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Agriculture & Food

E. coli warning issued

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B5

Section: Alberta

Column: Alberta Digest

Dateline: GRANDE PRAIRIE

Source: The Edmonton Journal

GRANDE PRAIRIE - The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has issued a warning to consumers in the cities of Edmonton and Grande Prairie about beef products that may have been tainted with a dangerous strain of E.coli bacteria.

In Edmonton, residents should avoid eating frozen diced oxtails purchased at Paradise Halal Meat between June 12 and Aug. 2.

Grande Prairie consumers should avoid several products sold between Aug. 3 and Aug. 24 at Blackmans Butcher Shop.

These are chuck-eye roll, chuck-eye steak, lean ground beef, pure beef patties and seasoned lean beef patties. Patties were sold in a nine-pound box.

All the meat products are from Ranchers Beef Ltd. of Balzac.

No illnesses have been reported.

Education

Teachers, province talking about pensions

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B4

Section: Alberta

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - The Alberta government is in negotiations with the Alberta Teachers' Association over the \$6.4 billion unfunded pension liability, Premier Ed Stelmach said Tuesday.

Stelmach has said the teachers' pension is one of the key issues he would like to deal with before heading into an election, which will likely take place in the spring.

"The negotiations are like any other -- certain positions are being taken. But at the end of the day I feel comfortable that we will have this issue resolved," he said.

The ATA won't comment on the issue because of the ongoing negotiations.

Teacher pension talks on

The Calgary Herald

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A5

Section: News

Byline: Jason Fekete

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Calgary Herald

Premier Ed Stelmach said Tuesday he's confident the government will soon reach a deal with its teachers on covering the \$7.1-billion unfunded pension liability.

The two sides sat down Tuesday for another round of negotiations.

"At the end of the day, I feel comfortable that we will have this issue resolved," Stelmach told reporters.

Since it started in the 1930s, the teachers' pension fund has been underfunded by both the government and the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Currently, 3.1 per cent of every teacher's salary is deducted to cover the pension liability, including new teachers who weren't working when the deficit was generated.

ATA president Frank Bruseker said Tuesday his group would still like the province to absorb the entire amount.

"It's a 53-year mortgage," Bruseker said.

"New teachers are rightfully asking, 'Why am I paying to fix a problem I had no hand in making?'"

Teach more Canadian history, says MLA

The Calgary Herald

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Jason Fekete

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Calgary Herald

Parents and students across the province, take note: the Stelmach government is looking to beef up Albertans' knowledge of Canadian history and is willing to play principal in order to do it.

Days after a national poll reaffirmed young Canadians know little about their country's origins, a Calgary Tory MLA unveiled Tuesday a private member's bill -- backed by the government caucus -- that would mandate a much larger amount of Canadian history be taught in Alberta high schools.

The bill, introduced by Calgary-Fort Conservative MLA Wayne Cao, would dictate that at least 75 per cent of instruction time for Grade 10, 11 and 12 social studies classes be allocated to Canadian history.

"We need to focus on those young people to be proud and protect our country," said Cao, who is originally from Vietnam and has lived in Calgary for more than 30 years.

"New Canadians coming in here have education from their old countries.

"When they come here at the senior (high) school age, we don't have any Canadian history."

Cao reasoned the proposed legislation -- Bill 215, the School (Canadian History Content) Amendment Act -- would help instil Canadian identity into students, as well as promote security by ensuring immigrants are familiar with their new country's history and feel a sense of belonging.

"Either they studied (history) too early and they forgot about it or the new people coming in and getting to high school have no clue what Canada is all about and they still carry their baggage of their old country," he said.

While there is Canadian history instruction in the school curriculum, none is explicitly required in grades 10 to 12, according to government documents. It's believed a greater historical component would "foster greater patriotism" among high school students and perhaps even improve voter turnout and civic participation, say the documents.

A dedicated Canadian history course isn't mandatory for students in Alberta, although it is in several other provinces, including Ontario and Quebec.

Opposition parties and the head of the Alberta Teachers' Association praised the government for wanting to mandate more Canadian history in the classroom. However, they're worried that concentrating three-quarters of social studies classes on our national history could be the wrong answer.

"It cuts out a bunch of other stuff. It could be overkill," said Alberta Teachers' Association president Frank Bruseker. "To the exclusion of other things, it might be going too far."

Bruseker argued, though, the bill could prompt greater public debate about what is the appropriate level of Canadian history that should be taught in school. Liberal education critic **Jack Flaherty** echoed those thoughts.

"Anytime we can get more Canadian content, that's great -- but that might be a bit too high," **Flaherty** said.

Cao, meanwhile, recognized that dedicating 75 per cent of social studies teachings to Canadian history could erode students' knowledge of the rest of the world. However, he said it's a price the government is willing to pay if it ensures Albertans become more knowledgeable and passionate about their own country.

"We have to know more about our (country) before we know more about others," Cao said.

Alberta Alliance Leader Paul Hinman said the ignorance about our national history is alarming. "How can you have a day of remembrance when you don't know anything?" Hinman asked.

The introduction of the bill comes only days after a national survey by the Dominion Institute found that young Canadians know little about their country's social and political history.

It found only 46 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds could name Sir John A. Macdonald as Canada's first prime minister, while only 26 per cent could name Canada's birth year as 1867.

A random sample of 1,004 young Canadians was interviewed by telephone from Sept. 6 to Oct 25. The results are considered accurate to within plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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Employment, Immigration & Industry

Hot jobs blaze an upward salary trail; Alberta Economy; Resources, law and finance the top winners

National Post

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: WK5

Section: FP Working

Byline: Derek Sankey

Source: CanWest News Service

While most employees can expect smaller pay rises heading into 2008 compared with this year, several hot jobs continue to see record increases, pushing up the national average as companies determine appropriate salary increases.

Although the national average is expected to be 3.9% next year, compared with 4.1% in 2007, key sectors of Alberta's economy will continue to see increases of more than 9%, according to recent salary forecasts, meaning the majority of employees will likely see less than the average predicted.

"Oil and gas and petrochemical industries, mainly located in Alberta and accounting for just over 18% of all respondents, are projecting a 6.2% [increase]," says Iain Morris in the annual salary review by Mercer Human Resources Consulting.

"This projection is considerably higher than in other industries, so it exerts a strong upward pull on the national average," he adds.

Other fields expecting significantly higher-than-average salary raises include the legal profession, where first-year lawyers at large law firms can expect a boost of 9.1% next year, according to a study by Robert Half International. "First-year associate lawyer salaries are going to continue to be at record levels at large firms," says Marlene Barchuk, division director of Robert Half Legal in Calgary. "We're seeing the most competitive hiring among the large and mid-sized law firms and retention has become a growing concern," she says. The legal industry average is 4.1% increases for all occupations.

Overall, lawyer salaries will rise 6.4%, adding to the upward pull on the national average. In Alberta, Ms. Barchuk says lawyers practising in banking and finance, commercial real estate, oil and gas transactions and general corporate transactions are in highest demand. Lawyers with more than 10 years of experience in large law firms can expect to see salaries rise by 8.6%, ranging from \$181,000 to \$257,000 for base salary alone.

Workers in utilities can also expect above-average increases of 4.8% in 2008, while the vast majority of organizations are planning raises in the 3.1% to 4% range.

Construction trades workers and marketing and communications professionals are also expected to see above-average results, while those in the finance and accounting field can expect raises in the 5.5% range, up from 3.1% last year.

Administrative positions, which are cited as another hot job area in Alberta due to the strong economy, are also pushing up the average. It presents an increased need for support staff and senior expertise in this field, says Koula Vasilopoulos of Robert Half's Administrative recruitment team in Calgary. "Those individuals that have specialized skills are individuals that companies really feel can make an immediate contribution and therefore they're able to command a little bit more," Ms. Vasilopoulos says.

Mortgage assistants, for example, top the list at 8.2% in salary increases for 2008, followed by senior executive assistants (7.7%) and receptionists (5.2%). Administrative professionals continue to take on more responsibilities and expand their jobs into areas such as budgeting and project management.

Employees are not just focused on salary increases. "Companies do really want to offer competitive compensation and benefits so that they can attract and retain the best people, but they're also looking at other out-of-the-box ideas on how to get people," Ms. Vasilopoulos says.

No matter what field you're in, job hunters are still experiencing an employees' labour market amid a growing national labour shortage, so many employers are setting themselves apart by offering non-monetary perks.

However, Ms. Barchuk says that even though conditions are favourable for finding a new job, paying attention to the basics of your job search is still paramount to landing that good job that's suited to your lifestyle.

"They have to be diligent in their job search ... network with friends and colleagues, interview with prospective employers, research, have strong resumes and cover letters to make sure there is an adequate reflection of your skills and experience," she says.

Energy

Gov't accused of fudging report on royalty collection

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B5

Section: Alberta

Byline: Archie McLean

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Government annual reports that claim the province studied its royalty regime and deemed it successful were misleading and possibly unlawful, the Alberta Liberals charged Tuesday in the legislature.

The province's auditor general also weighed in on the issue, saying a 2003-2004 departmental annual report that claimed a review had been done may have been unlawful had it been submitted in the private sector.

"Public companies cannot report information in their annual reports that they know to be untrue," Fred Dunn said in an interview.

"The securities commission would challenge them."

Leader **Kevin Taft** continued Tuesday to hammer the government over its handling of resource revenues.

"This is an issue of the government repeatedly and deliberately putting misinformation in annual reports," **Taft** said in the legislature. "This is the kind of thing that gets people in very serious trouble."

Premier Ed Stelmach called **Taft's** allegations "ridiculous" and said the province's current royalty regime has served Alberta well, sparking growth and adding billions to provincial coffers.

Taft's accusations began the second straight week that royalties have dominated question period in the legislature.

The NDP and Alberta Alliance also argued for higher and lower royalty rates, respectively.

Taft pointed to several documents, but especially the 2003-2004 Department of Energy annual report, which said "a review of Alberta's royalty structure and competitiveness was completed"

It goes on to say that the province's regime is one of the most rigorous in the world, "encouraging development while collecting a fair share of resource profits."

But Dunn said in his annual report last month that despite government claims, no review was completed.

"While the department did technical work during that year, no detailed cross-commodity internal reports support this assertion."

In an interview Tuesday, Dunn reiterated the government had the right to decide not to raise royalty rates. But he said the government can't sufficiently back up the claim that a royalty review was completed in 2003-2004. He would not speculate whether the government breached the Government Accountability Act in its reporting.

Taft did, though. "What we have here is a government that over the course of several years, consistently and deliberately lied through annual reports -- documents that are required by law to be submitted."

Stelmach accused Taft of showing "a complete disrespect for the sanctity of this Alberta legislature.

"The government did not table any false documents or reports," Stelmach said.

NDP Leader Brian Mason said the Liberals need to spend less time focusing on the past and more time on the new royalty structure, which he says is shortchanging the province.

"We can't get at money that the government, through its negligence, didn't get in the past," Mason told reporters.

Mason received cheers from the government side of the house when he mocked the Liberals' vague position on future royalty rates.

The Liberals say they will keep pushing the royalty reporting issue today at the public accounts committee.

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Grits accuse Tories of breach of trust; Stelmach team pounded again over Alberta's low royalty rates

The Edmonton Sun

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, SUN MEDIA

The provincial government falsified documents and broke the law when it said in annual reports that Albertans were getting a fair share of oil royalties, the Opposition charged yesterday.

The Alberta Liberals are relying on the dictionary definition of falsify, which includes being deliberately misleading, not just physically altering records.

And that's exactly what happened when the Energy Department glossed over Alberta's uncompetitive oil royalty rates as being "a fair share" without any documents to support it, said Liberal Leader Kevin Taft.

Taft suggested the government misled the legislature and Albertans, leaving them without any knowledge that the government had chosen an energy royalty scheme that cost the public purse billions of dollars between 2000 and 2007.

"If this was a publicly traded corporation, failing to disclose pertinent information would be grounds for prosecution," said Taft. "We don't have as clear-cut a set of rules around the legislature.

"What we have clearly laid out in the auditor general's report are cases where the annual report presented information that was not supported within the department and indeed, in a number of cases, contradicted the internal evidence within the department.

"Whether you want to call it political fraud or whatever, it was a clear-cut deception of the legislative assembly and the people of Alberta."

Stelmach, who continues to defend the royalty regime hammered by the auditor general as not representing a fair share for Albertans, said one of the things former auditor general Peter Valentine will look at is establishing the ground rules for how to develop a definition of fair share.

He called Taft's allegation a "ridiculous position and allegation."

"Many times in the house I've brought to the house information in terms of how well we've benefited from the royalty regime," he said.

Valentine's report will also include guidelines for publicly transparent reporting of royalty figures, Stelmach noted, putting the disagreement over the past royalty regime down to political philosophy.

But he would not commit to having Valentine report before any election call.

He should, said Taft. And Stelmach should stop using semantic arguments about definitions of fair share to defend the government's record on royalties, he said.

"This isn't about the definition of 'fair share'," said Taft. "This is about billions of dollars that rightfully belong to the people of Alberta.

"The breach here is very serious when an annual report - which is a legal document - misrepresents the internal information in the department. What we have here, over and over, is ... a breach of trust, a breach of integrity."

NDP Leader Brian Mason said while he wouldn't muddle the issue by categorizing the reports as "falsified" - which might imply forged or altered - the government was clearly in the wrong when it chose to use its own policies as a yardstick for what is a "fair share."

The government has repeatedly argued the public was not misled because its position on what constitutes a fair share differed in policy from the advice of experts and its own staff.

"It was deceptive and it was wrong," Mason said, before noting that Newfoundland Premier Danny Williams - who has far less leverage over big oil than Alberta - gets a much-increased share of the wealth from its new royalty structure, particularly compared to Alberta.

Stelmach vows to change Bill 46 to soothe rural voters

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B5

Section: Alberta

Byline: Jason Markusoff

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Premier Ed Stelmach confirmed Tuesday his government wants to alter a bill some angry rural landowners and consumer groups say will limit their ability to challenge utilities projects.

But he also accused opposition parties of "scare tactics" and misinforming Albertans on the implications of Bill 46 and wouldn't hint at how far he'll go to soothe the outcry in the Conservatives' rural heartland.

Rimbey landowner Joe Anglin is skeptical and doubts he'll see substantial changes to a bill he vehemently opposes.

"If they try their patchwork on it, it may or may not work, it's tough to say," he said Tuesday. "But the word I get from the Stelmach government is that they think the changes need to be minor."

He has helped lead the "Kill Bill 46" campaign against legislation that would split the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board into two agencies and overhaul the public hearings process.

Stelmach said in question period Tuesday the bill is going through a "number of amendments" and he wants to find a balance between government intentions and public concerns about the bill.

"There should be, of course, fair hearing on the terms of how somebody is wanting to build a power line or drill a gas well," the premier said.

The legislation will go through second reading Thursday and the government is expected to propose amendments to the bill next week. The bill, designed to streamline the regulatory process, currently proposes to stop making industry pay for intervenors to appear at utilities hearings.

Liberal MLA **Hugh MacDonald**, who warned Bill 46 will "trample the democratic rights of Albertans," said he was pleased the government is willing to amend the legislation.

Protests against the bill have come from places as diverse as the Pembina Institute environmental think-tank to the Consumers Association of Canada to community hall gatherings in Stettler, Lacombe and Fairview.

Anglin has toured the province, warning Albertans the bill gives the government regulators wide-ranging powers that are especially troubling after the recent AEUB spying scandal, which saw the agency hire private investigators to snoop on opponents of a proposed Calgary-to-Edmonton power line.

Stelmach said the amount of misinformation and innuendo around limiting Albertans' protest rights reminds him of the firestorm around the Ralph Klein-era Bill 11 health reforms.

The bill, which allowed private clinics to perform operations requiring overnight stays, drew vociferous public protests outside the legislature and from medicare advocates across Canada in 2000.

Anglin acknowledged that some troubling provisions in Bill 46 were also in past legislation for the AEUB, but some reworked provisions appear harsher and would make a regulator he doesn't trust even stronger.

"It looks like they're taking one dysfunctional board and turning it into two dysfunctional boards," said Anglin, a Green party candidate in Lacombe-Ponoka.

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Fire in the hole percolates profit; PetroBank ready to go with more eco-friendly oilsands megaproject

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: G1 / FRONT

Section: Business

Byline: Gordon Jaremko

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

A new entry is poised to enter the oilsands megaproject lineup despite provincial royalty hikes, following tests of technical advances aimed at cutting costs and pollution.

Petrobank Energy and Resources Ltd. vowed to make a start before the end of this year on obtaining approval for a 100,000-barrels-daily development.

The project, run by subsidiary Whitesands Insitu Ltd., is partly fuelled by provincial aid.

After a year of putting new methods through field trials, the firm qualified Tuesday for the maximum \$10 million available from Alberta Energy's "innovative energy technologies program."

Instead of cash, the aid will be reduced royalties on initial production by a pilot plant on 160 square kilometres of oilsands leases near Conklin, a remote Métis community south of Fort McMurray.

Petrobank's Whitesands development is one of 18 projects receiving help from the three-year-old program, which is giving up to \$200 million in royalty cuts for fresh approaches to tapping oil and natural gas.

The aid plan expires in five years and the government predicts new production that it stimulates will eventually spin off enough new royalties to more than repay the initial reductions.

"We have been continuously producing upgraded oil," Petrobank told its shareholders in a Whitesands progress report included in its third-quarter financial statements.

"We are now completing the engineering design phase for a 100,000-barrels-of-oil-per-day project at Whitesands and plan to issue a public disclosure document outlining our plans by the end of 2007."

The document is the industry's standard opening move on obtaining provincial approval for a project, as the first step in mandatory public and environmental consultations.

"We now expect to file the related regulatory application" -- a detailed package including construction plans, costs, employment requirements, and environmental and community effects -- "in the first quarter of 2008."

Results of field trials include designs for improved methods of bitumen processing that will accelerate construction and regulatory approvals by reducing the size of production facilities, Petrobank predicted.

The Whitesands project uses a new oilsands version of a well-established international industry method of tapping heavy crude known as a fire-flood.

The method cooks oilsands buried too deep for open-pit mining like a giant underground barbecue.

The heaviest 10 per cent of bitumen deposits, which turn into charcoal-like coke when heated, are burned as fuel to make more desirable lighter parts flow.

Vertical wells blast compressed air into oilsands pre-heated with temporary steam injections. The deposits smoulder as long as the artificial tornado continues, making bitumen flow to the surface through horizontal wells.

Except for the ignition stage, the process cuts heavy use of natural gas by steam-heat systems that prevail in current "in-situ" or underground production projects.

The new method also promises to provide at least partial cures for two of the worst oilsands environmental headaches, heavy use of water for steam and high levels of carbon-dioxide emissions by above-ground heat plants.

The first year of production trials has also shown fire-flooding yields higher quality, lighter bitumen than steam-powered oilsands production systems, the company said.

The Whitesands development will be done in "modules" or phases, with the first one producing at least 10,000 barrels per day and positioned to grow up into a 100,000-barrels-daily plant, Petrobank said.

Alberta Energy, meanwhile, also granted \$6.5 million in innovation royalty reductions to Penn West Energy for a pilot project using carbon-dioxide injections to prolong production by the aging Swan Hills oilfield 175 kilometres northwest of Edmonton.

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Dunn concerned over AEUB bill; Bill 46 could limit landowners' rights says councillor

Sherwood Park News

Tue 13 Nov 2007

Page: 1

Section: News

Byline: BY MICHAEL SIMPSON, NEWS STAFF

After a summer plagued with scandal at the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board over spying on landowners that eventually led to the disbandment of the security unit within the organization, Alberta's regulatory authority is under fire again from citizens and special interest groups.

Bill 46, a piece of legislation introduced by energy minister Mel Knight in June, was originally created to help manage the increased workload currently faced by the AEUB. The Bill aims to split the body into two separate parts, the Energy Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta Utilities Commission.

But Strathcona County Ward six councillor Alan Dunn is concerned about the implications for residents anxiously awaiting an update on the proposed transmission lines needed to power the upgraders in the northern part of the county.

"The thing that stands out to me is that there seem to be some provisions that are basically muzzling people," Dunn said. "In theory, this legislation could mean that they could run the lines right through without consulting us. You pretty much have to be living next door to the transmission lines to qualify as 'directly or adversely affected.'"

Groups have formed that demand the government "kill Bill 46," while others are simply asking the government to fix or nix 46 because they feel it limits public input.

"Nothing could be further from the truth," said Jason Chance, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy.

"The bill is being misinterpreted in a number of ways. When it comes to public hearings, there will be hearings. Even if only one person is affected, a hearing must be held," Chance said.

On the ministry of energy web site there is a document entitled Talk about Bill 46 which offers the government's reasoning behind the legislation.

According to the document, the whole purpose behind the bill is to enable the government to deal with the increased volume of energy and utility applications, which have increased from 19,000 a decade ago to over 60,000 last year.

The new bill is designed to close existing loop holes, Chance said. "The bill is up for second reading, and the minister has made it very clear that he's open to amendments. The legislation has been designed to protect the rights of landowners."

Therein lies the rub, say opponents of the legislation.

"Even if a person is entitled to make representations to the commission, this right only includes the opportunity to make a written presentation," said Steve Kennett, senior policy analyst at the Pembina Institute.

While the government document says outright that Bill 46 in no way interferes with a person's right to retain legal counsel, the legislation allows the new commission to avoid having an oral representation or to have a landowner be represented by counsel if they have an opportunity for a written representation to be made first.

According to the government, the ability to make decisions without holding a hearing in certain circumstances already exists. The power to decide to use written testimony is also a part of current legislation.

"The bottom line is that concerns will be addressed one way or another," Chance said. "The legislation makes it very clear that any individuals affected need to be notified."

Dunn is not convinced.

"I'm not buying this at all," he said. "It says under Section 9 (Sub 3c) that (the commission) can prejudice the complaint. In my view the whole purpose of the hearing is to make that judgement."

According to retired lawyer and environmental steward Tom Maccagno, that could be construed as restricting rights. Ultimately, says Maccagno, it boils down to intent.

"You have to look at the existing and proposed legislation and ask 'what was the intent behind the change?'" Maccagno said.

To view the proposed legislation, visit www.assembly.ab.ca and look under Bills and Amendments for Bill 46.

If passed, the bill will come into effect Jan. 1, 2008.

Oil price slides on demand forecast

The Calgary Herald

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: D1 / FRONT

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Dina O'Meara

Source: Calgary Herald

Crude oil prices dropped sharply Tuesday to a low of \$90.13 per barrel after the International Energy Agency said record fuel prices would slice demand by 500,000 barrels a day by the end of the year.

The Paris-based agency went on to forecast world oil consumption in 2008 would fall to 87.7 million barrels per day, down 300,000 barrels from its previous estimate as global economies slowed.

The report swept notions crude would hit \$100 this year right off the shelf, with frantic traders immediately pushing futures down its steepest decline in three months. The sell-off came on the heels of last week's record \$98.62, with crude futures closing Tuesday at \$91.17 per barrel.

"The demand data that we saw today really took the market by surprise," said analyst Chris Theal with Tristone Capital Inc. "This is entirely a demand-driven report, and it's bearish."

The street was looking for a 1.2-million-a-day global draw on inventories heading into the winter, and a significant draw in the heating season.

However, Tuesday's report revised estimates, slashing global consumption in half, to around 600,000 barrels during the last quarter of the year

"This market has been discounting a fundamentally tight market for the second half of 2007," Theal said. "What it's showing is we're starting to see concern about the pace of economic growth and consumption, and the demand numbers are quite negative.

"We're going to break through the \$90 mark on the downside very shortly," he said.

Oil prices have climbed 55 per cent in value in the past year, benefiting resource-rich Alberta and Canada's economy with an 18-cent rise in the dollar since January.

The downside of Canada's "petrodollar" has been lower exports and a shrinking trade surplus with its largest trade partner, the United States, to \$6.2 billion, as well as Canada's lowest world trade deficit in nearly a decade, \$2.6 billion.

The toll of surging oil prices on industrial countries has resulted in a slower global economy and calls for major oil producers to hike production and soften the market with increased supply.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries agreed to increase output by 500,000 barrels per day starting Nov. 1, but analysts at the time said a bigger increase would be needed to soften prices.

The organization said it would not be discussing further cuts at its summit meeting this week in Riyadh.

The IEA, which represents 26 countries, did not revise its first quarter 2008 forecast, leading analysts to believe more downward revisions could be ahead as inventories remain flat rather than being drawn down through consumption.

Such a situation could inflate inventories over the year, much as natural gas levels in North America experienced in the past 18 months.

Two warm winters, less than scorching summers and abundant supply, resulted in natural gas prices plummeting as consumption failed to draw down storage.

Prices skidded around 30 per cent last year and have remained soft, severely impacting drilling activity in natural gas-weighted Western Canada.

A warm winter would take an even bigger chunk out of the implied 2008 demand growth, and possibly impact oil-related projects, Theal noted.

"I think crude has to be in the \$70 to \$75 range for incremental projects to go ahead, but with geopolitics going on, \$80 to \$85 could be numbers we could test in the next little while."

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Health & Wellness

Attacking the messenger; Reaction to doctor's concerns curious move for Health Canada

The Calgary Herald

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A22

Section: The Editorial Page

Source: Calgary Herald

A glance through the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta's list of disciplinary actions against doctors reveals that their licences to practise medicine were suspended because of incompetence in carrying out medical procedures, misdiagnoses and conduct unbecoming a physician, such as having sexual relationships with patients.

Doctors are not disciplined for voicing their concerns about a public health issue. Yet, Health Canada officials have filed a complaint against Dr. John O'Connor, a former physician in Fort Chipewyan, apparently in the hope that the college will discipline him for causing undue alarm. O'Connor's crime? He has been speaking up for years about what he sees as a possible link between contaminants in the Athabasca River and the clusters of rare cancers and auto-immune diseases in the residents of Fort Chipewyan.

He also wrote a letter to a Halifax newspaper telling people not to move to Alberta because life is "intolerable" here, adding that he feels the Alberta government is trying to quell concerns about health risks. The letter was an expression of O'Connor's right to free speech; a doctor is as much entitled to write a letter to the editor as is anyone else.

It seems O'Connor is doing what a good doctor should do -- raising concerns about a possible public health risk. Health Canada's reaction to those concerns is strange indeed. Instead of trying to have him disciplined, the federal agency should be looking into the situation at Fort Chipewyan. Why they are complaining about O'Connor is a mystery -- Health Canada spokeswoman Rita Smith on Tuesday had her staff deflect inquiries to another media relations staffer, Jirina Vlk, who was "in meetings."

It's not like O'Connor is a lonely voice crying in the wilderness.

The uneasy health history of Fort Chipewyan/Fort MacKay goes back to 1989, when the Alberta Medical Association was first asked to examine peculiar clusters of arthritis, seizures, miscarriages and cancer at Fort MacKay. Alberta Environment studied the Athabasca's water quality but skipped more expensive tests for carcinogens. A year later, a northern pike with a tumour was hauled from the river, but then-environment minister Ralph Klein took months to issue a warning against eating fish from the river.

The tumours in fish didn't go away but in 2000, another study cleared the oilsands of blame for high local rates of asthma and cancer.

A 2004 joint federal-provincial study sounded a generalized alarm about the oilsands compromising water quality in northern Alberta. A year ago, the Alberta Cancer Board and Health Canada, acting on O'Connor's concerns, examined statistical probabilities and determined there was only a slightly higher incidence of cancer at Fort Chipewyan than among the general population. This, despite the fact, unusual forms of cancer were turning up in multiple cases among family members.

Last week, an independent report by Alberta ecologist Kevin Timoney found "cause for concern" because potentially carcinogenic contaminants are present in the food supply, including deformed fish, as well as local mammalian wildlife.

In view of this long history of uncertainty and concern, Health Canada should be hiring independent health researchers from a jurisdiction unconnected with Alberta, to carry out a definitive statistical and epidemiological study of residents in the Fort Chipewyan and Fort MacKay area. Instead, Health Canada's response has been to file a complaint about the doctor.

The optics are very bad, and the story has gained international attention, including recent coverage in the French newspaper Le Monde. Had such a puzzling and alarming saga been played out regarding the Bow River and Calgary, the federal government would have taken swift action long ago. Complaining about O'Connor is a waste of time and an unproductive diversionary tactic. His concerns -- and those of area residents -- demand an impartial investigation.

Alberta takes the lead on health-care spending

The Globe and Mail

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A14

Section: National News

Byline: André Picard

Source: PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTER

Alberta is showing its wealth in the most Canadian of ways: by becoming the biggest per capita spender on health care.

Residents of the oil-rich province will spend, on average, \$5,390 each on health care in 2007, according to new report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

That is \$1,000 a person more than Quebeckers will spend, revealing a widening disparity in health spending among the provinces.

"There are many factors that can account for these variations," said Glenda Yeates, the president and CEO of CIHI. "The age, health needs and distribution of a province's population can influence what a government spends on health care."

Newfoundland had long been the biggest per capita spender among the provinces, in large part because of the cost of services in remote communities, its older population and underlying poverty.

But Alberta's spending increases seem to be driven by pay increases to health professionals (a reaction to shortages), big investments in infrastructure and expansion of health services. The CIHI report reveals that health spending nationally is expected to total \$160.1-billion this year, up from \$150.3-billion in 2006.

That 6.6-per-cent increase shows that "health spending continues to outpace inflation and population growth," Ms. Yeates said.

The major spending categories are hospitals at \$45.5-billion, drugs at \$26.9-billion and physicians at \$21.5-billion.

It is notable that, after years of double-digit increases, drug spending increased relatively slowly at 7.2 per cent. But spending on physicians jumped 8.5 per cent in the past year, reflecting increases in both the number of physicians and their fees. About 70 per cent of spending comes from government coffers, while the other 30 per cent consists of private insurance and out-of-pocket expenses.

Per capita health spending in Canada will reach \$4,867 this year, up from \$651 in 1977. Thirty years ago, total health spending was a mere \$15.5-billion; since then, annual spending increases have never fallen below 7 per cent.

CIHI, a non-profit agency that collects and analyzes health information and provides data, cannot answer whether this ever-increasing spending is sustainable.

"The only way I can answer that is to say: Look at the international comparisons," Ms. Yeates said. "We are grouped with a bunch of countries of similar wealth and they all spend at about the same level on health care."

According to a report from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, health-care spending in Canada is similar to France, Germany, the Netherlands and Australia.

Albertans' medical tab highest in the nation; Report lists per capita spending at \$3,695

The Calgary Herald

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A8

Section: News

Byline: Michelle Lang, with files from Jason Fekete, Calgary Herald and CanWest News Service

Source: Calgary Herald

Alberta's massive medical tab continued to rise this year, with per capita health spending outpacing every other provincial government in the country, the Canadian Institute for Health Information reported Tuesday.

The CIHI study suggests the Alberta government will spend \$3,695 per person on medical care in 2007, well above the provincial and territorial average of \$3,156 per person.

Experts said the province's medical spending -- which has been at or near the top of CIHI reports in recent years -- likely reflects its strong finances as well as the high cost of doing business here.

"The wealthy tend to spend more on health and health care," said Dr. Tom Noseworthy, a University of Calgary health expert. "When you look at countries around the world, health expenditures are proportional to wealth."

Nationally, spending on health care in Canada is expected to reach \$160.1 billion, including private sector investment. That represents an increase of 6.6 per cent from 2006, a rate CIHI officials noted is growing faster than the economy.

CIHI officials said governments scaled back their health-care expenditures in the mid-1990s, but they have increased spending in recent years as medical care became a top priority for voters.

"Since then, we've seen growth in health spending outpacing population growth and inflation," said Chris Kuchciak of CIHI.

Tuesday's report comes as the Alberta government attempts to bring its ballooning health budgets -- the province's single largest expense -- under control.

This spring, the provincial government brought in a \$12 billion health budget, an increase of \$1.3 billion from the year before.

Combined with private expenditures, CIHI estimates total medical spending in the province will reach \$18.4 billion this year, an increase of 11.4 per cent.

Health Minister Dave Hancock said Tuesday the province must address the spending increases by encouraging Albertans to remain healthy, reducing the burden on the medical system.

"What we're looking at is more effectiveness with the resources . . . to get more productivity for the spending that goes on," he told reporters in Edmonton.

Hancock suggested the province's medical bill is so high because it publicly funds more services than some other jurisdictions, adding government has also had costs associated with population growth.

Noseworthy said the expense of operating a health system in an overheated economy is another factor, noting wages for health workers are higher in Alberta than many other jurisdictions.

The province with the second-highest health expenditures is Newfoundland and Labrador at \$3,637 per person, according to the report.

CIHI estimates Quebec and Prince Edward Island will have the lowest per capita health spending at \$2,853 and \$3,010 per person.

The agency reported that hospitals continue to eat up the largest amount of health spending in Canada, followed by drugs and physician salaries.

The report also found that health spending grows significantly at the beginning and end of life. Governments spend an average of \$7,437 for infants under age one and \$9,502 for patients over age 65.

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Highest health spending, longest waits

The Edmonton Sun

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: 30

Section: News

Byline: BY SUN MEDIA

Dateline: CALGARY

Alberta is spending the most on health care per person in the nation, despite having the longest wait times for surgeries and other treatments, says a report released yesterday.

Authored by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, National Health Expenditure Trends: 1975-2007 says the Alberta government is forecasted to spend \$3,695 per person on health care this year, the most of any province.

Quebec, in contrast, will spend the lowest per capita at \$2,853.

Liberal health critic **Laurie Blakeman** questioned how Alberta could have the highest amount of health care spending when residents feel they can't get timely access to treatment.

Another report released Oct. 15 by the Fraser Institute revealed Albertans wait longer than ever between seeing a family doctor and a specialist and between seeing a specialist and receiving treatment. The average wait time is 19.5 weeks, compared to 15 weeks in Ontario.

"It doesn't make sense to people on the street and it doesn't make sense to me," said **Blakeman**.

At-risk Albertans toughest to reach with mumps shots

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Jodie Sinnema

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - A blitz to vaccinate 200,000 young adults in northern Alberta against the mumps could be stymied by a shortage of nurses and a tough target audience more focused on final exams and weekend parties than swollen glands and potential infertility.

After an outbreak in southern Alberta infected at least 13 people, Alberta

Health offered free mumps shots to 475,000 young adults across the province to prevent a repeat of the full-scale outbreaks that hit Nova Scotia and New Brunswick earlier this year.

But it won't be easy.

"It's the toughest age group to capture, especially the twentyish age group because they have better things to do, or so they think, with their time," said John Tuckwell, spokesman for Alberta Health.

Many students work part-time, are busy studying for final exams and don't always pay attention to mainstream media coverage of health scares, he said.

But college dormitories, busy cafeterias and crowded dance floors are prime locations for spreading the extremely contagious disease.

Capital Health, which is responsible for delivering the vaccine, is working with the University of Alberta, Grant MacEwan and NAIT to first inoculate all faculty, staff and students born after 1970. They are most at risk, since they may not have received a mumps vaccine -- which wears off over time -- since childhood.

Then starting in January, Alberta Health aims to vaccinate all young people aged 17 to 26. Younger people have all received two vaccinations and people over 40 have built up natural immunity through previous exposure to the virus.

Dr. Gerry Predy, medical officer of health for Capital Health, said the campaign initially will be rolled out in a fairly routine way in lobbies, medical offices and residences at NAIT, Grant MacEwan and the University of Alberta, starting the last week in November.

The Northern Lights Health Region is focusing efforts on young men working in the oilfields and living in dorm-like camps.

The campaign will be considered a success if half of young adults are vaccinated.

But if students don't respond and more immunization clinics are needed at more sites where young people congregate -- such as sporting events, concerts, campus bars, food courts or classrooms -- finding the nurses to give out the shots could be tricky, Predy said.

"We're facing a bit of a challenge with a lot of our resources currently devoted to the flu campaign," he said. "We just don't have enough staff."

Nurses currently are vaccinating everyone from seniors to infants for the flu and won't wrap up the majority of that work until mid-December. By that time, final exams are in full swing and students are getting ready to leave -- possibly with viruses hiding in their systems -- for Christmas break.

Capital Health has no plans yet to follow the lead of Calgary Health Region, which in 2001 sponsored a van that travelled to nightclubs, sporting events and concerts to vaccinate against meningococcal disease.

But Predy said every effort will be made to quickly reach as many young adults. With mumps, the least of people's worries is fever and swollen glands.

Older teenagers and young adults also face more serious complications, such as inflamed testicles, potential infertility and possible meningitis and encephalitis, which can cause brain swelling and even death.

Depending on how the first vaccinations go, the province could turn to Facebook and other avenues to try to reach still-unprotected students.

Nova Scotia, for instance, set up a group in Facebook called "Kiss Me! I've had the mumps shot."

The operators of the site tell students to encourage their friends to get inoculated.

"Let them know that having mumps means nine days in isolation -- all alone with no classes, no parties. Worst of all, it could mean symptoms like swollen testicles (trust us guys, it ain't cool)."

Tuckwell said the province is also considering using cellphones to send mass text messages to students, although that may violate privacy legislation.

The issue, however, will be information overload, said Kevin Friese, assistant director of the University of Alberta Health Centre.

"Students are bombarded with so much information in posters and classes and on the Internet," Friese said. "Somehow, students need to sort through and filter that to find the important information."

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Nation's health bill will top \$160 billion this year; Cost of medical care outpacing economy

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A5

Section: News

Byline: Meagan Fitzpatrick

Dateline: OTTAWA

Source: CanWest News Service

OTTAWA - Spending on health care in Canada is expected to reach \$160.1 billion by the end of the year, according to the latest data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

In an annual report on health care spending released Tuesday, CIHI said spending is forecast to increase 6.6 per cent from 2006 (3.2 per cent after taking inflation and population growth into account).

"Health care spending continues to grow faster than our economy. This is the 11th consecutive year in which health care spending is expected to outpace inflation and population growth," said Graham Scott, chairman of CIHI's board of directors.

Scott said the findings may be due in part to public investments in health services from health accords signed between the federal and provincial and territorial governments in recent years.

"For example, we have seen recent government initiatives to increase services in wait-times priority areas, investments to attract and retain health providers and an increase in spending on buildings and equipment," Scott said.

The CIHI report shows that in 2007 health spending is forecast to reach \$4,867 per person.

The report also broke down how much is spent publicly and how much is spent privately on health care.

Public-sector spending is expected to represent close to 71 per cent of total health care spending in Canada in 2007, while private sector spending (including privately insured and out-of-pocket expenses) is projected to be about 29 per cent of the total.

Hospitals make up the largest component of health care spending, followed by drug costs and then physicians.

"This year, however, spending on physicians is expected to grow slightly faster (8.5 per cent) than spending on drugs (7.2 per cent) and hospitals (5.6 per cent)," said CIHI.

Alberta and Newfoundland are expected to have the highest health care spending per person at \$3,696 and \$3,637 respectively, CIHI reports, while Quebec and Prince Edward Island are projected to have the lowest (\$2,853 and \$3,010).

International, Intergovernmental & Aboriginal Affairs

Tories fear releasing contract details would set precedent; Public deserves to know, privacy watchdog says

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B6

Section: Alberta

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - The government is skittish about disclosing the contract terms for two high profile political appointees because it fears it could then be forced to release contract details for any public servant, Premier Ed Stelmach said Tuesday.

Alberta's privacy commissioner last month ordered the Stelmach government to end more than two years of stonewalling and release the contracts of Rod Love, former premier Ralph Klein's chief of staff; and Murray Smith, the province's Washington envoy who resigned earlier this year. The commissioner's office ruled the public deserved to know and that the government shouldn't censor the information.

The premier said one of the reasons the contracts are under wraps is that he's asked Alberta Justice to consider whether it sets a precedent that could affect any public sector employee.

The government is considering also whether to seek a judicial review of the commissioner's ruling, as it gives Smith or Love time to consider appeals.

Stelmach was international relations minister when Smith, a former energy minister, was hired. Ministry annual reports show Smith received more than \$292,000 in salary and benefits for each of the last two years.

Liberal MLA **Bill Bonko** said the delays don't bode well for Stelmach's assertions he's running an open government.

"This government is only willing to be open and transparent up to the point of action," he said. "Then, before you know it, secrecy kicks in."

Municipal Affairs & Housing

Building permits approach \$5 billion

The Calgary Sun

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: 4

Section: News

Byline: BY LINDSAY O'REILLY, SUN MEDIA

Calgarians can count on even more cranes on the horizon next year with the city's building-permit figures hitting record dollar highs.

The city has already received about 16,500 permit applications this year, with values totalling more than \$4.9 billion -- up from \$4.76 billion in 2006.

While residential permits are slightly lower than this time last year, non-residential construction values are up 42% to \$495 million.

David Watson, Calgary's general manager of planning, development and assessment, said the city's economy shows no signs of slowing.

"Alberta and Calgary are on the forefront of economic growth," he said.

"We're growing faster than anywhere else in the country right now, because of oil and gas and everything else that goes along with it," he said.

"The people who were making decisions a year or so ago, they're now at the building permit stage and they still have great confidence in where Calgary's going to grow over the next number of years."

Watson said Calgary's labour shortage is likely to slow both the processing of building permits and the ability of developers to get construction under way.

Another challenge is ensuring construction fits with the "future Calgary" it hopes to create.

"We're looking much farther ahead with major policy projects like the Planet Project, which is looking at a 30-year horizon, in terms of what kind of city we want to build in the next 30 years," he said.

Sloan wants higher tax increase; One per cent above proposed hike would help pay for affordable housing

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Gordon Kent and Susan Ruttan

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Coun. Linda Sloan wants to look at boosting Edmonton's proposed double-digit tax increase by an extra percentage point to help pay for affordable housing.

Last week, council voted to require a developer to provide five per cent of his new housing units to the city at less than market value so they can be used for affordable housing.

A proposal that would expand that policy to cover all new developments is expected to reach council early next year.

Such a move would simply push up prices for people purchasing homes when everyone should share the cost of a program that provides general social benefits, Sloan said Tuesday.

"If we do want to assume a greater role in the provision of affordable housing, what is the most equitable way of doing that?" asked Sloan, who requested that administrators look at how much the extra tax hike would bring in and how the money could be used. "My principle in asking these questions is, I don't think new home buyers should have to solely fund the affordable housing cost for the City of Edmonton."

City documents indicate each one-per-cent hike in property taxes is worth about \$7 million. The draft 2008 budget calls for taxes to rise by 10.9 per cent, the largest jump since they rose by 15 per cent in 1982.

Mayor Stephen Mandel, who doesn't support Sloan's idea, is pledging to reduce the proposed increase.

"I don't think that a 10.9-per-cent tax increase is a number that our citizens will be happy with," he told reporters.

Mandel hopes the final figure will be below 10 per cent. At the same time, he'd like to add into the budget a \$13.8-million plan for improved plowing of winter roads, which will tack on an additional two percentage points to the tax increase. "Our citizens want that. That was something I heard loud and clear during the (election) campaign."

The mayor doesn't know why Calgary's draft budget for 2008 contains a 4.5-per-cent tax hike, less than half that of Edmonton. He said he's committed to finding more creative ways to finance services to keep taxes in check. The city plans to hire a chief financial officer to help with this effort.

Calgary Ald. Bob Hawkesworth also couldn't explain why his city's proposed tax hike is so much lower than Edmonton's. He pointed out that Calgary has 100 construction cranes in the sky, evidence of an explosion of new building.

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Border battle goes to province for resolution; City wants changes to county development plan

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B3

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Susan Ruttan

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - The border dispute between Edmonton and Strathcona County is heading to a hearing next month before the Alberta Municipal Government Board.

The city is protesting sections of the new Strathcona County Municipal Development Plan that the county council passed last spring, asking the board to order changes to the plan. The board is empowered to rule on disputes between municipalities.

In its submission, Edmonton calls for a greater say in such things as the plan for a second Sherwood Park-like urban area in the county.

"A planned urban area that is located just outside the municipal boundaries of the city will clearly add pressures on city services and hence resources," it states, "and should only be planned through consultation with the adjacent municipality."

The city is also unhappy that the county plan is "excessively vague" about the type of development that will be allowed in some areas right on its 40-kilometre boundary with the city.

If the county approves shopping and institutional buildings across the border from the city's Clover Bar heavy industrial area, it states, that's going to cause problems. The two municipalities took their dispute to mediation earlier this year, but that hasn't settled all of Edmonton's concerns. The appeal is to be heard starting Dec. 6.

The new Strathcona County plan was developed over three years, with a series of public hearings to get citizen input. It is to guide development in the county over the next 20 years.

The city is also worried that an agricultural area in the county's southwest corner may be divided into acreage-type parcels of land. Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel has been pressing for a new planning model for the capital region so the 24 municipalities co-ordinate their development. Edmonton has withdrawn from the Alberta Capital Region Alliance, saying the voluntary, consensus group is ineffective in handling growth in the Edmonton area.

Strathcona County has been a strong defender of ACRA, and an opponent of any regional model that would encroach on its independence.

A provincial task force is currently studying ways to solve the regional wrangling in the Edmonton area, and to plan for the economic boom being created by construction of numerous billion-dollar bitumen upgraders in the region. It is to report in January.

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Service Alberta

Memory stick madness; Privacy breaches reaching epidemic proportions, says commissioner

The Edmonton Sun

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: 4

Section: News

Byline: BY KEVIN CRUSH, SUN MEDIA

Large organizations have to get better at keeping people's information private, says Alberta's privacy commissioner.

"I'm sort of laughing, but I don't know what else to do at this point. It is just very, very frustrating," said Alberta Information and Privacy Commissioner Frank Work.

"We just have to recognize that portables go missing. We had at least four (Capital Health) laptops go missing, and on the weekend we had a memory stick go missing. It's reaching epidemic proportions and I don't know what the answer is."

Yesterday, Work released his report into the theft of four Capital Health laptops last August - one containing 20,000 patient names, health card numbers, addresses and reasons for admittance into the hospital.

Work found that Capital Health did not properly safeguard the information and gave several recommendations for the health authority to better protect people's privacy, including physically securing portable devices, having a valid reason to store health information on portable devices in the first place, and, Work emphasized, to encrypt the information.

Encryption should be a basic tool to keeping information secure, said Work. Organizations should assume portable devices will get stolen and encrypt everything. He referenced a stolen memory stick containing school children's names and addresses earlier this month as an example of where the information should have been encrypted.

"The equation - and we keep hammering at this - the equation is personal information plus a portable equals encryption," said Work.

Capital Health agreed to all of the commissioner's recommendations and was already working on what the next steps would be when they first reported the theft to the commissioner, said spokesman Steve Buick.

For the past year, Capital Health has been working on getting an encryption program set up and hopes to have it ready by January.

"Encryption is the right thing to do," said Buick.

"We've been working at it for a year. It's a very big exercise and we totally sympathize with the commissioner's concerns of the time it takes for big organizations to get it in place."

He noted it takes longer for big organizations to set up encryption programs than it would for a home computer user because of the massive size of the health authority and how complex the information flow is.

Buick said Capital Health is also working on increasing file storage space so less information would be stored on portable devices.

Capital Health will not face any sanctions for the privacy breach. Work said Alberta's laws do not allow for any sort of sanctions but only give him the authority to make recommendations.

Computer security lapse 'just nuts' -- privacy boss

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: David Howell

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Alberta's information and privacy commissioner says he can't describe his mounting frustration with organizations that fail to protect personal information stored on laptops and other portable devices.

"It's just nuts that we're not looking after this stuff better," Frank Work said Tuesday after releasing an investigation report into the theft this May of four laptop computers from a Capital Health office in downtown Edmonton.

"We're into the information age and we can do all these electronic marvels, and yet the most basic issue we just can't seem to get our heads around."

The laptops stolen from Capital Health contained health information. More than 20,000 individuals had to be notified, and in some cases it took nearly three months to track them down.

Work's investigation concluded that Capital Health contravened the Health Information Act by failing to protect the information with adequate administrative and technical safeguards.

The laptops had two levels of password protection and were locked with cables to desks.

But Capital Health did not require its laptops to be protected with encryption programs, despite being advised twice by Work's office in 2006 that such programs were required.

Encryption programs convert data into a secret code to prevent unauthorized access.

Work said Tuesday he has opened an investigation into the theft of a memory stick -- a small device used to store computer data -- containing names, addresses and phone numbers of 560 students in Edmonton Catholic schools. An employee of a school-bus transportation company had the memory stick in her purse. The purse was in her car when the vehicle was stolen.

Work said the memory stick theft, which came to light on the weekend, is another example of information that should have been encrypted. Many memory sticks come with such programs, he said.

"If it was rocket science ... if it took some kind of incredible effort to protect the information, then I might be a little less frustrated," he said.

"But we're talking about what must be common knowledge -- that portable things go away. They get stolen or they get lost.

"Therefore, assume that they're going to get stolen or they're going to get lost, and take it from there, which means you just have to encrypt them."

Work said he finds it "unbelievable" that organizations still aren't taking necessary steps even after several high-profile incidents.

Last year, after a laptop was stolen containing the personal and financial data of 8,000 Edmonton-area doctors, Work found financial services firm MD Management in breach of the Personal Information Protection Act for not taking adequate steps to safeguard the information.

"That was the case where we said, very clearly, that the standard is a portable (computer) plus personal information means you've got to have encryption," Work said.

He said organizations don't recognize that protecting personal information must be a priority.

"They don't see it as ... part of their core business or something. And yet, when someone signs the cheque to pay someone for doing 20,000 individual notifications, I mean, that's going to cost some money. So how can that not be an organizational priority to mitigate those losses? I would think any auditor would tell them in terms of risk management that you've got to do this."

Capital Health has agreed to several recommendations.

It will find and implement an appropriate encryption solution and ensure that the new system is used on all types of mobile devices that contain personal or health information.

It will provide Work's office with a detailed implementation plan that includes "aggressive targets and timelines." It will also review and revise its incident-response procedure, in particular its process of notifying individuals about privacy breaches.

Capital Health spokesman Steve Buick said the health region will have encryption programs in portable computing devices by January.

"We have, in fact, been working toward moving to encryption for the past year, but it's a big undertaking and we were not ready to move to it at the time the laptop theft happened," Buick said.

"We remain satisfied, in our own minds at least, that it was a crude smash-and-grab kind of theft, which like most of these thefts probably had little or nothing to do with the information in the machines.

"It's the case with most of these thefts of small portable information storage devices. The kind of person who is hooking one of these devices from a purse or a locker probably has no interest in what's on them. But that doesn't change the potential for a breach, which has to be taken seriously."

The Catholic school district now requires that bus carriers encrypt student information stored on memory sticks.

A new policy requiring that information on school district laptops be encrypted will be implemented in the next couple of months, district spokeswoman Lori Nagy said.

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Solicitor General & Public Security

New crime approach looked at; Support comes from recommendations from provincial task force that had a meeting in Banff

Banff Crag & Canyon

Tue 13 Nov 2007

Page: 50

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, SUN MEDIA

Alberta will take a two-pronged, tough-love approach to crime by supporting recommendations from a provincial task force to treat addicts and crack down on drug dealers and repeat offenders.

That means a massive expansion of treatment services and alternatives to criminal courts for drug addicts and alcoholics, while also committing to putting more police on the street.

There is also the commitment to work with the federal government to toughen sentencing for repeat offenders and flagging those repeat offenders for special attention.

"We must take criminals off our streets and keep them off," said Premier Ed Stelmach.

"So today, we're announcing a redouble of our efforts to reduce crime and bolster law enforcement across Alberta."

The plan includes immediately adding 81 beds to treat addictions.

On the get-tough front, the plan calls for increasing the number of police and cracking down on drug dealers.

It calls for expanding alternative court diversion programs for addicts and the mentally ill.

Under the plan, repeat offenders -- the 15 per cent who commit 60 per cent of crime -- would be flagged in a database and receive "more focused treatment and prosecution."

Bail applications would be handled by Crown prosecutors to ensure continual attention is paid to the same offender by the same prosecutor.

The Opposition parties weren't impressed.

"I'm skeptical. There's great stuff in there if it's ever implemented," said Liberal critic **Mo Elsalhy**.

The government has already missed numerous chances to take the lead on some of the proposals in the report, said NDP Leader Brian Mason.

The report came to the same conclusion.

It said that the Alberta government has ignored anti-crime initiatives that work in other jurisdictions and underfunded social agencies dealing with the fallout from crime.

Public meetings were held by the provincial task force all over Alberta, including Banff, where they asked residents and police officers how they wanted the government to approach crime legislation.

Sustainable Resource Development

Pine beetle battle to continue through winter; Reforestation expert sees reason for optimism in Canmore area thanks to a wet summer in B.C.

Cochrane Times

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: 28

Section: News

Byline: BY JUSTIN BRISBANE, SUN MEDIA

Dave Wilson has seen firsthand the British Columbia skies blacken with millions upon millions of mountain pine beetles.

Working in the dense forests of the province, the forestry expert and owner of Celtic Reforestation remembers fighting a losing battle deep within the infested forest, as showers of the bugs poured out of the crimson trees.

"The sky fills up with millions of them. It's like black rain," he said.

It's a scene he wants to avoid in Canmore, as he's optimistic about the ability to stop the spread of the beetle.

"Right now, it's still pretty treatable, but it can go from treatable to excessive pretty quick," said Wilson.

Wilson and his team of about 70 forestry workers are in the Canmore area for at least the next four months to identify and eliminate mountain pine beetles in the area.

Aboard heavy trucks, ATVs and snowmobiles, the forestry workers will make their way through the community, particularly focusing on the Harvie Heights and Spray Lake communities on a search and destroy mission.

The mountain pine beetle has been blamed for the destruction of about 50 per cent of mountain pine in B.C., and is now being blamed for accelerating the wildfires in California.

According to Alberta Sustainable Resource Development spokesperson Duncan MacDonnell, trees killed by the mountain pine beetle are actually "drier than kindling," allowing for extremely accelerated burns.

"They're like matchsticks. Now we have a situation where there are homes built in traditional fire areas," he said.

That, coupled with the fact that developments are moving deeper into the forest, has created an environment in which the chances of a serious wildfire are enhanced.

Rick Arthur, a wildfire prevention officer with SRD said before the Bow Valley was settled, it used to have major fires every 15 years.

"The valley kept a different ecosystem. It was much more grasslands. The last major fire recorded in the valley was 1880, so it's well overdue," said Arthur.

Arthur said the dead trees left by the pine beetles create more fuel for wildfires. That, coupled with increased development in the valley, could produce dangerous results.

"There are some heavy fuel loads in the Canmore area," said Arthur.

He encourages residents to clean up debris around their yard to prevent potential fire risks.

Christie Ward, a forest health officer with SRD, said the crews are looking for evidence of pine beetle larvae in the area, especially evidence that the tree is fighting the pine beetle.

"They're looking to see a pitch tube, and you have to be on the ground to see that," said Ward. "It's like a search and destroy mission."

Ward said the level of impact of the tree cutting in Kananaskis will be quite low, and she doesn't anticipate the crews will find a large increase in the beetles this year.

"We started looking for the beetles near Canmore in 2002 and we found 1,200 infected trees. The next year it dropped substantially to about 380. Last year, they came over the mountains and there was a spike to about 900, but since it was so wet in B.C., we don't expect the numbers to be up."

Since the beetles are native to the area, Ward said the crews aren't looking to eradicate the beetles, just manage their population. That means the program will continue in perpetuity.

"We're not getting the help from nature, so we need to control them so we don't lose our pine tree population," said Ward.

However, the pine tree population isn't the only environmental factor at risk in the Bow Valley.

MacDonnell said the infestations have also created watershed concerns. Since pine trees are traditionally found around lakes and rivers, their impact upon the waterways could be huge.

"Dead trees draw no water, so along the watershed, the hydrology will change," he said.

Trees killed by the mountain pine beetle turn a distinctive red, which makes them easy to identify. Wilson said each tree they burn will kill about 8,000 pine beetles.

However, Wilson said the best defence against the pine beetle is a cold winter to destroy the larvae.

"We need a month of about -35 degree temperatures. That will kill off the larvae," he said.

Climate change is the biggest factor in the beetle proliferation.

"It's all part of the weather changing. Everything is out of balance... The bugs are always here. There is a change in the balance, and that's allowing the infestations," he said.

Pine beetle crews will be working in four different areas around Canmore until December, identifying and chopping down infected trees.

Burning is expected to take place in January.

Tourism, Parks, Recreation & Culture

What's wrong with this picture?

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A18

Section: Opinion

Source: The Edmonton Journal

The federal government has boldly decided to put the new National Portrait Gallery up for auction. Private-sector developers from Canada's nine largest metropolitan areas have been invited to submit bids for the design and construction of a new gallery that would house a veritable storehouse of treasures.

The announcement should finally quash any lingering notions that Ottawa's former U.S. Embassy will be the home of a new gallery. That prime site -- across the street from the Peace Tower -- was chosen by the Chretien government in 2001. Millions of taxpayer dollars have already been spent in its preparation. Yes, it is valuable real estate, but certainly a national museum open to all Canadians might trump the arguably redundant conference centre the Harper government favours.

Not surprisingly, given the broad invitation, Edmonton Economic Development Corp. has indicated it will take a serious look at the possibility of cheerleading local bids. That is as it should be, since EEDC

is charged with exploring and promoting the full range of our region's tourism and business opportunities.

And it's true that Edmonton would be a fine location for any museum -- including a renewed, long-overdue Royal Alberta Museum, should the Alberta government ever see fit to act. Surely, in theory, this city has every right to be considered as a legitimate repository for a vast national collection if Vancouver, Winnipeg and the others are in the running.

Nor should the idea of a national museum being located outside the National Capital Region be dismissed. It's perfectly appropriate, for a variety of reasons, that the Canadian Museum for Human Rights will be built in Winnipeg. Some day soon, a "Museum of the Canadian West" should be created, and it would logically find root in Alberta. One could easily imagine a well-endowed national Maritime Museum in, say, Halifax.

But the special nature of a national portrait gallery, as recognized in Britain, the U.S., France, Australia and literally every other country, should live in the nation's capital. This is especially so given our history of two founding nations, English and French. And it must also be noted that portrait galleries, often absolute gems as in London or Washington, D.C. are not mainline "destination" facilities such as the British Museum, but are welcome additions to a wide mix of larger cultural institutions. A critical tourism mass is important to provide the necessary audience numbers.

As well, while corporate and individual financial participation is to be solicited and valued in this realm, casting a national museum into the same category as developing an old military base is embarrassing. Certainly a nation as blessed as Canada must draw the line somewhere. Imagine the "Wendy's/Tim Hortons Canadian Museum of Civilization" or the "Bombardier National Gallery of Canada."

No, as intriguing as privatizing and locating a new national museum in Edmonton -- or much more likely, Calgary -- might be for some, our national portrait gallery should be owned and housed by the people, in the people's capital.

***Miscellaneous Government**

Cardinal pulling out of politics; First Cree minister won't run again

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: B4

Section: Alberta

Byline: Jason Markusoff and Jodie Sinnema

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Former cabinet minister Mike Cardinal is the latest in a long line of Ralph Klein loyalists to announce he won't be running in the next provincial election.

Cardinal said Tuesday he's satisfied he has done nearly everything he wanted to since he became an MLA in 1989. "Most of the roads in my constituency have been paved, except for two," said the Athabasca-Redwater MLA. "Deciding to enter politics was tough, but deciding to go was one of the toughest decisions I've ever made."

He is the 15th Tory MLA to announce intentions to retire when Premier Ed Stelmach calls the next election, widely expected this spring.

A 16th, Drayton Valley-Calmar MLA Tony Abbott, recently lost his nomination to run again as a Tory.

Nine of the retiring politicians, including Cardinal, Gary Mar, Clint Dunford and Denis Ducharme, were Klein cabinet ministers Stelmach demoted to the backbenches last year.

Cardinal, 66, was a long-time friend and fishing partner of Klein, who made him the province's first Cree minister in 1992.

He held many cabinet portfolios, but is most proud of and best known for his mid-1990s stint as social services minister, when Alberta drastically slashed its welfare rolls.

He introduced controversial changes, such as cutting teenage moms off welfare to make them their family's responsibility, and setting up work training programs as a condition of receiving assistance.

After publicly scolding parents who don't take responsibility for their children, he was revealed to have fathered a child in the 1970s whose mother spent about three years on welfare before Cardinal began making support payments.

Cardinal said he wants to help reduce poverty rates on aboriginal reserves, starting with his own Big Stone band near Wabasca.

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Elected Senate is best for Albertans: premier

The Calgary Herald

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A5

Section: News

Byline: Tony Seskus and Jason Fekete

Source: Calgary Herald

With the future of Canada's Senate up for debate, Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach voiced support Tuesday for reforming Ottawa's upper house rather than abolishing it.

And Stelmach, who backs the idea of holding future Senate elections in the province, said if Canadians were to vote for abolishing the upper chamber in a referendum, a new body would likely need to replace it.

"I would like to see reform -- but if Canadians as a whole have different opinions in terms of the Senate, I'm sure that they'll voice that opinion in a referendum," Stelmach told reporters in Edmonton.

"From Albertans' point of view, we may need another house for that . . . sober second thought, just looking at the bills, peeling them apart."

Stelmach's comments came as the federal Conservative government reintroduced bills that would reform the Senate by establishing eight-year term limits for senators and setting up a system for electing senators.

The minority government has hinted that if it can't get the support required to make such changes, it will back an NDP bid to hold a national referendum on whether to abolish the upper house.

Alberta has been a backer of Senate reform for years.

In 2004 provincial election, residents voted four people to six-year terms as senators-in-waiting -- though there was no guarantee Ottawa would choose any of them. Earlier this year, Prime Minister Stephen Harper appointed senator-in-waiting Bert Brown to the upper chamber.

Stelmach indicated Tuesday he'd hold senatorial elections.

"I personally feel it's in the best interests of Albertans," he said.

"I support it. I think it gives an opportunity to send someone to the house on another level to represent the province of Alberta."

Alberta senator-in-waiting Betty Unger welcomed Stelmach's comments as she believes abolishing the Senate would be a mistake.

"You've got to have checks and balances," Unger said. "If you had a dictatorial-minded prime minister with a majority in the House of Commons, you would basically have in Canada a benign dictatorship."

Roger Gibbins, president of the Canada West Foundation, a public policy think-tank, agrees that dismantling the upper house would create new problems.

But Harper might be thinking about using the results of a referendum to convince reluctant premiers that change is needed, he said.

The premiers control the amending formula for the constitution, he noted.

"If you're the premier of a province and you're really not all that keen about Senate reform -- many of the premiers aren't -- but the people in your province vote strongly for Senate reform, it gives the prime minister considerable bargaining power," Gibbins said. "It's important in that way."

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Columnists

Don Braid, Calgary Herald

Taft's thunder just blunderful
The Calgary Herald

Wed 14 Nov 2007

Page: A5

Section: News

Byline: Don Braid

Column: Don Braid

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Calgary Herald

Hold the presses -- the legislature was not told the truth! This is a shocker to rival that old non-headline, "Dog bites man."

Really, what could be more obvious? There's rarely a 10-minute stretch when anybody tells the whole truth, especially with reporters on hand. The best you can hope to see, at the end of the day, is a battered facsimile of truth crawling out of the ring.

But **Kevin Taft**, the Liberal leader, is determined to prove that Premier Ed Stelmach's crew are "a government that consistently and deliberately lied." **Taft** even accuses the Tories of something close to criminality.

"Albertans put their trust in this government and they were betrayed," **Taft** thundered on Tuesday.

"In the corporate world there are requirements for full, plain and true disclosure. Misleading the public (in) the corporate world leads to prosecution."

He's talking about oil and gas royalties; in fact, that's all **Taft** has talked about since the legislature opened.

He's determined to prove that while the government filed official reports saying the royalty regime was working fine, the Energy Department knew that billions more could have been collected.

Taft is correct. It's not news, though. He's repeating almost exactly what Auditor General Fred Dunn revealed weeks ago in his annual report.

The Energy Department did calculate that the province's share of oil and gas revenues could be higher, and this was not divulged to the public.

But **Taft** never repeats something else the auditor general said -- that the decision about whether the royalty take is sufficient is ultimately political, not bureaucratic.

Ministers in Ralph Klein's government thought the regime wasn't broken; after all, it was fuelling an enormous boom and reaping billions in revenue. As Klein famously said, he didn't give a tinker's damn about reforming the system. But Energy Department officials began to feel that with oil prices rising, the system was becoming too lax.

This bureaucratic version of truth clashed with cabinet political orthodoxy, so it never saw daylight. This is not rare. At lunchtime on a nice summer day, you can spit out a high legislature window and hit a dozen senior officials whose views and studies will never be made public. They're paid very well to understand that politicians make the final decisions.

So Taft is correct in a narrow technical sense, but his thunder is out of proportion to the offence. Why is that?

New Democrat Leader Brian Mason got close to the answer when he told MLAs "there's a bigger secret, and that's where the Liberals actually stand on royalties."

Later Mason added: "This is just Kevin setting his hair on fire again. He's doing it because he doesn't want to talk about his party's position."

The NDP is clear enough; it wants everything in the full royalty report, and more.

The government's compromise position is still under construction, but the main outlines are well understood.

Only the Liberals don't say much about their real-world policy. This party is mousetrapped between the Tories and the New Democrats, squirming with uncertainty as it tries to deflect attention to the past. Oddly, Taft doesn't seem to realize that he could actually be helping Stelmach.

The worse he makes the royalty record appear, the better the premier's royalty reforms start to look.

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