

# Former PM Jean Chrétien reflects on his years in office

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA  
Senior News Editor

Jean Chrétien beamed as he took his seat in a leather armchair in the centre of the Myer Horowitz Theatre last Thursday for the first installment of the University's Prime Ministers Conversation Series.

The former PM received a standing ovation from the sold-out audience and looked relaxed in the informal Q&A setting, which featured former MP and U of A Board of Governor chair Jim Edwards. He stressed that he didn't want to comment on current events, instead fielding questions from Edwards and reminiscing about his 40 years of experience in the public service.

In regards to federalism, he said provincial-federal meetings are often unproductive, as premiers have a temptation to "stick it to the feds" when the cameras are rolling.

But even as he spoke before a crowd of spectators, Chrétien says the tendency to speak to an audience has changed Canadian politics. Over the course of his career, he said that bringing television cameras into the House was one thing he has regrets about.

"The House of Commons was the best debating club in this nation. The real rules are that you're not supposed to have notes there. You're supposed to get up and speak, and it is the test. If you say something stupid, everybody knows. And if you say something smart, they think you're smart," he explained, adding that the old House produced great politicians.

However, once the camera came, Chrétien noted everyone started reading their speeches and checking their hair and tie—something he said was no longer true debating.

"The camera makes you artificial."

When asked about the level of charisma seen in Canada's federal leaders today, Chrétien said that while a politician may not be a "great, funny guy," a good background and a desire to serve still stands for something.

"Politics is not only a science; it's an art. And how to mix the two? Some are successful just with the science, and some are successful just with the arts, but sometimes it is better just to



PM-ESQUE Chrétien and Edwards discuss the former leader's political past.

have both," he said.

Since leaving office, Chrétien has written a book and is currently practicing law on international files, drawing on his experiences gained during his time in office—including his work with China.

He acknowledged that human rights were always a touchy issue when dealing with Canada-China relations, but said he never shied away from discussing them, adding that he was the first leader from the Western world to make a speech on human rights in China, at the University of Beijing.

However, he also stressed that China has its own unique problems to deal with, and that in terms of promoting democracy, they aren't the only undemocratic nation that Canada has had dealings with.

"Some do business in Saudi Arabia,"

he said. "It's not a great democracy."

Chrétien also said that he often found himself explaining what it means to be a liberal in Canada while travelling abroad.

"When the right says of you [that] you are a left-winger, and when the left says of you you're a right-winger—you're a damn good Chrétien Liberal."

*In commemoration of the U of A's 100<sup>th</sup> year, the University has invited the five living former Canadian prime ministers and current PM Stephen Harper to take part in a series of conversations with the Honourable Jim Edwards on the theme "Advancing Canada—Changing the World," concluding the series next winter with the Honourable Stephen Harper. The next installment in the series will take place on Wednesday, 12 March with former Joe Clark.*

## NEWS BRIEF

### U OF A'S ENGINEERS WITHOUT BORDERS TOP IN CANADA

The University of Alberta's Engineers Without Borders (EWB) has been named the top chapter of 2008 at the organization's annual general meeting held last month in Montreal.

Jamaal Montasser, EWB's U of A chapter president, explained the selection process as a combination of peer review and an assessment by a selection committee. He spoke of the extensive criteria requiring the chapter's demonstration of community outreach, successful program implementation, and high quantity and quality of programs available to its members.

According to Montasser and Jessica Virostek, a senior returning member, diversity is integral to EWB's strength and innovation. Virostek highlighted the misconception that Engineers Without Borders is an exclusive group, while in reality its members hail from outside the Engineering Faculty.

"One of our executives is a political science major," Virostek said.

Montasser further explained that

the club had greatly increased its community outreach, and that exemplifying the chapter's proliferation was its ability to reach 1400 students within the first three months of the academic year—eclipsing the total number reached in the entire year prior.

"We give one-hour workshops in high schools about water, energy, and what can be done as Canadians to make social change," Montasser said.

Shedding light on other EWB community outreach programs, Virostek detailed a new initiative called "Fair-Trade Fridays" launched last week. As part of this program, the EWB is giving away free fair-trade coffee every Friday along with information pamphlets as an initiative to educate and provide alternatives to students. They plan to incorporate more fair-trade products in the future.

"The program is basically about awareness—getting people to realize that they have feasible options and a choice in the source of their products," she said.

EWB has 4-12 month internship programs abroad made available to its members. Both Montasser and Virostek have completed junior internship programs with the Ghanaian Ministry of

Food and Agriculture, during which they used their skills to raise technological capacity both in the offices and in the fields they work in. Virostek explained that in order to maintain the success of the internship programs abroad, EWB operates on a philosophy of modesty: that they must first learn in order to successfully implement change.

"We learn from our local partners and then use their expertise to appropriately introduce new technologies and techniques," Virostek said.

She believes that this way of working fosters the healthy and ongoing relationships between EWB and its partners necessary to ensure the quality and quantity of the chapter's programs.

Also on the agenda of EWB is university "curriculum-enhancement." Montasser explained the on going effort to get faculty members to integrate a global aspect into the instructors' engineering classes.

"The program is meant to transcend absolute focus on the functional aspects of technology, and rather to explore the social, economic, and political impacts as well."

—Yaw Amoako-Tuffour, News Writer



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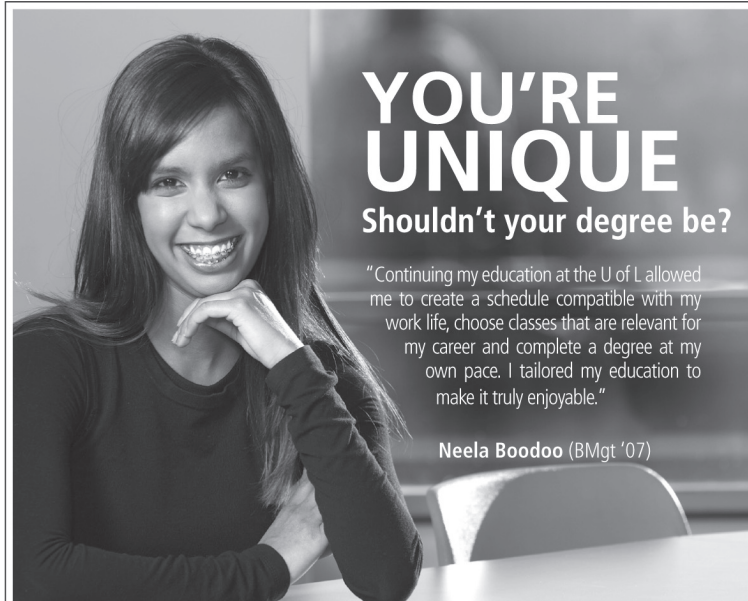
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Applications should be sent to Adam Gaumont,  
the Gateway Editor-in-Chief, at  
[eic@gateway.ualberta.ca](mailto:eic@gateway.ualberta.ca) on or before February 29.

For more information, please contact the  
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