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Alberta Cabinet Shuffle Gives Liepert Energy Portfolio

By **Richard Macedo**

Calgary-West MLA **Ron Liepert**, the controversial former health minister, is Alberta's new energy minister following Wednesday's cabinet shuffle by Premier **Ed Stelmach**.

Liepert takes over the portfolio at a critical time as the province is in the middle of an oil and gas competitiveness review after a tumultuous couple of years marked by the new royalty regime and a deep recession. He replaces **Mel Knight**, who has been shuffled to sustainable resource development after just over three years handling the energy portfolio.

Ted Morton, MLA for Foothills-Rocky View, is the new finance minister.

Industry organizations contacted by the Bulletin greeted the appointment of Liepert warmly but maintain there's still some heavy lifting to get Alberta back on track competitively with other jurisdictions.

Small Explorers and Producers Association of Canada Executive Director **Gary Leach** said the appointment makes sense due to Liepert representing Calgary, where most of the industry is headquartered.

"We believe strong economic policy guiding our provincial energy strategy will help accelerate Alberta's recovery from this recession," he said in a prepared statement. "The first step to achieving this goal is for government and industry to work together to complete the competitiveness review.

"SEPEC made a point of getting to know (Liepert) last year as part of a broader effort to make sure the concerns of our sector were on the table with senior ministers in the (Premier Ed Stelmach) government," he later told the Bulletin. "He will be on a steep learning curve no doubt but will benefit from the fact that a key piece of business, namely the competitiveness study, is nearing completion and we look forward to working with him to complete that project."

"I believe he does have a general understanding of the industry issues," added **Roger Soucy**, president of the **Petroleum Services Association of Canada**. "The primary issue he needs to shepherd at the moment is the competitive review which is coming to a conclusion."

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers added that the industry competitiveness issue "has a profound sense of urgency.

"We look forward to seeing this process through with (Liepert)," said **Travis Davies**, a CAPP spokesperson.

In a conference call, Stelmach said the fact that Liepert is based in Calgary should help improve dialogue with the industry.

"The oil and gas industry, especially on the natural gas side, is going through significant structural changes," he said. "We have to move the industry towards unconventional gas, shale gas.

"It requires new investment. We are partners, we are really partners with the industry. We own the

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resource but they are the ones who put up all of the critical dollars and those dollars, of course, are at risk unless you have a very good competitiveness position as a province.”

The provincial budget is scheduled to be delivered on Feb. 9.

But the leader of the upstart Wildrose Alliance said Stelmach’s cabinet changes will not make a difference.

“You can change the faces of the deck crew, but Albertans will only see real change when the Wildrose Alliance replaces this tired, rudderless government,” said **Danielle Smith**. “The premier and his crew of loyalists are the ones responsible for all of his government’s unpopular and destructive policies.

“Changing cabinet will not chart a new course. Each member of Stelmach’s crew has endorsed the crippling royalty regime.”

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