

Hurtin' Albertans

We've got the wealth—now we just need the vision



GRAHAM LETTNER

As a young Albertan, I am naturally interested in where our province is going. And as one of the thousands of overconfident twentysomethings that populate our campus, I feel I have a part in shaping this direction as well.

Where our province is going to isn't destined by market forces, demographic factors or socio-economic trends. Sure, it would be foolish to discount the role these and other factors will play in guiding our provincial future. But it will be the ideas of Albertans that blaze a trail into the future.

The best of these ideas are those that address the toughest challenges that we face as a province, and those that set out plans for the most ambitious future. Encouragingly, Alberta isn't unfamiliar with ideas like these. Our province was once chock full of ideas people—the pioneers—who thought Alberta could become a great new home, and then made it happen.

It would be tempting to romanticize this Alberta of the past: the hardiness of the pioneers, their grit and determination, their sense of purpose. But this does them—and us—a disservice. This type of character can still be found and is needed today, while nostalgia only serves to relegate it to yesteryear. Romanticism also whitewashes the mistakes made by Albertans of history: the oppression of Aboriginal people, exploitation of foreign workers and government corruption, just to name a few.

But this pioneer mindset, updated with new ideas for the 21st century, is what could lead our province out of our now-infamous economic prosperity—one induced by a short-term

highs, but which sets up the inevitable and exasperating economic bust.

The pioneer mindset isn't outdated or outmoded simply because our land is cleared, our cities are built and life is comfortable. On the contrary, it's just this type of easy-going attitude that makes us forget to be mindful—and indeed grateful—of the work of past Albertans, and leaves us ill-prepared for the challenges the future will bring.

A great voice of this “modern pioneer” thinking is Jim Gurnett, Executive Director of the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. In his words, “The forest we have to clear for us as pioneers is this individualized ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’ mentality.” This statement doesn't relegate pioneers to the history books, it urges them to see and understand—and then overcome—the new challenges of the Alberta today.

It strikes me as entirely possible that if us undergraduate and graduate students weren't so preoccupied with the “Alberta Advantage” we expect our university degrees to unlock for us, we could strain our collective intellect in an effort together to find solutions for the most important issues facing our province and chart a new and promising direction for our Albertan future. This doesn't mean foregoing work and careers: it means focusing our work and our careers to address the big issues of our day and not using them to insulate ourselves with luxuries we may soon be unable to afford.

No one person, and certainly not this rambling amateur, has the full stock of pioneering ideas that could shape an optimistic future for our province. But I'll bet the ideas in the heads of 35 000 intelligent students would be a good start—imagining our campus to be teeming with tens of thousands of pioneers is an awfully exciting perspective. More than 100 years after the first wave of pioneers shaped Alberta's future, it could be time for a second wave to create Alberta again.

THE BURLAP SACK

This sack-beating goes out to Frank Thomas' kids. Why? Because, as Thomas himself has shown us, they deserved it—don't listen to all these touchy-feely family-first critics who say they didn't.

In case you missed it, the Toronto Blue Jays organization is in hot water after running a television ad in which Thomas, the Jays' recently acquired designated hitter, lays the big hurt on one of his bratty kids with a pillow after they won't stop pillow-fighting on their bed. Some are calling it an inappropriate depiction of domestic violence—I say those no-good brats were up past their bedtime.

And besides, the kid hit his dad first—what did he expect? This is Frank Thomas we're talking about here: the guy's 6'5" and 275 lbs, with 487 career home runs. He turns on the light switch and there's drywall everywhere. So when he goes all JC Penny on a nine-year-old, you'd best believe someone's going flying.

The youngster seems to take a positive message away from the lesson as well—that is, his dad is Frank fucking Thomas, which is pretty rad when you think about it. He's up again in a matter of seconds, and with a look of admiration and awe—in other words, nothing that suggests internal bleeding.

However, there's still plenty room in the sack for all the naysayers as well. Only in this case, perhaps we should be using a pillowcase instead. Oh, and Mr Thomas will be doing the beating this time around, thank you very much.

ADAM GAUMONT

The Burlap Sack is a semi-regular feature where a person or group who needs to be put in a sack and beaten is ridiculed in print. No sack beatings are actually administered. Except when they are. Which is, admittedly, not very often. All we're saying is, just watch it, okay?

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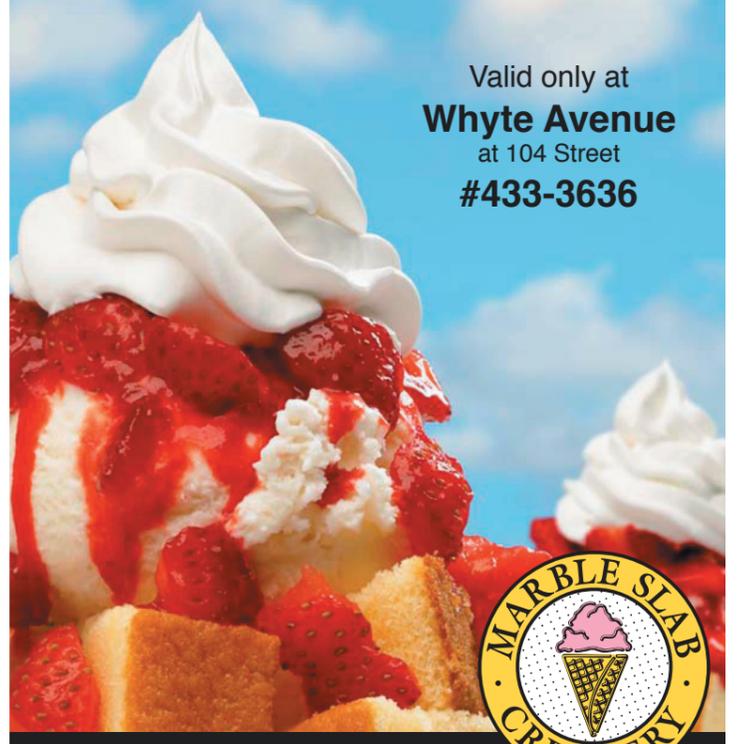
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