

# Practice of partisan politics clear disrespect of democracy in Alberta

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Premier's office seems intent on clutching power at all costs

Democracy has a very interesting history. It has provided the world with a form of government that, when nurtured and upheld, has resulted in unprecedented prosperity and respect for civil liberties.

Conversely, if left without meaningful opposition for whatever reason, democratically elected governments have proven just as dangerous as dictatorships — trampling on individual freedoms, sowing corruption and entrenching their influence and power on the backs of hardworking taxpayers.

Alberta's democracy is not yet at either of the above extremes — but it is definitely moving in the wrong direction — and fast.

After spending two years with the Progressive Conservative caucus and six months in opposition, I have no doubt the current PC leadership has only one primary concern — and that is retaining power at all costs.

We saw this during the last member services committee meeting, where the government ignored decades of precedent and refused to give the three-MLA Wildrose Alliance caucus the same office and research funding as the two-MLA New Democrat caucus solely because the Wildrose

is perceived as a threat to their grasp on power — while a strong NDP, in their view, helps to split votes on the left (I have heard this discussed in the PC caucus many times).

We saw this when Premier Ed Stelmach cancelled necessary Senate elections for this fall, solely because he feared losing the election to Wildrose.

We saw this when MLA Guy Boutillier, without a caucus vote, was kicked out of the PC caucus for simply speaking out for the needs of seniors in his community.

We saw this when MLA Heather Forsyth was stripped of government committee membership by Stelmach for speaking out publicly about her constituents' unhappiness with the premier's policies.

We have seen billions in uncontracted given to the largest donors to the PC party via Bill 50. In fact, the PCs acclaimed the vice-president of one of these companies to the party's executive mere days before passing the infamous legislation.

PC party members saw this distrust of democracy last November, where Tory cabinet ministers instructed



RICK MACWILLIAM, THE JOURNAL, FILE

Wildrose Alliance floor-crosser Rob Anderson speaks at a legislature press conference in January.

MLAs and other party officials to ensure only members loyal to the premier be allowed as voting delegates for the leadership review. The result was a skewed vote completely unaligned with Albertans and the majority of PC party members.

I saw this disrespect of democracy personally when I, while still a PC MLA, chose to speak out against the

spending practices and mismanagement that have led our province into unprecedented deficits, only to be repeatedly bullied and threatened with the loss of committee work and position by the premier's old boys' network.

I left the PC caucus shortly thereafter for this and the many other reasons described herein.

And then there was the effective removal of the powers of the official opposition chair of the Public Accounts Committee, Liberal MLA Hugh MacDonald, who apparently allowed too many requests for information from government departments on how public money was being spent, which is, of course, the job of the Public Accounts Committee chair.

There is also the matter of PC Speaker Ken Kowalski, who has used his very well-funded, powerful and supposedly neutral Speaker's office to repeatedly advance the agenda of the PC party by: decreasing the NDP's questions during question period — despite the PCs and not the NDP losing seats in the legislature; instructing the Liberals to take criticism off their website of how then health minister Ron Liepert was run-

ning health care in the province; instructing Wildrose to remove a photo of leader Danielle Smith from the party's caucus websites; and repeatedly giving extra time to ministers and the premier to finish their long-winded responses in question period while opposition parties are repeatedly cut off and shouted down.

This government fired the chief elections officer for offering recommendations they didn't like (I know, I was in caucus when this was discussed). They deplored and repeatedly undermined Fred Dunn for his thorough audits of the books (again, I was there). They have refused to hold free votes in the legislature or set fixed election dates and have given cabinet ministers massive pay increases behind closed doors.

I could go on. Every time the PCs pull one of these stunts, their reasoning is simple — it strengthens their grip on power and they believe the public will forget about their actions in the long term.

My constituents deserved better, so I left for a party that understands what democracy should look like. And whether it's a vote for the NDP, Liberals or Wildrose in the next election, I hope Albertans do the same.

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