

Fort McMurray not a crime capital: study

The Canadian Press

FORT MCMURRAY, Alta. — A study is suggesting that Alberta’s oilsands capital is not the wild and woolly, crime-ridden boomtown it’s sometimes painted to be.

“It seems clear, by looking carefully at the best available data, that crime is not rampant in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo,” writes author Neil Boyd, head of criminology at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby.

Municipal officials put out a call for someone to do a crime study in Fort McMurray after repeated magazine and news stories suggested the city was a dangerous place to live.

Boyd concluded that while “Fort McMone” may have a bit of a cocaine problem, violent and property crimes are not only lower than national averages but are falling faster.

A British outlet said Fort McMurray was “synonymous with crime, an explosion in prostitution and the tough, young, bored single men with too much money and little to do, who are fuelling the chaos.”

A Canadian magazine used official statistics to rank the city as the eighth most dangerous in Canada.

Those statistics are part of the problem, said Boyd, whose bid to conduct the study was chosen by the municipality.

Federal census figures don’t count Fort McMurray’s so-called shadow population. Including people who live in work camps in the area adds 80 per cent to the number, making a huge difference to the crime rate.

“We’re not calculating crime rates on the right population,” said Boyd.

He calculates Fort McMurray’s rates of break-and-enter, robbery and sex assault are substantially lower than seven other similar-sized cities. They are also lower than the Alberta and Canadian average. The city’s sex assault rate is slightly more than half the Alberta average and its robbery rate is three-quarters the provincial one.

And while crime is decreasing across Canada, it’s falling faster in Fort McMurray.

Boyd said his figures show the amount of all Criminal Code violations fell by 47 per cent between 2003-2012 in Fort McMurray. The Canadian average was 28 per cent.

Violent crime in Fort McMurray dropped 44 per cent over that time, said Boyd, while falling 17 per cent in the rest of the country.

The community’s rate of cocaine-related crime was almost four times the national average and its vehicle theft rate approached double. But other crimes such as marijuana possession or prostitution were in line with where they are elsewhere.

Boyd suggests the young, single men who flock to Fort McMurray are there for one reason – work.

“People are either eating, sleeping or working,” he said. “It’s that kind of a life when you’re in the camp.”

Boyd also credits the increasing prevalence of no-alcohol work camps for keeping crime down.

RCMP Supt. Bob Couture agrees that Fort McMurray isn’t the rowdy place it once was.

“It was probably a little rougher than it is today,” he said.

“We see huge improvements in our downtown. We had some well-known facilities that attracted bad behaviour. Those are closed, bulldozed and gone.”

Couture said that over the years “this has developed into a young, sustainable community. People are moving here to put down roots.”

Boyd guesses that the community of Fort McMurray gets tarred with the same brush that taints its main industry – the oilsands.

“People have environmental concerns about the oilsands and they bring those concerns to the community itself.”

CANADA IN BRIEF

Medical marijuana program facing problems

OTTAWA (CP) — The federal government says the unforeseen growth of its medical marijuana program has “seriously compromised” the goal of providing the drug to patients while ensuring public safety.

The number of people authorized to possess marijuana under the federal program has risen to 37,000 this year from fewer than 100 in 2001.

In a court document defending planned changes to the program, the government says growing marijuana at home poses hazards including mould, fire, toxic chemicals and the threat of home invasion by criminals.

It says the number of licensed users could climb as high as 400,000, adding it is not possible for Health Canada to effectively inspect tens of thousands of production sites across the country.

Under the existing program, to be

eliminated April 1, people are issued licences to grow marijuana for their personal use to help ease painful symptoms.

Several British Columbia residents are asking the Federal Court of Canada for an injunction that would allow them to continue producing their own pot.

Foul play not suspected in death of Charest

MATANE, Que. (CP) — Quebec provincial police say a woman found dead on Saturday in Matane is Nancy Charest, a former Liberal member of the national assembly.

The 54-year-old Charest was found near Highway 195, just south of Matane, about 400 kilometres northeast of Quebec City.

Police say their investigation leads them to believe she wasn’t a victim of foul play.

Charest, who was not related to former Liberal premier Jean Charest, was a member of the legislature from 2003 to 2007 before being defeated by a Parti Quebecois candidate.



CP PHOTO

Vadym Prystaiko, Ukraine’s Ambassador to Canada, is shown at the Ukrainian Embassy in Ottawa on Monday.

Canada mulling Crimea mission

Mike BLANCHFIELD
The Canadian Press

OTTAWA — Canada is considering taking part in a special observer mission to Ukraine’s troubled Crimea region to debunk Russian claims that people there are at risk, The Canadian Press has learned.

Ukrainian ambassador Vadym Prystaiko said many governments are looking at how to get into Crimea to see the situation on the ground and to “take this pretext from the Russians,” which they are using to support their invasion of the Crimean peninsula.

“We are open for anyone who wants to come to Ukraine and see for themselves,” he said in an interview Monday at the Ukrainian embassy in Ottawa.

Prystaiko was speaking just as Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, told the Security Council that Russian interests faced threats in the region.

He read from what he said was a letter from the fleeing President Viktor Yanukovich that asked for the Russian military “to establish legitimacy, peace, law and order, stability and defending the people of Ukraine.”

Prystaiko said he would like to see Canadians take part in future election observer missions as it has done so in the past, but added: “The mission to observe the tensions and Crimea [is] even more important than bringing people to observe the presidential election in May.”

The envoy said he planned to meet Tuesday with Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird “to discuss the details.”

“We are consulting with Foreign Affairs,” Prystaiko said, but stressed there’s been no decision by Canada to participate and the matter is simply under discussion.

Baird’s office had no immediate comment.

Prystaiko also questioned the buildup of Russian troops across Ukraine’s northern border.

“We have to confirm it, but the local governments on the Russian side are preparing the refugee camps,” he said.

Prystaiko said he was grateful for the political support from Canadians “of all political parties, the government side, the opposition.”

Asked about last week’s decision by the Conservative government to exclude opposition MPs from a trip to Ukraine, Prystaiko replied: “Every Canadian politician is welcome nowadays. A If anybody wants

to go to Ukraine and had a plan now to help it, we will be more than happy to accommodate the ideas.”

Prystaiko was one of his country’s top negotiators behind Ukraine’s stalled bid to join NATO.

“If we were in NATO now, maybe Russia wouldn’t get so smart,” he said.

He said Ukraine’s bid never came to fruition because “nobody wanted to provoke Russia.”

Still, Prystaiko said he understands why Western countries, including Canada, are taking the military option off the table.

“Nobody wants to fight. Nobody wants their kids and fathers to die,” he said.

“The first ones who do not want it, that’s Ukrainians. Believe me we don’t want to fight and to have war on our own soil,” he added.

“I understand the reluctance of everybody. The only player who seems to be less reluctant is Mr. Putin.”

Earlier Monday, Prime Minister Stephen Harper telephoned his Ukrainian counterpart to offer Canada’s unwavering support.

“Prime Minister Harper condemned in the strongest terms President [Vladimir] Putin’s military intervention in Ukraine,” said Jason MacDonald, Harper’s spokesman. He said Harper spoke to Arseniy Yatsenyuk from Toronto.

“He expressed to Prime Minister Yatsenyuk that Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected and that the Ukrainian people must be free to determine their own future.”

At an event in Toronto, Harper again called on Putin to withdraw Russian forces.

Canada has summoned its ambassador to Russia home for consultations and, along with some major allies, has suspended preparations for the G8 summit that is to be held in Russia in June.

Harper said Monday Canada was reviewing “all planned bilateral interactions” with Russia.

“President Putin’s actions have put his country on a course of diplomatic and economic isolation that could see Russia exit the G8 entirely,” Harper said.

“We will also continue to work closely with our G7 partners and our allies.”

In his telephone call, Harper said he delivered a direct message to the Ukrainian people from Canadians.

“Canada pledges ongoing friendship and steadfast support for your efforts to defend your sovereignty and to restore economic and political stability.”

Tensions were running high in Crimea as Russia threatened to seize a

Gov’t backing Ukraine

OTTAWA (CP) — The House of Commons has unanimously adopted a motion supporting Ukraine and calling on Russia to withdraw its troops. Here is the text of the motion, introduced by Conservative MP Ted Opietz:

That this House strongly condemn Russia’s provocative military intervention in Ukraine; call upon Russia to withdraw its forces and respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, as per the commitments in the 1994 Budapest Declaration and under international law; reaffirm the legitimacy of the government of Ukraine and Ukraine’s territorial integrity; support the government’s decision to recall Canada’s ambassador in Moscow for consultations and to suspend the government’s engagement in preparation for the G-8 summit; encourage the government to work with like-minded partners, including through multilateral forums, to de-escalate the current situation; affirm the Ukrainian people’s right of self-determination, free from intervention; and stand with the Ukrainian people as they pursue a free and democratic future.

Ukrainian warship.

Russia’s military invasion of the peninsula sparked concern in European capitals as diplomats met in Brussels, Kyiv and Geneva.

The House of Commons unanimously adopted a motion Monday that supports Ukraine and calls for a Russian withdrawal.

“We, on this side of the House, stand with the government and with Canadians who are condemning these very troubling actions,” said New Democrat MP Megan Leslie.

“We all stand in solidarity with Ukraine’s thirst for freedom, democracy, human rights and the civilized rule of law both domestically and internationally,” said Liberal MP Ralph Goodale.

Prystaiko said his embassy has been flooded with messages, letters, emails and general good wishes from Canadians.

“Sometimes we have up to hundreds a day,” he said. “People are bringing flowers and candles... they support us much.”

Frigid prairies having pipe problems

The Canadian Press

An already wicked winter that refuses to let go its frigid grip on much of the Prairies is playing havoc with waterworks in major cities across the region.

In Winnipeg, which is experiencing its second-coldest winter in 75 years, people in more than 500 homes have asked the city to come and thaw out their pipes.

The city has said it will take up to two weeks to deal with all the requests and so has opened shower facilities at indoor pools for the general public.

In Saskatoon, where temperatures

dropped to -50 C with the wind chill over the weekend, crews were trying to repair 15 different water main breaks.

The city blames deeper than normal ground frost for putting more pressure on pipes and causing them to snap.

Broken water pipes were also being reported in Calgary, where the temperature was -28 C with the wind chill.

City workers in Winnipeg use specialized electrical thawing equipment, towed from house to house on a trailer, to deal with frozen pipes. But thawing a frozen pipe can take anywhere from 20 minutes to several hours.

Do you need an investment advisor?

Whatever your financial situation, you should have a clear plan in place to ensure you meet your short and long-term savings – and spending – goals.

Depending on your stage of life, these goals could include paying off your mortgage, sending your kids to university or retiring comfortably.

Some prefer the do-it-yourself approach to financial planning and investing, and there are many great resources out there to help you learn, and tools to make sure you’re on top of your game.

If you have a strong knowledge of investments, enjoy doing research and have the time to monitor, evaluate and make periodic changes to your portfolio, there’s a good chance you are on the right track.

But many people don’t have the time or expertise to take care of every little detail and that’s where professional advice comes in handy.

Financial planning can be stressful and complex. A qualified investment advisor can tailor your plan to your specific needs, making sure you set realistic goals during every stage of life from buying your first home to passing on your wealth after you pass away. In addition, an advisor can also work with other experts, such as lawyers, accountants and tax preparers, to ensure all aspects of your financial life are in order.

Taxes are a major concern for many, and although they say nothing in life is certain but death and taxes, many would argue that taxes aren’t so clear cut. Yes, we all must pay income tax, property tax, sales tax, capital gains tax... the list goes on. But by having the right financial plan, you can cut down on how much goes to the taxman, which means more money for you.

Some strategies are fairly common such as maximizing your Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) contributions and reinvesting your tax refund. If you don’t maximize your RRSP contribution, you can carry it forward but you might not realize that you can also carry forward the deduction as well. Why would you do that?

If you expect to be in a much higher tax bracket in the near future (say you take a sabbatical or parental leave), then the deduction will be worth more to you later. If this is the case, you may want to delay claiming

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