

LAW AND DEMOCRACY WEEK

Session n°7: Dinner and Discussion with the Chief Justice of Canada

The Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin, P.C.,
Chief Justice of Canada

Chief Justice McLachlin spent her formative years in Pincher Creek, Alberta and was educated at the University of Alberta, where she received a B.A. (Honours) in Philosophy in 1965. She pursued her studies at the University of Alberta and, in 1968, received both an M.A. in Philosophy and an LL.B.

She was called to the Alberta Bar in 1969 and to the British Columbia Bar in 1971 and practised law in Alberta and British Columbia. Commencing in 1974, she taught for seven years in the Faculty of Law at the University of British Columbia as a tenured Associate Professor.

Her judicial career began in April 1981 when she was appointed to the Vancouver County Court. In September 1981, she was appointed to the Supreme Court of British Columbia. She was elevated to the British Columbia Court of Appeal in December of 1985 and was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia in September 1988. Seven months later, in April 1989, she was sworn in as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. On January 7, 2000, she was appointed Chief Justice of Canada. She is the first woman in Canada to hold this position.

In addition to her judicial duties at the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice chairs the Canadian Judicial Council, the Advisory Council of the Order of Canada and the Board of Governors of the National Judicial Institute.

The Chief Justice is the author of numerous articles and publications.

In the initial sessions of the program, students will have had exposure to the fundamentals of democracy and to the work of the legislative and executive branches of government. Logically, this is the appropriate occasion in the schedule to acquaint them to the judicial branch, to emphasize its specific characteristics and to demonstrate how the judiciary functions in relation to the other parts of the architecture of the state in a democracy.

The most suitable way of injecting this knowledge is through the personal experience of an informal meeting, over dinner, with the Chief Justice of Canada, the head of the judicial branch. The event is designed to be purely educational and so, to enable the Chief Justice to explore the issues relating to adjudicating in an off-the-record and not-for-attribution manner, with no one but students and organizers present.

The Chief Justice will be invited to structure comments around the following themes:

- The work of the judiciary;

- Judicial decision-making;
- Criteria judges use in making judicial decisions;
- Criteria customarily excluded from guiding judicial decision-making;
- Independence of the judiciary from the legislative and executive branches of government;
- Judicial view of the role of law in democracy.

The presentation may be followed by a question and answer period.

Animator

Hoi Kong teaches and researches in the areas of Constitutional Law, Comparative Law, Administrative Law, and Municipal Law. Hoi Kong joined the Faculty of Law of McGill University in August 2009 and he is a member of the Law Society of Upper Canada.