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Campaign 2008: Week 4 in review -- Alberta Liberals vs Stelmach PCs

Edmonton – The 2008 campaign ends today, and Kevin Taft and the Alberta Liberals are proud to have been the only party to bring fresh ideas and a far-sighted vision to the voters this election.

For everyone in Alberta newsrooms who received our flood of releases and announcements this campaign, here's some lighter reading on Election Day from the Alberta Liberal campaign team:

- “Not only are the Liberals ready to govern, Alberta is super-ready for the Tories to stop governing... The Liberals have good ideas, and Taft actually tells you straight out what they are. How refreshing is that? He does not share the Tories' love of jargon and talent for saying nothing; I don't think you'd ever catch him uttering the kind of evasive inanity that ...Ed Stelmach did this week at his own meeting with the Herald editorial board... Better red than Ed. Much better, in fact. That's why I'm voting Liberal on March 3.” (Columnist Naomi Lakritz, Calgary Herald, February 29, 2008)
- “Are Kevin Taft and the Liberals up to the task? And are enough voters ready to take a chance on a new governing party? This election campaign was Taft's chance to prove himself. After four years on the job and a somewhat shaky start, he has grown into his role as leader of the Opposition. He stepped up to lead the Liberals when no one else wanted the job. Now, he's made the transition from caretaker, from another perfectly nice walk-shovelling neighbour to a legitimate premier-in-waiting. The Liberals have run a smart campaign. They have recruited some strong candidates, with some particular stars in Calgary. They've developed a comprehensive, coherent and credible policy platform. They have successfully presented themselves...as a party ready to govern.” (Paula Simons, Edmonton Journal, March 1, 2008)
- “And now the Liberal leader is in a fight he admits is tough. He says people know in their insides Alberta's wealth has not brought good government. He believes Albertans realize the Tories use taxpayer dollars to try to wallpaper over the many cracks in their record. "I won't take lectures from Ed Stelmach about fiscal responsibility. He doesn't know what the words mean..."Calgary has changed and is way more sophisticated than they're given credit for. They're looking for a different kind of government. They don't see themselves reflected in Ed Stelmach. His crew is Alberta as it was decades ago." You mean, as in almost four decades ago, when the Tories got elected? It is nowhere near easy, this electoral Everest. Kevin refers to the "risk of doing nothing," but realizes doing nothing politically is situation normal in these parts. 'If these guys get away with being inept, lame and corrupt and get another majority they'll do anything,' he says.” (Rick Bell, Calgary Sun, February 28, 2008)

- “Kevin Taft and the Liberals made a compelling argument in their strong campaign: And all things being equal, most Albertans would probably agree it's good to clean house from time to time, to let a fresh group take a look at the books, to hire new policy-makers who have no ownership of past policy. The fuss about Tory returning officers symbolizes the need to have different people making appointments.” (Edmonton Journal editorial, March 1, 2008)
- “Taft is thoughtful and articulate. And his push for an expansion and upgrade of our post-secondary education system is bang on.” (Calgary Herald editorial, March 1, 2008)
- "A Liberal sweep of Lethbridge is more likely than ever." (Lethbridge College political science professor Faron Ellis, Edmonton Journal, February 29, 2008)
- “The [Alberta Medical Association] posed 10 questions to the five main political parties, focusing on matters such as government funding for physician's offices and making primary care networks available to all. The Liberals took home a B, while the NDP finished with a C+ and the Tories scored a C grade... The AMA chief said the Liberals came out ahead due to their support for protecting patient confidentiality in the management of electronic health records. The Grits also scored high because they opposed Bill 41, which physicians have said gives Alberta's health minister sweeping powers to regulate the medical profession.” (Calgary Herald, February 29, 2008)
- "There is a Liberal backbone in [the constituency of Calgary-] Buffalo. And I would say given the current mood, given Kent Hehr . . . and his hard work, I would say dollars to doughnuts, it's his." (University of Calgary political analyst David Taras, Calgary Herald, February 29, 2008)
- "It would be implausible to say that New Democrats have any chance of getting elected as a government on March 3rd -- the only plausible alternative are the Liberals." (Retiring NDP MLA Raj Pannu, the University of Alberta Gateway, February 28, 2008; <http://www.thegatewayonline.ca/Electionsprovdisection08Change.html>)
- “In this, his second election in one of the traditionally most thankless jobs in Canadian politics, Alberta's Opposition Leader Kevin Taft exudes quiet confidence that he could actually become premier next week, and that he is ready for the job.” (Edmonton Journal, February 26, 2008)
- “I would have to say I enjoyed Kevin Taft [in the debate] the most though, he definitely had charm and strength in his answers, he knew what he was talking about and how to bring it up.” (<http://terahertz.wordpress.com/2008/02/26/edmonton-strathcona-candidates-forum-2>)
- “Alberta Liberal leader Kevin Taft had what [journalist Mark] Lisac called a dynamic performance, offering people a chance to decide for themselves if he had the makings of a premier in him.” (Sherwood Park News, February 26, 2008)
- “If you allow yourself to forget there hasn't been a Liberal premier here for 86 years, or anything but a Conservative one for 37, and if the light falls on him just right, Taft looks and sounds the part of a premier. That alone sends out a signal that Alberta politics has changed for the better in 2008.” (Edmonton Journal, February 26, 2008)
- “I watched the debate with other people and we all thought, 'Taft is the only person who is talking to me.' All the rest of them are reading cue cards, talking to the podium...(Taft) came across as the most natural.” (University of Lethbridge professor Peter McCormick, Calgary Herald, February 24, 2008)

- “The Conservation Voters of Alberta, a coalition of environmentalists working to make the environment the top issue this election, says the Liberals have the strongest environmental platform, primarily because of their promise to place absolute caps on carbon emissions.... [Lindsay Telfer, director of the Sierra Club’s Prairie chapter] says the Liberals’ climate change plan ‘takes the cake.’ Their promise of an absolute cap on greenhouse gas emissions in five years was exactly what many environmentalists were looking for.” (See Magazine, February 21, 2008)

And for Ed Stelmach and the PCs, the campaign ended as it began, with a steady stream of missteps:

- “After 37 years in power, the Tory party is stodgy, tiresome and drab. If you could put theme music to their latest election campaign after nearly four decades of rule, it would be the funereal tones that used to grind out on Russian radio whenever some grey Soviet apparatchik had, as a friend of mine puts it, ‘gone to the Big Casino.’” (Naomi Lakritz, Calgary Herald, February 29, 2008)
- “Panic has crept into Conservative ranks, but the fret is most intensely felt in Calgary, where the party's 37-year reign is facing its most dangerous electoral test in, well, 37 years. The Ed Effect has gone toxic in the heart of the oilpatch, a doorstep rejection of Mr. Stelmach's folksy low-coherence sincerity as the sign of someone in well over his head politically and out of touch with urban Alberta personally. ‘We have to work hard for the win this time,’ confides a veteran Conservative strategist. ‘That's not something we're used to doing in this party. Usually we sit back and wait for the polls to close to claim victory.’ (Don Martin, Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald, March 1, 2008)
- “At least two aboriginal communities won't have a polling station in their communities on election day... ‘After the election is over we want to make sure that every area has an equal opportunity to cast their ballots,’ Stelmach said.” (Edmonton Journal, February 29, 2008)
- “Alberta Progressive Conservatives tried to position themselves as a party with new leadership, policies and vision. Conceptually, it was brilliant strategy. Unfortunately, the reality of the campaign was completely different. The campaign recycled tactics from the old Tory campaign manuals like re-issuing old funding announcements and using scare tactics to frighten voters. These tactics disappointed a lot of us who believed that Ed Stelmach had raised the bar on governmental integrity and intelligence. Instead, we took a stroll back into Ralph's World. Calling the members of the Environmental defence organization who criticized his environmental policies ‘silk-suited environmentalists’ was a cheap shot revealing [Stelmach’s] lack of respect for those who care about environmental stewardship. Stelmach also flagged the dire prospect of 335,000 lost jobs if the [Alberta] Liberal policies were implemented -- but then couldn't reveal the basis for that statement during the Leader's debate. Observing [Stelmach] caught with his factual pants down did not increase our political engagement.” (Les Brost, Calgary Herald, February 29, 2008)
- “What precisely a re-elected Stelmach government will mean in terms of a new overarching course for the province is less clear. He talks about communities, and about laying sound preparations for the province we will leave to our children, and about a new urban agenda, and about more action on climate change, all in an unsatisfyingly general way.” (Edmonton Journal editorial, February 29, 2008)
- “Stelmach, for his part, is playing to political prejudices with his repeated claim that, if elected, the Liberals would kill 335,000 jobs with their proposed reductions on greenhouse gas emissions from the oilsands... At first Stelmach said those jobs would be lost in Alberta alone. Now, he's backed off a bit, saying the job losses would be spread across the country. But he still can't seem to explain where that number came from. Stelmach is twisting the facts, insisting the [Alberta] Liberals would impose Kyoto-style reductions. [They] are not saying that at all. They want a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, true, but not to the extent Stelmach is talking about.” (Graham Thomson, Edmonton Journal, February 28, 2008)

- “CIBC chief economist Jeff Rubin chortled when told about the Tories' job warnings. More realistically, they should prepare for such high job losses if they are forced to play catch-up with aggressive U.S. climate-change strategies, he said” (Edmonton Journal, February 28, 2008)
- “Stelmach's fiscal and social conservatism was quickly evident in the legislature. He thumped loudly on his desk when Red Deer Tory MLA Victor Doerksen suggested the government should axe the Advisory Council on Women's Issues so the money could be put towards the debt. ‘[Stelmach's] seatmate, Calgary-Cross MLA Yvonne Fritz, threw a punch at him, but missed,’ reported the Edmonton Journal afterwards. In February 1995, Stelmach was one of 12 Tory MLAs who voted against a successful [Alberta] Liberal motion to recognize Freedom to Read Week in the province...Stelmach, however, was an integral part of Klein's team -- not just as a backbench MLA, but as a cabinet minister for nine years. University of Lethbridge political scientist Peter McCormick says that's something many Albertans don't remember. ‘If they did, he'd get hit a lot harder on all this infrastructure stuff,’ says McCormick. ‘He was the minister responsible for infrastructure for several years.... And now he's saying, “Hey, we need a plan to take care of infrastructure.”’ Well, yeah -- who was in charge of that, Ed?” (Fast Forward Weekly, February 28, 2008)
- “More striking still, 62 per cent feel the government should limit emissions, even if that means cancelling or delaying oilsands projects. Those attitudes run directly contrary to Tory Leader Ed Stelmach's refusal to ‘touch the brakes’ on oilsands development, and his policy of allowing emissions to rise for decades.” (Don Braid, Calgary Herald, February 28, 2008)
- “The fact PC Alberta approved the Bier ads [PC endorsements placed by a sitting member of the Chinook Health Region board] is further evidence of a government whose vision of boundaries has become blurred over time. ‘It proves what the Liberals are saying, that after 37 years in office they’ve lost track of the boundary between what’s the Conservative party and what’s the Government of Alberta... Of course they don’t get it. This government doesn’t see anything wrong with putting their people in everywhere.’” (University of Lethbridge political scientist Peter McCormick quoted in The Lethbridge Herald, Feb 27, 2008)
- “Stelmach, who was speaking with this newspaper's editorial board Tuesday, appears to be reading and interpreting comments and signs more optimistically than what is being suggested by the rest of the electorate... Stelmach also talked about Alberta being a leader in the country in the area of managing the environment. The fact he had the audacity to even go there is proof again that [Stelmach] doesn't quite get the big picture... [he] has lost the confidence of the business community and this election -- no matter what the outcome -- will almost certainly start the process of finding his successor.” (Deborah Yedlin, Calgary Herald, February 27, 2008)
- “It was clear that Ed Stelmach was pulling a fast one when he asked the Lieutenant-Governor to dissolve the legislature and issue the writ for an election immediately after the Throne Speech on Feb. 4. Why couldn't he wait 10 days for the budget speech, already scheduled for Feb. 14? Obviously, he didn't want his campaign promises put through the discipline of Department of Finance spreadsheets, whose standardized format allows taxpayers to see how their money is spent and whether revenues match expenditures.” (Tom Flanagan, Globe and Mail, February 27, 2008)
- “Calgarians feel like political orphans. They are so alienated by the Stelmach government that the legislature might as well be in Inuvik.” (Graham Thomson, Calgary Herald, February 27, 2008)

- “On Monday, the Tory leader took two bodychecks from heavyweight skaters -- one from the courts, and a real thumper from major oil companies... The Tory reaction [to the insurance ruling] is a mistake both politically and ethically. Government policy was forcing a group of injured people to subsidize insurance rates for the rest of us. It's wrong, the judge said so, and the policy should simply be reformed. Stelmach refused to do that, and now he's taken two public legal defeats in the course of one election campaign.” (Don Braid, Calgary Herald, February 26, 2008)
- “Several companies want a slowdown in oilsands development, which puts them in line with the [Alberta] Liberals, and against Stelmach's refusal to ‘touch the brakes.’” (Don Braid, Calgary Herald, February 26, 2008)
- “With voting day set for next Monday, Mr. Stelmach is facing an emboldened opposition and polls predicting a slimmed-down majority for the Tories. His pro-industry stand on environmental protection is widely viewed as his Achilles heel.” (Dawn Walton and Katherine O'Neill, Globe and Mail, February 26, 2008)
- “Stelmach's attacks on the Liberals seem hasty and ill-conceived. Which pretty much sums up the Conservative campaign so far. It is like a train wreck that won't stop. The lead engine is lying in a smouldering heap, unmoving, but the cars keep slamming into the wreckage, victims of their own inertia. Just when you think it's all over, another car lurches into the wreckage. It's even more impressive when you realize the wheels of this train came off weeks ago. It's amazing it manages to move at all.” (Edmonton Journal, Graham Thomson, February 26, 2008)
- “Pro-conservation calls to halt land sales in the oilsands region from a group that includes the largest petroleum producers were given a chilly reception by ... Ed Stelmach yesterday.” (Calgary Sun, February 26, 2008)
- “He's as wooden a person as I have ever seen. This is the richest city in the richest jurisdiction in Canada, and we still can't get a commitment from government to properly fund health care. Mr. Stelmach is trying to address that problem, but the anger has become so apparent to Albertans that people will take it out on the ruling party.” (Bruce Foster, chairman of the policy studies department at Mount Royal College, Edmonton Journal, February 25, 2008)
- “If they used a cardboard figure of Ed Stelmach at the debate and he had been talking on the phone it would have worked just as well. He looked like an accountant reading the dull parts of a company report.” (University of Lethbridge professor Peter McCormick, Calgary Herald, February 24, 2008)