

Towards a more purposeful legislative assembly

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With the end of the fall Legislative sitting comes the perennial calls for a more civil discourse by the members of the Assembly. This year's call for decorum comes after a particularly nasty sitting that will undoubtedly make many Albertans wonder why we elect these people in the first place. There are many reasons for the lack of civility by MLAs, including lack of enforcement by the Speaker and low expectations from the party leaders.

This recent article by Samara Canada co-founder Alison Loat on creating a more purposeful parliament in Ottawa may also include some truths about the Legislative Assembly in Alberta:

It may be time to ask whether we can do better for our Parliamentarians, and by extension, for the citizens they serve.

When our organization, Samara, conducted exit interviews with 65 former Members of Parliament, many of them long-time veterans of federal politics, we found most ex-MPs recalled feeling very unprepared for their new careers. We were surprised by the intensity of these descriptions, even years after they first took their seats in the House of Commons.

On one hand, this was only logical. For many, politics was a career change. On average, the MPs came to Ottawa in their late forties,

<http://daveberta.ca/2010/12/towards-a-more-purposeful-legislative-assembly/comment-page-1/#comment-6759>

having spent most of their life pursuing other careers and interests outside national public life. They arrived on the Hill with a desire to create a different politics from that which was on offer. They were determined to better represent their communities, and felt pride in the privilege to serve in such an important role in an important institution.

But on the other hand, it was a surprise to learn that when the MPs arrived on the Hill, they were given almost no orientation to Parliament or training on how to effectively advance that which brought them to politics in the first place.

“You learn by the seat of your pants,” one MP recalled. “There is no training ... nothing on how to be effective,” said another.

While preparation is, in part, the role of each individual MP, Parliament is an institution with complex rules and traditions. We should look to systematically improve on the way in which newly-elected Parliamentarians are prepared for their positions.