

## PM issues manifesto and clears the decks

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JOHN HOWARD has chosen strength, prosperity and security as his themes for the federal election, while Kevin Rudd has promoted Labor as a fresh alternative to a stale government.

In a rehearsal for the election campaign to be called any day now, Mr Howard yesterday released a 33-page manifesto outlining his Government's achievements over the past 11 years and nominating five broad goals for the future.

"The coming election boils down to a single question: which side of politics has what it takes to keep Australia strong, prosperous and secure into the future?" he says in the introduction.

"The choice is between a Coalition team with a clear policy agenda and a record of doing what's right for Australia and an untested, union-dominated Labor Party that has failed to spell out how it would make our country better."

The Labor leader immediately mocked the document as containing nothing new or visionary.

Labor pointed out that "strong, prosperous and secure" had been borrowed from Ronald Reagan's 1984 campaign for a second term as US president.

Labor also accused Mr Howard of drawing inspiration from the former Opposition leader Mark Latham. One of Mr Howard's five goals pledges to "ensure a rising tide of prosperity lifts all boats, with every child getting a solid start in life". Reflecting on the challenge facing Labor after its thrashing in the 2004 election, Mr Latham wrote that "Australia needs a rising tide of economic growth to lift all boats".

When launching Labor's 2004 election campaign, Mr Latham described education as a "passport out of poverty".

Mr Howard's manifesto says "a steady job remains the best passport out of poverty".

Mr Howard has released similar manifestos before all elections, starting with 1996.

The Prime Minister said it was important to remind people of what the Government had done and what its plans were, but he stressed he was not ungrateful that voters rated his Government so poorly in the polls at the moment.

"But I do think it is necessary when you get to the end of a term to bring together in a document what is being done but, more importantly, what it means about your capacity to implement an agenda for the future."

The Liberal Party also revamped its website.

Mr Rudd said the future required leadership that would keep the economy strong as well as look after working families, and he reminded people that it was Labor that put education, climate change, broadband, federal-state relations and housing affordability back on the political agenda. "Mr Howard's Government has grown stale and after 11 years in office it doesn't have fresh ideas for the future."

The Government continued clearing the decks for an election announcement. The Environment Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, approved the controversial Pluto gas development in the ecologically and culturally sensitive Burrup Peninsula in Western Australia. He also announced the make-up of the independent panel of experts to monitor the Gunns pulp mill in Tasmania for environmental compliance.

Mr Howard reappointed Lynelle Briggs as the Public Service Commissioner for three years. He also announced an independent panel to review the awarding of medals after the 1966 Battle of Long Tan. The Foreign Affairs Minister, Alexander Downer, named ambassadors for Mexico and Brazil.