

Ric Dolph's

Insight

into Government

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INSIDE THIS WEEK

Pg. 3: Fildebrandt leads the latest attack on the PAB

Pg. 4: A reduced federal health transfer; 'triage' in the courts

Pg. 5: People: an NDP warhorse heads the NAIT board

Pg. 6: Nursery status for the Leg. floor; O'Leary blasts Notley

THE OPIOID CRISIS

AN EMERGING EMERGENCY IN EVERYTHING BUT NAME

Liberal leader Swann is granted his debate on the fentanyl epidemic, but despite a united front by the opposition, the gov't rejects the call for a state of emergency, arguing that although the situation is serious, it is being handled as well as possible.

Like a dog with a bone, Liberal Leader **Dr. David Swann** (Calgary-Mountain View) has grabbed onto the issue of opioid addiction and, for more than a year, has been hounding the gov't to declare a state of medical emergency to address the problem—as British Columbia did last April.

On Monday, the first day of regular business in the spring session, Swann succeeded in persuading the Legislature to delay the normal proceedings and devote two hours to an emergency debate during which Swann and all opposition members present argued for a medical emergency to be declared.

Much impassioned rhetoric ensued, notably from Swann, 67, who had brought along several relatives of fentanyl fatalities for a press conference and to sit in the gallery, and also from Conservative MLA **Mike Ellis**, 45, (Calgary West), the former police sergeant who last spring succeeded in pushing through a private member's bill prohibiting the possession of pill-making equipment (*Insight* June 10).

"As a physician I can confidently say that the current levels of opioid addiction overdose are beyond anything I've ever experienced in a lifetime of medical practice and constitute indeed a threat to public health and safety," said Swann. "... While we don't necessarily understand all the dimensions of this epidemic, we must address the urgency. We must acknowledge that we do not have the resources or expertise currently or the coordination of resources needed to bring this under control."

But it was all for naught. Associate Health Minister **Brandy Payne**, who is handling the fentanyl file, said she could see no advantage to Alberta's declaring a medical emergency—really little more than a symbolic gesture—and that the province was already doing as much or more than BC to tackle a crisis that is escalating at an alarming rate.

Alberta has in the past four years seen the misuse of the syn-

Continued on next page...

POLITICAL PULSE

CARCINOGENIC FEMINISM

A POLITICAL GIFT FOR THE DIPPERS ON WOMEN'S DAY

This was the week of International Women's Day, which provided much opportunity for the NDP feminocracy to indulge itself in a chorus of self-congratulation, to fill the galleries with various "strong and courageous" women, to dole out more cash to women's groups, and to introduce a new bill removing the limits on the time allowed for a victim of sexual assault to sue her attacker (see p. 4).

But the best thing to happen to the NDP, at least politically speaking, came in the form of a gift from the Wildrose. And we're not speaking of Chestermere-Rocky View Wildrose MLA **Leela Aheer's** paean to the two female prime ministers of India and to her courageous immigrant Indian mother-in-law, or the central role played by red **Roser Nathan Cooper** (Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills) in the transformation of the floor of the Legislature into a nursery (see p. 6).

No, this gift-wrapped goodie came in the form of what deputy-premier **Sarah Hoffman** gleefully referred to in Question Period as a "bozo eruption" from a rogue member of the University of Calgary's Wildrose on Campus (WROC) youth group. His crime? In an email promoting the screening of *The Red Pill*, a documentary about the men's rights movement, he wrote "you and I both know feminism is a cancer."

Wildrose Leader **Brian Jean** immediately declared the WROC to have no connection with the party and denounced the offending language. "We are very disappointed and took immediate steps," he said. "It is not a group that is registered with us or that we have any control over." Was this the wisest of reactions?

The "feminism is a cancer" phrase is the trademark slogan of the very British, very conservative—and very gay—**Milo Yiannopoulos**, 31, a Wildrose provocateur who uses the carcinogenic analogy to describe campus-based third-wave feminism. He views it as a killer of free thought and expression in the universities, and mocks its promotion of "safe spaces" and "trigger warnings" to shield students from conservative controversialists like him.

Yiannopoulos was the British correspondent for the far-right online journal *Breitbart News*, but resigned last month following a column in which he opined that sex between older men and 13-year-olds—something he experienced at 13—was acceptable if the teen was "mature."

At those US Colleges that haven't banned him, he's been attracting crowds to hear him debate second-wave feminists like the philosopher **Christina Hoff Sommers**, 66, now with the conservative American Enterprise Institute think tank.

On Wednesday morning, in the wake of the "feminism is cancer" kerfuffle, CHED talkshow host **Ryan Jespersion** put Sommers on the radio with University of Alberta gender studies instructor and third-waver **Christina Stasia**, 38 (who, incidentally, ran for the Alberta Party in the 2015 election).

It was instructive to hear Sommers, a Utilitarian pragmatist, clash with Stasia on things like the reputed 23% wage gap between men and women (a myth, according to Sommers; an under-estimation according to Stasia), and especially to hear their differing thoughts about men.

"We definitely need a movement that interrogates

Turn to Political Pulse on pg. 4...

thetic opioid painkiller fentanyl explode. Since 2012, when oxycodone (brand name: OxyContin), the previous problem prescription opioid, was reconstituted to make its abuse difficult, fentanyl has become the number-one problem drug.

Beginning life as an anaesthetic and pain treatment for terminal cancer patients, fentanyl addiction became widespread after doctors started routinely prescribing it for chronic pain about ten years ago. Now it is also being manufactured illicitly (mostly in China) and processed by organized crime-run labs (mostly in western Canada) into grey-green pills resembling OxyContin that sell on the street for around \$20 a pop.

Because of the extreme potency of fentanyl—between 50 and 100 times as powerful as morphine—two milligrams (equivalent to two grains of salt) are enough for a fatal overdose. And because of the vagaries inherent in the illegal manufacture of the pills—as well as the practice of adding fentanyl to other street drugs like heroin and even marijuana—the number of fatal overdoses is increasing. Alberta and BC—partly because of their proximity to the source—have seen the biggest increases in fatalities, although the numbers are growing in the eastern provinces as the illicit trade spreads.

High incidences of fentanyl deaths in Alberta first occurred in 2014 on the Blood Reserve in southern Alberta when dealers from Calgary and from the reserves at Maskwacis (formerly Hobbema) targeted the Aboriginal market. This resulted in a wave of break-ins and thefts by addicts needing to support their habit. The reserve town of Stand Off declared a state of emergency in early 2015 and EMS workers in the area became the first to be issued kits containing naloxone, the antidote drug that can save a life if administered soon enough to someone suffering an overdose. (The Alberta gov't has since made naloxone available to all first responders, as well as to pharmacies for free distribution.)

In the past three years, the problem has spread throughout Alberta and is especially pronounced in the big cities. According to a report entitled “Opioids and Substances of Misuse” released by Alberta Health last month, 343 people died from drug overdoses “related to fentanyl” in 2016, with 22 of those attributed to the vastly more powerful variant carfentanil, an elephant tranquilizer 10,000 times more potent than morphine.

The number of fentanyl-related deaths last year was 34% higher than the 257 in 2015, which was up 107% from the 125 in 2014. Last year there were more fentanyl overdose deaths in Alberta than there were traffic fatalities and homicides combined. And this number does not include the roughly 150 unspecified opioid-related deaths that have yet to be classified by the medical examiner.

All this being said, it is difficult to see how a declaration of a medical emergency could, in itself, alleviate the situation. British Columbia, which has the highest rate of opioid deaths of any province, has seen no diminishment since declaring an emergency last April.

Those opposition members calling for a declaration, however, argued that a state of emergency would not only create more public awareness, but force a focused coordination of efforts, as occurred during natural disasters like the Fort McMurray fire or the High River flood when Municipal Affairs, acting as the lead, effectively marshalled the resources of multiple ministries.

“We need a cross-ministerial body established to quickly implement new models of prevention and care,” MLA Ellis insisted. “We need real-time data that will allow law enforcers

to address an evolved and a very evolving situation which occurs rapidly. We need full commitment to educate the public on the serious dangers of all opioids, the terribly toxic recreational ones that appear quickly on the streets and the opioids that Albertans obtain legally for bonafide health problems. If this government does not declare a public health emergency and instead continues to deal with our opioid crisis in a reactive, piecemeal fashion, more and more Albertans will die.”

“Now, I know that various departments of this government have a plan,” added Alberta Party Leader **Greg Clark** (Calgary-Elbow) “I know that the Department of Health has a plan, the Department of Justice has a plan, Community and Social Services has a plan, Education has a plan, Indigenous Relations has a plan, but I’ve seen scarce, if any, evidence of coordination within and between those departments of their plans. We need a public health emergency to bring focus to this issue.”

Associate Health Minister Payne countered that the fentanyl crisis, unlike a fire or a flood or even a disease outbreak, is not suited to an emergency declaration. “We do not believe that substance use is something that can be fixed in the 30 days provided for in the *Emergency Management Act* or in the *Public Health Act*,” she said. “It would not be helpful for the province of Alberta to enter an indefinite period of emergency in response to what is fundamentally a crisis of social isolation and stigma.”

She assured the House that all of the relevant departments and organizations were working together in a coordinated fashion to tackle the problem. New treatment clinics for opioid replacement therapies using drugs like methadone were opening, the College of Physicians & Surgeons had updated its prescription guidelines to reduce the over-prescription of the drugs, and the Health ministry was working with community groups to provide more counselling and treatment services for addicts.

Justice Minister **Kathleen Ganley** pointed to the recent addition of two medical examiners and the completion of a new toxicology lab that will enable the more comprehensive collection of data on opioid deaths and speedier identification of the new strains of the drugs. She has also been working with police forces on what is euphemistically called “harm reduction.”

This refers to the establishment of those controversial facilities that used to be called supervised injection sites, such as Vancouver’s famous InSite, where heroin addicts can shoot up in a sterile environment under medical supervision.

They are now called supervised *consumption* sites, reflecting the fact that drugs like fentanyl are ingested. And thanks to the federal Liberal gov’t liberalization of Conservative drug law, it will be easier to get the necessary approval from Health Canada to establish such facilities.

Ganley and several other NDP MLAs who spoke during the emergency debate talked up the idea of supervised consumption sites for fentanyl addicts; places where naloxone would be readily available to save the lives of those who overdose.

“The issue of supervised consumption services has been intensely studied, and the evidence is crystal clear: supervised consumption saves lives,” said Payne. “Communities across Canada are developing applications to the federal government, and the federal Health minister has made it very clear to me that she wants to make these services available to Canadians as quickly as possible.”

IN 2016, THERE WERE MORE FENTANYL DEATHS IN ALBERTA THAN TRAFFIC FATALITIES & HOMICIDES

DEREK DOGS THE PAB

THE VENERABLE TRADITION OF ATTACKING FLACKS PERSISTS

It was, perhaps, redundant for Wildrose

Finance Critic **Derek Fildebrandt** (Strathmore-Brooks) to preface his interrogation of **Corey Hogan**, managing director of the Public Affairs Bureau (PAB), at Tuesday's Public Accounts Committee meeting with the words, "My questions will be pointed..." When have this notoriously captious MLA's questions not been pointed? Perhaps only when they have been "blunt." Which raises the question of how these two seemingly antonymous words mean much the same thing when applied to the interrogatory style of someone like Derek? Leaving such questions to the semanticists, we'll press on...

The Public Affairs Bureau, which falls under the purview of Executive Council and cost \$6.8M in 2015-16 (the fiscal year under review by the committee), has been a favourite target of the opposition since political messaging unofficially became part of its remit during the Getty era. Back then, Liberal Leader **Laurence Decore** compared the PAB's work to that of Hitler's propaganda chief **Josef Goebbels**. In opposition, the NDP regularly attacked the PAB for being a Tory mouthpiece. Fildebrandt's grilling of Hogan continued the tradition.

"It's pretty obvious that the Public Affairs Bureau is not a regular branch of the government," he said. "There are many direct political appointees as a part of it. Can you speak to what proportion of staff within the Public Affairs Bureau could be classified broadly as political, maybe not necessarily partisan but political?"

"Certainly. That would be zero per cent," said Hogan, a former Alberta Liberal Party executive and political podcaster who was hired as chief flack last fall (*Insight* Oct. 7). "The nature of my role is to manage government communicators and provide communications advice. It has very little, if anything, to do with politics."

"Okay," persisted Fildebrandt. "That's difficult to believe, considering the nature of the advertising and the campaigns that come out of the Public Affairs Bureau. The Public Affairs Bureau regularly conducts, I think, what could be fairly described as propaganda campaigns around government policies. For that to be effectively communicated through the Public Affairs Bureau, there are obviously people with strong partisan ties at the senior management levels of that. Can you speak to how many people, before entering the Public Affairs Bureau, had partisan ties?"

"I certainly would not hazard a guess. But I would also say that it is absolutely immaterial to the work they do day in, day out."

And so it continued, with Hogan demonstrating the alacrity with which he has made the transition from cheeky podcaster to obfuscatory gov't functionary.

Unsatisfied with the answers he'd received in committee, Fildebrandt continued his interrogation in Question Period that afternoon: "Today the government's official propaganda wing testified before the Public Accounts Committee. We asked real, simple questions about the extent of partisanship in this historically partisan branch of the public service. Government has parachuted NDP apparatchiks into dozens of positions across the gov't that are supposed to be nonpartisan. For the most part they refused to answer our questions, so I'll ask the government directly. How many employees in the Public Affairs Bureau have partisan ties to the NDP?"

In the absence of the Premier **Rachel Notley**, who was in Houston attending the CERA oil conference, Deputy Premier **Sarah Hoffman**, her tone one of withering abrasiveness, answered:

"The question that's being asked is one that I'd say was directed to the appropriate body. It's a public agency, the Public Affairs Bureau, and they are working as public servants, and it's important that we respect their professionalism as public servants. I wish the members opposite would show a little bit of professionalism as well."

"They're not professionals," Fildebrandt rejoined; "they're party bureaucrats, Mr. Speaker. They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money . . ."

This was when Gov't House Leader **Brian Mason** interrupted by raising a point of order, explaining it was because "the impugning of professional civil servants by the opposition is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker."

In fact the words Mason was objecting to were partly his own, as Fildebrandt demonstrated in completing the quotation he had started: "'They are using their position in government to spend taxpayers' money to convince people to vote for the Progressive Conservative Party.' Those words were spoken exactly five years ago to the day, when the Government House Leader was in opposition. Now the NDP are spending tens of millions of dollars to convince people to support their carbon tax. Can the Government House Leader stand up, look me in the eye, and tell me with a straight face that they're not doing the exact same thing?"

Later, when it came time for Speaker **Bob Wanner** to consider the point of order, Mason claimed that Fildebrandt had referred to PAB members as "partisan hacks" and had singled out "individuals" in the bureau. Reviewing the transcript of the proceedings, Wanner found neither claim to be true and rejected Mason's point of order.

No doubt this turn of events gave Fildebrandt greater satisfaction than any of the answers he knew he wasn't going to get.

Corrections & Clarifications

In a chart in last week's *Insight* listing the 23 agencies whose CEO compensation is being reduced to levels in line with other public service managers, we incorrectly named Alberta Utilities Commission CEO **Bob Heggie** as being one of those affected. The AUC was quick to inform us that it is its chairman, **Willie Grieve**, who is the affected party. His base salary of \$345.8K, however, will remain unchanged, although some of his other cash and non-cash benefits, totalling \$161K in 2016, may be reduced.

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en passant...

Alberta, along with Ontario, & Quebec, which had all initially held out for better, were compelled to sign on to a bilateral health funding deal with Ottawa Friday. In the federal election, the Trudeau government promised to break with the high-handed approach of the previous Harper government and negotiate a new Health Accord with the provinces and territories. Instead, after tabling a take-it-or-leave-it offer in December, the feds walked away from the table and are now forcing through bilateral deals with each province. The deals set the federal funding level at nominal GDP with a floor of 3%. The province predicts that will amount to a \$4.223B federal health transfer for the coming fiscal year. Additional "targeted" funding for mental health and home care will amount to \$1.3M over 10 years. In the December Federal-Territorial-Provincial Finance Ministers' meeting, the provinces and territories were calling for a Canada Health Transfer funding escalator that would match projected health care cost growth at 5.2 percent. At the time of last year's budget, Health Minister **Sarah Hoffman** had promised to keep Alberta's health care costs, which in the previous year had risen by 6%, to 2.5% in 2016-17. However, the recently released Q3 fiscal update (*Insight*, Feb. 24) forecasts a 4.1% rise.

Fittingly, Justice Minister Kathleen Ganley chose International Women's Day to introduce her feminist-minded Bill 2, *An Act to Remove Barriers for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence*, which gets rid of the two-year limit between the time an offence occurs and the commencement of a civil suit to recover lost wages and other expenses or for pain and suffering. When passed, act will remove any time limitation for those filing claims for sexual assault, sexual misconduct or nonsexual assault involving a minor, those in an intimate relationship, or a dependant. For the most part, this will put Alberta in line with other provinces, although the inclusion of "sexual misconduct in an intimate relationship" will, according to Ganley, "make Alberta a leader across the country." Sexual misconduct includes stalking or sending inappropriate text messages or photos.

Facing growing concern from Prosecutors and sharp criticism from the opposition over the dropping of criminal charges from the provincial court roster, Ganley announced on Thursday that \$14.5M will be spent to hire 35 prosecutors and 30 support staff (pending budget approval). Partly because of last year's Supreme Court "Jordan" decision, which limited the time between the laying of a charge and the end of trial to 18 months, and partly due to hiring restraints, a "triage" system has been introduced in the the provincial courts. This prioritizes certain cases and stays others. The stayed cases are not always minor ones, according to **James Pickard**, president of the Alberta Crown Attorney's Association, who cited weapons charges and the alleged assault of a police officer among the charges dropped on a single day. "The tide has risen to the point where we're concerned that justice is now being threatened," Pickard told the *Edmonton Journal*, "and that the public may start to question the efficacy of the criminal justice system." Wildrose Leader **Brian Jean** used stronger language in Question Period on Wednesday, saying, "We're talking about murders and sexual assaults. This is sickening. This means victims will likely see the accused criminals walking free on our streets. How on earth did the Premier or anyone in this government possibly think this was a good idea?"

POLITICAL PULSE ... from Page 1

masculinity and looks at the way patriarchy also gets in the way of men reaching their full potential," said Stasia, "and I'm really glad to be part of that movement called feminism that has been attending to the ways patriarchy creates boxes for men and women."

Sommers, on the phone, let Stasia, in the studio, continue in this vein without arguing. A little later Jespersen brought the subject around to the "feminism is cancer" story. Sommers, obviously familiar with debate-mate Yiannopoulos' criticisms of feminism, is also aware of the film the WROC was promoting: *The Red Pill*, by the young feminist documentarian **Cassie Jaye** about the Men's Rights Movement. In interviews, Jaye has described her surprise in discovering that she sympathized with many of the moderate members of the movement. It's a sympathy shared by Sommers.

"I can understand," she told Jespersen, "why a lot of young men and fair-minded young women would look at a lot of contemporary feminism and find it very harsh, chauvinistic against men - female chauvinism - and more indifferent to the troubles of men. And I don't sympathize with those who say, 'Oh yes we care about men, we want to liberate them from their masculinity.'"

"No, that is not caring about men, that is imposing a radical feminist agenda on men. If you want to help men, you meet them where they are. The feminist movement wasn't based on radically transforming the nature of the human mind. In the best sense, it was about equality and political reform and that is where we should be."

One might expect a conservative party like the Wildrose to have some sympathy with such a position. And while it would be unwise to endorse an over-the-top controversialist like Yiannopoulos, one might also suppose a party that champions libertarian principles such as free speech and open debate (especially in a university setting) could forgive a young acolyte his use of Milo's intemperate shorthand. ("Harsh, chauvinistic, indifferent," might have been the better way of expressing the thought.)

But for the Rosers, this is about political survival. They have been running scared since 2012 when the Tories—specifically a red Tory named **Troy Wason**, who is now the PC executive director—dredged up a blog by fundamentalist Wildrose candidate **Allan Hunsperger** in which he committed homosexuals to the "lake of fire" — i.e. hell. Since then the Rosers have tried, not always successfully, to keep a lid on anything that might identify them with a socially conservative position. This partly explains the rapidity with which Jean and other members of his caucus disavowed the Wildrose on Campus club. (Jean's disavowal of the club might also have had something to do with a poll conducted last month that showed the majority of the club's 160 members favoured a single conservative party led by **Jason Kenney**.)

The Dippers, of course, were not buying Jean's attempt to distance his party from the club and its offending tweet.

Along with several digs about the party's "bozo eruptions," Hoffman, in one Question Period exchange with Jean, listed several Wildrose faux pas and finished with "Now they're comparing our struggle for equality to cancer?"

Several other NDP MLAs pointed out closer than admitted links between the party and the club, with PC defector **Sandra Jansen** (Calgary North West) taking great pleasure in tabling a variety of items including a Wildrose newsletter welcoming WROC members to the party's AGM, a "lovely picture on Facebook" of eight Wildrose MLAs paying a visit to the club at the U of C, and another Facebook entry in which Strathmore-Brooks MLA **Derek Fildebrandt** "appears as their special host at campus week."

Perhaps Jean et al should have simply dismissed the "cancer" tweeter as a rogue element and foregone the strident disavowals of the club. Too late now.

People ...

Appointments

● **Ray Martin**, 75, former NDP MLA (1982-93, 2004-08) and party leader (1984-94), as a member and designated chairman of the Board of Governors of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, for a three-year term. Martin, vice-chairman and trustee with the Edmonton Public School Board, says he was contacted by a NAIT vice-president to join the board and was appointed by Advanced Education Minister **Marlin Schmidt** after an interview. The position carries no salary. Martin says he has yet to decide whether to run for another term with the EPSB in October but will announce his intentions in May.

● **Joe Loran**, the deputy Ombudsman, and **Ted Miles**, first director of the Public Interest Commissioner's office (which investigates gov't whistleblowers' complaints), as interim Ombudsman and interim Public Interest Commissioner, respectively, pending the appointment of a permanent officer (or officers) to replace **Peter Hourihan**, 59, who is retiring and will not be renewing his five-year contract in April. Hourihan was a senior RCMP officer in BC when he became the province's eighth Ombudsman in 2011, and took on the additional duties as Alberta's first Public Interest Commissioner in 2013. His compensation for 2015 was \$333.6K. A subcommittee of the Committee on Legislative Offices is currently seeking a permanent replacement whose duties will be expanded to include municipal oversight.

● **Francis Flewwelling**, 75, a former Red Deer councillor, museum operator, alternate school founder, former governor of the Heritage Canada Foundation, and Alberta Order of Excellence inductee, as a member and designated chairman of the Board of Governors of Red Deer College for a three-year term.

● **Murray Billett**, a labour relations "educator" with the United Nurses of Alberta union and homosexual rights activist, and **Edith Kloberdanz**, a Calgary labour mediator, as members of the Alberta Review Board, each for a three-year term.

● **Anne Wildcat**, a member of the Ermineskin Cree tribal council and executive assistant with the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, as a member of the Law Enforcement Review Board for a two-year term.

● **Dominique Grégoire**, CFO of Alberta Blue Cross in Calgary, **Dr. Lynne Paradis**, associate superintendent with Red Deer Catholic Schools, **Lynn Parish**, an Edmonton lawyer and hearing chairwoman with the WCB Appeals Commission, **Zahra Somani**, a business analyst with the City of Calgary, **Sheri Somerville**, executive director of Edmonton's Citie Ballet, and **Owen Tobert**, former manager of the City of Calgary, as members of the board of The Governors of The University of Alberta, each for a three-year term.

● **Corinne Jamieson**, an executive counsel with Alberta Justice in Calgary, as a member of The Board of Governors of Mount Royal University for a two-year term.

● **Vi Becker**, VP of Marketing & Communications with Stantec in Edmonton, **Mary Lynne Campbell**, CEO of the Public School Boards Association of Alberta, **Yasmin Jivraj**, co-owner of an Edmonton electrical engineering consultancy, and **Matthew Woodley**, an Edmonton lawyer, as members of the Board of Governors of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, each for a three-year term.

Verbatim ...

We've come a long way, baby.

Status of Women and Service Alberta Minister Stephanie McLean, who became the first MLA ever to bring her nursing infant onto the Legislature floor a year ago, delivers a salutary recap of her gov't's feminist accomplishments in a member's statement delivered on International Women's Day, Jan. 9.

“Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to celebrate strong Alberta women. Today, on International Women's Day, we recognize the social, economic, cultural, and political accomplishments of women around the world and the ongoing struggle for equality. In 1975 the United Nations designated March 8 as International Women's Day to advance the status of women worldwide. Countries around the world unite every year on this day to restate our dedication to the principles of gender equality. We need this day. Decades later women are still not equally represented in corporate boardrooms or at decision-making tables in public office. In Alberta we have had a thousand male MLAs and only 99 female MLAs, 29 of whom are sitting as members today.

Sadly, Alberta women continue to face some of the highest rates of sexual violence in the country. Changing old ways is not easy, but the people of Alberta asked for change, and our government is honoured to answer that call. We started making history in 2015 by appointing Canada's first gender-balanced cabinet. We launched the Status of Women ministry with a commitment to make the lives of Alberta's women and girls better. And I'll tell you something about my ministry, Mr. Speaker: though she be little, she is fierce.

We are working hard to advance gender equality. After our first year Alberta now has a law that lets survivors of violence break a residential lease without fear of a financial penalty; a minimum wage that will keep increasing, to \$15 an hour, making sure that women who are clustered in the lowest range of pay have a little more at the end of the day; a new disclose-or-explain rule for publicly traded corporations to report on gender equality at the highest levels of their organizations; a grant program that supports community projects and programs that advance our ministry's mandate of leadership, economic empowerment, and ending violence; a partnership with the city of Edmonton and UN Women to reduce sexual violence in Edmonton; Ready for Her, a website to encourage women to see themselves as candidates in the upcoming municipal elections and resources to help them get on the ballot; entrenched gender expression and gender identity in the *Human Rights Act*, making it illegal to discriminate against anyone on those grounds. We joined the national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, and we invested an additional \$10 million to increase affordability, quality, and access to child care for Alberta families.

We are building on a legacy of women who fought in their day- to-day lives to be treated as equals. They were our role models, and now it's our turn in this House, in boardrooms, on sports fields, and in law courts. We will continue to be leaders of change. Your government is working hard to make life better for all Albertans, ensuring that the necessary policies, programs, and services are in place for the advancement of gender equality in Alberta. Women shouldn't have to spend the next century fighting for equality. It's time now.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, and all members of the Assembly to join me in the fight for women's equality. [Standing ovation]”

Talk in the Corridors

Babies to take the floor...

● In a sort of feel-good moment in the Legislature on Tuesday morning, a motion was passed that officially allows for members to bring their infant children with them onto the floor of the House.

Status of Women & Labour Minister **Stephanie McLean** and Associate Health Minister **Brandy Payne** have already brought their newbies into the Legislature, but with the express permission of Speaker **Bob Wanner**, who allowed these exceptions to Standing Order 14, which prohibits the presence of “strangers”—that is, anyone not a member—on the floor.

The motion to amend the standing order, recommended by the Subcommittee on Family Friendly Workplace Practices & Policies, adds the clause “For the purposes of this Standing Order, a stranger does not include an infant being cared for by a Member.”

This being the week of International Women’s Day, and this gov’t being one with an explicit feminist agenda, subcommittee chairwoman **Robyn Luff**, 36, (Calgary-East), mother of two toddlers, thanked the House for embracing “what I consider to be a very feminist change. It’s a step towards equality, equality in opportunity to be both an elected official and a parent for all genders.”

Wildrose MLA **Nathan Cooper**, 37, (Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills), father of three young uns and the committee member who first proposed the family-friendly initiatives (more will be coming), said he looked forward to the day when his colleague **Derek Fildebrandt** (Strathmore-Brooks), whose wife was expecting a daughter any moment, would be bringing the child into the assembly.

Speaker **Bob Wanner**, who regularly cautions and shushes this loudest and most pugilistic of MLAs, shared Cooper’s hopes. “It would be nice to see the Member for Strathmore-Brooks snuggling, with a soothing and soft voice,” he said. “I’m not sure that the House will, but certainly I will look with anticipation to that.”

He may not have to wait long. Fildebrandt’s wife **Emma** delivered their first child Saturday morning. They have named their daughter Winifred.

Rachel-bashing in Cowtown...

● Following on his solo appearance in Edmonton last week (*Insight* Mar. 3), renegade federal Conservative leadership candidate **Kevin O’Leary**, 62, repeated the process in Calgary this week.

The other 13 candidates had appeared the previous Wednesday at a forum sponsored by several Calgary riding associations. But O’Leary, 62, the reality TV personality and multi-millionaire investor currently leading the pack, again boycotted the group event and held his own townhall lunch before an audience of 200 at the Metropolitan Convention Centre on Thursday. It was sponsored by the Alberta Prosperity Fund (APF), the non-profit political action committee founded in late 2015 by former federal unite-the-right Reform Party operative **Barry McNamar** to support “organizations and initiatives working to restore and retain Alberta’s advantage.”

It was appropriate, then, that O’Leary’s bombastic monologue focused on restoring Alberta’s prosperity by (figuratively) putting the boots to Premier **Rachel Notley**.

“The best outcome is to get rid of her and I’ll do everything I can,” O’Leary said, referring to the 2019 provincial election. “If that’s not the case, I will definitely be punitive on transfer payments on health care. I’m going to have to push back. It’s

The week ahead ...

Mar. 12-15—Status of Women minister **Stephanie McLean** will journey to New York along with her federal counterpart **Maryam Monsef** for the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women, which will be discussing pay equity and women’s inclusion in the workforce. Cost for the minister and two staffers: about \$10K.

Mar. 16—Finance Minister **Joe Ceci** presents the third budget of his career at 3 pm. We are guessing that the \$42,938 in revenue predicted in the Q3 update two weeks ago, will come in a bit higher, thanks to slightly better than predicted oil & gas prices, new oilsands facilities coming on stream, increased crude exports, and some higher than expected transfer from the feds and/or an arcane accounting anomaly whereby some fugitive cash is recovered from the previous year. Whether more revenue will mean a reduction in the forecasted \$10.8B deficit, however, seems unlikely. With the contracts for 70K public employees up for renewal this year, we suspect that any extra money will go for the “modest” pay increases negotiated. (0.8%?)

Mar. 17—Agriculture & Forestry minister **Oneil Carlier** holds a St. Patrick’s Day Ceilidh (party) fundraiser for his home riding of Whitecourt-Ste. Anne at the Onway Hotel between 7 pm and 2 am and featuring a pool tournament and a trivia contest. Tickets \$25 at <http://www.albertandp.ca/stpattysceilidh>

Mar. 17—Meanwhile Wildrose Leader **Brian Jean** will bestow his good self on the Airdrie riding for a St. Paddy’s day “Brew & Stew” dinner & dance with local MLA **Angela Pitt** at the Overtime Lounge starting at 6 pm; tickets \$40 at http://www.wildrose.ca/airdrie_st_patty

Mar. 17-18—The Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta’s (PCAA) Leadership Convention takes place at the Telus Convention Centre in downtown Calgary with opening ceremonies at 5 pm Friday, where candidates **Jason Kenney**, **Dr. Richard Starke**, & **Byron Nelson** will be nominated and introduced by as-yet-unknown nominators (rumour has it **Stephen Harper** will nominate Kenney). Hospitality suites with plenty of green beer will occur on Friday evening. On Saturday, the candidates will deliver their final pitches at 11:30 am, followed by delegate voting between 12:30 and 3 pm with results to be announced at 4:30. If **Jason Kenney** defies all expectations and fails to get the 50%-plus to win on the first ballot, then a second will be held between 5 and 7 pm. Registration for delegates and non-delegates costs \$175 and is available until 11 am Saturday. For online registration & the program go to: <http://leadership.pcalberta.com/convention/>

Mar. 19—The PCAA board of directors will hold a general meeting at the Telus Conference Centre following the election of the new PC leader to discuss the future of the party—or lack thereof (assuming a Kenney victory). Up for discussion will be Wildrose Leader **Brian Jean**’s invitation to the PCs to unite the right by joining the constitutionally intact (but renamed) Wildrose Party—viewed as an opening gambit by the Kenney folks who are still bent on creating a new party. Much back-room horse-trading and sausageery lies ahead.

Mar. 19—Perhaps hoping to attract a passel of progressive Tories abandoning the PC ship following Kenney’s coronation, **Greg Clark**’s Alberta Party will hold a “Not so Sober Second Thoughts” event at Calgary’s Stonewall Pub, 735 Ranchlands Blvd NW, at 7 pm for beer, games, and chat. Tickets \$20 at http://www.albertaparty.ca/hawkwood_march19