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## Agriculture and Rural Development

### Alberta seed-potato growers to get \$23M in government compensation; Crops 'down to a fraction' of volume before 2007 ban by U.S., Mexico

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: F1 / FRONT

Section: Business

Dateline: EDMONTON

EDMONTON - Alberta seed-potato growers who had their valuable export business shut down by a soil pest will get up to \$23.5 million in compensation from the federal and provincial governments.

The U.S. and Mexico banned all Alberta seed potatoes last October after the potato cyst nematode was found at two Edmonton area farms.

The borders were reopened in March, in time to plant this year's crop, but Alberta's 60 producers had lost an estimated \$35 million in sales, according to Potato Growers of Alberta.

Ernie Van Boom, one of the farmers hit by the pest, called the announcement encouraging, but said he'll reserve judgment until he sees a cheque.

"It's been very tough for us. We're down to a fraction of what we've grown in the past.

"Government people are still crawling all over my land, and all the results have been negative. They only found half an egg sac the first time, and I'm beginning to wonder about the science. It looks like they are just trying to make a good impression on our trading partners, and we're feeling like the martyrs."

Van Boom said he had to find other land this season because he's still not allowed to use any of his 500 acres or the Fort Saskatchewan farm infrastructure.

Both affected farms had to destroy their crops.

"This is a much-anticipated announcement," PGA executive director Edzo Kok said.

"Potato seed growers have been anxiously awaiting this compensation."

Alberta produces half of Canada's seed-potato exports to the U.S.

The pest, an invertebrate roundworm, reduces crop yields by up to 80 per cent but isn't harmful to humans.

It can be easily spread through the transportation of infested soil, wind or floodwaters.

It was the first instance of the pest at a seed-potato farm in North America, although it has appeared at commercial potato farms in B.C., Quebec, Newfoundland, Idaho and New York state.

The money, split 60-40 by Ottawa and the province, will help potato growers cover costs not covered under other programs, including disposal of genetic plant stock, cost of destroying inventory and loss of export market.

## Live testing for BSE in cattle on horizon

Taber Times

Wed 06 Aug 2008

Page: B4

Section: News

Byline: Ric Swihart

Source: ALTA Newspaper Group, LP

Live testing for bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle is near, science which could significantly alter the cattle-testing policy in Canada, according to Alberta Agriculture Minister George Groeneveld.

In the face of a shift in BSE testing that could reduce the active search for the disease and shift more of the testing costs to producers, Groeneveld said when live animal testing is introduced, Alberta and Canada will have to consider options to maintain safe, quality beef.

Meanwhile, Groeneveld is pointing a new agriculture industry agency just created toward the issue of cattle testing.

Many within the livestock industry oppose significantly increased or mandatory animal testing for BSE, claiming the monitoring system used by Alberta and Canada that exceeds the number of animals tested to meet the international OIE guidelines is sufficient.

Groeneveld said he knows agencies are discussing ways to tweak the BSE testing system, and withdrawing government funding is one topic. "You can't say that would be right or wrong."

If that funding goes, the cost of testing would fall back to the cattle industry.

Regardless of cost or frequency of testing, Groeneveld likes the concept of testing to assure Canada's beef quality and safety. "Personally, I wonder why we didn't start testing earlier in the game."

He said consumer confidence in the nation's beef is vital. Marketing is what makes the industry tick.

He points to the failed Ranchers' Beef slaughter plant near Balzac. One of the key factors in its demise was its inability to implement individual animal BSE testing, something it felt would open up global markets sooner.

Groeneveld said that is one of the ticklish questions the new agency, manned by an appointed board of directors, will be reviewing, and making recommendations to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.

He said food safety is front and centre for his department and the Alberta government "as it should be."

He said in Alberta and Canada, there is BSE in the cattle herd, but the disease is under close scrutiny.

Since BSE was first diagnosed in central Alberta in 2003, the testing program has done a job of keeping the beef of affected animals out of the human food chain.

Since then, the agent that causes BSE was ordered removed with the specified risk materials that carry it. And still another major policy evolved -no beef animal parts can be used as protein source in cattle rations, thought to be one of the vehicles for the disease to reinfect other cattle.

## Education

### Private school funding increase an 'elitist' move say Liberals

Fast Forward Weekly

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: 6

Section: News

Column: News Notes

The **Alberta Liberals'** health critic is calling the recent funding increase to privately funded accredited schools a further step towards privatization.

**Liberal** MLA **Harry Chase** calls the move "elitist" and says it will only serve to further undermine Alberta's public school system, which is still reeling from budget cuts in the mid-'90s.

"I do have concerns that whatever financing goes out of the public taxpayers' pockets to prop up private schools comes at the expense of public schools," says **Chase**.

Provincial funding for accredited private schools will increase to \$117.7 million from \$109.7 million and will go into effect for the 2008-09 school year. Private schools will now be eligible for Alberta Initiatives for School Improvement grants for operations and maintenance.

As part of the agreement, private schools will be required to follow the same core curriculum as public schools, employ Alberta-certified teachers and have students write provincial achievement tests. Alberta Education must also monitor the schools. The measures will act as a check-and-balance system says Alberta Education spokesperson Kathy Telfer.

Public schools saw their budgets slashed by 12 per cent in the mid-'90s as part of the Conservative government's effort to eliminate the provincial debt. According to Chase, they've never recovered, and unless Calgary's public schools receive a large injection of money, their infrastructure deficit will soon reach \$1 billion. According to Telfer, the Alberta government's investment in education is the highest in the country and it remains a priority. "Over the last 10 years, investment into public education has gone up 85 per cent," says Telfer. "The government continues to invest in public education, but it also believes in choice." While he has no problem with private schools existing, Chase says taxpayer money should be going towards public schools because of their inclusiveness. Private schools, he argues, emphasize people's differences, while public schools bring people together.

"Public schools don't provide any filters or screening processes," says Chase.

"That's the strength of the public system in that it's universal. It opens its doors and embraces students regardless of their ability to pay, culture or religion."

"One of the challenges private schools have faced is attracting teachers to teach in their schools," says Telfer. "In order to make sure that their children get a good quality education you want to attract good teachers."

There are 193 private schools in Alberta. Of that, 127 are accredited. Enrolment for private schools in the province is about 3.5 per cent of the total student population.

## Rare exemption clears way for school; Cabinet overrides appeal board ruling on Terwillegar Heights

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Darcy Henton

Dateline: EDMONTON

The provincial government took a rarely used step to override a development appeal board decision that threatened to delay construction of a proposed school in south Edmonton.

Cabinet approved a regulation this week that exempts the Terwillegar Heights public school from the Municipal Government Act to ensure the school -- one of nine public-private partnership schools planned for the city -- opens as scheduled in the fall of 2010.

The school was proposed to be built in Education Minister Dave Hancock's riding, but it lost its development permit after local residents, who complained they hadn't been properly consulted, took their concerns to the city's subdivision and development appeal board.

Alberta Education spokesman Cathy Telfer said the unusual intervention was required because the 850-student school is desperately needed.

"It was exceptional circumstances. It allows us to remain on track and bring these schools in on time."

She said the number of families with school-age children in the area increased from four to more than 950 in the past decade.

"We've seen massive growth and it continues to grow."

Jerry Ward, a spokesman for Alberta Municipal Affairs, said before making the move, the government met with local residents to address concerns about traffic and parking.

"There was a community information meeting last Thursday and the feedback we received was positive."

While the cabinet order was not common, it was not unprecedented, Ward said. Similar orders have been used to bypass rules to build a francophone school in St. Albert, the northeast Edmonton medical clinic, the Calgary Court Centre and the Calgary Saddledome.

Ward said it was in the public interest to invoke the measure.

"This area obviously needs a school to serve six communities," he said. "It would be late if this exemption was not granted."

The project, located west of Rabbit Hill Road and 23rd Avenue, was in danger of falling behind schedule after a group of 18 local residents won the surprising victory on a technicality.

The board ruled against the public-school project July 25, saying it contravened a 2003 neighbourhood area structural plan that called for a Catholic school on that site.

The public and separate school boards had switched sites for their respective schools, but the plan had not been amended to show it.

The company hired by Alberta Infrastructure to design the schools, ACI Architecture Inc., would have had to seek leave to appeal the decision to the Alberta Court of Appeal or seek a city council amendment of the neighbourhood area plan.

The local residents, who aren't opposed to having a school built on the site if it's done properly, were surprised to discover that cabinet issued an order that

supercedes the development board decision. They are uncertain of the consequences of the action.

"I am not very happy with the order-in-council," said Len Leiman. "I am concerned because I am not sure what will happen."

Under the original plan, the two-storey school building would have been metres from Leiman's property, but if the builders follow through with their promised revisions, it will be moved 50 to 75 metres further away.

The developers have also pledged to move the school parking lot towards adjacent commercial businesses and away from homes.

Leiman said those amendments to the development, if carried out as promised, will satisfy his concerns.

Sharmayne English, a mother of two preschool children, led the development appeal with her husband, Jordan. She is also worried about what effect the cabinet order will have on the school project in the long term.

"I was a little surprised they would take such an extreme measure, but since the appeal, we're entering into a relationship of trust with them," she said.

"Whether that's naive or not, I don't know. I would prefer to think it's optimistic. Whether we will regret it in the future, time will only tell."

She said the province, school board and developers have done everything right since the appeal and have now taken the steps they should have taken at the beginning of the process to include residents in their plans.

"Judging from the new design they put forth and their actions since the appeal, we're pretty comfortable that they won't abuse this extreme measure," she said.

"I don't think you can make all the residents happy, but they've put forward a very big effort to address our major concerns."

But one resident, who asked not to be identified, said his concerns have not been resolved and the Conservatives have lost his vote over the way they have handled the situation.

He's not convinced the street can handle the traffic such a large school will bring, and he's upset the school will not have to meet the community's rigid architectural design requirements.

"It's a pretty ugly building and they don't have to obey the architectural controls," he said. "They haven't looked into the traffic issue at all. They simply said once it's built, they will figure it out."

## Energy

### Alberta has record August land sale

The Calgary Herald

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: E3

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Dan Healing

Alberta collected \$41.9 million from the sale of oil and gas leases and exploration licences Wednesday, its biggest early August result in at least 10 years -- but its year-to-date total remained at less than half the record rush of cash being steadily accumulated in British Columbia.

The auction brought the Alberta total for conventional oil and gas rights so far this year to about \$716 million -- well off the blistering pace set in 2006 when Alberta took in \$3.5 billion for the full year.

In contrast, B.C.'s last land sale in July alone brought in a record \$610 million for parcels in the northeastern part of the province, taking the province's total for the year so far to \$1.5 billion.

Saskatchewan has raised about \$605 million from its sales so far this year.

In Wednesday's Alberta sale, 69,204 hectares were sold at an average price of \$605 each.

The two parcels that commanded the highest prices per hectare were both located northwest of Grande Prairie, just across the border from the hottest drilling properties in B.C.

An anonymous company represented by Scott Land and Lease Ltd. of Calgary paid \$7.2 million for a little more than 1,000 hectares, forking over \$7,067 per hectare.

Windfall Resources Ltd., meanwhile, paid about \$4,900 per hectare for a plot of about the same size, for a total fee of \$5 million.

"I think both the average price per hectare and the number of parcels, as well as the total bonuses that were collected, shows this was another successful sale both on the petroleum and natural gas side as well as the oilsands side for the province of Alberta," said Alberta Energy spokesman Jason Chance.

The government has in the past conceded natural gas royalty increases that kick in at the end of this year have had an impact on land sale activity.

Only eight oilsands leases were sold and six of those were for less than \$30 per hectare. A total of 5,632 hectares were sold for an average of \$211 per hectare. According to government statistics, the July land sale in B.C. was the second-largest in Western Canada -- surpassed only by a \$651-million Alberta result in February 2006.

The B.C. sale cleared out 146 parcels covering 132,740 hectares at an average price per hectare of \$4,596.

Producers paid as much as \$33,500 a hectare for drilling rights, with five licences accounting for \$483 million of the sale proceeds.

Land sales in B.C. have been red hot as energy companies race each other to tap a tight sandstone reservoir that has been opened up with horizontal wells using multiple staged fracture techniques to break up the hard rock and release gas.

Analysts said a chance to tap the geologic formation, called the Montney, was a key reason for Shell Canada's recent decision to buy Duvernay Oil Corp. for \$6 billion.

Some geological consultants estimate the Montney alone could hold 50 trillion cubic feet of gas.

B.C.'s next sale on Aug. 13 promises to be a big one, with another 136 parcels covering 115,879 hectares up for grabs.

Alberta's early July sale was its biggest July sale in three years, raking in \$173 million.

## Enbridge delays pipeline reversal; Joint venture would send Alberta crude to U.S.

The Calgary Herald

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: E3

Section: Calgary Business

Source: Bloomberg

Enbridge Inc. chief executive Pat Daniel said Canada's largest pipeline company plans to delay at least by a year a project with ExxonMobil Corp. to reverse an existing line to transport Alberta crude to U.S. Gulf refiners.

The joint venture with ExxonMobil, the largest U.S. oil company, may not start until 2015 or 2016, Daniel said. The project was pushed back last month to 2014 from 2011 as rising costs and environmental scrutiny caused some companies to slow multibillion-dollar oilsands investments, he said.

"Producers are not prepared to make the commitment that would give us sufficient volume to generate an economic project for our shareholders," Daniel, 61, said Wednesday in an interview in Calgary. "Enbridge does not build uneconomic projects."

Daniel said Enbridge fell short of commitments from oil producers to move 400,000 barrels a day along the pipeline, though he declined to say by how much. The proposed Texas Access line would cost between \$2.6 billion and \$3.5 billion.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers scaled back its forecast for output by 300,000 barrels a day for 2015 to 2016, reducing demand for pipeline capacity, Daniel said.

Falling oil production in countries such as Mexico will boost demand for output from Alberta's oilsands in the U.S. Gulf Coast, said Daniel. The region is home to about half of U.S. refining capacity. Calgary-based Enbridge is Canada's largest pipeline company by annual revenue.

Texas Access includes a new line that would take Canadian oil to refineries near Houston from a hub in Patoka, Ill., Enbridge has said.

Daniel said he expects oil prices will remain above \$100 US a barrel because of rising demand and smaller future discoveries.

"We probably can count on oil staying sustained north of \$100 simply because of the worldwide demand for oil and not a lot of new production coming on," he said. "We may have found, as we approached \$150, we seemed to be bumping our head on a bit of a ceiling."

Prices have dropped 18 per cent since crude oil futures peaked at \$147.27 US a barrel on July 11, the highest since futures trading in 1983 on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Short-term issues may cause oil to trade above or below the estimated range, Daniel said.

Enbridge plans to expand its system to capitalize on rising natural gas output in shale formations in states such as Texas and Louisiana, Daniel said, without elaborating.

## B.C. cracks down on natural gas marketers; Companies must stop door-to-door salesmen's lying

The Calgary Herald

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: E9

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Scott Simpson

Dateline: VANCOUVER

Source: Canwest News Service

The British Columbia Utilities Commission is cracking down on natural gas marketers who fail to follow the rules when they're signing up new customers, documents show.

The commission has this year levied single and multiple fines ranging from \$1,000 to \$6,000 per offence against marketers including Smart Energy, Direct Energy, Access Gas Services, Summitt Energy, Planet Energy and Universal Energy.

In all cases, the fines arise from customer complaints including aggressive sales tactics, misrepresentation and other infractions the commission deemed serious enough to warrant more than the cancellation of a customer's contract.

Documents on file with the commission also show that, so far, penalized marketers are unlikely to succeed if they choose to dispute the fines.

The decisions appear to be causing anxiety among marketers who are worried about their reputations.

In a letter last month to the commission, U.K.-based Direct Energy disputed \$6,000 in fines and cited concern about the impact on its reputation in other jurisdictions -- including Ontario and Alberta -- where it markets gas.

The commission levied the fines on the basis of a complaint by a woman who said a Direct Energy salesman misrepresented himself as an agent of B.C. distributor Terasen Gas.

Direct Energy subsequently told the commission it was unable to identify the salesperson, a failure the commission considered a possible violation of the code of conduct for gas marketers.

"It would seem from Direct Energy's response, that it only chose to advise the commission of the salesperson's identity when a written hearing was initiated," the commission wrote.

The B.C. Utilities commission also rejected Burnaby, B.C.-based Smart Energy's request to reconsider a decision ordering a total of \$9,000 in fines for a case in which a customer complained the company's door-to-door salesperson misrepresented himself as an employee of Terasen Gas.

Terasen owns the pipeline system natural gas moves through and can sell gas based on quarterly North American pricing but is barred from offering fixed-price, long-term contracts, while Smart Energy and the others have been offering fixed-price contracts since the B.C. residential gas commodity market was deregulated last year.

Smart Energy elicited numerous complaints from contract signees in 2007, and at one point had its marketing licence suspended.

## Pengrowth to keep structure as trust

The Calgary Herald

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: E4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Shaun Polczer

Pengrowth Energy Trust plans to maintain its corporate structure past a 2011 deadline to tax the royalty income vehicles, its chief executive said Wednesday. With the federal government deadline to change the tax structure for trusts looming, CEO Jim Kinnear said Pengrowth would be able to employ some \$3 billion worth of tax pools to shelter distributable income to unitholders for at least the next four years, until 2013.

"We believe there will remain strong demand for yield-based investments," he told a conference call to discuss second-quarter results.

"These pools can be used either to shelter income from the tax and can also be used to mitigate impacts to our unitholders beyond 2011."

One of Canada's largest royalty trusts, Pengrowth produces about 81,000 barrels a day.

During the second quarter, Pengrowth generated record cash flow of \$267.9 million, or \$1.08 per trust unit, compared with \$250 million, or \$1.02, in the same period of last year.

The trust paid back \$168.2 million, or 68 cents per unit amounting to 63 per cent of cash generated in the quarter.

Nonetheless, Pengrowth lost \$118.7 million on the heels of a \$352.6-million hedging loss based on out of the money oil and gas contracts.

Kinnear described a "challenging" business environment characterized by the federal government's Oct. 31, 2006, tax decision followed by the Alberta government's September 2007 move to announce royalty hikes.

Brad Borggard, an oil and gas analyst with CIBC World Markets, said the question of what happens to trusts post-2011 is looming larger after the federal government in July clarified plans to allow trusts to convert back into corporations without penalty by 2013.

"The government is trying to be clear that they want them (trusts) to convert back," he said.

Barring a change in the ruling party, Borggard predicted the vast majority would convert back to corporations.

However, it might make sense for some outfits like Pengrowth to maintain the structure for as long as they can. With oil prices of \$125 US, he predicted Pengrowth would become taxable in any event by 2013.

"If you have enough tax pools it can make sense if you stay on as a trust for a little longer," he added.

Pengrowth units rose 28 cents on the Toronto Stock Exchange on Wednesday to close at \$17.48.

## Synenco takeover by Total SA done deal

The Calgary Sun

Thu 07 Aug 2008

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Section: Business

Byline: BY REUTERS

French oil major Total SA said yesterday it had wrapped up its acquisition of Synenco Energy Ltd. after winning over shareholders by raising its bid for the Canadian oil sands developer to \$530.5 million.

Total said 94% of Synenco's shares were tendered to its \$10.25 per share offer.

The company raised the bid by 14% last month after failing to win the support of major shareholders with a \$9 offer made in April.

The acquisition bolsters Total's presence in the oil sands region of northern Alberta, an area that contains 173 billion barrels of oil.

Synenco's main asset is its 60% stake in the 1.66-billion barrel Northern Lights Project, a planned oilsands mine.

Synenco is Total's third investment in the oil sands region. It has a 74% stake in the planned Joslyn oil sands mining project and half interest in the Surmont thermal oil sands development, shared with ConocoPhillips .

## Environment

### Global geological map can help industry, climate

Global geological map can help industry, climate

The Calgary Herald

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: A11

Section: News

Byline: Alister Doyle

Dateline: LILLESTROEM, Norway

Source: Reuters

Scientists unveiled the first digital map of the Earth's geology on Wednesday and said it could guide oil and gas exploration and mining, or pinpoint sites for burying greenhouse gases.

The map shows the world stripped of vegetation, water, soil and human structures by joining up existing data from the geological centres of 83 member nations in a planetary jigsaw on the Internet ([onegeology.org](http://onegeology.org)).

"We have simply unlocked what already exists," said Ian Jackson, chief of operations at the British Geological Survey and a co-ordinator of the map he said could be of interest to the public and private sector.

"The rocks beneath your feet have a powerful impact on resources, minerals, where your energy comes from, the hazards you face and, last but not least, climate change," he said at the launch at an international geological congress in Norway.

Potential uses of the geological map could be identifying areas suitable for mining and oil and gas exploration, or finding areas at risk from landslides or earthquakes.

It could also add to the understanding of formations that store groundwater for drinking or irrigation.

It could also help locate porous rocks suitable for burying emissions of greenhouse gases, mainly from burning fossil fuels in power plants or factories. The UN Climate Panel says such burial could be a main way to slow global warming this century.

But there are problems with burying greenhouse gases, most notably the risk of leaks.

"You will have to understand the geology, especially if you are going to do it near a border, such as the United States or Canada," Jackson told Reuters.

The mapping project so far covers about 70 per cent of the globe -- gaps include India and parts of Africa. Britain and France have contributed a total of \$930,100 to the project. All countries provided their data for free.

Jackson said the maps could help mineral-rich developing nations, such as Sierra Leone or Afghanistan, win foreign investments. Strong economic growth in developing economies such as China is boosting demand for many raw materials. The maps could also help countries adapt to global warming by aiding understanding of groundwater trapped in rocks, a major source of water for drinking and irrigation.

Clay beneath London, for instance, swells and shrinks according to rainfall, causing subsidence to buildings that costs insurers \$590 million a year. Shifts in rains linked to climate change could aggravate losses.

In many countries, maps are used to safeguard groundwater, for instance, by identifying whether rock formations would let a toxic spill from a nearby factory seep into drinking water.

## Mountain pine beetle continues advance

Cochrane Times

Tue 05 Aug 2008

Page: 3

Section: News

Byline: BY JAMES EMERY, FOR THE TIMES

From high above the Kananaskis valley, the devastation to Alberta's forest caused by the mountain pine beetle is plainly visible.

Miles and miles of square hectares of dead trees and scattered pockets of discolored pines show the presence of the bugs that are advancing on southern Alberta's forest territory at an alarming rate.

"We're worried enough that we're spending \$55 million per year on identification, removal and control," said Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) who took a helicopter tour of the area July 31.

"Right now, we're in the middle of our beetle management cycle," said Dan Lux, manager of forest health for the SRD. "Our goal is to treat all the infested trees before the beetles fly."

It's estimated that six million hectares of Alberta's pine forest are at risk.

"In all likely hood, we're looking at another major event," said Dr. Allan Carroll, a scientist and pine beetle specialist with the Canadian Forestry Service.

And the advancing pine beetle could have a direct impact on Cochrane's economy, with Spray Lake Sawmills relying heavily on the trees the beetles inhabit.

Gord Lehn, the woodlands manager at the Sawmill, said while the impact of the bugs may not result in jobs lost at the mill right now, it does remain a possibility in the future.

"It is a possibility, but if it occurs, it would certainly be down the road," he said. "The beetles don't come through and kill every tree in the valley simultaneously. "It's a huge concern for us. The feedstock that we get from the forest, that's our lifeblood. That's what we need to keep the mill. Without that, we don't exist." In British Columbia, the mountain pine beetle has infested 14 to 15 million hectares of forest and Alberta is scrambling to combat the beetle to avoid a similar situation here.

An extremely effective way of combating the problem is with prescribed tree burnings.

Rick Arthur, a wildfire specialist with the SRD, said that prescribed burns of infected areas has several beneficial values along with killing the beetles. Calling it a disturbance event, Arthur said that fire returns youth and vitality to a forest.

"In our prescribed burn program ... we're trying to bring back fire as a disturbance tool into our ecosystems and at the same time pick and select areas to burn to have the most maximum benefit from that burn event," he said. Alberta has seen over 59,000 hectares of pine beetle habitat in the mountain national parks scorched to date, with 10,000 colonized trees in the Banff and Jasper parks alone, said Jackie Syroteuk from Parks Canada.

"We developed a 20-year prescribed fire conceptual plan for the mountain national parks," she said.

"Restoring the historic role of fire to the mountain national parks means that the landscape is more resilient to insect and disease outbreaks in the future, less susceptible to large scale, catastrophic wildfires, as well as improved wildlife quality of habitat."

It's a program that Morton is supportive of to avoid what happened in British Columbia.

"There are some areas in BC you won't see a green forest again until 2050, so obviously, we don't want that to happen in Alberta," Morton said.

Morton said because British Columbia took a "let mother nature take its course approach," the beetle spread rapidly due to inaction.

He said Alberta is taking action now while the problem is still combatable.

"In Alberta, both forestry department, parks department and also our federal counterparts in Banff ... we're all going off the same scientific page now," Morton said.

"It's a disturbance management approach that accepts the fact that forests are always changing and we can either have natural change, which is the risky part.

"You get either the pine beetle scenario that we have in B.C. or the big forest fire scenario like they had in Yellowstone 20 years ago.

"Or, you can have managed stage, which is what we're trying to do."

The mountain pine beetle bores into the bark the host tree where it lays its eggs and introduces fungi that systematically kills it, while feeding off its vascular tissue.

An infected tree can die within one month of a pine beetle attack.

A tree killed by a mountain pine beetle infestation usually has two years to be harvested before the wood is worth nothing more than fuel pellets and fire wood, Lehn said.

The Spray Lake Sawmill, whose wood supply runs from Sundre down to Waterton, cuts about 300,000 cubic meters of wood per year, but replaces the trees at a rate of two seeds planted for every tree cut down, Lehn added.

The sawmill reforests with a mixture of lodgepole pine and white spruce to diversify the species of trees in the area.

"The long-term health of the forest means you need to have a diverse forest in terms of species, composition and age class," Lehn said. "If you have a good diverse forest, you have a healthy forest, and a healthy forest means an ongoing wood supply."

Steve Donelon from Alberta tourism, parks and recreation said that infrastructure inside the Kananaskis valley is also at risk.

"We have literally tens of millions of dollars invested in infrastructure within Kananaskis country," he said, citing the Nakiska ski hill and the Kananaskis village as two major projects inside the valley.

In the last few years the Alberta government has spent more than \$134 million to battle the beetle.

## Health & Wellness

### Chinese newcomers often suffer in silence; Lack mental-health support: social worker

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Elise Stolte

Dateline: EDMONTON

Edmonton's Chinese community is in urgent need of more culturally specific support for mental-health patients, says a social worker, days after a local immigrant allegedly stabbed, beheaded and cannibalized a passenger on a Greyhound bus.

Many immigrants suffer in silence, sheltered by their families, but unable to access English-only services, Josephine Lai said.

"We just want to do more preventative work. We don't want to see those problems getting worse."

Lai used to work as a cultural liaison in a mental-health program specifically geared to reaching five immigrant groups, including the Chinese. The provincially funded pilot project ended three years ago when the money ran out, and no federal or provincial department would step forward.

During the four-year project, Lai started a Mandarin and Cantonese support group and also held a series of workshops on mental health. About 40 people attended each night.

She estimated that put her in contact with at least 20 families with mental-health patients who had never discussed the issue with a medical professional.

"In our culture, it's not taboo, but no one knows how to deal with it. There is helpful information (available), but no resources to get it to them."

Alice Chen, a researcher at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C., measured the number of times Chinese immigrants in British Columbia accessed mental-health services between 1991 and 2000. She found in her research, conducted while she was at the University of British Columbia, that they were 10 times less likely to visit a psychiatrist when compared to someone from the general population.

They were also much less likely to bring a mental-health complaint to a family doctor. Chen said often culture, not just language, is a major barrier. Although there are few psychiatrists who speak Cantonese or Mandarin in the Vancouver area, there are many Chinese doctors.

"The cultural barrier, in the sense of many Chinese people not perceiving emotional problems or psychological problems as being medical in nature and therefore not seeking health care, that may be a larger issue," she said.

Chinese culture is more focused on the community and less on the individual when compared with western culture, she said.

"Chinese culture itself does not encourage individuals to be focused on their own emotions, so Chinese are probably less in tune with how they feel.

"People around (mental-health patients) would see problems as more of a social or behavioural problem. On the front lines, people need to be more aware of this."

Chen said she was horrified, but not surprised to hear about the incident on the Greyhound bus on July 30. "People don't recognize they are ill. Sometimes there is nothing the system can do about it."

On Tuesday, Vince Li, 40, was ordered to undergo a psychological assessment. He was charged with second-degree murder in the death of 22-year-old Tim McLean.

Many Chinese immigrants come to Canada as lawyers and engineers, said Shophie Yohani, assistant professor of counselling psychology at the University of Alberta, who also runs a private practice working with immigrants.

When any immigrant can't use their experience to get equivalent jobs here, they spend years working low-paying jobs. That leads to stress, tension in their families and sometimes alcohol or drug abuse.

"One thing leads to another and it's not what they imagine before they come," she said. In addition, when they move, they lose the support network they had back home. Any of those can trigger mental illness.

Jim Gurnett, head of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, said he lobbied to get more funding for the local, ethnically based outreach program at both the federal and provincial levels.

The former pilot project got good reports when it was independently evaluated after three years, but "everyone said it was someone else's responsibility," he said.

Most of the limited mental-health funding for immigrants now goes to refugees, perhaps because the needs of those suffering post-traumatic stress are so obvious, he said.

John Tuckwell, spokesman for Alberta Health and Wellness, couldn't say why funding wasn't continued, but said the province focuses on services available to all Albertans.

Lai said she hopes to see more funding specifically targeted at immigrants, especially after what happened on the Greyhound bus.

It shocked her community and brought a lot of shame. "When people talk, they just say, 'Oh, it's too bad he's Chinese.' "

Now, they are paying attention to mental illness, she said.

She said many don't know there are different mental illnesses -- depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia -- and that they can be treated.

"They want to know, but they don't know where to get this knowledge," she said. "If they don't have the knowledge, the illness is getting worse."

## Syphilis kills 5 Alta. babies; Outbreak of 'preventable' STD reaching crisis levels, doctors say

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Alexandra Zabjek

Dateline: EDMONTON

EDMONTON - Five infants have died of syphilis in Alberta since 2005, a sign of a syphilis outbreak described as having reached a critical state in the province.

"To have one of those deaths is a tragedy. To have five of them is something that means we're exploring as many ways as we can to bring those numbers down," said Dr. James Talbot, associate medical officer of health for Capital Health.

Most of the infant deaths occurred in the Edmonton region.

Since 2005, Alberta has seen 14 cases of congenital syphilis -- babies who acquired the infection in the womb.

In addition to the five infants who died, nine will require long-term followup care, Alberta Health and Wellness says.

Syphilis rates in Alberta were relatively low until around 2005, when reports of the sexually transmitted disease started to spike here and in other parts of the country.

There were more than 200 cases of infectious syphilis in 2006 in Alberta.

The Edmonton-area, in particular, has suffered higher numbers than the rest of the province.

Syphilis testing is a routine part of pre-natal care for most women.

The majority of Alberta women who have had babies with syphilis did not see a doctor during pregnancy, however, Talbot said.

Pregnant women with syphilis can be treated with antibiotics that cross into a fetus's bloodstream and stop the infection.

"The unfortunate part is that it doesn't reduce the damage that's already been done," Talbot said.

"There are a range of things that babies who have syphilis at birth can have. They can have bone abnormalities, cardiac abnormalities and neurological abnormalities. In a totally preventable condition, that's a very bad price to pay."

There were no cases of syphilis in babies between 1992 and 2002 in Alberta.

Canada didn't record a single death from congenital syphilis between 2000 and 2004, according to the most recent data available from Statistics Canada.

From 1998 to 2006, the number of congenital syphilis cases across the country ranged from zero to six per year, the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Nationally, syphilis rates increased almost ten-fold between 1997 and 2006.

A person infected with syphilis might experience sores in the genital area in the early stages of infection. The person may later experience rashes and swollen glands.

If untreated, someone infected with syphilis can suffer heart attacks, brain aneurysms and insanity.

For Talbot, who has spent almost 15 years working in the public health field, news of the first infant death from syphilis in Alberta was a "shock." Then there were four more.

"To see infants die of it, absolutely it's a shock. And the only thing that takes a little of the shock away is that it's a trend we're seeing in other places," he said.

"It's totally preventable. That's both a source of frustration to us and the feeling that we have to do a better job to be able to protect Albertans."

Syphilis rates are rising along with rates of other sexually transmitted diseases, Talbot said.

Unprotected sex, a burgeoning sex trade and increased substance abuse are all contributing to those rates in Alberta.

He also noted that single, working mothers with few resources face pressures that can prevent them from seeking the care they require during pregnancy.

"Women of lower socio-economic status are less likely to get pre-natal care and more likely to be the ones who need it. And that's a bad combination," he said.

Capital Health has been working to ensure sexually transmitted disease testing is done more quickly at city clinics. It has also partnered with outreach organizations in inner-city neighbourhoods and among sex-trade workers to encourage testing and treatment.

The province is expected to unveil a provincewide campaign this fall to raise awareness about syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections.

Talbot stressed that protected sex, monogamy and abstinence are the best ways to prevent a syphilis infection.

## Municipal Affairs

### The slow slide back to corporate welfare

Airdrie Echo

Wed 06 Aug 2008

Page: 20

Section: News

Byline: BY SCOTT HENNIG, SPECIAL TO THE ECHO

It's no secret the Alberta government literally lost billions of taxpayers' dollars in the 1980s and 90s through loans and loan guarantees to private companies.

Thankfully, during the Klein revolution of the mid-1990s these corporate welfare programs were ended. Unfortunately, a few recent moves by the current Alberta government have raised the spectre of a return to these corporate welfare days.

Taxpayers will likely remember the names of some of the larger corporate welfare bums in Alberta from the 80s and early 90s, like NovAtel (\$646-million), Gainers (\$209-million) and MagCan (\$164-million), but the list doesn't stop there.

Hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars were either invested in, loaned or guaranteed to companies like Millar Western, Al-Pac, Glacier Ammonia, Myrias Research, Peace River Fertilizers, Alert Disaster Control, Nanton Spring Water, Ski-Free Marine, Norstar Recreation Products and countless others.

Shortly after Premier Klein took office, the Alberta government suffered huge losses in order to rid taxpayers of these problem investments.

The message from the Klein government was clear: Corporate welfare doesn't work, and governments have no business being in business. Since then, Alberta has been a shining example for the rest of Canada as to why it is always the best policy to avoid corporate welfare.

However, over the past year, there have been signs the government is sliding slowly back towards more taxpayer welfare for Alberta companies.

The first sign was the creation of the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. This new crown corporation will administer \$100-million of taxpayers' money for venture capital. Essentially, the goal is to help start-up technology companies grow and expand in Alberta.

While governments using tax dollars for venture capital funds is not a new phenomenon in Canada, the results are not very positive for taxpayers.

A May 2008 report by three researchers in the Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia (Brander, Egan & Hellmann) showed that government sponsored venture capital funds tend to crowd-out private investors, have lower returns than private venture capital funds, and create less innovation. The second sign of a slide back toward corporate welfare was the recent \$2-billion investment into carbon capture and sequestration technology. While it can be argued that the investment is more about public relations than actually attempting to change world temperatures, it nonetheless is going to be a form of corporate welfare. Depending on your view, the cash will either let greenhouse gas emitting companies off the hook by having taxpayers pay to store their carbon under ground, or if the CO<sub>2</sub> is used in enhanced oil recovery, taxpayers are paying to help oil companies extract more oil from their wells.

The third and most recent sign of a corporate welfare slide is the potential for the City of Calgary and the Alberta government to build a new film studio in Calgary. The Alberta government has long thrown tax dollars at rich Hollywood producers to entice them to film their movies in Alberta, but building them a film studio with taxpayer money is completely over the top. But, depending on who you talk to, it's either a done deal or just a proposal. Either way it should be shot down. Whether it is start-up technology companies, energy companies, or Hollywood movies, if they are good investments and there is money to be made, private investors will follow and government investment is not needed. If an investment opportunity is not good enough for private cash that should be a clear sign government shouldn't support it with taxpayer cash. Premier Klein's government understood this, and with any luck Premier Stelmach's government won't have to learn this the hard way.

## **Sustainable Resource Development**

### **Fire, flood \$\$ announced**

Cochrane Times

Tue 05 Aug 2008

Page: 44

Section: News

Byline: BY JAMES EMERY, FOR THE TIMES

Alberta's Sustainable Resource Development announced July 31 that over \$100 million would be dedicated to fighting wildfires and flood relief initiatives in our province this year.

"These funds help our staff fight wildfires that threaten Alberta's forested communities," said Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development in a release.

"The protection of human lives and the safety of communities are our top priorities when fighting wildfires."

The monies will be drawn for Alberta's Sustainability Fund, which will see over \$91 million dedicated to fighting Alberta wildfires.

The sustainability fund provides resources for emergencies and the new money in addition to the department's \$125 million base budget.

To date, Alberta's Sustainable Resource Development department reported they have responded to 1,282 wildfires, including 150 new fires that started after the July 26 weekend.

Also, over \$13 million will be set aside to aid residents in southern Alberta affected by flood disasters this past summer, including Black Diamond, High River and Okotoks.

"Helping Albertans get their lives back to normal after a severe storm or weather event is our priority," said Ray Danyluk, minister of municipal affairs. "The province's disaster recovery program supports Albertans in need and helps to build strong communities.

## Province announces disaster funding

Taber Times

Wed 06 Aug 2008

Page: B9

Section: News

More than \$107 million from the Alberta's Sustainability Fund, which provides resources for emergencies, will be used for firefighting activities in Alberta's forests and municipalities this year, and to help residents in several communities recover from a series of severe storms and heavy rainfall.

Sustainable Resource Development received \$92.1 million to fight wildfires in the province. This new funding is in addition to \$125 million in the department's base budget, which is used to prepare for fighting wildfires. Base funding provides for training, securing aircraft, hiring seasonal staff to assist firefighters and opening airtanker bases and fire lookouts. To date, the department has responded to 1,282 wildfires, ahead of the five-year average of 1,164 wildfires. The current total includes 150 new wildfires since last weekend.

"These funds help out staff fight wildfires that threaten Alberta's forested communities," said Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. "The protection of human lives and the safety of communities are our top priorities when fighting wildfires."

As well \$13.7 million in disaster recovery program funding was approved to help residents in southwestern Alberta, St. Albert and Lethbridge recover from a series of severe storms and heavy rainfalls this summer.

Eligible communities for the 2008 Southwestern Disaster recovery Program include Black Diamond, High River and Okotoks, the municipal districts of foothills and Pincher Creek and the Kananaskis Improvement District. Other municipalities may be added as more information is collected. Damage occurred when heavy rainfall and high stream flows struck southwestern Alberta between May 19 and May 25. On June 17, the City of St. Albert experienced overland flooding from a severe rain and hail storm, while the City of Lethbridge experienced overland flooding from a severe rain storm on July 1.

In addition, \$1.5 million in funding has been approved to assist the county of Thorhild and the Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement under the Municipal Wildfire Assistance Program. During May, these communities experienced severe wildfires. This funding will be used to assist these municipalities with emergency operations costs and reclamation efforts.

## Transportation

### Minister boosts electric vehicles

The Calgary Sun

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: 48

Section: Business

Byline: BY FRANK PINGUE, REUTERS

Dateline: TORONTO

Canada has taken a small step to promote the use of low-speed electric vehicles as fuel prices surge and the public grows ever more concerned about greenhouse gas emissions, but it will be up to the individual provinces to decide whether they will be allowed on public roads.

Lawrence Cannon, the federal minister of transport, said yesterday that Ottawa would allow low-speed trucks that operate only on electric power to be sold across Canada.

But he stopped short of saying the vehicles are fit for roads and said their use should be limited to areas such as campuses, parks or retirement communities, where speeds are lower than on public roads.

Ottawa's move was quickly dismissed by Zenn Motor Co., a domestic maker of zero-emission electric cars, as not going far enough.

## Columnists/Editorial & Comment

### Gurus predict end of boom

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH, EDMONTON SUN

Column: The Province

It's the lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer.

Our provincial politicians are toiling full-time on the barbecue and golf-tournament circuit - at least, those who are working at all.

So it's downright unneighbourly for the Conference Board of Canada to rain on the PC MLAs' picnic, declaring in the eastern think-tanks' latest provincial outlook yesterday that we're "not out of the woods yet."

They revealed it's only the hard work of bartenders and cocktail waitresses keeping the province's economic head above water at all, while Saskatchewan and - if you can believe it - Manitoba "will steal the spotlight" in 2008.

The report talked about "a number of megaprojects in the oilsands" being completed for a 1.4% slowdown in the construction sector, along with a "lagging housing market."

It's only personal income increases that are "propelling" the service industry to a "lofty" 4.7% growth rate this year.

All this prognosticating likely occurred before the sudden oil price drop.

The conference boarders are not the only crystal ballers predicting the end of the Alberta mega boom.

The Royal Bank of Canada's economics gurus' latest provincial outlook also sees dark clouds on the horizon.

"Alberta is gearing down," it notes, even though this province "rewrote the book" on economic indicators.

"The stars so far appear to be perfectly aligned for Saskatchewan," the document adds.

The same old, same old reasons are cited.

"Price pressures that developed during the boom are now hurting business."

The boom that developed when Ed Stelmach, as one of his first acts of office in 2007, vowed "there's no touching the brake."

Then, this again:

"The housing market is a prime example where earlier outsized price increases have led to an erosion in housing affordability," the RBC analysis sniffed. "And an ensuing drop in house resales and new housing construction."

ATB Financial's Todd Hirsch - about the closest thing we have to a homegrown bank economist - goes one giant step further.

He admits in a recent economic comment, "some of the froth has come off the housing price frenzy in Edmonton and Calgary."

Is housing "froth" the same thing as a housing "bubble"?

And you know what happens to bubbles. They inevitably pop, leaving the last guy in holding the bag.

The bag so far in Edmonton is worth \$46,804, Edmonton Real Estate Board president Marc Perras revealed. That's how much the average single family dwelling selling price has retracted since it peaked last May. A 10.9% drop.

"Sellers have accepted the market realities," Perras said while releasing the July stats this week.

"And have adjusted their listing prices to attract buyers."

How low can it go?

"Alberta housing prices have levelled off," Perras insisted. Even though there are over 10,000 properties on the market.

Or is that wishful realtor thinking?

In Calgary the haircut so far is worth \$49,000 - a 9.7% drop since the average single-family dwelling peaked at \$505,920 a year ago.

There are still "great opportunities for buyers," beamed Calgary Real Estate Board president Ed Jensen. I'll bet there are, with over 13,000 properties in Ed's inventory.

Especially those who "wish to take advantage of the zero-mortgage program and the 40 year amortization program."

Those are two ludicrous concepts that only made sense if real estate markets rose forever and folks made their equity back through inflation - like all the stupid money in the condominium-speculation business.

Now Calgary condo listings are up 5.9% in July, while in Edmonton, condo sales "slowed to under 500 units."

With real estate, especially the goofy speculative stuff heading toward what economists call "negative equity" (when the mortgage is worth more than the property), what happens next?

In Britain, Standard and Poors reported one in seven Brit properties are in the negative zone after the froth was blown off that market.

The last time this happened following the NEP economic bloodbath, folks turned in the keys to the bankers and simply walked away.

Is anyone in the Alberta Tory braintrust on top of this?

Thought not.

**Alberta Conservative habits die hard; AISH rates still below the poverty line**

Fast Forward Weekly

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: 3

Section: Viewpoint

Byline: David Wilson

Source: Special to Fast Forward

The Alberta government is encouraging those on the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) to get a job. A government press release states that work will help them "connect with the community, develop new friendships and increase their self-confidence." Looking a little beneath the surface, though, this feel-good policy is just a bunch of sweet nothings and actually quite sinister. In Alberta, there are about 36,000 people receiving AISH from the Alberta government. Only those who are deemed to have a permanent disability that severely limits their ability to earn a living can receive AISH. Though Alberta is one of the richest places on earth, AISH pays the most vulnerable people in our society only \$1,088 per month, leaving them 29 per cent below the poverty line, as determined by the low income cut-off after-tax rate.

After the Conservatives gave themselves and opposition MLAs pay raises of 30 per cent, they seemed to be in a pretty giving mood. AISH recipients could already earn \$400 per month and not be taxed. On July 21, the government proudly announced that only 50 per cent of any money earned over \$400, and up to a limit of \$1,500 per month, would be taxed.

In that same press release, Ed Stelmach is quoted as saying "Many AISH clients want to work to the extent that they are able, and this change helps support that drive." The problem is that only 19 per cent of those on AISH have a part-time job. One wonders how many of these people actually earn or can earn more than \$400 a month. Probably not many. They are on AISH for a reason: their income-earning ability is severely limited. If one could earn \$1,500 a month, they wouldn't be on AISH. The additional income exemption for the remaining 81 per cent on AISH who do not work is meaningless, because they don't work. Clearly, this policy is public relations spin that won't cost the government much, and the public gets the impression that the government is bending over backwards to help AISH recipients.

The government's press release further states that "more than 30 pilot projects are underway across the province to connect clients seeking work with employers filling job vacancies." You almost get the impression that the worker shortage is due to AISH recipients not working. One gets the sense that if the government provides just enough incentives it can encourage significantly more people on AISH to work.

What the Alberta government is really saying is that people on AISH should get off their butts and start working like the rest of us. This policy is really just fuelling the stereotype of capable people sitting at home watching TV, collecting

paycheques and living the good life, while the rest of us poor working chumps bust our humps for an honest day's pay. The insinuation is that those on AISH can work, but choose not to.

While reading the new policy announcement, I got flashbacks of Ralph Klein's rants about creeps and bums mooching off hard-working Alberta taxpayers. That night, I woke up in a sweat remembering that Stelmach was a Conservative MLA during the Klein years. Stelmach is not brash like Klein was. He is more of the wrap-it-up-in-a-pretty-package kind of New Age Alberta Conservative. He is a nice guy, his PR people tell us. Though subtle, his government's AISH income exemption policy is just good old-fashioned Conservative poor-bashing.

After applause for the policy died down, people on AISH are still mired in poverty. A man on AISH who was born blind with physical and mental health problems asked me why he has to continue to live in poverty. I would like to ask the government whether it was his fault that he was born this way. Is he not working enough hours? When I realize that I am living in a province with a predicted surplus this year of \$10 billion, it does seem crazy. Actually, it seems criminal. There is hope, though. An energetic group of AISH recipients meets every week at the Disability Action Hall in Calgary. It is an opportunity to be with friends, to discuss what it is like living in poverty and what people can do about it. The group has been meeting MLAs throughout the province to advocate that AISH rates be raised to at least the poverty line. For them to be successful, more citizens need to call their MLAs to support this noble effort.

The root of the problem for people on AISH is not income exemption, but lack of income. Therefore, the time has come for the Alberta government to lift all AISH recipients out of poverty by paying them significantly more money. It is time that the Conservatives release their inner red Tories. For the sake of people on AISH, just let it out.

David Wilson is an activist working for a more equitable and sustainable Calgary and has worked in the not-for-profit sector.

**Let Saskatchewan and Manitoba have first and second -- this scribe and the finance minister agree that third place is a good place to be**

The Calgary Sun

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: 5

Section: News

Byline: BY RICK BELL

Column: Page Five

We're number three and third is a good place to be.

Yes, Alberta will not grow as much as Saskatchewan and Manitoba this year. So say the deepest of deep thinkers at the Conference Board of Canada. Great. The province has boomed big. The province has boomed very big and some people have made very big money and some have made a little money and some have made the square root of squat.

Cash or not, Alberta is still doing very well, outperforming most spots on this continent in the dollar sign department. But there have been challenges, a fancy word for pains in the posterior.

Ask anybody who has lived here more than five years and they will tell you the quality of life has suffered in ways no toys and no amount of bling can cover up. Yes ma'am, let somebody else be the top of the top for awhile.

Finance Minister Iris Evans, this province's guardian of the public purse, knows such is the sentiment of many.

"It's not a bad thing. In fact, it's a good thing," says Iris, of the cooling off of what has been a very hot economic engine.

"It gives us a chance to take a breath. It's gone well. We can afford to take a breath. There's going to be an easing up on the throttle but, for Alberta, it doesn't mean we're in trouble. It doesn't mean the sky is going to fall. Alberta is still leading by a country mile.

"For many people to be less in the whirlwind is particularly wonderful." Indeed. Yes, the cash has been coming into this province for a decade with the U-Hauls following quickly behind. The arithmetic adds up to overall affluence but far from all boats have risen with the tide. And, with the coin, comes the complaints, headaches to fix, catching up on all the construction for all these newcomers, providing massive services to match the exploding population. Never forget the traffic. Never.

There's the high cost of living, the lack of housing folks can afford, the labour shortage, the irritating influx of those looking for the quick buck. There's the creeps and the bums who have heard Alberta is the place to come to score dough by working the wrong side of the street or not working at all.

And do not overlook all those individuals who can't stop flashing the cash, wanting to brag to everyone about exactly how much money they've made. Didn't Mom teach us such behaviour was rude?

Oh, our Iris is right. We need a break. Just a breather.

All those chasing the pot at the end of the rainbow, detour to Regina. I hear it's nice this time of year.

Yesterday, the Conference Board pocket calculators confirm what we know. Alberta is losing some speed. So what? Alberta was going pretty fast. The XXL-size noggins admit the growth in this province is now more "sustainable", a fancy word for it's not nuts.

It is not the bonfire of the vanities. Real growth is still at 2.6%, down from last year, when growth was already cut in half from the year before, when people clamoured to get on the gravy train.

The economy is expected to pick up a little next year and Alberta will be "a destination of choice," though the red-hot days of 2005 and 2006 aren't coming back any time soon. Double great.

A recent report by the head scratchers of RBC also says the province is "gearing down." High costs hurt, including in the housing market, where a lot of excited sorts predicted the price tag on digs would keep going into the stratosphere and everyone would get rich. But Chicken Little is not a prophet in these parts. Even with oil at \$110 a barrel, Iris says this province will have "a very tidy surplus."

"We have a long way to go before we're in any kind of situation causing anybody to be even a little jittery at the treasury," says the boss of the budget.

"We're not cratering. We've got the oilsands and for the majority of Albertans the good times are rolling."

Iris says there is some "white knuckling" in the cattle business and in forestry and "some softness" in tourism. As for the housing speculators who thought they could do some instant high-profit flip, Iris shakes her head.

"Boy, that didn't happen. There must be a Houdini or two who got in and got out fast, but friends of mine have a hard time getting rid of that second condo."

The RBC navel gaze does advise the Alberta government look at its spending and Iris plans to roll out a policy for saving coin in the fall. But spending will go on.

"It's very hollow to be told we're looking after your money but you're not getting your hospital, road or school. Albertans would not tolerate that. Saving is important but we have to recognize there's going to be some spending."

Iris admits a few fortunate folks may still hunger for the highest growth possible to go on forever and damn the consequences.

"For those people, they must be living in paradise," says Iris.

Or, looking at the numbers, perhaps Cloud Nine

## Is 60 over the hill in federal politics?

The Calgary Herald

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: A4

Section: News

Byline: Don Martin

Column: Calgary's Eye on National Politics

Dateline: OTTAWA

Source: Canwest News Service

Too old to run? Well, if you're born before 1948, at least one Liberal MP thinks you're unfit to contest a seat in the next federal election.

Perhaps, as a party flack insisted by way of damage control Wednesday, it was just a "spur of the moment" quip when veteran Liberal MP Robert Thibault, 49, dismissed his Conservative rival as an unworthy campaign combatant for having reached the ripe old "retirement" age of 60.

But the third-term Nova Scotia MP is not prone to shooting off at the lip before his brain is loaded, notwithstanding the libel suit he faces from former prime minister Brian Mulroney.

So, when he was asked about Conservative opponent Greg Kerr, a former provincial cabinet minister who narrowly lost the 2006 vote, Thibault made an interesting observation that must reflect something in his thought process.

"If they (Conservatives) wanted to take me out, I would think you'd get someone who's looking forward to building a political career, not somebody who's at the age where he's considering retirement," he told reporters. "You're not building for the future here. This is a candidate who's lost provincially, lost federally, and is what, 62, 63 years old?"

Former Liberal prime minister Jean Chretien, now 74, and successor Paul Martin, now 69, might quibble with the notion that politicians have reached their best-before age at 60.

It's also hard to square an age limit for politicians with the possibility the next U.S. president could be John McCain, who will be 72 at his inauguration. Or that the most likely Liberal leader if Stephane Dion stumbles in the next election will be Michael Ignatieff, age 61.

Just for the record, there are currently 90 MPs in the House of Commons at 60 or older and 33 of those are Liberals. And the average age in the Senate is 66, although Senate-bashers could argue that's evidence to support Thibault's preference for under-60 talent.

Not surprisingly, PMO spokesman Kory Teneycke has spotted a winning quip for Liberal smear material in the next campaign.

"A whole lot of seniors think that 60 is a rather spry age," Teneycke said. "If Mr. Thibault wants to stand by those comments during the election, that would be interesting, but we'll be gracious if he retracts."

Senator Marjory LeBreton, the cabinet minister in charge of seniors, was appalled. "Here I'm trying to convince seniors to stay in the workforce if they so wish. They've got a lot to give, but he's saying when you reach 60, you're over the hill and of no value."

But even if this was just a careless throwaway comment, it could be symptomatic of greater problems for a Liberal party, which holds 20 seats in Atlantic Canada. While the Liberals can afford to alienate Alberta, knowing they're guaranteed a seatless shutout in Canada's richest province, trouble on the East Coast should have Liberals headquarters in a sweat.

And trouble has arrived with the release in June of the Liberal carbon tax. Truckers and agriculture interests on the Liberal fortress of Prince Edward Island, where all four seats belong to the official Opposition, are angrily denouncing the carbon tax concept and some nervous area MPs have privately warned of serious backlash consequences if the allegedly revenue-neutral concept becomes the defining Liberal issue of the campaign.

Possible evidence of a Liberal vote shift from the Green Shift emerged Tuesday when the winner of a hard-fought battle to secure the party nomination in a P.E.I. seat held by the Liberals for 28 years bowed out of the election because "new opportunities have arisen in the private sector," which sounds suspiciously like code words for cold political feet.

Just before returning to politics in 2002, a policy wonk named Stephen Harper was vilified along the entire East Coast for describing Atlantic Canada as possessed by a "culture of defeat." It took years of backpedalling to reverse that tongue-tripping damage.

But with a high-profile candidate abandoning the election fight and Liberal MPs offending seniors (who vote in huge numbers) while engaged in a difficult struggle to defend their party's unpopular environmental policy, the culture with greatest risk of being defeated could be the complacent Maritime Liberal.

## Lack of women in politics a matter of democracy; Poll finds growing gender gap on views, and support for many issues

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: A18

Section: Opinion

Byline: Janine Marshall-Giles

Source: Freelance

The results of recent public opinion surveys conducted by the Canada West Foundation show that we need more women in politics to articulate their increasingly unique point of view.

Is it a coincidence that issues women are most concerned about -- health care, the environment, poverty and affordable housing -- are the exact ones to which the three levels of government have not been able to find durable solutions? As a group, women prefer a more compassionate form of politics. Many women put social issues ahead of economic ones, turning their backs on parties that challenge the welfare state.

Men, on the other hand, tend to place economic issues at the forefront, showing greater support for promises of deficit reduction, social program cuts and government downsizing.

Women and men have been sorting themselves along the left-right spectrum, with the result that their political preferences are becoming even more distinct. Canadian public opinion surveys show that this gender gap has been growing since at least the 1960s.

At 15-20 percentage points, the differences for the most pertinent political issues have never been so large.

The results of the most recent Canada West Foundation Looking West Survey illustrate these gender differences.

The survey found large gaps in the strength of support for a number of key issues.

For instance, by a margin of 17 percentage points, women are more likely than men to agree that improving the provincial health-care system is a very high priority. Similarly large gender differences show up in greater support on the part of women for doing more for the environment and for reducing poverty in Canada.

This trend was also found the year before among the residents of the West's big cities when the Canada West Foundation asked urbanites about local issues.

The gender gap was largest for issues such as protecting the local environment, reducing homelessness and doing more to increase the supply of affordable housing, with women more likely to agree that these issues are "very high priorities."

#### UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES

These gender differences are themselves not a problem, but the fact that women have less political influence than men (despite outnumbering them) means that their unique perspectives on political issues are not getting the attention they deserve.

How do we fix this democratic deficit?

Getting more women elected to political office may help relieve the problem.

While the attitudes of elected women do not exactly mirror the female electorate, the gender differences between male and female legislators are similar to those among the broader public.

Electing more women would ensure that the female point of view is better represented in legislatures.

Another approach to getting the unique opinions of women heard is to ensure that a larger number of them are represented at the highest levels of political parties. It is one thing to be a member of a party, but quite another to be solidly placed in the strategy rooms where the critical decisions are made.

Much of the onus here must fall on the current crop of party leaders and powerbrokers.

Proactively seeking out women and showing them that they are welcome in the upper echelons of the parties would be a good way to more fully integrate women into Canadian politics. Forcing women to repeatedly hit their heads on concrete ceilings until they eventually crumble is not the way to go.

The parties have a lot to gain. More women than ever possess professional education and experience and the parties stand to gain from this vast talent pool. Looking to the women's movement certainly brings little hope for support and resources.

Across Canada, government funding for women's groups has been reduced or discontinued. Since the cutbacks, some women's organizations have been unable to raise the necessary funds to keep moving forward. This is a step in the wrong direction.

The role of individual women leaves more reason for optimism.

Mothers talking about politics at home and more women running for office would be steps in the right direction. Female role models are critical to dispelling the myth that politics is an unnatural place for women.

In a democracy, it is critical that everyone have the chance to be heard.

On paper, Canadian women have this chance, but until women are more fully represented in the halls of power, their unique voices will be unduly muted and Canadian democracy will be the lesser for it.

Janine Marshall-Giles, a PhD student in political science at the University of Calgary, is currently working as an intern with the Canada West Foundation.

Her report on the gender gap in western Canadian public opinion entitled "What Women Want" is available for download from [www.cwf.ca](http://www.cwf.ca)

## The sale of the National Post would reverberate in political circles

The Globe and Mail

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: A17

Section: Comment Column

Byline: Lawrence Martin

With the purchase of the Southam newspaper chain and the creation in 1998 of the National Post, Conrad Black single-handedly changed the tenor of the debate in the country.

Before this time, right-side views tended to be marginalized in our liberal-leaning media culture. Bombastically, Conrad Black made them mainstream.

That could change. The Post appears to be up for sale and a contender for the national paper is a group headed by Liberal Senator Jerry Grafstein.

If his bid succeeds, if Liberals get their hands on the Post, down would go the Conservative Party's media flagship, its ideological promo sheet. It would be like the Liberals losing the Toronto Star.

Although the increasingly Toronto-centric Post has withdrawn from some markets and faces declining circulation, it is still read by Ottawa's political elites each morning.

In October, it marks its 10th birthday - an occasion that might well be dubbed its crimson anniversary celebration given all the red ink it has bled. (Latest estimates are annual losses of \$10-million.) The asking price from the current owners, CanWest's Asper family, is in the neighbourhood of \$30-million. That's not a lot of swag given the influence the paper can wield. It is a lot, given the stresses of its present-day balance sheet.

Mr. Grafstein, a former communications lawyer and a founder of Toronto's Citytv, isn't divulging any details of his negotiations. He spoke in an interview of his experience in putting together media deals and of his dismay at how much of the business, in the 24/7 news cycle, has descended into infotainment and how it has to change. While some see Mr. Grafstein as more of a conservative-oriented liberal in that, like the Aspers, he is heavily pro- American and pro-Israel, he was quick to rebut that, saying he was a bona fide liberal democrat, or "Louis St. Laurent Liberal," the suggestion being the Post would have a different look if he became a majority owner.

His bid would appear to be a long shot. A more likely scenario would be for the Aspers, if they do sell, to find a more conservative-friendly buyer. That said, no one expected the moderate Southam family to sell their newspapers to Mr. Black in the mid-1990s. As in many other businesses, in this one, money talks.

The Post, which drove prime minister Jean Chrétien up the wall, was a leading voice in the movement to unify the political right. In the early days, it brought to the fore issues such as the alleged brain drain and over-taxation, although it hasn't added much to the national debate lately and has been an adoring supporter of Israel and the United States. The colourful war-boosting paper attacks Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion on a daily basis and gives the Harper government the benefit of the doubt on every issue imaginable. Most recently, it stood with the Conservatives in their decision to support the Guantanamo judicial regime in the prosecution of Canadian Omar Khadr.

To its credit, the Post publishes an often illuminating column from Mr. Black, written from his cellblock in a Florida jail. For the Post founder to see his paper fold up or be sold off to Liberals in the same year of his incarceration would be the ultimate indignity.

Facing a debt load of more than \$3-billion, Mr. Black sold half his interest in the Post as well as his entire Southam chain to the Aspers in 2000 for a princely profit. Now it is the Aspers who face a similarly staggering debt and may have to unload big media titles as well.

Although it would be a daunting task, a new proprietor could conceivably retool the Post to make it more viable in today's difficult newspaper market. The Post's Texas-styled ideology has been a nice fit for Alberta, but it has had trouble finding a growing audience east of Moose Jaw. Its difficulties were compounded by its inability to keep star performers such as Mark Steyn, Andrew Coyne, Christie Blatchford and Paul Wells.

For the Liberals, the sale or death of the Post, which is also possible, would have the result of saving them untold millions in adverse publicity. They have seen their media clout dwindle over time with the creation of the Sun chain, the sale of Southam, the birth of the Post and an ideological makeover at Maclean's.

For years, there have been predictions of the National Post's demise or sale. The rumours never panned out - and the same could be the case on this occasion. But if the Post does go, which could in turn see other CanWest titles follow, it would substantially alter the face of journalism in the country.

## A sign of a broken system; Physician lotteries show us how desperately health reform is needed in this country

National Post

Thu 07 Aug 2008

Page: A16

Section: Editorial

From rural Ontario to Newfoundland to the booming oil fields of Alberta, Canadian doctors and clinics are increasingly resorting to lotteries to choose which new patients to see, or which long-standing patients to cull from their overburdened case loads. Welcome to the capriciousness of socialized medicine: Your in-come may not affect your level of care, but your luck will.

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) estimates that between four and five million Canadians have no family physician, and that at least one million patients actively looking for a family doctor are unable to find one. In most provinces, no more than 15% of doctors are taking new patients. In Ontario, just 10% are. And the crunch is being felt as much in large urban centres as in remote rural areas. Canada has just two-thirds as many doctors per 1,000 population as the OECD average. We would need 26,000 additional doctors just to bring ourselves up to the norm for industrialized countries. And the situation is likely to get worse before it gets better. Our average physician is 50 years old. Due to retirement and population growth, an additional four or five million Canadians will be without a regular doctor by 2018, the CMA estimates.

Thank government-monopoly health care, a system in which central planners see doctors as drains on the overall budget rather than care providers and profit

generators. Doctors' use of the system's resources is to be limited, hospital beds carefully rationed, admitting privileges tightly controlled, operating-room time parcelled out in drops -- since the primary goal of our health system is its financial and logistical self-preservation rather than the provision of timely care. Two decisions are directly responsible for the doctor shortage.

First, the passage of the Canada Health Act (CHA) in 1984 drove thousands of doctors south. The CHA all but banned private care in Canada and forbade doctors from billing patients more for a visit or treatment than was paid for by medicare. Almost immediately, a doctor trickle to the United States became a doctor flood. Every year for the past 25, the equivalent of two full graduating classes from Canada's 17 medical schools has fled south to practice. Government bean counters, not medical professionals, now decide what new equipment to buy, what technologies to adopt and what next-generation drugs to prescribe. As central planners have taken over more and more of the medical decision-making in Canada, more and more doctors have left. Now, one in nine Canadian-trained doctors is practicing in the United States, including one in five specialists. And it's not just the lure of more money. A desire to practice the best medicine possible without government interference is just as big a draw.

The other government action that led to today's doctor lotteries was the 1990s-era decision by federal and provincial health ministers to limit enrolment in medical schools. At a time when Canada's population was both growing and ageing-- two factors that drive up health care demand -- Ottawa and the provinces believed that limiting the number of new physicians would allow them to control their spiralling health budgets. Fewer doctors meant fewer tests would be ordered, fewer patients treated, fewer procedures performed, so costs would stabilize. Between 1991 and 2000, the number of medical school admissions was reduced by nearly 14% and foreign-trained doctors found it increasingly difficult to earn Canadian licences. As any thinking person could easily have predicted, the result was a doctor shortage.

Obviously, Canada needs to train more doctors. But our obsolete, North Korean-style, government-monopoly health policies need to be liberalized as well.

Opening up the system to private choice wouldn't eliminate the doctor shortage overnight. But it would, at least, provide market-based incentives that would encourage more doctors to remain in Canada, and to work longer hours.

Our socialized system is incapable of providing all the care Canadians need. It is time to try something new -- such as the blend of private and public health choices that have helped lessen physician shortages and wait lists in Europe. Until such reform comes, the only Canadians who can be assured of quality health care are, quite literally, those who win the lottery.

## Providing financial incentives for healthy living; Anderson Airdrie-Chestermere MLA

Airdrie Echo

Wed 06 Aug 2008

Page: 21

Section: News

Byline: BY ROB ANDERSON, SPECIAL TO THE ECHO

Last Spring, Bill 206, the Alberta Personal Income Tax (Physical Activity Credit) Amendment Act, 2008, was introduced in the legislature. It has not yet passed as it will be voted on in the fall; however, it has been a point of some healthy debate among the governing P.C. party's MLAs, so I thought I would weigh in and let my constituents know where I stand on the proposed law.

Bill 206 provides a tax credit of up to \$1,500 per person in a family each year for expenses incurred for participating in physical activities like soccer, hockey, swimming lessons, or a gym membership to name a few. This means, for example, that a family of four who spent \$1,500 per family member on approved physical fitness programs or memberships in a year could claim a total of \$6,000 in tax deductions, meaning a net tax savings to that family of \$600. If a family only spent say \$1,000 on physical activity expenses, they would save \$100 in taxes.

Arguments against Bill 206 mainly focus on doubts that such a tax break would effectively result in parents and individuals changing their behaviour by participating in more sports and physical activities.

The argument against is somewhat valid in my view (I don't think it will change behavior to a significant degree), however, I still feel the Bill is worth supporting for several reasons.

First, although it may not change most people's behaviour, it will likely change the actions of some parents who will be given a yearly discount for putting their children in sports or buying that gym membership for themselves. Financial incentives (even relatively small ones) have been proven to work, at least in some degree, or else corporations like McDonalds and Wal-Mart would have stopped using them decades ago.

Secondly, it sends a message to Albertans of what is considered positive behaviour. If we tax cigarettes and place repulsive warnings on their packaging to discourage a bad health choice, it seems just as appropriate to put a financial incentive on a positive health choice.

And finally, it's a tax break, and most importantly, a tax break particularly beneficial to families. I ran on a campaign platform of tax relief for families and I intend to support (barring extenuating circumstances) any initiative that will make it more financially attractive to raise a family. This bill does just that. Best case scenario, the bill has a positive effect on the health choices people make for

themselves and their children. Worst case, families that are already active, are given a break on their fees and can instead use that extra money for the investments and expenses they feel are important to their family's welfare. I will therefore be supporting Bill 206.

## There is a plan--but it's a secret!

See Magazine

Thu 07 Aug 2008

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Section: News

Column: Our Comment on This Week's News

Dateline: ALBERTA

Source: See Magazine

Controversy continues to swirl around the recent dissolution of Alberta's regional health boards because Health Minister Ron Liepert hasn't told the public the real reasons for the changes.

The Edmonton Journal revealed last week that the acting provincial officer of health was making up to \$60,000 less than those doing her job in Ontario and Manitoba.

The problem is we really don't have enough information to conduct a serious debate about the government's actions, and so critics' concerns about privatization, while certainly understandable given the Conservatives' track record, can sound unfounded.

The provincial Conservatives announced yet another major policy change this week (namely, funding for private schools) that was not debated during the election.

The province desperately needs more substantial debate on these issues. And citizens of all political stripes should demand it.

## Policing changes target repeat offenders

Edmonton Examiner

Wed 06 Aug 2008

Page: 5

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY CHIEF MIKE BOYD

Column: Communities and Crime

Over the past year, I have enjoyed writing a monthly column in the Edmonton Examiner. It has given me an opportunity to share information with the community and express my views on policing and matters of crime and disorder. As I complete my final column, I have good news to report.

There have been a number of recent announcements by Alberta Justice Officials about changes that will improve the effectiveness of the justice system. A couple

of weeks ago, Justice Minister Alison Redford and I held a news conference to announce changes in the process for offenders charged with robbery.

The Edmonton Police Service is also making another series of changes, which will contribute to the effectiveness of the system. These changes have already started and will continue into the fall. They will enable both police and justice officials to make better use of the tools already built into the system and ensure better follow through of offenders who previously fell through the cracks.

The focus will be on protecting the public while ensuring justice for victims and offenders. Specifically, these changes will shine the spotlight on repeat offenders, that small percentage of offenders responsible for the greatest amount of victimization and crime. Many of these offenders have previously been out of custody on several bails and continue to commit crime even though they have not yet had their trial on the original charges.

A very high percentage of these offenders are people who are dependent on drugs and who have crossed over the line from harming themselves to criminally victimizing other people. They are locked into the cycle of committing crime to get the money, to buy the drugs, to feed the habit.

If you're wondering what all this will mean for you, it means, as the system becomes more effective at dealing with these offenders, these changes should help reduce victimization and crime in Edmonton and bring about a higher quality of life for everyone.