

crisis. They try to create an atmosphere of conflict. They create an atmosphere of controversy and conflict and confrontation and chaos. That is their whole strategy. Mr. Speaker, if the truth be known, electricity rates are falling. More competition has come onstream. As I said before, we've had more generation than we've ever had before. We have cogeneration projects that we've never seen before.... Mr. Speaker, those are the good stories, and that is the kind of information that the Liberals in their absolute desperation to get us fired refuse to tell the public. Instead, they depend on misinformation and untruths.

Mr. MacDonald: Speaking of misinformation, why is this government continuing to spend \$3-million of consumers' money on a propaganda campaign from the Public Affairs Bureau to convince us that energy deregulation is what we want when in reality we know that it has not worked and will not work?

Mr. Klein: I would rather spend no money at all, but sometimes you have to spend money to combat the absolute misinformation—the misinformation—and the untruthful propaganda that's being put out by the Liberals. Mr. Speaker, I don't like to spend this money, but they force us to through their program and their aggressive campaign of conflict and controversy and confusion and chaos. We don't like to do that. If they would start to tell the truth and be responsible, then we wouldn't have to spend those kinds of dollars.

Mr. MacDonald: Then to the premier, Mr. Speaker: would it not be cheaper for the premier's office to click onto www.altaliberals.ab.ca to see what a real electricity policy looks like instead of spending valuable tax dollars going to London to try to find an affordable and reliable electricity policy because the government knows they currently do not have one?

Mr. Klein: It is precisely their website that is the problem. That... website is full of propaganda, is full of misinformation, Mr. Speaker. Those seven people over there have no policy to develop. They have no responsibility for the development of policy. All they do is sit around and dream up ways of trying to frustrate the government. They are so desperate, Mr. Speaker—so desperate—to do something to get recognition, to get noticed. When you ask who any member of the Liberal Party is, the majority of Albertans couldn't name any of them. So they are so desperate that they put up websites, that they spread misinformation, that they issue press releases. They do everything that they possibly can to discredit the government. Well, guess what? The people of this province elected 73 of us and only seven of them.

REACTION

Through the Liquor Glass

In June 2003 the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Parkland Institute released "Sobering Result: The Alberta Liquor Retailing Industry Ten Years After Privatization". An examination of the province's decision to privatize the industry a decade earlier, the study received more media coverage than any previously published by Parkland. In the following article, report author Greg Flanagan, a public finance economist in Alberta, reflects on the media maelstrom "Sobering Result" generated. The complete report is available at www.ualberta.ca/~parkland/research/studies/sobering-result-final.pdf.

A properly functioning democracy requires a well informed citizenry. A well informed citizenry requires competent and effective media. Issues need intelligent analysis, public debate and, ultimately, *political* decisions. Public policy issues are usually complex and not conducive to simple interpretations, yet media often only want to hear contradictory opinions rather than serious analysis of the political questions raised.

About eight journalists were at the Parkland Institute offices in Edmonton when "Sobering Result" was released. I spent the rest of the day on the phone with radio and newspaper reporters from throughout Alberta and British Columbia and was interviewed for follow-up stories for months. I was also a guest on several radio call-in shows, often facing off "against" someone with an opposing viewpoint.

Overall, the opportunity to get the "facts" out to the public has been excellent: readers, listeners and viewers learned how dramatically privatization has changed the industry. A decade later, for example, the number of retailers in Alberta has more than tripled from roughly 300 to nearly 1,000 and stores are now open longer every day except Christmas. There are now approximately 4,000 jobs in the industry, compared to 1,300 in 1993, but wages have fallen from more than \$14 per hour (in current dollars), plus a benefits package and civil service pension, to approximately \$7 per hour.

Interestingly, however, no media outlets seemed particularly interested in pursuing the very real social issues related to liquor consumption, such as ill health effects, fetal alcohol syndrome, family violence and divorce, crime and lost productivity. This could be because they feel the public cannot relate these issues directly to any difference in retailing and see them as a consequence of selling and consuming liquor regardless of the retail marketing circumstances.

WARNING Corporate media rarely questions the assertions of economic, military and security "experts"

Please turn off television in or near wartime; read all contents of corporate news vehicles skeptically —Media Health Canada

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