

Premier's aide changes focus

By LINDA SLOBODIAN
Staff Writer

For the past half decade he was the voice of Alberta's most powerful man — Peter Lougheed. Now, Ron Liepert is speaking for himself.

His career as the the premier's press secretary is over. But, Liepert, 36, is focusing on the future.

Although, there's an element of sadness — Liepert liked his job — this change simply means a challenge. He identifies that challenge as determining in which direction he'll take his future. At this point, he says, it could go any way.

"I'm going to take some time, I'm not saying how much time and I'm going to look around. There are a couple of things within government that interest me, but at the same time I want to see if I have any marketability in the private sector. Time will tell."

Liepert insists the timing is right, that five and a half years as the premier's press secretary "is about long enough."

"I think it can't be much shorter because then you're not being fair to the person you're working for. Whoever you're working for needs some sort of a long-term commitment."

"But if it's much longer than that you really get burned out. You kind of lose your challenge. You start to form opinions where you shouldn't be forming opinions."

And the man who worked so closely with the great blue-eyed Shiek, says he feels just as good about leaving with Lougheed — as he does about Lougheed leaving.

There were a lot of wet eyes on June 26 when Lougheed announced his decision to retire.

"Mine were not," says Liepert. "I

took a different approach. He was a happy guy and it showed.

"He's a friend of mine. You're damn right he is. And I think I'm a friend of his."

One would have to be a friend to perform the formidable task of bringing Lougheed to — as well as shielding him from — the media. Part of Liepert's job was to sift through a daily barrage of

phone calls from the media on "anything and everything."

On this note Liepert becomes slightly defensive.

"Very few people in the media have an idea of the number of hours in a year the premier has spent doing interviews, or meeting with editorial boards, or having lunch with somebody from the media."

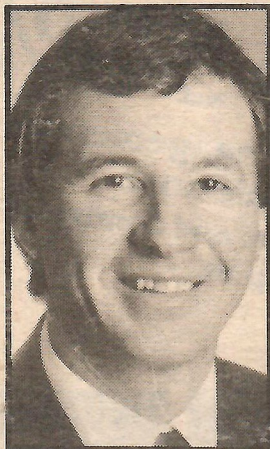
"I think we — we in terms of him and I — have been wrongly accused of being inaccessible, of treating the media with disdain. I would challenge anybody on that. In fact, I have a running list of the number of people the pre-

mier has seen in the years I've been there. And I'll tell you, it'll knock the socks off most media people."

And beyond Lougheed?

"Don Getty will make an excellent premier and has tremendous qualities although they'll be different than Lougheed's," says Liepert.

"Mr. Getty will have to, and I believe he will, have time to listen to those who were not supportive of him. I believe he's a compassionate, sincere man. And with those qualities it's natural that he'll listen to people who have concerns."



RON LIEPERT
... timing is right

Former aide to Lougheed lands L.A. job

By BILL SASS
Journal Staff Writer

Peter Lougheed's former press secretary is heading to sunny California for a job that opposition spokesmen say is blatant Tory patronage.

Ron Liepert, who has been out of work 15 days since Lougheed formally left the premier's office Nov. 1, has been appointed director of the Economic Development Department's Los Angeles office. The four-year contract job pays between \$40,000 and \$53,500 a year.

Economic Development Minister Hugh Planche said Thursday it's not a patronage appointment.

"You have to presume because he was press secretary to the premier he is qualified."

Planche describes the one-man office as basically a remote public relations branch which sells business and tourists on the idea of coming to Alberta.

"He'll be responsible for the Alberta profile in the western United States."

Liepert will be rubbing elbows with everyone from California oil sands executives to movie barons looking for wide-open spaces to shoot an epic.

He is also "well versed" in Calgary's 1988 Winter Olympics and will be able to tell Californians it might be fun to head north for the event, Planche said.

But opposition spokesmen are not impressed with the appointment. "I'd call it patronage in every way," said Opposition Leader Ray Martin.

"What does a former ITV reporter and press secretary for the premier know about running the L.A. office?"

Martin said there's a lot of trade matters the director has to discuss with top American businessmen.

Representative Party Leader Ray Speaker said Liepert's only qualification for the job "has been in carrying Lougheed's briefcase to exotic places. He's never negotiated a deal or promoted Alberta in any way."



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Jobs for the boys

We tend to forget that political patronage is alive and well outside Ottawa.

Ottawa shovels more of the muck than anyone else, but it taints provincial government as much as federal.

Hypocrisy rules, even in our very own Alberta.

All parties rail against patronage and demand it be stamped out — and all indulge in it though they know it's the root cause of a growing cynicism among many Canadians toward the political process.

How often did Brian Mulroney and his colleagues blast the Trudeau and Turner Grits for blatant patronage — and rightly so?

Mulroney even made it an election issue.

But that didn't mean the federal Tories could resist handing out their share of favors to friends and allies before making a limp attempt at tackling the cancer of patronage.

(And despite its holier-than-thou posture on patronage federally, NDP provincial governments have wallowed in this particular trough as enthusiastically as the other two major parties.)

With that background it would be naive to expect something better from Alberta's new premier — but we were hoping.

Unfortunately, the jobs-for-the-boys mentality is alive and well.

There's nothing wrong with rewarding public service, but the appointments of two former Lougheed aides to posts in the U.S. smacks of patronage pure and simple.

Ron Liepert was Peter Lougheed's press secretary. Bryce Nimmo ran the former premier's Calgary office.

Both were political posts pure and simple, yet both have been given public appointments without any competition or advertisement.

We're asked to take it on faith that they're well suited for their new jobs as economic development representatives in Los Angeles and Houston.

Maybe, but the combination of their obvious political connections and lack of experience in trade development is bound to lead people to the conclusion that they've both been given political rewards — at public expense.

And yet Premier Getty and other members of the government react to that suggestion as if it were outrageous!

Come off it, guys.

Even if you have the gall to insult the taxpayer's pocket, don't insult his intelligence.

Press aide denies deal

EDMONTON — Peter Lougheed's former press secretary denies his appointment to the Alberta's economic development office in California was part of a deal made by his old boss.

"I'm not saying there wasn't any discussion with Mr. Lougheed, but there were no deals made," Ron Liepert said of his new job as director of the Los Angeles office.

Liepert, who's been out of work for 17 days since Premier Don Getty hired his own press secretary, said he made his own deal with Economic Development Minister Hugh Planche.

He said the job in California, which he expects to begin this spring, will involve a variety of areas — primarily promoting Alberta products and services.

"Basically the position is one of liaison between Alberta business and California interests," said Liepert.

He said he'll encourage investment in Alberta, promote the 1988 Winter Olympics and push for the purchase of Alberta products.

Peter's aide gets L.A. job

The press aide for former premier Lougheed says he'll need training time before taking over as the provincial government's liaison officer in Los Angeles.

"I'll need a couple of months to find out what's going on. I don't profess to know everything about Stelco or the electronics test centre, and I want to learn," Ron Liepert said Friday.

Liepert, who finished as Lougheed's press secretary when the former premier officially stepped down Nov. 1, starts his new duties Dec. 1.

He will earn about \$50,000 a year promoting Alberta business and economic development in the Los Angeles area.

Liepert refused comment on Opposition charges his appointment is strictly a patronage award for his service to Lougheed.

"I'm not going to comment on that. It's not my place to comment on what the Opposition says."

Liepert said he will not likely move to Los Angeles until the spring, adding his family will wait until the school year is finished before joining him.

He will replace Randy Pallivoda, who returns to Edmonton.

LOUGHEED AIDES APPLIED AND WERE ACCEPTED

No patronage deals, says Getty

By PETER STOCKLAND
Staff writer

Premier Getty has denied patronage was behind the appointments of Peter Lougheed's former press secretary and tailor to head foreign trade missions.

"I don't think it's patronage. They applied for the jobs and were accepted," Getty said yesterday.

And Getty rejected suggestions he influenced the appointment of Ron Liepert to Alberta's trade office in Los Angeles and Bryce Nimmo to a similar post in Houston.

"I didn't try to influence anybody into giving them those positions," he said.

Getty said he was especially surprised at the

uproar over the appointment of Liepert, a television reporter before joining Lougheed's staff.

"I thought it unfair to say that because someone is from the media, he's unqualified," he said.

Economic Development Minister Hugh Planche also defended the appointments, saying the two were chosen because they're familiar with the government network.

"When you're sitting in a lonely office in Houston, you've got to know how to access the place. You couldn't send someone right out of industry," Planche said.

Liepert will take over the Los Angeles trade office from Randy Palivoda, who will return to Edmonton. Nimmo takes control of the Houston office Jan. 1, replacing Rob Scott, who moves to

the New York office.

New Democrat leader Ray Martin said the shuffle is proof Alberta taxpayers are funding the Tory party's desire to take care of its own.

"Lougheed is gone, and the government is looking after its Tory pals. They're there because of who they know rather than for their expertise," Martin said.

But Planche, whose ministry oversees the trade offices, defended the appointments, saying it would be unrealistic to exclude known Tories from government jobs.

"If you preclude Conservatives from these jobs, half the population would not be able to participate," he said.

●Don Wanagas comments: Page 11.

Patronage isn't alphabetical

Political patronage has to rank as one of the most successful Alberta government job-creation programs going.

It's simply amazing the number of plum jobs these Tories can find to hand out when the need arises.

The problem is, if you're not a card-carrying Tory you're not eligible for the benefits of this program. You need not bother to apply. Because the simple truth is: There's absolutely nothing available for you.

If, on the other hand, you're a loyal Conservative who's in need of employment (meaningful or otherwise) the world is your oyster. There are jobs galore for faithful Tory servants. And the pay's not half bad either.

Bob Dowling, for example, will be making something in the neighborhood of \$50,000 during the next year as Alberta's commissioner for Expo '86 in Vancouver.

Under the guidelines which have been established for the patronage program, the affable Dowling is eminently eligible to be paid benefits by the Conservative government.

After all, he's a vice-president of the Alberta Progressive Conservative Party and a stalwart Tory campaign organizer. (These points, naturally, were not included in the biography Public Affairs Minister Bill Payne sent out with the announcement of Dowling's appointment on Friday.)

Add to the above qualifications the fact Dowling posted a surprising byelection win for the Tories in the Edson constituency back in 1968 when Peter Lougheed was starting the party off on the road to power. And don't overlook Dowling's tenure in two cabinet portfolios before he quit government in 1979 and soon afterward accepted a two-year appointment as Commissioner for Alberta's 75th Anniversary celebrations.

So not only is Dowling eligible for patronage. He's had previous experience in this area which he can probably pass on to the fellow who has been appointed as his deputy commissioner.

That fellow is Tom Donnelly. On Friday, he was officially made responsible for Alberta's economic-promotion efforts at Expo '86.

And what are Donnelly's qualifications for a deputy commissioner's posting, you ask?

Well, at first glance one suspects the connection might be that he played football for the Saskatchewan Roughriders at the same time Premier Don Getty was chucking a pigskin for the Edmonton Eskimos in the mid-1950s. After all, a former career in football tends to be advantageous in Alberta government circles these days.

DON

WANAGAS



But Donnelly can do even better than that. He was also the Tory MLA for Calgary Millican from 1975 to 1979.

No, I didn't remember him right off the bat either. I had to look up his name in an old *Parliamentary Guide* from his government days to supplement the bio the public-affairs department provided.

And I must admit that the fact Donnelly's name preceded Dowling's in that *Guide* made me suspicious the Tories may be handing out plums in alphabetical order.

But Roy Farran, the former solicitor-general whose name appears next on the '75-'79 Legislature roster, already has an appointment as chairman of Alberta's Racing Commission. So, unless there's something else in store for Farran, my theory is unfounded.

Besides, two other recent beneficiaries of the patronage-plum program don't show up in the *The Parliamentary Guide*.

Ron Liepert received an international trade posting in Los Angeles on the merits of his performance as Lougheed's surly news secretary. His biggest claim to fame in that capacity is that he once took a trip to Hawaii simply to deliver a case full of briefs (the kind you read) to the premier.

Bryce Nimmo first impressed the Tory hierarchy with his ability to tailor Lougheed's suits. That was enough to get him the job running the former premier's Calgary office. Now he's off to Houston for another international trade job which pays in the range of \$50,000 a year.

And who was it that was saying the Tories aren't doing enough to make jobs for Albertans?

One just wonders what might be in store for the people who once dusted Lougheed's desk and emptied his wastebaskets.

If they've ever bothered to buy themselves memberships in the Conservative party their names may already be on a list somewhere, just waiting for a job to open up for them.

Away in the Manager

AWAY IN CAL-I-FOR-NIA
LOS ANGELES THEY SAY
OUR LIT-TLE RON LIE-PERT
WILL BE SLAVING A-WAY
COUNTRY BOY FROM AR-DROSSAN
HOW WILL HE SUR-VIVE
WHEN HE LEARNS THERE'S NO COW-BOYS
OUT ON ROD-E-O DRIVE

THE PRESS THINK THAT TO LIE-PERT
SAY- NG "YES" IS A VICE
BUT LIN-DA AS-SURES US
HE'S SAID IT AT LEAST TWICE
THE MED-I-A WILL MISS HIM
AND HATE TO SEE HIM GO
RON WILL MISS THEM JUST LIKE
HE MISSES THIR-TY BE-LOW

PRO-MOT-ING OUR PRO-VINCE
WILL BE HIS DAI-LY BREAD
B.S.'ING CAL-I-FOR-NIANS OUT OF
WEATHER REPORTS THEY'VE READ
WHEN THEY'RE AT OUR OL-YM-PICS
HE'LL HAVE EARNED ALL HE'S PAID
AND WHEN THEY'RE UP HERE FREEZ-ING
WE'LL SNEAK DOWN AND IN-VADE

Getty appoints media man

The first new appointment in the office of premier-designate Don Getty has been announced.

Geoff Davey will start Friday as the premier's press secretary, replacing Ron Liepert who dealt with the news media for Peter Lougheed for 5½ years.

Davey, a former television reporter for CBC and CFRN, has worked as executive assistant to Economic Development Minister Hugh Planche since 1980.

Liepert, 36, said he expected to be leaving the premier's office.

"When I accepted this job I didn't have any intention of ever staying on to get a gold watch," Liepert said.

NANCY
BEASLEY



At The Legislature

Speaking of bad publicity — Getty certainly got his fair share this week and it's no wonder.

The new man in charge not only hired one of his own leadership opponents, Ron Ghitter, to sell the multi-mil-

lion dollar Kananaskis hotel project — one of Getty's ministers gave former premier Peter Lougheed's press secretary a cushy job in our economic development Los Angeles office.

Sure, everyone on the Tory side of the fence is denying these appointments are patronage but who's fooled?

When Getty hired Ghitter to sell the \$30-million hotel, he didn't even know how much Ghitter was getting paid.

Hardly what I'd call good planning.

And Ron Liepert, Lougheed's former press secretary, has been a faithful servant for more than five years. It's hard to believe he's not being "thanked" for those years of devoted work making sure reporters didn't bother Lougheed and carrying his briefcase from appointment to appointment.

Certainly Getty isn't being as blatant about his appointments as were former prime minister John Turner or Prime Minister Brian Mulroney when they promoted certain key helpers.

But to expect all thinking Albertans to accept these recent moves as anything less than patronage is like asking us not to think at all.

Record

APPOINTED: Ronald Liepert, 36, of Ardrossan, former press secretary to ex-premier Peter Lougheed and one-time TV reporter, as director of the province's international economic development office in Los Angeles, in charge of promoting tourism and economic opportunities in Alberta. The \$53,500-a-year job commences December 1.