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Advanced Education & Technology

Agriculture & Food

Children’s Services

Province hosts round two of childcare talks; Childcare stake holders will have second chance for input on new draft of proposed regulations

Sherwood Park News

Tue 11 Dec 2007

Page: 8

Section: News

Byline: BY MICHAEL SIMPSON, NEWS STAFF

The Alberta government has announced that they will be hosting a second round of information sessions for stake holders in the childcare industry starting in January.

The announcement comes as a second draft of proposed childcare regulations were released following feedback from 1,500 Albertans over the summer and fall of this year.

"This isn't a reaction to feedback," said Cathy Ducharme of Alberta Children's Services. "We wanted to have ongoing dialogue with the childcare community during this whole process."

Ducharme pointed out that in the second draft of childcare regulations, there have been some major changes, including the sections dealing with meal and washroom requirements. "We're now proposing we don't go forward with those changes based on feedback," Ducharme said. "Some programs already had a meal component in place, and with the washrooms many facilities couldn't add one to their premise, so we dropped that."

The second round of information sessions will take place in January, Ducharme said. On the Alberta Children's Services web site, dates, times and locations will be available as of today. It will be a chance for current childcare staff, business owners and parents to place themselves face to face with the government and ask questions and get answers.

Locally, Program Director Pat Drake of Mr. Cakes Day care feels that there is still some clarification needed on key issues such as day care grand-fathering.

"We need further clarification on grand-fathering and on staff certification," Drake said. "The clarification on ratios is still a little ambiguous as well."

In spite of areas Drake wants to have cleared up, she feels that overall the second round of interaction with the ministry is a good sign.

"It's very positive that they're doing a second round of discussions - I'm very pleased to see that. The first go-round was quite disheartening. However, the few parents we've spoken to about the second draft don't feel like there's been much of a change."

According to Drake, online copies of the workbook have been printed off and turned into hard copies, which have been physically delivered by the day care owner to other facilities in Sherwood Park so everyone is aware of what's going on.

"Having six to eight weeks to become informed is certainly better than last time. I'm just hoping the distribution of documents on the government side will be better this time, even though here we're a bit more on top of things than we were," said Drake.

Ducharme confirmed that a round of mail-outs will occur in the middle of December containing a letter informing day care institutions of the many different ways to participate in the consultation process.

Owners, staff and parents wanting more information or to order work books and questionnaires can call the parent information line at 1-800-714-KIDS (5437).

Education

Catholic teachers reach tentative five-year deal

The Calgary Herald

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: B5

Section: City & Region

Byline: Sarah McGinnis, with files by Sean Myers, Calgary Herald.

Source: Calgary Herald

Calgary Catholic teachers announced Tuesday they have reached a tentative five-year agreement with the school district.

The deal comes as teachers in Alberta's 62 school boards rush to adopt contracts to take advantage of the province's \$2.2-billion pension offer.

Negotiators with Alberta Teachers' Association Local 55 and the Calgary Catholic School District have finalized the terms of a teachers' contract to run from 2007 to 2012.

"I'm very very pleased. I think it's good news for both the ATA and the board," said Calgary Catholic School District chairwoman Marg Belcourt.

"I'm really impressed with the professionalism on both sides. I'm glad that it settled as quickly as it did and now we can go forward on our real job, teaching kids."

Both parties have said no details of the memorandum of agreement will be released until the board and the union's 2,830 teachers have voted on it.

If approved, the Calgary Catholic teacher contract brings teachers across the province one step closer to accepting the province's \$2.2-billion offer to take over their portion of the unfunded pension liability.

ATA president Frank Bruseker said he's happy to see another contract ready to be ratified.

"I'd say it's very positive," said Bruseker.

"We've got two locals who've already voted in agreements and five agreements that have been reached, but still need to be ratified," he said.

"We are moving on the path towards 62 agreements. So far, I would say, so good."

According to the ATA website, school boards in Medicine Hat and St. Albert have ratified locally negotiated collective agreements.

Under the provincial deal, the government will assume the teacher portion of the unfunded pension liability in exchange for five years of labour peace.

The province has offered teachers a three per cent increase and a \$1,500 bonus in the first year of the five year contract with subsequent increases to be based on Alberta's average weekly earnings index.

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Employment, Immigration & Industry

Energy

U.S. refiner to forge ahead for oilsands opportunities; ConocoPhillips targets 1M bpd of bitumen

The Calgary Herald

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: D4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Ashok Dutta

Source: Calgary Herald

Dec. 11 will probably be a red letter day for the second-largest U.S. refiner ConocoPhillips.

In Calgary, ConocoPhillips Canada announced a formal startup of commercial production from the first phase of the Surmont oilsands project. The development will be the first stepping stone in a mega-growth strategy it plans to implement over the next two decades to develop Alberta's oilsands resources.

To the south in Houston, Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Oil Minister, Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah, and Conoco's chairman and chief executive, Jim Mulva, put pen to paper on a memorandum of understanding with Qatar Petroleum International to pursue and develop energy projects outside of the Persian Gulf state.

Conoco is already a shareholder in Qatargas-3, the operator of one of the world's largest liquefied natural gas trains.

But there is also a downside to these developments.

In late October, ConocoPhillips pulled out of a 400,000-barrel-per-day export refinery it planned to build in the United Arab Emirates with Abu Dhabi-based International Petroleum Investment Co. primarily due to soaring project costs. However, the U.S. major reiterated its commitment to build a similar export refinery in the Red Sea city of Yanbu in Saudi Arabia on a 50:50 joint venture with Saudi Aramco.

In its backyard in Alberta, ConocoPhillips is actively pursuing growth opportunities and is unlikely to spare any efforts to forge ahead.

It is the operator of the Surmont steam-assisted gravity drainage (SAGD) project and is the partner with EnCana Corp. on a major integrated oilsands venture.

Matt Fox, senior vice-president for oilsands, spoke to the Herald

Q: What is the current status of Surmont Phase 1?

A: We have formally commenced production of bitumen from the first phase of Surmont, which is a 50:50 joint venture with (Paris-based) Total. The project has a capacity of 25,000 bpd and is expected to reach peak production by 2012.

Our operations team has done an outstanding job. Their success has been commendable, particularly with the water treatment plant.

Q: Steam injection into the well pairs has been on for a while. How is the performance and how many well pairs will be injected?

A: We are pleased with the outcome.

Twenty well pairs have been drilled until now, of which four are in production while steam will be injected into two more pairs next week. In total, 36 well pairs will receive steam injection for Phase 1.

There will be a ramp-up in production and that will happen in first quarter 2008.

Q: What are your plans for Phase 2 of Surmont?

A: We are in the final stages of FEL (front-end loading)-2 and hope to complete it by first quarter 2008. We will then move into FEL-3 and aim to complete it by mid-2009. That will give us a cost estimate and it will be followed by project sanction soon after.

Phase 2 will have a capacity of 75,000 bpd and first production is aimed in 2012-13. It will take us three years to reach full capacity thereafter.

Q: Are there plans for future phases of Surmont?

A: Surmont has the potential for more phases. It is early to talk in detail what the phases will be, but there are several options. We will definitely be moving beyond just phase 2.

Q: What do you plan to do with the bitumen to be produced from Surmont?

A: It will be taken to our refineries in the south. There are several options for us . . . it may go to Woodriver or Borger.

Q: Will you supply bitumen to Total for the 200,000-bpd refinery it plans to build in Strathcona?

A: We will not be doing so. They have their own plans.

Q: What is Total's role in the Surmont project joint venture?

A: Under the joint venture agreement, they are an active partner and we have a strong relationship.

Q: Rising capital costs is a major issue in the oilsands sector today? How can it be mitigated?

A: The two main issues driving costs are the shortage of skilled labour in Western Canada and increase in price of materials. The economic growth in China has particularly driven hard the price of steel.

Various reports also confirm that oilsands costs have now trebled.

The best way to tackle is implement high-quality FEL work and employ an effective project management team.

Q: Does ConocoPhillips have any plans to build an upgrader in Alberta?

A: There are no such plans at the moment. But, as part of our long-term (20 years) growth plans we may consider it.

Q: Broadly speaking, what are your plans for the oilsands?

A: At present, we are producing about 60,000 bpd. This includes our share in Syncrude, Surmont and Christina Lake (in joint venture with EnCana). There are several other assets that we hold as well and have the largest position in oilsands with over one million acres (404,685 hectares). Other properties include Thornbury, Clyden and Saleski.

We see all of these assets producing one million bpd of bitumen in two decades. We are well positioned to be a leader in SAGD.

From a global perspective, the oilsands assets are very important and for us it is a key part of our corporate strategy. The bitumen here has to be brought to the market to provide energy security for North America.

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Alberta nuke debate set to mushroom

The Edmonton Sun

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: 25

Section: News

Byline: BY DANIEL MACISAAC, SUN MEDIA

A debate over nuclear energy in New York might soon be coming to Alberta.

The future of the Indian Point nuclear plant near New York City made news this week when state Attorney General Andrew Cuomo joined those opposed to extending the life of the two-reactor plant.

"Indian Point should be closed, and it should be closed now," he's quoted saying in a Dec. 9 New York Times article.

"Indian Point is, in my opinion, a catastrophe waiting to happen."

But spokesman Jim Steets says Indian Point owner Entergy has invested "hundreds of millions of dollars" in plant upgrades and safety since purchasing it from the state in 2000-01.

And he has warned that a forced shutdown would negatively affect not only the New York economy but the environment, too, since "replacing Indian Point's emissions-free power would mean a greater reliance on fossil-fuel burning plants."

The nuclear industry has won over several prominent environmentalists, including Greenpeace co-founder and former member Patrick Moore, by promoting nuclear energy as green energy.

But Shawn-Patrick Stensil, a climate campaigner with Greenpeace in Toronto, argues the nuclear industry is notorious for overestimating construction schedules, underestimating costs and simply can't build reactors fast enough to play any meaningful role in controlling climate change.

"This is an industry with a really bad learning curve," he said.

Heinz-Juergen Peter, a retired nuclear scientist and a research associate with the Parkland Institute, adds that nuclear energy becomes even less green when you factor in the complete "nuclear-cycle," including the mining of uranium for fuel, plant construction and waste disposal.

Peter says that because proposals for the introduction of nuclear energy in Alberta have included plants across the province, at the very least people across the province should take part in an informed debate on the issue.

And on that point at least, Bruce Power CEO Duncan Hawthorne agrees.

Bruce Power wants to build at least one 1,000-megawatt Advanced Candu Reactor near Peace River.

And Hawthorne says while the company considers its option, it will also talk to Albertans.

"I can anticipate a good opportunity for consultation," he said.

"It's worked well for me everywhere else, and there's nothing to suggest Alberta is a close-minded community," he said.

Another firm joins power fray

The Calgary Herald

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: D4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Gordon Jaremko

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Edmonton Journal

A new entry Tuesday joined the race to build new Alberta electricity plants, with a \$1.4-billion project 450 kilometres northwest of Edmonton.

Maxim Power Corp. unveiled plans for a 500-megawatt coal-fired generating station on the site of a smaller, 35-year-old plant 20 kilometres north of Grande Cache. "It's on the top of the heap when it comes to efficiency," Maxim corporate development director Tony Mauro said in an interview. "We're optimistic our project can be competitive."

The Calgary firm's proposal, known as the Milner Generating Station, is the sixth major power project announced since the oilsands development rush lit a fire under Alberta industrial and population growth. The lineup also includes two coal-fired stations west of Edmonton sponsored by Epcor Utilities Inc. and TransAlta Corp., nuclear plants proposed by Bruce Power and Areva Canada northwest of the Alberta capital at Peace River and Whitecourt, and a natural gas-burning generator sought near Calgary by Enmax Corp.

The newest proposal can count on local support in a community seeking to improve on a painful boom-and-bust history of relying on coal mining and logging for volatile exports since the 1960s.

"The town is supportive of expanding and diversifying the economy and creating additional jobs," Grande Cache economic development manager Tara Wignes said.

Construction is expected to employ up to about 1,000 workers then create 75 to 90 permanent coal-mining jobs and increase the old Milner generating station's payroll to more than 90 skilled plant operators. Environmental details are bound to run into local requests for changes as knowledge of the proposal spreads, Wignes added.

The company pledged to listen and adapt. The project is still in early stages of initial public disclosure to start the regulatory approval process by opening formal community consultations and an environmental impact assessment, Mauro said. His firm set a target of 2012 for switching on the new power station. The schedule calls for a detailed regulatory application in mid-2008 and a start on construction about a year later.

Maxim has built-in advantages because the Grande Cache location is already a coal-fired generating station and the new electricity output would use an established power line corridor, company spokesman John Sparks added.

After the storm, it's off to the oil patch

The Globe and Mail

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: B1

Section: Report On Business: Canadian

Byline: Norval Scott

Dateline: CALGARY

CALGARY -- The man likely to be the next top executive at Imperial Oil Ltd. showed his ability to keep a cool head in 2005 when hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc on the U.S. Southeast.

Then manager of the Baton Rouge, La., refinery, the second-largest in the country, Bruce March was able to gather his scattered employees to staff their posts and secure emergency crude supplies, successfully keeping the vital facility running despite the disaster playing out around it.

"He did a really good job of finding all the employees, putting them up and getting them to work," said Bob Landry, president of the union that represents Baton Rouge refinery workers. "He's a stand-up kind of guy."

As Imperial's new president and likely its next CEO, Mr. March's cool head will be tested again. This time he must manage spiralling costs of labour and construction materials created by Alberta's

overheated market, all while integrating the company's huge oil sands potential with parent firm Exxon Mobil's vast U.S. refining network.

It's a task Mr. March's refining credentials suggest he can meet at Imperial, which is valued at \$47-billion (U.S.) with annual sales of \$6.43-billion.

Since Katrina, his star has risen quickly: Mr. March became project executive for Exxon Mobil's gas-to-liquids project in Qatar in 2006 and then, in 2007, the company's director of refining for Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Now, as Imperial's new president - an appointment announced yesterday - he looks almost certain to take over the reins of the company when current CEO and chairman Tim Hearn stands down.

Mr. Hearn, 63, hasn't publicly voiced any intention to retire, but Imperial's corporate guidelines call for employees to retire by their 65th birthday. Historically, as the incumbent CEO nears retirement age, Imperial has pinpointed the likely successor early; Mr. Hearn himself was appointed as president of the company in January, 2002, taking over the CEO reins from the departing Bob Peterson later that year.

However, Mr. March's role is far from a ceremonial one, and the new man looks likely to bring his refining experience quickly to bear on Imperial's operations. "[He] has good international experience in refining ... and will be strongly involved in the implementation of projects and project management," Imperial spokesman Richard O'Farrell said.

One investment banker, speaking on condition of anonymity, said bringing in a refining expert to lead the company next appeared a good move. "It makes sense as the question of integration is now key in the oil sands," he said. "It's no use any longer just building an oil sands project and assuming that someone will refine the production for you - you need to create solutions."

While the upstream sector currently contributes the majority of Imperial's earnings, the importance of the company's refining business is rising. The sector has accounted for about 30 per cent of Imperial's profit thus far in 2007, compared with about 18 per cent in 2006.

In addition, the company's proposed \$8-billion Kearl oil sands project includes a substantial upgrading component; upgraders process the heavy bitumen from the oil sands so it's easier to refine and can access a larger market.

According to Baton Rouge's Mr. Landry, Mr. March was a respected manager of the refinery, being highly visible in the community as well as a good communicator with the unions.

"I enjoyed working with him when he was here," Mr. Landry said. "His big quality is that he would listen to you, and if you were right, he would realize that. I hated to see him go."

Meet Bruce March

Age: 51

Background: Born in a small town in upstate New York.

Education: Mechanical engineering student at Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, N.Y.

Career: Started with Mobil Oil Corp. in 1980 at Buffalo refinery. He was named process manager at Mobil's Beaumont refinery in 1993. Held various supply- related positions until becoming manager of the Baton Rouge, La., refinery in 2003, before moving on to Qatar in 2006 as project executive for a gas-to- liquids project. Appointed in 2007 as Exxon Mobil's head of refining for Europe, Middle East and Africa in Brussels.

Quote: "I was raised to value teamwork ... [I see myself as a] coach, but also something of a cheerleader."

Environment

Finance (including Pensions/Insurance)

Hail claims set new record in 2007; Alberta insurer loses \$150 million

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: B4

Section: Cityplus/Alberta

Byline: Mike Sadava

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - A record 89 hailstorms flattened farmers fields in the summer, resulting in a \$150-million loss for Alberta's crop insurer.

"It was a bad year for farmers and a bad year for us," said Gilbert Goudreau, manager of adjusting services for Agriculture Financial Services Corp., which paid out more than 7,200 hail-related claims this year, a record.

"Usually, certain areas will get hit by hail but this year, whether it was Peace River or Lethbridge, there was heavy hail across the province."

Some farmers were hit five times, which kept claims adjusters busy, he said. Many farmers have a hail endorsement on their crop insurance, as well as straight hail insurance. The number of farmers filing claims was around 5,500, more than one-third of the insured farmers, he said.

There will likely be an increase in next year's premium, but the rate is based on a long-term, 25-year average to make the crop insurance system run on a break-even basis, he said.

Hail is such a problem in Alberta that the insurance industry spends \$2.5 million on seeding clouds to reduce the size of hailstones. Insurance companies have pooled their resources to seed mostly in the heavy hail areas of central Alberta and around Calgary.

"We're certainly convinced that this helps bring premiums down," said Michael Debolt, government affairs manager of the Alberta branch of the Insurance Bureau of Canada. "It is a worthy investment to do that."

David Phillips, senior climatologist with Environment Canada, said from Toronto seeding doesn't stop hailstorms, but reduces the size of stones.

Hail forms when moisture from clouds creates ice crystals around small particles of dust. There is only a certain amount of moisture in a cloud. When particles of a substance, such as silver iodide is added, more hailstones are formed, but they are much smaller and less damaging.

A wet spring followed by intense heat in July created the perfect recipe for big hailstorms, Phillips said. The same conditions that produced the bumper crop growing last summer were also conducive to violent storms, and the feverish growth of the plants adds to the moisture in the air and feeds storm conditions, Phillips said.

Major storms were common across the Prairies last summer, he said.

There was a record 410 severe weather events, which included wind storms, drenching rain, tornadoes and hailstorms in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, breaking the record of 297 in 2006. One hailstorm in Dauphin, Man., damaged 60 per cent of the vehicles, which were declared writeoffs.

While the past two summers of extreme weather are consistent with climate change, Phillips said it is not a "smoking gun" that proves global warming. Part of the increase in the number of storms is reflective of better reporting, he said.

"There's more property damage now, but not necessarily because there are more storms, but because there's more property being covered."

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Oberg chairs talks on high-flying loonie

The Calgary Herald

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: A7

Section: News

Source: Calgary Herald

Economy - A robust Canadian dollar -- and its implications for manufacturers and exporters -- will be the focus of talks today when Alberta Finance Minister Lyle Oberg meets with his federal and provincial counterparts in Ottawa.

The dollar's strength has been hard on many sectors of the economy in recent months and is also projected to gut more than \$1.5 billion from Alberta's treasury by the end of the fiscal year.

Oberg, who will chair discussions between provincial and territorial finance ministers, suggested the answer is not as simple as merely slashing interest rates.

"When interest rates go down, inflation goes up -- and that's going to be the killer in Alberta," Oberg said in an interview.

Health & Wellness

Alberta halts mumps shots

Campaign shut down after five people fall ill

Michelle Lang, with files from Jamie Komarnicki, Calgary Herald, Calgary Herald

Published: Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Alberta health officials have shut down a provincewide inoculation campaign against the mumps after several people suffered serious allergic reactions to the vaccine.

Five young adults -- three in the Red Deer area and two in the Edmonton region -- developed anaphylaxis recently after receiving the mumps shot.

Anaphylaxis can cause swelling of the face, wheezing and shortness of breath. People can also suffer from abnormally high blood pressure and collapse.

Health officials say it's possible there is a problem with the batch of vaccines used in the inoculation program or the age group targeted in the campaign is somehow susceptible to allergic reactions from the shots.

Karen Grimsrud, Alberta's acting chief medical officer of health, said Tuesday she is immediately putting the brakes on the vaccination campaign, noting it's "highly unusual" for so many people to have an allergic reaction.

The decision, however, comes as the Calgary Health Region and other medical authorities in the province scramble to control a mumps outbreak that has stricken about 150 Albertans, including 79 Calgarians.

"I'm hopeful the amount of vaccine we've provided so far is going to be enough to curtail the outbreak," said Grimsrud, noting many mumps cases were at post-secondary schools.

"Most students who wanted to be vaccinated have been vaccinated already."

The five people who developed anaphylaxis after receiving their shot have all had previous allergic reactions. They have all recovered.

Grimsrud said there is little chance of anyone else becoming sick at this point, noting symptoms usually appear almost immediately.

Health Canada is investigating the cause of the reactions. The federal department also issued a warning to other provinces against using shots from three affected lots of the vaccine.

Merck Frosst, the company that produces the vaccine, confirmed it's quarantining about 200,000 doses from the suspect batch that have been distributed to six provinces.

"It's very unusual," said Sheila Murphy, spokeswoman for the company, which is investigating its manufacturing processes. "We're working with our parent company to see if there's anything that can explain this."

The decision to stop providing mumps shots in Alberta comes a month and a half after government announced an ambitious campaign to immunize most young adults in the province -- about 470,000 people -- as cases of the virus began appearing.

About 62,000 Albertans have been immunized so far.

The symptoms of the disease are fever and swelling of the salivary glands. It can cause infertility in serious cases.

The illness has mainly hit young adults in Calgary and Lethbridge.

Calgary physicians, who have identified 65 cases since October, say there was little choice but to suspend the vaccination campaign.

"This is clearly the prudent thing to do," said Dr. Richard Musto, Deputy Medical Officer of Health for the Calgary Health Region, on Tuesday.

Some 24,000 Calgary post-secondary students and staff have received the vaccine in recent weeks.

At this time, there are no reported cases where Calgarians have had an adverse reaction after receiving the vaccine.

But some post-secondary students who recently lined up in droves at immunization clinics said they might have reconsidered receiving the shot had they known about the possible side-effects.

"I probably wouldn't have gotten it," said Dina Saleh, 19, a University of Calgary student.

Grimsrud said Alberta is working with Health Canada and other provinces to find other sources of the mumps vaccine.

Young adults between the ages of 17 and 26 are thought to be at risk of contracting the mumps because they only received a single shot against the virus as children. Physicians have since discovered the vaccine wears off over time.

Meanwhile, the decision to quarantine the Merck Frosst vaccine is also impacting regular immunization programs in Alberta where children receive a mumps shot at 12 months of age.

CHR officials says the quarantine has left it with few available doses of mumps vaccine at health clinics in Calgary. Some rural clinics have better alternative stocks of the vaccine.

The CHR's Musto encouraged Calgarians to keep their appointments, despite the shortage, saying there are other important reasons to attend the checkups.

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Infrastructure & Transportation

International, Intergovernmental & Aboriginal Affairs

Recruiters take their search abroad; Government and business turned recent trade mission to India into a recruitment drive

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: G4

Section: Working

Byline: Derek Sankey

Dateline: CALGARY

Source: For Calgary Herald; CanWest News Service

CALGARY - The growing need for labour in Alberta is turning many business development trade shows around the world into recruitment fairs as much as investment missions for government and industry leaders.

"We're targeting more countries than ever before," says Terry Jorden, a spokesman for Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry. "In the past, we were focused a lot on Europe. Now I'm hearing immigration marketing activities in Venezuela, Mexico, Korea, the Philippines, the U.S. and throughout Europe."

The latest example came last month when a team of government and industry leaders went on its GO-India trade mission, which ended up being a recruitment drive as much as a trade mission.

"We're working with our colleagues ... to see where it makes sense to have immigration an issue that's undertaken at the same time (as trade promotion)," says John Cotton, executive director of Alberta International, Inter-governmental and Aboriginal Relations, who went to India last month as part of GO-India.

LANGUAGE ADVANTAGE

The reason countries such as India, in particular, are being targeted for recruitment is the large skilled and educated population base that is mostly English-speaking.

Jorden says the provincial government will be releasing an "action plan" soon that will detail specific ways agencies will work with all stakeholders.

Their aim will be to make the immigration process easier, whether it's acquiring work visas or temporary foreign worker status.

Recognition of credentials is another huge obstacle being addressed with various labour organizations.

"That's definitely one of the hurdles we're trying to at least lower," Jorden says.

It illustrates the increasingly global nature of today's workforce as agencies, industry and post-secondary institutions work together to develop clearer standards.

They also work toward better mechanisms to providing immigrants with upgrading and skills necessary to better integrate into the Canadian workforce.

Deepak Brahmhatt, a project manager with Edmonton's Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, has been stationed in India on behalf of NAIT for the past year.

NAIT's newly established office in New Delhi acts as a co-ordination centre to recruit, train and assist in the immigration of qualified candidates to Canada from the local market.

"Canada has not been really actively recruiting students from India, and India seems to be one of the largest markets in the world," says Brahmhatt, adding 300,000 to 400,000 students leave India each year.

Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. have been competing for India's highly skilled workforce for several years, he says.

Catherine Brownlee, president of Calgary-based staffing firm Prominent Personnel, joined the GO-India mission and says the experience was eye-opening.

"The ideal spot (to recruit from) is India because they have excellent communication skills (and) their education system is very good," says Brownlee. "Usually, they have a master's degree or several other degrees."

PAPER OBSTACLES

Recognition of foreign credentials has been an ongoing obstacle for eager Indians -- and many others -- looking to immigrate to Canada. In many cases, it requires some skills upgrading or re-certification and development of language skills.

"The Alberta government is trying to bridge that gap, which is why there was such a huge presence (at the GO-India pavilion)," Brownlee says.

The immigration system lacks clear standards for who gets awarded entry, and fails to recognize the contributions these workers can make to a labour-starved economy in Alberta, says Brahmhatt.

"Canadian visas are very hard to come by," he says.

"I have one case who has enough money, is well-qualified with a degree in (NAIT's) program that's the same as in Canada, and the (immigration) officer didn't even look at the case."

Australia recruited about 35,000 students from India in the last year, far more than Canada, which recruited only about 5,000 students, according to Brahmhatt. Immigration from India isn't a magic bullet for the country's labour woes, but it is one of the most critical.

"Immigration and temporary foreign workers are one part of addressing our labour shortage," says Jorden.

However, it's becoming a much higher priority.

"We're certainly becoming more aggressive," he says.

Justice & Attorney General

Municipal Affairs & Housing

Municipalities back return to regional planning boards

The Calgary Herald

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: B5

Section: City & Region

Byline: Joel Kom

Source: Calgary Herald

Municipalities large and small said they would endorse the return of some form of regional planning for land-use decisions -- but with their own caveats, reflecting what one Alberta minister said will likely be a "mixed reaction" to a major provincial strategy next year.

Alberta is considering bringing back a vehicle for regional planning decisions when it introduces its land-use framework in 2008, a water and land management conference heard Tuesday.

The provincial framework will set out what Alberta might look like in the next few decades as well as lay out guidelines for development that take environmental impacts into account.

Morris Seiferling, an assistant deputy minister at Sustainable Resource Development, told the conference the province has heard from many people who want it to allow the regions to make decisions for themselves.

How or if that will be done is still to be decided, he said, but noted it could be better for some decisions to be made on local levels.

"Biodiversity in Peace River and biodiversity in southeastern Alberta are two different animals," he said after his speech.

The fact the province is looking at letting regions make some decisions was welcomed by Calgary Mayor Dave Bronconnier, who said the province's disbanding of regional planning mechanisms in 1995 put cities, towns and districts at odds with each other without offering any way to resolve their disputes.

"It has proven to be costly and inefficient," he said. "There's an absolute need for some form of regional planning, but regional planning that has might."

Bronconnier said the province needs to put strength behind the framework by stepping into a regulatory role and making decisions when the regions can't do it themselves.

Don Johnson, president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, said he'd also back a move to regional authority, but said it would still have to respect municipalities and districts' autonomy.

Transportation and utilities corridors that cross areas large and small in size will be a key issue with the framework, Johnson said.

But getting regions to hash out their issues is the right way to go, he said.

"We can't exist in isolation, we just can't," Johnson said.

Some regions have already started creating their own frameworks. The Calgary Regional Partnership, which includes 18 municipalities and one First Nation, is expected to release its framework in 2009. It's a plan that partnership chairwoman Linda Bruce, who is also the mayor of Airdrie, hopes will dovetail with the provincial document.

A draft of the framework will be sent to Premier Ed Stelmach and cabinet before Christmas, Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton said Tuesday.

Morton suggested there's some significant changes coming.

"Our basic argument is that all the rules that worked when there were only one or two million people don't work quite so well when there's four or five million people, so we're trying to get ahead of the curve," he said.

"We're proposing some changes in how land-use decisions are made, and whenever you propose changes, some people get rubbed the wrong way. People love reform, but they don't like change. So there will be those issues."

Morton also said there will be "tons" of room for tinkering, saying the draft will be open to feedback, while the final document will take several years to implement.

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Seniors & Community Supports

Service Alberta

Solicitor General & Public Security

Sustainable Resource Development

Tourism, Parks, Recreation & Culture

***Miscellaneous Government**

Stelmach gives himself an A

Premier's first-year report card claims sweeping success

Jason Fekete, Calgary Herald

Published: Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Premier Ed Stelmach gave himself straight As Tuesday on his government's first annual progress report card, but the opposition Liberals argued the Tory regime should go back to school after failing Albertans.

Political observers also weren't as generous as Stelmach when grading his first year in office, but said the premier has accomplished far more than his predecessor and will use the report as a springboard to a spring election.

Flanked by his cabinet, Stelmach identified Tuesday in Calgary what he said are his government's top accomplishments during his first year in office, and promised a new action plan for the coming year.

"We've laid a solid foundation and our goals for the future are clear," Stelmach told reporters at McDougall Centre, "but there's still a lot to do."

Stelmach's report card includes 70 tasks his ministers were required to tackle, as required by mandate letters, with 35 marked off as "completed" and the other half "in progress." However, many of the objectives checked off on his list are only addressed in vague terms or are still being developed.

For example, Energy Minister Mel Knight's mandate to increase value-added opportunities -- a top priority for Stelmach -- is checked off, despite being listed as a work in progress.

As well, Health Minister Dave Hancock's requirement to implement a new pharmaceutical strategy to save taxpayer dollars is also checked off as in progress. However, the only detail provided is that "substantial work" has been completed on it and that "work continues" on policy options.

Liberal deputy leader Dave Taylor, on hand for the announcement, said the government has succeeded on some issues such as striking a preliminary deal to absorb the multibillion-dollar teachers' unfunded pension liability.

However, Taylor said the Tory government has failed miserably on housing and deserves barely a passing grade for its new royalty plan. Added up, the Stelmach government is averaging out poor marks for its first 12 months in power, he said.

"I don't really think that students should be marking themselves on this sort of thing," Taylor said. "If it's 35 (tasks completed) out of 70, that's 50 per cent -- that's barely a passing grade."

The Liberals argue that nine ministers deserve an F for failing to fulfil their mandate letters, while three would earn a D. Six ministers would receive a C, two a B, and only two would garner an A.

The premier hailed a handful of major accomplishments over the past year, including the government's new royalty blueprint, a \$285-million investment to address affordable housing pressures, a 10-year funding deal with municipalities and a sweeping crime reduction and safe communities strategy.

Political observers said Stelmach has picked up the slack of former premier Ralph Klein and has accomplished a lot.

"It's been a reasonably sound performance," said Chaldeans Mensah, political scientist at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton, who would give Stelmach a B+.

Faron Ellis, political analyst at Lethbridge College, said Stelmach is "much less susceptible to charges of drift" than the Klein government, and said the premier set out to accomplish a lot, which garners him an overall grade of B.

Keith Brownsey from Mount Royal College said the government should receive kudos for trying to clean up some of the mess left over by the Klein government.

"Just on doing things, I would give them a good, solid B," Brownsey said.

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POLITICS: STELMACH'S REPORT CARD

Alberta Premier gives his government top marks

DAWN WALTON

December 12, 2007

CALGARY -- After one year as Alberta's Premier, Ed Stelmach issued his own report card yesterday, awarding top grades in every portfolio, but the opposition parties were quick to say his government needs improvement.

In his 24-page Progress Report to Albertans, Mr. Stelmach checked off 70 goals as either "completed" or "well under way" and pointed out that a head-spinning 55 bills had been passed in the legislature this year.

"It's outstanding, the accomplishments of this government," Mr. Stelmach told reporters in Calgary yesterday, flanked by his cabinet ministers. "We've made tremendous progress, and I submit that we've made more progress this year as a government than many other provinces."

After Mr. Stelmach won the leadership race of the Progressive Conservative Party last December, he gave "mandate letters" to each cabinet minister with duties they were expected to carry out in his five broad "priority areas." Specifically, he lauded the new energy-royalty regime, housing initiatives, a municipal-funding agreement, a crime-reduction strategy and recruitment plans for health-care workers.

The New Democrats, however, described Mr. Stelmach's first year as a "failure" in terms of protecting tenants and standing up to the energy industry. Leader Brian Mason said the government also rammed a bill through the legislature that splits the province's energy and utilities regulator despite vociferous objections from landowners.

The Alberta Liberals expressed similar reservations. "Ed Stelmach has been looking at the kinds of report cards that we all get as parents when we have kids in the primary grades," deputy leader Dave Taylor said. "You really have to read through the gobbledygook to try and figure out how your kid's doing. And you have to do that same thing here, too."

The Liberals even took the time to assign their own grades, including F's for nine ministers.

"This would be an embarrassing report card for any teacher," they said. "One would assume that a teacher would be fired if their class performed so poorly."

Undeterred, Mr. Stelmach outlined his plans for 2008, including investing in infrastructure, finding new economic opportunities and protecting the environment. He also said he is going to take a leadership role in creating a "western economic marketplace" and have a "much larger voice in Ottawa."

But he brushed off questions about how much longer he is going to continue as a premier who hasn't been elected by the people of the province.

"Well, for an unelected premier we sure accomplished a lot," he said, adding that his government still has "a lot to do" before the next election.

There hasn't been a provincial election in Alberta since November, 2004, when Ralph Klein was premier. The Progressive Conservatives lost considerable ground to the Liberals, showing Mr. Klein's slide in popularity among voters and precipitating the erosion of his support within the party.

Both Mr. Stelmach and Finance Minister Lyle Oberg, who this week said he would not be seeking re-election, said a budget is still slated to be brought down Feb. 14. But there is increasing chatter that an election will be called before Valentine's Day, especially with a lame-duck Finance Minister in cabinet.

The wait-and-see game is another area where the opposition members take issue with Mr. Stelmach's government.

"If [Liberal Leader] Kevin Taft were the premier," Mr. Taylor said, "you would know when the next election date was going to be because we stand for fixed election dates."

Lobbyist registry won't be ready before 2009

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: B9

Section: Cityplus/Alberta

Byline: Jason Markusoff

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Albertans will remain unaware about who's influencing their leaders for another year or more.

The Stelmach government announced its much-hyped lobbyist registry is expected to start up in early 2009.

That revelation came Tuesday in Premier Ed Stelmach's self-congratulatory report card, which trumpeted that the registry he created with his Bill 1 is a work "in progress."

While the bill was first introduced in March -- and passed by the legislature last week -- the ethics commissioner still needs to hire a lobbyist registrar, acquire and test a new software system for the online registry, and launch a public awareness campaign about the complex new system, said Karen South, the commissioner's senior administrator.

The registry could be running in 2008 if things come together sooner than expected, she added.

Since the summer, the government has been setting up and recruiting staff for a new utilities regulator to start work next month, while the controversial Bill 46 that created it was still being pushed through the legislature.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives' tougher new ethics rules will take effect sooner. The conflicts-of-interest law, also passed last week, will be proclaimed into law before the next provincial election, said Alberta Justice spokesman Mark Cooper.

The new law means retiring cabinet ministers Lyle Oberg and Greg Melchin -- and any others who get voted out of power -- cannot lobby government for a year after leaving, rather than six months.

It also ensures that senior aides to the premier or other ministers will also have to abide by conflict-of-interest rules if they leave politics shortly before the election.

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Stelmach gives his ministers top marks for job performance

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: B9

Section: Cityplus/Alberta

Byline: Archie McLean

Dateline: EDMONTON

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

EDMONTON - Premier Ed Stelmach gave himself and his government a first-year report card Tuesday and the grade was A+++.

"We're showing progress in all areas," Stelmach said in Calgary.

Last year, Stelmach gave mandate letters to all his new cabinet ministers. Their report card, which is available on the government's website, puts check marks beside each of the 70 tasks they were assigned. Half of them were marked "completed" and the other half were marked "in progress."

Energy Minister Mel Knight's task to "develop a strategy to increase value-added opportunities from Alberta's energy resources." In progress. Check.

Culture Minister Hector Goudreau's assignment to "lead the establishment of a culture policy encompassing Alberta's cultural, historical and natural heritage." Completed. Check.

Housing Minister Ray Danyluk's task to "establish a housing task force to develop a plan to increase the availability of affordable housing." Completed. Check.

Opposition parties begged to differ with the premier's rosy assessment, of course. The Alberta Liberals put out their own report card, which -- no less predictably -- gave the government a failing grade.

On Knight's value added strategy, they say "the government will allow bitumen to go to the U.S., instead of looking for opportunities to work with our western neighbours to form an energy partnership."

On Danyluk's housing strategy, they say "a housing task force was established but failed to act on two of the most important recommendations -- temporary rent regulations and a moratorium on condo conversions."

Calgary Liberal MLA Dave Taylor, who was on hand for the announcement, said the government shouldn't be too proud of its achievements.

"I don't really think students should be marking themselves on these sorts of things," Taylor said. "If it's 35 (tasks completed) out of 70, that's 50 per cent -- that's barely a passing grade."

The NDP also attacked the government over its failure to implement rent controls, the new royalty regime, Bill 46 and Stelmach's anonymous campaign donors.

The government has issued several progress reports this year, some of which were mailed to Alberta households at taxpayers' expense.

This one, however, comes at a negligible expense, a spokesman for the premier said.

Stelmach has not yet faced the electorate, but a vote is widely expected in the spring.

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Ed sees Tories making progress

The Edmonton Sun

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: 22

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, LEGISLATURE BUREAU

His priorities are out in the open, and Premier Ed Stelmach is giving his own government a passing grade for its efforts to accomplish them.

Stelmach introduced a "report card" yesterday in Calgary to update progress by individual ministries in meeting his mandates, outlined in a series of letters last year.

MANDATE LETTERS

He said the mandates - a collective blueprint of sorts for the government's direction - were largely completed. "I issued mandate letters to each member of my cabinet as their contracts with the people of Alberta," said Stelmach. "These contracts are either completed or well underway. Now, we're moving forward with an even sharper focus on meeting Albertans' needs."

Stelmach stressed the report is not a suggestion the government has accomplished all of its goals, but does demonstrate it knows how to achieve them.

"Some of these tasks are marked 'complete', in that our policy direction is in place and we're moving on to implementation," he said. "The remaining tasks are marked 'in progress' - the groundwork has been completed and work is well underway toward meeting the mandate."

Most of his ministers get "completes." However, Energy Minister Mel Knight, who is handling the fallout from the unpopular Bill 46 - which establishes a new utilities commission and advocate - and the oil royalties realignment still has his three major mandates to fulfil.

Seniors Minister Greg Melchin, who also had a full page of works "in progress," was expected to bring forward an updated long-term care plan, a demographic planning commission, quality of life benchmarks and improved supports and services for persons with disabilities.

And Solicitor General Fred Lindsay, who had two mandates, is still working on both. He has yet to negotiate a new provincial policing contract with the RCMP or complete a plan to co-ordinate policing resources in the province.

Two associate ministers, Tourism honcho Cindy Ady and Capital Planning Minister Gene Zwozdesky, received their mandates well into the year and continue to work on them, the report said.

ACTUAL PROGRESS

But the opposition Liberals said writing a report card on "planning progress" is pointless - what the public needs is actual progress.

"This government did not live up to their own mandate letters, and also overlooked a number of other important issues," said Liberal Leader Kevin Taft.

"They failed to address conditions in long-term care, improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, increase access and affordability for post-secondary students, develop a plan for the Heritage Fund - the list goes on."

"Finally, they have failed to respect the rights of Albertans by ramming through the undemocratic Bill 46, and they have failed to admit to losing billions of dollars through mismanagement of the provincial royalty system. This shows their claims of openness and accountability are false."

Premier Ed's doing great; All you have to do is ask ... Stelmach claims great progress for government

The Calgary Sun

Wed 12 Dec 2007

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Section: News

Byline: BY BILL KAUFMANN, SUN MEDIA

One year into his reign, Premier Ed Stelmach yesterday gave his government top marks for policy achievement, insisting its record is Canada's best.

But when asked if his un-elected mandate was wearing thin and when a vote could be expected, Stelmach responded tersely.

"For an un-elected premier, I sure have accomplished a lot," said Stelmach, flanked by members of his cabinet at Calgary's McDougall Centre.

"Let's work through Christmas first and then we'll tackle that."

Stelmach unveiled a report card handing his team 35 check marks on "complete" tasks first targeted a year ago, ranging from resource royalty review to affordable housing.

"We've made more progress this year than any other province," said the premier, adding half the targeted tasks have been accomplished.

"We passed the most bills in a number of years -- I believe 55."

He also emphasized the province's \$11.3 billion investment in municipalities to meet their growing infrastructure needs.

When pressed on the topic of mending the province's royalty regime, Stelmach insisted they'd met the challenge, but also said "we've still got some discussions with the oil sands people."

"There's a fair amount of work to be done on 11 pieces of legislation."

But he insisted the new regime will still take effect Jan. 1, 2009, and only be impacted by the future price of oil and gas. He said the task of attracting skilled workers to address Alberta's labour shortage was a tough nut to crack.

"There are so many other countries pursuing the same skill sets," said Stelmach.

Calgary Currie Liberal MLA Dave Taylor said Stelmach has worked hard to clean up "a big mess" left by former premier Ralph Klein, but added the government's report card was overly rosy.

"I'd fail him on affordable housing. Yes, they've made a little bit of progress, but not nearly enough," said Taylor, who questioned the merits of a government rating itself.

And Taylor said voting dates should be out of politicians' hands.

"I think we should have fixed election dates. The credibility gets stretched a little further every month (Stelmach) goes," he said.

Calgary eclipses Edmonton's star

The Edmonton Journal

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: G3

Section: Business

Byline: Eric Beauchesne

Dateline: OTTAWA

Source: CanWest News Service

OTTAWA - Calgary is the most economically dynamic and attractive city in Canada, followed in order by Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Victoria and Ottawa-Gatineau, according to a report released today.

Meanwhile, Montreal lags well behind other large centres with a ranking of 14th out of 27 cities, according to the assessment from the Conference Board of Canada.

And being a city that is attractive to people and dynamic is becoming increasingly important, the think-tank said in releasing its report card on Canadian cities. It grades them on the seven criteria of economy, innovation, environment, education, health, society and housing.

"Labour shortages are already beginning to affect some Canadian cities," said Mario Lefebvre, director of the board's new Centre for Municipal Studies.

"Attracting highly skilled workers and the business investment they encourage is crucial to Canada's economic competitiveness."

It's becoming more a case of businesses going where the people with skills and talent want to live than people going to where the jobs are, he said. "In other words, places attractive to people will also attract business investment."

Calgary also ranked high when compared with 27 major cities in the U.S., the report said. "Thanks to its red-hot economy, robust employment growth and young labour force, Calgary ranks just behind first-place Washington and second-place Austin (Texas) as the only overall A cities."

The report calls Edmonton "an economic star, albeit somewhat eclipsed by Calgary." The Alberta capital came in second or third on more than half of the 11 economic indicators.

"Canadian cities trail their U.S. counterparts on key economic measures and on higher education, but offer more affordable housing, better commuting options, healthier lifestyles and better student-teacher ratios," it said, adding that the stronger employment growth recorded by many Canadian cities over the past five years is a promising sign.

Overall, the results show that size matters, with five of the top six rankings in Canada going to big cities, all of which were given an A grade.

Calgary No. 1 draw for brains, bucks

Geoffrey Scotton, Calgary Herald

Published: Wednesday, December 12, 2007

Calgary is the most economically dynamic and attractive city in Canada, says a new report from the Conference Board of Canada.

The Ottawa-based economic research and policy organization says money and businesses go where highly skilled people go -- and that's Calgary.

"Calgary stands tall among Canadian census metropolitan areas as the city that is most attractive to people," said Mario Lefebvre, director of the board's Centre for Municipal Studies.

"Attracting highly skilled workers and the business investment they encourage is crucial. Places attractive to people will also attract business investment," Lefebvre added.

"Calgary is blowing everyone away with its economy, but doesn't rank low with any other measures -- and that makes the city very attractive to people."

Mayor Dave Bronconnier said the report reflects the stature and reputation Calgary has achieved in recent years.

"Calgary has been the beacon of the country and a magnet for people moving here," said Bronconnier.

"It lines up with what Alberta's all about and particularly Calgary -- and that's opportunity."

Along with ranking head and shoulders above other Canadian cities, Calgary ranks third overall in all of North America, trailing only Washington, D.C., and Austin, Texas.

The seven criteria used in the analysis -- the board's first-ever report on Canadian cities' attractiveness -- were economy, innovation, environment, education, health, society and housing.

"It wasn't the economy domain alone that propelled Calgary to the top," says the report, to be released today. "Calgary was the only (metropolitan area) to earn A or B grades across all seven domains."

Large cities dominated the upper tier of attractive places to live in Canada, with Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton and Victoria rounding out the top five. The lowest-ranked of 27 cities studied was Thunder Bay, Ont., with Saguenay, Que., and Saint John, N.B., not far behind.

Analysts said Tuesday the new report confirms what mobile Canadians have known for years: Calgary is a place where almost anyone can be successful.

"It's funny how economic growth will do that," said Tsur Somerville, director of the Centre for Urban Economics and Real Estate at the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business.

"People foremost move for jobs. The best predictor that somebody is going to move to your city is that your economy is doing well and there are jobs," Somerville noted.

In both 2004 and 2005, based on its size, Calgary attracted more migrants than any other Canadian city and between July 2005 and July 2006, it set a record for interprovincial migration. Between 2001 and 2006, Calgary was Canada's second fastest growing large city, according to figures from Statistics Canada and between 2002 and 2006 Calgary attracted more arrivals on a per capita basis than any other city.

The conference board report emphasized that Calgary sits in the top echelon of cities across North America because of its youthful population, strong labour market and rapidly expanding economy, which has led all Canadian cities in three of the last four years and is expected to lead again in 2008.

Canada's star (metropolitan area), Calgary, sits comfortably near the top of the list, just behind first-place Washington and second-place Austin," says the 96-page report. "The good news is that Calgary

held its own among the field of 54 cities, thanks to its league-leading employment rate, robust employment growth and young labour force."

Adam Legge, director of research and business information for Calgary Economic Development, said the conclusions of the conference board report aren't surprising.

"It reaffirms a lot of the research that we do that demonstrates that Calgary is a national leader across virtually every economic indicator," said Legge.

***Election**

Chandler says he'll still run; Dumped by Alberta PCs

The Edmonton Sun

Wed 12 Dec 2007

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Section: News

Byline: BY THE CANADIAN PRESS

A would-be candidate who was dumped by the Alberta Progressive Conservatives over his ties to an anti-gay letter is preparing to lead a charge against Premier Ed Stelmach in the next provincial election.

Craig Chandler tells The Canadian Press that he will still run in Calgary-Egmont, while several of his supporters will run in other ridings as a protest against him being ousted.

Chandler is the founder of the Progressive Group For Independent Business, a Calgary-based group that lobbies for less government and lower taxes.

He has not said what banner he will run under, but Alberta Alliance Leader Paul Hinman says he's been told that six members of the business group are lining up behind Chandler to run as Independents.

Chandler was dumped as the Tory nominee in Calgary-Egmont after two human rights rulings censured a Christian group he founded for an anti-gay letter written by one of the group's leaders.

Chandler says he got 945 votes at the recent Tory nomination meeting and most of those people are pledging their support even if he doesn't run as a Tory candidate.

Oberg heads for open range

The Calgary Herald

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: A18

Section: The Editorial Page

Source: Calgary Herald

There comes a time when you find all the signs are pointing to the exit. That time is now for Finance Minister Lyle Oberg, who announced he would not seek re-election almost exactly a year after he lost his bid to lead the Alberta Progressive Conservative party.

Easily one of the brightest people in provincial politics, his departure will surely bring down the average IQ in the Tory caucus.

Yet there were times when his refulgent intellect did not protect him from careless words or a journey down the wrong road. For example, his 2002 intervention as learning minister in negotiations between school boards and the Alberta Teachers' Association was intended to limit settlements to six per cent. Yet one bitter strike later, an arbitrated deal gave the ATA 14 per cent.

Likewise, his criticism of Ralph Klein, after the former premier instructed leadership hopefuls to vacate their cabinet posts: "If I were the premier, I wouldn't want me sitting there as a backbencher . . . I know where all the skeletons are."

If he meant to distance himself from his colleagues, it was a master stroke: He was suspended from caucus. In retrospect, though, it still seems injudicious.

That said, one will misjudge the man if one recalls only his controversies. An early advocate of the spending cuts that eliminated the deficit, he served capably in four portfolios since promotion to cabinet in 1997.

His support for extending private delivery of medical services will one day be recognized as prophetic, he brokered the province's first P3, and even his contrarian views on equalization and a national securities regulator, while causing friction in caucus, showed that whatever else one might say of Oberg, he was nobody's trained seal.

We did not always agree with Oberg. But as the doctor from cowboy country rides off in search of more open range, it's hard not to wish him well. Just beware of tumbleweed, Lyle

Columnists

Lougheed knew to avoid German businessman, why didn't Mulroney?

The Calgary Herald

Wed 12 Dec 2007

Page: A6

Section: News

Byline: Don Martin

Column: Calgary's Eye on National Politics

Dateline: OTTAWA

Source: Calgary Herald

The key question to fire at former prime minister Brian Mulroney on the witness stand Thursday has its genesis 28 years ago in a Swiss ski chalet.

That's when then-Alberta premier Peter Lougheed reluctantly sat down with Karlheinz Schreiber for dinner. The German businessman had somehow tracked Lougheed down several times during the unpublicized visit, even confronting the premier on a ski hill to lobby his Alberta interests.

The meal ended early and badly. Lougheed had an "uncomfortable feeling" about Schreiber as a shameless name-dropper, recalls former aide and current Calgary MP Lee Richardson. Lougheed ordered an immediate, government-wide ban on any association with the man. "In hindsight, I'd say Peter's instincts were correct," says Richardson. "The guy is toxic."

That's a long backdrop to a concern the ethics committee should obviously raise with Mulroney: how could a double-majority Conservative leader be such a lousy judge of character that he'd allow himself to be hired, while still serving as prime minister, to represent a man for unspecified purposes and accept three stacks of \$100,000 bills as payment?

Put another way: was he nuts?

More than any breach of ethical conduct alleged by Schreiber in detailing his life of shady schemes and dreams as an arms dealer, lobbyist and political high roller, the ethical character of a former prime minister is on trial here.

No outgoing party leader of his stature, flush with global business connections, could've or should've been so desperate for quick and easy cash that he'd sell out for the first overstuffed envelope thrust into his hands.

On that score, Brian Mulroney has a lot of 'splainin' to do when he faces MPs on the ethics committee.

Let's hope he gives them answers, because there was a chronic shortage of clarity from Schreiber during his fourth day of testimony.

After eight hours on the hot seat, Schreiber's one-man prosecution rested with a whimper and not a bang.

MPs were grasping for decent questions and getting back stale answers while the quest for new scandal was starved of fresh oxygen. All MPs could do was run around in aimless circles over the same old ground, to often bemused smiles from Schreiber.

Barely 90 minutes after it started, the committee adjourned, with Schreiber wishing the media scrum a very merry Christmas before heading home to his upscale townhouse, a 10-minute drive off Parliament Hill.

It was his mission accomplished. Without this committee's intervention, Schreiber would've been extradited to spend the holidays in a German prison cell, facing fraud, tax evasion and bribery charges that would, upon conviction, slam him behind bars for the rest of his expected life. As it stands, he left a spotlight, having added neither heat nor light to the controversy, beyond what had already been unearthed by inquisitive reporters.

Schreiber's vague accusations of Mulroney-bound payoffs being laundered through a lawyer in Geneva are hardly credible. He couldn't name the lawyer, the amount or whether anything actually happened, yet oh how the committee tittered so.

We do know that no money was given to Mulroney while he was in power, that no specific assignments were accepted for future compensation, and that no value was received once the cash was delivered.

Mulroney was clearly a wasted investment as a lobbyist and, if Schreiber is correct, a devious liar whose government had actually killed a light-armoured vehicle project in Nova Scotia long before Mulroney pledged to promote that business venture. But these are broken business ethics, if that's not an oxymoron, and fail to back up Schreiber's claim to be at the centre of "the greatest political scandal in Canadian history."

Perhaps incredulous Bloc Quebecois MP Carole Lavallee summed it up best when she noted how a furious Schreiber had warned the former prime minister to refund his payment or he'd rat out the wrongdoings: "You don't seem to know anything," she said. "How can Brian Mulroney see you as a threat?"

Well, that's Karlheinz Schreiber. He's a nuisance who drops names randomly into shady circumstances without context or proof of wrongdoing.

Peter Lougheed had Schreiber fingered as a high-risk political predator three decades ago. One can only marvel how Brian Mulroney spent a decade figuring this same shady character was a worthy friend and business associate.

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