

Lougheed dwells on complex Alberta

Former premier's speech touches on the stickiest topics facing the province

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News Staff

Former Alberta premier Peter Lougheed was on campus last Wednesday to give a lecture on the "Growing Complexity of Governing" as part of this year's Eric J Hanson Memorial Lecture. His talk covered issues ranging from health care to the "out-of-control" oil sands situation in the province.

According to the lecture host, Lougheed propelled Alberta through what many politicians call the "most challenging years" in her history, battling issues varying from the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) price shocks to the Patriation of the Constitution, an act that officially transferred legislation from Britain to Canada. Lougheed, premier from 1971–84, gave insight on many of the contentious decisions facing government today, and began with voicing his disregard for the hostile nature of Question Period during caucus meetings in both parliament

and provincial legislatures.

Lougheed said he doesn't think that politicians comprehend the impact heckling has on the public, and gave former Alberta premier Ernest Manning credit for not tolerating it in his government of the day.

"I don't think it's a good thing for public awareness, and I don't think it is a good thing for encouraging people to go into public life. There is too often a lack of recognition and respect for the individual Member of Parliament," he said, adding that repercussions should be dispensed to offensive individuals.

Switching gears, Lougheed noted that although the topic of climate change is heavily debated nowadays, it's a difficult issue that has lingered for years.

"I think it's possible for Canada to take positions on the environment," Lougheed said.

However, he noted that he believes environmental initiatives should be implemented through a North American reduction in emissions, instead of an international effort such as Kyoto.

In terms of health care, Lougheed noted that the Canadian public expects more involvement from the federal government, but stressed that it's unfortunate that citizens fail to acknowledge the fact that health care amendment resides in the jurisdiction of the provincial arena.

"It's a tricky issue, and it demonstrates the public difficulty in communicating the differentiating role between provincial and federal responsibilities," he said.

Lougheed also discussed one of the most controversial issues plaguing our government today: Québécois sovereignty and Ottawa's perpetual focus on the province, which he said results in resentment from other provinces.

"My political instinct tells me that in 2007 there is not nearly the goodwill and support—from the West in particular—towards Québec as there was when I was premier," he said.

Lougheed also touched on rural matters, saying that he sees the opportunity to reiterate statements made about



PHIL HEAD

THE WAY IT WAS Lougheed discussed the complexities of politics in Alberta.

Alberta's oil sands on different podiums and forums in the past.

"I think [the oil sands situation is] out of control and I think we're going to pay a price for it. Primarily, it's out of control because we have authorized a number of companies to build their plants at the same time," he said.

Lougheed was most vivacious, though, when speaking about the current status quo of an ill-informed public

about caucus and its purpose, meaning and process.

"I don't understand why so few comments are made and so little is written about government caucus and how it works," he said. "If you're trying to understand the environment that we live in from the political point of view under our system of government, you've got to understand what caucus means," he concluded.



Fact: The earliest recorded case of a man giving up smoking was on 5 April, 1679, when Johan Katsu, Sheriff of Turku, Finland, wrote in his diary "I quit smoking tobacco." He died one month later.



Fact: Dan Rather has warned: "Be careful. Journalism is more addictive than crack cocaine."

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