

Rudd clears way for Gray

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January 19, 2007

LABOR leader Kevin Rudd has intervened to clear the way for former party national secretary Gary Gray to enter federal parliament in Kim Beazley's seat of Brand in Western Australia.

Mr Rudd told The Australian last night he wanted Mr Gray as part of his team and had told party officials to deliver his endorsement after Mr Beazley confirmed he would not contest this year's federal election.

Mr Gray, who quit the Labor secretaryship in 1998 and now works in the private sector, told The Australian this week he was considering standing for preselection and had been sounding out the local branch members. There had been speculation that Sharryn Jackson, who held the federal West Australian seat of Hasluck from 2001 to 2004, could seek endorsement in Brand, which Labor holds with a margin of 4.7 per cent.

But when Ms Jackson said she hoped to recontest Hasluck yesterday, Mr Rudd said Labor must endorse Mr Gray in Brand.

"I am confident this will be the outcome," Mr Rudd said. "He is a person of great political experience. He's also a person with strong links to the business community and strong links to the mining community, both of which are part and parcel of this country's economic future."

Mr Rudd, who replaced Mr Beazley as Opposition Leader last month, said he was determined to win the election and would do what was necessary to secure first-class candidates.

"When I judge it's appropriate for the party's overall interest and the country's overall interest to get first-class people into parliament, I will act, and I have done so today," he said.

"And I don't rule out doing so in the future."

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

Since he retired from an active role in ALP politics, Mr Gray 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 to The Australian on Wednesday that he was talking to people in the local electorate and the party to see whether he might be "a suitable candidate".

Ms Jackson said she was more interested in Hasluck than Brand.

"I never canvassed it," she said yesterday. "I was having a hard enough time trying to make up my mind in throwing my hat in the ring for Hasluck. It's the seats you don't hold you've got to win, not the ones you do."

Ms Jackson said she had respect and admiration for Mr Gray and thought he would be a great candidate.

The Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union had been spruiking Ms Jackson's credentials for a return to parliament, including Brand, if she chose to run there.

Alongside Mr Gray, Labor is putting forward another high-profile candidate in its bid to bolster its West Australian vote.

A former war hero, SAS commander Peter Tinley, was asked to run by Mr Beazley in the Liberal-held marginal seat of Stirling after he publicly criticised the Howard Government's involvement in the Iraq war.