

It was hunker-down time this weekend in Nelson. Caucus met to devise recovery plan after poll shows NDP facing ...

TOTAL WIPEOUT

NELSON — News of David Stockell's defeat in his unlikely fudge-it-budget lawsuit against the government sent a jolt of optimism through the NDP political strategy retreat here.

"This is wonderful, fantastic," one MLA gushed to me.

"Now, whenever the Liberals say we lied about the budget, we can stick this judgment right in Gordon Campbell's face!"

Another grinning New Democrat suggested a counter-lawsuit against Stockell, the no-name political neophyte who accused the NDP of electoral fraud for claiming two balanced budgets before the 1996 election.

"We can kick his ass right out of the province," the MLA growled with delight.

Whoa there, you lusty NDP avengers! Have you forgotten a guy by the name of Morfitt?

As much as the New Democrats wish it, the Stockell judgment does not erase the findings of Auditor General George Morfitt in the fudge-it budget affair.

Here's a little reminder for the chest-thumping NDPers: Morfitt discovered the government had inserted "virtually impossible" revenue targets in its "balanced" election budget.

He slammed the government for not telling voters about a secret plan to use supposedly untouchable Forest Renewal B.C. dollars to prop up those rickety revenue numbers after the election.

But just watch: The NDP will use the Stockell case to try to make voters forget about Morfitt's damning report. Sources tell me that exact strategy was discussed in detail at the closed-door caucus retreat here.

NDP politicians left the three-day session with a sense of guarded optimism. You can hardly blame them.

The Stockell judgement comes with Premier Ujjal Dosanjh still enjoying healthy personal-approval ratings in the polls.

But the NDP is still in desperate trouble with an election less

BEST BETS: MLAs with the party's 'safest' seats



JENNY KWAN



JOY MacPHAIL



DAN MILLER

than a year away. A new poll, conducted by an NDP consulting firm, no less, projects a complete electoral wipeout for the party unless it recovers quickly.

The poll is an update of one done last year by former NDP cabinet minister Bill Barlee and former NDP political operator Mike Geoghegan.

Barlee and Geoghegan have joined forces with former B.C. Green Party leader Stuart Parker, who has constructed an election-outcome model that should give Dosanjh nightmares.

It shows the Liberals winning all 79 seats in the legislature if the NDP doesn't move up from its 16-per-cent showing in current polls.

The model says the NDP needs to get to 24 per cent — an eight-point leap — just to win five seats and barely secure official-party status in the house.

The party needs to climb to 27 per cent just for Dosanjh to win his own Vancouver-Kensington seat and a puny 15-seat caucus.

Here's the kicker:

The "safest" NDP seats in the province are occupied by some of Dosanjh's most bitter enemies from the party's leadership struggle.

The top five: Jenny Kwan, Dan Miller, Joy MacPhail, Moe Sihota and Glen Clark.

Can you imagine Dosanjh being leader of a rump opposition with that bunch plotting and scheming behind his back?

He wouldn't last a single session.

The man has work to do.



MOE SIHOTA



GLEN CLARK



MICHAEL SMYTH
In the House

SMYTH'S SUNDAY SPIN-O-METER



"It would have been convenient to point a finger across the border. My approach was more measured, more respectful"

— Environment Minister Joan Sawicki on why she took more than a year to oppose the Sumas 2 power plant in Washington state



WHAT IT REALLY MEANS

Joanie-come-lately finally wrote to Washington-state regulators last week to oppose the plant, which will pollute Fraser Valley air. She's in full-scale damage-control mode after getting her butt kicked by the Liberals and your friendly spin-o-meter man.

DID THE SPIN WORK?

There was no need for a measured, respectful approach on a no-brainer like Sumas 2. Washington gets the jobs and the power. We get the pollution. Wakey-wakey, Joan!