



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

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Red River College Decision Part of a Pattern of Bad Decision-Making

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The recent decision to end the tenure of Paul Vogt as President and CEO of Red River College (RRC) has been met with widespread condemnation from some surprising sources.

The consultant hired by the provincial government to review the governance, programming and finances of Manitoba colleges responded to the news of Mr. Vogt's departure by calling it "the worst personnel decision at a Canadian college, maybe ever."

In his review the consultant, Alex Usher, gave RRC strong grades, particularly in the areas of governance and financial accountability.

The CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba, Don Leitch, who like Vogt is a former Clerk of the Executive Council, called the decision "perplexing," adding that RRC was "going so well in the right direction."

The head of the Manitoba Division of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters said that Vogt "had done a marvelous job of building a strategy of growing the organization and attracting federal funds for projects."

Former Political Science professor and editorial page editor Shannon Sampert described Vogt as "polite, self-effacing and brilliant." She called the RRC Board's decision a "bad move," one they would live to regret.

The *Winnipeg Free Press* editorialized that the explanation by the RRC board chair that the organization wanted to "move in a different direction" was "dismissive" and "woefully inadequate."

What then is one to make of this outpouring of support for Mr. Vogt?

At a micro level it is clear that many knowledgeable people view this as a mistaken decision and a potential loss to our community of a highly qualified and obviously effective public administrator.

At a broader level, it is but the latest in a series of what appear to be narrowly partisan decisions by an ideologically-driven provincial government.

Few would question the right of a new government to replace members of boards and commissions in order to ensure that broad governance represents the interests and values of the government of the day.

But the Pallister government is going well beyond that.

The Premier has flatly denied that either he or his government played a role in Mr. Vogt's dismissal. That may be the case. But to date there is no reasonable explanation for what is almost certainly a very bad decision. And the Vogt case fits—in ways that are not fully clear—with a pattern of behaviour that is worrisome.

In the past three years we have witnessed

there is an alternative.

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the mass resignation of the Manitoba Hydro Board, less than two years after their appointment by Mr. Pallister, apparently because of the Premier's refusal to meet with his appointed Chairperson.

The Chairperson of the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation Board was removed amidst charges that the Pallister government was going around the board to provide financial direction to management.

The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Board has seen their apparently cost effective business decision to allow customer access to on-line services opposed by the Premier, who appears to have succumbed to private broker interests to the detriment of the broader public interest.

The privatization of the provincial air ambulance service has seen medical doctors and other health care professionals withdraw their services because of safety concerns with the new, for-profit system.

The Manitoba Labour Board found the University of Manitoba guilty of bargaining in bad faith because the UM did not reveal to the union the secret instructions issued to them by the Pallister government.

Each of the above situations speaks to inappropriate government micro-management of public services. They also speak to a record of decision-making that is narrowly partisan and at odds with the public interest.

And while Mr. Pallister spends his time trying to micro-manage what ought to be arms-length public institutions, he remains unable or unwilling to make, or is disinterested in making, decisions about the real issues facing Manitobans—the meth crisis being but one very obvious and important example.

Red River College, Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba Public Insurance, the Liquor and Lotteries Corporation and the University of Manitoba—each of them public institutions that are important to Manitobans—will survive Premier Pallister.

But the completely unwarranted summary dismissal of Paul Vogt is yet another example of the fact that the Conservatives' long-standing boast to be the most effective public managers is a claim for which the evidence is weak, and growing weaker.

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