

9

How does the provincial government function?

Chapter Focus Questions

- How is provincial government structured?
- What does the provincial electoral process involve?
- What are the roles of provincial representatives?

A Symbol

Mr. Grundy pulled out a picture. It showed a gold-painted pipe with red velvet and ornamentation at one end. A critical look at the picture revealed that the ornamentation was made from what looked like cup handles and buttons.

“What do you think this is?” asked Mr. Grundy. Alex suggested that it resembled something that would be part of the regalia for a king or queen, if it were made of gold instead of gold paint, and jewels instead of buttons.

“You’re pretty close, Alex,” said Mr. Grundy. “This is a mace. Back in medieval times, a mace was a weapon that could penetrate armour. Over time, it became a symbol of the authority of the government and of the monarch. That’s when people began to make maces out of precious stones and metals.” He passed the photograph around.

“We’re going to learn about Alberta’s Legislative Assembly. This mace dates from Alberta’s first Legislative Assembly in 1905. Somebody remembered they needed a mace – in a hurry! So, they built one out of scrap materials. That’s the one in this photograph.

“Many of the customs that we have in our government are historical, and link together democratic traditions from the past. We have learned about some of those traditions this year.” He paused as he looked at the photo once more. “You know I admire the new mace, but I love the original, too. And you can still see it on display in the Legislature building.”

What are we learning in this chapter?


In the previous chapter, you learned how local governments work. This chapter explores how provincial government works. You will investigate its structure and learn about the provincial electoral process. Provincial government and local government have similarities — and important differences, too. For example, provincial government involves political parties, where one party forms a governing group and other parties become the opposition. You'll learn about the roles of elected provincial representatives, and discover how to take part in decision making at the provincial level.

Why are we learning this?

Provincial government has a lot to do with your life as a Grade 6 student. For example, think of the words you are reading right now. The provincial department of education had a role writing in these words, because it is responsible for the curriculum — the topics you learn about every day in school. Now think beyond this textbook. On a larger scale, the department of education allocates money to school boards and decides whether to build new schools. Here's another example: the provincial health department provides your vaccinations, and on a larger scale, allocates money for hospitals and hospital staff. Each provincial government department has an effect on your life, in ways that are both straightforward and complicated.

Elected representatives are always willing to give information and have input from Grade 6 students. They want you to know how democratic government works.

That's another reason to dig into this chapter, because your inquiries about government will always be welcome.



This is the Legislature building, where the representatives elected from across the province meet to debate topics and make decisions.



Chapter 9 Inquiry Task

SKILLS at Work

For this task, you need to debate a current events topic you identify on TV, the radio or in your newspaper. Check out the Skills Centre for tips on debates and on assessing current affairs.

- present opinions in debates
- analyze significant current affairs



Communicate

Debate a topic of provincial importance

Introduction

Voicing your opinion has always been a democratic right. Equally, listening with an open mind to the opinions of others has always been a democratic responsibility. A debate is a particular way to explore opinions and perspectives. It starts with a proposed action. An individual presents reasons and evidence for supporting the action. Then, another person presents the opposite viewpoint: reasons and evidence for not supporting the action. The discussion goes back and forth, like a tennis match, as different ideas are brought forward, first on one side and then on the other.

Debates are courteous and follow strict rules. They require critical thinking, because everyone involved has a responsibility to make the best decision. Sometimes, the best decision comes from ideas on both sides of the debate. In our provincial legislature, representatives use formal debates to discuss topics. Government budgets, plans and potential laws are always debated, because debate provides a way to consider perspectives and examine topics closely.

This student is sitting at the desk of a *Hansard* editor. *Hansard* is the official word-for-word record of debates in the Legislative Assembly. *Hansard* editors listen to audio files and convert them to print, which is then available in hard copy or online. Why is *Hansard* important in a democratic government?



The task

Step 1: Prepare a Debate

Scan your newspaper and listen to news reports for topics provoking discussion among the people in Alberta.

Research the topic, and draft a statement about an action the provincial government could take. Try finishing this sentence: “The provincial government should...”

Prepare two short (a minute or less) talks that take opposing sides on the action.

Step 2: Debate

Present one of the sides you have prepared in a debate with another student.

Step 3: Think Critically

Listen to others present their talks. Think critically, with an open mind, about what you hear. Decide where you stand on each talk. Do you agree strongly, agree, disagree or disagree strongly? Record your decision and why you came to that decision.

Step 4: Plan Action

Outline a plan for bringing your ideas on the topic to the attention of the appropriate provincial representative. Include specific details, such as titles (e.g., Minister of Childrens’ Services), e-mail and postal addresses or telephone numbers in your plan.

Step 5: Take Action

Outline the topic and what you think should be done. Support your ideas with reasons and evidence.

Things to think about before starting the task

The choice of topic is important. Some issues are very one-sided, or don’t have different points of view. Look for a topic that has a variety of viewpoints.

Getting Started

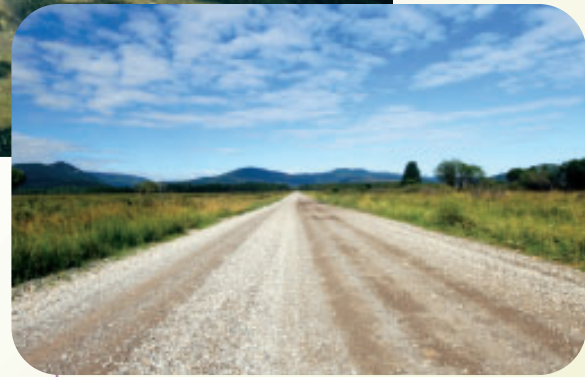
What provincial topics might spark debate among Albertans?



Alberta's government provides funding for athletes. The athletes in this photo competed in the Western Canada Summer Games in 2007.



The provincial government makes decisions about natural resource development, such as forestry. This photo shows logged areas ready for reseedling along the Athabasca River.



Alberta's government is responsible for building and widening roads that connect urban centres. How might that affect you?

Provincial laws determine how old you have to be to drive an all-terrain vehicle. How might this affect you?



Many laws that affect wildlife come from the provincial government, such as laws about hunting grizzlies.

How is provincial government structured?

What's important?

Know that provincial government has a political party system.

Time for Parties!

"Listen class," said Mr. Grundy. "We are going to learn about parties!"

The class knew there had to be a catch somewhere. It was already past Hallowe'en, Christmas and Valentine's Day. It seemed too early to be thinking about end-of-year graduation parties. Everyone waited to see what Mr. Grundy meant.

"We're going to learn about **political parties**. A political party is a group of people who have similar ideas about how to run the province, and who have grouped together to take action. Political parties nominate candidates to run in provincial elections for the Legislative Assembly. Some people run without belonging to a party. They are called **independents** because, as you can guess, they hold their own independent beliefs about government."

SKILLS at Work

As you read this section on the structure of provincial government, think about what it means for you. How does the structure of government help you participate in it?

- critically evaluate ideas, information and positions



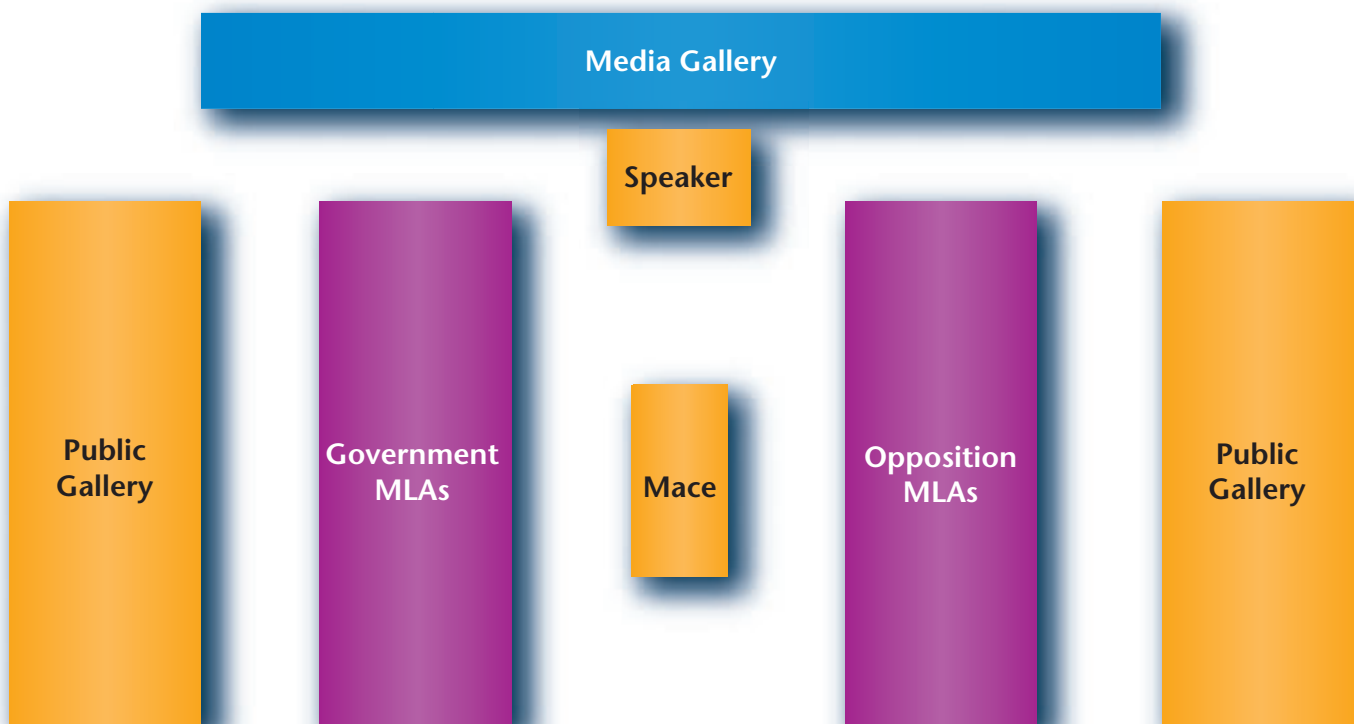
Craig Cheffins, Liberal candidate for Calgary-Elbow, talks to voters during the Lilac Festival in Calgary. What practical ways to participate do provincial elections offer Grade 6 students? What can you conclude from this photo?

Inside the Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Pause

What similarities and differences can you identify so far between the **Legislative Assembly of Alberta** and local governments? Identify at least one similarity and one difference.

- The Legislative Assembly has 83 elected representatives. Representatives are called **Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs)**. Winning an election gives a representative the right to a seat, or a place in the assembly.
- Each seat in the assembly matches an area of the province called an electoral division or constituency. Think of it this way: the Métis Nation of Alberta has regions (see page 162), some local governments have wards (see page 202), and the Alberta Legislative Assembly has constituencies.
- In the assembly, the party that wins the most seats forms the **government**. Parties that have fewer seats form the **opposition**. The opposition has different ideas and goals than the government, and it challenges the ideas the government puts forward. The party with the second-largest number of elected representatives is called the **Official Opposition**.



The Speaker is an MLA elected by the other MLAs to run meetings of the Legislative Assembly. The galleries are places for the media and the public to observe the proceedings of the assembly. The galleries are in balconies that overlook the assembly.



This is the inside of the chamber where the Legislative Assembly meets. The mace usually sits on a table between the seats for the government and the opposition, but this photo was taken on a special day in the assembly. The mace has been moved to make room for chairs for special guests.

If we didn't have an opposition, we'd have a dictatorship*. Government needs people who have different ideas. It is very important to be involved in government because it affects all of us at every age.

*A dictatorship is a government that does not allow an opposition.



Ben and Kianna are Grade 6 students who took a tour of the Legislature building with their class. Do you agree with the comments these students made?

Government is really important. You need to know about government to know how it affects you and how to make it work for you.

The Roles of Political Parties in Provincial Government

Let's look at what political parties do.



The political party forming the **Government**

- has more MLAs than the parties forming the opposition
- holds a specific set of ideas
- defends its ideas through debate with the opposition
- collects and spends taxes
- defends how it handles topics of concern

Pause

How do political parties help people with different points of view and perspectives have a voice in provincial decision making?

The political parties forming the **Opposition**

- have fewer MLAs than the party forming the government
- have different ideas than the political party forming the government
- challenge government ideas through debate
- challenge how much the government collects in taxes and how it spends taxes
- inform the public about topics of concern, and challenge the government's actions on topics of concern

What does the provincial electoral process involve?

What's important?

Compare the electoral process for local government and the provincial assembly.

freedoms
representation
equity
justice

How are provincial representatives elected?

Provincial elections are held at least every five years. When an election is announced, voting takes place 28 days later. The four weeks leading up to the vote are very busy and exciting for everybody!

Provincial Electoral Process Step 1: Nominating

Most provincial candidates belong to political parties. Only one candidate per party can run in a constituency. Often, several people from the same party want to run in a the same constituency. Then, the party members in the constituency must choose their candidate in a vote.

Some people run as independents — candidates who do not belong to a party.

All candidates must complete a nomination form that lists the signatures of 25 eligible voters from their constituency.

What's the difference?

Nominating for Provincial Elections

- In each constituency, members of political parties vote to choose a candidate for election.
- Individuals can be nominated as independent candidates.
- Candidates must be knowledgeable about the required duties for a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA).

Nominating for Local Elections

- Individuals are nominated. There are no connections to political parties involved in the process.
- Candidates must be knowledgeable about the required duties for a mayor/reeve, or councillor/alderman

Provincial Electoral Process Step 2: Campaigning

The excitement builds! Candidates set up bustling campaign offices. Campaign offices get information about their candidates to the voters of their constituency. Volunteers phone voters, deliver campaign literature door to door, set up signs, and answer questions by e-mail. They arrange interviews with media reporters investigating the views of their candidate on topics of concern.

SKILLS at Work

As you learn about the provincial electoral process on the next pages, think about ways Grade 6 students can take part in provincial elections. Although Grade 6 students can't vote, they have other opportunities to participate.

- critically evaluate ideas, information and positions



What's the difference?

Campaigning for Provincial Elections

- Candidates are supported by their political party members.
- Campaign costs are supported by political party donations.
- Campaign literature identifies the political party and candidate.
- Candidates must go door to door, attend forums and give media interviews.

Campaigning for Local Elections

- Candidates are not supported by a political party.
- Campaign costs are not supported by political party donations.
- Campaign literature, colours, slogans or icons are candidate choices.
- Candidates must go door to door, attend forums and give media interviews.



Political parties usually have logos and colours, and create signs for their candidates. The signs go up during elections. How might putting up a sign influence the results of an election?

Provincial Electoral Process Step 3: Preparing the Polling Stations

Alberta has a law about how provincial elections are run. The Chief Electoral Officer is a person who works for the Legislative Assembly and makes sure the law is followed.

Each constituency is divided into **polls**, or voting sites. The Chief Electoral Officer makes sure every poll has a list of registered voters. When voters come to a poll, election officials check their names against the list and cross them off.

The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for training election officials and making sure they have the right ballots for their polls.

Provincial Electoral Process Step 4: Showing Eligibility to Vote

To vote in a provincial election, a person must be at least 18 years old and have lived in Alberta for at least six months. Voters must also live in the constituency where they cast their vote. Voters can register with the office of the Chief Electoral Officer at any time. If they want to register on election day: they must provide two pieces of identification and take an oath.



An oath is a solemn promise that you are telling the truth. Breaking an oath is the same as breaking the law.

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Provincial Electoral Process Step 5: Casting and Counting Votes

Advance polls are provided for voters who will be away or busy on election day. What provisions are there for any Albertans outside the province, such as our Armed Forces? Ballots are sent to them ahead of voting day. Their completed ballots arrive by plane before the polls close, to make sure those votes count!

At each poll, an empty ballot box is displayed and locked, and two officials are in charge of watching it, so nobody stuffs in extra votes. Other officials make sure everyone votes only once. People in nursing homes and hospitals who can't get out to vote have ballot boxes carried to their bedsides

by election officials.

The intention is to give as many people their democratic right to vote as possible!

Abbott, Tony

Progressive Conservative

Cunningham, Viona

Wildrose Alliance

Erickson, Edwin

Alberta Greens

Higgerty, Laura

Liberal

Oberle, Lynn

New Democrat

Knopp, Elmer

Independent

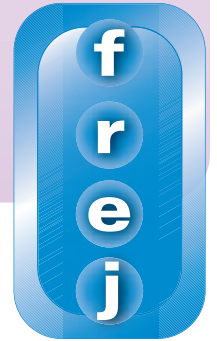
Provincial Electoral Process Step 6: Declaring the Outcome

When the polls are officially declared closed on voting day, excitement is high. Across the province, officials open the locked ballot boxes and tip the votes onto tables for counting by hand. Scrutineers observe the count. The number of votes needs to exactly match the voters crossed off the list of registered voters for that poll.

Each ballot can only have one candidate marked as a choice. Ballots marked with more than one choice are considered spoiled and are not counted.

The polling stations send their vote counts to an electoral office in their constituency. When all the votes are counted, the office declares a winner.

Television cameras record the announcement of the winners as the results come in. The party with the majority of votes will form the government. Sometimes the winning party is known early on in the counting; at other times, everybody must wait until the end. In any constituency, a **recount** can be called if the numbers are very close, and this can cause delays in knowing who has won a seat. When the winning party is finally declared, so is the **premier**. The premier of the province is always the leader of the party with the most seats. It will be up to her or him to lead the new government!



	Conservative	Liberal	Green	Independent	New Democratic
Poll 1	171	90	19	7	201
Poll 2	57	71	16	1	60
Poll 3	20	30	4	0	27
Poll 4	114	121	6	0	95

Pause

Are there really any losers if an election is fair and democratic? Why?

The number of votes can show large differences from poll to poll. Why does this happen?

What's important?

Understand how population affects constituencies.

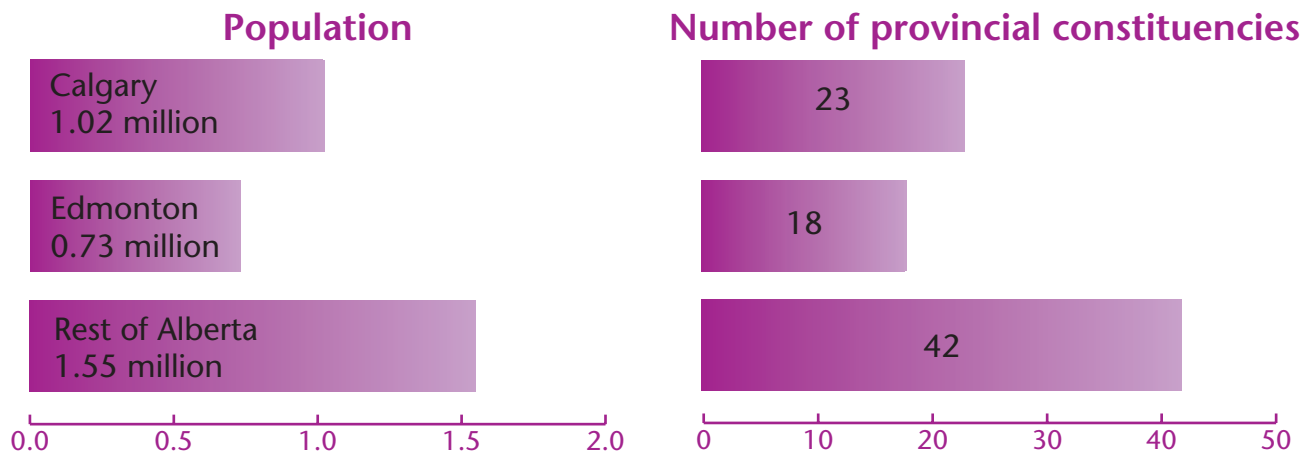
How are constituencies determined?

Pause

How is being able to change electoral boundaries a sign of democracy?

Alberta's 83 elected representatives come from 83 constituencies, which are set through electoral or voting law. A number of factors determine the area and boundaries of constituencies, such as population statistics and natural divides created by mountains or rivers.

It is important that the constituencies change with changes in Alberta's population. Until 1950, most of Alberta's population lived in rural areas, so Alberta had many more rural constituencies than urban constituencies. Today, Albertans live in urban centres — in fact, more than half live in Calgary and Edmonton. How does the chart below reflect the way constituencies have changed in response?



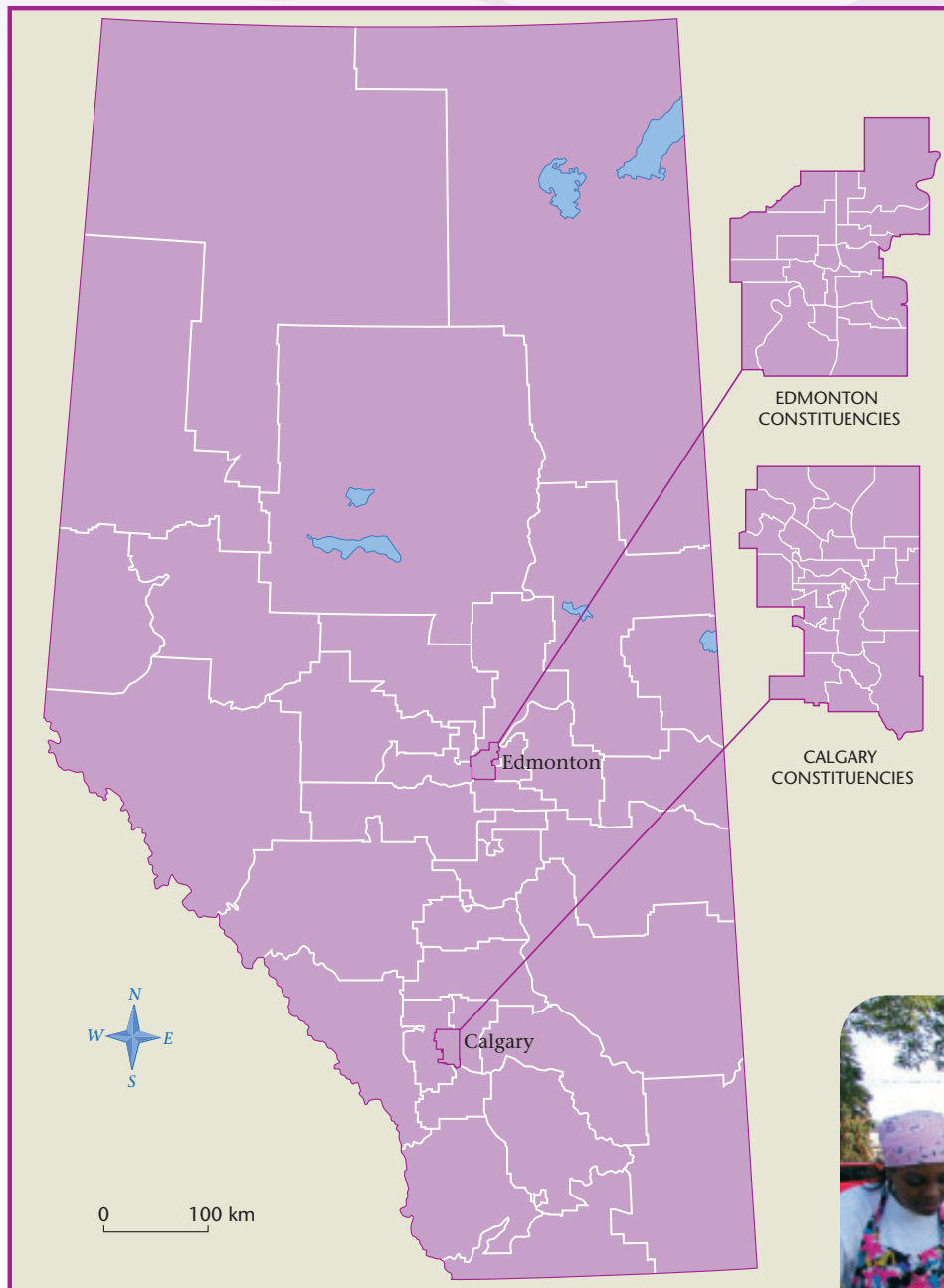
SKILLS at Work

Do a quick online research project. See if the numbers in the chart above have changed. What has happened to the population of Calgary, Edmonton and the rest of the province since 2007? What has happened to the number of provincial constituencies? What explanations can you give?

- access and retrieve information from the Internet by using a specific search path
- use graphs, tables, charts and Venn diagrams to interpret information



Alberta Provincial Constituencies, 2007



SKILLS at Work

Most constituencies have a population between 31 000 and 40 000. Why are their areas different? How does this reflect fairness and equity in a democracy?

- identify geographic problems and issues and pose geographic questions

SKILLS CENTRE
3
Geographic Thinking

Raj Pannu, MLA for Edmonton Strathcona from 1997 to 2008, makes pancakes at a function organized at his constituency office. As an MLA, he represented the 29 000 members of his constituency.



Pause

Why are population statistics important in running a democratic government?

What's important?

Understand the varied responsibilities of MLAs.

SKILLS at Work

Examine the photos and captions of the premiers of Alberta on this page. What changes over time do they illustrate?

- use primary sources to interpret historical events and issues



What are the roles of provincial representatives?

Think About the Task

For your chapter task, you need to describe a plan for bringing your ideas on a current affairs topic to the attention of provincial representatives. Use the information in this section to think carefully about how best to do this. How might the jobs and schedules of provincial representatives affect your choices?

Who is the premier?

The leader of the party that wins the most seats in a provincial election becomes the premier. The premier leads the government. The premier is a Member of the Legislative Assembly, and represents the voters of one constituency. As leader of the government, he or she also represents Albertans. In provincial elections, however, the position of premier is never on the ballot for voters. If a leader of a political party wins a seat and that party is in the majority, then the leader is the premier.



Alexander Rutherford
Liberal Party, 1905



John Brownlee
United Farmers of
Alberta, 1921



William Aberhart
Social Credit
Party, 1935



Peter Lougheed
Progressive
Conservative
Party, 1971

Responsibilities of Members of the Legislative Assembly

Attending Sessions of the Legislative Assembly

This is one of the most important responsibilities of every MLA. When the Legislative Assembly is “in session” it means all the MLAs are meeting to debate and vote on proposed laws. This happens for certain periods of time each year, determined by the political party that forms the government. The assembly usually meets in the spring and the fall for a few weeks.

Communicating with Constituents

In addition to offices in or near the Legislature, each MLA has a **constituency office** in his or her constituency. There, knowledgeable staff help the public and keep the MLA informed about public concerns. MLAs slot times when they are available to meet with **constituents**. Some MLAs write columns in local newspapers or send out flyers with constituency news. When the Legislative Assembly is meeting, MLAs need to be at the Legislature. A typical day for an MLA seems packed with official meetings, or seeing individuals or groups who are seeking advice or support. All MLAs attend many social functions to keep in contact with their constituents.

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equity

justice



Pause

Over the course of a year, some MLAs travel 80 000 kilometres going to and from their constituencies. Why do you think they do this, instead of using other ways to stay in touch?



Wayne Cao, MLA for Calgary-Fort, celebrates Canada Day with some of his constituents. If you call the constituency office of your MLA, you can find out what events he or she plans to attend. What opportunity to participate might this offer you, as a Grade 6 student?



Supporting the Needs of Constituents

MLAs make the needs of their constituents known by debating and discussing issues or concerns with other representatives. Because MLAs are knowledgeable about government ministries, they can make referrals, seek advice and act as advocates for their constituents. MLAs also help special-interest groups, such as those concerned with the environment or health and education issues. The experiences that MLAs bring to their work help them understand the needs of their constituents and how best to support them.

Representing their constituents in the Legislative Assembly is among an MLA's most important roles. Why is it important to be represented in the Legislative Assembly? How does your MLA give you a way to participate in the decisions of the Legislative Assembly?



Pause

How do the experiences of MLAs help support their work with constituents?

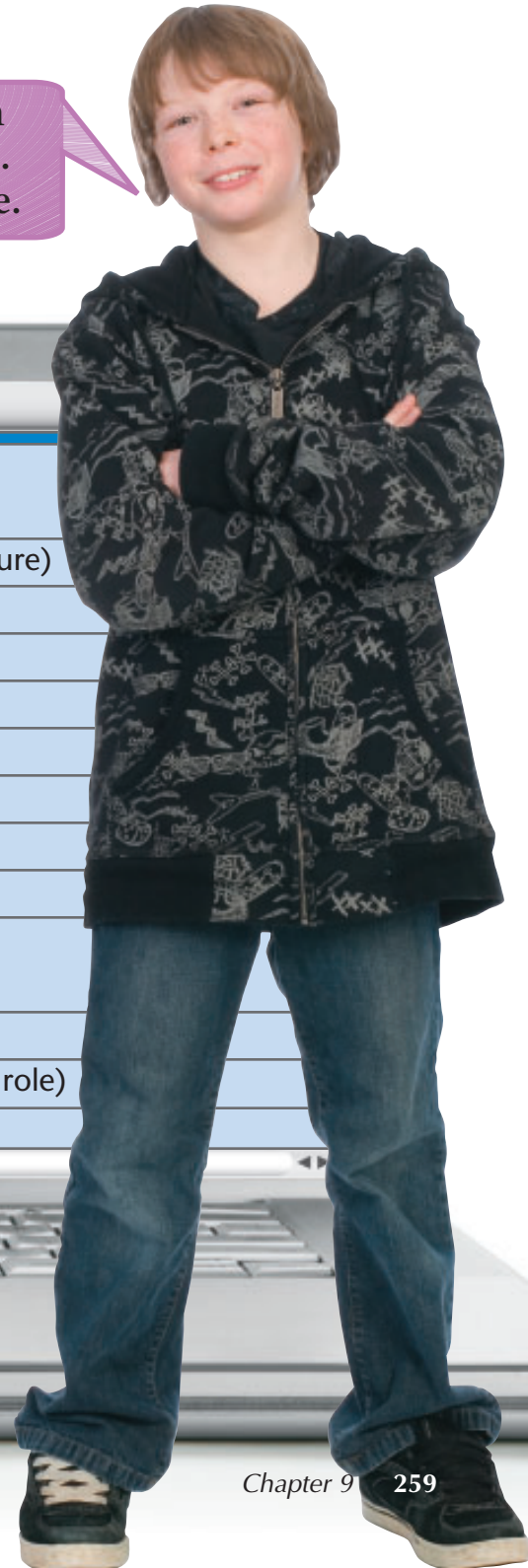
Pearl Calahasen, centre, was born and raised in Grouard, Alberta. She is a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, of teacher organizations, and of the High Prairie Native Friendship Centre. Her membership in many organizations helps her understand the needs of her constituents.

A Day in the Life of an MLA

What's important?

Understand the role of MLAs in representing their constituents.

I asked Brian Mason to describe a typical day in his life as an MLA. He said he'd rather show me. Here is a page he e-mailed me from his schedule.



16 November 2007 – Constituency Day	
7 a.m.	7:10–7:40 Interview with the Calgary Eyeopener (media interview)
8 a.m.	8:30 Media Conference on Green Energy Plan (Legislature)
9 a.m.	
10 a.m.	Caucus Meeting
11 a.m.	
12 a.m.	Louis Riel Ceremony at Legislature (speaking role)
1 p.m.	
2 p.m.	Constituency meeting
3 p.m.	
4 p.m.	Meeting with constituents about proposed changes to labour laws (constituency office)
5 p.m.	
6 p.m.	6:00–11:00 Métis Nation of Alberta function (speaking role)

My Notes

- A caucus meeting is a meeting of all the MLAs belonging to the same party.
- A constituency meeting involves the staff who work in an MLA's constituency office. People often contact the constituency office with concerns, and the staff take down their contact information and make notes for follow-up.
- When the Legislature is in session, Mr. Mason's schedule changes. He spends part of every morning preparing for Question Period, and spends every afternoon at the Legislature building.
- Question Period is when opposition MLAs challenge the way the government is handling current affairs. They ask questions, and MLAs from the government respond.



Brian Mason was a city councillor for 11 years before he was elected MLA of Edmonton-Highlands in 2000.

Pause

How do associations such as the Métis Nation of Alberta provide MLAs with information and perspectives? How does this help them represent the people of Alberta?

A Day in the Life of a Cabinet Minister

What's important?

Understand the responsibilities of cabinet ministers.

What's a cabinet minister?

The premier chooses **cabinet ministers** from among the MLAs that belong to his or her party. Cabinet ministers are responsible for specific **ministries** or departments, such as the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Children's Services. Ministries have staff to carry out the directions of cabinet ministers. Together, the premier and cabinet ministers are called the Executive Council. They hold regular meetings to discuss the government's aims and put them into practice.

Hi, I'm Brittany! I wanted to know what a cabinet minister does. The Honourable Iris Evans is the Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. I asked if I could follow her for a day to see what she does. Her office told me to wear running shoes. I thought they were joking — but they weren't.



Ms. Evans has an awesome office in the Legislature building that looks onto the grounds. She had trays of squares out, because I was visiting. She invited me to get whatever I wanted to drink. She meant it, because there were ten kinds of pop in her fridge! We sat on a couch in her office. She told me that her ministry has to introduce bills, which are proposed laws. Part of her job is to encourage companies to invest in Alberta. Another part is to attract workers to Alberta and help them live here.

As we talked, her staff gave her a list of all of her meetings through the day. We ran upstairs for some and ran downstairs for others. She met with cabinet ministers from the Northwest Territories to exchange ideas. She also met with Alberta cabinet ministers to plan a trip to Asia to promote investing and working in Alberta.

Grade 6 students often visit MLAs with their parents, or with groups such as Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. Here, Lisa Mead and her father visit Iris Evans in her constituency office.



Working for Constituents

Like all MLAs, Ms. Evans is responsible for representing her constituents. Her day starts early — often at 4:00 a.m. First, she goes over papers from her constituency office, dropped off at her house the night before. Breakfast is a helping of politics over porridge.

Ms. Evans goes to the constituency office regularly. Visitors are scheduled every half hour. Concerns range from how to apply for sports funding, to changes in daycare regulations, to problems in accessing health care. Ms. Evans and her staff take notes on all these meetings for follow-up later. Lunch is a working concern, too. It may involve hosting a girls' soccer team that has won a provincial championship, or meeting with a group raising funds for cancer research. After lunch, there are more meetings, and letters to be written and signed. Frequently, dinner also involves constituency work, and the evening finishes late.

Before becoming an MLA, Ms. Evans served in local government. She was a school board trustee, a municipal councillor, and a reeve.



Ms. Evans meets with industry and government officials from China at a seminar in Beijing on opportunities in Alberta.

During lunch, Ms. Evans had a conference phone call with the mayor of Calgary. They talked over plans in case a strike of emergency medical workers went ahead. She also used that telephone time to share some Chinese food with me (yummy) and clean her desk.

Part of the job as Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry involves safe and fair workplaces. On the day I was there, she met with a group concerned about cleaning up houses where illegal drugs had been grown. They talked about the dangers to workers who have to go into these houses later. For example, many of the houses have illegal electrical wiring. They had posters showing examples of illegal wiring. It looked like spaghetti — very dangerous spaghetti. I wondered what people could do about this problem. They said there was a telephone number to report any suspicious houses.

I could have gone to more meetings, but by then I was really tired. I think it would be interesting to have a job like Ms. Evans has.

What is the role of opposition MLAs?

What's important?

Understand the responsibilities of opposition MLAs.

Can you imagine the dangers of having a government that can make any decisions it wants, without discussion or constructive criticism? In some places of the world, that happens. Democracy needs open dialogue among people and groups with different viewpoints and perspectives. The opposition has a very vital role in presenting and debating those different viewpoints. The opposition is often called a “watchdog” because of its role in ensuring that government decisions are fair and democratic.

After my day with Iris Evans, I decided to talk to her counterpart in the opposition. Every cabinet minister in government has a “shadow minister” in the opposition. Check out my e-mail and then have a look at my notes.

To: Dr. Bruce Miller

MLA for Edmonton-Glenora

Dear Dr. Miller,

Please could you tell me what you believe is the role of the opposition, and the role of the Shadow Cabinet? How can Grade 6 students participate in government?

Thank you,

Brittany



Notes from my conversation with Dr. Miller

The opposition:

- **Helps make the government more accountable**

When the Legislature is in session, Question Period occurs every day at 1:30. It lasts for 50 minutes. This is the chance for the opposition to ask the government questions that it must answer. The opposition asks the most urgent questions and anything that is news-breaking. If there is a train derailment or a water problem, the opposition will ask what the government is doing about that.

- **Helps make all voices heard**

During debates, the opposition brings up the viewpoints of people who don't agree with what the government is planning. Everybody has a right to have their opinion heard.

- **Has “shadow ministers”**

Shadow ministers learn about the topics and concerns that particular ministries deal with. This helps the opposition ask effective questions during Question Period. Also — if the opposition wins an election, they will be prepared.

How Grade 6 Students Can Participate in Government

Dr. Miller had these suggestions:

- **Present a petition.**

Any Albertan can ask an MLA to present a petition to the Assembly.

- **Write letters.**

One student wrote to Dr. Miller about making a law requiring adults to wear bicycle helmets. Dr. Miller agrees this is a good idea.

- **Suggest a private member's bill.**

All MLAs can draft bills to voice their personal views, called “private member's bills.” These are discussed Monday afternoons when the Legislature is in session. There isn't enough time to discuss all the bills, so the MLAs hold a draw. If Dr. Miller gets lucky, he will propose a bill for adults to wear helmets!



Bruce Miller was a United Church minister in Lethbridge, St. Paul and Edmonton before he became an MLA in 2004.

Think About the Task

Why might it be useful to contact an MLA in the opposition about a topic of concern to you?

What are the responsibilities of government at the provincial level?

SKILLS at Work

The names of ministries and the services they offer change from government to government, depending on the aims of the political party that wins an election. What ministries does the government have today?

- use examples of events to describe cause and effect and change over time



What's important?

Discover the role of the provincial government in providing services to Albertans and how it pays for services.

What services does the provincial government provide?

Just like local governments, provincial governments are responsible for passing laws and providing services. The focus of the provincial government, however, is on matters that affect the whole province.

To learn about the services offered by the provincial government, you can investigate the ministries of the government. As you learned on page 261, Iris Evans was responsible for the ministry of Employment, Immigration and Industry. All the ministries of the provincial government are listed and available on the Alberta government website, so that citizens know where to go for help and advice. They are also listed in the blue pages of the phone book.

This section outlines some examples of ministries.

Think About the Task

How might contacting a cabinet minister bring attention to a topic that concerns you? How could you find out which cabinet minister to contact?

Case Study

Provincial Ministries and Services, 2007

Pause

How do the services provided by the provincial government reflect fairness and equity?

Ministry of Agriculture and Food

This ministry takes care of food producers as well as consumers. It helps food producers with loans and financing, marketing programs, and information and research. It protects consumers by setting food standards and issuing licences. For example, dairy farms that process milk must get a licence. This ensures the farms follow procedures that produce safe milk. What impact does this service have on you?



Ministry of Health and Wellness

This ministry costs \$12 billion a year to run. It uses one-third of all government spending and costs \$1.4 million an hour. This money pays for services provided by hospitals and medical workers. This ministry also provides social services, such as support for people who need help meeting their basic needs.



Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport

Infrastructure refers to the structures that a society needs, such as publicly owned buildings and lands, roads and bridges. This ministry is responsible for building and maintaining the many thousands of miles of provincial highways and roads that link urban areas. In 2007, this ministry planned to complete freeways in Calgary and Edmonton, for a total cost of more than a billion dollars. In what ways is this ministry important to your life?



A billion dollars! It's hard to imagine that much money. Where does the provincial government get the money it spends?

How does the provincial government pay for services?











Just like local governments, Alberta's government collects taxes to pay for the services it provides. It collects **income tax** — a tax paid by citizens of Alberta based on how much money they earn. Alberta's government then makes decisions about how to spend taxes by preparing a budget. You learned about taxes in Chapter 8, on page 223.

Some of the money available to the provincial government also comes from the oil and gas industry. The people of Alberta own the oil and gas in the province, and collect fees from oil companies that develop these resources. The companies pay the fees to the provincial government, because it represents Albertans. These fees generate a lot of wealth for Alberta.

Debating the budget proposed by the government is an important part of an MLA's job, because the budget determines what services the government will provide the people of Alberta.

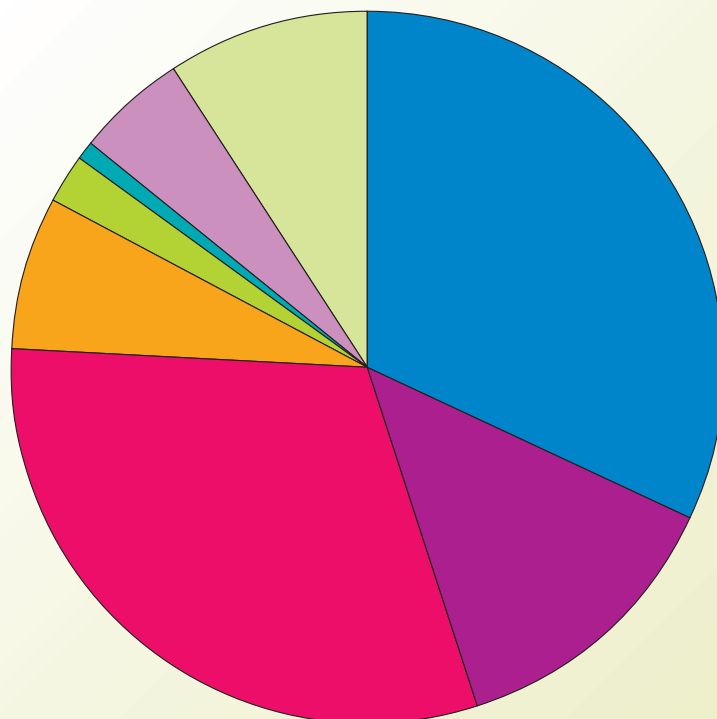
Spending by Alberta's Provincial Government, 2007

Legend					
Health	32%		Environment	2%	
Social Services	13%		Recreation and Culture	1%	
Education	31%		Transportation and Communications	5%	
Resource Conservation and Industry	7%		Miscellaneous	9%	

SKILLS at Work

Examine the graph on this page. What two services did the government spend the most money on in 2007?

- Using graphs to interpret information



How does the Legislative Assembly make laws?

What's important?

Understand the role of debate in making laws in the Legislative Assembly.

The Legislative Assembly makes laws that apply to everyone in the province and that are of importance to everyone in the province. For example, the assembly makes laws about

- health care, including the kinds of services hospitals provide
- the environment, including laws about pollution and wildlife
- Education, including whether to build new schools
- vehicle safety, such as wearing seatbelts, and the age when you can drive a car or an ATV



Pause

Why does it make sense for vehicle safety to be a provincial matter? How does this contribute to a well-functioning society?

Think About the Task

In your chapter task, you need to prepare a debate on a topic. Debate is an important part of the way the Legislative Assembly functions. As you read this section, count the number of times MLAs use debate to make laws.

freedoms

representation

equity

justice

Debating is an important feature of democracy. It allows many viewpoints to be heard and considered. This photo shows Kevin Taft, MLA for Edmonton Riverview, making a point in the Legislature.

SKILLS at Work

What does the lieutenant governor reflect about the history of the Legislative Assembly?

- explain the historical context of key events of a given time period



What is the role of the lieutenant governor in the Legislative Assembly?

What's important?

Understand the duties of the lieutenant governor.

The lieutenant governor of Alberta is the monarch's representative in the province. This person is not elected, but is appointed by the governor general of Canada, who consults with the premier of Alberta. Most lieutenant governors serve around five years.

The Steps in Passing a Law in the Legislative Assembly

Introducing a Bill

A **bill** is a proposed law. The step of introducing the bill is called its "first reading." This step is like an announcement, to prepare the Legislative Assembly to debate the bill.

Debating the Bill in Detail

After studying the bill carefully, MLAs make suggestions on how to improve the bill. They can suggest adding, removing or changing specific points. The Legislative Assembly — all the MLAs — debate and vote on each suggestion, one by one. This process can change parts of the bill.

Debating the Bill in Principle

This step is called "second reading." During this step, MLAs debate the main idea or principle of the bill. As a group, they decide whether to reject the bill or examine and debate it in more detail.

The lieutenant governor gives Royal Assent to bills that have passed in a vote of the Legislative Assembly. Royal Assent is a European tradition that goes back many centuries. At one time, monarchs passed laws by making a decree or statement. When Parliament eventually took the right to make laws, monarchs kept the right to give approval. This is now a custom, which continues in our Legislative Assembly.

Queen Elizabeth II meets with Alberta Lieutenant Governor Lois Hole in 2000. Lois Hole was Lieutenant Governor from 2000 to 2005.



Last Chance to Debate

This step is called “third reading.” This is the last chance for MLAs to make comments about the bill. They may criticize or praise it. They may ask final questions about it.

Royal Assent

The lieutenant governor of the province gives the bill Royal Assent. This makes it a law.

The Vote Is Taken

The bill comes to a final vote of all the MLAs. If a majority of MLAs vote for the bill, it “passes.”

The Responsibilities of the lieutenant governor



Lieutenant Governor, Norman L. Kwong, reads the Speech to the Throne in March 2007.

- **Represents the monarch**

The lieutenant governor is the monarch's representative in the province. This means that he or she is the highest-ranking person in Alberta, after the monarch and the Governor General.

- **Is impartial**

Just like the monarch, the lieutenant governor does not belong to a political party and does not favour one party over another.

- **Opens, and later discontinues, a session of the Legislature**

There is a formal protocol for beginning and discontinuing sessions of the Legislature that is the responsibility of the lieutenant governor.

- **Reads the Speech from the Throne**

This is a speech read by the monarch or the lieutenant governor at the beginning of each new session. The speech outlines what the government plans to accomplish in the session.

- **Grants Royal Assent to bills that have passed the third reading**

Royal Assent is a ceremony that requires the lieutenant governor to give final approval to a bill. This changes a bill into an Act of the Legislature, and it becomes part of the law of the land.

Principles of Provincial Government

Review the following summary chart that describes the way Alberta is governed as a province. How does the government of the province reflect the rights and freedoms of Canadians? Where do Grade 6 students fit in?

What is the structure of the Alberta provincial government?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lieutenant governor represents the monarch and gives impartial Royal Assent to legislation• Based on a democratic, political party system• Alberta has 83 seats for elected representatives• Government is formed by the party that holds the largest number of seats• Premier is head of the majority party• Official Opposition is the party with the second largest number of seats
What responsibilities do MLAs have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Represent constituents' needs, concerns and best interests• Keep constituents informed
What responsibilities do the premier and cabinet ministers have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determine government policies• Work out budget based on income and aims• Draft bills• Cabinet ministers are in charge of ministries• Premier and cabinet also have their own constituency duties



A program at the Legislature provides Grade 6 students the opportunity to enact passing a bill. This student is playing the role of the lieutenant governor.



<p>What's the role of the opposition?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge and debate government policies and bills • Provide a democratic voice for those with viewpoints different from those of the government
<p>What is the usual procedure for making government decisions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government drafts bills (proposed laws) • Bills go through debate in three readings and changes are made • All MLAs vote on a bill • Bills that are passed are given Royal Assent
<p>How do members of society influence government decisions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through their MLAs • Petitions, letters and e-mails, private member's bills • Voting in elections for the party that reflects their viewpoints



This Grade 6 student is role-playing the Sergeant at Arms, the official who brings the mace into the Legislature when the Legislature is in session. Why are traditions like this important?

Review! Review!

1. What does the provincial electoral process involve?

Make a comparison chart showing differences between the electoral process of your local and provincial government.

2. How is provincial government structured?

Draw a diagram or picture of provincial government that shows its political structure.

3. Create a series of questions that illustrate the roles of the following people in a democracy:

- the premier
- the leader of the Official Opposition
- your MLA

Role-play being an interviewer with another student. Then, switch roles.

freedoms

representation

equity

justice

