

Morrison tells Liberal organisation to act on bullying after second woman flags she'll quit

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

In another blow for Scott Morrison, a second Liberal woman in a marginal seat has declared she will not run at the next election. Ann Sudmalis, who holds the NSW regional seat of Gilmore on a [margin](#) of 0.7%, cited stacking, bullying and leaking against her, and denounced the state Liberal organisation.

In a damaging statement for a party in desperate search of unity and fending off allegations of female MPs being bullied, Sudmalis said: “My decision has been made after six and a half years of holding my pledge to be a team player in the face of NSW Liberal party bullying, intimidation, leaking and undermining at a local level.”

Her stinging attack on the NSW Liberal division has prompted action from the prime minister to have the party's organisational wing investigate the allegations.

À lire aussi : [**Politics podcast: Judith Troeth on the Liberal party's woman problem and asylum seekers**](#)

Morrison - who met with Sudmalis on Monday – said she had “raised a number of genuine concerns with me” about her treatment in her local Federal Electoral Conference within the NSW division of the Liberal Party.

“This is in addition to complaints I have received from other colleagues about processes in the party's organisational wing,” he said. He emphasised the complaints did not relate to the parliamentary wing, but to the party's organisational wing.

Morrison said he had on Monday, through the party's federal director Andrew Hirst, requested the Liberals' federal executive “to consider how they will take steps to ensure there is a rigorous and confidential process to deal with concerns and complaints from party members, including members of parliament.

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"Nola Marino, the chief whip, has managed this process for parliamentarians. This new arrangement will ensure that the organisational wing of the party has the same processes and upholds the same values."

Minister for Women Kelly O'Dwyer said earlier this month that such a process was needed, in the wake of the recent allegations of bullying.

À lire aussi : [**Minister for Women Kelly O'Dwyer says Liberals were 'subject to threats' in leadership battle**](#)

Sudmalis' announcement follows Victorian backbencher Julia Banks' decision also to quit at the election, citing bullying. Her Victorian seat of Chisholm is on about 3% margin after the redistribution.

Without the well-known incumbents, both seats will be harder for the Liberals to hold.

À lire aussi : [**Liberal MP Julia Banks to quit at election, calling out bullying**](#)

Sudmalis stressed her decision "has nothing to do with the leadership of Scott Morrison nor my federal colleagues". She described Morrison as a friend and a man of integrity who was "absolutely passionate about the long-term progress and vision for Australia."

"I am concerned that the media will interpret my decision as a reflection on the leadership of Scott Morrison. If they do, they will be lying. Scott Morrison truly is a good man," she said in a

statement.

She said that she had endeavoured to keep her decision private until after the Wentworth byelection but this wasn't possible.

"I have asked the prime minister to acknowledge that I am withdrawing my nomination", she said.

Sudmalis said she had "never before said how I voted in the party room for the position of prime minister, but as this has been some of the undermining process by those who actually don't know, let me confirm that I have never voted against a sitting prime minister."

"I did not support the spill motion. I supported Malcolm Turnbull through the entire process. The position of prime minister should not be a dispensable position."

She said her decision "has everything to do with the NSW [Liberal] State Division and the actions of one of my state Liberal colleagues.

"Since the day of winning pre-selection in 2012, the local self-determined senior Liberal has been leaking damaging material to media, holding publicity stunts that are completely against federal policy initiatives, and has overall been unfair and unethical.

"The final straw came when my supportive FEC [Federal Electoral Conference] committee at the AGM was completely rolled, installing people of inexperience and hostility.

"It is at the NSW State Division level that I have had little or no support during the past six months while waiting for the pre-selection process, which should have been determined well before now."

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When her preselection was obviously coming under pressure earlier this year, Turnbull and Morrison strongly backed her. It was reported at that time that party powerbroker and NSW Liberal MP Gareth Ward was behind the campaign against Sudmalis.

Sudmalis, 63, entered parliament in 2013. She had a 3% swing against her in 2016.

Cabinet minister Christopher Pyne was cavalier in his comment: "It's not compulsory when you get elected to remain in parliament for the rest of your life. It's not a life sentence. If they get to choose how to retire it's a nice way to go out."

The Labor candidate for the seat, Fiona Phillips, [issued](#) a statement thanking Sudmalis for her service to the region.

"Whilst Ann Sudmalis and I have fundamental disagreements on what is best for our region, I do not doubt her dedication and sincerity to serve.

"I would like to work closely with Mrs Sudmalis for the remainder of her term to achieve real and significant improvements for our local dairy farmers who face an existential crisis during this drought," Phillips said.

Meanwhile, Fairfax Media [reported](#) that the NSW Liberal Party had said Tony Abbott secured 68% support in the vote last Friday to re-endorse him.

There had been different reports of the numbers and earlier they had been kept secret. The substantial minority vote against Abbott has been interpreted as a warning that locals want the next term to be his final one.

Abbott was not in parliament on Monday; his office said he was on "emergency services" leave. He was paired, so his absence did not affect the numbers in votes.

UPDATE Sudmalis accuses state Liberal of 'vengeance' against 'strong Liberal women'

Sudmalis in parliament launched an extraordinary attack on state Liberal Gareth Ward, declaring that "bullying, betrayal and backstabbing" had been his hallmarks over six and a half years.

She said since she was preselected in 2012 Ward, who is member for Kiama, had leaked against her "and more recently he approached friends asking me to nominate my retirement date and then he'd call off his people".

He had stacked her branches and rolled her supportive FEC committee, installing people who had never been part of a federal campaign.

'This is not the first time that Gareth has flexed his vengeance on strong Liberal women. He doesn't just get even, he annihilates anyone who opposes him", she told the House of Representatives on Monday night.

"In 2016 Gareth worked the numbers and denied a priority position for a strong Liberal woman Kellie Marsh, a local and effective councillor. She ran independently and won a place on the Shellharbour Council.

"That same year Gareth, while helping his friend Andrew Guile get back on to the Shoalhaven City Council, worked on the booths handing out for the independent team, knowing their preferences for the mayor would all go to the Greens candidate and not to Jo Gash, also a strong Liberal woman. Despite her winning the primary count she was defeated.

"Then when nominations were called for the seat of Gilmore, Gareth's friends Paul Ell and Adam Straney strangely decided to nominate against me, while Andrew Guile actively encouraged Grant Schulz to do the same," Sudmalis said.

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“Was I doing a lousy job? No. ... Was it because they thought I'd lose the last election?

"Hardly. When I had the confidence of the former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the current Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, openly stating on national television their support for me.

"This was all about Gareth's narcissistic revenge planned and plotted.”

Sudmalis said she had decided “enough is enough.

"Who was this about? Certainly not the people who elected me. It was about ego driven ambition, bullying and betrayal and my local position is completely untenable,” she said.

Michelle Grattan ne travaille pas, ne conseille pas, ne possède pas de parts, ne reçoit pas de fonds d'une organisation qui pourrait tirer profit de cet article, et n'a déclaré aucune autre affiliation que son poste universitaire.

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