

Ric Dolphin's

Insight

into Government

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THE FIRST CUTS

THE WATCHDOGS FEEL THE PINCH OF THE SHARP PENCIL

And so it begins with two percent cuts to the Legislative Offices. Almost quaint in retrospect, they are but nicks compared with what's to come. Campbell's talking about 9% across-the-board and J.P. finally admits to recession. Do we smell a Ralph?

In the grand sweep of the Alberta budget the seven Legislative Offices—sometimes called the “watchdog” agencies—have always seemed like relatively inconsequential entries on the \$40B expense side of the ledger.

And for four or five Decembers now, the heads of these arm's-length organizations, often rather cocky in the knowledge that they do not directly report to gov't, have marched into the Standing Committee on Legislative offices, with budget estimates for 5%, 10% or even 15% increases. And there has been little resistance.

The badly needed cash is usually to hire more staff, or higher paid staff, which will inevitably make things more efficient and save money in the long run. Or it is necessary because of the increase in population and cost of living—even if their workloads aren't actually increasing. For they will be. Soon. Parkinson's Law.

The officers or their minions dutifully present annual reports that are heavy on surveys and anecdotal information, and light on any empirical performance data, often with big photos of laughing children or inspiring natural scenes.

Somewhere deep towards the bottom one might, if one's lucky, come upon a consolidated financial statement. And buried somewhere deep in those figures, the astute scout will discover that the pay raise for the top guy or gal has increased at a rate slightly higher than that of the overall budget.

But no matter. These are *important* organizations very much loved by the media, not necessary because they help the public at large, but because they have the ability to embarrass the gov't and its members.

Continued on next page...

POLITICAL PULSE

KEEPING IT WILD

A LIKELY SUCCESSOR TO THE DANIELLE

Derek Fildebrandt, the former Alberta director of the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation who was acclaimed Wildrose candidate for Strathmore-Brooks last Friday, says he will be deciding “soon” whether he'll take a run at the leadership of his tragically diminished party.

He'll be gauging his support as he campaigns in the riding currently held by Jason Hale, one of the 11 Wildrose turncoats who is now a PC and may or may not run for election...

Oh, but before we go any further, we should ask our rural Wildrose candidate if he'd ever march in a gay pride parade. Well, Derek?

“It's not the way I would spend my weekend, but I have no problem with people who like to do that.”

Seems a good answer. But maybe we should consult Laurie Blakeman. (Get back to you.)

While we do not claim to know the mood of the electorate in this largely small-c conservative rural riding, it is reasonable to suppose that a tele-genic, hard-driving, small-government, fiscally hawkish firebrand like Fildebrandt, might have a shot at the seat.

Hale, like other strayed Rosers, faces the two edges of the sword: one side's the PC voters who hold grudges from when the Wildrose attacked their party; the other's the Wildrosers who are disgusted with the floor-crossers' and are very unlikely to vote for them as PCers.

Hale, 45, a rancher and former rodeo bull rider, was, according to Fildebrandt, “roped into” crossing the floor by his peers. Hesitant and less than articulate in public discourse, he will be hard-pressed to defend his actions if it ever comes to debate with Fildebrandt, 29, who has been close to politics since puberty, is used to the media, and has a belly full of fire.

“I'm full of piss an vinegar,” he corrects. “I will out-work my opponents two hours to one.”

More importantly: “I know how to raise a lot of money from a large number of small donations.” The story of the Wildrose's success.

A clue to how well PC members will take to the former Wildrosers will come in the nomination contests. The only former Roser so far selected as a PC candidate is Ian Donovan (Little Bow), who was acclaimed last week. The affable Donovan is popular with Tories and Wildrosers alike in a socially conservative riding where his stated reason for leaving the party—leader Danielle Smith's pandering to the gays—played well.

The other patch-overs may not be so lucky, although Jim Prentice is making a point of showing his support for the mongrels. He appeared with Smith in Highwood two weeks ago (*Insight* Jan. 30), and this week was in Sylvan Lake at a Kerry Towle event. Both gals are being challenged for the nomination.

Turn to Political Pulse on pg. 5

For whether it's the Electoral Commission revealing dodgy political donations from hockey arena developers, the Ethics Commissioner investigating a contract awarded to a premier's ex-husband, or the Auditor General chronicling the premier's misuse of airplanes, these reports allow reporters the opportunity to become muckrakers—crusaders for truth, justice, and “the most vulnerable members of society.” And to get their stories on the front page or at the top of the newscast.

Similarly the opposition parties have a soft spot for these offices because they provide the ammo with which to blast the gov't in Question Period. The Freedom of information and Privacy Commission has been especially profitable in this regard. Where would the Wildrose—or the CBC for that matter—have been if not for FOIP requests?

And so, year after year, when officials from these offices have arrived in the committee chambers with requests for substantial increases, the committee, even though most

‘THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE DIFFERENT. WE ARE FACING A BUDGETARY DILEMMA WHICH IS WITHOUT PRECEDENT.’

members are Tories, has rubber-stamped the requests.

What might they have been thinking? Let's muse on it:

Why upset the media? Why upset the opposition? Even if these outfits are a little bloated, they generally serve worthwhile purposes, I guess. Certainly the Auditor General and the Electoral Commission have done some worthwhile work. Not so sure about the rest.

When was the last time we heard anything about the Ombudsman? And that Child and Youth Advocate? What does he do that social workers, cops, family lawyers, foster parents, half-way houses, and the huge army of do-gooders in Humongous Services aren't doing already? Collecting \$300K and looking saintly, I guess. He does ooze empathy quite splendidly! I want him at my funeral.

Oh well, best not to rock the boat. The media will no doubt find some way of blaming us for killing babies. They always do. No, best to just tell these officers they're doing yeoman's service, give 'em their money, and then grab lunch...

And so it was with the usual expectations that representatives from the seven Legislative Offices skipped into committee in early December with requests for the normal handsome increases to their budgets.

Information and Privacy Commissioner **Jill Clayton** asked for a 16.5% increase. **Peter Hourihan** who wears both the Ombudsman's hat and that of the fairly new Public Interest Commissioner (whistle blowing) asked for 7% for the former, and 6% for the latter.

New Ethics Commissioner **Marguerite Trussler**, was most modest, requesting a 2.4% increase. While Auditor General **Merwan Saher** who runs the biggest (\$27M), but possibly tightest operation, requested an additional 4.5% to his budget so he could meet merit and cost of living pay obligations and hire a couple of executives that he insisted would increase AG's capabilities and ultimately save the gov't money through more “systems audits” into depart-

mental efficiencies.

Child & Youth Advocate **Del Graff** wanted a 9% increase to add staff to do the new job of investigating the deaths of children who had been in state care within the last two years. (This retroactive measure was mandated by new legislation last spring that grew out of a round table discussion, that was called after the *Edmonton Journal* rediscovered that foster kids, 60% of them native, have a habit of dying from physical and mental ailments.)

There were three people on the committee who wanted to give the offices all that they asked. Two of them, predictably, were Liberal **Laurie Blakeman** (Edmonton-Centre) and NDP'er **David Eggen** (Edmonton-Calder), who argued repeatedly that cutting back on these “watchdog” agencies would hurt everyone and diminish the civilization. Their unlikely fellow traveller turned out to be Wildrosier **Jeff Wilson**, who on the day after the final December meeting would cross the floor to the Tories, but might more properly have moved into the Dipper camp.

By the time we were half way through December, and the committee was ready to decide on the Offices' requests, oil was down around Alberta's knees (\$60 and dropping). Prentice was already <http://budget.alberta.ca> giving his “prudence and resilience” speeches, and the treasury board issued a directive to committee Chairman **Matt Jeneroux** (Edmonton South-West) to pass on to the Tories on the committee: not only would the Legislative Offices have to forego budget increases, but they'd have to cut 2% from their existing year's budget (2014-15) and live on that for 2015-16.

All of the agencies except for the Electoral Office—which must stage an election in the coming year for a population 300K greater than in 2012—were voted 2% cuts.

Dr. Neil Brown (Calgary-Nose Hill) tried to explain things to the crest-fallen officers.

“In my capacity as a member of this committee over the last several years I've got to say that we have given, in every instance that I can recall, 100% of what has been asked for to each and every one of these legislative offices. We have never cut a dime out of what they've asked for. But these circumstances are different. We are facing a budgetary dilemma in the province of Alberta right now which is without precedent.”

Dr. Richard Starke (Vermilion-Lloydminster) spoke presciently on Dec. 16 when he said, “You know, quite frankly, I think that when all the dust settles and we have a budget for the '15-16 year, it will show that a 2% reduction is actually preserving the function of these offices at a level that a lot of government ministries are not going to enjoy.”

This week, two of the slapped-down officers—the Auditor General and the Child & Youth Advocate—returned to the committee meeting, beseeching the members reconsider. The media had barely noticed the cuts of Dec. 16 because of the intrigue and excitement accompanying the floor-crossings of nine Wildrosiers to the Tories.

But this time the *Edmonton Journal* and CBC were there

in full force as Graff and Saher argued for more money.

This time, however, the AG had reduced its original ask of \$28,565,000 to \$27,300,000, the same amount as it had received for its current budget year. In other words, a hold-the-line budget.

“So we’re saying that we’re prepared to take on the challenge of dealing with that environment in a hold-the-line budget,” said Saher. “We think that that will cause pain only in the sense of causing us to have to, you know, —let’s use an accounting metaphor here —sharpen our pencils.”

Graff, who this time around was merely asking for the reinstatement of \$275K for five staff to handle the increased workload, was not so lucky.

He was asked by committee members what would happen if he didn’t get the money. He said that the investigations into child deaths would take much longer, though he could not point to any real dangers caused by the delay.

His request was voted down and the keeners at the *Journal* wailed accordingly. Special umbrage was taken when committee member **Genia Leskiw** (Bonnyville-Cold Lake) said of the advocate’s office “I really don’t

believe that they’ve sharpened their pencils to as sharp as they could have.”

Another surprise came Wednesday when Prentice and Finance Minister **Robin Campbell** held a presser to deliver their latest sky-is-falling alarm on Wednesday.

Prentice, who just a few weeks ago had been quoting all the Canadian bank economists saying there would not be an Alberta recession, cited a recent CIBC report that said that there would.

Campbell, for the first time, also announced how much would be cut from spending: 9%. Since the current “hole” in the budget is said to be 20% of revenue, we now await news on where the rest of the shortfall is coming from.

Certainly not much will be coming from what now seems like a measly 2% trimmed from the Legislative Offices. And on that very subject, Prentice, those black Irish brows furrowed and brooding, declared that the money given back to the Auditor General by the committee would be rescinded.

“It’s clearly not realistic in the environment that we are in to expect that the gov’t expenditures will continue to increase.” And, with a scowl, he was gone.

DATA bank ...

GOLDEN HANDSHAKES

Estimated severances for retiring MLAs

MLAs serving prior to April 22, 2012, are entitled to a transition allowance, which the **Ralph Klein** gov’t instituted to replace the pensions that members received until 1989. The transition allowance is calculated by multiplying the years served (till April 22, 2012) by 3 months of salary averaged from the 3 years the MLA was paid the most. (e.g. as a cabinet minister).

Since April 22, 2012, MLAs have received a “retirement investment amount” equal to 13% of their annual MLA salary (currently at \$134,000, but soon to be cut by 5%), which works out to \$17,420 a year. The “employer” (i.e. you & I) will also contribute up to 3.65% of the member’s salary (i.e. \$4,891) in a matching contribution to the member’s RSP. For our estimations here, we have assumed all MLAs will receive this amount. We are also assuming a spring election, meaning most of those on this list will resign when the writ is dropped (Horner’s & Griffiths’ resignations were immediate.)

MLA & RIDING	YRS IN OFFICE	\$ REC'D	MLA & RIDING	YRS IN OFFICE	\$ REC'D
Rob Anderson, 37 (PC Airdrie)	7	\$180K	Doug Horner, 54* (PC Spruce Grove-St. Albert)	14	\$507K
Cal Dallas, 58* (PC Red Deer South)	7	\$209K	Mary Anne Jablonski, 61* (PC Red Deer North)	15	\$493K
Alana DeLong, 65 (PC Calgary-Bow)	14	\$397K	Darshang Kang, 64 (LIB Calgary-McCall)	7	\$180K
Heather Forsyth, 64* (WR Calgary-Fish Creek)	21.75	\$676K	Donna Kennedy-Glans (PC Calgary-Varsity)	3	\$67K
Yvonne Fritz, 64* (PC Calgary-Cross)	21.75	\$873K	Genia Leskiw, 60 (PC Bonnyville-Cold Lake)	7	\$168K
Hector Goudreau, 64* (PC Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley)	10.5	\$733K	Bruce Rowe, 72 (PC Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills)	3	\$67K
Doug Griffiths, 42* (PC Battle River-Wainwright)	13	\$422K	Bridget Pastoor, 74 (PC Lethbridge East)	1.5	\$279K
Kent Hehr, 45 (LIB Calgary-Buffalo)	7	\$180K	Dr. Raj Sherman, 48 (LIB Edmonton-Meadowlark)	7	\$182K
Fred Horne, 53* (PC Edmonton-Rutherford)	7	\$207K	*Designates MLAs who held full cabinet posts.		

WHAT WE PAY THEM

MLA Pay since April 2012:
\$134,000

MLA Pay before April 2012:
\$78,138
(\$26,046 tax free)

MLA Pay in the 2015-16 year:
\$127,300

Cabinet Minister’s pay since April 2012:
\$201,000

Cabinet Minister’s pay in the 2015-16 year:
\$190,950

Premier’s pay before/after cut:
\$217,750
\$206,863

2nd highest paid prov. members:

Ontario MPPs:
\$116,500

Ontario Cabinet Ministers:
\$165,850

Ontario premier:
\$208,974

PETROGEDDON CONTINUED

DREAMS DIE ON THE VINE AS GOVERNMENT EYES THE CITIES

Although Alberta's cities still await word on the severity of the hits they will be taking in reduced provincial grants, a precursor came to Edmonton this week when Culture & Tourism dashed its hopes to host a second Commonwealth Games in 2022. Many Edmontonians brimmingly remember that proud August in 1978 when HRM QEII opened the games in the brand-new Commonwealth Stadium, Canada led the 46 competing nations with 109 medals, and Alberta's capital seemed on the verge of being as vibrant, prosperous and promising as Calgary.

The bid for the 2022 games, approved a year ago by the city and the province, held the promise of a comeback that the city—with its new arena, new museum and a plethora of planned office towers—was just beginning to taste.

But on Tuesday C&T Minister **Maureen Kubinec** issued one of those statements that will, assuming no one blows up Saudi Arabia, become all too familiar in the weeks and months ahead: “As we approach the next budget, we know we will have to make difficult choices. In this context, the Government of Alberta is simply not in a position to financially support the costs associated with not only a bid, but with further costs beyond the bidding process. For the next several years, the Alberta government's priority is to focus on spending that directly supports Albertans' core priorities, like health and education.”

The bid itself was not the main concern, as the city was to bear that \$70M cost. Rather it was the estimated \$1B cost of the games if approved that caused the province to balk, for it would have been on the hook for 80%.

“Should Edmonton or any city decide to proceed with any future bids,” Kubinec's statement continued, “the economic context must be favourable and the bid must have the full support of all three orders of government.”

And we'd bet the rookie minister thought this would be a fun portfolio when she was appointed in September.

Incidentally, it was nice of Maureen to show up at the funeral of Wildrose co-founder Link Byfield (*Insight*, Jan. 30) two weeks ago. She'd narrowly beaten him in the 2012 election to win the Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock Riding. Link's family appreciated the gesture.

Among the 500 or so who filled the Catholic church and adjoining hall in Riviere Qui Barre, northwest of Edmonton, were federal Employment Minister **Jason Kenney**, Reform Party founder **Preston Manning**, Sun TV controversialist **Ezra Levant**, Wildrose MLA **Rick Strankman**, and of course Link's father, Alberta Report magazine founder and Reform Party co-founder **Ted Byfield**, 86, who read a passage from scripture. Conspicuously absent was former Wildrose Leader **Danielle Smith**, whom Link had recruited in 2009. She said she had a “prior engagement.”

The comeback kids...

● As of this week the following incumbent PC MLAs had been acclaimed as candidates in the upcoming election:

- Seniors Minister **Jeff Johnson** (Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater)
- Infrastructure Minister **Manmeet Bhullar** (Calgary-Greenway)
- MLA **Jason Luan** (Calgary-Hawkwood)
- Jobs Minister **Ric McIver** (Calgary-Hays)
- Environment Minister **Kyle Fawcett** (Calgary-Klein)
- MLA **Mike Ellis** (Calgary-West)
- Municipal Affairs Minister **Diana McQueen** (Drayton Valley-Devon)
- MLA **Sohail Quadri** (Edmonton-Mill Woods)
- MLA **Matt Jeneroux** (Edmonton-South West)
- Health Minister **Stephen Mandel** (Edmonton-Whitemud)
- Advanced Education Minister **Don Scott** (Fort McMurray-Conklin)
- Transportation Minister **Wayne Drysdale** (Grande Prairie-Wapiti)
- MLA (& former Wildrosier) **Ian Donovan** (Little Bow)
- Energy Minister **Frank Oberle** (Peace River).

A future Culture minister, *peut-être?*

● The 15th acclaimed PCer is newcomer **Terry Rock** in Calgary-Buffalo, the downtown constituency being vacated by Liberal **Kent Hehr**, who is to run federally.

Prentice—a-la-Lougheed—is looking for well-credentialed hot shots to ornament his new gov't, and the constituency association knows it also needs some kind of Bohemian rhapsode who will appeal to the denizens of this metrosexual/homosexual, vegan/locovore, indie/hipster, artsy-fartsy caricature of an urban riding.

The riding probably couldn't have done much better than Rock, who not only has a name that does just that, but is a solid member of the public arts establishment in Calgary, having been the founder and CEO of the municipally owned Calgary Arts Development Authority, a recently resigned member of the Premier's Council for Culture, and a member of assorted artsy organizations.

He also boasts a PhD in Management from Texas Tech University and in 1998 was recruited to the U of C's Haskeyne School of business where his research (according to his website) “focused on the processes by which organizations develop competitive advantage and continue to create value in turbulent times.” Might be useful just now.

Has Rock got sufficient progressive cred? Sadly, he's neither gay nor black like Mayor **Naheed Nenshi's** executive assistant **Chima Nkemdirim** who is considering a run in Cal-Buff for the Alberta Party. Rock's a white breeder with a wife and three kids. But he is the chairman of his local United Church—aka: the NDP at Prayer—which must count for a few prog points.

POLITICAL PULSE ... from Page 1

When we spoke with Fildebrandt on Wednesday, he'd already phoned or door-knocked more than 600 residences in Strathmore-Brooks.

Half of the Wildrose members encountered had walked away from the party because of Smith's betrayal.

"Danielle Smith was the Wildrose to them," says Fildebrandt, who as the CTF director worked cheek by jowl with both Smith and the party's former Finance Critic **Rob Anderson**. He says Anderson tried to bring him over to the Tories, "But it didn't taste right. Like bad fish."

As for the disenfranchised in his riding, "They were angry with Wildrose, but I was able to convince many of them that **Danielle Smith** is not the Wildrose."

He says he talked 90% of the departed back to the party, and also signed up enough new members to exceed the previous total.

"He's smart, he's articulate and fearless," says a senior member of the Wildrose executive, "but he's maybe too young. You can talk a good story until you're elected but then you have to be a good manager. You have get caucus to do what you want and make them think it's their idea. Most people get that through experience. Hell, I didn't get it until I was 50."

There are others, however, who think Fildebrandt has the same qualities as the departed Danielle, who was also once thought too young and inexperienced in political leadership, but who brought the Wildrose within a whisker of gaining power before she returned to the PC party whence she had originally emerged.

"He's got the spark, the energy, and the right message," says a northern Alberta Wildrose constituency president. "And there's no past with the provincial Tories. He seems to hold them in a healthy disregard, and is less likely to go running into their arms after hitting a couple of speed bumps."

Of Prussian/English stock, Derek grew up in a small town in the paradoxically conservative Ottawa valley, earned a BA in Canadian History at Carleton, and worked for politicians on the Reform/Alliance side of the federal Conservatives, staying in Ottawa long enough to become "disgusted with politicians." (He categorizes them as cliquy, status hungry, greasy pole climbers.)

After a stint as a policy analyst with the BC gov't Fildebrandt went to work for the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, the national non-profit advocacy group that grew out of two provincial tax whineries (AB & SK) in 1990, and whose mandate is the exposure of wasteful gov't spending, the promotion of lower and fewer taxes, and probably property rights. Maybe firearms reform?

To us bile-stained scribes at the Legislature, Fildebrandt's was the chiding epilogue that followed the latest quarterly update by (usually) **Doug Horner**. The blonde and bearded supply-sider could be counted upon to explain, yet again, how the gov't's claims of fiscal balance or surplus were bogus.

And public debt is, was, and always has been the great Satan for the CTF, for Ralph Klein, and of course for **Derek Fildebrandt** who once toured the province with Danielle and "The Debt Clock."

I'm not sure if he has leadership qualities, but the Wildrose has time to find this out. And given the rather pedestrian options who have so far expressed interest in the Jun. 6 competition, Fildebrandt would be breath of fresh air and, one expects, a huge pain in the ass for **Jim Prentice**.

People ...

Recent appointments by cabinet and highlights of recent cabinet orders

Academic appointments...

- **Vance Langford**, a Calgary lawyer, and **Andrea Robertson**, president & CEO of STARS Air Ambulance, to the board of Bow Valley College for three-year terms.
- **Nancy Spencer-Poitras**, of Edson, director of leadership learning for the College of Alberta School Superintendents, to the board of Olds College for a three-year term.

Recent cabinet orders...

- Approval of 89-year lease of land by the University of Calgary to Alberta Health Services for the continued occupation by the Calgary Childrens' Hospital
- Approval of the borrowing by the University of Alberta of up to \$17.5M from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority for a 25-year-term at an interest rate of up to 5.5% p.a. to fund a portion of the construction of the Saskatchewan Drive Student Residence.

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Talk in the Corridors

How'd you solve a problem like Joe Anglin?...

● When we talked to Wildrose-turned-Independent MLA **Joe Anglin** (Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre) a couple of weeks back, he had decided to he was going to run for the Tory nomination.

“Why the hell would you want to do that, Joe?” we asked. “Being an independent suits you.”

Joe sort of agreed but explained that he would probably more likely be elected if he were a Tory candidate. And he kind of liked Prentice.

Anyway, he went through the criminal background check, filled out the forms and what-have-you, but the next thing he knew PC Association executive director **Kelly Charlebois** was on the phone requesting a meeting in Red Deer.

One the more salient questions he and several PC execs asked Joe at the meeting was why hadn't he crossed to the Tories after becoming the first Wildrose defector?

Joe said gave his standard, principled answer that one shouldn't be able to just walk over to a party, but win an election as member of that party, thus legitimizing one's position with a mandate from the voters. Meanwhile, one should sit as an independent.

According to Joe, Charlebois and his colleagues weren't much impressed with this answer, sensing, as Joe puts it, that “I am not gonna be an MLA who will raise my hand when I want to ask a question.”

“Too much of a loose cannon for them?”

“Yeah, that's basically it.”

So will he now run as an independent after all?

“I'm thinking of it. I've been getting a lot of calls from people saying, ‘Good! We didn't want you to run PC in the first place.’”

Oh, okay then, Greg...

● Last week in our prognostications on the outcome of the upcoming election and the probable extermination of all but a handful of opposition members by the J.P. Empire, we not only failed to mention the Alberta Party—an oversight about which leader **Greg Clark** chided us this week—but assigned it zero seats in our projected six-member oppo.

Gregor insists that his non-existent caucus will metamorphose into a creature with at least two seats—and if not two then certainly the one he intends to personally win in the land of flood-drenched Mercedes otherwise known as Calgary-Elbow.

You'll recall he came second in the October by-election to Tory Education Minister **Gordon Dirks** (*Insight*, Oct. 31), with 27% to Gordo's 33%. The Wildrose got 22%, the LIBs 12, and the NDP 4%.

Our assumption for the general election is that most of those Wildrose voters will either sit on their hands this

time or migrate to the Tories and cement Dirks' incumbency (assuming he wins the nomination).

But Clark, who door-knocked up a storm during his by-election campaign and can therefore claim barometric superiority over we desk-bound scribes, believes a good chunk of those Wildrosers—the more middle-of-the-road ones—will choose his party as the best means of providing a robust opposition to the Tories.

He also expects that some of those liberal-minded constituents who strategically voted PC to keep out the “scary” Wildrose will switch to the AP, as will those erstwhile Liberal supporters who will wake up one morning to discover that their party has dissolved in the rain.

Could we rent the palace by the hour?

● Got a tour of the newly refurbished Federal Building the other day. They've done a good job on the designed-in-the-'30s, built-in-the-'50s, 11-storey Art Deco granite monument to Diefenbaker-era bureaucrats in grey flannel suits. Treasury & Exec. Council people were already moving in.

The amenities will include a decent restaurant, a cafeteria, gym, theatre, art gallery, gift shop, and a big entry atrium with a living wall of plants. Upstairs is a big cabinet room, and an even bigger caucus room, and twice as many committee rooms as there are currently in the Annex (all are equipped for TV or webcast.)

The “skypalace” that caused such glee among the Wildrose is an 800-sq-ft, two-bedroom apartment that adjoins twice as much meeting space for various events and hostings. Nothing special in itself, but the glass walls, the rooftop garden surrounding them, and the view make you wish someone was enjoying it. With you.

Outside in the west plaza, preparations are being made for the rink that will actually be built (a philanthropist will cover the \$1M cost foregone by the province.) We hope to see Jimbo out playing shinny on it for a photo op before the winter leaves.

The week ahead ...

Feb. 16- Premier **Don Getty's** gift to the province, Family Day, is celebrating its silver anniversary this year, with the gov't offering free admission for families to its various sites, museums, and parks. The Legislature will be alive with assorted entertainments, including roving musicians and magicians, the “Build a Legoslature” activity for kids wishing to create their own capitols with Lego bricks, horse-drawn carriage rides, and a sugar shack where folks can make maple candies in the snow.

Feb. 21- The Alberta Party's AGM akes place at the Radisson Hotel (nee the IHotel) in Red Deer. Along with the usual AGM business (policy reviews, board elections, etc.), storied campaign manager **Stephen Carter** (**Mayor Naheed Nenshi, Alison Redford**) will be giving the keynote address at lunchtime, and the Alberta Party's once and only MLA, **Dave Taylor**, the former Liberal now back on Calgary talk radio, disrupt your supper. For tickets and more info go to: http://www.albertaparty.ca/2014_agm_and_constitutional_review