

## **Filmmaker says Alberta politicians skilful at playing off provincial mythology**

The 'rhetoric of exceptionalism' paints Albertans as freedom-loving mavericks

**Montreal, Quebec – June 4** – Alberta politicians have become skilful at creating an 'us-versus-them' mentality that paints the province as the home of independent mavericks, says a Calgary-based filmmaker and researcher.

And he says that 'rhetoric of exceptionalism' has been key in creating long-lived political dynasties in Alberta – even though it doesn't quite reflect the complex realities of a rapidly changing province.

Geo Takach grew up in Montreal and arrived in Alberta with his family at the age of 15. He says he was immediately struck by how Albertans felt they were different from people in the rest of the country. He says he could understand Quebec's differences based on language, but began wondering about Alberta's. He discovered a provincial mythology based on the cowboy and the maverick.

Takach, a doctoral student at the University of Calgary's Faculty of Communications and Culture, recently produced a documentary film called *Will the real Alberta please stand up?* in which he explores the province's identity as part of the work he's doing on his PhD.

He develops his ideas further in a paper presented at the 2010 Congress for the Humanities and Social Sciences taking place at Montreal's Concordia University.

"I try to assess Alberta's claim to exceptionalism," he says. "Is Alberta really exceptional?"

Takach says Albertans certainly claim to be: "Albertans are more aggressive that way than anybody except Quebec."

That identity emphasizes personal freedom and opportunity, and is generally anti-government.

He says provincial politicians have been able to leverage that identity to their advantage by painting the federal government as the bad guy.

"By demonizing the federal government and establishing the image of Alberta as a maverick place, successive governments have reduced the need for an opposition in Alberta. Ottawa is the opposition."

That rhetoric resonates enough with voters to keep parties in power once they get there. Takach notes that the last time a party was voted out of office was 39 years ago, in 1971; prior to that, Social Credit had enjoyed 36 straight years in office.

"We have kept the mentality and rhetoric even though we have economic clout – it was felt it did not translate into political clout," he says.

"Nobody wants to be called a sheep," he adds. "It's much more flattering to be called a maverick."

### **Get more from the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences**

Organised by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences brings together about 9,000 researchers, scholars, graduate students,

practitioners, and policy makers to share groundbreaking research and examine the most important social and cultural issues of the day. Montréal's Concordia University is the host of Congress 2010, May 28 to June 4.

The Congress program includes original research from across disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, providing a great collection of expert sources and innovative story leads. Contact the Congress Media room for assistance connecting with researchers at Congress.

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