

# Albertans have a 'resource curse'

Posted By Sara Loftson Cochrane Times

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Author and journalist Andrew Nikiforuk gave a persuasive presentation in Cochrane calling Alberta a "petro state".

For 38 years the Conservative party has governed Alberta, said Nikiforuk, likening the province to Saudi Arabia, a country without democracy.

"It's the resource curse at work," he said. "It's a petro state that produces populace leaders."

About 60 people packed St. Andrew's United Church June 12 in the evening to hear Nikiforuk give a lecture organized by the Ideas Society and the Cochrane Environmental Action Committee.

Nikiforuk is well known for his book, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*, detailing economic and environmental effects of tar sands production in Western Canada. It has earned him this year's W.O. Mitchell City of Calgary Book Award.

"When income from oil accounts for 20 per cent of a state, that revenue will begin to bend a place out of shape," he said.

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"A petro state operates by reducing taxes... that's us, that's Wyoming, that's Alaska, that's United Arab Emirates, that's Saudi Arabia," said Nikiforuk. "Everyone feels this is great, but Thomas Freedman of the New York Times pointed out there is no representation without taxation."

Over time the government comes to represent the resource rather than the citizens because that's where its cheap source of revenue is coming from, said Nikiforuk, explaining voters lose interest in a democratic system that isn't representing them.

"Only 40 per cent of the population of this province now votes, the lowest of any jurisdiction in Canada," he said.

"We like to consider ourselves as fiscal Conservatives in this province, but our spending has been out of sight for the last decade, so has the federal government of Canada," he said, questioning whether Alberta's being properly audited.

While Nikiforuk's message could be construed as doom and gloom, he did leave the audience with some suggested solutions.

Keeping the refinement process in Canada will save the country from losing jobs to the U.S. , he said.

"There is a renaissance in the world right now, but it's not in nuclear power, it's in renewable energy and clean forms of energy," he said.

Nikiforuk gave a nod to the Cochrane Farmers' Market for giving people an option to right buy locally.

"Globalization has failed. It's time to re-localize, that is the new trend, less carbon, less fossil fuels and better tasting foods and you're supporting local communities," he said.

In the future the most sustainable communities will be those with access to fresh water, local food and ones that are walkable with very good public transit, said Nikiforuk, who also called for the province to be connected by rail.

"We became hyperactive on oil, I mean we were having a grand time, it was a hell of a party, but the party is coming to an end," he said.

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