

Peter Lougheed – An Albertan Icon

By Daniyaal Qureshi

Since a young age, family time to me has meant going hiking on the weekends. One of our favourite destinations is Kananaskis country, which boasts some of the greatest natural beauty in the country, with relatively less crowds than Banff and Jasper. Whenever we went, we would pass a sign which said, “You are now entering Peter Lougheed Provincial Park.” When I asked my parents why it was called that, they told me he was an Albertan premier. I thought it was pretty cool that he had a park named after him. A few years ago when my dad got sick and we went to the hospital, that name popped up once again; Peter Lougheed. I didn’t really think of it too much back then, but after passing by a school a few months ago that bore the same name, I remembered the other places I had seen that name before, and decided to look into who this man was and why his name was etched into every corner of Albertan life.

Born on July 26, 1928, as the second child to Edgar Donald Lougheed and Edna Alexandria Bauld, Peter Lougheed would grow up to become one of the most influential Albertans ever. From a young age, Peter Lougheed caught the attention of local newspapers as a football prodigy. Being a multitalented individual, he would go on to graduate from Harvard with an MBA, as well as practicing law in Alberta for many years. However, it was later on in life that Peter took an interest in politics and decided to run for Alberta premier through the Progressive Conservative Party, who, at the time, didn’t even hold a single seat in parliament. After being elected for the position in 1971, running out of the Calgary West riding - the very area which our family called home when we first moved to Calgary. In the years to come, Lougheed’s popularity

would rise, and he would come to the table with new policies, funds, and infrastructure that boasted both short and long-term impacts that still affect Albertans lives today.

When researching Peter Lougheed, I found he was the one behind the creation of Kananaskis Country and Provincial Park, a place many families (including ours) visit frequently for hiking, biking, and skiing. The story behind the creation is almost as wonderful as the park itself, and really outlines the forward-thinking mindset Peter Lougheed possessed. Lougheed was asked by some residents of Alberta in 1977 who thought it would be worth protecting and preserving that area. After taking a helicopter tour of modern-day Kananaskis, Peter Lougheed agreed it was worth preserving, and so a new provincial park was born. By creating Kananaskis, Peter Lougheed protected 4211 km² of land and native wildlife, preserving it for current and future generations from acts like deforestation and poaching. This act helped protect thousands of plant species and hundreds of animal species by providing them a safe environment to live, while also protecting endangered species who call that area their home such as the Limber Pine and the Whitebark Pine. This further proves that Peter Lougheed was a visionary, but more importantly, he was willing to listen to everyone, no matter their social status, to improve Alberta's future.

This isn't the only major action that Premier Lougheed took, though, in fact, it is just the tip of the iceberg. After being elected to office, Lougheed's first major act was to increase the royalties oil and gas companies payed to the government by almost 25%. This move ensured that the province could not only benefit from the funds generated by natural resources, but also start diversifying Alberta's economy so we could make money from other sources too. With all these extra funds, he put them to good use, with the money going towards building new infrastructure, including roads, schools, and hospitals.

As part of his commitment to make sure that the province had a sustainable income, he created the Heritage Savings Trust Fund, a fund in which a portion of all natural gas funds are deposited into long term investments. Over the course of 48 years, a profit of 20.6 billion Dollars has been generated according to the annual reports published on the Alberta.ca website. All in all, the Alberta Heritage Trust Fund has been a really important part of the funds generated by the province and we can all thank Peter Lougheed for it. This money has been very important in addressing so much of Alberta's issues over the years, and I was really happy when I found out while writing this essay that the provincial government had announced that they were going to re-initiate investing in the fund.

On top of all this, Peter Lougheed held an interest in both medical research and agricultural diversification, which supported the growth of small businesses. In the year 1980, he allocated 300 million dollars to help create the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. To this day, that very foundation has contributed a total of 650 million dollars to the Canadian scientific community. Additionally, it was Lougheed who was behind the original modernization of the Alberta Curriculum, laying the groundwork for Alberta having the highest ranked school curriculum in Canada today.

While his acts as premier were commendable, it was often the small things he did even after his time in office, that truly showed his dedication to Alberta and Albertans. One of my favourite sources to use when researching historical events and figures for schoolwork is the Canadian Encyclopedia. It often serves as a one-stop shop for me to get a basic overview of any Canadian event I'm interested in, even helping me to study for tests. It was nice to find that two months after retiring from office, Peter Lougheed personally donated a copy of the Canadian encyclopedia to every school in Alberta, as well as funding its research with his own money. This

action has helped the encyclopedia continue to provide highly reliable information with contributions from over 5000 scholars to students like me across Alberta.

Just like Peter Lougheed who modernized the education system, I use STEM concepts (science, technology, engineering, and math) and enjoy teaching them in a 'modern' way that is both rewarding and fun to learn. Over the past 3 years, I have been volunteering at Coded Minds Canada, teaching kids from grades K-4 about coding using different platforms including Microsoft Makecode and Python inside of Minecraft, as well inside of Scratch. As a student myself, I know what it feels like to learn in a traditional way so I try to teach them in an inviting way that I would enjoy if I were in their shoes. Moving forward, I would like to use virtual reality to teach children in an interactive way that makes them feel like they are actually interacting with the environment they are in.

While doing research for this project, I realized there was a lot more I could be doing, even at my age, to help my fellow Albertans. After a conversation with my parents in March of this year, I started joining them once a month to volunteer at my local food bank. Every second Saturday, I go in person to help make and distribute food hampers, as well as helping organize people as they come into the centre. With my small contributions, I want to live up to the ideals that Peter Lougheed lived with, and be someone who puts others before himself.

While researching the formation of Kananaskis and how it preserved one of the places I love to visit with my family, I found out about the Volunteer Trail Care program under the Alberta Parks. This summer, I wish to start volunteering for them to ensure that hiking trails are safe and enjoyable for both my family and other families as well. I love Kananaskis and I want other families to be able to feel and enjoy the beauty of the park that captivated Peter Lougheed all those years ago.

Above all his ideas and politics, Peter Lougheed was someone who was willing to take feedback and constructive criticism, even from his opposition members. He saw them as honorable opposition and his colleagues in parliament, rather than like the enemy. Peter Lougheed represents a respectful form of politics that saw everyone, regardless of who they voted for, as fellow Albertans and Canadians, something that you don't see often in modern day politics. Learning about his life story, I feel inspired to be a champion like him in my own life; someone who is a true leader and trailblazer, helping others to succeed for generations to come. It is this very spirit and determination to create meaningful change in a lasting way that I will be reminded of when we go to Kananaskis for our next family hike, or when we drive by Peter Lougheed Hospital on our way home.

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