

Brendan Nelson warns against Malcolm Turnbull Liberal Party coup

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BRENDAN Nelson has sternly warned Liberals MPs against dumping federal president Alan Stockdale, in what is being viewed as a direct attack on Malcolm Turnbull's attempts to remake the party.

Dr Nelson, the former opposition leader who this week announced he was quitting politics at the next federal election, entered into the Liberal Party infighting today after The Australian reported Mr Turnbull wanted Mr Stockdale replaced by former party president Shane Stone.

“Alan Stockdale ... represents the heart and soul of this party,” Dr Nelson told ABC Radio.

“He has the intellectual drive, he has the energy, and he also has the strength of character to lead the party.

"I could only describe it as unwise to, at this stage especially, to be challenging Alan Stockdale and his authority."

Mr Stockdale has renominated for the position, which will be decided during next month's federal council meeting in Canberra.

Liberal Party infighting has intensified in recent days, with the Opposition Leader's staunchest supporters frustrated with former treasurer Peter Costello's resolve to stay in parliament after attempts to implicate him in the messy Julie Bishop resignation.

Mr Costello's decision threatens to continue uncertainty surrounding the Liberal leadership until the next election.

The controversy over leaks of private conversations between Mr Turnbull and Mr Costello - seen as a bid to damage the latter's credibility - means he is likely to renominate for his Melbourne seat of Higgins mid-year and sit on the back bench as an alternative Liberal leader.

But a Liberal MP has told The Australian Online Mr Costello is putting himself ahead of the best interests of the party.

“He should either stay and take on a role or go. Sticking around on the back bench is creating instability and people are getting fed up with him,” the MP said.

It comes as Liberal senator Cory Bernardi has accused Christopher Pyne - the MP Mr Turnbull appointed as the leader of opposition business - of being a political opportunist.

He said Mr Pyne once told him he would have joined the ALP "if I lived in a Labor seat".

Mr Pyne has denied ever saying this to Senator Bernardi.