

## MAY 6, 2018 – RED DEER United Conservative Party Convention/AGM – Press Conference Transcript

Jason Kenney: Well, good afternoon, everyone. Just going to give you some comments for this closing news conference. We wanted to do an availability and time for your filing. I know probably some want to get home later on not too late, so I hope this is convenient. First of all, we are thrilled with the success of this historic founding AGM for Alberta's, Canada's newest political party, the second largest political party in the country in terms of membership.

As you saw with the polling presentation this morning, we appear to be the most popular political party in Canada in terms of polling with the trend lines pointed in the right direction. The energy and enthusiasm we've seen throughout the weekend, especially last night, just is deeply encouraging after the last two years of really hard work.

So gratifying to see this coalition come together but also to see so many new people. Last night, the first person who came up and shook my hand onstage was Marv Moore, who was a Lougheed minister in 1972 and Ralph Klein's campaign chair for three provincial election wins. When I asked how many people had attended their first ever political convention, I think about 30% or more of the audience put up their hands.

Here you have a movement with a strong and proud history but which also has to recognize some of our historical weaknesses, as I did very bluntly last night, but also a new start, a fresh beginning with a huge number of people getting involved in democracy for the first time. That for me is one of the most important takeaways from this conference. We've had great guest speakers.

Andrew Scheer, I want to thank him for making the trip out here. Rona Ambrose, very important message about the huge emphasis that we are placing on encouraging strong women to seek Conservative nominations to MLAs and ministers in a future Conservative government. I'm pleased to report to you that is going very well. We're not going to do quotas or set-asides. We don't believe in that, but we are actively encouraging and seeking out strong women candidates.

I would estimate that we already have women who have either declared for or have told us they intend to seek UCP nominations in over 70% of the 87 [ridings 00:02:33]. I hope we can get closer to 100%, but it is of course they're going to have to win those nominations. Rona and others will be providing them with some mentorship and training and support to assist some of those great women who may not have yet much political experience.

I'm delighted with ... it really was a mistake for me to get Brad Wall to be our warmup speaker last night. He blew the roof off the joint. Honestly, I probably think the most popular political figure in the province, certainly far more than I am. He was, I thought, just brought the issues home about the importance of

our resource industries, fighting for the west, the carbon tax and other issues beautifully.

I was humbled by the response I got last night. I wrote a speech that was on paper about a 35 minute speech and I think we went about for an hour and five minutes with applause. I think that wasn't all about the speech or it's certainly not about the speaker. I think what we saw there was just about 3,000 people representing a whole lot of ... tens of thousands of others who just wanted through their enthusiasm to make a statement.

These are people who have been anxious, frustrated about the direction of the party, angry about the division in the Conservative movement, wondering whether we could get this put together on time. Last night, they said, "We've done it." Last night was this party, this movement saying to itself, "We've made so much progress." We could celebrate a little bit last night before the tough year, before the tough work in the year ahead.

I noted some anodyne work on our constitution and governance yesterday, hotly contested executive elections that will be determined this afternoon and the ongoing policy debates. I look forward to reviewing all of those resolutions once we have them and I'm happy to take any questions you have.

Speaker 2: What do you think about motion 30 passing when it comes to parental choice and particularly around sector-

Jason Kenney: Sure. My view is I think it's a badly worded resolution. The way I interpret it is an affirmation of the longstanding legal status quo in Alberta basically to say that we don't believe and we will not ever take the position that there should be mandatory notification of kids joining peer groups. They don't have to when they join the chess club, why should they if they join a GSA? We do not support mandatory notification of kids joining peer groups as extracurricular activities.

My understanding of the resolution is that it's saying it's reaffirming the section 50 requirement of the School Act which says that if there is content offered dealing with religion or human sexuality, that school boards do have to inform parents and there's an opt-out provision. I simply see it as a reaffirmation of the longstanding legal status quo. It does not change the policy that I articulated in November on Bill 24 where I said we do not support, I repeat we do not support, mandatory notification of parents regarding the involvement of students in GSAs.

We did table a ... Mike Ellis tabled a motion on Bill 24, an amendment which sought to apply a section 50.1 of the School Act to Bill 24 basically to say that if a content dealing primarily, or I think it's explicitly or primarily with human sexuality or religion goes into an extracurricular club, then there is a statutory requirement that parents be informed. So it's about the content.

Speaker 2: So no, if I can follow up on that, can I ... my question, thanks. So to follow up on that, I suppose with LGBTory groups, they'd say they're very disappointed that this motion passed and they also hope to get it defeated in February. Actually speak to the motion here, they're disappointed it passed. Is it not worrying for you that their own group is really disappointed that this is a thing?

Jason Kenney: Actually, I just met with gay delegates who are here at the convention. We have Harrison Fleming here who is I think the de facto leader of the LGBT Tory, hosted our reception for LGBT Tory at our convention. He agrees completely with what I've just said, that this resolution is not about mandatory notification for peer groups. Peer groups are peer groups. There's no reason to notify parents. We've never suggested that. I will not propose that and Harrison understands that.

I also met with Donna Trimble, who is the executive director of Parents for Choice in Education, who did not propose this motion. They opposed mandatory notification of parents when kids join peer support groups. What I see here is a moderate and nuanced understanding of the longstanding legal position in Alberta, which is if there's content in the schools that deals with religion or human sexuality, there is a School Act requirement that parents be aware of that content, but not if kids join peer groups.

Male: That is not, sir, how even the people debating the motion just picked it. There was on the yes side, they were saying this undoes Bill 24. On the no side, you had three MLAs, including Ric McIver, right here saying, "This is like a fire material. We don't want to out gay kids. Please don't vote against this." So I can appreciate that you're offering a very gently coated image of this, but on the floor, this was Bill 24 [belitigated 00:08:39] and your party said "We do support mandatory notification."

Jason Kenney: I disagree.

Male: With Ric McIver? You disagree that this is like a fire material?

Jason Kenney: Ric is going to speak to that when I'm done. You're welcome to ask Ric questions. Ric has told me he was trying to describe the way that this would be mischaracterized by our NDP opponents, which is very predictable. They do it all the time. They did it during the debate on Bill 24, even though I explicitly said that we are opposed to mandatory notification, even though our two legacy parties opposed mandatory notification when Bill 10 was adopted back in 2014.

The NDP still maintains that's our position when it's not. Let me be absolutely stone-cold clear a United Conservative government will not be changing law or policy to require notification of parents when kids join GSAs. We will not do that. You can take that to the bank. I think this was a badly worded resolution. I didn't hear the debate, but I think there are, parents do have some legitimate

concerns about content primarily or explicitly dealing with religion or human sexuality being taught without their knowledge or consent.

Doing so would also be seen as violating section 1 of the individual or the Alberta Bill of Rights which basically says that parents are primarily responsible for the education of their children. That's what I take from what the members said and guess what, I'm the leader. I get to interpret the resolution and its relevance to party policy.

Female: Does that mean your position on Bill 24 stands-

Jason Kenney: Yes.

Female: That you still believe that it's up to the discretion of teachers to decide in cases like this? Not mandatory, but at the discretion of schools?

Jason Kenney: We oppose mandatory notification membership in gay-straight alliances or other peer groups. We don't think, however, it's prudent to completely exclude the possibility that an educator thinks it's in the best interest of the kids to engage parents. If a kid's facing, a young child is facing terrible bullying and they need parental support, a principal might decide it's in the best interest of the child to engage. I would refer you back to the statement I gave about that I think on November the 2nd.

Not a word of that has changed. We think that is the moderate centrist position. Our public opinion research suggests that reflects the overwhelming consensus of Albertans who are not completely polarized on these debates. They want safe, caring spaces for kids, especially those who might be struggling with issues around sexuality. They understand that those should be generally confidential, but there might be some exceptional circumstances where educators decide that parents can help their kids.

Male: Would you revisit Bill 24 and scrap that and address the law?

Jason Kenney: As I said, we're going to review the School Act generally and the Education Act that has not been proclaimed. My position has not changed on this. We haven't made a decision. You'll have to wait for our platform, but our position is that their canon should be exceptional circumstances when parents, when teachers and principals using their compassion, their focus on the best interest of the kid, and relevant legal principles determine that involving family is a critical way of supporting a young person.

I think this is a bit of a phony debate created by the NDP. They're trying to create a red herring, a boogeyman. I can tell you nobody in our caucus, we've spent a lot of time talking about this. Nobody in our caucus in the many times that we discussed Bill 24 proposed mandatory notification. We do not support

that, we will not do that. The adoption of this poorly worded motion today changes nothing.

Male: But this wasn't about the caucus. Today wasn't about the caucus. You had this grassroots policy guarantee. You also talked a lot about discipline last night. Was this discipline by your party membership today?

Jason Kenney: Jason, I've been to probably dozens of party conferences. There's always at every single conference, like the Liberals voting to legalize hard drugs in Halifax two weeks ago or NDP conferences on the Leap Manifest, there are always resolutions that are going to be contentious. At the end of the day, what I've said is that I will take the resolutions adopted today as important input, but I hold the pen on the platform.

I reaffirmed in my remarks last night the important role of the leader to make decisions. I will make decisions in our platform where it is a balanced mainstream platform that reflects the values and priorities of most Albertans. That platform and our governing approach will not ever include mandatory notification of peer groups including gay-straight alliances which we support.

100% of the MLAs in our two legacy parties voted for Bill 10. We support that group support for kids who are going through some difficulty. None of that has changed. Of course there's going to be some controversial debates and resolutions at a wide open policy conference. Fundamentally we had 1300 policy resolutions come forward. I think the vast majority of them avoid the kind of issues that you're more interested in talking about.

Male: This was the one that your party was most divided on. There was no such division on almost any other issue, some of them [inaudible 00:14:54] too as you yourself.

Jason Kenney: Well, it's in the nature of controversial issues to be controversial.

Male: It's grassroots, but you hold the pen, so is it still a grassroots process?

Jason Kenney: Well, I've never suggested that 110,000 members are going to write the platform. In fact, I refer you back to my grassroots policy guarantee. I referred to the fifth point in my speech last night. It says that the leader will appoint a platform committee following the convention which will consult broadly with Albertans in developing a blueprint for the next government.

This today, it is important. It is input, but ultimately the leader is responsible for producing a balanced winning platform. That's my intention and I reminded our members that we won't be governing for 110,000 UCP members or a million potential UCP voters. We'll be governing for 4.3 million Albertans, including those that don't agree with us on a lot of issues. So party input is important. It's necessary, but not sufficient.

Female: I was going to ask, Education Minister David Eggen said the mere mention of the words "Lake of Fire" is poison to your party. How would you characterize the mere mention of this [inaudible 00:16:14]-

Jason Kenney: It's a phrase the NDP uses in the legislature every single day. Ric was simply reminding us that the NDP will torque and distort anything we do using that phrase.

Speaker 5: [French 00:16:26].

Jason Kenney: [French 00:16:37]. Does that work in French? Sorry. [inaudible 00:16:45]. [French 00:16:46].

Speaker 2: What did you do today? You went on the floor. What did you do?

Jason Kenney: I was meeting with different groups of delegates. I just came from a lunch with my Calgary-Lougheed delegates. I met with some of our donors and fundraisers. We met with some of our volunteers. That's the kind of stuff I've been doing.

Male: Jason, do you think ... Last week of course you told me you're not going to be in the Pride parade. Regardless of everything that's happened here, do you feel like you have the trust of the LGBTQ community or does your party have some work to do about that?

Jason Kenney: I don't think people define their politics by their sexuality. I think that whole idea is actually insulting. I think that people of different sexual orientations have different political views and convictions. I'm proud of the many gay and lesbian members of our party. Harrison here would be happy to talk to you about the reception hosted by LGBTQ Tory at this conference on Friday night.

I've indicated to Harrison and other friends that we intend to have a UCP Pride reception at the margins of the Edmonton and Calgary Pride weeks where we will highlight the activists in our party who are friends and supporters and coming from the gay community. So we'll continue to do that. The people who run those events are free to decide who they invite and we respect their decision. I'm not going to be rude and show up where I'm told I'm not welcome, but I'd always be happy to have a dialogue.

As I've said before publicly, I said this back in November on this statement on Bill 24, I'm a guy who in college used to volunteer at the Gift of Love AIDS Hospice in San Francisco in the late 1980s. I'm the only immigration minister in Canadian history to have created a specific refugee protection program for persecuted gay refugees. You saw on the video last night a gay refugee from Iran saying I helped to save his life. So I know where my heart stands. I don't think I have to prove myself to anyone.

Male: Sir, you've alleged you're heading for [inaudible 00:20:10]-

Jason Kenney: Tonight. I'm on the red-eye and I didn't even get any sleep last night or the night before. Yes, I'll be appearing at 3:30 at the House of Commons Finance Committee hearings on the federal budget bill which includes 200 pages on the Trudeau federal carbon tax. I will be informing the committee that we, the United Conservative government potentially will as bill number one introduce the Carbon Tax Repeal Act. If they then seek to impose a federal carbon tax on us, we would then make an application to join the court reference recently filed by Premier Moe challenging federal jurisdiction on provincial carbon taxes and we're prepared to go further. I'll be talking about that tomorrow.

Male: Can you join channels like that as an opposition party, like official opposition party? Do you have any standing?

Jason Kenney: I was invited by the committee, so-

Male: I didn't mean the committee, I mean when you talk about [inaudible 00:21:07].

Jason Kenney: Oh. Yeah, we can certainly apply for intervenor status. As a government, I'm quite sure we would get it. As an opposition party, thank you for reminding, Don. I'd forgotten this part. Yeah, actually we have instructed legal counsel to file an application for the UCP as Alberta's official opposition to act as an intervenor before the Saskatchewan Court of Appeals on the reference that will be heard later this year.

We have done that. There's no guarantee. We're not aware of any precedent pro or con on that, but our lawyer thinks we have got a decent shot, so we'll give it a shot. We just want to be seen. Look, we think there should be an Alberta voice before the court when that reference is heard. If the government's not going to step up, we'll be that voice.

Female: Are you getting bit ahead of yourself? The election's a year away. Now you're presenting as a government [inaudible 00:21:56].

Jason Kenney: Well, no, I don't think we are. Normally you guys say, "Why aren't you being more specific about policy?" I mean, come on. You can't win in this business. We are a year away. We have to start getting ready for that election. We'll be moving straight from this convention to a lot of fast action.

We'll be opening our nominations in a couple of weeks probably and then we will be appointing our platform committee by early June at the latest. The work towards the next election begins now. There's not a day to waste. You know, it's funny. When we started this thing in the summer of '16, people said, "There's no way you can get a party bill put together, candidates recruited, the fund money raised in time for the 2019 election." Well, we're going to be there. Sorry, Jason.

Male: You were talking earlier, and this speaks to this idea that [inaudible 00:22:56]. You were talking about wanting to build balance winning proposals. This resolution 30, is that loser [inaudible 00:23:05]-

Jason Kenney: Obviously it's a distraction because you guys have been more concerned about that than everything else happening at this convention, apparently. That defines itself as a distraction. It's not changing anything for me. It doesn't change one syllable of what we're going to do in our platform or as a government.

Male: Can I ask you what the rapid response thing ... I want to get to that and moving away from Bill 30 for a second.

Jason Kenney: Sure. Are we turning this into an exclusive, Jason? But carry on. Anyways, go ahead ... No, no, go for it. [crosstalk 00:23:36]. Go for it. I love it. 100%.

Male: This rapid response room thing. That sounds like the work of CAP and other organizations. Why does the government have to spend its taxpayer dollars responding to critics?

Jason Kenney: The resource that is being bottlenecked belongs to taxpayers. We have a huge strategic interest as a province and as a government in getting the full value for that resource. We are bigger stakeholders in the oil patch as taxpayers than CAP or any of the oil companies are and we need to start acting like that. That was my message yesterday. Enough passivity. I will say it.

The energy patch itself, the oil companies themselves mailed in their advocacy efforts for much of the past 20 years. I think they've improved recently and frankly, former PC governments didn't do enough, either. I think I commend the NDP for increasing advocacy efforts in the last year or so, but they relate to the game as well. What I'm saying is we are going to be on a war footing as a government in opposing this well-resourced strategic campaign to defame our key employer and industry.

They have spent, according to Vivian Krause, independent Vancouver researcher, she has tracked I believe some \$80 million in foreign funding for Canadian environmental NGOs in the past decade alone. On top of that, that's only what she's tracked from abroad. Tom Steyer, the San Francisco billionaire hedge fund manager who made money on coal and oil and gas, spent an estimated \$140 million on campaigns to support candidates opposed to Keystone XL.

We are dealing with opponents who are spending tens and hundreds of millions of dollars. Ultimately if we don't get a fair price, the opportunity costs for the Alberta Treasury is in the range of tens of billions of dollars. I think this would be the smartest investment we could possibly make. My question is why the heck hasn't this been done before now? Government has the resources it can bring

to the table. The federal governments do this on important issues. We should be stepping up to the plate. Kelly?

Female: Just one more question on the resolution. Is it poorly worded because it talked about associations and clubs versus a peer support [crosstalk 00:26:08]-

Jason Kenney: Yeah, I just think that-

Female: And whether it's aimed at [crosstalk 00:26:10].

Jason Kenney: The whole thing is poorly worded. It starts with a falsehood. It says that it wants to restore ... I don't have it in front of-

Female: Reinstate.

Jason Kenney: Reinstate an opt-in provision and there never was an opt-in provision. The rest of it is imprecise language. There's a subordinate clause in there that doesn't make any sense. It seems to me that their basic intent was to say content that deals primarily with human sexuality or religion should be subject to parental notification. That's section 50 of the School Act. I believe the NDP supports that, too. They haven't sought to amend it.

Female: They talk about activities and clubs too in the resolution.

Jason Kenney: Yeah. That's one of the reasons it's imprecise. It is possible, but that's the point. We made this point in our amendment to Bill 24. It is possible that content, de facto sex ed content can be brought into a GSA. We're simply saying if that happens, it stops being a peer group and it starts being teaching content. [inaudible 00:27:14]. Listen, here's my point.

The point is that it doesn't matter what room the content is brought into. If a teacher comes in to a extracurricular club and starts offering content that is primarily and explicitly dealing with religion or human sexuality, it triggers section 50 of the School Act. We support GSAs as peer groups to provide support and a safe space to kids going through a difficult time.

Female: Jason, it sounds like you talk about sexuality [crosstalk 00:27:57]-

Jason Kenney: Yeah. Nobody's censoring that. If somebody comes in, a teacher comes into a club and they start showing a film that would normally be shown in a class on religion or sex ed, then that becomes content. It triggers section 50, all right? Anything else? I'm happy to stay all day, but this ...

Male: Could you comment a bit on servant leadership? Of course there will people in a room that were part of the 57%. Now you're saying you make the final decisions in terms of the platform. They'll be saying, "What about us? We say we should

go this direction and you're saying the UCP will not." Can you [crosstalk 00:28:33] that?

Jason Kenney: Absolutely. I was elected by 62% of the party in October on a mandate for a five point policy development process, the fifth element of which was the leader appointing a platform committee that would consult broadly with Albertans to come up with a balanced platform. I will exercise the mandate that I was given by our members. Maybe not everybody likes that. Maybe they didn't vote for me. But leaders have got to lead and I will be doing that. This resolution changes absolutely nothing.

Male: So would you say that this is showing servant leadership not to the party membership, but to the broader [crosstalk 00:29:18]?

Jason Kenney: I've said this. Look, when you become Premier, you're not just a party leader. You're responsible and accountable to the entire public. I will be very mindful of that when we develop and publish our platform. Not to say we're going to seek to be all things to all people, but we will take into account the views of Albertans who are not members of our party and on every issue. We'll be doing that very aggressively in the next six months. Thanks very much, guys.

Male: How did you or would you have voted on [inaudible 00:29:49] 30? I don't think you were in the room, so how would you have voted on it?

Jason Kenney: Because it's badly worded and it starts with a falsity, I would have voted against it. All right, thanks very much.

Female: Thank you. Thanks, Jason.

Male: I haven't seen you lately.

Male: Oh, that's [inaudible 00:29:58].

Speaker 6: Okay, a couple of you indicated you wanted to talk to me?

Speaker 2: What did you mean when you were talking about "Please don't do this. It's a lake of fire party"? What were you talking about?

Speaker 6: I felt then and to some degree still feel now that when this item came up, that it could be easily misinterpreted and torqued and twisted by those who are not our friends. Our position of our caucus and our party is we are for gay-straight alliances. Our position is we are for the privacy of the kids in those gay-straight alliances. This I thought that the wording there and I think the fact that I'm standing here is some evidence of the fact that those that aren't our supporters could torque and twist this into saying something other than what our position is. For that reason, I tried to get people to not support it.

Male: [inaudible 00:31:01] torquing and twisting.

Speaker 6: I'm just telling you. You asked me a question and it was my feeling. It's my feeling now and consequently, I spoke against it. I think it was a mistake to pass it. It's sad in a way because there's good things in there, because parental choice in education. Parents being the primary people to make decisions about their children's education is something that I feel strongly about. Again, the way it was worded, it certainly could be torqued and twisted into a whole bunch of different directions.

Male: [crosstalk 00:31:41] this is called outing gay kids. [crosstalk 00:31:44] outing gay kids.

Speaker 6: Those words are not in the resolution, but I'm pretty sure those who are not our friends will take the opportunity to try to say that that's what this is about. That was my concern.

Male: But you didn't say others will say this. You said this is about outing gay kids.

Speaker 6: Well, again, that's what I said. You know what? Up there, I've got 20 seconds or 30 seconds, whatever it is. You're in a lineup and I'm just telling you my concern was and is that people would be able to twist this. I gave that as an example of what they'd be able to twist it to and as part of my encouragement for people not to vote for the motion.

Male: [inaudible 00:32:21] your statements on the floor today?

Speaker 6: No, I'm telling you now that my concern is that this thing is open I believe to being interpreted in a negative way by those people that are not our friends. I tried to alert the room to my concerns and I asked them not to vote for it as a result.

Male: Do you remember using the lake of fire language? The language usually used by your opponents?

Speaker 6: You know what? I said what I said. I own it and that's, you can't take back what you say into a microphone.

Male: What does it say about the grassroots of your own party?

Speaker 6: I think that they're diverse. I think that our grassroots of our party is very diverse. There's 100,000+ of them and they don't all agree. This is an example where they don't all agree. That's in many ways a very healthy thing. It really speaks to the broad big tent that our party is and the fact that it goes across a big variety of thoughts and opinions. You saw that on full display this weekend.

Male: Did the floor represent do you think the majority of your party?

Speaker 6: You know what? People voted, there was little machines to add it up. All I can tell you is the numbers that were recorded. Listen, we have over 100,000 members. Listen, there's, what, 25, 2600 people here, the biggest political convention I think anybody can remember. Those people that bought, paid and came here should be respected and I respect them, but they are not the whole ... So you're asking me a question to predict what the whole 110, 20,000 people would think and I just can't do that for you. I'm sorry.

Male: But we do know that it was number 30, so among the members of the party that weren't here, that aren't attending, it was a fairly popular resolution because it was high up on the agenda. What do you think about the fact that this resolution was able to make it to number 30 out of hundreds of resolutions based on polling of the general party membership?

Speaker 6: All I can say is when you start a open transparent policy process with up to 120,000 people, anything can happen and sometimes it does.

Male: If you had to do it again, would you have stepped to the microphone and made those comments?

Speaker 6: You're asking me to speculate on something I can't say.

Male: This party is very clear on a number of issues. No carbon tax, balanced budgets.

Speaker 6: Yeah.

Male: Why is it on this particular issue, GSAs, that things always seem to get twisted up-

Speaker 6: You know what? Those who are not our friends love to try to, in my view, misrepresent and torque our position.

Male: Is it because maybe the position isn't as clear as-

Speaker 6: No. No, sir. Our position's clear. I've stated here, I think you just heard the leader state it. We're in favor of gay-straight alliances. We are in favor of providing privacy for the young people in the GSAs and that's clear.

Female: Are you trying to have it both ways, though, you guys? You're trying to pander to that side of your party that maybe is very uncomfortable with gay kids in schools but you're also trying to appeal to the mainstream of Alberta that might be very uncomfortable with outing gay kids?

Speaker 6: No, we're trying to manage a process where people with diverse opinions in a big province, a big tent party can come and settle their differences in a nice nonviolent way by voting at a convention.

Female: Well, you say though, look, this stuff is not part of the mainstream, so stop it.

Speaker 6: The members were promised a policy resolution and I would say that that promise was delivered this weekend.

Speaker 2: Just quickly ...

Speaker 6: That's it. Thank you very much.