

# Glamour candidate aims to smash that old Nationals stereotype



Swinging voter: Hajnal Ban, Nationals candidate for the seat of Forde, south of Brisbane, takes time out from campaigning yesterday

Picture: Patrick Hamilton

## FORDE

Sarah Elks

THE Nationals' glamour candidate for the southeast Queensland seat of Forde has had to sacrifice sleep and violin lessons to squeeze in campaigning around her day job as a local councillor.

Hajnal Ban, 29, who worked as a barrister before being elected to Beaudesert Shire Council in 2004, faces a tough battle in the electorate that extends south of Brisbane through farming land to the Gold Coast hinterland.

The seat is held by the Liberal Party with a margin of 11.5 per cent, and has not been won by the Nationals in their 23-year history.

It covers the extending urban sprawl of Brisbane to the south as well as farming country and the major rural town of Beaudesert.

Ms Ban, preselected by the Nationals in December, became one of the faces of the party's television campaign aimed at breaking the stereotype of a traditional Nationals politician.

She has made quite an impression on the internet, with her YouTube video, *The Adventures of Hajnal Ban*, being viewed more than a thousand times since it was posted a week ago.

There is a fan club on the social networking site Facebook dedicated to the Israeli-born barrister of Hungarian descent, with more than 100 subscribers.

"The internet can be quite addictive — if you sit down in front of it, you can easily waste an hour," Ms Ban said. "I started campaigning quite a long time ago, but the pressure has really started in the last six weeks."

## FORDE, QLD

■ Ranked 17th for households with mortgages

■ But 119th where dad has a full-time job and mum works part-time

■ In the top 50 for employment (ranked 43rd)

Sitting member: Kay Elson (LP)

Swing needed: 11.6 per cent

Last time seat changed hands: 1996

Demographic rating: Rural

Household income weekly median \$942

Paying off home 43.2%

Renters 24.7%

McMansions 38.2%

Couples with dependent children 48.1%

Single parents 16.5%

Never known recession 31%

Grey voters 29.9%

"I've cut out all my fun activities — I started playing the violin again last Christmas and I've cut that out completely. I'm also not sleeping much, about four hours a night."

But not all are pleased with Ms Ban's time-management abilities.

The Labor candidate for Forde, Brett Raguse, had to resign from his position as a state government policy adviser to contest the poll.

He told *The Australian* it was "a little bit unfair" for Ms Ban to still be working as a councillor.

"Voters I spoke to are concerned she's supposed to be their councillor, representing them at the same time as campaigning," he said.

Mr Raguse said the ALP sees Forde as winnable. "There's a retiring member, it was a Labor seat prior to 1996 for three terms, and the redistribution means it's

the first time since 1996 that Boonah, which has a strong conservative flavour, has been removed from the electorate."

But the Liberals have the inside running for the seat, with community newspaper-owner and mother-of-six Wendy Creighton standing for the party after sitting member Kay Elson decided not to contest the election.

Ms Creighton said would never take the seat for granted. "Kay worked very hard to be a very good local representative — I watched her do that for years, it's not easy," she said.

"You've got to be in touch with the people across the rural and regional communities. People want to see you on the ground."

For voters on the streets of Forde, there is a consensus on local issues that are biting hard. One of their major concerns is the state of the health services.

In his curtains and blinds business in Beaudesert, rusted-on Liberal voter Mark Lohmann said the town hospital reflected badly on the state Government.

"It's only recently been rebuilt but they've closed the maternity wards and cut back some of the other functions," said Mr Lohmann, a father of two.

Down the road, at the local dry cleaners, owner Chris Dansey agreed that the poor state of the hospital was an issue.

He said he was a swinging voter who voted Liberal at the last federal poll but was leaning towards Labor this time. "One good thing is Labor's going to have a look at the hospitals, and Beaudesert needs that," Mr Dansey said.