

PUBLISHER & EXECUTIVE EDITOR

JACKIE FLANAGAN

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

ERIN WAITE

ART DIRECTOR

JOEL JACKSON

ASSISTANT EDITOR & CIRCULATION MANAGER

AMBER BOWERMAN

ADMINISTRATION & PROMOTIONS

DOLLY SILLITO

BOOKS EDITOR

EVAN OSENTON

RESEARCH/COPY EDITOR

JOE WILDERSON

CONTROLLER

KELIE JENSEN

INTERNS

CHRISTINE CASKEY

ADVERTISING

GLENDEN DENNIS, EDMONTON  
780 435 1120

NANCY JO CULLEN, CALGARY  
403 243 5334

ALBERTAVIEWS is published by  
ALBERTAVIEWS LIMITED PARTNERSHIP  
208 - 320 23rd Avenue SW, Calgary, AB T2S 0J2  
Tel: 403 243 5334 Fax: 403 243 8599

#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

In Canada \$25.68 per year (includes GST).

US subscribers pay in US dollars.

Send cheque or money order or call 1 877 212 5334.

#### CONTENTS COPYRIGHT 2005

Written queries with article proposals should include the author's résumé, tear sheets and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All requests for permissions and reprints should be made in writing to the editor.

Printed in Canada

GST Registration No. 86847 0469

ISSN No. 1480-3151



Alberta Foundation  
for the Arts

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40024877  
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

Circulation Dept.  
208 - 320 23rd Avenue SW  
Calgary, AB T2S 0J2

e-mail: amberb@albertaviews.ab.ca

## EDITORIAL

### The Power of Citizens by Jackie Flanagan



IN THE 1998 INAUGURAL ISSUE OF *AlbertaViews*, we said we would address our readers as citizens rather than as consumers. Other magazines—*Flare*, *Homemakers*, *Fisherman*, *Sports Illustrated*—are niche marketed to consumers of certain products—cosmetics, laundry detergent, hip waders, beer. At *AlbertaViews* we discuss issues that concern our shared life and values. Our universe of readers is what Mark Starowicz of the CBC ironically calls “that lamentable group, the ‘unfocused demographic,’ in other words, the public.” Why lamentable? Because the general public is supposedly not of interest to any advertiser. As long as we continue to address our readers as citizens, *Skateboarding Magazine* will attract more advertising revenue than we will.

Many people today think of themselves primarily as consumers, their only influence being purchasing power exercised in the market place. Students call themselves *consumers* of educational services. City hall calls us *clients*. This is not only offensive, it's false. We are citizens, and as citizens of a democratic country we have the power and the responsibility to create a society which functions for the benefit of all. We are not separate, private individuals seeking only our own selfish interest. Our good is tied up with the good of all. If one person is imprisoned unjustly, everyone's freedom is in jeopardy.

To recognize that each of us is a citizen changes the way we think about ourselves and others. In a democracy, it's one person, one vote. The lowliest homeless person on the street is a citizen. The richest, most powerful CEO of an oil company is a citizen. Each equally has only one vote. When we think of ourselves as citizens, a certain dignity is realized, a certain pride, and also a certain humility. Everyone has the right to vote, the right to have a say, to make input. Everyone has a right to the conditions which make citizenship possible—education, the amelioration of poverty. And everyone has only one vote. No one should have undue influence

on the outcome of an election, or any democratic process.

After the last provincial election Premier Klein said, referring to the electorate, “The bosses have spoken,” acknowledging that the power of the government to make decisions is delegated by the electorate. However, the term “the bosses” suggests a distorted hierarchical relationship between citizens and their government. Really, no one is the boss in a democracy. All people are subject to the rule of law, which we have collectively created for the common good.

Citizens, through their vote, legitimize or give authority to leaders to act. A democratic government should actively encourage an engaged citizenry. If we want to keep our democracy alive we have to be informed and involved. But in our most recent provincial election, voter turnout was the worst on record: fewer than half of those eligible to vote showed up at the polls. And fewer than half of those voters chose the Conservatives. So even though the Conservatives hold three quarters of the seats in the legislature, they were elected by only 22 per cent of eligible voters.

Why are we abandoning the political system? It may be that our electoral system does not adequately translate votes into seats. In mixed-member proportional representation (implemented in New Zealand in 1996) each elector gets two votes, one for a member of the legislative assembly and one for a party. The number of MLAs is doubled, half elected in single member constituencies as now, and half selected from party lists so that each party's share of the seats corresponds to its share of the overall vote. We might consider trying that here.

If the hard-won right to vote, to participate, is dismissed as irrelevant, it deeply affects the legitimacy of the government. And it diminishes each of us; because only as citizens are we empowered and entrusted with the task of building a just society.