



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION

THIRTY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE

Votes and Proceedings

of the Assembly

Wednesday, 9 May 2007 — No. 2

**President of the National Assembly:
Mr. Michel Bissonnet**

QUÉBEC

The Assembly was called to order at 2.05 o'clock p.m.

Moment of reflection

Following a meeting with the House leaders and by leave of the Assembly to set aside Standing Order 20, Mr. President informed the Assembly that the proceedings will begin at 9.30 o'clock a.m. on Thursday, 10 May 2007.

Mr. President informed the Assembly that Her Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor would deliver the Opening Address of the Session.

Her Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor entered the National Assembly and, being seated in the Chair, was pleased to open the Session by the following Address:

Mr. President of the National Assembly,
Mr. Premier,
Mr. Leader of the Official Opposition,
Members of the Executive Council,
Members of the National Assembly,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to experience an important moment and to write a new page in our political and parliamentary life in Québec. In this ever-changing world, thankfully when certain traditions remain, they elevate us and allow us to reach unsuspected heights of modernity, as will this 38th legislature of the National Assembly. An Assembly consisting of you, the men and women elected by the population last 26 March. Hence, this day marks the beginning of the proceedings of the first session of the new legislature with the presentation, by the Premier, of his Government's programme.

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I would like to take this opportunity to salute Mr. Jean Charest, to whom the population has, for a second time, given the mandate and especially the privilege of guiding the destiny of Québec.

I also wish to salute the new Leader of the Official Opposition, Mr. Mario Dumont.

I salute Mr. André Boisclair, who was until yesterday the Leader of the Second Opposition Group. As the Premier declared yesterday, I, in turn, would like to underscore the dedication of the Member for Pointe-aux-Trembles to the public cause and to Québec. Political life is one of the most difficult and challenging there is, and this was again demonstrated yesterday. Mr. André Boisclair has not left this Assembly, and I sincerely hope that he may continue to contribute to the fundamental work of our Parliament.

The context in which the 38th legislature will unfold is largely unprecedented. For the first time since 1878, a premier of Québec will lead a minority government. And for the first time in the history of our Parliament, three parties represented in the National Assembly will be required to modify their traditional role and way of operating to adapt to the situation chosen by the citizens. I have confidence in the willingness of the leaders of the three parties represented in the National Assembly to expeditiously implement operational and equitable procedures that are adapted to this new situation. I am equally convinced of their determination to ensure that the debates of this new legislature will be marked with all the civility and mutual respect that is expected by the citizens.

The 38th Assembly of our history is first and foremost characterized by a wind of change. Today there are 56 parliamentarians sitting in this Chamber who were elected for the first time last 26 March, including several young people. And so a record of almost twenty years has been broken with the arrival at the National Assembly of the youngest Member ever elected in our history. Elected by his constituents soon after celebrating his twenty-second birthday, Mr. Simon-Pierre Diamond has beaten the record established in 1989 by Mr. André Boisclair.

This spectacular rejuvenation of our Parliament is accompanied by the return in the Chamber of experienced parliamentarians, whose dedication to the public cause and attachment to their constituents are worthy of mention. I would therefore like to congratulate Messrs. François Gendron and Yvon Vallières, who already were our most senior Members in 2003, on their reelection to the National Assembly. Mr. Yvon Vallières was first elected in 1973, and Mr. François Gendron has sat in this Assembly without interruption for over thirty years, since November 1976.

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Three other Members also boast over 25 years of parliamentary experience. They are Mr. Michel Bissonnet, Mr. Pierre Paradis and Mrs. Louise Harel. The experience of these Members will certainly be useful to all. As regards their devotion to the public interest and their commitment to their constituents, they are a source of admiration and inspiration.

Among these senior Members, yesterday you renewed your confidence in Mr. Michel Bissonnet as President of the National Assembly. This choice bears witness to the competence and impartiality with which he carried out these same duties during the previous legislature.

The wind of change also brings to the Assembly a Member of Native origin, Mr. Alexis Wawanoloath. In the history of Parliament of Québec, this is only the second time that a person of Native origin has been elected as a Member of the National Assembly. The only other Native Member ever elected to this Chamber was the former Chief of the Huron Council, Mr. Ludger Bastien, who sat in our Parliament from 1924 to 1927. The arrival of Alexis Wawanoloath thus ends an all-too-long absence of our Native fellow citizens within our institution.

Since I first began my term of office 10 years ago as the first woman Lieutenant-Governor of our province, on a number of occasions in this place I have indicated my wish to see more women in this Assembly and that they be given roles that are equal to their ambitions and abilities. I therefore wish to congratulate our Premier for having dared to form his Cabinet with an equal number of men and women. I note with regret, however, that this parity is not yet reflected in the National Assembly and that, unfortunately, the number of women sitting here has decreased since the previous legislature. Indeed, the new Parliament comprises 32 women, or 25 %, compared with close to one-third four years ago.

Among them, let us mention Mrs. Yolande James, the first Black woman elected to the National Assembly in 2003, who recently became a member of the Cabinet. Also, Mrs. Louise Harel, the first woman to have held the office of President of the Assembly.

On behalf of all women, of those who lived at a time when their rights were not recognized, when even the right to vote was not granted to them, up to today's young women who soon will be choosing careers enabling them to realize their full potential, I simply hope that this setback witnessed in the National Assembly is but temporary and unintentional. I am convinced that the parity exercised by the Premier in forming the Government will someday be attained in our Parliament.

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Today, I would also like to mark the retirement from political life of the parliamentarians who left the National Assembly at the end of the previous legislature. Two among them, William Cusano and Cécile Vermette, had over twenty years of parliamentary experience. I would like to salute them on behalf of the entire National Assembly and wish them a well-deserved retirement.

In conclusion, you, the elected Members of this new legislature, hail from various political backgrounds, but you share several points in common: all of you have chosen a difficult life where you must give freely, often far from your families and friends whom you will miss on more than one occasion. You are also united by this deep desire to defend the public interest and to represent all citizens within this institution which constitutes the foundation of our democracy. As the 38th legislature of our Parliament commences, I wish to mark the quality and the utmost importance of the commitment each of you has made.

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of the National Assembly, I have only to wish you the best of luck in carrying out the mandate that the citizens have entrusted to you. Each of you is the bearer of projects, expectations and convictions. I pray that Divine Providence may enlighten you and guide you in achieving them and carrying them to fruition.

Her Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor was pleased to retire.

Mr. President took the Chair.

Mr. Charest, Prime Minister, then delivered the Opening Speech of the Session for the Government.

At 3.14 o'clock p.m., Mr. President adjourned the Assembly until Thursday, 10 May 2007, at 9.30 o'clock a.m.

MICHEL BISSONNET

President