

I am the voice for those who Labor don't listen to

The Zempilas plan to put Libs back in contention for 2029 election

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Political Editor

Basil Zempilas says his brief stint as Liberal leader has strengthened his belief that he can lead the conservatives back from the political abyss.

In his last major interview of the year, Mr Zempilas reflected on his nine-month tenure as WA Liberal and Opposition Leader, saying the baptism of fire has reaffirmed his already strong belief that he was cut out for arguably the toughest job in Australian politics.

"I don't feel like I'm out of my depth," he told The Sunday Times.

"And I feel very comfortable playing that role — to be a very strong voice for those who do not have a voice and to challenge this Government when they make decisions or prioritise areas that most West Australians do not believe are the right ones to prioritise."

This has been a big year for Basil Zempilas.

At the March election, the former media personality and Perth lord mayor became a member of Parliament after narrowly winning Churchlands from Labor. His is just one of seven seats the Liberals hold in the Lower House.

Days later he replaced Libby Mettam as leader, but in the Zempilas household, it hasn't just been a big year for him.

It has also been a big year for his young family, the scrutiny of being State Opposition Leader also shouldered by wife Amy and their three young children.

"With Amy, it is not so much people coming up to her personally and saying things, but in this day of social media where people can contact people they don't know and express opinions — that has certainly happened," Mr Zempilas said.

"And that has been part of the adjustment for Amy, and I am incredibly fortunate that she, too, is resilient and understands the space that I am in — and therefore she and the kids are in."

"Amy often talks to the kids about perhaps what they need to expect in future years and what they might encounter."

But if 2025 was a big year for Mr Zempilas and his

family, the next three will be huge as he attempts to lead the Liberals out of the political wilderness after three big election defeats.

"There is a big mountain to climb, but mountains are there to be climbed," he said.

"We won't limit ourselves by history or by statistics. The focus of this journey for me is to put the Liberal Party back in contention."

"I look at the

focus of these four years as doing everything that we can to put ourselves in contention at the 2029 election. Experience tells me that if you put yourself in contention, then you can win."

The end-of-year interview with Mr Zempilas took place just a few days after

Sports Minister Rita Saffioti's failed bid to bring a regular-season game of Italian soccer

Serie A to Perth. It's political manna from heaven for the Liberal leader, who used it to highlight what he says are the Labor Government's misplaced priorities.

And against the background of behind-the-scenes political observations from all sides of WA politics that Ms Saffioti is arguably now a bigger force in WA politics than Premier Roger Cook, Mr Zempilas decided to stir the pot even more.

"Who is running the show," he asked.

"Surely, somebody should have said (to

Ms Saffioti) at some point 'hey, let's walk away from this one'."

Mr Cook's own sporting pet project, a new NRL side in WA, Perth Bears — which is costing taxpayers nearly \$100 million — is also in the Zempilas firing line.

"Should we have a team in the NRL: of course we should," Mr Zempilas said.

"Should it have cost us \$100m, when the NRL could have paid for it? No way."

Mr Zempilas continues to argue against spending millions of dollars on a V8 Supercar track at Burswood, as part of what the Cook Government now calls Perth Park.

Providing an insight into the Liberal game plan ahead of the next poll, Mr Zempilas said the immense wealth of WA was not being shared among the entire population.

"Our resources have meant incredible windfalls for the

Government, but everyday West Australians are not feeling the benefits of those huge windfalls and many West Australian families are doing it tough," he said.

"They are worried about paying the bills, they struggle to get the kids off to school and they don't have certainty over the house they live in, or the house they are trying to get into."

"That has been the common theme after 10 months in this job — that although we are a very prosperous State, a great deal of West Australians are not feeling that prosperity."

But what about the Zempilas-led Liberals?

What alternative government — and premiership — is on offer?

Reducing payroll tax and shifting stamp duty thresholds to better align with the \$800,000 median price for houses in Perth and make it easier for first-homebuyers to get into the market will be focuses in future policies, he said.

But as revealed by The Sunday Times a few weeks ago, one of the biggest changes after the Mettam era is that the Liberals and Nationals are almost certain to form a coalition in about 2028, rather than go to the next poll as an alliance, with both parties running separate agendas and candidates against each other.

"We (Liberals and Nationals) are certainly doing all of the things that would allow us to get to that position (coalition), but we are not there yet," Mr Zempilas said.

"Potentially, a formal coalition in the lead-up to the 2029 election may give us the best chance (of winning). Clearly it is something we continue to work towards."

Next Sunday: Joe Spagnolo sits down with Premier Roger Cook



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