

November 19, 2008 was a most historic and special day for the ISCWR and the GLBT community as we had the honour of being introduced to the members of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta. This would be the first time that a Court has been formerly introduced to a Provincial Legislative Assembly in Canadian history. This was a special day for so many reasons and one that exceeded all of our expectations.

The seven of us were made to feel very welcome by the New Democratic Party as well as all of the staff at the Legislature. After a brief "hello" with the mayor of Edmonton, we met with the Honorable Rachel Notley, MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona. Following a brief discussion during official photographs, we were treated to a tour of the building before proceeding to security in preparation for entry to the Chamber of the Legislative Assembly.

You should know that the days leading up to our visit, much discussion took place between us, our NDP hosts and the Sergeant at Arms about protocol and decorum with regards to how we would be dressed. They researched the 100 year history of the Alberta Legislature and British traditions going back even further. It was determined that it would be acceptable to enter into the building in full drag and regalia. We were told, however, that we would be asked to remove our crowns upon entering the Gallery as the only person that is allowed the privilege to wear a head adornment is the Queen of England (except for religious purposes). And, as expected as we approached security, we were asked to remove our crowns. I explained what our regalia and, especially, the crown means to our organization. Then, history was made. The staffers, watching our entry on the security monitors, approached the Speaker of the House. After a brief discussion, he then gave me special permission to wear my crown inside the Assembly chamber. Only Queen Elizabeth II and I have ever had the privilege of wearing a crown inside the Chamber of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. It will be an honour I will treasure forever.

Upon being seated in the gallery, we were definitely noticed by the members of the assembly as they prepared for the afternoon session. Laurie Blakeman, Liberal MLA for Edmonton Centre, sent a Page up with special greetings to our members written on a card. Soon, it was Ms. Notley's turn to make the introduction. She read from a statement which I prepared. After our names were read, including full titles for myself and Emperor Sundance, all of the members banged on their desks in the traditional welcome of the Legislative Assembly. Many of the members of all parties, waved and smiled in our direction. It was surreal, it was special, it was a true honour.

Moments later, during Question Period, Ms. Notley used our presence in the chamber to ask why the Provincial Government does not have any law in place protecting the GLBT community from discrimination. Her comments were poignant and articulate. Sadly, the responses from the Minister were not.

UPDATE: As of writing this, the Alberta Government has announced that protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation will be added to the Alberta Human Rights Act by the end of this month!

The following is the official transcript of our introduction and the exchange between the Honorable Ms. Notley and the Minister of Cultural and Community Spirit, The Honorable Mr. Blackett.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past Sunday was United Nations International Day of Tolerance, a day that recognizes the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others.

Today I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly six members from Imperial Sovereign Court of the Wild Rose. The ISCWR, informally known as the court, has been promoting and building awareness and acceptance of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered community while raising tens of thousands of dollars each year in support of local charities, which provide services to or foster accepting attitudes of the GLBT community.

The Edmonton court consists of an empress and emperor, who are elected by members of the community and act as figureheads of the organization, goodwill ambassadors in the community, spearheading charitable fundraising efforts, and representing the city of Edmonton and the province of Alberta throughout North America .

I would now ask that my guests rise as I call their names: Dale Newby; Doug Solahub; Antonio Bavaro; Barry Woodroff; Dale Krasowski, a.k.a his most imperial and sovereign majesty emperor 33, Sundance Lonestar; and Marcel Panas, a.k.a. her most imperial and sovereign majesty empress 33 Marni Gras.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we all now offer the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Sexual Orientation and Human Rights

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this week I attended the opening of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the U of A. This is a first in the country, and we should be proud. I also want to note a government of Alberta web page dedicated to understanding and stopping homophobic bullying. Obviously, certain ministers in government understand that homophobia equals discrimination and is wrong. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: isn't it time to move that acknowledgement from a website and put into legislation?

Mr. Blackett: Well, Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many ways I can say it. I've said it so many times. Maybe I'll say it in language that they understand: nyet.

Ms Notley: Well, that was great.

I was pleased to learn that Camp fYrefly, a camp for sexual minority youth, received funding from the Minister of Children and Youth Services, and – wait for it – I'd like to commend the minister for funding an organization that is committed to stopping oppression and marginalization and helping youth find strength through times of cruelty. To the Minister of Culture and Community Spirit: given that this government acknowledges that children deserve a kids camp free of homophobia, doesn't he also believe they deserve a province free of homophobia?

Mr. Blackett: Mr. Speaker, I don't know how many times we have to say it. We have a province where we have a Human Rights and Citizenship Commission that states through the Supreme Court judgment that people that are gay or lesbian will not be discriminated against. If they want

to go and lodge a complaint before the commission, they are free to do so. Our website, all our documentation states that they are free to do so, and we will operate in a province free of discrimination against people on the basis of racial discrimination. We are going through a review, as I've mentioned umpteen times in this House. When we get through the review . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member. [interjection] The hon. Member has the floor.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On one hand we tell kids to expect equality on the basis of sexual orientation, yet on the other this minister will not act to stop the inherent slap in the face which is the absence of that protection from the human rights code. Now, I would like to commend the Minister of Education, though, for combating homophobia in secondary schools through the safe and caring schools initiative. To the minister of culture. At least some of the cabinet understands that homophobia does not belong in schools. Shouldn't we be willing to hold the rest of society and the rest of us to the same standard?

Mr. Blakett: Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? In our party we have one native, we have four Sikhs, we have two Chinese, we have two Caribbean, and we have somebody from the Philippines . We understand diversity. We understand it for all. We have a multicultural education fund that goes out and helps educate. We fund organizations, including gay, lesbian, transsexual, transgendered individuals, on education of their rights and promoting equality for all Albertans.