

Stampeding into the Future

ROB ABBOTT FOR THE HERALD

The opening of Stampede provides an interesting vantage point from which to view the economic and cultural history of our city and province.

On the one hand, Stampede honours the legacy of Guy Weadick, and justly celebrates the pioneer spirit of those who came before us. On the other hand, the days when our economic and cultural identity was shaped by ranching are a distant memory. Most of the people wearing ten-gallon hats during Stampede are wearing a costume, not an essential part of their daily wardrobe. Farming and ranching might be billion dollar industries here, but energy swamps them. Nearly 70% of the province's annual exports, and a third of all revenue collected by the provincial government, are energy-related.

Stampede grew out of Guy Weadick's desire to do something that hadn't been done before – to stage a rodeo and Wild West event that would draw the best cowboys from across the continent to Calgary. It was an early example of visionary leadership in service of something bigger than any one person. The twinning of Stampede with the Calgary Exhibition and the subsequent development of both is a testament to the enduring strength of Weadick's vision. If you asked visitors to Calgary or even Alberta to name the defining feature of the province, I suspect many would say the Stampede. There's nothing wrong with this, but I wonder if we are missing an opportunity to forge a new vision of life here – a vision that doesn't abandon our cowboy roots, but extends them to reflect our position as a global energy superpower.

Lest anyone think this new vision is already in place, what I have in mind is quite different from the current government strategy of expanding oilsands production and putting a "for sale" sign out front. I can applaud the research and industry engagement during the last two decades of the 20th century that catalyzed initial investment in the oilsands, but that was then, what about now? If we want to have economic options in 10 or 20 years, we have to begin thinking now; we can't wait until the resource is gone, the environment trashed, or our competitors have migrated to something new and better. And so it is that I lament the lobbying effort in Washington last month by the Klein Government. While agriculture and technology were also on the agenda, make no mistake, our government emphasized energy, or more accurately, oil and gas. And therein lies the problem. Where was the vision, the story that fires people's imaginations, the leadership?

I'm under no illusions; I know that oil and gas will remain our primary energy sources for years to come. And reliability and security of supply are indeed important, but unless we begin to write a new story about new sources of energy and new sources of wealth, we are destined to spend our capital like a drunken sailor and leave nothing for those who come after us. And the worst of it is that we have the wherewithal to forge a destiny that is genuinely exciting and captivating.

Like Guy Weadick and his dream of a rodeo like no other, we have the resources, writ large, to keep Alberta a global energy superpower – albeit one based on radically new ideas and technologies. So, as you take in the sites and sounds of Stampede, pause for a moment and think not of the past, but the present, and how it will be viewed 50 or 100 years from now. Better still, grab two of your smartest

coworkers and write down the biggest, boldest ideas you can think of to accelerate the mainstreaming of clean fossil or non-fossil fuels. This is not about cramping anyone's style; in fact, it's about thinking of how our needs and desires can be met in the ways that are innovative, inexpensive, green, and even sexy.

Creating a truly sustainable energy sector in Alberta is a ridiculously ambitious idea. And doing it in such a way that it also looks so good people will want to come here and experience it just ups the ante. Somewhere Guy Weadick is smiling.

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