

# ‘Age just a number,’ says woman about to be Manitoba’s oldest lieutenant-governor

Neville, 80, believes challenge will be to pace herself

By: [Carol Sanders](#) Posted: 6:00 AM CDT Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2022



Anita Neville says she still has a lot to contribute.

As Anita Neville prepares to become the oldest lieutenant-governor in Manitoba history, the 80 year old is keen to demonstrate that “age is just a number.”

“I’ve still got a lot to contribute,” Neville said in an interview Tuesday. “I’ve been very involved and very active. I don’t think I’m any different than a whole host of people out

there who are wanting to get back into the workforce or another area of contribution,” said the former Liberal MP for Winnipeg South.

She’s meeting this week with Lt.-Gov. Janice Filmon, 79, who has served as Manitoba’s vice-regal for more than seven years. Lieutenant-governors serve non-fixed terms of at least five years in accordance with the Constitution Act of 1867.

“I’ve talked to lieutenant-governors in other provinces and their experiences are very different,” said Neville, whose appointment was announced Aug. 15. “I’m meeting with Mrs. Filmon later this week and I will learn more about the Manitoba experience.”

No date has been announced yet for her swearing-in ceremony.

“I’m proud to have the opportunity and I’m proud to be able to do it,” said Neville, who’s excited about her next chapter of public service as the Queen’s representative in Manitoba.

“I believe I have it within me to do a good job,” she said. “My head is floating around with all kinds of ideas.”

Neville said she’s eager to find out more about the resources, capacity and mandate of the office. She’s not concerned about the scrutiny to come from being the first octogenarian appointee.

“I’ve got to do well if I was 60 or 70 — the age has nothing to do with doing well,” she said.

“I had dinner with some friends who said to me, ‘pace yourself’. That’s going to be my challenge — to pace myself.”

A review by the Legislative Library of Manitoba confirmed that Neville, at age 80, will be the oldest person to be sworn in as lieutenant-governor of Manitoba. Until then, Filmon was the oldest when she was sworn in at 72 years, 5 months and 20 days old. The youngest was Yvon Dumont, who was 42 when he became vice-regal.

The role is broad, from granting royal assent to new legislation, sometimes in the wee hours of the morning, to delivering the speech from the throne at the start of each legislative session to hosting events and dignitaries at the official Government House and presenting the Order of Manitoba to recipients.

Filmon and her husband, former premier Gary Filmon, “annually undertake hundreds of ceremonial, official and community functions to fulfil their vice-regal responsibilities,” throughout the province, the official lieutenant-governor’s website says. In addition to hosting members of the Royal Family, the governor general and foreign heads of state on official visits to the province, they’ve welcomed diverse groups and charitable and community organizations.

Neville held elected office for 25 years, including 14 years as a Winnipeg School Division trustee and 11 years as an MP until 2011. Now, 11 years after leaving office, she’s about to become Manitoba’s vice-regal.

“I’m excited... I’m healthy, my mind is still working,” the mother and grandmother said, adding because of a back issue she uses a cane to walk “more often than I like.”



Anita Neville's new role as lieutenant-governor includes granting royal assent to new legislation to delivering the speech from the throne at the start of each legislative session to hosting events and dignitaries at the official Government House.

"But other than that, I'm fine. I'm looking forward to it. There's no reason that we have to stop contributing at whatever age."

The Manitoba head of the Canadian Association of Retired Persons said Neville's appointment at age 80 serves as a signpost.

"I think a lot of people in the past have made an assumption that after a certain age that people have lost either their viability or their ability to make a significant impact," said Carmen Nedohin, CARP Manitoba's acting president.

"I think more and more people are starting to realize that age truly can just be a number. With the historical perspective we bring — and certainly the renewed energy that a lot of us have after official retirement — we still have an awful lot to offer."

Nedohin said Neville's appointment may serve as a message to others to take a second look at people over the age of 65.

"There is a storehouse of knowledge out there, of people who are vibrant and still have a lot to give," she said.

Seniors are politically active and engaged, noted Paul Thomas, University of Manitoba political studies professor emeritus.

"As society ages and younger people exhibit disillusionment with politics and governing, more seniors will end up occupying public office," he said Tuesday.

The matter of Neville's age is "clearly sensitive," he said. "The question should really be does someone have the intellectual and physical well being to carry out the duties of lieutenant-governor. The matter of her age may well have been part of the vetting

process by the Prime Minister's Office before placing her name before the Governor General for appointment," he said.

The lieutenant-governor has staff to manage her commitments and schedule "so that potential concerns about workload and stamina can be addressed behind the scenes," Thomas said, adding Manitoba's chief justice is available to handle certain duties, such as signing bills into law if the vice-regal is not available, he noted.

Dwight MacAulay, who worked with six lieutenant-governors during his time as Manitoba's chief of protocol, said it's a busy, demanding role, but he has no concerns about Neville performing it well.

"There seems to be a preoccupation with respect to her age but I mean, really, it's her decision and obviously, she feels she has the energy to carry out the duties of the office," said MacAulay who now presides over citizenship ceremonies.

"Ms. Neville is no stranger to public life or the demands of public life."

MacAulay said there's been a diversity of appointees in recent years and they've all left their mark on the office. He sees Neville serving as a role model.

"I think we all need to give Ms. Neville the benefit of the doubt. I'm sure she will do her very best to get a very good representative."

carol.sanders@freepress.mb.ca