



## AB Today – Daily Report May 22, 2019

### Quotation of the day

“I’ll try my very best dad voice.”

*Newly elected Speaker **Nathan Cooper** (and father of three) on his plan to keep order in the House.*

### Today in AB

#### On the schedule

The first session of the 30th Parliament will officially commence this afternoon with Lieutenant Governor **Lois E. Mitchell**'s reading of the new government's throne speech.

Following the speech, Premier **Jason Kenney** is expected to introduce **Bill 1**, An Act to Repeal the Carbon Tax.

The UCP government is poised to introduce a dozen bills between today and the end of July.

In what the government is calling the “spring of renewal” — a toned down version of what it had previously dubbed the “summer of repeal” — the UCP will table legislation to repeal the carbon tax, cut the corporate tax rate and loosen regulations on employers, all with the stated goal of making “Alberta open for business.”

The new government will also put forward a bill to replace the NDP's *School Act* with the former PC government's *Education Act*, reducing protections for students in gay-straight alliances, and another establishing job training programs for newcomers.

Government House Leader and Environment and Parks Minister **Jason Nixon** confirmed the budget will not be tabled until the fall, but that two supply bills will be introduced in the coming weeks to ensure the public service is funded in the interim.

NDP House Leader **Deron Bilous** said the NDP will be "strategic" when it comes to filibustering UCP legislation while ensuring bills get consideration by committee.

### **Premier Watch**

Premier **Jason Kenney** was sworn in as an MLA on Tuesday morning, along with the rest of the 63-member UCP caucus.

Following the swearing-in ceremony, Kenney took an aerial tour of the wildfires near the northern Alberta town of High Level, where residents have been forced to evacuate, and toured the local emergency operations centre. He was joined by UCP MLA **Dan Williams** (Peace River), High Level Mayor **Crystal McAteer**, Dene Tha' First Nation Chief **James Ahnassay**, and Mackenzie County Reeve **Josh Knelsen**.

### **UCP MLA Nathan Cooper elected Speaker**

Alberta's new Speaker **Nathan Cooper** (Olds—Didsbury—Three Hills) was elected Tuesday afternoon after winning the majority of votes on the first ballot. (One of the legislature's 87 MLAs spoiled his or her ballot.)

This is the Calgary-area MLA's second term. He was first elected as a member of the Wildrose Party in 2015.

UCP MLA **Dave Hanson** (Bonnyville—Cold Lake—St. Paul) nominated Cooper for the role, characterizing the new Speaker as respectful and knowledgeable, as well as a "nerd."

When asked by reporters about keeping decorum, Cooper, 39, said he does not subscribe to the belief that the legislature is like any other workplace.

"We are doing battle for ideas for our democracy, for things we're passionate and tenacious about," Cooper said. "We'll see from time to time members express themselves in excitable fashion. There will be times when we correct that and there will be times when this is the product of voracious debate."

In a nod to the parliamentary tradition of Speakers taking on the job reluctantly, both Premier **Jason Kenney** and official Opposition Leader **Rachel Notley** “dragged” Cooper to his new seat.

UCP MLA **Angela Pitt** (Airdrie—East) was elected deputy Speaker and chair of committees.

UCP MLA **Nicholas Milliken** (Calgary—Currie) was elected deputy chair of committees.

The NDP attempted to get NDP MLA **Heather Sweet** (Edmonton—Manning) appointed to all four of the ceremonial posts, but she was shut out by the UCP.

Past Speakers **Bob Wanner** and **Ken Kowalski** — as well as Cooper’s nearly 90-year-old grandmother **Louise Cooper** — were in the gallery to watch the Speaker election.

## **UCP to end solar energy procurement, scrap consumer rebates on green home products**

The government’s marquee bill, **Bill 1**, will eliminate the province’s \$30-tonne carbon tax by May 30 and dismantle the NDP’s Climate Leadership Plan, which set timelines for shutting down coal-fired plants and reducing methane emissions, implemented a 100 megatonne cap on oilsands emissions, and funded renewable energy projects.

Nixon said the UCP will still fund infrastructure projects the previous government committed to under its Climate Leadership Plan, such as Calgary’s Green Line LRT, but that consumer rebates on purchases such as solar panels and high-efficiency furnaces and light bulbs will be eliminated.

“Albertans that I talk to want to pay for their own light bulbs and shower heads,” Nixon said.

The UCP will also stop accepting applications for new solar energy projects. The last round of projects, which received approval on April 10, will be going forward, but any subsequent project applications will be “re-evaluated.”

Instead, Nixon told reporters Tuesday that the UCP will take a technological approach to climate action.

“When the last government was in power, they brought in a tax that even they admitted did nothing on emissions,” Nixon said. “Our direction will be a different direction.”

The UCP’s election platform laid out a less ambitious climate strategy. Its centrepiece is the establishment of a Technology Innovation and Emissions Reductions (TIER) fund, which would require large emitters to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 10 per cent compared to their average output from 2016 to 2018.

Companies can hit that target either by reducing their emissions output on their own, purchasing carbon offset credits from other Alberta companies or paying into the TIER fund at a rate of \$20 per tonne.

Cash generated by the TIER fund will be used to fund new carbon-reduction technologies and finance the forthcoming energy war room. The TIER fund is scheduled to roll out January 1, 2020, per the platform.

“We’re not in crisis mode,” Nixon said. “We’re focused on actually being able to reduce emissions.”

The environment minister said he has yet to speak directly with his counterpart in Ottawa about the implementation of the federal carbon pricing backstop, which will be hoisted on Alberta once its carbon tax is removed.

However, Nixon noted **Justin Trudeau’s** \$20-tonne carbon tax is more affordable than the tax rolled out by ex-premier **Rachel Notley**.

The federal government’s carbon pricing scheme includes an annual rebate for families.

### **What else is on the roster?**

Nixon said Tuesday the UCP will scrap **Bill 6**, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, which came into effect on January 1, 2016.

Nixon said the UCP is working on legislation to replace the contentious farm safety law that got the NDP in trouble with the province’s farmers for making Workers’ Compensation Board coverage mandatory for all non-family farm workers.

Asked how far the government plans to go when it comes to repealing labour laws introduced by the NDP, Nixon said the government is focused on regulations that added financial cost or red tape burden to employers.

“We’re not going to repeal everything,” Nixon said.

The Government House leader was coy when asked whether the government’s planned interim supply bill will include funding to cover increased enrollment in schools.

### **Today’s events**

**May 22 at 8:30 a.m. — Edmonton**

Premier **Jason Kenney** and his cabinet will meet at the legislature.

**May 22 at 3 p.m. — Edmonton**

Lieutenant Governor **Lois E. Mitchell** will deliver the throne speech in the legislative chamber.

## Topics of conversation

- The nuclear industry is hoping to play a role in reducing emissions in the oilsands by using small reactors to power its various operations, the CBC [reports](#).
  - Industry representatives hope nuclear reactors could be used to provide electricity, replace natural gas that heats water used in open pit mining, and eliminate the steam that powers steam-assisted gravity drainage mining.
  - At the moment, natural gas is still cheaper than nuclear energy.
- “When your growth rates get that low it’s time to talk about the R-word, quite frankly.” That’s the message from **John Rose**, the chief economist for the City of Edmonton, who told *The Globe and Mail* that ATB Financial’s recent growth forecast for the province is so slight that a [recession could be on the horizon](#). “I don’t anticipate any new oil and gas investment in the coming years,” Rose said.
  - An economic forecast from ATB Financial released last week projected Alberta’s GDP growth would be 0.7 per cent in 2019 and 1.6 per cent in 2020.

## News briefs — Governmental

### Spring Wildfires starts ‘slightly higher’ than five-year average: Kenney

Premier **Jason Kenney** said the wildfire burning near High Level is a “6” — the most intense level of wildfire — and conditions are expected to worsen.

Kenney held a news conference to provide an update about the wildfires Tuesday morning alongside Agriculture and Forestry Minister **Devin Dreeshen**, Municipal Affairs Minister **Kaycee Madu**, assistant Deputy Minister for Alberta Agriculture and Forestry **Bruce Mayer** and Alberta Emergency Management Agency director **Shane Schreiber**.

So far, there have been no injuries and 4,000 people have safely evacuated communities in northwestern Alberta. The winds have so far blown the blaze away from towns.

Provincial officials said they learned lessons from battling “the beast,” the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire, including having a centralized command centre.

British Columbia announced it will send 267 personnel to help battle the blaze.

## Appointments and employments

- **Brad Tennant** has been hired as the new executive director of the United Conservative Party, replacing **Janice Harrington**. [According to the CBC](#), Tennant was hired last Friday.
  - Harrington will stay in the post until June 1 and will help with Tennant's transition.
  - Tennant previously served as the UCP's director of fundraising and as the former director of political operations for the Wildrose Party.
  - He is [credited with launching](#) the "Albertans 4 Giving" campaign that led ex-premier **Jim Prentice** to reverse plans to reduce Alberta's charitable donation tax credit in 2015.
  - Tennant was also manager of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers' "energy citizens" program.
  
- **Colin Aitchison** will serve as the press secretary to Education Minister **Adriana LaGrange**. Aitchison was issues manager for Ontario Minister of Children, Community and Social Services **Lisa MacLeod**.
  - Aitchison's recent experience on Ontario's contentious autism file, which led to a series of protests, may have made him the person-for-the-job in LaGrange's office.
  - Alberta's education minister has been tasked with fulfilling Premier **Jason Kenney**'s campaign pledge to reduce protections for students in gay-straight alliances, a hot button issue that resulted in city-wide protests in Calgary and Edmonton.

*AB Today is written by Catherine Griwkowsky, reporting from Alberta's legislative press gallery.*

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