



No Akubra ... Hajnal Ban says the election will come down to hard work. "I am going to give it everything I've got," she said. Photo: Jason Weeding

Happy National breaks the mould

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ONE glance and it is obvious Hajnal Ban does not fit the National Party stereotype of a fusty, balding middle-aged man in a tweed jacket and Akubra.

The 28-year-old barrister and local councillor is part of the Nationals' bid to wrest a key seat from the Liberals as the party seeks to reverse its decline at next year's federal election.

"It's really going to come down to the candidate and how hard they work," she said. "I'm going to give it everything I've got. I'll work like a dog for 12 months."

The retirement of several Coalition MPs at the next election

combined with the recent electoral redistribution has opened the door for a spate of three-cornered contests in NSW and Queensland in which the Nationals and Liberals will compete.

Ms Ban is after the seat of Forde which runs south of Brisbane to the NSW border. She has the backing of party heavyweights to win preselection in December.

The sitting Liberal member Kay Elson, who entered Parliament in 1996, is retiring next year after turning the seat from marginal to safe. "If you've got a marginal seat, you do 20 years' work in 10," she said of her decision.

Ms Ban, who was born in Israel of Hungarian origin, moved to Queensland with her family

when she was six. She was admitted to the Bar at 23 and joined the Nationals four months ago after being rebuffed by the Liberal Party. Ms Ban would only describe the matter as "a bit of miscommunication" and is now happily a National.

"I have quite a lot to do with National Party politicians in Queensland, I share their philosophy and ideas," she said.

She particularly admires the Queensland Nationals senator Barnaby Joyce.

Mrs Elson said Ms Ban was "a nice lady" who would "pull in a few votes" but most likely not enough.

Mrs Elson was challenged by a National twice in the past 10

years. The most votes they attained was 7 per cent.

Senator Joyce said she should not be underestimated. "People get caught in the trap of trying to treat her like a Barbie doll. She'll bite your head off," he said. "She's no fool. She's businesslike and very hard working. If people know her, they'll vote for her."

Other than Forde, three-cornered contests are expected in Queensland in the new seat of Flynn and in Leichhardt, which is being vacated by Warren Entsch.

In NSW, the Liberals could contest Page, and Parkes, both held by the Nationals. Ian Causley is retiring in Page and John Cobb is considering moving to Calare as a result of the redistribution.