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## Life after Reform: Stockwell Day will drive the federal agenda, writes Tom Flanagan.: [Final Edition]

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### Abstract (summary)

It was good for the Canadian Alliance that Stockwell Day won the leadership race. It was even better that he won decisively. By getting more than 60 per cent of the votes, he ensured no one will conduct a rearguard action against him within the party. But will he be able to take "the next step," as his campaign theme advertised, to make the Alliance a serious contender for power? Will he be able to do what Preston Manning never could?

Another potential asset for Mr. Day is his posture towards Quebec. This is not simply a matter of being able to converse in French. As came out late in the campaign, Mr. Day supported both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords. He now espouses the Reform/ Alliance policy of allowing the provinces to exercise their constitutional powers without minute supervision by the federal government. As long as the Bloc Quebecois retains its vitality, the Alliance may not win seats in Quebec; but Mr. Day should be able to build up a degree of rapport with that province that will rebound to his benefit elsewhere. Ontario voters who never supported Reform because they perceived it to be anti-Quebec will take another look at the Canadian Alliance led by Stockwell Day.

Huge challenges remain, however, in other areas of policy. In proposing a single-rate income tax, the Alliance has thrown down the gauntlet to the redistributive ethos of the welfare state; and Mr. Day is closely tied to this idea because he brought in a provincial flat tax as treasurer of Alberta. Many Canadian voters may see a graduated income tax as fairer than one with a single rate; but, as the victory of free trade showed, polarization can succeed. In the impending debate over taxation, only the Alliance will defend a single-rate income tax, while the other four parties will vie to denounce it. Consolidating the free-market vote behind itself while the other parties split the welfare-state vote could become a profitable strategy.

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### Full Text

Canadian Alliance Leadership

It was good for the Canadian Alliance that Stockwell Day won the leadership race. It was even better that he won decisively. By getting more than 60 per cent of the votes, he ensured no one will conduct a rearguard action against him within the party. But will he be able to take "the next step," as his campaign theme advertised, to make the Alliance a serious contender for power? Will he be able to do what Preston Manning never could?

Under previous leadership, Reform got support from two types of voters. The smaller category consisted of protest voters, angry at the system, "mad as hell and not going to take it any more." The larger number were ideologically motivated, enthused about Reform's distinctive blend of populism and free-market economics. But what Reform conspicuously lacked was any large number of voters drawn by the personal magnetism of the leader. Mr. Manning appealed intensely to a small number of loyalists, but his cerebral personality never connected with the electorate at large.

Mr. Day is as different a person as one could possibly imagine. Where Mr. Manning is introverted, solitary and reflective -- an unusual combination in a politician -- Mr. Day has a classic political personality -- extroverted, gregarious and spontaneous. It is almost impossible not to like him at a personal level. Moreover, he is young, handsome and athletic. Even commentators who oppose his views rave about how great he looks in a tank top.

One of the conceits of intellectuals is that elections are supposed to be "about issues," that is, about ideological abstractions. But people, not ideas, run for office, and many voters see an election as the opportunity to select the right person to run the country. Mr. Day's energy

and affability will make him a formidable opponent in that aspect of the competition, and his leadership will allow the Alliance to tap into a vote share denied to Reform.

Another potential asset for Mr. Day is his posture towards Quebec. This is not simply a matter of being able to converse in French. As came out late in the campaign, Mr. Day supported both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords. He now espouses the Reform/ Alliance policy of allowing the provinces to exercise their constitutional powers without minute supervision by the federal government. As long as the Bloc Quebecois retains its vitality, the Alliance may not win seats in Quebec; but Mr. Day should be able to build up a degree of rapport with that province that will rebound to his benefit elsewhere. Ontario voters who never supported Reform because they perceived it to be anti-Quebec will take another look at the Canadian Alliance led by Stockwell Day.

Huge challenges remain, however, in other areas of policy. In proposing a single-rate income tax, the Alliance has thrown down the gauntlet to the redistributive ethos of the welfare state; and Mr. Day is closely tied to this idea because he brought in a provincial flat tax as treasurer of Alberta. Many Canadian voters may see a graduated income tax as fairer than one with a single rate; but, as the victory of free trade showed, polarization can succeed. In the impending debate over taxation, only the Alliance will defend a single-rate income tax, while the other four parties will vie to denounce it. Consolidating the free-market vote behind itself while the other parties split the welfare-state vote could become a profitable strategy.

Finally, we come to Mr. Day's now-legendary social conservatism. This is a problem not so much because his moral views are out of line with those of voters but because abortion and gay rights are talismanic issues for the secular humanists who dominate Canada's mass media. Abortion and homosexual intercourse symbolize for them the liberal humanist vision of untrammelled personal choice unconstrained by divine or natural order. As the media showed during the leadership campaign, they will not leave these topics alone even though Mr. Day has not proposed any particular action on them as part of his federal agenda.

Mr. Day's stance is essentially the one developed earlier by Mr. Manning: The personal is not the political, the leader will not impose his views on the party and country, and legislation on these topics should emerge through direct democracy. His commitment as leader of the Alliance is simply that his government will legislate the tools of direct democracy -- an initiative and referendum process -- that will allow activists to try to bring forward legislation relevant to abortion, gay rights and similar issues.

I endorse this position, but I also think Mr. Day needs to do more. Referring everything to direct democracy allows opponents of the Alliance to paint doomsday scenarios of what might happen. Mr. Day would help his own cause if he would state the obvious about abortion: Given what we know about public opinion, the only legislation that could possibly succeed in a referendum would be a limitation on late-term abortions resembling what the Mulroney government tried to pass after the Supreme Court's Morgentaler decision. Mr. Day should also state the obvious about gay rights: While there is no prospect of removing sexual orientation from human rights legislation, marriage should remain the legal union of a man and a woman (a position also endorsed by the Liberals).

Mr. Day is talking about winning the next election. Political leaders are natural optimists; they would not be good leaders otherwise. As an analyst, I don't see the evidence that the Alliance can win the next election, but I do see abundant evidence that it can win seats in Ontario, deprive the Liberals of their majority, and thus make itself into a serious contender for power with Mr. Day as leader.

Tom Flanagan is professor of political science at the University of Calgary and a former research director of the Reform Party. He supported Stockwell Day in the leadership race.

#### **Illustration**

Black & White Photo: Bill Keay, The Vancouver Sun / Stockwell Day may not win the next federal election, but he can force the Liberal government's hand. ;

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