



# Surprise me

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LIKE MOST BRITISH COLUMBIANS, I was both surprised, and not surprised, by Gordon Campbells resignation.

Surprised by the exact timing; only a week earlier. Mr. Campbell had re-arranged his cabinet, hired a new chief of staff and press secretary, and spent \$250,000 of your money on a prime-time TV broadcast announcing he planned to spend a further \$2 billion of your money on a tax cut he hoped would restore his popularity. Not what you'd expect from someone planning to step aside a few days later.

Not surprised by the fact of his departure; the HST was the last straw for many British Columbians, and while much of the anger directed at his government this last year focused on this hated tax its roots run deep. Governments of all stripes must make unpopular decisions, but what rankled most about Mr. Campbells approach was a consistent tendency for high-handedness, short-sightedness and a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the suffering of British Columbias most vulnerable people.

Perhaps the best example of this approach is the minimum wage. For nine long years Mr. Campbell refused to allow an increase even as every other province, and neighbouring state, raised their own.

Another is child poverty. For the last seven years, BC has suffered the worst rate of child poverty in Canada ... currently about 87,000 BC children are living in poverty. While Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador have all committed to poverty reduction plans, Mr. Campbells government has ignored the problem or made excuses. The callousness of this is one thing, the short-sightedness another; ignoring the needs of these children will cost government and society much more down the line.

The record on health care is no different. Mr. Campbell came to power with simplistic ideas about health care and cost control. For nearly a decade he then ignored advice from outside his inner circle and the results of his own public consultations. The results are hardly surprising: wait lists are still too long, facilities are still overcrowded, shortages are still unmet, and a long list (see the whole thing on our web site) of short-sighted cuts to programs protecting the vulnerable mean that costs will go up as the damage plays through the system.

Can his successor undo all of this? Can they shake off the legacy of Mr. Campbell and force the BC Liberal Party to take an honest, inclusive and long-term approach the challenges of our health care system?

Now that would be a real surprise. 

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