

Morrison to invoke Menzies in bid for unity



Scott Morrison arrives at a care facility in Brisbane yesterday ahead of his Albury trip. Picture: AAP exclusive

Simon Benson, National Affairs Editor, Geoff Chambers, Canberra Bureau Chief
12:00AM September 6, 2018

Scott Morrison will embrace the principles and social values of the Menzies era in his first headland speech as Prime Minister today, in a bid to chart a new course for the Coalition government and end the bitter divisions of the Abbott-Turnbull years.

Signalling a break with Malcolm Turnbull's regime, Mr Morrison will travel to the NSW border town of Albury and deliver a speech to a community forum, arguing that the party needs to return to fundamental principles.

Mr Morrison told *The Australian* last night his speech would outline his own set of "beliefs", which would guide the government. Flanked by senior cabinet ministers — in a town that claims to be the birthplace of the Liberal Party — Mr Morrison will tell a hand-picked audience at a Menzies Research Centre forum that although his government marks a new generation of leadership, it is still the custodian of the Menzies legacy that has served the party since 1944. Mr Morrison will draw the comparison of trying to heal the party after

the events of the past two weeks with Menzies's task of drawing together - disparate groups to form the party in 1944.

While not wanting to draw a distinct point of difference with the Turnbull-led Coalition, Mr Morrison will say the party needs to "return to its roots". The Prime Minister will travel to Albury after spending the first half of the week in Queensland meeting the Liberal National Party's organisational wing. He has signalled to the party's base that he "gets it" after calling out "gender whisperers" in schools.

Mr Morrison is understood to have told his senior ministers that they now have an obligation to repair the party. He is expected to be joined in Albury by Liberal deputy leader Josh Frydenberg and senior ministers Mathias Cormann and Peter Dutton.

Having marked out a change in direction on policy with a clear pitch to retirees and the Liberal base, Mr Morrison will use his unrehearsed Albury address to emphasise his credentials as a Prime Minister who would govern according to underlying values of the Liberal Party. "I'm giving the speech straight from the heart: the beliefs that will drive me and my government," Mr Morrison told *The Australian* last night.

Mr Turnbull ignited a firestorm among conservatives last year when he said in a speech in London that Robert Menzies had been a moderate. He recently repeated that he believed Menzies was a progressive.

Mr Morrison, since claiming the leadership almost two weeks ago, has signalled he will embrace a socially conservative agenda, and has pledged to unite warring moderate and conservative factions in the Liberal partyroom.

With the government trailing Labor in Newspoll 44-56 per cent on a two-party-preferred vote, Mr Morrison, who is yet to hold his first formal cabinet meeting, has moved swiftly to dump unpopular policies pushed by his predecessor.

The Australian understands the first formal cabinet meeting is due to be held next week, when a decision to drop a plan to increase the pension age to 70 will be ratified. Mr Morrison's pension decision was made with the leadership group and cabinet remotely.

In his first press conference as Prime Minister, fresh from securing a Coalition agreement with the Nationals, Mr Morrison outlined that his top priorities would be drought relief, electricity prices, healthcare and chronic illness, - affordable medicines, aged care, Medicare and support for small and medium-sized businesses.

The Australian previously revealed that the Turnbull government would fast-track company tax cuts to provide more immediate relief for businesses with a turnover of up to \$50 million. There has been speculation the Morrison government could also look at further lowering the 25 per cent tax rate for small business to help supercharge the economy and potentially wedge Labor.

The Australian last week revealed Energy Minister Angus Taylor would relegate the Paris emissions target to a third-order issue behind delivering lower power prices and energy reliability. Mr Turnbull's doomed national energy guarantee will also be jettisoned.

In the dying days of the Turnbull government, Mr Morrison also announced the energy supplement would be extended to support pensioners struggling to pay power bills, after Labor accused the Coalition of planning to dump the support payment.

Mr Morrison, who has endured a series of damaging leaks from pro-Turnbull supporters since claiming the top job, was yesterday attacked by Labor after describing the leadership takeover as akin to The Muppet Show. Asked how he would unite a "bunch of Muppets", he said: "Well, I'm doing exactly that in terms of my colleagues. We're coming together. Those events drew to a close many, many years of bitterness on a whole range of issues from previous generations."

Mr Shorten, who is understood to have preferred facing Mr Turnbull or Mr Dutton at the next federal election, yesterday attacked Mr Morrison on his about-face on raising the pension age to 70.