



## AB Today – Daily Report September 18, 2019

### Quotation of the day

“We’re not interested in trying to compete in any way. There’s lots of care to go around.”

*Anne Summach, incoming vice-president of the Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta, told reporters the hiring of additional nurse practitioners at Primary Care Networks won’t cause conflict with physicians.*

### Today in AB

#### On the schedule

The House is adjourned for the summer recess. The legislature is scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday, October 8.

#### Premier watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** met with investors, fund managers and business leaders in New York on Day 2 of his trade mission. He plans to meet with more investors in New York on Wednesday before travelling to Ohio.

### Province announces \$3 million in funding for nurse practitioners in under-served areas

Alberta is hiring up to 30 new nurse practitioners (NPs) to work in Primary Care Networks (PCNs) with the goal of addressing health-care stresses in rural and remote communities where

patients face long waits for physician care and little access to clinics on evenings and weekends.

Health Minister **Tyler Shandro** made the announcement Tuesday alongside **Anne Summach**, incoming Nurse Practitioner Association of Alberta vice-president, and pediatrician **Dr. Tami Masterson**, a physician lead at Covenant Health Foster Care Clinic and a member of Edmonton Southside Primary Care Network.

Using funds already approved in the UCP's interim supply budget, the soon-to-be hired NPs will be funded on an annual basis, with the potential of expanding of the role they play in the health-care system, Shandro said.

The government hopes most of the new positions will be filled by the end of the year.

Currently, there are 600 NPs registered in Alberta, and about 50 of them work in PCNs.

Summach said nurse practitioners are prepared to serve as patients' primary care providers in rural and remote areas where the province has faced difficulty attracting and retaining health professionals.

In the past, NPs have often been underused in support positions, according to Summach.

"We want our members to practice to their full scope," she said. "We're not interested in trying to compete in any way. There's lots of care to go around."

Recruitment has already begun in northern Alberta, Bonnyville, Bow Valley, Edmonton and Sherwood Park, where the hospital is looking for more NPs to work at its opioid dependency clinic.

In November, the previous NDP government expanded the scope of practice for NPs and registered nurses to allow them to prescribe certain drugs. NPs can also now set bone fractures and conduct x-rays, on top of their ability to diagnose patients, provide annual checkups and order tests.

The UCP's spring campaign platform suggested giving nurses the ability to bill the province for health-care services, similar to the current fee-for-service model used by physicians.

"It's not part of this announcement today, but it's something we're working on," Shandro said.

According to the Alberta government, NPs in the province [make an average salary](#) of \$92,569, although Summach pegged the salary average at \$120,000.

**Blue ribbon panel recommended increased reliance on NPs**

The announcement follows a recommendation from the blue ribbon panel on the province's finances, headed up by former NDP Saskatchewan finance minister **Janice MacKinnon**, which said Alberta Health should reduce the use of physicians and registered nurses and expand the use of NPs.

"I don't think physicians, the ones I speak to, see this as zero sum," Shandro told reporters. "I see this as supplementing family physicians in the system. This is an opportunity for us to be able to add health professionals to a health-care team."

The UCP's NP growth strategy tracks with an NDP plan crafted earlier this year.

In a March 2019 [report](#), the then-NDP government laid out plans for a Primary Care Network Nurse Practitioner Support Program, but it was never enacted.

At the time, the government wanted to spend \$38.5 million to hire 50 more NPs across Alberta over two years.

NDP Health critic **David Shepherd** said Tuesday he is happy to see the UCP following through with what his government started, but worries it's just a slice of good news ahead of drastic cuts.

Speaking to *AB Today* by phone from Grande Prairie, Shepherd said health providers are making cuts themselves ahead of the budget, which he expects will call for a 20 per cent reduction in spending in some areas.

"Any day that the government announces funding for more nurse practitioners is a good day for Albertans," Shepherd said in a news release. "However, today's promise of more nurse practitioners is just a drop in the bucket compared this government's panel recommendations for deep cuts to health care funding and Americanization of services."

Shandro has ordered two reviews on Alberta Health Services, both of which are being conducted by Ernst & Young. The first, launched on May 30, is designed to find cost savings and improve services within the overall system. Shandro expects an interim report this month.

The second is a review of the health information systems, with a final report due January 2020.

## **Salary restrictions extended, judge salary report rejected**

Three orders-in-council passed by the government last week take aim at public sector salaries.

The OICs, signed off on by the lieutenant governor at the direction of cabinet, extend the public service salary cap that was due to end on September 30 until December 31, [approve](#) a salary range maximum for deputy ministers and senior officials, and throw out recommendations for increasing salaries for judges.

The announcement precedes a Thursday meeting of the Standing Committee on Resource Management, where committee members are scheduled to review the *Public Sector Transparency Act*.

Cabinet [crafted](#) a 40-page OIC to reject the independent Alberta Judicial Compensation Commission's 2017 recommendation to hike judges' salaries by 8.3 per cent on the basis that the commission "failed to give proper weight to certain expert economic evidence" and "significantly understated the severity and duration of the negative effects of the recent recession."

Ignoring the commission's recommendations could prompt legal action. The Alberta Provincial Judges' Association has taken the province to court over similar moves in the past.

In a statement, Justice Minister **Doug Schweitzer** said, "Alberta does not support increasing salaries for provincial judges and Queen's Bench Masters in Chambers ... from their current level of almost \$300,000 a year," adding that the move would not "adequately reflect the serious fiscal challenges facing the province."

## Today's events

### **September 18 at 9 a.m. — Edmonton**

The UCP's communities and families committee will meet in the cabinet room of the legislature.

### **September 18 at 10:15 a.m. — New York, New York**

Premier **Jason Kenney** will hold a teleconference with media from the Big Apple.

### **September 18 at 11 a.m. — Fort Chipewyan**

Transportation Minister **Ric McIver** will speak at the opening of the Fort Chipewyan water treatment plant.

### **September 18 at noon — Red Deer**

The Alberta Union of Provincial Employees will hold an information picket at the Red Deer Provincial Building on the *Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act*.

### **September 18 at 1 p.m. — Edmonton**

UCP MLA for Fort Saskatchewan—Vegreville **Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk** will declare September Arthritis Awareness Month at the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce.

### **September 18 at 6 p.m. — Edmonton**

Agriculture and Forestry Minister **Devin Dreeshen** will speak at the CropLife Canada board meeting at the Delta Edmonton Centre.

## Topics of conversation

- In a pair of decisions released Tuesday, the B.C. Court of Appeal ruled the conditions for the coastal province's approval of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project [could be reconsidered](#). B.C.'s environmental assessment certificate and the 37 conditions it required of the pipeline expansion project are now subject to "reconsideration and consequent adjustment," in light of changes the National Energy Board made in its February reconsideration report.
  - While the project does not legally require a certificate from B.C. to proceed, the province's NDP leadership said Tuesday it will conduct a review of the project's original environmental assessment stamp of approval, which was granted by the province's former Liberal government.
  - "It's not our goal to use this court decision as a tactic," B.C.'s Environment and Climate Change Strategy Minister **George Heyman** told reporters yesterday afternoon. "We intend to take the direction of the court seriously. We intend to do the job responsibly and within the laws of Canada and British Columbia."
  - On Twitter, Alberta Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** said "nothing in the ruling should delay the current construction schedule," adding that "In the current environment — including severe instability overseas — any potential delay in the construction of this pipeline is deeply disturbing."
  - The court cases leading to the decisions were filed by the [City of Vancouver](#) and the [Squamish Nation](#). The court rejected one aspect of the Squamish Nation's claim, concluding that B.C. "met its duty to consult and accommodate Squamish."
- An Angus Reid poll [shows](#) 73 per cent Albertans consider money laundering to be a problem for the province.
  - [Findings](#) from a "dirty money" report commissioned by the British Columbia government estimate nearly \$50 billion in criminal cash was laundered in Alberta from 2011 to 2015.
  - Solicitor General **Doug Schweitzer** dismissed the report when it was released in May, claiming its economic modelling was not "completely reliable."
  - "We use intelligence from front-line law enforcement agencies, not data we can't verify. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to protect law-abiding Albertans," Schweitzer said at the time.
  - Sixty per cent of Albertan respondents told Angus Reid their province should launch an investigation similar to B.C.'s dirty money report.
- Red tape reduction suggestions are coming in fast and furious. Public submissions to the government's [website](#) seeking suggestions on making the province's business climate more efficient range from serious to outlandish.

- Both the *Globe and Mail* and CBC obtained a 552-page page listing of the roughly 3,200 suggestions the government has received so far.
  - One Albertan [suggested](#) selling Lloydminster to China and investing the money in the Heritage Fund in order to get rid of inefficiencies caused by the unique characteristics of the town being split between Alberta and Saskatchewan.
  - Other suggestions [include](#) using the band Nickelback as leverage in the pipeline dispute with B.C., eliminating paper Christmas cards sent by ministers, and removing all analog wall clocks from government buildings.
- Global oil prices sank Tuesday after reports that the Saudi Arabian oil processing facility attacked by a drone Saturday will be back online in weeks, rather than months as originally projected.
    - Saudi Arabia’s energy minister said oil production capacity in the kingdom will reach 11 million barrels per day by the end of the month and 12 million barrels per day by the end of November.
    - By the end of the trading day, the price of West Texas Intermediate had fallen by 5.66 per cent compared to Monday, landing at \$59.34 a barrel.
- United Conservative Party MLA for Calgary—Fish Creek **Richard Gotfried** [suggested](#) telling individuals soliciting donations for the University of Alberta to “pound sand and get their heads out of dark places.”
    - Gotfried responded to a tweet from a University of Alberta alumnus saying she will no longer donate to the post-secondary institution after they awarded **David Suzuki** an honorary degree.
    - Gotfried’s remarks come in the wake of the blue ribbon panel’s suggestion that Alberta’s post-secondary institutions should be seeking out more non-governmental sources of revenue.
    - They also come as the UCP calls on all post-secondary institutions in the province to adopt the Chicago Principles of free speech.

## News briefs — Governmental

### Ministry of Energy

Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** is headed north to Alaska for the quarterly meeting of The Energy Council.

The Energy Council, a group of lawmakers from 13 energy-producing U.S. states and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, will meet in Anchorage from September 19 to 21.

On Thursday, Savage will meet with The Energy Council’s executive committee and the Centre for Legislative Energy and Environmental Research. She will also meet with state representatives and senators from North Dakota.

On Friday she will meet with senior delegates from Texas and stakeholders for the Alaska-Alberta energy project. The proposed oil-by-rail project would ship Alberta oil from Fort McMurray to Valdez, Alaska. Calgary-based Van Horne Institute [conducted](#) a pre-feasibility study in 2016.

On Saturday, Savage will give an address to delegates at The Energy Council panel breakfast before flying home to Alberta.

The minister, her chief of staff and a public servant will all fly economy class, according to the government. The total cost of flights, meals and ground transportation for the trip is \$13,300.