

Faith and Party Politics in Alberta

Or

“Danielle, this is Alberta, not Alabama”

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We are one of the first provinces to give women the vote. We had the first female cabinet minister. The Famous Five came from Alberta. We have a mayor in Edmonton who is Jewish, we have a mayor in Calgary who is a Muslim. We have a female premier and we will have a female premier as of Monday. When Toronto and Ontario does all those things, I am quite happy to sit here and be lectured about how backward we are. But until they actually catch up to Alberta, I am standing proud.

Danielle Smith, Wildrose leader, April 22, 2012

Alberta’s 2012 election posed questions about what might be called the province’s core values. The centrism (or for some “progressivism”) of incumbent Progressive Conservative Premier Alison Redford was set against the free enterprise libertarianism of Wildrose Party leader Danielle Smith. More than that, Wildrose went into the election with official policies on human rights clearly designed to appeal to religious conservatives, and other policies on enhancing school choice that would have strong support from that same constituency. The choice was clear enough to illustrate two different views of Alberta: one that it was a distinctively conservative place, still shaped by the twin currents of religious traditionalism and anti-government individualism; the other, a cosmopolitan and multicultural province not nearly as distinct from other parts of Canada as many insiders and outsiders believed.

Does the victory of Alison Redford’s Progressive Conservatives settle this question and dispel the portrayal of Alberta as a comparatively conservative province? Or, does Alberta still have Canada’s most politically-influential “Bible belt,” that is able to influence its centrist and right-wing parties? In fact, there are indications that “stock” portrayals need adjustment. Opinion surveys indicate that Albertans are only modestly more traditional than other Canadians, and only on some “morality” issues. In recent years, provincial party leaders on the right have generally avoided wading into such issues, and that is true of the upstart Wildrose Party as well as the Progressive Conservatives (PC). Within both of these parties, leadership candidates representing the clearest versions of moral traditionalism — PC leadership candidate Ted Morton and Wildrose leadership candidate Mark Dyrholm in particular — have lost.

And yet morality issues do pop up more persistently in Alberta than almost any other part of the country. In recent years, the province has legislatively retained a grudging approach to the public recognition of sexual diversity, attaching provisions to a bill that added sexual orientation

to human rights law explicitly allowing parents to take the children out of classrooms where discussion of homosexuality is to occur. Over many years, the education ministry has also supported a variety of measures that make it easier than anywhere else in Canada to secure generous support for faith-based schools. Voices calling for restraining or eliminating the province's Human Rights Commission are louder and more persistent in Alberta than their counterparts in other regions.

Taking all of this into consideration, we will argue here that Alberta has become less distinctive over time, with moral traditionalists playing a more peripheral role than ever in provincial politics. Right wing provincial parties have been largely staying away from the most significant hot button issues traditionally at the core of the political ambitions of religious conservatives – reproduction and sexuality. When they do tread into these areas, as the last election demonstrated, it is at their own peril. At the same time, both the Progressive Conservatives and the Wildrose Party remain prepared to make policy statements and (when in government) adopt measures that symbolize their sympathy with religious conservatives and moral traditionalists. And where possible, they have pursued policy initiatives in areas like schooling that will appeal to “social” conservatives but also to fiscally-conservative neo-liberals.

First Impressions

Foundations matter, and an important strand of writing on Canadian political culture points to early immigrant waves importing ideas that then congealed as enduring strands in political thinking and debate.¹ Gad Horowitz pioneered the view that early migration to the Maritimes and central Canada secured the dominance of liberal individualism, but not the radical individualism that was left behind with loyalist migration.² It was also accompanied by “tory” and socialist touches, creating room for collectivist alternatives to unadulterated individualism.

Nelson Wiseman talks of the formative influence on Alberta's political culture of immigration from the midwest great plains of the U.S.³ What came with them was a radical “populist” individualism, mixed with “religiously-infused moral conservatism.”⁴ This was especially true in rural Alberta, from the American border up to Edmonton. Conservative evangelical Christianity was also formative for several of the province's most prominent politicians, among them premiers William Aberhart and Ernest Manning, as it has been in more recent years for one-time provincial treasurer and federal Conservative cabinet minister Stockwell Day, and for Reform Party leader and now elder statesman Preston Manning.

Some commentators see this religious dimension as fading, though still recognizing that other forms of conservatism have strong roots in the province. David Laycock's account of the Reform Party, which had such strong support in Alberta, emphasizes its neo-liberal impulses and not at all its moral traditionalism.⁵ Rand Dyck certainly recognizes the strength of conservatism in Alberta, but he focuses on free market individualism and populism – particularly since the 1940s.⁶ He does not dismiss religiously-based conservatism, though, noting that Alberta was one of the provinces to see sexual orientation added to provincial human rights law, and did so only when forced by the courts. Premier Ralph Klein was also alone among provincial and territorial

leaders in promising (for a time) to lead a crusade against the extension of marriage rights to same-sex couples.

Wait a Minute: Complicating Views About Albertans and Their Governments

Mark Lisac suggests that we take a hard honest look at Alberta today, and confront the stereotypes that are sustained by Albertans themselves and not just outsiders. He refers to the “hackneyed” stereotypes of “maverick” and self-sufficient entrepreneur as central to self-sustaining mythology.

In reality, Alberta is a highly conformist society in which complaints about the federal government or Eastern (actually Central) Canada make up the only accepted displays of opposition to authority. And the reality of the self-sufficient business owner . . . is compromised by the equal reality of agricultural and resource-extraction industries that depend heavily on government regulation, government subsidy, government-provided infrastructure, and government financial aid during periods of low prices or other disasters.⁷

Lisac points out that the province can afford to run on low taxes, but largely on the basis of revenue from oil and gas. In some domains, as a result, the government has become a big spender, and a controlling presence steadily removing the capacity of local governments and institutions to deviate from provincial policy. The centralization of control extends to the premier’s office, leaving little room for dissent within the cabinet, and virtually no capacity for legislative voices to make any policy-making difference. The governing PCs have looked distinctive from other large provinces in the extent to which they relied on a rural base. The arrangement of election boundaries to over-represent rural areas is one factor that led to over a quarter of the legislature being made up of farm owners during the early years of Ralph Klein’s leadership. But as Lisac puts it, rural Albertans in effect “provided a salt-of-the-earth cover for urban ideologues.”⁸ Even rural Alberta didn’t have many farmers left. Full-time farmers accounted for only 3 percent of the population by the 1990s: “[a] rural Albertan was more likely to drive an oilfield service truck, or run a florist shop, or handle tax returns than to run a farm.”

Lisac spends little time on questions of religious faith, but he talks about the “remnants of William Aberhart’s and Ernest Manning’s Bible Belt” surviving in small towns, “with small posters in [shop] windows advertising evangelical meetings.”⁹ Such remnants, however, were most prominent in areas most in decline, most characterized by a sense of “impending loss.”

David Stewart and Anthony Sayers draw on survey evidence to argue that Albertans in general are not as conservative as the usual view would suggest. Drawing on their own 2008 survey of the province, they find that “a strikingly consistent three-quarters of respondents favour government action to ensure decent living standards (76 percent) and adequate housing (78 percent), and to limit rent increases (76 percent).”¹⁰ Fully 82 percent agreed that the province needed to take firm action to combat global warming, and 58 percent agreed that maintaining environmental standards should take precedence over jobs. Just under half agreed with the statement that “government regulation stifles drive,” and only 30 percent agreed that “a lot of

welfare and social programs are unnecessary.” They cite Gerald Boychuk as demonstrating that Albertans were no more in favour than other Canadians were of permitting more room for provinces to sidestep the restrictions of the *Canada Health Act*.¹¹

Their survey included questions tapping moral traditionalism, and here too they found a less conservative populace than many would expect. Asked if abortion was a matter between a woman and her doctor, 76 percent of Albertans agreed. A 2010 Ekos national poll had found that only 30 percent of the province’s respondents took pro-life positions, only slightly higher than the 27 percent of Canadians overall. On same-sex marriage, the same poll showed 33 percent opposed, only five percent higher than the Canadian average. Stewart and Sayer’s poll showed that 62 percent of Albertans agreed that gays and lesbians should be allowed to marry. There is significant evidence, therefore, to upset widespread perceptions that the province is unusually conservative in popular attitudes about moral issues.

Table 1: Moral Traditionalism in Canada, by Province and Region

	Can.	AB	BC	SK	MN	ON	QC	Atl
Bibby Teens, 2008:								
Approve and Accept:								
Premarital Sex if Love	72	70	75	62	63	65	87	78
Homosexual Relations	44	45	43	31	42	42	49	53
Abortion for any reason	38	38	43	24	30	33	49	38

Sources:

Reginald W. Bibby, *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation is Responding to Change and Choice* (Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, 2009), p. 55, 157. Percent approving and accepting “Sex before marriage when people love each other,” “Sexual relations between two people of the same sex,” and “Abortion should be available for any reason.”

Faith in Alberta

A close examination of survey evidence across the country reveals that most indicators of religiosity place Albertans at very close to Canadian averages. As Table 2 shows, there are insignificant differences between Albertans and others in rates of weekly attendance at religious services, or in attendance at least monthly. Kurt Bowen uses Statistics Canada survey evidence from 1997 to compile a composite index of religiosity (combining attendance with responses to other questions about the importance of religion), and finds Albertans ever so slightly less “committed” than Canadians overall, 18 percent “very committed” and 12 percent “less committed.”¹² According to the 2001 Census, Albertans are significantly more likely (23 percent) than Canadians overall (16 percent) to declare that they have no religion.¹³

Table 2: Religiosity in Canada, by Province and Region

	Can.	AB	BC	SK	MN	ON	QC	Atl
Bibby Adults, 2005:								
Weekly Attendance	25	27	17	- 36 -		28	15	39
Clark, 1999-2001								
Monthly+ Attendance	32	31	25	39	36	36	25	41
Bowen, 1997:								
Very Committed	19	18	13	- 23 -		22	17	26
Less Committed	13	12	8	- 14 -		14	12	16
Cons Prot as % of Comm'd	21	38	31	- 27 -		17	6	19

Sources:

Reginald W. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back: Religion's Demise and Rise and Why it Matters* (Lethbridge: Project Canada Books, 2011), p. 53.

Warren Clark, "Pockets of Belief: Religious Attendance Patterns in Canada," Canadian Social Trends, Spring 2003 Statistics Canada - Cat. No. 11-008, p. 3. These numbers are averages between 1999 and 2001, drawn from the General Social Survey, by Statistics Canada.

Kurt Bowen, *Christians in a Secular World: The Canadian Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), pp. 54-55. These numbers are based on the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering, Giving, and Participation by Statistics Canada.

A 2004 study of donations to religious organizations found only slight variations in Alberta from the Canadian norm.¹⁴ Of all charitable donations, 49 percent of those in Alberta went to faith-based organizations, as compared to 45 percent for Canada as a whole. On the other hand, there was a slightly lower proportion of donors (33 percent of the population in Alberta) than in the whole country (38 percent), and the total number of volunteer hours was slightly lower.

What does distinguish Albertans is the proportion of evangelical Protestants. In Bowen's analysis, the proportion of the committed ("very" and "less" combined) who were members of conservative Protestant denominations (i.e. not mainline) was 38 percent, significantly higher than any other region in the country (with the rest of western Canada just under 30 percent and Ontario at 17 percent.¹⁵ In Stewart and Sayer's 2008 survey, 38 percent agreed with the statement that the Bible was the literal word of God.

Faith-Based Political Organizing

Does the comparative strength of evangelical Protestantism in Alberta translate into more sustained and effective political organizing? A first glance would suggest "no." No plausible list of politically significant interest groups in Alberta would include a single faith-based group or institution. It did not even occur to Rand Dyck to include socially conservative or morally-focused groups in his listing of such groups in the mid-1990s, a time when there was much religious right concern about the political recognition of sexual diversity.¹⁶ In 2011, when

several well-informed participants and observers of Alberta politics were asked if there were significant faith-based organizations operating in the provincial arena, none could think of any.¹⁷

The Roman Catholic Church is a distinctive case, since it is organized hierarchically, and its bishops are able to speak authoritatively. Alberta bishops have been outspoken on moral issues, with the very conservative Bishop Henry of Calgary particularly vocal in policy discussions related to sexual diversity. But Roman Catholics constitute only 26 percent of the province's population, and the majority are non-practicing. There is also no evidence that Catholics are any more conservative on such issues than other Canadians.

What of evangelical organizing? When sexual diversity issues became front-page news in 1998 and 1999, groups such as the Canada Family Action Coalition (based partly in Calgary) and the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families launched campaigns against adding sexual orientation to the province's human rights code. But neither was ever a large organization, and now both seem to have no visible presence in provincial affairs. There is no provincial equivalent to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), and the EFC is not large enough to attend to provincial politics in most parts of Canada. The Institute for Marriage and Family, born out of Focus on the Family and based in Ottawa, also has no provincial presence in Alberta. Protestant evangelicals are also fragmented into many distinct denominations and free-standing churches, without any built-in system of coordination.

The same is true for Mormons, heavily concentrated in the province's southwest. In some constituencies they are a notable political force. But while they take positions on moral issues that are close to those adopted by most evangelical Christians, stable coalitional links are difficult since many, and probably most, evangelicals do not regard Mormons as Christian. Ties to Roman Catholics are also tenuous, since the Catholic hierarchy is much less shaped by the individualism that so permeates evangelicism, and would have obvious difficulties with populism. Pro-life politics would seem to be a unifying factor among religious conservatives, but not completely. For example, while the Canadian Centre for Bio-Ethical Reform has acquired some prominence in its use of graphic imagery to campaign against abortion, the Catholic hierarchy opposes its use of images, and many evangelicals are reluctant to focus on abortion, seeing the likelihood of significant policy change at either the federal or provincial level as slight. And so, in fact, faith-based political voices are fragmented.

In recent years, morality issues almost always have low political priority, even in those areas where there are concentrations of religious conservatives. In rural Alberta, there is a recurrent discontent associated with being on the margins of the province's political life, and in some respects outside the mainstream, but this has much more to do with economic disadvantage than it does with traditional values. As one experienced observer has commented, "when you go beyond the Edmonton-Calgary corridor, there is a sense that they've heard of the "Alberta advantage," but haven't seen it – they're still waiting for it to arrive."¹⁸ Rural Albertans are part of the "outer Alberta" observing an "inner Alberta" prospering.

So how, if at all, are religious networks and communities mobilized, and are they capable of exerting political influence? Remember that various conservative faith communities, often

acting autonomously, start with an ideal grass roots structural foundation – the houses of worship they congregate in each week. As one veteran observer comments, “faith communities are very cohesive communities: they tend to be people who are accepting of what you hear from the pulpit, or what you hear from your leadership.”¹⁹ Many of them will also listen to Christian broadcasts which include calls to political action, or to conservative talk-show hosts who do the same. Even if this is not routine, preachers may explicitly point to an issue (like same-sex marriage or abortion) that warrants community members’ attention. At other times, individual church members or groups of them may take the initiative in promoting political action or supporting a particular politician during the mingling that occurs after church. On the right issue, or in the right circumstances, all these comparatively unstructured forms of communication can translate into impressive barrages of messages directed at provincial legislators. In fact, they are capable of generating more telephone calls or letters than the best-funded lobby groups in Alberta. This creates visibility, and a certain attentiveness among politicians. Politicians or political aspirants in turn will court members of a particular religious community by attending religious services or community events, and by securing allies among church members. As one experienced observer suggests, “there are these communities around the province and if they find a politician who is agreeable to them they will gravitate to them, and to some extent it’s a ready made community where a politician can reach a number of people at once.”²⁰ Politicians of all stripes, but particularly those who are sympathetic to or members of religious communities, will as one political veteran put it, “go hunting where the ducks are.”²¹ They will gravitate toward any pre-established group, and particularly one with discernable common interests.

Such “ready-made” communities can be politically important, but it should not be exaggerated. Members of religious congregations do not necessarily act in concert, and can be a challenge to mobilize. As one veteran observer notes, “Christian candidates may think that they call up a pastor and get whole congregations voting for them, but it doesn’t work any more than it would if a golfer was talking to a golf club”²² As he observes of the 2006 leadership campaign, “Roy Byer did a lot of work for Stockwell Day’s campaign with churches – making calls, selling memberships. But there were no walkovers; he sold a lot of members, but not enough.”

The Progressive Conservatives’ Neo-Liberal Preoccupations

If religious conservatism once formed a crucial pillar to Alberta’s conservative political parties, its role is now much diminished. Until the 1970s, Alberta’s “Americanized strain of conservatism” was articulated primarily through the Social Credit Party, which wore its evangelical inspirations on its sleeve.²³ Much has changed since then.

The Progressive Conservatives drew enough popular support away from the Social Credit to score a stunning upset in 1971, gaining power under the leadership of Peter Lougheed. Since then, neither party nor government has paid more than short episodic attention to the hot button issues that most preoccupied the religious right, and the party’s leaders have not been markedly associated with evangelical faith or moral traditionalism. All faced leadership races with candidates who did, but in all cases the candidates most clearly associated with moral conservatism lost.²⁴

As one observer of provincial politics has suggested, the shift to the PCs from Social Credit was a turn away from the very explicit link of faith and politics that had characterized Alberta in the past.

Alberta has a veneer of religiosity. If you arm wrestled on the political right, the libertarians would win out against the social conservatives – they do every time. . . . Everyone listened to [Premier “Bible Bill”] Aberhart’s broadcasts on the radio – you could walk down the street without missing a word. Ernest Manning, as a concession to human weakness, did allow liquor to be sold in this province, but it was with a very very tough regulatory body. I think it just embarrassed people that they were governed by this preacher who would get on the radio every Sunday morning. This was the kind of paternalism from which [Peter] Lougheed’s Conservatives rescued Albertans so they could be modern.²⁵

Lougheed never demonstrated any particular affinity to religious conservatism. He focused on the provincial economy, on oil and gas particularly, and on asserting provincial rights. In the 1980s, economic issues along with federal-provincial relations dominated the party and government agenda. By this time, the Conservatives held near-absolute control of the province’s rural ridings, and effectively forged an alliance between rural interests and the oil and gas capital of Calgary. When Don Getty took over the party’s leadership in 1985, there was little indication of a fundamental change in direction, though the recessionary dips during this period led the government to impose major budget cuts in the late 1980s.

Ralph Klein became leader in 1992, and turned the party more radically to the free-market right, promising to eliminate the sizeable deficit by 1997.²⁶ David Stewart, Anthony Sayers, and Mark Lisac warn us against over-stating the shift toward smaller government, pointing to levels of government spending substantially above the Canadian provincial average, and to continuing patterns of centrally-controlled government regulation. Nevertheless, most writers see the early Klein years as shifting toward a form of neo-liberalism that served as a prototype for the Mike Harris Conservatives in Ontario and the Stephen Harper Conservatives in Ottawa.

To what extent was this accompanied by a shift to the right on moral or social issues? Klein showed no signs of being religious, and in general he displayed no particular affinity to moral traditionalism. His record as Calgary mayor during the early years of the AIDS epidemic, in fact, suggested that he was not drawn to the anti-gay politics of the religious right or to moral regulation on other fronts. He may well have held to traditional views of gender and sexuality, but they seemed not to be major drivers of his political agenda. As premier, like his neo-liberal counterparts in other parts of Canada, Klein largely stayed away from hot button issues. When, in 1995, a sizeable group of his caucus members advocated measures to stop funding abortions, Klein publicly argued that the government should stay out of the debate on the issue.²⁷ He knew that public opinion on these issues was shifting among Albertans, and there was little doubt as to his preoccupations with economic issues and with ensuring expansion in resource extraction sectors.

Ed Stelmach, replacing Klein as party leader and premier in 2006, was more of a social conservative than his predecessor. He was a Roman Catholic, ran the family farm, and came into politics with small-“c” values of family, community, and order.²⁸ But this did not signal a sharp turn away from the neo-liberalism that would have been a more exclusive preoccupation of Jim Dinning, the Calgary-based MLA who was his principal rival and the preferred choice of most caucus members. Stelmach may have been open to policy moves or public declarations reflecting moral traditionalism because they reflected his own values, but he showed no particular signs of being preoccupied by them or prepared to expend significant political capital on them.

Progressive Conservative Government Concessions to Religious and Moral Conservatives

However, the PCs still relied on strong support among rural Albertans, where religiously-shaped moral traditionalism has remained most widespread, and electoral shifts had drawn more and more conservative Christians to the party. According to the 2008 Stewart and Sayers survey, 61 percent of Christian literalists reported voting for the PCs, a sharp break from the rest of the population, among whom only 39 percent supported the party. This meant that literalists made up almost half (48 percent) of PC voters. The same survey showed that PC supporters were significantly more likely to be morally conservative than supporters of the main opposition parties in 2008. On a scale from “0” to “1,” where 1 is the most conservative possible response, PC supporters averaged .38, which at some level was not a particularly traditionalist response, but far to the right of the Liberals (.20) and NDP (.17).

What does the record show about how the governing PCs responded when levels of concern or alarm mobilized morally-conservative party members and voters? It is in fact a mixed record. PC governments stayed almost entirely away from the abortion question, inaction eased by the virtual elimination of room for manoeuvre by federal jurisdiction over criminal law and court-imposed limits on the application of provincial regulatory constraints. On sexual diversity, the story is more complex. Much more importantly, the record shows a consistent policy shift toward greater support for school “choice” – a shift that has created more room for publicly-supported faith-based education than exists in any other part of North America. This includes the creation of significant space for schools shaped by evangelical Christian frameworks.

Sexual Diversity

More than any provincial government in Canada, Progressive Conservative governments in Alberta resisted taking any steps to publicly recognize sexual diversity. We also find recurrent indications that the PCs were willing to marshal language on LGBT rights issues that would be regarded as extreme in most other parts of Canada. This was matched by a preparedness to enact medium or low-profile policies that reflected sympathy with the religious right’s distaste for the public recognition of sexual diversity.

From the 1970s until the end of the 1990s, the central issue in the province was the addition of sexual orientation to the *Individual Rights Protection Act*. Alberta’s Human Rights Commission had begun recommending the addition in 1976, following concerted pressure from lesbian and

gay activists. The government (or the PC caucus) said no. It did the same in response to further attempts at amendment in the mid-1980s, the early '90s, and the mid-90s. By this time, all but one province had explicitly added sexual orientation to their human rights codes, and court rulings were leaning strongly in the direction of interpreting the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* as prohibiting anti-gay discrimination.²⁹

Beginning in 1991, a constitutional challenge to the exclusion of sexual orientation from provincial human rights law was working its way through the courts. Launched by Edmontonian Delwin Vriend, the case ended up in the Supreme Court of Canada, which in 1998 delivered a clear victory to lesbian and gay advocates, “reading in” sexual orientation to the provincial act. A firestorm of opposition arose, calling on the provincial government to invoke the “notwithstanding” clause allowing governments in effect to override the *Charter*. This was a possibility that Premier Klein had publicly mused about shortly before the court ruling, despite significant controversy that had arisen earlier that year over a proposal to use the clause on another issue.³⁰ Among these most prominent voices within caucus calling for action to circumvent the court’s ruling was Stockwell Day, an outspoken leader of moral conservatism in the province. As Social Services minister in 1997, he had issued an order denying foster-child custody to a woman when it became known that she was a lesbian (despite an extraordinary record of fostering over seventy children over seventeen years).

Soon after the ruling was released, the Premier came out against the “notwithstanding” option, but took the unusual step of encouraging open debate among his caucus colleagues. This encouraged an unprecedented wave of letters and phone calls directed at legislator offices, running in favour of the option in rural Alberta, an important part of the Premier’s base of support. The Premier’s own office received 9,000 calls.³¹ In one central Alberta case, an annual meeting of party members drew 200, voting unanimously to take the notwithstanding option.³² Groups like the Canada Family Action Coalition, the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families, and the Alberta Civil Society Association (led by Calgary politics professor Ted Morton, who would eventually seek the leadership of the party), were helping mobilize a campaign that also had grassroots support in church halls. Now clearer than in the past, Klein was saying that the ruling should be accepted, and acknowledged that he was disturbed at the kinds of opposition that had been stirred up. Still, it was clear that he had to work very hard to convince a majority of his caucus to support him. Two-thirds of the caucus ended up on his side, though in part based on Klein’s announcement that he would establish a committee to consider ways of constructing “legislative fences” to limit the scope of the court ruling.³³

Klein and his core ministers then seemed to back away from the “fencing” project. The ban on lesbian and gay fostering was effectively lifted, and room was slowly being opened up on adoption.³⁴ A “domestic partnership” regime was promised, even if it was open to any two interdependent adults in order to avoid looking like a concession to same-sex couples. Shortly after this package was agreed to by a divided PC caucus, Klein was advising delegates to a federal convention aimed at uniting the right to avoid social conservatism. In language clearly intended to take in a range of issues related to sexuality and reproduction, he said:

We cannot, as those who adhere to conservative philosophy, declare ourselves to be the party of minimum interference in the everyday lives of everyday Canadians, and then propose to interfere in the most personal of all decisions – those decisions that are matters of conscience, those issues that present a moral dilemma, those things of so personal a nature that the decision becomes between an individual and his or her God.³⁵

In 2005, when passage of the federal government's marriage amendment seemed close, Klein shifted from the anti-gay crusader to the resigned pragmatist admitting that the Alberta government could do nothing, trying to persuade reluctant caucus members that invoking the notwithstanding clause would be useless.³⁶

The Premier's uneven shift was motivated in part by changes in public opinion. In 1996, an Angus Reid poll showed that only 40 percent of Albertans favoured adding sexual orientation to the Canadian Human Rights Act, dramatically lower than the Canadian average of 59 percent support, and the lowest of any province.³⁷ But late-1998 polling commissioned by the government indicated clear shifts on such issues. It showed that just over half of Albertans favoured extending to same-sex couples benefits that were already available to co-habiting heterosexual couples.³⁸

But the complicated game of demonstrating traditionalist values continued. In 1999, one year after the *Vriend* decision, the government pointedly excluded same-sex couples from legislation on common law relationships.³⁹ It also announced that in the future it would invoke the notwithstanding clause to prevent same-sex marriage, almost assuredly impossible because of federal jurisdiction over the definition of marriage. Although Klein eventually conceded that there was nothing Alberta could do to prevent same-sex marriages, he had earlier stood alone among provincial leaders in promising to fight it. And then after that federal legislation was enacted, Alberta's justice minister said that he might invoke the notwithstanding clause to protect the right of provincial officials to opt out of marrying same-sex couples.⁴⁰ In response to a private member's bill permitting marriage commissioners to refuse to perform them, he said that he and a majority of his caucus supported the measure.⁴¹

The PC government's willingness to use public policy tools to reinforce its discomfort with sexual diversity continued beyond the Klein years. After becoming premier in 2006, Ed Stelmach was pressed by moral conservatives (including the outspoken Ted Morton) to limit the authority of the province's Human Rights Commission.⁴² Stelmach and the minister responsible for the commission resisted those pressures, but then as a kind of consolation prize, the government delivered two swipes at sexual minorities. First, the government refused to include gender identity when presenting a bill that was to explicitly add sexual orientation to the *Individual Rights Protection Act*. More seriously, Bill 44 gratuitously added to that statute a stipulation that schools had to notify parents when classes were to engage "subject matter that deals explicitly with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation," and that parents could have their children excluded from such classes.⁴³ Education Minister Dave Hancock had tried to resist, indicating that parents already had the right to take their children out of classes in the kinds of areas at issue here, so it was clear that the provisions were unnecessary. But the government gave in to pressure from what may well have been a small number of determined backbenchers,

though backed by faith leaders and other MLAs supporting the general principle that the educational system should respect the rights of parents to inculcate “values” in their children.

This sequence of PC responses to sexual diversity issues illustrates the complexities in assessing the strength of moral conservatism and of religious traditionalism within the party. The party’s membership and its caucus has had strong minorities that were unwavering in their support for traditionalist positions, and who treated first Stockwell Day and then Ted Morton as leaders. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, they could recurrently attract enough support to constitute a majority, especially on issues related to sexual diversity. Ralph Klein’s instincts were to treat these issues as not worth political focus, but he was sometimes willing to play with policy options or rhetoric to flag his sympathy with moral traditionalists. He was careful to avoid abortion, and used sexual diversity issues only as long as he thought he had popular sympathy on his side. Only when he sensed that his morally conservative colleagues were going to head him into more trouble than even he could handle was he willing to shift language to marginalize the most ardent of his morally conservative colleagues.

The selection of Alison Redford as PC leader marked a shift from this calculated deployment of moral traditionalism. She was a human rights lawyer, and seen by some as a “red tory” in the Joe Clark mold. Many commentators remarked that this signaled a sea change in the province’s political life. As journalist Josh Wingrove put it, “Booming Alberta is a changing Alberta – younger, more urban and less homogeneous. And its politics has caught up.”⁴⁴ Few caucus members had supported her bid, and her victory surprised most observers, who expected long-standing cabinet member Gary Mar to win. But Mar was also a centrist, even if not as distinctly a break from previous PC leaders as Redford. In addition, the leadership candidate most identified with moral conservatism – Ted Morton – received only 12 percent of the first ballot votes (placing him fourth). All of this indicated that the party’s centre of political gravity was shifting toward the middle, and that moral traditionalism would be more thoroughly marginalized than ever in the policy process. Soon after her election as leader in the fall of 2011, she talked about changing the requirement that parents be notified when sexual orientation, sexuality, and religion were to be discussed in schools, expressing concern that students may not be getting “the information and support they need to have to live healthy lives.”⁴⁵ The challenge facing the new leader on this and other similar issues, as we shall see, is that moral conservatives now had another party to go to, well to the right of the PC even before the selection of Redford.

Schooling

Changes in school policy since the 1970s illustrate a pattern that has become widespread at the federal level and in provinces with sizeable constituencies of moral conservatives. In gradually moving toward school “choice,” Alberta’s PCs found a perfect instrument for appealing to both social and fiscal conservatives, including upper middle class parents who want specialized or gifted programs for their children, principled neo-liberals who believe that school choice will challenge cumbersome bureaucracies, parents-rights advocates critical of unionized educational experts, and religious conservatives who reject the secularism of public education. In the process, the province has moved farther than any Canadian jurisdiction in providing support for private schools, and in creating significant opportunities for faith-based “alternative” schools to develop

inside the public system. When examining these gains, it is impossible to disentangle the role of faith-based networks from that of neo-liberal advocates of parental rights and school choice, particularly in a province where individualism is such a strong current among evangelical Protestants. The political attractiveness of such policy moves lies precisely in their appeal to a range of constituencies.

The provision of public funds to support private schools began in 1967 under a Social Credit government, though at a modest level. When the PCs came to power in 1971, they faced increased pressure to expand such support. In 1974 they introduced a formula change that provided funds to private schools as a portion of the per-student operating funding it provided to public boards while at the same time making it easier to meet eligibility requirements.⁴⁶ This proportion was initially set at 33 percent, and increased to 40 percent in 1976. Private schools were quite easy to establish, requiring only six students from at least two families.

That year, the Edmonton Society for Christian Education submitted a brief to the Minister of Education calling for incremental funding increases to 80 percent after it failed to get approval to establish a Christian school under the aegis of the local public board. As Michael Wagner points out, the government soon adopted that as an eventual goal, justified in part by the full funding accorded Catholic schools.⁴⁷ By this time, the government had declared its allegiance to the concept of expanding school choice, and developed an “umbrella” concept that envisaged private schools receiving full funding by coming into public board jurisdictions.⁴⁸

In 1975, the *School Act* was amended to allow for alternative schools, following a government-commissioned report that called for increased options and experimentation in the public system.⁴⁹ The Calgary Board of Education moved to allow alternative schools a year later. Right away, two existing Jewish private schools were incorporated, and within a few years a Christian school sponsored by the Logos Education Society became part of the system.⁵⁰ Within a few years, opponents of faith-based alternative schools were organizing, in part due to the rapid growth of interest in Logos schooling, and their slate of candidates swept the 1983 board election. As Allison Taylor points out, one of the mayoralty candidates, Ralph Klein, joined the voices opposed to public funding for religious schools.⁵¹ The new board cancelled the contracts of the two Christian and two Jewish schools in their system. In an odd twist, the Catholic school board took in the two Jewish schools (not the Christian schools), a step approved by the provincial ministry and one that may provide a precedent for later board “shopping” by faith-based schools.

In the late 1970s, further “flexibility” was introduced following a human rights challenge by a Mennonite school that employed uncertified teachers. It won at trial on the basis of religious freedom, and rather than appealing, the government chose to establish a new category of private schools that could use uncertified teachers, but would be ineligible for government funding. These would eventually be referred to as “registered” schools, distinguished from others referred to as “certified” or “approved.”

From 1980 to 1987, provincial funding for private schools increased 50 percent faster than for public schools, and not surprisingly, enrolment in the former more than doubled (reaching 3

percent of the total school population in the latter year).⁵² Then in 1988, changes to the *School Act* further widened “choice” by permitting home-schooling parents to register with any board willing to accept them, and thereby be eligible for funding.⁵³ It also made clear that alternative programs within public school systems could be based on language, culture, subject-matter, or religion. Along with these changes came a further increase in funding for private schools.

These increases were not conditional on tighter controls over what private schools taught or how they operated.⁵⁴ One schooling expert describes curricular control by the provincial ministry as “relatively high,” and yet there was some “wobble room” that would probably allow a faith-based school, for example, to not teach evolution.⁵⁵ There is also no provincially-approved set of textbooks – only a list of suggestions.

Under Ralph Klein’s premiership, support for school choice continued to increase. In 1994 the province reduced the power of school boards by taking over all educational funding and preventing boards from taxing locally, a move that would later open the door to schools joining distant boards willing to accommodate them. The government also made Alberta the first province to open the door to charter schools.⁵⁶ Charter schools could be formed within a school board, though they could also circumvent local resistance by developing an agreement with the provincial ministry.⁵⁷ They could not be faith based, but as Alison Taylor points out, the capacity to create charter schools “increased pressure on other public schools to respond to parental demands for religious and other kinds of alternative programming.”⁵⁸ As one experienced observer puts it, “in 1994 the province really extolled the virtues of competition . . . [c]ompetition was the means by which you guarantee choice.”⁵⁹

The Edmonton School Board was one of the first to systematically expand the number and range of alternative schools since the backlash mobilized against the Calgary Board’s short-lived foray. It already had a few alternative programs, including a Hebrew language school that began as a private Jewish school (the “language school” label meant to overcome a board prohibition on faith-based schools). In 1995, under new administrative leadership (and pushed by the changes in provincial legislation) the board accepted a proposal for Christian Logos programs in five existing schools. Three years later, with the Logos program still expanding, it approved the absorption of three private Christian schools into board jurisdiction. For its faith-based schools, the board would be responsible for the assignment of teachers and administrators, but appointments would not be made without the approval of the not-for-profit society that created the school.⁶⁰ Schools were also given considerable leeway in developing or obtaining Christian curricular materials. By now the Alberta Teachers Federation had declared its opposition to such arrangements, but with no perceptible influence on the ministry.

By 2000, according to Taylor, at least eight school districts had Christian programs or schools under the public board umbrella, and by that decade’s end Calgary was the only board still resisting. At mid-decade, the pressure for change was mounting, and three private Christian schools that were refused “admission” to the Calgary Board approached the nearby Palliser school board and got a “yes” in 2006.⁶¹ Palliser saw nothing in the *Schools Act* limiting its jurisdiction to a fixed territory, and they clearly had the support of the government.⁶²

Every Conservative government has a peculiar love-hate relationship with the City of Calgary. They get a lot of money out of Calgary – the energy industry is very important. But sometimes the government feels as though Calgary throws its weight around too much. And in particular there’s a history of tension between the Department of Education and the Calgary Board of Education. Either Calgary or Edmonton is big enough to do anything that Alberta Education does, and they will sometimes argue that they do it better than Alberta Education does. The rough edges of that tension are smoothed in Edmonton because these people rub shoulders with each other socially.⁶³

One educator puts it, “without the 1994 reforms ending direct board funding from property taxes . . . the adoption of schools outside the jurisdiction would have been legally possible but operationally unlikely – [now] you’ve created a financial incentive for boards to go looking for students.”⁶⁴ Religious families also of course had private school options. Three-quarters of the students in the “private” sector were in faith-based schools, and their parents pressed for even stronger provincial funding.⁶⁵ In 2009, levels rose to 70 percent.⁶⁶

The movement to blur the boundary between public and private systems, and create a system based on choice that allowed more significant funding for faith-based schooling, is not unique in Canada. Other provinces in western Canada have moved up their support for private schools in recent years. B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba all provide up to 50 percent of the operating costs of such schools, all in the name of choice or rationalized by the funding constitutionally required for Roman Catholic schools. For somewhat different reasons, more a product of the historic role of Catholic schools than of the “choice” framework, the Quebec government also provides up to 60 percent of the operating costs of private schools. On the question of funding private schools, therefore, Alberta’s policies are at one extreme of a broader pattern. What makes the province more distinctive is that this funding has been combined with other moves to create opportunities for a range of schools, including those based on faith, to secure governmental legitimacy and support. More than anywhere else in the country, therefore, schools policy in Alberta reflects what Taylor refers to as “an articulation between neoliberal themes of self-interest, competitive individualism and anti-statism and conservative themes around family, authority, standards and tradition.”⁶⁷

The Current Role of Religious and Moral Conservatives in the Progressive Conservatives

For the four decades in which the PCs held government office, a majority of party members have held to traditionalist positions on at least some of the hot button issues associated with the religious right, most notably sexual minority rights. The party’s caucus may well be more centrist than the party membership, but it has also had a majority in favour of some such traditionalist stances. The cabinet, on balance, has had a smaller portion of moral conservatives in it than the caucus, and none of the party’s leaders has been unequivocally associated with the “so-con” wing of the party. The leadership has also been preoccupied by other issues, and wary of the electoral risks that come from seizing conservative stances on morality policies or in seeming too closely allied with the Christian right. Ralph Klein appointed Stockwell Day to his cabinet and gave him important portfolios, but was more than ready to reject his policy preferences. It was strategically useful to keep him in the fold, but there was no doubt that the

Premier was watching carefully to ensure that the concessions made to Day's natural constituency did not shift the party from its priorities or jeopardize its electability. There is nothing to suggest that Ed Stelmach behaved much differently.

Over recent decades, however, the party's leadership has not been averse to rhetorical pitches and legislative steps rejecting or compromising gains by sexual minorities. Neither has there been much hesitation about supporting the provision of public funding to faith-based schooling.

As one former MLA comments,

I wouldn't say that the PCs play to religious interests. But there were individuals in the party, MLAs, who because of the dynamics in their own constituencies, wanted to play to that. And if a particular issue was seen as bringing along a particular constituency, the party was glad to do it.⁶⁸

David Stewart and Anthony Sayers argue that the party's dominance over Alberta politics, and the plebiscitary openness of the party in leadership selection, helps draw in a large and diverse membership.⁶⁹ In such a party, "local heroes" emerge as representative of distinct ideological strands in leadership races that take on some of the characteristics of a full election. Once a selection is made, the leader's tight control over the party usually means that the range of factions and currents under the PC umbrella can usually be centrally managed. As long as moral traditionalists got a voice and obtain some policy concessions, they seemed willing to stay within the fold.

Tom Flanagan makes a similar point, and while it speaks to federal parties, it could also apply to the provincial PCs during most of their time in government.

[Religious conservatives] realized that they had gone too far with Stockwell Day. There was this sense among them that when they managed to make Stock leader of the Alliance that "finally we won." A lot of new people came in with Stock who hadn't been very political before and thought, "now we have a man of God as our leader and now we're going to be able to do things." And then they found that they couldn't, and the party exploded and Stephen [Harper] came in. And Harper's views had been very clear from right at the beginning that he was not going to touch any of these issues. This was known to people, and that's why this particular community was never keen on having Stephen as leader. When it was Stephen against Stock, they supported Stock, but they lost and they realized that they were a minority within the Conservative movement. Some gave up on politics, but others said, "well, as long as Harper shows us respect, which he does, we'll stay, and we think it's better than being governed by the Liberals, so we'll stay involved." But these people are very pragmatic and realistic now about what they can expect to achieve. They want symbolic victories, and if they can get occasional policy victories they're happy. And I think they expect the government to take their side when new issues come up."

The provincial PCs seem not to have worked out a systematic approach to retain the loyalty of religious conservatives in general, or of ethnic-minority communities of faith in particular. One former party member argues that in recent years the provincial party has become more

fragmented, which leaves room for individual policy entrepreneurs. “Lougheed and even Getty were very, very strong – with them as leader the caucus was a whole cloth. The caucus now is nothing but a shifting kaleidoscope of fragments.”⁷⁰ The maneuvering over human rights code amendments in 2009 was the product of sometimes quite small clusters of MLAs prepared to insist on their point of view, eventually prevailing over the views of the Minister of Education in legislating a provision that would allow parents to extract their children from classroom discussions of sexual diversity. “It was pushed through by a small number of people, some say as few as three or four, who insisted that this was a hill they were going to die on.”⁷¹

This fragmentation may well have become even more pronounced during Alison Redford’s brief term as Premier, especially in light of how little support she had from caucus during the leadership race. Over time, it is possible that she would have adapted some variant of the pattern of ad hoc concessions to morally conservative caucus members. On the other hand, her support for recognizing the province’s diversity, and her talk of revisiting the human rights provision on parents taking children out of “controversial” school discussion, would have made the kind of explicit swipes at Alberta’s LGBT communities unlikely. Much of her ability to rein in caucus extremes would depend on her first general election.

The Wildrose Balancing Act

A relatively stable PC coalition that included the bulk of Alberta’s moral conservatives seemed under threat at the time of the party’s leadership contest. The Wildrose Alliance was born of a 2008 merger of two small parties – Wild Rose and Alberta Alliance – and by the end of 2009, it was pulling significant support away from the Conservatives.

Rural evangelicals had been prominent among the 1 percent of voters that each of the Wild Rose Party and the Alliance attracted. By the 2008 election, when support for the merged party had increased to 7 percent, the prominence of religious conservatives was still marked. The 2008 provincial election survey showed that 57 percent of those who reported voting for the party were Christian conservative (compared to 48 percent of the PC voters, 22 percent of Liberals, and 29 percent of NDP voters).⁷²

Paul Hinman, the leader chosen at the time of merger, stepped down a year later, clearing the way for a leadership race just as the party was gaining support from Conservatives. One of the two front runners was Mark Dyrholm, a Calgary chiropractor with strong connections to religious conservatives (Mormons in particular), and representing a form of continuity with the party past. His campaign was reported to have sold memberships through church networks, and to have pitched his candidacy directly to evangelicals. One supporter of rival Danielle Smith reported that the campaign characterized Smith as someone “who’s going to take our province swiftly to the left,” and who supports both homosexuality and abortion.⁷³

In fact, Smith was a laissez-fair conservative with a “live and let live” view on social issues.⁷⁴ She had ties to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and the Fraser Institute. She was founding managing director of the Canadian Property Rights Institute, and heavily involved with the Alberta Property Rights Initiative (a response to the PC government’s land-use planning

proposals). As one party member claimed, Smith is “unabashably a libertarian” who believes in smaller government.⁷⁵ Her candidacy was primarily not a function of the party’s roots, but of the large current of neo-liberal dissatisfaction with the PCs. One observer has suggested that prominent ranchers associated with the Alberta Property Rights Initiative, alongside important figures in the oil industry, persuaded Smith to seek the leadership and helped organize her campaign.⁷⁶ They viewed the Wildrose as a vehicle for getting a new right wing government in the province, though they would need to move it from one based strongly in social conservatism to one focused on fiscal conservatism.⁷⁷ Business interests in Calgary, a region that had heavily favoured Jim Dinning in the 2006 PC leadership race and had lost out to northern Alberta’s Stelmach, were especially unnerved by the government’s review of provincial royalty policies.

As David Cliehaga puts it,

Key components of its membership include the perpetually disgruntled Alberta social conservative super-right, rank and file Albert Conservatives who for one reason or another didn’t approve of Premier Ed Stelmach, a subset of the Calgary oil industry that wanted to punish Stelmach for daring to contemplate higher royalty rates, and economic market fundamentalists not particularly interested in social conservative issues.⁷⁸

Smith won the leadership in October 2009, after a race in which she made clear her differences from her principal rival. Soon after her selection, while addressing a breakfast gathering attended by major business interests in Calgary, she made clear her aim to sideline moral issues like abortion and gay marriage: “the divisive issues that tear us apart are not ones that are going to be on our election platform.”⁷⁹ As Tom Flanagan has said, “Danielle’s victory was clearly a victory for a secular view of politics, and she’s the only reason the party has become a mainstream choice.”⁸⁰ By year’s end, polls were showing that support had grown to almost 40 percent.⁸¹

As party policy was slowly becoming articulated, culminating in the annual meeting of 2010, it was clearly preoccupied with ensuring contentment in the oil and gas sector, increasing choice in health care, containing government spending, and addressing discontents over property rights in rural areas. However, the party also ensured a populist image, calling for the election of the province’s senators, for legislator recall provisions, and for more free votes in the legislatures. These commitments would appeal to most moral conservatives (with the reference to free votes potentially serving as a coded message for them in particular). The same dual appeal would come with promises to equalize schooling options by having funding “follow the student.”⁸²

Despite her earlier statements about wanting to stay clear of moral issues, Smith went further than this to shore up support among moral traditionalists. During the leadership race, she had written to a socially conservative magazine that the government should not be funding abortions.⁸³ There have also been statements critical of the Human Rights Commission, though framed as a free speech issue or as an example of needing to reign in government. There is no evidence that the human rights issues register at all for most Albertans, but it does for many social conservatives. As one party member puts it,

Social conservatives are deeply concerned that human rights commissions are the thin edge of the wedge that could drive chunks of a far left agenda. Social conservatives are deeply concerned that it will be human rights commissions that drive us toward polygamy. Social conservatives are deeply concerned that it will be human rights commissions that drive us towards American-style banning of anything quasi-religious in schools. Social conservatives are deeply concerned that the human rights commissions will enact by fiat things that parliamentarians would never have the balls to bring forward in Parliament. And it also fits very nicely with the small government message: there is no way that when a street preacher writes a letter to the editor that it should become an issue that the government is spending your tax dollars on.⁸⁴

Tom Flanagan agrees that there is considerable pressure to speak in such terms. He describes the party's platform as having no religious elements in it – “completely silent on what you would think of as typical moral issues.” He also characterizes the leader as not religious, and the internal organizational environment as “completely secular.”

But Danielle realizes and we all realize that there is a religiously motivated element of the vote in Alberta and we're not going to alienate them. So Danielle consciously takes positions that she believes that the religious conservatives could endorse even if it wouldn't necessarily be their first choice. . . It's true of Danielle, and it may be true of any effective leader anywhere on the political spectrum, that you have to craft political positions that can appeal to broad coalitions.⁸⁵

Smith also secured the support of two high profile social conservatives – Paul Hinman (the first Wildrose leader and its first MLA), and Link Byfield (conservative publisher and son of Ted, a long-time high-profile advocate for moral traditionalism). Byfield's support has provided her with what may be thought of as a “strong so-con shield,” helping to point out how little PC governments have done for social conservatives. As one interview informant has suggested, “people for whom religion plays a strong role in their lives will tend to gravitate toward a party like the Wildrose Alliance because it has a strong sense that certain things are right and wrong.”⁸⁶

One Wildrose activist echoed similar themes in agreeing that the leader would dodge the big hot button moral issues of homosexuality and abortion. However, he also emphasized the party's intent to formulate appeals that cast a wide net:

We messaged ourselves for all of the things that a libertarian would have in common with a social conservative. We focused on issues of self-responsibility. Although she spoke about defunding abortions only once on a Christian radio show, it is something that most Wildrosers want to see happen because you've got your libertarians who views it as an issue of self-responsibility, and you have your so-cons who view it as a morality issue. Smith gave the keynote speech at Civitas last year focusing entirely on what so-cons and libertarians have in common.⁸⁷

This careful strategy was going to require deft managing, to ensure, for example that policy resolutions presented to and approved by annual conferences avoided what would be seen as extremes. And at the same time, the party has been training candidates to be careful about what they talk about, particularly with respect to morality politics. Candidates who are known to be socially conservative have been counseled to be realistic about what can be achieved. As one social conservative Wildrose member puts it, “we’re constrained on a socially conservative agenda: if the voters aren’t prepared to go there yet, you can fail or you can move incrementally...Just because something is true doesn’t mean you have to talk about it.”⁸⁸

The primary appeal of the WRA, therefore, lay in its promises to reduce the role of government, but there was certainly an interest in spinning out some policies in ways that would appeal to social conservatives, and to remain ambiguous on issues that were uniquely appealing to moral traditionalists. In this respect the party was broadly similar to the federal Conservatives, and it is no coincidence that there were prominent federal Conservatives active in the WRA. There seemed significantly more in common between these two parties than there was between the federal and provincial conservatives, even more so once Alison Redford was chosen as PC leader.

The 2012 Election

Alberta’s 28th general election was held on April 23, 2012. Its catalyst lay many months earlier in October 2011 when the Progressive Conservatives selected Alison Redford as their new leader. Few observers expected Redford to win the leadership — her politics were too centrist and endorsements too few to mount a credible challenge against Gary Mar, Doug Horner, or the socially conservative Ted Morton.⁸⁹ Her campaign strategy, however, helped to distinguish her candidacy in a crowded field. In taking positions contrary to established party policy and in reaching out to new areas of support (teachers and nurses, for example, two constituencies not often courted in PC leadership races).⁹⁰ Throughout the leadership contest, Redford’s mantra had been “change” was necessary, and that it could and should come from inside the governing party. At the point of her leadership victory, she said that “[t]his has been a party that has been in government for 40 years and there hasn’t been a tendency to understand how to embrace change and bring that different policy conversation to the table.”⁹¹

Writing shortly after Redford’s victory in *Policy Options*, Tom Flanagan commented on this remarkable turn of events and the perceived movement of the PCs to the centre of the political spectrum.

The political situation is a new one for the Alberta PCs. For most of the 40 years they have been in power, their only serious opposition was on the left, and that was divided between the Liberals and New Democrats. But the mistakes of the Stelmach government led to the rise of a new party on the right—the Wildrose Alliance—now supported by many former PCs. Formerly a party of the centre-right, the Alberta PCs have now become more like the Liberals of Ontario—a party of the centre with significant opposition on both left and right.⁹²

Soon after Redford was sworn in as Premier, her government introduced a fixed election regime which set the next election for the spring. Then early in the new year, a budget was introduced clearly designed to appeal to centrist voters and create a sharp contrast with the more fiscally conservative Wildrose. However, just weeks before the start of the formal election period, a scandal broke which called attention again to the tarnished PC brand, as well as casting doubt on Redford's promised change. MLAs assigned to the committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing had continued to accept compensation (\$1000 a month) despite having not met since 2008. Following two weeks of unfavourable press, Redford agreed to suspend committee pay, while stopping just short of announcing that affected PC MLAs would have to return their "no-work" committee pay.

Redford visited Government House on March 26, 2012 where the writs were dropped. Polling was to take place 29 days later. From the outset, there was no doubt that it would be a race between Redford and Smith, with early polling showing them tied. The Liberals, New Democrats, and the relatively new Alberta Party were sidelined, although they continued to show some strength in Calgary and Edmonton. Susan Elliott headed the PC campaign with Stephen Carter—who had also managed Redford's leadership bid—as war room manager.⁹³

The Wildrose campaign routinely characterized Redford as a closet Liberal intent on turning Albert into a "big government nanny state."⁹⁴ Tom Flanagan headed the party's campaign team, and there were recurrent indicators of involvement on the party of federal Conservatives.⁹⁵ Prime Minister Stephen Harper was a political veteran, and knew full well the risks of drifting off message. The leader's tour stayed away from moral issues and instead focused on calls for smaller government. Among the initiatives trumpeted by the campaign was a promise to deliver a \$300 dividend payment to each Albertan that would take effect once the province returned to surplus.⁹⁶ One PC insider sensed that the promise of "Dani-dollars" was vulnerable to attack, seeming to be a recycled policy from the Klein years that even at the time received mixed reviews, and a poor substitute for more straightforward tax reductions.⁹⁷ For some in the PC camp, this felt like a turning point, during a stage of the campaign when polls were showing Wildrose substantially ahead of the PCs.

The PC campaign also judged Wildrose vulnerable on policies that could be portrayed as catering to prejudice. Alison Redford criticized her principal opponent for its support of "conscience rights" for health care professionals and, potentially, other provincial employees. Conscience rights appeared in the Wildrose *2011 Member Approved Principles and Policies* which stated that, if elected, the party would "implement legislation protecting the 'conscience rights' of healthcare professionals." Encoding such rights would allow marriage commissioners to refuse to perform same-sex marriages, or doctors and nurses to refuse to perform procedures or prescribe medications they disapproved of on religious grounds. Redford's statement on the matter included this:

I was absolutely amazed we were having this conversation in Alberta, because I believe that all Albertans want to live in a place where we respect each other, where we feel safe, where whether you are a woman or a young girl or a new Albertan you're going to be treated equally.⁹⁸

Smith had clearly supported such conscience provisions in responding to a civil liberties association survey the previous August, but now was trying her best to portray herself as neutral on the issue, and asserting that “we don’t have positions on contentious moral issues.” She also tried to characterize criticism of the party’s stance as fear-mongering—a common strategy of “Eastern Canada and Eastern Canadian critics.”⁹⁹

There were now more questions about “morality” policy being asked of the Wildrose leader. Official party policy called for the elimination of hate speech provisions in provincial human rights law, an issue particularly important to social conservatives. Smith pointed out that the position arrived at for official Wildrose policy was one that called for abolishing the human rights commission and replacing it with a new provincial court route that would handle complaints in a more “balanced” fashion.¹⁰⁰

Abortion funding was another issue that seemed to never fully disappear. Alberta Pro-Life had tried to make de-funding abortions an election issue, in a campaign announced in early March.¹⁰¹ This seemed to have little traction, but it did surface recurrently enough to issue a statement saying that the party “has absolutely no intentions” of defunding abortion.¹⁰² There are strong parallels here to the kind of denials that federal Conservative leader Stephen Harper issued when pressed in the 2008 election – denials that never seemed to fully dispel fears.

There were also Wildrose candidates who represent unequivocally the conservative Christian constituency that forms an important part of the party’s overall coalition. In addition to Paul Hinman and Link Byfield, Ron Leech was an evangelical pastor who has published fierce attacks on homosexuality.¹⁰³

The televised leaders’ debate marked a turning point in the campaign. In a highly scripted set of performances, there were few dramatic exchanges, but during a discussion of conscience rights, Liberal leader Raj Sherman quipped: “Danielle, this is Alberta, not Alabama.”¹⁰⁴ This was underreported in the mainstream media, which generally saw Danielle Smith as holding her own in the debate, and thereby holding on to her apparent lead in the polls. As the *Globe and Mail* put it:

Ms. Redford needed a strong performance. And what she delivered Thursday was serviceable, if unspectacular. There were neither major gaffes nor knockouts. She snuck in one-liners occasionally while under fire from the other three parties, but few (though some) were calling it a Redford win. As such, it was considered, by default, a win for Wildrose leader Danielle Smith, who nonetheless turned in a solid performance herself.

The television debate had a huge viewing audience, and was seen by many strategists as the true “start” to the campaign, after which both front-running campaigns came under closer scrutiny than ever. It was in this context that controversies arose over remarks by two Wildrose candidates, dragging the party’s campaign off-message during the final weeks of the race. The first flare-up occurred over a 2011 blog post by candidate Allan Hunsperger. Responding to the release of Lady Gaga’s song, “Born this Way,” Hunsperger wrote with regards to homosexuality

that: “You see, you can live the way you were born, and if you die the way you were born then you will suffer the rest of eternity in the lake of fire, hell, a place of eternal suffering” (See Appendix A). The news broke first on Twitter, before being picked up by the provincial and national press on April 15. Smith, for her part, refused to condemn the comments saying that:

When a person is making personal statements in their capacity as a pastor, which he was, I don’t think anybody should be surprised that they’re expressing certain viewpoints... It was a year ago when he was talking in his capacity as a pastor. He now understands, we’ve spoken, we’ve communicated on this, that we will not be legislating on contentious social issues. He understands that. He accepts that.¹⁰⁵

This statement did not quell media scrutiny, in part because reporters had already learned that Wildrose candidates were required to pay a \$1000 bonds against what were dubbed “bozo eruptions.”¹⁰⁶

A second controversy came from another Wildrose candidate – Ron Leech – who told a Calgary radio station that he had an advantage even in his ethnically mixed constituency because he was white candidate. He said, “I think as a Caucasian I have an advantage... When different community leaders such as a Sikh leader or a Muslim leader speak, they really speak to their own people in many ways. As a Caucasian, I believe that I can speak to all the community.”¹⁰⁷ Again, Smith refused to condemn the comments.

On Thursday April 17th, a leak directed at the *Calgary Sun* suggested that Smith would hold a press conference the following day to deal with both candidates’ comments, leading many reporters to believe that she would more firmly repudiate them. In fact, she seemed once more to equivocate:

Let me be perfectly clear – a Wildrose government will not tolerate discrimination against any individual based on their ethnicity, religion, beliefs, background, disability or sexual orientation ... period. And I know and expect my Wildrose candidates, regardless of what ethnicity they come from or what personal beliefs they might have, will speak to and wholeheartedly serve every one of their diverse and unique constituents. All Albertans are welcome in my Wildrose party and in the province I seek to be Premier of – not just the ones I agree with – not just the ones who would vote for me. I’m running to serve all Albertans – every...single...one. These charges against me and my party are the last futile gasps of a frightened 41-year old government and its allies. The Wildrose candidates and supporters in this room and all over Alberta know the truth. They know the stereotypes are bogus, and often used by liberal political parties when they feel threatened by conservatives. Usually, though, the stereotypes are aimed at Albertans from outside the province. What’s uncommon in this election, and particularly reprehensible, is that they are being used by Albertans, against fellow Albertans.¹⁰⁸

The ambiguities in a statement that many reporters expected would be clearer kept the statements made by these candidates firmly in the spotlight for a crucial period in the final stretches of the

campaign, helping to sew doubts in more voters' minds about what this comparatively new party stood for, and how coherent its team of candidates was.

On election day, Albertans elected another PC majority government, giving them 61 seats, Wildrose 17, the Liberals 5, the NDP 4, and the Alberta Party none. No one cause lay behind what to many was a surprising outcome. The Liberal vote collapsed in the midst of what had emerged as a competitive race pitting a clearly right wing alternative to a governing party that had shifted noticeably to the centre. There can be no doubt that Redford had more capacity to lure Liberal supporters than any PC leader in recent memory, and her apparent sidelining of moral traditionalism may well have enhanced willingness to shift camps. Another crucial factor is the split between fiscal and moral conservatives inside Wildrose, deepened by the comments of Hunsperger and Leech. Many fiscal conservatives were probably driven back to the PC fold, even if not securely so, for fear of backing a party that seemed open to distraction. The PC's policies were also not hostile to business or the oil patch, with no revival of talk about increased royalties that had contributed so much to unseating Stelmach as PC leader. Another factor appeared to be a higher voter turnout among PC supporters, motivated in part by the election's competitiveness, and in part by the centrism of its new leader.

The 2012 election, therefore, seemed to illustrate two patterns relevant to any discussion of faith in provincial politics. Moral traditionalism remains a potent enough force that one or another of the province's major parties is induced to recruit candidates strongly identified with that current of opinion. That used to be routinely true of the PCs, and now is more obviously true of Wildrose. On the other hand, a candidate statement condemning homosexuality using starkly colourful language has been widely interpreted as contributing to a late-campaign swing against Wildrose. Such an interpretation has in fact been so widespread that Danielle Smith spoke soon after the election about the need to re-think party positions on some fronts – a statement universally interpreted to refer to positions like conscience rights most directly associated with moral conservatism. More than any other election in Alberta's recent history, this one was interpreted as a repudiation of that form of conservatism.

Conclusion

Whatever its settler origins, and the character of its political life until the 1970s, Alberta has become less distinct in the intensity of religious faith and its explicit play in provincial politics. Survey data indicate that levels of religiosity do not set out the province's population as categorically distinct from other Canadians. Opinions on morality policy questions likewise do not radically differ from opinions in most other Canadian regions. To be sure, populism is a stronger current there than elsewhere, but on other dimensions of political belief associated with right wing politics, ordinary Albertans are not all that unusual.

What is true is that there is a higher proportion of evangelical Protestants in Alberta than other provinces. And what is also evident is that this evangelical current has continued to retain a political visibility that is not nearly as evident in other provinces except perhaps Saskatchewan. We have already seen, however, that this evangelical presence no longer has much influence on the opinions of the average Albertan on morality policy. There have also been only occasional

episodes of evangelical political organizing. This is a pattern across the country, in part a product of parliamentary system that makes institutionalization difficult for social movement groups. The institutional development we have witnessed in the religious right has occurred almost entirely at the federal level.

On the major public policy questions that have driven religious conservatives to mobilize politically across Canada, there have been only occasional signs of more success in Alberta than elsewhere in the country. No provincial government has allowed abortion funding to get raised as a serious policy issue, and eventually provincial party leaders have “given in” on every major sexual diversity issue that confronted them. And yet on “smaller” issues related to sexual diversity in particular there have been legislative moves on sexual diversity that set the province apart from other parts of Canada, sometimes coupled with extreme political rhetoric.

The influence of Christian conservatism on Alberta is evident in the continuing impulse on the part of major parties on the right to signal sympathy with moral traditionalists. Recurrent “swipes” at the province’s LGBT community offer one illustration, and the evolution of school choice offers another. The latter has the extra advantage of pleasing very different right wing constituencies. Despite being led by a libertarian with no particular interest in faith and absolutely no policy interest in moral traditionalism, the Wildrose Party made a number of moves to suggest that its ears are open to the religious right prior to the 2012 election. As one veteran party insider argued in 2011, in assessing strategies for shoring up moral traditionalist support,

You don’t have to carve out space on every one of their issues. But you have to do certain things that demonstrate sensitivity and respect and connectedness and awareness of how officialdom and how elites can mock religious people. So you grab on to one or two of these symbolic issues. You fight things that matter but don’t have a huge impact on people’s everyday lives. You find things that get people mad when you talk about them.

And so, party strategists on the right have obviously thought of religiously conservative currents in the population as politically significant, particularly in southern Alberta. This is in the absence of stable set of interest groups articulating their concerns, or of any recent systematic attempt to specifically mobilize conservative Christians. There is no conspiracy here. It is a realistic response on the part of politicians and strategists to sentiments they know exist, and which they recognize can be mobilized effectively either in support of them or against them. One strategic response evident in the recent history of both the PCs (up to 2011) and Wildrose (up to the election) is to think of small gestures that the concerns of religious conservatives are being heard. Another is to recognize which policy areas have the potential to appeal just as strongly to moral traditionalists as to small-government neo-liberals. Calls for limiting the right of a human rights commission to set limits on speech is an example of a policy designed to appeal to conservatives of faith on the one hand and libertarians on the other. The controversy over this and other similar positions in the 2012 election may reduce the utility of this issue position as a signaling device, but the need to deploy analogous devices has not disappeared. Talking of enhanced school choice will probably continue in that role.

Faith, then, continues to play a role in Alberta's provincial politics, though calls for public policy to reflect moral traditionalism have been increasingly made from the political margins. A careful examination of provincial party politics, and to some extent public policy, reveals that those margins are not without occasional influence, more so than in most parts of Canada.

APPENDIX A

Allan Hunsperger and Cindy Hunsperger, "Born this Way," *The House*, 5 June, 2011. Available: http://www.thehousetoday.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=40:born-this-way&Itemid=94

I have decided to do a sequel to Lady Gaga's CD, "Born this Way." My CD will be entitled, "Born this Way - And that's why Jesus came."

The world is believing the lie that because you were "born this way" you now have a right to live this Username way - the way you were born. Sounds great at first except nobody is mentioning what the results will be of living the way you were born!

If you were "born this way," are you going to "die this way?" Well if that is true, and it is, then you have fallen right into the trap that is as old as time. That trap is what satan wants for you – but is that what you want?

You see, you can live the way you were born, and if you die the way you were born then you will suffer the rest of eternity in the lake of fire, hell, a place of eternal suffering.

Now at this point I am not judging, I am just stating a fact! You may not believe me and you have that choice, but I would challenge you to seriously check it out because once you cross over, there is no turning back.

It is not only Lady Gaga that doesn't understand this, it is also our educators with the Edmonton Public school board. The following is right from the public school board's website:

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION STATEMENT

The Board is committed to establishing and maintaining a safe, inclusive, equitable, and welcoming learning and teaching environment for all members of the school community. This includes those students, staff, and families who identify or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two- spirit, queer or questioning their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The Board expects all members of our diverse community to be welcomed, respected, accepted, and supported in every school."

Why this from our public educators? Because they believe people were "born this way" and have a right to die this way. The blind leading the blind!

Now every Christian school that has come under the Edmonton Public School board will have to adopt this as well. Trapped!

For years I have warned Christian educators that you can't partner with public education because public education is godless. As far as public education is concerned, there is no God. The dictionary defines godless as profane or wicked.

Psalm 1:1 "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel (teachings) of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers."

There is so much I could teach on from this point but I will stick to the subject and then all the other subjects that come out of this, I can speak to later.

Back in the eighties Holy Spirit revealed to me a truth that I have never forgotten. Our family was flying from California back to Calgary and we had to make a change over in San Francisco. As we were waiting for our plane to leave, two men who were homosexuals were also waiting and we began to share in conversation. Once they found out that I was a pastor the conversation went to their lifestyle and they began to expand how we as Christians have judged them wrongly. Then one of the men said to me, "You will never understand what it is like to be born one way

and have society expect to you live another.” Immediately Holy Spirit dropped this in my mouth and I said, “You know, I do understand, because I was born the same way. I was born living one way and God expects me to live another way. I can’t do that on my own and that’s why Jesus Christ came so I could be changed.”

Warning people to not live the way they were born is not judgment or condemnation - it is love! Accepting people the way they are is cruel and not loving!

Endnotes

1. This is a view widely associated with Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964).
2. Gad Horowitz, “Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation,” *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 32, 2 (May 1966).
3. As he points out, Americans were a third of all immigrants from 1900 to 1920. See “Provincial Conservatism,” in *Conservatism in Canada*, ed. James Farney and David Rayside (forthcoming).
4. Nelson Wiseman, “The Pattern of Prairie Politics,” in *Party Politics in Canada*, 8th ed., ed. Hugh Thorburn and Alan Whitehorn (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 2001), pp. 353, 355.
5. David Laycock, *The New Right and Democracy in Canada: Understanding Reform and the Canadian Alliance* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002).
6. Though he counsels caution in over-homogenizing the province’s political culture, he points out that it was “the last province to require the use of seat-belts, the last to outlaw extra-billing by doctors, and one of the few to leave the provision of electricity in private hands.” See *Provincial Politics in Canada*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1996), pp. 517-18. Jared Wesley certainly agrees that political leaders have pitched familiar themes to their electorates – personal responsibility, entrepreneurship, a strong work ethic (*Code Politics: Campaigns and Cultures on the Canadian Prairies* [Vancouver, UBC, 2011]).
7. *Alberta Politics Uncovered: Taking Back Our Province* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 2004), p. 3.
8. Lisac, *Alberta Politics Uncovered*, p. 79
9. *Alberta Politics Uncovered*, p. 87.
10. David Stewart and Anthony Sayers, “Albertans’ Conservative Beliefs,” in *Conservatism in Canada*, ed. Farney and Rayside (forthcoming).
11. Boychuk, “The Regulation of Private Health Funding and Insurance in Alberta Under the Canada Health Act,” The School of Policy Studies, University of Calgary, Research Papers, vol. 1, issue 1, p. 35, cited in Stewart and Sayers, “Albertans’ Conservative Beliefs.”
12. Kurt Bowen, *Christians in a Secular World: The Canadian Experience* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), pp. 54-55. These numbers are based on the 1997 National Survey of Volunteering, Giving, and Participation by Statistics Canada.
13. Non-Christian religions are about as represented in Alberta as in Canada overall, with no one minority as prominent as Muslims in Ontario and Sikhs in B.C. Muslims and Buddhists each represent 1.6 percent of the population, Sikhs 1.1 percent, Hindus 0.8 percent, and Jews 0.4 percent. The total of these is 5.5 percent, compared to 6.0 for Canada as a whole.
14. David Lasby and Julie Sperling, “Giving and Volunteering for Religions Organizations in Alberta: Findings from the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteer, and Participating,” *Imagine Canada*, 200x.
15. Bowen, *Christians in a Secular World*, p. 54. The use of denomination to track evangelicals is of course limited, since there are many evangelicals who do not identify with a particular denomination, and others who remain within “mainline” Protestant denominations.
16. *Provincial Politics in Canada*, pp. 522-23

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17. Confidential interviews conducted by the authors.
 18. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 19. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 20. Confidential interview, 29 May 2011.
 21. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 22. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 23. Wiseman, "The Pattern of Provincial Politics."
 24. David Stewart and Anthony Sayers, "Leadership Change in a Dominant Party: The Alberta Progressive Conservatives, 2006," *Canadian Political Science Review* 3,4 (December 2009): 85-107.
 25. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 26. Dyck, *Provincial Politics in Canada*, pp. 554-56
 27. Marta Gold, "Group Upset with Klein's Comments on Abortion," *Edmonton Journal*, 2 April 1995. Klein's comments were seen as swinging a party convention vote against the proposal to limit funding, a proposal supported by at least seventeen of his caucus members. His office was getting 100 letters a day, running 6 to 1 in favour of no funding for abortion.
 28. This is a description provided by a one-time colleague, confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 29. On this, see David Rayside, *On the Fringe: Gays and Lesbians in Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) chap. 4, and *Queer Inclusions, Continental Divisions: Public Recognition of Sexual Diversity in Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), chap. 4; and Miriam Smith, *Political Institutions and Lesbian and Gay Rights in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
 30. The government has proposed legislation limiting compensation to victims of sexual sterilization, and knowing the risks of successful *Charter* challenge, included the notwithstanding provision for the first time in an Alberta statute. After a storm of protest, the government withdrew the measure.
 31. Mark Lisac, "Cultures Clashed When Tory Caucus Faced Gay Rights," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 April 1998. Most callers favoured invoking the notwithstanding clause, though a few of Klein's urban caucus members reported most contacts were opposed to overriding the court ruling.
 32. Rick Pedersen, "Gay Rights Ruling Sparks Rural Uproar," *Edmonton Journal*, 5 April 1998. See also Don Martin, "Barrage of Phone Calls Has Klein Starting to Waffle," *Calgary Herald*, 7 April 1998; and Larry Johnsrude, "Tory MLAs Feeling Heat to Override Court Ruling," *Edmonton Journal*, 4 April 1998.
 33. Steve Chase, "Caucus Accepts Gay Rights Ruling," *Calgary Herald*, 10 April 1998; Larry Johnsrude, "Province Will Abide by Court Ruling," *Edmonton Journal*, 10 April 1998
 34. Don Martin, "Gay 'Fence' Built but All Sides Sound Like Winners," *Calgary Herald*, 19 March 1999.
 35. *National Post*, 20 February 1999.
 36. CBC News, "Tories Go Against Advice, Renew Same-Sex Marriage Fight," 18 March 2005.
 37. Brian Laghi, "Rage Finds its Voice in Alberta," *Globe and Mail*, 11 April 1998.
 38. "Alberta Justice Issues Research, Final Report (December 1998), cited in Ashley Geddes, "Cabinet Tackles Gay Rights," *Edmonton Journal*, 3 March 1999. The poll showed that 54 percent strongly agreed that a human rights complaint should be considered in the case of the denial of a job based on sexual orientation; 37 percent agreed strongly (30 percent agreeing somewhat) with not using the notwithstanding clause; and 48 percent agreed that Alberta laws should treat gay Albertans the same re marriage, adoptions, foster parenting.
 39. Allyson Jeffs, "Passions Ignited on Both Sides of Gay Rights Issue," *Edmonton Journal*, 13 February 1999.
 40. CBC News, "Alberta May Invoke Notwithstanding Clause Over Same-Sex Marriage," 27 July 2005.
 41. Canadian Press, "Alberta Premier Supports Private Bill Denounced as Being Anti-Gay," 8 May 2006,.

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42. Confidential interview with former MLA, 30 May 2011.
 43. Also in 2009, the government de-listed gender reassignment surgery, thus denying public funds for it.
 44. "Alberta's Premier-Elect Signals a Province in Transition," *Toronto Star*, 3 October 2011.
 45. Karen Kleiss, "Redford May Reopen Debate on Sex Education," *National Post*, 6 October 2011.
 46. Michael Wagner, "Charter Schools in Alberta: Change or Continuity in Progressive Conservative Education Policy?" *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 45, 1 (Spring 1999): 52-66
 47. Wagner, "Charter Schools in Alberta." The *Alberta Act of 1905* provided funding guarantees for Roman Catholic schools and for Protestant schools in areas where they were in a minority
 48. Michael Wagner, "Charter Schools in Alberta."
 49. Alison Taylor, "'Fellow Travellers' and 'True Believers': A Case Study of Religion and Politics in Alberta Schools," *Journal of Education Policy* 16, 1 (2001), p. 21.
 50. Taylor, "'Fellow Travellers,'" p. 22
 51. Taylor, "'Fellow Travellers,'" p. 23.
 52. Wagner, "Charter Schools in Alberta." It is now about 4 percent.
 53. As Wagner points out, the per pupil grant to boards created an incentive for smaller and financially-stretched boards to accept home schoolers ("Charter Schools in Alberta"). By 2011, according to one informant, the central Alberta Catholic school district in Vegreville was supervising 1,200 home-schooled students (interview, 30 May 2011).
 54. Taylor, "'Fellow Travellers,'" p. 26; and Wagner, "Charter Schools in Alberta,"
 55. Confidential interview, 1 June 2011.
 56. Wagner points out that the Charter school idea originated in 1988 educational reforms under Britain's Margaret Thatcher, authorizing the creation of autonomous "grant-maintained" public schools. Minnesota was the first U.S. state to adapt the idea by creating room for charter schools, and several other states quickly following. Shawna Ritchie also details the development and expansion of Charter schools in the province, in "Innovation in Action: An Examination of charter Schools in Alberta," *The West in Canada Research Series*, CanadaWest Foundation, January 2010.
 57. Wagner, "Charter Schools in Alberta." The legislation allowed for the creation of up to fifteen charter schools across the province. As of 2011, there were thirteen, with a combined student population of about 7,000.
 58. "'Fellow Travellers.'"
 59. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 60. Alison Taylor and Jesse Mackay, "Three Decades of Choice in Edmonton Schools," *Journal of Education Policy* 23, 5 (2008): 549-66.
 61. In one of these cases, the Mennonite Education Society of Calgary asked that its Menno Simon Christian School be allowed to join the Palliser board. The Society owns the building, but receives full financial support for its academic and extra curricular activities.
 62. Confidential interviews, 29 May and 1 June 2011.
 63. Confidential interview with former Conservative, 30 May 2011.
 64. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 65. Taylor, "'Fellow Travellers,'" p. 15.
 66. For "accredited" schools, "level 1 schools received 60 percent funding. "Level 2" could be obtained by agreeing to certain accountability measures, in exchange for which they received 70 percent, as well as being eligible for other specific funding grants. In general the 70 percent funding level covered about half of the overall costs of running a private school.
 67. Taylor, "'Fellow Travellers,'" p. 27.
 68. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 69. "Leadership Change in a Dominant Party, pp. 85-87. This is not their central argument, but one that emerges in the midst of making other points.

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70. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 71. Confidential interview, 30 May 2011.
 72. David Stewart and Anthony Sayers, "'Christian Conservatives' in the Conservative Heartland: A Preliminary Analysis," paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the Prairie Political Science Association, October 2010.
 73. Confidential interview, 1 June 2011.
 74. On this, in addition to the sources already cited, see Gary Mason, "Stephen Harper's Wildrose Soulmate," *Globe and Mail*, 5 April 2012.
 75. Confidential interview, 29 May 2011.
 76. Confidential interview, 29 May 2011.
 77. CBC News, "Wildrose Party Leader to Run for Calgary Seat," 19 October 2009.
 78. "Has Wildrose Alliance Support Peaked? If so, It's All Downhill From Here!" *rabble.ca*, 3 July 2011. (<http://rabble.ca/print/blogs/bloggers/djclimenhaga/2011/07/has-wildrose-alliance-support-peaked> .
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 79. Jason Fekete, "Wildrose Unveils its Vision," *Calgary Herald*, 10 November 2009.
 80. Interview, 17 May 2011.
 81. Angus Read polling showed 39 percent support, up from 28 percent reported in an Environics poll one month earlier.
 82. The question of capital funding is still unclear in Wildrose policy.
 83. Confidential interview, 17 May 2011. In truth, Smith favoured privatization in health care more generally, though pulled back from that kind of belief in her election campaigning.
 84. Confidential interview, 29 May 2011.
 85. Interview, 17 May 2011.
 86. Confidential interview, 29 May 2011.
 87. Confidential interview, 1 June 2011.
 88. Confidential interview, 29 May 2011.
 89. Graham Thomson, "As Summer ebbs, leadership votes loom," *Edmonton Journal*, 7 September, 2011; Graham Thomson, "As Mar gains momentum, critics start taking swings." *Edmonton Journal*, 23 September, 2011.
 90. Keith Gerein, "Tory contender pledges to reverse education cuts; Redford makes promise at meeting with teachers' association," *Edmonton Journal*, 23 September, 2011; "Redford wins Tory leadership," *Edmonton Journal*, 2 October, 2011.
 91. Petti Fong, "Alison Redford new leader of Alberta's PC party," *Toronto Star*, 2 October, 2011.
 92. Tom Flanagan, "The Redford effect: Stagecraft, statecraft, and rhetorical pragmatism," *Policy Options*, November 2011.
 93. Carter also ran Nehid Nenshi's successful Calgary mayoral bid in October, 2010.
 94. Josh Wingrove and Dawn Walton, "In Alberta, an Election, and a Horse Race," *Globe and Mail*, 27 March 2012
 95. Gary Mason, "Stephen Harper's Wildrose Soulmate," *Globe and Mail*, 5 April 2012; and Josh Wingrove and Dawn Walton, "In Alberta, an Election, and a Horse Race," *Globe and Mail*, 27 March 2012.
 96. Something the Wildrose estimated for 2015 if they formed government.
 97. Confidential interview, May 2012.
 98. Keith Gerein, "Alberta Election 2012: Smith Accuses 'Liberal' Tories of Fearmongering on Rights Issue," *Edmonton Journal*, 5 April 2012. See also Keith Gerein and Kelly Cryderman, "'Conscience Rights' Discussion Puts Wildrose's Smith on Hot Seat," *Edmonton Journal*, 5 April 2012.
 99. Quoted in Josh Wingrove and Dawn Walton, "Opposition Piles on in Bid to Slow Wildrose," *Globe and Mail*, 7 April 2012.

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100. Gerein, "Alberta Election 2012."
 101. Thaddeus Baklinski, "Alberta Pro-Life Rolls Out Defund Abortion Campaign," *LifeSiteNews*, 1 March 2012.
 102. Josh Wingrove and Dawn Walton, "Opposition Piles on in Bid to Slow Wildrose," *Globe and Mail*, 7 April 2012.
 103. Gary Mason, "Why Wildrose Could Take the Province," *Globe and Mail*, 7 April 2012
 104. Josh Wingrove, "Winners, losers and devastating blows in Alberta leaders debate," *The Globe and Mail*, 13 April, 2012.
 105. James Wood, "Wildrose candidate tells gays in Lady Gaga-inspired blog post: 'You will suffer the rest of eternity in the lake of fire, hell'", *National Post*, 15 April, 2012.
 106. Josh Wingrove, "Wildrose's behaviour bonds aim to nip 'bozo eruptions' in the bud; Danielle Smith confirms candidates pay \$1000 bonds for good conduct, which they get back after the elections—if they behave," *The Globe and Mail*, 14 April 2012.
 107. Jen Gerson, "'Caucasian advantage' quip casts shadow over Wildrose campaign despite poll lead," *National Post*, 17 April, 2012.
 108. <http://www.wildrose.ca/blog/danielle-speaks-about-mondays-election/>