

THE FREE PRESS OPINION

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"The theory of a free press is that the truth will emerge from free reporting and free discussion." Walter Lippman

THE PRINCE GEORGE FREE PRESS

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Time to protect kids

The coming week is Education Week in British Columbia. It is also the third Stop Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth Week in B.C. The irony is that the public needs to be educated on the horrors of child prostitution and the children need to be educated as to the different avenues available to them.

There is no doubt that any attempt to stamp out prostitution (or the sex trade, if that's less offensive a phrase) will be doomed from the beginning. Prostitution is not called the oldest profession in the world for nothing; it has always existed, will continue to exist and puritan values won't change that reality.

However, the public needs to make it clear that picking up underage children for use as a disposable sex toy is wrong. The children down on George Street plying their trade need our help, not our glares of indifference. This life is not an acceptable choice and we have to do more than just offer words.

Tougher penalties for johns is one way to begin reversing the child prostitution trend. But that's not enough. We need to, as a community, find ways to eliminate the circumstances that push them on to the street. We have a responsibility to those children, even if they have been abandoned and abused by their own parents.

It's not a favourite topic for many and it's a source of shame for others. But ultimately we will be judged as a community by how we treat the weakest in our midst. And right now we're not protecting our kids.

Where was Nettleton?

At the press conference on Friday morning to announce major funding for new science labs at the University of Northern British Columbia, there were two very interested spectators: Todd Whitcombe and Bryan Llewellyn. The men are the NDP hopefuls in Prince George-Mount Robson and Prince George North respectively.

There is no reason for them not to attend the announcement (especially in light of the fact Mr. Whitcombe is a chemistry professor at UNBC) but what is curious is how the event became a party announcement.

By choosing not to invite the Liberal hopefuls in the local ridings, the provincial government tried to share the glory with its new candidates.

As the election draws near, let's hope the provincial government doesn't continue to blur the lines and turn government announcements into messages brought to you by the NDP. Is that naive? Probably, but the NDP could score points by not trying to score points.

And let's not forget, UNBC resides within the confines of Liberal Paul Nettleton's riding. And no, he wasn't invited.



Premier confirms obvious

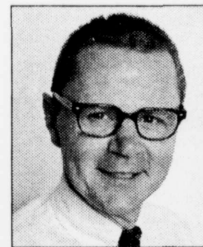
If you believed Premier Ujjal Dosanjh's televised infomercial this week, then Gordon Campbell will descend on B.C. like one of those giant monsters in Japanese Godzilla movies, breathing fire and stomping on cars and houses.

First he'll slash taxes, cackling wildly. Then he'll gut health care, kick kids out of schools, ban abortion and hire armies of fallers to cut every tree. And then, just for fun, Campbell will personally go out and kill off the grizzly bears.

Dosanjh's \$75,000 TV show, paid for by the party, outlined the NDP's election campaign plan, based on three main elements.

First, the party will be invisible. In 30 minutes, Dosanjh didn't once utter the words New Democratic Party or NDP. This will be the Dosanjh campaign.

Second, the Dosanjh team will focus on a few hot issues where it believes there's a perceived difference between the two parties. Most polls indicate the NDP can't be trusted to manage any area of government. But it's less weak on health care, education and helping poor people, and that's what Dosanjh pitched.



CAPITAL COMMENT

Paul Willcocks

And third, and most desperately and disappointingly, the party plans to sling mud at Campbell and the Liberals and hope some of it sticks.

Practically, that's a doomed tactic. Dosanjh's appeal comes from a sense that he's a decent man. Unfair attacks on Campbell undercut Dosanjh's own strongest selling point. And while Campbell is still not beloved, he's also no longer the

object of deep voter suspicion.

And during the TV broadcast, some of the attacks were clearly unfair and dishonest.

Dosanjh claimed that the Liberals have said they would cut \$1 billion from the health care budget. That's flat out untrue, and Dosanjh should know it. NDP spin doctors tried to manufacture the allegation by twisting comments by the Liberal leader last fall; it was a shoddy and transparent smear.

And he surprisingly devoted a section to abortion, hinting the Liberal ranks include a number of people aimed at ending choice.

Again, Campbell has been clear on his support for women's right to choose.

The speech didn't contain much substance.

The legislature will be back March 14, with a balanced budget and some legislation to follow. That sets the stage for an election call around the beginning of April and a vote in early May.

The Dosanjh talk gave an indication of what the election campaign will look like, and confirmed that the NDP has no magic tricks to turn around a hopeless situation.

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