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Children and Youth Services

Province rolls out plan for child-care crunch

The Calgary Herald

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: B4

Section: City & Region

Source: Calgary Herald

Funding - The Stelmach government will roll out its highly anticipated plan for creating 14,000 new child-care spaces across the province today in Calgary.

With many Alberta parents facing a child-care crunch -- especially in Calgary -- Premier Ed Stelmach promised he would create the new spots over three years during the provincial election campaign earlier this year.

The announcement will apply to children aged 12 and younger.

On Thursday, the provincial NDP called on the government to include space for day care and after-school care in all new schools being built.

"There are currently 134 school construction projects in the works in Alberta,"

Edmonton-Strathcona MLA Rachel Notley said in a statement. "With a little leadership, the Conservative government could ensure a lot of day-care spaces are included in those plans."

Culture and Community Spirit

Historic hotel pitched as site of portrait gallery; Architect Gene Dub's bid for national facility would be second to come from Edmonton

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Gordon Kent

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Edmonton could see a second bid to host the Portrait Gallery of Canada after architect Gene Dub said Thursday he'd like to put the facility in a rebuilt Alberta Hotel.

Dub is soliciting community support for the idea, but said he won't know until next week whether he can go ahead, especially with the federal government setting a May 16 deadline to put in proposals.

"We didn't plan to submit, but it would be such a great thing for Edmonton we're giving it some serious thought," he said. "There are all kinds of financial qualifications and various other qualifications I'm not sure we can meet."

Dub has been working for three years on resurrecting the historic four-storey brick hotel, which was taken apart and put in storage in 1984.

He planned to create a boutique inn on temporary parkland beside Canada Place that he's in the process of buying from the city, but said the portrait gallery would have more merit for the site.

"The hotel is approximately the same size as the national gallery requirements. That's what twiggled us on to the fact that ... this would be better for the city than a hotel."

Qualico announced last month it wants to put up a three-floor building for the gallery linked to the 28-storey Epcor Tower being constructed on the downtown Station Lands.

The federal Conservatives scrapped a plan by the previous Liberal government to build a national portrait gallery in Ottawa.

After a proposal to provide space in EnCana's new Calgary office tower fell through last year, the government asked developers in Canada's nine largest cities to put in bids including evidence of significant private sector and community backing.

The collection of more than 20,000 paintings, drawings and prints, four million photographs, several thousand caricatures, and 10,000 medals and stamps now doesn't have a gallery.

The City of Calgary is offering free downtown land for a site and the province has made a \$40-million commitment to support a successful Alberta bid.

Dub said if he doesn't put in a proposal, he hopes to start construction next fall on the hotel, which will also include brick from the demolished Rothesay Apartments and the Tegler Building's decorative balustrade.

"Hopefully, if we don't submit, it will come to the city through the Qualico submission."

John Mahon, executive director of the Edmonton Arts Council, said he'd be happy if either local bidder won the rights to this prestigious project, especially since it uses private financing rather than taking government money from other cultural priorities.

"I'm an old Alberta Hotel fan ... kudos to both of them for being willing to step up to the plate here," he said. "So far, it seems these are the only two bids we have heard of that fit the requirements the federal government asks for."

Education

More Alberta students eligible for the Rutherford Scholarship

Stony Plain Reporter

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: A68

Section: News

Byline: BY THE GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Alberta's scholarship program is expanding with a \$7.3-million investment to the Alexander Rutherford Scholarship.

"Alberta's scholarship program offers the most generous package of non-repayable assistance in the country and I'm especially pleased to enhance a program that is already strong," said Doug Horner, Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

"Our new investment in the Rutherford Scholarship will assist even more high school students in realizing their dreams of a post-secondary education."

The expansion of the Alexander Rutherford Scholarship will now enable students from Grades 10 to 12 to earn up to \$1,500 towards post-secondary studies with an average between 75 and 79.9 per cent.

The current Alexander Rutherford Scholarship, which provides up to \$2,500 over three years to students achieving 80 per cent, or better, remains unchanged.

In addition, the financial award under the Rutherford Scholar program has been increased to \$2,500 from \$1,500.

The Rutherford Scholar honours Alberta's top 10 students graduating from Grade 12.

As a result of the newly expanded Rutherford Scholarship, the application deadline for the program has been extended to June 1.

Overall funding for scholarship programming rises to \$69 million in 2008-09. In 2007-08, roughly \$55 million in scholarships was provided to over 31,000 Alberta students.

For more information on Alberta's scholarship program, please visit:

www.alis.gov.ab.ca

School board upset; Bus driver firing not enough

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 5

Section: News

Byline: BY GLENN KAUTH, SUN MEDIA

A city bus company didn't get a criminal reference check on a driver facing allegations of "inappropriately touching" a kindergarten student, a Catholic school board spokesman said yesterday.

The driver has now lost her job, but that hasn't stopped school officials from sending the bus company, R.L. Smith Transportation, a "strongly worded letter" about the breach of its contract with the board.

"We're very, very concerned that this is a serious breach and that the safety of our kids is always a priority," said board spokesman Lori Nagy.

Gordie Mayes, the owner of R.L. Smith, declined to comment yesterday.

But Nagy said the board learned the company hadn't done the criminal background check or a child welfare check, after it began its investigation into the allegations.

On Wednesday, Mayes told Sun Media that R.L. Smith runs background checks on all of its drivers before they come on staff.

The driver, now under investigation, had been working for the company since February, Nagy confirmed.

The case first came to light Wednesday, after a parent of the six-year-old girl at St. Angela Elementary School in northwest Edmonton came forward with allegations against the driver, who ran a noon-hour kindergarten route.

Officials have said little about exactly what happened, but Nagy said she doesn't believe the touching was sexual.

Police are also investigating the case.

Since learning R.L. Smith hadn't done the background checks, the board has changed its requirements of the company.

In particular, R.L. Smith must now give the board proof it has complied with its contract terms - which state that new drivers have to undergo background checks before they start work - every month.

"The newest piece is that we have verification those checks have been done," said Nagy, who noted that under the previous rules, R.L. Smith only had to submit the information at the beginning of the school year.

"They're the only company that we will be doing this with, but we will be looking into whether to expand that to the other carriers," Nagy added.

Energy

Royalty take called flawed; Small producers claim plan falls short when it comes to exploration investment

The Calgary Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 51

Section: Business

Byline: BY MARKUS ERMISCH, SUN MEDIA

Last month's royalty framework adjustment has failed to ensure continued investment in deep oil and gas exploration, says the Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada.

"The royalty adjustment offered for deep gas and the very narrow incentives offered to deep oil exploration falls far short of what is needed to keep Alberta an attractive and competitive place to invest for the conventional oil and gas industry," SEPAC executive director Gary Leach wrote in a letter to Energy Minister Mel Knight, a copy of which was obtained by the Sun.

"The royalty take for conventional oil and gas under the (new royalty framework) is so high during the initial production period that it eliminates the possibility of achieving a rate of return that will attract investment capital to these exploration plays."

As a result, development of new reserves will fall and production from conventional oil and gas reserves will fall, as investors shift their cash to Alberta's neighbouring provinces.

The letter refers to an adjustment, announced in April, in which the government will spend \$1.2 billion over five years to aid exploration of deep oil and natural gas wells.

In an interview yesterday, Leach said "the royalty policy, we think, should be based on a firmer understanding of the economics to invest in the province over the long term."

As it stands now, the royalty framework "destroys the economics" of deep oil and gas exploration and production, Leach said.

Knight's director of communications confirmed April's announcement marked the end of the "unintended consequence" debate.

"The ministry has made it very clear that this matter is closed," said Jason Chance, noting that Knight will respond to Leach's letter "in due course."

Leach said that although he realizes the government considers the matter closed, "we felt it was important to let the government know how we felt about the outcome."

He said the intent of the letter was to put it on the record SEPAC considers the royalty framework "flawed."

SEPAC sent a copy of the letter to Greg Stringham, vice-president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

Stringham said he considers the program dealing with deep gas "pretty effective," but added he would like additional clarity on how the program applies to deep oil. He said CAPP remains in discussions with the ministry about how these technical issues can be resolved.

Chance said government, through the royalty framework, seeks to balance the needs of industry and the province's taxpayers.

"There is a balance that needs to be struck here with ensuring that Albertans get a proper return for their resources while ensuring that these projects can proceed to go ahead," he said.

"And the province is confident that we've done that."

CNRL blames royalty hike for freeze on new drilling

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: D2

Section: Business

Dateline: CALGARY

Source: Calgary Herald

CALGARY - Canadian Natural Resources won't increase natural gas drilling in Alberta even if prices go higher, its president said Thursday.

Meanwhile, the company's first-quarter profits nearly tripled to \$727 million or \$1.35 a share from \$269 million or 50 cents a share a year earlier. Excluding one-time items, net earnings were \$827 million or \$1.61 a share compared with \$621 million or \$1.15 a share a year earlier.

"That (Alberta's royalty changes) hasn't gone away," CNRL president Steve Laut told the company's annual meeting in Calgary.

"The royalty impact has slowed down development in Alberta. When the conditions are right we can grow gas when we choose . . . when we do do gas, you'll see more in B.C."

Although natural gas prices have climbed from less than \$6 US per million British thermal units at the start of the year to more than \$10 in recent weeks, Laut said the government's royalty changes would take \$3 of the extra \$4.

Gas prices fell about 11 cents in New York Thursday, to close at \$11.22. The company produced about 1.5 billion cubic feet (bcf) per day in the first quarter, down about 10 per cent from 1.7 bcf in the same quarter of 2007.

Despite the reluctance to increase gas drilling, CNRL said it's moving full steam ahead on its heavy-oil program by increasing spending at the Primrose field in eastern Alberta by \$130 million.

Given record crude prices, Laut said the company could afford to pay higher oil royalties. "We think the government got it right on the oil side," he said.

Vice-chairman John Langille said the company remains on track for a third-quarter start-up of the massive Horizon oilsands project, which will deliver 110,000 barrels per day (bpd) in the first phase. Construction to increase capacity to 250,000 bpd is already underway.

Environment

Water permit loss could delay Kearl

The Calgary Herald

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: D4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Jon Harding

Source: Calgary Herald

Lawyers for Imperial Oil Ltd. said the loss of the company's key water permit this late in the game could delay the start of the company's \$8-billion Kearl oilsands project by a year or more.

The timing of the ambitious northeastern Alberta mining venture, in which Imperial is partnered with ExxonMobil Corp., rose to the fore in the second day of a federal court hearing pitting Canada's oldest oil company against a handful of green groups and Ottawa's Justice Department.

"The effect for my client is profound," said lawyer Munaf Mohamed of Fraser, Milner Casgrain LLP, which is representing Imperial in its fight to reclaim a permit issued in February from Canada's minister of fisheries and oceans, Loyola Hearn.

"It took nine months to get this piece of paper. What is significant to the sting of the lash? If we can't commit the (permit) now, (the project) gets pushed out a year or more," Mohamed said, adding there would be additional costs for Imperial associated with a delay.

He also countered Justice Department lawyer Kirk Lambrecht's claim that Imperial had left itself wiggle room to accommodate setbacks and therefore could absorb a short delay without material impact.

"Those contingencies have been used up. It has to start," Mohamed said.

Kearl, a project that could eventually produce 300,000 barrels of bitumen a day, was to be up and running by 2011.

The hearing in Calgary wrapped up Thursday and Justice Douglas Campbell said he would provide a ruling by next Friday.

In a worst-case scenario for the oil company, Campbell could rule the water permit is indeed "a nullity" and the project's environmental review could be sent back to federal cabinet for a new approval.

In a letter dated March 20, the federal Fisheries Department revoked its permit to let Imperial disturb fish habitat while preparing the site of the future open-pit oilsands mine, 70 kilometres north of Fort McMurray.

Campbell was told the timing of the drainage for the site is critical to the months of April and May and without the licence, some of the work might have to be held over to next year.

The federal Fisheries Department licence was pulled after another Federal Court decision reopened Kearl's environmental review process.

In that ruling, Madame Justice Daniele Tremblay-Lamer asked the joint provincial-federal panel that conducted Kearl's environmental assessment to provide rationale supporting its assertion emissions from the project will not significantly impact the environment.

The review panel provided an addendum to its work late Tuesday, which outlined Imperial's plan to mitigate emissions and said its recommendation on the impact from Kearl on air quality had not changed.

The four green groups that requested the judicial review of the panel's work and fought this week for the fisheries licence to be pulled -- the Sierra Club of Canada, the Pembina Institute, the Prairie Acid Rain Coalition and Toxics Watch Society -- said Thursday the panel's addendum failed to answer Tremblay-Lamer's questions.

"They didn't explain why intensity targets -- which will allow emissions to continue to grow -- will ensure the greenhouse gas emissions of an oilsands mine has an insignificant impact on the environment," said Simon Dyer of the Pembina Institute.

PCs denied feds enviro info: Grits

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

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Section: News

Byline: BY JEREMY LOOME, LEGISLATURE BUREAU

The Alberta government whitewashed a presentation to the federal government on the environmental impact of the oilsands, the Official Opposition charged yesterday.

DOCUMENTS

Citing documents obtained by the late Martha Kostuch, a prominent Alberta environmentalist, the Alberta Liberals produced a powerpoint presentation on the province's Mineable Oil Sands Strategy used to brief the federal government. The final presentation excluded some points, including issues raised during First Nations consultations.

They also produced an e-mail suggesting the notes package should not be forwarded to the feds.

Environment Minister Rob Renner said yesterday it's important for Alberta to protect "control over management of our resources." He also said it was natural to make exclusions.

"I don't think it's unusual in the least for powerpoint presentations to be customized, depending on who the audience is," said Renner.

It hasn't affected the province's working relationship with the feds, said Renner. "We work very closely with the federal government, particularly with respect to climate change initiatives and other issues.

"The federal environment minister, Mr. Baird, and I have frequent interactions and we're committed to work together to deal with issues of common concern."

But Liberal Leader Kevin Taft said withholding the nature of oilsands development from the federal government is a recipe for problems.

"How can Albertans trust this government's record on the environment when it doesn't even give the federal government the full information?" said Taft.

That's disingenuous, Renner suggested. There are examples where the federal and provincial standards and approach to environmental protection and reclamation differ greatly, he noted, making it necessary for Alberta to protect its interests.

WORK TOGETHER

"We work together as much as we possibly can but there may be times when we agree to disagree," he said.

Oilsands tailings continue to be a focus of world concern following the death of a flock of migratory ducks that landed on a Syncrude pond in Northern Alberta last week.

By the numbers

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: B2

Section: Cityplus

Source: The Edmonton Journal

- 300: the number of beverage containers that can fit inside the indoor bins
- 1.406 billion: the number of beverage containers sold in Alberta last year
- 3,729: the number of beverage containers recycled every minute in Alberta
- 75: per cent of beverage containers in Alberta are recycled each year
- 74,259: metric tonnes of beverage containers were recycled last year
- \$84.9 million: the amount paid in beverage container deposits last year
- \$13.7 million: processing costs for beverage container recycling last year
- 264,595: barrels of crude oil saved by recycling beverage containers last year in Alberta
- 409 million: aluminum cans were recycled last year
- 309,000: houses in Alberta could be powered for a month with the energy saved from recycling aluminum cans
- 225,000: cubic metres of landfill space is saved by recycling beverage containers

Finance and Enterprise (including Pensions/Insurance)

Permit Key To \$8B Imperial Oil Project; Year Delay At Stake

National Post

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: FP3

Section: Financial Post

Byline: Claudia Cattaneo

Dateline: CALGARY

Source: Financial Post

CALGARY - Imperial Oil Ltd. said in Federal Court yesterday its \$8-billion Kearn oilsands project faces a delay of a year or more if a key permit pulled by the federal government isn't quickly re-instated.

"It took nine months to get this piece of paper," Munaf Mohamed, of Fraser, Milner Casgrain, argued before Justice Douglas Campbell. "What is sufficient in terms of the sting of the lash? If we can't confirm [the Fisheries authorization] this whole thing gets pushed out a year or more."

Canada's largest integrated oil company said it did nothing wrong to cause the withdrawal of the permit by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, but rather that it was pulled as a result of a minor legal error by the panel that did the environmental impact assessment.

The permit, which deals with management of fish habitat, is required to de-water the site of the Kearl project near Fort McMurray so the company can proceed with construction of a dike. The company said it has done as much work as it can without the authorization and has a short window in which to carry out the de-watering work.

Imperial has asked the court to exercise its discretion and uphold the authorization.

Justice Campbell said at the conclusion of a two-day hearing he will rule on Imperial's request by May 16.

The hearing is the latest twist in a complex legal tussle between Imperial and the environmental movement over the Kearl project, which Imperial is developing with its parent, Exxon Mobil Corp.

Four groups -- the Pembina Institute, the Sierra Club of Canada, the Prairie Acid Rain Coalition and Toxics Watch Society of Alberta -- challenged in federal court the environmental impact assessment of a joint federal provincial panel on grounds it did not adequately deal with greenhouse gases.

They succeeded on only one front -- getting the court to ask the panel to provide a rationale to back up their conclusion on greenhouse gases. The request triggered the permit's withdrawal.

Federal government lawyer Kirk Lambrecht told the court the absence of the information was a major flaw that rendered the environmental impact assessment incomplete.

He said the federal Cabinet will have to conduct a new review of Kearl's environmental impact before issuing a new permit. He also argued the new information may lead Cabinet to a different conclusion.

Mr. Mohamed said the cabinet can proceed with another review, as long as its old permit is declared valid.

Sean Nixon, the lawyer for Ecojustice that represented the green groups, said outside the hearing that the organizations are not challenging oilsands projects in the courts to delay them. "They go to the courts to ensure compliance with public law," he said. "We see the courts as an avenue of last resort if the Alberta government and the federal government won't do what they can to control the environmental effects of the oilsands."

CBC shunned after budget error

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: A4

Section: News

Byline: Archie McLean

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - The Alberta government has banned CBC news from media lockups for at least a year, after the national news organization broke an embargo on last month's budget.

Media outlets are routinely granted early access to sensitive documents, such as budgets and policy briefings, in return for agreeing to keep them under wraps for a specified period of time.

CBC violated such an agreement for the April 22 budget when a television reporter made phone calls to the city of Calgary before the finance minister began her speech. No sensitive information made it on air.

"We can reach no other conclusion than CBC is not taking responsibility for their actions and therefore there must be serious consequences for a very serious incident," Roxanna Benoit, the head of the government's public affairs bureau said in a letter to CBC's regional director, Don Orchard.

Orchard acknowledged Thursday that his organization made a mistake and is developing training protocols to make sure it doesn't happen again. He said he's dismayed by the government's response.

"Access to those kinds of meetings is really important for public awareness of the issues in this province. So, we need to be there. I'm disappointed that our honest effort to make sure this kind of thing can't happen again, at least at this point, doesn't seem to be enough."

Orchard said CBC wants to continue talking to the government about the issue and is considering its options.

Health & Wellness

Cancer board looks at private funding; Cash crunch delays new Calgary facility

The Calgary Herald

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Michelle Lang

Source: Calgary Herald

Alberta Cancer Board executives said Thursday they are looking at private financing to build a major new Calgary cancer hospital, sparking controversy among opposition critics and public health advocates who say government should pick up the tab.

Two weeks after the province tabled a budget with no funding for the proposed \$1.1-billion facility, board officials confirmed they are in talks with government to explore models such as a public-private partnership or mortgaging the hospital. The board, which delivers cancer care in Alberta, says Calgary's Tom Baker Cancer Centre has run out of space and the financing options must be considered so the facility can be replaced as soon as possible.

"We are working with government and testing different options," said Dr. Jean-Michel Turc, president and chief executive of the organization, in an editorial board meeting with the Herald on Thursday.

"It needs to happen. Time is against us."

The proposal, however, generated heated debate among groups like Friends of Medicare.

The lobby group argued P3s -- or public-private partnerships where a private company builds a facility and then leases it to the public sector -- cost taxpayers more because the business needs to make a profit on the building.

"A P3 should be out of the question," said Suzanne Marshall, executive director of the organization. "If health care isn't expensive enough now, it certainly will be if they go to private financing."

Alberta Cancer Board wants to build a stand alone hospital located at the University of Calgary's west campus. The board says the price tag for the facility has grown from an original estimate of \$900 million to about \$1.1 billion because of inflationary pressures and construction costs in the city.

Calgary's current cancer facility, Tom Baker, reached capacity in 2003 and officials say they need to begin work on a replacement hospital quickly in order to accommodate patient growth.

The situation has forced the board to move some of its administration and research activities to the Holy Cross Centre, a former public hospital that was sold during public sector cuts in the 1990s.

In December 2005, former premier Ralph Klein pledged to pump \$1 billion into new or expanded Alberta cancer facilities, including the Tom Baker, saying he wanted to make the province a world leader in cancer treatment and research. Klein's government, however, did not follow through on the promise and instead dedicated \$500 million toward a legacy fund for cancer screening and research. Premier Ed Stelmach's government has not committed to paying for a new Calgary cancer hospital either. The recent provincial budget contained no cash for the facility in its capital plans.

Health Minister Ron Liepert was not available for an interview Thursday. Howard May, a spokesman for Alberta Health, said the province is considering the cancer board's request.

The cancer board's Turc said he understands government is facing a long list of requests to build large infrastructure projects as well as growing costs for the projects. Turc said the organization is exploring its options for private financing, which could range from a P3 to a mortgage, to the sale of bonds to Albertans. "All of that is on the table," he said.

The Alberta Liberals said they don't support P3s, arguing the projects cost more money than traditional government buildings in the long run. But Dave Taylor, the party's health critic, said the board likely has little choice in the matter. "We desperately need extra cancer facilities," said Taylor. "The Conservatives have broken their promises (to build a new cancer hospital). It's better this than nothing."

In recent years, several Alberta health authorities have mused about using a private financing model to build hospitals.

Before it received government approval to build a \$1.2 billion south hospital, Calgary Health Region mused about using a P3 to complete the project, which was facing significant cost overruns. At the time, region executives also said they would consider borrowing cash or selling bonds to residents of southern Alberta to raise money.

Although a hospital has never been built in Alberta using a P3, the province is planning to construct 32 new schools across the province under the model. Fifteen of the schools are to be built in Calgary.

Housing and Urban Affairs

Housing starts plunge 56%; Calgary area at lowest level since 1991

The Calgary Herald

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: D1 / FRONT

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Mario Toneguzzi

Source: Calgary Herald

Calgary area housing starts for single-detached homes in April plunged by more than 56 per cent compared with a year ago.

Through a third of the year in 2008, single-detached starts in the Calgary census metropolitan area have not been this low since 1996. And for the month of April alone, this year's number was the lowest since 1991.

"New home sales are competing with a record level of active resale listings in a lower demand environment and this is impacting new home construction," said Lai Sing Louie, senior market analyst in Calgary for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

"This is a very competitive market for new home sales as market conditions favour the buyers. Lower demand is caused by weaker net migration and slower move-up buying is resulting in fewer new home sales."

He said after massive home construction in 2006 and 2007, there are new homes for sale on the resale market that have never been lived in and "that tells you the cleansing of the investor and the speculator leaving the market."

"They're still not out of the market completely," said Louie.

As of Thursday, the Calgary Real Estate Board was reporting on its website active MLS listings for single-family homes in Calgary metro at 6,968 dwellings.

Preliminary figures released Thursday by the CMHC show housing starts in the Calgary CMA for single-detached homes fell to 336 units last month from 769 units in April 2007, a 56.3 per cent decline. Year-to-date, single-detached starts have fallen to 1,403 units this year from 2,486 units last year, a 43.6 per cent drop.

The Calgary CMA includes the city, Airdrie, the Municipal District of Rocky View, Chestermere, Cochrane, Irricana, Beiseker and Crossfield.

Coming off the boom years of 2006 and 2007, the new home construction sector for single-family homes is experiencing a "correction" today, said economist Frank Atkins with the University of Calgary.

"Going back to 2006, people were coming here in droves and so the new housing industry was backed up. They couldn't keep up," said Atkins. "Everyone was saying at the time, there's going to have to be a correction and here we are. I would look at this as a correction, not as a catastrophe."

He said there is no reason to panic because the economy here is still strong.

While the single-detached market continues to decline, multi-family starts remain at a good pace. Multi-family starts, which include semi-detached units, rows and apartments, increased to 760 units this past month from 601 in April 2007, a hike of 26.5 per cent. Year-to-date, they show a 162.3 per cent jump to 4,349 this year from 1,658 units a year ago.

"The growth rate of multi-family starts through the first third of this year will likely pull back as the pre-sales needed for large condominium projects will be challenging in a market that currently favours buyers," said Louie.

In the Calgary region, total housing starts, combining multi-family and single-detached, were down 20 per cent in April (1,096 units) compared with a year ago (1,370). But so far this year, total housing starts have increased by 38.8 per cent over last year, going from 4,144 units to 5,752.

The CMHC said total April housing starts in Alberta's seven largest centres decreased to 2,034 units in 2008 from 3,658 units in April 2007, a plunge of over

44 per cent. Nationally, urban starts in April totalled 17,030 units, down three per cent from a year earlier.

"With growing signs that deteriorating affordability and mounting economic uncertainty are cooling residential real estate markets in many parts of Canada, it's only natural that new home building also moderates," said Robert Hogue of BMO Capital Markets in a research note on the housing starts data.

"While a U.S.-style meltdown is unlikely on this side of the border, the faster decline in singles starts in the past several months is cause for close monitoring." Starts in Alberta have been on a downward trend since early 2007 and stood in April at their lowest since January 2005, said Pascal Gauthier, an economist with TD Bank Financial Group, in a research note.

"This province accounted for much of the elevated level of Canadian housing starts in 2004-06 as it played catch-up with a population inflow, and is now adjusting to a lower, more sustainable level of starts."

- - -

Calgary area April housing starts

	Single-detached	Multiple	Total
April 2008	336	760	1,096
April 2007	769	601	1,370
% Change	-56.3	26.5	-20
Year to date 2008	1,403	4,349	5,752
Year to date 2007	2,486	1,658	4,144
% Change	-43.6	162	38.8

Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

April new home starts down sharply from busy 2007 – CMHC

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: D3

Section: Business

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Greater Edmonton saw new home construction in April plunge nearly 60 per cent from the same time last year, according to preliminary figures released Thursday from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Starts were made on 683 single-detached and multiple-unit homes in the Edmonton census metropolitan area in April, compared with 1,695 in April 2007.

Despite job growth and a strong economy, for the first four months of this year total housing starts fell by 41 per cent from the first four months of last year. The April decline was most dramatic in the single-detached market, where builders poured foundations for only 178 units last month -- a 79.6-per-cent year-over-year plunge from 874 houses started.

"High levels of unsold spec home inventories coupled with an ample supply of resale listings continue to undermine new single-detached construction this year," said Richard Goatcher, CMHC senior market analyst for Edmonton.

The CMHC predicted single-detached starts will rise in the second half of the year when new house inventories fall.

In the multiple-unit segment, starts in April dropped by 38.5 per cent from April 2007.

"Multiple units are expected to cool for the duration of 2008 due to an expected run-up in new condominium apartment inventories and a relatively well-supplied existing condo market," Goatcher said.

Infrastructure

Edmonton airport slated for \$1.1-billion overhaul

The Globe and Mail

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: B7

Section: Report On Business: Canadian

Byline: Norval Scott

Edmonton International Airport has announced it plans to develop a new five-year, \$1.1-billion expansion program that provides more office space, restaurants and services at the facility. In addition, a new air traffic control tower complex will replace the existing building, while a new concourse will also be built, the EIA said yesterday. When completed in 2012, the airport, will be able to serve up to nine million customers a year, from six million currently. Financing has been secured from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority, a non-profit lending group operated by the province, an EIA spokesman said.

Airport changes ready for takeoff; Five-year plan includes \$1.1-billion drive to bring Edmonton facility into modern age

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: D1 / FRONT

Section: Business

Byline: David Finlayson

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Edmonton Airports promises to move you.

From the parkade, through the terminal and to the plane as quickly as possible.

The international airport's new brand "EIA: We'll Move You" was launched Thursday with a video, acrobats, blue T-shirts for staff and CEO Reg Milley promising a fresh commitment to customer service.

"We want people to get through the airport as seamlessly as possible.

Edmonton's changed a lot in the last five years. It's vibrant, bold, risk-taking and really confident, and our focus groups have told us we needed to get with it."

Milley said much is already being done to streamline the operation, with self check-in kiosks, park-and-go pay stations, flow-through counters, and the Nexus technology that allows members to move more quickly through U.S. border clearance.

Also in the works is a common baggage system so no matter where in the terminal you put your bag on a belt, it will get to your airplane. And further down the road new remote long-term parking for 4,000 vehicles with baggage and check-in facilities on the site.

"Edmontonians are sophisticated world travellers," Milley said. "They see what's being done at other airports and they want to see us grow and offer the same services.

"It's not going to be easy, but we're up to it. We have to earn our customers' trust and their business, and that's what the new brand is all about."

The new logo, which features a stylized delta wing soaring on blue airstream, symbolizes both the airport and the city ascending and going forward, Milley said. Blue was chosen because people regard it as a colour they can trust, he said. Unifying the two current baggage systems will be made possible by demolishing the current north terminal office building and NavCanada control tower, and building new facilities on the west side of the terminal adjacent to the current Gate 49.

It was a going to cost more than \$25 million to renovate the 50-year-old office-tower complex and it still wouldn't accommodate NavCanada's new technology, Milley said.

Moving the complex will also make more room for food and beverage outlets, he added.

The new complex will be built as part of the \$1.1-billion, five year expansion which also includes a new passenger concourse, adding 13 airplane gates to the current 17, and more parking. A total of 1,000 new parkade stalls will be completed this summer.

Milley said requests for proposals are currently going out, and he expects to have five-year alliances with contractors in place by the end of June.

The alliances will help keep costs in line and ensure a smooth construction schedule, he said. "The expansion is going to cost \$1.1 billion come hell or high water."

International and Intergovernmental Relations

Alberta eyes other oil buyers, Ed tells U.S.

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 20

Section: News

Byline: BY THE CANADIAN PRESS

If the United States follows through with import restrictions on "dirty" crude, Alberta will simply sell its massive oil reserves to other countries, says Premier Ed Stelmach.

"I'm not warning them, I'm just being frank," Stelmach said yesterday. "I'm just saying that we have options and will continue to pursue options."

The U.S. is preparing to invoke legislation to prohibit federal agencies from buying fuels that are produced with higher greenhouse gas emissions than conventional fuels, including oilsands crude.

Alberta has been lobbying for oilsands fuels to be exempted from the legislation to ensure that the U.S. military and other federal agencies are not prevented from buying them.

Stelmach says he was very clear when he spoke with U.S. political leaders during a trip to Washington in January that Alberta will no longer allow itself to depend primarily on the American market for exports.

"We will expand our markets," he told reporters yesterday. "If that means building a pipeline to the coast and selling oil to another country, we will."

But Stelmach later clarified that it would be up to the private sector to determine if and when a pipeline was built to the West Coast.

"If there's further resource development and other parts of the world are crying for energy, the companies in the pipeline business I'm sure will determine that and make that decision."

Premier counters dirty oil threat

The Calgary Herald

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Jason Fekete

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Calgary Herald

The Stelmach government fended off Thursday the latest attack against Alberta's oilsands, warning the province will look to export energy overseas if an environmental coalition's campaign to U.S. congressmen to prohibit "dirty oil" proves successful.

Premier Ed Stelmach and Alberta's point man in Washington, Gary Mar, maintained the latest attempt in the United States to ban American government agencies from using petroleum from the energy-intensive oilsands will prove unsuccessful.

But the premier delivered veiled threats to the U.S. that if it doesn't want to tap Alberta's oilsands -- the second-largest oil reserves on the planet -- the province and the energy industry can always look to other countries.

Stelmach suggested options included building a pipeline to the West Coast to send the product to Asia.

"We will not only depend on the American market. We will expand markets. If that means building a pipeline to the coast and selling oil to another country, we will," Stelmach told reporters Thursday. "We have options and we'll continue to pursue options."

The premier said Alberta and Canada relied too heavily on exports to the U.S. for beef and lumber, "and look what happened."

Stelmach's energy warnings ignore some basic fundamentals of free trade regulations with the U.S. -- including access to oil and gas -- as well as industry economics. The premier later said it will ultimately be up to companies to decide whether they should build a pipeline to the coast in search of new markets.

"If there's further resource development and other parts of the world are crying for energy, the companies in the pipeline business, I'm sure, will determine that and make that decision," he said.

The premier's tongue-lashing of the U.S. came a day after the Natural Resources Defense Council and 26 other U.S. and Canadian environmental groups sent a letter to members of the U.S. Congress, urging them to rethink the use of oilsands-derived energy.

It also fell barely a week after 500 ducks died in a toxic tailings pond near Fort McMurray -- an incident condemned by the prime minister and environmental groups alike -- and one that undoubtedly stained Alberta's environmental image around the globe.

The latest environmental fight comes from green groups asking Congress not to repeal a section of an American energy bill that would prohibit the federal purchase of unconventional energy sources that produce too many greenhouse emissions, which could include fuels from the oilsands.

"It's sort of sending a message to Alberta and Canada about cleaning up the tarsands," said Susan Casey-Lefkowitz with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "People are saying we want our energy, but not at all costs." Casey-Lefkowitz noted the coalition's campaign isn't to simply halt the flow of bitumen from Alberta to the U.S., but to slow the "out-of-control and irresponsible" development of the oilsands.

Dan Woynillowicz of the Alberta-based Pembina Institute, one of the groups that signed the letter, said restricting oilsands fuels in the U.S. would send a message to industry and government that energy must be developed in a more environmentally sustainable way.

"It's disappointing and contradictory that the (Conservative) government . . . is trying to stand in the way of a legitimate market signal," Woynillowicz said. Stelmach, however, said he's confident "cooler heads will prevail" in the U.S. and that American lawmakers won't blackball the oilsands.

Alberta's envoy to the U.S. agreed, saying all of his discussions with American politicians lead him to believe the new energy bill will not affect the oilsands. Even if there's unforeseen fallout, Mar said China's and India's insatiable appetite for energy won't stop anytime soon.

Municipal Affairs

Cooler heads prevail at regional meeting thanks to smooth chairman; Former ATCO boss manages to keep talks between civic leaders civil

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Scott McKeen

Column: Scott McKeen

Source: The Edmonton Journal

How did Chris Sheard prepare for this mission impractical?

Wrestling giant squid? Racing bullet trains? Felling mighty oaks with a ginsu?

Don't let Sheard's genteel demeanour fool you. The interim chairman of the Capital Region Board is made of tough stuff.

I know this because Sheard chaired this week's inaugural meeting of regional mayors like butter. Hell, the first official motion passed unanimously.

Admittedly, it involved a minor procedural matter. But getting 25 rival mayors to agree on anything but a rumpus is Nobel-worthy.

I've watched a lot of people chair political meetings over the years. It is to herd cats. Feral cats.

Now imagine rabid, mutant cranky-cats from hell. This is Sheard's task -- to make peace between the 20-odd municipalities in the Edmonton region, who have been locked in a decades-long tussle over turf, industry and pride.

Late last year, Premier Ed Stelmach ordered the municipalities to work and plan together. Grumbling ensued, especially from the counties of Sturgeon and Strathcona, who saw Edmonton's imperial ambitions at play.

But Sheard -- once CEO of ATCO; formerly chairman of the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation -- was hired to the rescue as interim chairman, and met every one of the hissing contestants.

It was to his credit that even the Sturgeon and Strathcona mayors -- Don Rigney and Cathy Olesen, respectively -- spent an entire meeting this week in the same room as Stephen Mandel, with nary a dagger drawn.

A lax chairman could have lost the room. A rumpus was only one sarcastic remark away.

How did Sheard keep the peace? First, by appealing to everyone's better instincts. He opened with a monologue of hope and promise for a better region.

Second, by subtly pointing out who called them together, Premier Ed Stelmach.

Third, by reminding the mayors of their sworn duty. This duty, writ in new provincial legislation, now extends past municipal borders. Mandel, Olesen, Rigney et al., are now considered officers of the capital region.

As Sheard reminded them, the fortunes of the other are now the concerns of all. If the region gets this right, all boats will rise on the tide.

But Sheard also allowed few openings for dissent. He allowed for little discussion of procedure or process. He set meeting dates. He set the agenda.

"I think the task ahead of us would be extremely difficult if the chair continually bowed to the wishes of the vocal members of the board, particularly on matters of process," Sheard told me later.

"At this point in the board's life, I think it's critical that it have someone who relieves the members of the dissension that occurs (in) dealing with process matters."

In other words, better the individual mayors be angry with him than each other.

"Exactly," said Sheard. "I'm not seeking re-election and I'm only on a short-term contract. So I have the ability to do what is best for the group, without having to put everything to a vote."

The mayors did allow themselves to worry collectively about the red-tape and delays to municipal growth if major developments must be reviewed and approved by the regional board. Sheard is not worried. The problems can be worked out, he said.

Yet at some future meeting the stuff will hit the fan. It is inevitable. Either Edmonton will lose a vote, or use its veto to kill some other municipality's ambitions.

Things will get nasty. Daggers will be drawn. A rumpus will loom.

No amount of tough stuff -- no amount of wrestling, racing or felling -- will matter.

But Sheard, I suspect, will work a miracle at that point. With one phone call, the premier will appear. And purring will break out.

Regional board meets; Focusing on four priority areas to create growth plan

Fort Saskatchewan Record

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 3

Section: News

Byline: BY CONAL MACMILLAN, RECORD STAFF

The new capital region board met Wednesday for the first time since Premier Ed Stelmach imposed it on the region in December.

Though the premier originally indicated the first meeting was to take place early this year, that was pushed back because the provincial election delayed the government's official creation of the board. Recommended in last fall's Radke Report, the board is made up of the top elected official from each of the 25 municipalities in the capital region, including Fort Saskatchewan, Bruderheim, Lamont and Gibbons.

The board's mandate, as laid out in the legislation, is to develop a regional growth plan focusing on four priority areas - land-use, transit, housing and geographic information systems (GIS).

Interim committee chair Chris Sheard has created five committees within the board; four of which are dedicated to each priority area with the fifth dedicated to governance, Fort Saskatchewan Mayor Jim Sheasgreen said Wednesday after returning from the morning meeting.

Sheasgreen said he put his name forward to be a member of the land-use and housing committees but added that Sheard will decide how many and who are on what committee based on interest expressed.

"He's probably got more interest and more names than what might be considered a workable number for a committee," Sheasgreen said.

It's expected Sheard will have the committee members chosen before the end of next week, he added. However, the chairs of each committee have been selected. Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel (land-use), St. Albert Mayor Nolan Crouse (transit), City of Leduc Mayor Greg Krischke (GIS), Leduc County Reeve Marvin

Molzan (housing) and Strathcona County Mayor Cathy Olesen (governance) will all chair a committee.

Once the committees start to develop plans in their area and motions start to come forward to the board, a vote on each motion won't occur until the following meeting in order to give municipalities a chance to consider and discuss it with their council, Sheasgreen said. Nonetheless, municipalities that don't attend a meeting where a vote takes place will be deemed to have voted in favour.

Sheasgreen said the board will be meeting at least once each month with the committees meeting more frequently in between.

The board is free to add areas outside the four priorities to its plan if they have the time. Sheasgreen said the board is considering three potential add-ons: solid waste management, wastewater and potable water.

The board has until the end of March 2009 to complete the regional growth plan and submit it to the province.

Solicitor General & Public Security

Lindsay is shocked

Stony Plain Reporter

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: A1

Section: News

Byline: BY CHANDRA LYE, STAFF WRITER

Stony Plain MLA and Alberta's Solicitor General, Fred Lindsay was tasered last week at RCMP K Division in Edmonton.

"I was at the RCMP headquarters for a meeting with the commissioner," Lindsay explained. "The Emergency Response Team was giving us a demonstration on some of the weaponry that they deploy under certain circumstances and the Taser is one of them . . . one thing led to another and we decided to be the guinea pigs."

RCMP Commissioner William Elliott and parliamentary assistant Rob Anderson also took part.

"It was very intense pain, obviously, during the period of deployment of the weapon," Lindsay said. "The other thing that surprised me was within seconds after the deployment the pain is gone away."

He said he felt it was important for him to have a full understanding of the tools used in law enforcement.

"Being the person responsible for putting guidelines in place in the province and of course, supporting the use of the Taser under the right conditions it was important that I have a good understanding of how the tool works. I'm convinced

it's a very effective tool, not only to protect the aggressor but to protect the policeman or woman and the public."

According to Stony Plain RCMP Const. Barb Roy some members are also tasered during training, as well as pepper sprayed, so that they know how it feels to be on the receiving end.

Roy said tasered officers can remember the pain, but it doesn't compare to pepper spray.

"It's not like the pepper spray, where the pepper spray stays with you forever."

"A demonstration is done during training," Roy explained, "and one person from the troop is tasered, but they are not trained at depot." She said that taser training was done by division.

Lindsay said the Taser was "a great alternative" in the right conditions.

"It certainly incapacitates you while it's being deployed. In my mind there is no way that you could take any kind of aggressive action while that tool is being deployed."

Lindsay also confirmed that the time of deployment of the stun could be altered.

"The standard deployment is five seconds and it can be increased if necessary."

***Miscellaneous Government**

Tories eye election reform; Stelmach government accused of silencing dissent

The Edmonton Journal

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Archie McLean, With files from Jason Markusoff, The Edmonton Journal

Dateline: EDMONTON

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

EDMONTON - The Alberta government is considering changes to campaign finance laws that would effectively mute groups such as Albertans for Change, which ran high-priced attack ads during the March election, says Premier Ed Stelmach.

The legislation would also bring party leadership races under the umbrella of campaign finance laws, a move that was loudly demanded by critics during the 2006 Tory leadership campaign.

Stelmach said he would like to introduce the legislation as a package this fall. He was unclear if the legislation would ban third-party spending or simply put limits on it.

"It's something that really piqued my curiosity during this last campaign, though I believe the strategy backfired on whoever came up with the idea," Stelmach said of the campaign.

Albertans for Change was a union-backed effort that ran splashy election advertising attacking the government's record. The ominous voice accusing Stelmach of having "no pla-a-a-n" was easily the most recognizable refrain of the campaign.

The exact cost of the ads -- which were supported by the Alberta Building Trades Council, the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta and the United Nurses of Alberta -- has never been made fully clear, but estimates have pegged it at more than \$2 million, more than double the NDP and Liberal budgets combined.

AFL president Gil McGowan accused Stelmach and the Conservatives of trying to muzzle opponents with the new laws. "This is a disturbing development and it doesn't bode well for democracy in this province," McGowan said. "He's just trying to shut down the voice of the labour movement as a voice of dissent on the left."

NDP Leader Brian Mason said it's unfair that unions could outspend his party on TV ads by a more than 10-to-one margin.

"The main conversation that took place in the election was not between the opposition parties and the government -- it was between Albertans for Change and the government," Mason said. "And I think that had a serious impact on the election."

Mason, who has pushed for new campaign finance laws, wants Stelmach to ban corporate and union donations and implement a system of public campaign financing, as the federal government and some provinces have done.

Stelmach has shown little enthusiasm for the idea.

Liberal Leader Kevin Taft said the Albertans for Change ads may have hurt his party.

"We had nothing to do with that spending whatsoever," Taft said. "And yet, on the doorsteps, we were often getting lectures about how 'You guys are running those terrible attack ads on Ed Stelmach.' So we got dragged into it."

While Albertans for Change was essentially delivering the same message as his party, Taft said their involvement could set an ugly precedent.

"I mean, they've opened the door now. What's to prevent next time any group from advancing all kinds of extreme views? I think we have to think that through."

Duff Conacher, co-ordinator of Ottawa-based Democracy Watch, said Alberta remains a laggard in Canada in implementing election campaign finance reforms. He praised the province for considering a ban on third-party advertising, which the Supreme Court has said is constitutional.

Federal rules cap the total amount of third-party spending at roughly \$172,500 for national campaigns.

Conacher, like Mason, also called for a ban on union and corporate donations.

"If you believe in one person, one vote, you should be limiting what any one person can spend in politics," Conacher said.

Stelmach and his Tory leadership opponents faced strong criticism for not disclosing all the donors to their campaigns, which under current laws they were under no obligation to do.

Some candidates, including current cabinet minister Ted Morton and former minister Lyle Oberg, have never disclosed any of their backers.

Stelmach also came under attack -- and was investigated by Alberta's ethics commissioner -- for offering "exclusive" access to people willing to pay \$5,000 to attend private soirees that were intended to raise money to pay off leadership debts. Stelmach quickly cancelled the private receptions after they were reported by the media.

"Alberta has the best provincial premier in government that secret money can buy," Conacher quipped. "That's both undemocratic and unethical."

With the Liberals and NDP facing possible upcoming leadership races, the timing of Stelmach's changes come at a politically opportune time.

"I don't plan on going anywhere for the next four years," Stelmach said. "But others may."

Columnists/Editorial & Comment

Ed fed up with UN; Kyoto-compliance bullying undeserved in face of Alberta's efforts in Afghanistan

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH, EDMONTON SUN

Column: The Province

It comes winging out of nowhere, posted on an obscure United Nations website: Shape up or they will ship us out - and Stephen Harper and Ed Stelmach have five weeks to do it.

Maybe even less.

The document is written in a weird and garbled English that only a UN bureaucrat fermented in the juices of his own bullspit could fully understand.

They're the most useless bureaucrats in the world, by the way, because they report to no real politicians.

But they threaten us with "consequences" if we don't knuckle under and give the Kyoto protocol's Compliance Committee what it is demanding: A national registry of greenhouse gas credits.

We could be declared in "non-compliance" and ordered to submit a plan to address the problem within a three-month deadline.

But worst of all, we could be banned from international carbon credit trading and effectively kicked out of Kyoto.

There's not a dry eye in the house down at the Alberta legislature. Premier Ed Stelmach speaks for many.

"We have taken action," he says. But first, he wants to take reporters on a trip down memory lane when Jean Chretien ruled the land, mainly on a program of Alberta bashing.

"It was signed by a prime minister who did not consult with the provinces," Stelmach spat. "And did not consult with his own cabinet members."

He just flew off to Africa and sighed the deal being pushed by a bunch of Euro-trash countries who had no consequences. Then, for 10 years, did nothing about it.

"And now we're playing catch-up."

But Steady Eddie has another bone to pick with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon before he gets too far down Intimidation Alley.

"Does it bother me a bit?" the premier continued. "Yes, it does."

An interesting letter falls into my hands. It's from the Great Moon Pie himself, to his Security Council bosses.

It contains a report from NATO secretary general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, where the western world's No. 1 warlord provides the Security Councillors an update on the International Security Assistance Force - the pointy end of the stick that's under UN orders to bring peace and love to Afghanistan. Things aren't going well, de Hoop Scheffer laments.

"Opposing militant forces have continued their attempts to disrupt, frustrate and destroy the process of establishing peace and security in Afghanistan."

He talks about "asymmetric tactics" (roadside bombs) and southern and eastern regions where "reported activity continues to be the highest."

He specifically identifies how enemy activities are "focused on disrupting ISAF movements along Highway 1."

Later today, the latest victim of these "asymmetric tactics" comes out of the back end of a Canadian Forces transport in Trenton, Ont.

There will be bagpipes and tears for Cpl. Michael Starker, the 83rd Canadian who has given his life in Ban Ki-moon's war - a disproportionate number of which are Alberta-based soldiers. The Calgary paramedic is described as a "good man," a reservist call-up who "made a choice to make the world a better place."

That's what Stelmach means when he says it "bothers" him when UN snapheads try to heavy Albertans and start imposing deadlines.

"At the same time, we're protecting the backs of the Americans in Iraq," the premier said. "And we're in Afghanistan."

Southern and eastern Afghanistan, to be precise.

"And we just lost another soldier. We're there because of the United Nations' request for peace," he continued, praising Canadian Forces members for "maintaining peace, order and hoping to rebuild Afghanistan during this critical period."

"While at the same time, I haven't heard of too many countries lining up to follow Canada's lead and our sacrifice in Afghanistan."

That's including the Euros, who are so keen to push Kyoto on Canada and Alberta.

"That's why I personally have some of these issues with the United Nations," the premier snapped.

Especially when considering Finance Minister Iris Evans booked revenues of \$92 million for "climate change and emissions management" in her budget.

"It's working," Stelmach says of Alberta greenhouse gas plan.

But the UN still wants to make mischief.

Bring back smoking rooms

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 10

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH

Column: Editorial

The trouble with zealots is they almost never think about the consequences of their zeal.

And there was no bigger caped crusader than Edmonton Tory MLA Dave Hancock during his brief stint as Ed Stelmach's health minister.

Last November, Hancock hailed his Tobacco Reduction Act as an "important part of our government's wellness agenda."

The legislation banned smoking from all "public places and workplaces" in the province on January 1.

The jury is out on whether Dave's Directive has actually done what it's supposed to - cut the number smokers.

Iris Evans's finance department beancounters certainly don't think so.

Evans's recent budget documents predict tobacco tax revenues will go up another \$20 million again this year to \$890 million, with similar increases in 2009 and 2010. So much for Hancock's wellness agenda.

It's also ironic that while Hancock was on his high horse, his successor, Ron Liepert, admitted in the legislature this week that he took two Calgary Stampede

freebies offered by a chewing tobacco company and the Alberta PC party accepted over \$5,000 in donations from the same outfit.

Liepert dismissed opposition Liberal badgering, saying: "Neither time did I chew." Whether Dave's butt ban actually cuts smoking is obviously a work in progress. But it's driven smokers outdoors.

Large clusters of puffers now form around office entrances most working days, and outside bars and bingo halls at night since the ban went into effect.

And they are creating one heck of a mess, Capital City Clean-up program manager Don Belanger revealed.

Up to 35% of the small trash collected is now made up of butts, he said.

This problem hardly existed when smokers puffed in sealed, ventilated smoking rooms.

Now that Liepert is in charge, is it time to lighten up? Let the nicotine addicts back into smoking rooms where they only have themselves to harm.

Are you into hearing strong words? Just say Kyoto investigation to Premier Ed. That's when an allegiance to our bravest men and women shows through

The Calgary Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 5

Section: News

Byline: BY RICK BELL

Column: Page Five

Ed is not happy.

In fact, Premier Ed is not shy about telling us he is actually miffed with the United Nations right about now.

You see, this week we find out Canada is being investigated by the enforcement branch of the UN's Kyoto Protocol for allegedly failing to meet a deadline set up for reporting greenhouse gases and our country is threatened with suspension from carbon trading.

As you also know, at the same time as the news of the UN probe, Canadians are serving and being wounded and dying on the front line of the UN-sanctioned, NATO-led mission in Afghanistan and, on Tuesday, the Taliban ambushed a patrol and shot and killed Cpl. Michael Starker, a full-time Calgary paramedic and a reservist medic with 15 Field Ambulance.

When Ed is asked about the UN announcement, he abandons his usual restraint. "They're maintaining peace, order and helping to rebuild Afghanistan during this critical period," he says of Canadian soldiers who have given their all in that faraway land, including, for some, their lives.

"That's why personally I have some issues with the United Nations when it comes to pressing our federal government. I haven't heard too many countries lining up following Canada's lead in our sacrifice in Afghanistan.

"Does it bother me a bit? Yes, it does. Because at the same time we're protecting the backs of the Americans in Iraq. We're in Afghanistan. And we just lost another soldier."

As for those stateside, Ed is also not amused by all the chatter south of the border about dirty oil.

He says if the U.S. of A. doesn't want our black gold, there are plenty of other buyers elsewhere "crying for energy."

"We will not only depend on the American market. We will expand markets and if that means building a pipeline to the coast and selling to another country we will. That's no warning, I'm just being frank. I'm just saying we have options and we'll continue to pursue options."

While Ed is worked up, he takes a swipe at carbon trading, where those who go over their cap on emissions buy credits from those don't.

He says no way and no how is he spending Alberta money to buy credits from other countries and he sure isn't buying them from other provinces.

"I assure you I'll fight any inter-regional transfer of wealth," says the premier.

Yes, Ed, who often answers in very long sentences resembling the verbal equivalent of a snakes-and-ladders game, pops up with a one-liner or two.

When asked if he's comfortable trading with countries having poor human rights records, such as China, he responds: "Do you shop at Wal-Mart? Zellers? Check your lawn furniture and look where it's made."

But the questions return to oil and Ed's expectations environmentalists will continue to go after Alberta.

And sure enough, on Wednesday, Greenpeace sends a letter to Ed and asks for a meeting with him, a proposed chinwag to include Mike Hudema, one of three people hit with a trespassing ticket after a stunt at the premier's recent dinner speech in Edmonton.

Remember?

Two Greenpeace protesters dropped from a catwalk high above the floor where a crowd was listening to Ed.

The duo unfurled a banner.

It read: Stelmach, The Best Premier Oil Money Can Buy.

They were apparently unaware it was not long ago when some of those with oil money were calling Ed all kinds of names, comparing him to Venezuelan leftist leader Hugo Chavez and predicting the end of Alberta as we know it because the premier increased the province's take of royalties.

The escapade reminds this columnist of the time six years ago when Greenpeace types climbed on the roof of Ralph's house here in Calgary and started putting up solar panels until the cops showed up.

Almost everybody sympathized with Ralph, some in colourful lingo. Greenpeace also followed Ed around during the election campaign. On the big day, Ed's party won 72 out of 83 legislature seats. There weren't a whole lot of votes supporting stopping the oilsands altogether, as Greenpeace wants.

That's probably because halting the oilsands would throw the province into economic shock. I know, it's a small detail.

Now, Greenpeace says it wants to discuss the death of the 500 birds in the Syncrude tailings pond and the provincial government investigation Greenpeace already doesn't like.

Of course, they know Ed won't meet with them and they can now say the premier is a lapdog of an oilpatch that doesn't like him a whole lot.

Sure enough, the premier's people say yesterday there will be no meeting. Greenpeace has already dropped in once.

Pushover nation; Canada unable to monitor people who show up on our shores

The Edmonton Sun

Fri 09 May 2008

Page: 11

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY MINDELLE JACOBS

In a bombshell decision more than 20 years ago, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that anyone who sets foot on Canadian soil is entitled to protection under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Fast-forward to this week's report by Auditor General Sheila Fraser that revealed the authorities can't find 41,000 foreigners who were ordered deported.

Another report, another dismal portrait of what a pushover Canada is when it comes to properly assessing and monitoring people who show up on our shores.

As usual, Fraser was refreshingly direct in her remarks. "If people can come into the country and stay here illegally, why would they go through what was a very long and complicated process to become a resident in Canada," she asked rhetorically during a news conference Tuesday.

Why, indeed? Canada has the largest immigration and refugee intake per capita of any country. Over the years, the word has spread that once you're in Canada it's virtually impossible to be booted out.

No wonder refugees and economic migrants are pouring in by the thousands. Not only do we hold the door open for decent, honest foreigners, we even put out the welcome mat for known criminals.

As Fraser outlined in her report, people who are considered inadmissible are allowed to enter Canada on a temporary basis if it's of economic benefit to the country or there are humanitarian or compassionate grounds.

CRIMINALS

More than 600 temporary resident permits were issued by the Canada Border Services Agency in 2006 to people who were inadmissible for "serious criminality."

And in four of those cases, officials actually granted temporary resident permits to foreigners who were flagged as risks to national security.

Of course, there are no exit checks in Canada so the authorities have no idea whether these potentially dangerous people left the country when they were supposed to.

Shucks, Canadians are so nice we can't bear to be mean to anybody. But shouldn't we be dialling down the charm a bit and beefing up safety rules? Sure, we've got about 12,000 foreigners in detention because of security concerns. But what about the tens of thousands of other illegals -- mostly failed refugee claimants -- who've disappeared off the radar screen over the years? "The precise number of people remaining in Canada illegally is impossible to determine due in part to the lack of exit controls," Fraser noted.

Perhaps the Supreme Court would have ruled differently in 1985 if it could have foreseen the problematic consequences. The ruling granted refugees greater rights to have their claims heard. But it also interpreted section 7 of the charter, which guarantees "everyone" the right to life, liberty and security of the person, to include anyone physically present in Canada.

In one fell swoop, the court gave foreign nationals the same charter rights as Canadians.

"It wasn't intended to apply to everyone," says former diplomat Martin Collacott. "But someone in a burst of enthusiasm thought it sounded so much more generous and so much more Canadian to say it applies to everyone."

The 1985 Supreme Court interpretation of section 7 needs a serious review and Canada needs to set up computerized exit checks like the U.S. is planning, he says.

"The refugee system is arguably one of the most dysfunctional in the world," Collacott adds. "Once you land in Canada ... you've got a good chance of staying here forever whether or not we want you, need you or whether you're a threat to us."