

INTRODUCTION

The theme of the Law Society of Alberta's 100th Anniversary Conference was "Canadian Lawyers in the 21st Century." The conference focused on four areas: Diversity and Demographics; Access to Legal Services; Professional Competence; and Regulation and the Legal Profession. It was a great success. From the opening night remarks of Harry W. Arthurs to the comments of the Honourable A. Anne McLellan at the closing dinner, those in attendance were confronted with critical issues that will have a profound effect on the future of the legal profession and how it is governed.

More than once during the course of the conference, a speaker thanked the Law Society of Alberta (LSA) for the opportunity to present on a topic that was, in one way or another, critical either of the legal profession itself or of those who regulate it. In a few instances, the speaker went on to question why any law society would have an event during its 100th anniversary that provided the opportunity for such criticism. Candidly, from the Law Society's perspective, I am not sure that was the intention, although I am reasonably confident that those directly responsible for selecting the conference topics and the speakers recognized that it was likely. As it turned out, we were very fortunate they did.

Our accomplishments over the last 100 years give the legal profession and the LSA much to be proud of. Lawyers have played an important part in the growth and development of this province, and have contributed in many significant ways. The Law Society governs in the public interest and, in doing so, its primary responsibility is to ensure that the assurances we provide to the public about the competence of lawyers and their ethical standards are matched by reality. The Law Society has done this well over the last 100 years. However, in order to continue to fulfill this responsibility, like all law societies, the LSA must be aware of and be prepared to address developments that will affect the legal profession and its ability to regulate lawyers effectively.

Globalization, increasing specialization, changing demographics, and limitations surrounding access to justice are all issues confronting the legal profession and each presents challenges to self-regulation. How law societies respond to these challenges will profoundly affect Canadian lawyers in the twenty-first century; that is why we held this conference.

On behalf of the LSA, I would like to thank the conference organizers as well as the participants, and I commend the *Alberta Law Review* for this special issue.

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Past President