

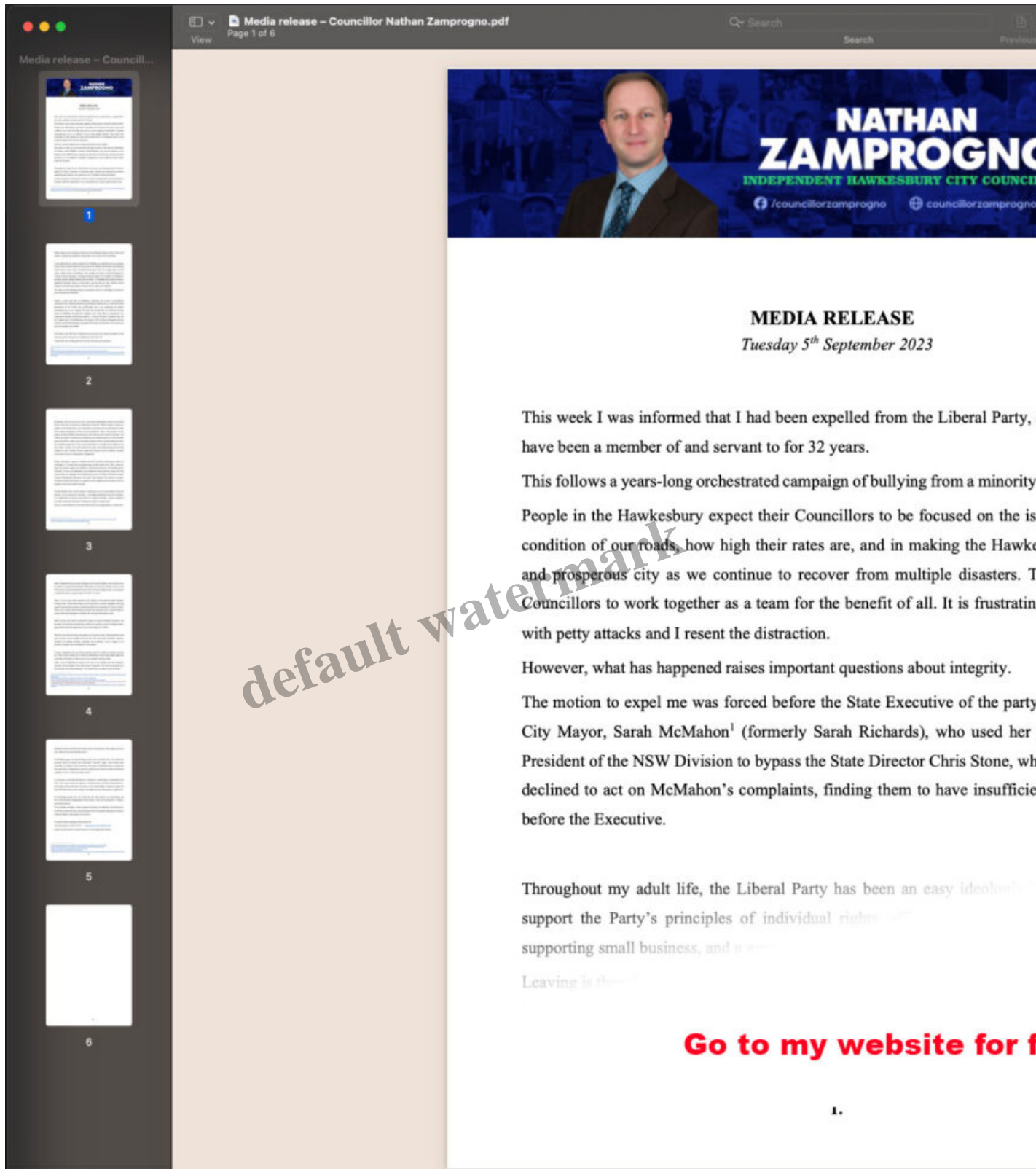
Upon leaving the Liberal Party

Description

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 5th September 2023

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[PDF version of this statement](#)

This week I was informed that I had been expelled from the Liberal Party, an organisation I have been a member of and servant to for 32 years.

This follows a years-long orchestrated campaign of bullying from a minority within the Party.

People in the Hawkesbury expect their Councillors to be focused on the issues, such as the condition of our roads, how high their rates are, and in making the Hawkesbury a pleasant and prosperous city as we continue to recover from multiple disasters. They expect their Councillors to work together as a team for the benefit of all. It is frustrating to have to deal with petty attacks and I resent the distraction.

However, what has happened raises important questions about integrity.

The motion to expel me was [forced before the State Executive](#) of the party by Hawkesbury City Mayor, Sarah McMahon, who used her position as Vice President of the NSW Division to bypass the State Director Chris Stone, who had previously declined to act on McMahon's complaints, finding them to have insufficient merit to place before the Executive.

Throughout my adult life, the Liberal Party has been an easy ideological home because I support the Party's principles of individual rights, efficient and competent government, supporting small business, and a generous view of Australia's history and destiny.

Leaving is therefore a bereavement, but also a relief. It no longer places me in the position of having to defend the indefensible. I am a schoolteacher by vocation, and the subject of my Masters degree was the teaching of ethics and critical thinking. Because of this, I find myself unable to walk past the standard of conduct that I see by some in the Liberal Party.

I am troubled that the evidence tendered by Clr McMahon as justifications for my expulsion from the Party [included statements I have made in the Chamber and elsewhere about planning matters before Council](#), where Councillors should enjoy a free vote to judge matters on their merits, without threat of punishment. This includes the Seniors Living Development in Vincents Road at Kurrajong, a Planning Proposal [brought to the chamber by McMahon's developer boyfriend Matthew Bennett and his family](#). Clr McMahon had already declared a significant pecuniary interest in that matter, and she and two other Liberals [recused themselves with declared conflicts of interest](#) when it came to the Chamber.

My stances on these planning matters are specifically cited by Clr McMahon as reasons for me to be kicked out of the Party.

Further, it seems clear that Clr McMahon's motivation was in part to pre-emptively assassinate a rival. I had been asked by respected figures within the Party to contest the Liberal preselection for the Federal seat of Macquarie and I was considering my position (nominations have not yet opened). The party has retreated after two disastrous elections where Clr McMahon was gifted the candidacy twice, both without a preselection or an endorsement meeting of local branch members – a breach of the party Constitution. She was the "Captain's pick" of Scott Morrison. The swing of 7.58% to Labor in

Macquarie at the last election was double the national swing against the Liberals, and easily the [worst swing in any must-win marginal seat in NSW.](#)

The attentive Labor MP Susan Templeman has presented a more articulate candidate on both occasions, and is in the process of making this a safe Labor seat. I lament that voters in Macquarie have been left with such poor alternatives.

Fortunately, I have my own story to tell. I was elected to Hawkesbury Council on the Liberal ticket in 2016 and re-elected as an independent in late 2021. When I sought to remain as a member of the Liberal ticket, I was summoned to a meeting of the elected Liberals in May 2021 to discuss arrangements. When I arrived in the Mayor's office, I was shocked to see the property developer Matthew Bennett present, and who proceeded to direct the meeting. I was told that any support I would get was conditional on me withdrawing from one of the winnable spots on the ticket, to make way for then-Mayor Patrick Conolly, who had neglected to tender his nomination paperwork on time and would therefore be excluded from standing by the Party unless a vacancy was created. Bennett also spoke of providing funding and providing manpower to other 'friendly' tickets to support the Liberals in the new Chamber, and spoke as one who was active in making those arrangements.

Being a team player, I agreed to withdraw from the #2 position, decreasing my chances of contending in a crowded field, and guaranteeing Conolly another term. After I signed the paper, the promised support was withdrawn, [I lost the preselection for the remaining spots I contested](#), stood as an independent, and watched the Liberals spend the money that I had raised on their own campaign. This included the proceeds of a February 2020 black-tie dinner I hosted at Hawkesbury Racecourse with former Prime Minister Tony Abbott as our guest. Councillor Conolly later became a co-signatory on the complaint sent to the Party to have me expelled. Such are the rewards of loyalty.

At that December 2021 Council election, I neither gave nor received preferences from the Liberals. I was re-elected on a full quota – a resounding endorsement from the community. I've worked hard over the last seven years to be a diligent Councillor. I remain confident of my ability to represent the people of Hawkesbury [simply by being myself.](#)

I have no current ambition to contest the Federal election as an independent or so-called 'teal'.

Where I dissented from my Liberal colleagues in the Council Chamber, it has always been in the defence of sound Liberal principles. When three out of the four Liberals voted to see the Wilcox house and farm demolished as part of the Grose River Bridge project, [I was prepared to defend that family's property rights](#) (13/9/2022, 31/12/23).

When I was the only Liberal opposed to the adoption of the [disastrous Rural Boundary Clearing Code](#), I believed that being a good Conservative is entirely compatible with being a good Conservationist, and that we should look after the environment (25/1/2022, 8/2/2022). There is now evidence that [Developers are indeed now using the Code to clear-fell lands](#) for reasons other than management of bushfire risk, placing Koala habitats at risk.

When I was the only Liberal to [defend the retention of Council's Heritage Committee](#), and the others were hell-bent on dissolving it, I believed a majority of voters, including Liberals, agreed with me about the importance of our local heritage (10/11/2020).

When the four elected Liberals voted against me to rescind a policy I had passed that would cause Council to report annually and at the end of the term about Councillor's expenses, attendance at meetings, briefings, committees and workshops, it was in support of the principle of integrity and accountability in Government.

I remain comfortable with each of these positions, and feel a majority of people are behind me. If this is what it means to be a Liberal on Hawkesbury Council, many might suggest that I am better off out than in. What can I say? I was trying to lead from within.

Sadly, a lack of leadership has created a toxic tone in our Chamber and in the Macquarie electorate Liberal branches. Three other Liberal Councillors (Clr [Brendan Christie](#), [Clr Daniel Myles](#) and former Clr [Chris Van Der Kley](#)) have also been pushed out of their positions in the Blue Mountains ([evidence 1](#), [evidence 2](#)). The Liberal Party was unable to man all its Blue Mountains booths in the March 2023 State election for the first time. I spoke to each of those men within the last month. Each tell me the toxic culture [has the same factional source](#).

Clr McMahon opines a lot about bullying, but she is the worst bully of all. I can't fathom the insecurity shown by someone who creates fake Facebook pages ([evidence 1](#), [evidence 2](#), [evidence 3](#)) just to defame other Councillors or members of the local Press. Or the lack of leadership shown in [wasting the time of the Police](#), sending them to someone's house because someone emailed a professional complaint or wrote a critical journalistic article.

It is necessary to state that bad behavior is confined to a small number of individuals in the Party. I have many friends and supporters, including Senators and State Parliamentarians. I have always been non-factional, even when it is to my disadvantage. I continue to support our State MP Robyn Preston whose integrity, friendship and unwavering support is appreciated.

For Hawkesbury people who vote Liberal, but who value fairness, our rural heritage, and don't want developer entanglements in their politics, I offer you an alternative. I remain a good Liberal at heart.

To my Chamber colleagues, I make an appeal for integrity, accountability, and inclusiveness.

For the many people who have expressed support for my increasingly independent worldview, I offer my thanks. I will continue to do my best.

Councillor Nathan Zamprogno MTeach BArts JP

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(outside of school hours 8-3 please because I'm a teacher).

Category

1. Uncategorized

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