

November 12, 2003 HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY PROCEEDINGS

CLERK: Please be seated.

Members of the House of Assembly, the Clerk Assistant and I have received a formal Proclamation from the Lieutenant-Governor. It reads as follows - addressed to me, the Clerk, and to the Clerk Assistant:

GREETING;

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS the Office of the Speaker of the House of Assembly is vacant;

AND WHEREAS it is not expedient to call together the 45th General Assembly until the Members of the House of Assembly have proceeded to the choice of a Speaker;

- and this is in the Lieutenant-Governor's own words -

NOW THEREFORE, I, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador do authorize and direct you, the said A. John Noel and Elizabeth Murphy, to signify to Members of the House of Assembly on the 12th day of November, 2003, that it is my pleasure that they should proceed to choose some person to be their Speaker and to present such person for my approbation when I call the House of Assembly together in session later on.

Therefore, you have heard His Honour's direction that you should elect a Speaker to preside over your deliberations. As of 4:30 yesterday afternoon, in accordance with the Standing Orders, the sole candidate having declared his intention to seek the Office of Speaker, being Mr. Harvey Hodder, pursuant to the Standing Orders, I declare Mr. Hodder, the Member for Waterford Valley, elected as the Speaker of the 45th General Assembly.

[Applause]

CLERK: I call upon the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition.

The Premier and the Leader of the Opposition lead Mr. Hodder to the Speaker's Chair.

MR. SPEAKER (Hodder): Colleagues, guests and visitors:

Today is a special occasion in the parliamentary life of our Province. All members of this hon. House hold office by virtue of the confidence placed in them by the electorate of our Province. My congratulations to all my colleagues who have taken the oath or have been affirmed in their offices this afternoon. I look forward to working with each member during the Forty-Fifth General Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I wish to thank you sincerely for the high honour you have conferred on me by electing me as your Speaker for this Parliament.

I am deeply touched by your faith in my knowledge of parliamentary practices and for your perception of my wish to be fair and reasonable in all matters affecting the role of the Speaker.

Colleagues, I must also thank the citizens of the Waterford Valley district for the kindness of their support. A few days ago, I began my thirty-fifth consecutive year in elected politics, having been first elected to the Mount Pearl Municipal Council on November 10, 1969. Since that first election, I have served as a Councillor, a Deputy-Mayor, and on four occasions, I was elected as Mayor of my community. On October 21, I was honoured to be re-elected for the fourth consecutive term to this hon. House. Again, my sincere thanks to all those who have participated in my campaigns, especially the host of volunteers who have helped my campaigns to be very structured and, for the most part, very pleasant events.

I would be terribly remiss if I did not commend and thank my family for their outstanding loyalty and support. Political life can place a strain on families, especially on one's spouse and one's children but, on occasion, this stress can also be extended to one's parents and other extended family members. Throughout the years and through ten elections, I have had tremendous support from my immediate family. Thanks so much for your love and for the continuity of your support.

My fellow parliamentarians, the Speaker holds a position which is not just one of historic significance but also one of important responsibility. When in the Chair, the Speaker, supported and strengthened by the traditions of this House and by the precedents of our sister Parliaments throughout the Commonwealth, embodies the power and authority of the historic office.

No other office or position in our parliamentary system is so closely associated and linked with our traditions as that of Speaker. Historically, and for good reasons, the role of Speaker has changed considerably since the first holder of the office in the British Parliament in 1377. Our parliamentary practices are evolutionary in nature.

Changes are often very gradual and substantive changes occur, in most instances, over many decades.

During the early phases of the evolution of our British parliamentary traditions, the Speaker was often seen as an agent of the Crown. In fact, he was often referred to as the "King's man". Later, when the Crown's influence over the Speakership diminished, the Speaker became very much the servant of the governing party. This often led to difficulties associated with partisan politics and this tended to compromise the integrity of the office. Again, changes evolved out of experience.

All parliaments which have followed the British parliamentary traditions have now adopted practices which have substantially disengaged the ties between the Speaker and the political party in power and, in so doing, have established new standards of independence and impartiality in the office.

Recently - and in parliamentary terms the word "recent" can refer to substantive periods of time - in the Parliament of Canada, and more specifically in our own House, Speakers have tended to abstain from direct political activity but have retained their general connection to their political party. During the Forty-Forth General Assembly, new rules were adopted to provide for the direct election of the Speaker by a majority of the elected members participating in the vote.

Colleagues, today I put aside my direct political affiliation and, in so doing, I will follow the practices that have become the tradition of my immediate predecessors. As much as I have enjoyed my ten years of partisan activities in this Honourable House, my political involvement while I hold the Office of Speaker will be restricted primarily to social engagements.

Colleagues, independence and the tradition of impartiality will be your Speaker's objective in all decisions made in this House and in the direction and management of all pertinent administrative roles associated with the Speaker's Office.

I am reminded of a quotation made by a former Prime Minister of Canada, the Hon. John Turner in addressing the role of the Speaker during a debate in the House of Commons in Ottawa in 1986. He said, "You know what we demand of you, Mr. Speaker. Perfection! We want fairness, independence, decisiveness, patience, common sense, good humour, upholding the traditions of the House, knowledge of the rules and an intuition for the changing mood and tone of the House."

My fellow parliamentarians, I cannot assure you of perfection but I can assure you of my desire to be fair, independent and autonomous.

The Speaker is the chief servant of the House, the guardian of members' rights and privileges, and the one to whom falls the obligation to enforce and interpret all rules and practices including the responsibility for the preservation of order and decorum.

This hon. House belongs first and foremost to the people of our Province and I am sure all hon. members will wish that the people's business be conducted in a parliamentary environment where each member is encouraged to speak openly and frankly on issues that affect the life and future of our Province.

Colleagues, all members should feel most welcome at all times to discuss freely and openly with my Office any suggestions to make our parliament function more effectively.

The Speaker's Office will function with an 'open door' policy. All members should feel the Speaker's Office to be most readily available for the sharing of viewpoints and hopefully for the resolution of any misunderstandings that may occur.

Thank you again for the confidence you have extended to me and for the honour you have conferred upon me by electing me as your Speaker for the Forty-fifth General Assembly.

Thank you very, very much.