



AB Today – Daily Report July 16, 2019

Quotation of the day

“They take too long. There’s too much red tape. There’s too much process. They’re not getting to decisions fast enough. So to understand why, you need to understand what their mandate is, what their governance is, what their internal processes are.”

*Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** [lists what she says](#) are problems with the Alberta Energy Regulator’s approval process while discussing an upcoming review of the regulatory body.*

Today in AB

On the schedule

The House is now adjourned until Tuesday, October 22.

At the Legislature

A protest against **Bill 8**, the Education Amendment Act, took place on the legislature grounds early Monday evening.

Premier Watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** gave a speech to SHAD Canada at the Energy Environment and Experiential Learning building at the University of Calgary. SHAD is a registered charity that offers summer programming to high-achieving STEM students.

Province to undertake review of the Alberta Energy Regulator

The Alberta government is conducting a review of the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) with a goal of reducing approval times for resource projects.

On the campaign trail, the United Conservative Party promised to launch a review of the AER within six months of taking office. The review is a piece of a larger UCP promise to reduce oilwell approval times, which it says lag behind other jurisdictions.

In Alberta, according to the government, a well approval takes 70 to 220 days, while it takes 72 to 120 days in Saskatchewan and only 30 to 90 days in Texas.

“Our view is that [the AER] has not achieved its promise from when it was first created — that timelines for project approvals in Alberta are unacceptably long and also that the fees charged to Alberta energy producers are unacceptably high,” Premier **Jason Kenney** said [in an interview](#) with the *Calgary Herald* where the review was first announced.

Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** told the *Herald* the government expects the review to be complete by fall.

There have already been signs of change at the AER in recent months. In late May, news broke that the regulator was making plans to [automate its approval of oilwell drilling permits](#), which will allow about 90 per cent of applications to fly through in under 15 minutes.

The review comes as the liabilities of orphan wells swell. According to the government, Alberta has 176,000 active wells, but also 90,000 inactive wells and 77,000 abandoned wells. In May 2017, the government loaned the [Orphan Well Association](#) (an industry-funded non-profit organization) \$235 million to accelerate the cleanup of abandoned wells.

In addition, investigations show three AER executives were being [paid to commute](#) from B.C. and the UCP has said it plans to replace the entire AER board, though the government offered no timeline for the latter.

The party made a public enemy out of ex-board member **Ed Whittingham**, who resigned after the election. Whittingham, an NDP-era appointment, was previously head of the Pembina Institute, which has advocated for a reduction in the use of fossil fuels.

In an emailed statement to *AB Today*, a spokesperson for the AER said the regulator is not involved in the review and directed questions to the government.

“The AER has not been involved in any review of the AER conducted by the Government of Alberta,” the statement says.

Upcoming events

July 16 at 11 a.m. – Calgary

Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** will speak at a Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation event.

July 16 at noon – Edmonton

PETA is [planning](#) a protest at the legislature after six chuckwagon horses died during the Calgary Stampede.

July 16 at 3 p.m. – Edmonton

Alberta's chief medical officer of health will give an update on 2018 infectious and congenital syphilis cases.

Topics of conversation

- Parents and advocacy groups are raising concerns that provincial Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) funding is being delayed, the *Star Edmonton* [reports](#).
 - The funds go to parents of children with disabilities to pay for daycare, among other things, but according to Inclusion Alberta, dozens of parents have been calling to complain about funding denials and delays.
 - A spokesperson for Community and Social Services Minister **Rajan Sawhney** told the *Star* there has been no funding freeze and no change to Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) and PDD services.
 - Similar concerns were also raised during question period in June and received a similar answer — no changes have been made.

- The province's top court could be renamed when Canada's head of state dies.
 - The *Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act*, which was given royal assent in December 2018, would give the cabinet the ability to change the name of the Court of Queen's Bench through a regulation, according to the court's annual [report](#).
 - The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General has been in talks with the court to rename it the Supreme Court of Alberta with the looming inevitable death of Queen Elizabeth.

- The Government of Alberta wants the federal government to compensate it for its rural internet program, the *Edmonton Journal* [reports](#).
 - Alberta's high-speed rural internet for public institutions, SuperNet, has been in operation since 2005 and has already cost \$1 billion, with a 10-year, \$50 million contract signed last year.
 - Alberta is hoping to get a piece of the federal government's recently [announced](#) rural broadband initiative, which is currently only open to the territories and satellite-dependent communities.

- Lethbridge Mayor **Chris Spearman** says the UCP's decision to pause an \$11.2 million investment in affordable housing promised by the former NDP government is hurting city, which is struggling with a lack of addiction and supportive housing facilities, the *Calgary Herald* [reports](#).
 - Associate Minister for Mental Health and Addictions **Jason Luan** said his ministry will establish a panel this fall to conduct a “robust social-economic assessment” on affordable housing.
- *Press Progress* [reports](#) that a crowdfunding campaign to fund a movie by **Vivian Krause**, whose work tracing foreign funding for environmental campaigns spurred the UCP to launch its own \$2.5 million public inquiry, is accepting foreign donations.
 - Two individuals — one from the United Kingdom and one from the United States — told *Press Progress* they donated to Krause's campaign using only their first name and last initial.
 - On July 4, the Alberta government announced it hired chartered professional accountant **Steve Allen** to lead an inquiry into “anti-Alberta” activity, building off of Krause's research.

News briefs — Non-governmental

Health-care workers form information picket over Bill 9

NDP MLAs joined health-care workers outside the University of Alberta hospital during a picket rally over **Bill 9**, Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act, which delays arbitration hearings between the province and several unions until after October 31.

Monday's picket was one of several planned across the province this summer by the United Nurses of Alberta, Health Sciences Association of Alberta and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.

The NDP says Alberta was the only province not represented at a recent Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions meeting about workplace violence that [coincided](#) with the Council of the Federation in Saskatoon last week. (CFNU says Québec was also missing at the table.)

“It sends a sad and scary message to our healthcare workers that Alberta was the only province not to attend this important meeting,” **David Shepherd**, NDP Health critic, said in a news release. “Every Albertan has the right to expect that their government will take violence in the workplace seriously. Health care workers looking to the Alberta Government to listen to their concern saw only empty chairs.”