



MPs should face new election rorts probe

MARK BUTTLER, ANTHONY DOWSLEY AND MATT JOHNSTON

SENIOR legal figures say they are baffled criminal charges are not being considered after an integrity watchdog probe found Labor rorted almost \$388,000 from taxpayers.

Ombudsman Deborah Glass released a damning report in March, showing 21 Labor MPs had employed parliamentary staff to campaign for them during the 2014 election bid.

The money was repaid by the

party after Ms Glass said the scheme “crossed the line”, and advice from parliament had been ignored.

An experienced former police investigator said a charge of obtaining financial advantage by deception should be explored because the ALP’s campaign benefited from

money to which it was not entitled.

He said legal advice sought by police in 2016, shortly after the rorts-for-votes scandal emerged, was “bull” and should be reinvestigated.

“This is straight-out criminality — has anyone sought advice from the OPP (Office of Public Prosecutions)?” he said.

A leading barrister said a deeper investigation could probe whether

the ALP obtained a financial advantage by deception, and whether it committed a conspiracy to defraud.

And in news that will shock some Labor MPs, ReachTEL polling commissioned by the Bus Association of Victoria — which is at war with the government over new contracts — has the ALP trailing the Coalition 53-47 on a two-party preferred basis.

CONTINUED PAGE 4



MPs should face new election rorts probe

FROM PAGE 1

Labor's primary vote is 34 per cent to the Liberals' 39 per cent.

An Upper House committee probe of the rorts for votes scandal is likely to heat up when state parliament resumes this week after the government's big-spending Budget release.

The rorts for votes saga has dogged the government since the Ombudsman's report, but Mr Andrews insisted his MPs acted in "good faith" and did not deserve any punishment.

But legal sources disagree.

In 2016, police said investigators had decided not to pursue the case after they "interviewed electorate officers, department of parliamentary services officials and other nominated parties" and considered legislation, parliamentary guidance materials and policies.

"We assessed the allegations and received legal advice that there was insufficient evidence of a criminal standard to warrant a prosecution," a Victoria Police spokeswoman said.

An Upper House parliamentary committee will probe 11 sitting and former Labor MPs — including Special Minister of State Gavin Jennings and Families Minister Jenny Mikakos — who were named

in Ms Glass' report for breaching a Parliamentary Member's Guide. They were among 21 MPs named in the report.

Ms Glass described the scheme, where public resources were diverted for a political purpose, as an "artifice" and "wrong".

The taxpayer-funded staff led armies of Labor volunteers in red shirts to doorknock and phone voters to try to convince them to vote for Mr Andrews.

The amount each MP cheated from taxpayers ranged from between \$2300 to more than \$44,000.

The parliamentary probe, by the Upper House's Privileges Committee, has been delayed because of a political spat over who should chair it.

It is expected this issue will be resolved when parliament resumes.

mark.buttler@news.com.au
EDITORIAL, PAGE 20



How we covered the story on March 22