

Ministers' Report Card by Rich Vivone

On the surface, everything is always about Ralph. He so completely dominates the public face of the Conservative government that his 23 ministers—both good and bad—are too often invisible. Yet, while Ralph rules in public, these invisible ministers run the day-to-day affairs of government. Who are these people that govern?

No Cadillacs in this bunch, but a few reliable Chevrolets. Unfortunately, some are running on empty. One measure of the performance of ministers is how they handle trouble. That they hit patches of ice is expected—active ministers shouldn't stick to the plowed roads. The skill is in steering their way out of it.

Effective Ministers



Justice Minister **David Hancock** is one of the best—a politician who keeps a government functioning day by day. Quiet, unassuming, sensible, he can deal with trouble.

Hancock is on all the influential private committees and runs the government side in the Assembly. From a Conservative government perspective, the assembly hasn't run this well in a decade. Yet Hancock is unknown outside Edmonton.

In Justice, he deftly handled a political problem that, if not handled well, would have unleashed a torrent of invective from the right wing. When the Supreme Court ruled that Alberta's laws on homosexual rights required change, the homophobic Conservative government had no idea how to deal with the decision. In the hands of a less skilled politician, gay rights would have been a political mess and the end of a career. Hancock fixed the problem before it spawned a public life. Solution: give everyone the same rights and responsibilities.

Sensible solution; end of problem. Vintage Hancock.



Finance Minister **Pat Nelson** is the designated Dr. No, and she loves it. She's cold and she's hard. Some in her legion of critics insist she doesn't know what she's doing. No matter: she doesn't care what others think.

Whatever your view of Nelson, one fact is certain: she has a grip on spending. When she was assigned the Finance portfolio after the 2001 election, she inherited the budget books left by Stockwell Day and Steve West, two so-called fiscal hard-liners who spent like the Liberals they love to ridicule. (As Treasurers from 1997 through 2000, Day and West hiked spending by 41 per cent.) The new, larger gang elected in 2001 expected the spending to continue. None of them heard Premier Klein

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What is a good MLA?

MLAs receive annual remuneration of \$63,306, plus extra for committee work. What is their job description? There isn't one. Any effective organization expects team members to achieve agreed-upon results. What are MLAs supposed to be achieving? We're not sure. A good job description includes goals and objectives measurable by some standard. How can we citizens know if our elected representatives are doing a good job when we are unclear about what that job is?

We take it for granted that an MLA's job is to advocate for constituents, to bring their problems to the attention of the government and to help them. An MLA's capacity to do this varies depending on whether he or she is an opposition member or with the government party, a cabinet minister or a backbencher, from a rural or an urban constituency. The job also varies considerably with the imagination and initiative of the individual. Some MLAs make a real difference in their communities. Some don't.

MLAs are supposed to make the views of their constituents known by introducing bills, debating them in the Legislative Assembly and passing the good ones into law. In reality, cabinet has control of the agenda. MLAs also attempt to obtain benefits such as public works projects, government buildings and related jobs for the constituency as a whole. Again, only cabinet ministers have the power to allocate these benefits. Lucky the constituency whose MLA is appointed to cabinet, and unlucky the constituency that elects an opposition member—who will be entirely out of the loop. Maybe that's why we have so few of them in Alberta.

Is it appropriate for an MLA to be welfare officer, ombudsman and errand boy for constituents? Certainly, members are elected to represent the local interests of their constituents, but in provincial affairs members should consider the best interests of the province first, whatever their political outlook and affiliation. Debate in the legislature means more than special-interest pleading. Ideally, it is based on the best thinking about the good of all the people—the commonwealth or the public good—rather than just advocating for the squeaky wheels in a particular constituency.

Unfortunately the performance of the individual MLA doesn't seem to matter. When people go to the polls, they vote for the party or the leader. They choose candidate A because he's a Conservative, not for any of his or her particular contributions. How demoralizing for our elected representatives.

—Jackie Flanagan

Our Elected Representatives

For further information on our MLAs, visit www.assembly.ab.ca.

Airdrie-Rocky View

Carol Haley, PC
(403) 948-8741

Athabasca-Wabasca

Hon. Mike Cardinal, PC
*Minister of Sustainable
Resources Development*
(780) 675-3232

Banff-Cochrane

Janis Tarchuk, PC
(403) 760-8281

Barrhead-Westlock

Hon. Kenneth R. Kowalski, PC
*Speaker of the
Legislative Assembly*
(780) 674-3225

Bonnyville-Cold Lake

Denis Ducharme, PC
(780) 826-5658

Calgary Bow

Alana DeLong, PC
(403) 216-5400

Calgary Buffalo

Harvey Cenaiko, PC
(403) 244-7737

Calgary Cross

Yvonne Fritz, PC
(403) 280-4022

Calgary Currie

Jon Lord, PC
(403) 246-4794

Calgary East

Moe Amery, PC
(403) 216-5450

Calgary Egmont

Denis Herard, PC
(403) 640-1363

Calgary Elbow

Hon. Ralph Klein, PC
Premier
(403) 252-0346

Calgary Fish Creek

Hon. Heather Forsyth, PC
Solicitor General
(403) 278-4444

Calgary Foothills

Hon. Pat Nelson, PC
Minister of Finance
(403) 288-4453

Calgary Fort

Wayne C.N. Cao, PC
(403) 216-5454

Calgary Glenmore

Hon. Ron Stevens, QC, PC
Minister of Gaming
(403) 216-5421

Calgary Lougheed

Marlene Graham, QC, PC
(403) 238-1212

Calgary McCall

Shiraz Shariff, PC
(403) 216-5424

Calgary Montrose

Hung Kim Pham, PC
(403) 248-4487

Calgary Mountain View

Mark Hlady, PC
(403) 216-5445

Calgary North Hill

Richard Magnus, PC
(403) 216-5430

Calgary North West

Hon. Greg Melchin, PC
Minister of Revenue
(403) 216-5444

Calgary Nose Creek

Hon. Gary G. Mar, QC, PC
*Minister of Health
and Wellness*
(403) 274-1931

Calgary Shaw

Cindy Ady, PC
(403) 256-8969

Calgary Varsity

Hon. Murray Smith, PC
Minister of Energy
(403) 216-5436

Calgary West

Karen Kryczka, PC
(403) 216-5439

Cardston-Taber-Warner

Broyce Jacobs, PC
(403) 223-0001

Clover Bar-Fort Saskatchewan

Rob Loughheed, PC
(780) 998-4740

Cypress-Medicine Hat

Hon. Lorne Taylor, PC
Minister of Environment
(403) 528-2191

Drayton Valley-Calmar

Tony Abbott, PC
(780) 542-3355

Drumheller-Chinook

Hon. Shirley McClellan, PC
*Minister of Agriculture, Food
and Rural Development*
(403) 854-4333

Dunvegan

Hector Goudreau, PC
(780) 837-3846

Edmonton Beverly-Clareview

Julius Edward Yankowsky, PC
(780) 476-6467

Edmonton Calder

Brent Rathgeber, QC, PC
(780) 451-2345

Edmonton Castle Downs

Thomas A. Lukaszuk, PC
(780) 414-0705

Edmonton Centre

Laurie Blakeman, Lib
(780) 414-0743

Edmonton Ellerslie

Debby Carlson, Lib
(780) 414-2000

Edmonton Glengarry

Bill Bonner, Lib
(780) 414-1328

Edmonton Glenora

Drew Hutton, PC
(780) 455-7979

Edmonton Gold Bar

Hugh MacDonald, Lib
(780) 414-1015

Edmonton Highlands

Brian Mason, ND
(780) 414-0682

Edmonton Manning

Tony Vandermeer, PC
(780) 414-0714

Edmonton McClung

Hon. Mark P. Norris, PC
*Minister of Economic
Development*
(780) 408-1860

Edmonton Meadowlark

Bob Maskell, PC
(780) 414-0711

Edmonton Mill Creek

Hon. Gene Zwozdesky, PC
*Minister of Community
Development*
(780) 466-3737

Edmonton Mill Woods

Dr. Don Massey, Lib
(780) 414-1000

Edmonton Norwood

Gary Masyk, PC
(780) 414-0708

Edmonton Riverview

Kevin Taft, Lib
(780) 414-0719

Edmonton Rutherford

Ian McClelland, PC
(780) 414-1311

Edmonton Strathcona

Dr. Raj Pannu, ND
(780) 414-0702

Edmonton Whitemud

Hon. Dave Hancock, QC, PC
*Minister of Justice and
Attorney General*
(780) 413-5970

Fort McMurray

Hon. Guy C. Boutillier, PC
Minister of Municipal Affairs
(780) 790-6014

Grande Prairie-Smoky

Mel Knight, PC
(780) 513-1233

Grande Prairie-Wapiti

Gordon J. Graydon, PC
(780) 538-1800

Highwood

Don Tannas, PC
(403) 652-7100

Innisfail-Sylvan Lake

Luke Ouellette, PC
(403) 227-1500

Lac La Biche-St. Paul

Ray Danyluk, PC
(780) 645-6999

Lacombe-Stettler

Judy Gordon, PC
(403) 782-7725

Leduc

Albert Klapstein, PC
(780) 980-9665

Lesser Slave Lake

Hon. Pearl Calahasen, PC
*Minister of Aboriginal Affairs
and Northern Development*
(780) 523-3171

Lethbridge East

Dr. Ken Nicol, Lib
(403) 320-1011

Lethbridge West

Hon. Clint Dunford, PC
*Minister of Human Resources
and Employment*
(403) 329-4644

Little Bow

Barry McFarland, PC
(403) 643-2077

Livingstone-Macleod

Hon. David Coutts, PC
*Minister of
Government Services*
(403) 553-2400

Medicine Hat

Rob Renner, PC
(403) 527-5622

Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills

Richard Marz, PC
(403) 556-3132

Peace River

Gary Friedel, PC
(780) 624-5400

Ponoka-Rimby

Hon. Halvar C. Jonson, PC
*Minister of International and
Intergovernmental Relations*
(403) 783-2950

Red Deer North

Mary Anne Jablonski, PC
(403) 342-2263

Red Deer South

Hon. Victor P. Doerksen, PC
*Minister of Innovation
and Science*
(403) 340-3565

Redwater

Dave Broda, PC
(780) 942-3505

Rocky Mountain House

Hon. Ty Lund, PC
Minister of Infrastructure
(403) 845-5154

St. Albert

Mary O'Neill, PC
(780) 459-9113

Sherwood Park

Hon. Iris Evans, PC
Minister of Children's Services
(780) 417-4747

Spruce Grove-Sturgeon- St. Albert

Doug Horner, PC
(780) 962-6606

Stony Plain

Hon. Stan Woloshyn, PC
Minister of Seniors
(780) 963-1444

Strathmore-Brooks

Hon. Lyle Oberg, PC
Minister of Learning
(403) 362-6969

Vegreville-Viking

Hon. Ed Stelmach, PC
Minister of Transportation
(780) 632-6840

Vermilion-Lloydminster

Lloyd Snelgrove, PC
(780) 853-4202

Wainwright

Doug Griffiths, PC
(780) 842-6177

West Yellowhead

Ivan Strang, PC
(780) 723-3601

Wetaskiwin-Camrose

LeRoy Johnson, PC
(780) 672-0000

Whitecourt-St. Anne

George VanderBurg, PC
(780) 786-1997

PC (74)

Lib (7)

ND (2)

talk of sustainability. Pat Nelson did. Spending increased by \$2-billion in her first budget, but before the year ended, she began to cut. Since then, she's held the line.

Love her or hate her, Pat Nelson is the toughest kid on the block—a rare true Conservative.



Health Minister **Gary Mar** is surviving in an impossible portfolio, which is an accomplishment in itself.

Health reform in Alberta should be easy. Government has a plan, the money and the power. So why is reform stuck in neutral? Two reasons: First, Premier Klein's hand is firmly clamped on Gary Mar's throat. Klein sees Mar as the number one "tire-kicker," a term he applies to ambitious would-be successors. Second, the caucus demands health reform while resisting change.

In such a spot, most politicians take the easy road—whine, whimper, hide, sulk or quit. Not Mar. He took the shots and smartly bounced back off the floor. Despite resistance from his own caucus, Mar was persistent, and finally won on health authority restructuring. A small victory, but a significant one. His credibility was re-established.

Mar has the courage to fight back and the toughness not to blame others for his own failures as so many other ministers do.

Ineffective Ministers



Learning Minister **Lyle Oberg** has provided no solutions and no progress in education. Many of the problems he inherited—class size, school buildings—are worse.

Oberg's solution to teacher negotiations in 2002 was pure bullying. As a minister, he had no role in negotiations on teachers' contracts. Unwisely, he involved himself and promptly ended up in court (he lost), wrote draconian legislation to deprive teachers of their right to strike (it had little public support), and tried to impose arbitration with financial limits (arbitrators gave teachers what they wanted).

In the last year, it's been all downhill. Having alienated the teachers, he is now on his way to alienating school trustees and parents. That's more trouble than Lyle Oberg can handle.

Oberg inflames rather than resolves problems. It is always his way or the highway. Someone with superior political skills will have to clean up the mess.



Deputy Premier and Agriculture Minister **Shirley McClellan** is clearly the province's most powerful rural minister. She's been in the assembly for 15 years and should be protecting rural Albertans. Yet her performance on rural issues—other than periodic disaster

assistance—is disappointing. The problems that exist today are the same as existed ten years ago. Her solution: new committees to work on another rural strategy. In the meantime, rural Alberta lost two seats in electoral riding restructuring in 1997 and will lose another two this time. She has performed poorly.



Energy Minister **Murray Smith** is on his fourth portfolio since he was first elected in 1993. Energy is the portfolio he's always wanted. He loves the business, the people and the profile that it comes with in this energy-rich province.

Energy may be Smith's dream job, but he can't handle the tough issues. Consumer prices for electricity, much higher because of deregulation, are not coming down as he promised. An ideologue who reveres the free-market system, Smith refuses to believe that prices are higher; he concocted a story about debt not being part of utility bills in other provinces. He won't admit that deregulation is the reason prices are high, so he blames the utility companies.

Same on natural gas prices. The Klein government spoiled us with gas rebates prior to the 2001 election. Naturally, we expect rebates now that prices are higher than in 2001. No, Smith says. Wear a sweater and turn down the thermostat.

He's lost his credibility. A terrible disappointment.

SCOTT DUTTON



Rich Vivone is the publisher and editor of *Insight into Government*, a weekly newsletter on Alberta policy and politics.