

Tony Abbott's recruitment drive: 'Let's take our party back and win the next election'

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DUMPED prime minister Tony Abbott will be the guest speaker at a Liberal Party function in Melbourne tomorrow night which has been described as a "recruitment drive" for conservatives.

The event is being organised by Assistant Treasurer Michael Sukkar, a rising star in the Right faction.

It comes as Mr Abbott, who yesterday appeared at an electorate function with children's entertainers Hi5, urged conservative grassroots members to take back control of the party as part of his ongoing campaign to overhaul the NSW branch of the party.

"The tragedy is that for too long the party hierarchy has expected the rank and file to turn up, to pay up, to shut up," he said to the cheering crowd.

"We are letting ourselves down. Let's take our party back and then we can win the next election," Mr Abbott said.



Former PM Tony Abbott with child entertainers Hi5 at the Little Zak's Academy in Brookvale. Picture: Daniel Munoz

His comments come after a week of infighting and division within the Turnbull Government triggered by the release of a secret recording of Christopher Pyne gloating over the influence of the moderate faction within the Government.

Mr Abbott further stoked tensions by questioning the capability of the submarines the Government has chosen and outlining his own political manifesto. Defence Minister Marise Payne, a moderate, hit back at Mr Abbott saying he had failed to raise his concerns with her. "The most important thing I know about team is there is no 'I' in team," she said.

Frontbencher Concetta Fierravanti-Wells also urged Mr Abbott not to "rewrite history" because it was "damaging his credibility."

Tomorrow night's recruitment event in Melbourne's outer east was said to be on a "need to know" basis. When contacted by The Sunday Telegraph several MPs in surrounding seats were unaware of the function.

One federal Victorian MP said he was "surprised" Mr Sukkar, a member of Mr Turnbull's ministry, was involved in the event given recent Mr Abbott's recent criticism of the Government. "It's certainly not a decision I would make in the current climate," he said.

Mr Sukkar was unavailable for comment.

The cash-strapped Victorian Liberal Party is trying to boost its membership ahead of the 2018 state election and next federal poll expected in 2019.

At the 2014 state election, Mr Abbott's leadership was, in part, blamed for the Coalition's loss.