

Jason Kenney's United Conservatives issue warning to Suzuki Foundation after winning Alberta majority

April 16th 2019 Dean Bennett

Jason Kenney and his United Conservatives channelled the angst of an angry electorate to soar to a majority government in Alberta's election Tuesday and relegate Rachel Notley's NDP to the history books as a one-and-done government.

The UCP, formed two years ago by a merger of the Progressive Conservative and Wildrose parties, held its rural and Calgary seats and took back many of the breakthrough NDP wins in those regions in 2015.

"What a great day for the province of Alberta," Kenney told cheering supporters after riding into a jammed event centre at Calgary's Stampede Grounds in a blue pickup truck.

"Today our great province has sent a message to Canada and the world that Alberta is open for business."

Early on his his speech, the premier-designate delivered a warning to environmentalists, accusing them of being funded by foreign interests who are trying to shut down the Alberta oil and gas industry. He pledged to launch a public inquiry into their activities, singling out several charitable organizations including the David Suzuki Foundation and the Tides Foundation, prompting a roar of applause from supporters in Calgary.

Notley's NDP held on to much of its traditional base in Edmonton, which it swept four years ago. But cabinet ministers and backbenchers went down elsewhere.

Notley, speaking to supporters at her Edmonton headquarters, touted her government's accomplishments and said she will stay on as NDP leader.

"We have fundamentally changed the politics of this province forever," she said.

"It has been an honour to serve as your premier and it will be an honour to serve as the leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition."

Notley said she had congratulated Kenney and "assured him that we will do everything that we can to ensure the transition to a new government is smooth and productive."

"I wish him and his government well. We all do. We must. Because we all love Alberta," she said, her family behind her on stage as supporters chanted "Rachel! Rachel!"

Kenney, who won his riding in Calgary-Lougheed, is a former federal Conservative cabinet minister under Stephen Harper.

He takes the top job after winning on a jobs, jobs, jobs message and a promise to wage war on all who oppose Alberta's oil and gas industry, particularly Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Kenney has derisively called it "the Trudeau-Notley alliance" —a partnership he says has turned Alberta into a doormat for Trudeau and other oil industry foes in return for no more than a faint and as yet unrealized promise of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion to the west coast.

Kenney has promised to kill Alberta's homegrown carbon tax, fight the federal carbon tax in court, and do what he can to help the federal Conservatives defeat Trudeau in the federal October vote.

"There is a deep frustration in this province, a sense that we have contributed massively to the rest of Canada, but that everywhere we turn we are being blocked in and pinned down," said Kenney.

In a statement, Trudeau congratulated Kenney and said he will work with the new government to create jobs, build infrastructure, and grow business and industry.

"Together, we will address issues of importance to Albertans and all Canadians, including ...taking decisive action on climate change while getting our natural resources to market."

Once Kenney is sworn in, Canada will have no women premiers.

Notley's NDP was trying to win a second mandate after toppling the wheezing, scandal-scarred 44-year Progressive Conservative dynasty in 2015 by winning 54 seats in the 87-seat legislature.

In the previous two decades, the NDP had never been able to elect more than four MLAs, and had been shut out of Calgary since the 1980s.

Interest in the election was high as leaders launched personal attacks while promoting their platforms as the best blueprint for Alberta's fragile economy.

Almost 700,000 people voted in advance polls, well above the record 235,000 who did in 2015.

The province, once a money-making dynamo thanks to sky-high oil prices, has been struggling for years with sluggish returns on royalties, reduced drilling activity and higher unemployment levels.

Kenney argued that Notley's government made a bad situation worse with higher taxes, more regulations and increases in minimum wage.

Notley, in turn, said Kenney's plan to freeze spending and pursue more private-care options in health care would have a profound impact on students and patients.

Notley also tried to make Kenney's character an issue. A number of his candidates either quit or apologized for past comments that were anti-LGBTQ, anti-Islamic or sympathetic to white nationalism.

On the margins of the campaign were the centrist Alberta and Liberal parties. Both elected single members to the legislature four years ago, but failed to win any seats

this time.

Alberta Party Leader Stephen Mandel lost in Edmonton-McClung and Liberal Leader David Khan failed to win in Calgary Mountain-View.

Kenney now turns his attention to a spring-summer sitting and a platform that includes undoing most of the signature elements of the last four years of changes under the NDP, starting with the provincial carbon tax on fossil-fuelled heating and gas at the pumps.

He has promised to repeal the NDP increase on corporate income tax and drop it to eight per cent. The minimum wage for youth is to be cut. Farm safety and injury compensation plans for farm workers is to be abolished and replaced. A \$3.7-billion plan to lease rail cars to ship more oil is to be cancelled.

The climate change program is to be dismantled in favour of a plan to tax the emissions-intensity of major greenhouse gas operations. A large medical lab in Edmonton, part of a plan to consolidate tests, won't proceed. Changes to overtime pay are to be rolled back.

A sweeping overhaul of school curriculums is also expected to be on hold.

Kenney plans to fire a shot across the bow of the B.C. government on his first day in office. He has said he will proclaim a law passed by Notley's government but never proclaimed.

The bill gives Alberta the power to reduce oil flows to B.C. in retaliation for its opposition to the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline.

with files from National Observer

Editor's note: This article was updated at 8:30 a.m. ET on April 17, 2019 to include additional details about Jason Kenney's comments about the David Suzuki Foundation and other charities.