



AB Today – Daily Report September 16, 2019

Quotation of the day

“I don’t think we could justify a quarter of a billion dollar investment if it wasn’t going to have some positive, economic impact in terms of prosperity and jobs.”

*At the opening of the University of Lethbridge’s Science Commons, Premier **Jason Kenney** [told reporters](#) he believes universities will more often partner with the private sector in the future. He also said it would be the last investment of its kind for a long time.*

Today in AB

On the schedule

The House is adjourned for the summer recess. While MLAs were originally scheduled to return to the legislature on October 22, Government House Leader **Jason Nixon** announced the legislature would reconvene on Tuesday, October 8.

The [revised legislative calendar](#) shows a one-week break starting November 10, with the fall session wrapping up on December 5.

Premier watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** has departed on a trade mission to New York City, Ohio and New Brunswick. The premier headed south of the border Saturday and will begin meetings today to promote Alberta to his fellow politicians as well as business leaders and investors. (He had a self-funded personal day in the Big Apple Sunday.)

Kenney was expected to be out door-knocking for the federal Conservative party in the Greater Toronto Area during the ongoing election campaign, but will miss at least one week of the campaign for his business trip. While Kenney has said his MLAs are free to stump for federal Conservatives on their own time, the earlier return to the legislature means they will be sitting two weeks before the federal election is held on October 21.

(More details on the premier's trip are below.)

On Friday, Kenney attended the opening of the University of Lethbridge's Science Commons.

The NDP pounced on [remarks](#) the premier made during a scrum about the Science Commons being the last provincially funded project of its kind for some time.

"I'll be honest, because we're going through a period of fiscal responsibility, we're not going to have a quarter of a billion dollars for these kinds of contributions for a while," Kenney told reporters.

Lethbridge—West NDP MLA **Shannon Phillips** [called](#) Kenney's comments "rude, smug and arrogant."

"He talks to us like he thinks he's a feudal lord," Phillips said.

Committees this week

The Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship [will come back](#) with its report on MLA pay, having gathered feedback from stakeholders. The committee will meet at 9 a.m. on Thursday in the Rocky Mountain Room of the Federal Building.

Fall session to start on October 8, two weeks earlier than scheduled

Lawmakers are being called back to the legislature two weeks early.

Government House Leader **Jason Nixon** announced Friday that the House will meet on October 8, much sooner than the originally scheduled date of October 22.

Nixon called on Speaker **Nathan Cooper** to recall the House so the government can fulfil its "ambitious legislative agenda." MLAs will now sit two weeks before the October 21 vote in the ongoing federal election.

"We promised Albertans during the election that we would work non-stop to pursue our platform commitments to bring jobs back to the province, eliminate red tape, improve public infrastructure and restore the Alberta Advantage," Nixon said in a news release. "I think I speak for all of our government members when I say that we are excited to get back to the business of fulfilling those promises."

Money talks — sooner than later

The change could push forward the release of the budget — the most anticipated piece of government businesses.

Opposition Leader **Rachel Notley** said she is happy to get back to work early, but called on the government to release its budget immediately. “Our schools and hospitals can’t wait any longer,” she [tweeted](#).

Meanwhile, Notley’s NDP is in the midst of a series of town halls, which are being held in advance of their release of an opposition shadow budget.

Kenney’s UCP government said budget consultations would follow the blue ribbon panel on the province’s finances led by former Saskatchewan NDP finance minister **Janice MacKinnon**, which saw the public release of its final report on September 3.

The panel widely recommended austerity measures, but there are some areas the UCP has promised to increase spending.

For example, last week Kenney announced the province would spend \$140 million over four years on addictions and mental health services, including funding for 4,000 new addiction treatment beds and spaces.

Meanwhile, Justice Minister **Doug Schweitzer** has been touring the province gathering feedback on rural crime. While the government’s job posting website says the province is in a state of restraint in hiring, it is still in the process of hiring additional judicial clerks and Crown prosecutors. The UCP’s throne speech also promised more police would be hired.

Bills, bills, bills

Nixon [told](#) the *Star Edmonton* he anticipates the government will table 14 to 17 bills in the session, more than the 13 government bills tabled during the summer session.

After a summer spent touring Alberta, Agriculture and Forestry Minister **Devin Dreeshen** is expected to table the “Farm Freedom and Safety Act,” which would roll back labour changes made in the NDP’s contentious *Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act*, which passed in 2015.

Mandatory Workers’ Compensation Board insurance for non-family farm workers was among the provisions Dreeshen hinted at axing.

The UCP’s throne speech signalled a forthcoming “Choice in Education Act,” which the government said would restore and expand school choice for parents and children.

Part of the province's planned legal arguments against federally imposed carbon pricing is the UCP's promise that Alberta will soon have its own tax on large emitters. The UCP government has pledged to replace the NDP's Carbon Competitiveness Incentive Regulation with a [Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction](#) (TIER) fund. The government set its implementation date for January 1, 2020, but has yet to pass legislation putting it into force.

The UCP government also plans to follow Ontario's lead by introducing the Saving the Girl Next Door Act. The proposed bill, which is focused on preventing sex trafficking, would allow victims of trafficking to get restraining orders against their traffickers. It would also create a civil tort to allow victims of human trafficking to sue traffickers.

Another promise made on the campaign trail was to bring in an Alberta version of Clare's Law, which has been enacted in Saskatchewan, Wales and England. The law, aimed at curbing domestic violence, allows police to disclose an individual's history of domestic violence upon request.

Today's events

September 16 at 10 a.m. — Edmonton

The UCP's treasury board committee is scheduled to meet in the cabinet room of the legislature.

September 16 at 1 p.m. — Clairmont

Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** will speak at the Minister's Seniors Service Awards nominee community celebration at the Lakeview Lodge Seniors Centre.

September 16 at 10 a.m. — Banff

Education Minister **Adriana LaGrange** and Infrastructure Minister **Prasad Panda** are scheduled to speak at the opening of the Banff Elementary School.

September 16 at 7 p.m. — Cheadle

Justice and Solicitor General Minister **Doug Schweitzer** and Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women Minister **Leela Aheer** will speak at a rural crime town hall at Cheadle Hall.

September 16 — New York, New York

Premier **Jason Kenney** will meet with Consul General of Canada **Phyllis Yaffe**, conduct interviews with U.S. business media outlets, give a speech at the Manhattan Institute (a right-wing think tank), and meet with representatives of "global investment and private equity firms."

Topics of conversation

- A [survey](#) out of the Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians are split on whether Liberal Leader **Justin Trudeau**'s pipeline approach has done too much, too little or is just right, but most think the government should build the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion.
 - Four in ten Canadians said Trudeau's government did not do enough to expand pipeline capacity, three in ten said he pushed too hard to build pipeline capacity, and one-quarter said the federal government struck the right balance.
 - Of those surveyed, 53 per cent said the federal government should move ahead with TMX, while 24 per cent said they should stop it.
 - Meanwhile, 63 per cent of Canadians said renewable energy is a huge opportunity for the country, while 52 per cent said they would like their province to invest in renewable energy over non-renewable energy if the federal government gave them the choice of funding.
 - Just over one-third (36 per cent) said Conservatives would be the best federal party for the oil and gas sector, while only 19 per cent said Liberals would be the best.
 - Support for TMX is highest in Alberta at 85 per cent, and lowest in Québec with 36 per cent in support of the project and 39 per cent opposed.

- The *Canadian Press* [obtained](#) a letter from Environment and Parks Deputy Minister **Bev Yee** outlining a restructuring of the department that will remove the province's climate change office, which was created by former NDP environment and parks minister **Shannon Phillips**.
 - The environmental monitoring and science division, an arm's length agency created by the previous Progressive Conservative government in 2014 and renewed by the NDP government, will also be closed, according to the letter.
 - A spokesperson from Environment and Parks said both the climate change office and the environmental monitoring and science division will be folded into the general ministry.
 - During Phillip's tenure, her official title included minister responsible for climate change. That moniker disappeared when UCP Environment and Parks Minister **Jason Nixon** took up the post.

- The war of words between Amnesty International and Premier **Jason Kenney** [continued](#) with a rebuttal from **Alex Neve**, the secretary general for Amnesty International Canada, to Kenney's response letter, issued last Thursday.
 - Neve doubled down on his concerns about potential human rights abuses stemming from the UCP government's "fight back strategy" and gave a point-by-point refutation to Kenney's initial response letter.
 - "We also did not say that Premier Kenney should refrain from defending the oil and gas industry; in fact, we noted that is his prerogative," Neve wrote.
 - Neve said Amnesty International is still the organization that campaigns to free prisoners of conscience, which the premier said he remembers fondly from high school.

- “Premier Kenney is derisive and mocking in his response, including frequent suggestions that we have lost our moral compass and are imagining human rights concerns where there are none,” Neve said.
- Federal Liberal Leader **Justin Trudeau** continued his campaign tradition of stopping in Alberta on Day 2 (something he did both in 2012 during his leadership campaign and in 2015 during the last federal election). On Thursday, he was in the Edmonton—Strathcona riding held by retiring NDP MP **Linda Duncan**, stumping for Liberal candidate **Eleanor Olszewski**.
 - Trudeau was met by protestors outside the event — both climate activists and pro-oil yellow vesters.
 - Pollsters project the seat will be a toss up, but it is the Liberals’ best shot in the province. The Liberals won four seats in Alberta in 2015, the highest in decades, but held three at the time parliament dissolved.
 - CBC’s **Aaron Wherry** [wrote](#) winning two or three seats in Alberta would be a victory in a province where the legacy of Trudeau’s father, former prime minister **Pierre Elliott Trudeau**, still casts a shadow despite the Liberal government’s support for the Trans Mountain pipeline.
- Alberta continues to mull over joining B.C.’s class action lawsuit against pharmaceutical companies over the opioid epidemic, the *Calgary Herald* [reports](#).

News briefs — Governmental

Office of the Premier

Premier **Jason Kenney** is in the Big Apple for a packed week of meetings that includes travel to Ohio Wednesday and New Brunswick on Saturday.

In NYC and Ohio, the premier will tout his *Job Creation Tax Cut* legislation, which he says will make Alberta’s corporate tax rate more competitive than 44 U.S. states by 2023. He will also champion his government’s red tape reduction strategy.

He will spend Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday meeting with investors, fund managers and business leaders before heading to The Buckeye State, where he will meet with energy stakeholders and tour the BP-Husky Toledo Refinery in suburban Oregon, Ohio.

On Friday, he will participate in a trilateral meeting with Ontario Premier **Doug Ford** and Ohio Governor **Mike DeWine** in Columbus, and afterwards hold a fireside chat at the North American Strategy for Competitiveness Network’s 2019 Continental Reunion.

On Saturday, Kenney will be in Saint John, New Brunswick, where he will deliver a keynote address on the future of Canada’s energy industry and eliminating interprovincial trade barriers at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce’s AGM.

He flies back to Calgary on Sunday. The mission will cost taxpayers \$46,000, including travel costs for Kenney, four political staff, one public servant and security detail.

Seniors and Housing ministry

Alberta's Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** is also on a mission. She will tour 13 northern Alberta communities this week to talk housing and seniors' supports.

"The challenges and opportunities Albertans face when accessing seniors supports and affordable housing vary by community," Pon said in a news release, adding that she is "eager to hear directly from seniors and housing organizations" about the unique needs in their municipalities.

The tour started on Sunday in Whitecourt and is scheduled to wrap up in Smoky Lake on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the NDP warns seniors will be at risk under the UCP's forthcoming budget if it tracks with the recommendations from the blue ribbon panel on finances.

The panel's report pointed out Alberta's health-care spending is 20 per cent higher than in British Columbia; the panel recommended getting Alberta's spending on par with that province.

But NDP Leader **Rachel Notley** and Seniors and Housing critic **Lori Sigurdson** say there are major differences between the provinces, especially when it comes to government-funded prescription fees. Seniors in B.C. pay an average of 25 per cent more out of pocket, a figure that climbs for those who are sicker.

"Cutting public funding for medications will mean more low- and middle-income seniors are forced to forgo their prescription drugs," Notley said in a news release. "That seriously hurts their health, undermines their quality of life and ultimately forces them to seek medical care in institutions rather than in their own homes."

Notley pointed to a number of health outcomes reported by the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) where Alberta outperforms B.C. for seniors care.

According to the CMA, there are twice as many seniors in long-term care in B.C. who experience pain and 50 per cent more seniors in B.C. in long-term care are given inappropriate antipsychotic medication.

The B.C. seniors advocate has also said Alberta seniors in long-term care are twice as likely to receive physiotherapy, occupational therapy or recreational therapy than seniors in B.C.