

# Patronage cloud obscures tax-cut sunshine

Palmer, Vaughn . The Vancouver Sun ; Vancouver, B.C. [Vancouver, B.C]. 07 June 2001: A10.

---

## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Mr. [Gordon Campbell] exploded with indignation. "This is the kind of appointment that makes the people of B.C. angry," the Liberal leader told Jim Beatty of The Vancouver Sun. "Mr. [Russ Pratt] is purely and simply a political appointment.

On the contrary, when the New Democrats accused the Liberals of secretly planning tax cuts for "the rich" – the top three brackets apply to people making more than \$60,000 a year – the Liberals complained that the NDP was misleading the public.

Mr. Campbell rejected the suggestion Wednesday that the Liberals had been harbouring plans all along to cut the top three tax brackets. But he was unable to cite any new information that has come his way since the election that would justify the sudden expansion in his tax-cutting intentions.

## FULL TEXT

VICTORIA - B.C. Liberals would like British Columbians to remember June 6 as the day they kept the promise to bring about dramatic tax relief – and did so on their first full day in government.

But there were other, darker, aspects of Gordon Campbell's first day as premier of B.C., and those, too, should be noted for future reference.

Take Mr. Campbell's handling of the controversy over his hiring of the president of the B.C. Liberal party for a \$180,000-a-year job in the civil service.

Andrew Wilkinson was appointed Tuesday as the new deputy minister in charge of intergovernmental relations, meaning relations with the federal government. It's a posting that has usually been entrusted to an experienced public servant.

But as of yesterday afternoon, Mr. Wilkinson was still listed on the B.C. Liberal Web site as party president. One click and you'd find him trumpeting his role in "electing Liberal MLAs" and "promoting the ideals and goals of the B.C. Liberal party."

Mr. Campbell's views on party people in public-service jobs is well documented.

Just three months ago the New Democratic Party government appointed Russ Pratt, who had significant party connections, as the \$134,000-a-year head of the homeowner protection office.

Mr. Campbell exploded with indignation. "This is the kind of appointment that makes the people of B.C. angry," the Liberal leader told Jim Beatty of The Vancouver Sun. "Mr. Pratt is purely and simply a political appointment.

"They have followed the NDP rulebook for taking care of their own and ignoring the public," he fulminated. "It undermines and besmirches the quality of the public service and it will not be tolerated by us."

No, siree. Such a thing simply could not happen under a Gordon Campbell B.C. Liberal administration: "We're going to have a professional, non-partisan public service – Period."

That was then, this is now. Interviewed by reporters just 24 hours after taking the oath of office as premier, Mr. Campbell gave the traditional defence for political patronage. He insisted Mr. Wilkinson was eminently qualified for the job.

The Liberal party president is both a lawyer and a doctor, so clearly he's a bright guy. But there's nothing on his resume to indicate experience in the intricacies of government-to-government relations. So it is hard to shake the suspicion that he was helped along by his party connections.

But as Mr. Campbell said, "I don't think you are excluded from participating in public service because of political activities in the past." In the past? As in "yesterday."

The premier also reminded reporters that the incoming government had done a "search right across the country to recruit deputy ministers." And one can just imagine the Liberals' surprise when, after they'd canvassed every hamlet from Bonavista to Vancouver Island, the right man for the job turned out to be sitting in the party president's office.

Two hours after that disappointing exchange with reporters, Mr. Campbell was in the legislative press theatre, taking the wraps off the biggest news of the day: a dramatic, \$1.5-billion reduction in the provincial income tax.

The cuts were a lot larger than anything the Liberals had discussed during the recent election campaign.

The bottom two rates, which did figure in Mr. Campbell's promises, were reduced. But he also hatched the top three brackets, something he never mentioned in his bid for the premier's office.

On the contrary, when the New Democrats accused the Liberals of secretly planning tax cuts for "the rich" – the top three brackets apply to people making more than \$60,000 a year – the Liberals complained that the NDP was misleading the public.

Mr. Campbell rejected the suggestion Wednesday that the Liberals had been harbouring plans all along to cut the top three tax brackets. But he was unable to cite any new information that has come his way since the election that would justify the sudden expansion in his tax-cutting intentions.

Happily for Mr. Campbell, most taxpayers won't worry too much about the unexpected windfall. They will take the money and run. And if he's right about how the economy works, they will spend enough of the windfall to generate a big return in government revenues.

If he's wrong, then we're in for some big deficits and/or some big spending cuts, and there's the darker side of the Liberal agenda manifesting itself again.

In a few months we'll know better which is the more reliable face of the Campbell administration.