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Quotation of the day

“What struck me was an atmosphere of arrogance and, on the other hand, a culture of fear that did not allow for proper disclosure.”

*Public Interest Commissioner **Marianne Ryan** describes the culture created by the top officials at the Alberta Energy Regulator that led to “gross mismanagement and waste of public resources.”*

Today in AB

On the schedule

The fall session of the Alberta legislature kicks off tomorrow, Tuesday October 8. In preparation, Government House Leader **Jason Nixon** will provide a briefing to media on the United Conservative government’s legislative plans for the nine-week session this morning.

Committees this week

The Standing Committee on Legislative Offices is scheduled to meet on Wednesday evening to discuss a pay review for officers of the Legislative Assembly.

Premier Watch

Premier **Jason Kenney** campaigned in Ontario over the weekend, stumping for Conservative Leader **Andrew Scheer** at 23 stops in Ottawa and the Greater Toronto Area..

Kenney lent his credentials as former multiculturalism and immigration minister in **Stephen Harper**'s government to 18 ridings in Ottawa, the City of Toronto and the surrounding, vote-rich 905 region.

While in the Ottawa region, the premier made a [whistlestop](#) at **Brian St. Louis**' campaign office in Nepean on Friday, and went door knocking with Kanata—Carleton candidate **Justina McCaffrey**.

"First time I've ever been offered a dram of whisky at a door; accepted as it's the polite thing to do," Kenney [wrote](#). "Everywhere I go, Ontarians are telling me they love Alberta, understand the tough times we're going through, and want to see pipelines built. Very gratifying to hear!"

Later in the day, he attended a restaurant [meeting](#) with Somali business owners alongside Ottawa West—Nepean candidate **Abdul Abdi**.

By Saturday morning, Kenney was campaigning in the Toronto area with Thornhill MP **Peter Kent** and York Centre [candidate Rachel Wilson](#). He also had lunch with volunteers at the campaign office of Willowdale candidate **Daniel Lee** and spoke at four synagogues in the area.

In the afternoon, he made a stop in Ford Nation territory, campaigning in the Etobicoke Centre riding with local candidate **Ted Opitz**. (Despite his significant political following in the area, Ontario Premier **Doug Ford** has not been asked to stump for the federal Tories, in Etobicoke or elsewhere, during the campaign.)

Kenney also visited Parkdale—High Park candidate **Adam Pham**, and Vaughan—Woodbridge candidate **Teresa Kruze**.

In the evening, he attended an Ahmadiyya mosque and community centre in Vaughan with King—Vaughan candidate **Anna Roberts**, [followed by](#) a Navaratri celebration with members of the Gujarati community at a Garba in Brampton with Brampton—North candidate **Arpan Khanna**.

On Sunday, Kenney met with members of the Iraqi Chaldean, Egypt Coptic Christian and Afro-Caribbean communities with Mississauga-area CPC candidates.

Simon Jefferies, spokesperson for the Conservative Party campaign, [told the *Globe and Mail*](#), "As the Premier of Alberta, Premier Kenney is able to share a compelling message about the consequences of **Justin Trudeau**'s policies."

Kenney's campaign stint [reopened speculation](#) that the premier may still harbour federal ambitions.

‘Unprecedented’ trio of investigations uncover conflicts of interest, gross mismanagement of public funds and oversight failures at AER

Three investigations into the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) found "gross mismanagement and waste of public funds" by **Jim Ellis**, the agency's former CEO, that left taxpayers on the hook for \$2.3 million.

Alberta Ethics Commissioner **Marguerite Trussler**, Public Interest Commissioner **Marianne Ryan** and [Auditor General Doug Wylie](#) held a joint news conference Friday to release damning findings from their respective offices.

At the centre of the allegations was the AER's relationship with the now-defunct non-profit International Centre of Regulatory Excellence (ICORE), which AER established in 2017 as an independent entity to offer training to international energy regulators.

Each watchdog received complaints from whistleblowers in 2018 about the conduct of Ellis and other executives and board members of ICORE, which Trussler found was primarily being used to advance their future career prospects.

Trussler also found that Ellis violated the *Conflict of Interests Act* through ICORE activities "in that he furthered his own interest and improperly furthered the private interest of three other employees."

Meanwhile, the auditor general and the public interest commissioner both found that establishing ICORE as a separate external entity fell outside the AER's mandate, and that taxpayer money was inappropriately spent on ICORE.

In his audit, Wylie estimated that ICORE activities cost the AER \$5.4 million and, with \$3.1 million recouped, that the regulator lost \$2.3 million.

Ryan, however, said there was no evidence to support the idea Ellis benefited financially from ICORE's activities, and ruled out referring the matter to the solicitor general for potential criminal charges.

The investigations determined Ellis was using ICORE so he and other employees of the AER could score contract work or employment once their jobs with the regulator were over, despite legal advice warning it would be a conflict of interest.

The reports show the province's energy regulator allowed what the public interest commissioner called a "reckless and wilful disregard" of cash and resources.

Wylie told reporters the "culture of fear" he saw evidence of during his investigation was "unexpected."

Trussler said she was struck by how “blatant” the behaviour was.

The investigation was hampered by a lack of proper financial reporting and by the fact that the AER and ICORE’s business was conducted on since-deleted ICORE email addresses and through text messages.

The investigation required technology to recover deleted emails and texts.

Investigators also found whistleblowers had tried to express concerns internally before bringing them forward to a public investigation. Interviews and text messages showed an attempt to track down the whistleblower, who Ryan said, remains anonymous.

This is the first time three independent officers of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta have conducted investigations stemming from whistleblower complaints and public complaints.

If Ellis was still employed, Ryan said she would have recommended his resignation.

Former energy minister spoke directly with CEO, not board

Former NDP energy minister **Marg McCuaig Boyd** also failed to provide proper oversight of the AER, according to the auditor general, who said Boyd met regularly with Ellis rather than the board and its former chair.

While McCuaig-Boyd said she did not want ICORE to be a provincial corporation, and said she didn’t want industry levies collected on behalf of the AER to be used for ICORE, she never confirmed those things did not happen.

The former energy minister told the auditor general she had concerns over the board’s lack of expertise, and the AG’s report shows ICORE withheld important information from the minister.

The board, which is supposed to have eight members, often operated with only five and at one point in 2016 was down to three members.

UCP government reaction

“Public servants are beholden to the taxpayers they serve, and we cannot condemn the practices noted in these reports strongly enough,” said Energy Minister **Sonya Savage** and Environment and Parks Minister **Jason Nixon**, in a joint statement released Friday.

The UCP government fulfilled a campaign commitment by scrapping the AER’s board and appointing an interim board in September, and launched an investigation, which is still ongoing.

Alberta Energy Regulator reaction

The AER, in a statement, acknowledged “regrettable actions” by its former leadership.

“While ICORE was originally established to provide training to AER employees and support information sharing across jurisdictions, it is clear now that a small group of senior leaders used AER resources in a way that is unacceptable,” the regulator said. “These individuals are no longer employed at the AER.”

The public interest commissioner is continuing her investigation.

Premier, UCP deny latest allegations of voter fraud in CBC report

Premier **Jason Kenney** and representatives of the United Conservative Party have [denied](#) new details of alleged voter fraud during the party’s 2017 leadership race, which put former MP and current Conservative Party of Canada candidate **Tim Uppal** at the centre of a plot using voting kiosks and VPNs to circumvent rules and get Kenney elected as the leader of the UCP.

Kenney, responding to the allegations reported by the CBC, told reporters over the weekend that he could not control the activities of the hundreds of volunteers or thousands of supporters.

“While the CBC story alleges that a small number of members willingly turned over their PINs, Kenney headquarters did not and would not advise a member to provide their PIN to anyone else — willingly or otherwise,” the UCP told CBC in a statement. “That said, a campaign obviously could not control whether a member consented to letting someone else vote on their behalf.”

Campaign insiders [who spoke to CBC](#) revealed details of how the party used voting kiosks to log votes for Kenney using PINs from UCP members that were assigned to potentially fraudulent email addresses.

Former president of the Pakistan Canada Association in Edmonton **Tariq Chaudhry**, who has complained that he was never repaid for \$6,000 in expenses he incurred for hosting a number of Eid banquets to allow Kenney to mingle with community members, says he also signed up people for memberships and volunteered at voting booths.

He told CBC he would phone UCP members of the Pakistani community to ask for their PINs in order to cast a ballot for Kenney. Chaudry would then pass the PINs to Uppal, who passed them to volunteers to cast ballots.

According to the CBC, the UCP had set up a voting kiosk in southeast Edmonton with the intent of helping members who needed assistance to vote online. Chaudry said following a panicked call from Kenney’s Calgary campaign team on day two of the leadership race’s three day vote, the kiosk closed and was moved to a private residence.

At the home, instead of computers, volunteers used phones with VPNs, which allowed the volunteers to use a unique IP address for each vote, despite multiple votes being cast on the same device.

Meanwhile, **Robert Such**, who acted as financial agent for **Brian Jean** — Kenney’s main political rival in the leadership race — alleges the Jean campaign’s vote-monitoring dashboard went down and by the time it was back up 90 per cent of eligible voters had cast ballots.

“That’s like, oh, you get the sinking feeling in your stomach,” Such said to the CBC.

Former PC MLA and UCP candidate **David Dorward**’s company, Dorward & Co, audited the leadership vote, which proved that only one vote was cast for each authorized PIN.

But Such said the audit could not tell whether a PIN was used by the member it was assigned to.

The RCMP is currently investigating allegations of voter fraud and several cabinet members have been contacted by the RCMP, including Solicitor General and Justice Minister **Doug Schweitzer**, who was also a candidate in the UCP leadership race.

Today’s events

October 7 at 9 a.m. — *Edmonton*

Government House Leader **Jason Nixon** will give an outline of the upcoming legislative agenda to journalists in the media theatre in the legislature.

October 7 at 9 a.m. — *Edmonton*

The UCP government’s Treasury Board committee will meet in the legislature.

October 7 at 2 p.m. — *Edmonton*

The UCP caucus will meet in Government House in Edmonton.

October 7 at 5 p.m. — *Gatineau*

Federal political leaders **Justin Trudeau**, **Andrew Scheer**, **Jagmeet Singh**, **Elizabeth May**, **Yves-François Blanchet** and **Maxime Bernier** go head-to-head for the first time in tonight’s English-language debate at the Canadian Museum of History.

Topics of conversation

- The *National Observer* published an analysis of allegations of foreign-funded economic sabotage of Alberta’s oil industry that [disputes](#) claims made by the UCP government.

- The analysis looks at nine claims, which it calls myths, and comes to the conclusion that there is no foreign-funded conspiracy to landlock Alberta's oil.
- The *Observer's* piece comes as researcher **Vivian Krause's** documentary film *Over a Barrel* screened in Edmonton theatres on Saturday. Krause's research helped prompt the UCP government to launch a public inquiry headed up by chartered professional accountant **Steve Allan** into the source of funding of environmental campaigns.
- Ahead of a provincial report looking into seclusion rooms due this month, the Edmonton Public School Board [released figures](#) on the use of time-out rooms in its district.
 - The EPSB report said during the Spring of 2019, 42 seclusion rooms have been decommissioned, bringing the total number of rooms still in use down to 137.
 - As of September 27, the rooms have been used 716 times — 468 times when students chose to use the rooms to manage their own behaviours and 248 times in a crisis response to unsafe behaviour.
 - Education Minister **Adriana LaGrange** lifted the previous NDP government's ban on seclusion rooms on September 1, citing a need for further review. That review is due back October 31.
- Federal NDP Leader **Jagmeet Singh** [says](#) he will work hard to earn Alberta NDP Leader **Rachel Notley's** vote after Notley said she will cast her ballot based on her local candidate. Alberta's former premier and the federal NDP leader have butted heads over pipelines in the past.
 - Notley's provincial riding of Edmonton—Strathcona was previously held by NDP MP **Linda Duncan**, who is not running for re-election.
 - In the running to succeed Duncan as the riding's representative are **Heather McPherson** for the NDP, **Eleanor Olszewski** for the Liberals, **Sam Lilly** for the Conservative Party of Canada, **Ian Cameron** for the People's Party of Canada, **Michael Kalmanovitch** for the Green Party of Canada, **Dougal MacDonald** for the Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada and **Naomi Rankin** for the Communist Party of Canada.
 - Poll aggregation site Canada338.com [projects](#) the riding will likely turn blue, a shift from its designation as a "toss-up" riding earlier in the campaign.
- Postmedia president CEO **Andrew MacLeod** [defended](#) his company's hiring of a lobbyist to get business from the government of Alberta's energy war room in a Q&A in the company's *Financial Post* newspaper by saying critics of the move have an agenda.
 - "I do take umbrage at the fact that they want to correlate a business endeavour with the integrity of our newsrooms," MacLeod said. "People need to understand that we're facing a systemic disruption, legacy revenue is falling, and we need to find new revenue streams. But that's the business side of the company; we are talking about commercial content. It has no relationship to editorial decision-making."

News briefs — Non-governmental

NDP says UCP will miss renewable energy goals based on AESO report

The former NDP government's goal of 30 per cent renewable energy in the province by 2030 has dropped to a projected 19 per cent.

Those numbers are based on the [2019 long-term outlook](#) report from the Alberta Electric System Operator.

The NDP said their government's Renewable Electricity Program would have generated \$10.5 billion for the provincial economy and created 7,200 jobs, but the UCP cancelled future rounds of the REP program, instead stating the market should decide demand.

"It was only a week ago when Albertans rallied by the thousands for action on climate change. That means supporting renewable energy," NDP Opposition Leader **Rachel Notley** said in a news release. "Their cries fell on the deaf ears of this government. In fact, some of the Premier's staff mocked them openly."

"We know that the new renewable projects announced when we were in government would have created thousands of jobs. Ending these programs means this government is turning their back on those jobs and the people who were counting on them."