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Aboriginal Relations

Native band suing over treaty may open lawsuit floodgates

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B4

Section: Cityplus/Alberta

Byline: Elise Stolte

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

An Alberta aboriginal band is suing the federal government for failure to provide the "medicine chest" and relief from "famine and pestilence" promised in its treaty.

If the band wins, experts say the effects could be far-reaching and Alberta could see a far greater number of treaty disputes.

"These days, the courts are pretty clear in saying that they're going to interpret terms like that broadly," said University of Calgary law professor Nigel Bankes, who has published several papers on treaty rights. "They're on fairly strong grounds. The question is, can you take it to court and sue on it? The courts are going to have to grapple in this province with treaty cases in a way that they really haven't."

The 3,500-member Ermineskin Band, based in Hobbema, filed its statement of claim in Edmonton court earlier this month, asking for \$270 million in compensation.

According to the lawsuit, Queen Victoria promised in Treaty 6 that, in the event of pestilence or famine, her agents will provide aid "sufficient to relieve the Indians from the calamity that shall have befallen them."

The treaty also says a "medicine chest shall be kept at the house of each Indian Agent for the use and benefit of the Indians."

Now the band is suing the government for failure to adequately fund social and development programs, including those for water, health care, education and housing.

Specifically, the band says the loss of a hunting and fishing lifestyle brought about an "epidemic" of diabetes and kidney failure, and the government failed to respond.

The band also alleges the government failed to fund a necessary well upgrade.

The band has had to truck in drinking water from Wetaskiwin since August 2006, "resulting in tremendous expense to Ermineskin and dangers to the health of its citizens."

Treaty 6 was signed on Sept. 25, 1877, and affects aboriginal bands across central Alberta and into Saskatchewan.

So far, no statement of defence has been filed.

Neither the Department of Indian Affairs nor the Ermineskin Band was available for comment.

The second half of the statement of claim deals with specific invoices for social assistance that Ermineskin officials say were given to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and not paid. They name two employees at the department.

The whole suit may have been filed to push the department into settling the dispute, said James Dempsey, professor with the University of Alberta's Faculty of Native Studies.

"This may be entirely just a pressure tactic. It'll be interesting to see how far it goes."

Advanced Education & Technology

U of A, MacEwan to receive more spaces; Province chips in \$73 million to accommodate growing student population

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B3

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Jennifer Yang

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

When the University of Alberta opens its classroom doors this September, there will be an extra 496 seats waiting.

The provincial government has committed \$73 million towards addressing the space crunch in post-secondary schools.

Most of the money -- \$56.5 million -- will go towards creating 2,447 new spaces at Alberta's universities, colleges, and technical institutions.

The remainder is for Grant MacEwan College and Mount Royal College, funding 1,989 spaces in programs that are in the process of converting from diplomas to bachelor's degrees.

Of the newly created spaces, 40 per cent are in the health-care sector.

While the University of Alberta will expand several of its departments, including engineering, philosophy and business administration, its nursing program is getting the largest boost, with 150 more students.

"We're really pleased," said U of A deputy provost Dru Marshall.

The added spaces put the province on track to meeting its target of 23,000 new spaces by 2017, government officials said on Wednesday.

The goal is based on current projections, however, and Advanced Education and Technology Minister Doug Horner said priorities can evolve with changing conditions.

"If the economy heats up and our participation rates go down, we're not going to be needing all of these spaces," he said.

"Don't measure me on the number of spaces I build. Measure me on the access the student has to the field they want to get into." This year, Edmonton campuses are getting 1,426 new spaces, compared with Calgary's 544. That's because Edmonton institutions simply had more physical space to accommodate the added students, said government spokeswoman Rachel Bouska.

"That's kind of the way it worked this year," she said.

"It doesn't necessarily mean that next year Calgary won't receive more because they have some capital projects that are coming into completion." Since 1998, Calgary schools have seen student intake expand by 3,644, while Edmonton has had a cumulative increase of 4,226.

Calgary schools last year turned away 2,816 would-be students, while 746 were unable to be accommodated in Edmonton-area institutions.

Horner said extra space was allocated this year in accordance to proposals put forth by the institutions. He said there are still gaps to be filled.

"There's probably going to be more news on that down the road," he said.

"We have a list of capital projects and priorities for all of Alberta." For now, school officials are grateful for the extra classroom spaces. Last year, Grant MacEwan started a new nursing program that expects to graduate 1,170 students.

The recent bump in spaces means an extra 300 students can now join future graduating classes in the four-year program.

"This is fantastic news for the college," said spokesperson David Beharry. "That is one of the largest nursing schools in western Canada, if not the largest."

Alberta ups number of postsecondary spots by nearly 2,500

The Globe and Mail

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A9

Section: National News

Byline: Elizabeth Church

Source: EDUCATION REPORTER

Alberta is adding nearly 2,500 spaces at universities and colleges this September, the latest step in a provincial plan to increase the education capacity of the booming province.

The new spots, allocated on the basis of student and industry demand and government priorities, are concentrated in health-care programs such as nursing, medicine and technical laboratory training. More than 40 per cent of the new spaces are in health-care fields. Commerce and business programs also are getting a boost in funding, as are graduate programs at universities.

As part of the expansion, the province also is providing extra money to two schools - Mount Royal College in Calgary and Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton - to convert close to 2,000 spaces in existing university transfer and applied degree programs to new bachelor degrees offered by the two colleges. Earlier this year, the province earmarked \$125-million for enrolment planning in its budget. Yesterday's announcement, which accounted for \$73-million of that, provides the first indication of how the money will be spent. It lays out where the new spaces will be created this fall.

The province is not saying how it will use the rest of the funds but indicated that other announcements will follow in the coming months. "Stay tuned. We are not done yet," said Doug Horner, Alberta's Minister of Advanced Education and Technology.

Mr. Horner said the \$73-million is operating funding that will increase as the new students move through the system to upper years and additional entry-level students arrive. At the University of Calgary, for example, the commerce program received funding to add 50 new first-year spaces this September, but that would translate into an increase of up to 200 undergraduates in the faculty at the end of four years if all the new students were to stay to graduation.

"These are quite significant increases," said Roman Cooney, the university's vice-president of external relations. He estimated that the 227 new spots granted to

the university in undergraduate and graduate programs will result in an increase of 750 to 1,000 students over four years. Mr. Cooney said this year the university is continuing to experience an increase in demand.

The University of Alberta received funding for nearly 500 new spots, including 150 in nursing.

Yesterday's new money is in addition to the billions the government has handed out in the past 18 months for capital projects on campuses across the province. It is part of a provincial plan to increase postsecondary capacity by roughly 2,300 spots annually over the next decade.

Mr. Horner cautioned the target number will likely vary annually and could be adjusted in response to demand and economic conditions. "With a growing economy and a growing population, we are going to add spaces every year," he said.

The province had about 141,000 students enrolled in higher education in the 2006-2007 school year. The new spaces represent about a 1.7-per-cent increase over that figure.

Students to enjoy wide-open spaces

The Calgary Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 18

Section: News

Byline: BY KATIE SCHNEIDER, SUN MEDIA

Thanks to \$73 million in provincial funding for student spaces, more than 1,800 seats are up for grabs at Calgary post-secondary schools this year, including in new bachelor's degree programs offered at Mount Royal College.

The funding from Alberta Advanced Education and Technology creates 2,447 new spaces in universities, colleges and technical institutes across the province.

As well, additional funding for 1,989 spaces will be provided to Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan College to convert their existing university transfer and applied degree programs to bachelor's programs.

Of those 4,436 total funded spaces for this year, 1,824 will be available at Calgary post-secondary schools.

Donna Babchishin, spokeswoman for Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, said 40% of the new spaces are in the health-care sector, including registered nurses, doctors, licensed practical nurses, X-ray technicians and medical laboratory technologists.

"It's balance -- 40% of spaces are for health care, but it also adds other fields students are interested in," she said.

The funding also addresses demand and capacity issues across the province, especially in Calgary and Edmonton, where expansion projects are in the works.

Advanced Education and Technology Minister Doug Horner said he will continue to address access issues.

Big ideas expected from thinking small; Research facility will help nanotech firms market products around the world

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: F1 / FRONT

Section: Business

Byline: David Finlayson

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

A world measured in thousandths of a millimetre that works with elastomers and dendrimers has the potential to pay big dividends for the Alberta economy, says the CEO of the new Alberta Centre for Advanced Microsystems and Nanotechnology Products (ACAMP).

The \$11.5-million facility in Edmonton Research Park will help the province become less dependent on the energy sector, while also making it cleaner and more efficient, Ken Brizel said Wednesday at the official opening.

"Nanotechnology is Alberta's next big investment," said Brizel, a technology veteran recruited from Florida to head the non-profit organization.

"Our mandate is to help turn ideas into real products in a worldwide market. In fact, we are already helping our clients produce marketable products to compete globally."

While energy will continue to provide benefits for Albertans, new technology can bring cleaner and more environmentally friendly methods to energy and other industries, said Brizel, most recently CEO of LightPath Technologies.

The collaborative government, industry and academia project allows entrepreneurs and startups access to some of the world's most sophisticated equipment, as well as business development, marketing and packaging mentoring.

The Alberta government provided \$8 million and another \$3.5 million came from Western Economic Diversification Canada.

It will work closely with established nanotechnology firms such as Micralyne, as well as the University of Alberta, University of Calgary, and the Edmonton-based National Institute for Nanotechnology, Brizel said.

"We're really only just starting. We anticipate a lot more activity as word of mouth spreads about what we are doing. And we anticipate that by year end, we will have a satellite facility in Calgary."

Bruce Alton, COO of private equity firm Touchstone Holdings and ACAMP board chair, said the centre will do a better job of translating technology into products people will actually buy, and get them to market sooner.

Opening the centre five years after the initial concept is "a fantastic result, but we still have some heavy lifting going forward," Alton said.

Advanced Education and Technology Minister Doug Horner said the goal for the province is to have two per cent of the trillion-dollar-a-year global nanotechnology market by 2020, representing \$20 billion in annual commercial activity.

The first nanotechnology graduates are coming out of the U of A, and that will rise to close to 600 in the next five years, he said. "And they will be able to get jobs at home."

If you're wondering, elastomers are cross-linked high-polymer materials with elastic behaviour, and dendrimers are artificially manufactured molecules comprised of smaller ones linked together.

U of C, colleges get 370 new seats; Calgary schools share \$73M boost

The Calgary Herald

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: City & Region

Byline: Sean Myers and Michelle Butterfield

Source: Calgary Herald

The province has anted up funding for 2,447 post-secondary spaces across the province to address the high demand that forces schools to turn away thousands of qualified applicants every year.

The \$73 million announced Wednesday will mean 227 additional seats at the University of Calgary, 93 at SAIT and 50 at Mount Royal College.

Mount Royal will also get funding for 1,300 spaces that convert university transfer and applied degree programs into the six newly established four-year bachelor degrees.

Officials with post-secondary schools said they were encouraged by the announcement.

"It's Step 1, but it's a pretty good sign that Step 2, 3 and 4 are on the way," said Dave Marshall, president of Mount Royal College.

Demand has been increasing faster than Calgary's post-secondary institutions have been able to keep pace.

At the University of Calgary, the number of applicants in June totalled 13,446, up from 12,783 last year. Yet, the university expects to enrol only 6,095 new students -- about 200 more than last year.

"While funding for 227 spaces sounds low, when you multiply that over several years, it's a significant increase in capacity," said Roman Cooney, U of C's vice-president of external relations.

He said the funding will translate into 750 to 1,000 new spaces over the next four years.

In recent years, SAIT has turned away an average of 4,000 qualified students every school year.

One of those students was Sarah Webb. She graduated from high school in 2000 with a plan to become a paramedic.

It took her three tries to get into the six-month emergency medical technician program at SAIT, a prerequisite for the paramedic program.

She completed her program with a perfect 4.0 grade point average and yet was turned down twice when she applied for paramedic training at SAIT.

"They don't tell you why you didn't get in, so you can know what to improve on," said Webb, 26. "When I made an appointment with someone in the program to discuss it, it got cancelled at the last minute and I got frustrated and finally gave up on it."

Eight years after graduating high school, Webb applied for the nursing program at Mount Royal and was accepted for September.

"It may have turned out for the best," said Webb. "But my goal was to be a paramedic by the time I was 25. I'm now 26 and starting all over again."

Liberal advanced education critic **Harry Chase** said the province is still not properly addressing the lack of post-secondary seats.

Advanced Education Minister Doug Horner said he is committed to addressing burgeoning enrolment figures by funding both student access and capital projects that increase capacity -- but it takes time.

"If we could wave the magic wand, we'd do all these capital projects at once and go looking for students," said Horner.

Tiny tech gets big lift

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

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Section: Business

Byline: BY CP

Alberta took aim at going big in the science of small yesterday by launching a centre focused on getting micro and nanotechnology inventions off the worktable and into the marketplace.

"There hasn't been enough spending towards productization and commercialization," said Ken Brizel, CEO of the Alberta Centre for Advanced Micro and Nanotechnology Products (ACAMP).

"This is brand new. This gives capability to all the start-ups and entrepreneurs as well as larger corporations."

Brizel said there are 40 companies and 200 researchers working in Alberta to have their work brought to market.

ACAMP is a joint initiative among government, industry and academe, supported by an \$11.5-million federal-provincial grant.

Doug Horner, Alberta's technology minister, said the goal is to capture \$20 billion of the global micro and nanotechnology market in the next 12 years.

Business and Economy

Albertans get cash course; Payday delight grows as province enjoys highest earnings in nation

The Calgary Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 53

Section: Business

Byline: BY MARKUS ERMISCH, SUN MEDIA

Wallets are just a little thicker in Alberta on paydays than in other provinces, says Statistics Canada.

And they're forecast to continue swelling into the next year, despite mounting signs Canada's economy is slowing.

Earnings before taxes have increased 4.6% over last year, the federal agency reported yesterday, boosting average weekly earnings, including overtime, to \$873 this June from \$835 a year ago.

No other province recorded higher earnings, or a larger percentage increase, than Alberta.

Average weekly earnings in runner-up Ontario totalled \$821 in June, 2.2% higher than last year, while P.E.I., with \$639, reported the lowest earnings of any Canadian province.

Nationally, average earnings increased 2.5% to \$789.

Earnings rose in all industry sectors but forestry, where earnings slid more than 1%.

By far the largest paycheques could be earned in mining and the oil and gas industry.

Average weekly earnings in that sector totalled \$1,529 in June, up more than 8% from one year ago.

People working in the accommodation and food services sector made the least money, earning, on average, \$336 per week.

Meanwhile, Canada's economy is decelerating.

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty downgraded Ottawa's projection for economic growth this year to 1.1% from 1.7% earlier this year.

Moreover, the Canadian economy shed more than 50,000 jobs last month, and inflation, although down because of sagging home prices, is projected to remain near 3% for the next months.

However, the slowing national economy appears to have little impact on paycheques, which are projected to continue increasing, especially in those provinces squeezing their living from commodities.

A Hay Group survey of 600 employers in the public and private sectors forecasts Canadian base salaries to rise 3.7% in 2009.

But for Alberta, the consulting firm anticipated salaries to increase 4.9% next year, behind Saskatchewan, which, with 5.1%, is expected to be the nation's salary growth leader. The Hay Group estimates the oil and gas sector will lead in salary growth next year with a 5.4% spike, followed by the mining sector at 4.4%.

A separate report issued by consulting firm Mercer predicts national average base pay to increase 3.8% next year, down from the 4% growth forecast for this year

Pay hikes highest in Wild Rose Country; Albertans lead nation with average wage of \$872.96 a week

The Calgary Herald

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: D1 / FRONT

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Geoffrey Scotton

Source: Calgary Herald

Despite signs growth in the Alberta economy is moderating, workers here still receive not only the largest pay packets, but also have the fastest-rising wages of any Canadian province, all at a time when inflation is softening -- meaning workers are making real gains in income.

Moreover, the outlook for further increases is among the strongest in the country as the demand continues to outpace the supply of available workers in Canada's tightest labour market, which at last read had a jobless rate of just 3.6 per cent in July, along with the highest employment rate and the highest labour participation rate.

That's the conclusion of two reports Wednesday, including a Statistics Canada assessment of average hourly wages across Canada in June, which found the Alberta average of \$872.96 per week was the highest among the provinces. It also represented a 4.6 per cent increase from June of 2007 and on a year-to-date basis showed Alberta wages were running five per cent ahead of the first six months of 2007.

"If Alberta's economy is softening in 2008, it doesn't seem to be having any effect on earnings in the province," said Todd Hirsch, the Calgary-based senior economist with ATB Financial.

"Not only do Alberta employees earn the most, those earnings are still growing faster than anywhere else in the country," Hirsch added.

The StatsCan report came as Hay Group Ltd. of Toronto said an extensive survey of firms and public sector organizations indicates that Alberta organizations foresee an average 4.9 per cent increase in base salaries in 2009, second only to Saskatchewan, where salary payments are expected to rise an average 5.1 per cent. "Saskatchewan has overtaken Alberta as the province with the highest salary adjustment," said Hay, which pegs the national average at 3.7 per cent. Nonetheless, Hay forecasts the oil and gas industry, which is centred in Alberta generally and Calgary in particular, will lead all others in Canada with average 5.4 per cent gains in 2009. About 600 public- and private-sector organizations across Canada were surveyed by Hay in June and July on their salary plans for the new year.

The prominent compensation and benefits consulting firm said differing dynamics are at play in various regions and among different industries in Canada, as jurisdictions with weak economies such as Ontario and Quebec experience diminished upward pressure on salaries. Conversely, the commodity-oriented provincial economies of the West, including Alberta's, are seeing heightening upward pressure on pay.

"Our commodity provinces are forecasting higher salary adjustments than they did last year, while Central Canada is forecasting lower adjustments than last year," said Hay's Karl Aboud, the firm's national director of reward management. Raises in Ontario in 2009 are pegged at 3.3 per cent and those in Quebec at 3.2 per cent, while Atlantic Canada's is forecast to be 3.5 per cent, which Hay said was the first time it can recall raises down east have surpassed the central Canadian provinces.

British Columbia is seen matching the national average at 3.7 per cent while Manitoba comes in a hair below, at 3.6 per cent.

Nation-leading wage gains in Alberta contrast with a recent retreat in inflation here, and generally modest price increases in this province so far in 2008.

Inflation in July in Alberta was 3.5 per cent, down from 4.4 per cent in July. So far in 2008, it's averaged 3.5 per cent.

"With weekly earnings up five per cent, the average Alberta household should actually be gaining some ground in making ends meet," said Hirsch. "The high and fast-growing wages in Alberta are due to a relatively resilient economy and a persistent shortage of labour."

The ATB economist doesn't see things changing much, noting worker flows from other provinces have softened recently and that should keep pressure on employers to improve their financial attractiveness to workers.

"Skilled labour remains especially difficult to attract, and that is reflected in companies having to continually ratchet up their pay packages."

Despite slump, deficit unlikely

The Globe and Mail

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B2

Section: Report On Business: Canadian

Byline: Julian Beltrame

Dateline: OTTAWA

Source: The Canadian Press

OTTAWA -- The federal government will easily manage to avoid slipping into a deficit position despite the slumping economy and will almost certainly record higher surpluses than forecast, says a new analysis by the Conference Board of Canada.

The private sector think tank says higher-than-projected inflation and other factors have boosted government revenues and almost completely countered the impact of slower growth and tax cuts that went into effect in January.

Finance Minister Jim Flaherty had forecast a \$2.3-billion surplus this fiscal year and a slim \$1.3-billion surplus in 2009-2010, but the Conference Board believes Ottawa will be able to better both targets.

"Federal revenues should have been down nearly \$20-billion in the first quarter, given the measures set out in last fall's economic statement," said Glen Hodgson, the board's chief economist.

"Instead, only a (\$1.1-billion) reduction is showing up in the national accounts" for the first three months of the fiscal year.

The report does not predict the size of the surplus this year, but Mr. Hodgson said in an interview that \$5-billion would not be a surprise.

Several other economists, including Dale Orr of Global Insight Canada, have also recently dismissed fears that Canada's slumping economy - which many now believe could grow at half the rate of the budget's 1.7 per cent working assumption - will result in the first federal budgetary deficit in more than a decade.

The estimates of additional fiscal room for Ottawa do not surprise John Williamson of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. He has argued that Ottawa taxes more than it requires.

Mr. Williamson said he has been watching with interest a flurry of spending announcements in the runup to what appears now as an almost certain fall election campaign, "including money for Nova Scotia, Bombardier, money for festivals and ribbon-cutting ceremonies right across this country."

Recently, the federal government reconfirmed a \$350-million research and development commitment to Bombardier Inc. and announced an \$870-million offshore resource settlement with Nova Scotia.

"This is not a government that is going to fall back into deficit, and for good reason, voters won't support that," Mr. Williamson said.

Wage inflation worries ease; Rates of increase expected to slow in 2009

The Globe and Mail

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B3

Section: Report On Business: Canadian

Byline: Janet McFarland

Canadian workers in the booming energy sector will see the largest wage increases next year, while employees at manufacturing and retail companies can expect to see more modest pay gains, according to two surveys released yesterday.

On a national basis, consulting firm Mercer forecasts wage increases of 3.8 per cent next year, down from 4 per cent in 2008. A survey from Hay Group suggests wages are set to rise 3.7 per cent in 2009, compared with 3.9 per cent this year. Karl Aboud, national director of reward management at Hay Group, said the national averages do not tell the full story because regional and industry differences in pay gains have never been so varied over the past 15 years.

"Boy, there are differences, the most differences there have ever been between region and between business sector," he said. "You put the lowest sector and the lowest geography together and compare it to the highest sector and highest geography and you're going to be more than two percentage points different. That's the highest difference we've ever seen."

Hay Group said it surveyed almost 600 organizations in the public and private sectors, while Mercer surveyed 485 employers on their wage forecasts for their 850,000 non-unionized workers.

The surveys both suggest wage increases will not be a significant factor in inflation pressures next year.

David Wolf, chief economist at Merrill Lynch Canada, said lower wage increases tend to reduce inflationary pressures and send a signal that employers are finding it easier to fill jobs without increasing wages as much as in the past.

"What you really get worried about on the inflation side is when you have these kinds of increases in food and energy, prices feed into higher wage demands," he said. "Higher wage inflation kicks off a wage and price spiral. The data we're seeing ... suggests that just isn't happening."

But while wage increases are falling, the surveys demonstrate the wide variations in economic health across sectors and regions.

In the oil and gas sector, for example, both surveys say wages are expected to increase 5.4 per cent next year. Mercer puts the wage increase for natural resources at 4.2 per cent, while Hay Group says mining will see growth of 4.4 per cent.

In contrast, manufacturing, retail and transportation companies forecast increases of 3.4 per cent, according to Mercer. Hay Group pegs manufacturing increases at 3.3 per cent, retail at 3.1 per cent and forest products at 2.4 per cent.

"You've got Western Canada's oil and gas sector still pushing along, and the oil and gas numbers are significantly higher than we're seeing in manufacturing, " Mercer principal Iain Morris said. "In manufacturing, if anything, they're going to be looking for ways to minimize wage costs."

The biggest variation between the two surveys is in their forecasts for wage growth on a provincial basis.

Hay Group, for example, said Saskatchewan's booming economy will propel wages up 5.1 per cent next year, topping the 4.9-per-cent growth of former wage leader Alberta.

Hay group forecasts Ontario and Quebec will trail the nation with wage growth of 3.3 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively, while Atlantic Canada will outpace Central Canada for the first time with a gain of 3.5 per cent.

Salary projection

Wage increase forecast by sector for 2009

NATIONAL AVERAGE: 3.7%

Oil & gas 5.4%

Credit unions 4.7

Mining 4.4

Bus. & pers. services 4.1

Chemical 4.0

Government 4.0

Pharmaceuticals 3.8

Banks 3.7

Utilities 3.7

Technology 3.6

Insurance 3.4

Mfg & distrib. 3.3

Retail 3.1

Consumer products 3.0

Forest products 2.4

KATHRYN TAM/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

SOURCE: HAY GROUP

Employment and Immigration

Increase in shift work takes heavy toll

The Globe and Mail

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B7

Section: Report On Business: Canadian

Byline: Virginia Galt

Source: WORKPLACE REPORTER

Almost 30 per cent of Canadians now work irregular shifts, which can mess with their sleep cycles and cut into family time, Statistics Canada reported yesterday. And, not surprisingly, shift workers are more inclined to be unhappy with their work-life balance than employees who work regular day jobs, Statscan found in analyzing the results of a general social survey conducted in 2005.

Analyst Cara Williams wrote that working 9 to 5 may be what many consider a normal full-time job.

However, "in an economy that often demands 24/7 activity," shift work has become increasingly common.

The survey found that, in 2005, 28 per cent of 14.6 million employed Canadians worked something other than a regular day shift.

Certain occupations, such as policing and health care, have long been associated with shift work because of the nature of the jobs. In addition, more manufacturers and shippers operate round the clock now to meet demands for just- in-time delivery. Call centres and information-technology help desks are also populated 24/7.

Public transit drivers are among those being called upon to work more irregular hours - to transport the growing ranks of other shift workers to and from their jobs, said transit union president Bob Kinnear, who represents employees of the Toronto Transit Commission.

"As for providing bus service and subway service, we recognize that the vehicles have to be out there," Mr. Kinnear said.

However, the Amalgamated Transit Union has long pushed for more consistent shifts, he said, because rotating schedules - where employees shift from nights to days to afternoons - are particularly disruptive.

"It's not a healthy lifestyle. Your body is not sure when to eat, when to sleep."

There is plenty of evidence that fatigued employees become ill more frequently, Mr. Kinnear added.

The majority of shift workers - 55 per cent - say they work irregular hours because of the nature of their jobs, according to the Statscan report, Work- life Balance of Shift Workers.

"However, for some, shift work was preferred because of family or child care (8 per cent), school (3 per cent), better pay (7 per cent) or personal preference (11 per cent). For another 8 per cent, it was the only type of job they could get."

Ms. Williams wrote that work-life balance "is a self-defined, self-determined state reached by a person able to effectively manage multiple responsibilities at work, at home and in the community."

This state is difficult for full-time workers to reach at the best of times, she wrote. "Role overload - too much to do and not enough time to do it - provides another measure of wellbeing," Ms. Williams wrote.

"For example, often feeling that not enough is accomplished in the day, worrying about not spending enough time with family, constantly feeling under stress, trying to accomplish more than can be handled and cutting back on sleep are all indicators of role overload."

Cutting back on sleep is one of the most common tactics used by full-time workers to accomplish more in a day, but shift-workers are more likely than nine-to-fivers to resort to this.

"For example, just over half of all day workers cut back on sleep compared with 70 per cent of evening shift workers and 63 per cent of rotating shift workers," Ms. Williams wrote.

"This may be particularly problematic for shift workers, since they may already be having difficulty with sleep time."

Energy

New royalty scheme expected to generate \$1.7B

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B4

Section: Cityplus/Alberta

Byline: Alexandra Zabjek

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

Alberta's new royalty framework will boost the province's burgeoning resource revenues by \$1.74 billion this fiscal year, the energy department says.

The new rates, set to kick in this January, should make up nine per cent of the \$19 billion of resource revenues the province expects to earn in the budget year ending next April.

"With the new framework, all three formulas for oil, natural gas and oilsands have been made price sensitive. So when prices are higher, revenues will be higher as well," ministry spokesman Jason Chance said on Wednesday.

Record-breaking resource revenues for 2008-09 were predicted in a fiscal update released Tuesday by the province. The report pegged the provincial surplus at

\$8.5 billion this year, with high oil and natural gas prices driving the swelling surplus. The new royalty scheme was introduced last October after Premier Ed Stelmach commissioned a panel to review how the province collects royalties from oil and gas companies. Municipalities and interest groups had long criticized the government for shortchanging Albertans on these revenues.

Among the many recommendations made by the panel was that a new royalty framework be implemented in July of this year. Stelmach instead committed to starting a new scheme in January 2009, leaving open the question of how much money has been left out of government coffers by delaying the scheme to the new year. Oil prices peaked this summer, reaching a record high of \$147.27 US per barrel in July. They have since declined steadily and closed Wednesday at \$118 US per barrel.

Chance said his department does not have any data on the potential revenue. Economists said it would be difficult to pinpoint the amount of royalties that could have been collected between July and December of this year had the new framework been in place.

"The royalty revenues would have been higher had they had the higher rates in place," said Jean-Francois Wen, a University of Calgary economist who studies public finance.

"Some of the triggers, for example, would have depended on the price of oil, which exceeded the top rate the new royalty rate was designed for."

He noted that the highest royalty rates for oilsands would be applied once the price of oil hit \$120 US per barrel.

The province has forecasted oil prices to average \$119 US per barrel this fiscal year. Chance defended the January start time for the new royalty framework and said Alberta's oil products don't always earn the top trading price.

"The new royalty framework was announced in October and it was very important to give industry and government an appropriate amount of time to make the necessary changes," he said.

"You can't snap your fingers overnight and change royalty rates."

When the new royalty framework was announced last October, the government predicted it would earn the province an additional \$1.4 billion in 2009-10.

Osum Oil Sands gains \$275M in financing; Investment to fuel Cold Lake project

The Calgary Herald

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: D4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Dan Healing

Source: Calgary Herald

The privately held Calgary company whose Marie Lake oilsands lease was yanked by the Alberta government last fall after protests from cottage owners has landed \$275 million in private equity financing.

Osum Oil Sands Corp. announced Wednesday it had sold 26.2 million shares at \$10.50 per share in a financing led by Warburg Pincus LLC that included a "substantial investment" by Blackstone Capital Partners.

Osum chairman and chief executive Richard Todd said in a news release the investment will fuel the company's plan for a 35,000-barrels-per-day Cold Lake in-situ oilsands bitumen project and help advance proposed Saleski region carbonate-hosted bitumen projects near Wabasca that could ultimately produce more than 150,000 bpd.

Last October, an Osum executive said it was considering suing the Stelmach government for millions of dollars in damages after it cancelled its lease to extract bitumen from under the lake, thus nixing plans for seismic testing.

"This kind of thing happens in South America, not Canada," fumed Osum vice-president Andrew Squires at the time.

Osum spokesman Justin Robinson said Wednesday the government has not returned the lease and Osum has not decided on a lawsuit.

"We feel ours is not the next move," he said.

Osum plans to file its commercial application for the Cold Lake project in late 2009, with first production anticipated in 2013.

Marie Lake is in the northeast Alberta region where Osum has leases covering 7,400 hectares but is not considered central to the project. The company has yet to choose a project site or technology, although it is leaning toward a combination of steam-assisted gravity drainage and cyclic steam stimulation to soften the bitumen for recovery, Robinson said.

An application for the first of the Saleski projects awaits pilot results, expected in early 2010, the company said.

"The closing of this most recent financing is a positive endorsement of our quality asset base and management team," said Todd in a release. "The calibre of private equity firms committed to this financing suggests a solid base of access to capital going forward for our company."

On its website, Osum notes it had raised \$100 million of equity and had about \$47 million in working capital at the end of 2007, with 45 million basic or 56 million fully diluted shares outstanding. Management and directors control 25 per cent of the fully diluted shares.

It also stated it has a total of 11 billion barrels of oil in place with 1.5 billion barrels recoverable, verified by independent engineers. In the Cold Lake area, it has 1.8 billion barrels of oil in place with 305 million recoverable.

International private equity provider Warburg Pincus, with \$35 billion of assets currently under management, has invested more than \$3.4 billion in more than

30 companies in the energy-sector worldwide, including Athabasca oilsands junior MEG Energy Corp.

New York-based Blackstone is an investment and advisory firm with assets under management of \$119 billion.

Two serving Osum directors will step down to make room on its board for two Warburg Pincus appointees and one from Blackstone.

Alberta gets crude awakening; Enhance and Fairborne's new recovery project contingent upon major CO2 pipeline

The Calgary Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 54

Section: Business

Byline: BY MARKUS ERMISCH, SUN MEDIA

An oil field more than 50 years old could see its output of crude increase significantly once an enhanced oil recovery project starts operating in 2011.

Enhance Energy Inc. and Fairborne Energy Ltd. formalized an agreement this week that will see the two Calgary companies inject carbon dioxide into the Clive oil field near Leduc.

The process -- known as enhanced oil recovery in industry speak, or simply EOR -- forces oil not recoverable by conventional means closer to the surface.

Extracting oil through EOR is more expensive than recovering it through conventional means simply because the process is more involved.

But unprecedented oil prices have suddenly made such methods lucrative.

Fairborne and Enhance tentatively agreed to the joint venture last year, when crude averaged \$72 a barrel.

Prices have since risen significantly and are now trading just below \$120 a barrel.

"Certainly, at today's prices, it's a very, very good project," said Fairborne CEO Steven VanSickle. "We were very encouraged last year by the commodity prices, and obviously have an incremental level of optimism at today's prices."

Although VanSickle declined to reveal how much oil he expects to recover from the Clive oil field, he said he has "high expectations."

The EOR project is contingent upon a CO2 pipeline Enhance plans to build to ship the gas from two industrial facilities near Edmonton to the Clive oil field.

Pending regulatory approval, construction of Alberta's first major CO2 pipeline, expected to cost \$300 million during the first phase, will start next year.

Once the CO2 is injected, it will be permanently stored underground.

Enbridge begins work on expansion

The Calgary Herald

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: D4

Section: Calgary Business

Byline: Dan Healing

Source: Calgary Herald

To the relief of oil producers concerned about Alberta's tightening export capacity, construction has begun on the Canadian portion of Enbridge Inc.'s \$3-billion Alberta Clipper expansion project.

Mainline construction activity started on the weekend near Hardisty and Provost in Alberta and near Bethune, Sask. In addition, facility construction has commenced at Hardisty; Mildred, Sask., and Cromer, Man., Enbridge said.

At its peak, more than 1,000 workers will be labouring on the Canadian part of the line this year.

"It's a very good milestone for us to get out there and start moving some dirt," said Leo Golden, vice-president for the project for Enbridge.

Some U.S. approvals at the state and federal levels are already in place and the rest are expected by the first quarter of 2009, he said, anticipating the pipeline will be in service by mid-2010.

Enbridge is already contemplating further building up what will be a 450,000-barrel-per-day expansion, looking at taking the line to 600,000 and then 800,000 bpd, although those projects have not been approved.

Industry observers were pleased.

"As we said when we released our forecast/outlook back in June, it is important that the growing supply from the oilsands has sufficient pipeline capacity to key expanding markets in Canada and the U.S.," said Greg Stringham, a vice-president with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers in Calgary.

"The start of construction on the Enbridge pipeline is a clear signal that these key links are moving ahead in a timely fashion."

In the report, CAPP estimated the country's oil production could nearly double to 4.5 million bpd by 2020.

"The Alberta Clipper pipeline is the largest expansion project in Enbridge's history," said Al Monaco, executive vice-president of major projects for Enbridge, in a news release.

"Together with our Southern Access project, Alberta Clipper will ultimately deliver an incremental 1.2 million bpd from Alberta to eastern Canadian markets and U.S. refineries throughout the Midwest, the mid-continent and the U.S. Gulf Coast."

The project involves the construction of a new 36-inch (90-centimetre) diameter, 1,607-kilometre crude oil pipeline from Hardisty to Superior, Wis.

Alberta Clipper will form part of the existing Enbridge system in Canada and the Enbridge Energy Partners' Lakehead system in the United States.

As much as \$23 billion in new pipelines, including Alberta Clipper, is planned to get rising production from the oilsands to current and new markets, such as the U.S. Gulf Coast, California and Asia.

In a recent report on the 45,000 kilometres of oil and gas pipelines it regulates, the National Energy Board said some rationing of space took place in 2007 on Enbridge's 1.9-million-bpd system to the U.S. Midwest and beyond, and that the system ran at or near capacity in first quarter 2008.

The industry will get some relief in November when Kinder Morgan Energy Partners is slated to have a 40,000-bpd expansion of its Trans Mountain system to the West Coast completed, the board said.

TransCanada Corp. and Enbridge have other major pipeline projects under development that would ship Alberta crude.

Gas flowing from refinery to stations again

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A2

Section: News

Byline: Dave Cooper

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Drivers heading off for the holiday weekend will still likely find some Petro-Canada and independent gas stations out of gasoline.

The Petro-Canada Edmonton refinery was back in the business of producing gasoline Wednesday after the catalytic cracking unit was restarted. The cracker, which produces gasoline, was shut Aug. 3 after a failure.

Petro-Canada says it will take some time before all service stations have gas to sell.

"The plan is to bring up our inventory. If you drive by a station and see prices listed where the zeros used to be, then that station has gas," Petro-Canada spokesman Jon Hamilton says.

"We still sell diesel and the convenience stores are open, but the stations ran out of gas at different times, so I can't say when they will all have gas."

He also was unable to comment on the cost to Petro-Canada in lost sales, extra trucking and the staffing bill to have 120 people working around the clock for more than two weeks to fix the cracker.

For many service station owners, the wait has been costly.

"I sent 75 customers away on one day alone, my sales have dropped from \$15,000 to \$6,000 and we can't do anything about it," says Barb Kennedy, owner of the FasGas at 10915 170th St.

"I've tried to buy gas from Esso and Shell, but they don't have any to spare. I've had some partial deliveries, I now have a quarter tank and one empty tank. That's it."

Hamilton says Petro-Canada will keep the 40 extra trucks it added to bring gasoline from Vancouver to central B.C. and parts of Alberta, an expensive proposition.

"We'll keep shipping up gasoline. It's all about having product available for our customers."

He says the firm has been trying to divvy up the gasoline it does have among stations.

The three Edmonton refineries produce a total of 410,000 barrels of product each day. Petro-Canada's production is normally 125,000 barrels, says the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

"There is enough supply in the area, and if one refinery goes down, sure you have some distribution problems," says Joseph Doucet, a professor of energy policy at the University of Alberta's School of Business.

"But you can't build extra capacity just in case something happens. It's the same with utilities, bridges and hospitals. You can't afford to build duplication."

Doucet suggests Petro-Canada may do something in the marketing area to lure back customers who have moved to other companies that have fuel to sell.

He says Canadians are less loyal than Americans. Price is important here and if customers get into the habit of filling up elsewhere, then that could present a challenge to Petro-Canada.

Doucet says provincial royalties are collected at the wellhead, so the province suffered no loss from Petro-Canada's drop in sales.

Engineers are still studying the reasons behind the catalytic cracking unit failure, Hamilton says.

Petro-Canada has 137 gas stations in Alberta and 62 in the B.C. Interior that are normally supplied by the refinery.

It also sells to many independent retailers.

Industry sees higher gas prices as inevitable; Liberal, Conservative plans won't curb increases

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A5

Section: News

Dateline: OTTAWA

Source: Canwest News Services

OTTAWA - Energy industry experts say consumers will pay more for gas at the pump, regardless of whether Conservative or Liberal policies are adopted to cut the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

The costs to consumers to cut greenhouse gases is expected to be a major issue in the federal election campaign that could be underway as soon as next week. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has described the Liberal plan, which involves a carbon tax to encourage business and consumers to reduce energy consumption, as "insane" and "crazy."

Harper has said the Liberal proposal will force Canadians to pay more for gas and that will hurt the economy.

Representatives of the country's gasoline refiners and retailers told a House of Commons committee Wednesday that gas prices will indeed rise under the Liberal Green Shift plan.

"A carbon tax would increase the price of gasoline at the pump," said Jane Savage, chief executive officer of the Canadian Independent Petroleum Marketers Association. Savage, whose organization represents about 70 per cent of Canada's gas retailers, was responding to a question put to her and other witnesses at the committee by Conservative MP Colin Carrie.

But the Conservative approach to cutting greenhouse gases -- a mix of regulations, technology investments and new markets to trade emission credits -- will also result in higher pump prices, said energy industry executives after testifying Wednesday at a House of Commons committee.

"I think we'd be fooling ourselves if, however we deal with the issue of climate change, that in the end there's not going to be some cost to Canadians and there's not going to be some element of economic dislocation," Peter Boag, president of the Canadian Petroleum Products Institute, said.

One of the centrepieces of the Conservative approach to fighting climate change is a requirement for all large companies to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2020, compared to 2006 levels.

In their Green Shift plan, the Liberals promised no new taxes on gasoline but would implement new taxes on a range of other fossil fuels such as diesel, jet fuel, natural gas, and coal.

But the industry executives say it's inevitable that companies producing, refining, and selling gasoline will pay new taxes on other fuels under the Liberal plan and will pass on new costs to consumers.

Gas prices tied to speculators; Producers, retailers tell MPs they're not responsible for spike

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 73

Section: Business

Byline: BY CP

OTTAWA -- Consumers feeling pain at the pumps got no relief yesterday from Canadian gasoline producers and retailers, who brought a don't-blame-us message to a Commons committee investigating high energy prices.

MPs are studying how a barrel of crude oil could jump from roughly \$70 US to above \$140 within a year, and what role speculators may have played in the rise. The price of oil has declined by about 20% since hitting a record high \$147.27 on July 11. However, gasoline pump prices have not fallen as quickly, particularly in competitive big-city markets such as Toronto where the average price for unleaded is about \$1.23 per litre. In Edmonton, the average price is \$1.26 per litre.

Retailers are not to blame for pump prices that have failed to decline in step with oil prices in recent weeks, said Jane Savage, president of the Canadian Independent Petroleum Marketers Association.

At fault, she said, are speculators in the oil markets and a small concentration of refiners who set the benchmark prices that retailers pay for gasoline.

"If one espouses the belief that the more the number of competitors, the lower the price, one could assume from that that with this high concentration of refiners in Canada, that we are paying a higher price at the wholesale level," Savage told the Commons subcommittee on oil and gas and other energy prices.

But Peter Boag, president of the Canadian Petroleum Products Institute, said refiners have seen their production margins squeezed by high oil prices.

He argued that by global standards, Canada was not hurt as badly as some other countries by peaking oil prices in mid-July.

"While it may be of little consolation to Canadians, the volatility we have recently witnessed is not unique to Canada," Boag said.

"What is unique to Canada is that, notwithstanding this turbulence, Canadians pay the second-lowest price in the Western world for petroleum fuels."

Environment

MUNI cleanup minor: report; Low pollution levels at airport open door wider to redevelopment

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Gordon Kent

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Despite fears that closing the City Centre Airport could lead to massive cleanup costs, a new report says tests done since 1995 indicate the contaminated ground shouldn't require significant remediation.

Studies of 28 sites along the airport's eastern and western edges either didn't show significant levels of pollution or recommended ways to deal with it, according to a city report written for next week's public hearing on whether to keep the facility open.

Coun. Tony Caterina still maintains the cleanup bill could reach \$1 billion, far more than the potential profit from selling the property for development.

But a review of the existing assessments suggests "only a localized pattern of contamination events," the report says. "These are typically what would be expected to be found in association with light to medium industrial activities, with no significant remediation requirements expected."

An overall environmental assessment would have to be done before the airport could be redeveloped, the report says. It also indicates the most likely of three concepts for the 217-hectare area would see it become home to 32,000 people living in 18,600 medium- and high-density housing units, with LRT service, commercial and office space, and expansion room for NAIT.

An appraiser has confirmed assumptions made in an earlier report, which found this 15- to 20-year project could give the city a \$486-million windfall and produce \$68 million in property taxes.

"Because several major pending projects could be impacted by (airport) land use changes ... and due to the opportunity to generate revenue to help bridge the city's infrastructure funding shortfall, it is prudent for the city to decide the direction of the (airport) land by June 2009."

The report suggests city administrators and consultants do further research by early next year on topics such as the possible expense of buying out the leases of existing businesses.

The report also suggests an analysis of potential downtown development if building height limits were removed.

Caterina, who has called for expanded service at the airport, said Wednesday the latest report doesn't change his mind about possible pollution problems on the property.

"They have gone to a couple of areas on the periphery and tested, but there has never been an environmental assessment on the entire site," he said. "During the '30s and '40s and '50s, with the air force out there, there were people dumping gasoline by the barrel. There's a lot of information that hasn't come out."

He supports a call by the Kingsway Business Association to postpone the hearings set for next Tuesday and Wednesday so people can collect more information. "I wanted to reopen this debate so we could get something done. We can't go another 13 or 15 years just letting it sit the way it's sitting."

Voters decided in a 1995 plebiscite to consolidate flights at the Edmonton International Airport. The Edmonton Airports Authority now limits scheduled flights into the downtown airport to planes with a maximum of 10 seats. One issue that still isn't resolved is what effect closing the airport would have on medevac and other health services.

While the report says Alberta Health staff hasn't comprehensively studied the issue, Capital Health spokesman Rob Stevenson said the main impact would be on shipping organs taken for transplant from people who die at the Royal Alexandra Hospital.

"It would be a setback for sure, and we would certainly work with the City of Edmonton and our team of experts to come up with an alternative solution. We would find a way to get around it."

In 2007-08, 67 flights bringing in or taking away organs used the City Centre Airport and 40 flights used the international, Stevenson said.

Export bulk water, report urges

The Globe and Mail

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B7

Section: Report On Business: Canadian

Byline: John Partridge

A Quebec think tank with a blue-chip business board of directors has waded into a controversial Canadian political issue by coming out in favour of bulk water exports.

"Large-scale exports of fresh water would be a wealth-creating idea for Quebec and for Canada as a whole," the Montreal Economic Institute said yesterday. "It is urgent to look seriously at developing our blue gold."

Indeed, Quebec could generate \$65-billion a year in gross revenue if it were to export 10 per cent of the one trillion cubic metres of "renewable fresh water" available to it each year, according to an MEI research paper, which was prepared by Marcel Boyer, the organization's chief economist and vice-president.

That's based on a price equal to 65 cents a cubic metre that it currently costs to desalinate sea water, which, the paper said, will ultimately determine the commercial value of fresh water and profitability of the infrastructure spending that would be required.

Even if the province were to charge a royalty of just 10 per cent on such exports, this would bring in \$6.5-billion a year in income, the paper said, about five times the dividend currently paid by Hydro-Québec.

Mr. Boyer also says in the research paper that Quebec alone holds 3 per cent of the world's reserves of fresh water and uses just 0.5 per cent of its renewable reserves a year, compared with 18.9 per cent in the United States.

The MEI released its research paper at a time when the debate about water is again on the boil.

Just last Wednesday, The Canadian Press revealed that Environment Canada had warned in a draft internal report last December that the country's supplies of fresh water are not as plentiful as once thought and that shortages threaten to pinch the economy and pit provinces against each other.

The city of London, Ont., also recently voted to ban sales of bottled water in city buildings, arenas, community centres and, potentially, even golf courses.

The wider issue of bulk water exports from Canada has cropped up regularly during the past 40 years, with a number of schemes proposed by various companies over the years.

All have met with controversy and all have been shot down.

But Liberal leader Stéphane Dion alleged a year ago - provoking denials from the federal government - that there have been secret talks between Ottawa and Washington about water sales to the U.S.

Mr. Boyer was not immediately available for comment. He was taking part in a lunchtime debate on water in Montreal organized by the MEI.

The Ottawa-based Council of Canadians, headed by Maude Barlow, has campaigned vigorously against what it calls the commoditization and commercialization of fresh water.

The council's national water campaigner, Meera Karunanathan, took issue with the MEI's research paper.

"I think it's absurd to suggest that you can potentially export such large quantities of water ... out of Quebec for that not to have an environmental impact," she said in a telephone interview.

Finance and Enterprise (including Pensions/Insurance)

Carbon levies among business tax reforms urged; Conference Board

National Post

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: FP3

Section: Financial Post

Byline: Eric Beauchesne

Dateline: OTTAWA

Source: Canwest News Service

OTTAWA - The federal and provincial governments should accelerate business tax reforms to help Canadian firms be more productive to deal with the strong dollar, the Conference Board argued in a report yesterday.

"Canadian firms are facing two major obstacles in their efforts to compete globally, lagging productivity growth and the strong dollar," said Glen Hodgson, the think-tank's chief economist. "Broad business tax reform would help Canadian firms invest in productivity-enhancing machinery and equipment, give companies a competitive advantage in global competition, and encourage investment in leading-edge environmental technologies."

The reforms should include the introduction of controversial carbon taxes, along the lines of what British Columbia has already introduced and what federal opposition Liberals have proposed, which would not only help reduce greenhouse gases but would provide additional revenues to cover the costs of accelerating tax cuts in other areas, such as corporate income taxes, Mr. Hodgson said in an interview.

"The easiest way to do it, frankly, is by putting a tax on fuel related to the amount of CO₂ produced by a litre of gasoline or heating fuel in the home," he said, noting that the federal Liberal carbon-tax proposal draws upon an earlier conference board recommendation. "Any time you raise the price of something people are going to look for alternatives or ways to become more efficient.

"Green taxes are coming; it's only a question of when," he said.

Governments should also introduce an environmental technology investment tax credit, the board said.

"It's a carrot-and-stick approach," Mr. Hodgson said, noting that the carbon tax is the stick and the tax credit the carrot to get firms to look for cleaner processes. Other reforms the board wants to see accelerated include cutting corporate income tax rates to the low end of the range in the Group of Seven major industrial nations to meet the federal government's target of a combined federal-provincial corporate income tax rate of 25%.

It also urges that provinces that haven't yet done so eliminate any remaining capital taxes, which are a tax on the assets of a firm and applied whether a company is profitable or not.

Health & Wellness

WHAT THE PROVINCES HAVE DONE

The Globe and Mail

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A11

Section: National News

Byline: Karen Howlett, Ian Bailey, Ingrid Peritz, Katherine O'Neill and Matthew Trevisan

Ontario

David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, credits an electronic system introduced after the SARS crisis of 2003 - in which 44 people in Canada

died - with helping officials in his office realize they were dealing with another deadly disease.

As of yesterday, the listeriosis outbreak had afflicted 40 people in Ontario, leaving 12 dead. But Dr. Williams said the toll would have been much higher without the new electronic system for reporting diseases. Twelve cases were reported by various health units around the province for July alone, up from a monthly average of four or five.

"Cumulatively, we were able to identify an aberration," he said in an interview yesterday.

As soon as staff in Dr. Williams's office noticed the higher number of cases, they investigated.

Staff set out to look for common links among the cases, a process that involved sophisticated testing known as fingerprinting. On Aug. 5, public health test results revealed that a sandwich from a nursing home in Toronto where two residents had died was contaminated with listeria. But it would take another two weeks before officials announced that a nationwide outbreak of listeria infection originated in a Toronto meat-processing plant.

Karen Howlett

British Columbia

B.C.'s provincial health officer said that for three years, hospitals and seniors care facilities have been warned against serving luncheon meats to some patients for fears of listeria, although there was no specific health threat.

Perry Kendall said the Health Canada warning was prudent.

"If you wanted to be totally risk free, you would take that food off your list, and I think we have been under the assumption that, basically, these foods came from an inspected, health-care approved, Health Canada approved, (Canadian Food Inspection Agency)-approved source, that they would be safe," Dr. Kendall said. Healthy Living Minister Mary Polak, designated to speak for the government on the issue, said there will be an eventual review of how health-care facilities have handled the outbreak to date. She rejected any idea of some kind of ongoing deli-meats ban. "Our focus right now is on contamination from this plant. ... Banning deli meat wouldn't solve the problem of the risk of listeria."

The province has four confirmed cases, with one death under investigation.

Ian Bailey

Quebec

Quebec health officials have linked one death in the province to listeria contamination in Maple Leaf products. They confirmed a second listeriosis death on Tuesday night near Montreal, but it is still under investigation to determine whether it can be traced to the same bacterial strain found in the Maple Leaf outbreak.

Another person in Quebec also became ill from eating a Maple Leaf product.

Fears about listeriosis have also spread to cheeses. Quebec agriculture officials recalled two local brands sold in separate stores in the province after they were found to be contaminated by traces of listeria bacteria.

Two people who became ill from the bacteria reported eating the cheeses, officials said.

Agriculture inspectors carried out tests at the Quebec factories where Mont- Jacob and Riopelle cheeses are produced, and found no traces of listeria.

This leaves medical investigators to suspect the contamination developed in the retail outlets.

Moving to protect the most vulnerable, provincial health officials also discarded Maple Leaf meat products from one Quebec City health-care facility. The meat was not produced during the period covered by the tainted-meat recall, but officials acted as a precaution.

Quebec has reported eight listeriosis deaths this year, compared with seven last year and five the previous year. Listeriosis appears to be on the upswing in recent years in the province. There were 63 cases reported in the province last year, nearly double the number three years earlier. The province has registered 42 cases so far this year.

Ingrid Peritz

Alberta

Alberta Health spokesman John Tuckwell said the province's public-health inspectors have been contacting restaurants, grocery stores and public facilities, starting with the "at-risk ones" such as hospitals and seniors homes, to ensure they are aware of and following the recall.

He said notification began Aug. 21, a day after the request for help with the recall was made.

In total, there have been nine confirmed cases of listeriosis in Alberta in 2008. Five of those cases - including two deaths - are currently being investigated to determine if they are linked to the deadly outbreak.

Katherine O'Neill

Saskatchewan

On Aug. 20, the day of Maple Leaf's first major recall, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency provincial branch in Saskatchewan contacted the province and requested that the Health Ministry and regional health authorities begin monitoring the effectiveness of the product recall in hospitals and long-term care facilities, said Tim Macaulay, manager of the Health Ministry's environmental health unit.

There has been only one confirmed case of listeriosis in the province: A woman in her 80s died on Sunday.

Dr. John Mark Opondo, the province's acting chief medical health officer, said the woman tested positive for listeriosis on July 17, but it was on Aug. 15, after being

notified of a possible outbreak in Ontario, that the province determined the strain was linked to the outbreak in Ontario.

Matthew Trevisan

Code red; City trying to collect \$1.2M in unpaid ambulance bills

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 5

Section: News

Byline: BY FRANK LANDRY, CITY HALL BUREAU

Edmonton Emergency Medical Services is dealing with a growing number of unpaid ambulance bills.

The city is trying to collect \$1.2 million in unpaid fees from the first six months of the year alone. That compares to roughly \$1 million for the same period last year, according to city figures obtained by Sun Media.

"It's going up partly because of the populations of transient and homeless people coming here, or people looking for work who might not have fixed addresses right off the bat," said city spokesman Robert Moyles.

Moyles said the city's overall population is growing, so more people also require ambulance services.

"This has been a recurrent challenge," admitted Coun. Linda Sloan. "But I'm not prepared to say we should be running to prosecute (those who don't pay)."

Sloan said she wants more information on what segments of the population are not paying their bills.

She speculated many working people don't have insurance policies that cover ambulance trips - and can't afford to pay out-of-pocket.

An Edmonton resident is charged \$376 for a ride in a city ambulance.

Non-residents are charged \$522.

Roughly 20% of people who use an ambulance are stuck with a bill, according to city figures. The remainder are covered by insurance or government plans.

Coun. Kim Krushell said while the figures concern her, she noted the service is being taken over next year by the provincial government.

"So it will be their issue to deal with," she said.

Krushell also questioned why ambulance rides aren't a basic part of provincial health coverage.

She said it happens from time to time where someone has a medical incident, or appears to be in need of help, and a passerby calls 911.

Even though the person doesn't need emergency help, they get stuck with the bill.

"I can tell you at times city council has debated this issue and we've eaten the loss," Krushell said. "It's a tough one because in many cases you're talking about people who do not have any extra cash."

Moyles said few ambulance fees are actually written off. Instead, they stay on the books until they're paid.

"We want to make sure we're diligent in having people repay their debts," he said.

"At the same time recognizing these are often people in difficult circumstances.

"We try to offer a number of options to make it as easy as possible for them to repay."

There are payment options available for as low as \$5 a month, he said.

Docs face another shortage of isotopes

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 28

Section: News

Byline: BY PETER ZIMONJIC, NATIONAL BUREAU

Dateline: OTTAWA

A worldwide shortage of medical isotopes has hit Canadian doctors before they could develop a plan of action for patient care.

This marks the second time in less than a year that Canadian doctors have found themselves short of isotopes, radioactive materials used in scans and cancer treatments.

The first shortage occurred in December when the 52-year-old NRU reactor, operated by AECL, a Crown corporation, was shut down for not complying with its operating licence. Five weeks after shutdown of the NRU - which supplies half of the North American and about 80% of the Canadian market - the government passed emergency legislation to get the reactor running.

During the shutdown, about 50,000 medical tests and procedures were cancelled. After the crisis the government set up an advisory committee, which was still working on a plan to ration and share supplies of isotopes in the event of another shutdown. However, those plans were incomplete this week when the Petten reactor in The Netherlands went down with technical problems.

Five reactors in Europe, South Africa and Canada produce most of the world's isotopes. The Petten reactor in the Netherlands is one of the biggest. As of yesterday all five were shut down.

The NRU reactor at Chalk River, about 100 km northwest of Ottawa, is expected to be running again by tomorrow at which time it will be the only major reactor supplying the world's isotopes. It can increase production, so with rationing and sharing Canada may cope but other countries will be less fortunate.

Housing and Urban Affairs

City real estate No. 1; Report cites real-estate investment performance in resale, rental markets

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: F1 / FRONT

Section: Business

Byline: Bill Mah

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

Looking for the best place in the world to invest in real estate?

If you live in Edmonton, you don't have to go far, says a new report Top Ten Towns Alberta released today by a real estate author and analyst.

Edmonton tops the list and four of its neighbouring communities follow close behind -- St. Albert at fourth, Devon tied at ninth and Sturgeon and Strathcona Counties tied at 10th of the best places in Alberta to make money in residential real estate based on long-term potential. The top 10 list actually has 13 areas. Calgary trailed Edmonton in second place.

"Once again, Edmonton clearly deserves to take the No. 1 spot on the list," writes Don Campbell in his latest issue of Top Ten Alberta Investment Towns. Campbell is a real estate consultant, author and president of Real Estate Investment Network.

"Edmonton remains at the top of all lists of best places in which to invest, whether you are talking provincial, national or worldwide."

The list is compiled from a survey of statistical and demographic data from sources such as Statistics Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Multiple Listing Service, government and economic development offices.

Despite a cooled-down real estate market, strong economic fundamentals keep Edmonton in the top spot that it's held for six consecutive reports, he said.

"The 'Tiger Woods' years are finally over and the market is going to begin performing closer to historic norms.

"The good news is that Edmonton's historic norms will be at, or near, the top of performance for all of Canada both economically and in the resale and rental housing sectors."

Campbell said the current slowdown in Edmonton may worry some people, but "the housing market had to take a breath as it just could not continue at its rapid clip. Economic diversity provides economic stability, meaning Edmonton is no longer prone to major upward or downward economic swings; this type of stability is what long-term real estate investors are seeking."

St. Albert came in fourth. Campbell said the city is shedding its bedroom-community image to become an employment centre and is poised for another growth spurt this decade.

"If consistently low vacancy rates, high rents and strong property-value increases, with a location in a strategically situated city surrounded by a major job base ... then St. Albert fits the bill," the report said.

Devon, which tied for ninth with Lacombe, offers proximity to Edmonton, Nisku, Leduc and Edmonton International Airport along with small-town living and real estate prices, the report said.

"Its location ... has been a boon to both real estate investors and homeowners." Strathcona and Sturgeon Counties tied for 10th place as centres of major refinery, upgrader and oil services.

"As the petro boom continues, so will the land boom across these two counties. And even if only a couple of the proposed refineries begin construction north of Fort Saskatchewan, watch the property demand hit new unseen heights."

The report is equally effusive in praising the province for its real estate investment climate. "Fundamentally speaking Alberta's economy is as good as it gets. High energy prices, rapid population growth, low unemployment, an abundance of jobs, improved infrastructure, and affordable housing costs translate into Alberta still being the No. 1 place in Canada -- if not the world -- in which to invest," said the report.

THE TOP 10

1. Edmonton
2. Calgary
3. Red Deer
4. St. Albert
5. Grande Prairie
- 6a. Lethbridge
- 6b. Fort McMurray
7. Airdrie
- 8a. Cochrane
- 8b. Sylvan Lake
- 9a. Lacombe
- 9b. Devon
10. Sturgeon and Strathcona counties.

Source: Real Estate Investment Network

Justice & Attorney General

Albertans join class-action claims

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY BILL KAUFMANN, SUN MEDIA

Dateline: CALGARY

Legal firms are launching class-action claims against listeria-linked Maple Leaf Foods, seeking damages for clients - including a Calgarian and two Edmontonians - they argue have fallen violently ill from the company's products.

Calgarian Brian Witwicki says he began heavily vomiting Aug. 19, four hours after eating two sandwiches containing smoked ham produced by Maple Leaf for one of its many brands of deli meats.

"I'll have to be taking antibiotics intravenously for five to 10 days and I'm not looking forward to it," said a furious Witwicki, 54, who expects to know in 10 days if he's a victim of listeria poisoning.

Witwicki said he's also angry at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for not investigating the report he made to them a week ago.

"I've got the ham here and they haven't sent a messenger to get it," he said. Lawyer Clint Docken, a veteran of numerous prominent class-action lawsuits, predicts Witwicki will be the tip of the iceberg of Alberta claimants, though Witwicki is his firm's only client in the case so far.

"There are a lot of sick people out there, though most of them seem to be in Ontario," said Docken.

Tony Merchant, a lawyer heading a class action for Merchant Law Group based in Regina, said more than 1,450 individuals had joined the suit as of yesterday afternoon.

The rapid growth of the class action is "shocking" and "unprecedented," said Merchant.

The Merchant Law Group has reportedly filed a statement of claim on behalf of two Edmontonians.

It's unclear how much money claimants could potentially be eligible for, Docken said, though the case could be much the same as the 2000 Walkerton, Ont., tragedy when E. coli-tainted water killed seven people and left 2,500 others ill.

"There's a range of damages depending on how sick you are - it can go from a few thousand to hundreds of thousands of dollars," he said.

Maple Leaf has apologized for the listeria-tainted meat and admitted they're fully accountable for the poisonings.

Docken said his firm, Docken & Company, is consulting with legal counterparts in Ontario who are also handling Maple Leaf class-action cases.

Meanwhile, Alberta Health and Wellness spokesman John Tuckwell said yesterday doctors are now considering the possibility the outbreak is linked to five Alberta cases, up from a previously reported four Albertans.

Results from all five cases will likely be available on the Alberta Health and Wellness website Tuesday, he said.

"We do have reports every year," he said. "But we are certainly very concerned when we see people with weakened immune systems becoming involved." Pregnant women and newborns could also be at risk.

Municipal Affairs

St. Albert to help those struggling to pay rent; Subsidies up to \$400 available monthly in assistance program

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B3

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Jennifer Yang

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

For St. Albert residents who can't make their rent, the city has announced up to \$400 in monthly assistance.

Mayor Nolan Crouse said St. Albert was given \$2.3 million by the Alberta government last September to address affordable housing issues. The city has decided to split the money among several housing programs, with \$265,000 being allocated towards rental assistance.

Crouse said rental costs in St. Albert are on par with those in Edmonton, though it has fewer available units. Of the city's 1,027 rental units, only 20 were vacant as of July, he said.

"It's very often not a well-understood problem in St. Albert," he said. "We're perceived to be immune to these kind of issues, but we still have them."

With the rental assistance program, people can apply for monthly subsidies of up to \$400 to be put towards rent. Qualifying applicants must be at least 18 years old and pay more than 30 per cent of their gross monthly household income on rent.

"We're hopeful that we can accommodate everyone who meets our criteria," Crouse said.

A study done this March showed there were 74 St. Albert individuals and families at risk of losing their housing, with 51 children affected under that count. Crouse said these people face a variety of challenges -- some are young people being evicted by their families, others are elders facing abusive situations.

For Crouse, these 74 individuals and families are among the city's top priorities. From the \$2.3-million provincial grant, \$450,000 will go towards providing

transitional housing, Crouse said. The other two programs are a \$750,000 basement-suite program that will encourage homeowners to convert basements into rental units and a \$915,000 land purchase program that will see land donated to Habitat for Humanity.

The remainder of the funds will go towards administrative costs, Crouse said. For those receiving rental subsidies, cheques will start coming in the mail within four weeks of approval. Crouse said payments will be valid for up to one year, given that the individuals and families are still meeting the requirements. City officials plan to evaluate the program on a quarterly basis, Crouse said. "I think these are good longer-term solutions."

Seniors & Community Supports

What will you need as a senior? Online survey closes this week

Airdrie Echo

Wed 27 Aug 2008

Page: 29

Section: News

Albertans have until August 31 to complete an online survey and help shape future government programs and policy pertaining to seniors.

The survey, announced earlier this summer, asks Albertans to share thoughts on what they anticipate will be needed when they become seniors and how these needs should be met. The results gathered will assist the province in developing an Aging Population Policy Framework that will guide future government decisions on seniors' programs and policies.

"The response to the online survey has been positive," said Mary Anne Jablonski, Minister of Seniors and Community Supports. "I appreciate the feedback we've received from Albertans and invite those who haven't completed the survey to take a few moments and submit their ideas."

While Albertans of all ages can complete the survey, baby boomers and those who are almost 65 years old are strongly encouraged to provide feedback. This age group will increase the seniors population by more than 40 per cent in the next decade, to about 550,000 seniors.

The Alberta government established the eight-member Demographic Planning Commission in May 2008 to consult with Albertans on how government programs, services and supports for future seniors should be allocated and sustained. Along with administering the survey and reviewing its results, the commission has met with stakeholders to look at the shared roles of governments, communities, families and individuals in meeting the needs of future seniors.

The online survey will be available until August 31 at www.TomorrowsSeniors.alberta.ca. Albertans without access to the Internet can have a survey mailed to them by calling toll-free 1-800-642-3853.

Solicitor General & Public Security

Mayor seeks cash for new police

The Calgary Herald

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Jason Markusoff and Stephane Massinon

Source: Calgary Herald

Mayor Dave Bronconnier is stepping up his fight for new Calgary police officers heading into a meeting today with Premier Ed Stelmach, armed with headlines of gang violence and drug arrests.

With a new Calgary Herald/Leger Marketing poll showing one in four Calgarians feel less safe in their communities than they did a year ago, Bronconnier will be asking the province to dig into its \$8.5-billion surplus to help pay for 400 new officers.

"I don't believe there's going to be too many people in the political realm that aren't going to want to support initiatives targeted towards the gang activity that's here," the mayor told reporters.

Calgary police announced 14 gang-related arrests Wednesday, showcasing \$1.7 million worth of drugs and weapons seized in raids dating back to last year. Bronconnier and Police Chief Rick Hanson will tell Stelmach today that Calgary police are working on several other major gang investigations.

Bronconnier and Hanson will tell the premier they need to recruit 400 more officers in the next three years.

City council is being asked by the mayor to fast-track money for 201 of those officers, and the mayor expects the province and Ottawa to outdo their promises and pledge the other half.

Most of the 14 arrests announced Wednesday happened within the past two months although some date back to 2007, including a cocaine bust near Cochrane in November, said Acting Staff Sgt. Martin Schiavetta.

The final, key arrest of 25-year-old Justin Rossbach on extortion, firearms and drug charges occurred last week.

Hersh Wolch, the lawyer for three of the people named in Operation Backlash, said he was surprised to see his clients in media reports for crimes they have already answered for in the courts. "The impression created is that this was a takedown of some huge gang yesterday," Wolch said.

As to the timing of the announcement made a day before the mayor's discussion with Stelmach, Wolch said it is a "remarkable coincidence."

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said it does help the city's case.

"Certainly, Mayor Bronconnier was well aware that this investigation was concluding last week, so the timing with us going forward and needing more police officers is very timely," she said.

The mayor's office confirmed Bronconnier had known about the investigation, but didn't know it had ended until the police news release Wednesday morning.

Schiavetta added: "We don't control how our investigations lead. The timing was right for us to conclude the investigation and it happened to occur last week."

As part of the year-long investigation, police seized 10 firearms, \$1.7-million worth of drugs and gear such as bullet-proof vests and night-vision equipment.

The charges, mostly for drug and gun possession, did not relate directly to the spate of daytime homicides or other high-profile shootings that have made it a bloody summer in Calgary.

Alberta Justice Minister Alison Redford, who will join Stelmach at today's meeting, said there are peaks and valleys in crime cycles, and the city is clearly enduring a peak. "Let's not act in a sort of knee-jerk way," she said in an interview. "I am sick and tired of the notion that everything comes down to a particular point and a particular meeting."

However, the minister didn't rule out the possibility that the mayor's demands will be met. She noted that the province has pledged to fund 200 new recruits around Alberta in the next two years. "I think the province has done a lot. I think we'll do more, and I'm not sure what," Redford said.

A Calgary Herald/Leger Marketing poll of 900 Albertans last week showed that 23.6 per cent say they feel less safe than they did a year ago. In Calgary, 24.5 per cent feel less safe, while 64.3 per cent feel as safe and 8.5 per cent feel safer. (For the Calgary sample size of 300 respondents, there is a 5.6 percentage point margin of error, 19 times out of 20.)

Calgary police statistics have shown violent crimes on a steady decline for years, although Leger pollster Marc Tremblay said the spread of murders into residential neighbourhoods like Marlborough and Saddle Ridge and sensational stories of daylight shootings stoke anxiety. "They make headlines and I think they scare people," he said.

Crime fears higher in capital region; Calgary, province as a whole less worried, new poll suggests

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Erika Beauchesne

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

About 35 per cent of Edmonton and area residents surveyed feel less safe today than they did a year ago, a new poll suggests.

In Alberta, 23.6 per cent of those surveyed felt less safe.

Marc Tremblay, vice-president of Alberta's Leger Marketing, which conducted the poll, said he was surprised there was more fear in Edmonton than in Calgary, where 24.5 per cent felt less safe.

"Crime played out in the media could be a factor," said Tremblay, adding crime rates in both cities have gone down.

Criminal Code offences fell by 5.4 per cent in 2007 from 2006 in Edmonton, says the most recent data from Statistics Canada.

But those figures don't account for the underground activity occurring in the city, Edmonton criminologist Bill Pitt said.

"The muggings, prostitution, drugs and weapons -- people are starting to witness it. This is a centre for organized crime, and there's a great deal of activity occurring under the radar," he said.

"The East is saturated, the Vancouver market is saturated. These groups are looking now to expand inward."

He also said not all crimes get reported to make it into the data used to compile crime rates.

Edmonton has 1,380 police officers. More are needed, said Pitt and Brian Gibson, police commission chairman.

"The community has changed; we're all aware of it," Gibson said.

"With some of these random acts like people racing cars down the street, throwing Molotov cocktails at homes, assaults -- it is happening, and the ever-increasing size of the city has something to do with it."

But Gibson stressed the crime rate has gone down, and said it's up to communities, as well as police, to create a safer environment.

Some residents are willing to fight for it.

Norm Aldi, 68, lost a tooth when he told a drug dealer to leave his neighbourhood park at 118th Avenue and 86th Street.

The vice-president of Eastwood Community League said it was a bold move in a part of the city where many of his friends won't leave their houses at night.

"There's druggies, there's drunks, there's teenage gangs," he said.

"Crime can happen anywhere -- it's not just us. But we need to reclaim it."

The poll was conducted Aug. 19 to 22, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 5.8 percentage points for Edmonton and 3.3 percentage points for Alberta, 19 times out of 20.

Columnists/Editorial & Comment

Amidst an enormous provincial surplus and a burgeoning gang problem Calgary is in a 'perfect storm' and poised to get more funding for cops

The Calgary Sun

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 5

Section: News

Byline: BY RICK BELL

Column: Page Five

Unlike Apocalypse Now, he may not be smelling anything close to napalm but he sure is sniffing what his nose senses is the scent of victory.

Yes, Mayor Bronco figures he's got Premier Ed right where he wants him, in a corner with not a whole lot of room to wiggle.

Bang. Tuesday. The province projects a wallet-busting surplus in the many billions, a financial La-la land the poor pocket calculators of most provincial governments can't even contemplate, let alone compute, a Big Rock Candy Mountain where everyone wants a taste of the sweets.

Boom. Wednesday. Lookee here! City cops announce a big gang bust, another episode in this summer of our discontent where shootings happen in broad daylight and open warfare between rival scumbags draws the big bold headlines, and the city top cop Rick Hanson warns of social disorder, gangs and guns and anyone who has been here longer than the last U-Haul laments the escalating ultra-violence happening on our streets.

Pow. This afternoon. Bronco and Hanson will sit down with Premier Ed and the mayor is ready to apply his favourite submission hold, the I'll Make Your Life Hell If I Don't Get What I Want arm-twist, demanding the premier cough up moolah for more uniforms right flipping now.

Yes, we're into the 1-2-3 perfect storm, a shame game no Hollywood hack could script.

Earlier this month, this page reveals the city is expected to pony up for 200 more cops over the next three years.

Earlier this week, Bronco and city police Chief Rick Hanson announce this plan will be fast-tracked by aldermen Sept. 8.

Now, Bronco wants Ed, the man with deeper pockets than the dude with the moustache in the Monopoly game, to match the city's considerable coin.

So far, Ed offers up only 41 cops, not 200 officers, and mumbles a bunch of nothings the last time he's asked about it.

Bronco sees an opening and pounces, demanding the premier's "immediate support" and, since the mayor only ever plays for keeps, pulls out all the stops.

It is a strategy that's worked like a charm in the past.

"My greatest fear is if we don't take immediate action there's going to be some innocent individual caught in the crossfire," says the mayor, repeating the police chief's recent sentiments.

You get the drift? Hey Eddie, are you going to be stingy with that awful possibility staring you in the face?

"We are seeking his assistance. We certainly need his support. We require more. We require more front-line officers to stay on these individuals and come down on them like a ton of bricks and say. 'In Alberta we are, in fact, going to be a gang-free province. We are going to set the direction. We are going to set the tone and we're going to provide the resources,'" says city council's numero uno, just getting warmed up.

Ah yes. Then Bronco goes, pardon the comparison, from bad cop to good cop. Come on, he more or less says.

Naturally, Ed will ante up the scratch. It's nothing to Ed in the big picture. A few million. Ed is a reasonable fellow. He will do the right thing.

"I've spoken with the premier personally twice on this matter," reveals the mayor.

"He is just as concerned about the violence and gang activity in this region as I am. I do believe he shares the same goal I have and this region has -- to rid ourselves of these gangs and this violence occurring."

You can see the set-up a mile away.

The mayor then brings the folks in blue on board for good measure, saying the latest arrests are the result of just one investigation in a nasty time of "far too many investigations."

"The Calgary Police Service is doing a tremendous job. We have people working 'round the clock but, you know, they get burned out. There are only so many individuals. They can't be on 24 hours and not stop and one way to assist these officers is more staff."

Translation: Ed, just show us the money.

And yet the prediction of at least some smart sorts is Bronco will not walk away from today's Make My Day meeting a happy man.

Yesterday, Iris Evans, the province's guardian of the public purse, hits the airwaves with talk of Alberta being in an "enviable position" enjoying "sustainable prosperity."

There is green stuff to do green things and green stuff for bricks and mortar and blacktop. There are savings to be saved though no one is quite sure where.

But, as for more cops?

"I'm not going to argue with the mayor's wish list," says Iris, not getting too excited and committing to squat.

Bronco, well, our Bronco thinks he's holding some pretty good cards. Calgarians wants someone to dish up some law and order.

"I don't believe there's going to be too many people in the political realm who aren't going to support an initiative targeting gang activity here."
Over to you, Mr. Premier.

Calgary becomes centre of resistance; Local Liberal MLAs compete to lead defeated, debt-ridden party

Fast Forward Weekly

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 12

Section: Viewpoint

Byline: Gillian Steward

Source: Fast Forward

There's no question that opposition forces were devastated after the last provincial election. The Liberals were reduced to nine seats, the NDs two, and the Greens barely registered. Even the right-wing Wild Rose Party was eliminated from the legislature. Since then, stunned party stalwarts and other activists have been trying to figure out how they can break through in Alberta. No easy task since 60 per cent of eligible voters didn't even bother to cast a ballot. At first there was talk of uniting the ND and Liberal parties into a new party, but that went nowhere. There is just too much bad blood between them. The NDs aren't much of a factor in Calgary, but during elections in Edmonton they get into such nasty fights with Liberals that many observers are left wondering if they hate each other more than they do the Conservatives. And most Liberals are still furious about ND leader Brian Mason's repeated assertions during the election campaign that the Liberals were raking in money from the corporate sector. The Libs no doubt wished it were true, but to be slagged for something that wasn't true really got their goat. Liberals are also angry that John Chan ran for the NDs in Calgary North Hill against Pat Murray because the combined Chan/Murray vote would have easily defeated the Conservative candidate. For the NDs' part, they simply don't believe that the Liberals, if they ever came to power, wouldn't be as anti-union and business-friendly as the Conservatives. Once the idea of a merger was dead and buried, a number of people explored the possibility of starting up a new party that would attract disaffected Liberals, NDs, Greens and Conservatives. A party that would drop all references to federal parties and become a distinct Alberta party, like the Saskatchewan Party in our neighbouring province. Meetings were held in Calgary and Edmonton. People talked and talked about policies and plans. I went to one myself but didn't hear any new ideas; no overriding message; no one person who emerged as an inspirational leader. Calgary Liberal MLA David Swann was one of the movers behind that idea. He talked openly about perhaps leaving the Liberals to start a new party. But in the end the whole

thing fizzled out. Apparently, no one felt emboldened enough to take the first few steps. Then last week **Swann** announced that he was seeking the **Liberal** leadership. He also said in response to a question from the media that he would consider changing the name of the party because the **Liberal** name is such a hard sell in Alberta. Political junkies are no doubt a bit confused at this point. First **Swann** muses out loud about wanting to leave the party, and then he wants to lead the party and perhaps change its name. Not exactly a ringing endorsement of the **Liberal** party. Another Calgary **Liberal** MLA is also seeking the leadership. **Dave Taylor**, who represents Calgary Currie, is definitely a different kind of **Liberal** than **Swann**. He would take the party further to the right, and in many ways sounds like he would rather be a Conservative. **Taylor** doesn't have the large following that **Swann** has. I've even heard people who have worked with him grumble about his abrasiveness. But **Taylor** does have experienced political operatives such as Donn Lovett on his team, the kind of people who know how to get out the vote when it counts. The fact that he was able to defeat star candidate Arthur Kent during the last election speaks for itself. **Swann** is working with mostly idealistic neophytes who see him as a hero because of his principled stands on a number of issues, particularly the environment. He has been able to attract **Liberals**, NDs and Greens to his campaign team, but whether there are enough of them to matter remains to be seen. In addition, a former **Liberal** candidate who feels let down by party operatives is looking to start a party that would be progressive and conservative and is hoping to attract a star from the oilpatch to lead it. The **Liberals** have nine seats in the legislature, five of them in Calgary. So far only one Edmonton **Liberal** has declared interest in the December leadership race -- defeated MLA Mo Elsalhy. So it is quite likely that leadership of the party will shift to Calgary. But the victor won't exactly inherit a thriving enterprise. The party is in debt and has only about 4,000 members. **Liberal** party antics aside, there is also another group of activists meeting regularly to discuss the possibility of endorsing one progressive opposition candidate in each provincial constituency so the opposition parties don't split the vote and let the Conservatives slip up the middle. Everyone at the meeting I attended agreed that given the turnout in the last election, getting voters to pay attention to any of the candidates is a formidable task. Some wonder if they shouldn't put all of their efforts into building the Alberta Greens. Anyone who cares enough about the state of democracy in Alberta to go to a meeting and discuss it, in the middle of the summer no less, deserves to be commended. Many of the people there are the same people who have been active in opposition circles for a long time. They are frustrated; looking for new strategies and tactics. They are genuinely worried about the future of this high-handed one-party state. Given the fact that the Stelmach government can pretty much do what it wants for the next four years, mounting effective opposition seems like a hopeless task. But for the first time in a long time, Calgary is poised to become the centre of resistance rather than

Edmonton. And that in itself could make for interesting times. Gillian Steward has been covering Alberta politics since the Lougheed days.

Poverty of saving

The Calgary Herald

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A18

Section: The Editorial Page

Source: Calgary Herald

One wonders how much the Alberta government would have to make selling off our backyard before it would save enough money to make a difference?

On Tuesday, the government delivered its first-quarter budget update. Record resource revenue (\$18.8 billion) from galloping oil prices gave Albertans a far-out record \$46.5 billion in revenue. Even with a budget announced just in April already inflated by a further billion, this still leaves the provincial government with an \$8.5 billion surplus, instead of the \$1.5 billion the budget called for.

What will happen to it?

Two billion goes to fund the transit expansion announced in July, and a further \$2 billion to the carbon capture and sequestration project promised at the same time. Another billion will go to future infrastructure.

Just \$2.5 billion is to be saved.

With so many zeroes after the primary digits, a few comparisons may reveal how rich is Alberta, and thereby illuminate how trifling the government's savings record really is.

The \$2 billion set aside for digging holes in which to bury air is almost twice what Prince Edward Islanders spent to run their whole province last year.

The \$8.5-billion surplus is close to what Alberta expects in 2008 from personal income tax.

The \$18.8 billion in resource revenues would have more than paid for the entire budget program expenses of all four Atlantic provinces last year.

The government's planned \$38-billion spending this year is more than double the \$17.9 billion it spent as recently as 2000-01, meaning spending has increased by almost 10 per cent compounded annually since then -- far in excess of inflation and population growth.

Alberta's projected revenue of \$46.5 billion is 23 per cent more than 2007.

Stripped of the \$18.8 billion in non-renewable revenues, that still leaves Alberta with nearly \$28 billion for 2008, an amount that only three years ago would have been sufficient to pay all Alberta's operating expenses, of \$26.9 billion.

Finally, Alberta paid off its debt in March 2005. What's been saved since?

Then, the Heritage Fund was worth \$11.3 billion, and endowment funds held \$1.6 billion more. (The government had other assets, but as the ultimate end of

money jars such as the Sustainability Fund and Capital Account is to be spent, they cannot be looked at as savings.)

Between then and March 2009, the government expects resource revenues to top \$46 billion, and despite ramped-up spending, still expects \$30 billion in total surpluses.

Today, the Heritage Fund is worth \$17 billion, and there's a further \$3.7 billion in endowment funds, for a total of \$20.7 billion. (Again, there are substantial other assets set aside for future spending.)

Thus, of all the resource revenues received over four years, genuine savings accounts will have grown a mere 17 per cent by March 31, 2009 -- barely enough to inflation-proof them.

It is lamentably small. To be fair to Finance Minister Iris Evans, who has promised a provincial savings strategy, it may not be to her taste, either. Clients with spending desires hover like vultures over a surplus, most with MLAs pleading for them, in the limiting belief that an MLA's job is only to get taxpayer money for clients, and not to pursue a long-term vision for the province's welfare.

A finance minister's job is not an easy one then, and Evans is said to be spending the summer building consensus on what a savings plan could be.

However, for a province as rich as Alberta, saving \$2.5 billion from revenues of \$46 billion, is not nearly enough. Worse, the Heritage Fund lacks a growth strategy: budget documents show the expected outcome is that it holds value over 20 years. That might be fine when Alberta's fiscal capacity is closely aligned with spending. But with today's dollar abundance, to merely hold the line is poor stewardship on behalf of the next generation.

For heaven's sake, we spend enough. Now it's time to save.

Building a northern metropolis; Is Fort Mac the next Dubai, or a future ghost town?

Fast Forward Weekly

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: 8

Section: News

Byline: Adrian Morrow

Source: Fast Forward

Series: The Future of the Oilsands

Jerry Bussieres came to Fort McMurray as a 17-year-old, when his railway worker dad was posted to the remote northern community. It was 1952, and the town was a tiny wilderness outpost dominated by forestry and fishing. Most of the area's roads were dirt, and there was just one public school in the community. The government ran a small experimental plant to process the bitumen that lay under the forest surrounding the community and seeped from the sides of cliffs into the Athabasca River. Bussieres got a job as a city worker in 1960 and

conducted a census that year. The population was 1,109. In 1968, everything changed. The Great Canadian Oil Sands company (now Suncor Energy) opened a strip mine north of town and started digging up the oilsands. In 1973, Syncrude opened a second mine. The population climbed to 35,000 people, hundreds of whom lived in tents in a city park during the summer. After an economic downturn in the 1980s put the city's growth on hold, a more favourable provincial tax rate and a rise in oil prices touched off a new round of oilsands extraction. Suncor and Syncrude expanded, more than 10 new companies set up shop nearby, and tens of thousands of workers flooded into Fort McMurray. "We had some booms all right," Bussieres recalls of the town's early history. "But nothing like this." The city, over 200 kilometres from the closest large town, is poised to become the third-largest urban area in the province. By some estimates, the population could reach half a million. And the significance of the oilsands -- which most analysts agree will become the most important source of oil in North America and the cash cow of Alberta's economy -- means the growth won't stop anytime soon. No one anticipated how fast Fort Mac would grow. There isn't enough housing for everyone, the local hospital is overcrowded and the highway to the oilsands isn't large enough to accommodate all the traffic. However, a new crop of civic leaders are pledging to do things differently. They want to catch up to the population growth, and use the opportunity to turn Fort McMurray into the Dubai of Canada. They want to make the city a great northern metropolis awash with oil money and filled with world-class shops and restaurants. However, not everyone thinks this is realistic. The city is broke. And even if it did have the money to build, Fort Mac's government is so far behind on infrastructure, it might never catch up.

THE DUBAI OF THE NORTH

Dubai is a model oil town. In just 50 years, black gold transformed the city from a port of 20,000 people noted for its pearling industry to a modern metropolis of 1.2 million. New money helped build soaring skyscrapers, a university and museums. And when the oil left, the money stayed. Dubai only produces about 240,000 barrels of oil per day (compared to one million that flow from the oilsands), but the city is still growing. The area used the oil boom to diversify the economy. Dubai is a major trading base, banking centre and a hot spot for property development. By contrast, Fort McMurray still looks like a frontier town. Downtown is dominated by strip malls interspersed with '60s bungalows. At the Oil Can, a hotel saloon at the city's main intersection, live country music reigns, and Wrangler-wearing dancers swill Molson next to walls decorated with antlers and old polaroids of locals. From anywhere in town, it's just a 20-minute walk to the forest. Fort McMurray's infrastructure problems are well-known. Before the boom, the local hospital and city hall had two empty floors, and the water treatment plant was used to just over half its capacity. Now, both buildings are crunched for space and the plant had to be upgraded because it wasn't large

enough to service the entire town. Space is tight, and skyrocketing real estate prices have forced people to share cramped accommodations. Independent businesses have been forced out and replaced by big box stores and fast food chains. "The way we did business 25 years ago, we don't do it that way now," says Vaughn Jessome, who owns the Garden Café, a 24-hour diner, where he's worked since 1981. He's one of the lucky ones -- he's been able to keep the business afloat by doing much of the grunt work in the kitchen himself. The café's staff, which was once 60 people, is now half that. "You have to do what you used to be able to get other people to do." The city government, however, is determined to turn things around. "There's an increasing awareness of the global demand [for oil] and what that will mean for the region," says Melissa Blake, Fort McMurray's mayor since 2004. "It's exciting." The city is expecting the population to reach 250,000 in 15 years (up from the roughly 80,000 in the city and surrounding region today). To plan for the growth, the government has pumped money into a new wastewater treatment plant and is building an enormous recreation centre in a riverside park. It's also planning to build more retail space to give small businesses a fighting chance. Blake also wants to build a convention centre and a community centre for the city's ethno-cultural groups. The city has obtained 4,000 acres of crown land in the area to develop suburbs. When completed, the new neighbourhoods will house 40,000 people. In the downtown, developers hope to replace many of the small buildings with apartment blocks. "The world has taken notice of Fort McMurray, and it would behoove them to put a signature building in their downtown core to create a skyline," says Maurice Yusep, a vice-president with Bond Street Properties, an Edmonton developer planning to build two condo towers, one 31 floors, the other 26. When finished in four years' time, they will be the tallest buildings in town. The province has spent \$820 million to twin Highway 63, which leads into town from the south and to the oilsands in the north. The government has also built three new health clinics. Guy Boutilier, the excitable local MLA, spent years pushing his colleagues in the Progressive Conservatives to put more money into the area. He thinks the government can do even more. "A rail system between the city and the [oilsands] plants makes environmental sense and transportation sense," says Boutilier, bouncing in his chair as I struggle to get a word in edgewise. He believes the city will reach a population of half a million, and says the government is onboard with helping the area develop. "They have an appreciation today, and so does the premier." Most importantly, the city needs to develop industries other than the oilsands. "It's largely focusing on economic development and diversification," says Mike Allen, who sits on city council and owns Campbell's Music. "Who's to say oil will always be so important?" Allen wants to see a manufacturing industry that could build the pieces needed for construction, as well as oilsands equipment. With more housing, he says, workers would be encouraged to bring their families,

who could work in the health care and education sectors. "It's a desire to see [Fort McMurray] flourish on something other than just the oil industry," he says.

AFTER THE GOLD RUSH

Barkerville, B.C. is a ghost town. For most of the year, its 50 historic houses stand empty on two dirt streets. The only thing that keeps the town from being swallowed by the surrounding forests are the tourists who come to see the well-preserved historic site. Barkerville used to be Western Canada's biggest town. Lured by gold in northern B.C.'s Cariboo mountains, 50 kilometres east of Quesnel, prospectors founded the town in 1862. Barkerville grew into the biggest settlement north of San Francisco and west of Chicago. Schools and a highway followed the prospectors, along with their families. By the turn of the 20th century, however, the population started to drop off. Other towns opened mines and grew their populations. Gold mining was no longer as profitable as shipping, and the towns of the lower mainland overtook Barkerville in size. By 1958, the few remaining inhabitants were relocated and the town declared a historic site. This is the alternative scenario for Fort McMurray. The oilsands cover an area the size of New Brunswick, and other area towns could see their populations grow if new plants are built closer to them than the city. The rise in alternative energy -- such as wind power -- and further exploration for oil in the Middle East and Russia could also lead the energy industry away from the oilsands. Without infrastructure, other industries, or an established community, Fort McMurray could be doomed to the boom-and-bust cycle of so many other resource extraction towns. "We're sitting in the middle of the largest resource extraction project in the world, but as a municipality, we're broke," says Allen, the city councillor. The city is already in debt to the tune of almost double its annual budget. Without money, Fort McMurray can't build the roads, sewer lines and other infrastructure that developers need to put up houses. Without houses, the workers coming to the area have little reason to stay. Many are angry the province has kept approving new oilsands projects without giving the city money to build the needed infrastructure. They also think the companies should be offering up more money to improve the community. "It's to no one's advantage to allow every Tom, Dick and Harry to have an oilsands plant while we're left in the pinch," says Jessome, the owner of the Garden Café. "If you're not willing to do your fair share, it affects your employees." For its part, the industry gave \$12 million to community projects in the area last year, including \$3 million for the riverside recreation complex, according to Suncor. Jessome, however, says companies need to invest more. Both Blake and Allen want to attract other industries to the city, but admit that the city is so far behind in basic infrastructure that it might never happen. "If growth keeps going as fast as it is, it'll be a long time before [economic] diversification," says Blake.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY

It's a sweltering hot August afternoon, and a few hundred locals are gathered in a downtown park for Heritage Day celebrations. Booths serve hot dogs, Indian and Samoan food. A group of kids from a native community north of town rap onstage. People mill around and visit a small cluster of perfectly preserved historic houses. This is Fort McMurray's established community, and they have harsh words for anyone who wants to slag their town. "Are you tired of defending Fort Mac yet?" a friend asks Jerry Bussieres's wife. "She tells them 'Highway 63 is just over there, you can get the hell out,'" says Bussieres, who's been here since 1952. "If people don't like it here, why are they here?" He and other longtime residents are equally disparaging of the workers who come to town to make money and leave, and don't bother to bring their families. "Your transient population doesn't contribute to your town or your city or whoever," says Jack Avery, who first moved to Fort McMurray in 1966 to work in the Suncor refinery, and served for 26 years on the local school board. For Jessome, simply having a 250,000-strong population won't make Fort McMurray a great city -- it needs recreation facilities and more housing. He fears that without the infrastructure, the population won't stay and put down roots. Over the next few days, I meet several of the workers he's talking about. Most have been here a few years, and most plan to leave within the next few. But the money is attractive enough that many have stayed longer than they planned. "Everyone wants to leave," says Ward Stuckey, a 25-year-old construction worker who was lured here from Newfoundland like so many other local residents. "But no one's gonna."

FORT MCMURRAY IN FIVE DAYS: A TRIP THROUGH ALBERTA'S NORTHERN BOOMTOWN:

SATURDAY, AUG. 2

Afternoon On Highway 63, farmland gives way to thick boreal forest near the small town of Grassland. Long stretches of forest are burnt, the tree trunks sticking out of the ground like charred bones.

SUNDAY, AUG. 3

Morning The tiny plane that's about to take us over the oilsands looks more like a toy than an actual aircraft, and the eggs we had for breakfast that morning rumble their objection. Once we're in the air, though, the beauty of the dense boreal forest surrounding Fort McMurray takes over.

As we fly over the actual oilsands operations, there's a faint smell, like someone on your block just paved their driveway. The huge Syncrude and Suncor tailings ponds are much less impressive from the air than the Greenpeace photos from their recent protest, but the desolate land at the end of the line before we turn around, which looks like a desert or moonscape, does pack a devastating visual punch.

MONDAY, AUG. 4

Morning The downtown library is filled with young men. Some are well-dressed, as if they are heading to job interviews. Others are sporting the classic Fort

McMurray dirty jeans and T-shirts. They are seated in low chairs near the front, waiting for their turn on an Internet terminal, supplied by Syncrude and Suncor. At the Damal Internet Café on Hardin Street, a group of young to middle-aged black men are gathered around a computer to watch a Barack Obama biography. The owner, 38-year-old Keyse Serar from Somalia, has spent the last six years in Fort McMurray, "to make money," he says simply.

The condo-turned-business isn't exactly state-of-the art. The computer desks must have been painted after they were nailed to the wall, because brown paint smears the white walls where the desks sit. On the far side of the room, a homemade table has nails sticking out of it. But the Internet connection is faster than at the public library.

Afternoon At Helen Arong's Fine Fashions, also on Hardin Street, Menchu Malubay finds her retail job much less exciting than her work as a pharmacist in the Philippines.

She moved to Fort McMurray on a two-year contract as a temporary foreign worker, and has been in town for two months. When she first arrived, the trees surrounding Fort McMurray brought on a feeling of claustrophobia, and all she wanted to do was turn around and go home to Cebu.

Inside the welcome air conditioning of Chow's variety store on Franklin Avenue, a couple of kids are standing at the far end of a long counter and till, debating what they should order for lunch while watching Star Wars on a TV mounted above the video rack. They eventually agree on chow mein.

TUESDAY, AUG. 5

Night At the Oil Can, security guards run a metal detector over us before we enter the deserted bar. The coat check smells like men's cologne, something along the lines of Old Spice, only muskier.

On the left side of the stage where a new country group mangles a couple CCR tunes is a cigarette machine and, around the corner, a wooden Native Canadian statue. On the wall directly to our left is a bison head, the only one we'll see the entire trip.

The metal detector was hardly necessary, on this night at least. Two obviously drunk women in ripped jeans start dancing together to new country. And then kiss. That's the wildest thing we see all night.

WEDNESDAY, AUG. 6

Afternoon Downtown Fort McMurray isn't really a downtown. There's a mall, a strip mall, a bunch of townhouses and apartments, another strip mall and then the looming big-box stores -- Wal-Mart, Canadian Tire and Rona. (Outside Wal Mart, a bottle of water costs a whopping \$2.75.)

Franklin Avenue, the main drag, is a bleak stretch with few trees or shade and almost no street level storefronts.

THURSDAY, AUG. 7

Morning In the van on the way home, the boreal forest gives way to the flat prairie landscape of home, and some of the bigness of Fort McMurray fades away.
- Angela Brunschot

Learning from Alberta's schools

National Post

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: FP13

Section: FP Comment

Byline: Scott Hennig

Source: Financial Post

The Alberta government's recent decision to increase the grant level for private school students (from 60% to 70% of the per pupil public school amount) has come under attack by some public school advocates, the teachers' union and opposition MLAs.

Alberta Teachers' Association president, Frank Bruseker, denounced the decision, calling it "an assault on public education." NDP Leader, Brian Mason, suggested that the funding increase was "inappropriate," and that "we need to focus on building the very best quality public education system."

Mr. Bruseker is completely wrong, and Mr. Mason is half wrong.

Mr. Mason is correct that the Alberta government's goal should be to build the very best public school system (which it arguably already has in Canada).

However, what he and others fail to recognize is that this increase in private school funding will help augment that.

Edmonton Public school division has been heralded by Time Magazine as the "most imitated and admired public school system in North America."

What has made it so admired and imitated? Choice and competition.

In 1973, Edmonton's public schools adopted an open boundaries rule, allowing parents and students the choice to go to any school within the district. This competition for students became even fiercer in the mid-'90s. First, the Alberta government allowed the establishment of autonomous charter schools that receive full public funding. Second, the government boosted funding for private schools from just under 50% to 60% of the per pupil public school amount.

With tax dollars following the students, it forced all schools to compete for pupils with innovations like alternative programming and more options for parents and students. This competition, not surprisingly, has led to higher parental and student satisfaction, as well as better educational outcomes. Currently, over 50% of high school students enrolled in Edmonton Public attend schools other than their local designated school.

More competition arrived with the site-based budgeting process, which allows school principals to decide how their school's budget dollars are to be allocated.

Previously, central office would decide how many teachers, text books, globes and computers each school would receive.

Central office became a service provider and handed school principals 92% of all dollars given to Edmonton Public for the year. Parents, students, schools and principals now called the shots and the central office had to adapt and provide the demanded services or they would lose their jobs to private vendors.

In the first year, demand for after-school in-service programs -- previously provided by central office -- dropped by 85% while demand for technology services tripled. Moreover, the competition created by site-based management led to central office creating new service areas and products.

Parental and student satisfaction continued to climb, as did educational outcomes.

-Scott Hennig is Alberta Director of Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Food safety calls for reliable system

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

Page: A18

Section: Opinion

Source: The Edmonton Journal

With the number of listeriosis deaths still rising this week, Canadians need some clear and direct answers to a growing number of questions about food safety in Canada.

So far, six listeriosis deaths (in Ontario) are confirmed as linked to tainted meats from the Maple Leaf plant in Toronto. The same strain of the bacteria is a factor in nine deaths still under investigation.

Alberta is looking into two deaths from listeriosis, including one in Grande Prairie on Aug. 14, as well as two cases of illness, to see if there is a link to Maple Leaf products that are widely distributed across the country.

At this point, it is impossible for the public to know the extent of the problem.

Given the 70-day incubation period for the bacteria, Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz says he expects the number of cases linked to the tainted meat will increase. All that uncertainty further hurts the confidence of consumers.

In the past, a tainted-food episode was generally quickly contained. But this one has been getting bigger after the first hints of a problem emerged in July in Toronto.

On Aug. 5, Health Canada found a sandwich that tested positive, and by Aug. 17, Maple Leaf announced the first recall of a dozen products and quickly shut its plant. The recall grew to more than 200 products and recalls spread from grocery stores this week to sandwich shops and foods in local convenience stores.

While it's important that public authorities be careful not to create unnecessary fear and anxiety about food safety, the issue here goes beyond problems at one meat processing plant. In this circumstance, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's

attempt to offer calming platitudes this week was inadequate and unfortunately added to the confusion.

"This is a serious concern," said Harper, when asked about food safety. "It's necessary to reform and revamp our food and inspection regimes after some years of neglect."

"I think all of us -- and obviously, I include my own family in this -- we expect that when we shop, that the things we buy or what we eat are going to be safe." First, when Harper talks about revamping food inspection, what exactly does he mean?

According to Canwest news reports in July, the Harper government revamped the food inspection system some months ago -- without informing the public. The goal is to hand more responsibility for inspections over to the companies in order to cut the budget of the Canada Food Inspection Agency.

CFIA inspectors, who formerly conducted safety tests in the plants, are now relegated to overseeing paper records of each company while the companies are in charge of implementing safety control programs.

So when Harper talks about "revamping," does he intend to carry on with his new policy? Or will he return to a system that gives inspectors a more hands-on role in food safety?

If allowing the industry to police itself is a superior system, Harper should explain how. The mood of Canadians may well be skeptical at this point.

According to reports this week, the Maple Leaf plant was chosen to test the new inspection system a year ago. Did that contribute in any way to the outbreak? The confusion goes further. This week, CFIA manager Richard Arsenault said the agency used to have two methods to test for listeria -- by sampling the meat product itself and by taking swabs from the plant's equipment to test for the presence of the bacteria.

Arsenault said the swabbing procedure was abandoned three years ago because the U.S. required product testing. Is that how Canada makes inspection policy? There are other issues to address. This week, scientists raised the possibility that the bacteria could spread through deli meat slicers if it is already present in the meat. If that's the case, what further measures are needed to make the food system safe?

Canadians have been fortunate that such breaches of food safety have been rare. But it's important to find out where the mistakes were made in this case and how they can be avoided.

Signs of sex-ed success

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 28 Aug 2008

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Section: Opinion

Source: Calgary Herald

A StatsCan study showing fewer Alberta teens are having sex than they were a decade ago appears to show that including abstinence in school sex-education courses works. The study revealed that among teens between the ages of 15 and 19, the percentage who report they've had intercourse at least once was 39 per cent in 2005, down from 44 per cent in 1996 to 1997. StatsCan says that girls are responsible for the lower figures -- from 51 per cent down to 43 per cent in the same time period -- which also suggests a quiet revolution is being fomented in the way girls' values and images of themselves are changing.

Abstinence has been part of the Alberta sex-ed curriculum for a number of years and is an essential component of any sex-education program. Focusing exclusively on the clinical aspects of sex, threatening kids with gruesome diseases -- as was done 30 years ago -- or dwelling overlong on the mechanics of, for example, putting on a condom, do not give kids a context in which to place their sexual relationships. Kids need to be taught that sex is something intricately bound up with love, caring, commitment and mutual respect.

Teaching abstinence goes further, because it is about what is safe for the mind, the self-esteem and the heart.

The pendulum is swinging back in other ways, too, as Wendy Shalit documented in her book, *Girls Gone Mild*. She reported that teen girls who are sexually active are much more likely to bully and be bullied, suffer from depression and low self-esteem and engage in self-injurious activities, including attempting suicide.

Shalit noted that girls themselves are in the vanguard of change.

Teaching abstinence in sex-ed classes is one of the most important ways this need can be met -- and the efforts have begun to bear fruit.