



AB Today – Daily Report September 3, 2019

Quotation of the day

“On #AlbertaDay, let us celebrate all we have achieved and have yet to achieve as a province and people of destiny.”

*The official UCP account tweeted a celebration missive on the 114th anniversary of Alberta becoming a province. UCP Spruce Grove—Stony Plain MLA **Searle Turton** chimed in with a [video parody](#) of the infamous “I am Canadian” Molson beer commercial.*

Today in AB

On the schedule

The House is adjourned for the summer recess. MLAs will return to the legislature for the fall session on October 22. Regular committee meetings are set to resume next week.

Premier watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** [released](#) a Labour Day statement Monday, shining a light on out-of-work Albertans. He also thanked emergency services providers, and others who did not get the day off.

On Sunday, Kenney issued a statement marking the 114th anniversary of Alberta as a province.

“Albertans have built a province that is the engine of Canada’s prosperity, of growing the middle class, of economic progress and social mobility,” Kenney said. “We have thrived on the contributions of newcomers from across Canada and around the world.”

Blue ribbon panel report set for release following fiscal update

The findings of a blue ribbon panel — struck by the United Conservative government — examining Alberta's finances will be released today.

The panel, led by former Saskatchewan NDP finance minister **Janice MacKinnon**, wrapped up its work and delivered a report to the UCP government last month. Finance Minister **Travis Toews** — who has already reviewed the report — warned last week the government will have to undertake a program of fiscal restraint, but did not offer specifics.

The blue ribbon report will include recommendations for a path to economic balance, but the panel was not asked to consider the revenue side of the equation.

MacKinnon has previously said she believes the government can balance its books without tax increases, something Premier **Jason Kenney** said he would do on the campaign trail earlier this year. “You have to prioritize, you have to have some fiscal discipline, because in the long term then you have more money,” she stated in May.

The government is holding off on tabling its inaugural budget until the fall, along with other funding decisions, saying fiscal plans cannot be finalized until it weighs the panel's report.

An austerity budget will be on the way, according to Toews.

Toews' remarks accompanied the [release](#) of the province's first quarter financials.

“This Q1 report shows just how much work is needed to get Alberta back on track,” Toews said.

“Compared to Q1 last year, we are now paying an additional \$93 million on debt servicing instead of on programs and services for Albertans. Burdened with cost pressures and compounding debt left by previous governments, we have to find ways to exercise restraint.”

The first-quarter fiscal update showed that Alberta brought in \$13.4 billion in revenue between April and June, the same as last year — but the three month deficit of \$835 million was \$365 million lower than it was in 2018. Meanwhile, spending was \$364 million lower than the same period last year.

Revenue from income tax increased by \$166 million thanks to growth in household income and increased corporate profits. Resource revenue was up \$164 million, due in part to the reduction in the oil price differential.

But the revenue side also took a \$66-million hit due to the cancellation of the carbon tax. Premier **Jason Kenney's** cut to the corporate tax rate did not come into effect until July and was therefore not accounted for in the update.

NDP MLA for Edmonton—North West **David Eggen** slammed the UCP's fiscal update for being short on detail.

"We lost 14,000 jobs in July under this government and the Minister can't tell us when — or even if — his risky experiment will get a single one of those jobs back," Eggen said. "This corporate tax cut is an epic failure."

Opposition Finance critic **Shannon Phillips** questioned when the government will announce budget consultations, something the NDP is undertaking as part of its shadow budget plan.

"We will put forward an alternative budget that will prove you can balance the budget while still protecting vital services," Phillips said. "It will be built on what we hear from Albertans, not a shady panel that has no transparency or accountability."

Toews said the upcoming fall budget will be a more detailed document.

Today's events

September 3 at 9 a.m. – Edmonton

The UCP's Communities and Families Committee — a new addition to the government's committee roster — will meet in the cabinet room of the legislature.

September 3 at 5:30 p.m. – Edmonton

Municipal Affairs Minister **Kaycee Madu** will speak at the Boys and Girls Club/Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and area awards night.

September 3 – Camrose

Advanced Education Minister **Demetrios Nicolaidis** will kick off an 18-campus tour of Alberta's post-secondary institutions starting at the University of Alberta Augustana campus.

Topics of conversation

- Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** and Justice Minister **Doug Schweitzer** issued a joint statement on the proclamation of federal **Bill C-69**, which overhauls the environmental assessment process for infrastructure projects. The UCP refers to the legislation as the "no more pipelines act" and contends it will make it "virtually impossible" for any future infrastructure projects to be approved in Canada.
 - "This is a dark day for Alberta and Canada as a whole," the statement reads, calling the law "an unconstitutional attack on Alberta and our vital economic interests."
 - "This act will further scare away billions of dollars in capital investment and tens of thousands of jobs to the U.S. and other jurisdictions. All Albertans — and

Canadians — should be concerned with the disastrous impact this act will have on the economy,” Savage and Schweitzer said.

- Calgary Pride chose the conversion therapy working group, which was defunded by the United Conservative government, to marshal its annual pride parade on Sunday.
 - The working group was [tasked](#) by the former NDP government to develop a plan to ban the practice of conversion therapy in the province.
 - Group members who marched included **Dr. Kevin Alderson**, LGBTQ advocate and co-chair **Glynnis Lieb**, NDP MLA and alt-chair **Janis Irwin**, NDP MLA and co-chair **Nicole Goehring**, United Church of Canada missionary **Gary Simpson**, and co-author of *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions* **Junaid Jahangir**.
 - When the UCP government took office, Health Minister **Tyler Shandro** called the group “ad hoc” and said while he would review recommendations from anyone, he would not fund the continuation of the group’s work.
 - Calgary Pride previously announced political parties could not march in the parade, but walked it back to say politicians could march as invited guests of other previously approved participants.
- The UCP government has allowed the cap on auto insurance rate increases to lapse. The five per cent annual cap on rate increases was brought in by the NDP via a ministerial order in 2017. That order expired on Saturday.
- New regulations around [school fees](#) and transportation came into effect on Sunday.
 - The new school fee regulation requires school boards to notify parents before making changes to school fees for instructional items such as textbooks or paper supplies.
 - The UCP government also removed the NDP-era requirement that transportation be provided for free to students who live outside a 2.4-kilometre radius of their school.
 - “The UCP is clearly preparing to offload the cost of busing kids on to working parents,” said **Sarah Hoffman**, NDP Opposition Education critic. “By not providing proper funding to school boards for transportation, boards will have no choice but to charge parents more.”
- An Auditor General [report](#) released last week says ministries are not reporting performance measure outcomes as effectively as they should be. The report was a followup to two audits — one in 2012 and one in 2014.
 - “Albertans use costing information to make countless decisions every day, ranging from whether they can afford to buy a coffee or purchase a vehicle,” Auditor General **Doug Wylie** said in a news release. “Government is no different. Limited costing information reduces the government’s ability to make informed decisions to obtain value for taxpayers’ dollars.”

- A new Calgary-based political fashion line called [Madame Premier](#) has launched, the brainchild of political watchers **Sarah Elder-Chamanara** and **Marcie Hawranik**.
 - Madam Premier offers up clothes with slogans like “#PoliNerd,” “Political AF” and “A woman’s place is in council chambers/the legislature/the House of Commons/The Senate.”
 - Models on the website include federal Liberal candidate **Maggie Farrington**, UCP president **Erika Barootes** and former Alberta Party candidate **Kara Levis**.
- The Alberta Liberals named a committee tasked with shaping the course of the party. The committee members include the Liberal Party’s regional chair for Edmonton **Zakeria Abdi**, party organizer **Irene Hunter**, former Calgary—North candidate **Saliha Haq**, lawyer and Liberal party volunteer **Cathleen McFarland**, Lethbridge—East Liberal candidate **Devon Hargreaves**, and former Liberal vice-president of communications and past candidate for Calgary—Edgemont **Pam York**.
- Premier **Jason Kenney** applauded a ruling from the Nebraska Supreme Court approving a permit for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline.
 - “In all of our government’s engagement with U.S. officials, we have consistently stated that this pipeline is critical to North American security and prosperity,” Kenney said in a statement. “Alberta is a stable, secure and responsible energy supplier to the United States that can be relied on at a time of geopolitical uncertainty.”

News briefs — Governmental

Education minister reverses ban on seclusion rooms

A ministerial order banning the use of seclusion rooms in schools that was supposed to take effect on September 1 has been repealed by Education Minister **Adriana LaGrange**.

Instead, the government says it is crafting new rules in conjunction with school boards and the Alberta Teachers’ Association. New [interim standards](#) will be in place until the end of October.

LaGrange says after “a lot of listening to those directly affected,” she decided to move forward “in a more measured way” to “finalize how this tool can be used and how the system will be held accountable.”

News briefs — Non-governmental

Auditor general calls for consistency in board member applications and appointments

Auditor General **Doug Wylie** released an [audit](#) entitled *Public Agency Board Member Recruitment and Selection* that calls on the government to follow its guidebook on how public appointments should be administered.

“Public agencies manage and administer almost 50 per cent of the province’s budget,” Wylie said. “If public board members do not have the right skills and experience to provide effective oversight, it can impact how well programs and services are delivered to Albertans.”

Wylie’s report, which looked at appointments made between July 2017 and February 2019, found the former NDP government used open competitions for re-appointments as opposed to utilizing a more efficient re-appointment process. About half of the province’s appointments since July 2017 were re-appointments.

It also found vacancies were left open on some boards for longer than six months.

In some cases there was a lack of evidence showing how qualified the candidates was.

Last month the UCP government announced a fleet of new appointees at more than 20 public boards, including 11 post-secondary institutions, Alberta Health Services, and the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis commission.

NDP calls for Jason Luan’s resignation following comments about naloxone use

The associate minister of Mental Health and Addictions, **Jason Luan**, came under fire this weekend for suggesting that naloxone, which is used to reverse opioid overdoses, encourages addicts to use drugs.

Luan made the remarks while attending an event for International Overdose Awareness Day last Friday where he said kids are deliberately taking larger doses of opioids because of the availability of naloxone kits.

NDP critic for Mental Health and Addictions **Heather Sweet** responded by calling for Luan to be fired.

“For the Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to imply people are intentionally overdosing is disgraceful and offensive to those grieving the loss of a loved one today,” Sweet said in a news release. “It’s clear the minister lacks any understanding of the opioid crisis affecting our communities.”

People speaking on behalf of Luan [said](#) his comments mirrored what he was told by parents at the event.

"You know the naloxone kit that we send as an emergency recovery for people with overdose? Actually, the kids take that, knowing they have the kit, because now you're safe," Luan told reporters on Friday.

"They want to push it to their limit, how far they can go to overdose, because they're safe, because the kit is there. Lots of times we're trying to make it easier, wanting to help, but it's a fine line. If you cross that line, you become an enabler."