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Controversial MP wins squeaker

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Rob Anders renominated in Calgary West

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CALGARY HERALD

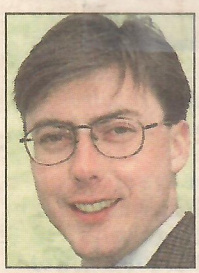
Controversial MP Rob Anders has won the Conservative nomination in Calgary West, but only after defeating three challengers in a narrow vote Saturday afternoon.

Anders got 1,390 votes to 1,054 for Alison Redford, a former member of the Progressive Conservative party, on the third ballot.

Anders led in all the votes, but didn't win 50 per cent until two others, Abe Hage and Dan Morrison, were dropped in the preferential-ballot system.

Anders, who has represented the riding since 1997, said the vote shows his competitors did not dent his support in Calgary West.

"Abe brought in hundreds of Muslims into this thing and Alison Redford brought in lots of Tories — former Progressive Conservatives," he said. "They were just bringing in their own new camps into the party."



Rob Anders

But Anders' margin of victory was surprisingly narrow, according to one Calgary political scientist, who found it odd he would refer to his competitors by their religious and party affiliations.

"What it says is Anders has identified Muslims as being a potentially hostile group," said Don Ray, a University of Calgary professor of political science.

"If (Conservative Leader Stephen) Harper and the Conservative party want to make substantial inroads into Ontario, they're going to have to drop this whole business about who was a Tory and who was Alliance and who was Muslim."

Ray said one strength of the former Canadian Alliance party was its ability to "overcome all kinds of religious and cultural differences." But Anders could be divisive enough to encourage opposition parties to unite against him, as happened to Alliance MP Eric Lowther in Calgary Centre in 2000, when many Liberals and New Democrats helped PCer Joe Clark win.

Anders has been known as a plain-speaking, uncompromising right winger who nonetheless is hugely popular, earning about 2½ times the votes of his nearest competitor, PCer Jim Silye, in 2000.

His most controversial move was to be the lone voice of opposition when the Commons voted to grant Nelson Mandela honorary Canadian citizenship. Far from apologizing for that stand, he told the Herald last year history would vindicate him.

Meanwhile, Conservatives in the Macleod riding, which covers much of the area south of Calgary from Okotoks to Pincher Creek, selected Ted Menzies as their nominee for the next election.

Menzies, a Claresholm-area grain farmer, needed five ballots to defeat his rivals in a vote conducted in four communities over a week. He finally knocked off the last remaining competitor, Erik Gregson, with about 65 per cent of the votes.

"It's humbling to see the support that came out," said Menzies, who will face Liberal candidate Chief Chris Shade in the election, expected as early as May.

Macleod is currently held by Grant Hill, who is retiring from politics.

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