

Ric Dolphin's

Insight

into Government

Alberta's independent newsletter on government & politics

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Volume 30 Number 12

Week ending Nov. 20, 2015

INSIDE THIS WEEK

Pg. 3: Bills before the House this week include a tranny fix

Pg. 4: Verbatim: Fitzpatrick's lachrymose account of her abuse

Pg. 4: A feminist cat fight enlivens budget debate week

Pg. 6: Marlin twits Todd; the Great Charter lands in the Fed Bldg.

DIPPERS IN A HURRY

RACHEL THE EXPEDITER & THE IMPETUS OF PESSIMISM

The rapid deployment of the farm workers' bill might well be symptomatic of the Notley government's low expectations of winning a second term. We've seen this before in Manitoba, but as things turned out, the worrying was premature.

This week's long expected introduction of Bill 6, the *Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act*, which allows agricultural labour to unionize and forces farmers to insure them, may mark another milestone on the NDP's road to Alberta, the Workers' Paradise. But the way in which this and other gov't initiatives are being hurried along also suggests a political strategy that could well be described as the Schreyer Gambit.

Avid readers of this sheet may remember a conversation we had in the spring with former Manitoba Premier **Ed Schreyer**, 79, one of the Dipper emeriti attending **Rachel Notley's** outdoor swearing-in ceremony on May 24.

Schreyer recalled that when his NDPers replaced the 11-year-old Progressive Conservative gov't in 1969 he had not expected to win a second term. Consequently, his gov't embarked on an expedited program of rapid change: building dams and floodways, amalgamating the 13 warring Winnipeg suburbs into one urban entity, instituting public auto insurance, raising the minimum wage, eliminating health-care premiums, and creating Canada's first state-run home-care and pharmacare programs.

As the minister responsible for the Manitoba Hydro crown corporation, Premier Schreyer also began building hydroelectric dams instead of coal- and gas-fired plants, with the result that close to 99% of Manitoba's electricity now comes from hydro.

As things turned out, Schreyer's gov't did win a second term, but he had not expected this, and hence the impetus to get things done quickly—and expensively. (In 1977, the NDP lost to **Sterling Lyon's** Tories, who'd successfully campaigned on a promise to

Continued on next page...

POLITICAL PULSE

RIGHT & RIGHT

AFTER THE RESURRECTION, WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE WR?

As AGMs go, the Wildrose gathering at Calgary's Coast Plaza Hotel last weekend had a respectable showing. About 550 attended, which was 50 more than turned out for last year's unhappy outing in Red Deer on the heels of the Wildrose's disastrous performance in the four byelections all won by Tories.

At the 2014 AGM, then leader **Danielle Smith**, seemingly off her meds, had rambled endlessly about what could be wrong with the party and how it might be fixed. She suggested the creation of "the Fun Police" to jolly up constituency meetings and the creation of "1,000 Wildrose Ambassadors" who would go out into the community and recruit new members.

There had also been that fateful resolution to expand the party's human rights policy to specify "sexual preference." It was voted down—an occurrence that Smith later cited as the reason for her departing the party—along with ten others—for the Tories.

This year's convention, under the leadership of **Brian Jean**, was less eventful, although the whiff of the miraculous still lingered from the resurrection that followed the party's near-death experience—a resurrection that has seen the caucus grow from last year's 17 to the current 22 MLAs.

In a rousing opening speech, Jean, whose oratorical skills have improved markedly in the last six months, spoke sharply of the floor-crossings of last Dec. 17.

"Let's remember what it was: it was a day I'm sure everybody in this room will remember for a very, very long time. It was in my view the day a gang of unprincipled opportunists spell-bound by the promise of easy political power tried to drive a stake through the heart of this party and this movement and every single person who has worked so hard to build it."

The party didn't die, he said, because its "values, principles, and ideals endure," making it larger than the sum of its parts.

"Wildrose is quite simply the strong, beating heart of the conservative movement in Alberta and it belongs to all of us." (Much cheering and applause.)

On the subject uppermost in the minds of most of those present—the uniting the right—Jean edged into it with a condemnation of the NDP gov't for its "disastrous" fiscal policies that "are the exact opposite to what our province needs right now."

"With the PCs in power," he continued, "Wildrose was the principal check on a wayward dynasty. Sometimes we'd have to nudge them a bit. Other times we'd have to drag them. But eventually when their members quietly told them Wildrose was right, the PCs would come

Turn to Political Pulse on pg. 5...

slash the provincial debt, which had ballooned to \$3.5B—about 30% of GDP—under the NDP).

The Notley gov't seems in a similar hurry to carry out an agenda that is in some ways similar to Schreyer's (minimum wage hikes, accelerated infrastructure spending, renewable electricity generation, deficit spending), but differs in its ideological emphasis, notably as regards gender politics. Notley demonstrated this preoccupation immediately after taking power by appointing a 50%-female cabinet and creating Canada's only provincial stand-alone Status of Women's ministry.

The other big priority is labour and workers' rights. Notley spent most of her pre-political career as a lawyer working for unions (she met hubby **Lou Arab** when they were both with CUPE in Vancouver), defending workers with health and safety claims, and appealing decisions by

THE TRADITIONAL TORY RELIANCE ON THE FARM VOTE ENDED WHEN WILDROSE STOLE HALF THE RURAL RIDINGS

the Workers' Compensation Board. As an opposition MLA, Notley excoriated the WCB as being "a tool of the employer" whose decisions invariably shafted the injured worker.

The Notley gov't has yet to tackle the WCB, but in the meantime its Bill 6 addresses worker inequity long a sore point with the NDP, the Liberals and Alberta's labour movement: the exclusion of farm workers from mandatory WCB coverage, from Occupational Health & Safety Act regulation, and from union membership. Bill 6 not only fixes all that, it also draws a clear line between the Rachelites and the *ancien régime*.

For reasons muddled in the mists of time, but perhaps having to do with the post-war fears of **Ernest Manning's** Social Credit gov't about Commie unions cutting off the food supply, farm workers have been prohibited from organizing since 1948 under *The Farming and Ranch Exemption Regulation*.

Most every other worker in the province has been covered by mandatory WCB insurance for almost a hundred years. Farm workers in every other province are covered. But Alberta farmers, ever wary of gov't interference and regulation, have managed to avoid regulation.

This isn't to say the larger operations—southern Alberta feedlots, for example, that employ a couple of hundred workers—do not insure their employees, either privately or with the WCB (which offers optional coverage). Banks would be loathe to provide financing if the threat of injury lawsuits were a possibility.

It is the small and medium-sized operations—for example a 5,000-acre, \$500K-p.a. grain operation run by a farmer, his wife, and a son, who bring in temporary workers to operate heavy equipment at harvest time—that are resistant to such state-imposed regulation.

Wildrose MLA and agriculture critic **Rick Strankman** (Drumheller-Stettler), whose family grows grain and beef near the Saskatchewan border, opposes Bill 6 as an unnecessary imposition. Strankman, who once went to jail for selling his grain outside of the old Canadian Wheat Board,

says that educational programs provided by farm organizations and manufacturers of machinery have reduced injury and fatality levels in Alberta to levels comparable with those in OHS-governed provinces.

Perhaps. But what happens if one of those temporary truck drivers gets hurt or killed? Shit happens, is Strankman's attitude, and it's one that's shared by a good many small and medium-sized producers. That same driver could just as easily die in a car accident coming home from church.

At this week's convention of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) in Edmonton where Notley staunchly defended her bill, discouraging words were heard from rural politicians who said the bill would create red tape, increase costs, and disrupt seasonal operations.

Here, in a nutshell, is the rustic attitude—call it individualistic, call it redneck—that has kept Socred and Tory gov'ts compliant for 70 years. Thanks to electoral distributions giving disproportionate clout to the rural ridings that sustained conservative

dynasties.

Thus whenever a Liberal or an NDP asked a gov't minister in the House why the poor farm workers weren't getting the same protections and rights as others—and the question has been posed for at least forty years—they received answers like: *this is what the rural constituents want; or farmers have the option of insuring their workers and many do; or Alberta's safety record is as good or better than provinces with mandatory OHS regulation; or, mom-and-pop farms are not normal industrial workplaces; there are odd hours and kids and other family members helping with the chores. How do you regulate that?*

The traditional Tory reliance on the farm vote ended in 2012 when the redneck-friendly Wildrose arrived and stole half the rural ridings.

The NDP was elected in May with barely any help from the central and southern Alberta rural ridings most wedded to an unregulated farm worker market.

Over the summer, officials in Agriculture & Forestry, led by seasoned deputy minister **Jason Kripps**, were put to work preparing Bill 6. Lobbyists, representing producers, tried their best to get the bill diluted or delayed, but all they could accomplish was an agreement by the gov't to hold a few consultation sessions across the province to get "stakeholder input."

Then in October, Kripps was transferred to the sexier new portfolio of Economic Development & Trade (Ag is kind of the Siberia of ministerial postings) and the lobbyists lost their focus.

The new DM, **Beverly Yee**, previously a bean-counting ADM in Muni Affairs with no knowledge of agriculture, kept the senior bureaucrats in the ministry busy bringing her up to speed—too busy to deal with the lobbyists, who gave up the fight.

When Bill 6 was announced at a friendly grain farm in Gibbons, north of Edmonton on Tuesday by Jobs Minister **Lori Sigurdson** and Agriculture Minister **Oneil Carlier**, no one had thought to invite the two people most active

in fighting for farm workers rights through the years: **Eric Musekamp** and **Darlene Dunlop**, founders of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta, formed 16 years ago, and still technically illegal until the new legislation is proclaimed.

Bill 6, which Sigurdson plans to push through the Legislature before year's end, gives Alberta's 60,000 farm workers the same rights, benefits, and protections as other workers and will require the province's 43,000 farms to purchase mandatory insurance from the WCB. The bill also repeals *The Farming and Ranch Exemption Regulation*, meaning farm workers can form trade unions.

In Brooks, the United Food & Commercial Workers (UFCW) union representing employees at the JBS beef processing plant (Canada's largest), and one of the unions that donated big bucks to the NDP in the May election, is already preparing to certify JBS' feedlot workers.

Although most of the producer groups and smaller farming operations knew these changes were coming, they are not happy about it. But the NDP gov't doesn't seem to care. *Insight's*

eminence in the Ag patch, **Will Verboven**, a veteran writer and editor for a half dozen specialty publications, says gov't has become decidedly insular, relying "only on its NDP pals and senior bureaucrats for advice," instead of taking an "activist approach" and reaching out to producers and farm groups for ideas on how they and the gov't might collaborate on projects to benefit the industry.

"The point is," says Will, "an NDP gov't has everything to gain from an activist approach since they had no votes to lose from the ag. community. I have met them a few times and I advised them to stop giving voters more reasons not to vote for them next time. But they want to do it their way and seem oblivious to the reality that they need to get re-elected in four years."

On the other hand, perhaps the NDP realize that they'll never be popular in farm country and see their energy and resources as better directed to the more urban areas where Dippers vote. Then again, maybe the Schreyer Gambit is in fact their strategem. In which case, there's no time to lose.

BILLS BEFORE THE HOUSE THIS WEEK

BILL (SPONSOR) & STATUS	PURPOSE	REACTION
Bill 4 – <i>An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act</i> (Ceci), 2nd reading debate adjourned	This omnibus money bill amends various acts to allow for budgetary tax increases on tobacco, fuel, personal and corporate income, and the tourism levy. Also, limits Crown debt to a maximum of 15% of GDP in a given fiscal year; repeals the portions of the previous gov't's <i>Fiscal Management Act</i> that stipulated an increasing amount of the net income of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund be retained by the fund. Once again the fund's profits will be channeled directly into general revenue.	The Wildrose refer to this legislation as the "Tax Hike, Debt, and More Taxes Act," and their criticism had been loud and prolonged. They and the other opposition members are critical of deficit spending on operations, doubt the 15% cap will be honoured, and fear that Alberta's credit rating will be downgraded and debt-servicing costs will become crippling.
Bill 6 – <i>Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act</i> (Sigurdson), passed 1st reading.	This sweeping farm safety legislation will require all farms to follow the same basic occupational health and safety regulations as other employers, and to buy Workers Compensation insurance coverage for their workers. Provincial safety inspectors will have the right to enter a farm site and impose penalties.	While delighting Liberal Leader David Swann , who's been pushing for such legislation for years, members of the Wildrose, several of whom are farmers, felt the legislation is being pushed through without proper consultation and without differentiation between large and small operations.
Bill 7 – <i>Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015</i> (Ganley), passed 1st reading	Adds "gender identity" & "gender expression" as prohibited grounds for discrimination. "No Albertan should be denied basic services for being true to themselves," said Justice Minister Kathleen Ganley at a presser announcing the legislation, backed by several activists from the "trans community" along with the homosexual activist MLAs Estefania Cortes-Vargas (Strathcona-Sherwood Park) & Michael Connolly (Calgary-Hawkwood).	Another piece of social engineering by the NDP that will no doubt bolster the cases of those activist parents of so-called transgendered children who want to use the school washrooms & change rooms assigned to the sex opposite to that into which they were born. It's doubtful, however, that any member opposing this initiative would dare say so.
Bill 203 – <i>Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act</i> (Strankman); passed 2nd reading, sent to Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee	Restricts the gov't from advertising or publishing any information about its programs or activities during an election period – as then Education Minister Gordon Dirks did in his riding during last fall's by-election – unless the information is required by law, concerns a matter of public health or safety, or is required to solicit proposals or tenders for contract or applications for employment.	Wildrose MLA Rick Strankman's (Drumheller-Stettler) private member's bill, was originally killed by the NDP, who apparently wanted this legislation to be their own, arising from the ethics committee. Realizing their error, however, they rescinded their vote and allowed the Roser's bill to pass second reading and be referred to the committee.
Bill 204 – <i>Residential Tenancies (Safer Space for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act</i> (Drever); passed 2nd reading.	Deb Drever , (Calgary-Bow) the NDP MLA who was banished to the independent benches for on-line indiscretions, is now shepherding a bill that will doubtless expedite her passage back into the fold. Similar to legislation in three other provinces, this act would allow women suffering physical abuse to break their leases on apartments and vacate the premise on 28 days notice.	Following the emotional and moving testimonial by Lethbridge East MLA Maria Fitzpatrick about her physical abuse (see Verbatim, p. 4) in support of this bill, no one could really say anything against it, although there are many details that will have to be debated in committee of the whole.

Details & progress of all bills currently before the House can be found at: <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bill§ion=doc&legl=29&session=1>

SHANNON V. SANDRA

FEMINIST CAT-FIGHT ENLIVENS A BUDGET ESTIMATE SESSION

The budget estimate sessions conducted by the various standing committees during the last few weeks were, for the most part, dull, predictable, and, ultimately, futile exercises. For three hours, in one of the windowless committee rooms in the expensively renovated Federal Building, members of the opposition parties attempted to pry details out of ministers and deputy ministers on what exactly this or that line item in the typically sketchy budget documents meant and why the amount was so much higher (or occasionally lower) than it was the previous year.

The ministers sometimes gave straight answers, sometimes deferred to their deputies, and sometimes obfuscated with a “we will get back to you on that” while the opposition—predominantly the Wildrose critic for the ministry under scrutiny, secondarily one from the PCs—persisted with pointed questions designed to demonstrate NDP profligacy or ineptitude.

But none of it much matters in the end, for the opposition has no power to force the NDP majorities on the committees—or its majority in the Legislative Assembly where the budget will ultimately be passed—to amend the estimates.

If these sessions are interesting at all, it is for the occasional glimpses they provide of the inner workings of the

bureaucratic machine (there are few other occasions, for example, when deputy ministers actually venture from the shadows); for the odd revelation about a gov’t program or process we’d never known existed; and for the character-revealing moments that sometimes erupt when a minister is in the “hot-seat” and being questioned by a particularly hostile committee member.

Hostility was certainly the salient feature at Tuesday’s meeting of the Families and Communities Committee which was reviewing the budget estimates for the newly created Status of Women ministry.

The minister in the hot seat was **Shannon Phillips**, 40, the member for Lethbridge-West, also the minister of Environment & Parks, and a former Alberta Federation of Labour official and one-time Environmental activist known on occasion to be a trifle snappish.

The Status of Women ministry formerly existed as two departments within of the vastness of the Human Services ministry: Women’s Equality & Advancement, and Women in Leadership. The Notley gov’t pulled them out, along with some staff, patched them together, appointed **Kim Armstrong** (formerly deputy Attorney General) as the DM, and *voilà*: Canada’s only dedicated provincial women’s ministry.

It’s a small ministry (budget: \$1.4M) but, according to Phillips, is tasked with crucial feminist work such as “gender based analysis” of gov’t departments, promoting female leadership in the private sector, and training senior bureaucrats to be better

Verbatim ...

*On Monday in the Legislature during second reading debate on Bill 204, Independent MLA **Deb Drever**’s bill enabling battered women to break their leases, Lethbridge East MLA **Maria Fitzpatrick**, 66, brought many in the House to tears with an account of the nine years of abuse she and her daughters endured in the 1970s in Cincinnati. This is what she said:*

“**T**hree times I left with my kids, twice I went to shelters, twice I was forced to return or live on the street. Both times I returned, the violence got worse, and the threats, which he could have carried out at any time, became more frequent and more intimidating. Broken bones, black eyes, sexual assault, and two miscarriages as a result of this abuse were only some of the physical atrocities I had to endure.

I did not have this kind of experience in my life before I was married, so I was not prepared for it, nor how I could protect my children and myself. I prayed. I asked God why this was happening to me. I’m a good person. I’ve never intentionally hurt anybody or anything in my life.

Someone said to me: God helps those who help themselves. I figured I needed to do something, and I did. I finally got away to a women’s shelter and tried to figure out what to do and where to go. Suffice to say, this attempt was unsuccessful, as the limit at the shelter was two weeks, and I had nowhere to go. At the end of the two weeks, I was forced to return.

The next time I left I was a little more prepared. I had contacted a lawyer before I left. I saved some money and then left again when I saw the chance to run. I met with the lawyer, but I couldn’t get a court date for a month. The time in the shelter was only three weeks. Again, I had to go back. There were no supports left after the shelter.

This time the abuse was so bad that I thought I would be killed, especially when I awoke from a very tentative sleep with a gun to the back of my head and the clicking sound of the hammer as the trigger was pulled. There were no bullets in the gun, and he laughed hysterically. He beat me. He raped me, and then he threatened that the next time there would be bullets, and he would kill our daughters first to hurt me and then kill me. I knew it would be just a matter of time before he followed through on these threats.

I called the police as soon as I could, and he was arrested and then released on his own recognizance, and a restraining order was put in place. I gathered whatever I could. I begged some friends and family for some money to get out of there, and I called the police 16 times in two weeks before he was arrested again; not so much for assaulting me, but because he broke the restraining order.

This time he was held in remand until the issue was settled in court. In court he was found guilty and sentenced to a year in jail, but this sentence was suspended, all but the days he’d spent in remand. He turned, and as he was leaving the courtroom, he said that he would kill me.

I asked the judge how he could let him go? The judge said to me: it’s a marital issue. Get a divorce and leave. He proceeded, then, to give me a lecture on how much it was going to cost to keep him in jail.

When I returned to my house, he was there, holding my children and my mother-in-law at the point of a gun. At the end of a four-hour ordeal, his mother rose and asked God to help us, and he ran from the house. We spent a few more days barricaded in the house before we finally had the opportunity to get out and get on that bus and run for our lives.

This should never have happened to me or these situations to anybody else. My children have been scarred for their lives, and I will be horrified if anybody in this Chamber votes against this bill. ”

feminists, which, according to Phillips, might include “public shaming where necessary with respect to pointing out some of the inequalities that we have at those upper levels.”

The committee session went relatively smoothly during questioning by Wildrose Status of Women critic **Angela Pitt**, 32, (Airdrie), who we suspect may have been carefully avoiding critical comment for fear of ruffling feminist feathers and igniting one of those lake-of-fire incidents.

However, soon after PC critic **Sandra Jansen**, 52, (Calgary-North West) began her interrogation, the claws came out and the fur began to fly.

Jansen, one might recall, is the proud feminist and champion of all things sexually variant whom Premier **Alison Redford** made associate minister of Family & Community Safety in 2013. As such, her responsibilities included working with those women’s departments in Human Services from which the SoW ministry had been cobbled.

Somewhere in her earlier testimony, Minister Phillips had criticized the previous gov’t as having done little to advance women’s issues—a remark to which Jansen took exception, before listing her various accomplishments in the field:

“We released the province’s first family violence framework and sexual violence framework. We began work on a women’s equality and advancement framework, and I was lucky enough to work with **Suzanne Lacroix** on that. We had begun that women’s equality and advancement framework. We had some great cards printed up...” (Lacroix is Phillips’ new director of women’s equality and advancement seconded from Human Services.)

Things progressively become more heated:

Phillips: That sexual violence framework was utterly distasteful, and honestly, you know, you talk to stakeholders and so on, and they go: Yeah, well, this was, we thought, the best that we could get. The fact of the matter is that it contained no gender analysis. It was drained of its women’s equality analysis. It did not take into consideration LGBT issues, trans issues, rape culture . . .

Jansen: Well, I’m talking now. So you’re actually talking about a framework that we put together with staff from your department, who are telling you that they did it under duress from me?

Phillips: Nobody is telling me anything.

...And a little bit later:

Jansen: Well, you know what? I mean, I can ask a question, and you can talk for the entire 10 minutes, and then I only get to ask one question. The point of estimates is I get to ask a question . . .

Phillips: Go ahead. If you’d like to brag more about the previous government’s record on women’s issues, I’m happy to have that conversation because it’s deplorable.

Jansen: You know, you’re using terms like “deplorable” and “disgusting,” and we’re actually in an environment here where, you know, I’m trying to ask questions. That kind of language is, first of all, unparliamentary and unhelpful to the situation.

And so it went on for several more minutes until Jansen’s allotted time was up and chairwoman **Heather Sweet** (Edmonton-Manning), with a sigh of relief, said, “I’m going to call a break because I think right now we all need to have one.”

POLITICAL PULSE ... from Page 1

around and do the right thing. Common sense would prevail.

“With the NDP we’re up against a gov’t to which economic reason and logic do not appeal. We can yell, we can scream, we can jump up and down. They just aren’t interested.

“In a situation like this the only thing we can do is defeat them in the next general election. And to do that we need to have all the help we can get. We can no longer afford to have any conservatives sitting on the sidelines.”

But, he cautioned, the party needs to be discerning and choose the “right kind of people” and avoid those scalawags “who view a united conservative movement not as the best way to get Alberta back on track, but as their personal one-way ticket back to power.”

In other words: stay clear of those “unprincipled opportunists” who nearly destroyed the party.

Jean said he “had taken steps” to “ensure Wildrose is in the driver’s seat in this exercise... ultimately Wildrose members, not the leader, not the MLAs, not somebody sitting in an ivory tower somewhere... It will be the members who decide our future, just as I believe it will be the members of Wildrose who decide Alberta’s future.”

By the end of the convention, however, it still wasn’t clear how this grassroot-vetting process would be accomplished.

Among the resolutions that came up for discussion on the Saturday morning were two that placed restrictions on floor-crossers. One stipulated that an MLA wishing to join another party’s caucus must sit for six months as an independent before being eligible. The other required an MLA to resign his party and win his new seat in a byelection.

Jean had earlier declared himself in favour of such restrictions. But a number of delegates spoke out against the measures, arguing that they were undemocratic, contrary to Westminster parliamentary tradition, and would have thwarted the floor-crossings from the Tories of early Wildrose recruits like **Heather Forsyth** and **Rob Anderson**. Both resolutions were defeated.

Jean was also somewhat discouraged by the results of the confidence vote that took place on the Friday night—Friday the 13th.

Under party rules, this vote need not have taken place until next year, but Jean, as a new leader, felt he needed a little affirmation.

When the results were tallied, he got a 78% show of support, 1% higher than Alison Redford received in the fall of 2013, and .6% higher than Ed Stelmach got in 2010. Both Redford and Stelmach went down year later.

The next day during a panel discussion, Jean said, “I’m not happy that 22% of you voted against me; but I’m happy that 22% had the chance to vote against me.

“And I’m happy that we did it here, because this is where we have to be arguing and debating and out there we have to be working together because the electors will see between now and three years and three months from now if we are stable, if we are mature, if we can offer them good policy with good quality of life provisions for the future they will elect us but if we bicker among ourselves in public they will not elect us.”

Talk in the Corridors

Dipper wit...

● On Thursday, Wildrose MLA **Todd Loewen**, 49, (Grande Prairie-Smoky), delivered an earnest maiden speech to the House. He spoke of his humble roots as the son of a Peace Country homesteader; the establishment of his own farm and outfitting company with just a high school education; the pride he felt for his wife, kids and grand kids; and, in some detail, the social and economic history of the communities in his area.

“Some of the smaller communities in the riding include Teepee Creek, Crooked Creek, DeBolt, Ridgevalley, Little Smoky, and Sunset House,” Loewen recounted. “Teepee Creek is best known for the Teepee Creek Stampede, which began in 1916 and now draws several thousand visitors each time, not bad for population of about 20 people. Crooked Creek is an unincorporated community that has a post office, a gas station, and a general store that many say has the best donuts in Alberta...”

When he had finished, NDP MLA and gov't whip **Marlin Schmidt**, 37, (Edmonton-Gold Bar), the former hydrogeologist known for mordant wit, couldn't resist.

“Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker,” said Schmidt, struggling to keep a straight face. “I listened with great interest to what the member for Grande Prairie-Smoky had to say. Not just today but through all of our time here in the Legislature I know that he and his party have really focused on waste, which is really why I found it so surprising that his maiden speech failed to mention that the Valleyview Shell station was nominated for having Canada's best washroom in 2013. I would just like to give the member the opportunity to correct that omission in his maiden speech. Thank you.”

If he suspected Schmidt of taking the piss, Loewen did not let on, but, in the same earnest tone as before, answered:

“Thank you to the member for the question. Yes. We have several businesses in our community that are world class and, of course, being known as having the best bathroom in Canada is definitely a source of pride for our community. Of course, there are other things, too, that we have in our community that are world class. And, again, I'm proud to represent the members of my constituency. Thank you very much.”

Tory fun...

● That same afternoon in the Legislature, during debate in on the budget, PC Interim Leader **Ric McIver** was riffing on the by-now familiar point that the NDP gov't was not actually creating jobs but killing them with its new taxes and the threat of royalty rate increases and a carbon tax, etc., when he noticed **Deron Bilous**, minister of the newly recreated Economic Development & Trade, sitting opposite.

“Mr. Speaker, I'm going to give the government credit,” he said. “So far they have created one job, and the owner of that job is sitting in the minister's chair across from me. Congratulations. You are the only thing the government can actually point to for job-creation, so congratulations. You're as good as it gets.”

The week ahead ...

Nov. 23—The *Magna Carta*, will make the final stop on its 800th-anniversary Canadian tour at the new Borealis Gallery in the Federal Building. This is not the original 1215 document which defined the medieval relationship between **King John (Lackland)** and his rebellious barons, but one of seven copies of the Great Charter reissued in 1300 by **King Edward 1 (Hammer of the Scots)** who made it part of England's statute law. The parchment encased in glass and accompanied by interactive multi-media stuff, will be on display until Dec. 15. For more info go to: <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/visitorcentre/borealis/magnacarta.html>

Nov. 26—After several years of trying to lure crowds to outside venues—with little luck—the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund will hold its annual public meeting on the fund in the Grasslands Legislature committee room in the Federal Building. The fund, which stands at \$17.9B, netted a respectable 12.5% return in 2014-15, earning \$1.6B, but has since faltered. The Q1 rate of return was 0.2%. The public meeting is your opportunity to ask **Kevin Uebelein**, the new CEO of the Alberta Investment Management Corp. (AIMCo), “What's up with that?” Festivities begin at 7 p.m.

Nov. 26—“An Evening with **Rachel Notley**” is the NDP fundraiser & equivalent of the Tory “Leader's Dinners” or yore. The \$250-a-head do features hors d'oeuvres & cocktails, and is now billed as a chance to “Join **Rachel Notley** and her team for the evening to discuss issues that are important to you.” The wording had originally been, “Join Premier **Rachel Notley**, cabinet, and MLAs for the evening to discuss issues facing the province that are important to you.” But this fell afoul of ethics regulations that frown on access to gov't being offered for money, eliciting an apology in the House from Health Minister **Sarah Hoffman** after being called out by the Wildrose. The event starts at 6 p.m. at the Agrium Western Event Centre, Stampede Park.

Nov. 26—In what will be a busy night of fundraising shindigs in Cowtown, the Wildrose Leader is also holding a \$150-a-seat “Conversation with **Brian Jean**” drinks-and-canapés event at the Telus Convention Centre, 6 p.m.

And Alberta Party leader **Greg Clark** will charge \$150 for “A Conversation about Alberta's Future” over dinner with a political panel that includes on-line pundit **Kathleen “KikiPlanet” Smith** & former Wildrose-leader-turned-Tory-turned-radio-host **Danielle Smith**. 5:30 p.m. at the Hotel Beaux Arts, 129 12 Ave. SW.

Nov. 23-28—Agriculture & Forestry Minister **Oneil Carlier** makes a trade mission to Japan. He and industry delegates will meet with Japanese gov't officials and forest and ag. industry folks starting in Tokyo, and finishing in Sapporo, capital of the northern prefecture of Hokkaido, celebrating its 35th anniversary as Alberta's sister province. Alberta's exports to this our third-biggest trade market (70% agri/food, 17% forest products) have been stagnant in recent years, and shrank by 8.4% to \$1.7B in 2014. Cost of the trip for Carlier and two staffers: \$36K.

(An Ag ministry spokesman says they'll be flying economy, which a quick check with Expedia tells us would cost \$1,900 apiece for the two return flights—Edmonton-Tokyo and Tokyo-Sapporo—totalling \$5,700, leaving our three travellers with \$30K for ground transport, hotels, food, a reception, & entertainment for the five days.)