



AB Today – Daily Report August 20, 2019

Quotation of the day

“If you aren’t willing to accept our resources, why are you willing to accept the money that comes from them?”

*Premier **Jason Kenney** slams Québec Premier **François Legault** over recent remarks about keeping Canada’s equalization formula status quo.*

Today in AB

On the schedule

The House is adjourned for the summer recess.

At the Legislature

Alberta sheriffs were called to the legislature grounds after an alarmed pedestrian [spotted an unusual sight](#) — a lynx. The sheriffs called their fellow officers in the Fish and Wildlife department, who shooed the mid-size cat back to the safety of the river valley.

Government appoints panel for supervised consumption site review

An eight-person committee, chaired by former Edmonton police chief **Rod Knecht**, will review crime and safety issues associated with supervised drug consumption sites in Alberta, but will not touch on how the services they provide help reduce overdoses and save lives.

Appointed by the United Conservative government, the panel will study the “social and economic” impacts of supervised consumption services (SCS), including crime rates, needle debris, complaints of social disorder, impact to residential property values, emergency medical services calls and impact to businesses.

“We’re trying to balance the system,” Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions **Jason Luan** told reporters. “The existing government already has a wealth of information supporting the merits of supervised consumption sites in terms of their contribution to harm reduction and overall system of care.”

Luan suggested the previous NDP government failed to listen to the voices of communities and businesses in the areas near SCS.

Knecht, who was Edmonton Police Service chief for seven years before retiring in 2018, said he stands by statements he made in 2016 in support of SCS as harm reduction tools, but told reporters that communities near the services should not have to deal with higher crime rates.

He pointed to Edmonton, where Knecht said has seen needle debris, social disorder and garbage in the streets in the area around the Royal Alexandra Hospital (there is a SCS for patients in the hospital).

Currently, there are seven SCS in the province — four in Edmonton, one in Calgary, one in Lethbridge and one in Grande Prairie. There is an interim overdose prevention site in Red Deer while the community awaits Health Canada’s approval of a full SCS.

There are also three proposed sites — a mobile site in Calgary, one in Medicine Hat and a full-fledged SCS in Red Deer.

Knecht says he wants to see police get ahead of addiction by arresting drug traffickers and spoke in favour of addiction treatments that will end the “cycle of despair.”

The panel’s vice-chair, **Geri lininaatoóáakii Bemister-Williams**, is a professor, criminologist and member of the Blackfoot Nation who is in long-term recovery from addiction. She said her role is to look objectively at the facts and does not have an opinion on SCS either way.

The other panel members are:

- **Dr. Charl Els;**
- **Joan Hollihan;**
- **Dr. Rob Tanguay;**
- **Dr. Ray Baker;**
- **Paul Maxim;** and
- **Steve Cormack.**

The panel, which will meet next month, will not be considering whether any additional sites should be opened, nor will it look at funding or the broader social context such as homelessness or the need for social housing.

NDP questions why panel discludes addictions workers, SCS users

Heather Sweet, the NDP's critic for Mental Health and Addictions, said the panel is stacked with supporters of the "abstinence-only" approach to addiction treatment and criticized the lack of representation from the supervised consumption services or harm reduction advocates.

While the panel includes a mother whose son died of fentanyl poisoning, an addictions expert and a person with lived experience of addictions, it does not include anyone who works at SCS or who currently uses the services.

Sweet said the SCS in Lethbridge is now the busiest such site in North America and the review has ignited fears that the province may close it, or target other sites.

"If this site closes, there will be death in the streets," Sweet said. "People will die in alleys, in playgrounds, in yards, in the library. More Alberta families will grieve for a lost loved one. That will be on Premier [**Jason**] **Kenney** and Minister Luan. That will be their fault."

Luan said the panelists were chosen for their diverse backgrounds in business, real estate, economics, social demography, research ethics, addiction and recovery services, harm reduction, First Nations health, mental health, trauma, pain management, and law enforcement and crime reduction.

Both the NDP and Luan said SCS are part of a continuum of care that includes treatment, enforcement and housing.

Next steps

Beginning next month, the panel will spend three weeks gathering public feedback via town halls, online surveys, focus groups and paper feedback forms, as well as collecting additional data, to create a report. Consultation dates for public events will be announced soon.

The report, which will be presented to cabinet by the end of the year, will not include recommendations. Cabinet will decide whether the report will be released to the public.

Today's events

August 20 at 7 p.m. – Calgary

Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** will speak at a citizenship ceremony at GlobalFest in Elliston Park.

Topics of conversation

- The war of words over equalization payments between Alberta Premier **Jason Kenney** and Québec Premier **François Legault** continued over the weekend, with Kenney

slamming his counterpart's claim that equalization is constitutionally protected and should remain unchanged.

- On Saturday, Kenney re-affirmed his election promise to hold a referendum in October 2021 on changing the equalization formula if pipelines have not yet been built.
- During a speech to his political supporters, Legault [acknowledged](#) that Alberta is unhappy, but said it should not be allowed to unilaterally change Canada's equalization formula, saying Québec is "entitled to equalization, there is no question of adjusting or changing it."
- Kenney [fired back](#) Monday, saying if Québec wants to "benefit from our oil and gas wealth," it must "stop blocking oil and gas pipelines."
- Speaker **Nathan Cooper** was "[talking twaddle](#)" in his latest behind-the-scenes video. Cooper explained the rules about unparliamentary language, which have evolved from a list of banned words and phrases to a system that also includes rulings based on context.
- The government is mulling over an \$8.9-million, 48-square-kilometre caribou-rearing facility — a place for caribou to breed without predators — in the Municipal District of Greenview, CBC [reports](#).
 - Plans for a five-year pilot project at the facility were outlined in a memo from Assistant Deputy Environment and Parks Minister **John Conrad** to the federal government.
 - Caribou protection has been an ongoing issue in the province because the sensitive species has been impacted by the province's oil and gas industry.
 - Last week, the government announced three sub-regional caribou task forces as part of their overall plan to address the federal government's Critical Habitat Protection Order.
- The province could shift the tax designation for large-scale cannabis producers from agricultural to industrial as a way to collect additional tax revenue, the *Edmonton Journal* [reports](#).
 - Last year, the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association [passed a resolution](#) calling on the government to tax cannabis grow operations at "fair market value."
 - Municipal Affairs Minister **Kaycee Madu** told the *Journal* he plans to table the issue at an upcoming cabinet policy committee meeting in September.
 - "Alberta taxpayers shouldn't be responsible if these facilities are being assessed at an inappropriate rate," Madu said.
- People's Party of Canada Leader **Maxime Bernier** is skeptical about climate change, and his doubts could mean Elections Canada will deem environmental groups raising the issue to be partisan actors during the fall federal election campaign, [according to](#) the *Canadian Press*.

- Doing so could see environmental charities classified as third-party advertisers, putting their charitable status in jeopardy and subjecting them to the same reporting standards as partisan organizations backing specific candidates and parties — even if their activities name no candidates or parties.
- “At this point, unless I can get greater clarification, after the writ is dropped we would stop doing anything online that talks about climate change, which is our entire mandate,” said **Tim Gray**, executive director of the advocacy group Environmental Defence. “You feel you’re being drawn into this space where you’re being characterized as being a partisan entity for putting up Facebook ads that say climate change is real, which seems ridiculous to me.”

News briefs — Governmental

Alberta Education

The province released 23 regulations and three ministerial orders on Monday to bring changes to the *Education Act* into effect on September 1.

The UCP government passed **Bill 8**, the *Education Amendment Act*, giving it royal assent on July 18.

The regulations include changes to charter schools, private schools and home schooling, as well as the public and Catholic systems. There are also regulations around school transportation and school fees.

“We understand there are many steps required for school authorities to adjust to the new legislation, and we know it takes time,” said Education Minister **Adriana LaGrange** in a news release. “We are working with our education partners during this transition.”

The *Education Act* replaces the *School Act*.

The bill came under fire by the NDP opposition, who say it is rolling back LGBTQ protections while adopting few of the changes proposed by the previous Progressive Conservative government’s review of the *Education Act*, such as an increased period of time in which high school students can complete their diploma requirements.

Service Alberta

Service Alberta Minister **Nate Glubish** is kicking off a tour the province today. He will travel from Lloydminster to Mayerthorpe until September 4 to get feedback on issues related to his ministry.

“I have heard about specific challenges that Alberta communities are facing, from broadband service in rural Alberta to local registries and mobile home tenancy issues in more urban settings,” Glubish said in a news release. “This is why it is important to go out and hear directly

from Albertans who are in the best place to offer insight into the difficulties they face when accessing services.”

Glubish said it's the first time in five years the Alberta government has undertaken a tour on these issues.