



## AB Today – Daily Report August 8, 2019

### Quotation of the day

“This premier and this government might be proud of the 68 commitments that they kept. I don’t think following through on 68 bad ideas is a good thing.”

*NDP House Leader **Deron Bilous** says the UCP government’s first 100 days have created uncertainty.*

### Today in AB

#### On the schedule

The House is adjourned for the summer recess.

#### Premier Watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** held a news conference in Capital Plaza, in front of the Alberta legislature, on Wednesday to outline his government’s achievements after 100 days in office.

In the afternoon, Kenney appeared on CBC’s *Power and Politics* to talk about separatist sentiments, his plans for the federal elections campaign and voter fraud allegations stemming from the 2017 UCP leadership race.

The premier also [congratulated](#) Lac La Biche’s Beaverhill Shell gas station owner **Mo Kabalan** for being shortlisted in a national search for the country’s top toilets. In a tweet, [Kenney boasted](#) that Alberta has Canada’s lowest taxes, best educated population, fewest number of rats, and now — the cleanest washrooms.

## **New \$10M fund will finance legal battles for pro-energy First Nations**

The Alberta government is creating a new \$10-million Indigenous Litigation Fund, designed to help pro-energy First Nations fight expensive legal cases over resource development.

“For too long, pro-development First Nations have been ignored in the debate over resource development,” Premier **Jason Kenney** said at a press conference Wednesday. “For too long, a small minority of groups — often receiving foreign funding — have dominated the legal and political debate over resource development.”

The litigation fund will be open to Indigenous groups looking to advance Alberta’s energy interests — including First Nations whose territories are outside the province.

At the announcement, Kenney said he would be meeting with the Eagle Spirit consortium president **Calvin Helin** later that day. He confirmed the B.C.-based group, made up of members from 35 First Nations, would qualify for the fund. The Eagle Spirit consortium has proposed a \$16-billion pipeline from Fort McMurray to a port in northern B.C.

The premier called the litigation fund a key part of his “fight back strategy” to defend Alberta’s economy and jobs, and said it will operate in tandem with the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation.

The fund can be used to finance First Nation’s costs associated with “researching positions, developing motions, participating in trials and appeals, or intervening in processes and legal actions,” per a government news release.

NDP House Leader **Deron Bilous** agreed that support for Indigenous communities is needed, but said financing litigation is not the solution.

“I’m not sure they’re asking for a litigation fund,” Bilous said. “The premier talks about not wanting to fund bankers, yet he’s so eager to fund lawyers and to take everything through the courts, burning taxpayer dollars.”

## **Premier touts 68 ‘promises made, promises kept’ in 100 days, but warns of looming belt-tightening**

While [reflecting on](#) his UCP government’s first 100 days in office, Premier **Jason Kenney** told Albertans the province’s finances are worse than the previous NDP government led them to believe.

Despite February's rosy third quarter update that found the deficit \$2 billion lower than projected, Kenney says the situation has since deteriorated. "It has become clear since we came to office that the fiscal situation in the province is much worse than the NDP told us," he said.

The results of the **Janice Mackinnon**-led blue ribbon panel on provincial finances — which is due to report to the government on August 15 — are expected to be released to the public in September.

As a growing number of groups say their government funding — including for policing, [public libraries](#) and [student aid](#) — has been paused or only partially delivered, Kenney contended the government "can't just be writing blank cheques."

"Everything has been fully funded through interim supply, and I encourage our partners who receive government transfers to continue delivering their programs," Kenney said. "We will have to go through a period of fiscal responsibility. That's what we were elected to do. That means we have to take the time to get the numbers right."

Kenney repeated a familiar refrain — "68 promises made and 68 promises kept" — in noting his government's swift success implementing its platform.

Asked by reporters about his pre-campaign promise that salary cuts for MLAs would not mean broader public sector wage rollbacks, Kenney said he made that pledge before coming into office — but that his preference remains avoiding public sector layoffs and pay cuts.

He said the best way to ensure public sector workers keep their jobs is to pay down the debt.

NDP Economic Development critic **Deron Bilous** called the blue ribbon panel on finances a "scapegoat" for cuts.

"When it comes to some of his priorities, he's more than willing to allocate and announce funding," Bilous said. "Yet when it comes to services that Albertans rely on, they have to wait and see and hold their breath."

He said the first 100 days of the UCP government can be summed up with the word "uncertainty," adding that public servants like teachers and nurses are nervous.

"I think it's pretty clear we're going to see a full-frontal attack on the public sector," Bilous said.

## Today's events

**August 8 at 10 a.m. – Calgary**

Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** will speak at the grand opening of The Clayton, a 30-unit project for people facing homelessness.

**August 8 at 4 p.m. – Edmonton**

Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women Minister **Leela Aheer** will speak about the Edmonton Folk Music Festival at the Chateau Lacombe.

## Topics of conversation

- Libraries across the province have been told they will only receive half of their regular funding allotment by the end of the fiscal year in August, a reality facing other service providers, including the Calgary Police Service, the CBC [reports](#).
  - Premier **Jason Kenney** said funding the libraries and other services through interim supply is the appropriate method in lieu of a budget, which will be landing in the fall.
  - Municipal Affairs Minister **Kaycee Madu** blamed the CBC report on the NDP sowing “fear and confusion at every turn.”
  - “In order to ensure libraries have the resources they need to get through the interim period, funding has been approved so they can obtain 50 per cent of their operating grants before the budget is finalized,” Madu [said on Twitter](#).
  - According to the province’s public library [statistics](#), there are 322 library locations that provide service to 99.8 per cent of Alberta. Per capita library spending was \$8.52 in 2016.
- As supply for legal cannabis increases, so too have the number of pot shops in Alberta, the *Calgary Herald* [reports](#).
  - The Alberta Gaming Liquor and Cannabis Commission has granted licences to 254 shops — more than all of Canada’s other provinces combined.
  - This number is quadruple the estimate provided by the AGLC ahead of the October 2018 legalization date.
  - Meanwhile, there are 491 additional shops in the queue for approval.
- CANADALAND’s *Commons: Crude* podcast [released](#) a new episode about a federal-provincial joint review panel’s recent decision to deem Teck Resource’s proposed Frontier mine outside of Fort McMurray to be in the public interest. The episode questions why the proposed project, which would be the largest oilsands operation in Alberta, is getting far less media attention than the ongoing pipeline debate.
  - The joint panel determined the project is in the public interest due to its potential economic impacts, despite the irreparable harm it will cause the environment and Indigenous people.
  - The federal cabinet has until the end of February 2020 to make a decision on the project.

- Premier **Jason Kenney** faced questions about whether he would protect funding for the Office of the Election Commissioner, which is currently investigating several allegations into the 2017 UCP leadership race. “Well look, I’m not going to start improvising the October budget here,” he responded, adding that while he respects the independence of the office, every part of government will be asked to show fiscal restraint.
  - Kenney was cagey about revelations Election Commissioner **Lorne Gibson’s** office is now investigating **Tariq Chaudhry’s** sworn affidavit alleging Kenney’s leadership team asked him to purchase UCP memberships and distribute them to members of the Pakistani community, as well as host two events, which he was never reimbursed for.
  - Kenney said there may have been volunteers that did not comply with the election law, but he hopes that is not the case. “Our campaign leadership were mature people who were scrupulous about following the rules,” Kenney said. “I’ve always said I can’t account for what every single one of the dozens of volunteers did out of our direct line of sight.”
  - Meanwhile, *Star Edmonton* [reports](#) federal Conservative candidate and former cabinet minister **Tim Uppal** has been interviewed by the RCMP about the UCP leadership race. Uppal says he is not a suspect.
- Kenney confirmed Wednesday he will be helping out the federal Conservative machine on the campaign trail — and it’s “quite probable” that work will take him out-of-province.
  - “I campaigned on the premise of replacing the Trudeau government,” Kenney told reporters on Wednesday, adding that his first job is as premier of Alberta.

## News briefs — Non-governmental

### Office of the Auditor General

While 19 of the province’s 20 post-secondary institutions adequately reported their finances in 2018, Keyano College needs to make a “significant improvement,” according to a new report from the auditor general.

Auditor General **Doug Wylie’s** [report](#) found Keyano “continues to lag behind all other institutions in the prompt and accurate preparation of its annual financial reporting,” despite making “incremental improvements” from past years.

Last week, Keyano College received praise from the UCP government for being the first post-secondary institution to adopt the “Chicago principles” of free speech, which the UCP is encouraging all institutions to do.

Wylie also [released an audit](#) from 2018 that looked at expenses under Agriculture and Forestry; Economic Development and Trade; Environment and Parks; Infrastructure; Justice and Solicitor General; Municipal Affairs and Transportation. The audit was conducted as part of a three-year

rotational schedule that began examining every provincial ministry in 2016. All of those departments had effective processes in place.

The next round of audits will examine the office expenses for the premier and other ministers' office, beginning in fall 2019.