

What Is An Albertan?

MANY PEOPLE—Albertans included—believe a stereotype about Albertans: that we’re generally farmers or ranchers or oil and gas workers, older white men who unfailingly vote Conservative. On our cover this month are faces that challenge the stereotype. Jackie Flanagan’s essay (p 36) explores how Alberta in 2024 is far more diverse than we’re usually given credit for.



Stereotypes exist for a reason. Our premier likes to talk about the

things that supposedly unite Albertans, including our uncritical support for oil and gas, dismissal of scientific expertise and hostility toward the federal government and national institutions. Danielle Smith is persuasive. We got a letter recently from an Albertan who’s incredulous that we criticize the UCP government. “My only reasonable conclusion is that some party or maybe George Soros and his kind are paying you to sing their song,” he wrote. How could a true Albertan dissent...??

But maybe Smith knows she doesn’t speak for all Albertans. She governs more and more like an authoritarian and is introducing legislation she didn’t even campaign on (e.g., giving herself more power to interfere in municipal politics). These are signs of insecurity. Election results are likewise revealing. Smith got 54 per cent support in the 2022 UCP leadership race. In 2023 the UCP got 53 per cent of the popular vote, and voter turnout was 60.5 per cent. In other words, this premier was handed her vast powers first, in 2022, by only 1.5 per cent of Albertans, and then, in 2023, by less than one-third (32 per cent) of voting-age Albertans.

This isn’t to say the UCP government is illegitimate. But these numbers reinforce the criticism that our current electoral system does a poor job of reflecting Alberta’s electorate. And they reinforce the inaccuracy of the Alberta stereotype.

Soon we’ll need to keep a close eye on how Danielle Smith redraws our province’s electoral map (“On the Ledge,” p 12). An authoritarian-leaning premier who doesn’t speak for a diverse Alberta could be tempted to tip the electoral scales to enhance the appearance that she does. ■

CONTRIBUTORS

Jackie Flanagan (“What Is An Albertan?” p 36) founded *Alberta Views* in 1997 after a career as an English instructor at Mount Royal College (now University). She is a third-generation Albertan and an ardent supporter of the arts.

Carissa Halton (review of *The Compassionate Imagination*, p 54) is a writer and speaker in Edmonton. Her novel about tensions between communist and fascist factions in a 1932 mining town is slated for publication by NeWest Press in fall 2025.

Camille Labchuk (“Should We Ban Rodeo?” p 32) is an animal rights lawyer who has been working for more than 15 years to protect animals. She seeks cases that enhance the legal interests of animals, expose suffering and lead to meaningful policy changes.

Adrienne Mason (“Bringing Back the Alberta Bouquet,” p 24) is based on Vancouver Island. She’s the author of more than 30 books for children and eight for adults and was managing editor of *KNOW: The Science Magazine for Curious Kids* and *Hakai Magazine*.

Graham Thomson (“On the Ledge,” p 12) has been covering Alberta politics for 30 years, first with the *Edmonton Journal* and now as a freelancer, and was twice embedded with Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

Aritha van Herk (“Should We Ban Rodeo?” p 32) is a professor of English at the University of Calgary and an internationally recognized author whose work has been translated into 10 languages. Her books include the non-fiction *Mavericks: An Incurable History of Alberta* (2001).

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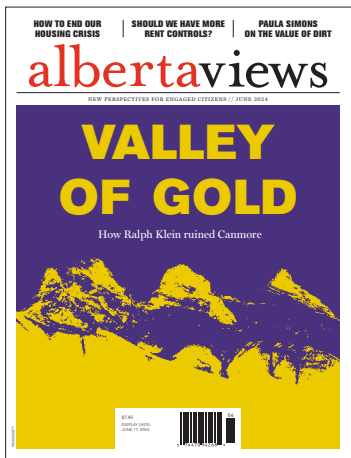
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Your Views



IT IS INTERESTING THAT AS I READ your article (“Valley of Gold,” by Jeff Gailus) I also read the article in the *Calgary Herald* praising Don Taylor and family for donating \$15-million to the Stampede for the Sam Centre, named after Don Taylor’s father.

JOAN ADAMS, *Calgary*

PAULA SIMONS’S COLUMN ON THE importance of soil health (“The Real Dirt,” June) is spot on. Soil is the only true capital any country has. Over the past 10,000 years agriculture has given rise to civilizations on fertile soil, many of which disappeared when the soil degraded and was unable to produce enough food. All up and down the Mediterranean, civilizations on fertile soil allowed for a class system: nobility, merchants, armies, farmers. Then, when the soil could no longer produce enough, these societies conquered neighbouring hunter-gatherers, who lacked armies. Colonized lands eventually rebelled and become the new “power civilizations.” On average, civilizations lasted 79 generations, about 1,500 years.

The Phoenicians were farmers, but they were also in the timber business. When King Solomon was buying the cedars of Lebanon,

150,000 men were in the timber business, cutting down almost all of the over two million acres of these trees. Just a few small groves are left in Lebanon today. Even after they wore their land out and cut down their trees, the Phoenicians managed to carry on for another 500 years because they were great seafaring traders.

When I was teaching holistic management to farmers and ranchers in the 1990s, I’d ask the class where the nearest desert is. They’d name somewhere in Arizona or California, but the answer, I’d tell them, is the nearest desert is six inches below our feet, and we’re getting closer to it every year, unless we protect the soil.

I’m glad Senator Simons and her committee are on this. A previous report, “Soil at Risk: Canada’s Eroding Future,” by the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, was published in 1984. It had some influence in raising awareness of the importance of healthy soil in sustaining our civilization. Perhaps the new report will take us a step further.

NOEL McNAUGHTON, *Edmonton*

READING ABOUT THE PROPOSED

Alberta Pension Plan (“Island Alberta,” by Curtis Gillespie, and Eye on Alberta, May), I was left wondering about our government’s LifeWorks study. It’s rare that Alberta’s government doesn’t get the answer it wants from its consultants, so it invites the questions: What was the scope of the study, how was LifeWorks selected and what did it cost?

LifeWorks didn’t ring any bells, so I looked it up and found it was formerly Morneau Shepell. I was surprised to learn that LifeWorks was bought in 2022 by Telus Health for over \$2-billion. Given Telus Health’s deep involvement with the UCP during COVID with the Babylon (now MyCare) virtual health

app, one can only wonder if the APP report’s conclusions were unbiased. Perhaps a feature on the use of compliant consultants and panels in conjunction with stage-managed public involvement would make a good article.

BRIAN KELLY, *Edmonton*

I’M OFTEN REMINDED IN THIS

“post-truth” world that if the truth isn’t spoken, it doesn’t exist. We face multiple crises that are coming home to roost, while our authoritarian government refuses to consult, disregards evidence, and, as our watershed groups are finding, offers almost no access to information that should be public.

Your May issue, highlighting rampant conflicts of interest and recurrent malfeasance from this government, is essential reading. This is the most blunt and honest reporting I have seen in a long time. Tadzio Richards is unrelenting in “Our Lobbyist Premier,” demonstrating our premier’s blindness to oil and gas reclamation issues that ignore the industry’s legal responsibilities, destroy the environment and transfer massive financial liabilities to the public. As Fred Stenson quips in “Wit,” we’re “going from Polluter Pay to Pay the Polluter,” based on Danielle Smith’s continued lobbying for RStar subsidies. It hardly needs stating that the financial health of the UCP is closely tied to the profits of the oil and gas industry!

It will take more courageous journalism and much more citizen engagement to turn this ship around. I applaud you for your commitment to Alberta’s long-term public interest.

DAVID SWANN, *Calgary*

RE “ALBERTA IS BURNING,” by Trina Moyles (April): When it comes to the devastation caused by wildfires, it brings us no joy to tell the UCP government “We told you so.” More than a year



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ago, wildland firefighters who are Alberta Union of Provincial Employees members warned that the 2023 fire season could be catastrophic. They warned that the province was ill prepared. This government didn't listen, and refused to reverse their cuts to firefighting services. The result was 1,088 fires, 26,000 km² of forests, farmland and property destroyed, and 38,000 people evacuated from 48 communities.

The 2024 wildfire season is shaping up to be as bad or worse than last year. The government still isn't listening. It must act now to solve the crisis in retaining and recruiting wildland firefighters. More than 50 per cent of seasonal workers didn't return this year. Firefighters with only one or two years of experience are now leading crews that have even less experience.

Alberta's wildland firefighters are scared. We think Albertans should be scared too.

JAMES GAULT, *AUPE vice-president, Fort Saskatchewan*

YOUR ARTICLE ON THE NEW POLAR bear exhibit at Calgary's Zoo ("Where Sad Animals Are Happy," by George Colpitts, April) impressively outlines the cyclic problems with the zoo's polar bear exhibits since 1938. Having monitored animal welfare at the Vancouver Zoo for decades, we've seen the same behaviours that demonstrate boredom and stress, including pacing and bar biting.

Polar bears have complex needs as the widest ranging terrestrial carnivore on the planet. The new exhibit in Calgary is hundreds of thousands of times smaller than the smallest known home range of wild polar bears. An exhibition of orphaned bears is likely to garner public sympathy; after all, isn't this a sanctuary? But while sanctuaries exist for the benefit of animals, zoos exist for the interest of visitors. Zoos often

keep animals in or near urban centres with a climate far different from their natural habitats. While wildlife rescues typically focus on rehabilitation and release of native wildlife, zoos are motivated to keep animals captive indefinitely.

A recent Research Co. poll shows that 56 per cent of Canadians oppose keeping animals in zoos. I hope these facilities soon align with public values and realize that wild animals are not here for our entertainment.

CHANTELLE ARCHAMBAULT,
*communications director,
Vancouver Humane Society*

RE "SHOULD WE BE OPTIMISTIC about our climate future?"

(Dialogue, April). Andrew Nikiforuk is right again. Technology isn't a solution. Climate disaster can be avoided now, with simple social policy decisions that will have little if any impact on quality of life. But this means less industrial activity, which means less profit, which idea is impossible for the capitalists running society to comprehend. So we're racing over the cliff waiting for a technology superhero as fictional as any comic book character to save us.

MARTIN GAGNE, *Toronto*

ANYBODY OLD ENOUGH TO remember Debbie Downer will recognize her channelled presence in the doom-laden shtick of Andrew Nikiforuk. Show Debbie a healthy, gurgling one-year-old, and she'll quickly pivot into a grim reminder that in a mere few decades, that bright child will devolve into a drooling, geriatric basket case gibbering on about meaningless nonsense.

Chris Turner's virtue is to make the best of a bad job in this difficult world. Nikiforuk, a nattering Nostradamus, contents himself with making the worst of a good job. Give him a sandwich board with "The End Is Nigh"...!

PHIL BURPEE, *Pincher Creek*

MY TWO SONS ARE PROFOUNDLY handicapped. Ryan is 50 and Daniel is 45. They live with me and have services from AISH and Persons with Developmental Disabilities. For many years they were able to access the Marwayne Dental Clinic in Red Deer, which specifically served disabled people from Michener Centre and the community.

In March 2020 the clinic was suddenly closed by the UCP government. Some 400 patients were left without dental care. I received a letter from Community and Social Services (CSS) saying the services offered at Marwayne were redundant, as there are lots of dentists in central Alberta, and CSS believes in "inclusion." Trouble is, none of these dentists provide dental day surgery.

I spent weeks calling dentists, none of whom offered day surgery. I finally found one in Edmonton at U of A hospital. At the assessment it was deemed that, yes, my sons both needed day surgery to have their teeth cleaned, X-rayed and repaired. We were booked into the Grey Nuns in March 2021 and my sons' procedures were done. Since then, nothing. After three years I was finally told the earliest my sons could be booked back in for surgery is the middle of 2025.

I've contacted everyone I can think of—Disability Advocate, Ombudsman, PDD, CSS, MLAs, opposition MLAs. I finally got a meeting with Health Minister Adriana LaGrange in 2023. She seemed to understand the need for day surgery; I was cautiously optimistic. But nothing happened. Marwayne remains closed. Danielle Smith and the UCP continue to shadow box with the federal government. My profoundly handicapped sons continue to lack access to basic dental care. How sad is this in the progressive province of Alberta?

LILY BRELAND, *Red Deer* ■



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