

FEATURE BUZZ: SUBHEAD



HEARD ON THE HILL

BY BEA VONGDOUANGCHANH

Tory incumbent Lukiwski running against Polkarama's and Grammy-nominated country singer NDP candidate Sklar

NDP Leader Jack Layton is the "toughest S.O.B. alive," says a Saskatchewan NDP candidate, who also happens to be "one of Canada's most awarded country music performers."

Brian Sklar, the NDP candidate running for election in Regina-Lumsden-Lake Centre, Sask., told HOH last week that Mr. Layton, recovering from hip surgery and a prostate cancer survivor "doesn't run and hide" when faced with difficult situations.

"Anybody that's gone through what he has gone through and is putting the kind of stamina into the campaign as he is a very, very special human being," Mr. Sklar said, noting that's more than he can say about Prime Minister Stephen Harper. "You don't have to have a pass to get into a Jack Layton event. You don't get shut out because you had your picture taken with another political leader."

Mr. Sklar, who until the election started as a staffer for the Saskatchewan NDP caucus, is a country singer and has a TV show with "Canada's polka king" Walter Ostanek called *Polkarama*. He has recorded 35 albums, has a display in the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame, is a member of the Canadian Association of

Country Music Legends, and was nominated for a Grammy award in 2007 in the Best Polka Album category for his band The Western Senators' record *Dueling Polkas*. His campaign theme song is the instrumental version of *Orange Blossom Special*, a song recorded by Johnny Cash in 1965.

He said even though it's his first time running against three-term Conservative MP Tom Lukiwski, he's been involved in politics since he was a young child. Saskatchewan MLA Dwain Lingenfelter asked him to run last year.

"We were in Saskatoon at a function and we walked out of the function and he said, 'Why don't you run in Regina Lumsden Lake Centre?' It's my home constituency. And I said, 'Oh, I'm a backroom guy' and he said, 'No, you know you have a recognizable name, you'd be a really good Member of Parliament, you're little but you're loud, and we haven't had that for the last seven years and this was a constituency that was held for 26 years by Les Benjamin and 10 years by John Solomon, so I think you've got a fighting chance. Your name recognition certainly wouldn't hurt you,'" Mr. Sklar said.

When he decided to take the plunge, he called his wife to ask if

it would be okay. "There was a long pregnant pause and she said, 'Have you been drinking?' And that's particularly funny because I've been in AA since Aug. 6, 1977. It wasn't until two months or three months later when she said, 'You know I was serious.' Anyway, I won the nomination."

Mr. Lukiwski won with 51.1 per cent of the vote in the last election and the NDP candidate placed second with 28.53 per cent of the vote.

He said he's optimistic about his chances of winning because he's been campaigning in the riding since he won the nomination more than a year ago.

"At least people know who I am and I think there's an element of trust there because they see me three or four times a week on television and they haven't seen their Member of Parliament at all except for at election time for the last three terms," he said. "On the door step it's very, very positive. I'm certainly not getting 100 per cent approval, and I don't expect to but even the people that may be not voting for me are very, very polite. The number of people who do say they're voting for me, if they're telling you the truth, is very, very high."

Mr. Sklar said the top issues in the riding are health care and affordable housing and said people should vote for him because "we've got a better plan, simple as that."

Impact Public Affairs' Williams pens third edition of GR how-to book

One of the most important strategies in government relations is to say, "Thank you," says Impact Public Affairs president Huw Williams.

"It's unbelievable how many people don't. Saying thank you is hugely important, and doing it in an appropriate way," Mr. Williams told *The Hill Times*.

It's something on the checklist of things to remember when lobbying governments in his new book, a third edition of *Government Relations for Canadian Associations: How to Be the Voice of your Members with Government*.

Other "to dos": develop a plan, be visible and accessible to officials and elected politicians, understand the role of the media, and be patient.

It's also important to have some "constructive follow up," he said. "One of the things I saw in the Languevin Block and other departments, some groups took a hit and run approach. They would come in and they would make their approach and think the problem would be solved. If you don't have that sustained and strong follow up and bring some strong organization to it, you're not going to solve any long



The two Fs: Aaron Freeman and Craig Forcese are out with another book.

term results," said Mr. Williams, a former Conservative Hill staffer.

Since writing the first book, a collaboration between himself and the Canadian Society of Association Executives, he said there have been major changes to the lobbying industry, not least of which are changes to the Lobbying Act, the Federal Accountability Act, and the advent of social media.

"The other thing is that I really believe lobbying has shifted from that backroom, insider deal persona and it's more about building a campaign than ever," he said. "It's about making sure your stakeholders are lined up, making sure that the public and consumers understand your issue, and then building those elements of a campaign so that you can inform public policy makers both on the official and elected side about how your issue fits into the broader policy context."

The book is a "tactical guide," and a "good roadmap" for associations that want to do advocacy work, Mr. Williams said, noting that it makes it easier for associations to engage in government relations, but some still need expertise. He said he's not worried the book will slow down his consultant lobbying business.

"I always remember what Jack Niklaus said and he said, you can write a book about playing golf, but that doesn't mean you're going to be able to do what he does. One of the things is that associations need to have a good plan," he said. "We help them maximize their plan."

This just in: Freeman and Forcese release second edition of *Laws of Government*

Speaking of books, and the Federal Accountability Act, Dalton McGuinty adviser Aaron Freeman and University of Ottawa professor Craig Forcese have released a second edition of their compendium on everything that makes Canada's democracy work, *The Laws of Government: The Legal Foundations of Canadian Democracy*.

The 600-page book was first published in 2005. The second edi-

tion, released last month by Irwin Law, incorporates all of the changes since then, including the Federal Accountability Act introduced by the Conservative government in 2006. The FAA overhauled ethics, lobbying, political fundraising and accountability laws.

"*The Laws of Government* is a comprehensive legal treatise on the law of Canadian democracy. This book is a one-stop-shop for an area of law and policy that is emerging quickly," says the book's press release. "Almost every year, Parliament has had to deal with controversies involving electoral reform, political fundraising rules, ethics and conflict of interest, access to information, judicial appointments, parliamentary reform, and minority governments, to name a few. The book grapples with these contemporary issues."

H&K launches election predictor

Hill and Knowlton's fun election predictor and seat count application is up and running again for this election campaign.

Users can input polling numbers and generate how many seats parties would win if there were an election today. According to the predictor, and using Nanos poll numbers from April 6, if there were an election, the Conservatives would win another minority government with 144 seats. The Liberals would gain seats and have 94, the NDP would lose six seats from the 2008 campaign and have 30 in the House of Commons. The Bloc Québécois would also lose nine seats, according to the predictor, and end up with 39 seats in the House. There would be one independent.

"This is the fourth federal election in seven years, which makes it an important race to follow," said Elizabeth Roscoe, Hill & Knowlton's national practice leader for public affairs.

"Individuals and companies affected by the federal government will be interested in seeing how different swings in voter support can affect the result."

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The Hill Times



Let's polka Tom and Brian: NDP candidate in Regina-Lumsden-Lake Centre Brian Sklar, left, is a musician and entertainer. He's in a for a race against incumbent Conservative Tom Lukiwski, right, who won with 51.1 per cent of the vote in the last election. The NDP placed second with 28.53 per cent of the vote.



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