JOHN CUMMINS INTERVIEW

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NIK (CFUN-AM): Well, getting back to the story of what's going on in Delta South, one of the reasons why this is such a battleground is that so many people have come out on different sides of the issues there, including Conservative MP John Cummins, who has been a long-time representative of that area, and in the last few days of the BC election campaign, he stepped right into it with a highly critical attack of the BC Liberals and a strong endorsement of NDP leader Carole James, which a lot of people were very surprised by, and John Cummins joins us now this morning. Good morning.

JOHN CUMMINS (CONSERVATIVE MP): Good morning.

NIK: Now it's pretty tense. Did you think it was going to be that tense in that riding?

JOHN CUMMINS: Well, to be quite honest, I turned the TV off here long before the drama started last night, so I'm only finding out about it by listening to you this morning and the few people I've talked to after I got out of the Caucus meeting at noon hour.

NIK: Two votes.

JOHN CUMMINS: Yeah, two votes [LAUGHTER]. Wow.

SIMI (CFUN-AM): Now what was it that made you really be so highly critical against the BC Liberals?

JOHN CUMMINS: Well, I think that they've been totally insensitive to a number of issues in South Delta, whether it's the power lines that really industrialize a residential neighbourhood, whether it's taking 500 acres out of the agricultural land reserve to service the port of Vancouver, or whether it's the South Fraser Perimeter Road, which, again, is going to take more land out of the agricultural land reserve and just increase the traffic through our community. I mean it's a host of issues, but the most damning criticism, I think, is that these folks simply just didn't want to listen. They had no time for alternatives, and, you know, I don't think that… I just couldn't support that a government that behaved in that way.

NIK: And people would say to you you're a Conservative MP, but why choose the NDP then?

JOHN CUMMINS: Well, it was… you know, it was you got to pick the best of… well, I don't want to necessarily use the term "evils," [LAUGHTER] but the best of two poor options…

NIK: Right.

JOHN CUMMINS: … and I think that in that sense, I quite clearly was able to support the NDP. I think that they were opposed to these run of the river hydro projects. They are opposed to nut cage aquaculture…

NIK: And those are all issues that are near and dear to you.

JOHN CUMMINS: Absolutely, and…

SIMI: Sorry. Do you think if we hadn't been in this massive economic crises that there would have been a different outcome? It seems that there's been a lot of fear surrounding this provincial election.

JOHN CUMMINS: Oh, I'm absolutely positive that if this… if we hadn't been in the middle of an economic crisis, Mr. Campbell would have been… he would have been gone and badly beaten. You look at the results, and I've gone… was going through the results this morning, riding by riding, and you know, there's not many big wins for the Liberals in this. There's not many places where Ministers, longstanding Ministers, had substantive wins. There's a handful in the areas (inaudible), but when you go throughout the province, they managed to take out a 1,000-win… vote win here and a 1,000-vote win there or less, and I think that clearly, people felt that Mr. Campbell, because he parades himself as a small "c" fiscal conservative, that he was the guy to lead the charge. I think that Carole James' failure was that she wasn't able to portray herself as a moderate NDPer in… much in the style of Gary Doer in Manitoba…

NIK: Right.

JOHN CUMMINS: … and gain some political support that way.

SIMI: It's interesting, though, that I mean Vicki Huntington actually was once on staff at your office there, and you initially endorsed her and then changed your mind. What brought that…

JOHN CUMMINS: No, no, no, no, no. I… I continued. I endorsed Vicki midway through the campaign and continue to support her, and my endorsement of the NDP was actually limited. I didn't particularly endorse the NDP, but I did indicate that I endorsed Vicki. I supported the NDP candidate Guy Gentner in the area that I lived in and that I… and I advised people to look throughout the province…

NIK: So you're really saying is what you were saying is just don't vote Liberal.

JOHN CUMMINS: Well, it was anybody but Campbell, anybody but Kinsella, and that was my attitude on this. I think that there's a number of issues that are outstanding, Mr. Campbell's sale of BC Rail, for one…

NIK: Uh huh.

JOHN CUMMINS: … that put this government under a cloud. I was not pleased with the way the election campaign was run in South Delta either. I think that… I think that it was a little bit over the top in some areas. Mr. Oppal certainly didn't, I think… I think that the campaign was somewhat excessive. Just as an example, there was an issue where they went out to Tsawwassen First Nation and they invited everybody to come on down to the TFN Rec Centre and that white spot burgers would be served and then lots of prizes given away, so they gave away Giants T-shirts, gas certificates for $50 each, white spot gift certificates and some Starbucks gift certificates. Like that to me is pretty borderline…

SIMI: I mean I was going to say isn't that illegal. They may as well have just shoved used fibres in their hands, don't you think?

JOHN CUMMINS: Well, I think that it… if it's not illegal it's certainly questionable conduct, and I… that issue, some of the media at least had knowledge of it and chose not to run with it, and…

NIK: Well, see, I hadn't heard anything about this.

JOHN CUMMINS: Yeah, but I think that… I think that that conduct is questionable…

NIK: Well…

JOHN CUMMINS: … and I think that the issue should be raised with the chief electoral officer in BC to determine whether in fact it was appropriate.

NIK: Well, that's a good point.

SIMI: So four more years of the Liberals. What are your predictions? What are the things that we're going to see?

JOHN CUMMINS: Well, I think what Mr. Campbell has to recognize is that he barely squeaked out a win in these econ-… tough economic times, and he did it because he was able to present himself as the best caretaker of the economy. But that doesn't give him licence to continue with his reconciliation policy, which most of the folks that I've talked to, people in the lumber industry, people in the mining industry, are very, very concerned about. I don't think that this election gives him the licence to continue with that. I don't think it gives him the licence to continue with these run of the river hydro projects either. Again, that's a huge issue of concern to British Columbians, and I think that if he tries to continue that, I think that you'll see that more and more people are going to start to speak out much more loudly than they may have to date.

NIK: Do you think this is something that everybody's going to have to just stay on top of and be more aware of?

JOHN CUMMINS: Absolutely. I think that we… you're going to have to watch this government because Mr. Campbell has an agenda that he's not really being open about. I mean these issues were not discussed during the election. They dodged them, and I think that it's wrong. I'm… you know, I think Vaughn Palmer did a great job on the recognition and reconciliation legislation in the Vancouver Sun, but the media itself, like they never picked it up as a news story either in the Sun or the Province or elsewhere, really, in British Columbia to any extent, yet that's a hugely significant proposal that he's put, and it's one that deserved a free and open debate and what better time to do it than during an election campaign, and yet it didn't happen, and I think it's the same with these run of the river hydro projects. There's some huge concerns there that people have about putting these projects on isolated rivers throughout British Columbia because they need roads to service them; there's hydro transmission lines that are going to have to flow from them to the grid, and the reality is that they're not environmentally friendly, and I think that, again, those are issues that needed to be discussed during this election campaign, and they certainly weren't in the mainstream media, and… so I think the public is going to have to be very, very careful. I think Mr. Campbell will use this election victory as a… as a justification for some of these policies that he really hid from public view during this election, and I think all British Columbians are going to have to be very vigilant to ensure that our province and the province that we want to leave our kids is not going to be damaged by Mr. Campbell's ambitions here.

NIK: Well, listen, we would love to keep you longer, because I know there's lots going on in Ottawa we'd like to talk about, but we know you have to go, so thank you very much for joining us this morning.

JOHN CUMMINS: Well, thank you very much. It's been my pleasure.

NIK: OK. That was John Cummins, the Delta MP from the Conservative Party, and really quite surprising when you hear that ideologically he… people would assume that he is on the same wavelength as Gordon Campbell and instead it is the complete opposite.

SIMI: That he would take a 180 turn, basically. He would support anybody else other than Gordon Campbell.

NIK: Gordon Campbell.

SIMI: But he would even be supporting the NDP.

NIK: I mean John Cummins is my MP, so I'll put that right out there, and even though ideologically I don't share things with the Conservative Party, I will say he has been a very good MP. I mean he doesn't get along with his own Party leader because he will do what is best for his constituents, and that's all he's concerned about, and there's never

any question that he's ever going to get re-elected because they love him in the riding. But he's a very good local MP, and so when he talks about locally what the issues are, he knows just as well as anybody else, and his whole thing was this government is not going to be good for that riding.

SIMI: But also, the other thing which seems to be a constant theme with our guests and our callers is the fact that it was the best of two evils.

NIK: Yes.

SIMI: When you asked him why he was supporting the NDP, the best of two evils, and this is what some of our listeners said as well.

NIK: Even though he tried not to use that word. [LAUGHTER]

SIMI: Yeah, exactly, and he back pedalled furiously. When we come back, we're going to talk to Green leader Jane Sterk about how she's feeling today…

NIK: Uh huh.

SIMI: … after the defeat… well, she was defeated personally, and her Party.

NIK: And the Green Party actually got less of a popular vote than they did in the last election. We'll find out what their plans are for the next couple of years and how they plan on confronting this government as well.
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