

to take my vote now," he says.

Premier Klein has been trying to hold the core elements of his coalition together by insisting that the implications of the *Vriend* ruling are limited to the right of homosexuals to appeal to the Human Rights Commission in matters of employment and housing. His government has promised to "build fences" around the ruling so that it does not affect family law, marital status, or schools policy. However, further judicial activism is bound to test the strength of whatever fences they build.

This is both imminent and certain, according to University of Calgary political scientist and charter-watcher F.L. Ted Morton. "When the Supreme Court rules on the M and H case in September," he contends, "they will probably rule that Ontario's marriage law is invalid because by defining spouse as a member of the opposite sex, it violates Section 15 of the charter. Then all laws in Canada become subject to that." This will be the biggest test of the fences built around the *Vriend* decision, he says. In the M and H case, a lesbian is suing her former partner for support after their relationship ended acrimoniously. The exclusive legal status of heterosexual marriage was significantly eroded by another ruling handed down last Thursday by the Ontario Court of Appeal, which found that the federal government's definition of spouse in the Income Tax Act is unconstitutional because it excludes gays and lesbians. It will also take a substantial fence to shut out Teresa O'Riordan, the Mayerthorpe lesbian who is challenging the Alberta government's policy of refusing to allow homosexuals to take in foster children.

"We have non-elected judges changing the law in Alberta whether we like it or not. It's ludicrous," says Roy Beyer, president of the Calgary-based Canada Family Action Coalition. "It's Trudeau's poison pill that we are paying for today. People are saying we have to confront judicial activism and we need to defend our values through democratic renewal."

Alberta Social Credit Party leader Randy Thorsteinson naturally insists that disaffected conservatives need look no further than his party for a new, comfortable political home. "We're here, we've got the organization already in place," says Mr. Thorsteinson, who runs a Red Deer travel business. "We're the only party in the province with social con-

servative values." In answer to those who are calling for a provincial Reform Party, he says he might consider a coalition. "The name is irrelevant as far as I am concerned," Mr. Thorsteinson says. "What is happening in the province is that the timing is right for a



The once and former populist: Now he does 'the right thing.'

party with traditional social conservative values, beyond any party label." In the two weeks following the *Vriend* decision, according to Socred president John Reil, the party welcomed 1,700 new members to its base of 3,500. "We still have a lot of phone calls to follow up on as well," says Mr. Reil.

Stephen Harper, former Reform MP and president of the Calgary-based National Citizens' Coalition, says that at one time the federal Reformers should have been capitalizing on conservative dissatisfaction and starting provincial wings in order to develop support at the federal level for constitutional change. "But the window of opportunity for provincial Reform wings is past since traditional parties, in Alberta the PCs with their fiscal policy, and the Socreds with their social policy, have adopted Reform platforms," he says.

Not so, says Jason Kenney, Reform MP for Calgary Southeast. "I think that the reaction to the *Vriend* decision opens the window for a provincial grassroots, populist party with conservative values," Mr. Kenney says. To enable the creation of provincial affiliates, the federal Reform Party must change its constitution. The proposal has been examined and rejected by the RPC membership several times, and the party establishment opposes it. But the issue will be debated and voted on again at the party's upcoming May assembly in London, Ont.

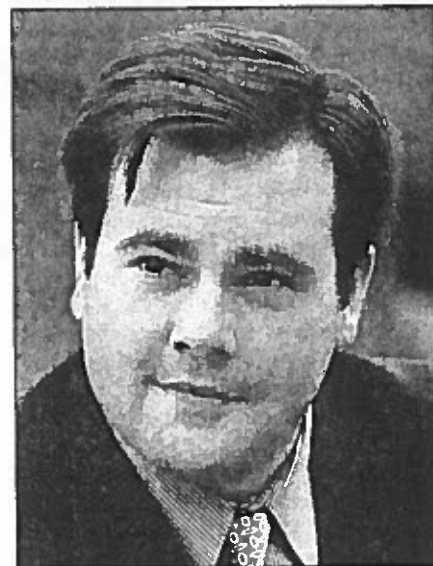
Mr. Kenney is the head of the national Reform Party's "United Alternative" campaign, an attempt to woo discouraged members of the moribund federal Conservative party across Canada to join Reform. His comments indicate he is sympathetic to a similar effort

at the provincial level in Alberta. Intriguingly, Mr. Kenney is hosting a fund-raising dinner in Calgary May 13 where "uniting the right" will be the theme, and his keynote speaker is none other than Alberta Treasurer Stockwell Day, a presumed social conservative who has indicated that he wanted the government to opt out of the *Vriend* decision.

Peter McCormick, a political scientist with the University of Lethbridge, says any serious attempt to rally social conservatives away from the Alberta Tory party raises the possibility of a self-defeating vote split on the right. "Certainly what we are talking about is not a party that will sweep into power, but a party that will cripple the PCs, possibly letting the Liberals come up the middle," he says. "The first big question is whether Klein will continue to follow policies that will make the social conservatives unhappy?

And the best bet is that he will. The second question then is, how annoyed will the social conservatives get? Will they seek an alternative political option?"

Mr. Beyer believes they have already started looking. And he also thinks an alternative conservative political movement could



Reform's Kenney: Opportunity's knocking.

achieve electoral success quickly if its platform were based primarily on advocacy of direct democracy and social conservatism. There is a natural affinity between the two principles, he says. "Some people think that social conservatives are narrow-minded, but the reality is that their issues—like tax-funded abortions, VLTs, the *Vriend* decision—they