

The Assembly met at 10 a.m.

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

Clerk: — I wish to inform the Assembly that I have received a communication from the private secretary to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor stating that His Honour will open the first session of the twenty-fourth legislature at 10 a.m. today, the 6th day of December 1999.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor entered the Chamber at 10:01 a.m.

Hon. Mr. Hillson: — I am commanded by His Honour the Lieutenant Governor to inform you that he does not see fit to declare the causes of the summoning of the present legislature until later today, when the Legislative Assembly shall have elected a Speaker according to law.

His Honour retired from the Chamber at 10:04 a.m.

Clerk: — Members of the Legislative Assembly, it is my duty to inform you that only one candidate has declared his intention to stand for election of Speaker.

Therefore, pursuant to rule 26(3), it is my duty to announce that Mr. Ron Osika, the hon. member for Melville, is declared elected as your Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — Members of the Legislative Assembly I wish to express my grateful thanks and humble acknowledgement of the high honour the Assembly has conferred upon me. While I leave the floor of this Assembly to take the Speaker's Chair, I leave behind all political partisan feelings in order that I may discharge with impartiality to all and to the best of my ability the various and important duties pertaining to the high office of Speaker.

It will be my aim and duty to uphold the principles and traditions of the Assembly and secure for each member the right to express his or her opinions within the limits necessary to preserve decorum; to recognize the rights and privileges of all hon. members, the political groups, and the Assembly itself; to facilitate the transaction of the public business in an orderly manner and; above all, to seek to be fair and impartial in the decisions you entrust to me.

I recall in 1996, my . . . the pleasure I had, my first duty in this House as an elected member was to congratulate the Speaker — the previous Speaker — to this high office.

Members of the Legislative Assembly, I wish to express grateful thanks again and humble acknowledgement of the high honour that's been conferred upon me. And while I leave the Assembly to take the Speaker's Chair, I do leave behind all political partisan feelings in order that I may discharge with impartiality to all and to the best of my ability the various and important duties pertaining to the high office of Speaker. It will be my aim and my duty to uphold the principles and traditions of this Assembly and secure the right for all members to express

his or her opinions within the limits necessary to preserve decorum; to recognize the rights and privileges of the honourable members, the political groups, and the Assembly itself.

As we look forward to the new millennium with hope and confidence, it is extremely important that we reflect on our heritage. We need the courage of our mothers and our grandmothers, and we need the faith of our fathers and our grandfathers, because it was their courage and faith that built this great province that we enjoy today.

We live in an area of Canada that grows enough wheat to feed the hungry of the world for a year. There is enough potash between this rich soil to supply the needs of that industry for the next 400 years. This province is blessed with resources in mining that are truly the envy of the entire world. But I . . . just let me ask you one simple question. What good is all that wealth unless we enjoy a free society? A society in which my grandchildren will receive the finest in health care. A society in which your children will have the opportunity to appreciate an education system that will allow them to compete in a global economy.

This morning you honoured me with the position of Speaker of the twenty-fourth legislature of Saskatchewan. I accept that position with humility and determination. I want the people of Saskatchewan to know, and the members of this Assembly to recognize, that I respect the past traditions and proceedings of this legislature. I am determined to preside over the Assembly with the dignity and impartial command that allows debate with respect to intellect.

Years ago, while still in my teens, I fulfilled a youthful dream in a colourful graduation ceremony. That day, many years ago, I promised to "maintiens le droit" as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. During a 25-year career, I wore that uniform with special respect for the institution and the endowment that order so richly deserved.

Today I feel a very special privilege to serve as a Speaker of an institution with a history that demands respect from every member. I share your pride in this heritage of this Assembly. This Assembly is known across Canada, and I dare say beyond, as a form for intense debate. I have witnessed that intense debate and I have participated in.

This morning I pledge my commitment to free debate with proper respect for the decorum necessary to conduct proceedings in a manner that will continue to honour this Assembly.

Reason, passion, and humour in a debate will always be acceptable. What will not be acceptable and should not be acceptable is a personal attack on another member of this Assembly. If we lose respect for one another by the way we conduct our affairs in this Assembly, we will contribute to the loss of respect for this venerable institution from the very people we serve.

I ask for your co-operation as we begin this new session. I want to also reassure the Assembly again that I will be fair but firm

in protecting the rights and privileges of all members of this Assembly. And I conclude by extending a sincere invitation to all members to visit me at any time to discuss issues or concerns.

The Speaker is the servant of the Assembly and it is my sincere desire to work with each and every one of you in the best interests of this venerable institution and ultimately the people of Saskatchewan.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Mr. Romanow: — Mr. Speaker, members of the House, it is my pleasure, my honour, to speak today on behalf of the government members of this Assembly. On their behalf, on our behalf, I want to congratulate you, sir, on your installation to this important high office as Speaker of the House and the legislature.

I want to begin with a quotation. It was once said that the Speaker's role is, and here I begin the quote. Quote: "... a daunting task. A task that must be approached with wisdom, fairness and dedication."

I wonder if Mr. Speaker recognizes those accurate and heartfelt words. He should, with respect, because they were spoken by him — by you, sir — at the beginning of the last session of this House upon the installation of his predecessor, the member from Moose Jaw North.

And I may say, I think on behalf of all of us, that you promised at that time to respect the office and indeed at all times comported yourself throughout an often lively session in a manner than honoured that promise. In doing so, Mr. Speaker, you set an example for all of us; an example by which we might govern ourselves during your tenure in the Speaker's Chair.

Yours, of course, is not an easy role to play. The Speaker of the British House of Commons, the Rt. Hon. Betty Boothroyd, has observed that being Speaker is, and I quote: "a cross between train spotting and bungee jumping." Elsewhere it has been observed that the Speaker's role is, and here's another quotation: "somewhere between traffic cop and circus ringmaster." It's true that this Chamber, when it gets energetic, as you put it, is sometimes not so much Broad and College as it is Barnum and Bailey.

Your challenge, sir, as you have pointed out, is to let the peoples' voices and hearts be heard in full measure and with the minimum of restraint but maintaining all the while our rules and procedures and a measure of decorum. It's not an easy task.

Fortunately, I believe that your background in this House, your character and personality of which we all know, your background in your previous experiences has given you the tools that will allow you to rise to the many challenges that you will face ahead in the days ahead. As a long-time member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as you've said, you know the value of patience, strength, fairness, impartiality, and integrity. And as a distinguished member of this legislature, you have the respect for its traditions and its rules and for the ideals of democracy that are the very foundation on which we function here.

And finally, I know that you'll be willing and able to draw upon the resources and experience embodied in Mr. Speaker's dedicated staff and staff of the legislature — the Clerk; the Deputy Clerk; Clerk Assistant; the staff of the office; the Legislative Law Clerk; the Sergeant-at-Arms; the staffs of the Legislative Library and *Hansard*; and of course, needless to say, Mr. Speaker, from time to time, the advice of the good members of this House as well.

Mr. Speaker, we have every confidence in you and express every good wish that you should enjoy your tenure. I know I speak for all members of the House in saying so.

Congratulations, Mr. Speaker, good luck, and God speed.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now is the time the official opposition is supposed to pass along our congratulations on the election of the new Speaker. Unfortunately we cannot congratulate this Speaker on his election because there was no election. Instead there was an auction. The member from Melville put himself on the auction block to be sold to the highest bidder. The sale price was the Speaker's Chair.

The Speaker is the highest office in this legislature. The Speaker's Chair is supposed to be the most respected position in this legislature, but instead the Premier has chosen to cheapen and demean the office of Speaker by using it as a bargaining chip in the political fire sale of the Liberal MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly)

You know, the Speaker tries to portray himself as some sort of great parliamentarian. But his actions over the past few weeks have shown that he is anything but. The Premier was bound and determined to buy back the majority that voters took away from him on September 16. And if he had to damage the very integrity of this institution by putting the Speaker's Chair on the auction block, then so be it. There was no price too high for the Premier to pay in order to buy back his majority.

Just look at how he has perverted the rule governing the election of Speaker. The rules governing the election of Speaker were adopted by this legislature on April 11, 1991, with the full support of the NDP (New Democratic Party) including the member from Riversdale.

I would like to read a few excerpts from the report of the Special Committee on Rules and Procedures that implemented this important rule change. The committee report said and I quote:

The Speaker is a servant of the whole House, . . .

Not a servant of the government nor of the opposition.

The committee concluded that to perform this role, the Speaker must enjoy the full trust and confidence of the House.

The impression of a Speaker's independence is sometimes tarnished by a government's influence in the selection

process.

In difficult situations . . . particularly when political stakes are high . . .

It is vitally important that the Speaker have the trust and support of all members.

When the manner in which a Speaker came to occupy the Chair comes into question . . .

This of course makes the Speaker's job doubly difficult, . . .

And does nothing for Member's respect for the position.

The committee was clearly stating that in order for the Speaker to be respected by all members, he must be elected by all members. This Speaker was not elected by the members. The opposition members had no say in this matter. In fact, most of the members on the government side of the House had no say in this matter.

This Speaker was put in the Chair as part of a backroom deal cut between two members — the Premier and the Liberal leader. A deal designed to buy the Liberals to overturn the election results and to give the Premier back the majority that voters took away from him. This clearly is a perversion of the process.

Now I've heard the Premier say: if the Saskatchewan Party is so concerned, why didn't they run a candidate, then we would have had an election. It's a little like listening to Don King defend one of his fights. Simply put, the fix was in.

The Premier needed the member from Melville in the Speaker's Chair in order to complete his takeover of the Liberals. He decried that no one on that side was . . . decried that no one on that side was allowed to run against him or vote against him. That's hardly the kind of fair and open process outlined in the rules adopted in 1991.

And it's interesting to read the words of the current Deputy Premier, who spoke in favour of this rule change back in 1991. The Deputy Premier said:

The election of Speaker must follow three important principles: democracy, openness, and accountability.

Mr. Deputy Premier, it's little more than a little ironic that you are the same member who brokered the backroom deal that put the member from Melville in the Speaker's Chair. Democracy, openness, and accountability — you have failed on every count.

Democracy — there was no democracy. There was no election. The Speaker was appointed as part of a political payoff. Openness — there was nothing open about it. The Speaker's appointment was part of a backroom deal cooked up behind closed doors, and some might even say in the dead of the night. Accountability — the Speaker is supposed to be accountable to all members of the House, but a Speaker appointed by the government side of the House is only accountable to the government side of the House.

You know, following the 1995 election, we saw how the system is supposed to work. We had two candidates for Speaker — both from the same party; both seeking the support of all members of this House. We had a fair and democratic election. And when it was over the new Speaker took the Chair with the confidence of all of the members of the House. That Speaker was elected and he was respected. The member from Moose Jaw Palliser not only was democratically elected to the role of Speaker, but also served this Assembly in a manner befitting the role of a fully elected Speaker.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — He received and maintained the respect of all members. The Speaker of the twenty-third legislature for the province of Saskatchewan worked hard to enhance the role of Speaker both within this Assembly and across the province. He worked diligently to explain and to provide an understanding of our political process to school children by visiting schools in every constituency. These visits also included the elected member no matter which side of the House they sat on.

For his hard work on behalf of all of us with school children, for his fairness and his respect for this great institution, for his respect for and to all members of this Assembly, we salute him — the member for Moose Jaw Palliser, the Speaker of the twenty-third legislature of Saskatchewan. We salute him and thank him for making the role of Speaker a non-partisan and respected position during his tenure.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. D'Autremont: — I do, however, lament the loss of one half of the crew of the pirates of the Saskatchewan legislature and their daily parade into this Assembly. Over the past decade, legislatures all over this country took a huge step forward by going to an elected Speaker. Today, the Saskatchewan legislature took a huge step backwards.

The first Speaker of the 21st century was appointed by the government; a procedure more in keeping with the 19th century. It is a sad day for this Assembly. We know have a process that is tainted, a premier who is prepared to compromise even the highest office of this Assembly in order to cling to power.

On behalf of the official opposition, I regret to say that we strongly object to the Premier's appointment of the new Speaker, and we strongly object to the tainted process by which this Speaker has assumed office. Thank you.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: — This House will now recess until 2 p.m. this day when the Lieutenant Governor will be here to read the Speech from the Throne.

The Assembly recessed until 2 p.m.