

Ric Dolphin's

Insight

into Government

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ELECTION 2015

TEN DAYS DOWN AND THE TORIES FEEL A HEADWIND

Almost half way into a 21-day election campaign that nobody except the Prentice team seems to have wanted, there are signs that this may not be the Conservative romp that seemed probable a month ago. Of course we've heard that one before.

We ran into a middle-aged social worker, a 300-pound, ex-pat Newfoundlander, at the gym the other day who asked us if there might be some hope of an NDP sweep in Edmonton on *Cinco de Mayo* (a.k.a. election day). Might the winsome **Rachel Notley** and her motley slate of unionists, university students, and, yes, social workers even topple the Tory megalith and form gov't, he wondered aloud, puffing and delving deep into moist crevasses with his big pink towel?

There would, we thought, be a certain poetry to such an outcome, occurring on the anniversary of the Battle of Puebla in which the humble Mexicans kicked imperial French butt. And was it really so inconceivable? After all, the flurry of electronic opinion polls publicized over the past couple of weeks have put the Tories, the Wildrose, and the NDP very close; all of them have showed the NDP leading in Edmonton, and one even had the Dippers, whose fundraising is breaking records, dominant province-wide.

In answer to our Newf's wishful querying, we gave our now-standard answer: these automated phone polls were of dubious worth, and tend to skew towards the opinions of the minorities on the right and left—those angry enough with the Tories to stay on the phone and press the appropriate buttons to proximate the power to effect change that they would lack at the ballot box.

The hanger-uppers and the more than 50% claiming to be undecided were, we proffered, more significant and only validated the cliché, spouted by the leaders of the three contending parties—we exclude the Liberals from contention—that the only poll that matters is the one on election day.

We also opined that the Tories would—as they had in 2008 when the polls and the media were similarly dire on PC fortunes—

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POLITICAL PULSE

GERRYMANDERING

ROCKY TIMES FOR THE CHESTERMERE TORIES

Of the various shenanigans occurring in Progressive Conservative nominations this spring—and there have been a few (*Insight*, Mar. 6)—the last-minute, late-night ejection of **Jamie Lall** from the Chestermere-Rocky View race on March 28 was one of the more confounding examples.

Lall, 30, is a Rocky View-born, third-generation Sikh, with a U of C poli-sci degree, a career in the non-profit housing and employment services field, and a decade-long attachment to the PC party. In the 2012 election, he was parachuted in as a last-minute, cannon-fodder candidate in the downtown Calgary-Buffalo riding that was solidly held by Liberal **Kent Hehr**. Lall did better than expected, getting 31% of the vote to Hehr's 42% (he might have won had there been no Wildrose candidate to take 20% of the conservative vote.)

In February he filed for the Chestermere-Rocky View nomination, eventually becoming the only challenger to Wildrose floor-crosser **Bruce McAllister**, the slick, telegenic former Global TV presenter, considered by those in PC central office to be a catch.

As per PC party policy, Lall was vetted for past indiscretions and criminal acts in a process that included a police check and an interview by a hired private investigator. He apparently passed what one senior PC operative describes as a “sniff test” that, under the careful Premier **Jim Prentice**, is more exacting than those practiced by his predecessor.

(Exacting perhaps, but rather arbitrary in that it failed to exclude Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo MLA **Mike Allen**, whose 2013 conviction in St. Paul, MN, for procuring two prostitutes [actually undercover policewomen] proved no barrier to his re-nomination. Our senior Tory operative, only half-jokingly, opines that Allen's testicular temerity in going for “two women!” engendered admiration in male party circles and might also be a vote-getter in the manly environs of the oilsands capital. This appeal to the McMurray *weltanschauung* may have also played a part in Wildrose leader **Brian Jean**'s decision to run against Fort McMurray-Conklin MLA and Advanced Education Minister **Don Scott** and not Allen.)

Having seemingly passed muster, Lall enthusiastically campaigned for the nomination, set for April 1, and in the days before his ouster sold 1,000 memberships, earning \$10K for his constituency association.

The Saturday of March 28, however, was a bad one for Wildrose floor-crossers hoping for rebirth as Tory candidates. **Danielle Smith** (Highwood), **Gary Bikman** (Cardston-Taber-Warner), and **Ron Fox** (Lacombe-Ponoka)

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actually increase their majority, maybe winning 79 or 80 of the 87 seats in the Legislature.

Knowing our friend to be a member of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, we asked him if he didn't think that Premier **Jim Prentice's** concessions to the gov't unions—the promise to honour contracts and to not roll-back wages—might not help secure the support of this significant voting bloc, as was the case in 2012 when **Alison Redford** made nice with AUPE and the Alberta Teachers Association, helping her to snatch victory (and 61 seats) from the jaws of those pollsters who had predicted a Wildrose win?

"I don't think it does him any good," said the social worker, mercifully dry and clothed now. "It makes him look soft on the unions."

This came as a bit of a surprise. Wasn't this better than **Ralph Klein** coming in and cutting 5% from gov't employee pay as he did in the '90s?

"With Ralph you knew what you were getting. He did what he said he was gonna do. He said he'd cut wages and he did. People respected that."

Odd chap. But maybe there's something to it. J.P.'s approval rating—according to those dubious polls—has dropped in a month from over 50% to 25%. Maybe it's the reaction to the budget; maybe it's the annoyance of having an election called a year before the legislated period. Maybe the polls are wrong.

Leaving the gym we drove to a community centre in Health Minister **Stephen Mandel's** riding of Whitemud where Prentice's big blue bus is parked.

He's speaking in a two-storey, interior courtyard reminiscent of a Shakespearean theatre-in-the-round. The faithful are arrayed on three sides and two levels gazing down on J. P. the soliloquist who is in the centre of the floor below.

It is one of those exercises in orchestrated triumphalism that pass for political theatre: a gathering together of all the city's PC candidates and their volunteers, waving signs and applauding like trained seals whenever one of Jimbo's sentences ends on a slight up-tick. It's much the same speech he has been giving for a month, and the familiar phraseology is starting to take on the characteristics of incantation.

...tough times call for tough measures... we must all bear the burden together... your gov't has a ten-year plan to get the province off the oil revenue roller coaster... "let me be clear, ladies and gentlemen, these are serious times"... but Albertans are "a strong and resilient people" (unlike, presumably, those pussies in Saskatchewan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo) ... health care costs are spinning out of control and must be curbed ... but of course no "front line workers" will be cut ... and those teensy weensy tax hikes and user fee increases will not affect "the most vulnerable" (unless they smoke, drink, hunt, camp, drive, speed, die, are born, buy a house, or use court services)... but still have the lowest taxes in the country... and it is only "prudent" to borrow \$30 billion over the next five years to pay for schools, hospitals that will be needed by those tens of thousands of people who

will continue to flock into the greatest province in the greatest country on God's green earth (even if jobs are disappearing at the rate of 14,000 a month)... for they do not bring their schools and hospitals with them... and we "have a plan" to put money back into the Heritage Trust fund just as soon as those oil prices revert to reasonable levels and the surpluses return... hospital wait times will be reduced just as soon as those long-term care beds open up and rid the acute care wards of those geriatric patients currently clogging them...and "let me be clear, ladies and gentlemen, there will be no provincial sales tax as long as I am premier..." An ovation.

Behind him is a backdrop of people with signs "Choose Alberta's Future" and "Vote the Prentice Team"—the East Indians and Chinese strategically placed in the front row, which recalls the Calgary Wildrose candidate who two weeks ago was disqualified after being caught on mike joking with his Sikh friends by saying "All you brown guys to the front." Seems you can do it; just don't say it.

The living wall of multi-cult stands stock still and looks like dweebish mosaic. The Wildrose were the first to do this in Alberta during the last election, having picked it up from the Harper Conservatives. The NDP have adopted the same practice, and the Liberals might do it too if they could ever find enough people to participate.

The only real part of the event comes at the end when a handful of reporters are permitted to ask questions. There are a couple a semi-hardballs lobbed, but Prentice, whose obfuscatory skills have improved immeasurably in the 212 days he's been premier, easily deflects them and blithely shifts his verbiage back to talking points that elicit more dutiful cheers from the tame audience.

As has been the practice at these sorts of events since the days of Bill Clinton, the official proceedings conclude with cranking up of some rock music—Nickelback?—that serves as a dynamic score for the premier's slow exit, hugging and handshaking his way through the adulatories and back on the bus bound for Stony Plain where the same speech will thrill another Tory crowd.

On the way out we run into **Ian McClelland**, the former Reform MP and Conservative MLA for Rutherford, who, fit and tanned from a winter of golfing in Palm Springs, looks a decade younger than his 72 years.

"Boy I certainly don't miss this B.S.," he says with a smile. He hasn't been politically involved for years, but has decided that he will help his old friend **Stephen Mandel** door knock in Whitemud.

"I admire him for stepping back into it," says Ian. "He's got a hell of a difficult job ahead of him."

We ask how he thinks the Prentice campaign is going.

Citing the unpopular budget, the unwanted election, and the unexpected backlash from the Wildrose crossings that has caused resentment among PC MLAs and a renewed and vengeful resolve among Wildrose members who are rallying around their new and competent leader **Brian Jean**—McClelland says that the party "faces a very real headwind."

A quick look at the parties

With the election campaign at the half-way point and all the candidates who will be running registered, we provide a run-down of the main parties that will be competing in the May 5 election. Parties with fewer than 20 candidates are not included, thus the exclusion of the Social Credit and Communist parties, running one and two candidates respectively.

PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVES

Money raised in 1st quarter of 2015: \$825K **Seats at dissolution:** 70 **Candidates running:** 87
Percentage of women: 25% **Seats won in last 4 elections/total seats:** '01: 74/83; '04: 62/83; '08: 72/83; '12: 61/87
Leader: Jim Prentice, 58 (Calgary-Elbow) **President:** Terry Beaupre **Slogan:** "Choose Alberta's Future"
Campaign manager: Randy Dawson
Main campaign planks: Budget support: replenishment of Heritage Fund from surpluses 5 years hence; borrowing \$30B over 5 years for infrastructure projects (schools, hospital expansion, Highway 63 twinning), 700 more continuing care beds this year; shorter hospital wait times; diversification of the economy through additional revenues from health care tax, increases to the 10% flat income tax to a maximum of 11.5% for those making more than \$100K p.a.; increased sin taxes and user fees; no provincial sales tax. **Contact info:** <https://www.pcalberta.com> Tel: 1-800-263-3408

WILDROSE ALLIANCE PARTY

Money raised in 1st quarter of 2015: \$355K **Seats at dissolution:** 5 **Candidates running:** 70
Percentage of women: 22% **Seats won in last 4 elections/total seats:** '01: 0/83; '04: 1/83; '08: 0/83; '12: 17/87
Leader: Brian Jean, 52 (Fort McMurray-Conklin) **President:** Wendy Fulton **Slogan:** "Standing up for Albertans"
Campaign team: Vitor Marciano, Bill Bewick, Matt Solberg, Evan Menzies, Daniella Yager
Main campaign planks: Balance budget by 2017 without raising taxes or cutting "front-line services" but cutting 3,200 management positions in gov't and Alberta Health Services; grow Heritage Fund to \$200M in 20 years; create an independent budget officer to analyze budget projections & costs; reduce gov't travel & advertising by 50%; reverse Prentice gov't's tax hikes; renegotiate a fairer equalization deal with Ottawa & other provinces; provide 10% of royalty revenues & 10% of surpluses to municipalities for infrastructure; restore measurable standards to education.
Contact info: <http://www.wildrose.ca> Tel: 1-888-262-1888

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Money raised in 1st quarter of 2015: \$406.9K **Seats at dissolution:** 4 **Candidates running:** 87
Percentage of women: 52% **Seats won in last 4 elections/total seats:** '01: 2/83; '04: 4/83; '08: 2/83; '12: 4/87
Leader: Rachel Notley, 52 (Edmonton-Strathcona) **President:** Chris O'Halloran
Slogan: **Campaign manager:** Gerry Scott
Main campaign planks: Increase corp. taxes, open 2,000 new long-term-care beds in a year, tax breaks for companies hiring new workers, a more progressive tax regime, subsidies for refining & upgrading oil & gas in Alberta, more money for schools & teachers **Contact Info:** <http://www.albertandp.ca> Tel: 780-474-2415

ALBERTA LIBERAL PARTY

Money raised in 1st quarter of 2015: \$110K **Seats at dissolution:** 5 **Candidates running:** 54
Percentage of women: 23% **Seats won in last 4 elections/total seats:** '01: 7/83; '04: 16/83; '08: 9/83; '12: 5/87
Leader: David Swann, 65 (Calgary-Mountainview) **President:** Gwyneth Midgely
Slogan: "Always there for you." **Campaign manager:** Raj Sherman
Main campaign planks: Higher progressive taxes & corporate taxes; elimination of health tax, pay equity legislation; mandatory vaccinations, more \$ for carbon capture & storage **Contact info:** www.albertaliberal.com Tel: 780-414-1124

ALBERTA PARTY

Money raised in 1st quarter of 2015: \$160K **Seats at dissolution:** 0 **Candidates running:** 37
Percentage of women: 26% **Seats won in last 4 elections:** 0, 0, 0, 0
Leader: Greg Clark, 45 (Calgary-Elbow) **President:** Pat Cochrane **Slogan:** "New Energy"
Campaign manager: Robert Walker
Main campaign planks: Progressive income tax; 1% corporate tax hike; per-student school funding indexed to population growth & inflation; reduce funding to private schools; cap post-secondary tuition increases to inflation rate; reverse PC's cuts to health care. **Contact info:** <http://www.albertaparty.ca> Tel: 1-844-453-5505

GREEN PARTY OF ALBERTA

Money raised in 1st quarter of 2015: \$4,284.50 **Seats at dissolution:** 0 **Candidates running:** 27
Percentage of women: 37% **Seats won in last 4 elections:** 0, 0, 0, 0
Leader: Janet Keeping, 62 (Calgary-Elbow) **President:** Susan Stratton
Main campaign planks: Moratorium on new oilsands development; elimination of coal fired electricity & 50% renewable powered grid by 2030; tax breaks for co-ops; progressive taxation; referendum on proportional representation.
Contact info: <http://greenpartyofalberta.ca> Tel: 403-383-1356.

LABOUR RELATIONS MEMORANDUM OF MISUNDERSTANDING

A boo-boo by a senior civil servant this week gave the campaigning **Jim Prentice** an opportunity to unleash some moral indignation and possibly score a brownie point with the gov't unions whose favour he covets going into an election against an NDP (the union party) that, under popular leader **Rachel Notley**, seems more of a threat than usual.

The offending article in question was a memo sent out to deputy ministers by veteran bureaucrat **Lana Lougheed**, the Public Service Commissioner, on the subject of staff behavior during the election. The DMs passed it along to all staff.

Most of the memo was boiler-plate stuff, drawn from the *Code of Conduct and Ethics for the Public Service of Alberta*, and sent to civil servants at the start of every election. Among its prohibitions are political activity on gov't time, the use of gov't premises or materials for political purposes, and direct fundraising for political parties.

Gov't workers are otherwise free to work on political campaigns outside of their regular hours or if they take a holiday or an unpaid leave of absence. Currently, for example, nine ministers' press secretaries are off campaigning, including **Emily Woods**, the Premier's press secretary.

This time, however, Lougheed added the sentence, "If you are volunteering, even if it is just on your own time, please let your supervisor know."

Such a directive, of course, was bound to raise the hackles of members of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, and one of them immediately leaked the document to the CBC which spun the story as one of gov't intimidation.

"This is a significant limitation to a person's participation in the democratic process that would prevent a lot of people from participating [in a campaign] for fear of retribution," said **Marlin Schmidt**, a gov't geologist who has taken leave to run for the NDP in Edmonton-Goldbar.

Before long AUPE president **Guy Smith** received a phone call from Prentice's Chief of Staff **Mike Percy** (who, incidentally, will be leaving next month) admitting that the memo had "crossed the line" and that a retraction would be forthcoming.

Meanwhile Prentice, questioned at a Tory rally in Edmonton Tuesday, took the opportunity to fulminate against the directive. "This administrative directive is ridiculous and offensive," he declared, black eyes blazing. "Anyone who works for the Government of Alberta has the right to volunteer on political campaigns on their own time and I encourage them to do so."

A memo of "clarification" was issued later that day by **Dean Screpnek**, an ADM in Corporate Human Resources (Lougheed is on vacation), telling employees that they only needed to alert their supervisor if their political activity infringed upon work time or presented a potential conflict of interest.

Any goodwill with the unions Jimbo may have salvaged Tuesday, however, was more than compensated for

Wednesday when, at a Tory rally in Calgary, he promised he would "insist on wage freezes in any contract negotiations until we..." "Anyone who works for the Government of Alberta has the right to volunteer on political campaigns on their own time and I encourage them to do so." have our budget back in balance."

Jack booted by Dippers...

● In defending the budgetary decision not to increase Alberta's 10% corporate tax, both Prentice and Finance Minister **Robin Campbell** have evoked the name of **Jack Mintz**, the University of Calgary economist.

Jack is probably best known for his perennial pleas for a provincial sales tax, in our opinion a sensible solution to the province's revenue fluctuations in that each 1% would add \$1B to the pot. And a PST, unlike, say, the new health-care tax which is applied to income, would be something paid by visitors to the province as well as by residents, meaning that tourists and all those Fort McMurray worker-commuters who pay taxes back home in the Maritimes would contribute an estimated 10% of the total.

But it is now received wisdom among all parties that a PST is a political suicide tax, and thus Mintz's pleas on this subject have gone unheeded. On the campaign trail this week, Prentice once again vowed never, ever to install a sales tax.

In regards to holding the line on corporate taxes, however, the Tories have repeatedly cited Mintz's equally sensible contention that taxing employers (both big and small) will cost jobs—an estimated 8,900 jobs for each percentage point the tax is raised—based on the logic that companies facing lower revenues and higher tax bills will lay off workers to cut costs. (A position emphasized in an article Jack wrote for the *Financial Post* this week criticizing B.C.'s 2013 increase in its corporate tax from 10% to 11%.)

The gov't's on-line survey conducted prior to the budget, however, found that Albertans felt as strongly about raising corporate taxes as they did about not being dinged with a PST. Seventy percent of them said that corporate taxes should go up.

The NDP and their brethren and sisters in the Liberal and Alberta parties, are probably smart enough to see the logic in not raising corporate taxes during a downturn in the economy. But this is an election and populism, no matter how wrong-headed, is a more useful tool than unpopular logic. So when 70% of the population appears to be saying, *Don't tax me, tax the corporations*, the workers' party will gladly revert to its Marxist roots and lump publicly traded corporations and small businesses alike into the category of robber barons who are "not paying their fair share."

And this week in a press release the people's princess **Rachel Notley**, NDP leader and darling of the liberal media, chose to lump poor old—well, rich old—Jack Mintz into the oppressor category.

"Can Albertans trust what he has to say about corporate taxes?" asked the press release, pointing out that in addition to his U of C salary, Jack receives \$263K p.a. for

sitting on the Imperial Oil board of directors, and holds \$1.39M worth of stocks and shares in that dastardly de-spoiler of Mother Gaia.

“Who benefits when corporations get tax breaks on their profits?” rhetorized Rachel. “Jack Mintz. Whether or not Jack Mintz should be advising Jim Prentice on corporate taxes is clearly questionable.”

Clearly questionable, one supposes, because Rachel just questioned it. What she failed to point out, however, is that Jack’s combined salaries at Imperial and at the U of C, where he is a director and Palmer Chair in the School of Public Policy making, well, let’s say \$250K p.a., total around \$510K. (Neither the U of C or Alberta Advanced Education discloses his salary.)

According to Randy, our accountant, this means that under the new semi-progressive tax regime introduced for high earners in the budget, Mintz’s Alberta tax rate on the portion of his income between \$100K and \$250K will rise to 10.5% in 2016, 11% in 2017, and 11.5% in 2018 (where it will stay); the rate on the portion of his income above \$25K will rise to 11% in 2016, 11.5% in 2017, and 12% in 2018 (before falling back to 11.5% in 2019 and staying there).

Thus Jack’s provincial tax will rise from its current \$49,000 p.a. to \$56,000 p.a. in 2018 - a 15.25% increase. Add this to his federal income tax, graduated to the maximum rate of 29% and amounting to \$135K p.a., and his tax bill in 2018 will be \$191,000.

A pup in every pot...

● In attempt to ward off what many are anticipating will be a record-breaking low turnout in the upcoming vote,

Voter turnout in Alberta

Year	%
1979	58.7%
1982	66%
1986	47.3%
1989	53.6%
1993	60.2%
1997	53.8%
2001	53.4%
2004	45.1%
2008*	41%
2012	57%

* Lowest ever turnout for an Alberta election.

Elections Alberta is spending \$1M of the \$28M it has been allotted in the 2015-16 budget in TV, Radio, Social Media and newspaper ads especially aimed at young people who, across the western world, tend not to vote as much as people like Elections Alberta think they should.

The reason for this, according to an article in *The Economist* last year, is two-fold: the young tend to assume the trappings of responsible adulthood later (e.g. the average American woman marries at age 26 today, compared with age 20 in 1970), and they are hard-pressed to find anyone for whom they wish to vote (**Barack Obama** was the exception that proved the rule) and are “switched off

by the negativity and cynicism of elections campaigns targeting the unhappy old.”

Elections Alberta’s “Don’t Let Others Decide for You” ads show young people about to make a decision only to have someone else make that decision for them. In one spot a guy is on the verge of buying a puppy dog when it is snatched from him and replaced with a cat bearing an unnerving resemblance to **Thomas Mulcair**. (We do not share the fears about low voter turnout that seem to ac-

company every election. What many construe as apathy and cynicism many just be contentment or, when it comes to most of our young friends, a natural disengagement from a process with little bearing on their self-involved, responsibility-free, sybaritic lifestyles.

POLITICAL PULSE ... from Page 1

were all defeated in nomination races in which they were rejected as Judases by their former Roser bases, and shunned as opportunistic interlopers by the Tories upon whom they had been foisted by a premier who seemed to view the process as a CEO might view a reassignment of senior VPs.

Some of those in the Lall camp believe that PC HQ did not wish to risk losing another Wildrose defector, especially McAllister, who was considered a blue-chipper in the same league with **Danielle Smith** and the Innisfail-Sylvan Lake firecracker **Kerry Towle** (she won her PC nomination 60%-40% a month ago.)

And any more defeats of floor-crossers might also further the growing suspicion that Prentice, rather than being a big-tent reunifier of the conservative clan, was a Machiavellian manipulator whose m.o. had always been the annihilation of the Wildrose opposition. This certainly has been the message put out there by the remaining Rosers, including **Brian Jean** who was chosen leader on that same Saturday.

The Dark-Prince legend was also abetted by the resignation of PCAA director **Bill McCormick** four days earlier. A Calgary oilman and a Tory blue-blood of 44 years service, McCormick, 61, had been the president of the party through the **Alison Redford** years, and had endured the difficult period in which the membership clamoured for, and finally got, her resignation.

McCormick did not run for reelection at last November’s AGM. He looked old, tired, but relieved when we saw him there. He stayed on as a director, believing in the healing magic of Jim Prentice.

Lall, who calls McCormick a friend and a mentor, believes that the PC central nomination committee’s plan to oust him (Lall) may have influenced McCormick’s resignation.

McCormick didn’t return our phone calls, but on Facebook he said he’d stepped aside on the advice of legal counsel, adding “I cannot and will not participate on a board where the head has no respect for it, its role and its members, regardless of letter, the intent, the spirit of the constitution thus exposing volunteers to personal liability.”

The resignation came in the wake of about eight controversial nomination battles, including Lall’s, where candidates were disqualified at the last minute, generally on orders from executive director **Kelly Charlebois** (“the head”), without any explanation.

Lall received a curt text from **Charlebois** at 11:30 p.m. on the Saturday night telling him the central nomination committee had “disallowed” his nomination. Around the same time Charlebois sent out a news release announcing the disqualification perhaps hoping that in the whirl of other politically newsy events the press release would go virtually unnoticed.

That didn’t happen, of course. And when Prentice was called upon for an explanation he merely said that Lall was “vetted” and disallowed “for good reasons.”

Several members of the **Chestermere-Rocky View CA** resigned in protest, including its president.

As for Lall, he is now running as one of two independents in the riding and predicts he will beat McAllister (who refuses to comment).

Talk in the Corridors

A Peter for all seasons...

● **Peter Lougheed**, dead these two and a half years, can be relied upon by parties of all political persuasions to lend his Kennedyesque/Churchillian imprimatur (depending on the hue of one's rose-coloured glasses) to whatever policy they may be peddling.

Last week it was the turn of NDP leader **Rachel Notley**, whose sainted father Grant spent his political career battling the Lougheed Tories from his lonely seat in the opposition benches. She sent out a news release in reaction to Premier **Jim Prentice's** recent remarks about the "extreme" positions of the parties to his left and right, the former being the NDP with its inevitable call for corporate tax hikes.

Rachel dug up a quotation from "senior statesman" Lougheed (may His name forever be praised) in 2011 in which he stated, "The decline in natural-gas revenues has been dramatic and the degree to which we are dependent on oil revenues, it is time for us to consider an increase in corporate and personal tax."

Tongue firmly in left cheek, the NDP accordingly awarded Lougheed its "Extremist of the Day" award.

"A Thorn among the Rosers"?

● Discarded Wildrose defector **Danielle Smith**, not three weeks into her imposed retirement from politics at the hands of the Highwood Tory voters in Highwood (*Insight*, April 3), indicated in a tweet on Tuesday, sent while clearing out her office in the Legislature Annex, that she will be writing a political memoir.

"Thanks for breakfast and brainstorming about writing a book on my 6 years in politics. I'm going to do it," she tweeted her former Wildrose press secretary **Brock Harrison**, who now works for the fledgling Edmonton advertising agency Starburst Creative.

Spinning the wheels...

● The vehicular choices of leaders in this campaign to an extent reflect the cash support available, but also carry some political baggage.

While once incumbent premiers—and the odd opposition leader—flew around in planes supplied by supporters, the perils of that notorious aviatrix **Alison Redford** have grounded **Jim Prentice**, who is plying the province in a big leased 1997 MCI motor coach wrapped in Tory colours and featuring an image so high-def that one can make out the dandruff on his blue suit jacket.

Wildrose leader **Brian Jean**, while occasionally availing himself of a friend's four-seater Cessna 172—Jean's in the final stages of getting his pilot's licence—mostly travels in a wrapped 2008 28-foot, wi-fi and cellphone-booster equipped Triple-E RV that he bought in March. He boasts of how he talked the Airdrie dealer down from an asking price of \$80K to \$60K. His son Jaymes drives.

NDP leader **Rachel Notley** is driven around in a new Dodge Caravan, also emblazoned with her blonde likeness. Meanwhile Interim Liberal **Dr. David Swann**,

leader of the impecunious Liberals, plies the lonely roads his seven-year-old Ford Escape. It is, as one might expect from this zealous environmentalist, a hybrid.

Latest Lobbyist Action...

● **Michael Bailey** of Western Policy Consultants will be lobbying the ministry of Human Services on behalf of the Canadian arm of the sometimes controversial US multinational Maximus Inc., which is contracted by gov'ts, including BC's, to provide such services as determining whether those on welfare or disability payments are able to return to the workforce.

Protests have recently been staged in the UK and Australia against the company by leftist groups unhappy with the reclassification of benefit recipients.

Human services, the third most expensive ministry after Health and Education, inevitably goes over budget, most recently in 2014-15 when the \$4.095B estimate turned into \$4.137B (despite having jettisoned Seniors, which became its own ministry in September.) Presumably, given the premier's professed aim to keep spending down, the gov't will be looking at services like those offered by Maximus' to ward off another deficit year.

● **Elan MacDonald**, of IMPACT and a former aide to various cabinet ministers and Premier **Alison Redford** (2012), is lobbying Finance & Treasury Board on behalf of the Katz Group, billionaire **Darryl Katz's** suite of corporations that include Rexall pharmacies, Medcentres, and the Edmonton Oilers.

The week ahead ...

Apr. 18-24—Party leaders continue to criss-cross the province. Their itineraries tend not to be planned until late on the previous day when they are posted on the party websites which are: PCs: <https://www.pcalberta.com/SiteEvents>; Wildrose: <http://www.wildrose.ca> NDP: <http://www.albertandp.ca> Liberals: <http://www.albertaliberal.com> Alberta Party: <http://www.albertaparty.ca/calendar>.

Apr. 21—Fundraising pie auction for Drumheller-Stettler Wildrose candidate and MLA **Rick Strankman** at the community centre in the tiny hamlet of Pollockville, which created some minor feminist upset on the Twitter-sphere because the poster, written by local farmwife **Nikki Rooke**, included the invitation to "BYWP (Bring Your Wife's Pies)." Apparently men bake pies too, although we have yet to meet one outside of a bakery. The event begins at 7 p.m.

Apr. 21—One of the few realistic hopes for an NDP win outside of Edmonton is in Lethbridge-West where candidate **Shannon Phillips**, 39, who came in a close second to Tory MLA **Greg Weadick** in 2012, will give it another try. She and the other contenders will square off in a debate being held by Southern Alberta Council of Public Affairs forum at the Lethbridge Public Library between 7 and 9:30 pm. Live streaming at <http://www.uleth.ca/unews/organization/southern-alberta-council-public-affairs>.