

Clueless, Ida Chong Spins and Begg For Her Political Life

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, December 01, 2010

<https://politicsrespun.org/2010/12/clueless-ida-chong-spins-and-begg-for-her-political-life/>



Welcome to December, Ida Chong! This will be a hard month for you.

MLA Chong has been given an opportunity to trot out Gordon Campbell's HST spin [in a Georgia Straight piece published online yesterday](#). In it, she essentially begs for her political future.

The reality, though, is that her tired explanations betray an ignorance, disregard or contempt for the current political climate and expectations of democracy in BC. This is no surprise because the Liberal government has pursued an anti-social, neoliberal agenda since before being elected. That agenda explicitly rejects the value of social cohesion. So it comes as no surprise that Campbell's natural successor, Kevin Falcon, credits inspiration from the neoliberal Olympians Thatcher and Reagan.

Below are Ida Chong's hollow pleas for her skin.

I understand that the decision to implement the HST, coming so soon after the last election angered many people. They are frustrated and upset that this significant change in taxation was introduced in this manner, and more importantly that our government did a poor job of communicating why we feel the HST is necessary. For that, I certainly apologize.

via [Ida Chong: Recall campaign is not about HST but refighting last election | Vancouver, Canada | Straight.com](#).

This is the extent that the government will ever acknowledge wrongdoing. This ignores how they released

FOI records to the media on the HST deliberations while claiming to the NDP in response to their FOI request that there were no records.

It also parrots out the "coming so soon after the last election" spin that it began after the votes were counted.

The Liberal party is choosing to define the anger of half a million British Columbians as bad PR. That's easy to apologize for. That way they can ignore the need to apologize for claiming before the election that the HST wasn't on the radar when it clearly was. That's lying. That's a calculated lie because to tell the truth about even considering the HST before the election may have been enough to destroy them. Fudge-it budget, meet your sibling: HST.

However, the recall campaign currently underway is not about the HST. Recalling your MLA will not eliminate the HST—the September 2011 referendum will determine that. So why recall, and why now? Quite frankly, I believe recall is being used as a political means to extract a political benefit for the NDP and for fringe right-wing parties. Unfortunately, recall is being used to refight the last election by creating a byelection. The recall campaign in my riding is being organized by someone who lives in NDP MLA Carole James's riding, and many of the campaign's volunteers and canvassers are not constituents of Oak Bay-Gordon Head but come from as far away as the Comox Valley. If people who live in Oak Bay-Gordon Head wish to speak with me or recall me, they can, but I do not believe we should accept outsiders coming in to our community, telling us what to do.

She's right that recall won't get rid of the HST. This, however, is irrelevant to people's current sense of democracy. People wish to recall Liberal MLAs, especially vulnerable ones like Chong, because the party lied about the HST before the election. Because the Liberals choose to ignore that, they need an alternate story. The above paragraph is that: spin and deflection.

Also, while the NDP and other parties may happen to benefit from recall, painting this battle as merely refighting an election the opposition lost is an over-simplification that inflames the ire of the half million verified signatures on the initiative petition.

The fact that people from all over Vancouver Island are gleefully volunteering to remove a member of a political party which is perceived to have lied about a regressive tax to avoid losing an impending election demonstrates the breadth of opposition, assuming the initiative's success in all 85 ridings was not enough.

Further, chatter from the Liberal leadership candidates about reducing the HST or moving up the referendum debate reflects that the party acknowledges their error, so Chong should not be surprised that the party is being targeted.

Her argument about non-riding volunteers is pale. It only works if the political culture around the province, even between regional ridings, is so wildly different that the presence of volunteers from outside the riding is merely manipulation. But the initiative passed in all 85 ridings, so there is nothing special about her riding beyond the zeal to fire her.

Recall legislation was implemented so that the public had recourse against an MLA who broke the law or committed serious ethical violations. It was designed to remove an MLA who has committed wrongdoing, and was never intended to be used as retribution against MLAs for an unpopular vote in the legislature. In September, NDP president Moe Sihota told members of his party that "the law forbids organizations from being proponents for recall; it has to be done by individuals. Below the surface though, it's a partisan effort." Recall legislation is being used, explicitly and admittedly, as a political, partisan tool to bully MLAs and to try to push British Columbia into political instability, by former MLAs like Bill Vander Zalm (who was forced to resign due to a conflict-of-interest scandal) and Sihota (who would like to effect a byelection for the NDP).

She is correct about why recall was implemented originally. It was designed to remove someone who broke the law or violated ethics. What kind of broken law is sufficient to justify recall? Fraud, assault, speeding, drunk driving, shoplifting, attempted murder? Those are not spelled out in the legislation so that the political community could decide. The public, bathing in the contemporary political culture will decide. I'm certain the premier would have been recalled almost 8 years ago if he didn't represent a riding so incredibly enamoured with neoliberalism, greed and tax cuts.

What about ethics, then? Littering, leaving lights on in empty rooms, not recycling, watching an NC-17 movie, spanking a child, having an affair? Is lying ethical? The Liberal Party lied about selling BC Rail and ripping up public sector contracts. They were vulnerable to recall this whole decade if people think lying is unethical. Ida Chong would have us believe that it takes more than lying for a recall-worthy ethical violation.

But she is wrong.

She has been deluded to think her party is untouchable because BC's political culture did not embrace recall as an option before now. That is just sad. The political culture of BC has evolved under the tyrannical rule of the Liberals to the point where, again, 85 ridings all passed the HST initiative.

Chong or her speech writers again attempt to spin the issue into recall as punishment for her voting for a bill. She was wrong about this being about refighting the last election, though there are some who have that as an added bonus, and she is equally wrong about this being about a legislative vote. It is about the substantial evidence indicating the party lied before the election.

The fact that the NDP and other parties and organizations contain as members some individuals who will gleefully attempt to recall lying Liberals, minus Blair Lekstrom of course, is merely a reality of life. Membership in an organization cannot be justified as an impediment for a citizen to participate in recall. The NDP was unlucky that their president's words were publicized, but I guarantee you, the fringe right wing parties that Chong refers to have said the exact same thing.

But it is in this paragraph that I am personally offended by her use of the word "bully." Leaving out Bill Bennett's characterization of Gordon Campbell as a bully, the Liberal party has spent almost a decade bullying the vulnerable in BC. It is the height of disrespect for Ida Chong to claim she is being bullied by people who feel she should lose her job because she committed the ethical violation of lying before an

election. Bullying implies an innocent victim. She is not.

It is no wonder political cynicism is so high and voter turnout dropped below 50%.

Everyone, even my political opponents in the NDP, acknowledge that I am one of the hardest-working constituency-focused MLAs in this province. I have worked extremely hard for my community, and the evidence of this is clear throughout Oak Bay-Gordon Head, from a new \$350-million hospital, expansions and renovations at the University of Victoria, Camosun College, as well as the public schools that have been seismically upgraded. The investment in parks, bike lanes, and many other projects I have supported and advocated for over 14 years as MLA are achievements I am very proud of. I have always conducted myself in a professional and ethical manner and have considered the diverse opinions of the constituents of Oak Bay-Gordon Head in performing my duties as MLA.

On the surface, I have a hard time caring much for how hard an MLA works in their constituency when their party has lost its moral mandate to govern.

Honestly, if Ida Chong were actually such a star MLA in her riding, I wonder why she was reelected by only 561 votes 18 months ago. Maybe that perception just isn't getting through to the people.

It further shows the disconnectedness of her party from the reality of British Columbians. She champions seismic upgrading of her riding's schools. By next year, over 200 schools in BC will have been closed from the Liberal party defunding public education. That was an unfortunate example in her letter. Let's make sure she lives with it.

While she may claim to conduct herself ethically as a riding representative, she is a member of a political party that lied about a new regressive tax to avoid an electoral defeat. She needs to realize that the populace of BC does not consider that to be an ethical action. Hence, the recall.

Our government has made tough, sometimes unpopular choices to ensure the fiscal stability and economic prosperity of our province into the future. Whether you agree with some, all, or none of the things our government has done, whether you support or oppose the HST, I hope you agree that there are appropriate forums to have these debates, including elections and the upcoming referendum. Recall is not one of them.

Ida Chong is the B.C. Liberal MLA for Oak Bay-Gordon Head.

The Liberal party rhetoric that they have made tough choices is tired. Upon first getting elected they embarked on the Thatcher/Reagan/Shock Doctrine tactic of a massive tax cut that reduced government revenues, thereby forcing themselves into having to be the tough love parent who has to make tough choices about what social services to gouge.

This is tired, insulting rhetoric.

Ultimately, her assertion that recall is not a venue for the public to deal with politicians' ethical violations is just desperate, clueless, cynical, or all three.

I, for one, am among hundreds of thousands who are mad as hell and simply won't take the abuse anymore.

I doubt Ida Chong or her party will be able to come up with any better spin to attempt to stave off the recall of a healthy portion of Liberal MLAs.

The always tenuous moral legitimacy of the BC Liberal party has run out of lives.