Lougheed's Dr. No a 'progressive' option



DON BRAID

Premier Peter Lougheed once plucked a brash young reporter out of the ITV newsroom in Edmonton to be his press secretary.

Now Ron Liepert, 54, is running for the provincial Conservatives in the very seat the former premier used to own, Calgary West. (It's soon to be vacant because of MLA Karen Kryczka's retirement.)

This is quite the twist of politics, duly noted by Lougheed when he called Liepert to congratulate him.

Often known back then as Dr. No, Liepert was a grumpy press guy. Today, he admits it.

"I was looking at clippings with some of my quotes from back then and I thought, wow, I really was a miserable guy."

Well, you said it, Ron.

When Lougheed later sent Liepert to Los Angeles to staff the Alberta office, a columnist (me, actually) wrote that he'd have to take classes to learn to say yes.

The battles were always fun, though. Liepert was and is a straight-up type who speaks his mind.

None of your political pussyfooting for him.

Now Liepert is as blunt as ever as he proudly proclaims himself a progressive from the old Lougheed side of the party.

"There are some new candidates, like Ted Morton, who have one view of the world," Liepert says. "And there are those, like me, who have another."

Morton, arch-conservative and firewall builder, is a long way from the old Lougheed tradition of social moderation and national compromise.

The ideological battles in the provincial party are intense these days.

It's the same struggle faced by the new national Conservatives, as moderates wrestle with the right wing of the party.

Liepert recently got tangled up in a hot local case, when he managed Alison Redford's campaign against MP Rob Anders for the nomination in the federal version of Calgary West.

Liepert and other conservatives were furious with Anders for his disparaging comments about Nelson Mandela.

Redford, an expert on Africa, was as direct a challenge as the progressive side of the party could possibly send.

"Alison was a very impressive candidate," Liepert says. "She's much more aligned with my views of the world than the current MP."

On March 27 she gave Anders a bad scare. He won by 1,390 votes to 1,054 for Redford after three ballots.

When Liepert decided to go for the provincial nomination, he expected retaliation.

Sources tell me that it came near the nomination deadline last Friday, but two candidates for the provincial seat ended up being rebuffed, one for improper documentation and another because he was late.

Back in 1992, Liepert was a major force in Nancy MacBeth's leadership campaign against Ralph Klein.

"That was primarily because I'd known Nancy and was a friend of hers," he says. "I didn't know him at the time."

Lougheed's family members also backed MacBeth, and it took no imagination to figure out that the ex-premier did, too.

But Liepert suffered no retaliation from Klein. Like Jim Dinning, who also supported MacBeth, he was quickly forgiven for backing the also-ran.

Liepert actually ran for the Tories in the subsequent 1993 election, losing Edmonton Highlands to a Liberal.

Since then, he's worked for Telus and established his own communications company. But never has he strayed far from Tory politics.

Now Dr. No is back — and this time he's saying no to the arch-conservatives.

The **Armet** REPORT

On The Move

Emotions were running high at the Tory caucus meeting this week in Calgary as a number of government MLAs took the opportunity to bid their colleagues a fond farewell.

They included Environment Minister **Lorne Taylor** (Cypress-Medicine Hat), Seniors Minister **Stan Woloshyn** (Stony Plain), **Marlene Graham** (Calgary-Lougheed), **Karen Kryczka** (Calgary-West), and **Dave Broda** (Redwater).

Meanwhile, on the nomination front, **Ron Liepert** will be the party standard-bearer in Calgary-West. Both were recently acclaimed. Liepert had originally been challenged by the former Alberta Director of the *Canadian Taxpayers Federation*, **John Carpay**, from Edmonton. However, Carpay apparently did not hold a ***P.C. Party of Alberta*** membership when his papers were filed and was subsequently disqualified by the riding's nomination committee.