

**THE DISCOURSE OF ECONOMIC CRISES:
POLICY MAKING IN ALBERTA, 1983-1993**

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For Carley –
This work, and my life

Abstract

Public policy is often conceptualized as a decision-making process, comprised of different stages or steps. Consequently, there is a tendency to view and examine policy as a linear and rational process, as well as a tendency to overlook language use as an important part of policy processes and decisions. Conceiving policy as discourse complicates policy conceptualizations, and posits alternative, non-linear, non-rational policy paths and elements. This thesis is an examination of policy as non-linear and non-rational. Specifically, and in light of recent economically, fiscally and politically challenging years for government in the province of Alberta, I examine government *Throne* and *Budgetary Agenda Speeches* from a previous, similar period of challenging economies and finances in the 1980s and early 1990s. I argue that language use in these agendas is an important part of what governments do.

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Introduction

The Alberta government recently faced several years of fiscal deficits. After fourteen years of surpluses, it recorded a deficit of \$852 million in 2008. The government has since recorded two deficit budgets, and is forecasting a deficit of \$1.4 billion for 2012-13. The current string of deficits is a sharp turnaround from years of plenty, including a record surplus of \$8.5 billion posted in 2005.

The possible cause of Alberta's recent fiscal imbalances has elicited a range of explanations and solutions from academics, pundits, and politicians. On the one side are those, including the Official Opposition Wildrose Alliance Party, who argue the Conservative government has a spending problem that can best be met through expenditure cuts. This view is broadly shared by several economists, including Emery and Kneebone (2009) who, recalling the province's deficits from the 1980s and early 1990s, have urged greater government control of spending. As well, Atkins and Latouche (2011) locate former Premier Ed Stelmach's lack of expenditure control as the primary cause of Alberta's current "deficit dysfunction" and "deficit mess." Writing for the Fraser Institute, a prominent right-wing public policy think-tank, Mark Milke (2011) argues that Alberta's "overspending" is the cause of its structural deficits and its depleting net financial assets. Milke warns that unless spending is controlled, Alberta is in danger of revisiting its past history of spiralling deficits and accumulating debt; hence the title of his commentary – *Alberta's finances: Welcome back to the 1980s*.

Government overspending alone is an arguably narrow explanation for the province's deficits, both past and present, however. Many political observers argue Alberta's deficits stem from the uncertainties of its boom and bust economy. Boothe

(1995), for example, argues that the provincial deficits of the 1980s occurred partly because resource revenues dropped dramatically, placing considerable pressure on provincial finances, particularly because during the earlier boom times the government had expanded services and infrastructure to keep pace with a booming economy and rapidly growing population. Taking an even longer view, Mansell (1997) argues that Alberta's dependence on oil and gas, from the 1960s onward, has played a major role in both its economy and finances. Indeed, fast forwarding to the 2010 *Budget Address*, the government argued that Alberta's latest deficits were the result of poor resource revenues and the "worst economic recession since the 1930s" (Alberta, 2010); a general argument given a new twist in the government's 2013 budget by its insistence that its deficit was caused by a "bitumen bubble" (Alberta, 2013).¹

Returning to the "overspending" argument, one might ask, "Overspending in what area(s)?" "Was (and is) the government engaged in wholesale overspending, or was overspending limited to particular areas and programs?" Peter Lougheed's governments of the 1970s and early 1980s significantly increased social spending in areas of healthcare, education and social assistance, and since the late 1970s these policy areas have accounted for upwards of 70 percent of government expenditures in a given year, but are these examples of over-spending or of judicious and necessary investments? Not to be forgotten, moreover, are government expenses and subsidies relating to the private sector, which Taft (1997) argues also increased significantly under Lougheed's

1 The government defines the "bubble" as the difference between Western Canadian Select (oil produced in Alberta) and other oil prices, such as West Texas Intermediate. The price for Alberta's oil was lower in 2012 due to a number of factors, including demand, quality, and transportation issues (Alberta, 2013).

governments, as well as a set of failed private sector investments by the government in the 1980s that cost the provincial government billions of dollars (see Laxer and Harrison, 1995; Smith, 1992).

On the other side of the debate are those who argue Alberta's recurrent fiscal problems are not caused by over-spending but rather a chronic absence of sufficient revenue. Writing in 1995, journalist Mark Lisac queried whether Alberta had a spending problem or a tax problem; an argument made also by Laxer and Harrison (1995) who stated the government could have easily wiped out its deficit and debt from the 1980s and 1990s if it had tax rates close to the national average. More recently, Flanagan (2011) has argued that Alberta's low tax rates are a contributing factor to its recurrent deficits. A report published in 2013 by Parkland Institute, a left-wing think-tank, states that Alberta "could collect nearly \$11 billion more in taxes and remain the country's lowest-tax jurisdiction" (Bower et al., 2013, p. 1). But this argument is not made only by the left. Jack Mintz, a prominent economist with the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary, has publically recommended that Alberta adopt a sales tax in order to stabilize its revenues (Graveland, 2013). Likewise, while arguing for expenditure controls, Emery and Kneebone (2009) have called for "strategic" tax increases as long as they do not hinder economic growth.²

2 There are also those who argue that Alberta's deficits are a product of *both* over-expenditure (or unwise expenditures) *and* insufficient revenues. Reid (2001), for example, attributes Alberta's deficits in the late 1980s to both decreased resource revenues and a dramatic increase in public expenditures on health care, education and social services that occurred during Lougheed's last term as Premier.

Issues of government spending, revenue, deficit, and debt are extremely complex, and how one views them depends largely on one's policy perspective. Indeed, fiscal policy is often a tool or means to reach social and economic ends. Though dealing with these issues at the national level, Hale (2001) offers in the following passage some insight into the issues of deficits and debt in the early 1990s and their broader implications:

By the early 1990s, the failure of successive governments to . . . build a national political consensus around the size and role of government had left Canada's public finances in a shambles with rising taxes, declining levels of public services, and shrinking living standards for most of its citizens. In response, a broad political and public consensus gradually emerged in support of deficit reduction and balanced budgets, more disciplined public spending (and private demands on government), and a more selective approach to government intervention in order to set Canada's economic house in order (p.14).

Hale's comments also shed light on the Alberta experience. As I noted above, the province's fiscal issues, both past and present are the subject of debate and bitter conflict. Furthermore, and perhaps more to the point, the state is often at the centre of this debate and must therefore try to build a consensus – not only in terms of how these social, economic and fiscal issues are understood and addressed, but ultimately, a consensus that will show the government as a competent steward in these policy areas. Indeed, while many of the above arguments regarding the causes of past and present provincial deficits seek to advise government policy, they often also discredit and lay blame upon government.

Given the province's recent fiscal climate, its recent economic difficulties, and the criticisms and warnings discussed above, it is an opportune time to examine how Alberta's Conservative governments understood and responded to the deficits in the 1980s and early 1990s. Peter Lougheed, Don Getty and Ralph Klein, Alberta's premiers

during this period, faced issues and circumstances similar to those recently experienced by premiers Stelmach, Redford, and now Prentice. This thesis is an examination of government policy from the 1980s and early 1990s, with a specific interest in the issue of the deficit, how it was articulated, and where it stood on the government agenda during the more challenging economic years. The specific years of interest are 1983 and 1984 (Lougheed); 1987, and 1992 (Getty); and 1993 (Klein). I will discuss this choice of years below in a review of the literature.

The following three questions are important to my analysis of policy in these years. What were government priorities during these years, and where did the issue of the deficit sit within these priorities? What problems were seen to be at the heart of the deficit? And lastly, what solutions did the government seek? To guide my analysis I borrow terms and concepts from policy studies and policy analysis – two related, but separate disciplines that comprise the broad discipline of the policy sciences.³ From policy studies I adopt several concepts that are fundamental to an understanding of public policy. These concepts underpin the central research questions posed above, and locate my policy interests within the agenda-setting and issue salience research of the broader policy studies literature.

I augment these fundamentals, and these questions, with a conceptualization of policy as discourse, provided by critical discourse theory and the policy analysis literature. Doing so holds ontological and epistemological implications for this thesis, and

³ The distinction between policy studies and policy analysis is not consistently made within the literature. The distinction I draw upon comes from Howlett et al. (2009). I will elaborate in the theory section below.

underscores the importance of examining the language of policy – a notion (and exercise) acknowledged, but often underdeveloped in the policy literature. I found that much of the policy I have analyzed concerned a discursive priority of consensus, and that consensus seeking is a fundamental activity of agenda-setting. This priority is never explicitly stated or acknowledged in government policy, but I argue that policy is constructed interactively, taking into account different people and groups within the legislative assembly and the broader policy context to this end. In addition to outlining priorities that involve balancing the budget, or raising taxes, or spurring the economy, or running a deficit, for example, governments also seek approval or consensus for their policies. I will explore this in my analysis of government agendas and priorities, with a particular interest in the deficit. What I argue is that the agenda-setting research pay greater attention to language use in theory and method, and that future studies of policy in Alberta place greater emphasis on this approach.

Over the next three chapters, I will elucidate the conceptualization of policy I have briefly discussed in this introduction. Chapter one discusses and wed policy studies theory with critical discourse analysis. Chapter two describes the methods of analysis used in this thesis and provides additional theoretical insight into the kinds of policy documents that I have analyzed. Chapter three provides an overview of the political, fiscal and economic context during the years of interest to this analysis, and policies pursued by successive Alberta governments. This chapter provides a review of the literature and identifies the unique insights this thesis offers. The four chapters that follow proceed with an analysis of the policy agendas pursued under the respective Lougheed, Getty, and Klein regimes. The concluding chapter substantiates several

theoretical claims made in the opening chapters regarding the importance of conceiving government agendas as language use and discursive practice. It also provides suggestions for future research in this area of provincial policy.

Chapter One: Theory

This chapter provides a conceptualization of public policy. I begin with a discussion of several foundational terms and concepts from the policy sciences. I follow with a discussion of policy as discourse, in which I borrow terms and concepts from critical discourse analysis. As policy sciences and discourse analysis are both very broad theoretical and methodological disciplines, it is important to note at the outset that my discussion is selective and limited, meant to draw out what I consider to be the relevant terms and concepts in answering the research questions posed above.

The Policy Sciences

The policy sciences emerged shortly after the Second World War as governments throughout Europe and North America began taking a greater role in the economic and social well-being of their citizens. As the state increased in complexity and size there developed a need and desire to understand and analyze its activities (Kernaghan and Siegel, 1995). As Inwood (1999) argues, many areas of government became actively debated and researched. The policy sciences consequently emerged as a discipline that sought to research, understand, influence and advise governments.⁴

Policy science has since branched into two fields of inquiry known as policy studies and policy analysis. Discussing the difference between the two, Dobuzinskis et al. (2007) assert that the former is *of* policy (policy studies tends to descriptive), while the

⁴ McCool (1995) attributes the establishment of the policy sciences to Harold Lasswell, who highlighted several characteristics of the discipline he hoped would help democratic governments run more smoothly. In particular, Lasswell (1966) argued for a science of democracy that was “restricted to the understanding and possible control of the factors upon which democracy depends.”

latter is *for* policy (policy analysis tends to be prescriptive). This difference is discussed in greater detail below.

Those interested in policy are drawn from a variety of professional and academic disciplines such as government, economics, anthropology, sociology and political science. One consequence of this variety of disciplinary influences is that definitions of public policy are similarly quite diverse. Thomas Dye's definition, given in 1987, is commonly cited, however: that public policy is "whatever governments chose to do or not to do" (quoted in Howlett, Ramesh and Perl, 2009, p. 4; see also Kernaghan and Siegel, 1995). Wharf and McKenzie (2004) expand on this definition when they argue that public policy encompasses "all the actions of governments in their continuing but not always consistent attempts to regulate social and economic structures and citizens' quality of life" (p. 17). Anderson (1975) argues that public policy is a course of action taken by an actor in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. Lastly, Doern and Phidd (1983) argue that public policy is a set of decisions by a political actor or group involving the selection of both goals and the means of achieving those goals.

Two important elements of public policy stand out from the above definitions. First, public policy is understood as a government action, output or whatever governments do (or do not do). Indeed, Inwood (1999) argues that public policy can be any number of government activities, including passing a law, raising taxes, spending money, having a royal commission, or even formulating and giving a speech. The second important aspect of public policy gleaned from the above definitions is that government actions or outputs are *choices*, both in terms of what to do and how to do it, that are intended to address a particular *problem*.

Policy studies. Dobuzinskis et al. (2007) assert that policy studies is undertaken mainly by academics and “is generally concerned with understanding the development, logic, and implications of overall state processes and the models used by investigators to analyze those processes” (p. 5). The concept of process is fundamental to policy studies. Although there is no universal policy process identified within the literature, most authors, if only heuristically, posit some form of process that is comprised of stages or steps involving different inputs and outputs. For example, both Howlett, Ramesh and Perl (2009), and Wharf and Mackenzie (2004) conceive of a five stage policy process that involves policy initiation and agenda setting, policy formulation, decision making and execution, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Corresponding to each stage are different policy decisions involving, respectively, problem recognition and identification, policy assessment and proposal of solution, choice of solution, putting the solution into effect, and monitoring results and evaluation.

The stages of the policy process are often conceived of as processes in themselves. This theoretical approach has anchored an expansive lexicon and body of taxonomies that seek to interrogate and understand policy and its various parts and processes. For this study, I find some taxonomies and terms of more value for a conceptualization and examination of policy than others. In particular, I am interested in those stages that involve policy initiation and agenda setting, and policy formulation. Furthermore, I pay more attention to the outputs, that is to say, the end results of those stages as opposed to the respective processes that may have led to those outputs. Consequently, my examination of policy as process is selective.

In concrete terms, I am interested in the priorities, problems/issues and proposed solutions of Alberta's Conservative governments during previous times of economic difficulty and deficit budgets; hence, the attention given in this study to the first and second stages (agenda setting and policy formulation) of the policy process model outlined above.

My limited examination of the policy process stems in part from the criticism that process models tend to portray policy making as a rational, linear set of decisions.⁵ As the argument goes, adhering too strictly to process models overlooks the complexities and “messiness” of policy (Shore and Wright, 1997). Drawing attention to this messiness, Wharf and Mackenzie (2004) argue that in the real world of policy making, different social actors and groups, carrying “conflicting ideas, values and needs, compete with one another, often on unequal grounds” (p. 14). Shore and Wright (1997) similarly assert that policy processes are inherently political, and “shaped by different contexts of interaction or social domains as opposed to a linear model of policy making” (p. 8). Drawing attention to political institutions, Rochefort and Cobb (1993) point to political pressures, bureaucratic structures and time constraints as non-rational variables involved in policy making. These arguments point to a number of factors that can influence policy decisions and processes. Examining the social, economic and political contexts in which policy unfolds draws attention to the messiness of policy processes.

Howlett et al. (2009) argue that good studies in public policy require looking at the interplay between the policy actors who make policy decisions, the social structures

⁵ It also stems from an interest in keeping this project manageable.

and institutions within and by which these actors create policy, and the ideas and knowledge that are embedded in these structures and otherwise inform policy making decisions and deliberations. Put a little differently, good studies of policy take into account how people, institutions and ideas interact in complex ways to influence and complicate public policy processes. The notion of context problematizes policy definitions, as well as process models. In particular, it situates any given policy “problem” or “choice” in a particular social, political, economic and historical context. Consequently, the policy problems and the decisions of a given government are understood not necessarily as objective, real problems or calculated rational decisions. Rather, they are viewed as products or outcomes of deliberative and communicative processes and practices subject to different influences within particular contexts.

In Canada, this approach emphasizes the role of liberal and democratic institutions, their underpinning ideas and values, and those actors and groups within these institutions who are influential in policy decisions (Doern and Phidd, 1983). Atkinson and Chandler (1983) argue that the state must serve the interests of capital because it is the primary mode of production upon which the nation depends. Thus, many policies and programs within liberal states are designed to support the market economy. Additionally, the relationships between different actors and groups involved (or not involved) in these policies should be examined with reference to the market economy.

However, as a democracy, the state is also accountable to a voting public whose collective interests and values are often at odds with those that underpin a free market economy. Consequently, state officials, particularly those who have the power to make policy decisions, must to some extent serve the interests of the public. Special attention

must also be given to how democratic institutions structure and shape social relations between the people and groups involved (and again, or not involved) in policy decisions. Indeed, “elections, independent political parties, and autonomous interest groups are all features of a liberal democracy with which politicians must come to terms” (Atkinson and Chandler, 1983, p. 4). I now turn to a discussion of the initial stage of policy under investigation in this thesis, Problem Identification and Agenda Setting. I will also briefly discuss Policy Formulation and Proposal of Solution, as it is difficult to examine government agendas without attention to this stage.

Problem identification and agenda-setting. Three concepts – issues, problems and agendas – are important to an understanding of the initial stage of the policy process. Issues generally represent the inputs of this stage, while problems and agendas represent the outputs. Issues take on the status of public problems when government officials act upon them. Moreover, when issues become public problems they occupy space on a government agenda. Sometimes referred to as agenda-setting, this initial stage can be viewed as a process in itself whereby issues come to occupy the attention of governments, and subsequently, how governments understand, structure and prioritize these issues and/or problems.

Important queries into this stage of policy involve examining the nature and source of public issues, and how and why governments come to act on some issues rather than others. As Kingdon (1995) argues, governments are constantly presented with numerous issues (which he calls subjects or concerns) of concern to different people and groups in society, but act on some rather than others. Doern and Phidd (1983) argue that some issues arise from within government, while others arise simultaneously from both

within and without. To be sure, some issues never actually reach the attention of government officials. Rein and Schon (2004) connect government issues with the overall policy context when they argue that “policy issues tend to arise in connection with governmental programs, which exist in some policy environment, which is part of some broader political and economic setting, which is located, in turn, within a historical era” (p. 154).

According to the literature, an agenda refers to a “list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time” (Kingdon, 1995, p.-12). Birkland (2005) conceives of four different agendas, ranging from the broad agenda universe, which contains the issues of all individuals and groups in society, to a much more narrow decision agenda, which contains those issues that governments are acting upon at a given time. Sometimes issues are actively filtered out by different individuals and groups both inside and outside of government (usually something occurring in the higher, decision agenda). At other times, issues can be filtered out by the nature of the political-economic system and the prevailing ideas and values in society (generally a filtering which occurs at the agenda universe).

Soroka (2002) argues that one purpose of agenda-setting research is to track and examine problems as they move on or off (or up and down) the government agenda. Similarly, Kingdon (1995) posits the goal of agenda-setting research is to understand both how the agenda is composed as it is at any one point in time, and how and why it changes over time. He argues that political events and processes, including but not limited to changes in public opinion, election results, and changes in leadership or

administration can have powerful effects on government agendas. Mitchell (1995) stresses that ordinary citizens have very little control or influence in the agenda-setting processes that bring about new public policies or changes to existing policies. He argues that the government (and in particular elected officials) ultimately have the power to decide what issues enter the government agenda.

The distinction between issues and problems highlights that government problems are often “acted upon” or have gone through some sort of process of interpretation, research and/or articulation. Indeed, Atkinson and Chandler (1983) explain that “political authorities are not simply receptors of political demands and the state not simply a mechanism for sorting out and pronouncing on them” (p. 5). Rather, they argue that governments often actively mould, shape and package problems. Doern and Phidd (1983) similarly argue that the identification of an issue as a problem often involves concerted effort by government officials to define and articulate an issue. Consequently, accompanying queries into the nature and source of issues that come to occupy the attention of governments are queries regarding the how issues are articulated, particularly by government actors, but also by other groups and people in society.

Policy formulation and proposal of solution. Much like the agenda-setting stage, policy formulation is a process in itself that has been extensively researched. Consequently, numerous taxonomies and theories have emerged in the literature. Generally, examination of this stage draws attention to the process whereby governments generate options for dealing with issues or problems. The substance, or output, of policy formulation is policy instruments. Sometimes called tools or means, policy instruments refer to the approaches governments take to address the “problems” on their agendas.

Early research into policy instruments presented by Mosher (1982), Hood (1986), and Doern and Phidd (1983) classified instruments according to, respectively, expenditure or non-expenditure based, the types of action governments take in response to policy problems, and, their degree of coercion and regulation in markets and citizen's lives. Recent research into policy instruments has provided insight into the range of instruments, their applicability and properties, and the justification for choosing them.

In theory, governments have a number of instruments at their disposal. Indeed, Linder and Peters (1989) suggest there are upwards of 25 different policy instruments available. Yet, despite the apparent abundance of choice, Peters (1990) contends that policy makers often rely on a small number of instruments to deal with a range policy problems. Hood (2007) offers insight when he advocates for an instrument approach that highlights the "politics of policy," which holds that instrument choice is rarely a matter of "neutral deliberation" but rather, strongly influenced by politics, ideology, and culture. Brooks (1998) elaborates, arguing the selection of policy instruments is a "messy process" that is:

influenced by how things have been done in the past – by vested bureaucratic, political and societal interests; by change, including the individuals involved in a decision; and by ideas and beliefs that may or may not be well founded (p. 10).

Brooks is highlighting the importance of context to policy instrument decisions, which speaks to the importance of context in the overall policy process. Any given policy instrument is understood as a choice, set against alternatives that were not chosen, or perhaps not even considered, due in part to the policy context (actors, ideas and social institutions) within which it occurred. The choices or decisions involved in this stage of

policy are often constrained or structured to varying degrees due to the social context within which they have occurred.

This discussion is perhaps a little too mechanical for the task at hand, however. Taken to the extreme, it affords government officials and those close to them too much agency in terms of setting the agenda and articulating the issues therein, and tends to promote a one way, top down view of policy making. Moreover it tends to promote policy making as a rational, linear decision making process – a view that I argue fails to capture the interactional, back and forth, discursive nature in which the issue of the deficit, and many other issues, are contested. I argue this view of agenda-setting and issue salience tends to overlook the issue (and indeed priority) of consensus seeking embedded within government agendas and policy articulations. A conceptualization of the agenda as discursive practice will add complexity to this stage, particularly in regards to articulating issues.

Policy analysis. As discussed above, the notion of context draws attention to the policy actors and groups who make and influence policy, the institutions within which they make these decisions and the ideas and values that are carried by policy actors and embedded in institutions. This outlook serves to complicate the policy process and thus facilitates a critical examination of policy. However, with its focus on context and process, this body of theory tends to overlook an important element at the heart of policy – that of language use. This interest, which conceives of policy as discourse, has gained significant traction within policy analysis.

While policy studies seeks to understand policy and its processes, policy analysis seeks to measure and influence policy and its processes.⁶ Indeed, policy analysts often refer to their discipline as *policy analysis and planning* because their work is intended to analyze, create and/or advise policy. Elaborating on what policy analysts do, Dobuzinskis et al. (2007) note that policy analysis grew from the “...efforts made by actors inside and outside formal political decision-making processes to improve policy outcomes by applying systematic evaluative rationality to the development and implementation of policy options” (Forward). To be sure, policy analysts’ efforts to “improve policy outcomes” is acknowledged by those engaged in policy studies, and policy analysts are consequently recognized as potentially influential actors in policy processes.

This “systematic evaluative rationality” is guided by positivist ontology and epistemology, which taken to extreme, holds that policy problems can be objectively and systematically understood and solved. However, these claims have received significant critique from within the policy sciences and led to a post-positivist break on the grounds that policy analysis is a normative discipline, and thus framed by particular theories, methods and language. Critics raise concern over the potential for such analysis to regulate governments and otherwise undermine democratic politics and ideals (Dryzek, 1990). One consequence of this critique is that many policy analysts today are much more cognizant of their theoretic and methodological assumptions and choices, and often stress the importance of reflexive disclaimers in their analyses (Moran et al., 2006).

⁶ This overly simplistic comparison barely captures the theoretical and methodological overlapping between these two disciplines. It does, however, provide a starting point for differentiating between them.

However, the post-positivist break within policy analysis signals a broader critical orientation towards policy. Often referred to as the argumentative movement in policy analysis, its proponents contend that public policies are first and foremost arguments or acts of persuasion. Highlighting the argumentative nature of policy draws attention to the existence of counter or contradictory arguments, issues regarding problem construction, and many other “micro-political” aspects of policy processes as they pertain to language use (Fischer and Forrester, 1993). Consequently, the argumentative turn can also be viewed as a critical orientation towards language. Discussing this turn, Hajer (1993) argues that “language lost [its] neutral status and itself became problematized....the use of language in political life or political discourse becomes an important object of political study” (p. 44). It is precisely this critical orientation towards language use that I wish to adopt for this thesis. Policy analysts have turned to discourse analysis to provide the theoretical and methodological tools to open up new ways to examine policy.

Discourse Analysis

Much like public policy, discourse (and discourse analysis) holds different meanings for different people. Consequently, I should note that I borrow from the writings of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which posits that language use (written or spoken) is a form of social action, and as such, is a way of acting both in and on the social world. Fairclough (1992) argues that discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure “in the widest sense and at all levels: by class and other social relations at a societal level, by the relations specific to particular institutions such as law or education, by systems of classification...and so forth” (p. 63). However, he is quick to point out that discourse, in addition to being shaped and constrained by social structure, also

“constitutes all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it” (Ibid). As a way of acting in the social world, discourse reflects particular settings, relations, identities and systems of knowledge. However, that same acting, in turn, acts upon the social world, those same settings, relations, identities and systems of knowledge to (re)create (and as Fairclough would argue, at times, transform) the social world. I conceive of policy as a way of acting communicatively in and on the social world, and I seek to understand through discourse theory and methods how, and to what effect.

To conceive of policy as discourse considers policy as constitutive social action, and consequently also examines it for its effects on the context within which it emerged. Policy is thus not only a reflection or product of specific social relations and structures, but it (re)creates those relations and structures, it interacts with them. There is sometimes a distinction in the policy studies literature between what governments say and what they do. While this approach has undoubtedly guided countless good studies of policy and contributed to greater understandings, discourse theory is particularly interested in what governments say because, as the argument goes, talk is a form of action.

Viewing policy as discourse complicates policy in much the same way as the notion of context discussed above. To speak of the contextual influences (actors, ideas, institutions) on public policy, is similarly to speak of discourse as constrained “in the widest sense and at all levels.” Policy (discourse) is a product or outcome of complex social processes. While policy studies focusses on context to make this argument, discourse analysis places primacy on language. With its focus on language use, discourse analysis draws greater attention to the micro-aspects of context, while acknowledging and

examining its broader institutional and ideational influences. Policy studies talks of contextual influences on policy, and discourse theory provides theoretical and methodological tools to examine this influence.

Discourse (policy) form and function. Rogers (2004) argues that CDA is “an attempt to describe, interpret, and explain the relationship between the form and function of language” (p. 4). Those interested in a critical discursive analysis of policy focus on various linguistic and grammatical elements (form) of policy discourse, including style, content, genre, and storylines (to name a few), to examine the ways in which policy functions to (re)produce knowledge and power relations (Hastings, 1998; Liasidou, 2011), constitute subjectivities (Fiske and Brown, 2006), who is privileged and who is silenced by policy (Asthana, 2011), and in general, to paraphrase Fairclough (1992), constitute multiple dimensions of social structure.

Gee’s (2005) discussion of “language-in-use” as a social “building task” provides insight into the nature of the discursive work that is accomplished through (policy) discourse, and what is at stake in this interacting. He argues that we use language in society to perform seven fundamental building tasks involving types of activities, identity, relationships, significance, social goods (ex. responsibility, blame), make connections, and sign systems and knowledge. I find issues of identity and the distribution of social goods (issues of responsibility and blame) the most salient to my thesis. Regarding the distribution of social goods, Gee (2005) argues:

We use language to convey a perspective on the distribution of social goods, that is, to build a perspective on social goods. For example, if I say “Microsoft loaded its operating system with bugs,” I treat Microsoft as purposeful and responsible, perhaps even culpable. If I say, on the other hand, “Microsoft’s operating system is loaded with bugs,” I treat Microsoft as less purposeful and responsible, less culpable. How I phrase the matter has implications for social goods such as guilt

and blame, legal responsibility or lack of it, or Microsoft's bad or good motives (p. 12).

I posit that, much like the everyday language use discussed by Gee, policy contains assumptions and propositions regarding identity and issues of blame, and that policy agendas interact with people in the broader context in a manner that not only passes on information regarding policy priorities, but also, constructs and reconstructs government, other subjectivities, and complex policy processes along these lines. I am interested in what kinds of identities are embedded in government policies, and who or what is assigned blame. My conceptualization of policy as issues/problems and (proposed) solutions is accompanied with a conceptualization of policy as an articulation of blame and identity, two related issues that are part of government re(constructions) contained in agendas that are ultimately set against other competing articulations in the broader context.

This conceptualization of discourse complicates the rational and linear decision-making processes posited by policy theory. While "identity" and "blame" issues may not necessarily comprise what is done in terms of addressing policy issues, these issues are none the less a part of what governments do, they are part of how governments interact. Thus, in addition to the non-rational variables of political pressures, bureaucratic structures and time constraints involved in policy-making (highlighted above) policy is also made-up of non-rational bits and pieces that factor into this decision-making process. Policy is about laying and deflecting blame, it is about identity management, it is about acting in and upon the social world along these lines, it is about representing decisions in particular ways, and at times, about camouflaging the power to make decisions.

Fairclough (1992) offers important insight into how discourse (policy) functions with his discussion of discourse as a form of social practice, where he posits that discourse serves political and ideological functions. He argues that discourse as a political practice “establishes, sustains, and changes power relations,” while discourse as an ideological practice “constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions in power relations” (p. 67). Indeed, policy is used to locate people and groups within society and particular policy relations. Policy rewards some people and penalizes others; it identifies and defines who and what is worthy of government attention, and who and what is not. This locating often occurs unequally and unilaterally, and holds implications for how people live their lives. The fact that this locating sometimes goes unnoticed or uncontested is a testament to the ideological work that is performed through (policy) discourse. These issues will be explored in the analysis, and I will elaborate in the methods section below.

Discursive policy: agendas, context and issues. Up to this point I have discussed discourse as contextualized spoken or written language that acts upon the social world. A more interactive view of discourse is offered by Fairclough (1995) when he conceives of discourse as a “complex of three elements: social practice, discursive practice, and text” (p. 74). Here I am interested in Fairclough’s concepts of text production and discursive practices, which together comprise a highly interactive and social set of practices. I conceive of government agendas as texts, and thus a moment or instance of Fairclough’s discursive practices made up through the social processes of text production, distribution and consumption. Although the practices of writing, distributing and consuming a government agenda speech might occur as different events (both temporally and

spatially), their discursive nature brings them together to the extent that they influence one another in complex ways. For example, the manner in which an agenda (along with its issues and priorities) is produced and distributed can influence the manner in which it is consumed. Conversely, its (anticipated or perceived) consumption can also influence its production and distribution. Put a little differently, those involved in the discursive practices of producing, distributing and consuming the agenda act upon one another in complex ways.

Some groups that factor into these discursive practices are highlighted in the policy studies literature as part of the agenda-setting context, and they include government officials who set the agenda, the media, the voting public, business groups, and, given that the agenda must be debated and voted upon, those within the legislature involved in policy debates. Much of this interaction relies heavily upon social conventions, norms, and commonly held beliefs. Furthermore, much of this interaction occurs socio-cognitively as anticipation, expectation, assumption and interpretation of these conventions and norms. In this sense, those in government who construct and set the agenda are (potentially) interacting with those who will consume the agenda in complex ways.

This view of agenda setting challenges process models that tend to portray policy as a linear process that is comprised of different stages. These models examine policy as it travels through government bureaucracy, and as policy elites make and implement policy *beyond* agenda-setting. Much less attention is given to how policy travels *back* to the agenda-setting context. While it is certainly true that policy moves beyond agenda-setting, it is also true that it fragments, or travels in different directions – at this stage,

back to the agenda-setting context in the form of public speeches and written texts, where it is taken up (contested, accepted, [mis]understood, re-contextualized) in diverse ways.

The deficit is an interesting issue that might be present on a government agenda. I classify the deficit as a focusing event – a concept from the policy studies literature that is often used to examine large-scale social and political events that happen suddenly and affect a significant portion of a population. Examples of focusing events include natural disasters, large industrial accidents, wars and terrorist attacks. Because of their magnitude, suddenness, and far-reaching consequences, these events and their accompanying issues are thrust upon the public consciousness and government agenda. Birkland (2005) argues that focus events “spark intense media and public attention” and often lead to a search for solutions in the wake of perceived policy failure. He identifies the media, academics, government, advocacy coalitions (comprised of different groups and people who rally together on common interests and values in the wake of the event), and powerful socially and economically elite groups as important actors during focusing events (Birkland, 1998). These groups all have an interest in the issues at hand, and generally work to either change or maintain current views and policies.

Although the issue of the deficit may not seem like a prototypical focusing event, there are some interesting commonalities. For example, the deficits occurred during Alberta’s economic hardships in the 1980s, which were widespread and rapid (perhaps less so in the 1990s), consequently, many people were adversely affected at the time and had an active interest how economic, social and fiscal policy issues were understood and articulated by government.

The research interest in examining focusing events lies not necessarily in *who* places a given policy issue on the agenda, but rather, given their importance and far-reaching effects, *how* they are understood, articulated and mobilized by different people and groups in society. A government's discussion is but one version of these issues, and what governments do is in part a reflection of what is being done and said, has been done and said, or is in anticipation of what will be done and said, in the broader policy context.

Birkland conceives of focus events as times of increased scrutiny of policy and government, efforts to deflect blame and reassert policy status quo and existing understandings, symbols, and knowledge pertaining to policy issues. As I have already discussed in the introduction, albeit briefly, this policy context for Alberta governments was (and is) one of intense conflict and debate, and also one of laying and deflecting blame, and engaging in identity work. The deficit, social programs, and the economy are all pressing issues for government during these periods, and discourse theory is particularly suited to complicate issues of power and agency in agenda-setting. While policy studies tends to center discussions of power on those who set the agenda, discourse theory offers more specificity as it examines the power to articulate, to locate blame, to construct and represent, and inasmuch as government agendas are widely distributed and consumed, locates power in an unequal means of dissemination. However, there is also power in ideas and representations to shape and structure government activity. For example, elected officials in a liberal democracy are *supposed* to be and do certain things, particularly in response to the deficit. The presence of a budgetary deficit *says* something about government, which signifies and acts upon people (including government officials) in particular ways. It is here where government officials

lack power, as they are not only pressed to address the deficit in some way, but also must contend with articulations that act upon and construct government and its policies in particular ways. Recall the introduction of this thesis, where I cited passages from politicians as well as the provincial media, passages that construct government as to blame and responsible for the deficit – as having a spending problem and/or a deficit dysfunction, for example. An important activity of agenda-setting is seeking and/or constructing a consensus within this broader context.

In this sense, there is a priority of consensus that drives governments in their agenda-setting practices, a priority that can be examined through studies of language. This conceptualization captures (theoretically) the range of discursive and social practices, and the complex issues of power involved in agenda-setting. Antonio Gramsci's (1988) notion of hegemony highlights the role of ideology in consensus seeking and constructing. Questions arise regarding how ideologies and dominant ways of thinking factor into policy making in Alberta, and how ideologies underpin policies that might serve elite economic groups. These questions interrogate power and agency issues in agenda-setting and issue salience in the province. I view consensus as a specific priority and activity within a given policy issue, as well as primary goal of agenda-setting. This priority arguably increases in saliency in difficult economic and fiscal years, but I suggest is nonetheless present in agenda-setting generally.

Summary

This chapter has provided a conceptualization of public policy as government (in)actions and/or outputs as choices, both in terms of what to do and how to do it, intended to address particular problems. These concepts are grounded in a particular theory of policy as process. The notion of context, with a focus on different actors, ideas

and institutions problematizes both policy definitions and process models. In particular, the notion of context problematizes and draws attention to the different factors that can influence what issues come to be recognized as problems and, how those issues are articulated and framed by different policy actors. Furthermore, context challenges an overly rational, linear notion of policy models, and posits that policy processes are often complex and understood with reference to particular ideas and values, institutions, actors and groups.

My view of policy as contextualized process is enhanced by a view of policy as discourse. Both context and discourse problematize policy concepts and processes. However, with its focus on language use, discourse analysis is ultimately better suited theoretically to complicate rational and linear notions of policy processes. In particular, Fairclough's view of discourse as a complex of text, discursive practices and social practice explores the discursive nature of policy and the policy context in ways that policy studies does not. Discourse analysis provides the theory and methods to examine in greater detail how government agendas interact with all the various elements of the context in which they emerged, and vice versa. The particular historical context within which I examine agendas was one of increased attention and scrutiny of government and its policies. I posit that a discursive priority of consensus is at work at this stage in policy, and I aim to examine this issue with particular focus on the issue of the deficit.

Chapter Two: Methods

This chapter details the data used in this study and the procedures applied to their analysis, including how terms were selected and coded. Further conceptualization regarding policy agendas as discursive practice is also offered. The chapter concludes with a summary of my methodological approach.

Data

The data used in this study consist of two types of government documents, budget and throne speeches. Three major reasons underlay the selection of these documents. First, both types of documents contain strong indications of government priorities and areas of concern, which the government knows will be given wide media dissemination. For example, the government opens each legislative session with the *Speech from the Throne*, during which time they often outline an agenda containing priorities and areas of concern for the coming year. The Parliament of Canada (2006) website has the following to say regarding the *Speech from the Throne*:

Traditionally, the Speech from the Throne reveals the reasons for summoning Parliament. It begins with an assessment of social and economic conditions in the country. It then declares the Government's goals and intentions, and outlines its policies and legislative agenda (http://www.parl.gc.ca/About/House/compendium/web-content/c_d_speechthrone-e.pdf).

Likewise, as Kingdon (1995) asserts, the *Budget Address* is a significant and influential aspect of government activity. The Alberta government often referred to the *Budget Address* in the throne speech. For example, in the 1983 *Speech from the Throne*, the government stated: "in due course you will be presented with budget proposals by my government to support these priorities and a program of balanced initiatives..." (Alberta, 1983a, p.7).

Second, the two types of documents complement each other, and while the *Speech from the Throne* articulated a broad view of the government priorities, I found it often lacked analytic content. By contrast, the *Budget Address* was a rich document that often contained more detailed discussion and articulation of priorities. Indeed, the deficit is a fiscal issue, and the *Budget Address* contains the government's fiscal policies for the year. The *Budget Address* provides more insight into the dynamics of the policy context, and thus warrants attention in this discussion of government agendas and priorities.

The third reason for choosing these speeches lies in their availability. Both types of documents are produced annually (in the case of the budget, sometimes semi-annually) and are readily available electronically on the Alberta Hansard website, or as hardcopies through the University of Lethbridge library. Both hardcopy and electronic formats were used in my analysis. However, I relied primarily on electronic copies.

Procedures of Analysis

My research involved a qualitative analysis of primary government documents. Esterberg (2002) describes qualitative analysis as a process of making meaning. As both the *Speech from the Throne* and *Budget Address* are large, rich texts that required several readings, I found this assertion a useful guide. Consequently, analysis of these documents generally followed an inductive grounded theory approach, which Saldana (2011) describes as a method of discerning and constructing patterns, and otherwise “meticulously analyzing qualitative data” (p. 6). Following recommendations within the literature, I used a two stage coding process of open and focussed coding. In the initial stage of open-coding, I attempted to “work intensively with [the] data, identifying themes and categories” by remaining open to whatever might or might not emerge (Esterberg, 2002, p. 158), though remaining informed by policy studies and discourse theory.

I conceived of both types of speech documents as broadly indicative of government agendas, articulating to varying degrees government priorities, problems and solutions to analyze. Although the government often discusses dozens of policy areas in these addresses, my focus was on the priorities. For example, the government stated the following in the opening of the 1984 *Speech from the Throne*: “One purpose of this address is essentially to set forth the agenda for the Second Session of the 20th Legislature. My government will, as part of the agenda, emphasize the following five priority areas...” (Alberta, 1984a, p.2). These five priority areas informed my coding for that particular document. In the *Budget Address*, governments often outline some form of fiscal strategy or plan consisting of anywhere from two to six priorities; the fiscal strategy would inform my coding for that document.

Also useful to my analysis was the government’s discussion of “priorities,” “problems,” “issues,” and “concerns” whose occurrences I noted in the margin.⁷ Both documents often contained headings and sub-headings that I utilized as additional coding aids in my meaning-making analysis. However, I did not rely solely on headings or government specified priority areas, but remained open to themes that emerged in each document. During the second stage of focussed coding I concentrated on the “key themes identified during open coding” (Ibid, p. 161). This involved a deeper analysis of how the

⁷ My analysis does not distinguish, as does the policy literature, between issues and problems; nor do governments usually make such a distinction, and often use these words interchangeably. Thus, issues/concerns/challenges/problems, are all understood broadly as potential areas of government policy.

themes identified in open coding might be connected, ordered and/or structured (Babbi and Benaquisto, 2002; Saldana, 2011).

I also conducted “keyword” searches for each document in an attempt to capture themes in the speeches and respective years. For example, in 1993, Premier Klein’s only year of interest for this thesis, the government repeated the word “change” 30 times in the *Speech from the Throne*, and ten times in the *Budget Address*, far more than either Lougheed or Getty in their respective years. As I will discuss below, “change” was an important theme for Klein’s government.

An important part of my analysis involved the reflexive exercise of acknowledging my preconceived notions and implicit theorizing regarding government policy for the particular periods in question, as well as my normative beliefs and values regarding state intervention and activity in society. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) argue, this reflexive “stepping back” speaks to research issues of validity and rigor. While I agree with these authors that reflexivity should accompany the entire research process, I consider it a particularly salient concern during the coding process and my interpretation of government policy. Thus, to reiterate, I strove to remain open to the themes that emerged from the data.

Discourse Analysis

I view this research as a content analysis informed by discourse theory and methods. During the initial stage of coding I recorded – verbatim – government policy. In so doing, I captured the language of the respective government on certain issues, and placed myself in a position to examine the form, and to a lesser extent, function of policy. I have focussed on specific sections and paragraphs of documents where the deficit, and

other priorities are discussed. I have not, however, engaged these documents in systematic, line by line, and paragraph by paragraph analyses.

However, there is an interesting theoretical and methodological discussion to be had regarding the fact that the government agendas I have examined are not just policy (problems/priorities/solutions, decisions, etc.), but public speeches as well. As such, they are written, delivered and consumed (interpreted, contested, accepted, etc.) by various people and groups. Perhaps the most important of these consumers are the voting public, the media, and those within the legislature. Drawing attention to the latter group, albeit indirectly, the government closed the 1983 *Speech from the Throne* in the following manner:

Members of the Legislative Assembly: In due course you will be presented with budget proposals by my government to support these priorities and a program of balanced initiatives consistent with appropriate restraint in public expenditures. You will be asked to grant the necessary funds for the operating services and expenditures authorized by the Legislature and to endorse a program of capital financing for the Government of Alberta. I leave you now to the business of the Session, with full confidence that as elected representatives, your debates and your votes will reflect your understanding of the public interest of all people of Alberta (Alberta, 1983a, p.17).

The government, through the Lieutenant Governor, is addressing “members of the legislative assembly” (and certainly many others), and drawing attention to the fact that these policies are at this stage only proposals, and must still be debated and voted upon.⁸

⁸ A recent public opinion survey titled *GOA [Government of Alberta] Throne Speech and Budget Tracking* offers insight into how the public consumes these speeches. Conducted by HarrisDecima, the survey examines how Albertans feel about budget proposals from the 2010 *Budget*, as well as the “awareness” respondents had of these priorities and agendas. (<http://www.alberta.ca/albertacode/images/GOAThroneBudgetTrackingSummary.pdf>).

The policy research tends to view agenda-setting as a stage of policy in which very few people (elected politicians and “those close to them”) are privileged to make important decisions regarding what issues enter the agenda, and how these issues are articulated. The tendency, then, is to focus on decision makers and to follow “their” agendas and policies through a sort of policy pipeline to examine how and if they reach fruition. The broader public tends to dissolve in the background, and policy (language) does not resonate back to the context from which it emerged. The focus is on the policy and process, and not necessarily the language of policy as part of that process. However, as the above discussion suggests, these agendas are also speeches (or perhaps *become* speeches), that are written, delivered, and consumed in particular ways by different groups in society, and by the broader public. In conceptualizing policy and government agendas as discourse I asked certain questions about their production, distribution and consumption. Although I am limited to examining only part of this interaction, the viewpoint which sees agendas as discourse and interactive, leads to queries regarding how policy issues (particularly the deficit) are understood in the broader perspective by the media, the political opposition, think tanks, and more generally the public. This viewpoint conceives of policy as both *non-linear* (inasmuch as it travels back to the context) and *non-rational* (inasmuch as policy decisions involve discursive and social practices). This is not a conceptualization of agenda-setting that I read anywhere, as I found both the policy studies theory, and the policy literature in the province to be lacking in this regard.

In his discussion of EU employment policy, Muntigl (2002) asserts there are generally two classifications of policy, one is analytic and the other hortatory. He argues

that “analytical exposition refers to a genre that persuades an addressee to adopt a particular view of the world. Hortatory exposition, on the other hand, calls upon an addressee to act” (Muntigl, 2002, pp. 396-397). Although there are elements of both genres in government agendas, Muntigl’s brief discussion of analytic exposition (his focus is upon hortatory) resonates more fully with the policy type I have examined in this thesis. As analytic expositions, government pronouncements seek to persuade people that government policies, the associated issues and their proposed solutions, are the correct ones. Much of the discourse on government agendas deals with propositions about the way things are in the world, the nature of public problems, their solutions, and who or what is at fault. At stake is consensus and support for government and its policies. The government agendas I examine in this thesis are perhaps best understood by their orientation to the broader context, particularly different voices and policy articulations in the broader context. Fairclough (2003) argues that “difference is...central in ‘monological’ texts, including written texts – most obviously because all texts are addressed, have particular addressees and readers in view, and assume and anticipate differences between ‘author’ and addressees” (p. 42). It is my finding that much of the language in government agendas seeks consensus by reducing different voices and policy articulations.

Nominalization

Asthana (2011), and Shore and Wright (1997) argue that analyzing policy as discourse draws attention to the ways in which the political nature of policymaking is concealed or hidden through the use of various linguistic elements. The potential for policy discourse to de-politicize policy processes represents perhaps the most salient

function of discourse, particularly in regards to articulation of policy proposals. This interest requires examining the form of policy language. Here, Fairclough's (2003) discussion of nominalization seems particularly relevant. He argues:

a linguistic form which is heavily used in accounts or narratives about the 'global economy' is nominalization...instead of representing processes which are taking place in the world as processes (grammatically, in clauses or sentences with verbs), they are represented as entities (grammatically, through nominalization, i.e. transforming a clause into a nominal or noun-like entity). One common consequence of nominalization is that the agents of processes, people who initiate processes or act upon other people or objects, are absent from texts (p.13).

He further argues passive verbs, adjectives, and metaphors contribute to "a widespread elision of human agency in and responsibility for processes."⁹ This is particularly true of neoliberal policies that aim to shift blame for complex social, political and economic issues, and ultimately, shift responsibility for public services from government to individual citizens and volunteer groups – a common occurrence in many Western democracies throughout the 1980s and 90s. I will pay attention to these aspects of policy form in my analysis, particularly as they pertain to the presence or absence of government as an agent of blame (or credit) in policy problems and solutions.

My discussion of neoliberalism is limited, however. Although present on government agendas, I found examinations of neoliberal ideas and policies of more interest in areas where policy calls on addressees to act, to paraphrase Muntigl. Examinations of neoliberalism are perhaps more congruent in studies of policy implementation, where neoliberalism has been critiqued in areas of welfare restructuring.

9 In this statement Fairclough is referring specifically to the elision of human agency in accounts of what he refers to as the "new global economy," where he argues that broad social changes come to appear as naturally occurring because of the manner in which they are linguistically represented.

Researchers highlight the problems associated with transposing the construction of a universalized market citizen on individuals, whose lived experiences and social circumstances often make it very difficult to “act” in the manner prescribed (Dacks, Green, and Trimble, 1995). Kingfisher (2013) details the nuances of translation and assemblage in her comparative analysis of this inconsistency of neoliberal policies in terms of how they are implemented and received in welfare policy. Neoliberal ideas and policies are present in all government agendas that I have examined, and the discursive issue of interest at this stage of policy lies in how these ideas represent complex social, political and economic processes, how they work to shift blame and perform identity work for government and Albertans, and particularly how they work to reduce different voices and policy articulations.

Modality

Fairclough (1995) asserts that “modality refers to the extent to which producers commit themselves to, or distance themselves from propositions” (p. 142). There are a number of modal markers in speech that can be examined, including verbs (should, must, may), adverbs (definitely, probably, possibly), and tense (is, was, will be). Furthermore, propositions can be subjectively marked, in which case it is clear who is showing commitment to a given proposition. Objective modality refers to statements in which it is unclear who is making the statement or proposition. How governments articulate the nature of a given policy issue and its proposed solutions could have profound effects on how these articulations are contested or accepted. For example, contrast the two fictional statements regarding the cause of a deficit:

- 1) “The deficit was caused by decreased revenues due to poor markets.”

- 2) “I believe the deficit might have been caused by decreased revenues due to poor markets.”

While both statements are assertions about the cause of the deficit, the first statement is much less open to contestation because it comes across as a neutral fact. In the second statement it is clear that the speaker’s opinion (*I believe*) is being expressed. The subjective marker (I), is much less a neutral fact, and more open to interpretation as an opinion. Moreover, the opinion is hedged by *feel* (rather than know) and *might have been* (rather than was), thus presenting a weaker commitment to the nature of the deficit. Fairclough (2003) argues that nominalizations often omit several of these modal markers that open up claims, assertions and beliefs to contestation.

As mentioned above, the discursive practices at work in producing government agendas concerns issues of consensus in particular policy areas, and more generally, for government itself. The level of commitment (be it strong or weak), and the frequency and type of objective or subjective markers that governments display in their agendas regarding the way things are in the world, could have a profound impact on how those propositions are received and interpreted, contested, accepted, appropriated and/or re-contextualized. This interest speaks to the potential ideological and political impacts of discourse – the extent to which propositions are inculcated, and the extent to which they work to construct and sustain (or change) social identities and relations of power, respectively.

Summary

My data consisted of government budgetary and speech from the throne texts. I have conducted a content analysis, which has been guided by an interest in government

priorities (particularly the issue of the deficit) and keyword searches. Moreover, discourse methods has informed my analysis, as I aimed to examine how public policy acts in and on the policy context from within which it emerged. I have found that these government documents contain propositions about the nature of complex social, economic and fiscal issues –propositions that call upon addressees to adopt a particular view regarding their causes and solutions, as well as embedded issues of identity and blame. Discourse analysis concepts of nominalization and modality have been useful language forms in this analysis. This approach facilitates a nuanced and complex examination of agenda-setting and the dynamics between actors, ideas, and institutions.

Chapter Three: The Context

In this chapter I provide insight into political context for Alberta governments during the 1980s and 1990s through a review of the policy literature. I outline the province's fiscal and economic performance, as well as the Conservative government's waning support throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s until the time of Klein's election in 1993. To borrow from Smith (1992), this was a context of increasing scarcity and conflict. There are a number of good studies of Alberta's economy and politics during this period and this literature has been a useful guide in this regard. However, there is an absence of agenda-setting research that examines how governments navigate these difficult times. I will discuss the implications of this, and emphasize what agenda-setting and discourse analysis research can contribute. I conclude this literature review by locating the unique place this thesis seeks in the literature.

Years of Interest

Regarding the province's fiscal performance, Figure 3.1 below shows that the province recorded a deficit in the fiscal year 1982/83 (Lougheed), and then nine consecutive deficits from 1985/86 (Getty) to 1993/94 (the first full year of the Klein government) that began fourteen years of surpluses before ending in 2008. A review of the literature shows that several of the deficit years stand out as particularly difficult economically for the province. These years are 1982 and 1983 (Lougheed), 1986 and 1992 (Getty) and 1993 (Klein). These years will be discussed in greater detail below. The decision to focus on these years is based upon the assertion within the policy sciences (and indeed discourse theory) of the importance of context to policy.

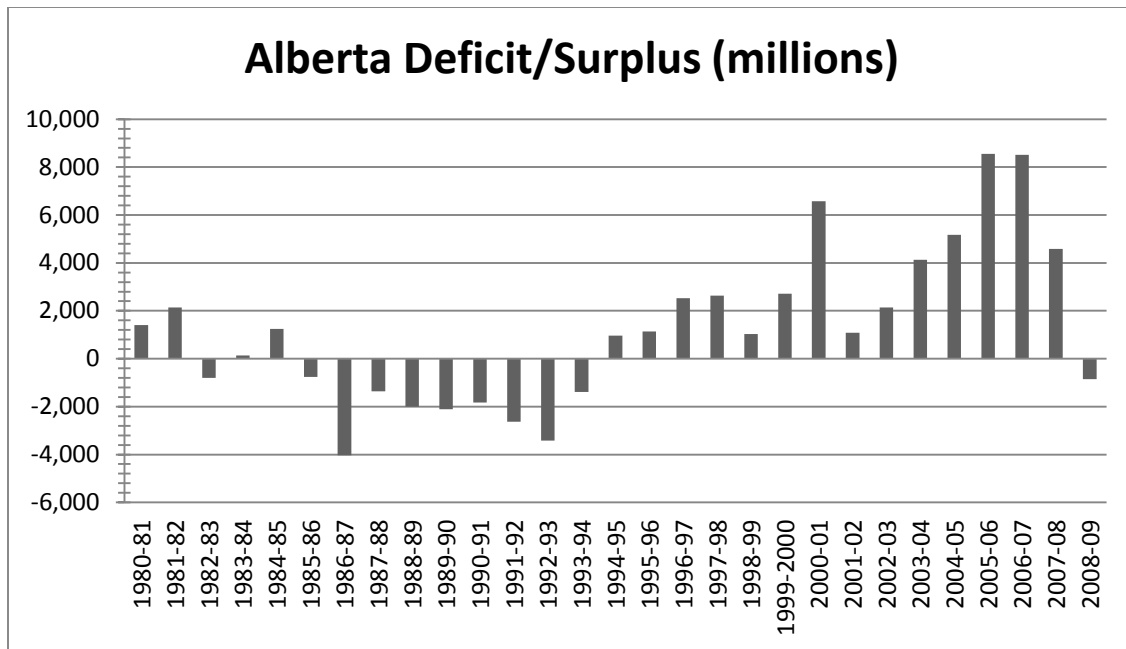


Figure 3.1

Source: Department of Finance Canada

I have made decisions regarding what years I thought most closely approximated the most recent policy climate of a challenging economy and deficit budgets (2008-2014). My idea of the relevant context may be different than others writing in different circumstances. I should also note that the decision to focus on specific years is also partially rooted in an effort to make this project more manageable. A more in-depth and nuanced comparative examination of policy might result from increasing the scope of this project in terms of years of interest. As Brooks (1998) argues, public policy is influenced by what has been done in the past. Thus, examining government policy in surging and/or surplus years can (and does) provide a deeper understanding of government policy during the fiscally and economically challenging years. In recognition of this, and in accordance with a more fluid concept of context (one that does not open and close solely via economic or fiscal indicators), I have also examined both the existing literature on

government policy, as well as actual policy documents for some outlying years. Some of this information is also woven into the research and subsequent discussions.

One final note before proceeding: the documents I have analyzed are for the year following each year of interest highlighted above. For example, although I have highlighted 1982 as a year of interest, I examined government documents from 1983. The purpose is to examine what policies the provincial governments pursued in response to, and in the wake of, the developments of the previous year.

Agenda-Setting: From Consensus and Plenty to Scarcity and Conflict

Peter Lougheed was elected Alberta's first Conservative premier in August of 1971, in what Richards and Pratt (1979) refer to as a stunning upset over the Social Credit government that had been in power since 1935. It was the first of four election victories for Lougheed, who enjoyed strong support at the polls throughout his years as premier.¹⁰ Smith (1992) paints the 1970s as a time of plenty for the Conservatives, and attributes Lougheed's political success in the 1970s to both the booming economy and his often "spirited" battles with the federal government (and eastern Canadian capital) over provincial non-renewable resource development and wealth. Prosperity in the resource sector, along with changes to Alberta's royalty structure, allowed the Lougheed government to increase per capita spending to among the highest in the country, to set aside as much as 30 percent of resource revenues to the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust

10 In 1971, Lougheed's Conservatives took 46.6 percent of the vote and 49 of 75 seats; in 1975 they took 63 percent and 69 seats; in 1979 they took 57 percent, and 74 of 79 seats (Smith, 1992; Richards and Pratt, 1979). In his final election in 1982, Lougheed took a healthy 63 percent of the vote and 75 of 79 seats; with the runner-up NDP party garnering 19 percent and two seats (Dyck, 1986).

Fund (AHSTF), and otherwise to assist large and small capital via subsidized loans and tax incentives, build infrastructure, and provide subsidies for new homeowners (Boothe, 1995). The government argued that Alberta's prosperity, its low taxes and high level government services stemmed from the "large sums of revenue flowing from the sale of non-renewable resources" (Alberta, 1976, p.5).

However, Dyck (1986) argues that Alberta's economy began to show signs of recession in late 1981, while Smith (1992) argues that the provincial bubble burst in 1982, citing high interest rates, unemployment, falling oil prices and an economic recession throughout the Western world. Mansell and Percy (1990) seem to agree, arguing that provincial real GDP showed "persistence weakness" throughout the 1980s, beginning in 1982. They highlighted 1982 and 1983 as particularly weak years. Amidst this economic slump the province held an election. Although Lougheed's government took a rather comfortable 62 percent of the popular vote, Smith (1992) argues that Albertans witnessed in the 1980s "a transformation from the politics of plenty and consensus to the politics of scarcity and conflict" (p. 244). He later provides a concrete example of some of the conflict and scarcity that would increasingly become a feature of provincial politics throughout the 1980s in the following passage:

[T]he election, however, marked a turning point in provincial economic policy. The government, stung by comments from large and small capital and from farmers that the public sector enjoyed a privileged position while they suffered, began to cut back the size of the public sector (p. 256).

He argues elsewhere: "in a situation of declining revenues, the government was now having to make political choices as to who its friends were in deciding whether to allocate its scarce resources (p. 258). Thus the policy "context" is not just one of difficult economies and fiscal imbalance, but one more precisely of scarcity and conflict, not only

in terms of who gets what from government, but also in terms of approval for government and its policies. And, as successive Alberta governments continued to grapple with the politics of deficit, debt, and declining public support – it was a context of increasing scarcity and conflict. The policy context is also one in which discursive issues of consensus or approval seeking, involving identity management, and laying and deflecting blame increase in saliency for government.

Kneebone (2006) argues that the economy stabilized somewhat in 1984 and 1985; an argument echoed by Dyck (1986) who cites increased drilling and production, and a number of new oil sands initiatives. Peter Lougheed resigned in late 1985 and Don Getty took over as premier. The following year Getty won the provincial election, taking 51.1 percent of the popular vote and 61 seats, but the victory paled somewhat in comparison with Lougheed's 62.2 percent and 75 seats garnered in the previous provincial election of 1982. The Conservative stronghold over the province was slipping, if marginally, and Smith (1992) argues that the NDP's 29 percent and 16 seats was the first sign of a competitive party system in the province in years.

However, in 1986, just as Alberta appeared to be rebounding economically, two of the province's biggest industries (wheat and oil) faced record price drops. Though the price for each stabilized somewhat the next year, Mansell and Percy (1990) argue the decline in these commodities dealt a "severe blow" to the province's economic base and led to accusations the Getty government was not doing enough to lead Alberta through the harsh times (Nikiforuk, 1987). Facing decreased resource revenues, and increased public expenditures on health care, education and social services, the Getty Conservatives

were at first hesitant to reduce spending, hopeful that markets would turn around (Reid, 2001).

Many of Getty's policy decisions were unpopular, and a number run-ins with the media during his tenure accentuated negative public feelings and raised fears about his government. He consequently came under harsh media and public criticism as someone who did not take his job seriously enough, did not work often enough and was not transparent enough (Savage-Hughes and Taras, 1992). Capturing this context of blame, Harrison (1995) argues the following:

In the midst of the recession of 1985-86, the Getty government adopted the full range of fiscal measures available to them: raising taxes, cutting expenditures, and running a deficit. Albertans, still coming down from the heady 1970s, sought out someone to blame for the change in circumstances. And while, as in the past, much fell on the federal Liberals and central Canada, inevitably some of the blame also alighted on the provincial Tories and the new premier (p. 51).

Indeed, Archer (1992) argues that by the late 1980s and early 1990s, many Conservative supporters in Alberta were becoming disenchanted. The 1989 provincial election results support this claim. While the NDP maintained their level of support from the 1986 election,¹¹ the Liberal party shot up from 12.2 percent and four seats to 28.6 percent and eight seats. Conservative support slipped from 51.1 percent and 61 seats to 44.4 percent and 59 seats.

The early 1990s was a time of economic difficulty across the country – the result of a generalized recession and restructuring following the adoption of free trade after 1988, in turn adversely affecting Alberta's already precarious economy (Lisac, 2004).

¹¹ The NDP party won 29 percent of the popular vote and 16 seats in 1986 compared to 26.6 and 16 seats in 1989 (Smith, 1992).

Mansell (1997) argues that Alberta's economy was in a recession in 1990-91 and describes it in late 1992 and early 1993 as still "fragile." Tupper, Pratt and Urquhart (1992) argue that the economic and fiscal situation in the province insight into the political conflict the Getty Conservatives faced during this time – resulting from past and current efforts at diversification, and the province's economic and fiscal situation. In September of 1992, amidst increasing public pressure and scrutiny, Premier Getty stepped down. Ralph Klein won the Conservative leadership campaign in December and was elected premier in June of 1993. Capturing the political climate prior to the election, Smith (1992) argues the Conservative government's hold on power was tenuous, and that the election to come would be one of the most competitive in Alberta's history.

The issues of the deficit and mounting debt were particularly important for governments across the country in the late 1980s and early 1990s (as they had been for many governments throughout the Western world). Discussing the deficit at the national level, Lewis (2003) argues that Brian Mulroney's Conservatives had "sworn off deficits" and committed to balanced budgets. He argues further that public opinion had shifted to the point that "electoral support and fiscal retrenchment were no longer incompatible" (p.159).

In the Alberta election of 1993, both Liberal leader Laurence Decore and Ralph Klein pledged in their election campaigns to eliminate the provincial deficit without raising taxes, thus signalling the policy direction to come. Furthermore, Klein began referring to Alberta's recurring deficits and mounting debt as a "crisis" to convince Albertans that the situation was critical (Cooper, 1996). Although the nature of Alberta's "fiscal crisis" has been questioned by many, most notably Laxer and Harrison (1995),

Lisac (2004) argues that public opinion in Alberta was nonetheless in favour of both expenditure cuts and low taxes. This begs the question of how public opinion was produced in favour, and who was implicated in that production.

Following the 1993 election, Klein's government embarked on an aggressive strategy of deficit elimination and debt reduction. Facilitated by comprehensive cutbacks and retrenchment, and blessed by an economic turnaround, the Conservative government balanced the budget in 1994 and the province did not see another deficit until 2008. Although Klein's government received significant criticism from the left during his first term, it was also praised by right-wing think tanks (such as the Fraser Institute), the business media (in Alberta and elsewhere), and perhaps most importantly, many Albertans. Indeed, despite the cutbacks Klein's approval rating soared. Reshef and Rastin (2003) argue that Klein's victory in 1997 was a strong indication of the public's approval for his government's activities beginning some four years earlier. They further point to the Conservative's second landslide victory in 2001, and Klein's ability to bring the Conservatives from near political extinction when first elected in 1993, as an indication that the people of Alberta supported many of Klein's policies. The agenda-setting context faced by Getty changed significantly during the Klein years with balanced budgets, economic prosperity and strong voter support.

Locating the Thesis

I have referenced in the preceding discussion some of the research dealing with provincial policy during these years of interest. Much of this literature examines what governments did in the policy studies sense, and not in the discourse analysis sense I propose in this research. Indeed, Bruce et al. (1997), who provide a thorough examination

of Klein's fiscal policies in his first years as premier, point out that much of the research (on Klein) has focussed on measuring policies and their outcomes. This is perhaps a good starting point for this section as it distinguishes my research from these studies during Klein's years, as well as many of the studies of Alberta policy in the 1980s. Few researchers have taken a direct interest in what governments say as something they do, and even fewer studies involve an analysis of agenda-setting outputs. Moreover, and perhaps due to this, when researchers do acknowledge a role for language use in policy processes, there is no method to examine its potential influence.

The research on Klein generally falls into two categories, those who support his policies and those who question them and offer alternatives. Taft (1997), Laxer and Harrison (1995) and the Parkland Institute are the most prominent critics of Klein's policies. Bruce et al. (1997), Cooper (1996), and the Fraser Institute are perhaps the most prominent supporters of the changes that occurred during Klein's first term. While these bodies of work offer different perspectives on Klein's policies, both generally focus on the outcomes. Moreover, while my theoretical (and political) underpinnings align this thesis with those who question Klein, there seems to be a lack of attention to public opinion, agenda-setting, and issue salience in both streams of research. This is particularly the case with those who have supported Klein's policies.

For example, Bruce et al. (1997) have provided an examination of Klein's Deficit Elimination Program. While a full review of their research is beyond the scope of this thesis (as well as beyond my expertise), I am curious about two questions posed in their introduction. On page three they ask "How did the Klein government gain and maintain the acceptance of voters for such dramatic spending cuts?" On page four they similarly

inquire how Klein's government was able to convince people that the cutbacks were important. These questions, along with the analyses in several of the chapters that follow, contain assumptions about the nature of government, policy processes, and public opinion in Alberta. Indeed, they seem to take as a starting point that Albertans did not want cutbacks. However, as I have previously noted, Lisac (2004) argues that public opinion had shifted in favour of government cutbacks, while Lewis (2003) points to a similar occurrence at the national level. Indeed, several pages after these questions were posed in Bruce et al. (1997), Mansell later explains:

In retrospect, as early as 1990 an astute political observer would have concluded that a majority of Albertans would support the type of aggressive action on deficits through expenditure cuts at the provincial level that the Reform Party was advocating at the federal level. Viewed in this light the election of the Ralph Klein government on such a platform should not have been surprising (p. 45).

According to this, Klein's ability to convince the population of the necessity of cutbacks had less to do with his government's (and perhaps the media's) ability to persuade, and more to do with being aware of the public sentiment. There is a lack of consistency in the volume regarding the nature of interaction between governments and citizens. Do governments convince people of an issue, or is it the other way around? Furthermore, the relationships seems to be one way, and are not complicated by different groups such as the media and political opposition.

I suggest this inconsistency results from assumptions about how governments and citizens interact, and relatedly, a lack of attention to this interaction – how policy plays out at the level of agenda-setting and issue salience. The following passage offers some insight into the nature of interaction espoused by the research. In chapter four, Kneebone (1997) argues:

The source of this shift of preferences [for cutbacks] can likely be attributed to the rapid deterioration of Alberta's public finances following the fall in energy prices in 1986. The speed with which Alberta's net asset position turned into a large net debt position undoubtedly promoted a perception among voters of a fiscal crisis. If so, this perception may have been responsible for Albertans coming to the conclusion that the potential losses they might expect to suffer if the growth of the debt was left unchecked were large relative to the costs associated with cuts to provincial expenditures and/or increases in provincial taxes. Thus, as [some] suggest, a perception of a fiscal crisis may have been responsible for making substantial expenditure cuts and/or tax rate increases palatable.

If this perception of a significant shift in Albertans' preferences is correct, then an important part of the success of the fiscal changes initiated by the Alberta government was its ability to gauge and respond to this shift in popular sentiment (p. 160).

There are assumptions about the "shift in Albertans" preferences as well as the issue of the deficit as a "crisis," and that it was Klein's government who was in tune with the voting public. This seems inconsistent with the questions asked at the outset of the book. In speaking of a "shift in Albertans preferences" there is no attention to how this shift occurred. Rather, it appears that the "fiscal crisis" is what convinced people to shift their preferences to cutback public services. I have an issue with this assumption because I feel it overlooks the deficit as a focussing event, and the role of previous governments, the public, the media and opposition politicians to both articulate the issue of the deficit in particular ways and to interact within this context.

Turning to those who opposed Klein's policies, Taft (1997) seems to take as a starting point that the Klein government convinced Albertans that massive cuts to expenditures was the only way forward for the province. While I am inclined after doing this research to agree with much of what he says, he tends to credit (blame) Klein's government for many of the cutbacks, while overlooking that much of this work was in full motion before Klein came to office. As Mansell (1997) argues: "...it is useful to note that in the election of 1993, the Conservatives and Liberals both campaigned for 'brutal'

and ‘massive’ cuts, and together they obtained 84% of the vote” (p.45). Laurence Decore, the Liberal leader at the time, was beating the drum for expenditure cuts before Klein.

What seems to be missing in this research is an examination how the issue of the deficit was articulated by the Getty government prior to Klein, as well as other important groups in the broader context, leading up to when Klein took over – an examination that actively captures public sentiment as it shifted, and influenced government decisions regarding the deficit as they occurred, not just at a point in time. Attention should be given to how self-interested opposition parties and media may have mobilized public sentiment, and focused public unrest on the deficit to discredit the government. What I propose to examine is not necessarily whether or not democracy was served, but how democracy “played out.” This can be done through agenda-setting and issue salience research.

Ultimately much of this work is beyond the scope of this thesis. My more limited goal in this research is to examine the discourse on government agendas in the province during these periods. My primary assertion concerns a discursive priority of consensus seeking. This priority is never explicitly stated or acknowledged in any agenda, but I argue that government agendas interact with people and groups within the legislative assembly and the broader policy context to this end. Given the context of the struggling economy, and the deficit as a focussing event, these are potentially interesting times to examine the language practices used by governments. The *Budgetary* and *Throne Speeches* are documents that can be accessed to examine in a preliminary way how governments interact with the public.

Change and Continuity: An Additional Policy (Discourse) Consideration

The topic of change and continuity is of special interest to both policy studies and discourse analysis, and consequently an important topic for this thesis. Howlett, Ramesh and Perl (2009) assert that understanding how policies form, change, and are maintained is a salient topic in policy studies, and add that continuity is a common feature of both policy and its processes.

My research in this thesis also directs attention to the substance of policy, that is, policy outputs, at a very broad level of agenda setting. As previously discussed, one of the goals of agenda-setting research is to understand how and why agendas change (or do not change) over time. Kingdon (1995) points to political events and processes – including election results and changes in leadership or administration – as powerful influences on government agendas. The years of interest in this thesis occurred shortly after elections and/or changes in leadership. For example, the first year of interest is 1982, the same year Lougheed was elected to his last term. Don Getty's first year in office was 1986, while Klein took over after winning the Conservative leadership in 1992, and was elected to office in 1993. As the analysis will show, changing government was an important theme in Klein's 1993 agendas.

Examining change and continuity is also an important issue for critical discourse analysts. Discussing policy change from a CDA perspective, Woodside-Jiron (2004) posits that important times for change occur when things are “going wrong.” Although she is vague on what it means to “go wrong,” I argue that the years of interest in this thesis – given the province's economic, fiscal, and political circumstances – can be considered times when things were going wrong for many Albertans, as thousands of became unemployed, thousands more left the province, large business (particularly oil

and gas) and those in agriculture appealed to government for subsidies. Certainly, given the context of political conflict and scarcity, this was also a time when things went wrong for government. Woodside-Jiron asserts these times provide opportunities to:

deconstruct the various aspects of practices that are oftentimes naturalized and therefore difficult to notice. These moments in time are particularly interesting to watch in terms of the language practices being used. They often shed light on language practices that naturalize relations of power and domination. Here, policy documents, documents that serve to redefine current thinking that have high circulation rates, and specific events where particular voices, ideas, or agendas are brought to the front and acted upon all become important sites for investigation” (p. 177).

The analysis that follows will track priorities as they move on and off government agendas, as well as the language practices used by governments, in an extended period of things going increasingly wrong.

Summary

The years of interest for this thesis are 1983 and 1984 (Lougheed); 1987 and 1992 (Getty); and 1993 (Klein). The agenda-setting context during this period was not only one of a struggling economy, fiscal imbalance and growing debt, but also, one of scarcity and conflict, and one in which embedded issues of blame, identity and consensus became increasingly important and problematic for government. How the issue of the deficit was (and is) articulated by government is particularly important to Albertans, for how the issue is articulated at this level holds implications not only for who gets what, but also, how policies are received and contested, accepted, appropriated, and re-contextualized within the broader context – for how democracy plays out in these periods.

Chapter Four: The Lougheed Government, 1983 and 1984

By 1983, the Lougheed government had been in office for twelve eventful years. The period began with the opening of the Syncrude tarsands plant in Fort McMurray, followed by the boom times. But by 1983 the province was in the throes of a bust that many blamed on the federal government's National Energy Program, though the collapse of oil prices was a world-wide phenomenon.

The boom and bust was not unanticipated by the Lougheed government. Looking back on the years leading up to Alberta's fiscal issues in the early 1980s, one can see policies that anticipate the debates to come, including the setting up of the Heritage Savings Trust Fund in 1976, ongoing attempts at economic diversification, as well as "expenditure control" and "restraint" efforts. According to Mumey and Osterman (1990), the Heritage Fund was established to provide a future source of revenue for the province, aid economic diversification, and pay for capital projects. Discussing the Heritage Fund in the 1976 *Budget Address*, the Lougheed government argued:

In recognition that the supply of non-renewable resources is limited and that revenue from the sale of those resources ultimately will decline, the Heritage Fund was established by an act of the Legislature of Alberta on May 19, 1976 (Alberta, 1976, p.5).

The government also stated in the 1976 *Budget Address* that "[I]t is our judgment though that the time has now come to substantially restrain the rate of increase of provincial government spending" (Ibid). The 1977 *Budget Address* similarly touched upon the government's commitment to "continue a general attitude of restraint in the growth of provincial government spending" and "fiscal responsibility" to maintain the province's "strong financial position during the transition from a resource-based economy to a more

permanent self-sustaining diversified structure” (Alberta, 1977, p.5). The government argued further that:

The major source of Alberta’s past rapid growth – our conventional crude oil and natural gas – is depleting. As this process occurs we will experience an inevitable shift in government revenues, toward those sources, such as personal and corporate income taxes, which future Albertans will be called upon to provide. (Ibid).

Similar priorities were again highlighted in 1978. The government prepared during the mid and late 1970s for a time when it believed non-renewable resource revenues would taper off and form a lower portion of provincial revenues. It planned to smooth this “transition period” through Heritage Fund savings and investment, increases in personal and corporate taxes, a more “diversified” economy, and expenditure reductions.

In 1981 the government warned that expenditures were beginning to outstrip revenue growth, and asserted the province was approaching an “important decision point” regarding raising taxes, reducing savings, and lowering demands for expanding services (Alberta, 1981, p.205). In 1982’s *Budget Address* Lougheed’s government asserted the province was transitioning from an economy dependent on depleting natural resources to one that relied on more “traditional” revenue sources (Alberta, 1982, p.23). They argued further that if demands for provincial services continued to rise, they would “increase tax rates sooner than expected,” and that “tax increases will inevitably have to occur” (Ibid, p.28).

As earlier mentioned, the late 1970s early 1980s also witnessed significant tension between the provincial and federal governments. Indeed, Lougheed’s government singled out The National Energy Program (NEP) and the patriation of the constitution in 1981 as two “very substantial difficulties” that posed a “threat” to Alberta’s future (Alberta, 1981,

p.7). The government reserved a particular disdain for the NEP, calling it a “discriminatory federal taxation” that had shaken Alberta’s economic growth (ibid).¹² Ultimately, the government felt the constitutional reforms and NEP infringed on areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Amidst a climate of growing political and economic uncertainty, albeit uncertainties anticipated in the years prior, Peter Lougheed’s Conservatives were re-elected on November 2, 1982. Lougheed’s final term as premier – he stepped down two years later – is of interest to this thesis, as the province experienced an economic slowdown and a budgetary deficit. What were government priorities in these years, and where did the issue of the deficit lie on the agenda? What issues or problems were (argued to be) at the heart of these priorities? Who – or what – was viewed as responsible? And what solutions did the government offer? Lastly, what were the language features used in these priority articulations? To answer these questions this thesis turns to the 1983 and 1984 *Budget* and *Throne Speeches*.

Government Agenda 1983

The government outlined three priorities in the 1983 *Speech from the Throne*, and a four point “fiscal strategy” in the *Budget Address*.

1983 Throne: Priorities	1983 Budget: Fiscal Strategy
Economic resurgence	Sound financial management
Job training and retraining	Economic recovery
Sound financial management	Maintain health, education and social services

12 Dyck (1986) argues that the NEP led to a decline in oil exploration in the province, halted oils sands projects, and fuelled separatism, as a number of right-wing separatist parties were soon active on the Alberta scene. The latter is certainly correct; the economic impacts of the NEP remain somewhat contentious, however.

Economic recovery/resurgence and sound financial management both came up in the *Throne* and *Budget Addresses*, placing broad policy areas of the economy and fiscal matters at the forefront of government priorities. Other priorities, such as job training (Throne) and reducing the public sector (Budget) also spoke to economic and fiscal concerns. Rounding out government priorities for 1983 were public services (health, education and social services), highlighted in the budget. The economy, fiscal matters and public services were broad priority areas in 1983.

Keyword searches yielded hits for “new budgetary,” “new fiscal” or “new economic reality(ies).” For example, the government argued that the “transition from an overheated economy to one of more measured, sustained growth involves new budget realities for Albertans” (Alberta, 1983b, p. 289). These keywords served as markers, or justifications of potentially unpopular government policy decisions. Word searches yielded more hits for these terms in the *Budget Address* than the *Speech from the Throne*.

Speech from the Throne

The government offered little discussion of the deficit in the *Speech from the Throne*. However, the priority of “sound financial management,” coupled with the two other agenda priorities that were to be carried out “within the limits of financial constraints,” is an indication that provincial finances were a government priority in 1983. Lougheed’s government argued it would improve both the quality and scope of social services “while simplifying policies and procedures in light of the economy and cost effectiveness” (Alberta, 1983a, p. 7). Regarding “sound financial management,” the goal was “restraining the rate of growth of government expenditure” (p. 16).

Despite the goal to restrain growth, the government allocated significant funding to buoy the private sector. The Alberta Economic Resurgence Plan, released in the fall of 1982, consisted of a “large stimulative capital budget” (p. 2). The priority of economic resurgence in 1983 was to see the government “sustain” and “supplement” this plan through “intensive efforts to assist the private sector.” The government argued the following of the economic resurgence plan:

My government responded to this economic situation in 1982 by bringing forth a large stimulative capital budget to help sustain activity, by reducing oil and gas royalties to encourage job activity in the petroleum industry, by shielding home owners from high interest rates to stabilize consumer and retail trade, by reducing interest expense to our farmers to partially offset decline in net farm income, and by shielding small businesses from high interest rates to sustain these businessmen through this difficult period (p. 2).

Of interest here is the use of active wording such as responded, bringing forth, stimulative, reducing, sustain, encourage and shielding. Indeed, the priority of “economic resurgence” creates an image of activity, presumably directed at the above groups, which includes homeowners, businessmen, petroleum industry, and farmers. These policy articulations ultimately aim to construct an identity for government that is actively addressing policy issues.

This active wording was not limited to economic issues, however, and keyword searches for “my government” (the first words of the above passage) produced 38 hits. Most instances were followed by an action statement such as “my government will assist...” and “my government has been actively engaged...” This active wording, along with a strong commitment to what government had done, was doing, or would do, are categorical assertions about government, their policies, and their relation with various people in the province. A presence of modal markers regarding, for example, what

government *may* have done, *might* do in the future, or was *trying* to do, would result in less assertive statements and open up these articulations to difference of opinion or criticism. Moreover, this active “responding,” “helpful” and “shielding” language potentially leads to assumptions about the source and nature of policy issues as something external to the province, and a threat. Inasmuch as government was viewed as universally active and helpful, this language acts as a moral guide that seeks to suppress blame, criticism and difference – indeed it would seem ungrateful to criticize such a helpful and protective government.

This language is a thematic constant in all *Speech from the Throne* agendas I examined, and speaks to issues of identity, and more generally, the discursive practice of consensus seeking embedded in government priorities and agendas. It is not my argument that governments necessarily knowingly fashion policy agendas in this manner, nor do I argue that agendas are necessarily interpreted in this manner (certainly, the interpretation can depend upon a number of factors beyond the articulation). Rather, I wish to draw attention to the features of language embedded in policy agendas, and theorize about their discursive nature. Examinations of this nature are not present in the provincial literature, nor are they encouraged by much of the policy theory that promote rational and linear examinations of policy.

Budget Address

Social programs, fiscal policy and the economy were budgetary priorities in 1983, evidenced by the government’s four-fold “fiscal strategy,” which involved: sound financial management; economic recovery; maintenance of education, health and social service programs; and a reduction in the size of the public service (Alberta, 1983b, p. 290). Of these four objectives, “sound financial management” was particularly salient, as

the government argued the Budget's "central objective" was to "safeguard" provincial finances and thereby "preserve Alberta's fiscal credibility" (Ibid).

Sound financial management. The government described the budget as a "prudent," "responsible," and "restrained approach" that would see a dramatic reduction in the growth of government costs and the size of the public sector,¹³ and no major tax increases (p. 286). Due to "new budget realities," a key thrust of the 1983 budget was a "hold-the-line approach" that would see "very few new programs and enrichments" (p. 290). Lougheed's government asserted the slumping economy, coupled with the "demands of a fast-growing population," had led to a number of fiscal concerns, including 1982's "record deficit," depleting financial reserves, and borrowing for the first time in 10 years (p. 296).

The government proposed revenue increases via Heritage Fund transfers and increases to health care premiums and the tobacco tax to address fiscal concerns. Revenues, particularly non-renewable resource revenues, were described as "unpredictable," "volatile," and "erratic." The causes of the economic downturn were all external to the province, as Alberta was "simultaneously hit by the full aftershock of the Ottawa energy program, record high interest rates, a Canadian and world recession, falling energy demand, and softening oil prices" (p. 287).¹⁴ The solutions sought

13 The fourth objective in the fiscal strategy involved reducing the public service by a total of 237 positions.

14 The government took issue with federal policies in particular, and argued that the NEP "inflicted" upon the country was an "ill-conceived," "harmful" and "anti-investment" initiative that weakened Canada's energy industry (Ibid).

contained similar active wording to that of the *Speech from the Throne*. The government emphasized numerous times that oil and gas revenue sources were beyond their control:

Roughly one-half of revenue is directly tied to the production and sale of our non-renewable resources. As was so graphically evidenced in 1982, market conditions largely beyond our control can cause unpredictable changes in our revenue. While we are closer to receiving fair market value for our resources, our revenue situation is more volatile than ever before. Fiscal planning and forecasting is therefore more difficult (Alberta, 1983b, p. 289).

The assertions of interest in this passage deal with the composition of provincial revenues, the unpredictability of non-renewable resource revenues, and the concluding principal assertion that fiscal planning and forecasting is difficult. These are strong assertions, evidenced by the tense marker *is*, instead of a weaker alternative such as *might be* or *could be*.¹⁵ This strong modality is bolstered by wording “tied directly” and “more volatile.” Inasmuch as revenues are “largely beyond” control and “unpredictable,” this language use has the potential to minimize government accountability for the deficit, or poor fiscal planning. Recall that economic diversification, with the aim of decreasing dependency upon these volatile sources, was an ongoing priority for Lougheed’s government throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. Issues of responsibility and blame for poor “fiscal planning” and failed economic diversification efforts are at stake in these assertions. So too is consensus for government and its policies.

¹⁵ There are, however, markers of a weaker modality, represented by “market conditions largely beyond our control *can* cause unpredictable changes.” This statement is less absolute than others in the passage, and suggests that government has some degree of control in fiscal planning. A categorical assertion such as “market conditions *beyond* control *cause*...” would go farther in removing Lougheed’s government as an agent of responsibility in revenue planning.

Other revenue sources. It is true that not all revenues are “largely beyond control.” Here, provincial taxation is of interest. The government pointed to their tax policy – no personal or corporate tax increases, and no sales or gasoline tax – as one of the “major reasons revenue has not kept pace with expenditures” (p. 289). However, the government did propose to increase the tobacco tax and health care premiums:

Given the new budget realities faced by Alberta, the unavoidable option of increasing tax revenue to reduce the size of the deficit was carefully weighed (Alberta, 1983b, p. 294).

The framing of tax increases as an “unavoidable option,” suggests that government does not wish to raise taxes, and offers insight into the broader context where raising taxes may be an unpopular decision (with some but perhaps not all). Moreover, inasmuch as this option was “unavoidable” it was not a decision or option at all, thus removing the government as a potential agent of blame in tax increases. The option was nonetheless “carefully weighed,” where carefully weighed is viewed as a reassurance that things are not being done in haste. After tabling tax increase proposals, the government asserted that “Albertans still enjoy, by a wide margin, the lowest tax rates in the country” (p. 294).

The manner in which the government discussed taxes leads to questions concerning what “Albertans” desire or “enjoy” in a taxing scheme. These are value statements regarding the undesirability of tax increases, and the desirability of the lowest taxes in the country. However, the government does not reference, for example, a public opinion poll. It is consequently unclear if this is a reflection of what “Albertans” desire – to what extent Lougheed’s government was responding to active, perceived or anticipated criticism or expectations – or if this taxing scheme is more precisely a government desire that has also been framed as an “Albertan” desire. An important issue in these excerpts is

the potential (re)construction of an “Alberta” identity, or a portion thereof, that involves low taxes (among the lowest in the country), and how this identity might influence agenda setting processes regarding what can and cannot be done regarding taxation. This interest resonates with Fairclough’s ideological function of language, and complicates issues of government agency and power with regards to tax policy.

A further point of interest lies in tax increases “to reduce the size of the deficit.” Why did the government not justify tax increases to reduce the deficit *and* pay for provincial services, or economic initiatives – two priorities representing large financial commitments? Here the deficit emerged as an issue in itself, and questions arise regarding how “the deficit” was understood and articulated in the broader context, and what kind of attention it was receiving.

Keyword searches for “reality(ies)” produced 13 hits for the 1983 budget, far more than the other years of interest for this thesis. Most instances of “new reality” (budgetary, fiscal or economic) occurred as justification for a potentially unpopular policy, as seen in the above passage where the government proposed tax increases. In discussions of many other “new realities,” the government proposed service or funding cuts. The term “reality” is particularly interesting in policy issues due to its potential to naturalize the issue at hand, and thus remove decisions and agents (of blame or responsibility) from policy processes.

Maintenance of Social Programs and Economic Recovery. The fiscal strategy contained the priorities of maintaining provincial social programs and economic recovery. These policy areas represent important expenditure aspects of the budget, and perhaps stand in contrast to government efforts to “restrain expenditure growth.” Indeed,

the government asserted their spending restraint would be balanced by their “commitment to continue to provide among the best public services in Canada and to care about those Albertans who require special assistance” (p. 286). They argued elsewhere that Alberta’s “wide range of programs” was of “unparalleled quality” and “second to none,” and cited as proof the province’s high per capita expenditure rate compared to the rest of the country (p. 292). The following passage displays less commitment to social programs, however:

Therefore the government and Alberta's citizens will be obliged to respond to these new circumstances with more realistic expectations as to the capacity of the provincial government to continue to provide high-cost services without major tax increases (Alberta, 1983b, p. 294).

There is an inclusion element in this passage (evidenced by “the government *and* Alberta’s citizens...”) that weds government and “Albertans” in the preference for cutting back public services over tax increases. Is this preference representative of “Alberta’s citizens”? To what extent is government speaking for Albertans, and constructing what Albertans desire in a tax scheme? This is a potentially significant moment in provincial policy, as it represents a turnaround from the open discussions regarding major tax increases (personal and corporate taxes) from previous budgets throughout the late 1970s. As recently as 1982 the government asserted that if demands for provincial services continued to rise, they would “increase tax rates sooner than expected” (Alberta, 1982, p.28). How or why this change came about is unclear in the *Budget Speech*, as there is no discussion of any sort of deliberative process. Moreover, there is no clarification of this in the literature.

Government Agenda 1984

The government highlighted the following five priorities in 1984's *Speech from the Throne*, and a five-fold fiscal strategy in the *Budget Address*:

1984 Throne: Priorities	1984 Budget: Fiscal Strategy¹⁶
Fiscal policy directions	Fiscal responsibility
Basic education reforms	Public service restraint
Deregulation	Reduce the size of government
Expanded privatization	Sustain employment
Legislative proposals	Maintain "high level" people services

The "major challenge" for 1984 was to "steer a careful course between sound financial management, providing job-producing private sector initiatives, while maintaining at the same time our high level public services" (Alberta, 1984a, p. 16). The budget's fiscal strategy also contained economic, fiscal and social priorities. However, throne priorities focussed on fiscal and economic issues, while the budget's "dual goal" was to balance fiscal responsibility with an economic climate conducive to private sector growth (Alberta, 1984a, p. 2). Keyword searches for the year saw "transition" (six) and "adjustment" (nine) emerge as important themes in the budget. The *Speech from the Throne* yielded no matches for either of these words.

Speech from the Throne

The deficit was not addressed in the *Speech from the Throne*, though fiscal policy was to "stress a trimmer, leaner government" and "responsible management of the public finances" (Alberta, 1984a, p. 15). There was also a "government-wide" deregulation

16 The *Budget Address* also contained "budgetary objectives" of economic recovery, fiscal responsibility, reductions in manpower and expenditure, employment support and maintenance of people services.

effort, which centred on reducing or eliminating “unnecessary or obsolete regulations” that “frustrate or complicate” business and citizens (p. 2).

The government was also looking to privatize services in 1984, and argued that a number of departments had utilized or were looking to utilize private sector staffing in light of recent privatization initiatives (p. 15).¹⁷ In the transportation industry, for example, services were outsourced to the private sector. Additionally, discussion of social services saw government “continue to encourage the involvement of volunteers and the private sector” (p. 6). This encouragement is significant as it is evidence of government seeking to decrease social responsibility and transfer it to the civil (volunteer) and private sectors. The specific priorities of deregulation and privatization represent a more focussed set of neo-liberal economic principles aimed at restructuring government than in 1983.

Budget Address

The government described 1983 as the “most difficult economic year in more than a decade” (Alberta, 1984b, p. 176). The outlook for 1984-85, however, was optimistic as it asserted the “the worst is behind us” (Ibid). The government argued that “Alberta is in transition from a period of superheated, artificially high growth to one of more normal and sustainable growth”; the “adjustment process” was largely completed (p. 177).

Fiscal responsibility and public service restraint. The reported deficit for 1982-83 was \$2 billion, while the forecast for 1983-84 called for a deficit of \$560 million (p.

17 Specifically, the privatization of Pacific Western Airlines.

180). The deficit was described as a “major problem,” while the prospect of long term deficits was “very disturbing” (p. 177). The government attributed the deficit to drastic increases in world oil prices in 1979 (which created an influx of investment, people and expenditures), the national energy program, and softened world oil markets.

Consequently, Alberta was left with high “expenditure commitments and uncertain revenue prospects” (p. 180). The government proposed a two- fold “deficit reduction strategy” of transfers from the Heritage Fund, expenditure reductions and the elimination of over 800 fulltime public sector positions.

The Heritage Fund was particularly important to fiscal goals in 1984, as the government announced “continued use of the Heritage Fund to hold down taxes and reduce the deficit” (p. 185). The fund was the province’s “financial bridge to the future.” Of particular interest here is the goal to “hold down taxes,” which again, is a turnaround from the 1970s when Lougheed’s government openly discussed raising taxes (personal and corporate) as part of this “bridging” and transition period. Regarding taxation, Lougheed’s 1984 government argued the following:

There are no new taxes and there are no increases in existing tax rates in this budget. [Applause]

Albertans enjoy the most favourable overall tax environment in Canada. We continue to have the lowest personal income tax rate of any province, we are one of only two provinces with no gasoline tax, and we are the only province with no sales tax (p. 184).

DR. BUCK: We better not bring one in.¹⁸

18 It was at this point, as discussed earlier (p.37), that MLA Dr. Walter Buck interjected, as noted in Hansard.

To conclude this taxation discussion the government argued that “if energy prices or markets deteriorate, or if expenditure on services cannot be contained, there will be no alternative but to look at a combination of service level cuts and tax increases” (Ibid). But discussions for tax increases or the need for a provincial sales tax were rare, and language such as the province’s “favourable” tax environment relative to the rest of the country, phrasing of “no alternative” regarding increases, and the above argument regarding the Heritage Fund “hold(ing)” down taxes suggests that tax increases were undesirable in the province at the time. Indeed, this passage offers a rare view into the broader policy context in which a member of an opposing party, and apparently the rest of the legislature, displayed opposition to tax increases. Moreover, “Albertans” are constructed in this passage as “enjoy(ing)” the lowest taxes in Canada. Given the rarity of applauses and interjections (I do not recall any others in my analysis), I suggest the issue of taxation was actively debated at the time. However, this speech offers little information regarding how important groups including the voting public, business, and media understood the issue at the time.

Expenditures. The government argued the budget lowered expenditure growth by 1.7 percent (p. 180-81).¹⁹ The government called for Albertans to be “partners in restraint” by lowering their demands for public services (p. 180). The manner in which government discussed cutbacks is of interest:

In 1983 we began to tackle government expenditure growth with a hold-the-line budget. This budget stays the course. It marks the second step in a necessary and orderly paring down of the provincial government sector (p. 176).

19 They pointed out that they lowered expenditure growth from 30 percent to about 10 percent in 1983.

Phrasing such as “tackle,” “hold-the-line,” “stays the course,” and “paring down” imply that cutbacks were difficult or uncomfortable for government, or that government wished them to appear this way. Indeed, the act of tackling produces an image of something that is out of control and must be taken down. The assertion that paring down was “necessary” contains a strong commitment to a need for cutbacks, and has the potential to hide the decision, and thus the agent – potentially deflecting criticism or blame for cutbacks.

After tabling restraint proposals, the following discussion aimed to soften any potential blow (or perhaps silence an active critique):

Even with this level of belt-tightening, Albertans will still enjoy the finest level of services and facilities of any province. On a per citizen basis, Alberta's expenditure on government services is approximately 35 percent above the average for all provinces (p. 181).

Again, the metaphor of belt-tightening suggests that cutbacks were unpleasant. Reaction to the decision to restrain and cutback (presumably unpopular with the voting public, but also perhaps the media, bureaucrats and those within government departments who are receiving cutbacks) is potentially softened through an appeal to Alberta's still strong monetary support for public services relative to the rest of the country. Here, government services are used as leverage for consensus in proposals for cutbacks. Elsewhere in the *Budget Address*, the government asked Albertans to “expect less,” and asserted the “support of all Albertans is needed because demand for services fuels and increases in our operating costs” (p. 181). These latter examples are direct appeals for co-operation, and indicative of a need or desire for consensus in policy proposals.

Economic Recovery. The fiscal strategy for the year was intended to “sustain employment and set the foundation for a period of steady, durable private sector growth and job security” (p. 180).²⁰ They proposed the following economic initiatives:

This year the government will continue to support vigorously marketing and trade development for Alberta's products. The international market is fiercely competitive. No existing Alberta market, whether domestic or foreign, is safe. New sales will require aggressive, imaginative initiatives. Now is the time to support our international sales force. The government will work in partnership with Alberta industry to help expand our markets (p. 181).

This passage contains strong propositions, evidenced by strong tense markers (is, will), which lead to categorical assertions about nature of government and the international economy. For example, “the government *will* continue to support vigorously” and “the government *will* work in partnership.” These assertions about the nature of government (as helpful, supportive, aggressive, imaginative and partners) are juxtaposed to categorical assertions about the nature of the international economy, which is fiercely competitive and a threat (no market is safe) to Alberta markets. The language is metaphoric, and it gives “international markets” qualities such as “fiercely competitive.” Markets appear to be attacking Alberta business, and thus receive the blame for provincial economic issues. In contrast, the government is constructed as universally willing and helpful, active, and indeed, an ally to Alberta business.

Summary

Government priorities in 1983 and 1984 spoke to economic and fiscal issues, and to a lesser extent social programs. While the deficit appeared as an issue on both the

²⁰ The fiscal priorities discussed above are understood, at least partially, as economic tools.

Throne and Budgetary Agendas in 1983, it did not receive significant attention in either. Rather, the more salient fiscal issue was “restraining” expenditure growth, despite outlining significant spending commitments to buoy the economy. There is evidence of the deficit increasing in saliency in 1984, as the government labelled the prospect of recurring deficits “very disturbing.”

In some instances there was a clear effort consensus seeking, as the government explicitly asked Albertans for “cooperation,” or to expect or demand less. In other instances, government used as leverage for consensus Alberta’s “advantages” to the rest of Canada, including its high level social programs, tax policy and more generally its fiscal and economic performance. Most often, however, government used language that presented itself as not to blame, as helpful, efficient, supportive, protective, etc. Overwhelmingly, these were categorical statements, and were realized through an absence of subjective markers that could indicate an expression of opinion, and of soft modal markers regarding what the government had done, was doing, or would soon do. Also, government was framed in a moral (helpful, protective, efficient) language that suppresses critique and offers little room for different voices regarding policy articulations. Of interest is the power or ability of government officials to construct government and Albertans in particular ways, and relatedly, the power of language and ideas to remove government as an agent of blame in policy issues, and at times to remove decisions, or perhaps disguise government decisions as those of Albertans (as was the case with taxation in 1983).

Chapter Five: The Getty Government 1987

After fourteen years in office, Peter Lougheed resigned as premier. Don Getty, a colleague and prominent member of the cabinet took over as Conservative leader and premier in November 1985 amidst ongoing concerns about the province's economic prospects for 1986. The government's priorities reflected this uncertainty, and efforts to assist oil and gas, as well as agriculture appeared in the *Speech from the Throne*. Budgetary priorities, included "reaching" out to Albertans who were less fortunate; continuing quality people programs; further streamlining government; and maintaining a "success-oriented, low tax environment" (Alberta, 1986, p. 25). The government planned to continue both the "momentum of privatization," and to downsize the public sector by laying-off another 300 workers.

While there is carry-over from Lougheed's agendas regarding the broad priority areas of the economy,²¹ fiscal policy and social programs, Getty's agenda differs in terms of a stronger emphasis on social programs, and particularly the priority of "reaching out" to those Albertans who were "less fortunate." Getty's attention to this policy group – consisting of the elderly, children, disabled persons, unemployed, and others – is of note. This concern for social programs is seen in 1987's agendas as well.

Government Agenda 1987

The government opened both the *Throne* and *Budget Speeches* with discussion of the economy, fiscal policy and public programs. In the *Speech from the Throne*, for

21 See Smith (1992), Dyck (1986), and Tupper, Pratt, Urquhart (1992) for more detailed accountings of economic continuity and change (particularly regarding economic diversification) between the two premiers.

example, government discussed the “sudden” drop in oil prices, a large budgetary deficit and balancing the budget, and maintaining Alberta’s “leading programs in health care, services for seniors, education and social policy” (Alberta, 1987a, p.1). In the *Budget Address* the government similarly discussed “extreme and difficult” economic challenges, “tough measures to address the new fiscal challenges facing Alberta,” and their commitment to “protect those Albertans in need” and “quality services” (Alberta, 1987b, p.1). However, there was a strong focus on the economy in throne priorities, while budgetary priorities focussed exclusively on the deficit – evidenced by the two-point fiscal strategy to lower the deficit in the short-term, and balance the budget in the medium-term by 1990-91. Keyword searches in the *Speech from the Throne* yielded increased hits for the active wording previously discussed, but did not produce any dominant theme in either document.

1987 Throne: Priorities	1987 Budget: Fiscal Strategy
Employment	Deficit reduction
Education	Balance the budget by 1990-91
Agriculture	
Energy	
Economic diversification	

Speech from the Throne

Although not outlined as a priority, the deficit was a significant concern in 1987. The government offered the following discussion in the opening of its address:

A budgetary deficit can be justified in the short term to protect Albertans, but as in our homes and businesses, deficits cannot be allowed to continue. My government will outline plans in the budget to balance the province's finances in an orderly way over the next several years. In this process Alberta's leading programs in health care, services for seniors, education, and social policy will not be placed at risk. Alberta has a long tradition of prudent financial management,

and working together, Albertans will continue to benefit from my government's firm commitment to these important policy areas.

My government encourages all Albertans to join in a cooperative spirit to meet the challenge of our new fiscal realities.

At the same time, these new realities can bring out the best in Albertans as together we seek new answers and new innovations to assure the greatness we know Alberta can achieve (p. 1).

The strong propositions (realized primarily through the wording “my government *will...*”) similar to those used by Lougheed’s government in 1983 and 1984, stand out here. This language indicates identity work is at play, where “firm commitment” (to social programs), and “deficits cannot be allowed to continue” speaks to the identity of a government of action and firmness. These identities relate to the priorities of social and fiscal policy (both appear in the first line when the deficit is justified to provide social programs).

There are potentially two audiences holding different priorities in this passage, one that values a “prudent financial manager” in government and one that values a commitment to social programs. While the latter group is more clearly identifiable as “Albertans,” there is less clarity on what group(s) value fiscal responsibility, or indeed, to what extent “Albertans” also value fiscal responsibility from government. Of particular interest is the potential conflict between these priority areas and identities, and perhaps the primary discursive work at play in this passage, which is to bring harmony to this potential conflict. It is here where this passage appears to be addressing “Albertans” more than specific groups seeking “fiscal responsibility.” In the last sentence of the first paragraph, for example, the government appears to set out a condition of cooperation for Albertans:

Alberta has a long tradition of prudent financial management, *and working together*, Albertans will continue to benefit from my government's firm commitment to these important policy areas.

The assumption of “working together” potentially closes off or minimizes the choice or possibility of not “working together,” as Fairclough (2006) argues, assumed consensus suppresses actual difference. A direct appeal for consensus is present in the second when the government “encourages” a “cooperative spirit” from Albertans. In the third paragraph the government again assumes cooperation (consensus) as they argue “as *together* we seek new answers...” Of interest in the last line is the document has gone from potential conflict and consensus seeking between government and Albertans, to an actual consensus where Albertans are constructed as working with government.

Further driving towards consensus is the manner in which government sets up cooperating as a moral good, where cooperating will “bring out the best” and “assure greatness” in Albertans, in which case it would not seem logical to not cooperate. Moreover, inasmuch as social programs are represented as contingent upon working together, not working together represents a potential threat to their continuance.

There is evidence of increased saliency regarding identity management for Getty’s government in 1987. For example, word searches for “my government...” increased from 38 and 32 in 1983 and 1984 to 60 hits in 1987.²² This increase was also a jump from 46 hits in 1986 (Premier Getty’s first *Speech from the Throne*). Although it is unclear why this increase took place, if it was merely coincidence for example, it is

22 The active wording similar to that of Lougheed is present in all policy areas. Examples include priorities of agriculture and energy, which were designed to “protect Albertans” from economic challenges, and the priority of economic diversification, which the government planned to “vigorously promote and continue” (p. 1)

possible Getty's government was responding to increased demands for action, was being accused (or anticipating accusation) of not doing enough. Indeed, 1986 is noted in the literature as a particularly difficult economic year for the province, and Harrison (1995) argues that Getty's government shouldered blame for policy issues at this time.

Budget Address

The government opened the *Budget Address* with a focus on the "uncertainty in the export markets for all our basic commodities" (Alberta, 1987b, p. 247). They sought "tough measures to address the new fiscal challenges facing Alberta" while asserting their commitment to "protect those Albertans in need" (Ibid). However, the deficit was given priority attention in the address, evidenced both by the government's extensive discussion in this area (28 hits for "deficit") and its "fiscal strategy," which consisted of a deficit reduction of 40 percent and a balanced budget by 1990-91 (Ibid).

Deficit Reduction and Balancing the Budget by 1990-91

The government forecasted a budgetary deficit of \$3.3 billion for 1986-87, which it noted was the highest per capita in Canada. The imbalance was due to a "dramatic decline" in provincial revenues (29 percent) coupled with expenditures that were "too high relative to our revenue base" and that "exceed those in other provinces by a substantial margin" (pp. 250-251).

Regarding revenues, the government argued that factors with OPEC, the American government and falling grain prices were "developments and trends beyond our borders and beyond our control greatly influence Alberta's economic performance and fiscal plan" (pp. 247-248). Once again, the blame lies with external factors.

Getty's government planned to make "the necessary fiscal corrections without delay," and argued that "failing to act decisively now could result in a crisis of major proportions" (Ibid). Government emphasized its intention to trim and reduce costs, and announced expenditure cuts "unparalleled in Canada" at 6.3 percent (p. 251). The deficit strategy involved a three-way "attack" on the deficit by suspending revenue transfers to the Heritage Fund, downsizing expenditures closer to the Canadian average by 1990-91, and substantial increases in taxes (p. 251). Of note here is the aggressive verb "attack," which conveys a sense of urgency towards the deficit and constructs "the deficit" as an enemy, and something to receive blame.

Reducing expenditures was a significant part of deficit reduction plans for the year. The following passage is part of the government's expenditure discussion:

Despite this government's restraint efforts, spending remains too high relative to our revenue base.

Alberta's per capita expenditure base is approximately one-third above the national average. During the period 1980-81 to 1986-87, combined expenditure grew at an average annual rate of nearly 11 percent, led by spending on social programs.²³

We must take action now to realign the government finances. Deficits in the order of \$3 billion cannot be allowed to continue (p. 250).

There is a sense of urgency in this passage ("we must take action now...") and firmness regarding the nature of provincial expenditures ("remains too high") and the undesirability of deficits ("deficits....cannot be allowed to continue") that conveys a

23 "Led by spending on social programs" is an interesting add-on here. Is spending that is led by social programs more acceptable, and less critiqued?

strong commitment to expenditure levels as an issue, as well as the need or intent to do something about them. These statements also contain strong assertions, evidenced by tense (is, will) and verbs (cannot, must).

Regarding issues of blame, there is an agent to receive “credit” for expenditure restraint, but not one to receive blame for existing high expenditures. Indeed, the government asserted in the opening line they had already been restraining (“despite this government’s restraint efforts...”). However, inasmuch as government argued that “spending remains too high...” and “combined expenditure grew...” there is no specific agent to receive blame. This language works to deflect blame for expenditure growth, but garner credit for “restraint efforts” and plans to balance the budget.

Questions arise regarding how “the deficit,” “public spending” and “restraint” were framed by important groups in the policy context at the time, and how government articulations worked to reconstruct, re-contextualize and/or change these articulations. I suggest the urgency displayed in this passage is meant to connect in some way with what is being said in the broader context, and examining how government articulations align (or do not) with public opinion, opposition politics, and media, seems a salient issue for agenda-setting research.

Proposed solutions for the deficit contained a strong social orientation, as the government asked Albertans to “pay more through taxes” to maintain provincial public services:

In this budget, Mr. Speaker, I am asking Albertans to pay more through taxes so we can maintain the quality of our programs.

In considering tax increases, we were concerned with the implications for the economy and the impact on low-income Albertans. Three benchmarks were adopted. First, Alberta's tax load should remain the lowest of any province;

second, the burden of tax increases should be shared between businesses and individuals; and third, low-income groups should be protected (p. 254).

These tax proposals are a noticeable shift from Lougheed's in 1983 and 1984, when the government proposed minor adjustments to provincial taxes. Getty's proposals to personal and corporate taxes would generate significantly more revenue, as well as more negative attention. Consequently, one might expect to find government removed as the agent proposing tax increases. However, it is clear that Getty's government made a request (I am asking...) in this situation, and it is consequently clear that government is making decisions to raise taxes. Here, there *is* an agent to blame for the presumably unpopular decision to raise taxes. In 1983 the decision to raise taxes was framed as "no choice," while the decision in 1984 to restrain expenditures and not raise taxes was framed as something government *and* Albertans desired. Thus Getty's 1987's agendas contain more transparency concerning policy decisions and proposals compared those of Lougheed in 1983 and '84. How these different policy articulations were received (re-contextualized, rejected or accepted for example) given Getty's orientation to transparency Lougheed's removal of agency and assumption of similarity, might yield interesting findings regarding the political and ideological effects of policy discourse, and the priority of consensus. And, although these policy moments are long gone, examinations of newspaper microfiche, along with archived legislative debates from these respective years could offer some insight.

One additional point of interest between Lougheed and Getty's tax proposals concerns their orientation. In 1987, taxation was a means to social ends ("so that we can maintain the quality of our programs"), whereas in 1983 the limited tax increases were aimed more directly at fiscal ends ("to reduce the size of the deficit"). The deficit was

partly a social issue for government in 1987, but more a fiscal issue in 1983. This shift in taxation as a (partial) solution for the deficit on the 1987 agenda leads to questions regarding what might have changed in the agenda-setting context. What might have occurred that paved the way for Getty's taxation proposals? What was public opinion at the time? Of note in 1986/87 is the particularly dramatic drop in economic output of the energy and agriculture sectors, as well as the fact that this was Getty's second year in office – he was relatively new. Thus these tax proposals may have been a confluence of an extremely difficult economy and a pressing need for revenue, along with a new premier who carried (some) new ideas. How do these different policy articulations work in and on their respective contexts at the time? How are they constrained, and how (who) do they seek to constrain? Once again, what is missing in this thesis, as well as the literature, is a view of the policy context at the time, particularly in reference to how “government,” “the deficit,” “Albertans,” and taxation were viewed by the public, media and political opposition in these years.

Two similarities to Lougheed's discussion of taxation are of note in the three tax increase benchmarks, however. First, taxes are discussed as a “burden” and something that is ultimately undesirable. Second, the government wished to “ensure” that Alberta's taxes remained the lowest in the country. The following passage is the conclusion of tax increase proposals, where Getty's government hedges tax proposals against criticism by pointing to Alberta's low taxes relative to the rest of the country:

These measures will add nearly \$1 billion to provincial revenue. However, Mr. Speaker, Alberta will continue to have no sales tax, no payroll tax and no capital tax. Albertans on average will continue to pay lower provincial taxes than other Canadians (p. 254).

Getty's government anticipated that some will view taxation as negative, and appealed for consensus through Albertans still paying the lowest taxes in Canada. In this situation the government followed up asking something potentially controversial with giving back to people (maintaining low taxes), and provincial taxation is seen as a political advantage, or wiggle room, for consensus. At work here is the potential (re)construction of Alberta as a special tax jurisdiction in the country. Also, perhaps more interestingly, taxation actually emerges as a special issue in the province – as leverage for consensus.

Highlighting the drive for consensus at this time are the government's closing remarks of the address: "it is now time, Mr. Speaker, for all Albertans to remember the spirit on which our province was built and to join together with new ideas and a renewed determination to build a better future for us all" (p. 255). Of importance is that "join(ing) together" is centred on government policy proposals. There is a concerted effort in this regard at the conclusion of the speech, as the government also argued that "we must all rise to the occasion" and "we must be determined in our resolve" (Ibid). The inclusive language (we) assumes similarity, that the "occasion" (the various fiscal, economic and social issues discussed in the speech) is the same for all, and that the resolve (proposed solutions) are also similar. Here policy works towards consensus through inclusive and assumptive language. Lastly, Albertans are constructed as people who cooperate and join together, while those who do not "join together," (perhaps those who oppose government), are simultaneously constructed as non-Albertan, thus providing a moral sanction against dissenting voices.

Summary

Government priorities in 1987 focussed on the economy and fiscal policy, with the *Speech from the Throne* priorities aimed at the former, and budgetary priorities at the latter. Once again policy articulations were comprised of strong assertions regarding government activity. Fiscal policy and the deficit received significant attention in the budget, and the government conveyed a strong commitment to the nature of policy issues and solutions. As I have argued, this language serves identity purposes, deflects blame through categorical assertions, and otherwise seeks a consensus for policy, and government, in the broader context.

Taxation once again emerged as an interesting issue, and there is evidenced of both shifting and continuity with Lougheed's previous agendas. In terms of solutions sought for the deficit, Getty's budgetary proposals to raise income and business tax represents a shift from Lougheed, as does the manner in which tax proposals were framed as specific requests by government. Consequently, questions arise regarding what led to the decision to raise taxes, as well as how the language in which tax increases were framed might affect consensus seeking.

Chapter Six: The Getty Government 1992

Don Getty was still holding office as Premier in the early 1990s when the provincial economy struggled once again. The government recorded a deficit of almost \$2 billion in 1991, marking their sixth of what would be nine consecutive deficits. Polls showed rising public disapproval of the government, resulting in what Cooper (1996) argues was Alberta's first competitive political party system in years.²⁴ Tupper, Pratt and Urquhart (1992) summed up politics for the Conservatives during this period as a time of increasing public demands upon a decreasing provincial treasury. In the passage below, they discuss increased opposition in the legislature, and issues regarding the nature of democracy under the Conservative government:

Debates about the quality of democratic life are not new to Alberta. The growth of government in the Lougheed years, the development of quasi-public institutions like the Alberta Energy Company and the active governmental pursuit of economic diversification led to an expansion of the cabinet's power. Alberta's opposition parties, especially the New Democrats in the 1970s, often worried about the growing imbalance between the executive and the legislature, the lack of public accountability and an excess of secrecy in provincial administration. But their concerns for more open government never engaged the public's imagination during the boom years

But in the early 1990s, questions about the quality of democracy in Alberta are much more widely debated. As noted earlier, Alberta's environmental movement, like its counterparts elsewhere in the democratic world, stresses the need for greater public participation in policy-making and administration. Greater partisan competition and the advent of larger, more aggressive legislative oppositions have also contributed to more careful scrutiny of the government (pp. 55-56).

24 As previously discussed, the Liberals under Laurence Decore were building momentum in the province. In the 1989 provincial election, for example, while the NDP maintained their level of support from the 1986 election, the Liberal party went from 12.2 percent and four seats the previous election to 28.6 percent and eight seats. By contrast, Conservative support slipped from 51.1 percent and 61 seats to 44.4 percent and 59 seats. Much of the Liberal party's gain can be attributed to Decore's persistent criticism of the government's handling of the deficit.

These environmental and democratic concerns appeared on the government agenda as priorities in 1990, and both issues remained in 1992.

Government Agenda 1992

Speech from the Throne priorities in 1992 included five “ever changing realities,” which covered policy areas of economic, fiscal, social, legislative and environmental policy. The *Budget Address* saw the government outline four point fiscal and economic strategies.

1992 Throne: Priorities	1992 Budget: Economic Strategy
Economic reality	Personal income tax cut
Fiscal reality	Business tax cut
Environmental reality	Support farmers and small business
Social reality	Capital works job creation
Constitutional reality	

1992 Budget: Fiscal Strategy
Balance the budget
Legislate spending limits
Restructure programs
Cut internal government operations

“Reality” and “change” were important words in 1992. Searches for reality(ies) produced 18 hits in the *Speech from the Throne* (one in the *Budgetary Address*), while searches for change(ing) revealed eight in the *Throne Speech* and fifteen in the *Budgetary Address*. Almost all hits for “change” in the budget referred to programs and initiatives government was actively changing. In the *Throne Speech*, however, change took on an

agent-less process, as the government referred to their five priorities as “ever-changing realities.”

Speech from the Throne word searches for “my government” produced 66 hits in 1992, and much of the active and protective wording similar to that used by Lougheed and Getty (1987) is on display. There were also hits for what I classify as democratic wording, at six hits for “consultation,” and ten hits for “listen(ing).” This wording speaks to a higher concern for identity issues than in years previous. In addition to an active and protective government, the projected identity is also one that “consults” with and “listens” to Albertans, one of a democratic government. A discursive priority of this language was constructing an identity that that seeks consensus with people in the broader context.

Speech from the Throne

Regarding the province’s “changing realities,” the government argued the following:

My government, the people of Alberta, and all Canadians face enormous challenges in adapting to the new and ever changing realities our nation and our world offer us. Governments cannot stop or control change, but together with the people we can have a major influence on our future. These new realities will find us confronting issues more complex than we have ever faced, but difficult problems also provide us with the opportunity for renewal so we can make our world a better place.

As we address the new fiscal, economic, environmental, social, and constitutional realities together, my government and Albertans know that the role of government and the role of citizens will continue to change. Co-operation, listening, and consultation are required more than ever... (p. 1).

There is a lot to digest in this passage, but the general theme is consensus seeking and constructing across very broad, and in many ways conflicting policy areas. Regarding issues of blame, for example, there is no agent to receive blame in the province’s

“realities.” The challenges, or issues were “offered” by vague agents of the nation and the world (once again external), and an even more vague “change,” which could not be stopped or controlled. Provincial issues thus appear as naturally occurring, and inasmuch as they are understood in this manner, are impossible to critique. Here “change” and “changing reality” are nominalizations that remove government as an agent of blame in the broadest of policy issues.

Getty’s government sought to construct a democratic identity through the usage of “cooperation,” “listening,” and “consultation.”²⁵ Keyword searches for “listen(ing)” and “consult(ation)” yielded ten and six hits respectively, while cooperation yielded five hits (two of which saw the government call for co-operation with Albertans). Although there is not a specific subject in the above passage (listening, cooperating and consulting are simply “required”), the subject is clearer in other instances, as the government argued: “My government will listen to and work with Alberta's processors...and our investors and exporters in order to improve competitiveness” (p. 2). Of interest is how “listen” combines with active wording to construct an identity for government that would work to improve competitiveness *and* listen. Thus, in addition to the active and protective government of previous years, Getty’s 1992 government also sought the identity of a democratic government – one that listens to, consults with, and cooperates. All priorities for the year contained this democratic wording, which framed government and its

25 The government’s environmental priority provides a good example: “...my government has conducted an extensive listening and consultation process over the past two years to develop new legislation. This legislation, written by Albertans, should be concluded in this session and will be amongst the most comprehensive and progressive in the world” (Alberta, 1992a, p.2).

policies in a manner that reflected public opinion, and ultimately in a manner that sought consensus.

Recall Tupper, Pratt and Urquhart's (1992) argument that "[G]reater partisan competition and the advent of larger, more aggressive legislative oppositions have also contributed to more careful scrutiny of the government" (pp. 55-56). The democratic wording in the *Speech from the Throne* is evidence of this scrutiny. What is not being said by government, but *is* being said in the broader context – the identity government sought to counteract through its policy articulations – is that government was not democratic, not listening, and not consulting. As I have previously argued, this broader context is an area where governments lack power. Given Getty's attention a democratic identity, questions arise regarding the production, circulation and consumption of counter articulations of "government" at the time. Was debate centered on blaming government, and constructing government as not competent, rather than exploring alternatives to ongoing policy issues? How are issues of blame and identity attached to other articulations of government? For example, was Laurence Decore's Liberal party's growing support linked to proposing new, more attractive alternatives, or to constructing and discrediting government in certain ways, and otherwise seeking consensus amongst an increasingly restless populace? Does democracy play out in a manner that reflects the self-interest of politicians or members of the media rather than debate?

The above passage also constructs a consensus through inclusive and assumptive language. For example, in the opening line the government argues: "my government, the people of Alberta and all of Canada face enormous challenges...our world offer *us*." This inclusive language is an assumption that social, fiscal, economic, etc. issues on the

government agenda are the same as those of the public. Rather, government issues are presented as universal issues. By including Albertans together in these “realities,” government speaks for Albertans, and there is less room for difference in terms of what challenges are faced and how those challenges are articulated, because government and people face them together. Further evidence of these assumptions is seen in the words “together with the people,” “as we work together,” and in the second paragraph “as we address the new...realities together.”

Getty’s 1992 government displayed more saliency for identity and consensus than any previous government, evidenced by an increase in hits for active wording, as well as language that constructed government as democratic. In these times of increasing fiscal, economic, and political difficulty, the *Speech from the Throne* emerged as a particularly interesting document to examine, and a potentially important means by which governments interact with those in the broader context.

Budget Address

The economy and fiscal policy were top priority areas in the 1992 budget; the government opened the speech discussing the “uncertainty” regarding both the economy and the “fiscal realities that lie ahead” (Alberta, 1992b, p. 383). Although the province had been “challenged as never before,” the economic plan would “keep Alberta growing while most of the country is suffering from a recession.” The government asserted the fiscal plan would keep taxes low and maintain priority programs (Ibid).

The following passage captures the government’s approach to fiscal and economic policy, as well as social policy considerations:

Some would argue that drastic action is required to offset the unexpected drop in resource revenue. That would be unwise this year. This government will not hurt

Albertans by sharply raising taxes or slashing health, education, or seniors' programs when the economy is struggling.

Others would argue that massive government spending is required to strengthen Alberta's economy. This would be an even more serious mistake. We must not compound the fiscal problems resulting from low resource revenue by abandoning this government's tight control of spending. As Albertans and other Canadians have learned only too well, it is easy to add spending but very difficult to cut it.

This government has chosen a sensible course for these difficult times (Ibid, p. 385).

This passage is unique in the analysis because of the inclusion of different social and economic voices, and what appears to be a deliberating process. The inclusion of difference in this passage highlights the dominant feature of the omission or erasure of different voices on government agendas. Most often in this analysis, alternative discourses are never brought up, and the audience is presented with universal views of policy issues and proposed solutions. Certainly, the above *Speech from the Throne* excerpt contains little difference. Most often in agenda speeches, the mechanisms of government agenda-setting are rarely on display, and it is thus difficult to examine how language, ideas, expectations, active voices (public opinion, for example) might exert power and influence on government officials. The “decision-making” of governments is rarely on display due to the omission of alternative discourses and naturalizing language, making it more difficult to contest government policy articulations.

Consensus is nonetheless a goal in this instance, as Getty's government uses hyperbolic language (“drastic action” required, “sharply increasing taxes,” and “massive government spending”) to discredit and reject economic and social voices. Rather, government would choose its own “sensible” path, where sensible also discredits the alternatives, and frames government proposals in a moral language. Here, power is

evidenced through language use that speaks for, or represents, economic and social voices in a manner that discredits. Once again, questions arise regarding the broader context, particularly, why might Getty's government have included different voices in the agenda speech?

Economic strategy. Discussion of the economy saw a familiar pattern that located blame in external factors, as “gloomy news from outside the province as affected Alberta” via the Bank of Canada’s “single-minded” fight against inflation, the Goods and Services Tax (GST), “weak performance with major trading partners has directly affected Alberta” (Alberta, 1992b, p. 383).

The economic strategy (*Economic Agenda '92*) was a “four-point plan to strengthen the Alberta economy and create more jobs for Albertans.” The four initiatives included personal income tax cuts, corporate tax cuts of one percent, “support for small business and rural Alberta through royalty holidays and incentives for famers, and a “work intensive capital project” (p. 385-86). The current budget would enhance “Albertans’ already substantial tax advantage; Alberta will continue to be the best place in Canada to live and work” (p.385). These tax proposals are a shift in direction from those of Getty’s proposals in 1987, when taxation was increased for social purposes. In 1992 taxation was viewed as a means to economic ends, thus signifying an emphasis on economic priorities over social priorities.

Fiscal strategy. Fiscal policy, particularly the deficit, was an important priority for the year, and it argued that restoring fiscal balance was the “second major focus of the budget” (p. 388). The projected deficit of \$2.3 billion for 1992-93 was a “serious problem” and a “very difficult” fiscal situation – the government would “tackle” the

deficit with “determination and a strong collective will” (Ibid). Once again, the deficit emerged as an enemy or threat, and is consequently constructed as the problem, potentially deflecting blame from government. Relatedly, there was a concerted effort to articulate the deficit also as a revenue issue (rather than an expenditure issue), as Getty’s government asserted the key difficulty with provincial finances was poor resource revenues. Elsewhere in the *Budget Address*, the government argued that although other provinces were also grappling with deficits, Alberta was the only province with a revenue problem. Government asserted their expenditure management had kept spending in check, and that Alberta had the best expenditure management record of any government in Canada. Moreover, their proposed “spending control legislation” was part of the “commitment to expenditure management.” The legislation would set “firm limits” on spending, keep taxes low, and “ensure that Alberta does not fall into the trap of spending more when revenue improves” (p. 389). The government also briefly discussed increasing taxes (specifically income tax and fuel tax), only to argue it would “seek a better solution” through expenditure controls (Ibid). There was a clear effort in 1992 to articulate the deficit as a revenue issue, rather than an expenditure issue. How these articulations reflect, re-contextualize, or transform other prominent articulations would provide insight into how policy played out in this period, particularly in regards to consensus-seeking.

The fiscal plan involved balancing the budget over the “medium-term” by 1996-97, primarily through expenditure cuts. Getty’s government proposed to cut another 1,000 public sector jobs (bringing the total since 1985-86 to 4,400), salary freezes, wage restraint and pension reforms, and planned to once again reduce expenditures to their

travel and hosting budget. The government was also actively “reviewing the need for existing offices, boards, agencies, commissions, committees, and task forces,” and planned to cut funding to eleven departments (p. 389). The government argued they couldn’t balance the budget without also cutting important social programs of health and education. Indeed, government was giving these two areas “time to prepare for the new fiscal realities” (p. 386).

Summary

The *Speech from the Throne* emerged as a particularly interesting document in 1992, where policy contained strong assertions about the nature of government activity. In addition to the active and helpful government of previous years, Getty’s government also sought to construct an identity as a listening government, a democratic government. This policy language displays an increased concern for identity. Policy issues were articulated as “ever-changing realities,” a nominalization that naturalizes policy issues, thus removing government as an agent of blame in and again, driving towards a consensus or approval for government. The *Speech form the Throne* also contained assumptive and inclusive language, which worked to construct one view (government’s view) of policy issues and solutions, but also, constructed Albertans as working with government, in which case there is a constructed consensus.

Another intriguing part of the policy debates in 1992 was the inclusion in the *Budget Address* of different economic and social voices, and some level of deliberation between the two. These features denaturalize policy issues and decision making, and consequently, facilitate (rather than suppress) critique of government and its policies. However, the language ultimately aimed to discredit alternative voices, and agenda

policy is nonetheless seen in its orientation to reducing difference and seeking consensus. The 1992 *Budget Address* also saw a concerted effort to articulate the deficit as a revenue issue, as we will see, this quickly disappeared in the course of the ongoing economic and political problems one year later.

Chapter Seven: The Klein Government 1993

Amidst a continuing decline in political support, fuelled by concern over Alberta's growing deficit (over \$3.4 billion in 1992-93), Premier Getty announced his resignation in the fall of 1992. A few months later, he was succeeded as premier by Ralph Klein. Faced with a serious challenge from the Laurence Decore-led Liberals, the Klein government focussed its rhetoric and policies on tackling the deficit and growing debt. This approach bore fruit when the Klein government won a majority in spring election that followed.

Klein's first full term as premier (1993-1997) is noted in the literature for comprehensive changes to government operations and programs. In fact, Klein's Conservatives and the Mike Harris Conservatives in Ontario are often cited as the leaders in public welfare reform in Canada. Amongst the changes were payment cuts to schools and hospitals, the deregulation and privatization of government services, and the restructuring and scaling back of social assistance. Ponak, Reshef, and Taras (2003) explain that cuts ranged from 5.6 percent in basic education, to 15.3 percent in higher education and 17.7 percent cuts to health care. While Reid (2001) adds that overall spending in Alberta declined by \$2.8 billion between 1993 and 1997, with social services posting a significant \$520 million (20 percent) decrease in funding.

Government Agenda 1993

The government highlighted "four fundamental [election] commitments" as priorities for the year. They argued that these priorities were to "guide the government through all its deliberations and actions" over the next four years, regardless of what issues they faced (Alberta, 1993a, p. 8). Budgetary priorities echoed those outlined in the

Speech from the Throne. Balancing the budget, and economic policies aimed at “job creation” were top priorities in both agendas.

1993 Throne: Election Commitments	1993 Budget: Fiscal plan
Balance the budget	Legislation to balance the budget
Job creation	Set clear priorities
Streamline, deregulate, reorganize government	Economic strategy
Listen to Albertans	Change the way government does business

“Change” was a specific priority, as well as a recurring theme in all other priorities. Word searches yielded 23 hits for “change(ing)” in the *Budget Address* and 35 in *The Speech from the Throne*. Government use of this word saw examples of Getty’s agentless change, as well as an active, comprehensive change occurring or planned for government programs. The vast majority dealt with the latter active change.

Much like Getty’s Conservatives the year before, Klein sought to connect government priorities with Albertans through democratic wording such as listen(ing) with five hits in the budget; one of the *Speech from the Throne* priorities was “listening to Albertans.” Searches for consult(ation) produced 15 hits in the *Speech from the Throne*, many of which referred to public consultation, or “the public consultation process.” This heightened concern for identity management represents a significant carry-over from the previous Getty agenda. Other areas of continuity were also present, including solutions sought to economic and fiscal issues. Despite all the talk of “change,” there was significant continuity.

Speech from the Throne

The following passage from the beginning of the speech captures several different uses of the word “change”:

Hon. Members, the great winds of change are sweeping through Alberta again.²⁶ The election of 1993 produced 49 new MLAs, virtually the greatest number of first-time members in our history. That means a fresh new perspective and a strong commitment to change.

My government recognizes that these are extremely challenging times to be an MLA. Widespread discontent among voters has fueled a cynicism about governments all over the world. Changing times require a fundamental change in the way government conducts the people's business. Positive change is what this government stands for, and positive change is what it will deliver (p. 1).

Stewart (1995) argues that Klein's "Conservative party presented itself as the agent of change" (p. 44). This presentation is on display in Klein's agendas of 1993, and much of the *Speech from the Throne* is understood as driving towards changing public perception of the provincial Conservatives. Indeed, the government mentions "widespread discontent" among voters, cynicism, and difficult times to be an MLA in the last paragraph. Klein's government also argued his government offered 49 new MLAs, and a "fresh new perspective." The identity at work is one of a changed government, and one that is different from the previous Conservatives. The focus in this passage is not on discussing a specific policy issue, but more directly on constructing government as "changed," as well as gaining support (consensus) for government and its eminent policy changes.

The first usage of change in the above passage, however, ("the great winds of change") is a metaphor, where there is no agent behind "change" – it sweeps across the province. The government mentions a vague, agentless change (changing times) in the third line of the second paragraph, which serves as a justification, nay a requirement, for

26 Prior to this statement the government hearkened back to the province's first legislature in 1905, when the "winds of change were sweeping across the prairie" (Alberta, 1993a, p.7).

the active “fundamental” and “positive” change to the “people’s business.” In these examples, “change” serves as a nominalization that removes human agency from complex processes, and “change” potentially receives the blame both for what has gone wrong, and for any proposed solutions. The strong propositional commitment here of what change *is* doing, and what change *requires*, are categorical assertions about what is happening and what must be done (rather than what *could* be happening and what *might* be done, for example). This language promotes the identity of a government with a firm direction. The more salient discursive issue here, however, concerns how these assertions are produced, circulated, and particularly received, and how they resonate with what is already being said (public opinion, opposition, and media, for example). These strong assertions, coupled with the nominalizing language of “change,” make critique more difficult inasmuch as agents (government) are removed from policy processes and they appear as naturally occurring, thus rendering a consensus more likely. Furthering the cause is how government constructs itself as the agent of “positive change” in the last line. The manner in which change is framed, as “required” and universally “positive,” renders a critique more difficult and closes off alternatives, and is thus seen as driving towards consensus.

Listen to Albertans. Listening to Albertans was stressed as a priority in itself, and mentioned many times throughout the speech as government discussed other priorities. This focus on “listening” is one area of continuity with Getty’s 1992 agenda, and is indication that constructing a democratic identity was important. Arguably this priority increased in saliency for Klein because “listening” appeared as a specific priority. Of particular interest however, is how the government’s use of active change, coupled

with democratic wording, leads to an assumption that Getty's government was not listening to Albertans, and through assumption, to blame for policy issues. The following passage does not contain "listening," but the government nonetheless uses wording that constructs Getty's government in this manner:

We all know that changing times demand new approaches and new ways of doing things. We know we cannot meet the challenges of today and tomorrow with yesterday's thinking and last week's ideas. Successful businesses know that if they stay the same, they are left behind. In 1993 my government has caught up to Albertans in their thinking. My government has a plan, and the heart of that plan is providing open, accessible, responsive, and affordable government (p. 8).

In arguing government had "caught up" with Albertans, the assumption is that the previous government was out of step with Albertans. Moreover, there is an assumption of complete disconnect with Getty's policies in this passage, as Klein proposed "new approaches" and "new ways of doing things," while categorically throwing out "yesterday's thinking and last week's ideas." Here Klein's policies (the "new") are framed in a moral manner as categorically good, while the "old" is categorically bad, in an effort to distance the current regime from the previous. What is potentially lost in these categorical assertions is the amount of continuity between the two governments.

Also of interest, the inclusive word in the opening lines "we" aims to reduce difference, as only one view of what is known is presented. Consequently, the government and public appear to have the same view. Combined with the strong appeal to common sense, evidenced through "*we all know*," government policy is constructed as both democratic and common sense. This combination is a potentially powerful example of consensus constructing, inasmuch as democracy and common sense are valued and should not be questioned.

The issue of the deficit. The government mentioned “deficit” three times in the *Throne Speech*, but offered little discussion of the issue. However, deficit legislation (the Deficit Elimination Act) would aid in their “first commitment” of balancing the provincial budget within four years. They asserted Albertans wanted government to pay down the provincial debt and put its “financial house in order” (Alberta, 1993a, p. 8). The government offered the following in its fiscal policy discussion:

A perceived lack of fiscal responsibility is perhaps the greatest reason for the cynicism that people feel towards governments today, but my government is changing that perception in this province, and not because it is expedient or fashionable. This government is initiating fundamental change in the way it manages the public purse because there is no other choice. It is that simple (Ibid, p. 8).

There are two “changes” at work here, that of changing public perception and a “fundamental change” in fiscal policy. “Fundamental change” is occurring because there is “no choice.” Framing policies as “no choice” is a strong appeal for consensus removes government as an agent from a potentially controversial policy decision, thus (potentially) deflecting criticism and blame, and seeking a consensus. The strong propositional commitment to “fundamental change” as common sense (“*it is that simple*”) also seeks consensus, inasmuch as people do not, or feel they should not, question something that is “that simple.” Moreover, the “fundamental change” in fiscal policy suggests that Klein’s fiscal policies were categorically different from Getty’s. Inasmuch as Klein’s policies were viewed as fiscally responsible, the assumption is that

Getty's government mismanaged public finances.²⁷

Job creation. The government's second election commitment involved "creating an environment that would allow the private sector to create 110,000 new jobs for Albertans over the next four years" (Ibid). In an effort to "change the way it does business" the government planned a "major shift" in economic development policy, in which their focus was to provide "a climate conducive to investment and job creation" (p. 9). *Toward 2000 Together* and *Seizing Opportunity* were identified as important policy documents. Of note here is *Toward 2000 Together*, which was initiated by Getty's government, and even mentioned as a forthcoming economic document in 1992's *Speech from the Throne*. There is no mention of this connection in 1993. Rather, Klein's economic policies were framed in a manner that disconnected them from Getty's:

The government's approach to economic development represents an important change in the way of doing business in this province. It makes sense in today's global economy....It is based on what Albertans have said will work (p. 9).

Toward 2000 Together is an area of continuity between the two governments, and so too is the democratic wording. Getty's government argued the previous year "the cornerstone" of *Toward 2000 Together* was "listening to people"; Klein's government referred to an "extensive public consultation process" when discussing the document. However, Klein's articulations contain a shift, and a stronger drive toward consensus, evidenced through his government's appeal to common sense.

27 Of interest is the anomaly of weaker modality, evidenced in the first line through the words "perceived" and "perhaps," which leads to weaker assertions regarding the previous government's fiscal performance, as well as voter discontent. Arguably this passage has less interest in blaming Getty's government (although this blame is nonetheless present), and more to do with the expressed goal of changing public perception.

Budget Address

The four point fiscal strategy involved a four-year legislated plan to balance the budget, setting and sticking to “clear priorities,” “acting boldly” on the province’s economic strategy, and “changing the way the government does business” (Alberta, 1993b, p.2605). Of these four objectives, “revitalizing the economy is clearly at the top of the list” (Ibid, p. 2606).

The “core” of 1993’s economic development strategy was tax and regulatory reform (p.9). Klein planned to build on Alberta’s tax advantage to create the most competitive economy in North America, and “strengthen the Alberta Advantage around the globe,” rather than “buy(ing) prosperity through higher taxes” (Ibid). The government intended to eliminate international trade barriers, end direct business subsidies, and eliminate “all but absolutely essential regulations” to generate “lasting” jobs in the private sector. Of interest is the amount of continuity between Klein’s economic plans and those of Getty in 1992. For example, Getty also stressed removing trade barriers, expanding international trade, and deregulation.²⁸ Moreover, Klein promised to build on the provincial strengths of agriculture, energy, forestry, tourism, small business and high technology – Getty’s Conservatives highlighted these areas in their 1992 diversification efforts. Central to the economic strategy of both premiers was a “job creation” initiative, and, both governments referenced *Toward 2000 Together* in their economic plans (both

28 “...Albertans tell my government and my government believes that business and individuals should not be subject to overregulation and that the private sector, not government, will determine our ultimate economic success” (Alberta, 1992a, p.2).

governments attempted to connect this policy document directly to Albertans). Lastly, both governments sought taxation as an economic tool.

The issue of the deficit. The government argued the deficit, debt and interest payments were a “national problem all governments and all Canadians must address” (Alberta, 1993c, p. 1).²⁹ They asserted the province was “overspending,” and that the rate of overspending was increasing. Thus, unlike the previous Conservatives, Klein’s government articulated the deficit as an expenditure problem. In 1993, government spending, deficit, and debt became an enemy to attack, as Klein pushed for a “strategy that attacks our fiscal problems now” (1993c, p.8). I view Klein’s shift to overspending as an issue of blame and identity, where Klein’s new, “changed” government could accept the argument of overspending because his Conservative government did not have a spending record, and accepting an overspending issue would distance his government from Getty’s. This articulation aims to change public perception of the Conservative government.

Despite this shift, there was continuation in proposed solutions as Klein’s government proposed, and eventually carried out, comprehensive cutbacks.³⁰ The budget was to see a deficit reduction of 22% solely through expenditure cuts, and called for a

29 This source (1993c) for the *Budget Address* was a printed document, while 1993b was obtained from the Alberta Hansard website in the form of a transcription. The printed document is intended to be circulated and consumed as a text, rather than a speech. In this instance there are two different productions of the agenda, and questions arise concerning differences in their production, consumption and distribution, particularly in regards to consensus-seeking.

30 Klein’s government also planned “conservative revenue projections” that were based on the average of the previous five year resource revenue actuals.

20% reduction in overall program spending and a balanced budget by 1996-97. Getty's government also planned to balance the budget through expenditure cuts by 1996-97. Klein stressed "all areas of government are on the table," including health, education and social services (1993c, p.11). Recall that Getty's government was giving these policy areas "time to prepare" for cutbacks. Similar to Getty's *Budgetary Agenda* the previous year (and Lougheed's of 1983), Klein's government proposed special legislation to address the deficit; the Deficit Elimination Act stipulated that gains in revenue would go to reduce the deficit and debt. Also, the government sought a tax system that was "focused on competitiveness" and planned a tax commission, whose central concern was determining what could be done "to improve Alberta's competitive advantage" (Ibid). Taxation as an economic tool represents another area of continuity between the two governments.

I view Klein's fiscal and economic policy (as contained in the agenda) as an extension or fulfillment of many of Getty's 1992 policies. This finding supports the existing provincial literature that draws attention to continuity between Getty's 1992 and Klein's 1993 governments (see Harrison, 1995; Taft, 1997). Perhaps Kevin Taft (1997) put it best when he argued "[I]n other words, the severe cuts of the Klein government began on budgets that were already relatively low... The Getty government took pride in the cuts and was pleased to be leading a government that was steadily getting smaller" (1997; p. 23). I found there was little in the way of "revolutionary" ideas and solutions presented in Klein's 1993 agendas. Klein's policies would not have been possible without the cutbacks and downsizing the Lougheed government introduced in 1983 and 1984, 1986, and particularly in the 1990s with Getty's government. Indeed, Klein's policy

proposals occurred, discursively, in a context where cutbacks were already taking place, and where an opposition party (Laurence Decore's Liberals) had built up significant public support on the platform of budget cuts and no tax increases. Questions arise regarding public opinion. Specifically, were politicians responding to public demand? Were politicians constructing public demand? Rather, how might government, the broader public, media, and political opposition be implicated in this continuity – how, over years of increasing scarcity and conflict, did different articulations emerge (or not), how were certain issues silenced, shifted, accepted, and challenged, in and amongst public opinion, the media, and political opposition?

Change. Change was a recurring theme in the address, evidenced both by the title of the address *A Plan for Change*, as well as comments throughout regarding changes and changing times. However, the construction of government as a business (“changing the way government does business” was a priority in 1993’s fiscal plan; “the people’s business” was used three times in the *Speech from the Throne*) stood out as an important change or shift in articulating government. The terminology of “people’s business” is understood as a branding of the provincial sector as a business, and otherwise incorporating business language, and market strategies and values into public policy in an effort to restructure government. Klein’s *A Better Way*, released in 1994, offers an outline of this “people’s business,” and details restructuring plans for every department. It is in this document where Klein’s changes take traction in policy – changes that have been widely covered in the literature. Of interest is that the “people’s business” and its associated language transferred from one policy document to another, and one level of government to another. Here, department heads and government bureaucrats are also of

interest in the agenda consensus seeking – where policy shifts in degrees from more directly calling upon addressees to take on a particular view of the world (government as business) to forms of calling upon addressees to act (implementing government as business, and being a particular kind of actor in this process), to paraphrase Muntigl (2002). This connection between broad government agendas, and more specific department agendas is evidence of agendas within agendas, and provides a path to examine policy as it moves beyond agenda-setting and consensus seeking into deliberation and implementation in various departments – an examination of a policy lifespan. Discourse analysis provides the theory and methods to examine policy as it passes through these various levels of government and out to policy recipients, where much of the work of government restructuring occurs, as policies and specific subjectivities are (re)constructed to align with fiscal priorities, and as policy transitions to more direct forms calling upon addresses (bureaucrats, and eventually policyrecipients) to act.

Summary

Despite all the talk of change in 1993, there was significant continuity between Klein’s and Getty’s agendas. The economy and fiscal issues were at the top of the agenda for Klein’s Conservatives in 1993, as balancing the budget, job creation and restructuring government were priority areas in both the *Throne* and *Budget Speeches*.³¹ The agendas of 1993 saw similar language to what has been observed in Getty’s 1992 agendas, with

31 The following themes, or approaches to governing, also emerged as priorities; “set clear priorities,” “listen to Albertans,” and change – in particular the oft repeated “change the way we do business.” These themes were stressed throughout government discussion of fiscal and economic issues, and as issues by themselves.

addition language that sought to distance the current from the old (Klein from Getty), frame policies as common sense, and construct government as a business. This latter articulation of government as a business is of interest, and leads to queries into how agenda policy travels to and resonates with politicians and bureaucrats, an additional group involved in consensus seeking.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion

My primary interest has been to examine the impact of discourse on government agendas. And my primary assertion is that there is far more going on in agenda-setting than laying out priorities. Indeed, in addition to proposing policy, governments articulate issues and problems, (re)construct particular identities, and naturalize policy processes and issues, in a manner that seeks consensus. Given the recurring periods of economic, fiscal, politically challenging times in the province – periods of focussing events – these are challenging times for consensus seeking in the province. Yet, there is a lack research that examines how policy plays out at the level of agenda-setting and issue salience. In this concluding section I will document my findings by offering a preliminary understanding of government agenda-discourse during these periods, and layout a direction for future agenda-setting and consensus-seeking research.

Agenda Discourse and Consensus Seeking

It is my finding that much of the language in the *Budgetary Address* and *Speeches from the Throne* drives toward a consensus for government and its policies. In some instances the need or desire for consensus was clear as governments actively sought “cooperation” or “working together” through explicit appeals. Generally, however, policy language drove toward consensus through the omission and/or suppression of alternative policy voices, particularly in areas of identity and blame, where the causes of policy issues (of which government was often absent as an agent of blame) and their solutions (of which government had been active agents) deflect blame and promote an identity of a government that was actively working to resolve a given issue. The language in which issues were articulated was often categorical, leaving less room for conflicting opinions.

Governments also assumed working together and cooperating (in which case there is a constructed consensus), employed nominalizations, metaphors and wording that naturalized policy issues and processes.

Consensus-seeking in the *Speech from the Throne* primarily involved identity (re)construction. The respective Alberta governments in this study did not generally engage in significant discussion of policy causes *and* solutions. For example, The *Speech from the Throne* did not contain detailed discussion of the deficit, as Getty's 1987 *Throne Speech* contained the most hits for "deficit" (four) for any year of interest (in contrast, the *Budget Address* for the same year contained 28 instances of "deficit"). Rather, policy articulations dealt with (proposed) solutions to policy issues. Overwhelmingly, statements of policy constructed government as categorically helpful, protective, and active in various policy areas through an absence of subjective markers that could indicate an expression of opinion, as well as an absence of markers of a weak modality regarding government activity. Each speech contained examples of this language, and "my government" or "this government" generally stood as markers of these identity statements. This issue can be seen as a (discursive) priority for each government in its respective year of interest, albeit one that is never openly acknowledged, or necessarily perceived by the author(s). And, as the policy context became increasingly difficult for the provincial Conservatives into the early 1990s, there is evidence of increased saliency – as Getty's (1992) and Klein's *Speech from the Throne* each displayed more hits for active wording, and new hits for wording that constructed government as democratic. Moreover, Getty's nominalization of "ever-changing realities" and Klein's discussions of

“change” sought identities that were “not to blame” for policy issues, and “not Getty’s government,” respectively.

In the *Budget Address*, discussion of fiscal issues, particularly the deficit, provided an opportunity to examine how successive governments attempted to sort through important social and economic policy issues. Presumably unpopular decisions, such as those to cutback spending in a particular area, or tax increases, were often framed as “no choice” decisions, thus camouflaging the decisions being made, and hedging against criticism. Yet despite this, governments always sought to establish the identity of “prudent,” “efficient” and “sound financial managers,” and to assure people they had tight control of expenditures. It is here where “the deficit” (and various associated words such as “expenditure restraint,” “cutting back,” “efficiency” and “people programs” “spurring the economy”) represents a very conflicting set of policy interests and expectations, as it spans important and economic, fiscal, and social policy issues. All of this played out on the *Budget Address*, and I suggest that the *Budget Address* receives higher circulation and consumption than *Throne Speeches*, deals more directly with government decisions (and disguising those decisions), and is generally the agenda of greater public (and academic) interest during these periods.

All of this is to stress the importance of talk as action, and talk as an important part of what governments do in agenda-setting. In addition to setting priorities, governments also represent and construct complex processes and issues particular ways. And, inasmuch as government agendas are also speeches that are mass distributed and consumed, those setting the agenda act in and on the agenda-setting context through the agenda. Policy decisions are not only reflections or products of specific social contexts

consisting of different social structures, identities and relationships, but they (re)create and transform those social structures and relations. Rather, government officials (re)create and transform social relations and structures, and interact with people along these lines, as they seek and construct consensus through their agendas.

It is of particular interest to those who examine government agendas (and certainly of interest to democracy) to explore these complexities. It is of interest that governments rarely offer insight into the mechanisms and processes of agenda-setting in their addresses, and specifically, whether or not they are actively tracking and carrying out, misrepresenting and/or transforming public opinion. It is also of interest that policy language tends to be categorical, and represents complex economic, social and fiscal issues as nominalizations or universal truths. This latter interest deals directly with commonly held ideas and values and their role in complicating issues of power and agency at the level of agenda-setting. The potential ideological and political impacts of discourse – the extent to which policy articulations and ideas are inculcated, and the extent to which they work to construct and sustain social identities, respectively – can be explored through examinations of policy as discourse.

“Albertans”

Perhaps the most interesting social identity in this analysis has been “Albertans.” I am particularly interested in the comparisons Alberta governments make to the rest of Canada regarding fiscal, social and economic policy. I view these statements as leverage or appeals for consensus. These comparisons often construct Alberta, and Albertans, as “the best” or “among the best” in the country. At work is the (re)construction of Alberta as a special place in the country, and Albertans as a special people. How Albertans,

media, political opposition, and elected politicians who construct the agenda accept, contest, and shift these constructs, and how these constructs influence policy making, are important considerations in studies of policy in the province, particularly during these periods of conflict.

One policy area of this Alberta identity is taxation, where “preserving” Alberta’s tax “advantages” was always a goal for government. Even in 1987 when Getty’s government proposed significant tax increases, it pledged to maintain Alberta’s status as the lowest overall tax jurisdiction in the country, and articulated taxation as a “burden” (and thus something undesirable). As the years progressed there was an increased focus on an Alberta “tax advantage” and on Alberta as the most competitive tax jurisdiction in the country (and North America). Indeed, the 1992 budget would enhance “Albertans’ already substantial tax advantage; Alberta will continue to be the best place in Canada to live and work” (Alberta, 1992b, p.385). The following year Klein’s government used the phrase “Alberta advantage” under the heading *The Economy and Job Creation: Promoting the Alberta Advantage*.³²

It is unclear if tax policies are a reflection of what “Albertans” desire – to what extent governments were responding to active, perceived or anticipated criticism or expectations of (not) raising taxes, if this taxing scheme is more precisely a government desire, or perhaps, if the “Alberta tax advantage” was more an Alberta (political) advantage, where keeping taxes low was leverage for consensus, particularly in the early

32 This was the first instance of the term “Alberta Advantage” in any document I analyzed.

1990s when the government could no longer boast of “the best” economic and social policies in Canada (see Taft, 1997; Laxer and Harrison, 1995). It is unclear if government is responding to public opinion, or constructing it. While this is unlikely a zero-sum scenario, attempts to disentangle this issue could lead to interesting findings regarding agenda-setting. Moreover, this discussion should explore how important groups such as the media, the political opposition, and perhaps think tanks and academics, locate and construct Alberta as a special place, or not (particularly as a special taxation jurisdiction), and to what potential effect on policy and policy makers. At play is not only the reconstruction of Albertans, but also, of what is expected of Alberta government.

Recent policy. Peeking into the most recent period of fiscal imbalance, the government argued in the 2011 *Budget Address*:

Revenue from personal and corporate taxes are expected to increase by 13%.

To be clear, this is not because taxes are being increased.

As Premier Stelmach has often said, you cannot tax your way out of recession.

This government remains firmly committed to maintaining the lowest provincial tax regime in Canada – with low personal taxes, low corporate taxes, the lowest fuel taxes, the highest personal and spousal tax exemptions, no capital tax, no payroll tax – and no sales tax! (p. 4).

The qualification offered for increased tax revenues (To be clear...), the categorical manner in which tax increases are denounced (by citing Premier Stelmach), and the “firmly committed” government to maintaining low taxes, all suggest that raising taxes is not a consideration for government – that it would be very difficult to reach and construct a consensus in proposals to raise taxes. In the most recent budget, the “Alberta Advantage” occupies an entire page in the fiscal plan, complete with a bar graph comparison to other provinces and a write-up. The “Alberta Advantage” has taken form

as an actual policy, and questions surrounding solutions to the deficit, what can and cannot be done to solve it, appear as relevant today as in the early 1990s. While Milke (2011) has argued that provincial expenditures (operating and capital budgets) were viewed by governments in the 1980s and 1990s as “sacrosanct” and points to government unwillingness to acknowledge an “overspending issue” as the cause of spiralling deficits and debt, I argue that keeping taxes low, and particularly maintaining the “Alberta Advantage,” has at times been more sacred than expenditures, that government “decisions” and “debates” involving taxation in the province are potentially framed by a powerful construct and idea of what it means to be “Albertan,” and that adopting “overspending” into policy articulations can only occur in a situation such as Klein’s where blame could be shifted away. How this construct is picked up by the various actors and groups in the province should receive greater academic attention. Moreover, for all the discussion in the literature about Alberta as a politically unique jurisdiction in the country, questions surrounding Alberta’s uniqueness have not been posed to Albertans specifically.

On Change and Continuity

I view this period of provincial politics as one of continuity regarding solutions sought for the deficit. This finding challenges the existing literature, particularly Bruce, Kneebone, and McKenzie (1997) and Cooper (1996), as well as publications from the Fraser Institute, whose works tend to disconnect Klein’s policies from his Conservative predecessors Lougheed and (particularly) Getty. While their arguments suggest that Klein had the fiscal fortitude to do what Getty could not, or would not, I echo Taft’s and others arguments that Klein could only do (and propose to do) what he did because of what had

gone on prior to his election as premier. Klein's policies are thus viewed as a culmination, as opposed to a revolution. And, inasmuch as Klein's government receives credit and is acclaimed as something different, new, or changed, I view Klein's policies as a success in terms of rebranding and constructing government as "changed" – a success in terms of the priority of consensus.

There are nuances to this discussion of continuity, however, and there is evidence of policy change, or shift, in every year of interest. For example, although Lougheed and Getty both articulated the deficit as a revenue *and* expenditure issue, Getty's proposals to raise taxes in 1987 represents one area of change between the two governments. There is, in these different policy proposals, evidence that the definition of a problem does not necessarily determine its solution(s) – there is not always a logical "flow" from policy issues to their solutions. This brings the discussion back to the policy studies theory and literature, and challenges assertions by Birkland (2010) and Hajer (1993) that the definition of a problem is an important part of the policy process because it holds implications for the choice of solutions. While this may be the case in many instances, it is not so in this example of early and mid-1980s taxation policy proposals in the province. Nor was it so in the early 1990s when Getty's and Klein's governments defined the deficit differently, but ultimately pursued similar solutions in a number of policy areas (recall Getty's assertion of a "revenue problem" and Klein's of a "spending problem"). Klein had no spending record of which to speak, and could place blame solely on expenditures, and by extension/assumption, upon Getty's lack of spending control, thus distancing his government from Getty's. Articulating issues is not necessarily

logical, or “rational decision-making” and might have less to do with actually solving an issue, and more to do with the discursive interest of identity work and consensus seeking.

A final thought on policy “change.” “Change” is an important theme and word in studies of policy, and it is not always evident what manner of “change” is a play. The change discussed by Lougheed was one of provincial transition and adjustment, but the change that stood out was a shift in taxation as a viable revenue option. With Getty in 1987, the change was quite the opposite, as taxation emerged as a means to address the deficit *and* fund social programs. Moreover, Getty’s 1987 tax proposals were more transparent regarding government decisions than those of Lougheed’s – given the potentially controversial issue of tax increases, one might expect language that framed tax increases in a manner that disguises government as agent and otherwise naturalizes policy processes, as was the case with Lougheed’s (much safer) tax proposals. The questions that arise from these “changes,” questions that are not addressed by the existing literature, include: why and how did Lougheed’s government shift from taxation as a means to fund provincial expenditures; how and why did Getty’s government come to focus on taxation as a means to fund provincial expenditures; and, how were these different tax proposals received within the legislature and the broader media and public opinion context?

With Getty in 1992 the change was a global, nominalized, agentless “ever-changing reality.” This change is perhaps the best example in this analysis of government discourse that removes government as an agent of blame and obscures the decision-making process, and otherwise drives towards consensus. And lastly, the change of Klein’s government in 1993 was twofold – an active change to government, as well as a

fundamental change, and new way of doing things. This latter change speaks directly to the discursive priority of consensus seeking, a priority potentially overlooked by conceptualisations of policy that do not emphasize language use.

Limitations and Future Directions: “I Blame Ralph”

For all the talk of processes and decision making, my research is limited to examining only moments or instances thereof. Furthermore, my examination of those instances has involved only the transcripts of agenda speeches and not the speeches as they occurred, or as recordings. Ultimately, in-depth examinations of agenda setting and consensus-seeking calls for a more diverse body of methods, including forms of institutional analysis that might include direct observation of these speeches, as well as interviews with those who construct and disseminate them. With the ubiquity of the internet, the method of distributing government agendas has changed significantly. One can go to the government of Alberta website and find a video summary of government priorities, conducted by the Premier. Additionally, one can access electronically the budget or throne agendas in their entirety, as well as the highlights. These are different productions than a speech, and are potentially produced and consumed in different ways. Future research should interrogate how government agendas are currently produced, distributed, and how these times of economic, fiscal and political conflict play out – not just for government, but for Albertans.

Moreover, future research could build on the discourse that has been documented in this analysis by documenting discourse in the media, debate in the legislature and amongst the political opposition, as well as the public. I suggest the manner in which we (re)construct government, Albertans, and articulate the deficit, is not unlike what I have

analyzed on government agendas. I draw attention to a campaign put on by the Alberta Alliance in 2004³³ with the bumper sticker “I blame Ralph” – a loaded and potentially powerful categorical construct of government. Government agendas are not the only source of categorical assertions and constructs, governments officials are not the only people seeking consensus. This is something that also happens in the papers, coffee shops, and university classrooms every day in the province, particularly during these periods. Tracking multiple agendas and the discourses there-in can provide greater insight into how democracy plays out during these periods.

Conclusion. Much of the extant theory and literature focuses on policy outcomes. Consequently, I feel the deficit as a focusing event has been overlooked. Viewing government agendas as discourse and thus interactive with people in the broader context from within which they emerged leads to queries regarding how the deficit, and government policies are understood in the broader perspective by the media, the political opposition, and more generally the public. This thesis has offered theoretical insight into these complex processes, as well as concrete examples of the kinds of discursive practices at play in government agenda speeches, those of convincing, assuming, naturalizing, reducing difference, and consensus seeking, all of which point to the importance of conceiving and examining language as a constitutive government tool or instrument, and – of the discursive production of priorities for government and the discursive construction of government itself. This thesis seeks new ways to examine

33 I understand this campaign occurred in 2004, well after (and before) the years of interest of this thesis. It none the less is an exemplary example of how “government” is constructed in the broader context.

policy, agenda-setting, and democratic politics in the province of Alberta, particularly in times of scarcity and conflict.

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Appendix A: Keyword Searches

Keyword Search										
	1983		1984		1987		1992		1993	
	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B	T	B
Adjustment	0	6	0	9	1	6	0	1	0	2
Change(ing)	5	7	5	2	8	5	8	15	35	23
Reality(ies)	1	13	0	5	2	1	18	1	1	9
Transition	0	2	0	6	0	0	0	1	0	0
Deficit	2	19	0	22	4	28	0	10	3	25
Consultation	1	1	1	1	5	1	6	4	15	1
Listen(ing)	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0	2	5
My government	38	0	32	0	60	0	66	0	35	0

T= Speech from the Throne
 B= Budgetary Address