

Table of Contents

Advanced Education & Technology	1
Agriculture & Food.....	1
Children’s Services	1
Education	4
Employment, Immigration & Industry.....	4
Energy	5
Environment.....	10
Finance (including Pensions/Insurance)	10
Health & Wellness.....	10
Infrastructure & Transportation	10
International, Intergovernmental & Aboriginal Affairs	13
Justice & Attorney General	13
Municipal Affairs & Housing	15
Seniors & Community Supports.....	18
Service Alberta	21
Solicitor General & Public Security.....	21
Sustainable Resource Development.....	21
Tourism, Parks, Recreation & Culture.....	21
*Miscellaneous Government	22
*Election.....	26
Columnists	27

Advanced Education & Technology

Agriculture & Food

Children’s Services

Opinions sought for child care

Stony Plain Reporter

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A33

Section: News

Byline: BY GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

As part of its commitment to ongoing dialogue, the Alberta government is inviting Albertans to share their views on proposed standards governing provincially licensed day care, out-of-school care and nursery school programs.

The proposed standards have been revised to reflect input from the first phase of consultation on the 'child care licensing regulation'.

"The development of child care standards is a partnership between government, parents and the child care community," said Janis Tarchuk, minister of children's services. "Our common goal is a regulation that supports quality, affordable and accessible child care programs. We will continue to work with Albertans as we move forward."

Individuals interested in providing input on the recommended standards are invited to go to the Children's Services website at [www.child.alberta.ca/child care](http://www.child.alberta.ca/child%20care).

The consultation document and questionnaire will be available online until Feb. 4, 2008. Copies can also be obtained by calling the Parent Information Line at 1-866-741-KIDS (5437).

Information sessions will also be held throughout the province in January.

More than 1,500 Albertans, including parents, child care operators and interested Albertans, participated in the government's first phase of consultation on the proposed standards held earlier this year.

Albertans indicated their support for improving the quality of child care without compromising affordability or access to child care spaces.

Proposed standards governing how meals and snacks are provided and the location of washrooms have been reconsidered in favour of keeping the current standards in place.

While many child care programs would not have problems meeting the proposed standards, some programs would have difficulty because of the lack of physical space in their facilities. Other proposed standards have been modified, including staff-to-child ratios in day cares and staff certification requirements.

The new Child Care Licensing Regulation will be finalized when the Child Care Licensing Act is proclaimed, expected in 2008. Changes will be phased in to allow child care operators to transition to the new regulation.

Quality, affordable child care is an important part of Premier Ed Stelmach's plan to secure Alberta's future by building our communities, greening our growth and creating opportunity.

Province moves to tighten up day-care certification

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, LEGISLATURE BUREAU

New, tougher guidelines for getting a day-care or day-home licence are another big step towards strengthening the industry here and giving parents reliable choices, says a local expert.

The province has unveiled a series of proposed amendments to child-care licensing and is consulting the public, with a view to making the changes during the upcoming spring legislature session.

Some of the changes include more experience being required by day-care managers, mandatory criminal background checks for staff, emergency plans and how community resources will be used to aid child development.

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

It will also crack down on low-rent "babysitting" services by making it mandatory for the day care to provide programming and play equipment, including items that promote literacy development.

So far, the proposals have met with 80% to 85% support from stakeholders. That doesn't surprise Sherrill Brown, with MacEwan's Early Childhood Development Program.

"The move to tighten up certification and to ensure that children have access to trained staff is really important," Brown said.

"The biggest concern facing the sector is around the availability of people to work in it, and generally speaking - quite apart from the regulatory tweaking - we're very happy to see that the government is trying to improve standards."

For the past two years, the government has offered incentive packages to draw people from more lucrative fields back to child care, and it's working, said Brown.

She said the industry knows it's not realistic yet to expect that every daycare worker will have extensive training. Right now, they're merely required to take a short course to get their Early Childhood Education 1 certificate. But eventually, the gradual improvement of the system will lead to that point.

"It would be nice to get to the point in Alberta where everyone realizes the need for child-care workers to be as well trained as possible," she said.

Several current standards won't change under the proposed plan, noted Cathy Ducharme, with Alberta Children's Services.

Current nutritional guidelines that mandate any centre providing food include at least four staple food groups were deemed adequate, and operators who don't offer a meal will continue to be responsible for substituting when a parent-provided lunch isn't sufficiently nutritious.

Licence inspections will also be strictly adhered to, Ducharme said. "At a minimum the licensing officers will be checking each location twice per year and those are random checks."

STRICT INSPECTIONS

"If programs continue to have issues with compliance - for instance, four critical failures in a year - they could be inspected anywhere from daily to monthly."

But the new standards won't address the industry's ongoing request for the reinstatement of operating grants. The province removed them when they deregulated the industry in the 1990s, but critics say that led to a glut of poorly run centres who couldn't afford, without the subsidy, to hire well-qualified staff.

Education

Employment, Immigration & Industry

Foreigners need help, union official tells forum

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 30

Section: News

Byline: BY RENATO GANDIA, SUN MEDIA

Temporary foreign workers coming to Alberta need to be educated about their rights and be given substantial orientation before they get to work, say union leaders.

The workers come to Canada hoping they can apply for immigrant status after a year because that's what they were told when they were recruited by a labour broker, said Michael Toal of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1118. The reality is, they can't apply to immigrate because often they don't qualify, he said.

"Half the time they're lied to," Toal told a forum yesterday. "They're told they can earn \$15 an hour," when, in fact, one has to work at least three years before getting to that pay scale, he said.

More than 100 academics, bureaucrats and employers who want to hire temporary workers attended the forum hosted by The Work and Learning Network at the University of Alberta.

Many foreign workers don't know they have to pay taxes and contribute to the Canada Pension Plan, said Doug Legear, also with the UFCW.

When a Red Deer packing plant brought in foreign workers from El Salvador two years ago, it involved the UFCW, Toal said.

He spent three weeks orienting the workers, teaching them about their rights and helping them adjust to living in a northern climate. But that didn't last very long because the next time more workers were brought in, the employer did not involve the union, he said.

In Edmonton, temporary workers are flocking to social service groups for help when they run into problems such as getting fired and looking for a new job.

The Catholic Social Services has been inundated with cries for help from temporary workers, said Zdravka Brnada, who fields calls or meets with at least 100 of them every month.

The province is poised to announce a program next week that will help alleviate the problems of temporary foreign workers, said a spokesman for Employment Minister Iris Evans.

Energy

Stelmach wants more bitumen upgraded here

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: B7

Section: Alberta

Byline: Archie McLean

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Premier Ed Stelmach wants more bitumen upgraded in the province but how that will be accomplished hasn't been determined.

Stelmach said Thursday about 62 per cent of the province's bitumen is upgraded here. He wants to see that increase. He was evasive when pressed on how he'd accomplish that.

"It will be announced once we finish a full discussion and see what we can bring forward in terms of a policy that's going to work," Stelmach said.

He was reacting to a multibillion-dollar deal announced Wednesday between Husky Energy and BP PLC to ship bitumen from northern Alberta to a refinery in Ohio.

The deal means Husky will defer plans to triple its output at its Lloydminster plant.

The deal is similar to another one announced last year between EnCana Corp. and ConocoPhillips Inc. that sends Alberta bitumen to Texas and Illinois.

During last year's leadership campaign, Stelmach referred to shipping bitumen south of the border as equivalent to "scraping off the topsoil" on a farm. Since becoming premier a year ago, he hasn't acted to stop the flow.

Stelmach said Thursday there are enough upgraders planned for construction in Alberta to increase the amount of bitumen processed here to about 72 per cent.

Opposition parties have slammed the government for inaction. The NDP will introduce a private member's bill in the spring that would keep the bitumen here. Alberta Liberal Leader Kevin Taft has suggested upgraders be built in other western provinces in return for things such as power and labour.

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Talk to the people; Taft warns premier on nuclear plant issue

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 26

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, LEGISLATURE BUREAU

Spare the rod, spoil the environment.

The rod in this case would be made of spent uranium, and the environment is Alberta's. And the risks associated with bringing nuclear power to the wild west mean the public has to have a say, Liberal leader Kevin Taft said yesterday.

He was responding to Premier Ed Stelmach's suggestion that Alberta will have public consultation guidelines for nuclear energy in place within weeks.

Bruce Power, through its newly acquired subsidiary Energy Alberta Corp., has applied for a licence from Atomic Energy of Canada to build a nuclear generating plant near Peace River.

"To us, the nuclear option is way down the list," said Taft. "There's a bunch of better ways to address the electrical requirements of Alberta than going nuclear.

"But I do believe the people of Alberta do need a voice. Sure, the issues are technical ... but the stakes are practically for all time."

It could become an election issue early next year, Taft noted, and the government would do well to pay attention to average Albertans.

"Again, that's Ed Stelmach's choice. He could look - and probably has looked - at the municipal election results in Peace River, where a council that backed the nuclear option was entirely thrown out."

Alberta has yet to develop an official position on nuclear power, said Jason Chance with Alberta Energy. Although it is a priority item, it will lean on outside expertise to assess its viability. Ultimately, approving such a facility is up to the federal government, he said.

"But the province would have a definite role to play environmentally in the allocation of water, transmissions," said Chance.

He added, "the government is working to develop a policy on nuclear," but could not say how long it will take to develop the policy.

Stelmach backs off bitumen stand; Premier won't force oil firms to process locally

The Calgary Herald

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A5

Section: News

Byline: Jason Fekete, with a file from Jason Markusoff, Legislature Bureau

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Calgary Herald

Premier Ed Stelmach won't force Husky Energy or any other petroleum producer to upgrade bitumen in Alberta, despite promising in the Tory leadership race to stem the oilsands giveaway to the United States.

Stelmach said Thursday a heavy-handed approach isn't needed on the issue, even though billions of oilsands investment dollars and potentially thousands of jobs continue to flow south.

Rather, he insisted upgrading capacity will only increase in Alberta over the next decade and that his government will release a bitumen processing policy sometime in 2008.

"We're working, trying to find how do we create the opportunity to upgrade in Alberta," Stelmach told reporters at the legislature.

"If you step in and stop (the flow of oilsands to the U.S.), what will be the value of bitumen if you can't get it out to set a market price?" a fiery Stelmach added.

The premier's comments came a day after Energy Minister Mel Knight vowed to use a "carrot" approach, rather than a "stick," and on the heels of Husky Energy announcing it's the latest oilsands player to ship Alberta bitumen to the U.S. for upgrading.

Stelmach noted there "will always" be some bitumen upgraded outside, but said his government will try to give incentives to producers to process the oilsands within the province.

"That's part of my personal commitment to increase the amount of upgrading in Alberta. It has to happen," he said, adding that "we can't build these upgraders overnight."

Liberal Leader Kevin Taft assailed the Stelmach government for being largely indifferent on the issue and said the province must consider having a bitumen upgrading plan mandatory prior to approving new oilsands projects.

"The people of Alberta understand these are very, very valuable projects. These are huge wealth generators," he said. "They want upgrading here."

Alberta produces approximately 1.3 million barrels of bitumen per day -- with about 800,000 barrels of that, or 62 per cent, staying in Alberta -- and approximately 500,000 barrels being exported and upgraded outside Canada.

Stelmach suggested the bitumen processed in Alberta will rise to 72 per cent by 2016, spurred by new upgraders on the drawing board and the government's value-added plan to be released next year.

The premier said it's foolish to force energy companies to upgrade all their bitumen in Alberta because it would sink the price of the product.

But during the Tory leadership race in fall 2006, Stelmach said Albertans didn't need to worry about Ottawa raiding the province's oilsands resources "if we are just going to give it away ourselves" to the U.S.

He also argued that locating upgraders outside the province "flies in the face" of the government's value-added strategy, and is like "scraping off the top soil" from a farm.

Stelmach even mused at the time he would consider having petroleum producers pay higher royalties if bitumen is shipped to the U.S., although the government hasn't pursued it.

Husky's \$5.5-billion deal with BP PLC will see it ship oilsands from northern Alberta to a refinery in Toledo, Ohio. The agreement will see the plant retooled to process 120,000 barrels per day of bitumen from the oilsands, with total capacity to ramp up to 170,000 barrels per day.

Husky president John Lau said the move "maximizes returns to shareholders while minimizing the inherent risk of proceeding with a mega oilsands project."

The company's plans to modify the Lloydminster upgrader on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border have been put on hold.

Husky becomes the latest Canadian oilsands developer to strike a deal with a downstream player after EnCana inked a pact with ConocoPhillips in 2006 to send bitumen to Texas.

The Tory government's new blueprint for processing oilsands will also review whether to adopt an upgrader credit.

Alberta Energy is currently recruiting an expert to explore options under the royalty framework's bitumen in-kind proposal.

A study, due before March, will "determine the quantity and quality of bitumen that the Alberta government may be able to take in-kind or make available for processing in oilsands regions and the Greater Edmonton area facilities for years 2009 through 2030," according to a ministry document.

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Atco power line approved without fuss; No landowner or aboriginal objections to \$210-million project northwest of Edmonton

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: D1 / FRONT

Section: Business

Byline: Gordon Jaremko

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Construction will begin this winter on a new power line northwest of Edmonton after Atco Electric won approval Thursday for the \$210-million project without a regulatory fuss.

No landowners or aboriginal communities held up the 226-kilometre line by objecting before the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Community consultations began months before construction applications were filed, Atco Electric president Sett Policicchio said.

"It's the way we work," he added in an interview.

Route planning and land access negotiation teams craft a range of potential, technically feasible rights-of-way, Policicchio said.

Then the teams explain power needs that drive plans for new lines and seek paths of least resistance across communities affected, he said.

"We consult, listen and make appropriate changes as successes for everybody involved," Policicchio said.

Atco is heir to an 80-year tradition of rural relationships in its service territory spanning northern and eastern Alberta. The firm, born east of Edmonton in the Vegreville area, operates outside the heavily populated Edmonton-Calgary corridor where conflict before the AEUB continues to delay a new transmission line sought by AltaLink.

The northwestern line is smaller than the contested plan for a new provincial grid "backbone" of 500-kilovolt wires on tall steel towers, crossing scenic farming, country residential and recreational areas west of the QE II Highway between Alberta's biggest cities.

Except on soft ground requiring strong metal structures, Atco will erect

H-shaped metal structures to support its 240-kilovolt line between the Wabasca and Peace River regions.

The firm set a target date of first-quarter 2010 for completing the power grid addition. The project is expected to employ up to 400 workers for two winter construction seasons. "The colder the better from our point of view," Policicchio said.

The route crosses soft ground and muskeg swamps that have to freeze hard for construction equipment and crews to operate.

The project is the first in a series recommended for the northwestern quarter of the province by the Alberta Electric System Operator, a non-profit agency created by provincial power deregulation to run the grid, plan additions and house the electricity supply "pool" or trading floor.

About 750 kilometres of new northwestern lines are proposed over the next 10 years. The additions are spread across the region between coal-fired power stations clustered west of Edmonton and Rainbow Lake near the Northwest Territories boundary.

Growing industrial activity and population are creating increased demand for electricity and requirements for new transmission wires to make the northern grid as reliable as power service in southern Alberta, Policicchio said.

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Environment

Alberta's ozone levels high

The Calgary Herald

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A5

Section: News

Byline: Hanneke Brooymans

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Edmonton Journal

There's trouble in the air in Alberta, says a new federal government report.

Many air-quality monitoring stations in the province registered high ozone concentrations in 2005, the latest year for which data was available, says the new Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators report.

The report was released Thursday.

Ground-level ozone can cause human health problems, ranging from coughing to premature death. It also reduces crop growth.

In 2000, Alberta signed on to a Canada-wide standard that aims to keep ozone at a concentration of 65 parts per billion or less. Some parts of Alberta are experiencing days when the ozone concentration hits 58 ppb. Among the worst hit areas are: Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer.

The province is aware of the problem. A year ago, Alberta Environment sent out 520 letters to industrial plants, municipalities and environmental groups, warning them a concerted effort was needed to reduce ozone concentrations and they had two years to come up with a plan.

The airshed management zones were given the responsibility of cobbling together a way to reduce the emissions that are the building blocks for the formation of ozone. That information will be shared by the groups in February.

Finance (including Pensions/Insurance)

Health & Wellness

Infrastructure & Transportation

Stelmach's capital board

Stony Plain Reporter

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A35

Section: News

Byline: BY CARSON MILLS, STAFF WRITER

Premier Ed Stelmach's newly proposed capital region growth plan was reportedly supposed to insight uncertainty and anger among municipal mayors and reeves, but mayors from the tri-area will have none of that.

The new political board intends to make binding decisions on municipal services and force both major cities and smaller counties to co-operate.

Allegedly, this regionalization was supposed to limit local autonomy, but local mayors feel that there won't be reason to fear, although they do have a few reservations.

"I'm very much looking toward regional co-operation," said Spruce Grove Mayor Stuart Houston. "There's going to be a fear of revenue sharing and protectionism of the resource revenue for the counties."

"Even (Edmonton Mayor Stephen) Mandel knows we all want to co-operate," said Parkland County Mayor Rob Wiedeman.

"We just need to meet in the middle."

All municipal mayors and reeves have received a report regarding this regionalization, but Stony Plain Mayor Ken Lemke has decided to take a wait and see approach before he sees this plan as negative or a positive.

"The mayor's met on the 22nd (of November), but we got a draft that was missing crucial information," he said. "Until we see the final report, there isn't any point in getting too upset about it."

Wiedeman says that the hubbub about smaller municipalities losing control of their destiny is mere speculation and hype.

"The media has blown it out of proportion," he said. "Municipalities have been very supportive."

The Parkland County continued that support for municipalities has been perceived as municipalities not co-operating, which he says isn't true.

Lemke, says that any fears of municipal power loss are grounded in paranoia.

"We should wait and see before we get bent out of shape," he said. "My personal feeling is that it's gotten to the point where it's a little emotional for some people. They're getting paranoid about what (the report) might say."

The Stelmach government has insisted it isn't proposing a new layer of government, but instead a board made up of councillors and mayors from 24 Edmonton-area municipalities. The system will likely have more power than the struggling Alberta Capital Region Alliance (ACRA).

"I really don't think (ACRA) is necessary," said Wiedeman."

"This (new board) will be very similar to what ACRA was intended to be," added Lemke.

Although the three mayors haven't been up in arms over the new proposed plan, each has his share of concerns.

"Municipalities don't have a lot of revenue to develop infrastructure," said Houston. "I think as a group we need to get together to get additional funding to develop (the area in response to the oil industry)."

Lemke also sees land use, cost sharing and the region's response to growth as major issues.

Wiedeman, on the other hand, worries about bringing his busy council up to speed with the report.

"The biggest problem right now is that the timelines are unreasonable after an election," he said. "It's very tight." The report is expected to undergo several changes before a final, definitive version is submitted.

Drunk-driving 'crack down' bill not intended for court

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 5

Section: News

Byline: BY BROOKES MERRITT, SUN MEDIA

The Calgary MLA who wrote a bill to "crack down on impaired drivers" admits it's of no help in prosecuting drunks behind the wheel.

Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation's media release for MLA Art Johnson's amendment to the Traffic Safety Act says Bill 49 "cracks down on impaired driving" by considering breathalyzer readings taken up to three hours after driving to be the same as they would at the time of driving.

The release fails to mention the people "considering" breathalyzer results aren't cops or judges, but rather Alberta's Transportation Safety Board.

The TSB is not involved in the prosecution of drunk drivers; their role is to enforce or overturn the automatic 90-day driving suspensions handed out when people are charged with impaired driving.

Johnson, a former TSB member, said his bill aims to lessen the burden on TSB officials dealing with an increasing number of appeals of driving suspensions - many of which he said are based on an irksome technicality.

"This bill has nothing to do with police and has no bearing in criminal cases against people charged with impaired driving.

"It was written because the (TSB) was getting too many appeals from people whose breathalyzers were taken after the previous two-hour limit. Extending the time limit to three hours should stop all those appeals."

Edmonton defence lawyer Paul Moreau specializes in impaired driving cases and said Bill 49 looks like political back-scratching.

"This only benefits the Transportation Safety Board," he said. "It might make it a little harder to get your suspension overturned on a time-limit technicality, but the truth is, the TSB rarely grants those appeals anyway.

"The government is trying to make it sound like they're cracking down on drunk driving, but really this is just a little bit of nothing."

Edmonton's top traffic cop Staff Sgt. Bill Horne said his first reaction upon hearing of the new bill was confusion.

"I don't think this has anything to do with the prosecution of these individuals, just the TSB's involvement when licences are suspended for 90 days. I wouldn't exactly call that a crackdown."

International, Intergovernmental & Aboriginal Affairs

Justice & Attorney General

Alberta courts flawed: top judge; Training inadequate and caseloads too heavy, justice minister warned

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Karen Kleiss

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Alberta's Judicial Council says backlogs and delays in the provincial courts are caused by serious, systemic problems including inadequate training and education of judges, heavy workloads and a lack of administrative and legal support staff.

In a letter to provincial Justice Minister Ron Stevens, the council's chairwoman says judges need more time to research and write complex judgments and a better administrative system that flags cases when decisions are overdue.

"It is incumbent on the government to ensure that our courts have sufficient judges, staff and other resources to effectively handle the caseload," Provincial Court Chief Judge Gail Vickery, the council chairwoman, wrote in the three-page letter obtained by The Journal.

The Sept. 20 letter was the council's response to the Justice minister's formal complaint about the conduct of provincial court Judge Brad Kerby.

In February 2002, the novice judge found Leo Teskey guilty in the savage beating of Dougald Miller, but waited 11 months before issuing reasons for his decision. In June this year, the Supreme Court granted Teskey a new trial, saying the long delay and several other factors, including Kerby's "obvious difficulty in arriving at a verdict," would lead a reasonable person to question whether he was truly impartial when he wrote the reasons for his decision.

In its letter to Stevens, the council cleared Kerby of any wrongdoing, saying there was no evidence of misconduct, incompetence, neglect of duty or inability to perform his duty. The council also said there is no evidence of a pattern of misconduct in Kerby's work.

"Your concern that Judge Kerby's conduct in the Teskey trial may have prospectively impeached him ... is not part of the ruling by the Supreme Court, and is not supported by the evidence."

The letter adds that the matters in the complaint "do not negatively impact the principles of justice ... or public confidence in Alberta's justice system."

After clearing Kerby, the council told Stevens its investigation had identified serious, systemic issues, including the need for more administrative and legal research support, more judicial education and increased time to deal with complex decisions.

"One or more of these conditions quite likely contributed to delays in this and other matters," Vickery said in an interview Thursday, adding that every provincial court judge confronts these issues.

"We are anxious to work towards ensuring it does not happen in the future. ... We wish it hadn't happened."

Vickery said all of the concerns raised in the letter are long-standing issues she routinely addresses with the minister in her role as chief judge. However, members of the judicial council wanted to take the opportunity to raise them again in the context of the complaint.

In his Oct. 16 response, Stevens said he disagrees that there is any connection between the council's concerns and the complaint against Kerby.

"I am at a loss to see how these systemic issues are tied to this complaint investigation," Stevens wrote. "If in fact they are, why have we not received complaints regarding the work of provincial court judges? I am not aware of similar concerns being raised regarding the work of other provincial court judges."

Despite the disagreement, Alberta Justice spokesman David Dear said Thursday the minister has accepted the outcome of the council's decision regarding his complaint and that he takes the council's concerns seriously.

He said the letter prompted a meeting and that the government and court have established a committee that will deal with the council's concerns.

In addition, Dear echoed Vickery, saying the government has long been working to ensure cases are dealt with efficiently and to reduce pressure on provincial court judges.

Over the past four years, he said Alberta Justice has added 12 new judicial positions and the equivalent of 125 full-time provincial court staff. He said operational funding for the provincial court has risen \$16 million in the past four years to \$70.5 million a year in total, and that the department devotes more than \$700,000 annually to the education of 121 provincial court judges in Alberta.

Finally, he said the province is encouraging the use of an early-case-resolution procedure, and is working with an expert from Manitoba Justice to revamp how the provincial court in Alberta schedules cases and trials.

The victim in the alleged beating, Dougald Miller, suffered permanent brain damage. He cannot move and communicates by blinking.

For his wife, Lesley, the release of the letter marks the first time she has heard anything about what might have led to the events that triggered a new trial for the man once convicted of savagely beating the man she loves.

The news came days before the start of Teskey's new trial, which starts Monday. It will be difficult for her.

"Maybe we'll get something changed now," she said Thursday. "I wouldn't want this to happen to any other person. It has been seven years of trauma, and now here we go again."

She says she and everyone she knows has lost all faith in the justice system.

"I don't see why we have to go through all this again, just because a judge was improperly prepared. I'm tired. I'm having to go through this nightmare again.

"The justice system let us down."

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Municipal Affairs & Housing

County capital growth plan

Leduc Representative

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 25

Section: News

Leduc County is one of six representatives of Capital Region municipalities who have reaffirmed their view that a growth management plan for the region should be based on the principles of local autonomy, accountability and cost sharing; and should not add a new level of government.

Over the past few months, representatives of six municipalities in the region have put forward a common approach based on these principles.

The group, known as the Cooperative Municipal Partnership or CMP, includes the Town of Bruderheim, Lamont County, Leduc County, Parkland County, Strathcona County and Sturgeon County.

In discussions with their counterparts throughout Alberta, representatives of CMP municipalities say they are hearing strong and widespread support for intermunicipal cooperation and collaboration and respect for local autonomy and accountability.

Two resolutions received near-unanimous approval last week from local councils attending the AAMD&C convention (Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties).

The AAMD&C represents Alberta's 67 municipal districts, counties and specialized municipalities.

One resolution requested the Government of Alberta to apply the principles of cooperation, collaboration, local autonomy and accountability to the Capital Region review and any other future regional governance initiatives.

The second urged that more time be taken for a full and open consultation with all affected stakeholders.

A draft plan being considered for the Capital Region recommends a new regional board with binding powers and the potential ability to requisition money from municipalities.

Under the proposed plan, the regional board could take over land use planning from local municipalities, and a wide range of other services could eventually fall under some form of regional control.

Gaps in the information are of concern, as mayors and reeves are being asked whether they agree to the board without knowing how board decisions would be made, or the cost to their municipalities.

CMP partners note their approach is consistent with what Premier Ed Stelmach has said about respect for municipal autonomy and the assurance that no new level of government would be created.

CMP partners recognize the need for continuous improvement, and are willing to pay their fair share for regional projects that benefit their residents.

Municipalities want power to preserve natural areas; Development legislation needs changing

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: B2

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Hanneke Brooymans

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Municipalities have asked the provincial government to give them more power to protect natural areas within their boundaries.

The City of Edmonton introduced a resolution at last week's Alberta Urban Municipalities Association convention asking the province to broaden municipal authority to protect these areas. The resolution was supported by 89 per cent of the attending members.

"We're losing a lot of our natural areas -- wetlands, tree stands, that sort of thing -- and we don't have the tools in the municipalities to protect them," said Grant Pearsell, Edmonton's natural areas co-ordinator and main author of the resolution.

Changes in the Municipal Government Act are needed, he said.

The act now allows municipalities to take up to 10 per cent of the land to be developed for schools, community centres and park space, leaving little for the conservation, Pearsell wrote.

Steep slopes, ravines, flood-prone areas and other land can be taken by municipalities as "environmental reserve," but that title is misleading and the potential limited, Pearsell said.

For example, a municipality could dedicate a water body and a narrow buffer for pollution prevention and public access, but not the upland habitat surrounding it, which is critical to the survival of many species, he said.

Pearsell's counterpart in Calgary, Chris Manderson, said the "environmental reserve" system doesn't protect certain types of natural areas in their municipality.

Pearsell said he's talked to staff of other municipalities and they are struggling with the same issue. Solutions are hard to find.

"Our council did establish a natural area reserve fund where they dedicate money every year to purchase the land," he said. "But that's not nearly enough, especially in the situation we have now where development is coming on so fast and over such a wide area."

What's needed is for the provincial government to say to municipalities that when you're developing new areas you are obligated to protect biodiversity and natural areas, said Linda Duncan, co-ordinator of the city's natural areas advisory committee.

"Whether it's protecting creeks and rivers or the last of the natural areas, all those headaches fall onto municipalities, but they don't really have the powers to do anything," she said. "They still rest with the federal and provincial governments."

Manderson said there needs to be some ability to look at land for its ecological significance and on a regional basis, so there's some connection for wildlife between important habitat patches.

Ideally, the act would allow municipalities to protect natural areas during the neighbourhood planning and subdivision process, Pearsell said.

"I think there can be more specific enabling provisions in the act that would provide municipalities with power to protect natural areas," said Jason Unger, staff counsel with the Environmental Law Centre.

Municipalities have a lot of power in their land use planning and bylaws, he said. But if they restrict development, they open themselves to potential litigation, a situation which could be remedied with supportive provincial laws.

A Municipal Affairs and Housing spokesman said the act has provisions supported by a provincial land use policy on the natural environment that encourages municipalities to use measures to minimize the loss of habitat.

Another part of the act allows a municipality to establish environmental policies through local statutory plans to guide development along natural areas, said Jerry Bellikka.

The department minister, Ray Danyluk, is prepared to document this item during the next review of the act scheduled for 2010, he added.

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Seniors & Community Supports

Economic boom is just the job for Alberta's seniors

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 18

Section: News

Byline: BY NICKI THOMAS, SUN MEDIA

As the booming economy continues to squeeze the labour market, seniors are enjoying a different kind of Alberta advantage.

A report released yesterday by the Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses revealed that almost half of small businesses in Alberta employ at least one person over the age of 60.

"The labour shortage is the No. 1 concern (of employers)," said Janine Halbesma, co-author of the report. "Businesses are looking to groups that are traditionally under-represented in the workplace."

While seniors have always had a place in the working world, the current labour crunch in Alberta has sparked an increase in hiring, she said.

"Small businesses are doing what they can to attract and retain older workers," said Halbesma, noting that employers find the experience, work ethic and loyalty of older workers invaluable.

"They've been there, done that. They want to come to work," said Stan Doubleday, human resources manager for Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, a not-for-profit organization whose mandate is to provide meaningful employment for seniors.

Commissionaires serve as security guards for government buildings as well as commercial clients like EPCOR.

In all, 226 of their employees are over 60 - about 35-40% of their total workforce - and their oldest employee is 84, Doubleday said proudly.

Most working seniors seek jobs because they find retirement boring, he said.

Big bucks from feds, province

Stony Plain Reporter

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A1

Section: News

Byline: BY DANIEL JUNGWIRTH, STAFF WRITER

The Stony Plain Exhibition Park will be getting a much-needed facelift and expansion.

MP Rona Ambrose, MLA Fred Lindsay, town councillors and user groups were on hand at town hall Sunday for the announcement of just over \$2.1 million in funding through the Canada-Alberta Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (CAMRIF).

"(There is) extreme potential of making this a first-class venue that will showcase what Stony Plain can do: our heritage, arts and culture and, of course, our celebration of our 100th anniversary," said Mayor Ken Lemke.

"The new park will be a focal point for community gathering, economic vitality, cultural visibility and environmental stewardship."

On behalf of the province, Lindsay said the funding will take the park to "the next level."

"This project will certainly allow local event organizers to expand the quality and quantity of heritage and cultural events in this community," he said.

Ambrose said this project is expected to attract 12,000 more users to the facility a year and as many as 30,000 more tourists a year.

"As a result of this project, residents from local groups will have year-round access to quality parks amenities, community event hosting and out door equestrian and agricultural venues," said the intergovernmental affairs and western economic diversification minister.

"This project will benefit both the residents of Stony Plain and neighbouring communities, which is key, by providing an environment that promotes a healthy and active lifestyle.

Developments

The funds will be distributed between two phases: revitalization of the existing grounds and further expansion.

The first phase will include the winterization of Toby Kazeil Pavilion as well as the creation of an outdoor performance stage, picnic area and walking trails.

"If you look at lifestyles and the fact that we're so busy these days, I think we need to refocus on living healthy and the walking trails will be a big part of that," said Lindsay.

Lemke also said the parking lot will be moved.

"One of the problems with the site is it's almost muskeg. So we've spent over the years, tons of gravel and it doesn't help."

The new parking area will be north of the pavilion and parallel to the existing service road. The current parking area will be turned into a multi-use grassed spectator area and play field, which may be used as an ice service in winter for skating.

Lemke hoped for the earliest start possible, but an increase of events for the town's centennial next year may delay the project.

"We'd like to get started in the spring, but it may not happen until the fall because all that's going on," he said.

He also hoped the first phase would be completed by 2009.

According to the conceptual plan, the second phase that follows includes an 89-stall campground, mini-trout pond, feature ring with grandstand, further parking, and possible museum and teahouse expansions and sports fields.

Partnerships

All three levels of government have worked together on this project. CAMRIF provides equal federal and provincial funding, but the municipal government is also responsible for one third of the project cost.

"We've already budgeted almost \$1.3 million in the 2008 budget," said Lemke. "We were hoping the project was going through."

Lemke also said he was thrilled by the collaboration between governments. This is a sentiment the other two representatives echoed.

"We do a lot of CAMRIF proposals and due diligence with our department and you really need to have everybody on board because it takes a lot of work for something like this to come to happen," said Ambrose. "If you don't have everybody on board, it's much more difficult."

She added there are sometimes competing interests, but this wasn't the case here. Lindsay agreed.

"Today's announcement is not just about expanding Exhibition Park in Stony Plain, it's about the relationship we're building between all levels of government," Lindsay said. "CAMRIF will provide an additional \$214 million in federal-provincial funding to Alberta municipalities over a four-year period above and beyond existing programs."

Reaction

Exhibition Park is used by a number of local user groups and hosts a variety of events and festivals, including Farmers' Days, the Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Festival, the Stony Plain Cowboy Poetry Gathering and the Family Fest New Year's Eve celebrations.

Cal Robins with the Stony Plain Kinsmen said user groups have been consulted since conception. He said the Kinsmen, who run a rodeo in the summer, had hoped the park would be more user-friendly.

"I think it's a great thing for the community," Robins said.

He also said the community user groups must also continue to help if needed.

"People can't forget that's its not just up to the province, federal and municipal. It's up to the user groups to help in whatever way, shape or form, too."

Shirley Uhryn sits on the museum board. She said she couldn't contain herself when the funding was announced.

"I got shivers running down my legs," she said.

Uhryn also was a bit surprised by the announcement.

"I was told by somebody that this was going to die," she said. "When I saw that what we had sat and planned and developed is now going to become a reality...ooh."

This is the first CAMRIF announcement of the secretariat's second-wave of funding. In its first wave, the City of Spruce Grove received \$5.7 million in funding for the West District Park project. Town council had originally endorsed the grant application at the end of May.

Service Alberta

Solicitor General & Public Security

Sustainable Resource Development

Tourism, Parks, Recreation & Culture

***Miscellaneous Government**

Stelmach OK with contract; Premier defends deal that gave Murray Smith six-figure severance

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: B5

Section: Alberta

Byline: Jason Markusoff

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal; With files from the Calgary Herald

EDMONTON - Premier Ed Stelmach staunchly defended the contract he signed in 2004 for a trusted longtime colleague who was paid \$105,000 after he quit his job as Alberta's Washington representative five months early.

Stelmach and Murray Smith sometimes wore teal-coloured bow ties to the legislature in the mid-1990s as part of the "Deep Six" club, a group of Tory MLAs who pressed the Klein government to cut back government spending.

In December 2004, Stelmach -- who was then intergovernmental affairs minister -- signed Smith's contract, which included a lucrative departure bonus.

The premier said Albertans were well served by former energy minister Smith's province-boosting in D.C., and that the contract's terms were necessary to attract a talent of his calibre.

"And if it wasn't a former politician, if we hired someone who was ... from the private sector, I suspect you would have the same issues tied to severance," Stelmach said Thursday. "It's part of the contract and I stand by the contract."

The six-figure payment was called a "termination allowance" in Smith's contract, obtained this week by the Journal through an information access request.

Smith was entitled to six months' extra pay whether he was fired, completed his three-year term in Washington or left early, as he did in July to join a Toronto-based bank's energy advisory board.

The money was on top of his \$210,500 annual salary, his car, his Washington apartment and other benefits.

Smith, for the second straight day, could not be reached for comment. But in an e-mail sent to a Calgary Herald columnist he said the contract is a thing of the past. "The contract is three years old," Smith wrote. "I've moved on."

Stelmach has long defended the \$1.4-million Washington diplomatic office, which he launched in late 2004.

The government insists Smith played pivotal roles in convincing senior White House officials to visit Alberta's oilsands, in organizing last year's Alberta Week at the Smithsonian Institute, and in pleading Alberta's case during the U.S. trade bans during Canada's mad-cow crisis.

"We needed to put a person in that office very quickly," Stelmach said. "We had a number of issues coming forward, most of them trade-related. And he did a very good job for us during a very difficult period of time."

Piers Steel, who teaches compensation at the University of Calgary, was surprised that the contract allowed Smith to collect a termination allowance even after he quit the position. "The way business works is that if we fire you, we pay you a penalty -- not if you quit we pay you a penalty," said the associate professor of human resources.

But Steel quipped that the contract may be evidence Smith was a good choice for the job. "Maybe this is exactly the type of guy who we need doing negotiations in Washington, if he can negotiate himself a sweet deal like this."

Brent Shervey, who negotiates big-money contracts for Boyden global executive search, said it's hard to say what the standards are. "It's hard to say that was 'normal' or not," said Shervey, who last year ran the Tory leadership campaign for Stelmach rival Jim Dinning.

The Conservative government fought media requests to see Smith's contract for nearly three years, until the privacy commissioner recently ordered it to release the information.

Stelmach said Alberta Justice is now looking into whether the release means that no government contract can remain shielded from public viewing.

Liberal Leader Kevin Taft said the secrecy deepened the murkiness of the Smith deal. "I don't know why the government and the premier chose to conceal this information," he said. "Obviously, the premier is uncomfortable with it."

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'Sweetheart deal'

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 24

Section: News

Byline: BY CP

Former cabinet minister Murray Smith got more than \$100,000 after leaving his post as Alberta's envoy in Washington earlier this year, even though he ended his contract six months early.

The opposition is calling the payout a "sweetheart deal" signed by Premier Ed Stelmach while he was intergovernmental affairs minister and hired Smith for the job.

Smith is refusing comment on his contract, which paid about \$200,000 plus benefits, including a place to live in the U.S. capital.

But Stelmach says he stands by the contract because Alberta needed a seasoned political veteran in Washington.

Ed pats self on back

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 24

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, LEGISLATURE BUREAU

When push comes to shove, says Premier Ed Stelmach, he's proving he has the guts to make tough decisions and lead Alberta.

That was his assessment after a first year in office - and an end to the 2007 legislature session Wednesday - that saw major controversies erupt over oil royalties, homelessness, skyrocketing living costs and clashes between landowners and energy firms.

"I'm confident that the priorities we've established as a government have really reflected what Albertans are telling us," said Stelmach. "We accomplished a lot this particular year, including something many in this room said: 'You won't do it. You either won't have the guts to do it or you won't be able to bring people together.'"

"Well, we did it on the royalty framework. We did it on the teacher pension liability. We will do it on the strategic growth plan for the city of Edmonton. Some of these issues have been around for 50 years."

The Alberta Liberals gave Stelmach some credit yesterday, saying he seems to have been genuine in attempts to open up his government to more scrutiny via a lobbyist and accountability act, and through more in-depth legislature sittings.

But the government failed miserably to meet its own mandates for various departments, said Liberal Leader Kevin Taft - a sure sign it's still putting out fires from Ralph Klein's administration.

"There needs to be new direction," said Taft. "We have Ed Stelmach cleaning up messes. But cleaning up messes is not the same thing as moving forward. The public wants the issues of water use addressed. They want the issues of royalties addressed. They want the issues of an overheated economy addressed."

The Tories are "trying to patch all the leaks in a dam left unrepaired by Ralph Klein," said Taft.

Taft predicted the government will soon face scandals over Klein's move to deregulate electricity via the threat of rolling blackouts. But he said no one issue is likely to decide the upcoming provincial election.

Premier defends payout to envoy; Ex-minister's 'golden parachute' angers critics

The Calgary Herald

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Tony Seskus and Jason Fekete, with files from Jason Markusoff, Legislature Bureau

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Calgary Herald

A defiant Premier Ed Stelmach is standing by the contract he approved for Murray Smith that paid the former Washington, D.C., envoy six months' salary in severance -- despite him quitting the post.

Smith will now cash in two government severances worth hundreds of thousands of dollars -- despite voluntarily leaving both jobs -- as the former energy minister will also collect an MLA transition allowance he deferred when he vacated his seat in 2004.

Spending and ethics watchdogs assailed the latest severance, worth \$105,000, as a "taxpayer-paid golden parachute," but Stelmach maintained Thursday he struck a good deal for Albertans when he approved Smith's contract as then-intergovernmental relations minister.

"I stand by the contract," Stelmach told reporters at the legislature when asked if he believed the pact was exorbitant. "We needed to put a person in that office very quickly.

"We had a number of issues coming forward, most of them trade related, and he did a very good job for us during a very difficult period," Stelmach said.

Smith declined comment on the matter, telling Herald columnist Don Braid in an e-mail that the contract is a thing of the past.

"The contract is three years old. I've moved on," he wrote.

But critics were astonished by the "termination allowance" provided to the former envoy.

Danielle Smith, director of provincial affairs for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said the contract sniffs of the same "mentality of entitlement" that has allowed MLAs to vote themselves severance plans of three months' pay for every year served.

"It's not appropriate," said Scott Hennig of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

"Severance payments are usually reserved for people who are fired without cause."

The six-figure payment was a so-called "termination allowance" in Murray Smith's contract, obtained this week through a government access request.

Smith was entitled to six months' extra pay whether he was fired, completed his three-year term in Washington, or left early, as he did in July to join a Toronto-based bank's energy advisory board.

It was on top of his \$210,500-per-year salary, plus a car, a Washington apartment and other benefits. The contract also allowed Smith to collect his \$360,000 MLA retirement allowance as of January 2006. Government records show he did not opt to take the money at that point.

Stelmach has defended the Washington diplomatic office, which he launched in late 2004.

Smith has been deemed pivotal in getting senior White House officials to visit Alberta's oilsands, organizing last year's Alberta Week at the Smithsonian Institute, and pleading Alberta's case during the U.S. trade bans amid Canada's mad cow crisis.

Stelmach argued Thursday that the government would have likely been forced to pay a similar severance had they hired someone from the private sector, rather than a politician. Hiring top talent requires the government to shell out a pretty penny, he said.

"The rate of pay, the schedule of pay, although for most Albertans, they'll see it as quite substantial," Stelmach said. "But to attract the kind of skill sets in some positions may require negotiating contracts so we can attract people for those positions."

Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch, an Ottawa-based group that advocates for democratic reform in Canada, called the deal a "taxpayer-paid golden parachute" for the former Calgary MLA.

He also criticized the fact government has not disclosed whether former cabinet minister Gary Mar, who has replaced Smith in Washington, could receive the same kind of package if he leaves early.

Hennig also pointed to the news as proof the government should disclose how taxpayer-funded staff are compensated.

While details of the "termination allowance" were a surprise to some observers, they didn't stun Brent Shervey, who has negotiated several high-powered contracts with Boyden Global Executive Search.

"Quite frankly, it's not unheard of that a person would receive severance if they initiated the departure, particularly in the event they had been there more than one year," said Shervey, who last year ran the Tory leadership campaign for Stelmach rival Jim Dinning.

But Piers Steel, who teaches compensation at the University of Calgary's Haskayne School of Business, was surprised the contract allowed Smith to collect a termination allowance even after he quit.

"You just don't write a contract that way," said Steel, an associate professor of human resources and organizational dynamics.

"The way business works is that if we fire you, we pay you a penalty -- not if you quit we pay you a penalty."

The Conservative government fought against media requests to see Smith's contract for nearly three years, until the privacy commissioner recently ordered it do so. Stelmach said Alberta Justice is now looking into whether this means no government contract can remain shielded from public viewing.

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***Election**

Boudreau slated to carry Liberal banner

Stony Plain Reporter

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A10

Section: News

Byline: BY REP AND EX STAFF

Ray Boudreau will carry the Liberal banner in the Spruce Grove-Sturgeon-St. Albert constituency in the next provincial election.

The 52-year-old Boudreau retired from the Spruce Grove RCMP detachment in 2002, after a 26-year RCMP career where he served in seven different Alberta communities.

He believes accountability in government will be the key election issue.

Throughout his career, Boudreau has been recognized for his dedicated service by municipal, provincial and federal governments. They include an Alberta Achievement Award, the Premier's Award for Service, the Alberta Youth Year Award, the RCMP long service medal with bronze clasp, the Alberta Policing medal, the Queen's Jubilee medal, a Commissioner's Commendation for bravery, the Alberta Centennial medal, and the Hockey Alberta Centennial award as one of the 100 recipients who have had an impact on the game of hockey in this province.

His vast volunteer service includes serving as president of MADD Parkland and serving on a steering committee which examines the problems of gang violence in Edmonton.

Boudreau said he's given up some of his volunteer responsibilities in order to focus on the forthcoming election.

Boudreau is currently the Director of Community Policing and Social Development for the City of Spruce Grove, and believes his experience in municipal administration will be valuable in the legislature.

"I believe in fiscal responsibility and sustainable program spending," says Boudreau. "An Alberta Liberal government would be a responsible steward of the province's wealth, and I'm excited to get to work to earn the right to represent the citizens of this constituency."

Alberta Liberal Leader Kevin Taft is happy to welcome Boudreau on board.

"Ray is a fantastic candidate who brings a lot of skills to the table," says Taft, "His record of service speaks for itself."

Boudreau ran unsuccessfully in the last provincial election. The date of the next election isn't known but it's rumoured to be in the spring.

Boudreau is a resident of Spruce Grove. He has been married for over 30 years to his wife Allison, and they have two daughters.

Columnists

Ed Stelmach needs to see the light

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 10

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH

Column: Editorial

The Alberta Tories' handling of the province's power problems has not been a sparkling performance.

To the contrary, their controversial plan to deregulate a utility that by its very nature lends itself to a monopoly has been a bust.

Many promises were made going in. Albertans were going to have a choice of an array of electric power marketers all fighting for consumers' business.

Market forces would kick in and rates would drop.

Well, it didn't quite work out that way.

The old monopolies were simply replaced with new monopolies. Power bills didn't go down. They went up, up, up. And consumers are faced with a raft of creative service charges.

Consequently, they steadfastly clung to the regulated rate option, clearly not trusting the high-pressure sales pitches from the power marketers.

It's a mess. And the reason the opposition Liberals and NDP were able to create so much public turmoil over Bill 46 in the just completed fall legislature session. The bill splits up the Energy and Utilities Board and creates the Alberta Utilities Commission to ostensibly ride herd on the power companies.

But the distrust of the whole system is obvious.

The one positive thing the PCs could point to was the surge in power plant construction that their deregulation plan spurred.

Supposedly, Albertans would never want for power again.

The lights went out on that myth this week when the dubious Alberta Electric System Operator put out a panicky notice urging folks to turn off their Christmas lights and not run household appliances or plug in block heaters.

The AESO warned of the possibility of brownouts. Blame the cold weather, the long nights and the increased demand for lighting for power demand hitting an "all-time high" last Monday at 6 p.m., the AESO alert noted.

Surely, a light will go on in Premier Ed Stelmach's office soon. And he will realize that like so many things from the Ralph Klein era, the power system is in need of an overhaul. Monday night provided all the proof needed.

Premier seeks regional peace

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH, EDMONTON SUN

The bells have stopped ringing down at the Alberta legislature and the MLAs have all gone home for the Christmas party circuit.

But politics never rests.

Yesterday, Premier Ed Stelmach was ticking off his accomplishments and checking his to-do list as the March vote looms ever nearer.

"Many said, 'You don't have the guts to do it,' " Stelmach spat, then listed off the royalty framework and the deal with the Alberta Teachers Association to wipe out their pension fund liability as proof he does.

But there's one more bump in the road to the election, which the premier wants to smooth out starting later today when the Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan gets rolled out to the 25 bickering municipal councils in and around Edmonton.

50-YEAR-OLD ISSUES

"I have great confidence in the leadership of all the municipalities," Stelmach said, without a lot of conviction. "Some of these issues have been around for 50 years."

The latest Edmonton municipal pol to make taxing Refinery Row and Upgrader Alley either his political hill to die on, or a smokescreen for his own leadership shortcomings, is Mayor Stephen Mandel.

He's anticipated by legislature city hall watchers to turn into his usual petulant self the moment the document is officially delivered.

Mayor Cathy Olesen has already launched a pre-emptive strike on Strathcona County's website, saying the plan raises "serious concerns and questions."

She claimed the proposed as-yet-unnamed board will have "authority over local municipalities including taxing powers."

Of course, it's the tax revenue from plants in Sturgeon, Lamont and especially Strathcona counties that Howie covets.

"We are committed to paying our fair share of costs related to necessary regional projects," Olesen continued, but only local municipal councils, who are "accountable to their taxpayers," should make the choices.

"There's no revenue sharing," Stelmach insisted. "It's a recommendation for cost allocation."

There may be a difference, but it's a subtle one.

If a draft of the deal is anything to go by - and this is going to make Mandel madder than he already is - the cost-sharing mechanism "is not an unconditional transfer of revenue between jurisdictions."

In other words, Edmonton's socialist city council won't be allowed to build frills like art gallery staircases or \$20-million bicycle bridges with Refinery Row tax money.

It will go to backstop the municipal share of costs "for projects that benefit the entire region."

The cash will come through cost-sharing requisitions "issued by the province." The "cost allocation model" will only kick in when "other sources of funding are not available."

And here's another kick in the pants for the capital region's squabbling mini-politicians.

"No additional provincial funding will be provided to the region until a true integrated regional plan has been approved," the draft warned.

There will be a board, Stelmach says, made up of the mayors and reeves of the regional municipalities. Nobody can threaten to quit, like Mandel tried to do, if they don't get their way.

First, they will attempt to work things out with consensus.

But if that doesn't happen (and with the present Edmonton city council's attitude it won't) then two "double-majority voting options" will be considered.

VOTING OPTIONS

That's where 15 municipalities with at least 75% of the population agree, or regardless of population if 21 vote "yes."

There's another - called a "super majority" - where 17 municipalities with 75% of the population are in favour.

Stelmach said he expects the regional board to focus on meat and potato issues like transportation, electrical power routes and pipeline corridors.

But the draft document said cost allocation could spill over into areas like social housing, policing and recreation.

Then, Stelmach held out a big carrot, hinting that the tax take from the Industrial Heartland alone could jump from the present \$200 million "at least by another \$300 million."

"I'm very confident we have moved in a pragmatic and rational way," Stelmach winked.

We'll see.

No tolerance for 'intolerance'

The Calgary Sun

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: 15

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY BILL KAUFMANN

It'll take some doing to top the latest stereotypical provincial political carnival featuring fire and brimstone homophobia, Alberta conservative cultural jingoism and the limits of party democracy.

It's all there folks, much to the glee of Alberta-bashers everywhere -- even with Premier Ed Stelmach using strong-arm tactics to nip it in the bud.

In nixing the candidacy of religious radical Craig Chandler, Stelmach summoned the name of Peter Lougheed, but overlooked the reality that the former premier left such disagreeable tasks to his underlings.

As well, Lougheed never had to wield a veto for similar reasons; the then-premier's internal woes were limited to loose-cannon economic ideologues. It's likely a hands-off Ralph Klein would have let Chandler slide.

To Stelmach's credit, he personally attended to the Chandler question last weekend, refusing any semblance of arm's-length detachment.

Being a man of faith, Chandler should have known that, just like some religions, political parties aren't entirely democratic.

If you don't like it, leave, or face excommunication.

The premier's distaste for the bile spewed by Chandler and his supposedly Christian disciples seems genuinely heartfelt.

Could it be a signal Stelmach's willing to move the party down a more small-p Progressive Conservative course, at least socially? It'd be easy to ascribe Stelmach's decision to power rather than principle.

Another option would have seen the premier honouring Chandler's nomination and relying on voters to do the purging, but that might have meant sacrificing the Calgary Egmont riding.

And the possibility of a colourfully quotable Chandler-on-the-hustings would make for a white knuckle campaign only the media and Opposition could love.

Alberta Liberals weren't hoping for a Chandler candidacy, says Calgary Currie Grit MLA Dave Taylor, who insists high road discourse is preferable to any gain from its scurrilous opposite.

"At the end of all the circus acts, we're here to serve the public interest," says Taylor, trying hard to make a rare pre-Christmas spirit of political giving over receiving sound convincing.

Chandler or allies running as independents could still splinter the Tory vote, says Taylor.

The damage, he adds, has already been done by the party machinery nominating such a fringe candidate at all. "The fact he managed to come in first place means he does speak for some people in that party."

That means there must surely be a riding somewhere in Alberta more suitable for Chandler, right Dave?

No comment, says Taylor, who does offer "somebody in Calgary Egmont was asleep at the switch."

That disarray, he says, extends to the premier, who was forced to perform damage control after the fact.

It's also a sign of a Tory party fracturing along social, rural-urban, north-south lines among others, he says.

That's not so certain and even if it is, it'll take a plague of the deepest schisms to overcome the Liberals' inability to exploit PC blunders.

Aside from the pure politics of this case stands the basic politics of intolerance in Alberta. In a Freudian slip, a Concerned Christians Canada e-mail is headed "Chandler Case Shows Intolerance of Christians."

The unfortunately titled tract is actually written in support of Chandler. Praise the Lord someone's defending the blessed right to label homosexuals as wicked; it's merely being outspoken, but when others object, it's "intolerance."

It's one of those miracles of faith.

It goes without saying uttering such things about minorities such as Natives, Latinos, Jews or Kurds would be considered grounds for instant disqualification -- even in the often sketchy nomination process.

The golden rule still has some distance to cover in Alberta.

Who wouldn't want a deal like Smith's?

The Calgary Herald

Fri 07 Dec 2007

Page: A4

Section: News

Byline: Don Braid

Column: Don Braid

Source: Calgary Herald

Murray Smith's pay-me-if-I-quit clause is a classic. Who wouldn't want one? Imagine the pleasure of that final phone call to the boss -- "I resign, so send me \$105,000 for the next six months I don't work."

Smith, the former energy minister from Calgary-Varsity, somehow had this clause written into his contract, which brought him \$210,000 a year as Alberta's Washington representative.

Don't blame Smith. Generally speaking, people who work for pay are welcome to as much as they can get. It's extremely rare, except among saints and madmen, to turn down money somebody else is foolishly willing to pay.

In this case, though, the donors are the taxpayers via the government. And the name on the contract belongs to Ed Stelmach, who's always telling audiences the money he spends belongs to us, not to him or his government.

The government also went to extraordinary lengths to keep this contract private. The CBC's requests were rejected for three years. A privacy commission adjudicator finally ruled there is no reason to keep the details secret.

So the government emitted the thing in the waning hours of the fall legislature. The timing was justified by the rules of release, but when you keep something in your pocket for three years, its sudden appearance can look suspicious.

Smith isn't his usual talkative self. In an e-mail Thursday, he told me: "The contract is three years old. I've moved on. No comment."

The premier defends the deal vociferously. "I stand by the contract," he says. Stelmach has little choice, since he signed it.

He's right about one thing, though; Smith was an able representative in Washington during the George W. Bush era.

His good-old-boy style often seemed as Texan as Albertan. He moved easily in the blustery Bush power elite at a time when energy issues were crucial. This is no small feat. A pseudo-diplomat from a place like Alberta, if he isn't skilled, can spend a lot of time sharpening his pencil in hopes of writing down an appointment.

Alberta's Washington hand has to influence U.S. policy without annoying his own country. Smith did so with back-slapping skill.

His replacement, Gary Mar (whose contract we'll probably see in three years, after another FOIP battle) is a different type.

Smoother and lower-key, but very bright, Mar could prove effective with the Democratic regime expected to replace the Republicans.

So this job is no sinecure. Nor is there any harm in appointing ex-politicians. The best of them have the contacts, skills and personalities to move in this complex world.

But Smith's payout provision is both generous and unusual -- and so is the government's refusal to release it for so long, even when it was passing rules to reveal compensation for senior officials.

As the FOIP adjudicator noted, Smith agreed to have the details of his salary released, as a condition of employment. And Smith didn't exercise his right to appeal the ruling.

So, why the big secret about \$105,000 in non-standard padding? It's suggestive, if not quite definitive, that other Alberta representatives abroad don't have this perk. They must be steaming today.

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