken Smith agrees to cross the floor, knowing it could risk a byelection in Frankston, a seat held by the slender margin of 2.1 per cent. If the ALP was to win such a byelection, it would give both sides 44 seats in the chamber, making Parliament unworkable, and potentially paving the way for an early election. But when things get this personal and ugly, as in

any bad marriage, reason goes out the window.



The chequered history of the controversial member for Frankston. Lara Nicholson

■ November 2010 - Accountant Geoff Shaw wins the seat of Frankston from Labor MP Alistair Harkness, who had served two

terms, with a 6.8 per cent swing, helping the Coalition form government with a small majority.

■ **April 2011** - Police called after Shaw refused to leave his wife Sally's home. The pair had recently separated.

■ **May 2011** - Shaw tells a young gay man in an email that his right to love whoever he pleased is as invalid as the right of a molester wanting to abuse children. Victoria's Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner call his comments "potentially dangerous".

■ **June 2011** - Shaw admits he had been charged over a serious assault while working as a bouncer at Frankston nightclub 21st Century. He received a fine and a good behaviour bond over the 1992 attack, but escaped conviction.

■ **August 2011** - When police pull over a 21-year-old driver in his electorate, Shaw intervenes. Police reported the member for Frankston (a karate enthusiast) had a word to the driver about his swearing and a scuffle broke out between the two, who had to be pulled apart by an officer.

■ **May 2012** - Shaw makes his personal life public, repeatedly putting up a hand-made sign on Golf Links Road in his electorate declaring his love for ex-wife Sally and pleading for her to forgive him and take him back.

■ **Baillieu government** launches an investigation into reports Shaw used his taxpayer-funded car to run his hardware business.

■ **October 2012** - Labor MPs claim Shaw called Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews a "wanker" and made an obscene gesture in Parliament.

■ **December 2012** - Police launch an investigation into the MP after the Victorian Ombudsman finds he used his parliamentary car to run his business.

■ **March 2013** - Shaw quits the parliamentary Liberal Party, claiming many Victorians share his lack of confidence in the leadership of the government. Premier Ted Baillieu resigns later that day.

■ **October 2013** - Shaw is involved in an altercation with taxi drivers protesting on the steps of Parliament.

■ **December 2013** - Prosecutors withdraw all charges against Shaw regarding the misuse of his parliamentary car and petrol card, saying there was not a reasonable prospect of criminal conviction.

■ **February 2014** - Parliamentary speaker Ken Smith steps down after Shaw sides with the opposition in declaring the long-term MP has lost the confidence of the house.

■ June 2014 - Shaw tells a radio station he will back a vote of no confidence against the Coalition should the opposition bring one, effectively threatening to bring down the government.

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/frankston-people-divided-on-mp-geoff-shaw-20140607-39q0v.html>

Upheaval a Shaw thing

THE AUSTRALIAN JUNE 05, 2014 John Ferguson Victorian Political Editor Melbourne



Geoff Shaw, independent Liberal member for Frankston. *Source:* News Corp Australia

TO understand the circus that is the Victorian Parliament it is necessary to drive 40km south of Melbourne's CBD, to a land outsiders call Frankghanistan.

It's an unkind play on words to typecast the bayside suburb of Frankston, home to some of Victoria's most disadvantaged residents and, ironically, the gateway to billionaire's row, further southwest on the Mornington Peninsula. Lindsay Fox can see Frankston from his helicopter on the way to his beach compound in Portsea, but the man at the centre of the parliamentary chaos — Geoffrey Page Shaw — will probably never leave.



Christine Fyffe, Speaker, member for Evelyn. *Source:* News Limited. Shaw is a 46-year-old former accountant who wears a suit, but his DNA is all tough-town Frankston.

Shaw takes advice from no one and, as a capable ruckman in the local league, former bouncer and committed Christian, says he fears no one either.

The problem for the Napthine government is that his robust refusal to conform has once again led the Coalition into deep uncertainty as Labor seeks to force a by-election and punt him out of parliament.

In normal circumstances, Shaw would be a punctuation mark in any government's four-year narrative. But his uncanny ability to attract negative publicity in a knife-edge parliament has harmed him politically and had a devastating impact on the government's confidence and standing.

In just 3½ years, Shaw has helped bring down a premier, forced a speaker to fall on his sword and is now dangerously close to bringing down a government and maybe even himself. His exploits are legendary. Simulating masturbation in the parliament, erecting a

roadside sign declaring his love for his estranged wife, a past stoush with the law over a 1992 assault while a nightclub bouncer and conflict with some constituents over his strident anti-abortion stance.

“I am who I am. What you see is what you get,” Shaw told me recently. “I take responsibility for my actions.” Shaw’s biggest indiscretion was uncovered in 2011, when it became clear that he had misused his parliamentary vehicle and his petrol card for his private business gain, a matter that attracted fraud charges (which were dropped), an ombudsman’s inquiry and a privileges committee investigation. It emerged that staff in his then hardware store had driven for thousands of kilometres at taxpayers’ expense, delivering and collecting goods and otherwise servicing clients.

It was an error of judgment that deserved condemnation but the then narrow government majority meant Shaw immediately became the focus of relentless attention from Labor. He was the MP cut loose from the herd. With a parliament made up of 44 Coalition MPs, 43 Labor and Shaw, he was under strain. It was attention he didn’t handle well but also attention that was often unwarranted and excessive.

The running sore over the misuse of his car — which may yet see him expelled from the parliament — is at the centre of this political crisis. When Shaw quit the parliamentary Liberal Party 15 months ago, Labor targeted him mercilessly, using the Tony Abbott opposition textbook. It was attack, attack, attack, to the extent Shaw’s friends in parliament were worried about his health; in the privileges committee report into the car scandal, the independent MP painted a rather sad picture of personal loss coinciding with the misuse of his car.

“In addition to the pressures of being a newly elected member of parliament, in early 2011, I separated from my wife of 20 years and my four children,” Shaw stated. “This was a period of extreme emotional upheaval for my family and I and I had to continue to be an effective member for the constituents of Frankston. “I had no time to be involved in the regular running of the Southern Cross Hardware business as my attention was diverted elsewhere.”

At the same time, Labor has done its best to trash the parliament, with its members being ejected hundreds of times under former speaker Ken Smith as they ranted and raved about the injustice of opposition. Smith is a VB-drinking, 25-year veteran of the parliament who turns 70 this year. It was his decision to refer Shaw to the ombudsman, a decision he said was compulsory under whistleblower legislation.

Shaw never forgave Smith and many months later was in a blind fury when parliamentary security failed during a taxi protest on the front steps and he was set upon. “Geoff never forgave Ken after that,” says a Parliament House friend. Nor did Smith forgive Shaw. Smith was forced out of the speaker’s chair by Shaw at the start of the parliamentary year and has been waiting ever since for the opportunity to strike.

That came last week when the minority Labor report in the privileges committee document held Shaw should be found guilty of contempt of parliament. Smith seized on this and vowed to side with Labor, sending Shaw into a rage. All this despite Smith’s own Coalition colleagues recommending against contempt of parliament proceedings. If

Smith backs Labor in its bid to expel Shaw — which is no certainty — then it may well be game over. Shaw is believed to have been in a rage on Monday over Smith's recalcitrance but Premier Denis Napthine was unable to broker a peace deal.

By 7pm Tuesday, Napthine had been backed into a corner. Taking the Frankston front-foot option, he alleged Shaw had tried to impose a judicial appointment on the government, a claim Shaw has reportedly denied. "I can't be held to ransom for those sorts of outrageous demands," Napthine said. "From time to time, Mr Shaw has made other demands of the government, which we have not accepted. That is outrageous, that is extreme, that is ludicrous, that is not tolerated by me as Premier."

This dummy spit by the Premier ends a 3½-year phony war between Shaw and the government. Ted Baillieu, Napthine's predecessor, could not handle Shaw, finding him disrespectful and obsessed with abortion. Baillieu lost his job 16 months ago in part due to Shaw, who resigned to become independent on the same day Baillieu was pushed. Nor could Smith deal with Shaw, also accusing him of making inappropriate demands, claims denied by Shaw.

Shaw has voted on occasion against the government, and caused mayhem in the parliament when he voted down the government business program, stifling the ability of the speaker to run the house. Which brings us to the constitutional aspects of the Shaw conundrum. Constitutional expert Greg Taylor, an associate professor at Monash University, acknowledges the deep uncertainty over what happens next, but his best bet is that the government will limp through to the fixed four-year term deadline of November 29.

Labor in 2003 introduced wide-ranging reforms to the parliament designed to introduce fixed terms, allegedly to prevent any party holding a majority in the Legislative Council and making it highly difficult to hold an election earlier than the set fixed date. The plan only partly worked, because the Coalition now has control of the upper house and an early election is still on the cards. Labor has advice that a by-election can be held on July 12 and July 19.

Shaw would likely lose any by-election, as would the Liberals; Frankston remains a marginal seat: after the redistribution it is just 0.4 per cent "Liberal" (any by-election would be conducted on the old boundaries, Labor says). Constitutionally, the outcomes of the parliament are not easy to predict, although it is safe to say a by-election can be held if the government wants one, and an early election is possible. The government is still seeking urgent legal and parliamentary advice to determine its final position, which will become clear early next week.

The most likely outcome at the time of writing was that the government would deny Labor's attempts to expel Shaw and, instead, propose an alternative motion dealing with the privileges committee report. A temporary suspension moved by the government would appear to be a logical outcome, banning Shaw from the parliament until after the July winter recess, which would make it constitutionally difficult for an election or by-election to be held, due to the looming November 29 poll date.

Nick Economou, a politics expert at Monash University, expects a compromise along these lines is a strong possibility, although Smith would have to vote with the government, which would leave a 43-43 tie and the Liberal Speaker backing the government. Economou says from the government's perspective, "you obviously can't trust Shaw and it would be very dangerous to try to trust Andrews". Smith told *The Australian* on Tuesday evening that he wanted to pursue Shaw to the end. "My position is still as strong as it was," he said. "My position is still to support the minority (Labor) report."

Smith is a popular member of the Liberal old guard and Napthine will be doing his best to get him back into the government tent, which would deprive Labor of a crucial vote it needs to get its way. Labor's decision to seek Shaw's expulsion from parliament would seem to dampen the prospects of the ALP and Shaw combining in any no-confidence vote. But Labor leader Daniel Andrews refused yesterday to rule out combining with Shaw in any future no-confidence motion.

He also self-servingly urged the government to back his bid to expel Shaw, declaring: "It will be over once and for all." A Labor victory in any by-election would render the parliament deadlocked at 44 votes apiece, in all likelihood triggering an early general election, although — again — there are conditions that need to be met. One of the great unknowns in this debate is how Shaw will respond.

He may not even turn up to parliament next week, "robbing" both Labor and the Coalition of his vote. Or he might quit, triggering a by-election, potentially bringing down the government. This cannot be ruled out; it would fit Shaw's modus operandi. Going out with a bang would be the Frankston way.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/upheaval-a-shaw-thing/story-e6frg6z6-1226943505369#>

Victorian Parliamentary Circus Remains A Shaw Thing

Ben Eltham 4 Jun 2014



The intriguing tale of how a guy with the balance of power, a parliamentary allowance and a big grudge held an entire state to ransom. Ben Eltham reports on the media circus that surrounds Geoff Shaw MP.

You've got to hand it to Victorian MLA Geoff Shaw. He certainly makes state politics interesting.

The maverick Victorian politician has single-handedly destroyed the Coalition governments of Ted Ballieu and Denis Napthine, using his position as the swing vote in Victoria's finely balanced lower house to frustrate and destabilise the Victorian

parliament. The power wielded by an obscure and trouble-prone independent all comes down to one thing: the numbers.

In a parliament split right down the middle, Shaw in effect holds the casting vote. Under Westminster conventions, the Coalition government of Denis Naphthine relies on his support to retain the “confidence of the house”. In other words, to stay in government. Four years ago, Ted Ballieu won office after narrowly winning the 2010 election against John Brumby’s Labor. The Coalition won a number of critical marginal seats to gain government by a solitary seat.

That was always going to make governing tricky. Four years is a long time in politics, and the misfortunes of scandal, illness and even death can befall sitting members. And so it proved for the Ballieu government. Shaw quickly became a magnet for scandal, getting into a roadside fight with another motorist in 2011, writing strange letters to his constituents, insulting the mother of a teenager with a mental illness, and erecting a huge banner across a busy Frankston road, asking for his estranged wife’s forgiveness.

The colourful member was notorious for his erratic presentation – for instance, making obscene hand gestures in parliament – and for his aggressive interactions with local media. Shaw’s problems really began in 2012, however, when allegations surfaced that he had been using his parliamentary vehicle and fuel allowance to make deliveries for his personal hardware business. A police investigation followed, and charges were laid.

Although Victoria Police eventually dropped the charges, the scandals forced Ballieu to act. As the Liberal Party administration moved to discipline Shaw for his electoral rorts, Shaw beat them to the punch. He resigned, declared himself an independent, and moved to the cross-benches.

From then on, Shaw has systematically worked to wreck the Coalition government. It didn’t take long for the damage to mount. Just a day after Shaw moved to the cross-benches, Ballieu was gone, after losing the support of his party room. The mishandling of Shaw’s defection, and the general air of crisis that seemed to dog his government, were key factors in his downfall.

Bailieu’s replacement was a former Liberal leader and mild-mannered country vet named Denis Naphthine. Naphthine proved a much better media performer than Baillieu, and even began to claw back some ground in opinion polls. But he couldn’t change the arithmetic in the parliament. Aided by a Labor Party only too happy to use him for its own political purposes, Shaw then attacked the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Ken Smith. Smith was an unpopular speaker whose habit of kicking out opposition members did not endear him to Labor.



Independent Victorian MLA and former Liberal member, Geoff Shaw. When Smith referred Shaw to the parliament’s privileges committee over the allegations about misusing his parliamentary car, Shaw announced he had lost confidence in the Speaker. In a major miscalculation, Smith then prorogued parliament for a fortnight,

completely derailing Napthine's legislative agenda.

Shaw won that round, too: with Labor against him, Smith had to be replaced as Speaker by the deputy, Christine Fyffe (but not before he let fly with a vitriolic speech criticising Shaw as "unworthy"). Then, in May, the privileges committee reported. In a split decision, government members found Shaw had misused \$6,800 in allowances, but wasn't in contempt of parliament.

A minority report by Labor members found that he was. Labor then announced they would move to expel Shaw from parliament. Shaw's old enemy Ken Smith announced he would cross the floor and support Labor to do it. Sometime after this, Shaw appears to have demanded an assurance from Napthine that he would vote against any motion to expel Shaw from parliament. Napthine apparently refused.

As a result, Shaw's long-simmering conflict with the Coalition exploded into an outright constitutional crisis. When Shaw announced yesterday he was withdrawing his support for the government, a media circus ensued. Phones ran hot and journalists flooded up the steps into Victoria's stately parliament building. Napthine tried to keep a stiff upper lip, but he was forced to admit his government hung by a thread.

It's another disastrous moment for Napthine's government – perhaps a terminal one. At every step of the process, Shaw has comprehensively outmaneuvered the Coalition, defeating first Bailleu and then Smith by adroit use of his balance of power. As of this morning, it appears Napthine will survive, however wounded. Overnight, Labor leader Daniel Andrews declared that he wouldn't use Shaw's vote to try and bring down the government.

With an election scheduled for the end of November, Labor appears to have calculated that it will be better served by taking the high moral ground, and letting the chaos of recent days continue. Andrews has stated that Labor will pass the budget and, in effect, keep the Napthine government in power. But he has also called on Napthine to join him for a special meeting with the Victorian Governor, Alex Churnov.

Whether Shaw can remain in parliament remains to be seen. It seems very likely that the government will vote with Labor next week to expel him. Of course, that raises interesting questions too. With Shaw gone, the numbers in the lower house will be exactly 43-43, with the Speaker obliged to remain independent. The Napthine government will be completely dependent on Labor to pass any bill or even to keep the parliament open.

As ever, the ABC's peerless Anthony Green has the best analysis. It may be that Labor forces Napthine to an early election. Or it may be that his government limps on until November. Either way, it seems unlikely that the Coalition could regain office: current poll figures have Labor well in front in what remains Australia's most left-leaning state. Whatever the eventual fate of Geoff Shaw, he has comprehensively demonstrated how, in the right scenario, a single member of parliament can hold an entire state to ransom.

<https://newmatilda.com/2014/06/04/victorian-parliamentary-circus-remains-shaw-thing>

Byelection no Shaw thing, says Liberal

June 3, 2014 Richard Willingham State Political Correspondent for The Age

A Frankston byelection could be avoided even if controversial MP Geoff Shaw is expelled from the Parliament, with the Speaker able to rule a vote out if she believes it is too close to the state election. Former Speaker Ken Smith, a government MP who lost his post as Speaker following Mr Shaw declaring he had lost confidence in him, says he will vote with the opposition to find the Frankston MP guilty of contempt of Parliament.



Former Speaker Ken Smith. *Photo: John Woudstra*

No date has been set for Parliament to vote on the privileges committee's recommendations to force Mr Shaw to repay nearly \$7000. Premier Denis Napthine indicated on Monday that he was in no hurry to bring the vote forward, diverting questions on the issue to the Parliament passing the state budget. The Premier said the Parliament, when it resumes next Tuesday, must focus on the budget so that schools and hospitals would continue to run.

"Our main focus must be on the budget, that is the most important matter before the Parliament at the moment," Dr Napthine said. The Premier challenged Labor to not filibuster the budget - Labor has no plans to block the budget. Dr Napthine dodged several questions about the timing of the privileges committee but said his office was getting legal advice on the privileges committee's findings. He also said it was unclear if the Parliament could expel Mr Shaw and if it could, what the process would be. Dr Napthine revealed that he had "a full and frank" discussion with Mr Smith last Friday after the former Speaker vowed to vote with Labor.

But another potential constitutional headache for the government - possible gun charges against Nationals MP Peter Crisp - has dissipated. A court on Monday dismissed the three most serious charges against Mr Crisp, with three charges withdrawn. Mr Crisp was slapped with a 12 month good behaviour bond, escaping conviction for failing to stop the theft of firearms.

Opposition Leader Daniel Andrews says Labor would move to find Mr Shaw in contempt, which could lead to him being suspended or expelled from the chamber. All parties are now seeking legal advice about the privileges committee and Mr Shaw. The easiest option for Labor to try and force a vote on Mr Shaw being in contempt would be to move amendments when the privileges committee report is debated.

If Mr Shaw is expelled from the Parliament Speaker Christine Fyffe must issue writs for a byelection within 30 days, with the poll to be held 25-58 days after that. However under law the Speaker does have the power to cancel a writ for a byelection. This last occurred in 2010 when Labor MP Craig Langdon quit Parliament.

Then Speaker Jenny Lindell cancelled the byelection because the election was only months away and would have been an inconvenience and cost up to \$350,000. On morning radio Mr Smith said Ms Lindell's decision was the right one and that it could be a path pursued this year if Mr Shaw was ejected from the Parliament. "Mr Shaw has done the wrong thing, he has got away with it for a long period of time," Mr Smith said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/byelection-no-shaw-thing-says-liberal-20140602-39esp.html>

A Shaw thing: from obscurity to notoriety

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MOST people who run for state or federal politics leave a trail through community associations, sporting clubs, local government or as a party apparatchik. Frankston Liberal Geoff Shaw lists an association with the Frankston RSL pipe band and a local veterans football club, but otherwise lacked a local profile before entering parliament in 2010. "He really did come out of obscurity," says Alistair Harkness, who held the seat for Labor for eight years until the 2010 poll.

Shaw has made up for it since. Today, not two years into his parliamentary career, he is testing all the bad news cliches of politics: "embattled", "troubled", "besieged", "elusive". Worse, he has whistleblowers ranged against him, former employees who have accused him of misusing parliamentary resources to aid his private business. It has been a rollercoaster ride for the Frankston accountant and evangelical Christian who, according to Liberal Party insiders, only joined the party in 2009, shortly before winning preselection after the previous endorsed candidate and favourite Rochelle McArthur withdrew for personal reasons.

Any hope for a respite this week lasted no longer than the opening moments of question time when the Speaker, Ken Smith, called in the State Ombudsman to investigate Shaw's behaviour. "I have received a disclosure under the Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001, alleging improper conduct by the member for Frankston," Smith said. "I have referred that disclosure to the Ombudsman for his determination as to whether the disclosure is a public interest disclosure, and if so, his investigation."

Shaw, sitting at the rear of the Legislative Assembly chamber offered a mask of studied indifference. If he realised his party was preparing to cut him adrift, he did not let it show. As the claims against Shaw intensified last month, Premier Ted Baillieu had asked Smith to check whether Shaw had breached parliamentary guidelines. Smith reportedly interviewed the whistleblowers before making his referral to the Ombudsman. In passing on delivering judgment himself, the Speaker may have bought Shaw some time, but the reference to the Ombudsman hints at the gravity of the MP's position.

Not to mention that of a government with only a one-seat majority - particularly given that Shaw scraped in to the litmus seat in 2010 with a slender margin of 2.1 per cent. "He joined six months before preselections opened with the sole purpose of running," says a local Liberal Party member. "He had not been involved in any policy committee. He had no profile beyond the fact he was an accountant in Frankston." That accounting practice - Geoff Shaw and Partners which he started with his now estranged wife Sally - is at the centre of the case against him.

Employees there were allegedly told to use Shaw's electoral office exclusively to print and copy documents for his accounting and hardware business, Southern Cross Hardware. "It was one of the first things he implemented," a source reportedly told

the *Sunday Herald Sun*. "He told all of his accountancy staff that they were only to use the photocopier at his parliamentary office." He is also accused of using a car supplied for electoral purposes to run errands interstate and to regional Victoria for his hardware business. Initially Shaw suggested that if his electoral car had been used for commercial purposes, then that was done without his knowledge. The whistleblowers branded this claim a lie, saying Shaw told employees to use the electoral car rather than Southern Cross Hardware vehicles.

If he lacked a local profile when preselected, Shaw quickly set about making an impression. "During the election campaign he knocked on the door here and said 'I am Geoff Shaw and I am going to get rid of the communist Labor government'," recalls Frankston resident Jim Brassil. "I then engaged him in a conversation about the Communist Party, about which he knew nothing. It was just to frighten people. I engaged him in a conversation about the Liberal Party - he knew very little about the Liberal Party." Brassil, who was private secretary to Lance Barnard when Barnard was deputy to prime minister Gough Whitlam, says Shaw presented as brash and confident: "A know-all who knew nothing".

He made an impression also with his inaugural speech in Parliament, supplanting the "welcome to country" acknowledging the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land with his own variant. "In taking my place in the Legislative Assembly it is appropriate for me to acknowledge the original owner of the land on which we stand - God, the Creator, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of the Bible," Shaw said.

Shaw again made a public stance of his religion when he erected a sign alongside a local roadway, pleading for Sally with whom he has four children, to reunite with him. On the sign which appeared this autumn, Shaw asked for her forgiveness and offered a reference to Psalm 42: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you." Indeed, his overt religiosity was influential in his comprehensive preselection victory, according to a source who says the backing of the party's "religious right" aided him.

Prominent conservative Liberal MP, Bernie Finn, has said Shaw shared his values on social issues, but that he had not taken a role in the preselection: "I went down there and campaigned for him after he had been preselected [but] I didn't get involved in the preselection."

Shaw, who was born in Brisbane, moved to Frankston when he was seven, and attended local Catholic schools, including John Paul College. His religious expression has shifted to pentacostalism. He was for a time a member of the New Peninsula Church but has not attended there for at least four years, says senior pastor Duncan Brown. Shaw is since understood to have joined another pentacostal congregation, the Peninsula City Church, but a spokeswoman refused to comment about his involvement.

Shaw has his supporters. The federal MP for Dunkley, Bruce Billson, applauds Shaw's work in winning funding for local hospitals and schools. "His work is well regarded locally. He has some allegations against him. Now that they are being investigated I am hopeful that takes its course and Geoff is given the opportunity to give his account of those things." Equally, Frankston deputy mayor Kris Bolam says he and Shaw had a good working relationship during 2011 when Bolam was mayor. Bolam says the pity of the

Shaw controversy is that it is unravelling the benefits of several years of work by the local community.

"Council over the last four years has worked very hard to change the image of Frankston. The serious charges levelled against Mr Shaw do little to improve the Frankston brand," says Bolam. "That's the concern that has been left out of this discussion. Innocent until proven guilty, I understand that. It's the Frankston brand that's being diminished. That's very disheartening."

Others point to Shaw's volatility. He famously asked for the seating arrangements at a local council function to be changed so as not to be seated near a Labor MP. That aversion is surprising since Shaw is remembered as being a member of the ALP more than 20 years ago, by then Labor candidate for Frankston, Rohan Cresp. His flirtation with Labor was brief, Cresp says: "He seemed more interested in what he wanted to do rather than in anything we were doing."

More recently Shaw had to defend himself against claims he was rude to a constituent who contacted his office seeking help to find housing for her son who had Asperger's syndrome, and in another incident outside his office he was involved in a scuffle with a young man who was being spoken to by police. Suggestions are that he was offended by the manner in which the young man spoke to the officer, and intervened.

It has also emerged that Shaw was charged in 1992 over an assault that occurred while he was working as a bouncer at a Frankston nightspot. He was found guilty of unlawful assault, however no conviction was recorded. A REQUEST to Shaw's electoral office for an interview this week goes unheeded. His Parliament House phone extension daily rings out without transferring to a message system.

Journalists who cover state parliament say Shaw has been eluding them for weeks as the controversy has unfolded. Shaw is a member of the Parliament's Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee (EDIC). At a meeting earlier this year following publicity about his clash with the motorist outside his office, Shaw was escorted to the committee's meeting by a government minder. At present the committee has no work, prompting suggestions its inactivity is protecting Shaw from the sort of media scrutiny he would be subject to if the committee were to convene for public hearings.

"It's all come to a screaming halt," confirms EDIC deputy chairman and Labor member for Albert Park Martin Foley. "In the run-up to tabling our report into Greenfields Minerals Exploration and Project Development in Victoria some weeks ago we asked the government what the next report was to be. We have no current references. "We are very disappointed that given we are in the midst of a skills, jobs and infrastructure investment crisis the Victorian government can't see one single reference for us."

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/a-shaw-thing-from-obscurity-to-notoriety-20120608-201ag.html#ixzz340RkkiRv>