



Red Deer: Separation if necessary...: The Winning Conditions

By Marco Navarro-Génie, president of the Haultain Research Institute.¹

Good morning, and thank you for that introduction. Thank you to Danny for inviting me to speak here today. I am a guy of many hats and I appear here this morning as a senior fellow of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, and as president of the freshly created Haultain Research Institute.

Some of you may know, I am recently returned to Alberta from my six-year exile in Atlantic Canada, perfectly timed to avoid almost the entirety of the Alberta NDP years.

It is germane to mention that before my first 24 years in Alberta I lived in Quebec for 11 years. I saw the 1980 from the vantage point of Montreal and the 1995 referendum from Calgary. Equally germane it may be to confess that I am a recovering academic, having endured 20 years of political correctness in its highest concentrations before jumping into the public policy world 10 years ago.

Last time I spoke in Red Deer was at the Wild Rose convention when we had just published a paper on Equalization. While lots has changed since then, much that still needs changing remains the same.

I am not in favour of changing things for sake of changing them. But as we all realise, there is much we need to change if we want things in Alberta to be as good as they used to be.

[slide 2]

Statement of the problem:

I agree with Leon Craig that we must concentrate on changing things for Alberta, but it does no harm in recognising that Alberta and Saskatchewan are both landlocked territory.

This is a problem of geography, which needs to be distinguished from the other problems. The current problem of Alberta and Saskatchewan isn't that they are landlocked per se. There are lots of territories in the world, some independent states and some sub-national states, that are geographically landlocked and do not have trouble getting their goods to market.

For all the inequity and unfairness in policy that Alberta and Saskatchewan have been subjected to since they were carved out of the Northwest Territories and became provinces in 1905, being

¹ This is the text of the presentation delivered in Red Deer at the Freedom Talk Conference on November 16, 2019. It is provided as a courtesy by request, and must not be distributed or publicly quoted without the explicit and written permission of the author:
mng@HaultainResearch.org



landlocked has not been the principal problem. The chief problem has been that the prairie provinces have been treated as colonies by the Laurentian elites, Roman Provinces we heard yesterday, and since they acquired more clout with the primacy of their energy wealth, there is now an attempt at clipping their power by constraining the supply of the resource that has made them wealthy. The goal is to blockade the resource, and that is not a geographical problem.

The green doom is an excuse. Foreign tankers filled with oil navigate into the waters of the Bay of Fundy, where even a small spillage at Saint John can cause damage along thousands of kilometres of richly unique ecosystems along the coast lines, parks and natural reserves in two provinces.

Let me also remind you that there is no formal or informal campaign from Ottawa to stop the oil productions in Newfound and Labrador, or in Nova Scotia. No prime minister has ever visited that part of the country and announce her desire to keep their oil beneath the ocean. Do we not care about the ecology in Atlantic Canada? So, again, this is not about the environment: the end goal is to blockade and trap the oil in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The green doom is the means by which Laurentians are chocking our economies, and in that sense, ladies and gentlemen, Alberta and Saskatchewan could be islands on an ocean, but Ottawa might still find other ways to restrict the sale of our oil. I remind you that getting the oil to tide water isn't enough. Exports still require the approval of the federal government, and as such there is a real chance that even with access, they would find ways to keep it from reaching far away markets.

But the problem goes beyond the people who are currently running Ottawa. The people who are currently running Ottawa are quite clearly the representatives of a large portion of the country, the dominant population of the country, who has declared war on our principle resources under the ecological banner. That's not going to change with changing administrations. Again, access to tidal water isn't the problem there. The war against our oil is 100 per cent political.

If you think that I am taking too much of an interpretive license in reading the facts before us, allow me to remind you of the words of a younger Justin Trudeau on a radio interview in Quebec before he became PM, before he became better-schooled in the political art of concealing what he means.

Paraphrasing and translating, he said that Canada belongs to Quebecers, and that the country can only best be run by Quebec Liberals. He went on to say that whatever troubles Canada had at the time, it was because Albertans were running things. Power therefore needed to be wrestled away from Albertans.

This last point has key political implications for conducting negotiations to reform and improve the federation. Despite the manifested words of the PM on election night that he



wants to address our concerns, Premier Moe of Saskatchewan met with platitudes and climate slogans from Justin Trudeau when Moe went to visit the prime minister at the beginning of this week. One can only negotiate with those who are open to negotiate and willing to accept that your position is different but valid.

So the problem is a multifaceted problem that cannot be fixed with a single solution.

One of the options is to break away, and I would like to look at that option somewhat closely. Not to endorse it and not to dismiss it. But to examine it in the light of the conditions necessary to adopt it.

My operating premise is that this option to become independent, and all the other options, must be carefully considered. Because it is the option that most requires a democratic consensus, we need to air it well, talk as well as listen to our friends and neighbors, it would do us well to drill down on what it takes, not just what it means.

So I will call the option independence, as in the act of constituting a sovereign state. This is the remedial option that is the furthest from the Status Quo. Between the current situation there are gradations of options, which include gaining as much autonomy as the current constitutional framework allows to a sovereignty-association as proposed by Rene Levesque for Quebec.

Most importantly, this option needs most careful consideration because failing at it would cause significant damage to Alberta and Albertans.

[slide 3]

To pick up on Barry Cooper's presentation about the seriousness with which this option needs to be treated, I would borrow from Lucien Bouchard's expression of achieving "the winning conditions," or "les conditions gagnantes," for a referendum. We have pretty much all agreed that this must be done, if done at all, with the consent of the citizens.

After the second referendum in 1995 at the time of near-victory, Lucien Bouchard spoke about the necessity to achieve the winning conditions before trying again. I would like for Albertans to consider the winning conditions before trying at all.

Now, Lucien Bouchard never outlined what he understood to be the winning conditions. But analysing the situation can give us an idea of what the conditions were for Quebec in 1995 when they came so close, and then surmise what else they would have needed.

1. Control of the government and a sitting premier that supported the option
2. Control of the legislature in Quebec City and the government machine of the province and its institutions

These first two crucial things gave them control of the referendum agenda, the legislation passed to enable it, control of the question to ask and how to ask it, the timing of the vote,



the rules for campaigning to minimise federal intervention, including spending limits.

3. Presence of an informal institution, the Parti Quebecois, mandated to push and promote, carry the water for the cause of Independence. The PQ was formed in 1968 out of the merger of the main three organizations wishing Quebec to become independent. It took them nearly a decade to capture power and 12 years to hold a referendum on their terms.
4. Support of the trade unions and the intellectual class, not as much from the business class.
5. Strong set of representatives in Ottawa (the Bloc Quebecois in 1995) that supported the option. This gave their cause and ideas more visibility, inside and outside Quebec.
6. A basic and steady support of the sovereignty option among of the population of about one third of the voters.
7. A less Ottawa-centered media. Radio-Canada may be a federal institution but the people working in it had less allegiance to the CBC Masters in Toronto. The same for TVA and the local radio stations. Most of our traditional media and some of our alternative media in Alberta are based in Toronto. The Rebel is based in Toronto! (:

With all of these favourable elements, Quebec sovereigntists still lost by a nose.

Alberta doesn't have half of these at the moment.

1. Jason Kenney is a great Albertan, but he considers himself a Canadian patriot. I am not saying that Kenney would never support the option of Independence for Alberta and Saskatchewan. I am saying he is not there now.
2. No control of the legislature in Edmonton nor the government machine of the province and its institutions.
No control of the referendum agenda, no the legislation to enable it, no control of the question to ask or how to ask it, and no control on the timing of the vote, the rules for campaigning to minimise federal intervention, including spending limits.
3. In AB there is no informal institution dedicated to harness the energy, effort and ingenuity of the movement. Such thing requires ideas, organization, leadership and money. But the most important thing it requires is will and perseverance.



4. The left-wing trade unions and the intellectual class are against the Independent option, but a good deal of the Alberta business class supports it.
5. Our federal representatives are federalists, and they were elected as such. Some of them might harbour sympathies with the movement here, but they are not going to voice it openly, and many will oppose it, naturally.
6. Right now, over a third of Albertans support the notion of Independent Alberta –but because it has not been sustained and steady, it is difficult to see how long it will last, how much it may fall to or grow to. Time will tell.
7. By and large a very Ottawa-centered media, with minor exceptions. I am glad to see that the Western Standard has been resurrected, but more will be needed.
8. Weak Federal Leadership and Central government
9. Indifference from rest of the country. The Czech example

Last week in this very room, Preston Manning said that the option to separate must remain an option, but it cannot be the only option.

Preston didn't elaborate as to his reasoning, but I agree in principle with the notion of pursuing all avenues for meaningful change to the status quo, even if perhaps for different reasons.

For Alberta to become independent, it will take much more than being angry. What we can learn from the Quebec experience is that to come even close to the winning conditions takes time.

[slide 4]

To run toward a referendum on Independence next year under current conditions would be a sure way to fail, and failure would damage the cause of Alberta. Not just the cause of separation. If Albertans go to the polls to vote on separating and fail, the independence option will be disregarded as a bluffing strategy and will damage the cause of Alberta being able to protect itself from a predatory Ottawa and a destructive Eco-Nirvana movement.

If the Independence of Alberta is the right thing to do, and it might be, then rushing to it will do the cause no favours. If the Independence of Alberta is the right thing to do, it is worth doing it right. If the Independence of Alberta is the right thing to do, then care to convince as many Albertans of its righteousness must be taken.

The framework allows for the Independence of a province that is supported by its people. That means a democratic vote, and given the attitude of Ottawa and what is at stake, it will need to be



an overwhelming majority, and it will best done in tandem with Saskatchewan. Perhaps it's time to revisit the dream that was once Frederick Haultain's to forge out of Alberta and Saskatchewan a single jurisdiction.

Now, to be sure, I am not saying that Albertans do nothing in the face of the current status quo. I am saying we use all available tools at our disposal. We start by implementing the Alberta Agenda, and I agree with Prem Singh, we need not debate these issues we have been considering since 2001. There are things we need to think a bit more about, "firewall letter" is not likely one of them.

Now, a shameless plug. This is what Haultain Research Institute has been tasked to do. It is not a political party and it is not a political club. We mean to summon the best minds available to conduct the best research possible to inform the people of Alberta and Saskatchewan on two fundamental things. Examine the experience of other territories becoming independent inside democratic states, and examine the experiences and strategies of landlocked states to prosper. Our goal is to do these things outside of the standard 140 characters.

Visit our page: HaultainResearch.org

Two things: register your preference and we will provide a measure of the temperature of the conference on the feelings of separation. Feel free to hit the contribution button and help us do the work we are setting out to do and think through beyond the already proposed Alberta Agenda to new ideas.

/mng.