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Ralph Klein can change Canada if he wants to

These are exciting times for conservatives across the country, as they see the old Conservative Party of Sir John A. Macdonald restored to its original name.

But the most significant event in Canadian politics next year will not be the new party, the old name, or even the impending federal election.

Paul Martin (after a lot of big talk) will do pretty much what Chretien did, and the Conservative Party will appeal for votes in Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic the way Joe Clark did, by promising not to change anything.

Only the West--and mainly Alberta--understands the urgent need for new directions.

That's why I think the really important event next year will be the McClelland Task Force. You may not have heard of it, but you will. It's a committee of nine Tory MLAs appointed by the Klein government to canvas opinion on Alberta's role in confederation.

Laugh if you like, but Alberta's premier has far more nation-changing power in his grasp than either Steve Harper or Paul Martin.

Look at all the things Klein and his government could do.

- They could save the average working Alberta family \$500 annually by opting Albertans out of the Canada Pension Plan and creating an Alberta Pension Plan. This would be good for

Albertans, but good for Canada too, because Alberta's exit from the national plan could force the CPP to be redesigned along more modern and practical lines.

- Alberta could opt out of the RCMP, and replace it with a provincial police force. There is no good reason for local policemen at Rimbey or Oyen, Alberta, to be selected, trained and managed as a bilingual branch of the federal Solicitor General's Department in Ottawa. This is a vestige of colonialism, pure and simple. The RCMP should do national policing tasks, and leave local matters to provincial and local management, as in Ontario and Quebec.
- Alberta could start collecting its own personal income tax the way Quebec does, giving it a lot more local flexibility for targeted deductions and incentives. Other provinces might then see reasons and ways to follow suit. Alberta already collects medicare premiums from everyone, and would also be collecting pension plan premiums.
- Some experts insist that Alberta should give up its fairly piddling federal health transfer. It could then design a provincial health system that reflects provincial priorities and attitudes about extra-billing and user fees. Most people understand that a public health

that a public health system does not need to be a government-managed monopoly, because they are always inefficient and unfair.

- Alberta could get serious about defending the ownership rights of its citizens by establishing an Alberta Wheat Board to bust Ottawa's export monopoly (a holdover from the price-controls program of the Second World War). It could also start more effectively challenging needless federal encroachments on private property in things like the Species at Risk Act and the billion-dollar rifle registry.

All these things can happen if ordinary, sensible Albertans appear in large, enthusiastic numbers before the McClelland Task Force with arguments that are well-informed and constructive.

They alone can convince Premier Klein to use all the powers the Canadian Constitution gives him to lead Canada in the right direction.

The hearings will begin in January. Now is the chance to put up or shut up.

- Link Byfield

Link Byfield is chairman of the Edmonton-based Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy.

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