

**U.S. analysts keep wary eye on B.C. political scene.** By Stanley Tromp.  
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The American State Department correctly predicted a Liberal win in the 2001 B.C. provincial election, called the 1996 one too close to call, and mourned the loss of the Social Credit party in 1991.

It also called then-NDP leader Glen Clark a "masterful" campaigner, and described Liberal leader Gordon Campbell as ideologically "very conservative" although "passive" and "tentative" in campaigning style.

The observations and conclusions of various unnamed policy analysts are contained in State Department records released recently after a request under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act.

According to the documents, in February 2001, the U.S. consulate in Vancouver wrote to the State Department in Washington, D.C., on Campbell's reach for the top job.

"Flush with huge infusions of corporate cash, the Liberal party's campaign machinery is eager for battle," it noted. "Based on all the polling data available, the opposition Liberal party should win a landslide and control anywhere from 60 to the entire slate of 75 seats in the provincial legislative assembly."

On election night, the NDP gained 21 per cent of the vote and just two seats.

The same State Department documents predicted that Campbell would "make the case for a seasoned and experienced team to come in and competently manage the province and get the economy back on track. He will present a platform of reducing personal and corporate tax rates, eliminating onerous government regulations, and creating a more business friendly labour code."

Another U.S. analyst concluded that during the struggle between B.C.'s left and right wing parties, "neither side has been all that extreme" to American eyes.

Regarding the 1996 provincial election, the consulate wrote a week before the vote that the result was "too close to call." (The NDP won a majority, although with a minority of the popular vote.)

"The premier has played a masterful hand since taking office," the Americans wrote of NDP leader Glen Clark's campaign strategy. "The essence of the Liberal slide is twofold. First, Gordon Campbell pales in comparison to Clark in most public aspects of the leadership role. Whereas Clark is glib and aggressive, Campbell seems reserved and tentative. Where Clark has passion, Campbell is passive. Second, and perhaps more basic, Campbell is leading a party that is anything but united."

The Americans lamented the bitter relations between Clark and the U.S. government. "When Clark wants to hurl the ultimate insult, he will accuse the Liberals of engaging in 'American style' politics, or otherwise implying that the Liberal tactic is somehow 'American and therefore shady.' When asked by a Portland, Oregon paper if he had hired any U.S. spin doctors, Clark acted insulted and stormed off.... [Then Clark tried to] land the knockout punch by comparing Campbell to House Speaker Newt Gingrich."

In the 1991 provincial election between Social Credit premier Rita Johnston and NDP leader Mike Harcourt, the consulate called an NDP victory "almost certain."

The U.S. called the Socred campaign a disaster: "By the end, the press labelled the journey the 'Throw Premier Mom from the Train' campaign trip.

"What has the NDP been doing? Almost nothing. And doing it very well.... Fringe elements of the party have made some outrageous statements on Pacific yew exports to the U.S., USN ship visits, and health care issues. But the NDP leadership has neither contradicted nor supported the assertions.... Harcourt avoided substance like the plague....

"The NDP could, however, win a sixty-plus seat majority, a prospect that reportedly frightens even Mike Harcourt. It would leave him with too many mischief-making backbenchers and us [the United States] as the occasional target of their interest.

"The election promises to be entertaining, if brutal, but the outcome is both predictable and not necessarily pleasing."

The consulate concluded "We are going to miss Social Credit. While the party's support for our policies was often only lip service, we at least got that. Harcourt's NDP is unlikely to be any more difficult to work with on most issues, but we may have to get used to taking verbal barbs from an unexpected quarter -- the B.C. government."