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And in some ways I think, given the way our electoral system works, small parties are dead before they're born. And this might be a way, too, that this would give people another reason to vote for today's fringe parties."

RP: "[That] begs a larger question that you have addressed a bit: that, really, to democratize the system is a major challenge. You need to make the democratic process more open, more revitalized, and that includes, of course, the question of how do we encourage representation of different political positions and points of view. So to open the door, I think the best way to guarantee it would be to move to proportional representation. Changes in the electoral system allowing a kind of PR system—that's the real guarantor, in my view, of fuller participation, and it's long overdue."

DC: "I think it shows just how fickle the people who make these decisions are. This time, the criteria was 'Do you have a seat in the legislature?' so all the parties who did have seats in the legislature were represented. You go back to 1997, both [NDP leader] Pam Barrett and [Social Credit leader] Randy Thorsteinson were represented in the debates, and neither of their parties had seats in the Legislature from the previous election. So you only have to look back eleven years to see that the criteria was different, and then two elections following that, Thorsteinson was the leader of the [Alberta] Alliance, and they wouldn't let him in the debates because he didn't have a seat in the Legislature—he didn't have a seat in the Legislature in 1997 either!"

SP: "I would say if you feel you could lead this province, you should be allowed in the debate, regardless of how many candidates you can run, regardless of how many candidates are in your party. And I know that that opens it up to maybe some crazy people, but it might also open up the debate, you know, because when I watched the debate, I didn't see ideas, I didn't see people debating what's actually going on in this province, so opening it up might actually challenge some people to come out with more radical perspectives and actually challenge some people to come up with policy perspective and challenge some actual results, so I say open it up."

RP: "If the intention really is to promote public debate on central issues, that should become the focus of electoral competition, and I think we need to talk about a number of things about the debate, not just about the representation present, which is certainly one important issue, but who should be responsible for designing certain questions that have to be asked. I thought the media did a poor job of really confronting the leaders with key, critical questions, so the debate [...] I didn't find it very helpful."

DC: "You watch the debates that are going on in the United States, like the Republican debates and the Democratic debates, and they're so much more exciting than anything that went on last Thursday night, and I see a number of things. I mean I would love to see a leaders' debate in Alberta where questions were submitted via YouTube. Have real people ask these questions—not to call reporters not "real" people—but have actual voters ask these questions. Have it in front of a live audience! Having a leaders' debate in a sterile, neutral TV studio just kills any sense of energy. Have it in Myer Horowitz Theatre! If you can't defend and articulately present your ideas in front of 800 people, what are you really doing at that podium?"

I think you'd see a lot more engagement. You watch the Democratic debates, if the audience doesn't like what you're saying, they'll boo you. If they like what you're saying, they'll

cheer. There's so much interaction. I think you'd see a lot more reality coming from the leaders instead of staying on the script. You'd see who they really are because they'd have to react to that. And people tune in too, because it's fun to watch."

SP: "I was shocked at the lack of passion. You want to lead this province, and you look like a robot—you don't have any emotion about what you're talking about."

RP: "The debates to watch, if you want to learn something from them, I think, is between the Republican and Democratic presidential candidates once they get nominated. I think if you go back to seeing the debates between Gore and Bush, they were quite engaging I thought, but there were only two persons debating. And that's a very, very important point is that you can't escape getting excited when answering questions and being pressed to answer questions. When you have an hour and a half and four people shouting at each other, it's very difficult anywhere with that kind of format."

SP: "And not just in the leaders' debate but in forums and constituencies, there should be some sort of rule that if you're running, you have to show up. It's pathetic that Conservative MLAs don't show up. It happens all over—they don't show up. And I don't know if there was just some sort of memo that was sent out, like, 'Don't

show up; we're okay,' but it's astounding."

Probably the most divisive—and most talked-about—issue in this election is that of the tar sands. Given all of the coverage that this issue receives, what do you think are some misconceptions about Alberta's biggest resource?

IU: "There's a great quote that Larry Pratt used when he wrote *The Tar Sands* [...] Someone from the Hudson Institute remarked that 'Boreal landscape is of really no aesthetic value, so this won't be much of an issue,' and I still think that's too much the way Albertans feel about it, even when you can get 60 per cent of them to say, 'You should slow down.'"

Another misconception about the tar sands is that everyone talked about how much more we were going to get in royalties from the energy sector.

about jobs and the environment—it's a discussion about the future of Alberta, like where do we want to go? We can't live off of resources, these non-renewable resources, forever—we have to make this decision eventually, and we're going to have to move our jobs somewhere else. Not just for the future of the environment, but for where we're developing these resources and what our economy is based off of, and it is really pathetic how much they've been able to get away with that debate.

The second thing is that [...] aboriginal communities are being destroyed. People are dying because of these projects. And I don't know how you can get away with saying that's not happening because it is—the studies have come out; it's proven that communities are being destroyed. And so I know how that is not an issue that's up for discussion here. Just the other day, aboriginal communities got together

"Philosophically speaking, what is the role of government if not to protect public interest, to define public interest and devise policies around it, to make sure that it's protected and enhanced and well-served by whatever decisions they make?"

—RAJ PANNU

The magic number is 20 per cent, so New Democrats aside, everyone is talking about 20 per cent. The Royalty Review Panel comes out with 20 per cent, and so the Stelmach response comes up with a different version of 20 per cent.

What no one points out when they examine those statements [is that] although they will say we're getting more royalties in 2010, we'll actually be getting less in 2010. Because the 20 per cent is a reference to what would have been taken in under the old system in 2010, not what we took in in 2006. So if the assumptions are right, in 2010, Alberta will take in from energy nearly \$1 billion less than it took in in 2006.

So I think Albertans think that this is a cash cow that's just going to give for ever and ever and ever and there's more money coming from this sector in the future, and there could be an increase in royalty rates, but the way we're operating right now, there's a physical day of reckoning that's going to come at some point in Alberta—there are environmental misconceptions about the oil sands, and there are fiscal misconceptions about the oil sands."

SP: "I think a huge misconception is that this is a debate between jobs versus environment, and that's something that neo-Conservatives will always bring up when talking about the environment, but it's really pathetic how much they've been able to get away with it. This really isn't a discussion

and said 'Stop it. Stop this project. We can't survive.' And where is that?"

What is the right pace of development?

RP: "Well, the tarsands is a huge economic reality in Alberta. So to talk about the Alberta economy you can't avoid talking about the central role of fossil fuel production in this province. So we must talk about why we're doing it. Why we're doing it at the rate at which we're doing it, expanding it. Who benefits from it the most, and should we or should we not maximize the returns on it to Albertans in general? That's one big question.

The second [question], of course, is the ecological and environmental impact. Very little attention is being paid to that, as a matter of fact. Those huge tailing ponds—I haven't heard anyone talk about those lakes of poisonous materials, toxic materials. And there's no guarantee, in [the] laws and statutes of the province, that the companies that are responsible for producing those tailing ponds are taking responsibility to take care of them within foreseeable time limits, that you've got to do it in ten years or 15 years or whatever. To leave those toxic pits open forever, without any legislative guarantee that it is the responsibility of producers to take care of them, is a huge sleeper issue that no one has really addressed.

And the third issue is the issue of the pace. [...] Why is it so crucial that we allow the expansion of operations,