

## **Alberta Progressive Conservative Leadership- Best In Show 2006**

Political leadership contests have a lot in common with big-time dog shows. Both are intensely competitive competitions and burn up big chunks of time, energy and money for the folks involved. Success at dog shows and political leadership contests doesn't happen by accident. It happens because of the breed of the contestant, it's pedigree, the skill of the handler and the depth of the pockets involved.

It's leadership selection time for the Progressive Conservative party in Alberta, and the P.C. Big Dogs are competing to be "Best in Show". The current champion, Ralph Klein, is slowly making his way to the exit, and the crowd is busily appraising the contenders for the show trophy.

It's going to be a heck of a show. The first round of voting will happen on November 25<sup>th</sup>. If no competitor wins a simple majority on the first vote, a second, preferential ballot will be held on December 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Who are the contenders? What breed are they? What are their pedigrees? What are their strengths and limitations? What are their show-ring styles? "Edmontonians Magazine" presents; "Alberta Progressive Conservative Leadership- Best In Show 2006".

### **The Show Ring-Lineup**

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#### **Jim Dinning**

##### **Breed of Competitor**

Jim Dinning is the Golden Retriever in this show. Golden Retrievers are powerful, active dogs that are sound and well balanced. They can be an ideal sportsman's companion, family pet, an excellent gundog, and guide or service dog. Golden Retrievers possess a personality that is eager, alert and self-confident.

##### **Pedigree**

Jim Dinning was first elected to the Legislature in 1986. He served as Minister in the portfolios of Community and Occupational Health, Education, and Provincial Treasurer.

##### **His Handlers**

Jim Dinning's handlers are very skilled, and his "brain trust" is a blue-ribbon panel of Alberta's business and political heavyweights. Thirty-four of sixty-two P.C. MLA's are wearing his colors. His "Chief Handler", Allan Hallman, has structured a show ring strategy that closely mirrors the image of the candidate. It has been a smooth, professional campaign that only rarely has wandered into "slick". Its' website ([www.jimdinning.ca](http://www.jimdinning.ca)) is top-notch. The campaign's biggest challenge will be to provide an error-free tour of the show ring that gives little opportunity for the other competitors to present an alternative to their contestant.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Jim Dinning is poised and polished in the show ring. His track record and ability to focus on goals explains his current status as “The Top-Dog In Waiting”. Mr. Dinning’s record and his ability to stay connected and relevant to the grassroots in the party has kept him in the front of the pack.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

That front-runner status has brought him the attention of the other dogs in the show. It’s very hard to hold a lead in a long race when you start out ahead of the pack- unless you can build up an overwhelming lead in points. He has had a tendency- particularly in front of rural groups- to “play down” to his audience.

### **Show Ring Style**

Mr. Dinning’s sense of focus keeps him square to the judges at all times. He is quick, upbeat and attentive to his handler’s instructions in the show ring. His handlers have worked hard to position him to be seen as a winner who has earned the right to wear the blue ribbon.

### **The Odds**

He will not win a majority in the first round, and will move on to the second round of judging. In a three-dog field, it all depends on how the judges set up the competition. In a center-left vs. hard right showdown, he wins in a walk. If a “Stop Dinning” move begins, it’s going to be interesting.

## **Victor Doerksen**

### **Breed of Competitor**

Victor Doerksen is the American Eskimo Dog in the show ring. The American Eskimo Dogs (formerly known as German Spitz) are intelligent, alert, and friendly, although slightly conservative. The American Eskimo Dog is neither overly shy nor aggressive.

### **Pedigree**

Victor Doerksen began his political life in 1993 as a Member of the Legislature for Red Deer South. In 2001, he was appointed Minister of Innovation and Science

### **Handlers**

Victor Doerksen’s team came into the race late, and have been playing catch-up. Led by Dwight Dibben, they are working hard to help their candidate catch the eye of judges. His website ([www.voteforvictor.ca](http://www.voteforvictor.ca)) is straightforward and serviceable. The challenge for his handlers will be twofold- to overcome the late start and to carve out a niche for their candidate in a field that already has strong social conservative candidates.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Mr. Doerksen has a strong record of involvement with the science and innovation file, which will play an important role in tomorrow's Alberta. There is also evidence of support from Central Alberta judges who are weary of "big city" politicians.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

Mr. Doerksen is not the most charismatic of the contenders. His late entry into the race is not helpful, particularly as he was not originally perceived as a "top-tier" candidate.

### **The Odds**

A long shot. His candidacy now will raise his profile for future shows.

## **David Hancock**

### **Breed of Competitor**

David Hancock is the Chesapeake Bay Retriever in the show. Chesapeake Bay Retrievers are responsive and industrious. They are devoted to their families and make excellent hunting and guard dogs. Chesapeakes are generally considered a country dog rather than a city dog, but will adapt to urban living if given plenty of exercise and space.

### **Pedigree**

He is in his third term as MLA for Edmonton-Whitemud and has served as Minister of Advanced Education; Minister of Justice and Attorney General; and Minister of Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Affairs. He chaired the government's Strategic Planning Committee.

### **His Handlers**

Mr. Hancock is a bit of a "policy wonk", and his handlers also lean in that direction. They are led by Campaign Manager Brian Mulawka. The campaign website ([www.davehancockcrew.ca](http://www.davehancockcrew.ca)) is well organized and is congruent with the personality of the candidate. The challenge facing the Hancock team is to mobilize his natural constituency—the people in Alberta's education community, particularly young people.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Dave Hancock is an articulate, intelligent man with a long record of service to the party and government. He is very well respected by party members, and appeals to those "Capital P" Progressive Conservatives who are looking for a fiscally conservative, socially liberal approach to government. Mr. Hancock is also the only metro-Edmonton-based candidate who is currently seated in the Legislature.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

Mr. Hancock's reputation as a "policy wonk" does not endear him to those Alberta Conservatives who are looking for an "Arnold Schwarzenegger" clone to lead them. The perception of him as a social liberal will not be an easy sell to the "hard right" of the party.

### **Show Ring Style**

Mr. Hancock is working hard to convince the judges that he wants to win this show. He is showing a feisty side in the candidate forums and is positioning himself to the judges as the only alternative to the front-runner.

### **The Odds**

He has the ring smarts to win. The challenge will be to make the final three. In a three-dog showdown, anything can happen. If he can make the cut, and if the other two competitors are polarized, he will be the next leader.

## **Garry McPherson**

### **Breed of Competitor**

Mr. McPherson is the representative of the bulldog breed in our show. Bulldogs are low to the ground, mastiff type dogs with power. They are an ideal pet that loves the companionship of its entire family including children. While the bulldog breed is more than capable of taking care of itself, they are not troublemakers but, as a last resort, will retaliate.

### **Pedigree**

Mr. McPherson has not held elected office. He has served in a cabinet appointment as Chairman, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Mr. McPherson has also served as Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship in the School of Business at the University of Alberta

### **His Handlers**

His campaign manager is Deb Hagman of Mayerthorpe. She leads an eclectic mix of individuals on the McPherson team. They personify the "can do" leadership style of the candidate. Their website ([www.teammcpherson.com](http://www.teammcpherson.com)) is straightforward and compelling. It does not have the bells and whistles possessed by some of the competition, but it quickly tells you what this candidate is all about. Their campaign challenge is to ensure that their message is clearly heard by the Party.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Garry McPherson epitomizes the Alberta spirit of perseverance and tenacity when confronted with obstacles. His reputation as a successful businessperson and advocate for people with disabilities gives him a tremendous amount of respect within the Party.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

The present power players within the Party do not share the policy positions he advocates. He has not been elected to public office.

### **Show Ring Style**

Garry McPherson will enter the ring the same way he approaches life- full speed ahead. He will not shrink from sharing his values and platform with the judges.

### **The Odds**

The longest shot in the bunch- but he will win the respect of everyone.

## **Ted Morton**

### **Breed of Competitor**

Greyhound

The Greyhound is as swift as a ray of light and graceful as a swallow. He is one of the oldest and purest known breeds. The Greyhound has been used on practically all kinds of small game, but the hare is his natural quarry. While gentle with children, the greyhound does have a natural tendency to chase anything small that moves and may be aggressive to small dogs.

### **Pedigree**

Albertans chose Ted Morton as Senator-in-Waiting for the Reform Party in the 1998 Senate “election”. He won a seat in the Legislature as a Conservative MLA in 2004.

### **His Handlers**

Mr. Morton has a highly skilled team of handlers who operate under the guidance of Sam Armstrong. They have conducted a brilliant strategic campaign, running early and running hard. The campaign has focused its energy in identifying and energizing Mr. Morton’s natural constituency on the right. The Morton website ([www.tedmorton.ca](http://www.tedmorton.ca)) is the class of the field- if one has access to high-speed Internet. His campaign will be challenged to overcome the deep reservations about his candidacy held by center and center-left Alberta Tories.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Ted Morton is a smart articulate spokesman for the political “right wing” in Alberta politics. That was underscored by his endorsement by Alberta Alliance leader Paul Hinman. He has the enthusiastic support of the heavy hitters in the provinces’ ultra-right wing media. The show judges who support him will crawl over 17 miles of gravel road to cast their ballots for him.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

See all of the above through the eyes of the centre-left wing Alberta Tories who have deep reservations about a Morton-led Alberta P.C. party. Ted Morton may have trouble in staying on track in the competition because of the show ring's oval shape and his natural tendency to run hard and to the right.

### **The Odds**

The odds are good that Ted Morton will make the second round of the competition. There are some who are betting that he will either be the next Leader of the P.C. party- or the next Leader of the Opposition.

## **Mark Norris**

### **Breed of Competitor**

Mark Norris is the Border Collie in the competition. Borders are highly intelligent, hard-working dogs that respond quickly and eagerly to training. They are the world's premiere sheepdog in terms of patience, agility and stamina. They thrive on games and are willing to please.

### **Pedigree**

Mark Norris entered provincial politics in 2001 when he ran against and defeated Liberal Leader Nancy MacBeth in the riding of Edmonton-McClung. He served as the Minister of Economic Development, responsible for Tourism and Industry, from 2001 to 2004. The Liberals reclaimed Edmonton McClung in the 2004 provincial election.

### **His Handlers**

The Mark Norris team is a hard-working team guided by campaign manager Tim Shipton. Their front-office group is very skilled at making visitors feel welcome. They have the support of some of Edmonton's corporate leaders, which is reflected in a very business-oriented campaign. Mr. Norris' website ([www.MarkNorris.ca](http://www.MarkNorris.ca)) is congruent with the perception of the candidate- businesslike, informal and hard working. The biggest challenge of the campaign is to overcome the impact of Mr. Norris' loss in the 2004 election.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Mark Norris is a very, very good salesman, a trait that made him a very effective Minister of Economic Development. He is also very focused, particularly on the "bigger picture". Alberta Conservatives who are looking at continued economic expansion will give Mr. Norris a long look in the show ring. He has not been tied to a direct defense of the P.C. record over the past four years, and can appeal to those Tories who are looking for a "fresh face" to lead the Party. Mark Norris also has the ability and energy to be able to use the word "passion" in a political context without appearing insincere or "overly leftish" - the kiss of death in current Alberta Tory politics.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

Mark Norris's political ambitions suffered a setback when he lost his seat in the last election. The first rule of parliamentary leadership is that a leader delivers their own seat. Tories deeply concerned with environmental protection do not all see Mr. Norris as a champion. Mark Norris, Mr. Hancock, Mr. MacPherson and Mr. Stelmach will go nose-to-nose for the attention and support of the judges from the Edmonton area.

### **Show Ring Style**

Mr. Norris is an up-tempo competitor who knows how to sell himself in the show ring. He will work hard to show judges that he possesses all of the other attributes required to be worthy of "Best In Show".

### **The Odds**

As a sitting MLA, Mr. Norris would be going head-to-head with Mr. Dinning. Now, he will have to do the selling job of his life to make the final three. If he makes the cut, anything is possible.

## **Lyle Oberg**

### **Breed of Competitor**

Lyle Oberg is the German Shepherd in the show. German Shepherds have a very high energy level. They are versatile working dogs, highly intelligent, fearless and self-confident. They are very willing to learn and please their owners and make excellent watchdogs.

### **Pedigree**

Dr. Oberg was first elected as an MLA for Brooks in southern Alberta in 1993. He has served as Minister of Family and Social Services; Minister of Learning; and Minister of Infrastructure & Transportation.

### **His Handlers**

Dr. Oberg's campaign manager is Ivan Bernardo. The team has run a very different campaign than the other competitors. They proved their flexibility early in the campaign when Dr. Oberg clashed with his colleagues in caucus and was relegated to the backbenches. The Oberg teams' ability to stay in the show despite that setback showed their depth and perseverance. His website ([www.obergforalberta.ca](http://www.obergforalberta.ca)) is in the top three. The campaign team's challenge will be to show the warm and caring side of Dr. Oberg.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Lyle Oberg understands the nature of the competition very, very well and is not afraid to take risks. His understanding of the current unhappiness bubbling under the surface of the Alberta P.C. Party led him to challenge the Premier's retirement strategy. He is a smart, articulate campaigner.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

Dr. Oberg's candor and quickness to respond can get him into trouble. Southern Alberta is also home turf to Ted Morton, the current poster boy for Alberta's political right wing, and perceived front-runner Jim Dinning.

### **Show Ring Style**

Lyle Oberg is smart, hard-nosed and can get in the face of the other competitors. Dr. Oberg is also flexible and capable of a high level of strategic thinking. He will not be afraid to do the unexpected.

### **The Odds**

If he makes the top three, he could come up the middle to win the competition, particularly if Mr. Morton is also in the final three.

## **Ed Stelmach**

### **Breed of Competitor**

Ed Stelmach is a Smooth Collie. Smooth Collies are considered to be one of the most beautiful breeds because of their elegant appearance. The Collie is intelligent, gentle and social. It is considered a very good family pet and is ideal for children and other pets around the house.

### **Pedigree**

Ed Stelmach was elected as MLA for Vegreville-Viking in 1993. He has served as Deputy Whip, and as Government Caucus Whip. Mr. Stelmach served as Minister of Agriculture; Minister of Infrastructure; Minister of Transportation and Minister of International and Intergovernmental Affairs

### **His Handlers**

Ed Stelmach's team wins top marks for their personable and friendly approach. Operations Manager Elan McDonald and the rest of the Stelmach team have been very astute in positioning their candidate to take maximum advantage of his attributes. His website ([www.stelmach.ca](http://www.stelmach.ca)) is excellent and mirrors the perception of the candidate. Their challenge will be to broaden his appeal to urban voters.

### **Show Ring Strengths**

Everybody likes Ed Stelmach. He is excellent at putting people at ease and conveying empathy and understanding- and he is a master schmoozer. His background in agriculture, small business and in the Ukrainian community are all assets. If pedigree and people skills count, Ed Stelmach will be a strong candidate.

### **Show Ring Limitations**

Mr. Stelmach will have to prove that he understands the concerns of young urban Tories. His warm yet laid-back style may cause some judges to question the depth of his passion and vision for Alberta. He may also be hampered by the perception that he is “too nice a guy to be Premier”.

### **Show Ring Style**

Ed Stelmach will show well in the ring. His personable approach will keep him centered to the judges, and his people skills and pedigree will make him one of the sentimental favorites as the show begins.

### **The Odds**

Can nice guys win the big prize? Can he peel off enough rural support from southern Alberta and combine it with his support from Edmonton and area to make it to the second round? If he can, and if the other two competitors are polarized, he will be the next leader. After all, everybody likes Ed.