



AB Today – Daily Report July 2, 2019

Quotation of the day

“This level of debt is unsustainable and we will be taking every measure possible to ensure this is brought under control to get Alberta on a path to balance.”

*Treasury Board President and Finance Minister **Travis Toews** pledged to take on Alberta’s \$80 billion in debt, after the 2018-19 year-end financial report was released Friday.*

Today in AB

On the schedule

Of the baker’s dozen of government bills tabled this session, only four remain on the order paper. There are three more sitting days before the House rises for its Stampede-timed constituency break next week.

Three government bills could be debated at committee of the whole:

- **Bill 2**, An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business;
- **Bill 8**, Education Amendment Act; or
- **Bill 12**, Royalty Guarantee Act.

Bill 13, Alberta Senate Election Act, is at second reading.

The following bills were granted royal assent on Friday:

- **Bill 3**, Job Creation Tax Cut (Alberta Corporate Tax Amendment) Act;

- **Bill 4**, Red Tape Reduction Act;
- **Bill 5**, Appropriation (Supplementary Supply) Act;
- **Bill 6**, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act;
- **Bill 7**, Municipal Government (Property Tax Incentives) Amendment Act;
- **Bill 9**, Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act;
- **Bill 10**, Alberta Personal Income Tax Amendment Act;
- **Bill 11**, Fair Registration Practices Act; and
- **Bill 201**, Protection of Students with Life-threatening Allergies Act, a private member's bill from UCP MLA **Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk**.

In the Legislature

On Thursday, body positivity activists, including Toronto-area blogger **Kayla Logan**, [stripped down](#) to their underwear on the legislature grounds.

On Friday, a group of students who organized [a climate change rally](#) on the legislature grounds say their event was crashed by a high school graduating class from the Parkland school division, who began taking graduation photos and could be heard chanting "[Pipelines! Pipelines! Pipelines!](#)"

Speaker **Nathan Cooper** hosted Canada Day celebrations at the Legislature Monday. Festivities included a performance from champion hoop dancer and electronic music producer **Dallas Arcand**.

Premier Watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** was the parade marshall at the Ponoka Stampede Parade on Friday. The premier travelled the route in a stagecoach with professional chuckwagon driver **Rick Fraser**.

Kenney took in Canada Day celebrations at the Calgary Zoo. On Friday, Kenney and Minister of Environment and Parks **Jason Nixon** [reminded Albertans](#) they can now celebrate Canada Day with beer and liquor at picnic sites in several provincial parks.

Deficit lower than projected, fiscal update shows

A year-end fiscal report released Friday shows Alberta's deficit has shrunk by more than \$2 billion.

While Treasury Board president and Finance Minister **Travis Toews** has repeatedly said the previous NDP government left the province's finances in worse shape than its United Conservative successors initially thought, the [2018-19 Year-End Report](#) revealed a projected \$6.9 billion dollar deficit, compared to the \$8.8 billion deficit projected earlier this year.

The smaller budget gap was a result of two factors that boosted government revenues. First was an increase in oil prices — resource revenue was up \$1.6 billion over the 2018-19 budget forecast. Second were higher-than-expected tax revenues, largely the result of growth in employment: the province collected \$1.1 billion more personal income taxes than in 2017-18 budget, and \$487 million more than forecasted in the 2018-19 budget.

But Toews, in a statement, instead emphasized rising provincial debt levels, which now sit at more than \$80 billion, or \$1,800 more per Albertan than one year ago.

“This level of debt is unsustainable and we will be taking every measure possible to ensure this is brought under control to get Alberta on a path to balance,” he said. “This challenge requires immediate action. We are reviewing spending through a thoughtful and measured approach and will be considering the recommendations from the MacKinnon panel this summer.”

Premier **Jason Kenney** has said his government will not table its first budget until the fall, in order to allow the government-appointed panel time to report back on the state of the province's finances.

NDP reaction

The NDP slammed the UCP for “misleading Albertans” on the state of the province's finances in order to justify service cuts.

“This is the last quarter update where you can see the NDP's track record on the economy, it shows our path to balance was working — faster than expected — despite the Kenney government's accusations that the books are off,” said deputy NDP leader **Sarah Hoffman**.

“They're not, and the Finance Minister knows it, which is why they aren't standing up and telling Albertans the whole story of the state of our financials.”

Today's events

July 2 at 8:30 a.m. – Edmonton

The UCP cabinet will meet in the cabinet room of the legislature.

July 2 at 9 a.m. – Edmonton

The UCP caucus will meet in the Windsor Room of the Federal Building.

Topics of conversation

- The Ontario Court of Appeal struck down the province's challenge of the constitutionality of federally-imposed carbon pricing. Judges ruled 4-1 in favour of upholding Ottawa's carbon backstop. Premier **Jason Kenney** joined Saskatchewan in its fight against the

carbon tax, which is [scheduled to be heard](#) by the Supreme Court of Canada in December, and watched on as Ontario fought its own case.

- “The decision’s application to Alberta remains to be seen because, frankly, the previous Alberta government was missing in action and failed to participate in this Ontario Court of Appeal case,” Kenney said. “As a result, Alberta did not contribute to the record before the court.”
 - The federal carbon levy will be imposed on Alberta on January 1, 2020 — Kenney has said the province will launch its own appeal.
 - Saskatchewan also launched an appeal in its appeals court after judges ruled 3-2 in favour of Ottawa in May.
 - NDP Environment and Parks critic **Marlin Schmidt** called on the UCP to drop its challenge.
 - “We are calling on the UCP to review today’s decision by the Ontario Court of Appeal and consider withdrawing other lawsuits it’s pursuing regarding carbon pricing before more taxpayer dollars are wasted,” Schmidt said.
- In another long weekend liquor law relaxation, the government announced 14 provincial parks [will allow liquor consumption](#) (with food) in day-use picnic areas.
 - “Another promise made and another promise delivered as our government continues to reduce red tape and end unnecessary prohibition-era liquor constraints,” Premier **Jason Kenney** said in a news release.
 - In Calgary on Friday, Court of Queen’s Bench Justice **Robert Hall** reserved his decision on the B.C. government’s injunction on Alberta’s **Bill 12**, the “turn off the taps bill.”
 - Hall, who characterized the law as a “[weapon to change the politics of British Columbia](#),” must decide whether B.C. has standing in the Alberta court and whether to approve the injunction on constitutional grounds.
 - While the bill was passed by the NDP government, it wasn’t given royal assent until the UCP’s first cabinet meeting on April 30.
 - No date has been set for the decision, but Hall warned “there’s a very serious danger of [the law] being used” in the meantime.
 - The province will wait at least one more year before reviewing its lobbying rules. The *Lobbyist Act* contains a clause requiring it to be reviewed for “ongoing relevancy and necessity.” An [order in council](#) passed Friday shifts the deadline for the review of the 10-year old regulations from September 30, 2019 to September 30, 2020.
 - The government also passed an order in council to [annex land](#) from Rocky View County to the town of Cochrane. The roughly 160 acre deal had been agreed to in principle last year, *Cochrane Now* [reported](#).
 - The UCP government issued a statement on its opposition to amendments proposed under the USMCA trade pact outlining mandatory country of origin labelling rules.

- “The members of Congress pushing this need to realize it isn’t something industry in Canada or the U.S. want to revisit,” said Agriculture and Forestry Minister **Devin Dreeshen** in a news release. “It isn’t consistent with American trade obligations, and it isn’t good for farmers in either country who want a fair and predictable trade relationship.”
- Farmers and school bus drivers now have longer to meet commercial driver training requirements.
 - The government extended the deadline to meet Class 1 requirements to March 1, 2021 for farm and farm workers. The deadline for school bus drivers to get their Class 2 licence has been extended to July 31, 2020.
 - The province brought in mandatory entry-level training requirements on March 1.

News briefs — Governmental

AISH recipients to be automatically enrolled for seniors’ benefits

The government announced it will automatically enrol seniors with disabilities into the province’s financial assistance programs for seniors once they turn 65 — eliminating the need for recipients of [AISH](#) (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) to fill out paperwork.

“This news not only reduces needless red tape in government, it will ensure that seniors with disabilities are protected and cared for financially,” said Community and Social Services Minister **Rajan Sawhney** in a news release. “We want to make sure Alberta’s seniors are supported in this transition for benefits they may be eligible to receive.”

The province has 64,000 AISH recipients with 44 per cent aged 50 or older.

News briefs — Non-governmental

Stephen Mandel steps down as leader of the Alberta Party

After being shut out of the legislature despite earning nine per cent of the popular vote and running 87 candidates for the first time, the Alberta Party’s leader **Stephen Mandel** has stepped down.

Mandel is leaving politics to take on the chancellor post at Concordia University in Edmonton.

“The results were not as we had hoped, but I believe we have broken new ground by gaining the support of over nine per cent of the popular vote,” Mandel said in a news release. “I am grateful for all the support and thoroughly enjoyed travelling the province making connections. Although I’m stepping aside as leader, I will continue to be involved in the party.”

He led the party for 15 months and was previously the health minister in former PC premier **Jim Prentice**'s cabinet. Prior to that, he served as Edmonton's mayor.

The party will choose an interim leader at the next AGM, which has yet to be scheduled.

Karen McPherson, who crossed the floor from the NDP to sit as an Alberta Party MLA, and former Alberta Party leadership candidate **Kara Levis** announced they will both sit on the board of directors.

Federal government willing to step in on protections for LGBTQ+ Albertans

Edmonton—Centre Liberal MP **Randy Boissonnault**, special advisor on LGBTQ2 issues, said if the province doesn't ban conversion therapy and rolls back protections on gay-straight alliances, his government will step in.

Boissonnault first made the remarks at the Edmonton Pride Run and Walk on June 15.

Even though health and education are provincial jurisdictions, the MP says there are steps Ottawa can take.

"All of the associated behaviours with the discredited practice of conversion therapy are criminalized," Boissonnault told *AB Today*. "Kidnapping, unlawful confinement, there are all kinds of provisions for harming people. We can also pull corporate registration and cancel an organization's charitable licence."

He said his government is looking at criminalizing conversion therapy by adding jail time and fines.

A spokesperson for UCP Health Minister **Tyler Shandro** told *AB Today* the provincial government will examine any steps the federal government will take to ban conversion therapy.

"It's not a recognized health service, it cannot be provided by any regulated health professionals in Alberta," said **Steve Buick** in an email. "As we've said, we welcome any input on further measures to ban conversion therapy, and we will examine any steps the federal government wants to propose. If anyone has a concern or evidence that conversion therapy is being practiced in Alberta, we urge them to bring that to the proper authority, including any member of our government."

NDP LGBTQ issues critic **Janis Irwin** told *AB Today* conversion therapy is happening outside of the health system, pointing to Journey Canada's advertisement for a week-long [conversion therapy](#) "retreat" that was slated to start on June 30 in Calgary.

"I've had people message me directly and express their concerns," Irwin said. "It's an attempt to change one's sexuality. It's deeply disconcerting."

Boissonnault also raised concerns about changes to gay-straight alliance rules proposed under **Bill 8**, Education Amendment Act.

“Clearly the Kenney government is playing to his base and saying LGBTQ2 kids don’t deserve the same protections as non-LGBTQ2 kids,” he said, adding that sexual identity and gender expression are protected under the criminal code and Canadian human rights legislation.

Appointments and employments

Justice and Attorney General

- Premier **Jason Kenney** passed an order in council appointing **Frank Bosscha** as Deputy Attorney General.
 - Bosscha previously served as the ministry’s assistant deputy minister for legal services.