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CANADA'S ENERGY LEVERAGE PROBLEM

Mackenzie Blyth

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to impose an additional 50 per cent tariff on a broad range of Canadian goods beginning August 19 has reopened one of the most politically dangerous questions in Canadian federalism: should Canada retaliate by restricting the export of oil, potash, electricity, or other strategic commodities to the United States?

Ontario Premier Doug Ford believes those options should remain on the table.

"No matter if it's the electricity, and I'm not speaking for the other provinces, I'm going to be very clear, the potash, the oil … they need to feel the pain," Ford told reporters during meetings with Canada's premiers in Charlottetown.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's response was immediate.

"That's not going to happen," she said.

That disagreement reflects two competing views of how Canada should respond to a more protectionist and antagonistic United States.

One approach treats Canadian energy and natural resources as weapons to be deployed in a trade war. The other sees those exports as the country's strongest source of economic resilience and argues that weakening them would do more damage to Canada than to the United States.

From Alberta's perspective, the second argument is considerably stronger.

A New Tariff Front

The latest U.S. action applies a 50 per cent tariff to a lengthy list of Canadian products, including alcohol, dairy products, agricultural goods, paper, furniture, electronics, clothing, textiles, sporting equipment, and industrial materials.

They cover products ranging from beer, wine, whisky, and hockey equipment to dairy ingredients, paper products, furniture, electronics, and clothing. The tariff order explicitly states that a 50 per cent ad valorem tariff will apply to the listed articles unless they are already subject to separate U.S. trade restrictions.

Alcohol is among the most politically visible targets. The tariff schedules include beer, wine, cider, whisky, vodka, rum, tequila, and other spirits.

Other lists target concentrated milk, whey, milk proteins, lactose products, and other dairy inputs, reflecting the Trump administration's continued frustration with Canada's supply management system.

The new tariffs are also significant because they apply to goods covered under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement. That undermines one of the central assumptions of the agreement: that qualifying goods moving within North America would enjoy predictable, preferential access.

For businesses, certainty is almost as important as the tariff rate itself. Companies can adapt to known rules. They struggle to invest when those rules can be rewritten by executive action with little warning.

The Canada-U.S. relationship has been built over decades around integrated supply chains, shared infrastructure, and a basic expectation that trade agreements would provide stability. The latest escalation calls that expectation into question.

Initial estimates suggest Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia will be hit much harder than Alberta and Saskatchewan. University of Calgary economist Trevor Tombe estimated that 13.7 per cent of British Columbia exports, 10.8 per cent of Quebec exports, and nine per cent of Ontario exports could be affected. By comparison, roughly one per cent of Alberta exports and 1.2 per cent of Saskatchewan exports would be exposed.

That difference helps explain why Ford is demanding a more forceful response.

Ontario's auto sector and manufacturing base are more vulnerable to tariff escalation. Alberta's largest export, energy, is expected to remain exempt, along with critical minerals and potash.

But Alberta is not insulated from the broader consequences.

The United States remains Alberta's largest trading partner. In 2025, Alberta exported more than $152 billion in goods to the U.S., with energy products accounting for approximately $125.2 billion. Plastics, machinery, meat, forestry products, and organic chemicals also represent billions of dollars in cross-border trade.

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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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Any lasting disruption to the Canada-U.S. relationship would affect investment decisions, commodity prices, supply chains, and business confidence across the province.

The question is whether Canada should respond by damaging the one trading relationship that remains most economically valuable.

Ford's argument has political appeal. Canada supplies the United States with roughly 4.3 million barrels of oil per day, almost all of it produced in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan also supplies approximately 85 per cent of the potash used by American farmers. Crude oil is Canada's largest export to the U.S., while potash is its most important mineral export.

Those numbers make oil and potash look like obvious bargaining chips.

If the United States is willing to target Canadian manufacturing, agriculture, alcohol, and consumer goods, why should Canada continue supplying strategic resources without disruption?

The problem is that leverage only works when using it hurts the other side more than it hurts you.

Restricting oil exports would reduce revenue for Canadian producers, workers, governments, and communities. It could also undermine Canada's reputation as a reliable supplier at precisely the moment the country is trying to attract capital and expand exports.

The same is true of potash. American farmers would face higher costs, but Saskatchewan producers would lose access to their largest market. Competitors would gain an opportunity to fill the gap. Once customers establish alternative supply relationships, they may not return.

Former Saskatchewan natural resources minister Tim McMillan summarized the problem well.

"What Ford gets right is that potash is a phenomenal resource … what he gets wrong is that it should be sacrificed to defend industries where, arguably, he and the federal government haven't put into a position of strength," he said.

"By killing the golden goose, you aren't saving the country. You're just making the country worse."

That is the core conservative objection to using energy as retaliation. It converts a competitive advantage into self-inflicted economic damage.

Smith's Case for Restraint

Smith has consistently argued that diplomacy, not escalation, offers the best path forward.

When asked whether oil and potash could be used as retaliatory measures, she rejected the idea and said the coming weeks should be focused on reaching a negotiated resolution.

Her position is that Canada should work toward preserving a tariff-free relationship under CUSMA rather than threatening industries that support hundreds of thousands of Canadian jobs.

Alberta has taken the same approach to American liquor. While several provinces removed U.S. alcohol from government-controlled shelves during earlier tariff disputes, Alberta kept American products available, arguing that a boycott would hurt workers and businesses on both sides of the border.

That approach has attracted criticism from those who believe Canada must demonstrate greater willingness to retaliate. But it is consistent with the province's broader position: trade barriers are economically destructive regardless of which government imposes them.

Tariffs raise costs, reduce consumer choice, discourage investment, and invite retaliation. Responding to bad policy with additional bad policy may be politically satisfying, but it rarely produces a better economic result.

Smith's position also reflects Alberta's experience within Confederation. Western resources have frequently been treated as national assets when other regions need them and provincial assets when Alberta seeks greater control over their development.

It is therefore unsurprising that Alberta reacts strongly when political leaders in Central Canada suggest using western oil as a bargaining chip to protect industries concentrated elsewhere.

The issue is not a lack of national solidarity. It is whether one region should be expected to absorb disproportionate losses because another region is facing a more direct tariff threat.

Energy Is More Valuable as an Asset Than a Threat

The better way to use Canadian energy as leverage is not to stop exporting it. It is to create more options for where it can go.

Canada's dependence on the U.S. market is the result of infrastructure, not geology. Alberta has world-scale oil and natural gas reserves, but for decades its producers have had limited access to tidewater and eastern Canadian markets.

That is why recent pipeline proposals have taken on renewed political importance.

Ford and Smith's Northern Shield Energy Corridor proposal would move Alberta crude eastward to refineries in Ontario.

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 theCommon Ground Initiative research team, and is completing a Master of Arts in Political Science at the University of Calgary.

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Supporters have also argued that it should ultimately extend to Saint John, New Brunswick, giving Canadian oil access to Atlantic markets.

The proposal faces significant practical challenges. It lacks a confirmed private-sector proponent, would require cooperation across several provinces, and could face regulatory, political, and Indigenous consultation hurdles.

Critics have dismissed it as more political branding than viable infrastructure. TVO's John Michael McGrath argued that the pipeline lacks a clear business case and may never be built.

But the strategic logic behind east-west infrastructure is becoming harder to ignore.

A country that relies almost entirely on one customer will always be vulnerable to that customer's political decisions. The answer is not to cut off existing sales before alternatives exist. The answer is to build alternatives.

A pipeline to the West Coast expands access to Asia. A pipeline east would strengthen domestic energy security and potentially open access to Europe. Additional LNG capacity would give Canadian natural gas producers more options beyond the continental market.

That is real leverage.

Threatening to shut off exports is temporary leverage that damages both sides. Building infrastructure creates permanent bargaining power because Canada is no longer forced to accept whatever terms its largest customer offers.

A National Unity Test

The debate also exposes a growing regional tension in Canada's tariff response.

Ontario and Quebec face the greatest immediate pressure from tariffs on manufacturing, autos, dairy, and other products. Alberta and Saskatchewan remain more protected because energy and potash have largely been spared.

Ford wants western resources used to create pain in the United States. Smith and Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe see that as asking the West to sacrifice its strongest industries to defend sectors elsewhere.

Economist Jack Mintz has argued that Alberta and Saskatchewan's stronger economies will already help absorb some of the national impact. Higher federal revenues from the West can fund support for workers and industries in harder-hit provinces. Equalization and interprovincial labour mobility also provide mechanisms for sharing the burden.

That may not satisfy politicians looking for an immediate and visible response, but it is economically more coherent than weakening the sectors still generating growth.

Canada will need national unity to navigate a more volatile relationship with the United States. But unity cannot mean treating Alberta's exports as expendable whenever Ottawa or Ontario wants additional negotiating leverage.

A durable national response must recognize that the strength of one province can help support the others.

It should not require weakening that strength first.

Diplomacy Without Illusions

There is no guarantee that diplomacy will succeed.

Trump has repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to use tariffs as an instrument of political pressure, even when doing so disrupts American businesses and consumers. Canada cannot assume that economic integration alone will prevent further escalation.

Ottawa and the provinces should prepare targeted responses, support affected industries, challenge unjustified measures, and build stronger trading relationships outside the United States.

But Canada should avoid turning its most valuable exports into symbolic weapons.

Heather Exner-Pirot of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute argued that energy and minerals have been among the most resilient parts of Canada's economy during the trade dispute.

"The resilience of energy and minerals in the past year, and their exclusion from tariffs, has been a huge net positive for the Canadian economy," she said. "It's not helpful to inject uncertainty into these sectors by floating the idea of using them as retaliation."

That is the wiser course.

Canadian oil, natural gas, potash, and electricity are sources of national strength. They support jobs, government revenues, exports, and economic stability at a time when other industries face serious pressure.

Canada should use that strength to negotiate, diversify, and build.

It should not switch it off.

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CHIROPRACTIC ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA

For millions of Canadians, conditions such as back pain, neck pain, headaches, and joint injuries can have a significant impact on daily life. The Chiropractic Association of Alberta is working to ensure Albertans have access to evidence-based chiropractic care as an integral part of the province's healthcare system.

As the province's professional association for chiropractors, the Chiropractic Association of Alberta (CAA) represents and supports chiropractic professionals while advocating for greater integration of chiropractic care into Alberta's continuum of care. Guided by its purpose, "A duty to diagnose, and a commitment to care," the Association works with patients, government, healthcare professionals, and insurers to advance the role of chiropractic in improving health outcomes across the province.

The CAA is an organization committed to evidence-based care. Chiropractors are primary contact healthcare providers who assess, diagnose, and treat disorders affecting the spine, muscles, joints, and nervous system. Through non-invasive treatments, rehabilitation, patient education, and preventative care, chiropractic services help Albertans improve mobility, reduce pain, and return to their everyday activities.

The Association provides valuable resources for its members while representing the profession in discussions with government, insurers, the Workers' Compensation Board, and other healthcare organizations. By advocating for policies that expand access to care and strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration, the CAA is helping position chiropractors as trusted partners within Alberta's evolving healthcare system.

As Alberta's healthcare system continues to evolve, the Chiropractic Association of Alberta is focused on ensuring patients have timely access to safe, effective, and coordinated musculoskeletal care.

The CAA's 2026–2029 Strategic Plan outlines a vision of chiropractors being recognized as Alberta's primary contact for musculoskeletal health, fully integrated into the public healthcare system and working collaboratively alongside other health professionals to improve patient outcomes. The strategy emphasizes evidence-based practice, patient-centred care, advocacy, and innovation while strengthening support for Alberta's chiropractic community.

As demand grows for accessible healthcare solutions, the Chiropractic Association of Alberta continues to champion a collaborative approach that benefits patients, practitioners, and the healthcare system alike. By advancing evidence-based chiropractic care and supporting integration across the continuum of care, the Association is helping build a healthier future for Albertans.

POLITICAL EVENTS

Lethbridge is Ready to Win with Naheed Nenshi

Mon, Aug. 17 – 7–9pm

Location: Private Residence, Lethbridge

- Alberta NDP Leader Naheed Nenshi will meet with supporters in Lethbridge for a fundraising reception focused on the party's campaign in southern Alberta.
- Attendees will have the opportunity to hear from Nenshi and special guests, discuss the party's priorities, and support local organizing efforts ahead of the next provincial election.

The Alberta Derby

Fri, Aug. 21 – 5pm

Location: Century Downs Racetrack and Casino, Rocky View County

- UCP Leader Danielle Smith, MLA Angela Pitt, and other United Conservative MLAs will attend the Alberta Derby, a fundraising event hosted by the UCP Airdrie-East Constituency Association.
- The event will feature horse racing, auctions, networking opportunities, and entertainment while bringing together party supporters, elected officials, and community leaders.

Martin Long's 7th Annual MLA Golf Tournament

Fri, Aug. 21 – 10am

Location: Whitecourt Golf & Country Club, Whitecourt

- The West Yellowhead UCP Constituency Association will host its seventh annual golf tournament in support of MLA Martin Long and the local constituency association.
- The event will bring together supporters, community leaders, and stakeholders for a day of networking and fundraising, with proceeds supporting the United Conservative Party.

Source: LinkedIn.com

KEY INFLUENCER PROFILE

SEAN AMATO

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS, ALBERTA NDP CAUCUS.

Mackenzie Blyth

Sean Amato has served as Director of Communications for the Alberta NDP Caucus since June 2026, overseeing communications and media relations for the Official Opposition caucus. His appointment represents a notable career transitions in Alberta politics, moving directly from the Alberta Legislature Press Gallery into a senior partisan communications role after more than two decades as a journalist.

Before entering politics, Amato built a 21-year career in broadcast journalism. Most recently, he served as Alberta Politics Reporter for CityNews, covering provincial politics from the Legislature while also reporting on major national and international events. Earlier in his career, he reported for APTN News and worked as a Communications Specialist for the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta.

Amato's transition into partisan politics has attracted attention because of his long-standing role covering Alberta governments from the press gallery. Announcing his departure from journalism, he said he had "filed my final story" and was "choosing to take a stand for Alberta & Canada" after concluding he could better serve the province in a different capacity.

His move will likely be interpreted differently depending on political perspective. Supporters view it as an experienced political journalist choosing to become directly involved at a pivotal moment in Alberta politics. Critics, particularly within conservative circles, are likely to argue that his transition reinforces long-held concerns about ideological bias within mainstream media. Whether fair or not, the move is expected to become a recurring point of discussion as debates over media neutrality and political communications continue in Alberta.

For the Alberta NDP, Amato brings an extensive understanding of the Legislature, established relationships within Alberta's media landscape, and two decades of experience identifying and communicating the stories that shape public debate. As the Official Opposition prepares for the next provincial election, he will play a central role in developing the caucus's communications strategy and helping define its public narrative.

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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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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AT A GLANCE

In the Media

Province Adds Record Number of Physicians

According to the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, the province added a record 14,156 fully registered physicians, an increase of 1,226, or nearly 10 per cent, compared with the same period last year. Every provincial health zone recorded growth, including gains in both family medicine and specialist care.

Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services, Justin Wright, commented: "More physicians are choosing Alberta, helping improve access to care in communities across the province. We'll continue working with our partners to train, recruit and retain more physicians."

Dane Lloyd Named Conservative Referendum Lead

Federal Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre has appointed Alberta MP Dane Lloyd to lead the party's campaign ahead of the province's October 19 referendum. Lloyd, who has represented the Parkland riding since 2017, will promote the case for Alberta remaining in Canada.

Poilievre said the party's approach will focus on listening to Albertans rather than dismissing their concerns. "This is not a zero-sum fight. What is good for Alberta is good for Canada. More pipelines, more homes, lower taxes, safer streets, stronger borders and more freedom will help workers and families in every province," Poilievre said.

Alberta Libraries Face Jan. 1 Compliance Deadline

Alberta public libraries have until January 1, 2027, to implement new provincial policies restricting access for anyone aged 15 or younger to materials containing sexually explicit images without parental consent. Library boards must determine which materials will be restricted and how they will be stored. The province says the measures will preserve adult access while keeping libraries family-friendly.

Critics, including the Alberta NDP, warn the requirements could increase costs, strain smaller libraries and limit local decision-making. Municipal Affairs critic Rob Miyashiro said the measures are unnecessary, noting that most public libraries already have policies intended to achieve the same outcome. "Local decision-making is going to be minimized in favour of a centralized approach by this government," he said.

Province Expands Addiction Supports in Edmonton

Alberta is investing more than $30 million to add over 400 addiction treatment, housing and stabilization beds in Edmonton. The funding includes a new Integrated Stabilization Centre, where people experiencing public intoxication can receive medical assessment, short-term care and connections to treatment and community supports. It will also expand recovery housing, medical shelter services and outreach programs across the city.

According to provincial data, Edmonton accounts for more than half of Alberta's opioid-related deaths. Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, Rick Wilson, stated: "The trends in Edmonton are deeply concerning and cannot be ignored. While most communities have seen opioid deaths return to pre-pandemic levels, Edmonton remains the exception. These investments are about strengthening Edmonton's entire system of care so more people can get the help they need."

THOMAS ASSER

Thomas joined Alberta Counsel after earning his Juris Doctor from the University of Victoria. During law school Thomas gained experience in commercial contracting. regulatory research, and public sector legal matters through his internships and practical legal work. Thomas has also completed legal research in taxation, administrative law, corporate governance, and British Columbia's Mineral Tenure Reform Act.

Outside the office, Thomas enjoys strength training, theatre, fishing, and is actively involved in his local church.

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ALEXIA YEUNG

Alexia is an Articling Student who is committed to providing thoughtful, client-focused legal service. She earned a Bachelor of Commerce, with Distinction, and a Juris Doctor from Dalhousie University.

She has a genuine passion for advocacy, complemented by her experience in the federal government, Legal Aid Alberta, and Dalhousie Legal Aid Clinic. Throughout her education and previous professional experience, Alexia has developed a reputation for being analytical, organized, and approachable.

Alexia enjoys tackling complex legal issues, finding practical solutions, and helping clients navigate challenging situations with confidence.

Outside the office, she's an avid gym-goer, runner, and film enthusiast.

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NOTICE FOR ALBERTA BUSINESSES: UNDERSTANDING CANADA'S NEW INTERPROVINCIAL MUTUAL-RECOGNITION RULES

Thomas Asser and Alexia Yeung

How do these new rules work in practice? Let's say a company in Saskatchewan is seeking to bring a product into Alberta.

Historically, that would result in a whole host of legal requirements. This could mean that a product that is tested, labelled, inspected, and certified in Saskatchewan may still be subjected to an additional round of Alberta approvals, fees, and paperwork before it is allowed to be sold in the province.

Under Alberta's new Interprovincial Trade Mutual Recognition Act [1], products originating from other provinces may not need to meet these duplicate requirements. Where a good has met the applicable standards and received approvals from another Canadian jurisdiction, the Act allows it to be treated as if it met the corresponding Alberta standards. Generally, an Alberta regulator cannot demand additional testing, approval or related fees simply because the product crossed a provincial border.

You may have seen this presented as: If it can be sold there, it can be sold here.

This is good advertising, but does not reflect the entire rule.

The new rules do not cover every product or displace every Alberta requirement. For example, Alberta has expressly preserved its requirement that electrical, gas-fired and plumbing equipment be certified or inspected by a certification body accredited by the Standards Council of Canada. The agreement also does not generally determine who may sell a product, how it may be sold, whether the seller requires a licence, or the contractual terms governing the sale. Food, alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, plants and live animals are excluded from the current agreement.

The agreement is primarily aimed at certain goods. It does not possess the same functionality for services, regulated professions or professional licences. Alberta's regulation states that the service provisions do not operate unless Alberta enters into a separate mutual-recognition agreement for services.

Certain Alberta-specific certifications and safety requirements also remain. Electrical, gas-fired and plumbing equipment, for example, must still be certified or inspected by a body accredited by the Standards Council of Canada. The province also retained requirements affecting safety helmets, motor vehicles, boilers, pressure vessels, pesticides and several other categories of goods.

The Mutual-Recognition Rules have real consequences for Alberta businesses.

A growing Alberta business may now be able to enter another provincial market without needing to pay for to duplicate testing and certification standards. This creates advantages for not only large sellers, but for smaller businesses as well. The official guidance identifies small and medium-sized businesses as likely beneficiaries since duplicate testing, certification, and paperwork can make expansion uneconomical.

However, businesses looking to expand into Alberta may also benefit from the changing legislation. Businesses from other provinces may now be able to enter Alberta faster and at a lower cost, creating more competition. For some local businesses, a provincial border that once created a practical buffer will offer less protection. This of course is not stated in the act, but is a natural consequence of removing intra-provincial red tape.

Unfortunately, this is the reality introduced with this act.

This is an economic consequence rather than a rule written into the Act, but it follows from the intended reduction in regulatory costs and delays.

In particular:

- Growing businesses should revisit markets they previously considered too expensive to enter.
- Established Alberta businesses should consider where new competition may come from.
- Any seller relying on the new rules should confirm the exact product, approval and Alberta exception before launching in a new market.

This act has not erased provincial borders, but certain goods may now find easier access to intra-provincial markets.