



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

SECOND SESSION

THIRTY-SEVENTH LEGISLATURE

Votes and Proceedings

of the Assembly

Tuesday, 14 March 2006 — No. 1

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

QUÉBEC

The Assembly was called to order at 2.09 o'clock p.m.

At the request of Mr. President, the Assembly observed a moment of reflection in memory of Mr. Gordon Atkinson, former Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, and Mr. Frank Hanley, former Member for Montréal—Sainte-Anne, who both passed away in January 2006.

Mr. President then read an excerpt of a letter, dated 20 December 2005, which the Secretary General of the National Assembly, Mr. François Côté, had received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Québec in relation to the by-elections held on 12 December 2005 in the Electoral Divisions of Outremont and Verchères.

He then tabled the following:

The aforementioned letter accompanied by a notice proclaiming Mr. Raymond Bachand the candidate returned in the Electoral Division of Outremont and Mr. Stéphane Bergeron the candidate returned in the Electoral Division of Verchères.

(Sessional Paper No. 1-20060314)

Mr. President read an excerpt of a letter and then tabled the following:

The aforementioned letter, dated 21 December 2005, which the Secretary General of the National Assembly, Mr. François Côté, had received from Mr. Jean Charest, Premier, informing him of the appointment of Mrs. Michèle Lamquin-Éthier, Member for Crémazie, as Deputy Government House Leader, in replacement of Mr. Pierre Moreau, Member for Marguerite-D'Youville, as from 22 December 2005.

(Sessional Paper No. 2-20060314)

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Mr. President then tabled the following:

A letter, dated 28 February 2006, he had received from Mr. Jean Charest, Premier, informing him of the appointment of Mr. Claude Béchard, Member for Kamouraska-Témiscouata, as Deputy Government House Leader, as from 27 February 2006;

(Sessional Paper No. 3-20060314)

The new seating plan of the National Assembly, dated 14 March 2006.

(Sessional Paper No. 4-20060314)

At the invitation of Mr. President, Mr. Charest, Premier, welcomed the new Member for Outremont, Mr. Bachand.

At the invitation of Mr. President, Mrs. Harel, Leader of the Official Opposition, welcomed the new Member for Verchères, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Bachand (Outremont) and Mr. Bergeron (Verchères) took the floor.

Mr. Charest, Premier, Mrs. Harel, Leader of the Official Opposition, and Mr. Dumont (Rivière-du-Loup) made a few comments.

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

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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,
Madam Leader of the Official Opposition,
Mr. Member for Rivière-du-Loup,
Members of the Executive Council,
Members of the National Assembly,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been almost three years since we commenced, in this very Chamber, the proceedings of the Parliament elected on 14 April 2003. We then had opened the First Session of the 37th Legislature of the National Assembly. We are gathered today to mark the opening of the Second Session of this same Legislature. We are thus taking a new and important step in the conduct of the parliamentary proceedings.

These three years will have been full of initiatives, achievements and events of all kinds. In a few minutes, the Premier of Québec will present in his Opening Speech the assessment of these three years of government. He will also outline the programme and vision he will implement in the course of the following session. Just as three years ago, I trust the Government and opposition will ensure that the debates will be conducted with the requisite civility and mutual respect.

This parliamentary work in the upcoming months will be carried out in a National Assembly that is not quite the same as it was three years ago. Since April 2003, seven Members have left us. Among them, I would like to mention the Leader of the Official Opposition and former Premier, Bernard Landry, as well as Members whose contribution we have all appreciated, namely Marc Bellemare, André Boulerice, Yves Séguin, Christos Sirros, Russell Williams and André Boisclair. In the latter case, I understand that his withdrawal from the National Assembly did not constitute retirement from politics.

New parliamentarians have come to replace them. I wish to mark today the presence of six new Members, including two women, in whom the electors have placed their trust since April 2003. We can now count on the talents of Raymond Bachand, Stéphane Bergeron, Nicolas Girard, Yolande James, Elsie Lefebvre and Sylvain Légaré. Despite the passage of time, the average age of the Members of the National Assembly has decreased, and three current parliamentarians are under thirty years of age. In these times of demographic change, it is a pleasure to observe that the succession is underway and that the young people are providing the injection of new blood that will secure the future.

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Three years ago, I had underlined how the place of women had improved at the National Assembly. At that time, Québec had beaten records, since our fellow citizens had elected the highest number of women Members ever seen in Québec, with 38 women out of 125 Members. Since April 2003, the place of women has been further strengthened. Our Parliament now counts 40 women, including Yolande James, the first Black woman elected to the National Assembly, Elsie Lefebvre, the youngest woman elected in Québec, and Louise Harel, the first woman to hold the office of Leader of the Official Opposition. Women represent close to one third of the National Assembly. A few days after International Women's Day, this development bodes well, even if it is still a tad slow to my liking.

As I indicated three years ago, this Parliament can now more than ever before count on proficient and experienced parliamentarians. The fifty-odd Members newly elected in April 2003 have learned the parliamentary role, with its requirements and the challenges that need to be met.

Our senior Members, François Gendron and Yvon Vallières, are ever-responsive to advancing the mandates under their responsibility and to which they are committed. I am very pleased to mark the return of Yvon Vallières, who with courage and determination won the battle against the illness that had kept him away from the National Assembly. I also wish to point out to our two senior Members that the election of several young Members has just added a new dimension to their longevity. Yvon Vallières was first elected in 1973. François Gendron has been a Member since 1976, at a time when the three youngest Members of the National Assembly were not yet born.

Next 13 April, certain among you will celebrate a quarter of a century of political life: Michel Bissonnet, William Cusano, Louise Harel and Pierre Paradis. Happy anniversary! May you sustain the same passion as that which first inspired us.

Let us recall that, since the last opening speech, several former parliamentarians have passed on: John O'Gallagher, Frank Hanley, Gordon Atkinson, Léo Pearson, Richard B. Holden, Ernest Godbout, Lucien Cliche, Kenneth Fraser, Guy Tardif, Fabien Poulin, Guy Lechasseur, Maurice Tessier, John Redmond Roche, Léonce Ouellet, Pierre Lorrain, Claude Filion, Michel Bourdon, Jacques Miquelon, Eric Kierans, Jean-Guy Gervais, Gérard Cadieux, Claude Ryan, George Kennedy, Paul Berthiaume, Lucien Caron, Paul-Émile Sauvageau, Albert Lemieux, John Richard Hyde and Marc Bergeron. May they rest in peace.

The Members of this Assembly all share the common point of having chosen the public service and general interest, by devoting all of their energy to gaining and maintaining the trust of their constituents to represent them.

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On this opening speech day, I believe it is important to underline the quality of the commitment made by each of the Members of the National Assembly. This quality is the basis of our parliamentary institution, one of the oldest in the world. It is thanks to the devotion of each of its representatives that our democracy works and thrives. We are proud, and rightly so, of our democratic tradition and of the institutions that uphold it. We owe this pride first and foremost to all of those who chose to devote their talent to parliamentary life.

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of the National Assembly, in closing, I hope you will carry out in the best conditions the responsibilities that have been entrusted to you by the population. You are bearers of projects, expectations and convictions. I pray that Divine Providence may enlighten you and guide you in your achievements and accomplishments.

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 4.39 o'clock p.m., Mr. President adjourned the Assembly until Wednesday, 15 March 2006, at 10.00 o'clock a.m.

MICHEL BISSONNET

President