



ALBERTA COUNSEL

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FROM DRONES TO DIGNITY IN DEATH: HOW THE UCP IS SETTING THE TERMS

Mackenzie Blyth

Armed conflicts in the Middle East are not typically where Alberta's economic development diversification strategies get validated. But earlier this month, that's exactly what happened.

Iranian drone strikes on Amazon Web Services (AWS) infrastructure in the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain caused structural damage, fires, power loss, and prolonged service disruptions. AWS warned customers to migrate workloads and described the regional operating environment as "unpredictable." Banking platforms, enterprise software, and government services were knocked offline.

For the first time, commercial cloud infrastructure was physically targeted by military action.

As professor of technology policy at Aalto University, Vili Lehdonvirta, puts it, hyperscale data centres have quietly become "attractive targets" in modern conflict. They're concentrated, high-value infrastructure underpinning both civilian economies and, increasingly, military and intelligence capabilities. The cloud has now become a network of physical assets exposed to violent geopolitical risk.

Alberta's Technology and Innovation Minister Nate Glubish moved quickly to frame the moment. [In a Substack column](#), Glubish cast it as a proof point that data infrastructure is no longer just a technical asset, but a strategic one.

The framing is deliberate. For several years, the UCP has been trying to position the province as a destination for large-scale data infrastructure, pitching a familiar mix of advantages: abundant natural gas, a cold climate that reduces cooling costs, and a regulatory environment designed to accelerate project timelines. None of that is new. What is new is Glubish's emphasis on geopolitical security.

Glubish frames Alberta less as a low-cost jurisdiction and more as a low-risk one. The logic is straightforward. Data centres are physical assets located in specific jurisdictions where they're subject to the actions of local regimes, political stability, and military risk. In that context, Alberta's selling point shifts. NATO alignment, domestic stability, and distance from geopolitical flashpoints become key parts of the value proposition, alongside utility prices and permitting timelines.

But if the global case for Alberta is becoming clearer, the local reality is more complicated. Earlier this month, the Alberta Utilities Commission rejected a proposal to build a 1.4 gigawatt natural gas plant intended to power what was billed as the largest data centre complex in Olds. The regulator cited deficiencies in the application, ranging from incomplete environmental analysis to gaps in public consultation. The decision also surfaced a factor all governments are sensitive to: community resistance.

Residents raised concerns about noise, water use, and the scale of the project, with some saying they first heard of the development through government announcements rather than local engagement. Even with the application rejected on technical grounds, opposition remains organized, and the proponent is expected to return.

While Glubish is attempting to position Alberta as a secure, strategic jurisdiction for global data infrastructure, the massive energy demand, industrial-scale facilities, and long timelines are contributing to local friction.

Legislative changes allowing data centre operators to bring their own power supply, combined with efforts to shorten approval timelines, are about signaling that Alberta can move quickly to capture demand that may be re-evaluating location risk in real time.

But speed does not resolve local tension. Strategic infrastructure may be framed as a national or even geopolitical asset, but it is still built in specific communities with localized impacts that can slow or reshape projects.

Glubish's column leans heavily into the concept of "sovereign compute" – the idea that control over data storage and processing is increasingly a matter of national security, not just economic efficiency. While that argument is not unique to Alberta, the province does have an opportunity now to position itself as a jurisdiction where Canadian (and allied) data can be stored under domestic legal authority, outside the reach of foreign regimes.

The security framing elevates what might otherwise be a nice infrastructure play into something closer to strategic policy, while also opening the door to a broader market: governments and enterprises aren't just looking for cheaper operations, but for politically and legally secure environments.



MACKENZIE BLYTH

Associate

Mackenzie Blyth is an Associate, External Relations at Alberta Counsel, where he supports clients through strategic communications, stakeholder engagement, and government relations initiatives. Mackenzie brings extensive experience working within Alberta politics, having worked in communications roles with the United Conservative Government Caucus and as Press Secretary in multiple ministries.

Prior to joining Alberta Counsel, Mackenzie worked as Manager of Strategic Communications for the UCP Government Caucus, overseeing media monitoring, message development, and communications coordination with elected officials. His background includes drafting speeches and communications products, staffing cabinet ministers at events and announcements, and collaborating closely with policy advisors and department staff to deliver accurate messaging on complex and time-sensitive issues.

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Whether that market materializes remains an open question, but military action in the Middle East has introduced a new variable that policymakers like Glubish are clearly intent on amplifying. The challenge will be translating that narrative into real projects that clear both global scrutiny and local resistance.

Medical Assistance in Dying

If the debate about data centres is about economic and security considerations, the debate over Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) is about something far more politically volatile: how governments define dignity, vulnerability, and the limits of choice. The UCP has moved quickly to define that terrain.

Through Bill 18, the UCP is attempting to set new boundaries on MAID in Alberta, positioning the legislation as a necessary correction to a regime that has expanded beyond its original intent. The core message, repeated in both public statements and the Legislature, is that assisted dying should be limited to end-of-life circumstances, not extended into areas where recovery remains possible.

In a member's statement, Grande Prairie-Wapiti MLA Ron Wiebe described a system that has "rapidly expanded" in recent years, pointing to rising MAID deaths as evidence that the current framework is moving beyond its original intent.

Camrose MLA Jackie Lovely's questions to Justice Minister Mickey Amery during question period focused on MAID being introduced as a last resort, which has revealed "blatant gaps where vulnerable people are not protected." She pointed to the planned federal expansion to include mental illness and invoked international concerns, asking what Alberta is doing to "introduce strong protections" and "keep patients safe."

Minister Amery's response built directly on that line of questioning. MAID deaths, he argues, are growing at an "alarming" rate, with non-end-of-life cases increasing sharply since 2021. He framed Bill 18 as a direct response that prohibits access where mental illness is the sole condition, and ensures minors are excluded.

Beyond just access to MAID is the issue of exposure, whether patients are being pressured or whether physicians should be allowed to raise MAID, and whether safeguards are sufficient to prevent coercion. This concern is central to the government's message that MAID should never be presented as an option unless explicitly requested, and the system must prioritize "hope over despair."

Despite the issue's sensitivity, the NDP has so far declined to engage directly during question period. The avoidance is understandable. This is a politically hazardous issue. It cuts across ideological lines, engages medical, religious, and disability communities, and carries significant reputational risks.

However, the UCP is already establishing a clear narrative that the system is moving too far, too fast, and that the government has a duty to intervene. Without a competing frame, that premise becomes the launching point for debate. And once established, it is difficult to dislodge.

The longer the NDP remains silent, the more political questions and public perception risk being defined by the UCP. And in politics, the side that defines the framing rarely needs to win the argument outright, they only need to ensure it is argued on their terms.





AILEEN BURKE
Director of Nonprofit and
Voluntary Sector

Aileen is an experienced lobbyist, researcher, facilitator, and communicator. She has been a part of creating and adapting policy and procedure, and complex problem solving. She has significant knowledge of the non-profit industry, with more than 15 years of front-line, management, and volunteer experience in the non-profit sector. Aileen pursued her master's degree in political science from the University of Lethbridge, where her work focused on public policy and systems integration as it relates to the Housing First philosophy. Aileen has put her expertise in political advocacy into action with a run for office at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

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CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

TIGER CALCIUM: THE HIDDEN FORCE BEHIND ALBERTA'S ROADS AND RESOURCE CORRIDORS

Across Alberta's vast geography, from municipal roads to resource corridors, maintaining safe and reliable infrastructure is both a logistical challenge and economic necessity. Tiger Calcium plays a critical role in meeting that challenge, supplying calcium chloride solutions that support road safety, industrial operations, and year-round mobility across Western Canada.

With operations spanning production, transportation, and distribution, Tiger Calcium provides essential support that many communities and industries rely on but rarely see. Its products are widely used in dust control, soil stabilization, and winter road maintenance, all applications that are fundamental to keeping transportation networks functional in both peak summer activity and harsh winter conditions.

In rural and industrial regions, where heavy traffic and environmental conditions can quickly degrade roadways, effective dust suppression and stabilization are key to extending infrastructure life and maintaining safe driving conditions. Tiger Calcium's services help municipalities and industrial operators reduce the need for maintenance, improve air quality, and enhance the durability of critical transportation routes.

During winter months, Tiger Calcium's anti-icing and de-icing products are essential. Designed to perform in extreme cold, these solutions prevent ice formation and improve traction, supporting safer travel for motorists, commercial carriers, and emergency services. In a province where weather has a direct impact on economic activity, this reliability is critical.

Tiger Calcium also supports Canada's energy sector through specialized fluid solutions used in drilling and well operations. These products help regulate pressure and maintain operational stability, contributing to safe and efficient resource development in one of the nation's most important industries.

Through its work across infrastructure, transportation, and energy, Tiger Calcium contributes to the foundational sectors of Alberta's economy. Its role may often be behind the scenes, but its impact is visible in safer roads, more resilient infrastructure, and the continued movement of people and goods in every Western Canadian province.



Our Services

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-  Writing, Revising, & Refining Advertising Messaging
-  Designing/Editing Creative for all Platforms
-  Registration and Logistical Campaign Set-Up
-  Ad Targeting
-  Website Design
-  Ad Reporting/Website Analytics



POLITICAL EVENTS

A Conversation with Hon. Anita Anand, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada

Wed, April 8 – 11:30am–1:30pm

Location: The Westin Calgary

- The Calgary Chamber will host Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand for a discussion on Canada's global strategy and economic diplomacy.
- The event will include a keynote and fireside chat focused on trade, competitiveness, and how shifting international dynamics impact Canadian businesses.

Webinar: Improving Canada's Impact Assessment Processes

Thurs, April 9 – 12:30–1:30pm

Location: Virtual

- Canada West Foundation and IAIA–Western and Northern Canada will host a panel on reforming federal impact assessment processes and project approval timelines.
- Discussion will include perspectives from Indigenous, regulatory, and industry leaders on balancing faster approvals with environmental oversight and Indigenous consultation.

Central Alberta Leader's Dinner

Thurs, April 16 – 5:30pm (program at 7pm)

Location: Westerner Park, Red Deer

- UCP Leader Danielle Smith and MLAs from across Alberta will headline the party's Central Alberta Leader's Dinner, a key annual gathering for supporters.
- The event will feature remarks on the province's political direction and priorities, while serving as a key fundraising and networking opportunity for the United Conservative Party.



Source: LinkedIn

KEY INFLUENCER PROFILE

DANA MACKIE

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ALBERTA MUNICIPALITIES

Mackenzie Blyth

Dana Mackie has served as Chief Executive Officer of Alberta Municipalities since January 2025. In this role, he leads Alberta's largest municipal advocacy organization, representing 260 member communities in which approximately 85 per cent of Albertans reside. As CEO, Mackie is responsible for advancing municipal priorities with the provincial and federal governments while overseeing a broad suite of programs and services that support local governments across the province.

Mackie assumed the role following a lengthy career in Alberta's public service, bringing nearly two decades of senior leadership experience across multiple ministries. Most recently, he served as Assistant Deputy Minister of the Seniors Division within Seniors, Community, and Social Services, where he oversaw income support programs, community initiatives, and policy development impacting vulnerable populations. His experience in this role reflects a strong background in program delivery, stakeholder engagement, and navigating complex policy environments.

Prior to this, Mackie held several roles within Environment and Parks, including Executive Director of Results-Based Management, where he led business planning, performance measurement, and system transformation initiatives. He also served as Executive Director of the Climate Change Office, supporting implementation of Alberta's Climate Leadership Plan and coordinating cross-government policy efforts. Earlier in his career, Mackie held senior roles in Economic Development and Trade, including Chief of Staff to the Deputy Minister, as well as leadership positions in Apprenticeship and Industry Training and international relations, where he supported trade and investment initiatives across key global markets.

Mackie's career reflects a consistent focus on intergovernmental relations, policy coordination, and large-scale leadership. His experience working across sectors, including economic development, environmental policy, social services, and workforce development, positions him to engage effectively with a wide range of issues facing Alberta municipalities.

As Alberta Municipalities prepares to convene its 2026 Spring Municipal Leaders' Caucus, Mackie will play a central role in shaping the organization's advocacy agenda and positioning municipal priorities within the broader provincial policy arena at a time of ongoing fiscal pressure and growing infrastructure demands.

An Evening with Searle Turton and Brian Jean

Wed, April 22 – 6:30pm (program at 7pm)

Location: Best Western Sunrise Inn & Suites, Stony Plain

- The Spruce Grove–Stony Plain UCP Association will host a fundraising reception featuring MLAs Searle Turton and Brian Jean.
- The event offers an opportunity to hear updates on provincial priorities and connect with local supporters, with proceeds supporting the United Conservative Party.

First Nations Major Projects Coalition (FNMPC) Annual Conference

Wed–Fri, April 29 – May 1

Location: Sheraton Centre, Toronto

- The FNMPC will host its 9th annual conference, bringing together Indigenous leaders, government, and industry to advance partnerships in major resource and infrastructure projects.
- Discussions will focus on Indigenous economic participation, project ownership, and long-term prosperity, guided by the "seven-generation" principle and evolving approaches to trade, energy, and investment.



STEPHEN BLANCHETTE

Associate

Stephen Blanchette brings a results-driven background in real estate, public policy, and strategic communications to his role as an Associate Lobbyist with AB Counsel. He spent five years in the real estate sector as a valuation and property tax consultant, progressing from appraisal work to senior consulting roles. In 2025, Stephen transitioned into politics full-time, first managing a federal election campaign and later supporting an Indigenous self-government in the Northwest Territories, where he contributed to executive operations and communications strategy.

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AT A GLANCE

In the Media

Alberta Proposes Stronger MAID Safeguards

The Government of Alberta is proposing new legislation aimed at strengthening safeguards around medical assistance in dying (MAID). The proposed changes would prohibit access to MAID in cases where mental illness is the sole underlying condition and introduce additional oversight of health care professionals involved in assessments and referrals.

Premier Danielle Smith stated: "This legislation strengthens safeguards and restores clear limits on eligibility to protect vulnerable Albertans facing mental illness or living with disabilities. Those struggling with severe mental health challenges need treatment, compassion and support, not a path to end their life at what may be their lowest moment. In Alberta, a patient whose sole underlying condition is mental illness will not be eligible for MAID."

Inspection Launched into Calgary Watermain Breaks

Alberta's government has announced a formal municipal inspection into the City of Calgary's management and operation of the Bears paw South Feeder Main following repeated infrastructure failures. The review will be conducted by a third-party inspector to assess how the city handled two major water breaks in 2024 and 2025 that resulted in significant water restrictions and disruptions for residents.

Minister of Municipal Affairs, Dan Williams, commented: "Given the recurring nature of this situation and the severe impact it is having on the daily lives of Calgarians and surrounding communities, all of whom rely on a safe, reliable water system to support their families and businesses, I believe an inspection is necessary. This decision was not taken lightly."

New Supports for Albertans with Disabilities

Budget 2026 proposes an investment of \$3.7 billion to support Albertans with disabilities, representing the largest commitment of its kind in the province's history. The funding is intended to enhance a range of programs and services, including income supports, employment initiatives, and community-based services that help individuals live more independently.

"Our government will bet on Albertans every time. That's why Budget 2026 makes a historic \$3.7-billion investment into supports for Albertans with disabilities. Because giving all Albertans the support they need to chase their dreams and help build a better future for our province – that's the real Alberta Advantage," stated Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services, Jason Nixon.

Fairview Campus to Remain Open

The Government of Alberta has confirmed that Fairview Campus will remain open, with Northern Lakes College becoming its new post-secondary provider in September 2026. Northern Lakes College is expected to offer in-person apprenticeship and health care programs, along with online learning opportunities.

"Our government heard clearly how important Fairview Campus is to students, families and the community. As an established public comprehensive community college in northern Alberta, Northern Lakes College's program offerings at the Fairview Campus will provide stability for learners and create the foundation for a community-led future that reflects the needs and strengths of the Peace Country," commented Minister of Advanced Education, Myles McDougall.



PASCAL RYFFEL
Senior Vice President

After completing his MA in Media and International Development, Pascal spent four years with the Alberta NDP Caucus. Pascal has been directly involved in Alberta politics for almost two decades, including as a candidate in 2008, and has a deep and current knowledge of Alberta politics. Pascal has been with Alberta Counsel since 2015.

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JANELLE JIMINEZ
Fund Development
Associate

Born and raised in Edmonton, Janelle Jiminez has built a career that bridges the worlds of science, business, and innovation. Her professional journey began in research, where her passion for biology and animal health led her to complete a Master of Science in Animal Science at the University of Alberta. Following her graduate studies, Janelle joined Livestock Gentec at the University of Alberta, where she coordinated multidisciplinary research in livestock genomics and led partnerships focused on genetic innovations in animal health. She later became Project Manager for the AMR – One Health Consortium at the University of Calgary, managing a \$16M provincial initiative connecting academia, industry, and government to advance antimicrobial resistance research.

Janelle earned her MBA focused on Strategy and Innovation from the Alberta School of Business in 2022. Following this she went on to join SVG Ventures | THRIVE as a Corporate Innovation Manager, supporting agri-food startups, corporate partnerships, and investment strategies across Canada. She is currently focused on supporting small business growth in Edmonton and has recently dedicated her time to support the opening of a women-run cocktail bar focused on agave education in downtown Edmonton.

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A NEW BACKBONE FOR HEALTH CARE —OR JUST A NEW NAME?

By Alberta Counsel Staff



Alberta's health care system is undergoing a significant structural evolution. With the introduction of Health Shared Services (HSS), officially launched on December 1, 2025, the Government of Alberta has created an entity to provide services to clinical and non-clinical teams across the province's health care system.

Health Shared Services, a Provincial Health Corporation, is responsible for delivering and coordinating corporate and support services related to the administration and operation of the health care system, with a budget of \$2.3 billion.

With the dismantling of Alberta Health Services (AHS) as part of the larger health reorganization and the creation of Health Shared Services, the change is positioned as transformative but could reflect more focused administrative change.

Although the budgets of these two entities, AHS and HSS, are entirely different, at approximately \$34.4 billion vs. \$2.4 billion, respectively, the functions and roles appear to have overlap.

What Was Alberta Health Services?

AHS was one of the largest integrated health systems in North America. It consolidated multiple regional health authorities into a single, province-wide entity responsible for:

- Delivering frontline care (hospitals, clinics, continuing care)
- Managing public health programs
- Overseeing workforce and clinical operations
- Providing centralized support services (IT, procurement, labs, etc.)

AHS combined both service delivery and support within a single organization.

What Is Health Shared Services?

HSS represents a functional reorganization of Alberta's health care system. Rather than one entity managing all aspects of care, the system is being broken into specialized organizations, with shared services acting as a backbone.

While still evolving, Health Shared Services will generally focus on:

- Procurement and supply chain management
- Information technology and digital infrastructure
- Finance, HR, and administrative services
- Laboratory and diagnostic coordination (in some models)

These services support multiple health care delivery organizations, rather than being embedded within one.

HSS separates support functions from direct care delivery.

Key Similarities

Despite structural changes, there are important continuities including centralized support functions, province-wide scope, and government oversight.

Both models recognize the value of centralized services like procurement, IT, and HR to reduce duplication, achieve economies of scale, and standardize processes across the province.

Both AHS and HSS operate at a provincial level, ensuring consistency in service access, coordinated planning and investment, and the ability to leverage provincial scale.

In both systems, the provincial government maintains strategic control, funding authority, and policy direction.

Key Differences

The most important distinctions relate to structure, accountability, and flexibility. AHS was a fully integrated model with one organization delivering care and managing support services, whereas HSS acts in a more modular fashion with separate entities for care delivery and support. This difference reflects the shift from a single operator model to a multi-organizational system.

Another key difference is in the focus and specialization of each. AHS had a broad mandate across all aspects of health care, whereas HSS has a narrower and specialized mandate focused on efficiency and support services. HSS acts as a provider to the system rather than a system operator.

The accountability and governance of each organization also differ significantly, with AHS having a single leadership structure accountable for both clinical and operational outcomes, while HSS supports multiple organizations with distinct leadership and accountability frameworks.

Lastly, AHS had a very integrated model with the goal of reducing fragmentation with an increase in bureaucracy, whereas HSS introduces an increased risk of silos between organizations if coordination is weak.

If the goal of this change is to build a system that is more responsive to patient needs, more efficient in its use of resources, and better positioned for innovation and growth, HSS will need to focus on the coordination of a new, networked ecosystem of health entities.

The ultimate success of this transition will depend on execution, emphasizing integration across multiple entities rather than integration within one.