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Advanced Education & Technology

Agriculture & Food

Children's Services

Education

Students balk at boosting Canadian content; MLA's proposal would limit global view, they say

The Calgary Herald

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: B7

Section: City & Region

Byline: Sarah McGinnis

Source: Calgary Herald

It's Friday afternoon. Students are 50 minutes from freedom.

Instead of tracking the classroom clock, a Grade 12 history class at Dr. E.P. Scarlett High School is filled with arm-waving teens in heated debate.

Calgary-Fort MLA Wayne Cao wants to increase Canadian history content in high school social studies classes to at least 50 per cent.

His private member's bill -- which originally called for at least 75 per cent Canadian content -- received second reading before dying on the order paper when the legislative session ended.

Cao has pledged to find a way to bring Bill 215 back.

If it passes, this advanced placement history program -- which is focused on European history -- couldn't exist.

"We live in a world where Canadian history is important, but it is only one piece of the puzzle. If we are going to understand our own history, we have to go beyond what happened in Canada," said Jacob Sussman, 16.

Cao, an immigrant from Vietnam, said he has become increasingly concerned by the number of immigrants who feel more closely connected to the politics and culture of their birthplace than this country.

"My father was an educator and he told us you need to know your place, your community and your country," said Cao.

Back at E.P. Scarlett High School, students in a Grade 10 social studies class are creating word searches using the names of Canadian trade agencies.

The activity is part of a new social studies curriculum that took seven years to create, and it's a completely different way of looking at history, said Ayesha Shaikh Marson, who has taught social studies for 21 years.

Instead of presenting one view of history, the new curriculum encourages students to look at events through the eyes of different social groups.

What did the European settlers see when they travelled to Canada? How did the First Nations communities view this so-called settlement? How did francophone immigrants consider the situation? What was the role of women?

"Other jurisdictions are looking to us and this amazing curriculum," Shaikh Marson said.

Some of Shaikh Marson's students, who are repeating the Grade 10 social studies course, have become unlikely champions of the new program.

"This class is a lot better. It gives us a broader perspective," said T.J. Jones, 15.

The new program talks more about current issues and finds ways to relate history to real life instead of studying dates and names, said 16-year-old Kayla Hungle.

Three students from the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre -- which operates a satellite campus of Alternative High School -- were so upset by the proposed replacement of this new curriculum, they wrote protest letters to Alberta Education Minister Ron Liepert.

"This is really big. This can affect our future careers. Businessmen travel to other countries to do business, and it's really good to know about other cultures to succeed," said Josh, who didn't give his last name.

Nonetheless, Cao has allies, such as Rudyard Griffiths, co-founder of the Dominion Institute.

Eight in 10 Canadian youths between 18 and 24 failed a basic Canadian history exam this fall, Griffiths said.

Who killed Canadian history?

Distinguished historian and former Canadian War Museum director Jack Granatstein has been on the case since before his book of the same name was published in 1998.

"Canadian history isn't boring. It has good guys and bad guys, thrills and chills. It's just being taught in a boring fashion," said Granatstein.

Both Granatstein and Griffiths applaud Cao's proposal.

Meanwhile, Canadian history appears to be getting a boost from an unlikely ally. The TV reality show *Are You Smarter than a Canadian Fifth Grader* has forced adults to confront their abysmal knowledge.

Airdrie's 10-year-old Nathan Logan was one of the whiz kids recruited by the show and watched competitors sweat over "easy" Canadian history questions.

"They did pretty well, but they were kind of scared," said Nathan.

Meantime, Cao vows to press on.

"This is something I need to do," Cao said of reviving Bill 215

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Peace negotiations in full swing; School boards, ATA locals racing to ratify five-year agreements by Jan. 31 as part of deal with province

Town & Country

Mon 17 Dec 2007

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: David Paul

Source: Town & Country

There are no exotic locales or epic, jet-setting journeys to take, just 62 school boards locked in separate rooms with their Alberta Teachers Association locals trying to hammer out collective agreements. Welcome to The Amazing Race, Alberta style.

A few weeks after the provincial government announced it had agreed to cover the teachers' \$2.1 billion pre-1992 unfunded pension liability in exchange for five years of labour peace, boards and ATA locals have been frantically trying to dot all the Is and cross all the Ts before February arrives. If just one jurisdiction fails to meet the deadline, the entire deal could be in jeopardy.

"As part of the agreement, all 62 boards have to have ratified contracts that last until 2012," explained Alberta Education Minister Ron Liepert during a conference call with rural media outlets Dec. 11. "For the eight boards whose contracts have not yet expired, they have the option to sit down with their unions and extend the contract until 2012 or negotiate a new contract that goes until 2012."

Despite the relatively short-time frame available to school divisions and their teacher locals, the Calgary-West MLA remains optimistic all agreements can be in place by the target date. He noted six boards have already ratified agreements and another dozen are awaiting a labour relations board ruling on whether they can collectively bargain a new contract.

"I'm very, very happy to get an agreement in place, to have labour peace for five years," said Liepert, refusing to speculate what might happen if not all boards are across the finish line by Jan. 31. "Actually, I'm astounded by the positive response wherever I go to this agreement."

New Alberta School Boards Association President Heather Welwood shares the minister's optimism. While admitting the Jan. 31 deadline leaves little room for error, she added "where there's a will, there's a way."

The prospect of avoiding strikes or lockouts until at least 2012 is not one school boards are anxious to pass up, she underlined.

"If all the boards and locals are settled by Jan 31, we've got five years that we could talk about education issues and not about negotiations and salaries but real education issues and so that's where I see the ASBA and boards going forward," said Welwood.

Issues such as transportation, improving high-school completion rates and procuring more money from provincial coffers to build new schools and repair aging ones, she noted.

Her wish list may not immediately come to fruition, however, regardless of whether all collective agreements are ratified by Jan. 31. Liepert insisted that while he would like to fork over more infrastructure money, his hands are tied at the moment, at least until the government finalizes its capital planning.

"I wish I was in a position to make good news announcements ... (but) I don't want to make any promises if I don't have the capital funds to fix the problem," said the education minister, warning that provincial revenues are not projected to be as bountiful in the future as they are today. "It's a difficult situation."

Nonetheless, he added, "we're committed to working it through."

Liepert highlighted the province's education system is already the envy of the world, with Alberta children continuing to score impressively on student achievement tests. Fifteen-year-olds from Wild Rose Country recently finished second only to Finland in science, while finishing third in reading and fifth in math. Grade 4 students also finished third in literacy, boasted the minister.

"I'm very proud of what our students are achieving," said Liepert. "They're achieving incredible things."

Employment, Immigration & Industry

Foreign workers get training before travel

The Edmonton Journal

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: F3

Section: Business

Column: Local Buzz: Projects, Awards, Appointments, New Business

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Recruiting company TC Hunter figures partnering in a training centre in India will reduce the number of temporary foreign workers who are set up to fail when they come to Alberta.

The centre, which opened last week in Chandigahr in northern India, will bring up to 80 tradespeople to a level where they can jump right into a job in Fort McMurray, TC Hunter partner Trevor Mahl says.

"They'll get classroom and practical training from Alberta trainers that will bring them up to our trade standards. They all already speak English, but we'll also make sure they know the right terminology for the job they will be doing."

The workers will be housed and fed at the centre for the duration of their training, which can vary from 20 to 80 hours depending on skill level and aptitude, and it will be paid for by TC Hunter's oilsands clients.

Welders and pipefitters are in great demand now, but they can also work with other trades such as carpenters and heavy-duty mechanics as needed, says Mahl, who is also opening a recruiting office in the Philippines.

"The advantage is you are getting trained people who are set up for success, not failure. There has been some negativity lately about companies bringing in people who can't do the job, but there are also some good things happening."

Chandigahr was chosen for the centre because it has a skilled and educated population with the highest per capita income in India. It's become one of the top global outsourcing and IT customer service centres.

BASIC ITALIAN

Read Jones Christoffersen chairman Gino Ferri was surprised but delighted when asked to be this year's guest host for Sorrentino's Back to Basics festival on Jan. 27.

The restaurant group asks a prominent member of the Italian community to host the event, which features traditional dishes at traditional prices.

"It's quite an honour. I didn't realize what a big deal it was until they started asking all these questions about my life," said Ferri.

"But then if (Stantec CEO Tony) Franceschini can do it, so can I," he added with a laugh.

RJC, like most engineering companies, is ultra-busy these days. They just finished the new downtown YMCA and are the structural engineers on the \$311-million Centennial Centre for Interdisciplinary Science at the U of A. They are also working with Harvard Developments on the ambitious Windermere Garden Market power centre at Anthony Henday and 38th Avenue, which has already signed up some big-box clients.

Rising construction costs are a fact of life right now, Ferri said. "If people can accept it as a reality it will be easier for everybody."

A WALK IN THE (CAR) PARK

It's a bitterly cold morning as you turn into the long-term parking lot at the international airport. The ticket dispenser isn't working and the gate is up so you stop at the booth where the attendant hands you a ticket. She does not tell you which row to park in to wait for the shuttle bus, which you think is odd.

You find somewhere to park, but there's no sign of a bus. You finally pick up your luggage and walk to the terminal with other parkers, muttering under your breath.

Here's the cruncher. When you return later in the week they still charge you the full \$44 rate for parking.

Edmonton Airports spokesman Jim Rudolph said it was one of the rare problem days at the parking area.

"We were short a shuttle bus that morning, and in this case the information may not have been fully communicated by the booth staff. The attendants are also supposed to direct people to a specific aisle where the bus will pick them up, but sometimes passengers don't stop at the booth."

HERE AND THERE

George Dawson has retired as managing director of Colliers International in Edmonton. He is replaced by John Frederickson, most recently director of real estate management for Oxford Properties in Edmonton. Dawson will stay on with the Colliers sales team ... Peter Rausch, executive director of the Alberta Avenue Business Association for the past three years, has joined B.C. mining supply firm Lynum Progressive Industries as its Alberta sales manager ... Sharon Copithorne, longtime executive director at Canadian Home Builders' Association's Alberta Region, has joined the Landmark Group of Builders as director of human resources. She'll be replaced by Dianne Johnstone, director of

government relations and member services for the Retail Council of Canada in Alberta ... Federal Labour Minister Jean-Pierre Blackburn will speak on Canada's approach to trade and labour in the Americas at the chamber of commerce lunch Jan. 7 ...

CardioMetabolics Inc. is moving next month from its university digs to new offices in Enterprise Square downtown (the former Bay Building). The privately held U of A spinoff is developing drugs for cardiovascular and other diseases ... The Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta, ASET for short, thank heaven, is looking for nominations for its 2008 awards. And they promise they've made the nomination process easier this year. Info at www.aset.ab.ca ...

U of A graduate forestry student Ian Curran took second place in a national research competition for his work on natural regeneration of white spruce trees in Alberta clearcut areas. The competition was sponsored by Edmonton-based Sustainable Forest Management Network ... Larissa Walkiw of St. Albert will be the spokesperson for Common Wealth Credit Union's Young and Free program after an online election. Walkiw, 19, a visual artist, won with her creative video blogs and e-journals posted on the Young and Free website (youngfreealberta.com). The program provides financial services geared to 17- to 25-year-olds ... John Deere has renamed its Phoenix Remanufacturing Group the John Deere Reman to reflect its commitment to the growing business. The Nisku company, founded as Phoenix Piston Hydraulics in 1984, was acquired by the heavy equipment firm in 2001 ... Bonni Clark leaves her PR job at Northlands Friday to begin a new career with Alberta Research Council in corporate marketing and communications.

Energy

Knight asked to explain royalty review cost estimate; Said panel recommendations would drain \$6B

The Edmonton Journal

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: B5

Section: Alberta

Byline: Archie McLean

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Provincial Affairs Writer

EDMONTON - Changes to Alberta's royalty regime recommended by a review panel would, if accepted, have cost the province's economy as much as \$6 billion a year, Energy Minister Mel Knight reportedly told a Tory party gathering in Mayerthorpe earlier this month.

The government-appointed review panel recommended hiking royalties by about \$2 billion per year.

But Knight was quoted in the Mayerthorpe Freelancer as saying that ministry calculations showed such an increase would have caused a massive flight of investment from the province.

"If you take \$2 billion ... there is about \$5 billion that doesn't come back to Alberta," Knight reportedly said. "What happens when you remove \$5 billion from our economy? It makes a hole."

Jason Chance, a spokesman for Knight, said the minister was only offering his opinion. He said the department does not have figures showing how much the province's new framework, which will increase royalties by about \$1.5 billion per year, would cost the economy.

This is the first time Knight has speculated about how much investment the province would have lost under the review panel's recommendations.

Liberal Energy critic Hugh MacDonald said the minister has an obligation to show how he arrived at his estimate.

"They have withheld so much royalty information from us in the past, he should provide the numbers that fit this calculation," MacDonald said.

During the recent legislative session, Premier Ed Stelmach likened the panel's proposed bitumen severance tax to the much-maligned national energy program. He elaborated on that comment Monday. "Essentially, it was a well-head tax, something that was tried during the National Energy Program, which really decimated the energy industry," Stelmach said.

MacDonald wondered why the government is bashing its own panel's report.

"Why they're trying to discredit these people is beyond me," MacDonald said. "It's the PCs who should be shining a flashlight on themselves."

The six-person royalty-review panel was appointed by government in February. It held public hearings around the province and delivered its report this fall. A month later, the government introduced its own plan, which will go into effect in 2009.

The new plan has been roundly criticized by some, such as the NDP and environmental groups, who believe it should have gone further, and by others who believe it will cripple the oil and gas industry.

Greg Stringham, a spokesman for the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, said his group doesn't have numbers similar to Knight's. But some companies, including EnCana, Petro-Canada and Canadian Natural Resources Limited, have threatened to yank investment from the province if the report was adopted, he said.

Stringham said the government's new framework will still pull investment from the province, particularly in the conventional oil and gas sector.

"The deep-gas and deep-oil guys really got hit hard," Stringham said. "It's not as if it was across the industry everybody's affected equally. Different sectors are feeling it much differently."

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Ottawa reviews pipeline plan; \$16.2B project to deliver Arctic gas via Alberta

The Calgary Herald

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: E4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Lisa Schmidt

Source: Calgary Herald; with a file from CanWest News Service

Federal Industry Minister Jim Prentice is reviewing a new financial plan brought forward by proponents of a \$16.2-billion pipeline to deliver natural gas from Canada's Arctic.

The proposal comes after meetings with the project's key participants last week. No details of the package were released, but Prentice said in a statement released Friday that he will review the proposal "as expeditiously as possible."

Projects proponents led by Imperial Oil Ltd. have been in negotiations with Ottawa for a year for concessions on the 1,220-kilometre pipeline and gathering system that could deliver as much as 1.9-billion cubic feet of natural gas per day from fields in the Mackenzie Delta of the Northwest Territories through Alberta's network to southern markets.

Regulatory hearings wrapped up last month, but the project has stalled as a result of cost increases and an inability to reach a fiscal deal with the government.

In his statement, Prentice reiterated that the project must remain a "private sector investment, driven by commercial considerations."

"The Government of Canada has no interest in owning any portion of the project or in subsidizing petroleum companies," he added.

A spokesman for Imperial confirmed that a plan was been presented to the federal government, but wouldn't elaborate on its details.

"A proposal has been tabled and obviously it will take some time for that to be assessed," said Pius Rolheiser. "This is an ongoing dialogue."

Reports have suggested that producer partnership of Imperial, Imperial's parent ExxonMobil Corp., ConocoPhillips and Royal Dutch Shell would be prepared to hand control of the pipeline over to TransCanada Corp., Canada's largest pipeline company, which has financially backed the project's fifth partner, the Aboriginal Pipeline Group (APG).

TransCanada would take the lead with 60 per cent ownership, with the rest going to the APG, the reports said.

A spokeswoman for TransCanada declined comment Monday. TransCanada chief executive Hal Kvisle said last week that his company taking the lead role is just one in a range of options that had been discussed.

"There is no specific grand plan at this stage, no transfer of leadership in the project from Imperial to TransCanada," Kvisle told Reuters. "The important issue is to figure out a way to pursue something that is . . . nation-building in character."

TransCanada also said late last month it has submitted a proposal to build a multibillion-dollar pipeline to ship natural gas from Alaska to southern markets through Alberta.

The pipeline operator joins U.S. oil and gas giant

ConocoPhillips and others planning to build the line that would carry as much as four billion cubic feet of gas a day from the massive fields of Prudhoe Bay on the state's Arctic coast south through Alaska, the Yukon, northern B.C. and into Alberta.

TransCanada did not release details of its proposal, but ConocoPhillips said its pipeline would cost about \$30 billion to build.

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TransAlta's debt row with shareholder comes to fore

The Calgary Herald

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: E4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Geoffrey Scotton

Source: Calgary Herald

A simmering dispute between Calgary-based power generating giant TransAlta Corp. and its largest shareholder boiled into public view Monday, strengthening speculation the electricity generator -- Canada's largest investor-owned utility -- could be put in play.

TransAlta said Monday that Luminus Management LLC, a New York-based investment fund, is calling for TransAlta "to retain an independent investment bank to perform a review of strategic alternatives for the company."

Strategic alternatives are generally understood to be a sale or merger of a company or the sale of some or all of the firm's assets.

In response, TransAlta has appointed a special committee of its board of directors overseen by director William Anderson to consider the changes and strategy proposed by Luminus, and the committee has hired both legal and financial advisers to help shape its response. Financial advice will be coming from Greenhill & Co. Canada Ltd., while Goodmans LLP will handle legal aspects.

Luminus has recently increased its pressure on TransAlta. In late November at a TransAlta investor day in Toronto, a Luminus official, Jonathan Barrett, suggested TransAlta consider forgoing investing in new capacity and devote it to share buybacks. TransAlta plans to spend \$815 million on its share of a new coal-fired plant, Keephills 3, in Alberta.

"We have a difference of opinion with regards to capital allocation, capital structure and the way you approach sort of value creation on the company," Barrett told TransAlta chief executive Steve Snyder, according to transcripts of the Toronto event. Barrett was travelling and could not be reached Monday.

TransAlta chair Donna Soble Kaufman said Monday that in the wake of several months of discussions with Luminus, she and her board of director colleagues disagree with Luminus' proposals for TransAlta, concerned the New York fund's proposals and strategy would saddle TransAlta with too much debt.

"It seems fair to say we have a disagreement over how much debt is prudent for TransAlta to take on at a time when our industry is facing considerable capital investment requirements and credit markets are in turmoil," said Soble Kaufman.

"The board and management maintain the view that continued financial discipline -- and a capital allocation strategy that strikes an appropriate balance between capital investment, dividends and share buybacks -- is critical to our ability to create value, capitalize on opportunity and manage industry cyclicality."

Luminus has been accumulating shares of TransAlta and has built about an eight per cent stake in the company. In filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Luminus has proposed that TransAlta limit the number of directors, as well as planning its own slate of five directors for TransAlta's annual general meeting in 2008.

Luminus is also apparently concerned about the connections by some of TransAlta's existing directors to financial services firms providing consulting to TransAlta.

Soble Kaufman defended TransAlta's corporate direction. "TransAlta has a sound strategy in place and is well positioned to consistently deliver value to its shareholders," said Soble Kaufman. "We will respond to the specific proposals Luminus has made in due course."

Analysts are uncertain of TransAlta's fate as Luminus flexes its ownership muscle. However, a sale or merger of the firm is definitely possible.

"There are a number of possible outcomes, including an increase in leverage (at the expense of an investment grade credit rating), acceleration of asset rationalization, more aggressive share repurchases and/or dividend increase, a takeout offer for the company, and/or cajoling the company into putting itself up for sale," Karen Taylor, who follows TransAlta for BMO Nesbitt Burns Inc., said in a report.

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Strong-armed over royalties?; Critics tell energy minister to provide proof

The Edmonton Sun

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: 4

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, LEGISLATURE BUREAU

The government decided against implementing the recommendations of its royalty review panel because it was warned by industry representatives that they would withdraw up to \$6 billion in investments if it proceeded, according to Energy Minister Mel Knight.

Critics now say Knight should pony up the supporting documents to prove that's the case.

Speaking to a rural newspaper last week, Knight said the government rejected the panel's recommendations - which would have increased annual royalties by about \$2 billion in 2008 - in favour of a plan to increase royalty value by \$1.4 billion beginning in 2009 because it "would have removed \$4 to \$6 billion annually from an industry right now."

An energy spokesman said yesterday that Knight was referring to consultations the government had with the industry in the month before it released its response to the report and its own framework.

"Those were the impacts on future investment in the province that we were told we could expect," said Jason Chance.

But critics note several reports prior to the new structure being announced were confident overall take from royalties could be increased to the same levels as other jurisdictions without hurting the industry.

And one member of the review panel, top University of Alberta economist Andre Plourde, said in an e-mail to Sun Media that no such number was presented to the review panel.

Liberal energy critic Hugh MacDonald said something about Knight's estimate doesn't sound right.

"I'm very concerned by this and I think Mr. Knight should produce something to back these numbers up, because it's the public's resource and they have every right to know."

NDP Leader Brian Mason questioned why no one has seen this report.

"Maybe there is such a report and maybe there isn't," he said. "But it's important to keep in mind how much credibility Mr. Knight has at this point.

"This is the same guy who sat on a report that said you could increase royalties by \$1 billion to \$2 billion per year without impacting the industry's investments."

Last week, Calgary-based Encana became the latest company to suggest an increased take would hurt and that it was removing \$500 million in investments from Alberta in the coming year.

But the company also has plans to increase its overall stake in the oilsands over that same time period.

Environment

Stelmach has green plan in works; Premier to announce Alberta program to help combat global warming

The Edmonton Journal

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Jason Markusoff

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Faced with a new era of tougher greenhouse-gas cuts after the environmental summit in Indonesia, Premier Ed Stelmach says he will embrace carbon-capture technology and spur Albertans to use more efficient washing machines.

Next month, the premier plans to release a new program for Alberta consumers to help combat global warming.

In a year-end interview with *The Journal*, Stelmach hinted Monday at incentives "with respect to simple things like washing machines that wash clothes with cold water, use less electricity, less water as well," and efficient furnaces and construction materials.

Alberta already has a rebate program for old furnaces, as well as "Soak up the Savings," a two-year-old initiative to get Albertans to replace old washing machines with new Energy Star models.

Canada reluctantly agreed this weekend to negotiations for a new climate-change treaty for industrialized countries, promising deep cuts in global emissions and guided by climate scientists and Europeans urging cuts by 2020 of between 25 and 40 per cent below 1990 levels. How would Alberta, with its expanding oil and gas sector, cope with such an ambitious goal?

"Well, I guess, learn how to stop breathing," Stelmach said with a laugh.

The Stelmach Conservatives, like their federal counterparts, have long insisted that overly ambitious targets to curb global warming -- such as the Kyoto accord's requirements -- are unattainable and would damage the economy, and both governments have instead set far more moderate goals.

Alberta's plan requires industrial emitters to reduce emissions per barrel or unit, rather than reach absolute limits. Stelmach has boasted that by 2004, the emissions intensity had already gone down 16 per cent from 1990 levels, but the overall output had risen by 40 per cent. Stelmach said he wants to commit government funds to building an infrastructure and pipeline network that would capture carbon dioxide (CO₂) from power plants and oil-and-gas operations and store it underground.

"Because that, by far, is the quickest way of reducing CO₂ significantly in the province of Alberta, it really is," the premier said.

A group of Alberta energy companies announced this month that the technology could reduce emissions by 20 million tonnes per year by 2020, and injecting the gas down old oil wells would help extract hard-to-reach fossil fuels.

But with an estimated project cost between \$45 to \$120 per tonne, the companies are looking to the government to help pay for the startup.

A federal-provincial task force on carbon sequestration is expected to report this month. The premier signalled much remains unclear about the technology.

"There's a fair amount of research now -- there's no sense capturing it in a way that it's going to escape," he said. "So what is the appropriate geography, or geology, to capture it. So how deep do we have to go? Is it in shallow gas wells or deep gas?"

Johanne Whitmore of the Pembina Institute, an environmental think tank, said the climate-change targets discussed in Bali, Indonesia, would be daunting but achievable for Alberta.

"Obviously it would mean that we would have to either get huge amounts of efficiency in our oil and gas industry, or we'd have to purchase emission offsets -- that's the only way we'd be able to meet those targets," she said. Other keys would be relying more heavily on cleaner, alternative energy sources, and using carbon sequestration, she said.

Whitmore said as a climatologist, she was disappointed with Stelmach's comment about breathing as a climate-change solution, even if it was a joke.

"It's really childish for him to say that," she said. "When a politician says that, what he's really saying is, 'I don't really care and I don't want to do anything about that problem.' "

In 2002, former premier Ralph Klein blamed "dinosaur farts" for contributing to global warming,

The 25 to 40 per-cent targets widely mentioned at the Indonesia summit were removed from the final international agreement, after strong protests from Japan, the U.S. and Canada. Firm targets for 2020 will be negotiated in the next two years.

As it is, energy firms will have to pay penalties under Alberta's current intensity-based requirements, said Pierre Alvarez, president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

He called energy players "big fans" of the carbon-capture technology.

"One thing that's clear -- it's not cheap," Alvarez said.

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Let's get realistic about cutting greenhouse gas emissions; Forget about impossible targets and focus on sensible solutions that work

The Edmonton Journal

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: F1 / FRONT

Section: Business

Byline: Gary Lamphier

Column: Gary Lamphier

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - On Saturday, I mocked the absurd, hyperbolic rhetoric of overheated greenies -- and their media soulmates -- as they do their best to portray Alberta's oilsands as a key cause of global warming.

The facts? Alberta's energy-dependent economy accounts for roughly 40 per cent of Canada's emissions. Canada as a whole accounts for about two per cent of the global tally. The oilsands? A fraction of one per cent.

China's coal-fired economy, meanwhile, adds the equivalent of Canada's entire annual CO2 emissions every 18 months. Yet China continues to resist all international pressure to curb emissions, while demanding that rich nations transfer their environmental technology on the cheap.

Sure, Canada can gut its economy to save the planet. That might make us all feel like good boy scouts. But it won't matter much to the planet unless major emitters -- notably the U.S. and China -- get on board.

Enter Canadian Environment Minister John Baird, who said so himself before flying off to Bali. But once there, he caved in to pressure, ultimately choosing not to oppose a loosely worded plan calling for industrial countries to slash emissions some 25 to 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.

With Canada's emissions growing by two per cent a year, that implies a cut of more than 50 per cent from 'business as usual' levels in just 12 years. Does anyone really have a clue how this can be achieved without bringing whole sectors of the economy to ruin? Nope.

Canada's manufacturing sector is already on the ropes. Ditto for forest products. Thus, it's illuminating to hear how Jayson Myers, president of the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters Association, sees the Bali accord.

"We're in a world where politicians are falling all over themselves to set targets. But I don't see any plan in place that would be effective in actually achieving those targets," he says. "These are targets that are taken out of a hat."

So where to from here? Given Canada's pathetic record of setting -- and subsequently missing -- overly ambitious targets, and its patently empty rhetoric on this issue, it's easy to despair. But that solves nothing.

So here's a thought. Why not start with one major initiative? Why not show real political leadership by focusing on one major project that has the potential to cut CO2 emissions in a substantial way? Not just in Alberta, but nationwide? One that's already supported by industry, and which will actually enhance the competitive position of Canada's top export sector?

I'm referring, of course, to the carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) system that's been proposed by the Integrated CO2 Network -- otherwise known as ICO2N -- a group of 15 of Canada's biggest industrial emitters.

Collectively, the group accounts for more than 100 million tonnes of CO2 emissions per year. Under terms of their proposed CCS system, those emissions could be cut by more than 20 million tonnes annually by 2020. That's akin to taking four million vehicles off the road.

Further out, those reductions could hit 100 million tonnes a year, equivalent to 13 per cent of Canada's total current emissions. That's huge.

The project would cost billions, of course. On a per tonne basis, it would amount to a minimum of \$45 per tonne. That's three times the slim \$15 per tonne penalty major Alberta emitters must pay, starting Dec. 31, under the province's current climate change plan.

As Journal reporters Gordon Jaremko and Hanneke Brooymans have written, such a scheme faces other obstacles. Besides the upfront cost, there's still no agreement on a cost-sharing formula between industry players and the federal and provincial governments. That's months away.

The key cost, accounting for 70 to 80 per cent of the total, would be to cover the actual capture of the CO₂. Over and above that, oilsands producers, power plants and other backers would have to build costly pipelines and secure underground storage space to sequester the gas.

There's also the issue of liability. With all that CO₂ trapped in hundreds of potential underground storage sites, governments and industry players will have to decide who takes responsibility for securing it for generations to come.

But here's the thing. Such CCS systems are already in use elsewhere, including the southern U.S. and Europe.

Secondly, with California leading the charge by more than a dozen U.S. states to impose low-carbon fuel standards in coming years, Alberta's oilsands-dependent energy sector has no choice but to act.

To do nothing isn't an option. The clock is already ticking. What's more, for oilsands producers, the cost of CCS may not be as high as you'd think.

According to CIBC World Markets economist Benjamin Tal, it amounts to about \$1.25 per barrel. That's equal to about 1.7 per cent of the current price of light crude.

Finally, the CCS scheme gives both the feds and the Alberta government a golden opportunity to appease the oilpatch, which is still smarting from last year's decision to kill the income trust market by 2011, and the Stelmach government's recent move to hike energy royalties by 2009.

Think of it as required infrastructure for a new century. Whatever you call it, it's a way forward. Finally.

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Stelmach would pay Albertans to go green; Cash, rebates could be part of '08 plan to cut emissions

The Calgary Herald

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Tony Seskus and Jason Fekete

Source: Calgary Herald

The Alberta government will release a strategy early next year to encourage consumers to cut their greenhouse gas emissions, Premier Ed Stelmach told the Herald on Monday.

On the heels of the United Nations' climate change summit in Bali, Stelmach said in a year-end interview he's looking at ways to persuade Albertans to become more energy efficient, noting that cash or rebates could ultimately be part of the answer.

But some environmentalists say the government must go farther and impose taxes to limit carbon consumption.

Stelmach snubbed the idea of forcing consumers to cut emissions through legislated regulations, balking at the notion of a carbon tax.

"I hate using legislation. I don't like to use the hammer in asking Albertans to participate," Stelmach said.

"We're looking at policies, again working with the various (non-governmental agencies), to see how we can encourage Albertans to change their lifestyle," Stelmach said.

The premier said there are a number of strategies open to consumers, including opting for energy-efficient appliances.

There are, however, already some incentives in place aimed at curbing Albertans' greenhouse gas emissions, including rebate programs that encourage people to dump their old washing machines and furnaces.

While some environmental groups welcomed the government's plan to target consumers' emissions, they said it's about time the province mandates changes to public behaviour.

Marlo Reynolds, executive director of the Alberta-based Pembina Institute, said Stelmach needs to put a price on energy use and consider legislative measures such as a tax on carbon consumption.

"If all (the government's plan) is an education program, then we've failed," Reynolds said. "If we're really going to tackle the problem, bottom line is you've got to put a tax on pollution."

The province should consider a carbon tax at the gasoline pumps or on the electricity bills of consumers who procure their energy from coal or natural gas, he said.

Reynolds said incentive programs that provide Albertans with cash rewards for voluntarily reducing their greenhouse gas emissions only go so far, and insisted that government's blueprint needs to be grittier. "Incentive programs are good for paving the way and building momentum," he said. "But it's not leadership stuff. It's soft and fuzzy."

New emissions-reduction policies should be revenue-neutral, he added, so income tax and other levies should be trimmed to reduce the burden on average Albertans who pay more for carbon consumption.

Liberal environment critic David Swann agreed, arguing government needs to ensure taxes on carbon consumption don't disproportionately punish low-income Albertans.

He also maintained that hard regulations are needed in Alberta, Canada's largest greenhouse-gas emitter.

"The writing is on the wall. We have to start sending the right message to consumers of energy as well as producers," Swann said.

Simon Knight, CEO of Climate Change Central, a government-funded group that seeks public participation in curbing greenhouse gases, said it's difficult to impose regulations because businesses and individuals need time to change their behaviour.

"We're educating people first and then we're providing incentives," he said. "It's not as simple as running regulation, stepping back and hoping it works."

Climate Change Central is urging Albertans to focus on two key areas for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions: their homes and vehicles.

Albertans should receive financial incentives for improving such things as their heating systems in their homes or pursuing alternative energy measures, such as solar heating. Rewards for updating emissions systems on vehicles also need to be considered.

Stelmach, meanwhile, acknowledged the debate over how to reduce emissions will be a contentious issue for Albertans. "There will be certainly some emotion expressed as we work through the various policies," he said.

While Stelmach is reluctant to use legislation to get consumers to reduce energy use, the province unveiled a strategy this year requiring heavy emitters -- facilities producing over 100,000 tons of greenhouse gases annually -- to reduce the intensity of their emissions 12 per cent by Jan. 1, 2008.

If the emitters cannot meet the target, they can pay into a technology fund. It's been estimated that if all 110 heavy emitters pay into the fund, it could generate more than \$170 million in its first year.

Pierre Alvarez, president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, said "every consumer" must also do their part if Canada is to meet future emissions targets. "We're doing our part," Alvarez said of the oil and gas industry. "As far as government moving forward, unless they deal with individual consumers . . . targets won't be met."

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'It's been quite a year': Mel Knight; Energy minister looks to resolve '07 controversies

The Calgary Herald

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: E1 / FRONT

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Geoffrey Scotton

Source: Calgary Herald

The energy sector has been a minefield for the Alberta government during 2007, with issues and regulatory change roiling both the oil and gas industry, and the electricity sector. At the centre of the storm has been Alberta Energy Minister Mel Knight, appointed to the job just over a year ago by then newly-installed Premier Ed Stelmach.

Since then, Knight and his department, along with the entire government, have had to grapple with the impact of skyrocketing crude prices, extraordinarily weak natural gas prices, the decision to review Alberta's oil and gas royalty structure, a move via Bill 46 to remake energy regulation through the creation of an Alberta Utilities Commission and a shocking controversy surrounding spying by the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board.

The Calgary Herald spoke with Knight on these and other issues Monday.

Q: What are your thoughts about 2007 in terms of your role as minister of energy and the areas that you've overseen?

A: Indeed it's been quite a year. A couple of the major highlights of the year would have to be most certainly the EUB. I'm going to put that first because that started for me before other situations. I recognized early on and made an attempt shortly after being appointed to look at some ways we could bring efficiencies into the regulators' world in Alberta.

I feel that what we've done with Bill 46 and with the set-up the Alberta Utilities Commission is very positive move forward. I understand all the angst around the legislation and so on, but I think that at the end, once the Utilities Commission is up and running and in place, and the Energy Resources Conservation Board returns to the type of regulator they were prior to having two roles to play, and they get some focus on that core business for Alberta, I really feel that at the end of this, it will be a very good piece of legislation and actually good business for Albertans.

Q: Were you surprised by the depth and breadth of controversy around and opposition to Bill 46?

A: I'd be more than naive if I didn't expect that there would be some controversy around what it was that I intended to do. However, situations with respect to certain hearings ended up -- partway through -- intercepting what it was that we were trying to do. Of course that put a completely different picture on that whole piece of legislation and it became extremely, extremely political and people became concerned about it from the point of view of what had taken place.

Q: Does the need to rewrite a key piece of electricity legislation, which follows other rewrites of related electricity legislation over the past 10 years, indicate that electricity deregulation has significant problems?

A: The best answer for me is to go back to 2002 and 2003, when I had a good opportunity to carry Bill 3, which was the new Electric Utilities Act that we brought in, in 2003.

That did change to some degree the framework around how we restructured the utilities system in the province. You won't hear me talk about deregulation very much because I don't think . . . there's less regulation now, or deregulation. It's a restructured industry. All it really did was put in place a competitive market on the generation side and took away the vertically stacked corporations and put those blocks all in separate silos. So, the restructuring I think is a positive move. We can find all sorts of people that would argue with me strenuously about that and indicate that there's a better way to do it because of power prices going up.

Well, I wouldn't argue with people about that, if you want to look at pure power price in the province of Alberta in the year 2007, the average is somewhere around 6.8 cents a kilowatt hour. From a non-hydro jurisdiction, that is very reasonable power.

Q: In recent weeks, in the wake of the province's decision on a new royalty structure, there have been a lot of corporate announcements by energy companies about billions of dollars in reduced capital expenditure plans that are attributed by some to fallout from the new regime, or the uncertainty that has surrounded the changes, or both. What's your response to that?

A: There are a number of factors at play. We are a high-cost area, we have a situation with the Canadian dollar, certainly commodity pricing plays into it and now, we have changes related to the royalty issue. Sometimes it is very difficult to read what affects investors and where investors' confidence can be improved or where it can be eroded. Certainly where you see any change, with respect to the economics of a business, investor confidence can be shaken.

If you put a number of those factors together, add some uncertainty (there's going to be an impact) -- and there is some uncertainty around where we're going to land with respect to the royalty framework implementation, we're working very hard with industry players to get this thing right and that work continues. I would never suggest to anyone that the work that we're doing with respect to royalties has no effect. If we are going to remove some of that cashflow capital, it has an effect.

Q: Has some of the attribution of spending reduction to the royalty changes been overdone?

A: It's difficult for me to pinpoint something like that, but when we look at this, even industry players by and large have indicated -- previous to the panel being assembled -- that they realized there was room for adjustment inside of this structure. I think that they would agree that the system needed a look and I am 100 per cent confident that we did the right thing -- for all Albertans.

The framework itself is a good framework to move forward. That's not to suggest that everything people see today is bang on, cast in iron. We've indicated that we're able to look at unintended consequence and we're working apace with that at the moment.

Q: Obviously 2007 was quite a year. What are the top three priorities of you and your department in the new year?

A: The three top things for me is, first of all, that in the province of Alberta, transmission is job one. And this isn't necessarily electrical wire. Transmission in the province of Alberta means for me the ability to move people, goods and services, electricity, oil, gas, petrochemical products, all of the above.

Transmission is beginning to get to be the thing that's binding us and we're going to have to loosen that a bit. For the Energy Department, those transmission issues come down to power lines and pipelines.

The second thing for me is to work and put together and finalize our energy strategy. We really need a plan to go forward. It's been a number of years and previous ministers have done very good groundwork with respect to this issue and in the coming year I would certainly like to put some finalization around that.

The third thing is we know that we know we have tremendous opportunity in Alberta for value added. I'm shooting for value maximization of Albertans' resources. They own the resource, let's maximize the value of the resource. That doesn't mean that we upgrade every barrel of bitumen, or that we process every cubic foot of natural gas.

There's a balance and I think if we can reach a balance and provide products that match the marketplace, we'll maximize the value for Albertans. Going forward, that's what I'd like to do over the next year.

Q: On that last point, on upgrading and refining, do you believe we have yet to reach that balance -- that we could be doing more?

A: Indeed we can. We have a long ways to go.

Q: Would you like to see more upgrading and more refining?

A: I can tell you where I'm at. With respect to upgrading, if you just take a look at the discounted upgrading projects that the EUB have in front of them, we'll reach a point by about 2016 to 2020 where we're at 78-plus per cent. I don't think that that's a bad number. We're at about 62 per cent, 64 per cent right now, headed for about 72 per cent and I think that that is a pretty good number. When we go by that, when we're upgrading this much, how much of this can we refine?

I think we need to be very careful, as Albertans and managers of this resource for Albertans that you don't end up with products that you can't sell.

Q: The province has yet to develop a policy around nuclear power. Is that one of the things your department will be taking a look at in 2008?

A: Yes. . . . Before we go out and establish policy here, I think it's fair on behalf of Albertans to do some of that work ourselves and be satisfied that we've heard both sides of that story.

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Balzac water deal appealed

The Calgary Herald

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: City & Region

Byline: Renata D'Aliesio

Source: Calgary Herald

A utility company is opposing a deal to supply water to a megaproject outside Balzac, contending the \$15-million trade increases the risk to its supply and could drive up prices for the resource.

The appeal by Westridge Utilities, which provides water to 1,200 homes in part of Springbank, is the first challenge of a licence transfer in Alberta's fledgling market to buy and sell water rights.

At a hearing in Calgary on Monday, the Environmental Appeals Board considered whether Westridge should be allowed to go ahead with its challenge of the province's approval of a water-for-cash swap to service a horse racetrack and super mall under construction just north of Calgary.

"This transfer may well give rise to speculation in the water market," Westridge president John Gruber told the board.

The three-person environmental board is expected to make a decision within 30 days.

The threat of a full appeal has again stalled progress on the \$1.5-billion development -- the largest construction project in Alberta outside of the oilsands.

The Municipal District of Rocky View, which acquired water rights from the Western Irrigation District, has put plans for a pipeline and treatment facility on hold until the objection is resolved.

In a letter to the environmental board, mall developer Ivanhoe Cambridge warned that reversing the trade could cause "significant economic loss" and jeopardize the social and economic benefits tied to the project, expected to create 5,000 jobs.

Horse racetrack and casino developer, the United Horsemen of Alberta, contends lingering uncertainty over water is affecting its ability to secure a \$140-million bank loan to finance the project.

In the worst-case scenario, continued delays could sink the racing centre and trigger a \$350-million loss to Alberta's horse-racing industry, the United Horsemen wrote.

"This appeal has extended an issue with regard to water that has been going on for a number of years," said Joe Bradford, a lawyer for the developer, which has seen the track's opening delayed two years to 2009.

"We are hoping for a quick decision on this because the slowdown is definitely impacting us," he added in an interview with the Herald.

"We need certainty on water."

Westridge Utilities, however, believes Alberta Environment rushed to make a decision on the province's largest licence transfer to date, failing to properly consider potential effects on other water users.

Gruber told Monday's hearing the investor-owned utility is worried about losing its supply in dry years to licensees with older rights.

When there isn't enough water to go around in Alberta, newer licence-holders such as Westridge face bans from taking water from rivers to ensure senior licensees, such as irrigating farmers and the City of Calgary, get their water.

The trade between Rocky View and the Western Irrigation District, approved by Alberta Environment in September, grants Rocky View some of the most senior water rights in Alberta -- dating to 1903.

Before the trade, the municipality couldn't legally take a single drop from the Bow River Basin. In August 2006, the provincial government introduced a sweeping moratorium on new licences for nearly every river, lake and stream in southern Alberta.

"It's a form of queue-jumping," Gruber told the board regarding Rocky View's deal.

"Those who are being pushed further to the back of the line could be potentially adversely affected."

"How could they not be when there is a moratorium?"

Lawyers for Rocky View and Alberta Environment have asked the board to reject Westridge's appeal, contending the utility west of Calgary isn't harmed by the trade.

Westridge draws its water from the Elbow River, while Rocky View would take water from the Bow.

"At best, Westridge has put forward an argument that is speculative in nature -- what might happen down the road," said lawyer Joanne Klauer, representing Rocky View.

"There is no change of the queue. No one is pushing Westridge down the queue."

The \$15-million deal is the highest price paid for rights in Alberta's emerging water market, the first of its kind in Canada.

Since the first financial swap recorded in 2004, the cost of rights has risen from \$133 per acre foot -- the amount of water required to soak one acre of land one foot deep -- to \$7,500. That's a jump of more than 5,000 per cent.

Gruber worries the escalating cost will hurt Westridge's plans for expansion. Eventually, it may have to buy water, too.

"Water is no longer available in the manner it formally was," he said.

"The fact is the market exists, and no one knows how the regulation of the market will evolve."

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Finance (including Pensions/Insurance)

Health & Wellness

Home health monitors eyed for capital region

The Edmonton Sun

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: 17

Section: News

Byline: BY NICKI THOMAS, SUN MEDIA

Patients in the capital region may soon be able to send their vital signs to doctors from the comfort of home, thanks to a new government-sponsored project.

"This project has tremendous potential to enhance the effectiveness, quality and safety of the care that we provide to residents with chronic illnesses and other health conditions requiring home care services," said Capital Health board chairman Neil Wilkinson.

The provincial government has pledged \$1.5 million to Capital Health, the University of Alberta and Korea's LG Electronics to co-develop the project over the next three years.

Development includes testing, clinical trials and preparation to commercialize the device, which will allow patients to test their own body temperature, pulse rate and blood pressure at home and transmit the data wirelessly to a health care provider.

Doug Horner, minister of advanced education and technology, said the collaboration will speed up the adoption of new health technologies both in Alberta and around the world.

"It builds on Alberta's priority to encourage growth and commercialization of value-added technologies, and promises to enhance the lives of thousands of people within Alberta's borders, and beyond," Horner said.

Cells can dial up medical help; U of A researchers testing new monitor for faster health care

The Edmonton Journal

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Jodie Sinnema

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Cellphones can hook you up already to music, photos and the Internet, but how about your vital signs? A new project between local researchers and a global electronics company from Korea could soon allow you to test and transmit your temperature, heart rate and blood pressure to a remote nurse using a hand-held device connected to a cellphone.

The University of Alberta and Capital Health are teaming up with LG Electronics to develop a sensor device that would fit in your pocket and, if you're feeling woozy at the shopping mall or flushed on the golf course, let you send your vital signs to a health-care professional for advice and help.

The technology would be especially useful for seniors with limited mobility who have difficulty getting to medical clinics for regular checkups. It would also help those living in remote and northern communities who may have high blood pressure or need monitoring when they start new medications.

Eventually, the research team hopes to target diabetics by developing a device that can monitor also unstable glucose levels and chemicals in the blood.

"That's great," said Ethel Ruller, 72, who goes to CapitalCare Choice Dickinsfield twice a week to have her blood pressure tested and blood samples taken because of a weak heart and lungs. The new technology wouldn't keep Ruller from visiting her friends and doctor at the centre each week, but such a device would give her peace of mind, especially when she gets a headache. Sometimes, the pain is caused by high blood pressure, and if she could test that in her own apartment, she could seek help if necessary.

Starting in January, Bob Haennel, chairman of the physical therapy department at the U of A, will test prototypes of the monitor in university labs before it reaches patients in clinical trials. He envisions a device that's part of a cellphone in the same way that music players or cameras are built in. Patients would carry the phone, then squeeze or insert their fingertips into it when they're feeling ill to have the information sent to a health professional. A cardiac patient facing mild angina might be able to get immediate advice and help if the tool registers unusual heart rhythms or rising blood pressure.

"What happens if I'm not in a hospital?" Haennel asked. "Then I have my heart rate and blood pressure right away. This would be another piece of the health-care arsenal." Lab testing will take at least nine months to make sure the sensors on the device are as accurate as a blood pressure cuff, ear thermometer and electrocardiogram. So far, Haennel said blood pressure has been the most difficult to tally, since the Korean company wants to measure it from a fingertip not the customary bicep, which is more accurate since it's closer to the heart.

"If it's really usable, even guys my age will start using it," Haennel said.

Dr. Kwyro Lee, executive vice-president of LG Electronics, already created and marketed a \$25 US device for diabetics that plugs into a cellphone and transmits blood glucose levels to health-care professionals. Lee said the device isn't yet popular in Korea, but sees Alberta -- where people in rural areas sometimes have difficulty accessing health care in big cities -- as a perfect place to test the new monitor.

"This is unique," Lee said, adding he wants the new monitor to cost \$25 or less. "We cannot find other places where this kind of service is deployed." The device also will reduce the number of visits home-care nurses need to make to check on patients, said Neil Wilkinson, board chairman of Capital Health. That will help with the health-care labour shortage.

"We identified technology and the use of it in caring for patients as a key priority," Wilkinson said. "There is overwhelming potential here to change the way in which health services are delivered." The Alberta government committed \$1.5 million to kick-start the project and move the machine out of the labs.

"Our goal is to make sure the technology doesn't sit on the shelf, but that we bring that technology to the people that need it," advanced education minister Doug Horner said. "This is the kind of technology success story that will give people receiving home care greater security and freedom here in Alberta and eventually in other parts of the world." Brian Heidecker, board chairman of the U of A, said: "We are incredibly confident that this technology will successfully be brought to the marketplace."
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Alberta refuses to cover two arthritis drugs; Ignores Pleas

National Post

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: A8

Section: Canada

Byline: Michelle Lang

Dateline: CALGARY

Source: CanWest News Service

CALGARY - Alberta is refusing to pay for expensive new drugs that treat a crippling form of spinal arthritis, despite pleas from patients who say the therapies allow them to lead a normal life.

The province decided this month against offering Blue Cross coverage of two drugs to treat ankylosing spondylitis, saying the treatments fail to slow progression of the disease.

The decision means Albertans with this form of arthritis have no access to public insurance for a new class of therapies, known as biologics, although the treatments are widely in use around the world.

The news is devastating for such patients as Nick Bourdon, a 21-year-old Calgarian with ankylosing spondylitis who was in a wheelchair until he began receiving biologic treatments through his father's private insurance plan.

The drugs allowed him to walk again, but his treatments are about to come to an end.

Mr. Bourdon is now considered an adult -- too old to receive benefits through his family's plan -- and Alberta Blue Cross won't pay his \$26,000-a-year therapy.

"I found my miracle cure and now there's nothing I can do to get it," said Bourdon, who worries he will end up in a wheelchair again.

"I only have one more treatment left. I don't know what to do after that."

Alberta Health says it turned down applications this month to approve the two biologics -- Humira and Enbrel -- because they weren't proven to be cost-effective or better at treating the disease than existing therapies.

Infrastructure & Transportation

International, Intergovernmental & Aboriginal Affairs

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Seniors & Community Supports

Service Alberta

Solicitor General & Public Security

Sustainable Resource Development

Tourism, Parks, Recreation & Culture

*Miscellaneous Government

It was a long day at the office; Stelmach gets his ups and downs mixed up

The Edmonton Journal

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: A3

Section: News

Byline: Jason Markusoff

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Alberta has long disagreed with Ontario and Quebec on many issues, and Premier Ed Stelmach positioned himself Monday to fight the provinces again on interest rates, to protect Alberta families from costly mortgages.

However, near the end a long day of year-end interviews, the premier seemed to have mistaken up and down.

"There's a lot of push by Quebec and Ontario to do something on interest rates, encourage the governor of the Bank of Canada to increase interest rates," he told The Journal, when asked about upcoming challenges.

"My concern is that we have a number of Albertans that are well (leveraged) in the purchase of their house, and any increase in interest rates will put additional pressure on those families, especially for mortgage renewal."

Indeed, politicians from Central Canada have recently been outspoken on interest rates -- both provinces urged the central bank to reduce them, to ease the burden a soaring loonie had on their manufacturing and export sectors.

The bank did so in early December.

Hiking rates wasn't an idea that crossed Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty's lips, his press secretary said. "Nothing that I can think of. He certainly had been calling on them to cut rates," Chris Morley said Monday.

Stelmach's spokesman, Tom Olsen, clarified matters an hour after the premier's interview.

"He made a mistake," Olsen said.

The premiers will meet with Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Jan. 11 in Ottawa to discuss the volatile Canadian dollar and the economy.

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Dunn will get second auditor general's report done

The Edmonton Sun

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: 4

Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME

Alberta's auditor general is taking up the government's challenge to see if he can save money on printing - but he won't do it by cancelling his planned second report next year.

A Conservative-dominated committee cut \$20,000 out of Auditor General Fred Dunn's budget request last month and suggested the second report wasn't needed.

It came less than two months after Dunn's annual report hammered the government for losing billions of dollars in revenue by not changing its oil royalty program.

Critics were quick to jump on the committee's decision as being political payback and an attempt to muzzle Dunn. But his spokesman said yesterday the AG is taking the committee's comments at face value.

"We're going to go ahead and publish a report in April, and in response to the challenge from the committee we will examine the options for reducing our printing costs," said Lori Trudgeon.

Dunn noted during his annual report's unveiling that much of the auditor's reports from years past received little or no attention, and a second volume would make the amount of information easier to digest.

Hugh MacDonald, the Liberal MLA and chair of the multi-party public accounts committee, said he was glad the auditor general's second report won't be shut down.

"I was very disappointed that the Conservative-dominated committee would try to suppress and delay his next report but thought nothing of spending \$26,000 just a few days later on a publicity campaign to try and convince the public that Bill 46 was in their interests," he said.

"I don't think the government was very happy with this auditor general or with his comments regarding the conduct of the department of energy, and this budget cut was supposed to be a warning shot."

NDP Leader Brian Mason applauded the auditor's decision.

"They were trying to send him a signal that he should stop, and to his credit he's going to put service to the public ahead of embarrassing the Conservatives."

Election*Ousted Tory candidate to run as an independent**

The Edmonton Journal

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: B5

Section: Alberta

Dateline: CALGARY

Source: Calgary Herald; CanWest News Service

CALGARY - Ousted Conservative candidate Craig Chandler announced Monday he will run in the next provincial election as an independent in Calgary-Egmont.

Chandler, who won the riding's Tory nomination battle, but was then told by Premier Ed Stelmach and the party executive he couldn't run under the Tory banner, said the party he once supported has thwarted democracy.

Chandler announced a slate of candidates who would challenge the Tories in other Calgary area ridings, including deputy premier Ron Stevens' riding.

Those vying for legislature seats with Chandler include Jim Blake, national chairman of Concerned Christians Canada, and David Crutcher, the former riding association president in Calgary-Egmont and a Chandler associate.

Chandler to sue Tories; Ousted candidate also plans to run as an independent in next provincial vote

The Edmonton Sun

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY TARINA WHITE, SUN MEDIA

Dateline: CALGARY

Ousted Tory candidate Craig Chandler plans to sue the provincial Progressive Conservative party for rejecting his nomination in Calgary-Egmont and to run as an independent in the next provincial election.

The outspoken candidate's nomination was rejected following a two-hour meeting with the party's executive Dec. 1, based partly on a finding the day before by the Alberta Human Rights Commission that a homophobic letter posted online by a group once headed by Chandler broke provincial human rights laws.

Chandler is also in hot water for stating people moving here should adapt to conservatism or leave.

"I feel my charter rights have been violated," Chandler, 37, said yesterday at a news conference to announce his decision to sue the Tory party and to lodge a human rights complaint in the new year.

"They picked the wrong guy to push aside - they've underestimated me every step of the way."

Chandler also announced yesterday that some of his supporters also plan to run as independents in the next election.

This includes former Calgary-Egmont association president David Crutcher, Concerned Christians Canada national chairman Jim Blake, Chandler's campaign manager Harley Shouldice and associate Sid Helishauer.

"I've lost confidence in the Conservative party," said Shouldice.

"I think it's time for change in Alberta and perhaps independents are the way to create that change."

Accusing the Tory party of being intolerant to people of faith, Chandler, a member of the Pentecostal church, said party executives grilled him about his faith at the meeting early this month.

"It's discrimination - I'm being punished for being honest about what I think," said Chandler.

He said he plans to launch his lawsuit against the Tory party in the new year. He also intends to sue an Edmonton newspaper journalist for defamation.

Sonny Morth, solicitor for the Progressive Conservative Association of Alberta, rejected Chandler's contention of discrimination.

"I don't think he has any basis to sue," said Morth.

"If he did (sue), he would certainly face a vigorous defence."

Columnists

A turkey of an annual tradition

The Calgary Herald

Tue 18 Dec 2007

Page: A16

Section: The Editorial Page

Byline: Graham Thomson

Column: Graham Thomson

Source: The Edmonton Journal

There is a tradition at the Alberta legislature called the year-end interview or "year ender." A time when journalists sit down in intimate sessions with politicians to ask them about the big issues of the old year while looking ahead to the new.

The tradition might be as old as the boilers in the legislature basement, but it is also as artificial as the Christmas tree in the legislative rotunda. The problem for reporters is we put a lot of stock in the interviews, especially those with the premier, and we invariably come away vaguely disappointed.

It is, after all, impossible to stuff 12 months worth of events into a 15-minute sack. Ralph Klein, when he was premier, was wary of the year enders, suspecting reporters were out to trick him into making controversial comments. Knowing Klein, though, we never had to set out traps. He'd happily wander into controversial territory on his own. Premier Ed Stelmach is much more cautious, even when he's in a room for only 15 minutes with a reporter.

On Monday, we paraded into his office throughout the day as if Stelmach was a movie star giving interviews on the opening of his new film.

In his year ender with the Edmonton Journal, Stelmach demonstrated again how he usually knows issues inside-out and backwards.

He can also be warm and funny in person. But one year into his job as premier he still seems nervous whenever a notepad enters the room attached to a reporter. And he still is not particularly good at explaining his position. I'll let you judge for yourself.

One Christmas gift I'll give politicians in their year enders is a chance to make their argument without being edited down to a 10-word quote.

Here, for example, is Stelmach on the issue of climate change and Alberta's intent to store carbon dioxide emissions underground: "There's a fair amount of research now -- there's no sense capturing it in a way that it's going to escape. So what is the appropriate geography, or geology, to capture it. So how deep do we have to go? Is it in shallow gas wells or deep gas? Deep oil? Will it make sense to capture that CO₂, let's say, in the Redwater field, or do we have to pipe it to Medicine Hat? These are all questions, research that's being done today. Once those decisions are made, then the next step is to build infrastructure, because you have to pipe it to those locations. And the efficiency gains, for instance, in the Redwater fields, if you're sequestering and pressurizing the existing oil and wells, you will then draw much more production out of those wells. So there's rather than creating a new footprint someplace in the province of Alberta, drilling a new gas well, we would of course bring about much better efficiency. Because they say, about 60 per cent of the gas is still in the old wells."

And here is Stelmach on getting Albertans interested in saving energy as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions: "We have our own plan which we'll be communicating with Albertans which will include consumer participation. Reducing the draw demand on fossil fuel. Which means also looking at how we can collectively reduce per capita use of electrical energy. There's also things we can do on the consumer side with respect to simple things like washing machines that wash clothes with cold water, use less electricity, less water as well."

Stelmach also talked about providing incentives for Albertans to buy new energy efficient furnaces. Things got a little confusing here because Alberta already has a furnace rebate program that has replaced 5,700 furnaces. It also has a Soak up the Savings program that offers consumers rebates to replace their old clothes washers.

It wasn't clear if Stelmach meant he would introduce new programs that would replace the existing programs. And then at the end of the interview Stelmach made things even more confusing by making a mistake on an issue he raised himself. "There's a lot of push by Quebec and Ontario to do something on interest rates, encourage the governor of the Bank of Canada to increase interest rates. My concern is that we have a number of Albertans well levered in the purchase of their house and any increase in interest rates will put additional pressure on those families, especially for mortgage renewal."

Stelmach said he would stand up for Albertans against Ontario and Quebec at a first ministers' meeting in January. However, Ontario and Quebec do not want to raise interest rates. Stelmach's position was a puzzle until his press secretary explained the premier had simply made an error. Not a big deal, I suppose, but I left the year ender vaguely disappointed. The tradition continues.

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Lyle Oberg a health-care rebel with a cause unfulfilled

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OTTAWA - The small-city Alberta doctor would often sit in bars and commiserate his fate as a rookie MLA doomed to serve as a one-term wonder.

Lyle Oberg often predicted voters would never stomach then-premier Ralph Klein's bloody budget cuts or the plan to starve an ailing health-care system of public funds until it accepted private sector competition.

He was wrong and right.

The 47-year-old Brooks physician will retire from politics next spring as the last of King Ralph's revolutionaries, forced out by Premier Ed Stelmach's gentle warning that Oberg was a one-time minister in his administration.

He served four terms in the Alberta legislature -- so much for being a one-term wonder -- and has been a minister of uneven performance in four portfolios, including his current role as finance minister.

But he never got the health gig he so desperately wanted and leaves politics as frustrated with patient care as he was 14 years ago.

Sitting in an Ottawa restaurant last week on the eve of a finance ministers meeting he was chairing, it took just five minutes into catching up on legislature gossip before Oberg stepped back in time to lament how little has changed in a system that demands an overhaul.

Health care has been frozen in status quo, he argues, a system with a voracious appetite for massive funding increases just to keep service from deteriorating.

Back in 1993, Alberta slashed health budgets to Canada's lowest per capita amount at about \$3.5 billion.

Now, Alberta now has the country's highest spending per person and spends \$12.1 billion on health and wellness.

Yet you won't have to scratch an Albertan very deeply to find someone seriously unimpressed with the struggle to find a family physician, the wait to see one or the packed state of every hospital emergency ward.

He's always been a private sector cheerleader, arguing competition and patient choice were the keys to faster and better treatment in both systems.

To back his contention, Oberg invited me to witness the puff of smoke as a private eye clinic lasered his cornea into 20-20 vision for a cool \$2,000 an eye, almost without a waitlist. Still dazed from the surgery, he was up and arguing he had just experienced proof of an efficiency and excellence the public system could never match.

Yet, Alberta today has fewer private health-care options than Quebec and the lead proponent of greater choice is the B.C. doctor Brian Day, heading the Canadian Medical Association.

Oberg talks of Canada entering the third age of health progress. The symptom and treatment phase gave way to the diagnostics era. Now comes the information age, where patient records and drug performances can be tracked for maximum efficiency and low-impact surgery.

"It's the only system in the world where you walk in, take off your perfectly good clothes and put on a gown with no ass in it," Oberg grins. "Health care is like a medieval castle with a moat around it. Once you get in, the drawbridge goes up and nobody knows what happens inside."

If nothing else, Oberg has been a case study in how a free-thinking backbencher can be fettered intellectually by cabinet duties.

"During your first year in cabinet, you think you can do everything," he recalls. "Then comes the, 'Oh s--t' phase, when you're told you can't do everything. You keep going if you're foolish, which I was on occasion."

True enough, although his worst moments came during the race to replace Klein when he was temporarily suspended from caucus for challenging the premier's leadership and warning opponents he knew where their skeletons were buried. Not that he doesn't have a few of his own. But I digress.

The true blue significance of Oberg's retirement is as the epitaph to Ralph's revolution. Some of the few from the Class of '93 election are dandy MLAs -- yes, that's you Heather Forsyth, Rob Renner and Yvonne Fritz -- but it would take a vivid imagination to see them as the shaker-uppers of the status quo.

It was the young doctor from Brooks who advocated change that distinguished Conservatives so distinctly from their Liberal rivals. The fact he's expected to help Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee testifies to his ideological colours.

Oberg leaves office four terms later as a rebel with a cause unfulfilled.

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