



AB Today – Daily Report September 10, 2019

Quotation of the day

“Since the Inquiry is not designated a ‘public body’ ... it is not subject to requests under the FIPPA.”

An FAQ on the [new website](#) outlining the terms of Alberta’s public inquiry into foreign funding of “anti-Alberta energy campaigns” says the commission conducting the inquiry is not subject to Freedom of Information legislation.

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.

Premier watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** held meetings with a handful of international consuls general Monday to talk trade and investment, including American Consul General in Calgary **Lucia Piazza**, Filipino Consul General **Zaldy Patron** and Colombian Consul General in Calgary **Jorge Guzman**.

Public inquiry into foreign funded environmentalism can compel witnesses, discourages media questions

The Alberta government has launched AlbertaInquiry.ca, a website that allows the public to submit information to its \$2.5-million provincial inquiry into the foreign funding of “anti-energy” groups.

“At this stage in the process, I’m focused on information-gathering and fact-finding, and that’s why it is critical that I hear from anyone who has valuable information to share,” said the inquiry’s commissioner **Steve Allan**, an accountant who is chair of Calgary Economic Development and past president of the Chartered Accountants of Alberta, in a statement.

Beginning this month, Allan will travel to Toronto, Vancouver, Haida Gwaii, B.C. and Washington, D.C., to “meet with individuals who may be in possession of information relevant the Inquiry.”

The website’s FAQ page says the commissioner has the power to summon any person in the province as a witness, should they refuse to talk, and to require them to provide evidence or documents. “Where necessary, the Commissioner may also pursue the attendance or testimony of persons located outside the province of Alberta,” according to the site.

When the inquiry launched in July, Allan told reporters he planned to ask other provinces for the power to compel witness testimony, an authority he had only been designated within Alberta. It is unclear whether Allan has made this request to any other jurisdictions or whether it has been granted. The website specifies that he will not be providing interviews with media.

Despite the wide-ranging powers of the commissioner, the inquiry team is not considered a “public body” under provincial law, so it is not subject to transparency requirements under the province’s Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

Another FAQ outlines the role **Vivian Krause**’s backlog of research on foreign funding of Canadian charities will play in the inquiry, calling it a “potential source” of information and evidence. It goes on to say that Allan will use his “education, training and experience” in forensic accounting and corporate restructuring to “conduct a thorough, independent and impartial assessment of the relevance and value of Ms. Krause’s work,” which has been frequently touted as factual and important by the United Conservative government.

The website also says the inquiry plans to use two recent U.S. Government-led investigations into Russian social media election interference as a resource.

An interim report is due to be submitted to the government by the end of January 2020 and a final report is due in July 2020.

The province said that public hearings may be held if Allan deems them necessary.

‘Alarming’ increase in pepper spray use, segregation in young offender centres, report from youth advocate warns

The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate says there has been an exponential rise in the use of pepper spray and segregation against young offenders in custody.

Del Graff issued his “alarming” findings in a [report](#) Monday, which includes four recommendations for the government.

In February 2016, the province rolled out a policy that made it easier for correctional officers to use pepper spray on incarcerated youth. Prior to that, a tactical team was required to be called before correctional peace officers could use the spray, which contains the chemical oleoresin capsicum (OC) and was previously not kept on site at Alberta’s two facilities for young offenders.

Graff said, in the final four weeks of finalizing his newly released report, pepper spray was used 10 times.

“This example is alarming and highlights the importance and timeliness of this report,” he wrote.

Since the former NDP government loosened the rules, the province has gone from averaging one use of pepper spray every four years to more than 60 uses in less than three years. In the process, Alberta — one of only four provinces that allows the use of pepper spray in young offender centres — has passed Manitoba as the highest user.

Pepper spray has been used 60 times on 114 youth in custody since youth correctional officers started carrying it in 2016, according to the report. From 2012 to 2015, it was used once.

Graff previously raised concerns about the use of pepper spray in 2016 and did so again earlier this year in an [interview with](#) the *Edmonton Journal*.

When the NDP government brought in the change, the minister in charge of the file promised to review how pepper spray was being used within six months. The advocate found no evidence of a review.

Justice stakeholders, including union representatives and youth offender centre staff, contend pepper spray is an important tool, both as a deterrent and as a way to reduce physical altercations.

“We would prefer to not have to intervene. Physicality is more traumatizing,” one justice stakeholder told the advocate.

Some youth agreed.

“OC spray is not as physically harmful,” one youth told the advocate. “Saves you from having a broken arm or being taken down.”

Youth are being punished with segregation despite lack of government guidelines

The report also raised concerns about the effects of segregation on young offenders. Graff warned that segregation has the potential to inflict severe psychological suffering, citing a UN report that says solitary confinement for young people can amount to “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment.”

In 2017-18, 333 young people were segregated. Of those, 166 were segregated two or more times, and 18 were segregated 10 or more times.

“It is alarming that segregation occurs in Alberta’s young offender centres without legislation to provide guidance and ensure accountability, transparency, and fairness,” Graff wrote.

While there are federally proposed changes to segregation rules in adult prisons, there is not an equivalent piece of legislation for youth in the country.

In the United States, “restrictive housing” was banned in juvenile prisons in 2015.

“Young people in custody often have complex needs and may present with difficult and challenging behaviours,” Graff said in a news release. “It is imperative that the Young Offender Branch explores approaches to improve the health and well-being of young people while ensuring a safe environment for everyone.”

Today’s events

September 10 at 9 a.m. – Calgary

Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women Minister **Leela Aheer** will speak at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Canada’s Indigenous women’s conference at the Grey Eagle Resort and Casino.

September 10 at 11 a.m. – Calgary

Children’s Services Minister **Rebecca Schulz** will announce new suicide-prevention tools for Indigenous youth at the Native Network Aboriginal Parent Link Centre.

September 10 at 12:15 p.m. – Fort McMurray

Premier **Jason Kenney** will deliver a speech at the Oil Sands Conference and Trade Show at the Suncor Community Leisure Centre.

September 10 at 2 p.m. – Calgary

Advanced Education Minister **Demetrios Nicolaidis** will make a funding announcement at Lord Beaverbrook High School for apprenticeship students.

September 10 at 6:30 p.m. – Edmonton

The NDP will host a shadow budget town hall at Escuela Mill Creek School.

Topics of conversation

- In response to the **Janice MacKinnon**-led blue ribbon panel on finances, the Parkland Institute released a [report](#) entitled “Cutting Through the Blue Ribbon: a Balanced Look at Alberta’s Finances,” which argues the province’s debt load is manageable, but successive governments’ “anemic tax effort” has caused a problem.
 - A harmonized provincial-federal sales tax and ending the coffers’ reliance on resource revenue are among the recommendations made in the report — which also argues that Alberta’s fiscal situation is not actually in a state of crisis, noting the jurisdiction’s low debt compared to other provinces and its high employment rate, labour force participation and wages.
 - “Alberta’s current financial challenges are deep and long-term, but they are not a crisis and certainly not cause for immediate panic and drastic cuts,” said report co-author **Trevor Harrison**, a professor of sociology at the University of Lethbridge. “Most of the issues of concern revolve around over-dependence on a single commodity—bitumen, oil, and gas—that has contributed for years to roller-coaster budgeting. With a more realistic and stable revenue stream, the current difficulties can be dealt with.”
- Heads of post-secondary institutions are calling post-secondary graduation numbers reported by the MacKinnon panel misleading because they include outcomes for students who take professional development courses, not only degree and diploma-driven students. The *Edmonton Journal* [has the story](#).
- The Edmonton and Calgary Chambers of Commerce [released](#) their own federal election platform on Monday, sharing a wishlist for Alberta businesses.
 - The platform calls for action on climate change, expanding market access and trade, tax system changes, closing the skills and talent gap, and greater fiscal planning.
- In the first eight months of 2019, Alberta shed jobs in mining, forestry, and oil and gas, but gained employment in public administration compared to the same period in 2017, according to Statistics Canada data compiled by ATB Financial.
 - According to Statistics Canada data, public administration grew by 6.7 per cent in 2019. Manufacturing saw the second largest increase at 4.9 per cent.

- The culture and recreation sector took the biggest hit with a four per cent drop in jobs, followed by construction at 3.2 per cent. Forestry, mining, and oil and gas lost three per cent of jobs while the accommodation and food services sector lost 2.6 per cent of its jobs.
- Business bankruptcies were up 53.8 per cent year over year in July, while personal bankruptcies grew by 11.5 per cent, according to the [province's economic dashboard](#).
 - Meanwhile, the number of active drilling rigs also took a sharp drop. There were 97 active rigs in August 2019, a decrease of 54, or 35.8 per cent, from August 2018. Inactive rigs increased from 267 to 276.
- Education Minister **Adriana LaGrange** [issued](#) a statement on Facebook telling school boards they can continue to use “public” in their common usage names, such as on letterheads and buildings. The statement follows uproar over the government’s removal of the word “public” from school division names, following the passage of the *Education Act* last session.
 - LaGrange said the move standardizes legal names for school divisions and only applied to eight of the province’s 41 school divisions.
 - “Despite the conspiracy theories of some with their own partisan motives, there is absolutely no ulterior motive with these common sense changes,” LaGrange wrote. “Rest assured that our government will continue to protect public education in Alberta.”
- Calling all choirs: Speaker **Nathan Cooper** [put out a call](#) for choirs or groups who want to lead the Alberta legislature in the singing of *O Canada*.
- Service Alberta Minister **Nate Glubish** welcomed a baby boy, **Max Alexander Stone Glubish**, on September 5.