The Great British Columbia Memory Wipe

By Robert K. Miller

A breakthrough in time travel allowed me to discuss the B.C. election with Hunter S. Thompson this morning. He wasn't impressed. This is my unauthorized dispatch from my porch, October 25, 2026.

By the morning of October 25, British Columbia had mistaken an eviction for an exorcism. Preliminary returns put the Conservatives ahead in 64 seats, the NDP in 27, and the Greens in two. David Eby announced his resignation as NDP leader.

He had called an election two years early to exploit the opposition's disorder, reaching into its cage to demonstrate that the animal was sick.

It ate his arm.

The NDP had been dragging the old Liberal record into daylight: health-care cuts, shuttered schools, public assets sold off, a housing market increasingly arranged for people who already owned the housing. Its warning was familiar: remember these people. Remember what happened last time.

The electorate's reply was that yesterday's bastards would have to wait. Today's bastards had held the keys for nine years. Send them the bill.

The Conservatives are not simply the Liberals renamed. They're separate parties, but some familiar hands are reaching for the steering wheel. The electorate handed over the keys. Did anybody check the driving records? Or the accident reports?

And here is the magnificent arithmetic of the operation. Preliminary turnout was about 48 per cent. The Conservatives won about 48 per cent of that. Thus, with the support of roughly 23 per cent of registered voters, they secured almost 69 per cent of the legislature's seats.

A landslide assembled from a minority of the electorate. Perfectly legal. Thoroughly democratic by the applicable rules. A magnificent machine for converting public indifference into concentrated authority.

The Greens, meanwhile, drew nearly 11 per cent of the vote and emerged with two seats. First-past-the-post had performed its familiar digestive miracle: swallow a substantial minority and excrete a decorative shrub.

There are sensible reasons to vote tactically. There is nothing sensible about declaring an alternative impossible, refusing to consider it, and presenting its failure as proof of your original wisdom.

That is a rigged experiment, with the voters playing both scientist and laboratory rat.

Odd, considering that three Green MLAs had helped put John Horgan in power in 2017. The Greens had already demonstrated that they could materially change who governed the province.

Yet to many voters, they remain a political hallucination: standing there in plain sight, breathing and casting shadows, but not quite real until enough other people choose them. Nobody wants to vote for a party until enough other people have voted for it.

Democracy by séance.

At 26, the Greens' new leader, Emily Lowan, has plenty of time to discover whether political conviction and fiscal arithmetic can be persuaded to occupy the same room. Her party published a costed platform. Talk is cheap. Governing comes with invoices.

Naturally, the succession gossip is already ripening in the cloakroom. Federal Conservative MP Aaron Gunn had spent the campaign touring provincial ridings. On October 22, the NDP claimed that Gunn and Caroline Elliott were positioning themselves to replace interim Conservative leader Lorne Doerkson. Both denied it.

By October 25, Elliott was publicly backing Doerkson. The party, meanwhile, faced an awkward constitutional problem: its rules prohibit an interim leader from becoming permanent without an amendment requiring two-thirds membership approval. Doerkson had gone from obscure MLA to premier-designate in roughly five weeks, only to discover that winning the province was easier than satisfying his own party's rulebook.

The alleged plot to replace him remains unproven. A rumour does not become reporting because somebody has ironed its shirt.

Nor did the NDP spend nine years manufacturing nothing but disappointment. It abolished MSP premiums, expanded subsidized child care and brought in insurance reforms that reduced premiums, while restricting the right of injured motorists to sue. Those were real changes to household expenses and legal rights, not orange hallucinations. Governments can disappoint the electorate without having accomplished absolutely nothing.

The NDP spent real money on housing and shelters. Yet on Victoria's Pandora Avenue, the horror required no special effects: people doubled over on the pavement, industrial fencing guarding the battered grass, and no director with the decency to shout "Cut!" Another 205 homes were under construction, but only 47 were supportive housing, and none were expected to open before 2029. Greater Victoria had counted at least 1,749 people without homes. The sequels were playing in communities across B.C.

A new government could stage a quicker ending: police clearing the tents, belongings hauled off as garbage, frightened people driven from whatever scraps of stability they had managed to assemble. Roll the cameras. Announce the restoration of public order. The street is cleared, for now. The homelessness isn't.

The grass, at least, would be allowed to recover where it lay.

Site C, begun under the Liberals and brought into full operation under the NDP in 2025, will survive another change of letterhead. Whatever one thinks of flooding the Peace, the dam is a durable inheritance. Concrete enjoys an electoral advantage over promises: nobody can quietly remove it from the website.

Concrete survives election nights. Laws may not. The Conservatives have promised to repeal the province's Indigenous-rights implementation law and change the no-fault insurance system, restoring some access to lawsuits for seriously injured motorists while retaining no-fault coverage for most claims. These are announced intentions, not completed demolitions.

Other programs remain vulnerable to future budgets. Child-care gains could be weakened without being formally abolished. You need not eliminate a service to make it useless. Starvation leaves tidier paperwork.

The NDP's command of the provincial agenda, however, is already running on borrowed time.

For nine years the ministers had occupied splendid guard towers, issuing instructions to the valley below, certain that the foundations were concrete and the railings made of solid British Columbia timber.

By Saturday night they were clutching the railings with white knuckles.

Their hands passed straight through.

The towers had been built out of votes.

Ministerial authority disappears with office. Access to power evaporates. The priorities, instructions and invitations change hands when the next government takes over. The permanent public service remains, obliged to serve the elected government rather than maintain a clandestine partisan resistance movement with better dental coverage.

There is a lovely half-memory of an older Victoria where political appointees placed resignation letters on their desks and departed with a handshake. Perhaps some did. Memory has polished the brass. I set the time machine for 2001, hoping to witness the lost golden age of honourable resignations. I came back with two severance statements and a headache. The transfer from the NDP to Gordon Campbell's Liberals generated a reported $9-million severance bill. Russel Pratt received $191,012. Jim O'Dea received $112,281. The handshakes may have happened. So did the cheques.

Nostalgia has misplaced the invoice.

The more interesting specimen is Kim Henderson, Christy Clark's former top deputy and head of the public service. Her departure during the 2017 transition brought a reported $540,955 settlement. She subsequently served as a one-dollar-a-year adviser to the incoming NDP administration.

Now, nine years later, she is back as chair of Doerkson's transition team, serving unpaid while on leave from Trans Mountain Corporation.

There is your revolving door, freshly lubricated. No evidence of an underground partisan sleeper cell. No secret instructions recovered from a hollowed-out copy of Hansard. Just the familiar political ecosystem, where experienced operators circulate through senior appointments, consulting, industry and government while ordinary workers are advised to embrace change and update their résumés.

Then we reach the casinos, where the old Liberal record stops being campaign wallpaper and starts smelling of banknotes carried in gym bags.

In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Thompson required considerable chemical assistance to encounter reptiles on a casino floor. In British Columbia, the money was real and the people supervising it were sober.

In 2014 alone, B.C. casinos accepted nearly $1.2 billion in cash transactions of $10,000 or more. BCLC reported almost $200 million in suspicious transactions that year. The money arrived in bundled twenties, shopping bags, suitcases and gym bags, sometimes delivered by unmarked luxury vehicles in the middle of the night.

The bags were real. The warnings were real. The revenue was real. So were the people who had been paid to notice. Nobody needed to hallucinate a monster. It had arrived carrying twenties, and somebody had directed it to the cashier.

And the machinery kept accepting it.

By 2010, Rich Coleman was receiving two radically different stories: investigators and police warned that casinos were being used to launder criminal proceeds, while BCLC assured him its safeguards were strong. He commissioned an independent review, which Cullen considered a prudent response. But the suspicious cash kept flowing, and Cullen concluded Coleman could have done more.

The paperwork moved. So did the money.

Michael de Jong received warnings too. Both took some action, but Cullen concluded that more could have been done. Christy Clark learned of enormous suspicious transactions in 2015 and failed to establish whether the casinos were accepting that money and contributing it to provincial revenues.

Cullen found no evidence that these failures arose from political corruption or personal gain. The inquiry did not establish a cabinet of mobsters.

It established something almost as unnerving: enormous institutional failure in plain sight.

A fire chief need not be an arsonist to deserve condemnation for failing to stop the fire.

But who was paying whom?

Here the political connections become considerably less abstract.

Elections BC records reviewed by PressProgress showed that Gateway Casinos and Great Canadian Gaming, operators of casinos prominent in the money-laundering investigations, contributed approximately $347,000 to the BC Liberals from 2015 until corporate donations were prohibited in 2017. The donations were lawful. They were not shown to consist of laundered money. But they were real, and they were substantial.

The relationships went back further.

Former Great Canadian casino supervisor Muriel Labine told investigators and reporters that the company paid her wages while she worked on BC Liberal election campaigns in the 1990s. Payroll records supported her account of the campaign work. A former company vice-president acknowledged asking her to participate in political campaigns, while disputing other aspects of her allegations.

Labine also said that a Great Canadian executive once boasted of having dictated the party's gaming policy to Liberal headquarters. Whether that was political influence or mere bravado was never established.

But the political connections were not exclusively Liberal.

During Mike Farnworth's unsuccessful campaign for the NDP leadership in 2011, Great Canadian-linked companies donated $7,500. Farnworth acknowledged accepting gaming-industry donations despite Labine's objections.

The money had excellent bipartisan manners. Great Canadian Gaming had donated to the NDP, but in April 2015 the cheques began flowing toward the governing BC Liberals. The biggest pile of chips was now sitting in front of the house.

Then the NDP took power in 2017 and banned corporate political donations. In January 2018, tougher casino cash rules arrived. Suspicious transactions reported by BCLC plunged from $45.3 million in 2017 to $5.5 million in 2018. The music hadn't stopped, but somebody had turned on the lights and asked where the money came from.

The donations were real. Cullen did not establish that either party knowingly accepted criminal proceeds or that a political cheque bought a government decision. Under the casino neon, even a virgin Caesar can look dangerous. But the celery doesn't prove there's vodka.

The provincial treasury had its own seat at the gambling table. Operators wanted high rollers. Governments wanted revenue. Political parties wanted donations. Investigators wanted to know where the cash came from. The security cameras watched the gambling floor, but they couldn’t capture the competing interests stretching far beyond it.

Somewhere along this trip, the casino lights dissolved into the tiny white lights strung across my porch. The carpet looked suspiciously like the vaguely Persian rug beneath my feet, and a chill wind sent the candles flickering. I glanced at my whisky, uncertain whether I was drinking in the casino or back on the porch.

The whisky tasted as though it had spent a century aging somewhere beyond the reach of clocks. But the money was real, the warnings were real, and the safeguards had failed. The strangest part wasn't what I imagined. It was what I could prove.

The donations were legal, the relationships between the casino industry and political insiders longstanding, and the failures of oversight well documented. But Cullen found no evidence that politicians deliberately permitted laundering for financial or political gain. Nor did the inquiry establish that gangsters threatened cabinet ministers into inaction.

British Columbia has a peculiar relationship with its past. The evidence is archived, the invoices are paid, the witnesses grow old, and every few elections somebody announces that the province has made a fresh start.

Apparently history is something that happens to other governments.

At this point I consulted the time machine again. It made an expensive grinding noise and declined to produce a smoking gun. Fair enough. The machine has no subpoena power.

Fear, at least, was not imaginary.

Labine said she had feared violence from gangsters and loan sharks, as well as consequences from her employer. In 2000 she signed an $18,000 severance agreement with Great Canadian containing restrictions on her participation in public proceedings concerning the company. She later said she regretted accepting it because she had wanted to speak publicly about conditions in the casinos.

The documented agreement is not proof of all her allegations, which the company disputed. But its restrictions are striking enough.

A deputy minister leaves government with six figures and a professional future.

A casino worker leaves with $18,000 and contractual restrictions on public participation.

Later, casino workers' union representatives told Cullen that members feared for their livelihoods if they testified publicly. The commissioner acknowledged the absence of their firsthand testimony as a gap in the inquiry's evidence.

If we are hunting for people who were afraid to speak, perhaps we should begin with those who actually said so.

To the NDP's credit, Eby commissioned Peter German to investigate, and his recommendations led to source-of-funds requirements for large cash transactions. In 2018 the value of suspicious

transactions reported by BCLC fell almost 90 per cent from the previous year. The province also banned corporate and union political donations in 2017 and established a new independent gambling regulator in April 2026.

For once, somebody had demanded to see the receipts. An inconvenient development for an industry accustomed to accepting cash by the bagful.

The laundering problems were not completely resolved, however. In 2025 FINTRAC imposed a $1.075-million administrative penalty on BCLC for anti-money-laundering compliance violations, including failures to report suspicious transactions. BCLC appealed the decision, disputed the findings, and emphasized that no criminal offence had been alleged.

Even after the great cleanup, the housekeeping attracted another federal inspection.

Now consider Silver International, the Richmond money-services operation at the centre of an enormous police investigation. Cullen described an underground banking operation allegedly moving upwards of $220 million annually through networks that helped launder criminal proceeds. The flows reached beyond British Columbia and into international financial channels.

Jian Jun Zhu, associated with Silver International, was shot dead at a Richmond restaurant in 2020. Paul King Jin, a central figure in related investigations, survived the same shooting.

This was not some quaint accounting irregularity involving mislabelled expense claims.

The RCMP investigation known as E-Pirate collapsed in 2018 after prosecutors inadvertently disclosed information identifying a confidential police informant. Protecting that person's life became paramount.

An extraordinary failure. Years of investigation, vast quantities of evidence, a potentially enormous criminal case, and the prosecution effectively blew itself up during disclosure.

Another investigation, E-Nationalize, produced police recommendations for eight charges against Jin. In 2023, special prosecutor Chris Considine decided not to prosecute, citing serious evidentiary and legal obstacles, the likelihood of conviction and the anticipated expense of a lengthy case.

His assessment included the memorable phrase, "my instincts tell me a prosecution is likely to founder."

You cannot get a criminal conviction on public outrage. You need proof. The difficulty of proving the criminal origins of particular funds was real. So were the disclosure problems and the enormous volume of evidence.

But the investigators had not simply run out of interesting things to examine. They had identified suspected transactions, gathered evidence and recommended charges. The legal machinery could not turn that work into a prosecution.

The money, meanwhile, was not waiting patiently for justice.

A July 2025 review of court records by investigative journalist Sam Cooper found that civil forfeiture proceedings involving Jin and relatives, including roughly 20 properties estimated at $30 million, remained largely unresolved. A little over $538,000 in cash had been forfeited through a consent order, along with a Porsche in a separate forfeiture. Millions in other assets remained entangled in litigation.

Those proceedings involved allegations, not established findings of money laundering against all the people or properties named. Jin had not been convicted of money laundering in the two major investigations.

Did bandits get away?

The inquiry documented extensive laundering and repeated enforcement failures. It was not a criminal trial. It produced 101 recommendations, but the two major police investigations produced no convictions against their central suspects. Cullen laid bare the scale of the disaster.

We obtained a map of the escape routes.

The money had a considerable head start.

And here is why this history belongs in the account of Saturday's election.

It is not an allegation that the incoming Conservatives received laundered money, or that every former Liberal now associated with the party had a connection to casino misconduct. Corporate political donations have been prohibited since 2017. The facts do not support simply transplanting the allegations from one administration to the next.

The old Liberal government's industry relationships are part of the record. So are the NDP's reforms and later enforcement failures. Whoever takes the keys next inherits responsibility for the system, not a clean slate.

The next administration's business connections are more openly advertised. Henderson now chairs the transition, bringing experience at the highest levels of government and from the pipeline industry. Doerkson supports expanded LNG production and an Alberta-to-B.C. oil pipeline, aligning with Prime Minister Mark Carney's energy ambitions. The coming disputes over land, Indigenous rights, environmental protection and private investment will not require anybody to invent hidden financial motives. There will be plenty of actual decisions to investigate.

No smoke-filled room is required. There is a press release.

Which brings us back to David Eby and his missing arm.

My final glimpse through the time machine finds him sitting in a British Columbia emergency department, the severed limb packed in a plastic grocery bag beside his chair. The sign over the reception desk warns of extended waiting times.

He had nine years to help shorten that line. His government made some improvements, but too many patients are still waiting, and emergency departments are still closing for lack of staff.

The incoming Conservatives have promised to fix it.

Naturally.

Eby takes a number.

Sixty-four.

The voters were entitled to punish the NDP. Governments are not owed gratitude, tenure or a sympathetic hearing.

But punishment is not due diligence.

Throwing one government out does not inspect the next one's luggage. Rage is not a background check.

The most expensive political innocence is the conviction that, because you have finally become furious, you have also become difficult to fool.