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## Ralph should support the Alberta Agenda

Canadians beware! Suddenly there's talk everywhere of "cooperative federalism," an "end to fed-bashing," and "a new era of goodwill" among our political leaders.

This sudden craving for a group hug breaks out among Canadian politicians now and then. It's a bit like a virus. One premier catches it, and within days they're all sick. Fortunately, everyone soon recovers.

Take Ralph Klein. Two he was up in Fort McMurray pouring scorn on the Alberta Agenda--the growing public demand for Alberta to take provincial control of the Canada Pension Plan, the RCMP and collection of provincial personal income tax.

"The goal of Alberta," he said, "isn't to build walls--it's to build bridges, and I'm talking about two-way bridges where dialogue between the West and Ottawa is open, honest and respectful."

Yes, wouldn't it be nice.

Then off he went to Quebec to attend a preliminary meeting of the new Council of the Federation.

"The [Council]'s purpose," Klein explained, "isn't about rejecting Canada or picking a fight with other Canadians either. It's about getting federalism working again the way it was intended."

Well, amen to that. By all means let's get federalism working as in-

tended. That's why Klein should adopt the Alberta Agenda.

Let's start with the Canada Pension Plan. From the founding of the country in 1867, social programs have been constitutionally the jurisdiction of provinces. Ottawa was not supposed to have any social role at all.

That's why Section 94A had to be added to the Canadian Constitution in 1964--specifically to allow Ottawa to mess around in the provincial area of public pensions, as long as the provinces consent. And it's why Alberta is entitled to opt out of the federal plan, the same way Quebec did.

An Alberta Pension Plan would be "getting federalism working the way it was intended." It would also deliver the same benefits as the CPP for an annual saving of about \$500 per working Alberta family.

The same could be said for replacing the federal police force with a new one hired by, managed by, and accountable to Albertans. Policing is another provincial, not federal, jurisdiction, as is provincial tax collection.

Quebec does all three and nobody gives it a second thought. But if Albertans just contemplate doing the very same things, they are accused of being treacherous, greedy and unconstitutional--even by their own premier.

When this new Council gets going, Klein has a choice. He can go in with the Alberta Agenda and argue a hard, clear constitutional line. Other premiers will dump on him but we'll come out ahead. If plays nice, everyone will congratulate him, pat him on the head, call him a statesman, send him home with Globe and Mail accolades, and Alberta will, as usual, get hosed.

Let's hope Ralph remembers that his constitutional duty is not to join hands with the nation's premiers and sing Kumbaya with Paul Martin. His job is to defend the provincial rights of the people who elected him.

- Link Byfield

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