Julian Grill still a friend, says Labor star recruit

By Amanda O'Brien March 08, 2007 01:18am

THE Labor Party's star recruit to take over Kim Beazley's seat of Brand at the next election has vowed to continue his 20-year friendship with lobbyist Julian Grill, the business partner of disgraced former premier Brian Burke.

Gary Gray, whose preselection was endorsed by the ALP on Tuesday night, told *The Australian* he saw no reason to change the friendship between his family and the Grills.

And he indicated investigations by the state's Corruption and Crime Commission should be allowed to run their course.

"If there has been wrongdoing then that will be identified in the CCC processes and dealt with accordingly," he said.

Mr Gray, a former ALP national secretary who is credited with playing a pivotal role in Paul Keating's 1993 "true believers" election victory, stressed he had never had any commercial relationship with either Mr Burke or Mr Grill and said he never would have.

But he said friendships were not something he considered "disposable".

Mr Burke and Mr Grill are central figures in Western Australia's CCC hearings, which have led to three state ministers being sacked and virtually crippled the Carpenter Government.

Senator Ian Campbell was also forced to resign as a federal minister last week after admitting Mr Burke attended a brief meeting at his office. And Labor Leader Kevin Rudd has been under constant pressure for meeting Mr Burke on several occasions.

But Mr Gray said he had always had the ability to separate personal, private and commercial relationships.

"The friendship between the Grill family and the Walsh family (his in-laws) extends over 30 years. You don't dismiss that lightly."

Mr Gray received a passing mention at the CCC last month but there was no suggestion of any wrongdoing by him.

Mr Grill was heard telling Mr Burke in a secretly recorded phone call that he had been speaking to Mr Gray about problems in the Department of Industry and Resources.

Mr Gray worked for oil and gas giant Woodside Petroleum at the time.