

Table of Contents

Culture and Community Spirit	1
Health & Wellness	2
International and Intergovernmental Relations	4
Municipal Affairs	5
Sustainable Resource Development	7
*Miscellaneous Government	13
Columnists/Editorial & Comment	14

Culture and Community Spirit

Aid to publishers long overdue

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: A18

Section: Opinion

Source: The Edmonton Journal

A healthy, homegrown book publishing industry is a hallmark of any smart jurisdiction. At the moment, the national book trade in Canada is anything but robust, and in Alberta, it's been on the rocks.

A just-announced new infusion of financial life-support from the provincial government is welcome and long overdue. Hopefully, the decision hasn't come too little and too late for this sickly English Patient.

It's one of those imponderables about the Klein years that the provincial government under that imprimatur seemed to have a strange animus toward the small, if plucky Alberta publishing industry. For years, those in the business here complained that they were at a severe competitive disadvantage compared with those in other provinces. B.C.'s fiscally conservative Campbell government offered fully seven times the amount of grants and tax credits to its local book industry than has Alberta of late. Even with the new bump, which doubles funding to a modest \$835,000 for the current year, our neighbours will still triple that figure.

Surely, those citing purist ideological reasons against funding such subsidies from the public purse would be waxing selective. The fact is, the Alberta government generously supports numerous home-based industries in the province, from agriculture to energy to horse racing and beyond, especially when they are under siege. From time to time, help from government is absolutely necessary, a fact recognized in the real world of commerce.

While markets ultimately rule, they rarely operate in a vacuum. The local book trade, if slow to effectively make its case, has a compelling story to tell in terms

of providing bang for the investment buck. Labour-intensive, non-polluting, carrying the name of Alberta forward, its economic multiplier effect is impressive. That's precisely why other provinces are willing to offer a helping hand.

That said, there is no question that the sector is in trouble at the moment.

Altitude Publishing of Canmore, a classy firm that specialized in top drawer Alberta nature and history books closed its doors forever in February.

Edmonton-based Brindle & Glass, another non-fiction shop rooted in the Alberta experience, has relocated to Victoria to take advantage of a more welcoming business climate in British Columbia.

Only ten of a paltry 30 publishers that have chosen to stick it out in the province were funded last year.

The same Klein regime helped cripple the once-burgeoning Alberta film industry with neglect, while literally every other province in Canada scrambled to attract movie and TV production, both domestically and internationally.

Eventually, the Alberta industry found its voice and the government finally responded, quietly owning up to its mistake. Things have improved somewhat, not surprisingly, although the rise of the loonie and a profound brain drain have conspired against a return to the relative salad days of years past.

To its credit, the Stelmach government has recognized its responsibilities, listened carefully to industry lobbies and the advice of its own informed bureaucracy, making a stab at salvaging a tiny, but worthwhile industry that only adds to our currency as a province and a people. At the same time, it has also announced a small degree of assistance to beleaguered provincial magazine publishers and sound-recording studios, other realms that tell Alberta stories to us and to the world.

Sometimes, drawing a distinction between old and new governments isn't so much a matter of turning out splashy epic novels than crafting satisfying short stories. The Stelmach government has lately been at the keyboard, writing its own potentially winning narrative.

Better late than never.

Health & Wellness

**Centralization: A step back for Alberta health care?;
Premier must explain how ending regionalization will
improve innovation, access and quality of care**

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: 24

Section: News

Byline: BY FRANK LANDRY, CITY HALL BUREAU

Premier Ed Stelmach should stop musing about using surplus money to fast-track the completion of the Anthony Henday ring road and just get it done, says a west-end city councillor.

"What I would have preferred is that the overpasses were actually in the three-year capital plan that was put forward in the legislature recently," said Coun. Karen Leibovici. "It's strange that we have to wait for surpluses for that to actually occur."

Stelmach this week said higher royalties paid to the province as a result of sky-high oil prices could be used to accelerate the completion of ring roads in both Edmonton and Calgary.

"I'd like to, if possible, accelerate all the ring road projects," Stelmach told reporters.

That could include the badly needed overpasses on the western portion of the Henday, where traffic routinely comes to a crawl - largely the result of four traffic signals.

Stelmach said oil prices would have to remain high for the fast-tracking to be considered. As it stands, the ring road is not slated to be completed until 2014. Stelmach admitted mistakes were made planning the Henday.

"If I could turn back the clock I would have pounded the fist on the cabinet table harder to propose and push the southwest leg of the Anthony Henday on a public-private partnership, or fight hard to get all the interchanges in place while we're building the road."

He said the engineering for the overpasses is already taking place.

Mayor Stephen Mandel said this was good news. But Mandel added there's no shortage of projects in Edmonton that could use an infusion of provincial oil money.

Talk of fast-tracking the ring road comes as the price of oil hit a new record above \$133 US a barrel yesterday.

© 2008 Sun Media Corporation. All rights reserved.

Gibberish quotes don't add up

Gibberish quotes don't add up

See Magazine

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: 10

Section: Lookback

Source: See Magazine

Of all the curious and awkward quotes to come out of Health Minister Ron Liepert over the last week, this is one of the most nonsensical: "I think Albertans said on March the 3rd, 'We want change, we're sick and tired of not being prepared to act

on ensuring that we've got a health care system in the future that we can be proud of."

If Albertans voted for change, then why do we have yet another Progressive Conservative health minister talking about how messed-up the health care system is and how only private-sector thinking will save us?

And what happened to Ed Stelmach's declaration "The Third Way is DOA"?

Liepert is basing his changes on research done during the Klein-era discussions.

As he said when he was selected as health minister, "There will be no more studies, no more commissions, no more round tables. It's time for action."

© 2008 Great West Newspaper Group. All rights reserved.

International and Intergovernmental Relations

Premiers considering trade mission to China

The Globe and Mail

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: A11

Section: National News

Byline: Karen Howlett And RhéAl SéGuin

Dateline: TORONTO, QUEBEC

TORONTO, QUEBEC -- Canada's premiers are working on holding their first joint trade mission abroad, with China the destination of choice.

The premiers have been part of a half dozen so-called Team Canada trade missions organized by former prime minister Jean Chrétien. But this would be the first time the premiers venture out as a group on their own.

Planning is at a preliminary stage, and the premiers will not make a final decision on whether to go ahead until July, at their annual meeting in Quebec City, a senior Quebec official said yesterday. They are looking at making the trip this fall to coincide with the 30th anniversary celebration of the Canada China Business Council, a private group that promotes trade between the two countries.

Protocol would dictate that the premiers would likely invite Prime Minister Stephen Harper to accompany them, the official said. But it is not at all clear whether he would accept, given that he has a frosty relationship with Chinese government leaders.

"I don't know much about it, so it would be rather difficult to comment," Dimitri Soudas, a spokesman for Mr. Harper, said yesterday.

The premiers, however, are not content to sit on the sidelines and watch the enormous potential of promoting trade with China and attracting investment pass them by. Tom Olsen, a spokesman for Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach, said

yesterday that it makes sense for that province to reach out to China as it looks at expanding its markets for the oil sands beyond the United States.

"We have a product to sell here," he said. "We have a need for workers."

Despite tensions at the federal level, which largely centre on China's human-rights abuses, the provinces believe they have sufficient ties with political and business leaders there to open new markets. And they contend that the best way to advance human rights in China is to maintain an open-door policy.

© 2008 CTVglobemedia Publishing Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Municipal Affairs

Bronco relentless in ride for tax bucks

The Calgary Sun

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: 3

Section: News

Byline: BY SHAWN LOGAN

Calgary's mayor is striking a more congenial tone with the province than a year ago, but Dave Bronconnier used a speech yesterday to tweak Premier Ed Stelmach in a continued push for more tax dollars.

Speaking at a luncheon for Calgary Economic Development's 2008 report to the community, Bronconnier painted a rosy picture of the city's future, aided by \$3.3 billion in provincial infrastructure funding, but still held firm the province needs to pitch in more for cities caught up in an economic whirlwind.

"Calgarians pay enough in total taxation -- it's just that only four cents on any dollar directly goes to the local municipality," he said.

"We do have a long-term financial agreement to deal with those capital projects, but of course, it's still the operational issues that are always a challenge."

Bronconnier met with Stelmach last month to push for the province to relinquish the provincial share of property taxes, which this year was about \$542 million, to ensure the city can continue to keep up with growth that is impacting the bottom line.

Last year, the mayor used the forum to carve the premier over his infrastructure funding plan, suggesting it was a broken promise and would halt two future LRT lines, including the \$700-million west leg of the LRT, which went before a city committee yesterday. Bronconnier told about 500 people Calgary is on the verge of becoming a global city and must focus on being safe, innovative, creating a competitive lifestyle and being efficient and affordable.

But with more forecasts for growth that will see the population soar along with demands, the city needs more resources to ensure it stays ahead.

"It is essential that a community like ours be able to pay for infrastructure and services we will need when this community reaches two million people," he said, adding it's about four decades away.

© 2008 Sun Media Corporation. All rights reserved.

Mayor lists financing needs; Province asked to address operating costs

The Calgary Herald

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: B5

Section: City & Region

Byline: Colette Derworiz

Source: Calgary Herald

With \$3.3 billion in capital funding for the city already promised by the province, Mayor Dave Bronconnier set his sights Wednesday on getting more money for day-to-day operations.

In a speech to the local business community, Bronconnier said municipalities have the proper resources to deal with their infrastructure backlog.

But he said the next step is to open a dialogue with the province about operating dollars.

"Ten-year capital agreements make planning a lot easier and more effective, but they won't fix our long-term operational needs," he told those gathered for Calgary Economic Development's annual report to the community. "That's an equation we need to solve."

Bronconnier's speech lacked the bluster witnessed by the same crowd last year, when the mayor publicly attacked the provincial government's funding for municipalities.

It led to months of sparring between Premier Ed Stelmach and Bronconnier, ending in the 10-year municipal infrastructure deal last September.

The mayor has raised concerns about this year's budget, suggesting the province is collecting too much in education property taxes -- a move that equated to a tax increase for Calgarians.

Bronconnier said Calgarians already pay enough in taxes.

"The problem lies in where those tax dollars go," he said Wednesday. "Only four cents of every dollar directly goes to our municipal government."

Stelmach has said he understands the pressures facing city council.

While he noted that this year's provincial budget is set, Bronconnier said Stelmach committed to making sure Calgary remains sustainable.

Tom Olsen, the premier's press secretary, said Stelmach is open to meeting Bronconnier to talk about the needs of Calgarians.

"The premier is concerned with the needs of Calgarians and all Albertans, which is why he set out his own long-term plan," Olsen said. "If the premier has indicated to the mayor that he would like to continue to talk, then Premier Stelmach will make good on his word and continue that dialogue."

cderworiz@theherald.canwest.com

Sustainable Resource Development

Province's land plan lauded; Development blueprint designed to balance growth, environment

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Archie McLean and Hanneke Brooymans

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: The Edmonton Journal

The province's draft land-use framework won qualified praise Wednesday from a wide variety of organizations that all hope the new system will bring some order to Alberta's development binge.

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton said the framework will not curtail economic growth, but will instead balance it with environmental and social needs.

"The Stelmach government rejects the view that development destroys the environment," he said. "The object is to manage growth, not stop it."

Land-use planning has been a hot topic in Alberta for several years now as a growing population, resource extraction, recreational activities and agriculture have put increasing pressure on the land.

Across the province, counties have squabbled with cities, ATV riders have fought with hikers, and oil and gas companies have come into conflict with landowners. The province abandoned regional planning commissions in 1995 as a cost cutting measure and because some felt they were impeding the development of counties. Since then, however, many have complained the province needs to take a more active role in mediating these conflicts.

The new proposed framework creates six large regions based on major watersheds.

Don Johnson, president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, was pleased the province didn't go back to the old regional planning commissions, which his group long opposed.

Don Johnson, president of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, was pleased the province didn't go back to the old regional planning commissions, which his group long opposed.

"We will still have jurisdiction over planning in our own areas of responsibility, which we're pleased with," he said.

While Johnson admitted not all his members will agree, he said rural fears of being railroaded by cities are overblown and that most rural politicians accept the need to act together for Alberta's long-term interests.

This is increasingly important in a province of more than three million people, said Brad Stelfox, an Edmonton-based independent consultant and scientist who researches land-use impacts.

"For our grandparents, this was probably a really big place with very few people," he said. "What was big and remote is now small and crowded."

There are tradeoffs to all the activity. Water is not as drinkable and air is not as clean, Stelfox said.

"Alberta is passing a tipping point and the average person who is not a scientist can now detect these tradeoffs, and they are beginning to ask the government, 'What are you doing about it?'"

Stelfox said Alberta is like a house being built without blueprints. All the trades show up every day, working hard but without a plan. The result will be an ugly, uncomfortable, unsafe house, he said. "It's going to fall down and our kids are going to have to rebuild it."

This new framework could change all that, he said.

Steve Kennett, a senior policy analyst with the Pembina Institute, said the framework could be the major change in direction that's needed if it manages to shift Alberta's fixation with economic growth to a more balanced focus on overall quality of life.

While the regional plans develop, the government needs to take interim steps to relieve the intense development pressure in areas such as the oilsands, he said. Other areas are already cruising rapidly towards caps on growth based on sheer resource limitations.

The North Saskatchewan River will likely face the same kind of moratorium on new water licences as the South Saskatchewan River basin, once all the proposed upgraders are built there, said Jay White, a director on the Alberta Water Council, which shepherds the province's Water for Life strategy.

White said the framework's basic design around watersheds makes a lot of sense. "Water is going to drive all the development and what sort of development is suitable to what location," he said.

David Pryce, vice-president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, said Wednesday's announcement was not surprising since his group was heavily involved in the consultation process. Pryce said he's unsure exactly how the province will examine cumulative effects, but still encourage development.

"The devil will be in the details in that regard," Pryce said. "But we're seeing what I would say is the appropriate wording that sends a signal that they're trying to manage growth, not stop it."

One of the government's pledges Wednesday was that it would reduce conflict between surface and subsurface activities by identifying priority surface activities before selling subsurface rights, such as oil and gas mineral rights.

Members of the Alberta Forest Products Association have been working for years to combine their interests with those of oil and gas companies using the same land, by doing things like building and using the same roads, said Parker Hogan, an association spokesman.

For the forestry industry, the framework looks like it could provide certainty about what will happen on the land they operate on, which would be a welcome development, Hogan said.

Reaction from opposition critics was generally complementary, though they had questions about the plan's details.

"It's a good-news day," said Liberal David Swann. "It's critically important that we go forward quickly and responsibly to protect the land and water that the minister is obviously committed to trying to do."

Swann said he was concerned Morton did not make reference to pacing development around the province. He also said the timeframe is too long.

NDP critic Rachel Notley agreed the government needs to take these issues on right away, particularly in the metropolitan areas and oilsands regions.

Go to to www.landuse.gov.ab.ca before June 20 to give the government feedback on the draft framework.

amclean@thejournal.canwest.com

hbrooymans@thejournal.canwest.com

Land use plan needed now: critics; Tory blueprint to be adopted over four years

The Calgary Herald

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: A1 / FRONT

Section: News

Byline: Jason Fekete and Renata D'Aliesio, with files from Colette Derworiz, Calgary Herald

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Calgary Herald

Albertans will be forced to live, work and play within stricter parameters unveiled Wednesday in the Stelmach government's new land-use framework, but its protracted implementation sparked concerns over a frenzy of new development.

The blueprint will demand greater co-operation among municipalities, and produce regional transit systems and more painless annexation, the province said Wednesday.

But the document also promises to rein in irresponsible recreational activities -- such as reckless off-road vehicle use -- and muses about introducing environmental levies to help pay for and protect valuable green space and sensitive areas.

"Albertans have told us that they want stronger provincial leadership on land use and a sustainable balance between development and conservation," Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton told reporters Wednesday.

Yet there are few concrete measures in the draft plan about how to manage Alberta's massive oilsands projects -- the second-largest oil reserves on the planet.

Opposition parties and some environmental groups are worried there will be a "free-for-all" on development before the land-use plan is adopted over the next four years.

Morton admitted there could be attempts by individuals or companies to launch into a development frenzy prior to its full implementation.

However, he said the blueprint is desperately needed in Alberta to balance competing interests for the lands and manage the growing demands and ecological footprint of a booming population.

"The purpose of the land-use framework is to manage growth -- not to stop it," Morton added.

The centrepiece of the provincial strategy is to develop six regional land-use plans over the next four years, based on Alberta's major watersheds. Each plan will set the ground rules for development in that region, while factoring in the economic drivers and environmental challenges of each area.

Other measures proposed include looking at the overall impacts of developments on land, water and air, rather than assessing projects on a "one-off" basis. The framework -- which will go back to stakeholders for feedback before government finalizes it this fall -- also calls for improved protection of agricultural land and better management of recreational activities, such as quading, mud-bogging and camping on public lands.

"It's a good news day," was Liberal environment critic David Swann's assessment, although he argued the province must begin applying the principles of the blueprint now, otherwise development across Alberta -- particularly in the oilsands -- could explode over the next few years and devastate the environment in the process.

"This is going to open up a free-for-all in the next few years," Swann said.

NDP environment critic Rachel Notley highlighted similar concerns, saying her party's major worry is that there are no interim measures to control development over the short term.

Indeed, the report says Alberta has reached "a tipping point" on the protection of our air, water and land, and that better management of the province's resources is desperately needed.

Calgary and southern Alberta will see respective metropolitan and regional plans adopted by 2010, while Morton said he expects to see a regional public transit plan -- including both rail and buses -- implemented in the next 10 to 15 years to link bedroom communities with Alberta's two major cities.

Mayor Dave Bronconnier said the framework must take into account the work already underway with the Calgary Regional Partnership, a voluntary coalition of 19 urban and rural municipalities that is working on a regional land-use plan.

"We are looking at everything from regional waste and water treatment facilities right through to transportation," he said. "It's time to have regional planning in a very strong legislated framework."

The transportation network is especially needed, the mayor said, but he called on the province to cough up some of the dollars necessary to implement it.

"We do think it's time for the provincial government to take a much more active role, to start looking at regional transportation solutions, but in order to do that though it does come with a cost," Bronconnier said.

The oilpatch hopes the provincial strategy will deliver more clarity and certainty to both energy companies and landowners.

David Pryce, a vice-president with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, expects the province will encounter support from the oil and gas industry because it has spent the past 18 months consulting with the business community, municipalities and environmental groups.

Like others, he believes the province needs a clear land plan. Pryce said energy players have been facing increasing uncertainty in regulatory hearings and growing tension from landowners.

"We need a better articulation and integration of the policies so that we can have a better understanding of the expectation of how we are going to go about doing our business," he said.

Environmental groups, meanwhile, offered mixed reviews of the strategy.

Steve Kennett of the Pembina Institute, a Drayton Valley-based environmental think-tank, said the plan represents a fundamental shift in the Alberta government's policy toward land and natural resources.

"It's a clear acknowledgment that the current system is broken and the status-quo is no longer acceptable," Kennett said.

Kennett wants regional planning enshrined in new legislation and is lobbying for interim measures to curtail growth in high-pressure areas, such as the oilsands and southern Eastern Slopes, until regional plans are created.

Nigel Douglas of the Alberta Wilderness Association hopes the province's proposed changes governing development will result in changes on the landscape, and not remain ideas on paper.

jfekete@theherald.canwest.com
rdaliesio@theherald.canwest.com

- - -

Land Use Policy Highlights

- The government wants to carve the province into six regions based on major watersheds and require regional plans be developed for each area;
- Establish a new provincial cabinet committee and appoint a land-use secretariat too oversee the drafting of regional plans;
- Implement cumulative effects management planning that considers the overall impacts of development, rather assessing projects on a "one-off" basis;
- Develop transportation strategies to foster regional transit service;
- Better protection of agricultural land;
- Improve management of recreational activities, such as quading, mud-bogging and camping, on public lands;
- Explore new environmental fees, charges and taxes in possible "green tax reform;"
- Review the current government process for mineral rights sales.

Alberta's Rapid Growth

Population: In the past 25 years, population has grown by more than a million people to about 3.5 million. Another million people are expected to move to the province over the next 20 years. By 2050, the population is projected to hit five million, if current growth patterns continue.

Vehicles: In 1980, the province had about 1.6 million registered vehicles. In 2006, there were about 2.6 million, a 64 per cent increase.

Recreational activities: The number of registered all-terrain vehicles has more than tripled from 19,000 in 1995 to 67,000 in 2006.

Oil and gas: The energy regulator has seen applications increase from 19,000 in 1995 to more than 60,000 in 2006. In the oilsands, there are 3,360 active agreements. Coal bed methane wells have risen from about 1,100 five years ago to 12,500 in 2007.

Forestry: The total harvest of softwood and hardwood in Alberta increased 4.6 times between 1980 and 2005, from 5.93 million cubic metres to 27.55 million cubic metres.

Electricity: Since 1998, electricity demand has grown at a rate equivalent to adding two cities the size of Red Deer each year. In 2007, Alberta's load growth was equal to that of Ontario -- a province with three times the population.

Agriculture: Alberta farmers and ranchers own or use about one-third of the province's land. Between 1960 and 2006, the number of cattle increased from 2.88 million to 6.37 million, the number of hogs increased from 1.47 million to 2.05 million.

Source: Sustainable Resource Development

*Miscellaneous Government

MLAs approve committee pay hikes

The Calgary Herald

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: A6

Section: News

Byline: Jason Markusoff

Dateline: EDMONTON

Source: Edmonton Journal

Alberta MLAs approved their own raises of up to \$42,000 a year Wednesday -- for the glut of extra committee work Premier Ed Stelmach's democratic reforms have created.

And, yes, that's on top of their base pay of \$78,138, one-third of it tax-free.

The politicians have long been grumbling about the added workload of the new, all-party policy committees that began last year. In fact, some MLAs, commonly Tories, perennially complain they are underpaid for the marathon days and gruelling schedules that mark a politician's life, and might make the job less attractive to highly qualified Albertans.

So, with some regrets that MLAs set their own pay rates, the all-party members services committee approved a new scheme that gives members \$1,000 monthly per legislature committee, up to \$3,000. If a member chairs one of those bodies, the ceiling is \$3,500 -- or, since it's paid out year-round, \$42,000 annually.

Such a move is "necessary so people can maintain the sanity with the work we do," said Treasury Board president Lloyd Snelgrove.

NDP Leader Brian Mason said the extra pay for all-party committee work helps make life more reasonable for his tiny caucus -- he sits on four MLA committees, while NDP rookie Rachel Notley is on six

Gagging from the prairies to the sea

See Magazine

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: 10

Section: Lookback

Source: See Magazine

British Columbia is set to pass third-party advertising legislation in much the same spirit as Ed Stelmach's proposed election spending limits. Liberal premier Gordon Campbell is even going further than Stelmach, as his bill includes the five months leading up to the election. (Unlike Alberta, B.C. has fixed election dates.) Capping donations to political parties is easily justifiable because of the inherent obligation it puts on elected individuals. However, third-party advertising doesn't

carry that obligation baggage, and unduly restricting the amount that citizens' groups can spend on presenting issues to the public is patently undemocratic. Certainly, we should strive to avoid front-groups like Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, but if a valid citizen-oriented group wants to kickstart debate on an issue with facts, they should not be prevented from doing so outside the party system. © 2008 Great West Newspaper Group. All rights reserved.

Columnists/Editorial & Comment

Superboard aims at consistency; Health-care access should be same for all

The Edmonton Journal

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: B1 / FRONT

Section: Cityplus

Byline: Paula Simons

Column: Paula Simons

Source: The Edmonton Journal

It was a putsch of such speed and ruthlessness, a week after the fact people are still grappling with its implications.

Last Thursday, Alberta's health minister, Ron Liepert, announced that the province's nine powerful health authority boards had been disbanded, effective immediately. Instead of nine semi-autonomous regional health boards, the province will now have just one health board, which will also assume responsibility for the Mental Health Board, the Cancer Board and AADAC.

It's still unclear what this revolution will mean for ordinary patients. Might it mean that the Cancer Board's dedicated research dollars will be pooled with other research funding? Could it mean addictions treatment and counselling will be more integrated with medical care? Or that rural patients will get better access to care in Edmonton and Calgary? Will it mean that Capital Health will lose its autonomy to experiment with primary care delivery or plan new research labs? And will this streamlined superboard save real money? Or will it just add a new layer of expensive bureaucracy?

"The message is, 'Stay tuned!' " says John Tuckwell, who speaks for Alberta Health (Liepert was unavailable for comment).

It will be up to the interim health services board, chaired by Calgary businessman Ken Hughes, and to interim CEO, Edmonton banking executive Charlotte Robb, to make those kinds of decisions, says Tuckwell. Aside from that, he says, the key goal of the reorganization is to make health-care access more "fair and equitable" across the province and to make the quality of care more consistent.

"Real consistency comes in real consistent governance."

It's all an uncomfortable degree of uncertainty, especially in Edmonton, where Capital Health, one of the best-run organizations of its kind in the country, hasn't just exercised its autonomy to create a solid public health-care system, but has been truly visionary in partnering with the University of Alberta to help make health research and state-of-the-art treatments a huge part of the city's burgeoning knowledge economy.

But this shakeup has at least as much to do with political regime change as it does with health-care delivery.

The regional health authorities were mighty political fiefdoms, bigger than municipalities, their boards (and sometimes their executive offices) stacked with powerful, well-connected Klein-era Tories, patronage appointees who owed their fealty not to Ed Stelmach, but to the previous regime.

Stelmach simply couldn't afford to have a bunch of health "warlords" who might not be loyal to him at the helms of these high-profile boards; he couldn't run the risk of that they might kick up an almighty fuss about funding or government policy at a particularly inopportune moment. In a province where the legislative opposition has been all but neutralized, the health boards represented the biggest political threat to Stelmach's authority, the greatest source of potential political embarrassment.

Several boards had already embarrassed the new premier mightily. There was the debacle in the East Central health region, when it came out that the St. Joseph's hospital in Vegreville, in the heart of the premier's own riding, had been failing to clean and sterilize surgical equipment properly, exposing thousands to the risk of infection.

In the Peace Country health region, Marv Moore, the just-ousted board chair, was one of Ralph Klein's closest cronies, a former health minister who ran four Klein election campaigns. Moore was frankly outspoken in his complaints about funding for his health region, and in his aggressive lobbying for a new hospital for Grande Prairie -- a little too frank for the taste of the current health ministry.

But perhaps Stelmach's biggest bane has been the Calgary Health Region. Word is that Stelmach has neither forgotten or forgiven the way Jack Davis, the Calgary's health region's CEO, held a news conference in the middle of the February election campaign to demand an immediate infusion of \$115 million to bail out the CHR.

Davis, Klein's former cabinet secretary and chief policy adviser, a guy with intimate ties to party fixer Rod Love and Stelmach leadership rival Jim Dinning, was perceived by some close to Stelmach as purposely undermining Stelmach's campaign, and leadership, at a time when Calgary's urban seats were still very much in play.

Now, with a huge electoral win safely under his belt, Stelmach has enough political clout to eliminate the capacity of the Calgary Health region and the other

boards to embarrass him ever again. Instead of bankrolling potential political critics and rivals, he's shut them, and their dissent, right down.

Yet Liepert and Stelmach are taking a significant risk. Under the old board structure, the government downloaded front-line responsibility for local health care to regional authorities, and thus protected itself against public griping. The old board structure gave the province a layer of political insulation, a buffer that's suddenly gone. If and when things go wrong now, there won't be a local board or authority to take the rap, just the one big superboard.

It's a risk the premier seems willing to take. Politicians are pack animals, and with this radical health board restructuring, Stelmach has just unmistakably marked his turf as Alberta's top dog. Whether this will actually give the rest of us better or more or more efficient health care remains to be seen. Stay tuned, indeed.

psimons@thejournal.canwest.com

The battle for Alberta's open spaces continues

The Edmonton Sun

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: 7

Section: News

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH, EDMONTON SUN

Regular readers have known for over a month now that the much-hyped, long-anticipated, 20-months-in-the-making Alberta Land Use Framework is really just a framework to have a framework.

The document that Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton released yesterday - and the six regional land use plans and the Regional Advisory Councils that will drive them - won't be up and running for a while. Maybe not until Premier Ed Stelmach's Tories gear up for the next election. Everyone who follows Alberta provincial politics knows what happens to controversial legislation that could cause trouble in the Tory heartland around election time: It tends to disappear.

But in the meantime, in between time - as the late, great rasslin' announcer Ed Whalen used to say - a lot of bad things could continue to happen to Alberta's landscape.

It's already under serious pressure from quad yahoos, gravel pit bandits, the coal bed methane outfits, the clear cutters and fly-by-night acreage developers. They join a lot more unsavoury operators who want to get rich quick at the expense of what Morton yesterday called "the natural wealth and beauty that we have inherited."

The minister talked about Albertans' "collective duty".

And how we - and more to the point, Steady Eddie's government - must "pass this natural bounty on to the next generation in as good or better shape as we received it."

Those are wonderful words and nice sentiments, if the rape of the McLean Creek recreation area hadn't just happened a few short days before. It marked the second long May weekend under Morton's watch as SRD minister that the maverick mud boggers and outlaw quadders won in the battle for Alberta's open spaces.

The Stelmach Tories once again look like they've lost control of the Eastern Slopes.

Yet this is one of the "priority policy gaps" that Morton's document talks in such glowing terms about. He wants to "reduce conflicts and increase co-operation" by "working with members of the recreational communities."

Before the PCs can get there from here, they must go through a tedious process of holding consultations, then finalizing the framework draft, getting it through caucus and cabinet, passing a blizzard of regs and legislation on an already clogged legislature agenda, setting up the regional boards, doing a regional inventory with all the usual bellyaching that will create. And then, only then, will this bizarre process be able to crack down on the yahoos.

"Grand designs often lead to unintended consequences," Morton said. "In an ideal world maybe you can stop things and design from a clean slate. In the real world you don't work with a clean slate."

While in the meantime it will likely be business as usual for municipal councils on the environmental bad boy list. Parkland and Strathcona counties - and the gross acreage sprawls they have created - spring readily to mind.

"Will there be some people who try to get the jump on this?" Morton said.

"Maybe."

But he insisted developers who "shortcut around aren't going to have a lot of luck."

The problem is, the minister and the premier aren't calling the shots.

At least for another two - maybe more - years. And while Morton's framework is supposed to assess the "cumulative effects" of development particularly in the oilsands, the Heartland industrial complex east of Edmonton, the southern foothills and the QE2 corridor - a lot more unregulated development is going to accumulate before Morton's regional boards get to examine the "effects".

Environment critic **David Swann** momentarily broke the **Liberal** mould yesterday and actually "congratulated" Morton for his framework.

"It's going to be good for Alberta," **Swann** said.

"If and when it's going to be implemented."

And that's the big 'IF.'

© 2008 Sun Media Corporation. All rights reserved.

Alberta landscape under pressure

The Calgary Sun

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: 15

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY NEIL WAUGH

Column: THE LEGISLATURE

Regular readers of this space have known for some time now the much-hyped, long-anticipated, 20-months-in-the-making Alberta Land-Use Framework is really just a framework to have a framework.

The document Sustainable Resource Development Minister Ted Morton released yesterday -- and the six regional land use plans and the Regional Advisory Councils that will drive them -- won't be up and running for a while.

Maybe not until Premier Ed Stelmach's Tories are gearing up for the next election. And everyone who follows Alberta provincial politics knows what happens to controversial legislation that could cause trouble in the Tory heartland around election time.

It tends to disappear.

In the meantime, in between time -- as the late, great rasslin' announcer Ed Whalen used to say -- bad things could continue to happen to Alberta's landscape, which is already under pressure from quad yahoos, gravel pit bandits, the coal bed methane outfits, clear-cutters and fly-by-night acreage developers. Many more unsavoury operators want to get rich quick at the expense of what Morton yesterday called "the natural wealth and beauty we have inherited."

The minister talked about Albertans' "collective duty." And how we -- and more to the point Steady Eddie's government -- must "pass this natural bounty on to the next generation in good or better shape as we received it."

Wonderful words and nice sentiments -- if only the rape of the McLean Creek recreation area hadn't just happened a few short days before.

It was the second May long weekend under Morton's watch as minister that the maverick mud-boggers and outlaw quadders won in the battle for Alberta's open spaces.

And the Stelmach Tories once again look like they've lost control of the Eastern Slopes.

Yet, this is one of the "priority policy gaps" Morton's document talks in such glowing terms about. He wants to "reduce conflicts and increase co-operation" by "working with members of the recreational communities."

Here's a better idea. Lock them up in the remand for the weekend and seize their OHVs if they drive them in no-go areas or rip up sensitive habitat.

Before the PCs can get there from here, they must go through a tedious process of consultations, finalizing the framework draft, getting it through caucus and cabinet, passing a blizzard of regs and legislation on an already clogged legislature agenda, setting up the regional boards and doing a regional inventory with all the usual bellyaching that will create.

Only then will this bizarre process be able to crack down on the yahoos.

"Grand designs often lead to unintended consequences," Morton sighed. "In an ideal world maybe you can stop things and design from a clean slate. In the real world you don't work with a clean slate."

In the meantime, it will likely be business as usual for municipal councils on the environmental bad-boy list. Parkland and Strathcona counties -- and the gross acreage sprawls they have created -- spring to mind.

"Will there be some people who try to get the jump on this?" Morton confessed. "Maybe."

But he insisted developers who "short-cut around aren't going to have a lot of luck."

The problem is, the minister and the premier aren't calling the shots -- at least not for another two or more years.

While Morton's framework is supposed to assess the "cumulative effects" of development -- particularly in the oilsands, southern foothills and QE2 corridor -- a lot more unregulated development is going to accumulate before Morton's regional boards get to examine the "effects."

Environment critic **David Swann** momentarily broke the **Liberal** mold yesterday and actually "congratulated" Morton for his "Framework."

"It's going to be good for Alberta," **Swann** boomed.

"If and when it's going to be implemented."

And that's the big "IF."

© 2008 Sun Media Corporation. All rights reserved.

Public thrown overboard by Alberta's health dictatorship

Public thrown overboard by Alberta's health dictatorship

Cochrane Times

Wed 21 May 2008

Page: 10

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY BRIAN L. HOREJSI

Column: Guest Column

Control of our health care system, and the services it should and must provide, is possible only when citizens provide the vision and legally control the processes that implement that vision.

As the gap widens between the public and democratic process and present day political - corporate domination of government on the other hand, as it has for decades in Alberta and other parts of Canada, dysfunction, bias and failure become common place. This is why health care is an irritating and worrisome, day by day issue in today's Canada.

Stelmach and his henchman, and for the past 25 years the conservatives in general, abhorred public checks and balances to government and corporate domination. They don't trust Albertans to do it the conservative or corporate way. Collapsing Regional Health Boards, so that you and I have to dial a machine in Edmonton in order to raise an issue or expressing dissent, only confirms this. This is just another in a growing list of dictatorial and arrogant moves by Stelmach; His transgressions range from squelching public involvement in oil and gas drilling/pipeline applications, to aggressive opposition to environmental assessment for power transmission facilities, to the most recent, squashing Health Boards.

There are virtually no Albertans that are unaware that present day Health Region Boards are resting homes for Tories, either those that are spent or those that have visions of climbing up the ladder to Tory Heaven. It is also true that these people and Boards have functioned almost exclusively to protect the Tory Father in Edmonton, as opposed to even meekly carrying forward the needs and wishes of citizens in their region. They have not served the public well, but the concept and structure are not flawed. Only the people that dominate the structure have failed us. Now, as has been Tory history, Stelmach and Liepert are again throwing the baby out with the bath water by eliminating Regional Health Boards.

Instead of progress in democratic governance, we are being force fed government by exclusion. When we desperately need to move to elected Health Boards that are regulated by legal accountability to citizens, we are being served greater isolation. Yes, democracy costs some money, even though it would amount to just a fraction of taxpayers pot given annually to special interests like the oil and gas industry and agriculture; but true again to the Conservative practice of twisting reality, we are being told efficiency is the objective. In the Tory dictionary efficiency is habitually defined as entrenching stranglehold control of decisions at the political level and systematic gutting of public process. As arrogance, isolation and hypocrisy become tools of maintaining power over a society, brute force becomes increasingly necessary, and it is brute force the Tories are using to kill Health Boards.

Too many pencil pushers? Almost every Albertan is aware that Stelmach gave up the pen for a pitchfork. Maybe its linked to the fear of intellect and analysis so routinely evident in decisions by Stelmach, his cabinet and Tory MLAs. Oil and gas royalty calculations are heavily bunkered in Edmonton, and despite a now buried "Fair Share" report, we still haven't seen any numbers. Not even Stelmach's own

review panel could get in the door. And now he proposes to do it to us with a Health Care version.

There is no light permitted in Tory Land. Without the light of legal, media and public scrutiny, and honest and legitimate access to information, the things that grow are suspicion, mistrust, resentment, and government corruption and prejudice. Try reaching "your" Health Board when its buried in the conservative fearing Edmonton Bureaucracy.

It is tragic indeed that the media, and probably many Albertans, believe that only a conservative ex minister could possibly influence the Stelmach juggernaut. This is only further evidence of the conservative disdain for the people and for democratic process.

Stelmach began to hurt Albertans with silence long before he became premier. Remember silent Ed, the cabinet Minister? Probably not, hardly anyone does. But now his disdain for freedom to know and participate, along with citizens right to dissent and resist, all of which form the foundations of democracy, are reaching threatening fever pitch. As severely as this government is hurting Albertans today, the pain has only begun.

Holes in their pockets; After record budget, urge to spend is undiminished

The Calgary Herald

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: A20

Section: The Editorial Page

Source: Calgary Herald

It was just a month ago that Alberta Finance Minister Iris Evans stood up in the legislature to present the province's books -- a record (\$37 billion) disbursement of funds even she conceded was "a spending budget," with a ramped-up capital spending program of \$22 billion over three years.

Now, with oil topping \$130 per barrel, securely above the \$78 assumed in the budget, the government is already figuring out how to spend a surplus it assumes will be far higher than the \$1.6 billion estimate Evans offered April 22. Premier Ed Stelmach speaks, for instance, of accelerating completion of ring roads around Calgary and Edmonton -- projects certainly capable of taking a big bite of the most munificent surplus.

Yet, these projects were already in the planning pipeline, which leads us to ask what might be the hurry? Otherwise, what's the point of a budget?

Apparently, not what one would think. Certainly, it has become customary for proposed expenses to be handsomely exceeded (from unbudgeted revenues) in the course of 12 months: The 2006 budget, for instance, called for \$28.3 billion in spending, but when the books were closed 12 months later, \$29.5 billion had

been spent. Likewise the 2007 budget was estimated at \$33.1 billion, but is likely to be closed out at \$33.7 billion. And so on back, for years.

The budget thus seems less plan than fiscal snapshot, and the reasonable citizen might well ask where the brakes are.

Answer, they're not so good: Spending has almost doubled in six years with billions never planned in a formal spring budget. Yet, if Alberta is to see any benefit from its boom beyond the generation that experiences it, there must be less aggressive spending, and far more diligent efforts to put some away.

In its defence, the government could offer two arguments.

First, so what? What's wrong with spending money on infrastructure that's needed now?

Second, it is doing exactly what it promised to do, that is to follow its so-called in-year surplus allocation policy of directing one-third of an increased surplus to savings, and two-thirds to capital spending.

The first would be more convincing, if this were not already a record year for infrastructure spending. There is a reason why the public works construction industry has suffered from galloping inflation, namely that it must compete for labour with oilsands megaprojects. To make matters worse, the provincial government will find itself in a bidding war with municipalities, which it has itself funded.

For example, the same resources that could build a ring road, could also build a transit railway. Trying to do both at once is a recipe for a spike in costs.

So, while there may be nothing exactly wrong with infrastructure spending, it is prudent to attempt the same kind of phasing in for roads, schools and hospitals that some have called upon government to insist upon for the oilsands.

The second argument is more complex. The government does indeed have a surplus allocation policy, and has followed it, (although this one-third/two-thirds split is not actually enshrined in law.)

But is it the right policy?

In calculating the province's fiscal capacity, it treats all revenue sources the same when, quite clearly, they're not.

Income tax may be relatively stable, but a growing reliance upon variable resource revenues sets up the province for a day of reckoning. Last year, it was an amount equal to one-third of expenses: 10 years ago, it was a quarter and 20 years ago, it was a fifth.

What is needed here is not a policy that may be changed at whim, but legislation dealing with surpluses.

Such legislation must consider revenue streams separately, and impose clear limits on how they may be handled.

If income-tax receipts exceed budget, for instance, the amount by which they do should be considered overtaxation, and returned to the taxpayers.

But overages from hard-to-predict resource revenues should be viewed as revenue to be saved in order to generate an income stream and thereby reduce Alberta's future dependence upon non-renewable resources.

It would, of course, be necessary to stay within the budget. But that's what this government shows so little inclination to do.

The budget press conference is fresh in our minds, in which the minister seemed to acknowledge the need for something like this, saying she was working on a savings strategy for next year's budget. "It's in the mandate letter (from the premier). I can assure you we will have a strategy."

One might think that after record spending, further unexpected revenues might have been viewed as an excellent start to such a savings strategy.

Evidently not.

It is discouraging. If the government will not live by a spending budget, can we believe it will abide by a savings strategy?

Landscape under pressure

The Calgary Sun

Thu 22 May 2008

Page: 14

Section: Editorial/Opinion

Byline: BY ROY CLANCY

Column: Editorial

You don't miss your water until your well runs dry.

There's more than a grain of truth to that old axiom.

Fortunately, Alberta's new draft land-use framework acknowledges the importance of this resource that too many of us take for granted.

It is our abundance of natural riches and the breathtaking beauty of the Alberta landscape that has led to the massive population and economic growth that's put mounting pressure on our most precious resource of all.

Southern Alberta contains more than half of Alberta's total population, but has the least water.

Massive future development in the oilsands regions will soak up ever increasing amounts of water.

The land-use framework released yesterday acknowledges the importance of making sure our well doesn't run dry by keying on the province's main watersheds.

Six proposed land-use regions will be developed based on major watersheds. The plans will consider the total impact of development in a region over time from housing, farming, resource development and recreation.

Even **Alberta Liberal** critic **David Swann**, no pushover when it comes to the environment, said he is "encouraged by the watershed approaches, since the watershed is the key priority."

The new framework "should deal with the regional waste water issue so we don't have to worry about the quality of water 10-20 years down the road," said Sustainable Resources Minister Ted Morton.

The land-use draft did come under fire from environmentalists for its lack of immediate action to curtail oilsands growth.

If they had their druthers, there'd be an immediate moratorium on this massive project that is Alberta's bread and butter these days.

Fortunately, the government is taking a more reasonable approach.

"The purpose of the land-use framework is to manage growth, not stop it -- to ensure a future with plentiful opportunities and a healthy environment," Morton said.

There's no doubt developing a blueprint for sustainable growth is a massive and complicated undertaking. That said, as Morton points out, population growth and economic activity are placing "unprecedented pressure on Alberta's landscapes." This also puts our politicians under some heavy pressure.

Alberta is in the world's gaze these days as a result of the oilsands.

We need to identify associated potential problems and deal with them before our province is placed in the embarrassing position of having others point them out for us.

Swift action is essential.