



**The Catholic Women's League of Canada
Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council**



**Legislation Chair
Communique # 5
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TO: Diocesan Chairpersons
CC: Provincial Executive (for information)
CC: National Chairperson - Betty Colaneri (for information)
FROM: Sharon Malec - Provincial Chairperson of Legislation

In August 2020, the Honourable Nathan Cooper, MLA and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta submitted an article to the papers in Alberta. Permission has been granted for the article to be published as a communique from the Legislation Chair of the Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council.

“Bills are the Assembly’s Bread and Butter”.

Alexander Rutherford, Alberta’s first Premier, introduced the first Bill in the province on March 19, 1906 about the Treasury Department and Auditing of Provincial Accounts. Since then, countless Bills have been debated, discussed, amended and repealed as Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta (MLAs) meet each year to pass new laws or change old ones. Some might say that Bills are the bread and butter of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. So much so that there have actually been Bills about bread and butter that went on to become law.

In 1934 the *Bread Act* went into great detail about the types of breads to be sold and the prescribed weights of different types of bread. The bread had to be weighed immediately upon removal from the oven while still warm. If wrapped, this too needed to be included in the weight.

First-time offenders could be charged anywhere from \$10 - \$100 or a month in jail for failing to adhere to these rules. The second offence would cost \$25 - \$200 and up to three months in jail.

The *Bread Act* was law in Alberta until 1979.

In 1949, Alberta legislation made it clear that margarine was not the same as butter. Serving margarine may have landed a person in jail for up to six months or resulted in a fine of up to \$500. The *Margarine Act* stipulated that no person could sell or serve margarine coloured the natural colour of butter or any shade of yellow that might cause it to be mistaken for butter. Restaurants that served margarine were required to feature the words “margarine served here” prominently on the menu or written in capital letters not less than one-and-a-half inches high on a placard displayed in the dining area.

The *Margarine Act* came into force on May 1, 1949 and while some may argue it still has

merit, it was, in fact, repealed in 1994.

So how does a Bill become a law? MLAs introduce Bills based on matters of public interest during what is known as first reading in the Assembly. The Bill is studied, and MLAs decide whether to support all of it or just some parts of it or oppose it altogether. The next stage of the Bill is second reading, during which MLAs debate the principle of the Bill. Debate of Bills is sometimes heated and has to be refocused. It is my job as Speaker to keep the debate running as smoothly as possible while giving all Members a fair chance to speak on behalf of their constituents.

If the Bill passes the vote on second reading, it then goes to the Committee of the Whole where it is looked at in detail and sometimes amended. Finally, a Bill reaches third reading and once it receives Royal Assent it becomes law.

In a typical session the government's agenda is laid out during the Speech from the Throne which outlines the areas of interest that the Government intends to bring forward. However, the 2020 spring session was far from typical. The Speech from the Throne took place February 25, 2020 and the budget was introduced a couple of days later, but within days the focus of the Assembly turned to the global outbreak of COVID-19, which was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11. The Premier initiated a state of public health emergency on March 17th.

The work of the Assembly, much like the rest of the province and the world, had to refocus and a motion was passed in mid-March that would provide some room to operate under extraordinary circumstances. During the most recent sitting of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, a total of 34 Bills were passed into law. Many of the Bills and resulting debate were directly related to the public health crisis.

Albertans have proven their resiliency time and time again since we became a province in 1905. Working together to slow the spread of COVID-19 is merely the most recent example of this spirit in action. Whether the Assembly is debating rules around the sale of bread and serving of margarine or discussing matters of vital importance such as the *Emergency Management Amendment Act, 2020* or the *Public Health (Emergency Powers) Amendment Act, 2020*, the Bills that become law reflect the issues of our society today. Collectively, we will abide these laws until future legislators determine they are due for review. This multi-staged opportunity for review makes this process so important and so vital to our democracy.

I think we all look forward to the day when we can settle into a new normal and break bread, served with butter, of course, with friends and family.

Until then the work of the Assembly continues to address the issues important to Albertans.