

SNATCHING DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY: THE ALL-TOO-BRIEF  
PREMIERSHIP OF ED STELMACH IN ALBERTA

by

Bohdan Harasymiw  
Professor Emeritus of Political Science  
University of Calgary  
Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4

[bharasym@ucalgary.ca](mailto:bharasym@ucalgary.ca)

**ABSTRACT:** Why would a new provincial premier, having in his first general election increased his governing party's seats in the legislature from 62 to 72 out of 83, resign just three years later? Normally, in Canada a provincial first minister remains in office so long as s/he wins elections, and either retires of his/her own accord or is forced to resign after an electoral defeat. Ed Stelmach's brief tenure as premier of Alberta is a singular anomaly in that regard. Answers to this puzzle are to be sought in the leadership selection process, the supposed shortcomings in his style of leadership and policy decisions, the threat to the Progressive Conservatives' forty-year hegemony from the wildly popular Wildrose Alliance, and lack of confidence from the party's financial backers. Relying on interviews with the principal players, monographic and newspaper accounts, and party as well as Elections Alberta archives, the paper makes systematic comparisons between the major features of Stelmach's term in office and those of his predecessor, the inimitable Ralph Klein. It also compares prospectively, to test the validity of hypotheses resting on Stelmach's presence as the explanatory variable. All of this retrospective and prospective scrutiny is in the search for a credible explanation or interpretation. This leads to the conclusion that Stelmach's ethnicity, widely credited as responsible for his selection as party leader, may also have brought about his demise. Popularity with the voting public simply did not translate into popularity in the backrooms of Alberta politics, where it apparently counts most.

Paper presented at the 2012 CPSA Annual Conference and Centennial Celebration,  
University of Alberta, Edmonton, 14 June 2012

## SNATCHING DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY: THE ALL-TOO-BRIEF PREMIERSHIP OF ED STELMACH IN ALBERTA

Canadian prime ministers and premiers do not normally resign following an initial election victory. Ed Stelmach, a dark-horse candidate, became Premier of Alberta in 2006 upon winning the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party. In 2008, he won a landslide victory in that year's general election, cutting in half the Liberal and New Democratic opposition's representation in the legislature, and ensuring that the Conservative dynasty would achieve its fortieth birthday in power three years later. Yet in January 2011, at the outset of that very anniversary year, Stelmach abruptly announced his intention to resign as premier, citing weariness with politics after three decades in it, trepidation over the prospect of nasty campaigning in the next election, and concern for the well-being of his party. What was it that really brought Ed Stelmach's unexpected success to such an equally unexpected and sudden end?

Apart from the publicly-communicated motives of the premier himself, which may have a certain validity, the search for causes for this uniquely anomalous situation requires consideration of the wider political environment. In the first place, there is a possibility that the mechanics of the leadership selection process influenced this particular outcome. It may be that the selection procedure used by the PC Party in Alberta is flawed, thrusting forth a leader popular with the membership—or even the general public—but unsuited for the political fray. At the national level we have seen this at work in the federal Liberal Party with the ill-fated selection of Stéphane Dion and Michael Ignatieff. In Alberta, however, this would not apply to Ralph Klein whom the selection process certainly did not affect adversely. Perhaps, then, in the Stelmach case it was the candidate himself who was flawed. This necessitates looking into the concept of leadership and its application to the context of Alberta politics. What qualities are required generally of a present-day political leader? What determines success (defined here for convenience as longevity in office) in the role of provincial premier? In regard to the latter, it is necessary to examine the premier's role, and Ed Stelmach's execution of it, in terms of the management of a multiplicity of relationships: with cabinet, caucus, legislature, the extraparliamentary party, the media, business and industry, and the general public. If Ralph Klein was successful in performing his role in all or most aspects, then where did Ed Stelmach fall short? In sum, if the people of Alberta selected him as PC leader, and the provincial electorate confirmed him as premier in the subsequent election, who, then, pushed him out? No doubt there is more to this incident than the story of a single individual's ineptitude for politics—

ultimately, it makes you wonder if the Government of Alberta actually runs the province, or someone altogether outside the government.

### Selecting Party Leaders in Canada

The study of political leadership selection in Canada is practically synonymous with the name of John C. Courtney. In his two books on the subject, Courtney has provided the definitive treatment of federal leadership conventions and given voice to his own misgivings about their relatively recent displacement by a universal member vote (UMV) system.<sup>1</sup> Conventions, he wrote in 1973, had led to a big change in the Canadian political system, fostering a plebiscitary mentality, but were now continuing bodies and were a good fit with the Canadian political culture. Unfortunately, we had by then the worst of two worlds; we were too much like the United States.<sup>2</sup> His subsequent empirical study of national leadership conventions between 1919 and 1993 found, among other things, that conventions had made a parliamentary career less essential, that “the candidate who is . . . ‘new’ . . . stands a better chance” of being selected leader, and that with time younger, more bilingual candidates, with less parliamentary experience, were coming forward.<sup>3</sup> Noting the (then) Reform Party’s initiative in moving away from the convention process, as well as Klein’s selection by UMV, he nevertheless expressed doubts about this being the wave of the future.<sup>4</sup> If conventions were losing their popularity, the alternative seemed to him no better, even worse. Conventions had created coalitions backing the leader, and this in turn had produced consensual leaders and parties for Canada; UMV constituted a threat to this. It was a gamble; it worked against networks; it was more like a general election, thus antithetical to the influence of seasoned party members. It seemed more democratic, but the benefits of UMV might be ephemeral and problematic, Courtney concluded.<sup>5</sup> Courtney’s skepticism and respect for tradition, even in our postmodern times, cannot be discounted altogether.

Others have weighed in on this topic as well. In a volume of essays in honour of Courtney, George Perlin has argued that the ills of Canadian politics have been misdiagnosed. These illnesses are: negative attitudes towards politics and politicians, non-voting, low feelings of trust and efficacy, weakened support for institutions, and declining voter turnout. The remedy lies in civic education, not in repairing the

---

<sup>1</sup> John C. Courtney, *The Selection of National Party Leaders in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973), and idem, *Do Conventions Matter? Choosing National Party Leaders in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Courtney, *The Selection of National Party Leaders in Canada*, 225-35.

<sup>3</sup> Courtney, *Do Conventions Matter?*, 176-82.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., chap. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., chap. 13.

mechanics of leadership selection.<sup>6</sup> In an earlier piece, Perlin had agreed with Courtney that the convention is a problematic device, noting that parliamentary parties do not accept easily a leader imposed on them by the extraparliamentary wing.<sup>7</sup> This tension is exacerbated with universal member voting. Such tensions were well displayed in the 1980s when, as Ken Carty relates, the Progressive Conservatives and Liberals chose outsiders as their new leaders—in the persons of Brian Mulroney and John Turner, respectively—with extremely different results in the following general election.<sup>8</sup> In 1992, a collection of essays edited by Carty included two further relevant items. Joe Wearing supplied his own intuitively-derived “Rules for Winning a PC or Liberal Leadership Contest,” the last of which stated that “You apparently do *not* have to have . . . organization.”<sup>9</sup> This clashed with Lawrence Hanson’s conclusions about the 1990 Liberal leadership convention. Comparing that event with its 1984 predecessor, he surmised that delegate contests had become more organized, and “that . . . it was vital for candidates to be highly organized at the constituency level. Rather than attempting merely to gain the support of those . . . already . . . selected as delegates, to be successful a candidate had to ensure that his identified supporters were able to compete and win at the grassroots.”<sup>10</sup> This necessity for grassroots organization must have become even more acute nowadays with the prevalence of direct election of the leader by party members instead of through delegates to a convention. The final word on leadership selection at the federal level in Canadian politics, however, may appropriately go to Heather MacIvor. “The Canadian party leadership convention,” she writes, “is headed the way of the dinosaur,” yet the direct-vote system also filled her with trepidation since “the power of the caucus . . . would be almost completely destroyed” by it.<sup>11</sup> Whether better, more skillful and successful, leaders had ever emerged from conventions in times gone by as opposed to direct election is a still unanswered question in the annals of Canadian political science.

---

<sup>6</sup> George Perlin, “The Malaise of Canadian Democracy: What Is It? How Is It to Be Explained? What Can We Do about It?,” in *Political Leadership and Representation in Canada: Essays in Honour of John C. Courtney*, ed. Hans J. Michelmann, Donald C. Story, and Jeffrey S. Steeves (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 154-75.

<sup>7</sup> Perlin, “Leadership Selection in the PC and Liberal Parties: Assessing the Need for Reform,” in *Party Politics in Canada*, ed. Hugh G. Thorburn, 6th ed. (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1991), 205-206.

<sup>8</sup> R. Kenneth Carty, “Choosing New Party Leaders: The Progressive Conservatives in 1983, the Liberal in 1984,” in *Canada at the Polls, 1984*, ed. by Howard Penniman ([Durham, N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1988), 55-78.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Wearing, “Joe Wearing’s 12 Rules for Winning a PC or Liberal Leadership Contest,” in *Canadian Political Party Systems: A Reader*, ed. R. K. Carty (n.p.: Broadview Press, 1992), 425. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Hanson, “Contesting the Leadership at the Grassroots,” in *ibid.*, 434-5.

<sup>11</sup> Heather MacIvor, “The Leadership Convention: An Institution Under Stress,” in *Leaders and Leadership in Canada*, ed. Maureen Mancuso, Richard G. Price, and Ronald Wagenburg (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), 14 and 24.

On the provincial level, the experiment by the Parti Québécois in choosing Daniel Johnson as leader by direct election in 1985, as recounted by Daniel Latouche, may in retrospect have some relevance for the Stelmach case. "After the general election," Latouche writes, "the . . . democratic nature of Johnson's . . . victory . . . [was] of little use . . . [because] these resources . . . could not be translated into power . . . over his opponents within the caucus."<sup>12</sup> Observing the decline of leadership conventions, William Cross has reviewed the direct election of provincial party leaders in 1985-1995, examining motivation for the switch, procedures used, and benefits obtained.<sup>13</sup> He found that the goal of increased participation depended on "the relative competitive position of the party and the openness of the process in terms of the rules adopted."<sup>14</sup> In terms of rules, he writes,

The Alberta PCs have the most lenient rule concerning voting eligibility—all members of the party may vote without having to pay a voting fee, and membership may be purchased right up to the day of voting (including the day of any run-off balloting). . . . The Alberta PCs . . . provide a second ballot, if necessary, to be held one week after the first ballot. . . . [T]he second ballot is limited to the top three finishers on the first ballot, and a preferential ballot is used on the second ballot to ensure a winner.<sup>15</sup>

Cross's non-committal conclusion is that "the adoption of direct election is evidence of further evolution in Canadian democratic practice," but there are shortcomings.<sup>16</sup>

The literature reviewed in the foregoing neglects the two most important questions on the topic at hand. One is whether the method of selection affects the new leader's mandate, legitimacy, or authority. The second is whether less capable leaders are being selected by direct vote, as compared to conventions, or whether there is just a secular decline regardless of selection method. Such questions remain open.

### **Political Leadership and the Premier's Role**

No matter how a person is selected, the requirements of political leadership and how these are met will likely contribute to success and longevity in office. From a

---

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Latouche, "Universal Democracy and Effective Leadership: Lessons from the Parti Québécois Experiment," in *Leaders and Parties in Canadian Politics: Experiences of the Provinces*, ed. R. Kenneth Carty, Lynda Erickson, and Donald Blake (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada Inc., 1992), 198.

<sup>13</sup> William Cross, "Direct Election of Provincial Party Leaders in Canada, 1985-1995: the End of the Leadership Convention?" *CJPS* 29, no. 2 (June 1996): 295-315.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 301-302.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

global perspective, a handbook on political leadership has summarized the qualities needed for effective, that is, “good adaptive and innovative global leadership” as being: “contextual or cognitive intelligence and judgement, vision, emotional intelligence, political bargaining skills, public communication skills and organizational skills.”<sup>17</sup> The authors’ elaboration and illustration of these traits cannot be reproduced here. Suffice it to cite their conclusions. “In the future,” they say, “contextual intelligence . . . will be indispensable. . . . Political skills, public communication skills and organizational management skills are also important factors for effectiveness. . . . Emotional and contextual intelligence and vision, however, need to be appropriated directly by leaders themselves and learned through the crucible of their personal experience.”<sup>18</sup> Presumably, most elements in some form of this model can be applied to provincial politics in Canada, particularly the requirement for vision and the various kinds of key skills. Did Stelmach have any or at least enough of the needed qualities of political leadership, for the provincial, if not the global, level of action?

One measure of political leadership is public opinion. In the United States, “Americans evaluate presidential candidates on the basis of a limited set of . . . criteria. . . . [Thus,] people have a preexisting . . . schema, concerning what a president should be like. . . . The primary dimension has been competence. . . . Integrity and reliability have become more prevalent . . . since 1964.”<sup>19</sup> In the Canadian context, on the other hand, “there appears to be no single model of ‘leadership’ against which leaders are measured. Personality characteristics tend to predominate among frequently mentioned attributes of Canadian party leaders.”<sup>20</sup> This means that empirical assessment of leadership qualities and public perceptions of them may be quite different things. But the latter, according to Lawrence LeDuc, are no less important. “Once in place,” he says, “such images do not change easily, because they are associated with the individual rather than with a particular set of circumstances.”<sup>21</sup> Ed Stelmach’s image was evidently a problem for him, quite apart from his behaviour in other respects.

---

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Masciulli and W. Andy Knight, “Conceptions of Global Leadership for Contextually Intelligent, Innovatively Adaptive Political Leaders,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Political Leadership*, ed. Joseph Masciulli, Mikhail A. Molchanov, and W. Andy Knight (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 108.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-17.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur H. Miller, Martin P. Wattenburg, and Oksana Malanchuk, “Schematic Assessments of Presidential Candidates,” *APSR* 80, no. 2 (June 1986): 535.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence LeDuc, “Leaders and Voters: The Public Images of Canadian Political Leaders,” in *Leaders and Leadership in Canada*, ed. Mancuso, Price, and Wagenburg, 62.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

From a practical, as opposed to theoretical or symbolic, standpoint, Howard Pawley has provided a comprehensive checklist for the role of provincial premier.<sup>22</sup> Briefly, according to him, that role is at the intersection of a series of relationships, all of which must be tended to by the incumbent. The premier therefore must: as party leader, nurture and provide a vision for the party; act as facilitator rather than the director of the caucus; ensure that cabinet demonstrates competence, complementing the premier's own abilities; not take any interest group for granted; and act as a statesman in the legislature. "Successful political leaders," in addition, "have always mastered the skills associated with the principal mass media of the day. . . . Current leaders must be telegenic and expert at communicating complex ideas in fifteen-second sound bites."<sup>23</sup> All of the many spokes, therefore, connecting the hub in the premier's office with the rim around it have to be examined carefully in order to assess the reasons for the premature termination of Stelmach's time in office.

### **Stelmach and Klein: Mechanics of Selection**

One of the contributing factors to the early termination of Ed Stelmach's premiership may well have been the PC leadership selection process, a kind of wound that never healed. In September 2006, Stelmach was, as the newspapers reported, "the first candidate to file nomination papers and pay the \$15,000 to enter the Tory leadership race to replace Alberta Premier Ralph Klein."<sup>24</sup> One of eventually eight candidates, he managed to capture third place on the first ballot with fewer than 15,000 votes (at \$1 per vote) or 15.3 per cent of the total of 97,690 voting PC members (see Table 1). Jim Dinning, the former provincial Treasurer, out of politics since 1997 and the establishment's favourite,<sup>25</sup> came in first with just over 30 per cent; University of Calgary political science professor and darling of the religious right<sup>26</sup> Ted Morton followed closely behind with 26 per cent. These three faced off in the second round; the next three (Lyle Oberg, Dave Hancock, and Mark Norris) endorsed Stelmach. On the second ballot, which saw a phenomenal 50 per cent increase in the selectorate, Stelmach managed by mobilizing his rural followers to edge slightly ahead of Dinning so that fewer than 500 votes or three-tenths of a per cent separated them. Morton's 41,243 (or 28.6 per cent) of the vote was then redistributed (more precisely, 30,040 of his supporters' second choices) so that Stelmach ended up well ahead of Dinning, 58.3 per cent to 41.7. Notable about this entire process was that Stelmach gained the most

---

<sup>22</sup> Howard R. Pawley, "Governing Manitoba: Reflections of a Premier," in *Leaders and Leadership in Canada*, ed. Mancuso, Price, and Wagenburg, 118-31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-8.

<sup>24</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 26 September 2006.

<sup>25</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 28 November 2006.

<sup>26</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 29 November 2006.

between rounds, and a hugely disproportionate share of the second round third-place finisher's tally. Ed Stelmach thus seemed to have benefitted from a rank-and-file sentiment of "Anybody but Dinning," and to a lesser extent, "Anybody but Morton." At the outset of this contest, Dinning had at least twice the caucus support of Stelmach,<sup>27</sup> a factor which came into play subsequently. At the time of this improbable upset victory, some observers were rushing to compare it with Dion's capture of the federal Liberal leadership crown.<sup>28</sup> In a more sober and prescient but under-appreciated comment, however,

Nelson Wiseman, a political scientist at the University of Toronto, called Stelmach a risky choice. The man nicknamed "Steady Eddie," and lauded for his quiet consensus-building, may not be the right fit for a party that "is beginning to develop osteoporosis" and needs renewal after 35 straight years in power, he said.

And he noted Stelmach's rural power base in northern Alberta is out of step with the dynamic growth in cities like Calgary, Edmonton and the oilsands hub of Fort McMurray.<sup>29</sup>

The man who had entered provincial politics in 1993, had bought into the Klein Revolution, and had made no discernible impact either as a backbencher before 1997 or a cabinet minister thereafter, was sworn in as Premier of Alberta on 14 December 2006, the acme of a provincial political career.

The coronation of Ralph Klein as party leader in 1992, although conducted under the very same rules, was different from the 2006 contest in at least one critical respect. On the second ballot, the third-place finisher, Rick Orman, withdrew from politics altogether leaving Klein to face off against Nancy Betkowski, the establishment candidate<sup>30</sup> (she had led on the first ballot by a single vote). Thanks in part to effectively rallying rural voters, his was a decisive (46,245 to 31,722 votes) win against only one opponent, not a come-from-behind effort as in Stelmach's case. Furthermore,

---

<sup>27</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 26 September 2006, and 3 December 2006; and *Edmonton Journal*, 28 November 2006. As Rod Love, Klein's reputed *éminence grise*, encapsulated it, "Everyone north of the Trans-Canada Highway looked at their second ballot and the three choices were: 1) Calgary; 2) Scary; 3) Ed Stelmach. Game over. . . ." Ric Dolphin, "The Ukrainian 'Mafia' Takes Over," *Western Standard*, 15 January 2007, 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 3 December 2006; and *Province* (Vancouver), 10 December 2006. Less than a year later, however, Don Martin's report headlined "Dion and Stelmach: troubled twins of politics," *Calgary Herald*, 20 September 2007, brought out the dénouement.

<sup>29</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 3 December 2006.

<sup>30</sup> David K. Stewart and Keith Archer, *Quasi-Democracy? Parties and Leadership Selection in Alberta* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2000), 171.



Klein had had the backing of at least half the caucus, while Betkowski drifted away, ultimately to the leadership of the Liberal Party. At first viewed as an interloper, eventually, after his opponents' strongest backers had been dumped, the entire PC caucus backed Ralph.<sup>31</sup> Stelmach, on the other hand, had only a plurality of caucus supporting him (with a core of just 6 or 7), most MLAs having sided with Dinning (including even his fellow Ukrainian Eugene Zwozdesky),<sup>32</sup> and he had also to deal with the continuing presence of one of his principal contenders, Morton. Divisions in caucus stemming from the leadership race dogged Stelmach to the very end.<sup>33</sup>

### **Stelmach and his Forebears as Premier**

Moving on from the question of how smooth or bumpy might have been the road to party leadership, let us consider Stelmach's subsequent performance in office from a comparative perspective. Which aspects of the premier's role have been critical historically in maintaining an incumbent in office? The evidence is episodic, but a reasonable interpretation can be cobbled together comparing Peter Lougheed, Don Getty, Ralph Klein, and Ed Stelmach in terms of a common set of criteria. Table 2, derived from the literature reviewed above, offers such criteria, summarizing the qualities by which political leaders, and provincial premiers in particular, can be measured. How does Stelmach's time in office compare with the performance of his PC predecessors?

Perfection is said not to exist in this world, yet for the world of Alberta politics Peter Lougheed seemed to embody it. In terms of the "Global Political Leadership Qualities" of our Table 2, most observers' assessments of his performance would concur that he should merit a high score on practically every item.<sup>34</sup> (1) His "Contextual or cognitive intelligence and judgment," or problem-solving ability for short, was certainly excellent. It will be recalled, for example, that as opposition leader he confronted the ruling Social Credit government not with carping criticism, but with positive and constructive policy proposals. (2) Lougheed had a vision of a dynamic and modern Alberta, which contrasted with the complacency of the Socreds and resonated with the awakening dynamism on the part of the province's society, especially amongst the

---

<sup>31</sup> Don Martin, *King Ralph: The Political Life and Success of Ralph Klein* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2002), 113-15; Mark Lisac, *The Klein Revolution* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1995), 67-73; Frank Dabbs, *Ralph Klein: A Maverick Life* (Vancouver and Toronto: Greystone Books, Douglas & McIntyre, 1995), chap. 11. Interestingly, Dabbs (p. 93) records that "Klein regarded the province-wide open ballot leadership . . . as the key to his success. He told his father that he wouldn't have run had he faced a convention. . . . 'The old guard would simply have put in one of their own,' he said to Philip. 'But with an open vote, I have a chance.'"

<sup>32</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 3 December 2006.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews.

<sup>34</sup> In particular, David G. Wood, *The Lougheed Legacy* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1985), *passim*.

urbanites of Calgary.<sup>35</sup> Of course, his vision of economic diversification was never realized, or even initiated, but this did not interfere with the succession of electoral victories he experienced in the 1970s and 1980s. Getty, for his part, could not be said to have been encumbered with visionary imaginings or aspirations. Klein, after the destructive so-called revolution of his first term, was equally bereft of vision and campaigned instead on the basis of selling his cute, cuddly self to a credulous electorate.<sup>36</sup> Stelmach presented himself more as a problem-solver than a visionary.<sup>37</sup> It has been said that the very hallmark of Alberta politics is non-partisanship or pragmatism;<sup>38</sup> if so, then vision is perhaps a superfluous attribute for a political leader of the province—two forty-year dynasties in a row do not indicate a great thirst for visionary leadership, except perhaps at the beginning of each one, although that, too, may be questionable. (3) The quality of “emotional intelligence” entails self-awareness and empathy; it has to do with personality, character, and courage. According to my source for this set of criteria, it “has been reformulated as resoluteness, perseverance and tenacity,”<sup>39</sup> which certainly applies to Peter Lougheed. This clearly can be seen throughout his leadership of the PC Party, as well as in his commitment to teamwork. (4) On bargaining skills or use of power Lougheed demonstrated his mastery in dealing with the oil companies over royalties and with the federal government over resource ownership and control. In this regard, he and his team of fellow lawyers were a more formidable force against the oil barons as compared with Stelmach and his rural MLAs, with corresponding results.<sup>40</sup> (5) As far as communication skills are concerned, Lougheed’s understanding of the vitality of television contributed greatly to his victory over Harry Strom in the pivotal election of 1971. His successor, Don Getty,

---

<sup>35</sup> Allan Tupper and Roger Gibbins, eds., *Government and Politics in Alberta* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992), xvii-xix.

<sup>36</sup> Lisac, *The Klein Revolution*; idem, *Alberta Politics Uncovered* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2004); Trevor W. Harrison, ed., *The Return of the Trojan Horse: Alberta and the New World (Dis)Order* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005); Martin, *King Ralph*, chaps. 11-20; Frank Dabbs, *Ralph Klein*, 124-79; Rich Vivone, *Ralph Could Have Been a Superstar: Tales of the Klein Era* (Kingston, Ontario: Patricia Publishing, Inc., 2009), 40-6; Kevin Taft, *Democracy Derailed: The Breakdown of Government Accountability in Alberta—and How to Get it Back on Track* (Red Deer, Alberta: Red Deer Press, 2007). For an early defence of the “Klein Revolution,” see Barry Cooper, *The Klein Achievement* (Toronto: University of Toronto, Faculty of Management, Centre for Public Management, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> As he expressed it in an interview with Kathleen Petty, on the CBC programme, “The House,” on 6 February 2010, referring to the Wildrose Alliance challenge, “Albertans are very wise; before they do change, they want to know what they’re changing to. . . . My role is to reflect those priorities, deliver on them, keep working with Albertans, consulting with Albertans, talking to Albertans and, from what I hear in terms of the balanced budget, looking after the most vulnerable, making sure that we have the best infrastructure—those are top priorities for Albertans and we’re going to deliver.”

<sup>38</sup> Leslie A. Pal, “The Political Executive and Political Leadership in Alberta,” in *Government and Politics in Alberta*, ed. Allan Tupper and Roger Gibbins (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992), pp. 1-29.

<sup>39</sup> Masciulli and Knight, 111.

<sup>40</sup> Interview.

unfortunately, failed to appreciate the importance of television as the prime medium of communication of our times.<sup>41</sup> Ralph Klein, of course, appreciated exceedingly well the use of TV, having worked as a TV journalist, and knew how to play the media people like a virtuoso; Ed Stelmach and his staff, regrettably, failed on that score. (6) In organizational and management skills there is no question of Lougheed's abilities considering that he, among other things, built the PC Party from scratch and brought it to government in five short years after taking on the leadership, a remarkable achievement in the annals of Canadian politics. On the half-dozen criteria of global political leadership we could probably say less that is positive about each of Lougheed's successors in turn, and perhaps progressively so.

No doubt it would be a fascinating exercise in quantitative analysis to draw up a comprehensive score-sheet on each of the leaders of the Alberta PCs from Lougheed to Alison Redford in terms of the given six criteria. It is, however, a reality that the assessments made of political leaders by the public in general as well as other actors on the political scene are distilled into less complex images. These simplified images spur appropriate reactions from the collective voting public, other relevant political actors, and individual citizens. The images are transmitted back and forth by the mass media, hence cultivating positive ones is a preoccupation of political office-holders and correspondingly suppressing negative ones also. As has already been said, in Canada the image of a political leader, and the personality as projected through the mass media, is the ultimate and truly sole evaluative criterion in public opinion; once established, it is extremely durable and resistant to change.<sup>42</sup>

Ralph Klein's image as Everyman carried him successfully through a series of four elections, including the final one of 2004, which he endured reluctantly whilst campaigning listlessly.<sup>43</sup> Ed Stelmach, whose tongue-tied performances before the television cameras were an embarrassment for all concerned, never shook off his image as someone less than ideal for the premier's chair. "Honest Ed" and "Steady Eddie" had the least uncharitable connotations while still implying a plodding and uninspiring persona, but he was also called "a political nobody" as well as being likened in his television debating to a robot.<sup>44</sup> Commending Stelmach's sincerity and honesty, the Reformer Preston Manning nevertheless questioned Stelmach's competence in the wake of the royalty review announcement,<sup>45</sup> thus adding "incompetent" to the array of

---

<sup>41</sup> Dabbs, 75; Vivone, 73.

<sup>42</sup> LeDuc, 62.

<sup>43</sup> Taft, 83; Lisac, *Alberta Politics Uncovered*, 26 and 62; Vivone, 11 and 46; Dabbs, "Epilogue."

<sup>44</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 3 December 2006; *National Post*, 4 December 2006.

<sup>45</sup> Nicholas Kohler, "An Alberta Sucker Punch for Stelmach," *Maclean's*, 26 November 2007, 32.

negative images. The most hurtful incident,<sup>46</sup> and perhaps the nadir in the downward trajectory of Stelmach's image, occurred in November 2009. In reference to a speech by the Premier to the Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, Stephen Carter, chief of staff and strategic adviser to Wildrose Alliance leader Danielle Smith, Twittered the following comment: "Just saw da premier making a speech. Dat was quite a speech. Dem media better report it right."<sup>47</sup> Carter quickly apologized, and then quit his job; he resurfaced, however, as chief of staff to Premier Alison Redford and then as her campaign strategist in the 2012 election.<sup>48</sup> That the ethnic stereotype of the "dumb Ukrainian farmer" should still be alive in Alberta after 100 years is remarkable, but it must have currency in some quarters still. "What kind of Alberta political strategist," asked a bewildered Paula Simons, "thinks it's a good idea to make fun of a Ukrainian accent? Or of any accent, for that matter?"<sup>49</sup> Like the columnist, we are left to surmise that there persists a deep cultural divide in Alberta, with two rather different social identities characterizing its major cities, Calgary and Edmonton, and hence the somewhat different reception accorded Klein and Stelmach in each one. In Alberta's top political circles,<sup>50</sup> Ed Stelmach's handicap was seen as being "rural"; ironically, the same "rural" support which catapulted Ralph Klein into the premiership in 1992 and kept him there until 2006 was never a drawback, but then he was from Calgary—Ed was not. It was ironic that Stelmach's acquisition of the party leadership through a supposed wave of support from the Ukrainian community, and his association with that community, initially an asset, should have become a liability.

If, like his predecessors Strom and Getty, Stelmach was regarded as a "misfit," what might be the basis of such an image? The answer to this has to be sought in the empirical record of his performance in the role of premier. For such an assessment to approach being systematic, let us return to the excellent checklist formulated by Manitoba Premier Russ Pawley as reduced to point form in Table 2 and use it as an outline. What does the historical record show?

(1) Nurturing the Party. According to Howard Pawley, as party leader a premier must ensure the electoral readiness of his/her party by strengthening it organizationally as well as by providing it with a vision to motivate the membership.<sup>51</sup> Ed Stelmach was weak in both aspects. On the face of it, his victory in the 2008 general election, described as "stunning" and a "landslide," ostensibly indicated the continued,

---

<sup>46</sup> Interviews.

<sup>47</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 21 and 25 November 2009; *Calgary Herald*, 21 and 25 November 2009.

<sup>48</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 15 March 2012.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 November 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Interviews with MLAs.

<sup>51</sup> Pawley, 120-21.

unflinching organizational strength of the Progressive Conservative Party.<sup>52</sup> (See Table 3.) Capturing 72 of 83 seats, a number greater than that won by any of his predecessors on their first contest (Lougheed in 1971 got 49; Getty in 1986, 61; and Klein in 1993, 51), and just two short of Klein's record in 1974, he also increased the PC percentage of the vote from 46.8 in the 2004 race to 52.7.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, voter turnout dropped from 45.1 to 40.6 per cent while over 367,000 new voters were added to the lists.<sup>54</sup> Despite the large majority win of 2008, the fact that three of every five electors stayed home makes it debatable whether organization or plain apathy was responsible for the victory.

Behind the scenes out of public view data on party finances told an entirely different story containing much less of that legendary Alberta sunshine—for the PCs, at least (see Tables 4 and 5). According to Elections Alberta, the PC party machine managed in 2008 to raise only slightly less than \$550,000, or half of the amount in campaign funds as compared to 2004. Meanwhile, Wildrose campaign spending was already a mere \$35,000 behind the Conservatives, putting that party definitely in the big spender league. By 2011, annual contributions to the two parties were almost the same—approximately \$2.2 million. More significantly from a long-term perspective, whereas the figure for the PCs was vacillating between \$1.9 and \$2.8 million between 2006 and 2011, Wildrose showed steady growth, providing substantiation for a perception of threat to the PC hegemony. Similarly, the number of large donors (over \$375) to the PCs dwindled from 215 to 85 between the two election campaigns; their contributions decreased correspondingly from \$652,038 to \$386,175. In 2011, however, the PCs received from 962 such donors a total of \$1,936,090.65, a remarkable recovery that may have been influenced by Stelmach's resignation announcement and the subsequent leadership contest. Perhaps most telling of all from the point of view of organizational strength has been the sharp and steady drop in revenues from PC membership fees: from nearly \$780,000 in 2006 to less than \$18,000 in 2010 (see Table 5). In Klein's last three years as leader, by contrast, membership fees had increased almost ten-fold, albeit 2006 was an anomaly due to the leadership race. By 2011, the PCs had surpassed the 2006 record number, and Wildrose membership revenues were still only 29 per cent of the PCs' revenues.

---

<sup>52</sup> See coverage of the election in: *Edmonton Journal*, 4 March 2008; *Calgary Herald*, 4 and 9 March 2008; and *Canadian Press*, 4 March 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Elections Alberta, Chief Electoral Office, *The Report on the March 3, 2008 Provincial General Election of the Twenty-seventh Legislative Assembly* ([Edmonton: Chief Electoral Office, July 28, 2008]), 142 and 158-9.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 158. There has been a secular decline from the peak of 60.2 per cent turnout in 1993, the year of Klein's first election.

In terms of organization the spectre that stalked Stelmach throughout his leadership and premiership was the Wildrose Alliance.<sup>55</sup> Indicative of the growing threat, revenues from membership fees for the latter rose from a mere \$3,010 in 2006 to nearly one-fifth of a million in 2009, before receding the following year to \$165,215—still a respectable sum and nearly nine times that year’s PC amount (see again Table 5). As in the case of large donors, so also in membership revenues, the trend for Wildrose, in contrast to the PCs, showed growth over the period from 2006 to 2011. Up to the end of 2010, apparently, members of the Progressive Conservative Party were abandoning ship and signing up for the Wildrose Alliance. This divergent trend in membership (at least as measured by revenues from dues) between the two rival conservative parties provided the background to a series of events which constituted political setbacks for Premier Stelmach. In May 2009, his former Deputy Premier, Ron Stevens, retired to accept a judgeship; the September by-election in Calgary-Glenmore to replace him was won by Paul Hinman of the Wildrose Alliance whilst the PC candidate ran third, behind the Liberal. In October 2009, leadership of the Wildrose Alliance was passed from Hinman to the lively, outspoken, and telegenic Danielle Smith. Shortly thereafter, a public opinion poll showed Wildrose ahead of the PC party in popularity throughout the province, and leading in Calgary by 34 per cent to 30.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, in November Stelmach received a vote of approval of 77 per cent at his party’s convention and leadership review. By December, an Angus Reid poll placed Wildrose in the lead with 39 per cent of decided voters, as against 25 per cent each for the Conservatives and Liberals.<sup>57</sup>

At no point in his time as leader of the PC party could it be said of Stelmach that he had articulated anything approximating a vision. In the runup to the leadership contest, for instance, he mused that the province needed: more control of immigration policy, a pension plan funded from energy royalties, an infusion of cash to municipalities, fewer taxes and better long-term care for seniors, a tax credit system for science and research, a greater proportion of oil sands bitumen to be processed in Alberta, and a review of the royalty regime. Except perhaps for the latter, these were not seen as bold moves, nor were they acted upon subsequently.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, the 2008

---

<sup>55</sup> For newspaper coverage on the rising Wildrose challenge, see, for example, *Edmonton Journal*, 25 April 2009; *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 30 June 2009; Nicholas Köhler, “Alberta’s Wild Card,” *Macleans*, 31 August 2009, 21-22; *Calgary Herald*, 15 September 2009; *Edmonton Journal*, 20 September 2009; and *Canadian Press*, 28 September 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Ed Stelmach”; and *Edmonton Journal*, 27 November 2009.

<sup>57</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 11 December 2009.

<sup>58</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 27 July, 27 September, 3 and 17 October, 8 November, and 4 December 2006; and *Toronto Star*, 9 December 2006.

election campaign was also noteworthy for its lack of vision.<sup>59</sup> The situation remained unchanged through to 2011, when Stelmach was replaced as leader by Alison Redford. He was an unrepentant pragmatist to the end.

(2) Leading Caucus. It is unsurprising to learn from Howard Pawley that “the premier must enjoy the confidence and the support of the caucus.”<sup>60</sup> It is also acknowledged that the Alberta PC caucus is riven with divisions—north versus south, urban versus rural, Calgary versus Edmonton, and Progressive Conservative versus Reform-libertarian—similar to those of the society outside the legislature.<sup>61</sup> These divisions did not evaporate after the 2006 leadership contest, but plagued Stelmach without relief throughout his term of office. They were manifested in a series of departures from caucus as well as an inordinate number of policy reversals. Among the departures the least surprising were those of Klein in January 2007, followed by his deputy premier and longtime MLA Shirley McClellan.<sup>62</sup> In August, it was learned that six PC MLAs would not be running for re-election. “Liberal Leader Kevin Taft said some MLAs are stepping down so they won’t be defeated, while others have been frozen out of possible cabinet jobs because they supported the premier’s leadership opponents.”<sup>63</sup> A landslide electoral win makes for wonderful headlines, but in fact an extra-large caucus, especially if brought in on a predecessor’s coattails, is full of headaches for any premier. At the end of the year, leadership contender Lyle Oberg, the finance minister, announced his retirement following some disagreements with Stelmach about oil and gas royalties, securities regulation, and equalization.<sup>64</sup> The member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, Guy Boutilier, who had served in Stelmach’s cabinet, was ejected from the PC caucus on 17 July 2009 for criticizing the government’s long-term care policy; he then began sitting as the only independent.<sup>65</sup> On 25 October 2012, “he joined the Wildrose Alliance caucus,” giving that party a fourth member and recognized status in the legislature.<sup>66</sup> Ron Stevens, as mentioned, resigned from cabinet and the legislature in May 2009.<sup>67</sup> When Heather Forsyth of Calgary, a former cabinet minister, and Rob Anderson, from nearby Ardrie, crossed the floor to join the Wildrose Alliance, David Taras commented that “There’s the sense that Stelmach is losing control of the

---

<sup>59</sup> Köhler, “Alberta’s Rube Awakening,” *Macleans*, 3 March 2008, 22-24.

<sup>60</sup> Pawley, 121.

<sup>61</sup> MLA interviews.

<sup>62</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 15 January 2007; *Edmonton Journal*, 12 January 2007.

<sup>63</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 30 August 2007.

<sup>64</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 11 December 2007. In March 2011, Oberg announced he was joining the Wildrose Alliance party, having “lost faith,” as he put it, in Ed Stelmach. *Ibid.*, 2 March 2011.

<sup>65</sup> *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Autumn 2009, 43.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Winter 2010, 64.

<sup>67</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 16 May 2009.

government and losing control of the cabinet."<sup>68</sup> Anderson, elected only in 2008, was said to have been "tired of not having his views heard."<sup>69</sup> During the fall 2010 sitting of the legislature, Dr. Raj Sherman, parliamentary assistant to the health minister, was suspended from caucus in a dispute over an amendment to a health care bill.<sup>70</sup> After sitting briefly as an independent, he contested and won the leadership of the Liberal Party and returned to the legislature as Leader of the Official Opposition. Such widely-publicized departures from caucus sent Stelmach into frequent damage control mode and likely helped to undermine his image as effective leader.

(3) Ensuring the Competence of Cabinet. At the outset, Premier Stelmach dispatched instructions to each of his 18 ministers giving them direction as to their departmental priorities. Since there were no deadlines attached to the priorities it was impossible to assess the efficacy of this apparently promising first step.<sup>71</sup> The actual makeup of Stelmach's first cabinet was criticized for being unrepresentative of women, major urban centres, and minorities, and for being made up largely of his leadership backers rather than on the basis of competence.<sup>72</sup> Soon it was being reported that some cabinet ministers were pursuing their own agendas instead of a common one.<sup>73</sup> In the wake of the loss of Ralph Klein's old seat to the Liberals, Premier Stelmach made an effort to bolster Calgary's representation by upgrading Ron Stevens, the justice minister, to Deputy Premier, and by making two other Calgary MLAs (Yvonne Fritz and Cindy Ady) associate ministers.<sup>74</sup> Following the 2008 election, Stelmach expanded the cabinet to 24 (including himself) and added 10 parliamentary assistants. Fifteen were held over from the previous cabinet; the three rookie MLAs named to cabinet included Alison Redford (Calgary-Elbow) as justice minister and attorney general.<sup>75</sup> The size of cabinet remained at 24 following a minor shuffle in January 2010, seen as an attempt once again to bolster the influence of Calgary following September's by-election loss in Calgary-Glenmore to the Wildrose bunch and the defection of the two area MLAs, also to the Wildrose ranch. Ted Morton, Stelmach's erstwhile rival for the leadership, was promoted to Finance, Ron Liepert to energy, and Alison Redford to political minister for Calgary. Otherwise, there were 18 holdovers and only three newcomers; this did not impress some observers.<sup>76</sup> Some minor changes to cabinet followed Stelmach's

---

<sup>68</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 6 January 2010. See also *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 47.

<sup>69</sup> *Telegraph-Journal* (Saint John, N. B.), 5 January 2010.

<sup>70</sup> *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 51.

<sup>71</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 19 December 2006.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 December 2006; *Edmonton Journal*, 16 December 2006.

<sup>73</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 18 January 2007.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 June 2007; *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Autumn 2007.

<sup>75</sup> *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Summer 2008, 57.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, Spring 2010; *Calgary Herald*, 18 January 2010.



announcement of his own resignation at the beginning of 2011,<sup>77</sup> but none of them significantly elevated cabinet competence. MLAs interviewed for this paper reported that Stelmach was loyal to a fault and that the effectiveness of his cabinet suffered accordingly.<sup>78</sup>

4. Paying Attention to Interest Groups. The one issue raised in the leadership race and which Stelmach subsequently pursued as premier was also arguably the one that proved most troublesome for him politically. "The Royalty Review Panel," as its chairman explained in a letter to Finance Minister Oberg dated 18 September 2007, "was created to review whether Albertans are receiving a fair share from energy development through royalties, taxes and fees." Finding "that Albertans do not receive their fair share . . . and they have not . . . been receiving their fair share for some time," the panel recommended a rebalancing of the royalty regime to ensure fairness.<sup>79</sup> It projected "an estimated increase in revenue of \$1.9 billion per year when all [its] recommendations are implemented."<sup>80</sup> Premier Stelmach accepted the panel's report and the next month promulgated the "New Royalty Framework," which in part envisaged increasing government revenues by "\$1.4 billion in 2010, an increase of 20% over revenues forecast for that year under the current regime."<sup>81</sup> While fair-minded observers recognized the new policy as a compromise, others took the side of the poor, downtrodden oil companies.<sup>82</sup> In the legislature, opposition MLAs expressed outrage at the government's having apparently missed billions in uncollected royalties and called for the energy minister's resignation.<sup>83</sup> A year later, having survived the general election, Stelmach was still attempting to implement the royalty regime change.<sup>84</sup> In the meantime, oil prices fell dramatically (reportedly from \$147 per barrel in July to under \$65 in October 2008),<sup>85</sup> and oil companies were pressuring their own employees as well as MLAs to create a climate of opposition to change in the royalty structure.<sup>86</sup> After the new royalty rates went into effect at the beginning of 2009, Stelmach

---

<sup>77</sup> *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Summer 2011.

<sup>78</sup> MLA interviews.

<sup>79</sup> *Our Fair Share: Report of the Alberta Royalty Review Panel*, To the Hon. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Finance, 18 September 2007, 4 and *passim*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. For a critique of the panel's report, see Parkland Institute, *Selling Albertans Short: Alberta's Royalty Review Panel fails the Public Interest* (Edmonton: Parkland Institute, October 2007).

<sup>81</sup> *The New Royalty Framework*, October 25, 2007, 2. For background, see *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 18 January and 19 June 2007; *Calgary Herald*, 26 September 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Compare, for instance, Graham Thomson and Paula Simons in *Edmonton Journal*, 27 October 2007, with Lorne Gunter in *Edmonton Journal*, 26 October 2007 and Kevin Libin in *National Post*, 6 November 2007.

<sup>83</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 6 November 2007.

<sup>84</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 25 October and 2 November 2008, and 31 January 2009.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 October 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Interview.

gradually backtracked until, by early 2010, he had completely reversed himself,<sup>87</sup> thus caving in completely to the oil companies and their stalking horse, the Wildrose Alliance.

It was rumoured at the time that in the course of the oil companies' efforts to influence policy they had shifted large amounts of political donations from the PC party to the Wildrose Alliance. This does not seem, however, to have been the case (see table 6). Out of five major oil companies, according to Elections Alberta data as interpreted by the present writer, none contributed to the Wildrose Alliance in the 2008 election, following the 2007 royalty review; none contributed to that party in 2009, putting their money instead on the PC party and its embattled leader. In 2010, the EnCana gave \$20,000 to Wildrose and only \$14,500 to the PCs, which conforms to the rumour, but then one swallow does not make a summer; in Suncor's case, it was \$2,000 and \$8500, respectively; the other three still were contributing nothing to Wildrose. According to the *Edmonton Journal*, between 2004 and 2010, altogether only 31 major (over \$375) from all economic sectors, not exclusively in energy, switched from PC to Wildrose.<sup>88</sup> In general, of the top 10 corporate donors to Alberta's political parties in 2004-2010, who donated a grand total of \$1,047,588, fully \$769,210 or 73.4 per cent was given to the Progressive Conservative Party.<sup>89</sup> In 2011, EnCana cut back slightly its contribution to the PCs while also reducing its payment to Wildrose; Suncor did the same; Syncrude upped, while Imperial reduced, its contribution to the PCs, but neither apparently donated to Wildrose; and Husky, uniquely, gave nothing to the PCs, but managed \$900 to Wildrose, not exactly a fortune. In aggregate, these five companies in 2011 still favoured the PCs by a two-to-one margin over the Wildrose, so the evidence for a wholesale shift is unconvincing. Corporate Alberta, including in particular the energy sector, is not in the habit of biting the hand that feeds it, and to assert the contrary is mere propoganda for the ears of the innocent.

5. Acting as a Statesman in the Legislature. While the MLAs interviewed for this paper were divided in their opinions of Ed Stelmach's statesmanship in the legislature—their assessments ranging from "adequate" to "embarrassing"—journalists were inclined to be more uniformly critical. This was unfortunate for Stelmach because the public image is based on media reports and reinforcement, not on the views of political insiders, especially denizens of the Dome. In his first legislative sitting, he was seen as having stumbled badly, apparently unable to recognize the most urgent issues facing

---

<sup>87</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 6 February 2009; *Edmonton Journal*, 12 and 16 March 2010; and *Calgary Herald*, 28 May 2010.

<sup>88</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 24 March 2012.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

Albertans.<sup>90</sup> He showed questionable judgment in allowing a function to be organized, as part of his effort to retire leadership race expenses, at which private access to the premier was offered for \$5000. Although Stelmach quickly quashed what looked like influence-peddling, and the province's ethics commissioner exonerated him, he and the Tory party were tainted by the possibilities for abuse opened up by the lack of rules in leadership races in the province.<sup>91</sup> He then got into hot water by deciding behind closed doors to raise salaries of cabinet ministers, including his own, which gave the lie to his reputation as "Honest Ed."<sup>92</sup> In the Spring 2009 sitting, Stelmach's government introduced bills on everything except the state of the economy and measures to deal with it, seeming to be aimlessly adrift.<sup>93</sup> The fall sitting was no better: "the Alberta legislative assembly is devoid of things politically interesting or significant," wrote the *Edmonton Journal's* political columnist Graham Thomson.<sup>94</sup>

6. Communicating Effectively. To say that Ralph Klein "understood" the media, particularly television, is a gross understatement. He played the media like a maestro plays a musical instrument; he parcelled out tidbits of information to journalists at their feeding-time; he gave them the sensation of having exclusive access to the premier and the inner workings of government; he knew they all had to report the same thing or risk being fired by their editors.<sup>95</sup> They lapped it up and gave Ralph a free ride; instead of the media holding the government to account, they became the government's mouthpiece. Ed Stelmach did not fare so well. In one of his first acts he appointed two newspapermen as his top communications aides.<sup>96</sup> This was unfortunate, since television is the prime medium for politics in North America, if not worldwide. More than unfortunate, it was a major strategic mistake.<sup>97</sup> Relations with the media were further impaired in 2008, when CBC radio and TV reporters were banned for a year from lockups and briefings for a minor breach of budget security.<sup>98</sup> In 2009, Stelmach's handlers unveiled a new version of the premier, "a rebranding in reverse," as one observer called it, which was supposed to bring out "Premier Ed Stelmach as his friends know him: relaxed, humorous and confident. Not as he often comes across in the

<sup>90</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 14 June 2007.

<sup>91</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 15 May 2007.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 May 2008; *Calgary Herald*, 31 May 2008.

<sup>93</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 6 June 2009.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 October 2009. "All the action is taking place outside: Lineups for swine flu; rallies against Bill 50; the growth of the Wildrose Alliance; Conservatives plotting against Premier Ed Stelmach for his upcoming leadership review."

<sup>95</sup> Lisac, *Klein Revolution*, 78; Lisac, *Alberta Politics Uncovered*; Harrison, *Return of the Trojan Horse*, chap. 3; Martin, *King Ralph*, chap. 15; Dabbs, *Ralph Klein: A Maverick Life*, 146; and Vivone, *Ralph Could Have Been a Superstar*, 50ff.

<sup>96</sup> *Canadian Press NewsWire*, 31 January 2007.

<sup>97</sup> Interviews.

<sup>98</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 10 May 2008.

media: so stiff you could use him to stir soup.”<sup>99</sup> No amount of rebranding could possibly have transformed Steady Eddie into the consummate communicator, Ralph Klein.

## Resignation

So it transpired, in light of the foregoing and much more, that in December 2010 a delegation of PC party notables travelled from Calgary to Edmonton to apprise the Premier that, in their opinion, the party could not realistically expect to win the next election should he remain at the helm.<sup>100</sup> It was a “preemptive strike” by the party’s backroom politicians which was clearly at odds with the public endorsements of Stelmach in 2006 and 2008, not to mention the vote of confidence given by his own party just a year earlier, but which now left the Premier with no options; his fate was no longer in his own hands. On Tuesday, 25 January 2011, Stelmach unexpectedly (for those not privy to the behind-the-scenes proceedings) announced his resignation. In his statement, he said in part:

Upon much reflection and consultation with family and close friends, I have determined that after 25 years of public service I am not prepared to serve another full term as Premier.

Therefore I have decided to announce today I will not be running as a candidate in the next general election.

.....

There is a profound danger that the next election campaign will focus on personality and US style negative, attack politics that is directed at me personally.

The danger is that it could allow for an extreme right party to disguise itself as a moderate party by focussing on personality—on me personally.

This type of US wedge politics is coming into Canada, and it comes at our peril.<sup>101</sup>

Ostensibly, the resignation was triggered by a conflict with Finance Minister Ted Morton over the budget; in fact, the entire caucus threatened to disintegrate along its many well-preserved, never-healing fault lines.<sup>102</sup> He could not lead, and they would not

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 21 November 2009. See also *ibid.*, 26 November 2009, and *Calgary Herald*, 28 November 2009.

<sup>100</sup> Interview.

<sup>101</sup> *Smoky Lake Signal*, 2 February 2011.

<sup>102</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 25 and 26 January 2011; *Vancouver Sun*, 26 January 2011; *National Post*, 26 January 2011; and *Ukrainian News/Ukrains'ki visti*, 3-26 February 2011.

follow. For the sake of party unity, as well as the integrity of his caucus, Stelmach resigned. As Paula Simons put it,

It wasn't just the disloyalty of his fellow Tories that brought Ed Stelmach down. He was betrayed, too, by his won fidelity to others. Loyal to a fault, he packed his cabinet with the old rural workhorses who'd helped to engineer his unlikely leadership win, slighting and sidelining brighter talents who might have helped him craft better policy—and reach out to younger Albertans. He made the same mistake with his inner sanctum, sticking with senior advisers who simply weren't up to the challenge.<sup>103</sup>

What brought Ed Stelmach down was thus a combination of factors—his personality and experience, which seemed unsuited to the demands of modern-day political leadership, global or local; the handicap of his come-from-behind leadership victory; his subsequently weak performance in the role of premier and party leader; and his inability to invent, develop, and project a positive image of himself—with which his more successful predecessors in the PC dynasty did not have to contend, but then Lougheed and Klein did not have to cope with Calgary (because they were from there) or with the Wildrose Alliance and its architect, Preston Manning.

### **Aftermath**

During the devastating Slave Lake fire in May 2011, and the concurrent flooding elsewhere in the province, if not before,<sup>104</sup> Premier Ed Stelmach finally showed his mettle. In numerous TV and newspaper interviews he explained in complete sentences what was happening, what needed to be done, and how his government was dealing effectively with the disaster. He was taking charge.<sup>105</sup> He sounded like he knew what he was doing, exuding confidence and determination. He was leading, and inviting others to follow—but it was too late.

---

<sup>103</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 26 January 2011.

<sup>104</sup> Graham Thomson, "The New Ed Stelmach—a Ferrari Engine Inside a Lada Body," *Edmonton Journal*, 24 March 2011.

<sup>105</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 27 May 2011.

**INTERVIEWS WITH MLAs<sup>106</sup>**

Hon. Ed Stelmach, PC Premier of Alberta, at his Legislature office, 28 November 2011

Eugene Zwozdesky, PC MLA, Edmonton-Mill Creek, at his constituency office, 10 December 2011

Brian Mason, NDP MLA, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, at Legislature Annex, 19 December 2011

Harry Chase, Liberal MLA, Calgary-Varsity, 21 December 2011, by phone

Ray Danyluk, PC MLA, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, at his constituency office, St. Paul, 5 January 2012

Dave Hancock, PC MLA, Edmonton-Whitemud, Minister of Government Services and Government House Leader, at his constituency office, 11 January 2012

Doug Elniski, PC MLA, Edmonton-Calder, at his Legislature office, 12 January 2012

Kevin Taft, Liberal MLA, Edmonton-Riverview, at his constituency office, 19 January 2012

Raj Sherman, Leader of the Liberal Party and MLA, Edmonton-Meadowlark, at Legislature Annex, 31 January 2012

Ron Liepert, Minister of Finance, PC MLA, Calgary-West, at his Legislature office, 6 February 2012

Iris Evans, PC MLA, Sherwood Park, at her constituency office, 15 February 2012

Rachel Notley, NDP MLA, Edmonton-Strathcona, 29 February 2012, by phone

Doug Horner, Deputy Premier, President of the Treasury Board, Minister for Corporate Human Resources, PC MLA, Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert, at his Legislature office, 5 March 2012

---

<sup>106</sup> As far as possible, I have tried to follow the guidelines of Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012).

Table 1  
Results of Voting in Alberta PC Leadership Contest, 2006

Candidate	First Ballot		Second Ballot		Second Ballot Redistributed	
	Votes	Per Cent	Votes	Per Cent	Votes	Per Cent
Jim Dinning	29,470	30.2	51,282	35.6	55,509	41.7
Ted Morton	25,614	26.2	41,243	28.6		
Ed Stemach	14,967	15.3	51,764	35.9	77,577	58.3
Lyle Oberg	11,638	11.9				
Dave Hancock	7,595	7.8				
Mark Norris	6,789	6.9				
Victor Doerksen	873	0.9				
Gary McPherson	873	0.8				
TOTALS	97,690	100	144,289	100.1	133,086	100

Source: Wikipedia, s.v. "Ed Stelmach," on the internet at  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed\\_Stelmach](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ed_Stelmach), accessed on 26 May 2011.

Table 2

Three Sets of Criteria for Evaluating the Qualities and Performance of Political Leaders

<b>Global Political Leadership Qualities</b>	<b>Public Opinion Schema</b>	<b>Pawley's Advice on Premiership</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Contextual or cognitive intelligence and judgment (problem-solving)</li> <li>2. Vision—requires knowledge</li> <li>3. Emotional intelligence (self-awareness, empathy)—a matter of personality, character, courage</li> <li>4. Bargaining skills, involves use of power</li> <li>5. Communication skills</li> <li>6. Organizational and management skills</li> </ol>	<p>In the U.S.:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Image of competence</li> <li>B. Integrity</li> <li>C. Reliability</li> </ol> <p>In Canada:</p> <p>Personality Image</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nurture the party</li> <li>2. Lead caucus</li> <li>3. Ensure competence of cabinet</li> <li>4. Pay attention to interest groups</li> <li>5. Act as a statesman in legislature</li> <li>6. Communicate effectively</li> </ol>

Sources: Masciulli and Knight, 108-17; Miller *et al.*, 521-40; LeDuc, 53-74; and Pawley, 118-31.



Table 3

General Election Results, 22 November 2004 and 3 March 2008, Alberta

Political Party	2004			2008		
	Elected	Votes Received	Percentage of Vote	Elected	Votes Received	Percentage of Vote
Alberta Alliance Party	1	77,466	8.7			
Alberta Liberal Party	16	261,737	29.4	9	251,158	26.4
Alberta New Democratic Party	4	90,829	10.2	2	80,578	8.5
Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta	62	416,886	46.8	72	501,063	52.7
Wildrose Alliance Party				0	64,407	6.8
TOTAL	83	890,635	100	83	950,363	100
Voter turnout			44.7			40.6

Note: In January 2008, the Alberta Alliance Party and the Wildrose Party merged to form the Wildrose Alliance Party.

Source: Elections Alberta, Chief Electoral Office, *The Report on the March 3, 2008 Provincial General Election of the Twenty-seventh Legislative Assembly* ([Edmonton: Chief Electoral Office, July 28, 2008]), 142 and 158-9; and *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Summer 2008, 57.

Table 4

Monetary Contributions to Progressive Conservative and Wildrose Alliance Parties, Alberta, Selected Years

Year	Progressive Conservatives		Wildrose Alliance	
	Yearly Contributions (\$)	Campaign Contributions (\$)	Yearly Contributions (\$)	Campaign Contributions (\$)
2004	1,598,297	919,420		
2005			51,035	
2006	1,861,266		53,144	
2007	2,600,469		90,011	
2008	2,245,822	548,566	213,672	513,265
2009	2,337,253		428,312	
2010	2,765,620		1,449,094	
2011	2,203,814		2,160,028	

Source: Elections Alberta website. Figures are rounded to the nearest dollar.

Table 5

Revenues from Membership Fees, Progressive Conservative and Wildrose Alliance Parties, Alberta, Selected Years

<b>Year</b>	<b>Progressive Conservatives (\$)</b>	<b>Wildrose Alliance (\$)</b>
2004	81,067.00	
2005		16,245.00
2006	779,986.00	3,010.00
2007	141,760.00	4,625.00
2008	79,980.00	5,195.00
2009	21,828.00	199,958.60
2010	17,886.00	153,215.00
2011	787,627.00	228,505.00

Source: Elections Alberta website.

Table 6

Contributions to PC and Wildrose Alliance parties by Five Large Oil Companies, Alberta, 2004-2010 (in \$)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>EnCana</b>	<b>Suncor</b>	<b>Syncrude</b>	<b>Husky</b>	<b>Imperial</b>	<b>Totals</b>
2004--year	Progressive Conservative	6,175	6,750				12,925
2004—election	Progressive Conservative	23,825	12,000		2,000		37,825
2006	Progressive Conservative	10,775	7,650	4,250	4,950	10,000	37,625
2007	Progressive Conservative	5,850	13,000	8,750	2,700	10,000	40,300
	<i>Wildrose Alliance</i>	<i>5,000</i>					<i>5,000</i>
2008—year	Progressive Conservative	4,250	14,500		4,250		23,000
2008—election	Progressive Conservative	25,500			1,000	8,000	34,500
2009	Progressive Conservative	10,750	5,650	8,975	1,075	10,250	36,700
2010	Progressive Conservative	14,550	8,500	4,250	9,950	10,250	47,500
	<i>Wildrose Alliance</i>	<i>20,000</i>	<i>2,800</i>				<i>22,800</i>
2011	Progressive Conservative	14,750	11,125	8,100		6,750	40,725
	<i>Wildrose Alliance</i>	<i>15,000</i>	<i>2,300</i>		<i>900</i>		<i>18,200</i>

Source: Elections Alberta website.

5 June 2012