

From the Alberta Prosperity Project to MAGA: The far-right forces behind Alberta separatism

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A network of Christian nationalists, anti-vaccine activists, oil executives and Republican political operatives has emerged at the centre of the campaign for Alberta independence, exposing the close political relationship between the separatist movement, Premier Danielle Smith's United Conservative Party (UCP) government and the American far right.

On Monday, October 19, Albertans will vote on whether the provincial government should begin the constitutional process required to hold a future "binding" referendum on separation from Canada along with 9 other questions aimed at advancing the far-right's political agenda in the province.

The vote follows years of organizing by separatist forces that played an important role in Smith's rise to power and have since established direct contacts with officials in the Trump administration.

While the Trump administration has avoided explicitly declaring its support for Alberta separatism, it is openly working to exploit the regional divisions within the Canadian bourgeoisie for its own ends. Since returning to the White House, Trump has repeatedly declared his intention to annex Canada as the 51st state or at least crash its economy so as to subordinate the country to US dominance as a vassal. This agenda is part of Trump and the American oligarchy's drive to establish unchallenged US hegemony in the Western hemisphere to create a base for waging war around the world against its geostrategic rivals, above all China. As for Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and the dominant section of the country's ruling class, they have rallied around a strategy of intensified worker-exploitation, diminished reliance on the US and expanded partnerships with European imperialism to ensure, in Carney's own words, that Canadian imperialism is at the "table" of imperialist plunder and not "on the menu" of other states.

The Alberta separatists' appeal to "Alberta First" regionalism is bound up with demands for unrestricted exploitation of the province's oil wealth, sweeping reductions in federal authority, attacks on immigrants and a more direct political alignment with the far right and fascist forces in the United States.

Their connections to Smith's governing party are substantial, despite the premier's insistence that she supports Alberta remaining in Canada.

The far-right forces behind the separatist campaign

At the centre of the movement is the Alberta Prosperity Project (APP), led by Bonnyville sporting-goods businessman Mitch Sylvestre, Calgary lawyer Jeffrey Rath and former Edmonton cardiac surgeon Dennis Modry.

Sylvestre organized the "Stay Free Alberta" petition, which collected

279,337 valid signatures in support of holding an independence referendum. He is simultaneously president of the Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul UCP constituency association, demonstrating the extent to which separatist organizers have embedded themselves in the governing party.

Smith attended the constituency association's May 2025 fundraising dinner, where she was seated alongside Sylvestre and Modry. Sylvestre subsequently received the UCP's awards for best constituency president and best fundraiser.

Modry, who helped establish the APP at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, has advocated organizing hundreds of thousands of independence supporters within the UCP to transform its political direction.

The APP emerged from a milieu of Christian nationalist activists, opponents of public health measures and anti-vaccine campaigners. Its meetings have featured anti-vaccination speakers, while its political program combines demands for expanded fossil fuel extraction with restrictions on immigration and the dismantling of federal authority.

Rath, the lawyer who spearheaded the campaign's constitutional challenges, has attributed his political radicalization to pandemic travel restrictions. His opposition to federal authority has brought him into increasingly open conflict with Smith over the pace of the independence campaign.

Another prominent organizer is David Parker, the founder of "Take Back Alberta."

Parker built his political network by mobilizing opposition to former UCP premier Jason Kenney's pandemic policies. The movement helped force Kenney's resignation in 2022 and subsequently organized support for Smith's successful campaign to seize the party leadership and premiership.

Parker has since established the Centurion Project, an organization dedicated to mobilizing independence supporters through voter identification and political campaigning. His proposed independent Alberta would be organized around Christian values, traditional family structures and far-right libertarian conceptions of profit and property-based individual "rights."

Other separatist figures include Cameron Davies, leader of the Republican Party of Alberta and a former Take Back Alberta organizer; Keith Wilson, a lawyer who represented organizers of the 2022 "Freedom" Convoy which blocked border crossings and occupied downtown Ottawa and threatened Parliament to demand the end of remaining COVID restrictions; and Chris Scott, whose opposition to pandemic restrictions at his Whistle Stop Cafe helped establish his standing among Alberta's anti-vaccination mandate activists.

Christian fundamentalism also figures prominently in the movement's broader political environment. The recent Reclaiming Alberta conference

featured religious-conservative broadcaster Faytene Grasseschi alongside separatist campaigners and activists drawn from the pandemic-era protest movement.

Republican operatives intervene in Alberta

An October investigation by the *Globe and Mail* exposed the extent of the separatists' contacts with the Trump administration and the US Republican Party establishment.

The newspaper established that APP representatives met US State Department officials three times during 2025, on April 22, September 29 and December 16.

Modry acknowledged that proposals presented to the American side included possible access to Alberta's freshwater resources, oil royalties, mineral wealth and land for a railway connection to Alaska, in exchange for financial assistance and guarantees during an independence transition.

Rath disputed Modry's account, insisting that these proposals were never discussed during the State Department meetings. The White House acknowledged the contacts while stating that no commitments had been made.

The revelations underscore the material interests involved in the separatist campaign. Its leaders have contemplated placing Alberta's resources and future public revenues at the disposal of Washington in pursuit of their political objectives.

The American intervention extends into the campaign's organizing machinery.

In January 2026, Republican political strategists from Michigan travelled to Calgary for a private meeting with Sylvestre and other APP representatives, arranged by Parker.

The Americans were associated with 10X Votes, voter-mobilization software developed by Republican organizers Drew Born and Drew Wierda and promoted during Trump's successful 2024 presidential campaign in Michigan.

Wierda belongs to the family of Blackwater founder Erik Prince and Trump's former education secretary Betsy DeVos. Born has publicly advocated American annexation of Alberta.

Parker subsequently adapted the American organizing model for the Centurion Project.

In April, Elections Alberta obtained a court injunction after the Centurion Project improperly acquired access to the provincial voters list, exposing personal information concerning approximately 2.9 million Albertans. The information originated with the Republican Party of Alberta.

The connections extend into the broader MAGA movement. Parker has described his efforts to persuade Tucker Carlson to promote 10X Votes during the 2024 American election campaign.

Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has publicly promoted an "independent" Alberta as a natural economic partner of the United States, while Christian nationalist pastor Doug Wilson, whose political influence extends into Trump's administration, has welcomed the prospect of Alberta independence.

Smith's cultivation of the separatist far right

Smith's political relationship with these forces extends back to her struggle for the UCP leadership.

Her government subsequently reduced the signature threshold required to initiate a citizen referendum. Following a court ruling against the separatists' petition-question being placed on the ballot due to the government's failure to consult First Nations on the impact secession would have on their Treaty rights, Smith placed a revised independence question directly on the October ballot.

Although Smith says she voted for Alberta to remain in Canada, members of her own caucus have openly supported advancing the separation process.

Red Deer-South UCP MLA Jason Stephan, who previously served as Smith's parliamentary secretary for constitutional affairs, announced that he voted for Option 2, which would begin the process toward a binding independence referendum.

The remaining nine referendum questions, which Smith backs, reveal the broader political convergence between the UCP and the separatists.

Five concern immigration, access to public services and proof of citizenship for voting. The other four seek constitutional changes expanding provincial power at Ottawa's expense.

These proposals closely parallel elements of the separatists' political program and the Trump administration's attacks on immigrant rights and federal institutions.

Smith has also cultivated direct relations with Trump, meeting him at Mar-a-Lago in January 2025 and opposing proposals to restrict Alberta oil exports in retaliation for American tariffs.

The premier's public objective remains a reconfigured Canadian federation in which Alberta's corporate and energy interests exercise substantially greater power and she has kept the far-right separatist elements in her pocket to advance those ends.

Alberta separatism and the interests of big business

The social and economic factors driving discontent in Alberta have been intensified by declining living standards, deteriorating public services and mounting economic insecurity.

The separatist movement directs these grievances against Ottawa, immigrants and federal restrictions on resource development, while advancing policies that would strengthen the position of the province's corporate elite.

The federal Liberal government, meanwhile, has responded with its own nationalist appeals, tying opposition to separatism to Prime Minister Mark Carney's efforts to strengthen Canadian imperialism in its confrontation with Washington.

Carney's partnership with Smith over pipeline development and energy policy demonstrates the common interests that persist beneath their constitutional disagreements.

The referendum thus exposes competing strategies within the Canadian ruling class over the control of resources, political authority and relations between Canada and the United States.

The growth of the Alberta separatist right and its increasingly extensive connections to Trump's political movement form part of this wider struggle over the future organization of Canadian and North American capitalism.

The working class has no stake in either side of this conflict. The separatist movement is a reactionary project of Alberta's energy barons and their far-right allies, whose proposals would place the province's oil wealth, water and public revenues at the disposal of Washington and the would-be fascist dictator Trump administration.

The federalist camp, for its part, invokes the "defence of Canada" to rally workers behind the Carney government's predatory imperialist

interests, including its program of austerity, military rearmament, the gutting of environmental protections and the criminalization of strikes in the “national interest.”

Both factions are committed to imposing the burden of the capitalist crisis on working people. Workers in Alberta and across Canada must reject the referendum en bloc and refuse to be corralled behind either separatist or federalist nationalism.

The fight against declining living standards, crumbling public services, war and the growth of far right and dictatorial forms of rule requires the independent political mobilization of the working class, uniting workers in Alberta, across Canada and throughout North America in the struggle for workers’ power and a socialist society based on their common international class interests.



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