

Labor tipped to hold marginal north-west seats

Labor is expected to retain the marginal seats of McEwen and Bendigo when voters head to the polls on Saturday.

Deakin University politics lecturer Dr Geoff Robinson said it was going to be close nationally, but he expected Labor to keep the seats covering Sunbury and the Macedon Ranges.

He said changing demographics, with growing mortgage belt areas, were unlikely to help Liberal candidates Chris Jermyn and Megan Purcell replace incumbents Rob Mitchell and Lisa Chesters.

This was despite the Liberals doing "quite well" in 2013. "Early in the campaign, betting markets seemed to be predicting that the

Liberals would pick up McEwen," Dr Robinson said, adding that controversies surrounding Mr Jermyn would definitely have an effect.

Mr Jermyn was firmly in the national media spotlight after he stood outside Sunbury Community Health on May 28 with signs while opposition leader Bill Shorten committed \$2 million for a new child health hub.

The Liberal candidate later packed up his listening post and stormed off after being unable to articulate his party's Medicare policy.

Then, large signs above his Sunbury campaign office had to be pulled down after it was revealed they did not meet Hume council bylaws.

Concerns were also raised about his

involvement in a media development company, which has lost millions of dollars.

"Even putting aside those issues, [Mr Jermyn] doesn't seem to have much of a local presence," Dr Robinson said. "Certainly nothing like [former candidate] Donna Petrovich had."

In McEwen, Labor promises have included \$2 million towards Sunbury's planned global learning centre (GLC). Mr Mitchell has also pledged almost \$1.5 million for a dementia wing at Gisborne Oaks aged care. The Libs have promised \$150,000 to upgrade Sunbury Memorial Hall.

Mr Mitchell said health, jobs and access to education remain key issues in Sunbury.

"People have suffered from the loss of

airlines, from the automotive closures," he said.

"That's where things like the GLC will help.

"It's always close, but I think people have been very receptive to Labor's plans."

Labor's Bendigo electorate promises included funding for Kyneton District Hospital and Loddon Mallee Community Legal Centre, while the Libs pledged \$1 million towards guard rails and skid resistant surfacing on curves on Ashbourne Road at Woodend and \$100,000 for a business plan for the proposed Macedon Ranges Indoor Sports Hub.

On Friday, punters had Mr Mitchell as \$1.05 favourite in McEwen, and Ms Chesters as \$1.10 favourite in Bendigo.

Matt Crossman