



## **AB Today – Daily Report July 17, 2019**

### **Quotation of the day**

“I don’t think Alberta businesses ever shied away from competition whether it’s from inside the province or outside the province.”

*Alberta Chambers of Commerce president and CEO **Ken Kolby** welcomes competition from outside the province after the premier announced he would lift half of the exceptions to the Canada Free Trade Agreement.*

### **Today in AB**

#### **On the schedule**

The House is adjourned until Tuesday, October 22.

#### **At the Legislature**

About two dozen protestors from PETA and A Voice for Animals gathered outside the legislature in paper horse masks to protest against chuckwagon races after six horses died during the Calgary Stampede.

#### **Premier Watch**

Premier **Jason Kenney** was checking out the helicopters at CFB Suffield with British Consul General in Calgary **Caroline Saunders**, per social media.

**Chamber head thrilled with interprovincial trade rule changes, while economist predicts ‘modest’ impact**

Alberta Chambers of Commerce president and CEO **Ken Kolby** told *AB Today* he hopes other provinces follow Alberta's free trade example, after Premier **Jason Kenney** unilaterally slashed 13 of its 27 exceptions — including all of those related to procurement — to the Canada Free Trade Agreement.

Kenney made the announcement last week during the Council of the Federation meeting with Canada's premiers, where he challenged his fellow first ministers to follow suit.

"A unilateral move is a heck of a lot more than we've had in the past," Kolby said. "It's a pretty bold move by the premier."

Removing barriers to interprovincial trade was a pillar of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce's "Vote Prosperity" spring election platform. Canada's Chambers of Commerce has [launched a similar campaign](#) ahead of the October federal election.

"Commonly you hear the story that sometimes it's easier to trade north-south than it is to trade east-west across Canada," said Kolby, who hopes Kenney's unilateral move will show goodwill and stimulate other provinces to act similarly.

"In this country, we probably waited too long for the federal government to try to bring all the provinces together, and I think it will take a series of these unilateral actions to actually get that job accomplished," Kolby said.

For his part, University of Calgary economist **Trevor Tombe** says the impact of wiping out procurement exemptions should not be overstated.

"These exemptions are somewhat narrow in scope," Tombe told *AB Today*. "Ideally, it will result in lower cost projects if we award a contract to an out-of-province bidder below what an Alberta contractor provides."

Awarding contracts to a more competitive out-of-province firm means businesses in Alberta could free up investment and workers for other sectors, ultimately leading to higher economic productivity, while saving money for taxpayers.

However, **Gil McGowan**, head of the Alberta Federation of Labour, said Kenney's announcement came without consultation and could shrink the number of jobs for Albertans who rely on public sector contracts.

"While Premier Jason Kenney talks a big game about supporting the economy, his actions belie his words. His move ties the province's hands in terms of tools to provide Alberta's workers jobs through public-sector investment. This will hurt local and regional economies," McGowan said in a statement last week.

At the premiers' meeting, Kenney also signalled he intends to lead the country in revamping how jurisdictions recognize professional credentials, which Tombe says could provide a bigger boost to the economy than changing procurement rules.

"That could take a big bite out of internal trade costs in Canada and increase the amount of labour mobility that is a problem for many types of professionals in the country," Tombe said.

Speaking on July 10 in Saskatoon, [Kenney said](#) it shouldn't be easier for professionals to move between the 28 sovereign states of the European Union than the 10 provinces and three territories of Canada.

"We in Alberta are committed to allowing people to move from coast to coast to practice in their professions," said the premier, who has directed staff to look into improving how Alberta recognizes professional credentials from other provinces.

"We'll work with our partners across the country, but that's not good enough," Kenney said.

"We're prepared to act unilaterally. For too long, there's been too much talk about free trade in Canada. It's time for action."

Kolby called the move overdue, noting the chamber of commerce called for mutual recognition during the province's last labour shortage.

"That fact that it's even being talked about openly is a real shift in the rhetoric, but it's too early to say," Tombe said.

## Upcoming events

### July 17 at 4 p.m. – *Cranbrook*

Federal Natural Resources Minister **Amarjeet Sohi** and B.C. Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources Minister **Michelle Mungall** will hold a news conference to speak about the Energy Mines and Ministers' Conference.

## Topics of conversation

- Surerus Murphy, a construction company set to work in the Trans Mountain expansion project, posted a slew of job opportunities in Kamloops on its [job board](#), despite still awaiting formal approval for construction.
  - The Calgary-based contractor responsible for the 5A leg of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion — which runs through Kamloops to Merritt — expects construction of the section to take between 30 and 34 months with more than 600 employees required at peak construction.

- An Angus Reid Institute [poll](#) on the federal election found environment and climate change is the top election priority for voters in every province but Alberta. In Alberta, the economy as well as energy and natural resources were the most important.
  - Only 19 per cent of Albertans surveyed said the environment and climate change were the most important issues, compared to 33 per cent on average across the country.
  - One quarter of Albertans ranked energy and natural resources as their number one issue compared to 10 per cent nationally. Another quarter of Albertans said the economy was one of the top two issues compared to 14 per cent on average nationally.
  
- The forensic accountant heading up the investigation into foreign-funded anti-oilsands activism, **Steve Allan**, says he may seek jurisdictional authority from other provinces to compel witnesses to testify, the *Globe and Mail* [reports](#).
  - The \$2.5-million public inquiry announced July 4 only has authority within Alberta's borders when it comes to mandatory testimony.
  
- *Maclean's* [chronicles](#) "the rise of Alberta's unapologetic petro-patriots," the growing trend of Albertans who wear their pro-oil leanings on their apparel and bumper stickers.

## News briefs — Governmental

### Ministry of Health

Dr. **Deena Hinshaw**, Alberta's chief medical officer of health, declared a provincial outbreak of syphilis with [skyrocketing rates](#) of infection and congenital syphilis over the past five years.

Rates of the sexually transmitted infection reached heights not seen since 1948, with 1,536 new cases of infectious syphilis reported in 2018 compared with 161 in 2014.

The relatively rare congenital syphilis, when a child is born to a mother with syphilis, saw 22 cases between 2014 and 2018, including one stillborn child.

"We need to emphasize for all Albertans: sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a risk to anyone who is sexually active, particularly people who have new sex partners and are not using protection," Hinshaw said. "I encourage anyone who is sexually active to get tested regularly. Anyone in Alberta can access STI testing and treatment for free."

### Ministry of Environment and Parks

The city of Edmonton got slapped with a \$165,000 fine under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* for applying industrial herbicide Hyvar X-L in a residential area.

The city pled guilty in provincial court, and other charges against the city were dropped.

The fine will go towards “creative sentencing projects” including creating two eco islands in the Wagner Natural Area of Parkland County, a study on biological control potential for slugs, and an update of the Identification Guide for Alberta Invasive Plants and Be Plant Wise brochures that will include a sub-project to use goats to remove invasive plants in the North Saskatchewan watershed.

The province also announced Tuesday it laid four charges under the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act* against the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo related to the releasing substances into waterways.

The municipality was also charged for transporting dangerous goods. It is scheduled to appear in Fort McMurray court on July 17.

## **News briefs — Non-governmental**

### **NDP says first \$25-per-day childcare provider cancels program**

The Camrose Children’s Centre cancelled its \$25-per-day childcare program due to lack of certainty around provincial funding, according to the NDP.

The \$25-per-day childcare pilot program includes 122 locations in the province. As part of their campaign promise, the NDP pledged universal \$25-per-day childcare.

“Families shouldn’t have to choose between paying their rent and being able to afford childcare,” said **Rakhi Pancholi**, NDP Children’s Services critic. “Quality, affordable childcare means more parents, often women, are able to re-enter the workforce without having to hand over their entire paycheck to pay for childcare.”

According to the NDP, the pilot program created 450 early childhood education jobs and allowed 1,400 parents to re-enter the workforce.

## **Funding announcements**

### **Ministry of Seniors and Housing**

- The province announced a \$5.17-million capital grant to the Calgary Drop-in Centre, which will convert an old hotel into a supportive affordable housing development. The federal government already announced \$8.78 million for renovations.
  - The supportive housing development, [Calgary Drop-In's third](#), is scheduled to open next month.