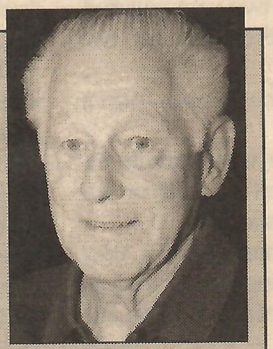
Choosing Klein's successor not easy



I write it as I see it
By Ron Moore

The 2004 election is now history. It ran true to predicted form—a Progressive Conservative majority, a large drop in popular vote and Edmonton returning to Socialist control.

The only area to run contrary to what political pundits predicted was Calgary. No one foresaw the Liberal breakthrough in the traditional Tory stronghold.

In hindsight, this sudden Liberal surge should not have been a surprise. Premier Ralph Klein's support has steadily eroded ever since the Hancock/Mar Red Tories gained control of caucus after the 1997 election.

In two elections, 1993 and 1997, grassroots supporters overwhelmingly showed the type of government they wanted and supported.

In caucus, the Red Tory sector was not happy with this sound, free-enterprise form of government, so they lobbied their counterparts to revert to the socialist way of spending. Reluctantly, Mr. Klein agreed, even though he knew the vast majority of Albertans were strongly against the move.

Today, he is reaping the results of this rash decision.

The premier will coast through his last 12 to 15 months in office, content to cause no ripples in the political waters until his retirement. The government will be able to meet all the wish lists of groups such as municipal, lobby and unions, thanks to our oil windfall. The future will be left to his successor.

We can only hope the present oil revenue influx will continue so the next premier will not face the same situation as Mr. Klein faced in 1993.

The question now facing Albertans is, "Who will succeed Mr. Klein?"

Presently, there are four former or present MLAs and two very creditable individuals.

The policies of Gary Mar and Dave Hancock are more in line with the NDP or Liberals. Mar has an added liability of his mishandling the thousands of taxpayers dollars in the Charlebois fiasco.

Lyle Oberg has not demonstrated qualities of leadership and must be considered a long shot.

Jim Dinning is a clean-cut young Albertan with a great personality, but his political track record raises questions. He's given credit for being the architect of the Klein 1993 policies, but Steve West was the main force there.

During the Getty years, Jim was known as a follower—a "Yes, Mr. Premier" person.

Ted Morton, newly elected MLA for Foothills-Rockyview, is the most creditable of the group. He has solid political credentials.

In the months ahead, another new MLA, Ron Leipert, will emerge as a serious contender. Ron served his political apprenticeship under the direction of Peter Lougheed. He is a strong advocate for fiscally responsible government. His voice should be heard in caucus deliberations in the future.

These are exciting times in provincial politics, as others will come forward to make this leadership race very interesting.

Ron Moore served as MLA of the Lacombe constituency for many years. He is now a freelance political commentator.