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## So who knew, and when?

**Les Brost**

For The Calgary Herald

*Monday, November 26, 2007*

I was born and raised here in Alberta, and I love this place with all my heart.

Albertans have been blessed with so much, both by our Creator and by the generations of Albertans who built this province.

Yet right now, pride is not the emotion I feel when I think about Alberta. Now, in the waning days of 2007, I fear for Alberta's future. I'm sure that sounds like a strange statement.

Why should one fear for a province that is the envy of the country and a beacon for the world's best and brightest?

Why should a province that has been described as "the Canadian tiger" be fearful? And what has happened to trigger this transformation from pride to fear?

My fear is simple. I fear that we, the current beneficiaries of so much, are no longer worthy of our inheritance. Our great-grandparents, grandparents and parents gave their sweat, blood and tears to build this place.

They faced drought, grasshoppers, a couple of world wars, international commodity cartels, the Great Depression and assorted other challenges, and passed all the tests. Life wasn't easy, but they more than lived up to the provincial motto; "Strong and free."

Our forebears lived the values they professed. They learned from their mistakes and demanded leaders of integrity who were accountable to the public.

Premiers such as William Aberhart, Ernest Manning and Peter Lougheed gained national recognition for their governance skills because Albertans then demanded the best of their leaders.

Those Albertans were -- in the immortal phrase taken from Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow* -- a province of "stickers." They stuck it out through the heavy going.

I wish we could say the same today. Too many of us have become -- again borrowing a word from Stegner -- "boomers." Boomers are the folks who believe that you can dance without paying the piper.

They want the best in government services without paying taxes and forget

that prices soaring into the stratosphere can crash through the floor.

Boomers happily traded their children and grandchildren's heritage for four hundred Ralphbucks. When the going gets tough, boomers take the money and run.

Only boomers could have absorbed Premier Ed Stelmach's shocking disclosure without raising an eyebrow. He admitted that while he was a senior minister in Ralph Klein's government, he was never made aware of important energy ministry reports. Those reports recommended that Alberta's royalties be increased to the tune of a billion bucks a year.

"In the time I was around the cabinet table -- there was nothing coming to me at that time," said the premier.

I believe Ed Stelmach. He is an honourable man, and his word is good enough for me. He didn't know that the premier of the day -- the leader of his party -- was withholding vital information.

So, who did know? Who -- besides Ralph Klein and his energy ministers -- knew about the recommendations of senior energy department officials?

Why did Ralph Klein and his inner circle withhold this information from other cabinet members?

What really happened? We really don't know how or why the decision was made -- and that's a problem for all of us, including Klein and his former energy ministers.

The ongoing scandal in Alaska, where oil company executives have pleaded guilty to bribing state legislators to get industry-friendly legislation, has increased public suspicion and mistrust of all politicians.

The speculation and innuendo coming from government secrecy tarnishes the political reputations of good people.

That's why transparency of government and within government is so important. Democracy stops working when citizens and media stop demanding transparency.

So, do today's Albertans care enough to fight for transparency? Will Albertans call their MLAs and demand a judicial inquiry into the secret decision?

Will Stelmach follow his own personal standards of integrity and character, and call that inquiry?

This is not as much about the actions of Ralph Klein and Ed Stelmach as it is about us. Our political actions in the next year will define us in the historical context and will help to shape our destiny. Are we prepared to do the heavy lifting? Are we stickers or are we boomers?

I've heard a deathly month-long silence and I am afraid I know the answer.

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