

“Alberta’s government would rather cut services to its citizens, refuse to consider imposing a provincial sales tax like the ones the rest of us have been paying for decades and then blame everyone but itself for its woes.”

TAKE THAT, YOU WEXIT WHINERS

If I may bastardize that infamous Alberta bumper sticker from the early 1980s (“Let the eastern bastards freeze in the dark”), my own version would read something like: “Let the western whiners whinge in the winter winds.”

I do not mean to be unkind (*Moi?* Never), but perhaps our Wexit-wannabe brethern could use a few lessons in history, practicality, even a little humility.

History? Don’t forget that we in the forgotten east have been whinging about Ottawa’s many unfairnesses since soon after that city adopted its name back in 1855.

And yet we’re still Canadians.

Albertans claim they’ve lost tens of thousands of jobs thanks to the downturn in the oil and gas industry, which they blame on big, bad Ottawa rather than on world prices or the six-alarm, climate-emergency fire-mess our historical over-reliance on hydrocarbons has already made of our world.

But hey, Albertans, if you want to pin the blame tail on the federal government donkey, get in line. On July 2, 1992, Ottawa slapped a moratorium on our vital east coast cod fishery, instantly putting 30,000 Newfoundlanders out of work. That moratorium continues.

If angry Albertans wonder why their own economy is struggling today, they might stop blaming Ottawa and, instead, play compare and contrast with Norway, a similarly-sized, once-poor now-oil-rich jurisdiction.

In 1990, Norway created a sovereign wealth fund, heavily taxing oil companies and banking the proceeds for the inevitable rainy, resource-gone-dry day. Today, that fund—valued at around \$1 trillion—is the world’s largest. It’s invested in 9,000 companies worldwide and helped diversify Norway’s economy so it’s primed for a post-hydrocarbon world.

Alberta? It set up a Heritage Savings Fund in 1976, charged the oil companies a pittance in royalties, then routinely raided that piggybank while failing to make new contributions. Its \$17-billion fund is a pale imitation of Norway’s. Rather than acknowledge its own complicity, Alberta’s government would rather cut services to its citizens, refuse to consider imposing a provincial sales tax like the ones the rest of us have been paying for decades and then blame everyone but itself for its woes.

Practicality? If the Wexiters get their way and Alberta goes it alone, good luck with that. Independent but land-locked, why

would the rest of Canada say yes to its pipeline pipedreams? Albertans might even find themselves waxing nostalgic for Canada’s current painful but important court-ordered environmental reviews and consultations.

And, oh yes, you wacky Wexiters, on your way out the door, here’s a bill for your portion of the national debt—\$71 billion. See ya...

But, hey, it shouldn’t have to come to that. Really.

The solution isn’t to scrap the market-based carbon tax—the one almost every economist, who isn’t in the pocket of the oil and gas industry, says “offers the most cost-effective lever to reduce carbon emissions at the scale and speed that is necessary”—or ram through a pipeline without a thorough airing of its implications.

The answer is... wait for it: proportional representation. Our current first-past-the-post, winner-take-all electoral system distorts the electoral landscape and exacerbates our differences.

The reality is that—though I’ve lumped them all together as lumpen Albertans—Alberta is no Tory/Kenny/Sheer monolith. More than 20 per cent of Albertans voted for parties other than the Conservatives in the last federal election. Their voices will be silenced in parliament. Just as there will be almost no one in Ottawa to speak for those who voted Conservative, NDP or Green in Atlantic Canada, even though more than 50 per cent of us did not vote Liberal.

If our parliament reflected our ballot box choices, the country would look—and be—far less balkanized. Let’s start nation-building, not nation-breaking.

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FEEDBACK

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