

Alberta Weekly Review

Thursday, February 22, 2018

Session Schedule & Activities

- Legislative session is scheduled to resume Thursday, March 8, 2018.
- Alberta Party Leadership vote will be held on February 27, 2018.

Government News and Announcements

BC Takes Action Against Alberta On Wine Ban

This week the government of British Columbia launched a legal challenge against Alberta through the Canadian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) dispute settlement process. The complaint claims that Alberta's ban on B.C wine contravenes the CFTA. The Compliance Panel will now deliver a report in 460 days, after which Alberta can appeal. It is interesting to note that the BC government could have launched a challenge under the New West Trade Agreement dispute process which has far shorter 30 day response time.

In addition, the BC Wine Institute announced it would be filing an injunction challenging the constitutionality of the ban. Deron Bilous, Alberta Economic Development and Trade Minister responded that Alberta is prepared to fight BC in court and at a trade tribunal. Bilous said that while BC. Wine producers have only experienced one week of market blockage Alberta energy producers have been waiting for access for years. Bilous reiterated that the province will continue to do whatever is necessary to get the Trans Mountain pipeline moving and built.

The Alberta government also spent \$62,000 this week taking out full page advertisements in numerous BC newspapers outlining the connection between the Trans Mountain Pipeline Expansion and Canada's National Climate Plan. This point was further emphasized by former New Brunswick Premier David McKenna in interviews given this week. McKenna is a member of Premier Notley's Market Access Task Force.

Cannabis Regulations Released

Late last week the province released regulations that outline the rules private cannabis retailers in Alberta will have to follow. Municipalities will have the ability to adjust aspects of these regulations to fit their communities.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission (AGLC) has also released details on the licensing process for cannabis retailers. The AGLC is responsible for overseeing the distribution, compliance and enforcement of the cannabis retail system in the province. Additionally, the AGLC will be responsible for online cannabis sales for the province. The applications for retail licenses will be accepted starting March 6, 2018.

Regulations announced by the province include:

- Mandatory background checks for retail license applicants;
- Mandatory training and background checks for all retail employees;
- One person, group or organization cannot hold more than 15 per cent of licenses in Alberta;
- A 100-metre buffer for stores from schools and provincial health-care facilities. However, municipalities have the ability to adjust these buffer zones or add additional ones to best suit their communities' needs;
- Store hours set between 10 a.m. and 2 a.m., the same as liquor stores, with municipalities able to adjust these hours; and
- Mandatory security measures in stores.

Province Promotes Industrial Energy Efficiency Rebate Program

The Government of Alberta's Energy Efficiency Business Non-Profit and Institutional (BNI) Energy Savings Program was highlighted this week by Hon. Shannon Phillips Minister of Environment and Parks. The program helps industrial businesses and organizations reduce energy and greenhouse gas emissions by replacing outdated and inefficient equipment with new energy efficient technologies.

Participants purchase products and once installed and in use they can submit proof of purchase to receive a rebate. As of December, more than 1,200 organizations have participated in the program on an average of \$2,600 a project. Products purchased include pump-off controllers for pump jacks, no-loss drains (compressed air), and steam trap survey and retrofits.

Whistleblowers Protection Amendment Act Comes Into Force

On March 1, 2018 the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Amendment Act will come into force. This week Christina Gray, Minister responsible for Democratic Renewal announced the proclamation of the act. The bill was passed on June 7, 2017 and regulations to support the legislation have now been drafted and released. Alberta will be the first Canadian jurisdiction with whistleblower legislation this comprehensive. Of note staff in MLAs', ministers' and the Premier's offices will have the same protections as other public sector employees and have clear processes to allow the Public Interest Commissioner to investigate reports of wrongdoing.

There are several key pieces of the act that have been clarified in regulations:

- "Wrongdoing" definition changed: Meaning of "wrongdoing" was originally defined as gross mismanagement of public funds or public assets. It has now been expanded to include bullying, harassment or intimidation; and mismanagement or abuse of human resources;

- The act clarifies that a whistleblower may approach their boss or the Public Interest Commissioner about a wrongdoing, and their protection from reprisal would start at that moment;
- The Labour Relations Board will decide what form of remedy, including restitution, should be provided to the whistleblower and will enforce compliance; and
- The act will now require more detailed public reporting from the Public Interest Commissioner, including descriptions of wrongdoings and recommendations made. She can also investigate a wider variety of wrongdoings, including bullying, harassment or intimidation, as well as some forms of mismanagement or abuse of human resources.