

Alberta's response: We don't believe you

Gas, electricity prices will rise, 450,000 jobs at risk, claims \$1.5M anti-Kyoto campaign

Kelly Cryderman, Provincial Affairs Writer

The Edmonton Journal

The Alberta government has launched a \$1.5 million assault on the Kyoto accord, saying it could result in job losses, higher gasoline prices and income tax hikes.

Advertisements will appear in newspapers today. TV and radio ads will start running across the province this week. They will be backed by 125,000 copies of a brochure titled: Why Alberta opposes the Kyoto Protocol, available at government offices.

The brochure, which has a prominent headline stating 450,000 jobs could be lost in Canada, says the cost of gasoline could go up to \$1.10 per litre, up from about 70 cents now, and electricity costs could increase by 100 per cent.

All of this will happen, it says, "without making an actual or significant reduction in global gas emissions."

"It's about providing Albertans and Canadians with clear facts on exactly what the costs of this agreement will be," Environment Minister Lorne Taylor told a news conference Wednesday. "With the projections that we have under Kyoto, this is what could happen."

The minister acknowledged the figures and statements in the brochure are just predictions.

A major problem in nailing down impacts is the lack of a clear federal plan for implementing Kyoto, he said.

For instance, it's still unclear whether Canada will demand credit for so-called clean energy exports to the U.S.

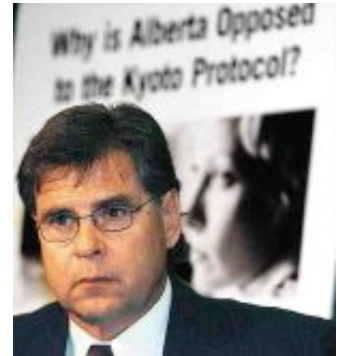
The provincial government will likely spend more on advertising as the campaign expands to include the rest of Canada, this fall. Premier Ralph Klein said he's not sure how much his government will eventually shell out, but "whatever is spent, if it's \$1.5 or \$2 million, it represents about 0.00005 per cent of what the economic impact on this province could be on an annual basis. So it's little enough to pay."

The campaign was quickly denounced by opposition parties for both its cost and its message. Liberals and New Democrats called it pure propaganda.

"It's misrepresentation right now, and it's misuse of Alberta taxpayer dollars," Liberal leader Ken Nicol said.

"It doesn't make sense to use this kind of advertising at a time when they don't know what the federal government is going to do. What we should be doing is asking very strongly for the federal government to develop their plan and give us their plan."

The information in the brochure on job losses is attributed to Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, an industry lobby group, and the information on increased energy costs is said to have come from the Canadian Journal of Policy Research.



Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald, Southam Newspapers / On Wednesday, Alberta Environment Minister Lorne Taylor was in Calgary to announce a new Awareness campaign, which will cost the government about \$1.5 million to denounce Canada's ratification of the Kyoto protocol.

"It's nothing but fearmongering," New Democrat Leader Raj Pannu said. "To turn speculative estimates made by special-interest groups into fact is the worst kind of propaganda campaign."

Gerry Scott, climate change campaign director at the David Suzuki Foundation, said the Alberta government is using the most exaggerated claims. The foundation's own modelling shows the accord will have a slightly positive impact on Canada's economy. It will mostly reduce energy waste, he said.

Jan Triska, campaign co-ordinator for Albertans for Ratifying Kyoto, said there's been a lot of economic estimates on the costs of implementing Kyoto. "Depending on the kind of economic modelling, you can get almost any kind of figure," he said.

This month, Prime Minister Jean Chretien said the Kyoto protocol -- an international agreement to reduce heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions -- will be put to a parliamentary vote by the end of 2002. Under the protocol, Canada would have to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to six per cent below 1990 levels by 2012.

As an alternative to Kyoto, Alberta is touting a plan that would see emissions produced per unit of economic growth reduced, meaning the absolute amount of emissions could still increase.

An Alberta government-commissioned poll released in May found more than 70 per cent of Albertans surveyed support the Kyoto agreement. However, a second poll given to reporters last week said nearly half of Albertans believe the provincial government has a workable plan to reduce emissions.

Klein, Taylor and other ministers will go across Canada during the next several weeks to speak about Alberta's views on Kyoto.

The premier's communications office says the last ad campaign of this scale was mounted two years ago in support of Bill 11, the Health Care Protection Act that provides for overnight stays at private surgical clinics. The government spent \$1.7 million to deliver copies of Bill 11 to more than a million Alberta households, hire additional staff and buy TV, radio and print ads.

A draft plan for implementing Kyoto will be presented at a joint federal-provincial energy and environment ministers meeting Oct. 21 in Halifax.

kcryderman@thejournal.southam.ca

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