

hope so because things could get ugly when the next government comes in and sees this money that was paid out was never received from California.

ALBERTA

On Monday, February 12th, the lieutenant governor of Alberta, Lois Hole, read the speech from the throne, which outlines the objectives for the government over the next year. Moments after that Premier Ralph Klein surprised nobody by dissolving the legislature and dropping an election writ (calling an election) for March 12. The objective for the election is to decide which government will lead Alberta into its 100-year celebrations in 2005. The election will be fought over health care and deregulation of electricity. Both have interesting elements (if you will), which I would like to discuss.

But before doing so, one thing needs to be mentioned. Alberta is using a little monetary persuasion as well. The Alberta government is giving out energy rebates of \$150 per month from January to April. Albertans too are facing rising energy costs and the government is looking to cushion its consumers. Of course things become a lot easier when the royalties flow in from their consumption. But everybody knows the glee of getting a government check. No fear of it bouncing

and it just feels like free money. Which is exactly how they want you to feel. Because, come election day, you can be sure that they will be reminding everyone of one who put those dollars in your pocket.

Ralph Klein has been head of the government since 1992. He has never lost an election between his time in civic and provincial politics dating back to 1980. He is on the right of the political spectrum and he is not afraid to do whatever it takes to balance the books. It was this approach that drove the present-day leader of the provincial Liberals out of the Conservative party.

Nancy MacBeth officially left the Conservatives because she was appalled by the depth of cuts Klein was making. I am sure that it is not easy to work with someone who has beaten you in a leadership race, as Klein did in 1992. MacBeth is targeting the cuts made to health care and especially Klein's hard-line with doctors and nurses there. She should score some points on this front.

But her best chance of success is the deregulation of electricity in Alberta. Things have been an unmitigated disaster in California and there is no reason why it should go any better in Alberta. She must harness a lot of energy for this front because nothing gains votes like trying to make the opposition look scary. If you have any doubts about

this, talk to Jean Chretien or Stock Day.

But one must be frank. Albertans love Ralph. He is a good old boy from Calgary. He used to be a TV reporter and has all of the assorted traits usually associated with hacks. Normally this would be a negative thing, but for some reason it has made him folksy. And when he begins touring around the province, it is going to look less

and less like an election and more and more like a coronation. Which it will be. Because, come March 12th, to nobody's surprise, Albertans are going to extend Ralph's winning streak to eight. Why? Because Albertans love a winner a little more than they love winter.

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