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NEW OIL ORDER: LEANER TIMES FOR CANADA'S 'FORT MCMONEY'

A forest clearing in northeast Alberta contains a monument to oil wealth. The Anzac Recreation Centre, opened last year, serves a hamlet of 800 people with 112,000 square feet of gym space, grandstands and an ice rink built to National Hockey League standards. An aboriginal dream catcher hanging in a window — the gift of the centre's sponsor and chief local employer, the Chinese oil group Cnooc — encourages those who enter to "Dream Big".

But dreams are now more unsettling than grandiose in Alberta, the western Canadian province with the world's third largest proven oil reserves. With the collapse in crude prices, energy companies have suspended or cancelled billions of dollars in new projects, thousands of workers have lost their jobs and voters ousted the party that ran the provincial government for 44 years.

New projects in Canada's oil sands need an average Brent crude price of more than $100 per barrel to break even, according to Rystad Energy, a consultancy — well above levels eyed by forecasters and futures markets.

The investment environment could be further complicated if Alberta's new premier follows through on a pledge to review royalties paid by energy producers, suggesting added expense for the high-cost oil region. A clampdown on greenhouse gas emissions would also threaten the carbon-intensive extraction methods of Canada's oil sands, already a target of green campaigners over pollution and deforestation.

In the Alberta oil sands region that encompasses Anzac, unemployment has doubled to 8.6 per cent from a year ago, when prices started to fall. Feeling the strain, the municipal council has cut its capital budget. "We need to re-examine how big we're going to grow and at what pace and be realistic with our budgeting," says Tyran Ault, a council member.

The shock has been sudden for Albertans. For the oil market, however, supply from Canada is still flowing as normal. The recoil from its great retrenchment is instead likely to hit in the next decade. Less oil

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will arrive just when forecasters say world oil demand — running at 93m barrels per day at the moment — will surpass 100m b/d, risking a tighter market. "You could see several years of higher oil prices [in the future]," says Ryan Kubik, chief executive of Canadian Oil Sands in Calgary.

Canada was a crucial contributor to the glut that halved oil prices. Its fields and sands added about a fifth of North America's net oil supply growth over the past five years, or 1.1m b/d. Much of the rest came from US shale formations.

Alberta's oil sands — the engine of the country's supply growth — are distinct from most other oilfields. They have high initial costs and take years to construct before a single barrel is produced. They "are on the opposite end of the price-sensitivity spectrum" from shale, the International Energy Agency says.

Delayed impact

Shale producers reacted to oil's price plunge by idling hundreds of drilling rigs, leading to expectations of a US supply dip starting in late 2015. In contrast, oil sands companies that have already sunk money into mines and steam injection wells in Alberta have no incentive to stop operating or building projects meant to deliver a return over several decades. Instead they attempt to run their plants, truck fleets and pipelines at full capacity, much like a factory.

"It is very much of a manufacturing mindset," says Mr Kubik, whose company is the largest shareholder in the Syncrude oil sands venture, opened in 1978. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers last week forecast that western Canada's output will keep increasing by about 156,000 b/d each year until 2020. Then growth slows to 85,000 b/d a year until 2030.

At the same time oil sands companies are applying a ruthless triage to uncommitted projects. Capital spending by Canada's oil and natural gas industry will total C$45bn (US$37bn) in 2015, 40 per cent lower than 2014.

"This is something that will have an impact in three to five years in terms of production, as opposed to production over the next three years," says Brian Ferguson, chief executive of Cenovus Energy, a Calgary-based producer.

Alberta's oil sands, a patchwork of sand, water and bitumen the size of Bangladesh, hold about 167bn barrels of proven reserves. Difficult to convert into a refinable hydrocarbon, they became more economically viable as oil prices crept towards $100 a barrel a decade ago. Turmoil in other oil producing states, from Venezuela to Libya, reinforced the appeal of Canada as a stable country where the government did not expropriate oilfields.

As the oil sands flourished, the Fort McMurray region lured workers from across Canada earning the nickname "Fort McMoney".

By 2012, average household income in the broader Wood Buffalo municipality was nearly C$190,000 — more than twice the Canadian average. House prices trebled as the population doubled.

Often depicted as a tawdry boomtown, Fort McMurray adopted a more cosmopolitan air. At the

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Western Trade Training Institute (WTTI) is seeking an Executive Director to lead the organization to further business growth. The Executive Director reports to the Board of Directors and has primary responsibility for all aspects of the private vocational training institute. Key priorities include business growth and expansion of industry training and the current delivery of the Crane & Hoist Apprenticeship program for Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trades Certification Commission (SATCC).

The Executive Director is responsible for leading the institute by establishing and maintaining effective and harmonious working relationships with instructional staff, personnel within other industries and organizations, and other constituent training groups. This position will ensure operational deliverables are met and exceeded, resource allocations are managed, and solid budgetary decisions are made based on the business requirements.

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Suncor Community Leisure Centre, residents could swim laps in the 54m pool, then listen to author Malcolm Gladwell as he dropped in for a speaker series. A downtown brewpub serves customers seared beetroot and quinoa burgers with cashew spread alongside meatier fare.

Outside town, oil mines have stripped sections of forest into lifeless grey flats. Other producers pump steam deep underground to loosen bitumen so it can be brought to the surface in a process called "in situ." Both methods require lots of energy to separate viscous oil from sand.

Industry costs escalated amid shortages of labour and parts. Oil companies flew thousands of workers to the frigid north for marathon shifts. At prefabricated "camps" in the forest or next to mining moonscapes, companies pursued an arms race to retain personnel, adding hunting-lodge style faux woodwork, squash courts and WiFi.

"A lot of these guys make 100, 150, 200 grand a year," says an executive at a camp housing company. "They work 12 hours, then they get really good food, they play their Xbox, FaceTime their girlfriend, watch some porn and go to bed. And repeat the next day. That's their life. You do that 10 days and you come home and live like a rock star for four days."

Then came the collapse. "In a very short time our world has changed, and changed dramatically," Rich Kruger, chief executive of Imperial Oil , told investors recently.

Western Canada Select, a heavy oil marker, was $86 a barrel a year ago. By March it was trading below $30. Oil companies quickly reassessed the risks of investments that pay back over more than 30 or 40 years. Royal Dutch Shell, for example, withdrew its application to build a 200,000 b/d oil sands mine at Pierre river, north of Fort McMurray. It has delayed by years a new 80,000 b/d in situ project at Carmon Creek, near Peace river, Alberta.

"The way I look at our oil sands business right now is we're basically running and perfecting what we have," says Marvin Odum, head of exploration and production in the Americas for Shell, which produces 255,000 b/d from oil sands. "We're not in any hurry to expand beyond that."

Companies have paired investment cuts with aggressive moves to hammer down costs. Service companies, for both oil sands and conventional producers, have been forced to renegotiate rates. The Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors estimates 25,000 jobs will be lost this year.

In Nisku, an industrial park that manufactures equipment for both oil sands and conventional fields, on-street job boards show no one is hiring and rig manufacturers are finishing work on equipment companies do not want.

The push for lower costs may persist, restoring profit margins and prolonging a period of lower oil prices. Suncor Energy plans to replace 800 dump truck drivers with automated trucks at its oil sands mines, saving about C$200,000 per employee.

Costs were "an industry problem", says Asim Ghosh, chief executive of Calgary-based Husky Energy. "Yes, Alberta has certainly been a part of that problem. And you are seeing a

dialling back of the cost structure."

The effects of cost cuts are starting to bite in Fort McMurray. At the airport, which opened a new C$258m terminal last June, charter flights are discharging 30 per cent fewer passengers. More families are visiting the community food bank. And as a sympathetic gesture the Wood Buffalo Brewing Company reduced its price for pale ale to a tenth of the cost of a barrel of West Texas Intermediate crude. A pint was C$5.99 early this week.

Oil workers accuse company executives of exaggerating the bust to pressure labour. "Even though they say there's a downturn, it doesn't exist. They're still making money. Oh, they're making lots of money," says Don Campbell, a welder who works on Cnooc's Long Lake oil sands project.

Alberta's oil industry is also facing the prospect of costs it cannot control. In May, the leftist New Democratic Party was elected to govern the province after pledging to raise corporate taxes and review oil royalties.

This year Alberta's take from royalties and land bonuses will drop by C$5bn to less than C$6bn, according to ARC Financial.

Even if oil springs back above $100, all will not be settled.

As negotiators work towards a climate agreement in Paris later this year, the oil sands industry also faces potential limits on carbon emissions. Because of its energy-hungry extraction process, crude from the oil sands spews more heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere than many other grades. A study by University College London found that 85 per cent of Canada's bitumen reserves should remain unburnt if the world is to avoid the 2C average temperature rise seen as the tipping point towards dangerous levels of climate change, suggesting oil sands could become stranded assets if global leaders crack down on carbon.

The most visible casualty of concerns about carbon is the proposed Keystone XL pipeline linking Canada to US refiners on the Gulf of Mexico, stalled in Washington amid pressure from environmentalists.

In Fort McMurray the mood is cautious but resolute. Despite the curb on capital spending, the new Shell Place stadium complex opened last Friday.

"We're not anticipating a lot of significant change for the next year or two," says Jeff Penney, municipal director of economic development. "But what happens beyond that? When will we see the next influx of new capital investment? Right now, nobody's really got an answer to that question."

LNG OUTLOOK IN CANADA DARKENING, SAYS IEA

There will be no LNG projects starting production in Canada over...

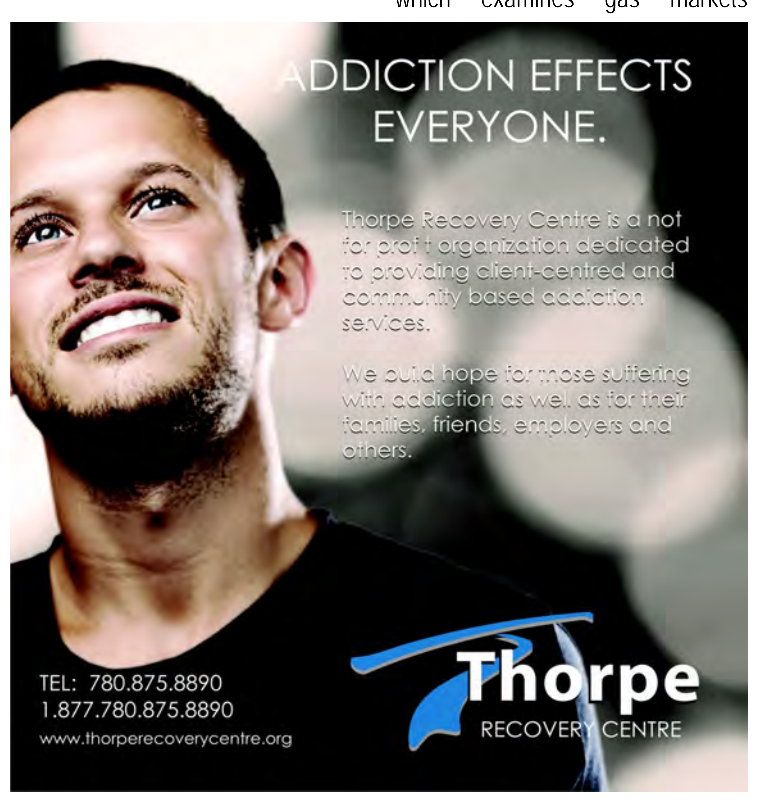
There will be no LNG projects starting production in Canada over the forecast horizon of a recently released natural gas market report by the International Energy Agency, which examines gas markets and provides forecasts to 2020.

Despite their proximity to Asian markets, Canada's LNG projects are at a disadvantage to United States projects, the IEA stated. U.S. projects under construction today are all brownfield facilities, resulting in much lower capital costs per unit of capacity, as operators can leverage existing regasification infrastructure.

By contrast, all but one of the proposed Canadian plants are greenfield units.

Additionally, they also follow the traditional integrated upstream model whereby the LNG plant and the connected upstream asset are developed in an integrated fashion. This adds to the project's upfront costs and, for Canada, specifically dedicated pipelines must be built to connect LNG plants on the coast with inland gas fields in remote areas.

Procuring the required skilled labour is more difficult and costlier in this environment. Proceeding with such large cost items is challenging under any market condition, "but the plunge in oil prices will certainly make companies



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think twice before pushing ahead."

"As a result, deferrals are likely. Not surprisingly, in late 2014, Pacific NorthWest LNG, which was understood to be close to taking FID, announced it would postpone making a final decision on the project."

The Petronas-led Pacific NorthWest LNG on Thursday issued a "conditional" final investment decision on the project, although it still hasn't received regulatory approval, nor has it received a blessing from First Nations.

The first condition for FID is approval of the project development agreement by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, and the second is a positive regulatory decision on Pacific NorthWest LNG's environmental assessment by the Government of Canada.

"In parallel with work to support the final investment decision, Pacific NorthWest LNG will continue constructive engagement with area First Nations, local communities, stakeholders and regulators," said Michael Culbert, president of Pacific NorthWest LNG. "The integrated project is poised to create thousands of construction and operational careers in the midst of the current energy sector slowdown."

Progress Energy Canada Ltd. and the North Montney joint venture partners will continue to invest in its North Montney natural gas resources. The investment to date has proved and probable natural gas reserves of over 20 tcf with $2 billion-plus invested annually, representing approximately 4,000 sustainable jobs in northeast British Columbia.

"Yes, it would be more prudent to go FID on the project when the firm is ready to do so," Kenneth Medlock, senior director, Center for Energy Studies with Rice University's Institute for Public Policy, told the Bulletin. "In fact, it cannot really do so without final capability to go forward.

"However, the announcement could be signaling of [a] willingness to move quickly. This can sometimes be done to send a signal to any competitive interests, of which there are plenty in B.C. That said, I am still unconvinced that a project in the region will move all the way through to completion."

Chevron Corporation, which is planning the Kitimat LNG project with Woodside Petroleum Limited of Australia, said it was "significantly pacing" its spending on Kitimat LNG project due to current market conditions. Woodside has said the focus this year will be on the upstream assets connected to the project, particularly in the Liard Basin. Woodside in April outlined plans for seven appraisal wells to begin in the second quarter of 2015 in the Liard Basin in northeast B.C.

In February 2014, the government of British Columbia proposed provincial LNG taxation that was heavily criticized for placing too much of a burden on the industry and thus undermining the competitiveness of West Coast projects.

Fiscal terms were ultimately sweetened in the final version of the proposal unveiled in October 2014.

Amid falling oil prices, the Canadian federal government pushed through further investment-friendly policies in February 2015, agreeing to grant tax breaks to British Columbia projects and thus allowing LNG investors to recover capital costs more quickly.

Competition from United States clouds production outlook

Canada's upstream sector continues to be undermined by rising competition from the United States, the IEA stated, particularly from its northeast shale formations with impressive productivity. With limited domestic demand growth, mainly linked to oilsands development, Canada is struggling to find marketable opportunities for its own gas.

"Prospects for LNG projects have deteriorated and no plant is expected to be operational over the time horizon of this report," the IEA stated. "There are several new pipeline projects for bringing gas from U.S. Northeast into the U.S. Midwest and Central/Eastern Canada, which could cause further volumes of Alberta's gas to be backed out from its traditional core markets."

Between 2007 and 2014, Canadian gas exports to the United States dropped by 30 bcm; 60 per cent of that relates to exports through the New York State entry point. The displacement reflects soaring production from the Marcellus shale and its fast penetration into the nearby markets of New England and Mid-Atlantic.

So far, Alberta volumes into the Midwest have held up relatively well while those into the West Coast have nudged higher.

For Canadian production, the main issue is how fast and how competitively U.S .Northeast gas can penetrate the Midwest market (which accounts for about a quarter of total U.S. gas consumption) and possibly Central and Eastern Canada. Further displacement seems likely when judging from the pipeline of new projects.

The start-up of the East–West project on the REX pipeline later in 2015 will allow for up to 12 bcm of Northeast gas to reach the Midwest market. Some projects are also looking at transporting U.S. gas into Canada: the proposed reversal of the Iroquois pipeline that originates near Montreal and heads south into New York State is one of them.

While Canadian production will remain challenged, there are limits to the degree of displacement that can take place, particularly looking towards the end of the period, the report stated.

Between 2014 and 2020, the call on U.S. gas from LNG buyers and Mexico will increase by 75 bcm. The United States' own consumption is also set to grow, increasing by about 35 bcm. If the United States can keep adding large quantities of gas at a price that remains competitive compared to Canadian volumes, then more displacement will occur. However, with export demand for U.S. gas set to increase rapidly, Canadian production might ultimately find some room in the North American supply system to feed into a growing call from abroad.

KEARL OILSANDS MINE COMPLETION CONTINUES BITUMEN BOOM

The second phase of Imperial Oil Ltd.'s Kearl oilsands mine has started production earlier than expected, continuing a heavy oil expansion boom in Western Canada that defies low commodity prices and constrained pipeline access.

The $9-billion project, which will ramp up to 110,000 barrels per day of bitumen, doubles the output of the troubled first phase of Kearl, which wound up with a $2-billion cost overrun at $12.9 billion due to issues including trouble getting Korean-built modules through Idaho and Montana.

The project is one of several started or starting up this year that are expected to eventually add about 300,000 bpd — about 15 per cent — to Alberta's oilsands output of nearly two million bpd at the end of 2014. The others include ConocoPhillips's Surmont Phase 2, Husky Energy Inc.'s Sunrise Phase 1 and Imperial's Nabiye Cold Lake project.

"Completed ahead of schedule, the project benefited significantly from Imperial's 'design-one/build multiple' approach, ExxonMobil's expertise in project planning and execution, strong relationships with Alberta-based contractors, and lessons learned from the Kearl initial development," said Rich Kruger, Imperial chairman and CEO, in a news release.

ExxonMobil owns 70 per cent of Imperial and about 29 per cent of the Kearl mining operation, which uses a proprietary paraffinic froth treatment process to eliminate the need for an on-site upgrader. Kruger said the diluted bitumen product "on a well-to-wheels basis" has about the same greenhouse-gas emissions as the average crude refined in the United States.

CIBC World Markets analyst Arthur Grayfer said the startup was about a month earlier than he had expected, adding that Kearl's growth is expected to continue after it reaches the 220,000 bpd capacity in about a year.

"After reaching capacity, Kearl is expected to remain flat for a couple

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of years as management determines optimal debottlenecking initiatives for the project, which we expect to be undertaken in the 2018 time frame," he said in a note to investors, adding the lull in spending in 2016 and 2017 could mean dividend increases, debt and share repurchases.

Commodities analyst Martin King of FirstEnergy Capital said the project is coming on stream at a time when heavy oil prices are strong compared with benchmark lighter crudes such as West Texas Intermediate.

He said Western Canadian Select has been trading at a discount to WTI of less than eight per cent, much tighter than its traditional discount in the teens.

"We, along with everyone else, really weren't expecting to see these single-digit differentials that you've seen over the past month or so," he said. "This is very, very good pricing for Western Canada Select right now."

King said northern Alberta wildfires, which caused the suspension of more than 200,000 bpd of bitumen for about two weeks, have reduced supply at the same time that the summer asphalt season is ramping up, leading to favourable supply-demand affects on heavy oil prices.

He said he expects the differential to return to levels in the low teens later this year if WTI remains around $60 US per barrel.

"Everybody expects there will be a significant increase in heavy oil output in the second half of this year," he said. "I think there is some expectation that you will see the price differential come under some pressure, certainly from where it is right now."

Imperial spokesman Pius Rolheiser said the Kearl startup target was originally by year-end 2015.

"As construction tracked ahead of schedule we revised expectation to Q3. In our Q1 release, we said 'about mid year,'" he said in an e-mail.

Last month, Husky announced its 10,000-bpd Rush Lake thermal heavy oil project in Saskatchewan was beginning commercial operations eight weeks ahead of schedule, attributing that to its "cookie-cutter approach" to building several such facilities.

Not all oilsands projects are ahead of schedule.

In April, Korean-owned Harvest Operations Corp. substantially completed construction of its 10,000-barrel-per-day BlackGold oilsands project in northern Alberta but then cut 105 jobs and said it will delay startup until benchmark New York oil prices are consistently above $60 US per barrel.

In March, Sunshine Oilsands Ltd. said it would delay startup of its 5,000-bpd West Ells oilsands project by a quarter in hopes that commissioning costs will fall and, in May, Baytex Energy Corp. announced it would decommission its Gemini oilsands pilot and delay a decision on a 5,000-bpd project there until WTI prices recover to $80 to $90 per barrel.

Imperial said the Kearl expansion employed a peak workforce of more than 5,000 people and 90 per cent of its capital was spent with Canadian companies based in Alberta.

Located about 75 kilometres northeast of Fort McMurray, Kearl is expected to recover approximately 4.6 billion barrels of bitumen over an estimated project life of more than 40 years.

PETRONAS TAKES ANOTHER STEP TOWARD BUILDING B.C. LNG PLANT

Approval conditional on provincial agreement, environmental assessment

A Malaysia-led consortium has become the first in British Columbia to announce conditional approval of a liquefied natural gas project, a major step forward for the Liberal government as it stakes its future on development of the industry.

Pacific NorthWest LNG, which is controlled by Malaysian energy giant Petronas, said Thursday it will confirm a final investment decision on the $36-billion project in northeast B.C. subject to two conditions.

The first condition is approval of the project development agreement by the provincial legislature,

while the second condition is a positive environmental assessment by the federal government.

"In parallel with work to support the final investment decision, Pacific NorthWest LNG will continue constructive engagement with area First Nations, local communities, stakeholders and regulators," said president Michael Culbert in a statement.

"The integrated project is poised to create thousands of construction and operational careers in the midst of the current energy sector slowdown."

The consortium is proposing to build an LNG export facility at Lelu Island near Prince Rupert, B.C., which would represent the largest capital investment in the province's history.

In May, the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation rejected a natural gas benefit offer worth $1.15 billion, citing environmental threats to the salmon-rich Skeena River.

Natural gas development minister Rich Coleman applauded the announcement, but acknowledged the province still had work to do, including engagement with First Nations.

"Our government has put this new industry in a position of strength to move forward and created certainty for Pacific NorthWest LNG on its path," he said in a statement.

"The province of British Columbia will continue to work with all partners to ensure the project is developed with the highest standards of environmental protection and enhancement."

A government source said the Liberals are expected to decide by the end of next week whether to recall the B.C. legislature to adopt legislation for the project.

Bruce Ralston, natural gas critic for the Opposition New Democrats, said his party is looking forward to the possibility of a final investment, but there are still major hurdles to overcome.

"Unfortunately, the big promises made by (Premier Christy Clark) and the B.C. Liberals in the last election have still not been met. There are no shovels in the ground, and no final investment decisions," he said.

Ralston said First Nations must be involved as "true partners," but the project is a long way from getting their support. He added the federal environmental review has been repeatedly delayed and will not be finished until at least this fall.

B.C. Chamber of Commerce president John Winter called the announcement "historic" and said it was rare for a brand new industry to arrive in the province.

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