



West at a Glance

MARCH 2017



WEST AT A GLANCE

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PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT DEVELOPMENTS

BRITISH COLUMBIA

- **BC government releases its budget for 2017-18** – On February 21, 2017, BC Finance Minister Michael de Jong tabled the province's fifth consecutive [balanced budget](#), delivering tax reductions and spending increases. Tax measures included: an immediate reduction in Medical Service Plan premiums, with a commitment to eliminate premiums altogether in coming years; a phased elimination of the Provincial Sales Tax on electricity; a 0.5 percent reduction in the small business tax rate; and a number of extensions to existing tax credits such as the Scientific Research and Experimental Development Tax Credit and the Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit. The budget also committed \$87 million to enhance BC's tech strategy, \$40 million to support rural broadband connectivity, and continued funding of \$25 million per year for the BC Rural Dividend Program.
- **David Emerson named as BC's envoy to US on softwood lumber** – BC Premier Christy Clark [announced](#) the appointment of David Emerson as the BC Trade Envoy to the United States to work with Canada in securing a new softwood lumber agreement. Mr. Emerson, a former cabinet minister, public servant, and CEO, said, "I am looking forward to working collaboratively with the BC lumber industry and Canadian Ambassador to the USA, David MacNaughton, as we defend BC companies, workers, and communities against the false subsidy allegations made by the US lumber industry."
- **BC and Pacific NorthWest LNG reach new agreements with First Nations** – The Government of BC [has reached](#) benefit-sharing agreements with the Lax Kw'alaams and Metlakatla First Nations around liquefied natural gas (LNG) development in the Prince Rupert area. The agreements provide financial benefits as specific milestones are reached in the development of the coastal LNG industry. The two First Nations have also signed benefit-sharing agreements with the private companies involved in Pacific NorthWest LNG, which is pending a final investment decision by PETRONAS and its partners.

ALBERTA

- **Banff International Research Station receives additional funding** – The Government of Alberta is [committing](#) \$4 million over five years to a \$12.5 million initiative supporting research and innovation at the Banff International Research Station (BIRS). The funding is in partnership with the federal government, the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), the National Science Foundation, and Mexico's National Council for Science and Technology. BIRS's [mandate](#) is to bring together international mathematical, scientific, and industry researchers to share knowledge and methods across their areas of specialization. It is a joint Canada-US-Mexico initiative, inaugurated in 2003, that hosts over 2,000 researchers from 60 countries every year.
- **Alberta funds Bioenergy Producer Program** – Thirty-one bioenergy companies are [receiving](#) short-term funding through the Government of Alberta's \$60 million Bioenergy Producer Program. This is a short-term [program](#) intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create value-added opportunities in the province through increased bioenergy production capacity. A bioenergy industry review is being conducted to inform the Government of Alberta's long-term policy in this sector. In Alberta, bioenergy currently contributes approximately \$800 million to the economy and powers the equivalent of 200,000 homes using wood pellets, biogas, and liquid biofuels. The Government of Alberta estimates that the program will directly support 500 jobs.
- **Alberta government funds Medicine Hat entrepreneurship incubator** – The Government of Alberta has [approved](#) its first business incubator under the Alberta Entrepreneurship Incubator Program, a two-year, \$10-million pilot program delivered through Alberta Innovates. The Apex Incubator in Medicine Hat will receive \$342,000 over two years to increase entrepreneurial capacity through mentorship and contact with business development advisors. The Government of Alberta anticipates several regional incubators will receive support.
- **Alberta government provides funding for climate change education** – The Government of Alberta is [providing](#) \$600,000 through the Community Environment Action program to organizations in the province that engage in educational programming on climate change. Eligible applicants include community organizations, youth and senior groups, Indigenous organizations, teacher organizations, and school-based associations but not governments, schools, or businesses. Funding for the grant will come from carbon levy revenues.



- **The Métis Nation of Alberta signs a framework agreement with the provincial government** – The Government of Alberta and Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) have [signed](#) a 10-year framework agreement formally recognizing their shared commitment to addressing MNA needs and aspirations, preserving Métis identity and cultural heritage, building a nation-to-nation dialogue, and promoting reconciliation. The Government of Alberta states that the agreement reflects many of the principles included in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which the federal government [fully supported](#) in May 2016. The MNA was founded in 1928 and has 33,000 members across Alberta. Approximately 97,000 Métis people [live](#) in Alberta according to the 2011 Census.

SASKATCHEWAN

- **Saskatchewan leads Canada in manufacturing sales growth** – Manufacturing sales in Saskatchewan grew by 5.4 percent between November 2016 and December 2016, the [highest](#) percentage increase among the provinces. Manufacturing sales in December totalled \$1.3 billion. On a year-over-year basis, sales were up 11.9 percent, the second highest increase of any province and well ahead of the 4.1 percent rate posted nationally.
- **Revenue from sale of petroleum and natural gas rights increases in 2016-17** – On February 7, the Government of Saskatchewan raised \$1.7 million from a [public offering](#) of petroleum and natural gas rights. This deal brings the total revenue from such sales to \$50 million in the 2016-17 fiscal year, surpassing the \$43 million raised in 2015-16. The increase in activity is an indication that the oil and gas industry continues to see opportunities for development in Saskatchewan, despite weak demand and low prices.

MANITOBA

- **New agriculture research funding** – On February 15, the Canada and Manitoba governments [announced](#) over \$1.6 million for eight research projects through the Grain Innovation Hub. Recipients include a mix of private sector companies, research institutes, and post-secondary institutions. Industry partners will contribute an additional \$4 million to the projects.
- **Joint federal-provincial funding to modernize science labs in the North** – The governments of Canada and Manitoba [provided](#) \$1 million in joint funding to retrofit the science labs at the University College of the North (UCN) in The Pas, Manitoba. The upgrade will ensure that students taking science courses will work in facilities that are comparable to their future workplace settings.



NEWS AND OPINION HIGHLIGHTS

- **Bell-MTS deal approved** – The proposed \$3.9-billion Bell acquisition of MTS has received regulatory approvals from the Competition Bureau. The deal, set to close March 17, was approved after Xplornet Communications Inc. offered to enter the Manitoba wireless market and acquire 24,700 MTS customers once they launch their mobile wireless service in the province. Xplornet currently provides 300,000 rural and business customers with fixed broadband and telephone services.
- **Saskatoon technology firm on track for high growth** – Vendasta Technologies Inc., a [WINN](#) recipient, [has grown](#) by at least 50 percent over each of the last three years, and is on track to reach \$30 million in revenue and 300 employees by the end of 2017. [Vendasta's](#) CEO attributes the firm's rapid growth to a lack of preconceived notions about Saskatoon-based technology companies in the US, where it does more than 95 percent of its business. The company designs and sells turnkey marketing tools to advertising firms across Canada and the United States. Solido Design Automation, a manufacturing technology firm and WINN recipient, has [also announced](#) plans for rapid growth in the coming years.
- **Alberta's inactive oil and gas wells** – The University of Calgary School of Public Policy (SPP) [released](#) a briefing paper on the issue of inactive oil and gas wells in Alberta. The Government of Alberta does not enforce a limit on how long wells can be left inactive before they must be abandoned (sealed) or reactivated. As a result, the 81,000+ inactive wells in the province will never be reactivated, regardless of economic conditions. The SPP paper concludes that the best way to limit growth of inactive wells is for the Government of Alberta to recognize that most inactive wells will never produce oil or gas in the future, and limit the amount of time that owners can keep wells inactive.
- **Calgary launches the Ignite Innovation Accelerator** – The Calgary Chamber of Commerce has [launched](#) a new accelerator aimed at early-stage growth-oriented businesses. The Ignite Innovation Accelerator is a facilitated 12-week program led by Ray DePaul, Director of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Mount Royal University. Its objective is to support participants in bringing an innovative idea from concept to reality and accelerate business success. Three cohorts of 8-12 businesses are expected to participate over 2017.
- **Staff cuts announced in Fort McMurray** – The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) has [announced](#) that due to the economic slowdown in the oil sands, the impact of the 2016 wildfires, and changes to municipal taxes, 168 positions at the municipality are being eliminated. This decision is expected to save \$24.2 million annually and affect 100 current employees, as some of the positions eliminated were already vacant. The total workforce of the RMWB municipal government will be 1,480 following these cuts.
- **Ballard announces new membership, corporate office, and \$25M deal** – Ballard Power Systems recently [announced](#) its membership in the "Fuel Cell Electric Bus Commercialization Consortium," a pilot program to provide fuel-cell buses to two transit agencies in California. Ballard will provide 20 fuel-cell engines to the project, which is funded by the state of California. Ballard has also recently [opened](#) a corporate office in Guangzhou, China and [signed](#) a \$25M deal with Broad-Ocean for assembly and sale of its fuel-cell engines in China. Ballard received a repayable contribution from WD in 1990 to help develop and commercialize its fuel-cell technology.
- **PayPal buys Vancouver-based TIO Networks** – TIO Networks, a Vancouver-based payments-processing firm, has been [bought](#) by PayPal Holdings for \$304M CAD, pending shareholder approval. The all-cash deal is expected to close in the second half of 2017. PayPal will [benefit](#) from TIO's bill payment services, which processed 60 million transactions in 2016.
- **Weatherhaven selected for Headquarters Shelter System program** – Coquitlam, BC's Weatherhaven, a supplier of portable shelters, has been chosen as the [successful bidder](#) for a \$169M contract with the Canadian Armed Forces. The company will provide tactical tent-based shelter systems, including integrated lighting, flooring, and HVAC. The Canadian Armed Forces will use these shelter systems on deployed operations. Weatherhaven received several small contributions from WD in the early 1990s to develop and commercialize these products.



KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	 British Columbia	 Alberta	 Saskatchewan	 Manitoba	 Canada	Last Update
Gross Domestic Product						
Real GDP¹ (2007 \$billions, forecast)	\$216	\$288	\$58	\$56	\$1,674	2017
% ch. from year earlier	3.4%	-2.2%	-1.5%	1.7%	1.5%	
Labour Market						
Employment (SA, thousands)	2,419	2,268	568	634	18,273	Jan-17
Change from previous month	11.2	0.2	-0.7	1.3	48.3	
% ch. from previous month	0.5%	0.0%	-0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	
% ch. from year earlier	3.5%	-0.4%	-1.0%	0.9%	1.5%	
Unemployment Rate (SA,%)	5.6%	8.8%	6.4%	6.1%	6.8%	Jan-17
percentage points from previous month	-0.2	0.3	-0.2	-0.2	-0.1	
percentage points from year earlier	-1	1.4	0.8	0	-0.4	
Regular EI beneficiaries (SA)	54,950	97,870	20,150	15,780	568,790	Dec-16
Change from previous month	-900	1,650	-750	80	-3,190	
% ch. from previous month	-1.6%	1.7%	-3.6%	0.5%	-0.6%	
% ch. from previous year	1.5%	56.1%	27.8%	2.9%	4.0%	
Average weekly earnings	\$933.75	\$1,129.62	\$1,010.37	\$898.69	\$971.00	Dec-16
Change from previous year	\$8.16	-\$16.98	\$18.27	\$5.57	\$11.27	
Prices						
CPI (y/y)	2.3%	2.5%	1.6%	2.1%	2.1%	Jan-17
CPI (y/y) previous month	1.9%	1.0%	0.6%	1.1%	1.5%	Dec-16
Consumers and Business						
Retail Sales (SA, \$millions)	\$6,333	\$6,264	\$1,588	\$1,600	\$44,912	Dec-16
% ch. from previous month	-0.3%	1.1%	1.2%	-0.1%	-0.5%	
% ch. from previous year	7.2%	1.8%	3.5%	3.1%	4.3%	
Manufacturing Sales (SA, \$millions)	\$3,965	\$5,618	\$1,320	\$1,467	\$53,462	Dec-16
% ch. from previous month	-1.5%	2.9%	5.4%	-4.5%	2.3%	
% ch. from previous year	8.8%	8.1%	12.2%	2.9%	3.5%	
Building Permits (SA, \$millions)	\$959	\$827	\$143	\$193	\$7,168	Dec-16
% ch. from previous month	-23.5%	-24.3%	-8.2%	5.8%	-6.6%	
% ch. from previous year	-26.5%	-28.6%	-38.4%	-7.5%	1.4%	
Housing Starts (SAAR, thousands)	29	19	4	9	207	Jan-17
% ch. from previous month	-30.9%	-28.8%	-21.7%	120.3%	0.5%	
% ch. from previous year	-17.2%	-18.9%	-9.5%	69.2%	19.0%	
International Trade						
Merchandise Exports (\$millions)	\$3,928	\$7,964	\$2,547	\$1,200	\$41,652	Dec-16
% ch. from previous month	4.4%	4.3%	-4.8%	0.8%	-1.7%	
% ch. from previous year	33.9%	9.2%	-1.4%	0.3%	-1.2%	
Merchandise Imports (\$millions)	\$3,867	\$2,255	\$733	\$1,612	\$41,952	Dec-16
% ch. from previous month	-2.4%	16.2%	13.6%	-0.8%	-6.0%	
% ch. from previous year	4.1%	-1.4%	0.4%	-3.0%	-4.1%	
Demographics						
Population (estimate)	4,773,345	4,268,929	1,155,393	1,323,958	36,443,632	Q4 2016
% ch. from previous year	1.3%	1.6%	1.6%	1.7%	1.3%	
Largest Cities (CMAs)	Vancouver (2,463,431)	Calgary (1,392,609)	Saskatoon (295,095)	Winnipeg* (778,489)		2016
	Victoria* (367,770)	Edmonton* (1,321,426)	Regina* (236,481)			

* Provincial Capital

¹ Real GDP at basic prices, forecast (Conference Board of Canada Provincial Outlook Spring 2016)

SA - Seasonally adjusted

SAAR - Seasonally adjusted at annual rates

Sources: Statistics Canada and Conference Board of Canada



UPCOMING EVENTS

Event	Description	Location	Date
BRITISH COLUMBIA			
Transportation Summit 2017: The Future of Our Region	The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade will host this opportunity for the business community to discuss the future of the region's transit and transportation networks.	Vancouver, BC	March 3, 2017
#BCTECH Summit	The Province of BC and the BC Innovation Council will co-host the second annual #BCTECH Summit, the largest conference in BC showcasing the province's technology industry.	Vancouver, BC	March 14-15, 2017
Bank of Canada	The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade will host the Bank of Canada's Deputy Governor, Lawrence Schembri, for a keynote address.	Vancouver, BC	March 22, 2017
University of British Columbia	The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade will host UBC's new President and Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Santa Ono, for his inaugural address.	Vancouver, BC	March 28, 2017
Air Canada	The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade will host Air Canada President and CEO, Calin Rovinescu, to discuss competitive business in the 21 st century.	Vancouver, BC	April 20, 2017
Simon Fraser University	The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade will host SFU President and Vice-Chancellor, Andrew Petter, in a discussion about building BC's innovation economy.	Vancouver, BC	May 30, 2017
ALBERTA			
Creating Prosperity Through Innovation	A lunch event hosted by TECTERRA, featuring Director of Portfolio Development, Richard Gorecki.	Edmonton, AB	March 1, 2017
Propel Energy Tech Forum	An annual forum for energy technology companies that focuses technology developments in energy efficiency, oil and gas extraction, pipeline operations, and environmental monitoring.	Calgary, AB	March 1-2, 2017
Calgary Downtown Economic Summit	An event hosted by Calgary Economic Development, Calgary Municipal Land Corporation, and the City of Calgary to identify emerging trends and opportunities for Calgary's city centre.	Calgary, AB	March 2, 2017
Addressing the Essential Skills Gap	A Canadian Apprenticeship Forum roundtable on how to address essential skills deficits among apprentices.	Edmonton, AB	March 2, 2017
Southeast Alberta Energy Diversification Symposium (SEEDS)	A conference hosted by the Alberta Labour, Economic Development Alliance of Southeast Alberta, and Medicine Hat College to provide an opportunity for discussion about Southeast Alberta's energy diversification opportunities.	Medicine Hat, AB	March 2-3, 2017
CERI 2017 Oil and Gas Symposium: Where do we go from here?	Symposium hosted by the Canadian Energy Research Institute (CERI) to discuss the current oil and gas extraction environment, such as pipeline approvals, LNG plants, market prices, and First Nations engagement.	Calgary, AB	March 6-7, 2017



Western Business Outlook: Edmonton	The Conference Board of Canada's outlook for Edmonton in 2017 from a global, national, provincial, and metropolitan perspective.	Edmonton, AB	March 8, 2017
Western Business Outlook: Calgary	The Conference Board of Canada's outlook for Calgary in 2017 from a global, national, provincial, and metropolitan perspective.	Calgary, AB	March 10, 2017
Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital 2017 Reverse Trade Show	A trade show hosted by Alberta Health Services which highlights clinical care challenges that could be addressed through the development of innovative technological solutions.	Edmonton, AB	March 21, 2017
Oil Sands Innovation Summit	Canada's Oil Sands Innovation Alliance (COSIA) will hold a summit showcasing how innovation is improving the environmental performance of Canada's oil sands.	Calgary, AB	March 21-22, 2017
EDA 2017 Annual Professional Conference & AGM	Economic Developers Alberta (EDA) will host its annual conference with the theme of "Embracing Change. Creating Opportunity."	Banff, AB	March 22-24, 2017
AccelerateAB	An annual event connecting local startups, mentors, investors, and other partners to accelerate the success of Alberta's entrepreneurs.	Calgary, AB	April 19, 2017
XXV Anniversary Business Forum and Gala Dinner	The Canadian Council for the Americas is hosting an event to discuss the future of the economic regions in the Americas (NAFTA, Pacific Alliance, Pacific Rim, US-Canada, and the Americas).	Calgary, AB	April 25, 2017
IPAC & Conference Board of Canada Present: Resilience	A conference focused on the increased risks posed by natural hazards and the responses from both public and private sectors. It will also feature a lessons learned event for the May 2016 Fort McMurray wildfire.	Edmonton, AB	April 25-26, 2017
University of Calgary's W21C Program 2017 Reverse Trade Show	A trade show hosted by Alberta Health Services which highlights clinical challenges for seniors that could be addressed through the development of innovative technological solutions.	Calgary, AB	May 2, 2017
CCAB Aboriginal Economic Development Conference	A conference highlighting innovation in the Indigenous economy.	Calgary, AB	May 11, 2017
2017 Canadian Inland Ports Conference	An annual Van Horne Institute conference discussing the present and future economic benefit of inland ports for the provinces and communities in which they are located.	Calgary, AB	May 24, 2017
SASKATCHEWAN			
The Centre for the Study of Science and Innovation (CSIP) Launch	CSI, the newest research centre to be launched by the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, is an academic research institute that supports the advancement of understanding about policy through the application of robust, theory, innovative method and evidence-based discussions.	Saskatoon, SK Regina, SK	March 8 & 13, 2017
SUSTAINTECH 2017	The third annual SustainTech conference, organized by the Saskatchewan Environmental Industry and Managers Association (SEIMA), brings together industry, academia, and regulators to share new ideas and technologies.	Saskatoon, SK	March 16, 2017



CANDO Links to Learning	Links to Learning is an annual training forum for First Nations Economic Development Officers and Land Management Officers.	Saskatoon, SK	March 28-30, 2017
Saskatchewan Economic Summit 2017	The Saskatchewan Economic Summit 2017 is organized by the Conference Board of Canada's Saskatchewan Institute. The Summit is an opportunity for senior government officials and decision-makers from the private sector to discuss issues affecting Saskatchewan.	Regina, SK	April 3-4, 2017
Saskatchewan Mining Supply Chain Forum	The 9 th Annual Saskatchewan Mining Supply Chain Forum is presented by the Saskatchewan Mining Association, the Saskatchewan Ministry of the Economy, and the Saskatchewan Industrial and Mining Suppliers Association. The Forum will provide information on how businesses can access mining supply opportunities.	Saskatoon, SK	April 4, 2017
Johnson Shoyama Graduate School 2017 Tansley Lecture	Under the theme: "Canada and President Trump: How do we manage?" – former Canadian diplomat Colin Robertson explores the uncertain and critical era into which Canada-U.S relations are entering.	Regina, SK	April 5, 2017
2017 Agri-Value and Networking Event	This year's theme is "Growth, Opportunities and Challenges in Value-Added Processing." The workshops will feature an address by Lyle Stewart, the Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture as well as other local and international speakers.	Saskatoon, SK	May 4, 2017
2017 Williston Basin Petroleum Conference	The 2017 conference includes talks on production optimization, geology, and environmental issues. Also featured is the core workshop, intended to give delegates a unique perspective on the geology of key plays within the Williston Basin.	Regina, SK	May 2-4, 2017
Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc. 2017 Annual Business Conference	This year's business conference will focus on "Business Innovation Through Technology," featuring high-calibre speakers and content while providing the opportunity to learn from some of the province's up-and-coming entrepreneurs.	Saskatoon, SK	May 10, 2017
Saskatchewan Mining Week 2017	The week-long event will feature various activities and events ending with the 49 th Annual Emergency Response/Mine Rescue Skills Competition.	Saskatoon, SK	May 28-June 3, 2017

MANITOBA

Rotary Career Symposium	Manitoba's largest career symposium with over 185 exhibit booths with post-secondary and employment options for students and job seekers.	Winnipeg, MB	March 14-16, 2017
2017 Dare to Compete (un)Conference	The conference is organized around the Industry 2030 themes: Human Resources & Skills Development, Technology & Innovation, Trade & Business Development, and the Business Environment.	Winnipeg, MB	March 21, 2017
Manitoba Sustainable Energy Association (ManSEA)	Conference and ManSEA's annual general meeting with the theme of "Carbon Pricing and Sustainable Energy – What does it mean for me?"	Portage la Prairie, MB	April 5, 2017
Red River College (RRC) Applied Research and Innovation day	A showcase of student and staff applied research that's happening at RRC and being driven by industry.	Winnipeg, MB	April 6, 2017



Western Economic Diversification Canada

The role of Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) is to improve the long-term economic competitiveness of Western Canada by supporting programs and services that enhance innovation, business development, and community economic development. In addition, the department undertakes policy, advocacy, and coordination activities in order to advance the interests of Western Canada in national economic decision-making.