

Liberal Party announces first female president

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The federal Liberal Party has appointed its first female president in its 61-year history.

Fifty-four-year-old Sydney businesswoman, Chris McDiven, has been formally endorsed by delegates at the Liberal Party's federal council in Canberra tonight.

Ms McDiven has commended the party for the growing number of Liberal women in federal parliament and says she is proud to be appointed as president.

"It is a prestigious and highly respected position," she said.

"Being the first female president is an added responsibility, but I hope during my term to provide a role model for, and be a mentor to, other women who wish to further their careers in organisational politics."

Ms McDiven takes over as president from Shane Stone on Sunday.

She told Prime Minister John Howard that she is ready for the responsibilities of her position.

"I look forward to leading the organisation and working behind the scenes to assist you and the Government to continue with your reform agenda," she said.

"In taking up this position I am very very aware that I have been given a big pair of shoes to fill."

Departing federal Liberal Party president Shane Stone has warned his party not to become arrogant or complacent.

In his final party address to the Liberal federal council in Canberra tonight, Mr Stone told delegates not to get too caught up with opinion polls.

"We should not get too carried away by our party's continuing difficulties and problems," he said.

"The Australian public is unforgiving of governments who take their eye off the ball, lose discipline and forget who put them there in the first place."

Mr Howard praised Mr Stone's leadership over the past six years.

At the same time, Mr Howard said the party is key to winning elections.

"As somebody who is himself a part of the party organisation, I have never forgotten the importance politically of the ... relationship between the parliamentary party and the organisation," he said.

Meanwhile, Liberal Party federal council passed a motion that enshrines state rights.

It comes as the Federal Government gets set to assume a majority in the Senate and push for a federal industrial relations system.

The Western Australian Branch of the party put forward a detailed motion to uphold the current federalist system.

Mr Howard and others spoke against the motion, but the majority of the 64 voting delegates agreed to protect the rights of the states.

But the vote is non-binding and Mr Howard and his parliamentary wing are under no obligation to follow through on the motion.