



AB Today – Daily Report October 2, 2019

Quotation of the day

“I’m getting tired of *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* editorials snarking at those parochial Albertans.”

Premier Jason Kenney slams the coverage of two Toronto-based newspapers while speaking to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday.

Today in AB

On the schedule

The house reconvenes on Tuesday, October 8.

Premier watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** gave a speech at the Calgary Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday, a favourite locale of the new premier and his cabinet.

Kenney also addressed the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in St. John on September 20. Earlier in September, Finance Minister **Travis Toews** delivered speeches at both the Edmonton and Calgary Chambers of Commerce in the same week.

Today’s events

October 2 at 9 a.m. — Edmonton

The UCP’s Communities and Families Committee will meet in the cabinet room of the legislature.

October 2 at 12:30 p.m. — Calgary

Health Minister **Tyler Shandro** and Calgary—Klein UCP MLA **Jeremy Nixon** will make an announcement on tobacco and vaping reduction at the McDougall Centre.

Premier says TIER fund, war room announcements coming within weeks

Alberta Premier **Jason Kenney** gave a keynote address to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday, recapping his government's "open for business" agenda while telling the business crowd that the province is in a difficult fiscal position with the spectre of recession looming.

"We are facing headwinds in the global economy, with many worrying indications of a potential global recession — the dreaded inverted yield curve," Kenney said, a reference to the bond market scenario used by economists to predict economic downturns that has appeared in the U.S. in recent months.

But, he added, Albertans are "never faint of heart."

Kenney laid out the poor state of the province's finances heading into the fall budget, including plunging after-tax incomes, job losses, bankruptcies and a lack of business investment. The premier repeated his achievements from the summer session, when the United Conservative government authorized a corporate tax cut, set red tape reduction goals, and reformed labour laws with the goal of getting the economy back on track.

The premier told the audience, which included oil and gas stakeholders, that his government's energy war room, now dubbed the "Alberta Energy Information Centre," will be up and running within weeks.

The government war room will "work in tandem" with the Canadian energy industry to inform targeted advertising to "opinion leaders," according to Kenney.

Kenney said more details on the UCP's promised Technology Innovation and Environmental Research (TIER) fund will be released at the end of the month, post-budget. The TIER fund will levy a tax on heavy industrial emitters — companies that produce more than 100,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year, which includes 55 per cent of Alberta employers.

Revenue generated from the fund will be funnelled towards research and technology to reduce commercial greenhouse gas emissions.

When asked about the Alberta Investor Tax Credit, created to encourage innovation startups, Kenney said his government is more focused on creating better macroeconomic conditions.

“The one-third reduction in the corporate income tax rate is orders of magnitude more powerful than any boutique tax credit,” Kenney said.

Topics of conversation

- Standard and Poor’s [affirmed](#) its A+ credit rating for Alberta and said the province’s outlook remains stable. The New York-based ratings agency said the change in the government’s fiscal policy under the UCP will mean a restraint in spending.
 - “We expect that that budgetary performances will improve in the next two years, leading to near-balanced operating results by fiscal 2021 or 2022, though the challenges facing the Province of Alberta’s economically important oil and gas sector will continue to weigh on the province’s revenues,” the S&P Global report states.
 - The credit rating agency added it expects the province’s revenues to continue to be volatile as a result of the oil and gas industry. The report predicts bottlenecks in capacity until 2021.
 - Alberta was [previously downgraded](#) by S&P three times between December 2015 and May 2017. Earlier this year, the City of Edmonton [was downgraded](#) by the agency for the first time in 15 years.
- **Toby Boulet**, a Lethbridge resident whose son **Logan Boulet** was killed in the Humboldt Bronco bus crash, called the government’s consideration of relaxing rules for semi-truck drivers on farms “disgusting news.”
 - “The present Alberta government has quickly forgotten about the Broncos,” Boulet [wrote on Twitter](#). “This makes me so sad!”
 - Agriculture and Forestry Minister **Devin Dreeshen** told agricultural workers at a town hall meeting in August, where he was gathering feedback on changes to the farm labour law, that the province may allow modifications for farm workers, the *Globe and Mail* [reported last week](#).
 - The previous NDP government brought in mandatory entry-level training for Class 1 and 2 licences following the crash in which a semi-truck driver from Alberta ran a stop sign, crashing into the coach bus carrying the Humboldt Broncos hockey team, killing 16 and injuring 13.
 - The UCP has also moved to restore non-governmental driving testers, a reversal of an NDP policy change made in the wake of the crash.
- Seniors and Housing Minister **Josephine Pon** and Associate Minister of Red Tape Reduction **Grant Hunter** announced applications and documentation for seniors’ financial assistance programs will now be accepted online.
 - Previously, forms, banking information and receipts could only be faxed, mailed or dropped off in person.

- The ministers made the announcement ahead of a flag raising at the Federal Building marking the International Day of Older Persons.
- The Fraser Institute [published a report](#) arguing that there is no correlation between secondary school class sizes and test scores.
 - The study, which weighed average provincial class sizes against test scores, found that in 2015 Saskatchewan had Canada's smallest class sizes, an average of 22.6 students, but its students scored the lowest in reading, math and science.
 - In Quebec, where class sizes averaged at 30.1, students had the highest math scores. Alberta, which had the second-highest class size with 28.5 students, had the highest science scores.
 - The NDP has warned school boards are considering laying off teachers because of budget uncertainty.

News briefs — Governmental

Ministry of Labour and Immigration

Labour and Immigration Minister **Jason Copping** announced the launch of an "[employee labour relations support program](#)" to help workers access information on union certification and decertification processes.

The website links to information bulletins from the Alberta Labour Relations Board and allows the public to submit questions to the government.

The program was part of the labour reform bill passed in July, *An Act to Make Alberta Open for Business*.

"This program is part of our commitment to restore balance in the workplace by giving workers access to factual information and, in some cases, supports or advice from a neutral source," Copping said.

Alberta Federation of Labour president **Gil McGowan** [told the Star Edmonton](#) he suspects the government's goal is to "encourage people to decertify their unions," a characterization Copping's office denies.

News briefs — Non-governmental

Public Interest Alberta

For the first time since 2010, Alberta's minimum wage did not increase on October 1.

Close to a quarter of a million workers — 245,300 — earned minimum wage during the last fiscal year. Another 277,500 earned less than \$16 per hour, according to Public Interest Alberta's [2019 Alberta Low Wage Report](#).

The majority of low-wage workers are women and more than three-quarters are over the age of 19.

The NDP increased minimum wage to \$15 per hour on October 1, 2018, hiked from \$10.20 when the party formed government. Since taking office, the UCP lowered the minimum wage to \$13 for students under 18 who work less than 28 hours per week.

“The minimum wage freeze means a small pay cut this year, and if it continues over time, it will result in a big pay cut to the lowest wage workers who are already struggling,” said **Joel French**, executive director of Public Interest Alberta. “We’re missing a key opportunity to put more money into the pockets of Alberta’s lowest wage workers. A raise for them would not only boost our economy, but would also allow more people to live with dignity and security.”

The NDP did not signal plans to increase minimum wage this year if it had won re-election.