



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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A PIPELINE AT LAST? OR A PLAN FOR A PLAN?

Mackenzie Blyth

For the first time in years, Alberta appears closer to achieving what conservatives have been demanding since taking office: a real pathway toward a new West Coast oil pipeline.

Whether that pathway ultimately results in shovels in the ground remains uncertain. But politically, the agreement signed last week between Premier Danielle Smith and Prime Minister Mark Carney marks a significant shift in tone, direction, and federal-provincial relations.

Ottawa has committed to treating the pipeline as a potential project of national interest by October 1, 2026 (the month as the potential referendum) while Alberta is expected to submit its proposal to the federal Major Projects Office by July 1. If approvals proceed according to schedule, construction authorization could arrive by September 1, 2027, a month before the next provincial election.

For the UCP, the dates matter almost as much as the project itself. Smith has spent years arguing that Ottawa's regulatory environment has made energy infrastructure effectively impossible to build. The inclusion of written timelines and a streamlined "one project, one review" framework allows her government to argue something tangible has finally changed.

"That's why we have got dates written in ink and signed by both myself and the Prime Minister," Smith told columnist Rick Bell following the agreement.

The deal also represents an opportunity to lower the temperature of Alberta's separatist movement. Smith herself acknowledged that reality directly, arguing the agreement would help "a group of folks who are disaffected because of economic issues."

The calculation is understandable. Much of the separatist frustration in Alberta has been rooted in the belief that the province's energy sector has been systematically constrained by Ottawa. A federally supported pipeline to tidewater directly addresses one of the movement's core grievances. But whether it will actually calm separatist sentiment is another matter entirely.

Almost immediately after *The Globe and Mail* published Smith's comments suggesting the deal would ease concerns among disaffected Albertans, separatist activist David Parker dismissed the idea outright.

"No, it won't," Parker wrote bluntly on X.

For many separatists, this agreement is not viewed as a breakthrough, but as another promise contingent on future approvals, future consultations, future investors, and future governments. In other words, it's a plan for a plan for a plan.

Despite the celebratory tone surrounding the announcement, there is still no private-sector proponent attached to the project. No final route has been selected. No investors have formally committed capital. The British Columbia NDP government remains resistant. Several First Nations have signalled opposition. And the entire project remains heavily dependent on the successful completion of the long-delayed Pathways carbon capture initiative.

Even the federal concessions, though significant, reveal the political balancing act at the centre of the agreement.

Under the new framework, the industrial carbon tax will be substantially reduced from the previous Trudeau-era trajectory. Instead of reaching \$170 per tonne by 2030, the carbon price will now rise more gradually, reaching \$130 per tonne by 2035.

For industry, that reduction represents a meaningful concession and greater certainty. Alberta estimates the agreement could save industry partners approximately \$250 billion through 2050. Collectively, they represent one of the most substantial retreats from the Trudeau-era climate framework seen to date. But not everyone is satisfied.

Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre continues to argue the industrial carbon tax should be zero. And among Alberta separatists, even a reduced price on carbon remains unacceptable. To many of them, the issue isn't only the rate of the tax, but the principle itself: continued federal influence over Alberta's energy sector.

The agreement is designed to demonstrate that cooperation with Ottawa can produce tangible gains for Alberta. But every compromise required to achieve that cooperation risks alienating the very voters she is attempting to win back from



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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separatist movements.

The NDP, meanwhile, has attempted to frame the agreement very differently.

Naheed Nenshi acknowledged that the deal creates “some forward movement” and called it “good news, and necessary.” But he also argued that Alberta is now “exactly where it was when the UCP took power, at the starting line to get things built.” In his view, seven years were wasted fighting with Ottawa instead of building the partnerships required to move projects forward.

“Business needs stability and certainty,” Nenshi said. “Who is going to invest billions of dollars in a pipeline if they don’t even know what country that pipeline will be in?”

Nenshi’s broader criticism is that major projects require stability, certainty, and long-term relationships with industry, Indigenous communities, and local stakeholders, conditions he argues the UCP has weakened.

Even as Smith and Carney attempt to project certainty, the project remains surrounded by political volatility. The legal uncertainty surrounding Alberta’s separatist movement, tensions with First Nations, unresolved questions around routing through British Columbia, and the absence of a committed private-sector builder all continue to cloud the path ahead.

And yet, despite all those caveats, the agreement still represents something politically significant.

For the first time in years, Ottawa is not simply tolerating Alberta’s energy ambitions, it is actively participating in them. The federal government is now publicly attached to the success of a West Coast pipeline in a way that would have been difficult to imagine under Justin Trudeau.

Whether that ultimately leads to construction is still unknown.



Source: Jeff McIntosh/The Canadian Press



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

ABDA: SUPPORTING ALBERTA'S RECYCLING NETWORK

Across Alberta, bottle depots are a familiar part of everyday life. But behind that network is an organization working to ensure the province's recycling system remains effective, accessible, and sustainable for the communities that rely on it.

The Alberta Bottle Depot Association (ABDA) is the trusted advocate and representative for Alberta's network of more than 200 privately owned bottle depots. Working alongside industry stakeholders, regulators, and government partners, ABDA supports depot operators while helping strengthen one of the most successful beverage container recycling systems in North America.

The organization provides guidance, operational support, and industry advocacy for depot owners across the province, while also participating in broader discussions around policy, infrastructure, and the future of Alberta's recycling system.

That system has become a national leader in beverage container recovery. In 2024 alone, Alberta's deposit return system collected approximately 2.2 billion beverage containers, achieving an 83.1 per cent return rate. Nearly 90 per cent of collected containers are recycled by North American processors and repurposed into new products, supporting Alberta's growing circular economy.

Bottle depots contribute directly to local economies and communities across the province. Nearly 1,200 Albertans are employed through depot operations, while more than \$600,000 in deposits is returned to Albertans every day. Through fundraising initiatives and community partnerships, Alberta depots also help raise more than \$30 million annually for charities, schools, sports teams, and local causes.

With more than 200 depots operating across over 160 communities, the network provides accessible recycling services to the vast majority of Albertans, including many rural and smaller communities where local infrastructure is essential.

ABDA's work also reflects the evolution of recycling itself. As consumer habits, environmental priorities, and regulatory expectations continue to shift, the organization has remained focused on supporting innovation across the depot system. From operational improvements and digital technologies to system planning and public awareness, ABDA works to ensure Alberta's recycling network remains efficient, adaptable, and community-focused.

In a time when sustainability and resource management are increasingly important, the Alberta Bottle Depot Association continues to play a critical role in supporting a recycling system that delivers measurable environmental, economic, and community benefits across the province.



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POLITICAL EVENTS

Sarah Hoffman's Annual Lobsterfest

Sat, May 23 – 5:30–9pm

Location: Woodcroft Community League, Edmonton

- Edmonton-Glenora MLA Sarah Hoffman will host her annual Lobsterfest fundraiser in support of the Alberta NDP's upcoming election campaign.
- The event will feature networking opportunities, auctions, and engagement with party supporters and representatives.

A Conversation with Hon. Grant Hunter, Minister of Environment and Protected Areas

Tues, May 26 – 11:45am–2pm

Location: Hyatt Regency Calgary

- The Calgary Chamber will host Environment and Protected Areas Minister Grant Hunter for a discussion on Alberta's environmental and regulatory priorities.
- The event will focus on provincial and federal policy developments, including regulatory reform, red tape reduction, and implications for Alberta's business and energy sectors.

Calgary Reception with Danielle Smith and Ric McIver

Thurs, June 11 – 5–8pm

Location: The Commons Collective (Hemingway Room), Calgary

- UCP Leader Danielle Smith and MLA Ric McIver will host a fundraising reception in support of the Calgary-Hays UCP Constituency Association.
- The event will provide an opportunity for attendees to connect with party representatives and discuss provincial priorities in an informal networking setting.

Defence Procurement Summit

Tues, June 16 – 9am–5pm

Location: World Trade Centre Edmonton

- The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, will host a summit focused on defence procurement opportunities for Alberta businesses.
- The event will feature procurement training, buyer engagement sessions, and discussions on federal contracting opportunities across sectors including construction, IT, logistics, manufacturing, and professional services.

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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

DEVERY CORBIN

CHIEF OF STAFF, ALBERTA NDP CAUCUS

Mackenzie Blyth

Devery Corbin has served as Chief of Staff to Alberta's NDP Caucus since July 2025. In this role, she is responsible for overseeing caucus operations, coordinating political strategy, managing stakeholder and intergovernmental relationships, and supporting Opposition Leader Naheed Nenshi and the broader caucus leadership team as the party prepares for the next provincial election.

Corbin entered provincial politics following a lengthy career in municipal government and strategic management. Prior to joining the Alberta NDP, she spent nearly eight years in senior leadership roles with the City of Calgary, including serving as Chief of Staff during Naheed Nenshi's tenure as mayor from 2018 to 2021. In that position, she worked closely with Nenshi on city governance, intergovernmental relations, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement during a period marked by economic volatility, infrastructure debates, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Earlier in her municipal career, Corbin served as Manager of Intergovernmental and Corporate Strategy for the City of Calgary, along with several senior planning, strategic services, and capital management roles. Her experience reflects a strong background in organizational leadership, long-range planning, and navigating complex government environments.

Following her departure from the City of Calgary, Corbin worked as an executive management and government relations consultant, advising organizations on strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. She also served on the Board of Directors for Headwater Exploration Inc., providing her with exposure to corporate governance and Alberta's energy sector.

Corbin's appointment is notable because, while she has extensive experience managing and advising Naheed Nenshi, much of her professional background has been rooted in municipal administration and executive management rather than partisan caucus operations. Her transition into a senior political role within the Alberta NDP reflects both Nenshi's preference for trusted senior advisors and the party's effort to blend political strategy with institutional and governance experience.

Corbin holds a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Queen's University and completed executive leadership training through the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative. As the Alberta NDP attempts to position itself as a government-in-waiting, Corbin will play a central role in shaping caucus operations, strategic direction, and the party's approach to stakeholder and intergovernmental engagement.

AT A GLANCE

In the Media

Smith and Carney Announce Pipeline Deal

Prime Minister Mark Carney and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith have announced a new climate and energy agreement that could pave the way for the construction of a major oil pipeline to Canada's West Coast beginning as early as 2027. The deal builds on a memorandum of understanding signed last November and includes a slower increase to Alberta's industrial carbon price, reaching an effective price of \$130 per tonne by 2040. However, no private-sector proponent or confirmed pipeline route has been identified.

Smith described the agreement as a "good day for Alberta and a good day for Canada." B.C. Premier David Eby criticized the proposed arrangement, arguing it could give Alberta an unfair advantage. "We will not be in a competitive position if Alberta has a special federal carbon price the rest of us don't have access to in the rest of Canada," Eby said.

Judge Overturns Alberta Separation Petition

An Alberta judge has quashed a separatist referendum petition backed by Stay Free Alberta, ruling that the provincial government failed in its duty to consult First Nations before issuing the petition. Justice Shaina Leonard stated the petition should never have been approved, agreeing with arguments from several Alberta First Nations that separation efforts could violate treaty rights and constitutional obligations. The separatist group claimed to have gathered nearly 302,000 signatures, well above the required threshold.

Premier Danielle Smith says her government will appeal the ruling. "This is a decision by one judge," Smith said. "We think that this decision is incorrect in law and anti-democratic, and we will be appealing it as a result."

Continued Investments in Affordable Housing

Alberta and the federal government are investing \$323 million through the Affordable Housing Partnership Program to build more than 3,600 affordable housing units and over 70 shelter spaces across the province. The funding will support 41 projects in communities including Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Red Deer and Grande Prairie, with at least 10 per cent of units designed to be accessible. The initiative aims to provide safe and stable housing for vulnerable Albertans.

Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services, Jason Nixon, commented: "You can't have strong communities without places for people to live. That's why we're building affordable housing in every corner of this province, and we're doing it by partnering with the people on the ground who know their communities best and how to deliver real results."

Support for Skilled-Trades Career Pathways at NAIT

Budget 2026 includes a \$384 million investment to expand apprenticeship training at NAIT through the creation of the Advanced Skills Centre, one of the largest skilled trades infrastructure investments in Alberta's history. The new 625,000 square-foot facility, expected to open in fall 2030, will support 5,500 additional apprentices each year across 29 programs. This investment reflects the province's broader aim to prioritize careers in high-demand sectors such as construction, transportation, manufacturing and energy.

Laura Jo Gunter, President and CEO of NAIT, stated: "NAIT applauds the Government of Alberta for this historic investment in the skilled trades. The Advanced Skill Centre will ensure more Albertans – 5,500 extra annually – get industry-leading training so they are job-ready to build the next generation of economic opportunities."



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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ALEXANDRA BALLOS

Associate

Alexandra Ballos is a public affairs professional, researcher, facilitator, and communicator with a strong understanding of Alberta's political landscape. Born and raised in Alberta, she is deeply passionate about provincial politics and brings particular knowledge of rural Alberta, municipal issues, and the complex narratives that shape public policy and decision-making across the province. She helps clients navigate government, understand stakeholder dynamics, and approach complex issues with clarity, strategy, and strong relationship-building.

Her background spans public and government affairs, political research, stakeholder engagement, and strategic communications. She has worked on municipal campaigns and worked with provincial elected officials outside the election period, giving her firsthand experience navigating both campaign and non-campaign political environments. She approaches challenges with a multi-partisan perspective, focused on finding common ground across perspectives.

In addition to her professional work, Alexandra is the Founder and Executive Director of the Gravel Road Civics Project and a co-founder of Municipal YYC, reflecting her strong commitment to civic participation and community leadership. She holds a First-Class Honours BA in Political Science from the University of Alberta, where she worked on the Common Ground Initiative research team, and is completing a Master of Arts in Political Science at the University of Calgary.

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PRICED OUT OF HOMES: ALBERTA'S POLITICAL DIVIDE ON HOUSING

Alexandra Ballos

Alberta has long sold itself through a simple promise: come here, work hard, and build an affordable life. That promise still attracts families, workers, students, and newcomers looking for opportunity, space, and a lower cost of living than in many other provinces; however, as the effects of recent population surges are felt and housing supply struggles to keep pace, the gap between Alberta's reputation for affordability and the reality facing households is becoming harder to ignore.

The numbers explain why housing has become central to Alberta's political debate. Alberta's Budget 2026 forecasts housing starts falling to 40,000 units, a 27 per cent decline from the 2025 peak, while the province continues to experience rapid population growth. Between October 2024 and October 2025, Alberta grew by 83,796 people, the fastest rate in Canada, meaning the province must build not only for current residents but also for tens of thousands of new arrivals each year.

Still, Alberta's housing story is not only one of crisis. Calgary and Edmonton remain expensive for many families, but they continue to be more affordable than several other major Canadian cities. According to the Fraser Institute, a typical family in 2023 needed 17.5 months of income for a 20 per cent down payment in Calgary and 12.5 months in Edmonton, with mortgage payments consuming 45.1 per cent of after-tax income in Calgary and 32.2 per cent in Edmonton. Yet Calgary and Edmonton still ranked 8th and 14th out of 36 major cities for affordability, showing that Alberta's relative advantage remains, even as it feels less secure.

This tension now defines Alberta's housing debate: the province is still comparatively affordable, but many Albertans no longer feel that affordability is reliable.

For the United Conservative Party, the path back to affordability is primarily supply driven. The UCP argues that when population growth outpaces available housing, prices and rents rise because too many people are competing for too few homes. As noted by Minister of Municipal Affairs, Dan Williams "Bill 28 is paving the way for more efficient homebuilding across our province..." Its solution is to build faster, reduce regulatory delays, lower development barriers, and make approvals more predictable so projects can move from proposals to construction more efficiently.

Bill 28, the Municipal Affairs and Housing Statutes Amendment Act, 2026, reflects this approach by requiring public reporting on municipal permit timelines, clarifying off-site levy costs, supporting automated permitting tools, creating a framework for "Automatic Yes" approvals, and allowing community design codes to streamline projects that meet local standards. The government has also committed \$768 million over three years through the Affordable Housing Partnership Program, which supports affordable housing through partnerships with municipalities, non-profits, housing providers, and community organizations.

The NDP, however, argues that more construction alone will not solve the problem if the homes being built remain out of reach. Its approach focuses more directly on low-income renters, first-time buyers, seniors, people experiencing homelessness, and Albertans who need accessible or supportive housing. NDP Housing Critic Janis Irwin has welcomed new housing starts but argued that market construction does little for those already priced out, emphasizing that thousands of Albertans still lack safe and affordable housing. That said a fulsome policy on housing is yet to be released by the opposition.

Both arguments respond to real pressures. Alberta needs more homes, and faster construction can help ease demand; however, new supply does not automatically guarantee affordability for households already under strain. The UCP is betting that construction, efficiency, and reduced barriers will restore affordability over time, while the NDP argues that targeted supports and public investment are needed now. Beneath the partisan divide, the shared goal is clear: Albertans want the Alberta advantage back, where stable housing and a realistic path forward feel within reach again.

