



## Alberta Weekly Review

Thursday, March 1, 2018

### Session Schedule & Activities

- Legislative session is scheduled to resume Thursday, March 8, 2018.
- Budget 2018 will be tabled in the legislature on Thursday, March 22, 2018.
- 14 months until expected provincial election.

### Government News and Announcements

#### *Alberta and BC Dispute Concludes (For Now)*

Late last week Premier Rachel Notley announced that Alberta would be lifting its wine ban on BC wine. This change was the result of BC Premier John Horgan announcing earlier in the day that the BC government would not proceed with the plan to restrict increases in bitumen shipments until more spill studies were completed. Instead, Horgan has said his government will file a constitutional reference case on the issue.

Notley cautioned that should the BC action prove to be part of a strategy to harass the pipeline and its investors with legal challenges the province is prepared to take further action.

#### *Alberta Announces Billion Dollar Investment In Bitumen Upgrading*

The Government of Alberta is investing up to \$1 billion in bitumen upgrading beginning in 2019-2020. The billion dollar investment consists of \$800 million in loan guarantees and \$200 million in grants. The government has estimated it will result in \$5 billion worth of private investments, 400 construction jobs and 200 permanent jobs at facilities once construction is complete.

The announcement is the result of a final report of the Energy Diversification Advisory Committee (EDAC) given to Energy Minister Margaret McCuaig-Boyd in December 2017. The EDAC was created in October 2016 and is made of seven members including co-chairs Jeanette Patell (VP Government Affairs and Policy, GE Canada) and Gil McGowan (President, Alberta Federation of Labour). The final report had 36 recommendations.

#### *Third Quarter Fiscal Update*

On Wednesday, Alberta Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board, Joe Ceci released the Third Quarter Fiscal Update and it painted a positive picture of the province's recovering economy. Alberta's real GDP growth is 4.5%, the highest it has been since 2014. The estimated deficit has also decreased to \$9.1 billion from the \$10.3 billion forecast at the last update in November 2017.

Revenues are estimated to be \$ 46.9 billion which is \$2 billion higher than estimated in Budget 2017. This is due to increased resource revenue and investment income. Additionally, the unemployment rate of 6.8% is lower than forecast at the last budget and 90,000 full time jobs were created over the last year primarily in the private sector. It remains higher than the Canadian average.

At the same time, expenses are now estimated to be \$1 billion higher than originally projected. Ceci said the increases are due to increases in health spending, child and labor market programs and income and disability supports.

### *Province Announces New Agreement With Alberta Pharmacists*

This week Hon. Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier, announced a deal with the province's pharmacists that should save Alberta Health \$150 million over the next two years. The talks began last spring but were subject to a non-disclosure agreement until Wednesday's announcement. Changes of note include:

- Dispensing fees decrease from \$12.30 to \$12.15;
- Cap on the number of fees charged due to patients who require frequent dispensing;
- Reduction in fee for injecting the flu vaccine from \$13 to \$20; and
- Additional prescribing authority and possibility of allowing pharmacists to administer more vaccines.

According to Minister Hoffman the changes will put Alberta's fees more in line with other provinces. Changes will take effect on May 17, 2018.

### *Alberta Party Chooses Mandel As Leader*

After a two month campaign, former Edmonton Mayor and PC Health Minister Stephen Mandel won the Alberta Party Leadership race with 66% of the vote. Of the 6,443 eligible members, 72% cast a vote in the race (4,613). Calgary Lawyer Kara Levis received 18% of the vote and Calgary-South East MLA Rick Fraser received 16% of the vote.

Mandel has also said he will not pursue a seat in the house until the general election unless Edmonton-McClung where he currently resides opens up. NDP MLA Lorne Dach holds the seat in that constituency. His immediate focus will be on travelling the province, growing the party and building to win the election in 2019.

### *Alberta Advantage Party Is Announced*

Over the weekend the Alberta Advantage Party was formed in Red Deer and announced its first leader. The party, which is not officially registered yet with Elections Alberta, is made up of former Wildrose members who were against the merger which formed the United Conservative Party. In July, they formed Wildrose 2.0, which will now be known as the Alberta Advantage Party.

Marilyn Burns was acclaimed as leader the party and she has said they are in the process of collecting the 8,000 signatures necessary to allow them to participate in the 2019 election. They have not yet divulged how many members they have.