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Insight

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PIPELINE POLITICS

RACHEL AND BERNARD: A TALE OF TWO STUNTS

A roughneck's photo-op and Notley's Lougheed impression were both met with some derision, albeit from different camps. For on the surface, both stunts seem incapable of moving Ottawa to approve pipelines. Unless...

Two stunts, two weeks apart, and both in support of oil pipelines to the sea, brought similar reactions, albeit from different sides of the political divide: to sum them up: *who are you trying to kid!*

Stunt one came more than a week before **Justin Trudeau's** unveiling this Monday of a nation-wide carbon tax, but in a way it heralded the pronouncement. We speak of the well-publicized appearance by **Neil Bernard Hancock**, aka "Bernard the Roughneck," a tall, photogenic 32-year-old from Surrey, BC, who works rigs near Grande Prairie. In a photo op that drew a gratifying number of lenses, Hancock appeared on Parliament Hill alongside Alberta Conservative MP **Sharon Stubbs** (Lakeland) and several pipeline advocates, including a rep from the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors (CAODC), which paid for his trip.

His face artfully smeared with oil and wearing authentically-stained blue coveralls and a red hardhat from under which frizzy black hair spilled, Hancock spoke in support of Stubbs' petition that called on the Trudeau gov't to "vocally defend the oil and gas industry and the use of pipelines, and to make the building of oil, gas, and diluted bitumen pipelines across Canada, to tidewater, and into the United States, a national priority."

Describing himself as "just an average roughneck," Hancock spoke with an eloquence one normally does not expect from rig pigs, as he complained of the Trudeau gov't's reliance on a limited and elitist sources in devising energy policy.

"The only people who have a say in these issues are not the working class, the average Canadian," he said. "It's the special interest groups, it's the university professors, it's the people who don't have a dog in this race that are influencing this public policy."

MP Stubbs, once executive assistant to former Wildrose lead-

Continued on next page...

POLITICAL PULSE

THE FLACKERY

A POLITICAL ANIMAL TAKES CHARGE OF THE THE PAB

Chief gov't flack **Mark Wells**, lured from his job as communications chief at the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees barely a year ago, is being replaced.

The new Managing Director of the Public Affairs Bureau, announced in a terse press release by the Premier's Office this week, is Calgary political consultant **Corey Hogan**, 34, (left), a former executive with the Alberta Liberal Party, who most recently was teamed with noted campaign manager **Stephen Carter** on the cheeky political podcast, *The Strategists* (see "Verbatim," p.5).



Carter, a swearsy red Tory who famously ran the winning campaigns for Calgary Mayor **Naheed Nenshi** and former Premier **Alison Redford**, and recently offered himself up to probable PC Leadership candidate **Sandra Jansen**, tended to take the Conservative position in the blog. Hogan, who attended the NDP convention as a member in June, was more of an apologist for the Dippers. He recently penned and posted a long article on the righteousness of a \$15 minimum wage, which no doubt earned him points with the Rachelites. In March of 2015, Hogan, then with Hill + Knowlton, had been one of the few pundits predicting an NDP sweep and a Tory rout.

Policy and big ideas seem to be his forte, however, and according to sources in the Liberal party, he likes to be seen as the brightest guy in the room, tending to forge ahead with his latest scheme with or without the imprimatur of the members.

One of these ideas was to allow anyone, member or not, to vote in the 2011 leadership race which elected the erratic ex-Tory **Dr. Raj Sherman**. Sherman divided the party and led it to near total annihilation in the 2015 election. (Current interim Leader **David Swann** [Calgary-Mountainview] was the only survivor.)

In 2012 when Hogan was executive director of the then five-seat Liberals, he and MLA **Kent Hehr** tried to foment a unite-the-left moment. Hogan drafted a proposed merger agreement that would have seen a new party—the Alberta Democratic Party—created from Liberals, Dippers, Greens, and Alberta Party members, and attempted to sell it to the parties.

The powers that reigned in the Liberal Party and NDP, however, rejected the idea and shortly thereafter Hogan abandoned the party.

Along with Carter and fellow Hill + Knowlton consultant **Zain Velji** (more recently the third member of *The Strategists* podcast), Horgan worked on the campaign for **Greg Clark's** Alberta Party during the four byelections in the fall of 2014.

At the time, the Alberta Party seemed to hold

Turn to Political Pulse on pg. 6.

er **Danielle Smith**, and wife of former Wildrose MLA **Shayne Saskiw** (currently supporting **Jason Kenney**'s PC leadership bid), had been positioning herself as an oilpatch champion for some months. But her photo-op boy seemed a little, well, *off*.

Why was Hancock grubbed up to look like he'd just stepped off a rig when he was a plane flight and a comfy hotel room removed from the job site?

And how "average" was this roughneck? Turns out he has a degree in history, communications, and poli-sci from Bishop's University in Québec, and had dabbled as an actor in amateur productions. Worse still, he had earlier debuted on right winger **Ezra Levant**'s Rebel Media website, an outlet much vilified by Canada's liberal cognoscenti.

Following the photo-op, the Twittersphere crackled with detractions from environmentalists and other leftist factions and Bernard's authenticity became a hot topic of debate on the AM radio talk shows. He was nothing more than a bogus strawman, said the detractors—an *actor* for God's sake. And as for his association with *The Rebel*—well, *need one say any more?*

Bernard, who later gave lengthy interviews to a number of outlets, made no apologies for his education. He had worked on the rigs on and off for ten years to put himself through school, and was back on them to further his studies. The patch was a good place to make good money and he knew lots of well-educated workers. (For those interested, we recommend you check out this recent video interview conducted outside the Alberta Legislature.)

The second stunt came on Monday and was performed by a seemingly sounder personage: namely NDP Alberta Premier Rachel Notley.

As mentioned, Monday was the day that **Justin Trudeau** stood up in the House of Commons and announced Canada's plan to impose a national carbon tax to meet the greenhouse gas emission targets signed onto at the Paris last fall.

The tax was surprisingly modest. The regulation levies a \$10/tonne across-the-board tax on carbon "pollution" (the word now favoured by the climate change faithful) beginning in 2018, and rising by \$10 a year until it topped out at \$50 in 2022.

It will be "revenue neutral to the federal government" meaning provinces will be rebated any carbon taxes collected by the feds. (At least that's what we think it means; the fine details are yet to be released.)

Moreover, provinces with carbon taxes or cap-and-trade regulations already in place—BC, Alberta, Ontario, and Québec—would not have to pay extra until such time as their rates fell below the federal one.

The utterance of the word "tax," of course send the usual suspects into paroxysms of outrage. During the three days of debate in the House on the motion to support the tax (a courtesy, since legislation is not required to impose the regulation), the Conservatives worked themselves into a lather over the extra cost to taxpayers in these straitened times. (An oddly effective, off-the-cuff oratory was delivered by St. Albert-Edmonton MP **Michael Cooper**, the young Ichabod Crane look-alike whose goal since pre-puberty has been to become an MP. You can catch him in the parliamentary video archive from Oct. 4 at the 16:51 mark.)

The NDP, meanwhile, said the Liberal's carbon reduction targets were no different from those proposed by the

Harper gov't and would be insufficient in meeting the Paris targets of keeping global warming to within two degrees above pre-industrial levels.

Saskatchewan Premier **Brad Wall**—still the country's most popular according to an Angus Reid poll released Sept. 22 that gave him a 57% approval rating—set his hair on fire. Saskatchewan has resisted imposing any sort of carbon tax and cites its various carbon sequestration and enhanced oil recovery projects as proof of its commitment to GHG reduction.

Unhappy, the Trudeau announcement had come whilst the provinces Environment ministers were meeting in Montreal with federal environment minister **Catherine McKenna** to devise a collaborative carbon plan (and, like, when have the provinces ever collaborated on anything meaningful). Wall harrumphed: "The level of disrespect shown by the prime minister and his gov't today is stunning. This is a betrayal..." Etc.

The Saskatchewan environment minister stormed out of the Montreal talks in protest, as did the ministers from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Alberta's own **Shannon ("Stompsky") Phillips** stayed put, having some sharp words to say afterwards. But not until after Notley had done her thing.

Alberta, you may know, is in the throes of Rachel's Climate Leadership Plan (CLIP), which makes Trudeau's project look anemic by comparison. Alberta's carbon tax, which is not revenue neutral—although 40% of the proceeds will be refunded to the lowest-earning 60%—will kick in at \$20 on Jan. 1, then rise to \$30 the following year, with inflationary increases as required.

There has been much blowback from businesses big and small, consumer groups, chambers of commerce, municipalities, and ordinary citizens fearful of what the increased fuel levies will cost them directly (gas, home heating) and indirectly (higher prices for transported goods, increased taxes from municipalities and for schools passing on their increased fuel costs).

Even without any possible inflationary increases, the Rachel tax will not be eclipsed by the Trudeau tax until 2020. Which means Albertans will be paying more in Rachel tax for the next three years than they would have been paying the feds if Alberta had no tax.

So what does a beleaguered Alberta premier with a 31% approval rating do? Postpone the carbon tax? Decelerate the closure of coal generation plants? Organize a photo-op with a transgendered single mom providing a heartfelt testimonial on how great it will be when the rebate cheque arrives and the reconstructive surgery can be completed?

No, Rachel's stunt is to imitate **Peter Lougheed** and attack Ottawa. *Huh?* you might ask, and you'd be right in asking it.

Following Trudeau's announcement in the House on Monday, Rachel fired off a press release saying that although her gov't supported a common carbon price for all provinces, there was still this problem:

"With regard to the federal gov't's proposals today, Alberta will not be supporting this proposal absent serious concurrent progress on energy infrastructure, to ensure we have the economic means to fund these policies. It is time for the Gov't of Canada to act on this issue. Albertans have contributed very generously for many years to national initiatives designed to help other regions address economic chal-

lenges. What we are asking for now is that our landlock be broken, in one direction or another, so that we can get back on our feet.”

In short: approve the Kinder Morgan or the Energy pipeline, and do so expeditiously, or Alberta will not sign on to your national carbon plan.

On the surface this ultimatum appears absurd. When Lougheed faced off against the Trudeau gov't over the National Energy Program in 1980-81, he had ammunition in his gun. For example when Ottawa attempted to impose the Petroleum Gas Revenue Tax (PGRT), which put a tariff on natural gas being exported from Alberta to the US, Lougheed announced he would be turning down the taps on the gas flowing from Alberta to Ontario - which he proceeded to do, incrementally, until the PGRT was eventually lifted.

Rachel is threatening to refuse to sign on to a federal carbon levy that will not even be imposed on Alberta for at least three years - if then. Meanwhile she will be imposing taxes on Alberta energy producers more onerous, at least for three years, than those announced by Trudeau.

What kind of leverage does she suppose she is applying to Ottawa? Or is this just play-acting: an attempt to cast herself as a Lougheedian defender of Alberta and it's oil interests in the hope of improving those public approval figures? A

ridiculous stunt, in other words, and one less likely to bear fruit than even Bernard's. (At least he and Stubb's will have produced a petition with several thousand names.)

But something tells us there's more to Rachel's play than a half-assed bid to improve her numbers.

A well-worn adage among lawyers and politicians alike is: never ask a question unless you know the answer. Notley is a lawyer and politician. And the question she's asking the Trudeau gov't is: are you willing to push through one of those pipelines?

Is it possible that she already knows Trudeau and his cabinet will approve Kinder Morgan's TransMountain expansion, which already has National Energy Board approval, by the end of the year?

As mentioned in last week's *Insight*, the buzz in Calgary is that, during his recent trip to China, Trudeau was told in no uncertain terms by the leadership to get that pipeline built so that the Chinese companies with ownership in Nexen and other oilsands projects can bring their oil home.

If this is true and Trudeau approves TransMountain by Christmas, it will appear to the unwashed that Rachel's Lougheed act worked.

Which would, by the way, do wonders for her public approval ratings.

DATA Bank ...

THE LATEST BAD

Despite this week's uptick in the price of WTI oil to just above US\$50, most economists are predicting no improvement in the Alberta economy until at least halfway through 2017. The Conference Board of Canada this week predicted that the oil industry's losing streak will last nearly three years—a first—from the last quarter of 2014 through to the second quarter of 2017. The following are most recent economic numbers from StatsCan & the Alberta gov't.

CATEGORY	2016	2015	Chg.	CATEGORY	2016	2015	Chg.
Population (July 1)	4.253M	4.180M	1.8%	Value of homes sold (Jan-Aug)	\$14.57B	\$16.29B	-10.6%
Net migrants to Alberta (Q2)	10,302	9,693	6.3%	Unemployment rate (Aug)	8.4%	6.1%	2.3%
Interprovincial migrants (Q2)	-2,165	5,650	-138%	No. of Albertans receiving EI (July)	99,320	53,250	86.5%
International migrants (Q2)	12,467	4,043	208.4%	Bus. incorporations (Jan -Aug.)	26,313	27,176	-3.2%
Consumer price index*, all items (Aug.)	135.9%	135.0%	0.7%	Bus. bankruptcies (Jan-Jul)	57	59	3.4%
CPI, energy (Aug)	143.5%	160.8%	-10.8%	Merchandise exports (Jan-Jul)	\$5.99B	\$7.91B	-24%
CPI, alcohol & tobacco (Aug)	161.0%	152.9%	5.3%	Manufacturing sales (Jan-Jul)	\$35.49B	\$40.79B	-13%
Av. WTI oil price (Jan-Aug, \$USbbl)	\$40.84	\$51.70	-21%	Retail trade (Jan-Jul)	\$42.91B	\$43.77B	-2%
Av. WCS oil price per bbl (July; \$US)	\$27.28	\$39.22	-30.4%	New motor vehicles sold (Jan-Jul)	131,360	143,185	-8.3%
Oil production (Jan-Jul) cu. metres	92.64M	97.19M	-4.7%	Farm cash receipts (Q1)	\$3.74B	\$3.58B	4.3%
Natural gas av. reference price, \$Cdn/GJ (Jan-Jul)	\$1.48	\$2.46	-39.8%	Av. wheat price \$/hundred-weight (non-Durum, Jan-Jun)	\$237.04	\$218.85	8.3%
Natural gas production (Jan-Jul) cu. m	73.76B	73.76B	0%	Grain deliveries, tonnes (Jan-Aug)	10.1M	10.8	-7%
Wells drilled (Jan-Jun)	1,610	980	-39.1%	Av. cattle price \$/hundredweight (Jan-Jul)	\$184	\$150.55	-18.2%
Bldg. permit value (Jan-Jul)	\$7.55B	\$9.82B	-23.1%	Lumber production (cu. m Jan-Jun)	4.74M	4.70M	0.8%
Housing starts, 7 largest cities (Jan-Aug)	14,243	24,069	-40.8%	*The CPI figure relates to the price of various items as a percentage of what they cost in 2002.			

en passant...

We're hoping our pet schnauzer might have a chance of being appointed to one of the 200+ Agencies, Boards, and Commissions (ABCs), now that the gov't has opened up membership to all Albertans in the name of—stand please—Diversity. Last month, as part of the gov't's ongoing mission to streamline and trim back the ABCs, Finance Minister **Joe Ceci**, photo-backdropped by an uncomfortable-looking grouping of the actual diverse—a black woman, an Indian chief, an old brown oncologist, more women—announced that appointments to the ABCs would no longer be the exclusive privilege of political cronies (read: scotch-slurping Tory trough hounds), but that anyone could now apply through the website (boards.alberta.ca). This week Joe launched a \$1M “Your Province, Your Voice” advertising campaign to get the word out. We'd like to see Bernard the Roughneck (see p.1) elevated to, dunno, the college of Alberta rig pigs? but suspect he'd have as much chance our *Schnauzlepuppa* (it's her pet name). For this initiative, draped in progressive bunting, looks like yet another NDP “meet-the-new-boss-same-as-the-old boss” moment. For the ABC gatekeepers remain the ministers in the departments responsible for agencies. And those ministers will continue to make political and nepotistic choices. And so the recent appointments—as those watching our “People” page may have gleaned—have included a disproportionate number of middle-aged, white females with backgrounds in labour or family law, the unions, and the soft sciences.

Two weeks ago more than 50 North American Indian groups most with ties to environmental organizations, signed treaties in Montreal and Vancouver opposing all new oilsands development and pipelines. This week the Indian Resource Council (IRC), which represents 189 Indian bands across Canada that benefit from mining and energy extraction, fired back. Chief **Jim Boucher** of the Fort McKay First Nation, a band that derives 96% of its operating revenue from its oilsands servicing (earth moving, trucking, etc), gave a speech Monday to the Pipeline Gridlock Conference in Calgary calling the environmentally aligned groups “naive.” Boucher, whose band's enterprises makes him one of the highest paid chiefs in the country (2013-14 compensation: \$765K), said “I was disappointed by the announcement. I felt it was not informed with respect to the people that are affected.” The IRC member bands are concentrated in the three prairie provinces (64 in SK, 40 in AB, and 32 in MB), but scarce in the provinces where opposition to the pipelines is greatest (7 in BC, 17 in ON, & 5 in QU), so the group's support for pipelines is unlikely to help approval of the Kinder Morgan or Energy East projects. **Perry Bellegarde**, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations also spoke at Monday's event, trying to sound conciliatory: “It's not about shutting off a pipeline or shutting down the oil and gas industry, because we all travel by vehicles, we all travel by planes. But there has to be a sustained approach.” Later in the week, Bellegarde, speaking at an industry conference in Ottawa, warned of an upsurge in protests and direct action if gov'ts approve pipelines without the consent of indigenous groups.

Restaurants Canada's vice-president of the Western Canada region, **Mark von Schellwitz**, said Thursday that the Oct. 1 increase to Alberta's minimum wage from \$11.20 to \$12.20, will result in 78% of restaurateurs having to cut hours and nearly half having to lay off staff. “In the first nine months since the last minimum wage increase [Oct. 2015],” he said, “we were down several thousand employees already. That doesn't count how many people are getting reduced hours. Their take-home pay is actually less with the minimum-wage increases.”

POLITICAL PULSE ... from Page 1

great promise for the centre-left, and Mayor Nenshi, who had also lent it several other of his campaign workers, was said to be eyeing it as a possible vehicle for his long-term goal to become premier.

But despite the application of the technological wizardry in which both Hogan and Carter pride themselves as being adept—demon dialers, social media inundation, etc.—the AP won none of the byelections. By the time Clark won his single seat (Calgary-Elbow) in the 2015 general election, Nenshi, et al, had lost hope in the party's promise. And Hogan hitched his star to the newly ascendant NDP.

Whether his penchant for big policy ideas and their swift application can be accommodated in the Public Affairs Bureau shop is questionable. Ostensively the PAB is a non-political branch of gov't that provides unvarnished information to the media and the general public on gov't programs and policy devised from above.

Under Premier **Jim Prentice**, the department was cut back from 200 staff to 40 and decentralized. Hitherto the PAB staff—directors of communications and communications officers—had reported to the head of the bureau, who in those days was called “deputy director.”

Under Prentice's revamped model, the PAB staff in each ministry now reported to the deputy minister of that ministry. This silo-ization was designed to enhance loyalty, expertise, and longevity among the communications staff. It also resulted in a diminishment of the PAB director's role, which would now involve only the co-ordination ministry-wide messaging and group initiatives.

Consequently **Martin Kennedy**, who had been hired less than a year before for the more responsible, pre-silo PAB directorship, scooted back to Capital Power whence he came.

Why **Mark Wells** lasted only a year in the \$250K-p.a. job might be related to frustration at these limitations. Wells is a smart and ambitious guy, who oversaw a staff of 12 at AUPE and was its chief spokesman. During his four years there, he also managed to earn a law degree as a part-time student.

The married father of two young children claims his reason for leaving the PAB is to article as a lawyer. Perhaps he sees more of a future in that career than one with a gov't that may not last beyond one term. Perhaps he chafed in the top-down NDP shop whose direction is very much controlled by the Premier's Office—particularly by Chief of Staff **Brian Topp**.

NDP communications has had its deficiencies, notably in its ham-fisted handling of last winter's farm safety legislation (Bill 6) and the roll out of various aspects of its climate policy such as the carbon tax and the retirement of coal powered electrical plants. But given the limitations of the PAB director's role, it is unlikely these problems can be blamed on Wells.

One wonders what might change under Hogan. He has been mum on whether the department will expand in size or whether the director's powers will expand in scope.

His facility with on-line communication, social media, arresting graphic presentation etc.—he cofounded a Calgary digital communications company ten months ago—will no doubt be brought to bear.

But Morgan is nothing if not a political animal, having worked on strategy and campaigns for the past 15 years. And he has those big policy ideas.

Why would such a man sign on to a job knowing he will be little more than Brian Topp's bitch?

Perhaps he's signed on to transform the bureau. Or maybe it's just that it pays rather well.

People ...

Appointments...

● **Brenda Ballachey**, a Calgary Wildlife biologist, **Meg Barker**, a manager of compliance assurance with Devon Canada Corp. in Calgary, **Susan McRory**, an Edmonton lawyer, **Anjum Mullick**, an Edmonton Environmental Engineer, and **Chris Powter**, an Edmonton environmental consultant, to the Environmental Appeals Board, each for a six-month term.

● **Alex G. MacWilliam**, a Calgary environmental lawyer, is reappointed as a member and as chairman of the Environmental Appeals Board, again for just a six-month term.

Latest lobby action...

● **Daniel Brock** of Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP is lobbying the ministries of Energy, Environment & Parks, Economic Development & Trade, and the Premier's Office in the promotion of the Amisk Hydroelectric Project, a 330 MW run-of-the-river generator proposed by a Vancouver consortium for the Peace River near Dunvegan that would provide enough electricity to supply 250K homes and displace 1.2M tonnes a year of CO₂. (Run-of-the-river means faster flow-through and thus less retention of water, meaning a smaller head pond than conventional dams, in the Amisk case an inundation of about 800 hectares of land.)

● **Jamey Heath** of KTG Public Affairs is lobbying the Energy and Parks & Environment ministries on behalf of

Brightmark Energy, a San Francisco clean energy consulting company, regarding the activities of facilities included in the Specified Gas Emitters Regulation and their compliance with the objectives of Alberta's climate leadership plan.

● **Hugh McFadyen** of DFH Public Affairs is now lobbying the ministries of Energy, Environment & Parks, Executive Council, and Indigenous Relations on behalf of Teck Resources of Vancouver in regards to the issuance of an environmental licence for the company's proposed 260,000-bbl/day Frontier open pit oilsands mine 110 km north of Fort McMurray. The application was first submitted in Nov. 2011 and is moving through a provincial-federal regulatory review that is expected to continue into 2017.

● **Nathan Mison** of Mison Consulting is lobbying the ministries of Health, Justice, and Economic Development & Trade on behalf of the Green Room Society of Edmonton, an organization advocating the medical use of marijuana, and promoting the economic benefits of reducing the use of other pharmaceuticals and creating a new industry.

● Mison will also be lobbying Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services on behalf of DynaLIFE Holdings (a branch of Dynacare Laboratories LP in Burlington, NC) whose contract to supply medical laboratory services to AHS in Edmonton and northern Alberta has been extended whilst the NDP gov't prepares a plan to replace privately-provided services with a public system. "DynaLife," argues Mison on his lobbyist registration form, "plays a unique role in the ability to foster economic diversification within the Alberta Health system."

Verbatim ...

THE SOFT LAUNCH

From the Sept. 27 episode of The Strategists, a podcast hosted by Zain Velji, a political consultant with Hill & Knowlton, and featuring Calgary political consultants Stephen Carter, best known as campaign manager for Mayor Naheed Nenshi and former Premier Alison Redford; and Corey Hogan, who has worked for several political parties and this week was hired by the Alberta Gov't as the Managing Director of the Public Affairs Bureau (see p. 1).

“**ZAIN VELJI:** In last week's episode... we were talking about the launch of **Donna Kennedy-Glans** and Stephen and I were going in what I call full-disclosure mode, I was saying I knew Donna quite well and she was launching her campaign to become new PC leader. We then had a much broader discussion on if there was anything like a soft launch in politics: could you say you're launching, then three weeks later have a room filled with people, and parading your name, and really actually officially launching. Steven said, 'Fuck no, that's not a thing. That does not exist...'”

STEPHEN CARTER: That's not... that's a false equivalency. That's a false equivalency...

ZV: ...Stephen's like, 'No, that's not a thing, stop being an idiot. By the way I'm working for **Sandra Jansen**.' We're like, 'That's great.' The only problem there is that Sandra Jansen has not launched a campaign—until when you said that.”

SC: She still hasn't launched a campaign.

ZV: Okay, okay...

SC: I'm not Sandra Jansen...

ZV: Lay it on us: how do you defend last week, Carter? Or do you defend last week?

SC: I'm not defending anything. I totally reject your premise and I move forward. I'm trying to get Sandra Jansen into the

race. I think there are hundreds of people trying to get Sandra Jansen into this race. She's not in the race; it's a different thing!

ZV: There are dozens of people who believe that bullshit. The rest of us, though, in adult land, feel like maybe you launched a campaign last week. But that's okay because I like to keep the scales balanced so I'm gonna launch another PC leadership campaign today...

SC: Attaboy. Who ya liking? Are your gonna try and bring back **Doug Schweitzer**? Cuz that was good.

ZV: No, I'm gonna launch **Harman Kandola** who is a lawyer up in Edmonton who is gong to be running, has apparently a sizeable delegate base up there, young guy, plenty of international experience, a compelling story. Check him out; join his campaign which I've decided to launch on *The Strategists*. This is what we do now. Every week *The Strategists* will launch a PC leadership campaign.

SC: I've met Harman Kandola; I like Harman Kandola. But he's no Sandra Jansen. (laughter)...

ZV: In seriousness, though, Corey. And I wanna have a serious conversation on this. Whether it's this situation—which is kind of fun to make light of cuz Carter's right fucking here—or it's another situation. How do you kind of recover from something like this? And do you even try?...

COREY HOGAN: I'll say there's not really a need to recover. There's not a need for Donna Kennedy-Glans to recover frankly. It's just something that happens; it's embarrassing. But frankly it was embarrassing for the first person. By the time the second person soft-launches like that too it's just a thing. Apparently it's the new seasonal colour. It's like cerulean. We're all soft-launching badly. I mean **Chris Alexander**, for the [federal] Conservatives yesterday, essentially soft-launched his campaign by saying, 'It's a really bad field, so I'm gonna file my papers and run.' This is essentially the season of the bad launch. ”

Talk in the Corridors

Sheathing the knives...

● As the political chess match that is the PC leadership contest plays out and candidate **Jason Kenney** continues on his favoured path to win the race, dissolve the party, and create a new one with the non-progressive conservatives from the Tories and the Wildrose, the Rosers are sitting back and watching, their internecine squabbles temporarily on hold. As one of their southern Alberta MLAs—let's call him Zeke—put it: “The knives are sheathed. For now.”

Avid readers will remember that the fault line in the party opened up in June after leader **Brian Jean** (Fort McMurray-Conklin) and his henchthingie **Vitor Marciano** suspended their tendentious finance critter **Derek Fildebrandt** (Strathmore-Brooks). Derek had inadvertently sent off a favourable reply to a Facebook message from a constituent that twitted Ontario Premier **Kathleen Wynne** for her saphist proclivities. (*Insight*, June 3).

Jean and Marciano, in Vancouver for the federal Conservative AGM, hastily called teleconference that weekend, and the MLAs supported the suspension. But in the official vote on the Monday, after receiving an earful from pissed-off constituents supportive of Fildebrandt, the MLAs overturned the suspension. Jean, embarrassed, restored Derek with full privileges.

Prior to that and since, says Zeke, there had developed around Jean an “inner circle” consisting of Jean, Marciano, and MLAs **Jason Nixon** (Rimberly-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre), the party whip, and house leader **Nathan Cooper** (Olds-Didsbury-Two Hills). A brain trust, if you will.

The other 19 MLAs, feeling neglected, harboured varying degrees of resentment: mixed feelings towards Jean, but a fairly uniform antipathy towards Marciano. Vitor is the skilled and rather Machiavellian Portuguese-born policy adviser and political operative whose control of the party and influence on its leader date back to the days of **Danielle Smith**. Good at what he does, and having done it for a quarter century, Vitor views most MLAs as amateurs needing a strong paternal hand. They chafe.

“The only reason he’s still there,” says Zeke, “is because he’s protected by Brian.”

Competing for hearts and minds...

● **Brian Jean** is harder to hate. After all he came in as leader five weeks before the last election and led what many had thought a moribund party to its greatest number of seats. And his personal approval ratings, which jumped during his involvement in the Fort McMurray fire recovery efforts, have remained high—between 50% and 60%, according to some recent private polling. **Rachel Notley**, according to an Angus Reid poll two weeks ago, has dropped to 31%.

But the MLAs outside the circle, who look to Fildebrandt and second-place 2015 leadership candidate **Drew Barnes** (Cypress-Medicine Hat) as possible successors, aren't convinced that Brian's approval figures will last. “He's struggling with his persona,” says a central Alberta MLA we'll call Jed, citing Jean's jape at last month's caucus meeting in Fort McMurray where he punned about wanting to beat Notley except that it was against the law.

His audience laughed, but the media, a collective Torquemada for our delicate age, pounced. Jean went into a protracted cycle of apologies that seemed only to exacerbate the effect of the original crime.

That performance revealed yet again the shortcomings that Jean has displayed ever since his robotic performance

in the TV debate with Notley and **Jim Prentice** during the 2015 election: he can't think on his feet, and has difficulty articulating a coherent message or vision for the party. In the debate, his repeated phrase, “No new taxes,” marked the height of his eloquence. He's improved somewhat, but not a lot.

Kenney, on the other hand, is a polished off-the-cuff speechifier who can hold an audience for an hour, and has little trouble handling the most hostile questioners. The skill gap between the two goes a long way to explaining why Kenney became a star cabinet minister in the Harper gov't while Jean only made it to parliamentary secretary during his ten years in Ottawa.

And it is Kenney, not Notley, who presents the most immediate challenge to Jean. If Jason wins the PC leadership in March and dissolves the party, his next task will be to convince Wildrosers to vote their party out of existence and join the new united right party. The Wildrose constitution requires support from 75% of the membership to effect dissolution. Our discussions with a handful of MLAs suggests that about 50% of constituents are open to the idea.

Kenney has been touring the province since July, drumming up delegate support for the leadership, and at the same time selling his plan to Wildrosers who can help him in two ways: by buying PC memberships and voting for Kenney-friendly delegates, and, later, by voting for the dissolution of the Wildrose party.

Jean, who recently returned from an Australian honeymoon with his pretty new wife **Kim Michelutti**, is also on a tour, visiting Wildrose constituency meetings and shoring up support. If he gets sufficient Rosers on side, one presumes, he can proceed with his preferred unite-the-right plan: retaining the Wildrose as the dominant conservative party and bringing non-progressive PCers into his fold.

If Kenney proves more convincing and lines up the necessary 75% of Wildrosers to effect dissolution—and also assuming he can convince the PC membership to do the same—then Jean will have to weigh his options. Will he run against Kenney—and whoever else might step up—for the leadership of the new coalition party? Or will he step down and, as some have speculated, run for the mayoralty of Fort McMurray? (Long-serving Mayor **Melissa Blake** assures us she will not be running in 2017)

Only one thing is certain: Alberta politics won't be getting boring any time soon.

The week ahead ...

Oct. 11 & 12—Municipal Affairs and the City of Calgary host information sessions on the Big City Charters, which are to be developed alongside changes to the Municipal Government Act (MGA), and are designed to give the two largest cities more local decision-making powers and develop a “new-fiscal framework” which could include additional municipal taxing powers. The sessions will be held between 5:30 and 8:30 pm both evenings, on Tuesday at the Calgary Elks Lodge 2502 6TH ST NE and on Wednesday at the McDougall Centre, 455 6TH ST SW. For more info: <http://www.alberta.ca/city-charters.aspx>

Oct. 12—Happy birthday to Transportation & Infrastructure Minister **Brian Mason**, born 63 years ago in Calgary.

Oct. 12—The Alberta Utilities Commission begins what could be up to six weeks of hearings into the Fort McMurray West 500-kV Transmission Project. The hearings go from 9 am to 5 pm at the Best Western Plus Westwood Inn 18035 Stony Plain Rd. For those wishing to follow on-line, a webcast will be available at <http://www.meetview.com/AUC-ListeningIn/>