

# How Provincial Government Works



Joe Ghiz, former premier of Prince Edward Island. His son Robert became premier of the province in 2007.

Imagine you are the premier of a province, elected by the people to lead the provincial government. But what if the people don't agree on an extremely important provincial issue? What if even the members of your own family are on opposite sides and you are caught in the middle?

Joe Ghiz, the former premier of Prince Edward Island, was a man with a big problem. The federal government wanted to build a fixed link—a bridge or tunnel—from Prince Edward Island to the mainland. Islanders were split, one group for and one against the fixed link. Premier Ghiz had to find a way to be fair.

## A Divided Province

One evening, Rose Ellen Ghiz and her teenaged son, Robert, were having a suppertime discussion. Rose Ellen agreed with a group called Friends of the Island, who argued that the fixed link was a bad idea. They didn't want life on their province to change.

Robert supported Islanders for a Better Tomorrow, who thought a fixed link would improve island life. They were tired of crowded,

unreliable ferries, especially when the water was blocked with thick chunks of ice.

Joe Ghiz listened. Everywhere he went in the province people had strong opinions about the fixed link.

- Why did people have different points of view about the fixed link?
- How would you decide what to do if you were Premier Ghiz?

Confederation Bridge spans the Northumberland Strait between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.



## Bridging the Divide

The problem of travel between Prince Edward Island and the mainland was an old one. In 1873, when PEI joined Canada, the federal government promised to provide “continuous” transportation. For years, there was a ferry service, but many Islanders had become dissatisfied with this and the idea of a fixed link was proposed.

Premier Ghiz decided to take an unusual step and hold a **referendum**. On January 18, 1988, Islanders had a chance to vote “Yes” or “No” on the question: “Are you in favour of the fixed link crossing between Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick?”

Even though the issue had been controversial, only 65 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots. Of those voters, 60 percent voted “Yes” and 40 percent voted “No.” The majority wanted the fixed link. Many Islanders were unhappy with the results, but the will of the majority was upheld. The provincial government began to work with the federal government to build the link. On May 31, 1997, the Confederation Bridge was opened.

### ? Inquiring Minds

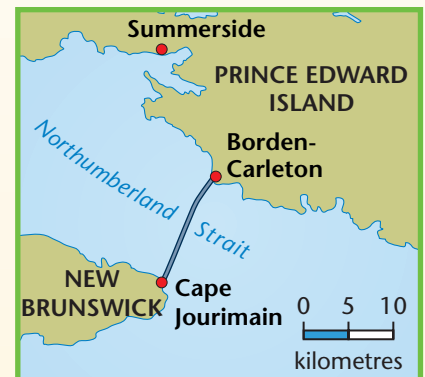
Every province and territory in Canada has its own government. In this chapter, you will learn about the roles and responsibilities of Alberta’s provincial government. As you read, think about the following questions:

1. In what ways does our provincial system of government reflect the principles of democracy: justice, equity, freedoms, and representation?
2. Why does having candidates from a variety of political parties contribute to democracy?

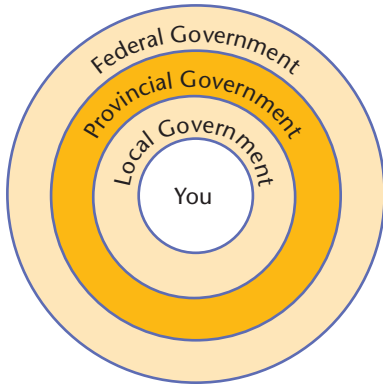
### words matter!

A **referendum** allows eligible voters to vote on an issue or law proposed by the government. It is similar to the direct democracy practised in ancient Athens.

### Location of Confederation Bridge



Approximately how long is the fixed link?



# Why Do We Need a Provincial Government?

The story of Premier Joe Ghiz and the fixed link shows one reason why each province and territory in Canada needs its own government. Alberta, like Prince Edward Island, is unique and has special needs and issues. The job of Alberta's provincial government is to take care of the people of Alberta and protect their interests. For example, the wealth that comes from oil and gas resources today needs to be managed by the provincial government to benefit you and future generations of Albertans. Why is this fair?

## Skill Smart

As you read this chapter, collect information from newspapers and the Internet about issues involving the Alberta government. Organize your data according to the government departments involved.



## Provincial Government Provides Services

Like local government, which you read about in the last chapter, the provincial government provides many services. A different government department is responsible for each service. There are about 20 departments in the Alberta provincial government.

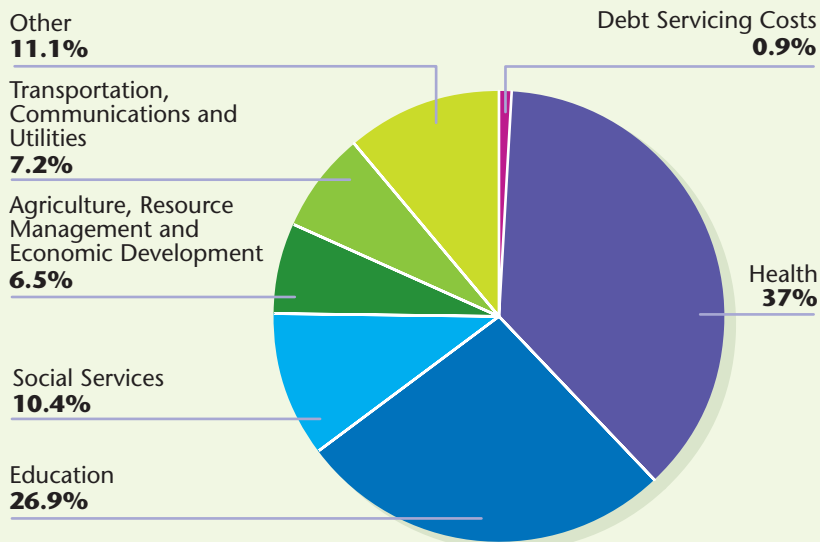
The provincial government shares responsibility for services with other levels of government. For example, the job of building and maintaining Alberta roads is shared by the local, provincial, and federal governments. The provincial government collects taxes to pay for services it provides. The graph on page 131 shows how tax money is spent.

### Thinking It Through

Not everyone in Alberta makes identical use of services provided by the provincial government. How are provincial government services an example of promoting equity in a democracy?

## 2006–07 Province of Alberta Expenses

Total expenses were \$28.3 billion.



### Skill Smart

A pie graph is a way to show information visually. The circle represents 100 percent of something. Each piece of the circle represents a percent of the whole.

- What does the dark blue piece represent?
- Which service on this pie chart does the government spend the most money on?

Do you think any of these services should get more or less money? Explain.

## Educating Albertans

Did you know that all Grade 6 students in Alberta are learning the same things in school? That many of them are using the same textbooks? That they write the same provincial achievements tests at the end of Grade 6? These matters are decided by the Alberta department of education. The department also gives money to local school boards, supports students with special needs, and certifies teachers.

## Managing Alberta's Resources

What Alberta resources can you name? How do these resources affect your family, your community, and your province? Energy resources, such as oil and gas, are the responsibility of a department in the provincial government.

### Thinking It Through

1. The amount of provincial tax that people pay is based on how much money they make. Do you agree with this system? Explain your reasoning.
2. Why do all Alberta students learn from the same program of studies and write provincial achievement tests?



## Keeping Albertans Healthy

**Subsidies** are funds that the government provides to those who need help to participate in a program.

Providing health services to everyone in Alberta is an important responsibility of the provincial government. As you saw in the pie graph on the previous page, the government uses tax money to pay for health services. Albertans also pay health care insurance premiums or fees. Seniors and people with low incomes receive **subsidies**. This means that the government pays part of their premium. How does paying subsidies where needed fit in with the democratic values of fairness and equity?

One cent of every dollar spent on health care in Alberta is used to encourage people to take care of their health. Here is a story board for a television anti-smoking ad from Alberta's health and wellness department.



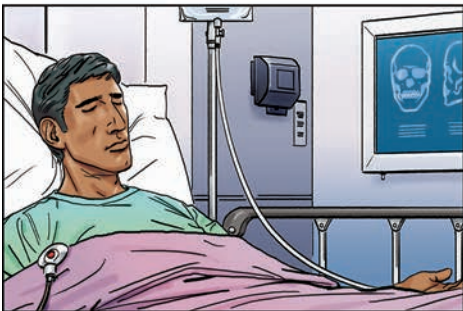
Male Child's Voice:  
I thought I'd try it just once.



Female Teen's Voice:  
I only smoked at parties.



Male Child's Voice:  
I thought you had to be old to get cancer.



Male Teen's Voice:  
I just wanted to fit in.



Female Teen's Voice:  
I wish I never started.



Announcer:  
A message from the Government of Alberta.

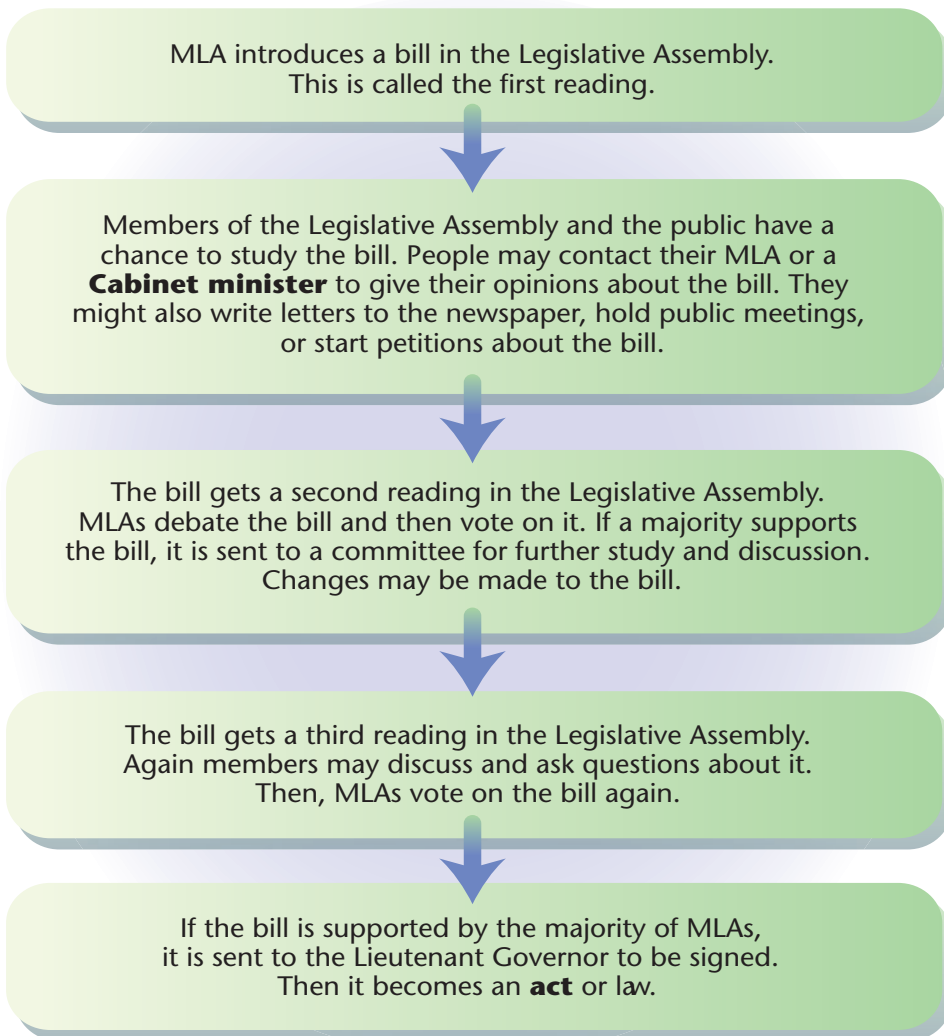
### Thinking It Through

1. How does stopping smoking contribute to the common good?
2. Why do you think voices of children and teens were used in the television ad?

# Provincial Government Makes Laws

The elected representatives in the provincial government of Alberta are known as Members of the Legislative Assembly or MLAs. The MLAs make laws, which must be obeyed by the people of the province. In 2001, for example, the Legislative Assembly passed a law that requires all Albertans under 18 to wear a helmet while riding a bicycle. Parents or guardians of anyone under age 18 who disobeys the law can be fined \$60.

As in local government, a law begins with a motion, which is known as a **bill**. In this case, the bill was introduced by Calgary MLA Yvonne Fritz. She believed that helmets save the lives of many bicyclists. Follow the flow chart below to see how a bill becomes a law.



## More About...

### Bicycle Helmet Laws

Although the provincial government has a bicycle helmet law, local government can make additional laws on this matter. St. Albert was the first city in Alberta to pass a bylaw that makes bicycle helmets mandatory for all ages. As of July 1, 2006, any cyclist not wearing a helmet in St. Albert can be fined \$100. The St. Albert bylaw does not apply in the rest of Alberta.

### words matter!

A **bill** is a proposed, or suggested, law.

A **Cabinet minister** is an elected representative who is in charge of a provincial government department.

An **act** is a bill that has been passed by the Legislative Assembly and signed by the Lieutenant Governor. An act is also known as a law.

### Thinking It Through

How do provincial laws support equality and justice?

# How Is the Provincial Government Elected?

## Skill Smart

Are lawn signs an important part of today's elections or are they visual pollution? Ask at least six people of different ages their opinions about election lawn signs. Use a PowerPoint presentation or another information technology to share your findings with your class.

## words matter!

A **political party** is an organization made up of people who have similar ideas about how to govern. Voting districts are called **constituencies**. Alberta is divided into different constituencies for federal elections.

When a provincial election is called, election signs suddenly appear everywhere. Provincial election signs give the candidate's name and usually the **political party**. Most candidates represent one of Alberta's political parties. There are also candidates who run as independents; they don't represent a party.

During a provincial election, candidates run for positions on the Legislative Assembly. One MLA is elected in each of Alberta's 83 voting districts, that is, **constituencies**. What is the name of the constituency where you live?



What groups in society are represented on these election signs?

## Result of the 2004 Alberta Election

| Political Party          | # of Candidates Elected | % of Votes Obtained |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Progressive Conservative | 62                      | 46.8                |
| Liberal                  | 16                      | 29.4                |
| New Democratic Party     | 4                       | 10.2                |
| Alberta Alliance         | 1                       | 8.7                 |
| Other Parties            | 0                       | 4.9                 |

## Thinking It Through

Provincial elections must be held at least once every five years. Compare this with the length of time an Athenian could be a member of the Council of 500. How do these time restrictions support democracy?



As you can see from the chart, most of the elected MLAs were from the Progressive Conservative Party. This means that this party was in charge of the Alberta government for the next four years. Ralph Klein, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party at that time, was re-elected in his constituency so he stayed on as premier of Alberta.

## Becoming a Candidate

Who is your MLA? What party does he or she belong to? Many members of the public also belong to political parties. Before an election, the party members in a constituency have a nomination meeting to select a candidate to run for their party. If several people wish to become the candidate, the members vote on their choice.

Candidates who are running for a political party and independent candidates need to fulfill two conditions to have their names appear on the ballot for a provincial election. He or she must

- be an eligible voter
- get a form from Elections Alberta signed by at least 25 electors in their district

Every candidate's goal is to be elected by the voters of his or her constituency. In order to do this, candidates must convince the voters that they are the best person to represent them and that their party will do the best job of running the province.



### Thinking It Through

1. The rules for getting on the provincial election ballot make it possible for most Albertans to run if they wish. How is this an example of equality?
2. What do you think makes some people want to take on the busy and difficult job of an MLA?

DORIS BANNISTER  
NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

PEARL CALAHASEN  
PROGRESSIVE  
CONSERVATIVE PARTY

IAN HOPFE  
GREEN PART

JONATHAN PIECKAITIS  
LIBERAL PARTY

VALERIE RAHN  
ALLIANCE PARTY

An example of a provincial election ballot.

During the election campaign, candidates talk about what they plan to do for their constituency and what their party plans to do for the province. How would you vote if you liked a candidate but didn't agree with his or her party's plans?



## Making the Decision

### Thinking It Through

Do you think the conditions for being a voter in a provincial election are fair? Explain.

On election day, voters select one of the candidates running in their constituency. The Chief Electoral Officer, who is the head of Elections Alberta, has the job of making sure that the election is run fairly, according to the rules. Elections Alberta keeps lists of the people who are eligible to vote. Voters must:

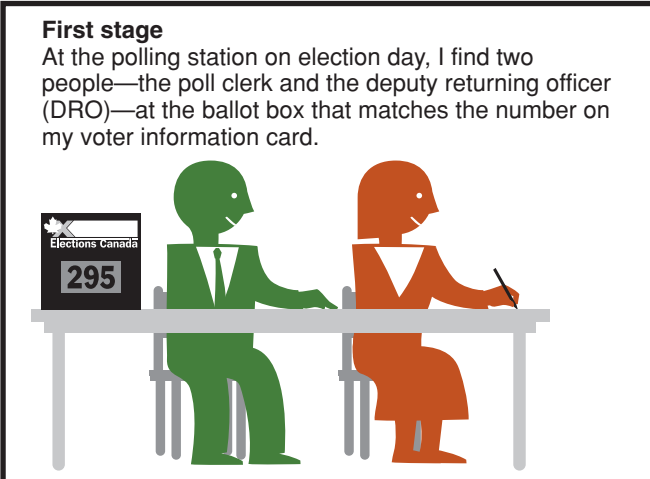
- live in the constituency where they want to vote
- be a Canadian citizen
- be at least 18 years old
- live in Alberta for six months before election day

The information below shows the step-by-step process of voting on election day.

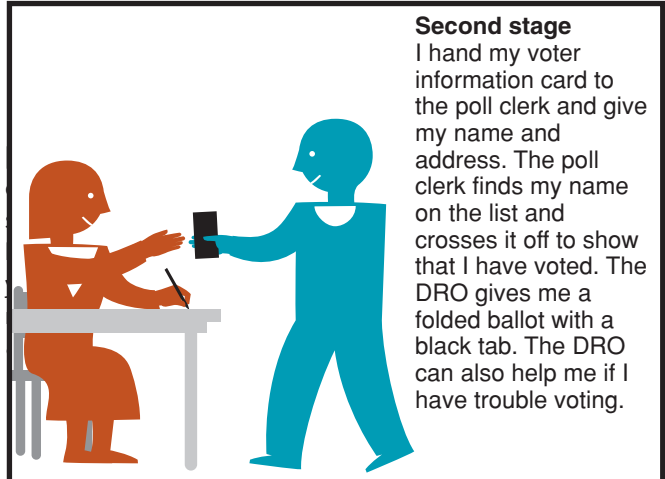
### How Do I Vote?

Before election day I get a voter information card in the mail, which tells me where and when to vote.

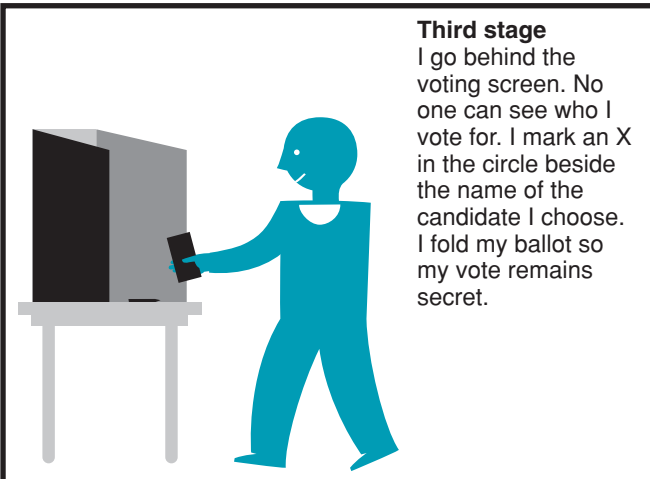
**First stage**  
At the polling station on election day, I find two people—the poll clerk and the deputy returning officer (DRO)—at the ballot box that matches the number on my voter information card.



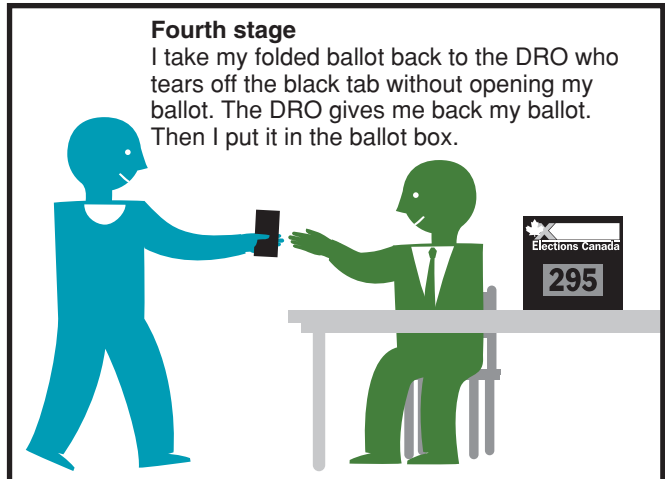
**Second stage**  
I hand my voter information card to the poll clerk and give my name and address. The poll clerk finds my name on the list and crosses it off to show that I have voted. The DRO gives me a folded ballot with a black tab. The DRO can also help me if I have trouble voting.



**Third stage**  
I go behind the voting screen. No one can see who I vote for. I mark an X in the circle beside the name of the candidate I choose. I fold my ballot so my vote remains secret.



**Fourth stage**  
I take my folded ballot back to the DRO who tears off the black tab without opening my ballot. The DRO gives me back my ballot. Then I put it in the ballot box.



## Denis Ducharme, MLA for Bonnyville

Denis Ducharme is a Franco-Albertan who grew up in Bonnyville, a small town northeast of Edmonton, where he still lives. Mr. Ducharme is active in his community and has served with many volunteer organizations. "Volunteering," he says, "is people giving of their time to make a community a better place."



Denis Ducharme

### Speaking Out

Volunteering is what makes a community and a province successful!

*Denis Ducharme*

His first taste of running for office came when he was in Grade 7. He was elected to be a homeroom representative on his school's student council. Eventually he was elected vice-president and then president.

In 1986, Mr. Ducharme was elected to the Lakeland Catholic School Board. During two terms with the school board he served as vice-chair and chair. He was elected to the Alberta Legislature in 1997 and was named to Cabinet as Minister for Community Development in 2006.

When Mr. Ducharme became an MLA he suggested to former Premier Ralph Klein that the province should do more to support the Franco-Albertan community. The premier and other members of Cabinet liked this idea and set up le Secrétariat francophone de l'Alberta in 1999. Mr. Ducharme was chair of le Secrétariat from 1999 to 2006. Le Secrétariat

- celebrates Francophone contributions to Alberta
- supports Francophone individuals, communities, and organizations that promote the French language and culture
- informs the public about government services for the Francophone community

### Over to You

1. How is the provincial government promoting Francophone culture an example of fairness?
2. Find out about services for Francophones in your community.

Richard, Marie, and Jana have been studying elections in Alberta and came across this table. It tells what percentage of people who were eligible to vote actually voted in the election.

| Election | Percentage of Voter Turnout |
|----------|-----------------------------|
| 2004     | 44.70                       |
| 2001     | 52.83                       |
| 1997     | 53.75                       |
| 1993     | 60.21                       |
| 1989     | 53.60                       |
| 1986     | 47.25                       |
| 1982     | 66.00                       |
| 1979     | 58.71                       |
| 1975     | 59.58                       |

**MARIE:** *Wow, look at that! In the provincial election in 2004 fewer than half the eligible voters actually voted.*

**RICHARD:** *The highest voter turnout was in 1982, but even then only about two-thirds of voters actually showed up to vote. I wonder why?*

**MARIE:** *I can't wait until I am old enough to vote so I can have a say about who gets to be in government.*

**JANA:** *My sister, Rosie, is in high school. She's 18 and can vote in the upcoming election. But she says that lots of people in her class aren't going to vote. Rosie thinks that's irresponsible.*

**MR. KAHN:** *I just read an article that said that young voters are less likely to vote than anyone. In the 2004 federal election, only 38 percent of eligible voters between the ages of 18 and 24 voted. And in 2000, only about 25 percent of that age group voted!*



Jana, Marie, and Richard decided to talk to Jana's sister, Rosie, about how they might get students in her school to vote. They came up with two ideas: putting up signs to encourage eligible voters to vote and making a morning PA announcement on Election Day. Jana and Rosie worked on a PA announcement. Other students in Mr. Kahn's class volunteered to help make posters and put them up around the high school.

The day after the election Rosie came to Mr. Kahn's class.

**ROSIE:** *Your signs were great! A lot of students noticed them and were talking about them.*

**MARIE:** *Do you really think they got anyone to go out and vote?*

**ROSIE:** *Definitely! One boy came up to me in social studies class today and told me that the signs and the PA announcement made him decide to vote. He said that voting made him feel important. He was really glad he did it.*

**MR. KAHN:** *I found an election simulation activity on the Elections Canada website. It looks like fun. I think our class should give it a try.*

### Over to You

1. Why do you think some people do not turn out to vote?
2. Why is voting such an important part of democracy?
3. Have you ever seen advertising campaigns targeted at getting young people to vote? Do you think they work? Explain.

LET  
YOUR VOICE  
BE HEARD!

Vote on  
Election Day:  
It's your right.  
It's your  
responsibility!

SPEAK YOUR MIND!!

There is an expression "every vote counts." What does this mean?



What is happening in this picture of an election simulation?



## Should Voting Be Compulsory?

In Chapter 3 you read how the ancient Athenians used a rope with red paint to encourage citizens to do their duty. After voter turnout is especially low for an election, people sometimes start talking about making voting compulsory. “Compulsory” voting means that everyone is required to vote. More than 30 countries around the world have compulsory voting including Belgium, Greece, and Australia. In Australia, people who don’t vote must pay a \$50 fine. According to William Fisher, the Australian high commissioner to Canada, the fine is just high enough “to encourage people to do the right thing.”

Here are some points of view on compulsory voting:



It does make people think about what they’re going to vote for, so even if people were not naturally inclined to be interested in politics, the fact that they are going to vote means that they do give it some thought. I think it has a general educational effect on the population.

—William Fisher, Australian high commissioner to Canada

Viewpoint 1



Compulsory voting goes against our rights. The Charter says that Canadian citizens have the “right” to vote. It doesn’t say that people can be forced to vote. What kind of democracy is that?

Viewpoint 2



Sometimes, in order to save democracy, you have to do things that might seem to run a little bit against it, but I certainly like the idea of voting freely, as opposed to...being required to do it by law.

—Canada's former Chief Electoral Officer *Jean-Pierre Kingsley*

Viewpoint 3



I believe that all three levels of government should adopt mandatory [compulsory] voting to ensure that all the people vote at all times for those who govern them...I take the position that, because of the fact that [Australians] have mandatory voting, they have more representative government than we do...Rights go with responsibilities.

—*Senator Mac Harb*

Viewpoint 4



I read that in Australia there is a "donkey vote." That means that people just vote for any old candidate without even thinking about it. Lots of people also spoil their ballots. That's one of the dangers of making people vote. What if you really don't want to vote for any of the candidates because you don't like what they stand for? Why should you be forced to vote for one of them?

Viewpoint 5

## Over to You

1. What are the main arguments for and against compulsory voting?
2. What is your view of compulsory voting? Explain your thinking.
3. Some people think that there is low voter turnout in Alberta because the same party gets voted in time after time. Ask some voters you know what factors influence whether or not they vote. Write down their comments and share them with the class.

# What Is the Role of the Lieutenant Governor?

## words matter!

A **constitutional monarchy** is a system of government in which a monarch, that is, a king or queen, is the head of state. In Canada, the Prime Minister is the head of government.

The **Speech from the Throne** describes what the government plans to do during the upcoming session of the Legislature.

Have you ever thought about why Canadian coins have an image of Queen Elizabeth II on them? In addition to being a representative democracy, Canada is also a **constitutional monarchy**.

The Queen's representative in the federal government is the Governor General. Her representative in Alberta's government is the Lieutenant Governor [LEF-tenant]. The Prime Minister recommends a person for the job of Lieutenant Governor and then the Governor General appoints that person.

All laws in a constitutional monarchy need the approval of the monarch. That is why, as you read on page 133, the Lieutenant Governor must sign a bill passed by the Legislative Assembly in order for it to become law. Here are some duties of the Lieutenant Governor. Here are some other duties:

- inviting the leader of the party that wins the election to become premier
- issuing the Royal Proclamation that calls the Legislature into session
- reading the **Speech from the Throne** to open new sessions of the Legislature
- dissolving or closing the Legislative Assembly so elections can be held

## Thinking It Through

1. How do the jobs of the Lieutenant Governor contribute to democracy at the provincial level?
2. Compare the process of choosing a Lieutenant Governor with that of choosing an Iroquois chief.



The Honourable Norman L. Kwong became Lieutenant Governor of Alberta on January 20, 2005. Born in Calgary, he was the first Canadian of Chinese ancestry to become the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. He was also the first person of his ancestry to play in the Canadian Football League and the youngest player to win the Grey Cup.

The remarks below are taken from the welcome message the Honourable Norman L. Kwong wrote to the people of Alberta.

“It is a true privilege to serve as our province’s 16th Lieutenant Governor. I am honoured to represent Her Majesty the Queen and the people of the province of Alberta...”

“During my time in office, I hope to encourage, educate, and empower Albertans to pursue a healthy and balanced lifestyle, whether through sports, fitness, education, or community involvement. I’m especially eager to share this message with the young, the aging, and immigrants—all groups that need to be made to feel welcome to participate and given further opportunities to contribute even more to our communities.

“I hope to show young Albertans in particular the benefits of participating in sports. My own involvement in amateur and professional sports brought huge benefits to my personal and professional life; I learned self-confidence, discipline, responsibility, and the value of friendships. A fit body not only improves the mind—it enriches the spirit.

“As a member of an aging segment of society, I am highly motivated to promote the special needs of senior citizens. I hope to encourage seniors to become more physically, mentally, and socially active and I hope that Alberta’s communities will join me in this effort. No matter our age, we all have something special to contribute.

“Growing up as a member of a visible minority, I understand the challenges faced by immigrants, particularly immigrant youth. Therefore, I intend to devote some of my time to Alberta’s young immigrants and their families by encouraging and supporting their academic and athletic pursuits. In this way, I hope to help them in their journey to becoming successful, involved citizens.

“In the coming months, I hope to meet people from all walks of life and all corners of the province, so that we can share stories, learn from each other, and perhaps build some bridges of understanding between peoples of different cultures and philosophies.

“Accepting the position of Lieutenant Governor is a tremendous honour, but with that honour, comes a great responsibility. I will do my best to serve all Albertans well.”



### **Thinking It Through**

1. How do the goals of the Honourable Norman L. Kwong as Lieutenant Governor reflect his background and life experiences?
2. Which of the four principles of democracy—equity, justice, freedoms, and representation—do his goals support? Explain.



These are the portraits of Alberta's Lieutenant Governors from 1905 to 2005. What differences do you notice between the Lieutenant Governors in the first two rows and those in the last two rows? How do you account for these differences?



The Honourable  
George H.V. Bulyea,  
1905-15



The Honourable Dr.  
Robert G. Brett,  
1915-25



The Honourable  
Dr. William Egbert,  
1925-31



The Honourable  
William L. Walsh,  
1931-36



The Honourable  
Colonel Philip C.H.  
Primrose, 1936-37



The Honourable  
John C. Bowen,  
1937-50



The Honourable  
John J. Bowlen,  
1950-59



The Honourable J.  
Percy Page,  
1959-66



The Honourable J.W.  
Grant MacEwan,  
1966-74



The Honourable  
Ralph G. Steinhauer,  
1974-79



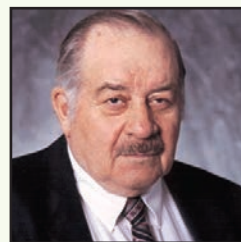
The Honourable  
Frank C. Lynch-  
Staunton, 1979-85



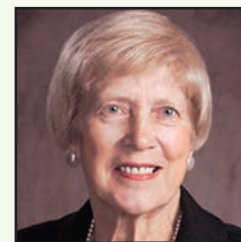
The Honourable W.  
Helen Hunley,  
1985-91



The Honourable T.  
Gordon Towers,  
1991-96



The Honourable H.A.  
"Bud" Olson,  
1996-2000



The Honourable Lois  
E. Hole, 2000-2005

## A Changing Society

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* includes equality rights that protect people from “discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical ability.” The Charter is part of our Constitution, which is the supreme, that is highest, law in Canada.

Laws in a democracy reflect the values in that society. Laws can also change the attitudes of people in society. You can see the changing values and attitudes of Canadians in the faces of the Lieutenant Governors of Alberta. The important roles of members of First Nations, women, and people of different ethnic origins and religions have been recognized.

## Diversity in Canadian Society

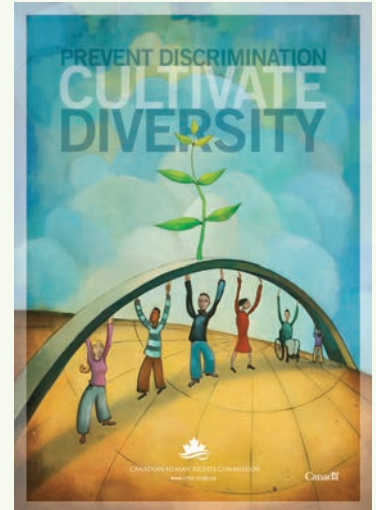
Diversity has become part of the identity of our country. We see Canada as a place that is made up of people who have come from many different countries and cultures. In the past, Canadian immigration rules favoured people of European origins. Today, however, immigrants come to Canada from every part of the world representing many cultural and ethnic groups. Most Canadians feel that diversity enriches us and contributes to our quality of life.

### Immigrant Population in Canada by Place of Birth

| Place of Birth              | Immigrated<br>1961–1970 | Immigrated<br>1991–2001 |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| United Kingdom              | 160 005                 | 42 645                  |
| Northern and Western Europe | 86 820                  | 57 235                  |
| Africa                      | 23 830                  | 139 770                 |
| Eastern Asia                | 36 360                  | 423 235                 |
| Southern Asia               | 26 600                  | 295 110                 |

### Over to You

Even though Canada is a diverse society, many Canadians still believe that “common Canadian values” should be upheld. In a group, brainstorm what you think these common values are. Have a member of your group record your ideas using a computer.



### Speaking Out

When I think of being Canadian, I think of multiculturalism. It makes me feel united with everyone else because I am not spotted as different because everyone is different... I don't have to tuck away my culture.... There's a day in the year in our culture when we eat only vegetarian food.... If I tell my friends I am not going to eat meat that day, they understand. My friends are from all around—black, Chinese, Indian. They're mixed.”

*John Huynk, 16, born in Toronto from Filipino parents*

# How Is the Alberta Government Structured?



The provincial government of Alberta meets in the Alberta Legislature Building in Edmonton. Why do you think it might have been designed with columns similar to those used in buildings in ancient Athens?

After the people of Alberta have voted for their representatives in the Legislative Assembly, the government gets down to the business of passing laws, running departments that deliver services, and putting programs into action that affect the province in many ways. This is what the government of Alberta looks like.

## Thinking It Through

If you were going to add a big box to this chart, containing the label “The People of Alberta,” where would you put it? Explain.

### The Alberta Legislature

**Lieutenant Governor**, Queen's representative

**Premier**, leader of the government

**Cabinet**, responsible for departments

**Legislative Assembly**



# What Are the Responsibilities of Cabinet Ministers?

The premier chooses a number of MLAs to become members of the Cabinet. Cabinet members are known as **ministers** and each minister is in charge of a different department in the government. These departments provide the services like those in the web on page 130. For example, in Alberta there is a Minister of Education, Minister of Environment, and Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. As in local government, there are civil servants who are appointed or hired to work in the departments.

## Thinking It Through

The premier chooses MLAs who belong to his or her political party for the Cabinet. Why do you think this is so?

### More About . . .

#### The Minister of Children's Services

The Honourable Janis Tarchuk was first elected as the MLA for Banff-Cochrane in 1997, and in 2006 she was chosen by Premier Ed Stelmach to be Minister of Children's Services. In his letter welcoming her to the Cabinet, Premier Stelmach asked her to focus on child care, the Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying initiative, and improving programs for children needing specialized services, including Aboriginal children and children with disabilities.



Janis Tarchuk and Premier Ed Stelmach presented prizes at the 2007 Great Kids Award ceremony that honours outstanding children and youth.

As well as running departments, Cabinet ministers have many other jobs and responsibilities. These include:

- meeting with the premier to discuss what should be done in the province and plan what actions the government needs to take
- working with the people in his or her department to create a **budget**, that is, its revenues and expenditures
- researching, writing, and voting on bills
- working on committees with MLAs to discuss government plans and actions
- serving as MLAs for their constituency



## What Are the Responsibilities of MLAs?

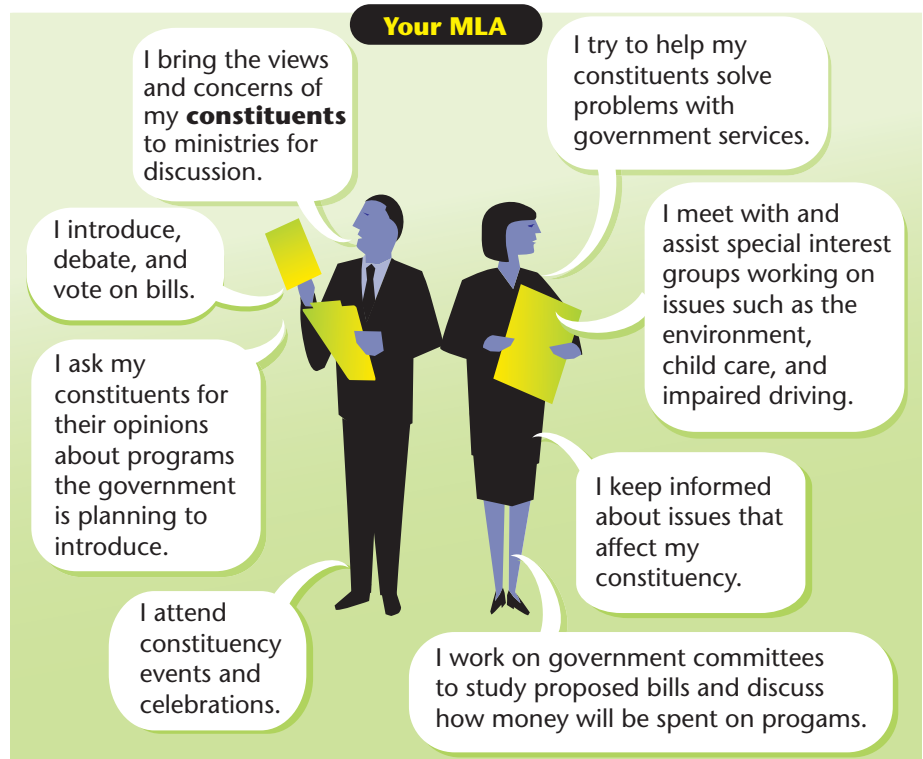
As you saw in the chart on page 134, representatives from different political parties are elected to be Members of the Legislative Assembly. MLAs have responsibilities in two main areas:

- serving the needs of the people in their constituency
- taking part in government

Here are some of the jobs done by your MLA.

### words matter!

**Constituents** are the people who live in the constituency that a member of government represents. An **opposition member** is an elected member of the Legislative Assembly who is not a member of the party in power



### Thinking It Through

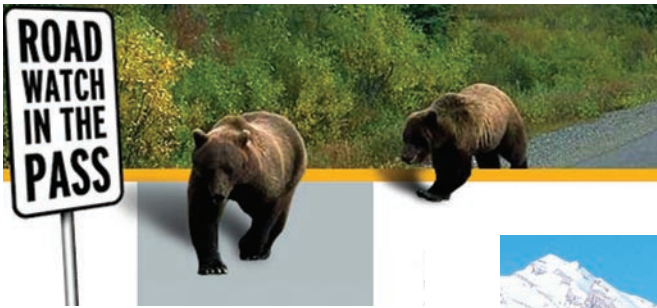
1. What are the differences between the responsibilities of an MLA and a Cabinet minister?
2. How do the elected representatives of the provincial government contribute to the democratic process?

If your MLA is not a member of the party in power, he or she is an **opposition member**. Opposition members are responsible for studying and questioning the government's plans and actions and proposing improvements.

MLAs have offices in their constituency. This is where constituents can go to discuss their views and concerns with their MLA. They can also contact their MLA by e-mail or telephone. MLAs take their constituents' views into account when they are helping to make decisions in the government. However, as you saw in the opening story, people don't always agree on what the government should do. In the end MLAs sometimes support government actions that are not popular with their constituents.

# How Can People Participate at the Provincial Level?

In this chapter you have seen a number of ways that people can influence decisions made by the provincial government. These include voting in referendums, expressing opinions about bills, becoming a candidate for the Legislature, contacting MLAs about concerns, and voting in elections. The photo below was taken for a research project in which people got involved.



When the provincial government announced plans to widen and improve Highway 3, many people in the area became concerned about wildlife conservation as well as human safety. Highway 3 is a major transportation route that runs through Crowsnest Pass in the Rocky Mountains.

Over 6000 vehicles pass along the highway every day. As a result, many large mammals, such as mule deer, white-tailed deer, and elk, are hit by cars and trucks.

The department of transportation needed information about where wildlife were most likely to cross the road when they were planning the new road. Dr. Michael Quinn, an environmental design professor at the University of Calgary founded the Road Watch program. Interested local volunteers participate in collecting data on animal movement and contribute it to the Road Watch in the Pass website. This information is being used to plan the type and location of wildlife crossing structures on the highway.



Information collected from the Road Watch program will be used to build wildlife overpasses and underpasses like this one, which has been constructed in the Banff area.

## Identifying Perspective

So far in this book, you have looked at point of view and opinion. When you express your point of view on an issue or topic, you give your opinion about it. Sometimes a person expresses a point of view that a group of people share. This is called a **perspective**.



Porcupine Hills near Nanton, Alberta. What other effects might seismic testing have on this area?

In the community of Nanton, for example, some citizens formed Porcupine Hills Watershed Group (PHWG) because they were concerned about seismic testing in their community. Seismic tests use small explosions and shock waves in the ground to search for oil. The members of the PHWG worried that the vibrations from these might damage underground waterways and ruin their water supply.

Brian Laycraft, the chairperson of PHWG, presented its perspective this way:

“Farmers and ranchers are stewards [guardians] of the land... We’re trying to make the public aware that it isn’t just a local thing... If the water is damaged it’s going to affect everybody. We’re trying to get the [provincial] government to listen and recognize how sensitive this area is in the Porcupine Hills.”

Mr. Laycraft was not only speaking for himself—giving his opinion—he was also speaking for a whole group of people with common backgrounds and concerns. He was expressing the perspective of the ranchers, farmers, and other residents of Nanton who belonged to the Porcupine Hills Watershed Group.

In thinking about a perspective you should ask yourself the following three questions:

- What is the position being stated?
- Who is the group of people that holds that perspective?
- What are the common living conditions or experiences that might explain why the members of the group hold that perspective?

Apply these questions to Brian Laycraft’s statement.



## Practise the Skill

In the boxes below are two more perspectives on the situation in Nanton. Read them and complete the chart below.

### **Tracey McCrimmon, an official with Compton Petroleum Corporation**

“We are following provincial government guidelines.”

“There will be no impact on water wells or natural springs and we will test wells both before and after our work to make sure.”

“We have never in the seven years we have been running seismic testing had a claim resulting from damage to a water well.”

“It’s more finding a balance of land use so we can work together and we can operate together and we’ll respect each other’s boundaries.”

### **John Blake, Mayor of Nanton**

“If you wreck the springs we’re in big trouble. It won’t help if the company tests the wells afterwards and finds out they’re damaged. You can’t compensate us for lost water supply, you don’t have enough money.”

“Whenever you do seismic testing where you drill holes and put dynamite in the ground and shake that ground, who knows what will happen to the wells?”

“At some point water is more important than oil.”

| Question   | McCrimmon | Blake |
|--|-----------|-------|
| What is the perspective?                           |           |       |
| What group of people hold that perspective?        |           |       |
| What might explain why they hold that perspective? |           |       |

Try to think of other groups that might have a perspective on this situation. Would their perspective be similar to or different from the three perspectives you read on these pages? Why?

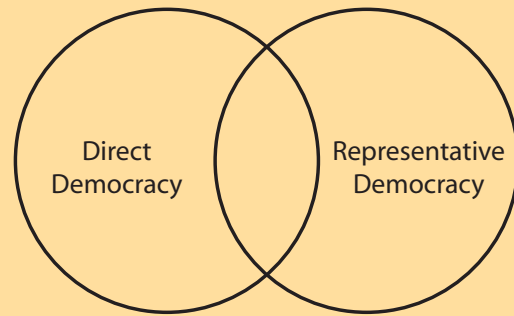
### **Thinking It Through**

Which of the perspectives on these pages do you think would be most reliable? Why?



# Explore More!

## ? Inquiring Minds



1. a. Compare direct democracy, which you learned about in Chapter 3, with Alberta's system of representative democracy. Use a Venn diagram to show similarities and difference.  
b. Explore the purpose of the Opposition in Alberta's Legislative Assembly. Investigate the Opposition's role during question period. Scan newspaper articles or use a reputable online search engine for information. Present your findings in an e-mail and send it to a member of your class.
  
2. Look over the newspaper and internet articles you gathered as you worked on this chapter and choose a problem that the provincial government is trying to solve. Research different perspectives on this issue. Choose two groups involved in the issue and write a paragraph presenting their perspectives.
  
3. a. Write a speech to introduce your MLA to a group in your community. You will need to do research to find out the following information:
  - the name of your riding
  - the party your MLA belongs to
  - how long the MLA has represented your riding
  - his or her job before becoming an MLA
  - your MLA's special responsibilities and the committees he or she is part of
  - how to contact him or her
  - how your MLA keeps people informed about important issuesb. Invite your MLA to your class to identify and discuss the important issues facing the provincial government. If this is not possible, exchange letters or e-mails with your MLA.

# Your Turn

Prepare an information booklet for new Canadians about provincial government services that are available in your community. Identify the areas of responsibility of the provincial government and which department provides each service. Give phone numbers for the office or individual to contact if people have questions or concerns.



## Democracy In Action Journal

When people are voting for a candidate in an election, they generally think about whether the leader of the candidate's party would make a good premier for the province. What qualities do you think are important in a leader? Keep track of the sources you use during your research.

In your journal, prepare a help-wanted advertisement for the position of Alberta's premier. Include a brief job description and the personal qualities you think are necessary. For example, which of these qualities would you look for: compassionate, outgoing, intelligent? What other characteristics would you add?

