

The Klein Revolution: Part II

*something old,
something new...*

RICH VIVONE

In late May, Premier Ralph Klein reconstructed Alberta's public service in the largest single reorganization of government in 60 years. He created three super ministries: Learning, Infrastructure, and Human Resources and Employment. He promoted fresh faces to run them. Justice and Environment were given new ministers—calmer, steadier hands. Senior managers were shuffled. Why? Understanding what this means for the future can be found in the past.

Election night, March 11, 1997, should have been a

happy night for Premier Klein. He and his Conservative Party had just been given a resounding vote of confidence by Albertans, winning 63 of 83 seats and 51 per cent of the popular vote.

He should have been ecstatic. After all, he and the Conservatives had inflicted four years of tough medicine on Albertans—axing government services from health care to education to balance the provincial budget—and enough Albertans applauded to keep him in business for another mandate.

Instead, a province-wide television audience saw this little rotund man wearing a face more fitting a kid who had just lost his dog. Klein's words, his demeanour and his body language betrayed that, although he had won, he was not pleased.

Klein expected more. Public opinion polling throughout the campaign consistently pointed to a landslide, perhaps 80 seats in the 83-seat Assembly and no less than 60 per cent of the popular vote. A massive majority would put the little guy right up there with Ernest Manning and Peter Lougheed as one of Alberta's great political leaders.

Instead, election night was a disappointment. This is Alberta, where one-dimensional politics and huge majorities are the norm; where in nine of the last 11 elections, the winning party filled more than 70 per cent of the seats in the Legislative Assembly; where in seven of the last 11 elections, the winner received more than 50 per cent of the total vote. This is the province where only two parties have ever formed governments since 1935.

History shows that, three times from 1975 to 1982, Peter Lougheed won more than 90 per cent of the seats in the Assembly. Ernest Manning captured 85 per cent or more three times between 1959 and 1967 alone. By Alberta standards, Klein's 76 per cent of the seats and 51 per cent of the total vote on March 11, 1997, was barely a passing grade.

What did they do that Klein hasn't done? Plenty. Manning and Lougheed understood the power of government. Their governments used economic, fiscal and social policies to build a wealthy province with a material quality of life comparable to any in the world. Klein mistrusts government and is wary of using its power for anything. Klein's government is better known for tearing down rather than building. Klein's been working the same themes since 1993: fiscal responsibility, no sales tax, low tax regimes, balanced budgets, and a competitive economic environment. It's earned him a sizable reputation inside and outside the province. It's also labeled him a one-trick politician, a one-dimensional scriptwriter who exhausted his creative talents in writing the first act and is trying to bluff his way through the second. Budget slashers aren't the heroes of political history; the heroes are the men and women who build, who earn trust and respect because they help make life better for everyone. If Klein expects to stand with the political giants in Alberta's history, he must do something positive and constructive. He will be 57 on November 1 and has one, perhaps two more elections left to do it.

SEVENTH IN POPULAR VOTE.

ELECTION YEAR	PREMIER	% POPULAR VOTE
November 1982	Lougheed	62.28
March 1975	Lougheed	62.25
March 1979	Lougheed	57.40
June 1959	Manning	55.69
January 1963	Manning	54.81
May 1986	Getty	51.40
March 1997	Klein	51.17

SEVENTH IN WINNING SEATS.

ELECTION YEAR	TOTAL SEATS	GOVERNMENT SEATS	PREMIER	% OF SEATS
1959	65	62	Manning	95.4
1963	63	60	Manning	95.2
1982	79	75	Lougheed	94.9
1979	79	74	Lougheed	93.7
1975	75	69	Lougheed	92.0
1967	65	55	Manning	84.6
1997	83	63	Klein	75.9

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The groundwork for a brand spanking new Klein

government began with the massive changes in late May: a management shakeup at the top levels of the public service; big new departments created by dismantling smaller ones; a concentration on services that impact people's lives; and a cabinet shuffle. It all happened in three days.

Absolute political control drives this reconstruction. From his first days in the premier's office late in 1992, Klein demanded that politicians control the public service. The logic: politicians are directly accountable to voters, therefore politicians make the decisions. Under that system, public service managers do what politicians tell them to do. The trick in this ageless struggle between the elected and their bureaucrats, popularized by the *Yes, Minister* television series, is to get public service managers, formally known in bureaucratic circles as deputy ministers, to do what they are told. Deputy ministers, wise and experienced in the ways of management, know that their strength is survival. They usually outlast cranky, annoying politicians who insist on knowing what their departments are doing. In large government departments with hundreds of programs, it is doubtful whether a politician can grasp even the rudiments of the inner workings of a bureaucracy. Worse, deputy ministers simply ignore political direction they think might jeopardize their operations. Even worse, and much more common, smart managers captivate politicians and end up telling them what they can and can't do.



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That ended with Klein. Five managers were removed previously in Klein's world of all-powerful, all-knowing politicians. Tough-minded cabinet ministers such as Steve West tolerated no disagreement: he personally got rid of deputy transportation and utilities minister Harvey Alton and deputy energy minister Rick Hyndman. Three other deputy ministers have cleaned out their desks in the last two years: Robin Ford from Labour, Leroy Sloan from Education, and John McGowan from Municipal Affairs. No explanations were offered; they just left, with no advance notice, no explanations and no going-away parties.

If any of Alberta's well-paid deputy ministers—minimum is \$125,000 annually—missed the message, Klein fired off a reminder in May. Most deputy ministers were moved to other departments whether they wanted to go or not. The move broke the chain of inner department loyalties that is the strength of deputy ministers. Put crudely, deputies were reminded who is the boss. These shifts also send a message to women who think this is a government run exclusively by men. Only three of the 18 deputy ministers are women, but after this shuffle, these three run the most influential and expensive departments. Lynne Duncan gets Health and Wellness, Maria David-Evans moves to the new Learning portfolio and Shelley Ewart-Johnson gets the new Human Resources and Employment job.

With top management re-educated, Klein dealt with the public service itself. Long criticized as intransigent, self-perpetuating, and self-important, government departments were stripped down and rebuilt. In describing the changes in late May, Klein said, "We need to see more teamwork and a move to more cross-government efforts." Gone are the days when government departments could afford to work independently.

The Growth Summit of 1997 provided the template. That public consultation process, often criticized because its participants were hand-

picked by its organizers, instructed government to get its priorities straight: people programs (defined as education, job training and lifelong learning) and infrastructure (public services such as roads and water systems) need money and attention.

In this restructuring, Klein heeded the Summit's direction. The two education departments—Advanced Education and Education—were combined under one minister and given a new name—Learning. Rather than two departments promoting different philosophies, one for education through Grade 12 and the other for the post-secondary system, a single department theoretically will deliver a consistent philosophy for both.

Job training, job safety, workforce regulation and welfare were combined under one roof in a huge new department called Human Resources and Employment rather than scattered among three.

Infrastructure is a new super ministry dealing with everything from school buildings to roads. Infrastructure is all about money. Government already spends almost \$1-billion annually in these areas as it struggles to cope with the demands of population growth (Alberta's population grew by more than 500,000 to 2.9 million since 1990) and vigorous economic growth (in real terms, using 1986 dollars, gross domestic product has grown from \$74-billion in 1990 to almost \$95-billion in 1999). Growth puts pressure on everything Albertans see and touch, from school buildings to education and health care programs to roads and water systems. The \$1-billion annually isn't nearly enough. A government task force reported early in 1998 that school buildings alone need \$771-million immediately.

With management re-indoctrinated and the bureaucracy re-constructed, political control became the final target.

Among ministers, four didn't move: Steve West in Resource Development, Stockwell Day in Treasury, Halvar Jonson in Health and Wellness, and Lorne Taylor in Innovation and Science. Three of them—West, Day and Jonson—are the ideological backbone of this government.

West's philosophy and style are stamped all over this reconstruction. First elected in 1986, West has been a leader and driving force from the day he was appointed to cabinet by Don Getty in 1989. A true enemy of bureaucracy, big government and government spending, he has relentlessly slashed and burned every department he has led. As Municipal Affairs Minister, he cut funding to local governments by almost half; he privatized the retail liquor stores ("you don't have to be a government employee to put a mickey in a brown paper bag"); he privatized the highway maintenance system; and he began to privatize provincial parks. West is as consistent as they come in politics. Determined to keep a sharp eye on government spending and knowing that West will do that, Klein has, in fact, made West his number two man. At 56, West has toned down his public statements somewhat in recent years, but not his personal political views.

Treasurer Stockwell Day is relatively young at 49, and looks younger. Better than anyone in this government, he understands that politics is theatre, where image is everything. Day is one of the conservative movement's poster boys: articulate, presentable, and intolerant. He's an entertaining public speaker who says all the right things to conservative audiences. No other politician in western Canada is portrayed so often by the media as leadership material. Trouble is, no one is certain which party he is running to lead—Alberta's Conservative Party or the non-existent federal United Alternative—or who his followers might be. Day came into



STEVE WEST: *Resources*



STOCKWELL DAY: *Treasury*



HALVAR JONSON: *Health*



LORNE TAYOR: *Science*

*something
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LYLE OBERG: *Learning*



GARY MAR: *Environment*



ED STELMACH: *Infrastructure*



DAVID HANCOCK: *Justice*

politics in 1986 determined to do something about the tax system and government spending. As Provincial Treasurer after the election in 1997, Day emerged by promising a new, single-rate tax system scheduled to come into effect in January 2002, if the economy and government revenues continue to be healthy. Regardless of his political record, Day will be haunted by his inability to separate his political and religious beliefs. Klein's continued tolerance of Day's intolerance is puzzling.

Halvar Jonson, at 58, quiet, unassuming and intelligent, has a solid political record and is the kind of minister who can keep the health sector under control. First elected in 1982, he was appointed to his first cabinet post by Klein in 1992. As Education Minister, this high school principal from Ponoka thoroughly restructured the political and administrative arms of the education system. When the health system came apart in 1996, due to an astonishingly poor choice of deputy ministers and an indecisive minister in Shirley McClellan, Klein turned to Jonson. The health system is still fraught with political difficulty, but Klein has no one else with the experience and common sense to keep the lid on.

With veterans firmly in control, Klein moved the best of the rest into troubled sectors. After health, education is the most politically volatile sector. Since 1993, much has changed in education—the structure, the funding, and many programs—but the complaints still come fast and frequently. Resistance to reform was expected from vested interests such as the Alberta Teachers' Association and school trustee organizations, but political action by parents, the very people expected to support educational reforms, was not. Government claims education is a priority, but Albertans with children in the system don't believe it. Albertans remember that Klein tried to chop kindergarten programs. The Klein government doesn't fear vested interests, but upstart parents terrify them. When parents don't get what they want for their children, they seek political alternatives.

In the reconstruction's biggest gamble, Lyle Oberg, a 39-year-old medical doctor from Brooks, was told to make the education system work better. Like Day, he exudes the youthful look, a definite plus in education. A school trustee who was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1993, Oberg sat just two years on the back bench before he was promoted to cabinet in 1996 as Family and Social Services Minister. A bright, outgoing, ambitious fellow with strong views on the health sector, Oberg had little experience in dealing with critics. He got a quick political education in Family and Social Services when he moved too quickly to redesign the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program. He got caught, and he wisely retreated. The education sector won't be so easy or so quick to forgive: its strong lobby groups don't fear government.

Gary Mar, at 37 the youngest in this cabinet, and a lawyer, was dispatched to Environment to pacify the environmentalists Ty Lund had infuriated by allowing industrial activity in sensitive regions. In two portfolios, Community Development, and Education, Mar was not so much an innovator as he was a communicator. Someone has to convince stubborn, vigilant environmentalists that the Klein government cares about them and the province's environment. Klein is gambling that Mar, open, friendly and soft-spoken, can do it.

Ed Stelmach, at age 48 and from the Andrew area just north of Edmonton, was barely noticed in Agriculture. Quiet and competent, he thinks before he talks or acts. He hasn't avoided controversy, notably in the government's move to recover the mineral access fees which energy companies had for many years been paying to leaseholders of public lands. Now, Stelmach has the new Infrastructure department, with its responsibility for funding roads and school buildings. He not only has to find money—which won't be difficult with this year's resurgence of oil and gas prices—but has to spend it wisely.

With those bases covered, Edmonton is the remaining target. If Klein is to win big in 2001, he needs the city. In the last four provincial elections, Edmonton voted solidly and consistently against Conservative governments under Don Getty and Ralph Klein.

The seduction of Edmonton began with the May reconstruction. David Hancock, a 43-year-old lawyer from Edmonton, was an automatic for cabinet after his election in 1997. He got the innocuous Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs portfolio, a safe place for a rookie to learn the ropes. Now he's Justice Minister. Like Halvar Jonson, Hancock is quiet and gets the job done without fuss. As Justice Minister, he will have a higher profile and will be more influential in the community and in the corridors of government. Like Mar in Environment, Hancock must pacify a legal community thoroughly disillusioned by the erratic former justice minister, Jon Havelock. Lawyers are influential in politics; they give money and they wield power. Klein needs the legal community, and Hancock may be the kind of politician who can bring it back.

A second move is a naked come-on. Appointing Liberal defector Gene Zwozdesky of Edmonton as associate minister of health and wellness sends a message to the city and to the Ukrainian community that the government cares about them. Much of the Ukrainian vote went Liberal when one of its favorite sons, Lawrence Decore, headed the Liberal party. Klein wants that Ukrainian vote back.

Ralph Klein is a popular politician proud of his populist instincts, of his renegade image, and of his political achievements. But success measured against today's opponents is one thing; success measured against the leaders of other eras is another. Don't kid yourself; Klein wants to be well remembered. He wants to be seen as being in the same company as the powerful, popular political leaders before him.

Election night in 1997 was Klein's first chance, but he didn't come close. The coming election, either late in 2000 or in the spring of 2001, will be his second chance. Klein is already preparing and it is clear he has a new agenda. If you thought you saw revolution in the first five years, stick around. Klein's overhaul is designed to devastate the Liberals by transforming the Conservatives into a more moderate, more positive, more active government.

Whether Klein's recent major shakeup means a more effective government and improved government services for Albertans, we can only hope.

Whether it will show that his leadership is exceptional remains to be seen. If it does, Ralph Klein will wear a much different face on the next election night. 🐾

Rich Vivone publishes Insight into Government, a weekly political newsletter covering provincial politics in Alberta.

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ACTIVIST'S PRIMER

Subtle Flattery Can't Hurt

An effective letter-writing campaign can go a long way toward influencing policy and decision makers. The important thing is that the letters focus on an issue and be sent to the appropriate people. In his book *Uncivil Obedience: The Tactics and Tales of a Democratic Agitator*, Alan Borovoy maintains that focused letters can produce significant change, especially if letters to people in authority (and released to the media) reveal important and new components of an injustice.

Write an individual letter if possible—a post card, form letter or photocopied letter is still useful but is not as effective.

Be polite, brief and use a personal tone—deal with one issue at a time and keep the letter to one page if possible. Snide, critical comments can weaken the letter.

Understand the bureaucracy and send your letters to the right people—your MLA, the minister involved, the Premier. Get to know the staff people for key legislators and send letters to them as well. Copy the letter to your MLA and request that he/she arrange a meeting with the minister to discuss the issue.

The first paragraph should identify the issue, refer to the purpose or intent of the letter and contain a clear statement of your position—this provides an immediate reference for the reader.

Tell why you feel the way you do—provide a reason for your position or an example of how you are affected. Identify any expertise you may have.

Subtle flattery can't hurt—refer to previous statements you agree with that have been made by the addressee, or refer to the public policy or stand the government maintains.

In your conclusion, indicate your specific recommendation for action and ask for a response—be precise and direct about what you are looking for. Request a meeting to discuss the issue in more detail. Try to avoid a form letter response.

Forms of address—Ministers are referred to as "Honourable" and letters to all MLAs go to the same address. Letters regarding the environment should be addressed to:

*The Honourable Gary Mar, MLA
Minister of Environmental Protection
Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6
The salutation should be: Dear Minister
or Dear Mr. Mar*

or
*The Honourable Ralph Klein
Premier of Alberta
Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6
The salutation should be: Dear Premier*

or
*The Honourable David Anderson
Minister of the Environment
House of Commons
Parliament Building
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0I6*

The federal government accepts postage-free mail.

You can also fax or e-mail letters to the following:

Honourable Gary Mar
fax: 780-422-6259.
e-mail: AltaTalk@gov.ab

Premier Klein
fax: 780-427-1349.
e-mail: AltaTalk@gov.ab

Honourable David Anderson
fax: 819-953-3457.
e-mail: Anderson.D@parl.gc.ca

You could also send a copy of the letter to the environment critics of the opposition parties:

Debby Carlson, Liberal Environment Critic
fax: 780-427-3697.
e-mail: email@altaliberals.ab.ca.

Raj Pannu, ND Environment Critic
fax: 780-415-0963.
e-mail: rpannu@assembly.ab.ca



From *How to Write an Effective Letter* by Pat Letizia, Project Coordinator at the Alberta Ecotrust Foundation, which appeared in the activist's primer pages of the April/May issue of *EnCompass*, Alberta's magazine on the environment. Since Government restructuring on May 25, we've substituted the new minister's address. A current RITE Telephone Directory for Alberta Government employees and elected representatives is available online at <www.gov.ab.ca/directory/> or toll-free in Alberta at 310-0000.