

Clark quitting cabinet [CA-BC] ^[1]

Hamish comes first, she says, as she plans exit from politics

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EXCERPTS

British Columbia's deputy premier and most high-profile female government member dropped a political bombshell Thursday, resigning from her cabinet post and announcing she will not seek re-election.

Christy Clark said her move was "personal, not political" as she told a throng of reporters she was stepping down as minister of children and family development in order to spend more time with her young son and husband.

Clark said she would continue to serve as the MLA representing Port Moody-Westwood until the May 17, 2005, election.

But Clark's unexpected departure from cabinet started speculation that her departure was at least partially brought on by her move in January to the troubled Children and Families Ministry.

Clark said the real reason she is stepping down boils down to an issue of time. She and husband Mark Marissen, have a three-year-old son, Hamish. The couple has been balancing careers and child-care responsibilities, a juggle made more difficult with Clark serving in cabinet since 2001.

"My family needs more of me than I have been able to give them," said the 38-year-old Clark, first elected MLA in 1996.

"I think the government's going to be able to find another politician. But Hamish is never going to find another mother."

"She's got my complete support in this," Campbell said. "It is important for us to recognize the toll that public life takes on your family and your private life."

A two-term Liberal MLA, Clark was appointed deputy premier and education minister when the party took power in 2001. Her strong presence has caused her name to often be raised by those speculating on possible successors to the premier.

But in January, she was moved into the troubled Ministry of Children and Family Development as Campbell shuffled his cabinet.

When asked on Thursday whether she would have made the same decision had she not held that portfolio, Clark replied: "It is hard to say because this is, I think, the most demanding ministry in government."

That ministry has been a political graveyard, with seven ministers heading it during the last eight years alone.

But Clark said she believes the ministry is in good shape now. "Things are functioning as smoothly as they have been in the ministry for a long time."

NDP Leader Carole James called for Campbell to use the opening to bring calm to that area of government which has simultaneously undergone massive reorganization and budget cuts.

"There's anything but stability in that ministry," James said. "There's an opportunity here for Gordon Campbell to take leadership in the Ministry for Children and Families. It's been in chaos since this government took office. We now have an opportunity for someone strong to come in and address the issues."

James said she is now concerned about the lack of women in Campbell's cabinet. "I didn't agree with Christy Clark, nor her direction," she said. "But she certainly was a strong voice in politics."

- reprinted from the Times-Colonist

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