



AB Today – Daily Report September 9, 2019

Quotation of the day

“[We] identified communities that demonstrated a suspicious account creation pattern that is indicative of troll or bot activity. It was mainly comprised of supporters of the United Conservative Party.”

A report into potential foreign influence in the 2019 Alberta Election by Rapid Response Mechanism Canada found a spike in troll and bot accounts from domestic — not foreign — sources in the lead up to the April vote.

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.

Committees this week

Committee business is back. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts is scheduled to meet Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning in the Federal Building to discuss outstanding recommendations from auditor general reports from October 2008, October 2012, October 2014, May 2017 and November 2018. The committee will also discuss the 2018-19 annual report for the Service Alberta ministry.

The Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund will meet Thursday to discuss the fund's first quarter report.

Domestic trolls and bots supporting the UCP spiked during Alberta election, research shows

The calls are coming from inside the house.

A spike in “inauthentic” accounts supporting the United Conservative Party during the last election came from within Canada, according to a [report](#) from a federal government agency created to monitor foreign interference in elections.

“Domestic actors are also emulating the tactics used by foreign actors, within the context of provincial elections,” the report states. “This behaviour will make it increasingly difficult to distinguish national from foreign interference efforts in the upcoming Federal election.”

In the findings released last week, Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) Canada determined that while there was no evidence of foreign interference, people within Canada employed worrying social media tactics in the lead up to the April 16, 2019, election.

RRM, which was created after a G7 meeting on foreign influence in democracy at the Charlevoix Summit, took interest in the Alberta election due to suspicions that environment and pipeline issues could draw the interest of foreign actors.

The research found a spike in domestic accounts tied to lobbying groups and supporters of the United Conservative Party, and a smaller subset of the federal People’s Party of Canada.

However, the report found no connection to the parties themselves, and government officials said there is no evidence the activity impacted the result of the election.

“The growing number of inauthentic troll accounts online is a disturbing trend but as the report states, there is nothing to suggest that these accounts in any way influenced the results of the election,” the premier’s spokesperson, **Christine Myatt**, [told media](#) in a statement.

Additionally, RRM determined a group of anonymous accounts pushed a pro-separatist message in Alberta, but they were unaffiliated with the Alberta Independence Party.

“Creating false separatist movements or amplifying domestic ones is a known tactic in foreign interference,” the report states.

The report also identified known far-right and hate group actors that used similar tactics.

The researchers did not find a similar pattern amongst Alberta Liberal Party or Alberta New Democratic Party supporters.

The report also [disputes claims](#) made in an April *Press Progress* story on a Mentionmapp Analytics study claiming 30 per cent of the Twitter activity around the provincial election was driven by bots or humans amplifying bots.

“RRM Canada’s findings, using multiple tools and methods, judges that the online activity is very unlikely to comprise one third of bots,” the report states.

Court overturns injunction on Bill 9

The United Conservative government scored a major legal victory Friday, when the province’s top court overturned an injunction on **Bill 9**, *Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act*.

The 2-1 majority Court of Appeal decision greenlights the government’s appeal of a July ruling by the Court of Queen’s Bench, which granted the initial injunction against **Bill 9** to the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE).

The act put off arbitration between the government and union until after October 31, which the newly-elected UCP government said was necessary to allow it the time to assess the state of the province’s finances. The injunction from the Court of Queen’s Bench allowed the AUPE and the province’s wage arbitration to move ahead, but the arbitrator had not yet released a decision.

Finance Minister **Travis Toews** issued a statement calling the Court of Appeal decision a victory for taxpayers.

“As we receive more information ahead of Budget 2019, a very clear picture is emerging of the significant economic challenges the previous government left us with,” Toews said in a news release.

“Our government has great respect and admiration for the work of Alberta’s public sector and I look forward to constructive discussions with union leadership as we seek the best value for the hard-earned dollars that Albertans pay for our public services in this difficult economic climate.”

The AUPE vowed to fight the decision, and is weighing the possibility of taking it to the Supreme Court of Canada.

“We are frustrated by the ruling. AUPE will be consulting with our legal counsel and our membership,” **Guy Smith**, AUPE president, said in a news release. “**Bill 9** is a political decision by the UCP government to attack our constitutional rights, our wages, our working conditions and the vital public services Albertans depend on.”

Today’s events

September 9 at 10 a.m. – Calgary

The UCP cabinet will meet in the Chinook room of the McDougall Centre.

September 9 at 1:30 p.m. – Edmonton

Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** will recognize Seniors Service Awards nominees at the Sage Seniors Association, the first of three community celebration events in the province.

Topics of conversation

- Finance Minister **Travis Toews** announced, moving forward, the Public Agency Secretariat will be responsible for recruiting board members for the province's agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs).
 - The announcement followed the release of an auditor general report that showed some boards went months without filling vacancies and had difficulty with managing conflicts of interest.
 - "Boards will no longer need to engage the services of costly executive search firms, saving Alberta taxpayers money," Toews said in a news release.
 - "This is about ensuring we have the right skills and competencies represented so that ABCs can efficiently and effectively carry out the important work they do for Albertans."
- [Keep Alberta Strong](#), a coalition of 34 organizations, has formed with the goal of stopping the province from cutting funding to affordable transportation, the Alberta Child benefit, family and community support services, social assistance, affordable housing and affordable child care.
 - Toews said last week he expects the fall budget will include at least \$600 million in spending reductions.
- The Public School Boards' Association of Alberta wrote to Education Minister **Adriana LaGrange** over a change to the *Education Act* that removes the word "public" from eight of the province's 41 public school boards. The *Edmonton Journal* [has the story](#).
 - The name change was made through a ministerial order last month.
- In a Twitter [thread](#) on Saturday, Alberta Health Services said wait times for urgent CT scans are not increasing and that there have been no policy changes around diagnostic imaging.
 - The tweet was a [reply to](#) family physician **Dr. Steve Hitchen**, who said he had to speak to a radiologist about an urgent CT chest scan to rule out lung cancer because the radiologist originally told him the appointment wouldn't be booked for six months.

- “Albertans who require CT scans urgently will get one in a timeframe consistent with the urgency of their need,” AHS tweeted in response. “Wait-times for urgent scans are not increasing.”
- An Ipsos poll commissioned by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers found 70 per cent of Canadians prefer Canadian oil and gas over the imported version. Of that group, 52 per cent believe Canada’s energy industry is the safest and most responsible global producer.
- Mount Royal political scientist **Duane Bratt** [penned an op-ed](#) in the *Globe and Mail* warning labour strife is on the horizon for Alberta if the government carries out recommendations in the MacKinnon report.
 - “Make no mistake, a provincial budget that implements many of ... MacKinnon’s recommendations will lead to acrimonious debates in the legislature, massive protests, court actions and strikes,” Bratt wrote. “And the report itself even acknowledges this.”
- Fort McMurray residents are going on the defensive following a visit from a documentary film crew from the Netherlands, the CBC [reports](#).
 - “The general sense I get ... Fort McMurray is of course providing something that everyone is using and people here are fed up with being blamed for something that everyone is profiting from,” documentary host **Emy Koopman** said.
 - The crew also made stops in Vancouver and Montreal.
- **Matt Wolf**, the premier’s director of issues management, claims there are rumours swirling in Ottawa that NDP Opposition Leader **Rachel Notley** is in line for a plum post as ambassador to Washington if Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** gets re-elected in next month’s federal election.
 - “Not the craziest thing I’ve heard (ex. Doer),” Wolf [wrote](#) in a tweet. “Plus Trudeau kinda owes Notley after hanging her out to dry.”
 - NDP MLA **Marie Renaud** (St. Albert) [responded](#) to Wolf, saying he was “Working hard to distract Albertans from what is happening in Alberta under the UCP.”

News briefs — Governmental

Ministry of Energy

Environment and Parks

The government has replaced the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) board with an interim board while it undertakes a review of the regulator.

The interim board will replace the existing board for the next nine months while the review is in progress.

“We’ve seen the performance of the AER decline over the past few years — despite hiring more staff,” Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** said. “It now takes four times longer than other jurisdictions like Texas to get a project approved in Alberta. We are engaging in a thoughtful and thorough evaluation of the regulator in order to maintain the high standards that have made Alberta a global oil and gas leader.”

The province will take feedback until October 14 from industry, municipalities, professional associations, government departments and Indigenous groups.

(See the Appointments and Employments section for a list of interim board members.)

Agriculture and Forestry

Consultation on the province’s plan to replace the NDP-era *Farm Freedom and Safety Act* (formerly **Bill 6**) has wrapped up.

The feedback, which was generated via 25 separate consultations and approximately 1,200 responses from the public, will be used to draft the “Farm Freedom and Safety Act” bill, which is expected in the fall session.

Economic Development, Trade and Tourism

The United Kingdom and Alberta’s Economic Development, Trade and Tourism ministry signed a MOU on increasing investment and innovation in artificial intelligence, health and life sciences, agri-tech and agri-food technologies, clean growth and smart cities.

“Through this MOU, the U.K. and Alberta will promote collaboration among innovation leaders in the new technologies of the future securing competitiveness, growth and job creation,” said British High Commissioner to Canada **Susan le Jeune d’Allegershecque** in a news release.

The MOU will be in place until September 2022 and includes “participation on a joint innovation forum that will meet biannually to share updates and priorities.”

News briefs — Non-governmental

NDP calls for early return of the legislature for a budget

NDP Official Opposition Leader **Rachel Notley** says it is time for the premier to reconvene the legislature and introduce a budget.

Notley says the lack of a provincial budget is causing chaos for school boards, who have made cuts due to uncertainty, including the Calgary Board of Education, which slashed 200 teaching positions, leading to at least one Grade 5 class having 45 students on the first day of classes.

“The Premier can only hide behind his so-called Blue Ribbon panel for so long,” Notley said in a news release on Friday. “We know he’s going to make cuts, we know he doesn’t have the backbone to talk to Albertans before making those cuts, so what is he waiting for?”

NDP slams job numbers

NDP Energy critic **Irfan Sabir** said the latest employment numbers from Statistics Canada show Premier **Jason Kenney**’s corporate tax cut has failed to create the jobs he promised Albertans.

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate rose from seven per cent in July to 7.2 per cent in August. The number of people looking for jobs grew by 5,6000, while the number of jobs rose by 600.

“These are more than numbers, these are real Albertans trying to support their families. The Premier promised he would create jobs in oil and gas but he’s actually killing jobs by cancelling the oil by rail contracts and extending curtailment,” said Sabir.

“Where are the energy jobs that Jason Kenney promised Albertans he would create with his \$4.5 billion tax giveaway? How is yet another review panel supposed to put people back to work? The Premier either doesn’t know the answer or can’t admit his plan isn’t working.”

Funding announcements

Seniors and Housing

- A month after the Calgary Homeless Foundation said it was [losing eight per cent](#) of its provincial government funding, the province announced \$3 million in capital funding for the under-construction James House.

Appointments and employments

Alberta Energy Regulator

- The individuals appointed to the AER’s interim board are:
 - **Beverly Yee**, the current deputy Environment and Parks minister, who will serve as chair of the board of directors;
 - **Grant Sprague**, the current deputy Energy minister;
 - **David Goldie**, an oil and gas industry executive, most recently with Cenovus;
 - **Georgette Habib**, former National Energy Board member; and
 - **Sherri Brillon**, 30-year Encana employee.