

Blogging linked to loneliness

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News Writer

In the late '70s, when Sting and the Police penned the pop hit "Message in a Bottle," the Internet was in its embryonic stages. Calls for attention, such as messages scrawled in notes, journals and sheets of paper stuffed in ocean-bound containers were possible outlets for angst and alienation.

But, with the evolution of media and the Internet, public expressions of melancholy have become commonplace among blogs and online social networks, such as Facebook, MySpace and Nexopia. Such is the research of Dr Michael Keren, professor at the University of Calgary and Canadian Research Chair in Communication, Culture and Civil Society. His latest book, *Blogsphere: The New Political Arena*, focuses on the political freedom given by such outlets, and also discusses the under-use of such powerful tool.

According to Keren, blogging adds a whole new dimension to the political and social arena.

"Blogging implies a huge emancipation in that, for the first time in history, the opportunity to present our private lives in the public domain isn't confined to people who have achieved prominence ... but to everybody with access to a computer," he said.

Keren believes that the appeal of

blogging is that it gives anyone a voice and a niche in a larger community. It puts anyone's opinion on the center stage and it allows many to get their opinions out to a large audience with anonymity. Bloggers range from struggling local bands with MySpace pages, to lonely, aged widowers uploading videos on YouTube.

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**DR MICHAEL KEREN,
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

Blog entries can range from frivolous to dire and touching. One example culled by Keren was a blog written by a young girl in Iran, expressing her desire for Barbie Dolls, which were restricted under the country's regime.

"Such an expression of a private desire is undoubtedly a matter of global political concern. When her scream for freedom remains in the dark, it is

definitely a bad thing," he said.

Keren also proposes that another possible appeal of becoming a blogger is in its counterculture and rebellious nature.

"There is also a sense of rebellion in that blogging is seen as providing an arena of public discourse free from the constraints attributed to the mainstream media," Keren continued.

He said that blogging provides the opportunity to voice political opinions typically not represented by major media sources, which he sees as an underused option. Blogging, although a potentially powerful tool, doesn't leave the Internet.

"It stems from the fact that blogging remains confined to cyberspace—this is where bloggers seem not to take advantage of their liberation," Keren said.

The act of blogging liberates many and whether the content of a blog is personal, or intended for millions around the globe it's a way of sending an "SOS to the world."

"We are all living in a world in which the individual may be seen as more liberated than ever, yet we are also aware of the gap between that liberation and the little control we seem to have over the political, economic and other systems surrounding us," Keren concluded.

Ralph Klein spends an afternoon lecturing U of A business students

OLESIA PLOKHII
News Staff

Former premier Ralph Klein addressed a University of Alberta business class last week, discussing Alberta's hot economy and his perpetual faith in the next generation of business students to propel commerce in the booming province.

Just before heading to the Business Economics 414 class, Klein met with current Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach and discussed the economic outlook in the province, which he doesn't expect will be declining any time soon.

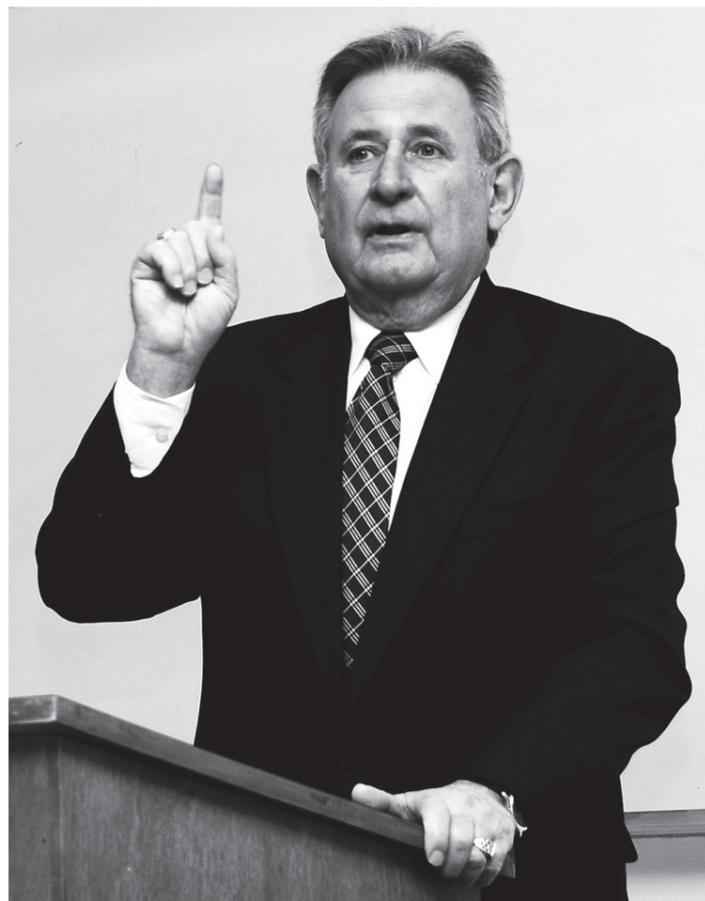
"When I look at all the vehicles in the world, I don't see a let-up in the demand for oil and gas," Klein said, noting that Americans are urging Alberta to more than double the current output of the oil sands in Fort McMurray from 2 million to 5 million barrels per day.

Klein used this example to voice concern over the growing problem of Alberta's youth dropping out of school to pursue lucrative careers working on oil rigs.

"There's no doubt about high salaries in the oil-sand sectors attracting people. But the [provincial] department of education, I hope, will be stressing the long term need for a good education," he said.

After admitting that the last person in the world who should be commenting on restrictions on oil and gas development is a politician, he stressed that business students play a pivotal role in the future generation of commerce. According to Klein, government ought to play the role of opening doors and creating opportunities for business.

"We open the door, you [students] go in there and do business because you know how to do business. Business should diversify, while government



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FROM PREMIER TO PROF Klein made a brief appearance lecturing on campus.

should provide the encouragement and the regulatory regimes to allow businesses to diversify," he explained.

During the speech, however, Klein also was adamant about the importance of limited government interference in the market, especially when it comes to regulating foreign investments.

"It's always been my attitude that we let the market prevail. The government can monitor the situation [of too much foreign invest-

ment in domestic interests], but to deliberately intervene, to prevent oil going south, is wrong because it skews the market," he said.

"Basically what we do is we promote postsecondary education, at the trade level, engineering level [and] commerce level. We're involved in harmonizing regulations to make it easier for skilled people to come to this country, and to fund institutions to provide those spaces. Aside from that, we ought to stay out," Klein said.

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