

Shorelines

NEWSLETTER OF THE PROBUS CLUB OF NORTH SHORE VANCOUVER

July 2020

www.probus-northshorevancouver.ca

Vol.18 No.7

Management Committee

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Special Events:

John Elliott
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Monday, July 13th Zoom Meeting at 9:30AM

with speaker

Terry Hood, Director,

Friends of the NVMA Society

*“The New North Vancouver Museum and Archives:
an Exciting Community Amenity Coming Soon”*



A new cultural attraction is coming to the North Shore! Join us while administrative staff and Friends Society volunteers let PROBUS members know about the significant developments now happening with the North Vancouver Museum and Archives (NVMA). Hear about the exciting new Museum of North Vancouver - now being constructed in the rapidly changing Shipyards District of North Vancouver. Be introduced to plans for the future of Lynn Valley's Community History Centre (this year celebrating its 100th anniversary) - the home

of the Archives of North Vancouver. Learn about ways you could become involved with the NVMA.



Mark Your Calendars to Attend Our Next Zoom Meeting



Monday, August 10th - Kandys Merola,

Executive Director, TB Vets Charitable Foundation

- President's Message, Nominating Committee Report - *page 2...*
- Review of Ralph Sutan's Zoom Presentation of June 4th - *page 3 - 5...*
- Special Events - *page 5...*

President's Notes



I am happy to report that the pandemic and government restrictions on large meetings have not prevented your club from providing you with the opportunity to enjoy and learn from interesting and informative presentations by some of the most accomplished Canadians.

Our June meeting was virtual on Zoom and featured Ralph Sultan, a long-time elected member of the BC Legislature with an outstanding life-time record of work in education and industry.

The meeting was attended by a large number of members, who in a survey revealed that they much enjoyed the contents and quality of Ralph's presentation. Some thought so highly of it that they asked to have access to a video of his presentation, presumably to listen to it again and share it with others.

This video can now be accessed by clicking the link and entering the password provided on page 5 of this newsletter.

This access has been made possible through the efforts of Darryl Stodalka and Linda Metcalfe. Thank you both.

We look forward to many members joining us for the July Zoom meeting at which our speaker will be Terry Hood. Darryl Stodalka will again make sure that there will be no technical glitches.

We are in the process of finding members for next year's management committee. Details about this important process are found elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Best wishes for a safe and good summer come to you from me and your Management Committee.

Herbert Grubel

Contact: president@probus-northshorevancouver.ca



Nominating Committee Report

As we head into the summer we are in the process of establishing our recommendation for the 2020/2021 Management Committee which is normally elected at our September Annual General Meeting. I have included our by-law related to this.

Bylaw No. 4 – Election of Officers

1. A Nominating Committee consisting of the President-Elect, President and a Past President (if available, otherwise a Club member in good standing) shall present to the Annual General Meeting a slate of candidates for election to the Management Committee.
2. Any further nominations (with prior consent to stand) shall be conveyed to the Nominating Committee at least 14 days prior to the Annual Meeting.
3. When more than one candidate is nominated for an office, voting for that position shall be by ballot.

We started the year with three vacant positions - Vice President, Speaker Chair and Secretary. There is a natural progression every year from Vice President to President to Past President. We have already recruited Darryl Stodalka to move from Communications Chair to Vice President, Keith Fenton for Secretary and John Elliott has agreed to move from Chair of Special Events to Speaker Chair. So we currently need a new Communications Chair and Chair of Special Events. If you have any interest in one of these positions please give me a call at 604-209-2495 or send an email to Jim_Grey@telus.net.

Jim Grey

Past President and Chair of the Nominating Committee



Why Not Join Our MC and Complete Our Team

Last Month Zoom Speaker - Ralph Sultan

On June 8, 2020 Mr. Ralph Sultan, MLA West Vancouver - Capilano, gave an informative and captivating presentation of what he has learned from almost 20 years in politics offering the “inside” view of being an MLA, interspersed with many personal anecdotes of his experiences.

The Legislature of British Columbia is composed of the Lieutenant Governor and 87 elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs). Being elected MLA is akin to becoming a director of a company with 5 million shareholders, with the role of the MLA serving them being to keep a close eye on what’s going on in the government - Is government’s strategy appropriate to the times? Are the budgets we approved on track? What messages are conveyed in its quarterly financial reports? Do we have sound leadership? What threats to this enterprise lie ahead?

The Legislature is not the Government and does not run the Government. It defines the Government’s legal powers approves or rejects its taxes, and approves, by simple majority, its annual budget, setting out Government’s proposed expenditures in great detail. In the absence of such approval from the Legislature, the Government is said to have lost the confidence of the Legislature resulting in the Legislature being dismissed, and a general election held to elect new MLA’s. This is the parliamentary system of government, quite unlike the Americans and in Mr. Sultan’s view, superior.

The Legislature has broad oversight responsibility. It can direct financial audits and performance audits of any area of Government it so chooses, with subpoena powers over reluctant witnesses. These on-the-ground audits are conducted by the office of the Auditor General who reports to the Public Accounts Committee of the Legislature what they have learned, have advised, and whether that advice was followed. It is just one of the mechanisms by which the Legislature endeavours to hold the government accountable.

This is the biggest and most important institution in our province. Its presence far exceeds that of the Federal government, the closest competitor. As one metric, if we add up total employment in our provincial health system, our education system, all of the other ministries and agencies, as well as BC Hydro, ICBC, liquor distribution, Ferries, BC Transit, Lotteries, WCB and BCSC (as they used to be known) and others, it adds up to roughly one-quarter of a million persons, or about 10% of British Columbia’s total work force. An assembly of 87 MLA’s with 250 support staff and a budget of \$80 million, oversees the spending of \$62 billion of your hard-earned dollars every year, not counting the Crown corporations and Crown lands.

Mr. Sultan worked with the Royal Bank of Canada for a decade and offered a comparison in size and scope to

the BC Government. Today, RBC has 85,000 employees. Our BC government has three times as many. RBC is organized into 5 business groups; BC Government is much more diversified. The Royal has annual sales around \$26 billion and the largest market capitalization of any Canadian company. The market capitalization of our provincial government, on the basis of revenue, is conservatively estimated to be worth 2-1/2 times as much. In addition, the BC Government is a wealthy landowner, owning about 94% of B.C.’s almost one million square kilometres of land. That’s France and Germany combined --surely worth many trillions of dollars.

His political career launched in 2001, and he remembers the advice given to him by a friend and mentor:

“Ralph, when you get over there, you’re going to be working with a cross-section of our entire population: the well-educated and the no-so-well-educated, the experienced and the not-so-experienced, rural and urban, social workers and lawyers, school trustees and farmers, all shapes and sizes, and you will understand that they are exactly who we need to guide our provincial affairs; because they are representative of all our citizens. And this is a good and necessary thing.”

His friend and mentor was right. It is a good and necessary thing. It’s what we call a healthy democracy.

Mr. Sultan’s background is varied. He grew up in a family of Swedish house painters, two parents, four boys, four girls, ten in all, fighting for space at the dinner table and somewhere to sleep, in a 3-bedroom house in East Vancouver. From the age of 15, Mr. Sultan gained experience as a painter and manual labourer, working in heavy construction, 2 years as an industrial salesman, 15 years at Harvard for economics and big business, and 10 years at the Royal Bank where he learned high finance. Then, a year at Anglo American as Executive VP, and 3 years with the McConnell family in Montreal, where he learned about wealth. Following that were a series of start-ups in mining and mutual funds, learning about meeting a payroll, losing your home to the bank, and that starting a business from scratch which he commented is a lot harder than it looks. Then retirement for several years where he learned about boating. When his wife of 43 years passed away, he went into politics. By next election Mr. Sultan will have served 20 years, and will be 88 years old.

Mr. Sultan got started in politics at age 68 by selling Party memberships followed by telephoning the hundreds of new members signed up by his six nomination competitors. He won them over, and then the election itself.

Fifteen years working in the Harvard Economics Department and as a Professor at the Harvard Business

Last Month Zoom Speaker - Ralph Sultan - cont'd

School, the focus was clearly on private enterprise, maximizing shareholder value, and relying on the marketplace to sort out winners and losers. For a politician, the reality was quite different, as the job required sitting down and listening to hundreds of constituents, where it was clear that the most important purpose of life for constituents was not maximizing shareholder value.

Mr. Sultan experienced a lot of changes during almost 20 years on this job.

- He entered politics before the phrase “social media” had been invented. Today, its massive influence has eroded trust in politicians. People get their facts from Facebook, not from journalists. Twitter gives anonymous strangers a reach and frequency which drowns out the voices of those actually qualified.

- Changes happened very quickly. It was after he was elected that a couple of Harvard undergraduates invented Facebook. A year later, Twitter swept in. A couple of years after that, the iPhone arrived.

- When he first arrived in Victoria, MLA’s communicated with their constituents using eight telephone booths in the hallway behind Legislative chambers. You shut the door, and picked up a black Bakelite receiver and dialed to get a long-distance operator. This was a huge step forward from the days when W.A.C. Bennett allowed only one long-distance telephone for use without personal charge by all of the MLA’s. Now, Presidents tweet policy on the fly, hourly to the world. The crowd of reporters and television cameras waiting outside the caucus room, hoping for a story, gets smaller every year.

- In his West Vancouver-Capilano constituency office when he started out, BC Mail hand-delivered letters every day. Now he gets email --by the thousands. To prove to his constituents that it is him personally composing a reply, and not some intern, he composes a hand-written note which will be delivered manually by Canada Post a few days later, using a postage stamp.

- Our first priority each morning at the constituency office is to rescue our email inbox loaded with megabytes. They are mostly emails sent by large foreign-funded organizations like Leadnow, Change.org, and Tides Canada. Each and every communication must be examined and triaged. Those from constituents go to the top of the pile, letters from important organizations are next. If it is thoughtful and informative from somebody he met on the road, it warrants his response. If it is from somebody recruited to re-broadcast lobbyist’s words --not hard to figure out since five people don’t usually write identical letters-- they too will receive a reply -- because they are constituents -- but not with the enthusiasm engendered by original think-

ing. He commented that he fears that with the coming of artificial intelligence, it will be harder in the future to distinguish real citizens from robots. He does not reply to emails with emails, as it is too risky. He sends them a letter, thinking that should hold off the robots for a while.

- In Victoria, as a Minister, he learned of the Government’s communication challenges. Letters and emails addressed to him went directly to a correspondence section, where wheat was separated from chaff. Letters meriting reply had one composed -- or more accurately “assembled” -- from pre-written modules, and sent to the minister for signature, along with the original letter (revealed to him for the first time.) Ministers are not inclined to rewrite these replies. They sit in the house and sign them as a distraction from the speeches.

With respect to whether there has been a parallel shift in what constituents are concerned about, it is hard to generalize, because of the huge variety of issues coming to their attention. But when people call his constituency office, they either want to let Mr. Sultan know an opinion or complaint, and insist upon talking with him directly; or they need help with a real problem, and don’t much care who they talk to, as long as the problem is solved. He noted that his constituency office takes pride in its ability to solve constituents’ problems -- if solvable.

What have been some of the big local issues that West Vancouver-Capilano Office has dealt with?

- In 20 years, the biggest all-time volume generator was not global warming, not ICBC, and not the speculation tax -- no, the all-time protest volume winner was the granting of a provincial liquor license to a store in Edgemont Village.

- Lesser issues, like the pipeline, steelhead, and vaccination, also keep us busy. It is not difficult to rattle off 100 issues on which constituents expect the MLA to take a stand. An MLA’s ability to discuss any of them intelligently, is simply part of the job, but not that easy.

Managing the local constituency office is only half of the job -- albeit the important half if you want to get re-elected. The other half of the job is at the Legislature in Victoria. Every Sunday afternoon when the Legislature is sitting, maybe 6 months of the year, he flies to Victoria. About Mid-way, your brain disconnects from Edgemont Village and you begin to worry about the health system, and other provincial matters.

The Legislature is unlike anything I previously experienced: small, tight, and you get to know the MLA’s really well: their background, ideology, and predictable refrain when giving a speech.

Victoria lessons learned:

Last Month Zoom Speaker - Ralph Sultan - cont'd

Lesson 1: It's all about team.

Lesson 2: Neither the premier nor the leader of the opposition is a dictator. Unlike the typical CEO, he or she cannot hire the team, he or she cannot fire the team, and if the team doesn't like the performance of the leader, he or she can be tossed out tomorrow.

Lesson 3: You must choose between focussing on personal priorities or government and party priorities. Caucus is where you can advance your personal agenda, but the problem is you will find there 40 or so equally articulate politicians with personal agendas of their own.

Lesson 4: It's a blood sport: MLA's are pals at the pub, but nothing feels better than sticking it to the other guy on the record, in Hansard forever -- during question period, during estimates, or during committee. The Hansard word-for-word record is studied and studied again, to find weaknesses you can use to exterminate them at the next election. But personal animosities are rare. Most of us accept that it's all political theatre. A sense of humour is helpful.

Lesson 5: Ask yourself if you seek fame or notoriety? Political fame is fleeting, infamy sticks forever. Politics encourages narcissism, but aggressive self-promotion has its price.

Lesson 6: You must keep faith in the job by excelling in adding value in ways that you can.

Lesson 7: You are exposed to intimidation.

Lesson 8: Most important of all, you must never forget your goal is to improve the welfare of the people. This noble purpose justifies the long hours and low pay. You are a lawmaker, and wise lawmaking is the game.

A final learning is that the Legislature is given purpose by Big Ideas. Big Ideas can glue together a cross-section of people into a common purpose. For example, a Big Idea that came forward in Gordon Campbell's time is that carbon dioxide is destroying our planet. After reading Al Gore's book one weekend, Gordon Campbell persuaded an earlier caucus in which I served, to introduce the world's first carbon tax. The idea was simple: instead of taxing income, why not tax carbon? Gordon really started something. The moral of the story is plain: don't underestimate the impact of Big Ideas.

The presentation wrapped up with the describing of two big threats to democracy, experts and kings, the first being rise of experts, and the decline of ordinary citizens in decision-making. The second threat was the occurrence several weeks ago when the Government of Canada and

the Government of British Columbia solemnly signed a Memorandum of Understanding with inherited chiefs of a First Nations up north, in defiance of the elected chiefs of that same First Nation. A part of British Columbia half the size of Belgium, and two levels of our government are contemplating turning over its governance to a local cabal chosen by family tree, accident of birth, and genetics – but not by citizen vote... and they also excluded all of the women.

Mr. Sultan concluded the presentation with the comments that it has taken 800 years of struggle and many gallons of blood for our country to perfect its parliamentary democracy. He asked ...was this struggle so trivial, so meaningless, that it's OK to replace democracy with inheritance, father to son, without even bothering to consult our elected representatives? Are we creating a West Coast royalty? Is the Legislature neutered? The current government has encouraged this nightmare.

In closing, Mr. Sultan said that he was immensely privileged to have been chosen for this job by the voters of North and West Vancouver, five elections in a row.

An energetic question and answer period followed. The entire presentation was recorded in the Zoom environment and can be accessed via our website.

Summary prepared by Darlene Dean

This video can now be accessed by clicking the link in the bottom of the page and using the password **Probus\$June8**

Special Events

We may be able to offer John Atkin's Viaducts Walk in September. Watch for a notice in the August Shorelines.

The fully subscribed tour of the Cancer Research Centre that was to happen April 16 is still many months away. Again watch for information in the Shorelines.

John Elliott

"Shorelines" © A monthly publication of
The PROBUS Club of North Shore Vancouver
Editorial contributions and comments are welcomed.
Forward by e-mail to linda@probus-northshorevancouver.ca
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To View Ralph Sultan's video, Click link below and use password Probus\$June8

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/z-t2Np7c9VJJOeJHO8VzDGfYsAbnLT6a80SMZqKENzBmWLAKE9_gb1aALYD-zYzGA?startTime=1591632199000