

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

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EDITORIAL

Voice for the poor supports oilsands

Of late, this province and its oil industry have been under sustained attack.

So, after David Suzuki, Greenpeace, American mayors, a British advertising council and domestic garden-variety oil-patch knockers, it was a pleasant surprise to receive accolades from an unexpected direction — U.S. poverty activist Niger Innis, national spokesman for the Congress of Racial Equality.

He says the last front in the civil rights revolution is economic. Artificially high energy prices, the work of politicians manipulated by radical environmentalists demonizing energies they don't like, are therefore "immoral," and a "de facto regressive tax on the poor... They destroy jobs, erode civil rights gains and force minority and elderly households to choose between food, fuel and medicine."

It's an argument seldom heard in a bipolar debate between oil and environmentalists.

But, we get it. Regardless of income, everybody pays the same for gasoline, or home electricity. It stands to reason when prices spike, it becomes a crisis for poor people more quickly than the better off.

The solution is admittedly a little easier said than done.

Innis would have Washington drive down prices by increasing energy supplies of all kinds — wind and solar naturally but first, and controversially, offshore oil exploration.

This would certainly exert downward pressure on prices.

However, difficult plays need higher prices to be economic.

Bottom line, energy may one

day be cheap and sustainable. For now, that which is cheap is not sustainable, and vice versa.

Still, if prices are destined to be higher, Innis is right they don't have to be driven higher yet by radicals who need to generate funds for their organizations, and thus create situations where legislatures shrink from such hopeful new sources there are: the oilsands, for instance.

At a Frontier Centre for Public Policy gathering in Calgary on Tuesday, Innis urged Albertans to remember the civil rights movement won because it held the moral high ground.

"Now, it is people who produce energy and keep things moving and people working, who hold the high ground, not those who would shut America down and push millions into poverty. You're the people in the white hats."

We'll take that, especially after Suzuki called oil extraction "ecologically disastrous," on these pages, and Greenpeace saying "the tar sands are one of the world's largest environmental disasters."

We're not suggesting a return to damn-the-daisies development.

However, there's much talk about environmental disaster from people who will be among the last to personally suffer economic disaster, were their prescriptions ever followed.

Balance is needed.

And frankly, if Innis brings his campaign north — as he means to — a voice articulating what high energy prices mean for low-income Canadians would be welcome in the debate.

Amber Alerts save lives

What began as a legacy to little Amber Hagerman is today credited with saving the lives of hundreds of children. Now, a seven-year-old Edmonton girl can be added to that list, freed four hours after she was abducted, and just two-and-a-half hours after an Amber Alert was issued.

The abductor apparently panicked and let her go with a \$10 bill and a note saying: "Please bring me home safe."

The incident will leave its mark on the girl, as she was drugged and sexually assaulted but the kidnapping ended with her safe return home, thanks to a neighbour who caught a description of the vehicle and driver, and the Amber Alert, which allowed for the quick dissemination of that information.

Pictures of the girl were plastered all over websites and television stations and a description of the abductor and his vehicle was widely broadcasted.

The success of these bulletins is in part due to its reliance on

the voluntary co-operation of the entire community. Broadcasters and transportation authorities immediately distribute information to the collective eyes and ears of the public.

Amber Alerts work. Amber Hagerman, 9, was kidnapped and brutally murdered after setting out on her bike one fateful Saturday afternoon in 1996. But the Texan didn't die in vain, thanks in large part to the dedication of her devastated family. The local program created in her name has spread across the U.S. and Canada, with Alberta launching the first provincewide program.

Communities everywhere should adopt these alerts. It's a powerful and precious enforcement tool that protects our children when they need it most.

Of course, if the repeat convicted pedophile who is alleged to have kidnapped the Edmonton girl had been kept in jail where he belongs in the first place, an Amber Alert would not have been needed in this case.



City council needs to put brakes on wheely bad idea



PAULA ARAB
OPINION

My latest favourite hobby is go-karting, now that I've unleashed unknown talents during my inaugural race at an Edmonton amusement park last week. I placed second to Ashley Hughes, who hardly counts since he drives competitively at the Calgary Kart Racing Club, the city's best kept secret.

The club is a hidden treasure buried in Calgary's deep south, on city land next to the Shepard Landfill. It's about to get paved over though, along with the more prominent Race City Motorsport Park, from which it subleases. The city has given notice it's breaking the lease by 2010 because it wants to expand the landfill.

The whole thing stinks. It's disgraceful that we're going to stand by quietly and watch the city lose Race City, once known as the jewel of Canadian motorsport.

The karting facility, reputed to be the best in Western Canada, is equally valuable. It offers Calgaryans a family-friendly, affordable racing activity, as karts are much cheaper to own and operate than race cars. It also makes kids better drivers, helping develop important road skills like vehicle control, awareness, focus, quick de-

cision making and concentration. Because karts are so low to the ground, drivers feel every move and learn to quickly correct course after spinning out.

"I think it's really sad the city doesn't see the value in it," says Rob Dezall, who was fine-tuning his children's kart ahead of their race Sunday. "Most of the aldermen didn't even know we existed out here. I don't think they realize what they have here."

What they have is something politicians wish for but can never achieve through legislation — organic community building at its best, derived through a colourful subculture. That's what being a

maintain their karts before a race, and sharing a beer and a few laughs afterwards.

Instead of shutting it down, Calgary should be promoting the facility as a centre for motorsports. But unless council puts a move on it, the club will leave Calgary for the friendlier pastures of Irricana, east of Airdrie. It's identified the land and is raising funds to build a new track.

Kerry Nevatte, a member of the executive of Calgary Kart Racing Club, says the economic loss alone amounts to about \$2 million a year. Calgary was to host the 2009 Canadian kart racing nationals but cancelled. "We can't say we're going to

the motorsport park alone, according to area Ald. Ric McIver. Up until now he says he's been playing "Mr. Nice Guy" but administration refuses to budge, or even discuss the possibility of shifting gears.

McIver agrees Race City — and the karting track — are worth fighting for, saying he plans to bring a motion to council at the November meeting. It will ask aldermen to use their clout and "direct administration to reverse course and extend the lease."

He needs to be held to that promise. The karting scene is more than just a bit of family fun for a small group of people. It's where professional race-car drivers often get their start. Grand Prix driver Allen Berg began racing karts at the Calgary kart club in 1978. He went on to become one of only three Canadians to compete in Formula One, the highest class of open-wheeled auto racing.

But karting, as I discovered on the amateur track in Edmonton, is something anyone can do. It gave me the opportunity to unleash my speed demons safely, after unsuccessfully fighting a ticket in Leduc.

The proximity to the ground allows you to experience the rush of extreme speed while travelling at a slower pace. Picking my spots and darting past drivers through the empty spaces left me feeling like the latest Formula One Sebastian Vettel. And it allowed me to get back to Calgary without any speeding tickets. I hope it lasts.

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What's really outrageous is the land may not even be needed

world-class city is all about. The karting crowd of some 500 members is welcoming and friendly. The facility offers free entertainment, with races every other Sunday.

Dezall's 11-year-old son, Bradley, and nine-year-old daughter, Jessica, both drive karts, while their parents and younger siblings cheer them on. When not racing, they're playing with their competitors. "We've taught them what happens on the track, to leave it there," says mom Marilene.

"Our trailer here at the park is usually filled with kids," adds Dezall.

The adults do the same, helping each other repair and

host a national event and then not have a facility," says Nevatte. A shutdown will also put people such as Joey Guyon out of business. He owns karting company Overdrive Motorsports.

"Seventy-five per cent of our business is derived from the local kart club," he says. "Losing the track could greatly affect us. I'd like to know its future in order to make a proper business plan for the next five years."

What's really outrageous is the land the track sits on may not even be needed. The city owns another empty lot on the other side of Race City it could instead use for landfill, leaving

Stephen Harper is architect of his own misfortune



NAHEED NENSHI
OPINION

First a disclaimer: there are five days to go in this election campaign, and anything could yet happen. We've seen homestretch surprises before... Brian Mulroney's 1988 majority, Bob Rae becoming premier in Ontario, even the size of Ed Stelmach's victory earlier this year. Nonetheless, if the polls of this week hold, the Conservative party is in a meltdown of historic proportions. A majority now seems an impossible dream, and extrapolating some polls shows a near-tie between the two leading

parties, or even a small Liberal minority government.

How could this be? Only five days ago, the Conservatives were riding high, with as much as a 15-point margin. A Conservative majority was, if not assured, certainly in the realm of possibility.

There are many potential reasons for this sudden reversal. One group of these are things outside of the Tories' control — the performance of the other party leaders in the debate, the enthusiasm amongst experts for something that looks more like the Liberal plan than the Conservative one (230 economists and 120 scientists signed open letters urging more action on climate change this week), and, of course, the economic meltdown.

On reflection, though, none of this holds water. The Conservatives are, in fact, the architects of their own misfortune. The master strategist has, it seems, picked the wrong strategy.

Take the debate for example: for some time, I have been suggesting people always underestimate Stephane Dion and how much folks like him when they actually listen to him. Did Dion do an amazing job in the debate? No. But thanks to the Tories, he didn't need to.

The Conservatives have spent almost two years demonizing Dion at every opportunity — weak, ineffectual, wavering, suspiciously effeminate (one release this week even referred to him as a "European-trained sociologist"). In short, Not. A. Leader. They simply went too far in their demonization. All Dion had to do was prove to Canadians he is not as bad as they say he is. Indeed, how could anyone be?

(What made matters worse is how little Dion actually meets that stereotype. Yes, he's a professor and probably doesn't go to Tim Hortons very often. But let's

not forget that this is the guy who fought for Canada in Quebec when no one else would, going toe-to-toe with Lucien Bouchard and the oily Jacques Parizeau. His knock in his home province was never that he was weak, but that, if anything, he was much too strong.)

The economic crisis is another example. Really, this meltdown should be helping Harper. Even a poll released Tuesday shows that the Conservatives are the most trusted party on handling the economy. Why then, have the Tories not solidified their support given the uncertain times?

I suggest, while people might trust Harper as a leader, they don't trust him as a person. Or maybe they just don't like him. The problem here, I submit, is one of his own making — he has been incredibly calculating, and Canadians have seen that.

For example, I recently

showed his "soft on crime" spot to a class of marketing students, and it was met with laughter. "He's trying to sound tough," the students said, "but he's also wearing that sweater vest, and the tinkly piano-and-strings music is totally at odds with what he's saying." Since they didn't believe the ad, they weren't sure what to believe about the man.

Harper hasn't helped his case by oversimplifying and prevaricating on issues from negative campaigning to his opponents' platforms. (The latest? Tuesday he told Peter Mansbridge he never thought the last Parliament was dysfunctional — after spending the summer using that word repeatedly.)

The public is smarter than that. We want to be engaged as intellectual equals, not disrespected by our leaders dumbing things down for us. My friend Don Iveson, who was elected to Edmonton city council last fall,

calls it "politics in full sentences." Instead, the Tories give us a platform three working days before the election, which shows every sign of having been cobbled together over the weekend, using the poor students' favourite tricks — lots of pictures and a really big font — to lend artificial weight.

Warren Kinsella wrote this week that opposition parties rarely defeat governments — governments can only defeat themselves.

If Harper's not careful, this may be his political epitaph.

I voted in the advance poll at Terry Fox Junior High, which was covered in posters stressing the value of citizenship.

Those kids get it. We could all learn from that.

NAHEED NENSHI TEACHES AT MOUNT ROYAL COLLEGE'S BISSETT SCHOOL OF BUSINESS.

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