

# Tory ads take on Wildrose

Radio spots target party's opposition to new impaired driving rules in Alberta

KELLY CRYDERMAN  
CALGARY HERALD

Signalling a combative provincial election is just around the corner, the Alberta PC party is expected to launch radio ads today slamming the Wildrose for its stance on the province's new drunk driving law — warning voters, “Danielle

Smith and the Wildrose: not worth the risk.”

The ad, which will run only in Calgary, marks a major shift in strategy for the long-governing Tories, who've usually paid scant attention to opposition parties before or during election campaigns.

However, the Redford-led Conservatives have suffered recent political turmoil over



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their handling of a judicial inquiry into problems in the health-care system, as well as accusations MLAs have bullied municipal leaders and school boards.

Some recent polls also indicate that while the PC party still leads the Wildrose, Liberal and NDP opposition in popularity, the gap between the province's two right-of-centre parties has narrowed.

“Negative advertising is always in the tool kit, but you wouldn't bring (it) out if you were clearly and unassailably the front-runner,” said pollster

Ian Large, vice-president of Leger Marketing in Alberta.

“The Tories are preparing the ground for a campaign that is more of a challenge than they might have expected, even three months ago.”

Large noted the tag line “Not Worth the Risk” already has a successful political pedigree.

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Bill 26 would allow police officers working alcohol checkpoints to impose administrative penalties on drivers with a blood-alcohol concentration of .05, which is below the current .08 required to lay criminal charges. Calgary Herald Archive

## ADS: Smith says PCs feel 'threatened'

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It's the same slogan the federal Harper Conservatives used against then-federal Liberal Leader Stephane Dion in 2008, the year they won a minority government.

At the heart of the advertisement is the government's new drunk driving legislation that was passed late last year.

Known as Bill 26, the Traffic Safety Amendment Act will impose administrative penalties on drivers with a blood-alcohol concentration above .05, which is lower than the .08 reading required to lay criminal charges.

The radio ad references the statistic that 300 Albertans have been killed since 1998 by drivers who have alcohol in their system, but are under the federally determined Criminal Code legal limit of .08.

The Wildrose party has promised to repeal Bill 26, which was passed by the legislature but has not come into force. Wildrose Leader Danielle Smith has said the bill threatens to "ensnare couples on a date night who share a bottle of wine."

In the PC commercial, the

announcer targets Smith's comments, saying 300 Albertans will never have another date night.

"Let's tell the Wildrose that real leadership is about making decisions to save lives," an announcer says, noting the ad is authorized by votepc.ca.

In the past, Redford has said one of her goals is to take the "heat" out of politics, adding one of her problems with the current political dialogue is "everything has become heated and petty and negative."

Alberta PC party campaign manager Susan Elliott said the advertisement is in response to the Wildrose move last month to distribute drink coasters in bars and restaurants with a red line running through the number .05 as a part of a Wildrose campaign against the law.

"Here we have a political party that appears to be trying to win votes by telling people that it's OK to have more than two or three drinks and then drive home," Elliott said.

However, Smith said Wednesday the ads were an indication of Wildrose success against the governing Tories.



Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald  
**Wildrose Leader Danielle Smith says the bill could ensnare couples on a date who share a bottle of wine.**

"It's astonishing for the first time in their 41-year history that they feel so threatened by an opposition party they're going to launch their first-ever attack ad," she said.

Smith said the ads also illustrate there's a deep division within the public about the Tory legislation and the public will decide which

either party's claims hold any water.

Elliott wouldn't reveal the cost of the ad campaign. She said the party's advertisement will run only in Calgary because that's where the Wildrose party coaster campaign appears to be focused.

This isn't the first negative volley between the two parties.

The Wildrose first released attack ads against Redford last fall, linking her to unpopular decisions by former premier Ed Stelmach and accusing her of flip-flopping on campaign promises.

Large said negative advertising has long been a feature of U.S. politics and recently a major part of federal campaigns. He said there's one key reason negative messaging via paid ads has become a mainstream political strategy: it works.

"The trend has arrived in politics in Alberta," Large said. "Personally, I find it disappointing, but it's not surprising."

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