



[Vince Byfield] The only separatist ever elected to the Legislature speaks out on what Albertans should do now

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Conspiracy aficionados are going to love this one. The year was 1982. “Teflon Ron” Reagan was entering his second year as President of the United States. Alberta families were struggling with the devastating economic crash that followed Prime Minister Trudeau’s massive tax grab known as the “National Energy Program” (or NEP, which pirated revenues from oil and gas but excluded all other forms of energy – notably hydro). Despite almost no media coverage to fuel it, Western Canadian alienation had reached sufficient critical mass that Alberta had actually elected its first – and only – openly-separatist politician: Gordon Kesler.

I managed to track down Mr. Kesler to get his perspective on our province’s current state of political unrest, and in doing so discovered a fascinating and, courtesy of this article, now de-classified rendezvous between Kesler and agents of the U.S. government.

But first a little background

Back in 1982, the economic devastation in Alberta caused by Trudeau's NEP proved too much for the young political renegade to bear. So Kesler helped found the Western Canada Concept, a party whose main objective was that the four westernmost provinces leave behind their confederation-enforced subservience and forge a brand new future as the independent nation of Western Canada.

Kesler's logic was that, as it is with all colonies, Canada had been founded with full economic power bestowed by Britain to a triad of city states: Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal. In essence, the British North America Act destined all Canadians living in outlying regions to forever be "hewers of wood and drawers of water." Whenever one of those outside areas began to prosper the powers invested in the BNA act enabled these three cities to inevitably "transfer" their wealth. Realistically, nothing would ever change this fundamental inequality of regions. Nothing that is, except a declaration of independence.

While door-knocking that frosty January in 1982 Kesler's message obviously had begun to resonate throughout the riding of Old-Didsbury. By the summer – a few months following his stunning by-election win and after managing to then muster up a full slate of candidates for the upcoming provincial election – Kesler received a curious call from the United States Consulate in Calgary requesting a meeting.

Kesler's brief encounter with the Deep State of *Canada*?

The consul asked Kesler to keep this meeting completely confidential. He claims to have so far honoured that request. But now – 37 years later – he thinks what happened in that session may have important bearing for Albertans today.

“It was quite strange. They drove me in an unmarked vehicle through to a back entrance of the consulate on Eighth Avenue that I didn't even know existed. I was then escorted up to a very “presidential” corner office on the penthouse floor. As the consul greeted me, I was shocked to see on his desk a large file folder – at least two inches thick – with my name on it.”

Kesler remembers commenting, “Boy, am I *that* interesting to you?” To which the consul replied, “We've followed you very closely and feel you would be an ally of the United States, but somebody else is sure interested in you. We made one phone call to the RCMP and that's what they sent us. Evidently, you're a *really* interesting fellow as far as *they* are concerned.” Kesler remembers the remainder of their hour-long interview focussing mainly on clarifying his party's future positions relating to trade with the United States should his provincial party form the government that fall.

Meanwhile, media coverage on Kesler and his fledgling party following his astonishing election win went from none at all to a full-on blistering attack from almost every media source in the province save one: Alberta Report Newsmagazine. “Your Dad and brother Link always gave us a fair shake,” said

Kesler. A reporter for the *Calgary Herald* at the time later informed Kesler of “things going on at the highest levels of his paper behind the scenes to destroy me that rocked me to the core. Some were absolutely shocking. They were serious about getting rid of us – whatever it took.” This smear campaign evidently accomplished its alleged objective, since Kesler and his fellow candidates lost all 79 races that November.

Fast forward 37 years

And so, when asked to comment on the current rise in western alienation sentiment here in Alberta, Kesler had four main points to make:

1. He's no longer so sure his original vision of the four western provinces setting off on their own is tenable for two reasons: British Columbia's stubborn refusal to meet Alberta's pipeline needs and the continuing consolidation of provincial power into Victoria and Vancouver. The economic avarice and short-sightedness of these two cities – currently focussed on fleecing the rest of B.C. – would likely extend eastward to the three other provinces, always using their coastal trade access as leverage.
2. He claims to have always been a “hopeful separatist” in that his first choice would be for Alberta to remain within Canada, but in a nation where power lay primarily at the “bottom” or community level rather than being in the hands of a select few senior cabinet ministers and bureaucrats – particularly when it came to tax and royalty collection. In Kesler's utopia, communities would gather revenues and then remit them upward to the provincial level who in turn would forward to the

nation's capital its "due share." Using this approach, he argues, would help to ensure that Ottawa was ever mindful of grassroots sentiments.

3. However, since such a scenario is politically unlikely, Alberta is best to ally itself with the largest of its neighbours in order to obtain the most advantageous economic trade benefits. Since Ottawa has proven incapable of standing up for the nation's best interests regarding resource management, and because regional rights are much better represented within the U.S. constitutional framework, it therefore makes sense for Albertans to begin exploring the possible advantages of securing special status with the United States. President Trump might even jump on this idea and agree to expedient Pacific coastal pipeline access should Alberta opt to become the first "Northern Canadian state." Additional bonuses to signing up include:
 - Courtesy of a much lower U.S. personal income tax rate every Albertan would essentially receive an instant 10% pay raise;
 - An end to our current \$1.3-Billion annual "transfer" to Quebec;
 - No longer having to pay GST.
4. In Kesler's political experience, most Albertans south of Calgary are already open to the idea of some form of political alliance with the United States. Many have roots and family on both sides of the border that go back for over a century. He believes it is the immigrant populations both in Calgary and further north – the British, Ukrainian and more recent immigrant groups that have no real personal American friendships to call upon and trust – that are more apt to respond emotionally, rather than rationally, to the possible advantages that come when Albertans ally themselves with Americans.

Gordon Kesler continues to act on his political values by

having moved to the United States (although he still maintains dual citizenship status).

What to make of Kesler's new "Albert-Exit" concept?

One may not agree entirely with his views but still find his political insights helpful, particularly when pondering what to do in our current political climate. I certainly see no harm in approaching President Trump to better understand what he might bring to the table.

Christians might also bear in mind that personal freedoms in the United States (religion, speech, parental rights, etc.) appear far better protected south of the border than in Canada. This is especially true now, in light of the unfortunate Supreme Court of Canada decision last year to deny graduates of Trinity Western University's new law school the right to practice in many provinces.

One thing is clear. Prime Minister Trudeau "The Second" is either incapable or unwilling to address our province's economic needs. Kesler and I can agree that his actions to sabotage the economic engine of both Alberta and much of Canada are tragic; at best incompetent and at worst malevolent. Many Albertans feel helpless since our future as an independent, landlocked nation would only make matters worse. However, I encourage you to set aside national pride for a while to reasonably consider all the pros and cons of Alberta becoming the 51st state. One thing is for sure. The more you do, the more likely Ottawa is to finally sit up and take notice.

Vince Byfield