

October 4, 2004

Why I'm running for the Senate

It now looks almost certain there will be an Alberta election on Monday, November 22.

This matters to me personally, because I'm standing as an Independent candidate for the Canadian Senate.

On voting day, Albertans will be given two ballots, one to pick their local MLA, and the other to choose province-wide nominees for Alberta's three existing Senate vacancies.

Premier Klein will send the winners' names to Prime Minister Paul Martin, urging him to appoint them.

There is, of course, no guarantee Martin will cooperate. Mulroney appointed an elected senator in 1989, but Chretien stuck to the old practice of choosing party favorites hardly anybody's heard of.

This is why the Canadian Senate has little credibility or public respect.

It's also why not one Albertan in a thousand knows the name of any of their senators, or how many there are supposed to be (six), or that half the seats have fallen vacant.

All they know (if they follow politics) is that in our last Senate election in 1998, Albertans chose Bert Brown and Ted Morton to sit for us in the Upper House, but for six years Jean Chretien refused to appoint them. Their terms have now elapsed.

Some people understandably ask, what's the purpose of electing more?

There's a very good reason.

The Alberta Senate election creates a new democratic platform for Albertans to promote federal reform and provincial rights.

Democracy functions properly only with "checks and balances." In Canada today, the courts are too strong, the prime minister is too strong, and the central government is too strong.

Meanwhile, the provinces have become too weak, and the premiers too politically dependent on federal money. Canada wasn't supposed to work this way, but it does now.

A reformed Senate--one that's democratically accountable to the people of the various provinces--would be a useful check on premiers and prime ministers.

And the only way to reform it is to keep electing senators, to force the issue.

Paul Martin says he wants to end western alienation, and to close the "democratic deficit" in Parliament.

Well here's your chance, Paul, on a platter!

Federal reform goes well beyond electing senators, of course, but senators-elect (whether appointed or not) have a democratic mandate to speak for their province to the people of Canada.

We should stop relying entirely on premiers and provincial governments to do this, because they don't. How often, for example, have you heard any Alberta politicians mention that Ottawa siphons a net \$10 billion each year out of their province? If they started talking about such things, people would expect them to do something about it.

Now, however, with oil reaching \$50, the minority Liberals will soon recall how they won huge national majorities a generation ago. They only need to promise to deliver Alberta's resource earnings to eastern voters--all in the "national interest," of course. It worked before and it will work again.

Albertans need to be ready to fight back with everything they can.

That's why this Senate election matters and why I'm running in it.

- Link Byfield

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

"Just Between Us" is a feature service of the Citizens Centre for Freedom and Democracy. The purpose of the Citizens Centre is to enhance freedom and democracy by enabling ordinary citizens to become active and effective on important issues outside the normal processes of party politics.