



AB Today – Daily Report November 25, 2019

Quotation of the day

“NO CONFLICT.”

*Justice Minister and Solicitor General **Doug Schweitzer** [battles it out on Twitter](#) with NDP MLAs critical of the contentious **Bill 22** — and Schweitzer’s decision to vote in favour of its passage despite concerns it put him in a conflict of interest.*

Today in AB

On the schedule

The house is scheduled to resume at 1:30 p.m. with private members’ business.

UCP MLA **Dan Williams**’ controversial **Bill 207**, Conscience Rights Protection Act, got the thumbs down from the all-party, 11-member Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members’ Public Bills on Thursday night.

The legislation will likely meet the same fate as NDP MLA **Richard Feehan**’s **Bill 203**, An Act to Protect Public Health Care. The legislative assembly voted to approve the committee’s recommendation that the bill not proceed, therefore killing the bill before debate in the house.

A reported vote could be called, allowing MLAs in favour of giving doctors more authority to turn away patients seeking procedures such as abortion and physician-assisted dying to have their position on the record.

The UCP has said its caucus can vote freely on matters of conscience. The government also recently brought in standing order changes that allow members to abstain from voting without having to leave the chamber.

In committee, UCP members **Joseph Schow** and **Michaela Glasgo** voted in favour of the bill proceeding to second reading debate.

The house could also vote on the future of UCP MLA **Matt Jones' Bill 205**, Human Tissue and Organ Donation (Presumed Consent) Amendment Act, which was endorsed by the private members' bills committee.

Two other UCP MLA's private member's bills could be debated at second reading.

- **Mark Smith's Bill 204**, Election Recall Act; and
- **Roger Reid's Bill 206**, Workers' Compensation (Enforcement of Decisions) Amendment Act.

Later in the day, the house will debate government business, including:

- **Bill 25**, Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act, at second reading;
- **Bill 20**, Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act, at committee of the whole; and
- The budget **Bill 24**, Appropriation Act, at third reading.

Committees this week

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts will meet Tuesday morning. NDP Finance critic **Shannon Phillips** chairs the committee and called for an emergency meeting to discuss the elimination of the election commissioner's office.

The committee is also scheduled to discuss outstanding recommendations from the Ministry of Health and Alberta Health Services from the 2018-19 Auditor General's report.

On Wednesday evening, the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services is scheduled to meet to discuss Legislative Assembly office budgets for 2020-21.

On Friday morning, at a meeting that was supposed to be attended by ousted Election Commissioner **Lorne Gibson**, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices will hear from the province's remaining legislative officers on their budgets, business plans and annual reports.

Premier watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** attended the groundbreaking ceremony at the Centre for Child and Adolescent Mental Health in Calgary on Friday. He was joined by Health Minister **Tyler**

Shandro, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions **Jason Luan**, Children's Services Minister **Rebecca Schulz**, and Labour and Immigration Minister **Jason Copping**.

On Friday and Saturday, Kenney [played host](#) at [Grey Cup celebrations](#) in Calgary.

On Sunday, he [posted a reaction video](#) to Vancouver Mayor **Kennedy Stewart**'s comment that Alberta and Saskatchewan's premiers should "get over yourselves" and work with other levels of government on policy questions such as infrastructure and transit. "Albertans don't need to be lectured to," Kenney shot back.

Elections Alberta to continue investigations into UCP, preparing transition of election commissioner role

Elections Alberta will pursue the investigations into the United Conservative Party that it is set to inherit from the formerly independent Office of the Election Commissioner.

The elections body issued a statement on Friday, following the royal assent of **Bill 22**, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, which fired Election Commissioner **Lorne Gibson** and folded the Office of the Election Commissioner into Elections Alberta.

"Transition activities will be taking place, commencing with a review of the current activities of the former Office of the Election Commissioner, to determine ongoing budgetary, workload, and resource needs," reads the statement.

The new law allows for the appointment of a new election commissioner, but it is unclear when that will take place.

Chief Electoral Officer **Glen Resler** will fill the role during the transition period. While Resler has the power to re-appoint Gibson as election commissioner, it is not clear whether he will be rehired. Resler's own contract is up for renewal in April 2020.

NDP Democracy and Ethics critic **Heather Sweet** wrote to Resler asking for information on how his office will secure documents related to ongoing investigations.

The Office of the Election Commissioner was created by the former NDP government in 2018 after changes to election financing rules increased the caseload for Elections Alberta.

In its first year, Gibson's office received 800 complaints — including 451 in the first nine months alone — and levied more than \$200,000 in fines.

The bulk of those fines revolved around the 2017 UCP leadership race and the so-called kamikaze candidate **Jeff Callaway**.

Callaway is alleged to have coordinated with now-Premier **Jason Kenney**'s campaign to attack Kenney's chief rival in the campaign, former Wildrose Party leader **Brian Jean**, before dropping out. Money was allegedly funneled to Callaway's campaign through Calgary businessman **Robyn Lore**.

On Friday, Kenney spoke to reporters in Alberta for the first time since the **Bill 22** controversy erupted. He said the changes in the bill bring the election enforcement function back into the purview of the chief electoral officer, as it had been since the founding of the province.

"There's no reason for any interruption in any investigations in the office of the commissioner," Kenney told reporters.

Today's events

November 25 at 9 a.m. — Calgary

Justice Minister and Solicitor General **Doug Schweitzer** will make an announcement about the justice system at the Calgary Court Centre.

November 25 at 9 a.m. — Edmonton

The United Conservative Party caucus will meet in the Federal Building.

Topics of conversation

- New federal Natural Resources Minister **Seamus O'Regan** [met privately](#) with Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** on Friday to discuss the file.
 - Savage said she was optimistic O'Regan, who is from Newfoundland, understands what is like to have a province's primary industry under attack.
 - "He listened; he heard; he understood," Savage told reporters on Friday.
 - Savage said her top priority is addressing the CN Rail strike, which is blocking Prairie farmers from being able to move perishable crops. She also put the issue of the Trans Mountain pipeline on the table, and called for federal laws **Bill C-69** and **Bill C-48** to be cancelled.
 - Conservative MP **Shannon Stubbs** was less conciliatory in her remarks.
 - "The Liberals are not listening to the message Western Canada sent the Prime Minister on election night," Stubbs told CTV in an email. "If Prime Minister **[Justin] Trudeau** is to walk the talk on listening to Western Canada and working collaboratively with the premiers, the first step is to scrap **Bill C-69** and use the 187 Senate amendments nine out of ten premiers and all territorial leaders asked for as the blueprint to replace it."

- Premier **Jason Kenney** also addressed the CN Rail strike in his Facebook Live Q&A on Thursday, telling Quebec a way to deal with [resulting propane shortages](#) would be to build a pipeline.
 - Savage and Agriculture Minister **Devin Dreeshen** have asked the newly appointed federal cabinet to order striking employees back to work.
 - Approximately 3,000 CN Rail teamsters members went on strike on November 19 over issues regarding safety, fatigue, time-off provisions and the lifetime caps on benefits.

- CBC Calgary [created a budget tracker](#) that itemizes cuts and spending within Alberta's 2019 budget.

- Former Wildrose communications director **Brock Harrison** was one of two top staffers who got the boot from federal Conservative Party Leader **Andrew Scheer**.
 - Scheer also fired his chief of staff **Marc-André Leclerc**.
 - "My time with Office of the Leader of the Opposition is over. It was a short, intense, and life-changing experience," Harrison [wrote on Facebook](#).
 - "Thank you to my great friend **Hamish I. Marshall** for believing in me and bringing me onto the team. Being entrusted with a leadership role in trying [to] elect a Prime Minister was an incredible privilege, one that I cherished every day, and one I will always consider myself blessed for having experienced."

- Retail sales in Alberta dropped 1.6 per cent in September and have experienced a 2.7 per cent year-over-year dip.
 - Overall retail sales were down during seven of the first nine months of 2019, and year-over-year sales were down in 10 of the 11 main categories.
 - The only growth category was "miscellaneous" retail, which includes cannabis stores. About two-thirds of the growth of miscellaneous retailers was in the cannabis retail sector.
 - Sales of gasoline totalled \$846 million in September 2019, down from \$955 million the year before, partly due to lower gas prices.

- Calgary Police Service Chief Constable **Mark Neufeld** [wrote an op-ed](#) in the *Calgary Herald* stating he would prefer to see no cuts to the force's budget, but assured the public he will be ready to find savings in areas that will minimize impact on services.
 - The police learned of budget cuts from the City of Calgary after the provincial budget cut money for forensic testing and increased the provincial take of fines collected on behalf of municipalities, which used to be directed back to policing.
 - When asked about the cuts during question period, Justice Minister **Doug Schweitzer** said as a Calgarian he wants lower taxes. He added it's up to

municipalities to determine priorities and, by cutting from the police budget, council is showing policing is not their priority.

- Union leaders wrote a joint column on changes to public sector pensions included under **Bill 22**, calling the move an “attack on the pension security of hundreds of thousands of Albertans.” It also lays out concerns over Premier **Jason Kenney**’s proposal to build an Alberta-only pension plan, saying the measure could cost billions and would be more vulnerable to economic downturns than continued reliance on the CPP.
 - Finance Minister **Travis Toews** [authored a rebuttal](#), arguing the recent changes to management will make no difference to benefits for pensioners.
- Last week, Premier **Jason Kenney** [appeared on](#) *RexTV*, the new online chat show of veteran journalist and commentator **Rex Murphy**, for a 44-minute feature interview.

Funding announcements

Ministry of Seniors and Housing

- Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** announced \$7 million for the renovation of the Sunshine and Hillview lodges in Drumheller, which will add 26 new continuing care spaces.