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TURNBULL'S POLL PLOT

As the politicians left Canberra for the last time this year there was one thing at their top of mind. Next year there will be an election. Nothing concentrates the political mind more than the risk of being thrown out of office.

The election for the House of Representatives and half the Senate cannot be held before

August-December period and we haven't had a double dissolution for 30 years.

I have heard people say the government would like an election before it delivers the next Budget, which is due in May. But these days that is hardly an advantage. The Budget position is pretty well known (it is bad) and even if the government doesn't update the figures there is an independent update that will be released under the Charter of Budget Honesty. A government can't

duce carbon dioxide more expensive. And that means higher energy prices.

Labor did well on climate change in 2007 when it promised to ratify the Kyoto target.

It did less well in 2010 when it promised "No carbon tax" and disastrously in 2013 when Tony Abbott promised to repeal the carbon tax that was never meant to be.

I doubt it can eke out an election on climate change alone. More likely it is hoping to embarrass Malcolm Turnbull over the issue.

On the tax front, Labor wants higher taxes on superannuation and it wants no change to GST. It calls GST a regressive tax which hits the poor harder than the rich.

On the other hand, it is promoting huge increases in tobacco taxes, which are regressive and really will savage the poor.

The Coalition is flirting with higher tax on superannuation. The longer it does so, the more it will give ground to Labor on the issue.

The hotheads in the Coalition are calling for a 50 per cent increase in GST. If the Coalition goes with that proposal you can put down the glasses and stop worrying about other policies. It will swamp everything. It won't matter what happens on defence or security or industrial relations or anything else.

It would make 2016 the fourth election over GST. The Coalition lost one in 1993, won one (just) in 1998 and punished Labor's "GST Rollback" in 2001. Those calling for a 15 per cent GST are the people who have no experience of what it is like to campaign for such a policy.

A Coalition proposal to increase prices under a higher

term. Then there was the disaster of the 2014 Budget. It looks like the parties are now content to let the Budget stumble through another three years of deficit, at least.

It would be nice to have this election fought over the issue of economic credibility.

But I don't see it happening. There are too many easier things for the public to be worked up about.

It looks like there will be one issue which will hardly speak its name during the election. Labor once promised to deliver tighter spending and bigger Budget surpluses than the Coalition. Then it blew the place apart with "temporary" spending increases that have never stopped. The Abbott government's plan was to fix this in its first

It is hard to see Labor opening up border protection again. For the moment it seems to have conceded the policy of "turnback" works in practice, if not in theory. They won't want the public to be reminded of how things used to be. Nor can I see either side wanting to turn IS or Syria into an election issue.

Industrial relations should be a defining issue between the parties, given

Labor's hostility to the Coalition's royal commission into union corruption. But it is not an area where either leader seems to want to pursue a political advantage. Both sides of parliament appear to agree nothing should be done to make our workplace relations more flexible and less regulated.



run and it can't hide. It is better to release the figures and try to explain them rather than get run over and flattened by them.

So I think the government will bring down a Budget, try to get some momentum, and get off to an election as soon as it can after August. Which leads us to the issues that the election will be fought over.

It looks like Bill Shorten and Labor want to fight the election over climate change. After visiting Pacific Islands to see how they are sinking, Shorten announced he was aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent by 2030.

This is almost double the government's target of 26-28 per cent. It would involve some financial mechanism — call it a tax or a price or whatever — to make industries that pro-



August 6 and must be held by 14 January, 2017. For practical reasons this means an election between August and early December next year. Only a double dissolution (which means electing the full Senate) could allow the government to head off to the polls in the first half of the year.

I don't think there will be an early election. First, it would be harder for the Coalition to improve its Senate position via a double dissolution. Second, the government would have to explain its reason for going to an election early, the last six federal elections have been in that