



AB Today – Daily Report September 23, 2019

Quotation of the day

“Alberta can remain an energy leader if we pioneer the transition to green energy.”

Kristine Fredrick, a grade nine student from Edmonton who took part in Friday’s Global Climate Strike demonstration at the legislature, calls on the government to support the transition of fossil fuel workers to renewable industries.

Today in AB

On the schedule

The House is adjourned for two more weeks of summer recess. MLAs will reconvene on Tuesday, October 8.

Committees this week

The Standing Committee on Alberta’s Economic Future [will meet](#) in the Rocky View room of the Federal Building at 9 a.m. on Tuesday to discuss the 2017 annual report of the Property Rights Advocate.

Meanwhile, the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship is seeking public feedback for its review of the *Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act* until October 1. The committee will meet on October 4 to discuss feedback and the review.

In the Legislature

A Global Climate Strike march — part of an internationally coordinated series of strikes — began at the legislature on Friday, where protestors staged a die-in. According to Climate Justice Edmonton, about 100 students showed up.

The students called on the government to end subsidies to the fossil fuel industry, support an economic transition to renewable energy, and end rights violations against Indigenous communities in the building of energy infrastructure.

“We’re here today to call upon all levels of our government for a just transition to 100 per cent renewable energy by 2030 that protects workers and upholds Indigenous rights,” said **Claire Morrison**, a Grade 11 student at Harry Ainlay, in a news release.

Federal Green Party Leader **Elizabeth May** was in Calgary on Friday, where she [participated](#) in a die-in.

On Sunday, an inter-faith coalition including members of the Temple Beth Ora, Al Rashid Mosque and the Anglican Church held a candlelight climate vigil on the legislature grounds. Faith leaders led attendees through prayer, songs and reflection on climate change.

Premier watch

On Friday, Premier **Jason Kenney** and Ontario Premier **Doug Ford** [participated in a fireside chat](#) at the North American Strategy for Competitiveness in Columbus, Ohio.

Kenney told the crowd he is engaged in a friendly competition with Ford when it comes to reducing red tape and advancing the tech sector in their respective provinces.

“Right now, I’m concerned there’s reverse momentum in North American economic co-operation,” Kenney said in reference to Buy American policies, which have ramped up under U.S. President **Donald Trump**.

Ontario’s Energy Minister **Greg Rickford** was also on hand for Kenney’s tour of the BP-Husky Energy refinery in Toledo. Rickford echoed both premiers’ support for Enbridge’s Line 5, [tweeting](#), “We stand shoulder to shoulder [with] Alberta in our support for the oil and gas industry and critical infrastructure like Enbridge’s Line 5.”

On Saturday, Kenney was in Saint John, New Brunswick, to deliver a keynote address at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce’s AGM. There, the premier announced he was lifting more trade restrictions. (See below for more details.)

He also dropped in at a Conservative Party of Canada barbecue in Westfield, New Brunswick, to support local candidates **John Williamson** and **Rodney Weston**, both former colleagues of Kenney when he was a federal Conservative MP. Kenney has previously said he will campaign

for federal Conservative candidates during the current election if and when it doesn't interfere with his duties as premier.

Release of UCP political staffer pay leads to political war of words over government prudence

The government quietly released its salary disclose list for political staffers on Friday.

In some cases, UCP staffers made more than their NDP predecessors, and in others they made less, leading to a bout of rhetorical back and forth among political players over which party is more fiscally responsible.

The United Conservative government's highest paid political staff are Premier **Jason Kenney's** principal secretary **Howard Anglin** and chief of staff **Jamie Huckabay**. Both will take home a base salary of \$224,138 per year.

Former premier **Rachel Notley's** chief of staff **Nathan Rotman** earned roughly the same as Huckabay, at \$225,000 annually, according to [cached documents](#) from a contract signed in October 2017. But Notley's principal secretary **Jim Rutkowski** made \$195,000, almost \$30,000 less than Anglin, who was previously deputy chief of staff to ex-prime minister **Stephen Harper**.

The contracts were [posted](#) individually and are based on a bi-weekly pay schedule.

Several top Kenney staffers share the same base pay: **Katy Merrifield**, executive director of communication and planning for the premier; **Patrick Donnelly**, executive director in the premier's southern Alberta office; **Matt Wolf**, executive director of issues management; and the premier's principal adviser **David Knight Legg** are all earning \$194,253 annually.

On Twitter, Wolf [said](#) the UCP government has 135 staff, fewer than the 177 staffers the NDP employment last year. Wolf also said the UCP government is spending 21 per cent less on staffing costs in the premier's office and ministries.

His claim is difficult to verify.

While the NDP made salary information about all its political staff public, the UCP only posted contracts for staffers earning \$111,395 or more per year, the threshold required by the *Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act*.

Edmonton—Glenora NDP MLA **Sarah Hoffman** said in a news release “It's a bit rich for the UCP to give massive raises to their party faithful after 6,000 workers lost their job in the resource sector last month and the government can't even afford to sit at a table with nurses and teachers.”

Hoffman called on the government to release the pay list of all political staffers, not just those covered by the act.

“There is nothing transparent about this list,” Hoffman said. “We have no idea how many political staff they’ve hired and what they’re being paid. The UCP need to come clean with Albertans and show just how much salaries have gone up for Kenney’s inner circle.”

The all-party Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship is currently reviewing public sector compensation for agencies, boards and commissions. The sunshine list for non-political public servants is released on June 30 and December 31 each year.

Today’s events

September 23 at 9 a.m. — *Calgary*

Premier **Jason Kenney** will hold a media availability at the McDougall Centre.

September 23 at 10 a.m. — *St. Albert*

Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women Minister **Leela Aheer** will be at St. Albert Place to announce the location of the Feature Celebration sites and events for the Alberta Culture Days programming.

September 23 at noon — *Siksika Nation*

Premier **Jason Kenney**, Indigenous Relations Minister **Rick Wilson**, Kainai Nation Chief **Roy Fox**, Piikani Nation Chief **Stan Grier** and Siksika Nation Chief **Joe Weasel Child** will renew a government-to-government protocol agreement.

September 23 at 1 p.m. — *Grande Prairie*

Transportation Minister **Ric Mclver** will attend a grand opening celebration for the Highway 43 overpass near Grand Prairie along with Finance Minister **Travis Toews** and MLA **Tracy Allard**, both of whom represent local ridings. City of Grande Prairie Mayor **Bill Given**, County of Grande Prairie Reeve **Leanne Beaupre** and representatives from the trucking and highway construction industry will also be in tow.

September 23 at 6:15 p.m. — *Edmonton*

Service Alberta Minister **Nate Glubish** will speak at a “housewarming” for BioWare’s new offices in EPCOR Tower.

September 23 at 7 p.m. — *Drayton Valley*

Justice Minister **Doug Schweitzer** will speak at the Clean Energy Technology Centre as part of his rural crime tour.

Topics of conversation

- A [report](#) from the Conference Board of Canada, commissioned by Alberta's Advanced Education ministry, says Alberta is in the best shape in the country when it comes to skilled labour, thanks to its young population, but that the province needs to stay on top of automation.
 - The report looks ahead to 2040, when labour shortages are anticipated to grow as the working population ages — the so-called silver wave.
 - Despite Alberta's strong position, the majority of its employers surveyed are concerned about a loss of skilled labour in the next three to five years.
 - The survey found 58 per cent of Alberta's labour force age 15 and older hold some level of post-secondary credential, a number expected to grow to 64 per cent by 2025.

- The Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms (JCCF) announced it has dropped its legal challenge against the NDP-era **Bill 24**, *An Act to Protect Gay-Straight Alliances*, which amended the *School Act* in November 2017 to make it illegal for schools to out students who were members of gay-straight alliances.
 - In 2018, the JCCF launched a constitutional challenge, saying the change violated religious freedoms and parental rights.
 - The JCCF is dropping the legal battle because the UCP government's amendments to the *Education Act*, passed in July, addressed its concerns.
 - NDP critic for LGBTQ2S+ Issues **Janis Irwin** said the NDP will continue its fight for youth.
 - "Rather than stand up for vulnerable LGBTQ2S+ youth who just want to feel safe and supported at school, **Jason Kenney** and his government sided with a homophobic far-right lobby group led by his close friend [JCCF president] **John Carpay**, a man who once compared the pride flag to the Nazi swastika," Irwin said in a statement.

- Advanced Education Minister **Demetrios Nicolaides** [told reporters](#) that rumoured cuts to post-secondary institutions, including a \$38-million cut to NAIT, are "completely false."
 - Rumours of cuts were swirling after the MacKinnon panel on finances recommended increasing tuition, decreasing government grants to post-secondary schools and incentivizing commercialized partnerships.

- NDP MLA for Edmonton—City Centre **David Shepherd** launched a podcast called *The Heard*, which is billed as a weekly, behind-the-scenes look at Alberta politics.
 - "I talk to a lot of people from all walks of life who want to know more about the issues they hear about every day and how that connects to the work we do as MLAs," Shepherd said in a news release. "That's what *The Heard* is going to be about — a chance to talk to Albertans about why and how we fight for the things we do, why we oppose things like massive tax cuts for profitable corporations, or

why we stayed up for 46 hours to filibuster a bill we believe will harm LGBTQ2S+ students and teachers.”

- The first episode focused on the education file with guest NDP Education critic **Sarah Hoffman**.
- Construction on the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion is on the horizon as the federally owned company [showed off](#) 550 kilometres of pipe being stockpiled in B.C. and Alberta, about 55 per cent of the total pipe needed for the project.
- Seasonally adjusted retail sales were up 0.7 per cent in July in Alberta after two months of contraction, according to Statistics Canada, driven in part by motor vehicle and parts dealers.
 - Despite the bump from previous months, July retail sales were down 0.5 per cent compared to 2018.
 - Non-seasonally adjusted numbers show monthly sales in Calgary grew by 1.8 per cent in July, but dropped 0.9 per cent in the Edmonton area.
 - Cannabis sales continue to soar in the province. In July, sales increased by 15.8 per cent. Since cannabis was legalized in October 2018, \$145 million worth of product has been sold in Alberta, accounting for 20.4 per cent of nationwide sales.

News briefs — Governmental

Office of the Premier

Premier **Jason Kenney** announced the government is axing eight additional exceptions under the Canadian Free Trade Agreement.

Combined with the 13 CETA exceptions Kenney repealed in July, more than 80 per cent of the province’s exceptions have been shown the door, with only four remaining in place.

Before Kenney took office, Alberta was the province with the third highest number of exceptions — and now has the least.

“The removal of these exceptions will strengthen interprovincial trade in Canada and mean great things for Alberta’s economy,” Kenney said, reiterating his call for all other provinces and territories to follow suit and “end the economic Balkanization of our country.”

“Alberta is embracing our ‘get ‘er done’ spirit by acting on, not talking about, free trade,” the premier added.

Eliminated exceptions

- Canadians — not just Albertans — are now eligible to own both public and controlled lands in the province;
- Alberta will no longer restrict grazing permits from people or corporations outside of Alberta;
- Canadian residents can now hold big game permits and guide designations, rather than only Alberta residents;
- The government is letting private power purchase agreements expire on January 1, 2021, opening the door to power companies from other jurisdictions;
- A never-used exception that allowed Alberta to retaliate against discriminatory practices against Alberta booze is rolled back, but the province is still authorized to launch legal or trade challenges, if needed;
- Protectionist policies on the renewable energy sector are lifted; and
- A retaliation mechanism for Alberta's energy sector was lifted, but it does not stop the province from using legislative mechanisms such as **Bill 12**, the “turn off the taps” legislation, according to the government.

Narrowed exceptions

- The province also eliminated a clause that allowed employment numbers to be restricted in the alcoholic beverage sector; and
- The government eliminated two paragraphs in the existing forest resources and products exception, removing limits on the type of legal entities and employment in the sector.

The province is keeping four exceptions, including two that allow the Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis commission to apply a markup on alcohol.

Ministry of Justice and Solicitor General

Justice Minister **Doug Schweitzer** issued a statement thanking Alberta sheriffs after the Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods (SCAN) unit temporarily shut down three drug houses last week.

Sheriffs used court orders to close two houses in Calgary and one in Edmonton that had been sites for drug trafficking.

“Illicit drugs are a scourge that plague our communities and harm Albertans — from the violence perpetrated by the criminals who sell them to the crimes committed by those under their influence,” Schweitzer said in a news release. “Our government is committed to helping people get off drugs while ensuring those who traffic in misery face the consequences.”

In 2018, SCAN shut down five drug houses.

Unlike RCMP or municipal police forces, which lay criminal charges against individuals, SCAN's surveillance sheriffs gather evidence and investigate property offences.

The court orders allow a house to be shut down for 90 days and for conditions to be imposed on the property for a number of years.

Surveillance sheriffs are one of four types of sheriffs in the province. The others are law courts and legislature sheriffs, communications officers, and traffic sheriffs.

Funding announcements

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Seniors and Housing

- The province announced \$200,000 in funding for the Brenda Stafford Foundation to create a guide for dementia-friendly communities. The ministry also announced \$100,000 in grants to the Covenant Health's Network of Excellence in Seniors' Health and Wellness for six innovation projects designed to improve the quality of life for Albertans with dementia.