

**You're not listening, Klein tells Ottawa**

Dion gets earful after calling for explanation on separatist talk

**Tom Olsen**

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EDMONTON - Premier Ralph Klein and federal Health Minister Anne McLellan laid a tag-team drubbing Thursday on a top federal cabinet minister seeking to clarify Alberta's position on separation.

Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Stephane Dion told reporters outside the Commons Thursday he sent Klein a letter asking him to clarify the province's position on western separatism. The provincial government warned in a throne speech Tuesday that western alienation is on the rise, and Klein said later he wants to quell talk by "a few" of separation.

McLellan, MP for Edmonton West, backed Klein rather than her cabinet colleague Thursday.

"My premier did not talk about separation -- I just want to make that absolutely plain," she said. "I read the speech from the throne and what my premier asked for, on behalf of Albertans, was that the federal government treated Alberta with respect and listened to Albertans."

Klein said Thursday Dion should take notice of key concerns of Albertans if he wants to discover what motivates western alienation.

"I don't want to offend Mr. Dion, but maybe he has failed to take notice relative to our concern over the Kyoto protocol," Klein said Thursday. "Maybe he has failed to take notice of our concern about health care, our concern over the gun registry or Senate reform."

Albertans are committed Canadians who hold dear the traditions that have shaped Canada, Klein stressed.

"And I hope Mr. Dion is listening," he added.

Dion described Klein as "a great Canadian," but said that's why he needs to clarify whether there's a misunderstanding leading to fresh talk of separatism.

"I think there is misunderstanding about what he said," Dion told reporters outside the Commons on Thursday. "I am sending a letter to be sure that we will dismiss it."

Fringe parties have advocated western separatism for years.

But the Alberta government's throne speech asserted that the province's ability to be a partner in Canada is compromised by the federal government, which rarely listens to Alberta's concerns.

Following the throne speech, Klein said he doesn't like talk of separation. But the federal government needs to be aware "there is that kind of talk out there," Klein suggested.

"To interpret what was in the throne speech as a separatist threat is taking a lot of poetic licence, or is reading a lot into it, that simply isn't there," Klein said.

"The issue of Alberta's place in Confederation was raised in the speech because pursuing Alberta's place with Ottawa is a priority of the government in 2003."

Still, Klein reiterated his frustration toward Prime Minister Jean Chretien's government "which seems not to listen to the people of this province" and "compromises the province's position as a full and equal partner in Confederation."

Klein said the issue will be discussed at the Alberta provincial Conservative party convention in

Red Deer next month.

"We have allotted 90 minutes of the convention to discuss Alberta's role in Confederation," said Klein.

Canadian Alliance Leader Stephen Harper sounded rather less forgiving of Klein's musings.

"I don't think it's useful," said the Calgary MP.

Harper said Albertans would be better served by flexing their economic and provincial powers and by voting for the Alliance to advocate their agenda in Ottawa.

Dion was brought into the federal cabinet by Prime Minister Jean Chretien to combat Quebec separatists.

He said he would be sending Klein "a very polite, very respectful" letter.

"I'm sure he is not a separatist," said Dion. "I will send a letter to him to be sure there is no misunderstanding about this aspect."

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