



ALBERTA COUNSEL

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The News from Alberta Counsel is Alberta's premier review of provincial politics and government vitality. As an original source of political news and commentary, The News will provide a fresh look at legislation, policy, committee debates, the civil service, along with party updates and events.

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AVI LEWIS AND THE NDP'S NEW DIVIDE

Mackenzie Blyth

On March 29th, Avi Lewis was elected leader of the federal NDP with 56 per cent of the vote on the first ballot. He campaigned on a populist left-wing platform that included a Green New Deal for Canada, government-run grocery stores, free transit, rent caps, and cracking down on the "corporate hoarding class." Lewis's victory does not just define the federal party, it forces every provincial wing of the NDP to respond.

Avi Lewis's overwhelming victory has clarified the direction of the federal NDP and exposed how unevenly that direction is being received across the country.



Source: X.com

For some, the reaction was immediate and enthusiastic. Newfoundland and Labrador NDP leader Jim Dinn described Lewis as a "fearless and principled voice" who brings "bold, unapologetic leadership" at a time when many feel left behind.

That sentiment is not isolated. Among activists and parts of the party's grassroots, Lewis's leadership is being interpreted as a shift away from incrementalism and toward a clearly defined left-wing ideological project centered on economic inequality, corporate power, and climate urgency.

In Ontario and Nova Scotia, the response was more measured. Leaders Marit Stiles and Claudia Chender have offered congratulations while emphasizing shared values, "lifting people up," "delivering for working people," and building a "progressive future." What is absent is direct engagement with Lewis's aggressive policy direction or ideological positioning.

The governing Nova Scotia Progressive Conservatives were quick to seize on Lewis's victory with a news release framing the provincial NDP as aligned with what they describe as an "extreme-left direction," tying Chender's response to a broader shift away from resource development toward policies they argue would undermine economic growth. The strategy is straightforward: collapse the distinction between federal and provincial parties and force alignment in the public mind. This is a dynamic likely to play out in every province with a competitive NDP.

In Saskatchewan, the federal-provincial relationship is much colder. Saskatchewan NDP leader Carla Beck, who has spent years building a broad coalition and bringing her party within striking distance of victory, declined a meeting with Lewis and



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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openly criticized his positions as “ideological and unrealistic,” warning they would harm workers, communities, and key industries. The language is blunt and rooted in economic reality, particularly regarding resource development, where Lewis’s opposition to new fossil fuel projects cuts directly against Saskatchewan’s priorities.

That reaction speaks to a deep divide within the NDP. In resource-dependent provinces, the relationship between environmental policy and economic opportunity is directly tied to jobs, investment, and fiscal stability. A federal platform perceived as hostile to energy workers creates friction that cannot easily be managed through messaging alone.

Even in British Columbia, Avi Lewis’s home province, where his populist left message may have a large constituency, there was visible tension.

Within days of Lewis’s victory, BC Conservative House Leader Á:á:liya Warbus seized on his comments opposing new LNG development. During question period, Warbus pressed the NDP government to reconcile Lewis’s claim that the Ksi Lisims LNG project “should not proceed” with Premier Eby’s support for LNG expansion.

Energy Minister Adrian Dix did not attempt to bridge the gap. Instead, he dismissed the premise entirely and used his response to promote the province’s economic record. The BC government, he said, “supports the project,” emphasizing jobs, growth, and the expansion of LNG capacity already underway. Rather than engaging with Lewis’s opposition, the BC NDP attempted to frame federal positioning as irrelevant to provincial decision-making.

“Lewis’s leadership is already providing opponents with a ready-made tool to challenge the vision and coherence of the NDP across jurisdictions.”

Lewis’s leadership is already providing opponents with a ready-made tool to challenge the vision and coherence of the NDP across jurisdictions. By forcing provincial leaders to respond to federal positions, internal tensions become visible, repeatable, and politically useful. Nowhere is that dynamic more apparent than in Alberta.

Alberta NDP leader Naheed Nenshi moved quickly to draw a clear line between the provincial and federal parties. In a statement following the leadership result, he argued the direction of the federal NDP under Lewis “is not in the interests of Alberta,” going further to note that Lewis had previously “cheered for the defeat of the Alberta NDP government.” Nenshi emphasized that Alberta’s NDP supports pipelines, Canadian energy jobs, and emissions reduction alongside development.

Nenshi also sought to reinforce a structural separation between the federal and provincial parties. Pointing to the party’s decision to make federal membership optional, Nenshi noted that he and many provincial members are not members of the federal NDP.

The day after Avi Lewis’s leadership victory, the United Conservative Party moved to rapidly define what it meant for Alberta. A caucus release framed Lewis as Nenshi’s “anti-pipeline boss” whose leadership would “spell trouble for the Alberta NDP, a central line of attack that would carry into the Legislature all week. It was framing that moved beyond caucus communications to direct attacks in the chamber during question period.

On the first sitting day after the leadership result, UCP MLA Chantelle de Jonge opened with a Members’ Statement directly attacking Lewis and his record, highlighting his opposition to pipelines and fossil fuel development while tying those positions to the Alberta NDP. That strategy quickly extended into Question Period.

When Nenshi attempted to focus questioning on the UCP’s handling of separatism and internal caucus tensions, Premier Danielle Smith repeatedly pivoted back to the federal leadership result, arguing that policies supported by Lewis were contributing to western alienation and fueling separatist sentiment. Rather than engage the opposition’s line of questioning, the UCP reframed the separatist issue as being driven by federal policies supported by the NDP, not internal UCP dynamics.

Throughout the week, UCP MLAs raised Lewis in Members’ Statements, in supplementary answers, and in rebuttals. By Thursday, Government House Leader Joseph Schow was still invoking Lewis and federal convention politics in response to opposition questions on separatism, reinforcing the link at every available opportunity.

Rather than engage directly with Lewis, the NDP attempted to redirect attention to the UCP’s own vulnerabilities, particularly the role of MLA Jason Stephan. Questions from the NDP focused on Stephan encouraging Albertans to sign the petition calling for a separatist referendum, and the government’s unwillingness to discipline an MLA openly supporting Alberta independence. Just as the UCP worked to tie Nenshi to Lewis, the NDP worked to tie Smith to separatism.

There is a long-standing tendency in Canadian politics to assume leaders who sit outside the political centre cannot translate that position into electoral victory, let alone relevance. Lewis’s victory was decisive and reflects a mobilized constituency demanding rapid change.

A more sharply defined NDP offers a distinct political project, one increasingly in opposition to the Liberals drifting back to the centre under Prime Minister Mark Carney. The challenge for Lewis will be attracting left-wing voters who may feel left behind by the current direction of the Liberals without appearing to be electorally doomed.



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
INTELICA: TECH WITH A PURPOSE

Based in Alberta and serving organizations across Edmonton and Calgary, Intelica Solutions Inc. is a managed IT and consulting firm focused on helping businesses navigate an increasingly complex digital landscape. With more than two decades of experience, the company has built its reputation on a simple but powerful premise: technology should work for your business, not the other way around.

Intelica delivers a full spectrum of services, from proactive managed IT and cybersecurity to cloud solutions and executive-level IT strategy. Through offerings like IntelliMANAGE and IntelliGUARD, the team provides continuous monitoring, layered security, and hands-on support designed to keep operations running smoothly and securely.

Rather than acting as a reactive help desk, the firm works closely with leadership teams to align technology with long-term business goals. Through strategic planning, infrastructure audits, and ongoing advisory support, Intelica helps clients reduce risk, improve efficiency, and make smarter decisions about their IT investments.

From legal practices and municipalities to energy companies, nonprofits, and healthcare providers, Intelica tailors its solutions to the unique demands of each sector, ensuring that systems, security, and workflows are built to support real-world operations.

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- Website Design
- Ad Reporting/Website Analytics



POLITICAL EVENTS

Powering Alberta's Future: A Conversation on Energy with Minister Brian Jean

Wed, April 22 – 9–11am

Location: World Trade Centre Edmonton

- The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce will host Energy and Minerals Minister Brian Jean for a discussion on Alberta's energy strategy and policy priorities.
- The event will focus on key issues including market access, pipeline development, electricity market reforms, and the role of energy policy in economic growth and competitiveness.

Cocktails and Art with Dr. Luanne Metz

Wed, April 29 – 6–8pm

Location: The Artist Lounge, Calgary

- Alberta NDP MLAs Dr. Luanne Metz and Court Ellingson will host an evening fundraiser and discussion on provincial issues.
- The event will provide an opportunity for attendees to engage with MLAs, discuss policy priorities, and support the Alberta NDP's upcoming election campaign.

South Edmonton Evening with Danielle Smith

Mon, May 4 – 6pm

Location: Holiday Inn Conference Centre, Edmonton

- UCP Leader Danielle Smith will headline a fundraising reception supporting local Edmonton constituency associations.
- The event will feature a fireside chat and Q&A focused on provincial priorities, with opportunities for attendees to engage directly with party leadership.

Edmonton Chamber 2026 State of the City Address

Thurs, May 14 – 11am–1pm

Location: Edmonton Convention Centre

- Edmonton Mayor Andrew Knack will deliver his first State of the City Address, outlining priorities for growth, fiscal management, and urban development.
- The address will focus on key issues including public safety, housing, infrastructure, and the policy decisions shaping Edmonton's economic future.

Calgary's New Chapter: A Fireside Chat with Mayor Jeremy Farkas

Wed, May 13 – 11:30am–1:30pm

Location: Petroleum Club (Devonian Room), Calgary

- The National Association of Industrial and Office Parks (NAIOP) Calgary will host Mayor Jeremy Farkas for a luncheon discussion on the city's economic outlook and development priorities.
- The conversation will focus on commercial real estate, urban growth, public safety, and strategies to support Calgary's long-term economic and population expansion.

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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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Source: LinkedIn

KEY INFLUENCER PROFILE

PHILLIP PETERS

INCOMING AUDITOR GENERAL OF ALBERTA

Mackenzie Blyth

Phillip Peters has been recommended as Alberta's next Auditor General following a vote by a legislative committee, with a final appointment pending cabinet approval. If confirmed, he will assume leadership of the Office of the Auditor General at a time of heightened scrutiny over government spending and oversight, including an ongoing investigation into high-profile health-care contracting.

Peters currently serves as Legislative Audit and General Counsel and Ethics Officer within the Office of the Auditor General, where he has held senior responsibility for legal, ethical, and governance matters since 2017. His tenure within the office provides continuity at a time of transition, while also positioning him as a central figure in shaping how the office approaches complex and politically sensitive audits.

Prior to joining the Auditor General's office, Peters spent nearly a decade with Alberta Justice and Solicitor General as Tax Counsel, advising on complex tax and regulatory matters. His background also includes experience in private practice with Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP, as well as earlier roles with the Canada Revenue Agency and KPMG.

Peters holds extensive professional credentials, including King's Counsel designation, Chartered Professional Accountant (FCPA, FCA), and advanced legal training in tax law. His cross-disciplinary background in law and accounting positions him well to oversee audits across government ministries, agencies, and regulated funds, particularly in areas involving complex financial structures and procurement processes.

If appointed, Peters will immediately take on the continuation of a high-profile investigation into allegations surrounding multimillion-dollar health contracts, an issue that has drawn political attention and ongoing review. His appointment process has also attracted scrutiny from NDP MLAs, highlighting the broader political context in which the Auditor General's office will be operating.

AT A GLANCE

In the Media

Alberta Expands Skilled Trades Pathways

Alberta's government is launching the Alberta Trades Discovery Centre, a new industry-led initiative that will give junior high and high school students hands-on exposure to skilled trades careers before graduation. Opening in Calgary in fall 2026, the facility will offer a professional, work-like environment where students can explore construction trades, learn from experienced tradespeople, and better understand their interests and strengths.

Minister of Advanced Education, Myles McDougall, stated: "Alberta's prosperity depends on a strong, skilled workforce. The Alberta Trades Discovery Centre will help students see the real opportunities available in the trades, while complementing the world-class training offered by our post-secondary institutions."

New Oversight for Alberta Immigration

The Government of Alberta has introduced Bill 26, the Immigration Oversight Act, to strengthen oversight of employers, foreign worker recruiters and immigration consultants involved in hiring foreign nationals. The legislation aims to address fraud and worker exploitation by requiring employers to register with the province before using federal temporary foreign worker programs. It would also create a licensing system for recruiters and consultants.

Minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration, Joseph Schow, stated: "Albertans deserve to know that immigration in Alberta is fair, transparent and addresses the real needs of Alberta's labour force. This legislation improves accountability and gives the province more control over how the immigration system is used and gives us tools other provinces use to ensure the system is working for Albertans."

Continued Investments in the Arts

Alberta's Budget 2026 commits \$40.1 million to the arts, including \$38.1 million for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts (AFA), marking the highest level of arts funding in the province's history. This investment aims to support artists and organizations, expand access to arts programming, and strengthen Alberta's growing creative economy.

"The arts enrich our lives, connect us as Albertans and contribute significantly to our economy. With record-high funding committed through Budget 2026, we are supporting creativity, strengthening communities and ensuring the arts remain accessible in every corner of the province," commented Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women, Tanya Fir.

Updated Animal Protection Laws

The province has introduced Bill 22, the Animal Protection Amendment Act, marking the first major update to the legislation in 20 years. The proposed changes aim to modernize definitions, align with other Canadian jurisdictions, and strengthen animal welfare protections. Amendments would give peace officers expanded authority to inspect more locations, including grooming and boarding facilities, and better tools to address animal distress.

"Bill 22 is an important step for Alberta, underscoring the province's commitment to animal welfare. Beyond updating the legislation, it sends a clear message that protecting animals is a top priority. Alberta is dedicated to ensuring all animals are treated with respect and protected by these safeguards," commented Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation, RJ Sigurdson.



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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QUINN HEFFRON
Associate,
Government Relations

Quinn is a public policy and government relations professional specializing in energy policy, with expertise in legislative affairs, regulatory analysis, and stakeholder engagement. He has supported elected officials at all levels of government and served as a consultant for a leading think tank, contributing to policy development in Canada's energy sector. Quinn brings strong political insight, analytical skills, and a pragmatic approach to navigating complex political and regulatory environments.

He holds a Master of Public Policy from the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, specializing in energy policy, and an Honours Bachelor of Social Science in Political Science from the University of Ottawa.

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BRINGING YOUR OWN POWER: DATA CENTRES, GRID CONSTRAINTS, AND LOCAL PUSHBACK IN ALBERTA

Quinn Heffron

Alberta's ambition to become a North American hub for hyperscale and AI-focused data centres is now being stress-tested by electricity system physics and by the politics of land use. In late 2024, the province published an AI data-centre strategy emphasizing abundant power, fast approvals, and Alberta's cold climate as a cooling advantage, while promising that grid affordability and reliability would remain paramount.

By spring 2025, the Alberta Electric System Operator (AESO) began quantifying the mismatch between demand and supply and noted that individual projects can be larger than most Alberta cities. The AESO also flagged why these loads are not "just another customer." Data centres can create grid stability issues through ramping and reactive power needs, raise power-quality concerns through harmonics and flicker, and complicate planning because project timelines can outpace transmission development.

The system operator's June 2025 interim policy was blunt: connecting all large loads seeking access would impair reliability, so the AESO capped new large-load connections at 1,200 MW through 2028, using a qualification framework that includes municipal support and completed studies. This interim cap effectively made Bring Your Own Power (BYOP) the default pathway for projects that want scale and speed, whether through off-grid self-supply (outside the AESO connection queue), or through new generation aligned with the load.

Legislation followed the engineering logic. Bills 8 and 12 received Royal Assent in December of 2025. Bill 8 strengthens the legal basis for triage by requiring system access service be provided in a way that maintains "reliability and adequacy," and by granting the minister regulation-making power over data centres, including system access, load management, and load shedding. Bill 12, with modifications in the most recent budget bill, adds a Data Centre Levy on computing equipment and embeds a rate logic that varies with grid versus self-supplied/netted electricity. This policy decision clearly signals that heavy, purely grid-dependent load is disfavoured.

Local politics, however, may determine which projects survive to reach those regulatory gates. Rocky View County's rejection of a proposed ~1,100 acre campus shows that "data centres = economic development" is not universally persuasive when agricultural land use, water servicing, community consultation, and industrial impacts are in play. Olds shows a parallel constraint. The Town acknowledges a desire to attract data centres, but a recent Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) decision has already halted a notable gas-powered data centre proposal.

This is where the political contrast sharpens. The Alberta Government has justified tighter renewable siting rules partly by invoking "pristine views" and other land-use and environmental values. Yet many BYOP-aligned data centre projects are predicated on gas generation, often with tangible local externalities like air emissions, noise, traffic, water use, safety management. These are issues that communities increasingly scrutinize. A central legal and policy question moving forward is whether Alberta can maintain legitimacy by applying coherent, comparable land-use and environmental standards across technologies.

Gaps and unresolved questions

Key rulemaking is still pending and vague. There is still broad regulation-making authority that remains outstanding for data centres that would be important for proponents to understand before making final investment decisions – namely clarity on definitions, classes, curtailment rights, performance requirements, and cost allocation mechanics. These issues will largely be determined through future regulations and the Restructured Electricity Market (REM) design currently being implemented by the AESO.