

Redford weighs tougher drunk-driving penalties

Premier may follow B.C. on roadside bans

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Alberta could follow British Columbia in slapping intoxicated drivers with stiff administrative penalties, Premier Alison Redford said Friday.

Redford made the comments in Calgary after her first meeting with B.C. Premier Christy Clark, who praised her province's strict, but controversial system of roadside driving bans and car seizures.

"We've cut the number of drunk-driving deaths in half in British Columbia," Clark told reporters. "It's pretty tough to argue with that."

Redford said the two premiers talked about legislation introduced in B.C. that "we're considering introducing here — with respect to administrative penalties for drunk driving."

The Alberta premier said

she will ask Justice Minister Verlyn Olson to take a look at the issue.

"But it's certainly been part of the agenda that I've committed to going forward," Redford added.

Last year, B.C. introduced Canada's most severe penalties for anyone who blows a "warn," a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) between 0.05 and 0.08, on a roadside screening device.

A driver dinged for a first offence not only gets a three-day driving prohibition, but a \$200 fine plus the possibility of towing and three days of storage fees if the car is impounded.

Driving with BAC over 0.08 is a Criminal Code offence, but B.C. also has additional administrative penalties.

Redford first broached discussion of tougher anti-drinking and driving laws in 2010, when she was still the province's justice minister.

Calgary resident Wayne Kauffeldt, past national chairman of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said he has long been in conversation with the premier on the is-

sue. He added it's gratifying to hear her speak of it now that she has won Alberta's top political post.

Kauffeldt said getting provincial governments to take tougher action on an administrative level is easier than getting Ottawa to make changes to Criminal Code provisions for drunk driving.

"That puts some teeth into the existing system that we have," Kauffeldt said Friday. "You take the car away from the driver and people think twice."

However, David Eby, executive director of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, warns there are major concerns in his province about the broad discretion the province's approach hands to police officers. He said the fines and penalties are difficult to appeal.

"The entire decision-making process is at the side of the road," Eby said. "You're talking about people's livelihoods."

Eby said people are more likely to change their driving habits if they see or come in contact with a large number

of Checkstops. More enforcement is key, he said.

On Friday, Redford and Clark said they had a wide-ranging conversation, on everything from the New West Partnership trade and investment agreement, to the Northern Gateway pipeline.

Redford is in favour of the oilsands pipeline to Asian markets, but Clark said she's not taking a stand on the controversial pipeline yet. An environmental review of the pipeline will likely take two years — she said following that examination the province can have a debate based on the facts.

"Let's let the process unfold," Clark said.

The B.C. premier, who only won the leadership of the province's Liberals earlier this year, said she was impressed at Redford's strong early grasp of provincial issues.

"There is some winds of change across the country, and I think Premier Redford certainly represents that for Albertans," Clark said.

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