

## A 30th anniversary celebration to remember



*BCYP President Chris Coulson, guest speaker Angus Reid, Association President Penny Priddy, Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Judith Guichon and Hon. Speaker Darryl Plecas at the 2017 Association Annual Dinner.*

More than 100 former MLAs, their spouses and friends packed the dining hall at Government House Sept. 22nd to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Association of Former MLAs of BC.

It was a special evening on many levels including touching opening remarks by Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Judith Guichon who is at the end of her five-year vice-regal appointment; a short, but powerful message from BC Youth Parliament Premier Chris Coulson; and an impactful polling lesson from the country's pre-eminent surveyor of public opinion Angus Reid.

And, taking it all in from his seat in the audience, was the AFMLABC's most senior of members, Gordon Gibson, a founding director of the association.

BCYP Premier Coulson really nailed the commonality between the youth movement and the AFMLABC which financially supports the BCYP's annual December sitting in the BC Legislature: "We teach our members that the nature of democracy is in service to our communities ... In that vein, there is very much a passing of the torch here tonight."

More stories and many more pictures from the Government House event are featured on pages 6 through 11.

**Her Honour**

**The Honourable Judith Guichon, OBC**

Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia

# Thank You and Miscellany

*Orders of the Day* is published regularly throughout the year, and is circulated to Association members, all MLAs now serving in Legislature, other interested individuals and organizations.

Material for the newsletter is always welcome and should be sent in written form to:

P.O. Box 31009  
University Heights P.O.  
Victoria, B.C. V8N 6J3

Or emailed to [ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com](mailto:ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com)  
or [ootd@shaw.ca](mailto:ootd@shaw.ca)

Editor: Brian Kieran  
Layout/Production/Research: Rob Lee

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*The Association of Former MLAs of British Columbia is strictly non-partisan, regardless of members' past or present political affiliation. Founded in 1987, the Association was formally established by an Act of the British Columbia Legislature on February 10, 1998.*

*Orders of the Day was conceived, named and produced in its early stages by Bob McClelland, former MLA and cabinet minister, following his retirement from office. Hugh Curtis ably helmed this publication up through May 2014.*

## From the Editor's Desk

The AFMLABC's 30th anniversary dinner at Government House had it all. It was a great stroll down memory lane - Jim Hume, Brian Smith and Terry Huberts were at our table with many stories to tell.

Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Judith Guichon and veteran pollster Angus Reid offered some telling reflections on the challenges we face today. Their stories are on pages 6 and 7.

And, BC Youth Parliament Premier Chris Coulson gave us compelling evidence that BC's future governance will be in good hands. His message was simple and elegant: "MLAs and MPs do not solely practice democracy in the halls of Parliament, or institutions like Government House, and as former elected officials, you all understand that democracy begins at home, in our communities.

"You contributed to your communities by listening to constituents, volunteering, attending events and more. The BC Youth Parliament is much the same. We teach our members that the nature of democracy is in service to our communities, that public service means returning to our communities and honouring our promise of 'youth serving youth.'"

I want to send a special shout out to John Yanyshyn whose photos of the event are superb. John and I started working together in 1980 when I came to Victoria for the Vancouver Sun and he was just starting up his business. One of the good ones!

If you would like a picture of yourself taken by John at the event just give him a buzz at (250) 361-7170, or email him at [viswest@islandnet.com](mailto:viswest@islandnet.com).



And, finally, a round of applause for our president, Penny Priddy, who will lead the AFMLABC for a second year.

## A message from the President

The 30th anniversary of the Association of Former MLAs of BC was well and truly celebrated at Government House on September 22nd.

The ballroom had a special feeling that evening.

The Lieutenant Governor welcomed us to Government House with very insightful comments on BC today and in the future.

We were very pleased that Gordon Gibson, one of the founding members of the organization was there to help us celebrate. Our guest speaker Angus Reid held everyone's attention as he offered his wisdom and experience on how public opinion is shaped; the myriad of factors that affect how citizens respond to polling; and, what poll results really mean in our democracy.

Chris Coulson from the British Columbia Youth Parliament spoke about the importance of hearing the voices and opinions of younger citizens and he thanked the Hugh Curtis Memorial Fund for providing financial assistance to BCYP to allow youth outside Victoria to participate.



Our slide presentation allowed people to offer assistance in identifying guests from earlier dinners.

Thank you to everyone who worked to make this a success and to everyone who came. You made the evening special.

Penny Priddy



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# BC's iconic political scientist Norman Ruff is gone

Associate Professor Emeritus Norman Ruff passed away in August at age 78.

Ruff was one of BC's most respected political scientists influencing a generation of politicians and Legislature reporters.

Ruff spent 36 years as a professor of political science at the University of Victoria, barely slowing down after his retirement in 2005. His classes, including undergraduate courses in BC and Canadian political science, helped inspire numerous students to go on to become legislative interns, MLAs, cabinet ministers and political staffers.

Premier John Horgan said: "He was a thoughtful and unique commentator, whose opinions were respected by all sides. His close study of BC politics gave him insights few others could match. He helped regular people understand the unique and tumultuous nature of BC politics."

Former premier Christy Clark also praised Ruff, whose commentary spanned her political career. "He was a rare specimen: A political scientist who understood that politics isn't a science at all – it's an art."

Ruff was born in Barking, Essex and grew up in East London and worked in a variety of jobs before graduating from Southampton University in 1961. At various times before launching his academic career he was a farm labourer, assembly line worker, a baker and a postal worker.

He left England for better professional opportunities in Canada, joining the Treasury Board in New Brunswick in 1962, completing his MA (PoliSci) at McMaster in 1965 and PhD at McGill in 1973.

Ruff joined UVic's Political Science Department as faculty in 1969, spending the next 36 years there before retiring in 2005. From the first years of his teaching career he was energized by the student advocacy on campus and quickly became known for his unique ability to balance academic work with his contributions to lively public discourse.

He served as a member of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for BC, as the Director of the BC Government Executive Development Training Program, as a Member of the National Advisory Committee for Fair Vote Canada, and as Academic Advisor to the BC Legislative Internship Program.

Ruff was an expert in and a passionate advocate for electoral reform in BC and Canada, drawing on his international studies for perspective, particularly his time in New Zealand.



We remember him best as a respected political commentator, widely quoted during provincial and federal elections. Ruff took to heart the concept of knowledge mobility, educating not only his students, but taking academia to the masses as well. At one point, he hosted a weekly radio show, "In the Ruff," on CKNW Radio in Vancouver.

Among many awards over a storied career, Ruff was recognized with the Pierre de Celles Award from the Institute of Public Administration of Canada in 2005, granted to "exceptionally effective and creative teachers."

"I still feel quite overwhelmed," Ruff said at the time of the award. "It's really something. IPAC is the professional institute for public administrators across the country, and it's an honour to receive this award. I just retired, so I'm missing not going back to teach. Teaching has always been extremely important to me, and my students recognize that."

He said having respect for his students was part of his teaching philosophy. A scholarship was established in Ruff's name by the department of political science, with the annual award recognizing the best undergraduate student in Canadian politics at UVic.

Beyond retirement, Ruff continued as an associate professor emeritus with UVic, unselfishly giving of his time and skills for many years. He is survived by his two children Andy (Louise) and Simonne (Saeed) along with four grandchildren (Annabelle, Alfie, Kahveh, and Arya).

## A message from UVic President Jamie Cassels:

"Norman Ruff was an inspiration to generations of young scholars at UVic. As a political scientist, his learned, intuitive commentary was a staple of news coverage and analysis during numerous elections.

"Colleagues recall media reporters lining up outside his office for the opportunity to glean even the smallest nugget of incisive wisdom and well-informed opinion of happenings on the political front.

"Dr. Ruff was one of our most prominent public intellectuals and he contributed to debate and understanding of political issues, explaining

complex matters in ways that made sense to people from all walks of life. It has been said that Dr. Ruff graciously observed every side of the political spectrum with equal insight, accuracy and thought. Respected by all, he was held in the highest esteem by politicians of all stripes, even among those who were in the critical crosshairs.

"Perhaps the greatest tribute to Dr. Ruff is that many of his students graduated and went on to prominence, building meaningful and influential careers in public service and politics. He will long be remembered and missed by UVic and the greater community."

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# Looking back with “wonder and humility”

*(Her Honour Lieutenant Governor Judith Guichon's address to the 30th anniversary gathering of the AFMLABC ... edited for length.)*

As I prepare for the next chapter in my story, I look back at these incredible five years with wonder and humility. It has been such an honour to serve, and the memories I have accumulated will indeed provide me with stories with which to entertain my grand-daughters for years to come.

When I began, two of my goals were to visit every valley, and to try to increase the understanding between urban and rural populations.

I have been fairly successful in achieving the first of these goals and indeed have been privileged to visit almost every corner of this great province. But, as far as creating better understanding between urban and rural populations, I am not sure that I can list any great success in that area.

At the opening of a new program, the Indigenous Educational Program at Vancouver Island University, I explained that I have a better understanding than most of



the challenges for students who must make the transition to the city university, because of the experience of my late husband, a ranch kid. When sent off to UBC, he did not make it through the first year. It was too far from home in every way.

For many rural folks, our perceptions and instincts are entirely different from city dwellers, and nothing smells, looks, or seems the same.

I understand this because of my own experience, which was somewhat reversed. Having travelled from Montreal to Whitehorse, I met a young pilot, yes, that same ranch kid. I was astounded as we walked down the streets of Whitehorse; he said hi and smiled his incredible warm greeting to everyone he met. In Montreal, I was taught to walk down the street, look neither right nor left and get where I was going as quickly as possible.

This difference is part of the reason I agreed to take on my present position. I believe that the gap has grown over the years.

It astounds me when I ask city dwellers where their power comes from or the origin of their water supply, that many merely shrug and are almost universally uninterested. It is not surprising, therefore, that we have difficulty getting people to take responsibility for their water or cut down on power consumption. They seem to think it is all part of some mysterious unending supply chain that will never stop providing. I worry that as generations become further removed from the land, we lose community, and that civil society becomes less civil.

I have not left any grand legacies behind at Government House, no enhancements to the garden, no totems or bandstands. My only legacy, while difficult to prove, is I pray that I have left a few stewards for the future behind in communities throughout the province. Young people who will perhaps look beyond the pavement and realize the interconnectedness of our planet, and the necessity to treat this earth gently.

This sesquicentennial has been a great opportunity to look back and consider our history. I have told students we are a nation born mainly of conversation rather than confrontation.

All of you also came to Victoria from your various constituencies to serve. Not for the money, not for the glory, and certainly not for the leisure time. You came here to serve your community; to help your neighbors; and, to work to keep this province productive, successful and safe for future generations.

Thank you to all of you who have served us in so many ways for so many years, and thank you also to your families who have been there for you along the way.

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# Reid: “Thankless task or taskless thanks”

“I have always had respect for people who spend time in service as elected officials,” iconic Canadian pollster Angus Reid told more than 100 guests at the 30th anniversary banquet of the Association of Former MLAs of BC at Government House.

“Increasingly it seems to be a thankless task. Or if you are lucky enough to end up in the Senate of Canada – a taskless thanks.

“When I accepted this invitation many months ago I had no idea that I would be addressing this group in the midst of a sea change in government here in BC.

“The need for independent research is stronger than ever because the historical source of that research, the media, has no money. And, polling companies need to survive by doing commercial work for the private and public sectors.

“This really puts constraints on the for-profit players. They don’t look at issues that they should because they don’t want to offend their masters. This is especially the case with highly centralized polling budgets in places like premiers’ offices and the PMO. It’s not that their pollsters fudge the numbers; it is just that they don’t cover issues that might embarrass their clients.

“And, there can be a tendency to tilt questions in a direction. At the Institute, we are trying to avoid these pitfalls.”

Reid said polling has changed. “Anyone can call themselves a pollster, but like wine there is good stuff and there is bad. Aggregators are running the business. In the UK, the online Brexit polls showed a very close race while telephone polling showed a wide margin. Taking an average was as stupid as mixing good wines with bad.”

Polling is more difficult than ever but the need is greater than ever – especially for independent non-partisan research, the pollster said.

Turning to the scene in BC, Reid said Premier John Horgan is currently enjoying a 48 per cent approval rating, the highest for any premier in BC in 20 years. That’s almost as high as retiring Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall who has been the most popular premier in the country.

Reid said five issues will define Horgan’s first two years and he provided the polling numbers for each:

1. Electoral reform: Support for proportional representation is almost 2:1 over our current ‘first passed the post’ system (65 per cent vs 35 per cent).



*Angus Reid speaks at the 2017 Association Annual Dinner.*

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2. BC Hydro’s Site C dam project. Go ahead vs cancel: Yes - 45 per cent, no - 27 per cent, undecided - 28 per cent. With undecideds netted out it becomes yes - 62 and no - 38.

3. TransMountain pipeline. Most want to see it go ahead as planned vs. being cancelled: Yes - 47 per cent, no - 33 per cent and undecided - 20 per cent. Netting out the undecided it is yes - 59 per cent and no - 41 per cent.

4. Health Care. It is not just about solving the fentanyl crisis.

5. Housing and transportation. They are hot button issues, number one in urgency say 24 per cent of BCers.

Finally, if an election were held tomorrow, the main party support would be: NDP 30 per cent, Liberals 29 per cent, Greens 14 per cent with 21 per cent undecided.

“So, it’s really a question of what kind of government Horgan is going to run,” Reid said.

This means a number of things: How he plays the labour union card; maintaining close ties with the business community; protecting BC’s interests in Ottawa; having ‘a grand vision’ that everyone can agree on; and, not getting petty – like premiers Brian Pallister in Manitoba and Kathleen Wynne in Ontario.

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# Images from the 2017 Association Annual Dinner

These following images are a small sample of the photographs taken during this year's Annual Dinner by John Yanyshyn of Vision West Photography.

If you would like a picture of yourself taken by John at the event, contact him at (250) 361-7170, or email him at [viswest@islandnet.com](mailto:viswest@islandnet.com).



*Association Secretary Ken Jones, Association President Penny Priddy, former MLA Dan Miller and Mary Lou Marksteiner*



*Former MLA George Abbott, Association Director Jeff Bray, Tabitha Bray and former MLA Murray Coell*



*Association Treasurer James Gorst and former Legislative Librarian Joan Barton*



*Anne Beckett and Jim Hume*



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Surrey Councillor Judy Higginbotham, former MLA Gordon Gibson, former MLA Joan Pottinger, Jane Baynham and Paige Straub



Linda Reid with representatives from the BC Youth Parliament



Former Speaker Linda Reid and Hon. Speaker Darryl Plecas



Former MPs Judd Buchanan and David Anderson



BCYP Premier Chris Coulson



Angela Larsen, Karen Armstrong (both from the Speaker's Office), Iona Reid (Legislative Library) and Ellice Schneider (Human Resources)



Angus Reid; former MLA Ida Chong; and Sachi Kurl, Executive Director of the Angus Reid Institute

# Olive barks herself a Vice-Regal dog house

By Corey Van't Haaff

We've all been there, holding one end of the leash while at the other end, a dog barks inappropriately. We might laugh it off, shrink in embarrassment, or even enroll in some positive reinforcement dog training.

The stakes were a little higher for Olive, a purebred yellow Labrador Retriever born at the end of October 2015. Olive came from guide dog breeding stock and had been a guide dog hopeful belonging to BC & Alberta Guide Dogs. The registered charity, funded by corporate and private donations and legacies, breeds, raises, and trains dogs intended for careers as seeing eye dogs for the visually impaired or as service dogs for young children with autism.

"For most pet owners, they wouldn't care about the barking," says Linda Thornton, Director of Breeding and Puppy Raising at BC & Alberta Guide Dogs, "but we need a dog that can work under pressure and think things out." If a dog barks at things that go by on the street, she adds, the visually impaired person at the end of the harness won't have any idea how to interpret the barking.



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Since this barking didn't appear to be just a phase for Olive, her career as a guide dog was over. "So, we set her free, set her free with love," says Thornton. There's usually a very long list for people to adopt these non-qualifier dogs because they make excellent family pets.

"We had a nice non-qualifier dog, and a potential owner became available the next day, looking for a low-key lovable dog." That owner was a grandmother whose work in Victoria was taking her away from her family and her ranch in Merritt for long periods of time. That owner was also the Honourable Judith Guichon, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia.

She had been chatting with the then-Speaker of the Legislature, the Honourable Linda Reid, while meeting for their regular book club. "Madame Speaker said to me, 'You need a dog,' and I said, 'You're right. I have five dogs on the ranch, but I spend a lot of time in Victoria.'"

Olive, she adds, gets her outside walking after sitting far too long behind a desk. "She's a wonderful pooch who didn't make the grade as a seeing eye dog. She's far too friendly and can't resist children."

Since Government House is a six-hour drive from home, Her Honour often finds herself alone on weekends. "I may only have one event on a weekend, so it's wonderful to have company when it's quiet. Olive fills a

big gap," she says, adding that she gets much more exercise now, which is so much healthier.

Thornton says the decision to rehome Olive with Her Honour at Government House was an easy one. "We skipped the home check," she said, and instead, she showed up with Olive, only to find the entire staff there to welcome this very special dog.

Her Honour kicked off her shoes, and knelt on the floor, providing the warmest of welcomes for Olive. "It was love at first sight; I knew it would work immediately."

The Lieutenant Governor is smitten. Olive begins each night in her own dog bed but ultimately, says Her Honour, "migrates into mine." Olive shares a coffee break most days with Her Honour in the fenced garden off Government House's Maclure Room, and otherwise is meeting guests, playing with visiting children, or just being a dog in the company of another dog brought in by a staff member.

It was all because of some wayward barking that Olive experienced an early career change, relinquishing the high hopes of being a service dog for the visually impaired, and arriving instead at Government House and becoming the unofficial First Dog of British Columbia. For Olive, it is exactly where she belongs.



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# Camp Phoenix is “youth serving youth”

By Sky Losier  
Premier (elect)  
89th BC Youth Parliament

Community service – particularly Camp Phoenix – is a deeply held value of the membership of the British Columbia Youth Parliament, and one that is shared with the members of the AFMLABC.

As an organization, our motto is: "Youth serving youth." We strive to fulfill this motto with all of our projects throughout the year; from providing parliamentary education to high school students in every corner the province, to helping new voters register to vote in provincial and federal elections, to perhaps our most quintessential annual project Camp Phoenix - a summer camp for children who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend summer camp.

This year Camp Phoenix gave 48 children that opportunity. For four days at the end of August these kids were given the opportunity to have carefree fun in a safe environment. What sets Camp Phoenix apart from other summer camps is that the majority of campers have their fees fully subsidized and our staff is entirely comprised of volunteers. These volunteers are current or former members of the British Columbia Youth Parliament. For many of them, Camp Phoenix was a steep learning curve, but they all rose to the challenge to help uphold our motto and give these 48 campers the chance to be children for a weekend.



Camp Phoenix was an action packed four days of fun, adventure, learning, and self-growth for our campers. Over the course of camp, the campers had the opportunity to participate in activities such as sports and games; theatre, arts and crafts; outdoor adventures; and, of course, the camp favorite, swimming. In between these thoughtfully planned activities, campers had time to build lasting friendships in their cabin groups and with their cabin leaders. Of course, like all good things, summer camp also comes to an end and as parents arrived to pick up their children a few tears were shed saying goodbye.

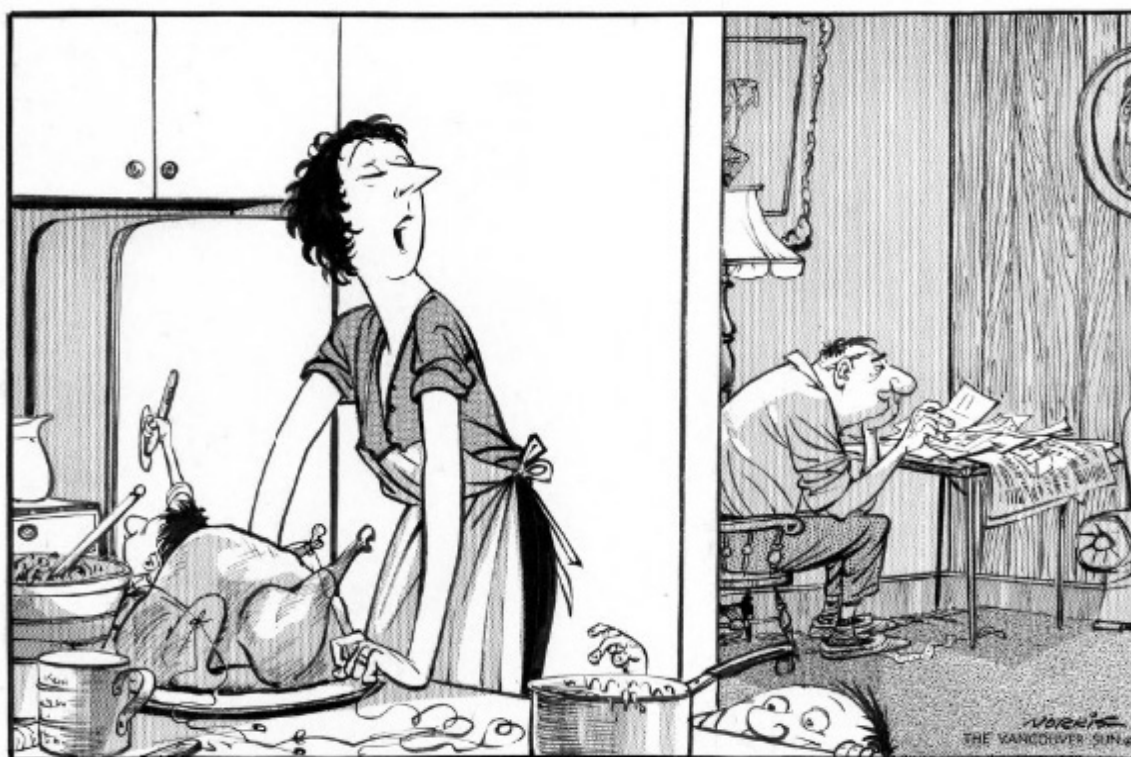
As the last camper departed, we (the staff) stood there in silence for a minute and had a collective sigh of relief. This moment was also the end of 10 long months of preparation. There were times when I wasn't sure if we were going to be able to pull it off, but in the true spirit of Youth Parliament, everyone stepped up to the plate and in the end we did it.

Again, both personally and on behalf of the British Columbia Youth Parliament, I would like to thank the members of the Association of Former MLAs of BC for their ongoing support of Youth Parliament and our projects over the year.

(Sky T. Losier, is the BCYP Minister of Camp Phoenix, and the 88th British Columbia Youth Parliament Camp Administrator.)



# Len Norris



"George, forget the monthly bills, the tax notices and the H Bomb for a moment and give me a hand with the Thanksgiving turkey."



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## Gladstone, the cat, is saving UK Treasury

LONDON (Reuters) - Twenty-two mice scurrying around Britain's finance ministry have fallen foul of the chief mouser to the Treasury since he took up residence one year ago with a mission to reduce the government department's rodent population.

Gladstone - a black cat named after long-serving 19th century prime minister and chancellor William Gladstone - joined the Treasury from a rescue home a year ago, and has almost 10,000 followers on photo-sharing website Instagram.



"I'm a grafter! This last year I've caught 22 mice and I believe in going the extra mile, so I've also caught 2 flies – it's harder than it looks," Gladstone said in a message to mark one year since he joined the finance ministry.

Finance ministry officials, who manage Gladstone's social media presence, regularly post photos of him wearing brightly colored bow ties to mark events such as gay rights celebrations, the introduction of a new one pound coin and visits by foreign dignitaries.

## Harvard Law buries Scaramucci

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Anthony Scaramucci is cursed. In the space of one day this past summer he was fired as President Donald Trump's communications director and listed as dead in Harvard Law School's alumni directory.



The directory mailed to alumni in August had an asterisk next to Scaramucci's name, indicating he had died, the Washington Post and CBS News have reported. The 53-year-old New York financier is a 1989 graduate of the Ivy League law school.

News of the mistake came out on the same day that Trump fired Scaramucci as White House communications director over an obscenity-laced interview with The New Yorker magazine, sources familiar with the decision said. Scaramucci had been in the job just over a week.

Harvard Law School acknowledged the directory error in a statement and apologized to Scaramucci. The directory is published every five years and is available only to alumni, CBS said. Scaramucci did not comment.

## The Italian Job ... Trump style

ROME (Reuters) - Italian police have arrested two brothers suspected of robbing dozens of cash machines while wearing masks of U.S. President Donald Trump.

The stunt evokes the 1991 film "Point Break" starring Keanu Reeves and Patrick Swayze, in which a gang of surfers don masks of ex-U.S. presidents while robbing banks. But, in a statement police said the brothers had been inspired by a different film.

"Inspired by the (1997) film 'The Jackal', whose protagonist -- played by Bruce Willis -- changes the color of his car because police are in pursuit, the two brothers painted their (white) Mercedes black," the police statement said.

The brothers, aged 26 and 30, targeted cash machines near the northern Italian city of Turin. In closed circuit footage of one of the robberies, one of the brothers in a Trump mask is seen covering the surveillance cameras in the lobby of a bank and planting an explosive in the cash dispenser. He then ducks around a corner after lighting the fuse, just before a violent blast.



# Member News

## Where Are They Now?

### John Reynolds

Each issue we ask a former Member of the Legislative Assembly a series of questions. What drew them to public service; what lessons have they taken away; and, most important, what are they doing now.



This month we welcome John Reynolds former MP, MLA, Speaker of the BC Legislative Assembly and federal Parliamentary House Leader for the Conservatives.

I began my political career 45 years ago at the request of the members of the Conservative Party in the federal riding of Burnaby, Delta, Richmond who wanted a Conservative representative in Ottawa. My first mentor in 1972 was the Hon. John Diefenbaker P.C., who taught me this most invaluable lesson still affecting my work ethic today: "Never go to bed without returning all of your phone calls." Making the trip from British Columbia to Ottawa resulted in a very demanding schedule which meant I spent many days away from my family. As much as I enjoyed political life, I resigned in 1976 to become a radio talk show host for CJOR.

Politics called again in 1982. The members from the provincial riding of West Vancouver, recruited me to run for the Social Credit Party under Bill Bennett. Being a Member of the Legislative Assembly and Government meant I could implement many requests by my constituents and all British Columbians. The highlight of my tenure as a MLA (1982-1991) was being elected as Speaker of the Legislature and being mentored by then deputy clerk, George MacMinn, who is a well respected authority and author on Parliamentary procedures throughout the Commonwealth. In my position as Speaker, I represented British Columbia in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association with over 100 countries, states and provinces as members. From 1989-1991, I was elected as vice-chair of the Executive Committee of that Association. My greatest insight from being Speaker and non-partisan was the understanding and appreciation that MLAs, regardless of their party affiliation, work diligently for the benefit of their constituents.

What did I do after my involuntary retirement from being a MLA in 1991? Yvonne, our son Christopher and I lived in Scottsdale, AZ where I worked in venture capital and played many rounds of golf. However, that ended in 1997 when I was asked to run federally for the Reform Party led by Preston Manning. Once again, my political life in Ottawa became my focus for nine years (1997-2006). I held positions as Opposition critic for many departments, House Whip and was elected by the caucus and the Executive to be Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition (2001-2001).

After the merger to form the Conservative Party of Canada, Hon. Stephen Harper P.C., as the Leader, appointed me House Leader. In 2006, I was co-chair of Stephen Harper's successful campaign for Prime Minister. Upon my retirement that year, I was appointed as a member of The Queen's Privy Council of Canada.

Returning to private life, I joined McMillan LLP as a senior strategic advisor also serving on boards in the mining industry, and advising companies in the alternative energy business.

Yvonne and I moved to Toronto in 2016 to be close our two sons, their spouses and our four grandchildren. We enjoy spending vacations with our six children, their spouses and our fifteen grandchildren in Mexico and our winter home in Boca Raton, Florida. My hobby is golfing with Yvonne, our family and friends. When I am asked what am I doing? I reply, "I am a professional babysitter!"

I am most appreciative that the Association and the OOTD keeps me informed about important events in British Columbia and news of our friends, colleagues and new members of the Legislature in Victoria.



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*The Association is pleased to provide space for selected not-for-profit children's organizations at no cost.*

## BC mining disasters: History repeats itself

This year, the worst wildfire season on record, we have learned yet again that lightening is not our friend in the BC Interior. As it happens, 2017 is the 50th and the 100th anniversary of fatal mine explosions in the east Kootenay and lightening was thought to be the culprit.

Horrible coal gas explosions in the mines were a constant threat in the early years of mining in the Crowsnest Pass. Careful detective work revealed that the likely cause of some of the major explosions was lightening that would strike the rails of the mine tramways and run from the surface deep into the mines where it ignited pockets of methane and coal dust. Grounding the mine railways helped solve the problem, but not before scores of miners lost their lives.

On April 3, 1967 an explosion in the Balmer North mine operations of Crows Nest Industries, just minutes after the 4 p.m. shift change, rocked the villages of Natal and Michel and claimed 15 lives immediately.

The blast travelled at more than 900 miles per hour. With it came all sorts of debris from deep inside: Power cables, timbers, chunks of coal and rock, conveyor belting and a toxic cloud of smoke and gases. The victims had literally climbed into the wrong end of a gun barrel and fate pulled the trigger at the other end.

Ron Venzi, whose uncle Guy Venzi died that day, recalled the tragedy in a memorial. "The memory of that day is still quite vivid in my mind's eye even though I was away at university at the time. I heard a news flash on the radio and when it mentioned a 'mining accident' it spurred my attention immediately.

"I knew that my Uncle Guy worked in that mine and due to the emergency there was no way for me to contact anyone over the phone. I did not learn of my Uncle Guy's death until the next morning when his name was announced on the radio. Guy Venzi was not my first relative to die in the mines. Another of my uncles, Mike Borsato, died in a gas related accident in 1951.

"As a child growing up in Michel, I had watched the ambulance go to the hospital many times. Each time, I had heard my parents, Fred and Helen Venzi, speak of other miners who had died on the job. I also recall the fear I felt as my own father would go to work in the mine. It seemed especially foreboding when he left the house on his night shift."

At the time the Lethbridge Herald reported: "A pall of grief and disbelief hangs over this community and the entire coal mining area of the Crowsnest Pass on both sides of the BC - Alberta border today.

"In Natal groups of men stand in silence on the street corners, women walk in hushed groups carrying food between homes and children wait news of the loss of relatives and men they knew well.

"There were reports that rock particles showered Natal immediately following the explosion. The mine entrance is



The 1967 mine disaster and 15 men whose lives were lost.

located about 500 feet from the edge of the village. At the scene it was almost like a bomb hit.

"Rocks, coal and dirt shattered buildings and other debris lay about in a 500-by-300 foot area on the mountain in front of the mine entrance. Mine buildings on the outside were literally uprooted and smashed to pieces in the blast. Trees were uprooted."

The disastrous explosion at Balmer Mine came very close to the 50th anniversary of the 1917 explosion at Coal Creek when 34 men were killed in No. 3 mine. Just as the (Fernie) Free Press was on deadline news arrived "of a terrible mine explosion at Coal Creek, which has probably snuffed out the lives of 34 men employed in No. 3 mine."

The newspaper reported: "Grave fears were for a time entertained for the men employed in No. 2 mine which is directly connected with No. 3 mine, but all men in this mine have come out safely.

"A large crowd of anxious wives and children are eagerly waiting for news from the mines but the company clerk in charge J.S. Irvine, refuses to give out any information."