

Just like that, there are huge changes to the face of politics in Canada

More to the Story

By Ben Bennett

They say a week is a long time in politics. No kidding.

Anyone who recently came back from a trip away will need an extra day off just to catch up on the news.

In Alberta, Allison Redford is gone; in Ottawa, Jim Flaherty is gone and the prospect of a majority PQ government in Quebec appears to be gone, too.

Allison Redford was unwise in thinking taxpayers would be okay with covering the \$45,000 cost of sending her to Nelson Mandela's funeral. That being said, it is not as if she is alone in pushing her luck with the perks of high office. Her main crime seems to have been that she was a more progressive conservative than her colleagues and an uppity female in a caucus dominated by not particularly progressive men.

No one would argue that Ralph Klein was exactly a paragon of virtue when he was Alberta's premier. He may not have been up to (down to?) Rob Ford standards, but he did have his moments. If Ms Redford had shown up drunk at a homeless shelter and lectured the clients about their lack of work ethic she would have been gone. Ralph Klein got away with it. He was famous for his intemperate outbursts – uppityness, if you will - but apparently that was different.

I realize that politics is a tough business and people are not always "nice", but we do seem to be a big hurry to condemn the ladies at the top while accepting such behaviour in men. Women face this issue in all walks of life so it shouldn't come as a surprise, but the double standard is more obvious perhaps when politicians are involved. It's a shame but, to be honest, I think we all share this inclination to judge.

I am sure I am not the only one who wonders at the speed with which Mr. Flaherty left the scene. Absent a scandal, most people make an announcement about their impending departure and there is some time before they actually leave.

And you have to wonder how Mr. Harper was able to find Mr. Flaherty's replacement, and his replacement's replacement, and even *that* guy's replacement, all within 24 hours. Mr. Harper knew. The rest was theatre.

Whatever you may think about Mr. Flaherty's politics, he did exhibit some likeable qualities, which is more than can be said for Joe Oliver's brief career in politics. But the appointment makes sense. Mr. Oliver was big industry's champion during the pipeline debate and no doubt will soon be sharing cocktails with the same guys on Bay Street.

When Pauline Marois called an election in Quebec a few weeks back she was a mile ahead in the polls and there was lots of talk about what that could mean for the rest of Canada. She seemed to have a winner in the divisive plan to remove religious symbols from public offices. But when she unveiled her star candidate the first thing he did was to unfurl the sovereignty flag. The Quebec election changed from that very moment from a possibly winnable one to a lost cause.

Now she is backtracking on the referendum issue but the cat is out of the bag and it won't go back in.

In Toronto we have another high profile candidate to add to the mix, but whether that profile stays high for long seems doubtful. It's actually too bad, because Sarah Thompson does at least have a tangible plan to raise the cash needed to fund more transit without increasing local taxes. She is calling for a toll on the Gardiner and the Don Valley Parkway, but only for out-of-towners. The feasibility has yet to be tested but at least the idea is out there, now, and will surely be discussed.

The last time Ms Thompson ran she pulled out before election day; this time she says she is in it for the long haul, I wouldn't be surprised, however, if Karen Stintz were to throw in the towel. It would save her a lot of money and grief and leave the main race to John Tory, Olivia Chow and that other guy; more on that another time.

(Ben Bennett's past columns can be found at www.bbc.guelph.org.)