



BLUE STORM: THE RISE AND FALL OF JASON KENNEY

Edited by Duane Bratt, Richard Sutherland and David Taras

ISBN 978-1-77385-418-2

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BLUE STORM

The Rise and Fall
of Jason Kenney

Edited by

**DUANE BRATT,
RICHARD SUTHERLAND
AND DAVID TARAS**



BLUE STORM

ARTS IN ACTION

SERIES EDITOR:

Jennifer Pettit, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Mount Royal University



Co-published with Mount Royal University

ISSN 2371-6134 (Print) ISSN 2371-6142 (Online)

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Arts in Action Series
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University of Calgary Press
2500 University Drive NW
Calgary, Alberta
Canada T2N 1N4
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LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Title: Blue storm : the rise and fall of Jason Kenney / edited by Duane Bratt, Richard Sutherland, and David Taras.

Names: Bratt, Duane, 1967- editor. | Sutherland, Richard, 1964- editor. | Taras, David, 1950- editor.

Series: Arts in action ; no. 4.

Description: Series statement: Arts in action, 2371-6134 ; no. 4 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20220445184 | Canadiana (ebook) 20220445273 | ISBN 9781773854168 (softcover) | ISBN 9781773854175 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781773854205 (EPUB) | ISBN 9781773854199 (PDF) | ISBN 9781773854182 (Open Access PDF)

Subjects: LCSH: Kenney, Jason, 1968- | LCSH: Premiers (Canada)—Alberta—Biography. | LCSH: United Conservative Party. | LCSH: Alberta. Legislative Assembly—Elections, 2019. | LCSH: Alberta—Economic conditions—21st century. | CSH: Alberta—Politics and government—2015-

Classification: LCC FC3676.1.K46 B58 2023 | DDC 971.23/04092—dc23

The University of Calgary Press acknowledges the support of the Government of Alberta through the Alberta Media Fund for our publications. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada. We acknowledge the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from Mount Royal University Library, through the Mount Royal University Library Open Access Fund.



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada



Cover image: Colourbox 6153926 and 8364348

Copyediting by Tania Therien

Cover design, page design, and typesetting by Melina Cusano

In memory of
David Taras

CONTENTS

Preface	xi
I. Setting the Scene	xv
Introduction: Jason Kenney and the Perfect Storm <i>Duane Bratt, Richard Sutherland, and Lisa Young</i>	1
II. The 2019 Election	17
1 Two Combative Leaders, Two Disparate Parties, and One Bitter Campaign: The 2019 Alberta Election <i>Graham Thomson</i>	19
2 The Alberta 2019 Election Online: A Turn to Two Party Electoral Dominance? <i>Peter Malachy Ryan and Kate Toogood</i>	35
3 Standard Error: The Polls in the 2019 Alberta Election and Beyond <i>Brooks DeCillia</i>	59
III. Inside the United Conservative Party	81
4 Divisions among Alberta’s “Conservatives” <i>David K. Stewart and Anthony M. Sayers</i>	83
5 Albertans and the Fair Deal <i>Jared J. Wesley</i>	105
6 Policing and Alberta’s United Conservative Party Government <i>Doug King</i>	127

7	Playing the Populist Victim: Women, Gender, Representation, and the United Conservative Party <i>Melanee Thomas</i>	145
8	Kenney's Ride: Albertan Neo-Liberal Myths and the Symbology of a Blue Dodge Ram <i>Chaseten Remillard and Tyler Nagel</i>	169
IV. Oil and Gas Policies		187
9	Alberta's Climate Policy: Public Kenney versus Private Kenney <i>Duane Bratt</i>	189
10	Jason Kenney, Energy, and Pipelines in the 2019 Alberta Election: A Study in Hubris <i>Jean-Sébastien Rioux</i>	211
11	Just <i>Our</i> Facts: The Energy War Room's Adventures in Branded Content <i>Brad Clark</i>	233
V. Alberta's Fiscal Situation		257
12	The Long Slide towards Fiscal Reckoning: Managing Alberta's Finances in an Age of Decline <i>Trevor Tombe</i>	259
13	Always More Than It Seems: Rural Alberta and the Politics of Decline <i>Roger Epp</i>	281
14	Cultural Industries under the United Conservative Party <i>Richard Sutherland</i>	301

VI. Health Care, Education, and Public Sector Policies	319
15 Bitter Battles: The United Conservative Party’s War on Health Care Workers <i>Gillian Steward</i>	321
16 Education and the United Conservative Party of Alberta <i>Charles F. Webber</i>	341
17 Riding the Roller Coaster: Post-Secondary Education in Alberta under Kenney <i>Lisa Young</i>	361
18 Labour in the Time of COVID <i>Lori Williams</i>	385
VII. COVID in Alberta and Ontario	413
19 Comparing the Kenney and Ford Governments <i>Jonathan Malloy</i>	415
20 “With Comorbidities”: The Politics of COVID-19 and the Kenney Government <i>Lisa Young</i>	435
VIII. Conclusion	467
21 Conclusion: States of Uncertainty <i>Duane Bratt and Richard Sutherland</i>	469
Contributors	477
Index	483

Preface

In 2019, the United Conservative Party (UCP), under the leadership of Jason Kenney, unseated the New Democratic Party (NDP) to form the provincial government of Alberta, a restoration of conservative power in a province that had seen the Progressive Conservatives win every election from 1971 to 2015. Almost from its first days in office, the UCP began to create political waves, many of which have yet to subside.

Blue Storm is the first scholarly analysis of the 2019 election and the first years of the UCP government, with special focus on Jason Kenney's rise to power and his stunning fall. It brings together a wealth of original research from scholars, journalists, and political watchers, each with a unique methodological approach, to provide a well-rounded analysis of complex and ongoing political issues in Alberta, including the impacts of COVID-19.

It opens with an examination of the election from a number of vantage points, including the campaign, polling, and online politics. It provides fascinating insight into internal UCP politics with chapters on the divisions within the party, gender and the UCP, and the symbolism of Kenney's famous blue pickup truck. Explorations of oil and gas policy, the Energy War Room, Alberta's budgets, health care, education, the public sector, Alberta's cultural industries, and more provide unprecedented insight into the actions, motivations, and impacts of Kenney's UCP government in power. It concludes with a survey of the impacts of COVID-19 in Alberta and a comparison between Jason Kenney and Doug Ford.

Blue Storm is essential reading for everyone interested in Alberta politics and the tumultuous first years of the UCP government. Providing key insights from perspectives across the political spectrum, this book is a captivating deep dive into an unprecedented party, its often

controversial politics, and its unforgettable leader. Unfortunately, not all policies or events could be covered with the same depth in a single volume. Nonetheless, *Blue Storm* provides what we believe will be the definitive account of the conservative restoration after four years of an NDP government, Alberta's political management of COVID-19, and the turbulent three-and-a-half-year reign of Jason Kenney as premier.

While the book features a distinguished roster of contributors from across the province and beyond, much of the expertise and indeed the financial support for this enterprise came from Mount Royal University. We are grateful to Jennifer Pettit, the dean of arts, for her support of the project, which is part of the Faculty of Arts' "Arts in Action" book series through the University of Calgary Press.

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic affected every aspect of the Kenney government's first three years in office, it also affected our work on the book. We benefitted from an intensive two-day workshop in June of 2021. Because of COVID-19, this workshop had to be held virtually. We're grateful that our authors were willing to spend two days online to bring the volume together as a cohesive whole, and for their perseverance in working on the volume at a time that was disruptive and difficult for many.

We are also grateful to Brian Scrivener and Helen Hajnoczky at the University of Calgary Press for their professionalism, encouragement, and advice. We also owe a great debt to Tania Therien for copy editing the manuscript and Alison Cobra for designing the promotion strategy for *Blue Storm*. This project has been a voyage of discovery and intensive but warm collaboration for the editors. We are indebted to our contributors and to the peer reviewers who helped us steer our course.

It is with deep sadness that we acknowledge the loss of our colleague and friend David Taras before *Blue Storm* was published. Several days before the contributor's workshop was to begin in June 2021, David informed the other editors that he had been diagnosed with cancer and would be immediately starting treatment. This meant that he would be unavailable to participate in the workshop. Over the subsequent year, David remained engaged with the project and read, when his strength allowed him to, draft chapters. In June 2022, roughly a year after his cancer diagnosis, David passed away. While an obviously massive tragedy to his family and friends, David's death also leaves a huge absence in Alberta's

scholarly community and political analysis. David was an internationally renowned scholar, greatly admired teacher, public intellectual with many media appearances spanning decades, generous mentor to junior scholars, and, most importantly, a very kind man. Many of the contributors to *Blue Storm* had been friends and colleagues of David for years during his two decades at the University of Calgary and the decade that he spent working as the Ralph Klein Chair in Media Studies at Mount Royal University. The editors will miss the brainstorming sessions enjoying the lunch buffet at the Danish-Canadian Club, where David was a member and always, despite protests from others, picked up the cheque!

In our last conversation with David, less than a week before his death, he complained that he did not do enough work as editor to warrant his name on the book cover. He was kindly, but firmly, told that we were acknowledging his request, but denying it. It is no exaggeration to say that David was the driving force behind *Blue Storm* and its prequel *Orange Chinook*. Both books were David's idea. David helped to identify the themes and topics for *Blue Storm*, recruited the contributors, and planned the workshop.

In recognition of his contributions not only to this volume, but to understanding politics, government, and communication in Alberta throughout his distinguished career, *Blue Storm* is dedicated to the memory of David Taras.

Duane Bratt
Richard Sutherland

