

# YOUR OPINIONS

## Rockyford committee wants to keep the schools open in East Wheatland

RE: Community Proposals to GHSD to keep their schools

It is time to update the communities on the debates and concerns of GHSD changing the schools in their division.

Two presentations have been made to the board regarding East Wheatland.

Hussar/Gleichen are willing to compromise by moving to a K-12 school as long as it is at the junction of highway 561 and 842 – Wheatland Farm Services/UFA corner, which is 5km from Hussar. This school would serve the communities of Hussar, Cluny, Gleichen and Standard.

Their presentation stated that including Rockyford would make the new school unrealistic because of the distance between the communities.

Standard wants a K-12 school in Standard. This would include consolidation of 10-12 and possibly the 7-9.

Rockyford has requested to make a presentation as well, and it is well known that they will accept nothing less than the K-9 school they already have.

Hussar, Gleichen, Cluny, Standard and Rockyford still insist that a school is close to or in their OWN community. It seems ironic, but this is how it should be. Students

need to learn in their own community.

At this time GHSD has not given any indication as to what our future holds. We do know that there will be a Capital Planning Committee meeting on March 19. We strongly encourage all of you to contact the trustees and let them know what you would like to see happen in East Wheatland and the rest of the GHSD. Contact the trustees by phone or email. Their contact list is on the GH website [www.ghsd75.ca](http://www.ghsd75.ca).

Sincerely,  
The Rockyford School Steering Committee

## Alberta Research Council responds to groundwater article on coalbed methane

The concern of eight landowners regarding their groundwater and coalbed methane activity is understandable.

We at the Alberta Research Council know it's a sensitive issue, but we are concerned emotions have led to inaccurate statements regarding our work. We are grateful for the opportunity to respond.

### THE INVESTIGATION

Alberta Environment (AE) identified five water well complaints - three in Rosebud, one near Wetaskiwin and one near Ponoka – and contracted ARC to investigate. The contract called for an analysis of information in the well complaint files and in the water well data base to come up with data to compare against previous information gathered by consultants and AE.

In four wells there was no evidence of contamination due to coalbed methane production. Methane and small amounts of ethane were found to be naturally occurring from the coal zone the water wells were completed in. The fifth well showed evidence of impact from conventional gas, though it is unclear whether it was caused by an energy well or a natural pathway such as a fault. ARC recommended further work to determine the source.

### GEOLOGY & GAS

The evidence of naturally occurring methane in the wells is not surprising. In Alberta we live on a basin rich in petroleum deposits. Oil and gas precursors were trapped, matured and migrated into permeable rocks. Hydrocarbons migrated to near-surface over geological time. There is a long history of shallow natural gas in water wells and as seeps on the Rosebud River. There are examples of even deeper gas naturally migrating to the surface in the Turner Valley and Peace River areas.

The geology and hydrogeology of CBM areas in Alberta is very different from the US, where methane production requires dewatering of the aquifer. In Alberta, the Horseshoe Canyon coals (the target in the area of the well complaints) are mostly dry. When a well penetrates the coal, it immediately produces gas.

### BASELINE INFORMATION

We agree baseline groundwater information, as defined as measurements made before the influence of human activity, is difficult to find because the production of hydrocar-

bons in Alberta dates back to the 1900's. It would have been beneficial to have analysis of water wells from the start of HC production in Alberta.

It's also been suggested that some data from Rosebud is invalid because it contained information from CBM contaminated water wells. ARC is confident the data is valid and represents baseline conditions. The data was collected by a reputable consulting firm which followed ERCB guidelines. The firm used a laboratory with excellent detection limits for hydrocarbon gases. ARC used a multitude of sources to gather evidence to reach its conclusions including:

- geological and hydrogeological controls on groundwater flow
- energy well drilling and completion information
- water well construction and maintenance
- major ion chemistry
- dissolved organic chemistry
- free gas composition and carbon isotope geochemistry

Scientific criticism of ARC work is based solely on ethane isotope values. We believe that is a valuable tool when used in conjunction with geological and hydrogeological evidence.

### OTHER WATER WELL ISSUES

We also found Rosebud wells had instances of coliform bacteria contamination, indicating surface water contaminated the well water. A common well bacteria called *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, known to cause a burning sensation on skin, was also found in one well. One well also displayed the presence of fecal coliforms, amoebae, flagellates, ciliates and possible water fleas.

The wells in question have not had regular shock chlorination, which is the most effective way to deal with bacteria. People concerned about chlorination should realize the treatment goes in the well, sits overnight and is then pumped out. Within days, chlorine byproducts are below the detection limit.

### WELL WATER LEVELS

Some residents in Rosebud claim CBM activity affected water levels in their wells. Those levels have gone up and down over the years and the levels in two particular wells are currently at the highest levels ever recorded. Those levels depend on factors including seasonal variation, water withdrawals and

precipitation. Alberta has just come through a serious drought (2001 to 2004). It can take years for the effect of drought to show up in wells and it can take more time for the effects to be reversed. Some of the lowest static water levels observed in the Rosebud wells correspond to 2003 and 2004, near the end of the drought.

### NO OIL FUNDING

Some critics have also falsely accused ARC of receiving funding for these investigations from EnCana. ARC was paid by Alberta Environment, a fact clearly stated in the reports. We acknowledge how this could be misunderstood. A report on our water group in our Annual Report concludes with an acknowledgement to funders including EnCana. That refers to a project in the previous paragraph but it could be misconstrued to include all projects listed on the page.

To date, our researchers investigated five water well complaints and found one well to be potentially impacted from conventional energy wells. This reinforces the fact that our work is carried out at arm's length from both the province and industry.

### EXPERTS OVERFLOWING

ARC's expertise in hydrogeology dates back 60 years when hydrogeology was a newly emerging science. Some of Canada's greatest hydrogeologists have worked at ARC, leaving a legacy ranging from scientific papers to hydrogeological maps used by consultants and government to this day. ARC currently has one of the largest Integrated Water Management teams in Canada, with six Ph.Ds with expertise in hydrogeology and geochemistry.

### IN CONCLUSION

It is encouraging to see cases like this draw attention to the important issue of protection of groundwater resources. We have a shared responsibility between government, industry and individuals to ensure safe, sustainable groundwater resources.

ARC takes great pride in the work we have done to contribute to the protection of our water in Alberta.

Sincerely,  
Steve Hogle  
Vice President Communications  
Alberta Research Council  
[steve.hogle@arc.ab.ca](mailto:steve.hogle@arc.ab.ca)

## Changes made to the Royalty Framework

When the New Royalty Framework was released, Premier Stelmach committed that the government would review any unintended consequences of the royalty change to help ensure that the development of Alberta's energy resources remains economically viable.

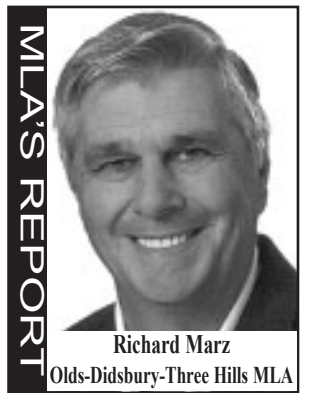
The government identified that the development of some deep oil and gas resource pools may become uneconomic to develop under the framework, potentially causing the loss of activity, jobs and royalties.

The Government of Alberta is committed to developing the province's resources for the benefit

of its citizens. As such, two new programs will be introduced to help ensure that these hard-to-access resource pools will continue to be developed and that Albertans benefit from new energy investment in the province.

Energy activity at lower depths is an important investment in our province that will help generate hundreds of millions of dollars in royalties and countless new jobs over the years to come.

Deep resource pools represent an opportunity for greater royalties, new jobs and a significant increase to our proven oil and gas reserves that will benefit future generations of Albertans. The New



MLA'S REPORT  
Richard Marz  
Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills MLA

Royalty Framework remains the right plan to secure Alberta's energy future. These new programs respond to the challenges of today, while securing our energy future.

For more information on the New Royalty Framework, visit [www.energy.gov.ab.ca](http://www.energy.gov.ab.ca).

## Legislative Assembly premiers this week

Last week the Alberta Legislature saw 72 Progressive Conservative MLAs and two New Democrats sworn into office.

About 180 people turned up at the reception for the NDs - a good show of support, unless, of course, most of the guests were PC MLAs.

The nine Liberal MLAs were sworn in last week. The 23 Ministers were sworn in a few weeks ago.

As you can gather, a lot of swearing-in has been going on over at the Alberta Legislature lately.

And this week's opening of session should be even more exciting.

By the way, imagine the hullabaloo if a member of the opposition was assigned to be a Minister! That would be as much of a scene switch as, say, an old Charlton Heston movie like 'Ben Hur' being re-made with a woman playing the leading role. It would stretch our horizons, and possibly, Charlton's, may he rest in peace.

Personally, I'd rather not have to hammer chariot wheels back on, even if we do run out of oil and gas in Alberta.

Over at the Legislature Library, opposition researchers are busy finding questions for question period. Questions like, why are health care cutbacks bad?

Laconic Health Minister Ron Liepert, taking over from garrulous Dave Hancock, plans to release a report this week outlining a new vision for health care. Will it be called the Fourth Way? Or

the Final Wave? We wait with baited breath, and may need CPR afterward.

Health care just plain costs too much now, apparently. And it will get even worse as more and more boomers attempt to bulge their burgeoning hips through the system.

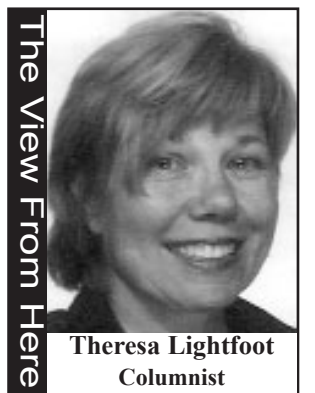
Proponents of public health care will surely be running their fingertips over Liepert's report, feeling for the thin edge of the wedge on privatization. There could be long line-ups for tetanus shots if they find any. Still this could turn into a good opportunity to start charging user fees for that service, but only over the dead bodies of Friends of Medicare.

Questions for QP: Will Ron's report be shorter than anything Dave would have written? Will the weight of Ron's few words be greater than the weight of Dave's many? And cost Albertans more?

Speaking of expensive reports, Energy Minister Mel Knight announced last Monday a new report from the former Auditor General Peter Valentine (once-removed). Valentine had 13 minor recommendations for more efficient oil and gas royalties collection by Alberta Energy.

Thirteen is usually an unlucky number, but it was certainly lucky for Alberta Energy last week. Valentine's report indicates all has been basically fine with royalties collection, despite other reports seemingly to the contrary, such as the current auditor general's. Enough said.

The Valentine report



The View From Here  
Theresa Lightfoot  
Columnist

was expensive, yes, apparently, \$600,000. But it may be well worth the cost as a sweet gift to Albertans, a bargain if it renews our confidence in the royalty collection system.

Strange how Valentine's day followed April Fool's day this month. But are Albertans feeling the romance? That's a \$600,000 question the opposition might raise in the house next week.

By the way, imagine if royalties collectors had to be elected like dog-catchers are in some U.S. states? Or regional health boards used to be in Alberta, back in the golden, olden days of health care? The imagination reels.

Another high flight news release last Friday has the Alberta government giving deep oil and gas a billion dollars in royalty breaks as part of their 'unintended consequences of the royalty review' review. Whew! With all this intense action, the new faces, smiles and frowns in the Legislature next week, you might want to line up for a front row seat in the galleries.

Just remember, throwing popcorn is generally not permitted.