Time for a change

The Klein and Harris agenda— downsize government and eliminate deficit—is said to have made them the most popular and successful politicians in Canada. But Harris isn't so popular in Walkerton today. Since the Ontario government privatized water testing in 1996, laboratories have not been required to notify health officials about contamination. The outbreak of E. coli in Ontario shows the importance of public regulators overseeing the safety of our water supply. Perhaps getting rid of government isn't such cause for celebration.

Under the Klein regime we've seen the dismantling of the public service—once considered the best civil service in the world. It was well run and dedicated to working for the public good. We've seen the privatization of our provincial public radio network, CKUA; of AGT, which provided superb service for decades in the interests of people, not profit; of liquor stores; of public utilities providing electricity and gas; of highway maintenance services—the list goes on and on. We've seen cutbacks to education and the erosion of the public system with the proliferation of private schools. We've seen the edge of the wedge driven into our health care with the passage of Bill 11 allowing for private hospitals.

Did this massive transformation happen at the will of the citizens? How well informed were we? What was the response of government to the thousands of protesters against Bill 11 at the Legislature? Contempt. And worse. (See the letter from Scott Harris on page 13.) Now the government has imposed Bill 18, the single rate tax, to perpetuate further social injustice in our fair province. We see the spectre of 16 taxis and 11 private cars driving kids to school, rather than all paying the few cents in taxes it would take to hire a school bus.

A provincial election will likely be called within the next several months. Let's not accept that this government is inevitable and that we are powerless to effect change. It is our right, our responsibility, our privilege as citizens in a democracy to choose our government, *to be* our government. Nurse Diane Buchanan, who attended her first protest rally at age 60 (see page 15) inspires us with her example and eloquence.

So what to do? Work within your own party to bring about change. Find out what other groups stand for. Consider voting for an alternative party. Consider getting involved with any political party as a volunteer. Consider running as a candidate in the next provincial election. Clem Martini tells you how to get started, on page 40. Make your voice heard.

Our purpose here at *AlbertaViews* is to provide an independent perspective with informed commentary by Albertans on issues of importance to Albertans. We love Alberta, the variety of its terrain from southern deserts to northern tundra, flatlands, rolling foothills, forests, mountains and lakes. We are constantly awed by the imagination and creativity of our thinkers, writers and artists. We want to contribute in our small way to the collective well-being of all in the province, to encourage so-called ordinary people to be informed about *this* place, as we are already so vastly over-informed by CNN, *People* magazine and Oprah, etc. about that country to the south over which we have no influence.

Every one of us has influence here. Every one of us can make a difference.

Jackie Flanagan