



Learning our Way to the Next Alberta – Can we do it?

Ken Chapman, Cambridge Strategies Inc.

From May 31st to June 2nd *Learning our Way to the Next Alberta*, gathered about 700 Albertans in conversations. The topic was: Can we learn and create the necessary economic, environmental, social and political adaptive capacity to respond to changes the 21st century will impose? The events, in Edmonton and Calgary, partnered the Alberta Teachers' Association with their Calgary and Edmonton Locals, Literacy Alberta, the University of Calgary and Cambridge Strategies Inc.

The evening dialogues and day-long symposium featured renowned author, documentary filmmaker and syndicated journalist, Gwynne Dyer; author of the *Economics of Well-Being: Creating Genuine Wealth*, Mark Anielski; and UN and OECD Senior Advisor and adult literacy expert, Scott Murray.

Alberta is known as one of the wealthiest societies on earth, with one of the best education systems. Yet we face falling competitiveness, low productivity and a weak business culture for innovation. We live in challenging, changing and uncertain times. As noted by Gwynne Dyer Alberta is one of the few places on the planet with the human and natural resource capital, coupled with a high quality infrastructure, to be effective in adapting to these volatile times. But we must learn new, creative ways of living that are flexible, deliberative and prudent if we hope to create a responsible and sustainable economy, environment and society.

The *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta* events drew diverse groups of people and revealed some creative tensions. One tension was about how to get attention regarding the need for dramatic change. The consensus was there would be no real change without the Alberta public sensing a crisis of confidence about their future based on growing uncertainty and doubt. Mark Anielski noted a tension between building an economy based on production and consumption versus a society more grounded in well-being and happiness as another challenging change barrier.

Scott Murray warned about the risk of believing in naïve ideas about creating a viable prosperous society. We cannot take for granted that the high literacy scores in our students translate into high literacy skills in our workforce. The jobs of our past required less literacy skill than the jobs of our future. Our workforce has traditionally lost literacy

and essential skill over time. We will simply lose the economic competitive sweepstakes if we do not dramatically upgrade all these skills in our workforce, starting now.

These questions and tensions are just a few of the reasons to keep the public dialogue going. Plans are now being formed for the next series of *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta* events. For more information and to contribute to the conversation on *Learning Our Way to the Next Alberta* visit www.learningourway.ca