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Lord to sell new N.B. in Alberta

Image-enhancing effort out West might work for province and for any federal leadership aspirations

By Shawn Berry
Telegraph-Journal

A trip to Calgary next month to showcase Atlantic Canada as a dynamic, vibrant region will be asw prime opportunity for Bernard Lord to further define himself to powerbrokers in the Conservative heartland.

In a bid to update the region's image, Atlantic premiers will stop over in Calgary on their way to the Nov. 25 First Ministers Conference in British Columbia.

"We want business people, the leaders of Alberta, the media there to renew their perception of New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada," Mr. Lord said Friday as he unveiled details of the meeting the Council of Atlantic Premiers will hold in O'Leary, PEI on Wednesday.

But an audience with decision-makers in the Tory stronghold of Alberta is also a great opportunity for anyone hoping to one day take the reins of the federal Conservative Party.

"If you were interested in that, for sure, you absolutely have to get them to know who you are and think of you as someone worth thinking about," said UNBSJ political science professor Don Desserud.

The Conservative Party's strength doesn't lie in Atlantic Canada, Quebec or Ontario.

If there's a splash to be made by a future Conservative leadership contender "it's got to be out West," said Prof. Desserud, who cautioned he has no idea whether Mr. Lord still has any federal leadership aspirations.



Lord

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"If that is indeed his agenda, that would be the right thing to do."

In August, Mr. Lord finished a modest third in an SES Research Associates poll of public support for potential federal Conservative leaders. Deputy Tory leader Peter MacKay got the most support among respondents at 17 per cent (30 per cent among Conservative voters), edging out former Ontario Premier Mike Harris at 15 per cent (21 per cent among Conservative voters). Thirteen per cent of voters (12 per cent among Conservative voters) favoured Mr. Lord as the next Conservative leader. At the time, Premier Lord said his intentions are to run for a third term in New Brunswick in October 2007.

Mr. Lord is no stranger to Alberta Conservatives. He caught their attention - and the country's - during his oft-quoted address at the former Progressive Conservative party's annual convention in August 2002.

The speech, which outlined Mr. Lord's national vision, vaulted him into the spotlight and ignited a flurry of draft Lord campaigns, first for the federal PC leadership and then again for the merged Conservative party. He said no both times, leaving the field open for Nova Scotia's Mr. MacKay and then Stephen Harper.

The qualities of a dynamic, innovative province that Mr. Lord will try to impart during his trip are the same that national audiences often associate with New Brunswick leaders, Prof. Desserud added.

Speaking to reporters Friday afternoon, Mr. Lord described the Calgary stopover as a chance to shed dated views of Atlantic Canada that persist elsewhere in Canada.

"The objective is to reinforce the new social and economic reality in Atlantic Canada, that there have been changes. We're going to talk about the new things going on in the Atlantic provinces, give them another perspective of the dynamism, enthusiasm and confidence that exist in the Atlantic provinces."

They'll highlight investments in education, a qualified workforce, balanced budgets and tax cuts and investments in infrastructure.

"We want business people, the leaders of Alberta to renew their perception of New Brunswick and Atlantic Canada."

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