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Alberta's headlines dominated by elections and economy in 2006

SCOTT LILWALL **Deputy News Editor**

TORY LEADERSHIP CONTEST

In 2006, Albertans saw the retirement of long-time premier Ralph Klein, as he handed over the leadership of the ruling Progressive Conservative party exactly 14 years after he first took the position.

Weakened support from party delegates in a March 2006 vote led Klein to schedule a new leadership election for later in the year. Ed Stelmach, who resigned as Intergovernmental Relations Minister in June to pursue leadership, was elected as Alberta's new premier. Despite not releasing a campaign song, Stelmach beat out two other competitors, former treasurer Jim Dinning and former university professor Ted Morton, by preferential ballot in late November.

"Honest Ed," as he was dubbed by the media, began by reducing the number of ministry positions from 24 to 18. His new Cabinet, divided evenly among experienced ministers and newcomers, was regarded by many as a move towards a more rural-focused

ALBERTANS RECEIVE RALPH BUCKS

The prosperity bonus program,

first announced by premier Klein in September 2005, led to a great debate over what should be done with Alberta's \$6.8 billion surplus. The cheques, which were mailed out to Alberta residents in January 2006, brought mixed reactions from recipients. Some saw them as a muchneeded respite from rising energy and gasoline costs, while others argued that the money could have gone towards better uses. In all, Albertans received cheques worth \$400 each, for a total expenditure of approximately \$1.6 billion.

Despite concerns over the effectiveness of the program, the government noted that very few of the bonuses were returned once sent out.

ECONOMY CONTINUES TO GROW

Rising oil prices and a corresponding boom in the service industry saw the Albertan economy growing to unprecedented levels in 2006. Studies suggested that the province benefited from the fastest growth in Canadian history, as well as the lowest unemployment rate in North America—3.4 per cent.

The growth didn't come without problems, however. Growing immigration into the province caused low vacancy rates and rising living costs.

Many businesses, especially those in the service and retail sectors, were forced to offer higher wages and more benefits to compete with the many highpaying jobs available in the oil patch. Some were even forced to cut business hours due to staff shortages.

THIRD WAY SPARKS HEALTH DEBATE

While the provincial government's push for a Third Way, a hybrid of private and public health care, began in 2005, it made big headlines early last year. In late February, the Tory government revealed their ten-point plan to create a provincial health-care system that would allow doctors to work in both the private and public systems. As well, some patients would be able to pay more to gain access to faster surgeries, primarily joint and hip replacements and cata-

Many opposed the plan, including the federal government and Alberta's opposition parties, arguing that the plan might draw the most talented medical staff from the public system. Even the government admitted that many of those consulted while the plan was being crafted were against privatization. In response to the opposition, the government dropped its Third Way plan in April 2006.



NOT SO QUIET RIOT Oilers fans lit up a section of Whyte Ave as the team made the run for Lord Stanley's cup. Literally.

2006 showcased worst of Whyte Ave

News Writer

Whyte Avenue definitely had its fair share of newsworthy moments in 2006. From bar brawls and nose biting, to fist fights, stabbings and playoff fever, the heart of Edmonton's nightlife has many stories to tell.

MAN BITES NOSE DURING BRAWL

Probably one of the more strange news stories of 2006, Bar Wild lived up to its name when a man's nose was violently bitten on 8 October. At 1am, Edmonton police were called to the bar after reports that 31-yearold Aaron Helferty had been attacked by a group of other men. During the attack, 21-year-old Zack Morrison jumped at Helferty and bit him on the nose, severing the lower half of his right nostril. Bar staff evicted all of the men from the bar and Helferty was taken to hospital with nonlife-threatening injuries. Morrison later turned himself in to authorities in mid-December and was charged with aggravated assault.

PHOTOS OF ARRESTED USED AS **EVIDENCE OF POLICE ASSAULT**

Whyte Avenue police officers definitely had their hands full during the Oilers'

Stanley Cup playoff run. On 17 June, the night with the highest number of arrests, 394 people were taken into custody. Among them was 20-yearold Kristin Wilson, who was caught on film by an Edmonton Journal photographer as an arresting officer struck her in the head. The police claimed that the move was called a "head stun," which officers are trained to use as a method of subduing someone who is actively resisting arrest.

According to Wilson, she was arrested for stepping off the curb and asking what happened to a friend who had been arrested. She said she was then struck when she swore at the officer after he told her to, "Get on the fucking bus." After the incident, Wilson filed a lawsuit against City Police, and left Edmonton to return to her hometown of Vernon, BC.

MAN STABBED BY STRANGERS

One tragic news story from 2006 was the murder of Dylan McGillis. McGillis, who was moving from Lloydminster to Edmonton to be with his girlfriend, was out celebrating with friends on Whyte Avenue early 19 November after learning he was going to be a father.

At closing time, McGillis' group came in contact with several males.

Words were exchanged and additional people joined the suspect group until there were more than a dozen people. McGillis was assaulted and knocked to the ground. One of his friends was leading him away from the melee when someone in the suspect group lunged forward, and stabbed him in the chest. He died later in hospital.

FANS RIOT DURING PLAYOFF FEVER

The NHL playoffs brought with it Whyte Avenue's most memorable moment of 2006—the now infamous riots. After a tremendous victory over the San Jose Sharks, Oilers fans went a little crazy, filling the streets of Whyte Avenue in a drunken rampage. There was plenty of drinking, dancing, fighting, and looting, which lead to numerous arrests. Much of the festivities made their way onto the Internet, including a YouTube video of a topless girl in a shopping cart having a lit firecracker thrown at

The rioting went on for quite a while, until Edmonton lost to the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Finals. As stunned and subdued Oilers fans poured out of the bars after the 3-1 loss in Raleigh, NC, there was no repetition of the raucous partying that followed earlier games.

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