



ALBERTA COUNSEL

Senior Editor: Aaron Singleton
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Legal and Lobby Professionals
Management Consultants
Trade-mark Agents

LEDGEVIEW BUILDING
800, 9707-110 Street NW
Edmonton AB T5K 2L9
P: 780-652-1311
F: 780-652-1312
E: info@albertacounsel.com
www.AlbertaCounsel.com

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.

Alberta Counsel

We work with organizations to navigate their way through the confusing network that is associated with government. We help our clients connect with those who are important in shaping public policy and ensure your messaging is effectively communicated to decision makers.

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MAKING SENSE OF ALBERTA'S DESIRE TO BLOCK FEDERAL FUNDING

Aaron Singleton

Back when Jason Kenney was leading the United Conservative Party into its first election in 2019, there were few questions about the plans he held for Alberta. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic forced him to pivot temporarily on a number of issues, his party had crafted a platform that looked more like a checklist – making things much more simple to anticipate.

Fast forward to the 2023 provincial election.

Neither the Alberta NDP nor UCP put forward a similar looking platform. Rather, both opted to focus on a few key promises supplemented by general themes they intended to pursue. While there are strategic reasons for not outlining each and every item your party plans to action, more general platforms tends to lead to more speculation and guesswork as it is tricky to predict exactly what could come forward at any given time.

With the UCP under Premier Danielle Smith, one trend has arisen that helps politicians and watchers to better predict future initiatives her government will undertake:

If someone in Cabinet muses about an idea publicly, it is reasonably safe to assume that it will be coming forward in some way, shape or form.

Last weekend, Minister of Seniors, Community and Social Services Jason Nixon spoke with [Rosemary Barton on CBC](#). On her show, Minister Nixon indicated that the province will be introducing legislation to prevent the federal government from stepping on provincial jurisdiction. At the time of writing, such a bill is not found on the Order Paper; however, it is reasonable to suspect that we could see legislation introduced before MLAs break for summer.

So, how did we get here?

Creating a List, Checking it Twice

While the origin of the tension between the province and municipal orders of government go well beyond the scope of this article, we want to focus solely on this particular issue.

At the start of 2024, Minister of Municipal Affairs Ric McIver sent a letter to every municipality in the province. In said letter, he requested that municipalities provide a detailed list on agreements they may have with the federal government, including:

- capital funding agreements.
- building lease agreements.
- maintenance agreements for federal properties.
- mutual aid agreements with First Nations.
- funding agreements for cultural events (i.e. Canada Day events or fireworks).
- community mailbox agreements with Canada Post.
- agreements municipal bodies hold with the federal government (defined as any organization that receives 50 per cent or more of its funding through the municipality).

Last week, the province felt further aggrieved by the conditions placed on \$5 billion in new housing funding created by the federal government. Of the total \$6 billion, only \$1 billion is being made available immediately for shovel-ready projects. The remaining \$5 billion is set aside for provinces and territories that meet certain requirements.

Among those conditions are permitting more multi-home projects (duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, etc) as well as a three-year freeze on development charges (only for municipalities with more than 300,000 residents).

In response, Ministers Nixon and McIver issued a joint statement.

"To date, the Government of Canada has not provided adequate or appropriate funding to Alberta for housing and are once again bypassing provincial jurisdiction by not consulting or even notifying provinces about the new program."



AARON SINGLETON
Associate - Digital Campaigns

During the second year of his Political Science degree at the University of Alberta, Aaron worked as the campaign manager for a candidate in the 2011 federal election. He was able to translate that experience into a public service career that includes various positions with Service Alberta and Justice & Solicitor General. He also served as the Foreign Policy Advisor for Security Council at the University of Alberta's HSMUN conference where he developed his understanding of pragmatic policy analysis.

a.singleton@albertacounsel.com



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Where We Find Ourselves Today

Minister Nixon spoke quite clearly about the government's intentions on Barton's program.

"The premier and I and the municipal affairs minister of the province have been clear that we will be taking steps to make sure we're in the same circumstance as Quebec shortly, and we will pass legislation to protect the people of our province."

In this quote, Minister Nixon is speaking of An Act Respecting the Ministère du conseil exécutif, legislation passed by the Assemblée nationale du Québec, in force in the province since December 1984.

Section 3.11 of said legislation reads as follows:

Except to the extent expressly provided for by law, no municipal body or school body may, without the prior authorization of the Government, enter into any agreement with another government in Canada or one of its departments or government agencies, or with a federal public agency.

The Government may attach such conditions as it determines to the authorization.

Any contravention of the provisions of the first paragraph or any failure to comply with the conditions referred to in the second paragraph entails the nullity of the agreement.

The Minister, concurrently with the minister responsible for or the minister who subsidizes the municipal or school body, shall see to the negotiation of the agreement.

Following sections outline how the minister responsible shall provide advisory opinions on draft agreements and attached conditions as they deem necessary.

Given the age of the legislation in Quebec, it is difficult to say if Alberta's legislation will mirror the conditions or if our province will incorporate new measures or stipulations to make it more difficult to accept funding from the federal government.

The provincial government under the UCP believes very strongly in the idea of jurisdictional independence. Minister Nixon said "municipal governments are our jurisdiction and the federal government stepping into that area is something we will not accept. You don't see this taking place in the province of Quebec, as an example, and that's because Quebec has passed legislation to make sure the feds can't do that."

Regardless of the design of the legislation or the outcome of this jurisdictional stand-off, the number one question that will persist is how will municipal finances be affected. As many of our readers are acutely aware, municipalities are forbidden by legislation from carrying deficits when it comes to tabling municipal budgets. There have already been significant changes in how provincial funding is executed since the transition from the MSI to LGFF (though LGFF funding totals have exceeded initial forecasts in the most recent budget).

With both municipal political parties and the 2025 election cycle around the corner, those in office (and hoping to be) will need to strategically craft a plan for how to navigate the seemingly unending changes to municipal funding.

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Minister Jason Nixon

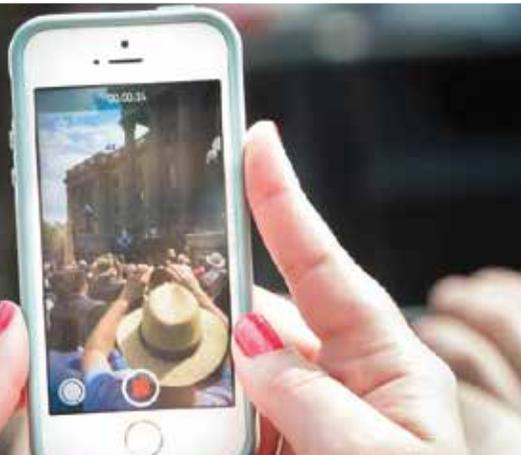
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Minister Jason Nixon



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Photo Credit: Brendan Brown



POLITICAL EVENTS

Alberta Counsel – Municipal Recall

Tuesday, April 16 @ Noon

Location: Zoom

- Join us for a free webinar looking at the technicalities of municipal recall legislation and hear first-hand accounts of those facing recall petitions.
- Tix: Free (albertacounsel.com)

UCP – Edmonton Leader’s Dinner

Tuesday, April 16th @ 5:00PM

Location: Edmonton Convention Centre

- Join Danielle Smith and the UCP for an evening dinner event
- Tix: \$350(unitedconservative.ca/events)

Alberta Counsel – Federal Budget 2024

Thursday, April 18th @ Noon

Location: Zoom

- Alberta Counsel’s funding team will review both the impacts and opportunities arising from these announcements for our non-profit clients.
- Tix: Free (albertacounsel.com)

NDP – Leadership Debate

Thursday, April 25th @ 7:00PM

Location: Yates Memorial Theatre, Lethbridge

- This will be the first of three official debates sanctioned by the Alberta NDP for their leadership race. It will also be streamed online.
- Tix: Free (albertandp.ca/events)

THE NEWS
from ALBERTA COUNSEL



ANDRE DESPINS
Senior Associate

During his tenure with Alberta’s Progressive Conservative government, he held senior positions in the minister’s office across various portfolios. After his time in government, Andre spent six years with a fast-growing transportation technology company where he managed government relations, market access initiatives and new program implementations for expansion across numerous US states, Alberta, and Ontario.

a.despins@albertacounsel.com



Source: LINKEDIN

KEY INFLUENCER PROFILE

KERRY BALES
CEO OF RECOVERY ALBERTA

Elyse Holman

The Government of Alberta continues health care refocusing efforts with its first major announcement establishing one of the four agencies that will comprise the restructured AHS. Recovery Alberta, the new agency focusing on mental health and addiction, will be helmed by AHS’ current Chief Program Officer for Addiction and Mental Health and Correctional Health Services, Kerry Bales, as CEO.

Bales has been a registered nurse since 1998, receiving his BSc in Nursing from the University of Alberta that same year. After working in health care across a variety of functions, including providing front-line nursing care in the community, Bales became AHS’ Chief Zone Officer for the central zone in 2009. After being promoted to Senior Program Officer in Health System Integration in 2019, he started working in addiction and mental health in 2020 and was promoted to CPO in 2022. In 2018 he received a Master of Arts Degree in Leadership from Royal Roads University.



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PASCAL RYFFEL
VP of Corporate
Development and
Government Relations

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.

pr@albertacounsel.com



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AT A GLANCE

In the Media

Alberta to Establish Two New Health Organizations

As part of the province's refocusing of health care delivery, Alberta announced it will be creating two new organizations focused on mental health and addictions services. Recovery Alberta will be responsible for taking over the delivery of these services from Alberta Health Services. The province is also establishing the Canadian Centre of Recovery Excellence (CoRE), a public body that will "support Alberta's government in building recovery-oriented systems of care by researching best practices for recovery from around the world, analyzing data and making evidence-based recommendations."

In the province's press release, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Dan Williams wrote "Alberta is leading the country with the development of the Alberta Recovery Model to address mental health and addiction challenges. The establishment of these two new organizations will support the delivery of recovery-oriented services to Albertans and will further cement Alberta as a leader in the field. We are proud to establish Recovery Alberta and CoRE as part of the Alberta Recovery Model."

Funding Awarded for Regional Airports

The provincial government has announced that it is investing \$1.13 million to develop a number of regional airports across Alberta. The money will be used to aid in "developing business cases and feasibility studies for improved airport infrastructure and air transportation."

Funding for the ten airports listed range in value from \$56,000 to \$150,000 to assist with the various needs of each airport. The airports that will benefit from the funding include Cold Lake, Whitecourt, Lloydminster, Peace River, Lethbridge, High Level, Red Deer, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie, and Fort McMurray.

Arts Commons Expansion Displayed

Albertans got a sneak peak into what the finished product of the country's largest arts-focused infrastructure project will look like. Located in Calgary's Olympic Plaza, Arts Commons secured funding to help revitalize their existing building while also constructing a new building. Part of the project includes a 1,000-seat theatre and a 200-seat studio – both of which will be included in the first phase of construction.

Ground breaking is expected to occur this year with completion estimated to happen in time for the 2028-29 season. Arts Commons president and CEO Alex Sarian said "Today, we don't just reveal a stunning new design, we come together to celebrate the fact that the largest cultural infrastructure project currently underway in Canada is truly and uniquely Calgarian."

British Columbians Flocking to Alberta

A new Statistics Canada report shows that more and more British Columbians are choosing to move to our province. In 2023, it was reported that 67,944 residents of British Columbia migrated out of the province – the first net-migration loss for our neighbours since 2012. Of those who left, about 37,650 move to their immediate neighbour to the east.

The news is part of a larger story – that being Alberta experiencing "the largest gain in interprovincial migration nationally since comparable data became available in 1972. Last year, Alberta saw a net increase of 55,107 new residents from interprovincial migration – dwarfing the combined totals of the other net-positive jurisdictions.



JENNELE GIONG
Energy, Minerals, and
International Strategy

Jennele has refined her skills in government relations and policymaking through diverse roles within the United Conservative Party, including local board directorship and ethnic outreach for the former Premier and UCP caucus. Jennele utilizes her extensive knowledge and varied professional experiences to develop strategic solutions for the energy sector's unique challenges. Her sharp political insight, coupled with her entrepreneurial drive, positions her as a key strategist in shaping Alberta's future.

j.giong@albertacounsel.com



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ALBERTA LEADS WITH NATURAL GAS: CHARTING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN ENERGY

Jennele Giong

CERAWeek, an annual summit organized by S&P Global in Houston, Texas, stands as a pivotal forum for discussions on a wide range of energy topics. At the 2024 conference, Premier Danielle Smith highlighted the province's promising future in energy and mineral development, particularly focusing on the roles of natural gas and doubling oil production.

She advocated for the expansion of natural gas, asserting its vital position not only within Alberta's energy strategy but also as a key player in global energy frameworks. In the midst of evolving conversations around energy security and the reduction of emissions, Premier Smith emphasized the significance of natural gas as a fundamental element in Alberta's energy mix, framing it as an essential transitional resource towards more sustainable energy forms like nuclear power.

The speech highlighted the contrast between the temporary halt on LNG exports from certain states and Alberta's proactive strategy to boost production of natural gas, LNG, bitumen, and emerging sectors like lithium and geothermal energy. Premier Smith articulated a clear vision for Alberta: to lead in innovation by simultaneously pursuing emission reduction and energy provision. This dual approach aims to utilize Alberta's rich natural resources and advanced technological capacity to achieve energy security, ensure affordability, and uphold environmental stewardship.

A standout element of the Premier's address was her emphasis on fostering international partnerships and expanding markets, notably by promoting ammonia as an alternative energy source for nations such as Japan, Korea, and India. This initiative is a key component of a wider strategy aimed at cutting global emissions without sacrificing competitive energy markets. By collaborating with major industrial players, including Dow, Alberta is positioning itself as an innovator in the energy field, leveraging its rich resources to spur innovation and draw investments.

Alberta's Energy and Minerals Minister, Brian Jean, also echoed this sentiment at CERA Week, emphasizing Alberta's commitment to increasing production, enhancing energy security, fostering innovation, and advancing Carbon Capture, Utilization, and Storage (CCUS) technologies. Minister Jean highlighted Alberta's strategic advantages—cost-effective resources, a world-class regulatory framework, and a skilled labor force. These strengths make Alberta an attractive destination for global corporations like Dow, Air Products, and Shell, drawn to the province for its competitive advantages in feedstock pricing and carbon emissions management.

Minister Jean also focused on economic partnerships with Alberta's Indigenous communities, illustrating a commitment to inclusive and sustainable energy development. This collaborative approach is key to Alberta's strategy, ensuring that energy development proceeds in a manner that respects Indigenous rights and contributes to mutual prosperity.

Moreover, the focus on CCUS and methane emission reduction by companies such as Pathways and Tourmaline Oil signifies Alberta's ambition to lead in environmentally responsible energy production. Minister Jean believes these initiatives are pivotal, showcasing the province's proactive approach to balancing energy needs with environmental concerns.

Premier Smith has expressed her commitment to bolster Alberta's presence at future CERA Weeks, aiming to position the province as a key player in the energy sector. Embracing a comprehensive strategy that harmonizes energy security, environmental stewardship, and economic progress, this initiative is crafted to offer a balanced response to the challenges facing the global energy landscape.

Furthermore, Premier Smith and Minister Jean have consistently showcased Alberta's strengths, reinforcing to the world that Alberta stands as a dependable ally for neighboring nations and an attractive option for companies looking to collaborate and invest. As Minister Jean eloquently put it, "Alberta is energy, and energy is Alberta, and it will be for generations to come."

To sum up, the insights shared at CERA Week 2024, Alberta's presentation showcased a visionary role for the province within the global energy landscape, emphasizing natural gas as a critical element of its energy strategy. This approach not only addresses the pressing needs of energy security and cost efficiency but also lays a solid foundation for the transition towards renewable energy sources.

Alberta's dedication to fostering innovation, building partnerships with Indigenous communities, and engaging in collaborations with leading global industry figures highlights its role as an influential and proactive player in the energy sector. The province's strategy, characterized by a refusal to compromise between emission reduction and energy security or affordability, is designed to make a significant impact on global energy policies and practices.

By advocating a "do it all" strategy, Alberta is positioning itself to lead by example, demonstrating how to judiciously leverage resources for the betterment of the global community, thereby steering towards a future marked by innovative and sustainable energy solutions.