

Gray may replace Beazley

Samantha Maiden
Elizabeth Gosch

LABOR heavyweight Gary Gray, the party strategist credited with dubbing Paul Keating "Captain Wacky", is considering running for Kim Beazley's seat of Brand in Western Australia.

But he could face a fight, with persistent speculation ALP state president and former federal MP Sharryn Jackson is also considering a tilt at the seat.

Mr Gray, a backroom strategist who helped lead the party to Mr Keating's "sweetest victory of all" in 1993, quit as ALP national secretary eight years ago.

Since he retired from an active role in ALP politics, he has forged a lucrative career in the corporate sector, and is currently based in Perth as the director of corporate affairs for oil and gas company Woodside Petroleum.

He confirmed yesterday he was considering his options.

"I'm in the process of talking to people in the local electorate and the party and coming to an assessment of whether in their view I would be a suitable candidate," he told *The Australian*.

"I would certainly like to be a member of Kevin Rudd's team and a member of the federal Labor Party.

"But I really want to assure myself that the locals are happy. Over the last few weeks I've been regularly travelling to better understand the area and of the

matters that are of concern. I have been testing the level of local support for me to be the candidate."

Ms Jackson refused to comment yesterday, but it is understood she has strong union backing. She could also nominate for her former seat of Hasluck.

Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union secretary Dave Kelly made it clear that the union would throw its weight behind her.

"Sharryn Jackson would make an ideal candidate for any seat that she decides to run for," he said.

"Sharryn Jackson belongs in federal parliament. The people of WA deserve and need someone of her calibre to represent them.

"If Brand is the seat Sharryn Jackson chooses to run for, the LHMU will throw its full support behind her."

Mr Beazley closed the door on his political career last year, telling his closest supporters at his Christmas party he would not contest the next election.

While the former Labor leader was widely expected to leave politics after he lost the party leadership and ruled out a return to the Opposition front bench, he told colleagues that Christmas 2006 would be his "last as the member for Brand".

His farewell follows the double blow of losing the leadership on the same day his

brother David, 53, died of a heart attack.

"For me to do anything further in the Australian Labor Party I would say is Lazarus with a quadruple bypass," he said.

In 1999, Mr Gray broke down in tears as he announced his resignation for personal and family reasons.

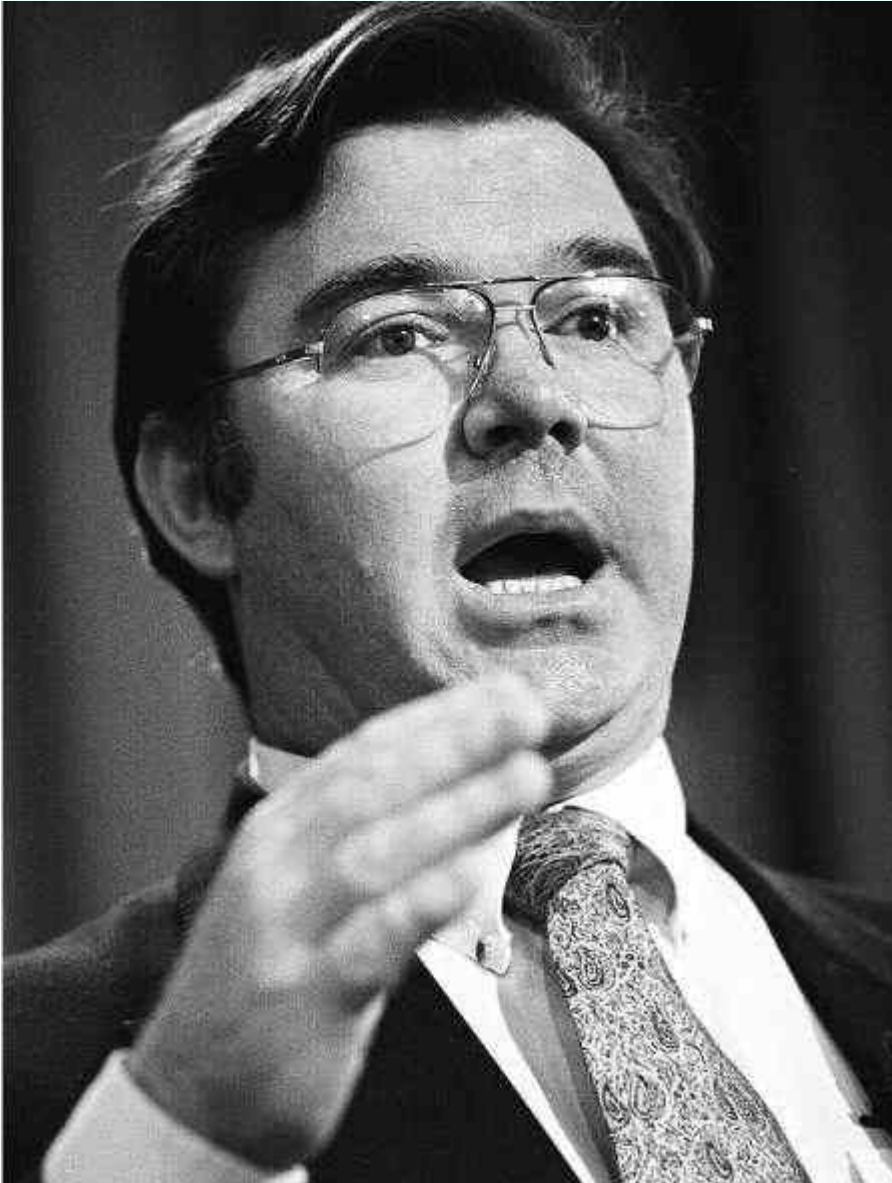
He joined the Labor Party at the age of 16. After the 1993 Labor victory, his relationship with Mr Keating broke down, with the former party secretary later credited with giving Mr Keating the nickname "Captain Wacky".

Mr Gray also had a nickname of his own. He was called "Pugsley" by Mark Latham in his infamous *Diaries*.

The pair fell out after Mr Gray asked former prime minister Gough Whitlam to have a word with Mr Latham over rumours he was attempting to bed Coalition staffers.

Mr Latham never forgave him and later blamed Mr Gray as being the source of rumours about his personal life. Mr Gray rejected the allegations.

Mr Gray said the rapid growth in the electorate, the need for infrastructure including new highway and rail connections into metropolitan Perth were at the top of voters' agenda in the area.



Blast from the past: Former Labor strategist Gary 'Pugsley' Gray is eyeing up the Brand electorate



Contender: Gray could face opposition from Sharryn Jackson, the former Hasluck MP



Bowing out: Former Labor leader Kim Beazley

■ Mainly a suburban seat involving heavy industry in the Kwinana area, alumina refining, tourism and the HMAS Stirling naval base on Garden Island

Two-party preferred, 2004

Labor	54.65%
Liberal	45.35%
Margin	4.7%

