

## ▼ From Front

# Ready for a change

After the controlled craziness of a campaign, election day is an odd moment for the expectant candidate. The work is not done, but the political hopeful's job is done; it is left to the election team to deal with the mundane details that lead to electoral success. It's a lot like being in the army, you hurry up and then are told to wait.

For Paul Nettleton, the day starts informally in Fort St. James. One of the difficult tasks of representing a northern riding is the time away from home and the 50-year-old takes the time to spend a few precious moments with the two children at home. Five-year-old Disa is a natural politician, greeting each new visitor and showing off the newest additions to the home, a pair of kittens. "Will you take my picture with daddy?" she asks and is not above a little coercion in the form of a hug. In contrast is almost 3-year-old Thorin, who prefers to watch the action from the comfort of his father's knee.

"Every time I'm getting ready to come back, Disa gets on the phone and says 'Don't forget my present, don't forget okay?' I always bring home some candy for her," says Mr. Nettleton.

Now it's time to vote and Disa, who has been canvassing her kindergarten class for support, is off to David Hoy Elementary accompanying mom and dad to the polling station. When that task is done, it's back to school for Disa and Mr. Nettleton heads down to the Gourmet Deli.

Walking into the deli is like walking into the town centre, as people come and go with a wave and a smile. Not a natural campaigner, Mr. Nettleton relaxes and swaps stories. But he's not the star here and is quite content to sit back and let others steal away the spotlight.

Most of the occupants pledge their allegiance to Mr. Nettleton and the Liberals. The explanation is a simple one: "We just want to go back to work," says one man, who notes the sawmills in Fort St. James



**Nervous moments working out little details before the results begin to**

**come in.** JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

took a total of 17 weeks downtime last year.

During this campaign much of the provincial focus, at least, has been on the fact Ed John is running in Prince George-Omineca. Appointed to cabinet without first being elected, many wondered whether Mr. John would prove popular as a mainstream politician and how the native community would respond.

Driving into town, the signs dotting the reserve lands belong to Ed John, while the placards for Paul Nettleton surround the blue and yellow NDP signs. But much like labour leaders support the NDP and the members don't follow, Mr. Nettleton has seemed to overcome some of the native distaste for Liberal politics. "A lot of them know me from my work as a lawyer," says Mr. Nettleton, who moved to the Fort to be the staff lawyer at the Dene Law Centre.

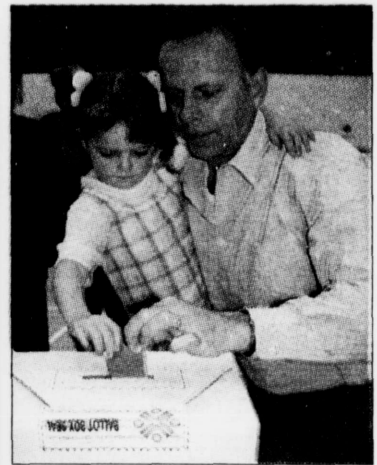
It's off to Vanderhoof, with wife Elite at the wheel. And if Mr. Nettleton expects support in his adopted hometown, he's grati-

fied by the support in the geographic centre of B.C.

As he walks the mall with former mayor Frank Reid, Mr. Nettleton stops to chat and most everyone says congratulations, as if the ballots have already been tabulated. "It's not over yet, we're not taking anything for granted," he tells one supporter. "It's over and congratulations," is her quick response.

Vanderhoof is proof of how far the Liberals and Mr. Nettleton have come in the past five years. In the last election, Elite Nettleton ran both offices and was a key organizer on election day. This time around, there was a small army of dedicated volunteers, led by June Clark, who turned her home into control centre on election day in an effort to get out every last vote.

The support is so strong in Vanderhoof some businesses have lent the campaign employees to make sure voters are called,



**Disa Nettleton, 5, helps her dad Paul vote in the general election.**

SHANE MILLS/FREE PRESS

identified and urged to vote.

With all the visiting and shaking hands near an end, the nervousness starts to set in as the polls near closing. In the hotel room, the hockey game between Pittsburgh and New Jersey heads into overtime and provides another distraction until the verdict of the voters is in. "But it's not as bad as last time," says Mrs. Nettleton, who has slowly gotten use to her role as a politician's wife.

For Mr. Nettleton, he's looking forward to the celebration and the work that follows. Downstairs in the ballroom of the Ramada Hotel, Mr. Nettleton is all smiles as he won the largest majority in the three Prince George ridings — capturing nearly 62 per cent of the vote.

As to what role he will play in government, Mr. Nettleton says that's unimportant and points to a devotion that he had read just that morning.

"Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me." (Psalm 131 Verse 1)

All that matters for Paul Nettleton is the waiting is over. He's now part of government.

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