



For 38 years running, the Progressive Conservatives have ruled Alberta. But lately, it seems like the old PC dynasty is on shaky ground.

TORY MLAS SMELL THE ROSES

On January 4, two Members of Alberta’s Legislative Assembly deserted the Progressive Conservative party. **Tories** Heather Forsyth and Rob Anderson both crossed the floor to join Alberta’s upstart party, the Wildrose Alliance. Party leader Danielle Smith welcomed Ms. Forsyth and Mr. Anderson, saying that their **defection** represents Albertans’ belief that Premier Ed Stelmach is no longer able to look after the interests of the province.

The move leaves the PCs with 68 seats in the Alberta legislature. The Liberals still have nine seats. The New Democrats have two seats, while the Wildrose Alliance now has three. One seat is filled by an Independent – an ex-Tory who was kicked out of the PC **caucus** last year for criticizing the actions of his party.

PCS LACK LEADERSHIP

Neither Ms. Forsyth nor Mr. Anderson have been happy with Alberta premier Ed Stelmach’s leadership. They don’t think he’s doing a good job. And they disagree with his decision to run up a **deficit** of nearly \$4.3 billion to help keep Albertans employed during the recession.

“Alberta once again needs to have a stable economy, strong fiscal policies and attract **capital** to work here,” said Ms. Forsyth.

JURY IS OUT ON DEFECTIONS

Voter reaction to Ms. Forsyth and Mr. Anderson’s decision to cross the floor is divided. Some residents in the MLAs’ **ridings** were supportive. They trust their elected officials to make decisions in the best interests of their **constituents**.

But others were angry. They felt that the party-changers should have resigned from the PC party and run again in a **by-election** as Wildrose **candidates**.

“He did not consult with any of us on this issue, to my knowledge, and I’ve been a member of this constituency association for eight years,” said one Tory supporter in Mr. Anderson’s riding. “I’ve been a member of the party for 13 years. I worked on his campaign to get him elected as the member and I certainly wasn’t consulted.”

Critics say floor-crossing can be dangerous to an elected official’s career. It can be hard for MLAs to get re-elected when they’ve been seen as dumping their party in favour of another.

“There is so much in flux currently in Alberta, it is very difficult to predict what’s going to happen in the next election,” said an associate professor at Calgary’s Mount Royal University.

CHANGES LIE AHEAD FOR PCS

Shortly after the defections, Premier Stelmach announced a **cabinet shuffle** would take place in late January. Close on the heels of that, a new budget will be introduced on February 9. In the budget, Mr. Stelmach plans to prove to Albertans he can cut costs just as well as the next guy.

But the party is facing pressure from all sides. And some experts say it looks like the long reign of Alberta’s Progressive Conservatives is drawing to a close.

DEFINITIONS

BY-ELECTION: a special election to fill a political office that has become vacant between regular elections

CABINET SHUFFLE: where the Premier makes changes to who’s in charge of certain portfolios in government, i.e. transportation, health, education

CANDIDATE: an individual who seeks election to public office

CAPITAL: money that can be invested in jobs and/or projects

CAUCUS: all members of a political party

CONSTITUENTS: people living inside the boundaries of an electoral district

DEFECTION: the act of abruptly abandoning one’s group or cause (in this case, political party)

DEFICIT: the situation that occurs when the government spends more money than it takes in

RIDINGS: electoral districts; Alberta has 83

TORIES: a nickname for members of the Conservative party



ANSWER THE FOLLOWING IN COMPLETE SENTENCES:

1. What did MLAs Heather Forsyth and Rob Anderson do in early January?

2. For what reasons did they do this?

3. Explain how voters' reactions have been divided by the pair's defection.

4. How many seats does the Wildrose Alliance now have in the Alberta legislature?

5. What changes will Mr. Stelmach make to his government in the coming weeks?

6. The job of an elected official is to help make decisions in the best interests of the people he or she represents. Given this definition, Mr. Anderson and Ms. Forsyth didn't do anything wrong. But many people feel if they were elected under the banner of the Progressive Conservative party, they should stay there throughout their term. As you see it, is it fair for an individual who was elected to represent voters in a particular party to switch parties halfway through the term? Why or why not?
