

# BCTI Gazette

A Parliamentary Education Newsletter for BC Teachers



issue 1 | volume 13 | spring 2021

read time: 8-10 minutes



## Virtual Speaker in the Schools

**Karen L. Aitken, Director**

In February 2021, the Honourable Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Raj Chouhan, relaunched the Speaker in the Schools program, but with a virtual twist. To date, students in two schools have participated online with Mister Speaker to learn about his role in parliamentary democracy in British Columbia.

Grade 7/8 students in Ms. Cumberland's class at Holy Cross School in Penticton, along with Ms. Cacchioni's grade 4 class as onlookers, met virtually with Mr. Speaker in late February and posed many great questions to learn more about his experiences and observations of many years in the Speaker's Chair. Although a new Speaker, officially as of December 7, 2020, Mr. Speaker previously held the roles of Deputy Speaker (2017-2020) and Assistant Deputy Speaker (2013-2017). After a short introduction to the Legislative Assembly, the students posed over 10 questions to Mr. Speaker ranging from his favourite part of the job to why he wanted to become a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the first place.

In early March, Mr. Speaker spent time with another class - Ms. Barberis' grade 12 law class from Walnut Grove Secondary School in Langley. These students also asked excellent questions ranging from what it's like to oversee debates in the Chamber to how have the proceedings changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In each session, the students brought thoughtful questions to Mr. Speaker. He answered them with passion for his role as both the Speaker and an MLA representing his constituents of Burnaby-Edmonds. Mr. Speaker also encouraged the students to make the most out of their education and to treasure opportunities to learn. The students were pleased, too, with comments such as, "I liked how he really thought about his answers - they weren't fabricated" and "His answers were easy to understand like he was used to talking to teenagers." All in all, a fabulous start to the relaunching of the valuable Speaker in the Schools program.



# In the House

The Legislature has resumed for its spring sitting period. Committees are active and undertaking public consultation, including the Special Committee on Reforming the Police Act. To get your classroom involved, please visit [here](#).



Monday, April 12: Speech from the Throne  
Tuesday, April 20: Budget Day

For more dates and to watch, listen to, and read debates, visit: [www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)

## Meet the Speaker: The Honourable Raj Chouhan

Esther Rzeplinski, Parliamentary Education Officer



The Speaker, currently the Honourable Raj Chouhan, is a key figure in the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker is an MLA elected in a secret ballot by all Members of the Legislative Assembly to preside over debates and ensure that the Assembly's established rules of behaviour and procedure are followed. The Speaker is neutral, responsible for making sure that all MLAs are treated fairly and impartially. He votes only to break a tie. In addition to his procedural responsibilities, Mr. Speaker is also responsible for the Parliament Buildings and Legislative Precinct, as well as having ceremonial duties.

Mr. Speaker is also the MLA for Burnaby-Edmonds! He was first elected in 2005 and was elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly on December 7, 2020.

In 1973, Mr. Speaker immigrated to Canada from India, where he was actively involved in student union activities. Upon his arrival to Canada, Mr. Speaker was greatly impacted by the plight of other immigrant workers and the wide disparity between the rich and poor in a prosperous country. This contributed to his ongoing advocacy for community and social justice for workers.

A founding member of the B.C. Organization to Fight Racism, Mr. Speaker has worked relentlessly in promoting human rights and racial equality. He has taught courses on human rights, the BC Labour Code and collective bargaining since 1987. Mr. Speaker continues to support organizations in his community and has helped to promote diverse programs including neighbourhood safety, refugee assistance and health and wellness programs for seniors.



## Parliamentary Trivia!

Q. When is the 50th anniversary of the first Question Period held in the Legislative Assembly of BC?

Check out [Discover Your Legislature](#) to find the answer. The first correct answer will win a prize! Email [PEO@leg.bc.ca](mailto:PEO@leg.bc.ca) to submit. Good luck!



## Stories from the Legislative Library

### Nicholas Guerreiro, Parliamentary Player Information Assistant

The Legislative Library contains six floors of bookshelves, including the largest collection of BC government documents in the world alongside other rare and valuable objects. When the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered in-person programming at the Legislature, the Parliamentary Education Office and Legislative Library collaborated to create a new, safe way for the public to learn about this incredible collection. Stories of the Legislative Library is a program offered over Zoom. While aimed at adults, the sessions are excellent supplements for secondary students learning about history or government.

The first offering is called Documents Towards Democracy, an hour-long trip through BC's political history, as told by ten remarkable items from the Legislative Library's shelves, including early laws, signed petitions, treaty documents, and more. This program runs every Thursday in March, April, September, and November at 2:00 pm.

The second offering, Treasures from the Legislative Library Vault, allows to the public to get a close look at said treasures. For our first slate of items, we have selected the earliest British parliamentary records (April 7), annotated books belonging to early Canadian politicians (June 23), the original maces from BC (October 13), and first editions of the novels of Charles Dickens (December 15). All sessions take place Wednesday at 2:00 pm.

To learn more, visit [here](#), and to sign up, contact [tours@leg.bc.ca](mailto:tours@leg.bc.ca).

## Elections BC Updates

### Melanie Callas, Elections BC Outreach Coordinator

#### ***List of Future Voters***

16 and 17 year olds who are Canadian citizens and residents of BC can now pre-register to vote by joining the List of Future Voters! Joining the List of Future Voters will make it easier for youth to vote when they turn 18. On their 18th birthday they will be added to the Provincial Voters List automatically, and when an election is called they will receive important information from Elections BC about where, when and how to vote. Find resources about the List of Future Voters [here](#).

#### ***Online Resources***

Check out Elections BC's [website](#) for resources about democracy, the voting process and the history of voting rights. The resources include videos, lesson plans and more.

#### ***Outreach Newsletter***

Would you like updates on Elections BC's election and voting-themed resources and programs? [Email](#) us to sign up and you will receive our quarterly outreach newsletter.



## Other Opportunities for School Groups

**Virtual Classroom Program:** Join a Tour Guide for a fun, hour-long learning session! Students learn about the work of the MLAs and the history of the Parliament Buildings. Sessions are offered via Zoom or Teams and can be booked in English, French, or Mandarin.

“Our guide did a fantastic job. He facilitated our students SO well and was such a passionate, animated presenter. It was a good reminder that passion for a topic is contagious. I would highly recommend this field trip, as it was one of the best virtual field trips I’ve attended!”

“This was excellent! My students were engaged the entire time. The presenter did an incredible job keeping them engaged and interested. It was age appropriate, interactive (he was very welcoming of questions and comments), and informative. It exceeded my expectations!”

“I wasn’t sure what to expect as the online forum can be challenging, but I feel that it was done very well and the kids were engaged. Great job adapting to the circumstances and thank you for making this happen!”

### **Virtual Tours of the Parliament Buildings:**

Take a self-guided walk through the halls of the Parliament Buildings and discover the beautiful treasures found inside. For younger students, we have added a virtual Scavenger hunt with animals [here!](#)

**Outdoor Walking Tours:** Local school groups are invited to join us this spring for free outdoor guided tours starting April 6.



**For more information and to book: [bcleg.ca/tours](https://bcleg.ca/tours)**

*The Parliament Buildings and surrounding areas are located on the traditional territories of the Lekwungen-speaking (pronounced Le-KWUNG-en) peoples. Now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, these Coast Salish peoples have a rich culture and history dating back thousands of years.*



# BCTI Gazette

A Parliamentary Education Newsletter for BC Teachers

## BCTI Update: *Virtual Learning Sessions & Fall 2021 BCTI*



The BC Parliament Buildings:  
Celebrations, Demonstrations  
& Public Participation

## February 12 Virtual Learning Session

**David Nicholls, Parliamentary Program Officer**

On Friday, February 12, we held an online professional development session and were very pleased to have 30 teachers participate from around the province. The two-hour presentation, “The BC Parliament Buildings: Celebrations, Demonstrations and Public Participation”, included a look back at some of the many interesting events that have taken place at the Parliament Buildings over the years and different ways for teachers and students to engage with the Legislative Assembly through letter writing, the petition process, and Parliamentary Committee meetings.

We appreciate all of you who were able to join us and hope the session proved useful in your classrooms.

## Upcoming Events for Teachers

Our next virtual learning session is on the provincial budget process and will include opportunities to hear from Parliamentary Committees and Treasury Board, as well as discussions with other teachers about lesson plans and how to get your class involved in budget consultations. Email [peo@leg.bc.ca](mailto:peo@leg.bc.ca) to register for this upcoming session on the morning of Friday, May 21.

Stay tuned for other upcoming professional development opportunities, including the BC Teachers’ Institute. Once available, more information can be found [here](#).