

# CANADA

Looking ahead to the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth  
Parliamentary Conference in Halifax, Canada  
Inclusive, Accessible, Accountable and Strong Parliaments

65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth  
Parliamentary Conference



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## 65<sup>th</sup> COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE HALIFAX, CANADA

20 to 26 AUGUST 2022 (inclusive of arrival and departure dates)

**CONFERENCE THEME: 'INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE, ACCOUNTABLE AND STRONG  
PARLIAMENTS: THE CORNERSTONE OF DEMOCRACY AND ESSENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT'.**



65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

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65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth  
Parliamentary Conference

20 August 2022, 9:00 AM - 26 August 2022, 4:00 PM

Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

CPA

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- One of the largest annual gatherings of Commonwealth Parliamentarians. Hosted by the CPA Canada Region.
- Over 500 Parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and decision makers from across the Commonwealth for this unique conference and networking opportunity.
- CPA's global membership addressing the critical issues facing today's modern Parliaments and Legislatures.
- Benefit from professional development, supportive learning and the sharing of best practice with colleagues from Commonwealth Parliaments together with the participation of leading international organisations.

During the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, there will also be a number of additional conferences and meetings including: **38<sup>th</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference**; **7<sup>th</sup> triennial Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Conference**; **65<sup>th</sup> CPA General Assembly**; meetings of the **CPA Executive Committee** and the **Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD)**; and the **Society of Clerks at the Table (SOCATT)** meetings.

This year, the conference will also elect the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee; the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians; the Chairperson of the CPA Small Branches; and the CPA Treasurer for new terms of office.



**CANADA: Host of the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference**

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Front cover image: Banff National Park is Canada's oldest national park, established  
in 1885 as the Rocky Mountains Park. It can be found in Alberta's Rocky Mountains in  
Canada. *Image copyright: shutterstock\_103042103.*





# INCLUSIVE, ACCESSIBLE, ACCOUNTABLE AND STRONG PARLIAMENTS: THE CORNERSTONE OF DEMOCRACY AND ESSENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT

The CPA President and the Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada looks forward to the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and welcomes delegates.

As CPA President and the Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada, I would like to welcome you to the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference on behalf of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Although we have not had the pleasure of welcoming you to Canada since 2004, our excitement this year is unquestionably much greater. After more than two years of the pandemic, I feel we can truly appreciate this opportunity to meet in person. Technology has helped us, but I think you will agree there is no substitute for the warmth of human contact. You have been invited to the capital of Nova Scotia to discuss an important topic: how can our Parliaments be strong, inclusive, accountable and accessible?

In Canada and elsewhere, we saw how Parliaments were essential services in times of crisis. For example, they approved legislation and measures to help people affected by COVID-19, whether by the disease itself or by job losses due to the various lockdowns.

We also realised that the more marginalised groups in our societies suffered more from the impact of the pandemic. This shows the need to boost our inclusiveness to keep in touch with our citizens and the daily challenges they face.

At the same time, we had to reinvent ourselves to maintain and increase our accessibility and transparency by communicating much more often with our fellow citizens.

In this article, I will take you step by step through each of these issues. I will try to illustrate how the Canadian House of Commons was able to deal with these difficult circumstances.

## A strong Parliament: In times of crisis

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global COVID-19 pandemic. Most governments imposed shutdowns of places where people gather, such as restaurants, schools,

convention centres and stadiums. The purpose was to limit social contacts and, in turn, the spread of the virus.

At first, the Canadian House of Commons took the same approach: it initially adjourned its proceedings for a few weeks. When Members realised that the situation would persist, it began to consider potential solutions. We had to continue to play our part; we had to be there for the people. I recounted this extraordinary journey in an article published in *The Parliamentarian* earlier this year.<sup>1</sup> I will not go into detail here, but the ability of the House to adapt gradually - with the help of keen and dedicated administrative staff and through innovative solutions such as hybrid work and electronic voting - was admirable.

It might have been easy to minimise Parliament's role during the crisis. But that is not what Canadian Parliamentarians chose to do. They chose to roll up their sleeves and face those challenges. As a result, the House passed more than a dozen Bills directly related to the pandemic. Our Committees held nearly 1,000 meetings in virtual or hybrid mode last year, almost as many as in 2019. Hundreds of hours of debate took place to take stock of pandemic management. It was also decided to provide Members with additional resources to support their constituents during the pandemic.

## Parliamentary privilege and other tools

If we set aside the last two years and ask ourselves what the source of a Legislature's strength is, we usually think of its independence from the Executive and the Judiciary. In this regard, our House is fortunate. When modern Canada was established in 1867, its Parliament was empowered to exercise the privileges enjoyed by the British Parliament in the 'Westminster' model. Parliamentary privilege is the main tool available to us as Parliamentarians to fulfill



**Hon. Anthony Rota, MP** is the 37<sup>th</sup> Speaker of the House of Commons in the Parliament of Canada and the current CPA President as the host of the upcoming 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. In April 2020, he was also appointed Chair of the Special Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic (COVI). He is the Member for the electoral district of Nipissing-Timiskaming and other previous parliamentary roles have included Chair of the Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs of the Standing Committee on National Defence as well as Assistant Deputy Speaker and Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole. Prior to his election in 2004, he worked in the field of international technology transfer and in the financial and real estate sector.



Left: The Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada, Hon. Anthony Rota, MP presides over a 'hybrid' parliamentary sitting in the main chamber.

the three major roles we must play: to debate the major policies of the day, to legislate and to hold the government accountable.

These tools include the following:

- freedom of speech in debates - Members cannot be sued in court for their statements in the course of deliberations;
- freedom from obstruction, interference and intimidation for Members in the performance of their duties;
- the right to institute inquiries, call witnesses and demand papers - a valuable tool to hold the government to account; and
- the exclusive right of the House to regulate its own internal affairs.

**“In Canada and elsewhere, we saw how Parliaments were essential services in times of crisis. For example, they approved legislation and measures to help people affected by COVID-19, whether by the disease itself or by job losses due to the various lockdowns. We also realised that the more marginalised groups in our societies suffered more from the impact of the pandemic. This shows the need to boost our inclusiveness to keep in touch with our citizens and the daily challenges they face.”**

The latter privilege refers to the management of its own rules of deliberation and procedure, admission to its precinct, the policies or laws that apply to it, and the nature of the goods and services offered to Members.

In addition to the tools related to parliamentary privilege, there are a few others:

- **Officers of Parliament.** These officials act as watchdogs on certain issues of public interest or review government activities. They include the Auditor-General, the Privacy Commissioner and the Commissioner of Lobbying. Also worth mentioning is the Parliamentary Budget Officer, whose mission is to produce independent financial and economic analysis for Parliamentarians. Officers of Parliament are unique in that they are appointed with the approval of the Senate, the House or both. In addition, they report the results of their investigations directly to the House, not to the government;
- **Party research budgets.** In the House, all recognised political parties have access to research budgets. This enables them to hire staff and develop their own capacity to comment on government actions and the issues of the day; and
- **Services of the Library of Parliament.** For any research and analysis required to perform their work, Members may call upon the services of the Library of Parliament. Library staff, like employees of the House, work in a professional and impartial manner.

So, in my view, this is the basis of our strength: first, that in times of crisis, Parliament can function and, second, that Parliament needs a great deal of freedom and a well-stocked toolbox to make this independence a reality.

#### An inclusive Parliament

I mentioned earlier that it was important for Parliamentarians to consider all the different perspectives in our societies. This is true, but we need to go one step further: we must ensure that groups with fewer opportunities to speak out can feel that they are represented in the House's work. These are two of the components that make up inclusiveness.

While the House is an exemplar of tradition, it has proven willing and able to take these issues into account in recent years. This was the case with changes to long-standing practices and with more formal changes to its procedure. Let me give you a few examples.



### Indigenous languages

Since 2018, the Canadian House of Commons has a protocol for the use of Indigenous languages, with the following guidelines:

- With reasonable notice that a Member or Committee witness will speak an Indigenous language, the House will seek the services of an interpreter who can work from that language into one of our two official languages; and
- If the above is impossible, the Member or witness is asked to provide a copy of their speech in one of the official languages, thus facilitating the interpretation and transcription of the remarks.

In the recent past, a few Members of Parliament of Indigenous origin have spoken in an Indigenous language:

- While serving a term from 2015 to 2019, Robert-Falcon Ouellette, a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation and Member of Parliament for Winnipeg Centre, delivered 45 speeches in Cree - including speeches on issues that are not specifically Indigenous in nature;
- Hon. Hunter Tootoo, former Member of Parliament for Nunavut and Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, spoke in Inuktitut about 15 times from 2015 to 2016; and
- The Member of Parliament for Nunavut, Lori Idlout, currently begins and ends most of her speeches in Inuktitut.
- The use of Indigenous languages has also flourished at Committee: Cree, Inuktitut, Nisga'a, Dene and many others have been spoken. These languages are used primarily at our Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, by Members, of course, but mostly by witnesses.

### Dress code

My predecessors prescribed that contemporary business attire be worn in order to speak. As the composition of the House has increasingly mirrored Canada's cultural diversity, our practices have had to change. For many years now, the House has no longer required Members to remove their headwear before rising to speak, in recognition of Sikh Members who wear a turban and Muslim Members who wear a hijab. More recently, Indigenous Members of Parliament have worn traditional medallions as ties. These garments and accessories have been duly recognised by the Chair as proper attire.

### Improved parliamentary services for Members with young children

A growing number of Members have young families, and in recent years the House has taken several measures to help them meet their responsibilities. These innovations benefit everyone by making life easier for Members and by encouraging people who have a family to enter politics.

One of Members' main duties is to be present in the House to participate in debates and votes. Accordingly, Members who are absent for more than 21 days have their sessional allowance reduced. Exceptions are provided for Members who cannot attend because of illness, but until recently, there were no exceptions for new parents. In 2019, the House approved rules allowing new parents to miss sittings in the 12 months after the birth or adoption of their child without penalty.

### An accountable Parliament

The House I preside over is also accountable. As an institution that serves the people, we are fully funded by the public. This funding

comes with great responsibilities. One of these is to ensure that we have as many mechanisms as possible for anyone interested to easily learn about the expenses and activities of Members and the House administration.

### The Report to Canadians

One of the key pieces of this accountability is our Report to Canadians. I table it once a year in the House, and it is available on our parliamentary website. I am very proud of this report, as it provides a wealth of information. It is well illustrated and is written in plain and accessible language, which is important to me. The report includes information on Members and the most significant activities of the past year, a review of the results achieved relative to the objectives the House administration set for itself and financial information. The work of our staff is also highlighted.

### Financial reports

For those who wonder how the money we receive for our operations is spent, the parliamentary website provides a host of financial reports. Do you want to know how much a particular Member spent on salaries last year? Simply check the expenditure report for Members. Or perhaps you are interested in the travel expenses of Parliamentary Committees for the same period? No problem! There is a financial report on that topic as well. Similarly, expenses related to what is known as parliamentary diplomacy, along with the activities of parliamentary associations such as this one and meetings with other legislative Presiding Officers, are duly reported. The parliamentary website also contains the financial statements of the House.

In this way, the House is a transparent - and thus modern - institution that reports on the use of the public funds entrusted to it. This transparency is necessary for public confidence in our institution, and for we Members of Parliament, it is worth its weight in gold.

### An accessible Parliament

Do you remember when setting up a website with some documents and hyperlinks was all that was necessary to say 'Mission accomplished!' on accessibility? For the House, that time is long gone. We need to do more to ensure that Members hear from every perspective. As I mentioned, a Parliament must take this additional step to reach out to citizens, consider how they gain access to information and adjust accordingly.

### The [www.ourcommons.ca](http://www.ourcommons.ca) website

I encourage you to visit our parliamentary website. This is a one-stop shop for a wealth of information, including the following:

- information on the House and its role in the Canadian political system;
- information about its architecture and heritage;
- a 360° virtual tour of its interior;
- information on its work through publications such as the Hansard and webcasts of meetings of the House and its Committees, with closed captioning for Canadians with hearing loss;
- information on Members of Parliament, Ministers, parliamentary secretaries, and the Speaker and Deputy Speakers of the House;
- information on parliamentary procedure, with innovative videos explaining key concepts and special parliamentary events;



- information on the various ways that citizens can participate in the House's work and express their opinion (e.g., information on creating a petition); and
- a powerful search tool for delving into the records of the House and its Committees.

But what I am most proud of is that this site conforms to the Web 2.0 accessibility standard (WCAG). Its content is accessible to persons with disabilities, such as blindness and low vision, deafness and hearing loss, learning disabilities, cognitive limitations, limited movement, speech disabilities and photosensitivities. Accessibility staff are available to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to documentation in a format that is accessible to them.

#### Social media

In light of how people consume information nowadays, the House joined in the great social media adventure a few years ago. We have a presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. We

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have several Twitter accounts to provide non-partisan, high-quality information to people interested in the activities of the Speaker, the House, each of its Committees and parliamentary diplomacy. Our tweets are intended to be visually appealing and educational. I encourage you to follow me at @HoCSpeaker!

#### Open data

If you are a researcher or like to work with data, you should know that the House has an open data portal on its website. Several databases are available in Excel format, and they are downloadable free of charge, without any restrictions. Featured lists include information on Members and their expenses, Bills and petitions. In my view, this resource should be better known.

#### Non-digital options

If you are a little less technologically inclined, fear not! The House continues to appreciate the fine art of using good old pen and paper to write to one's Member of Parliament. What is more, in Canada, all citizens can mail correspondence to their elected representatives postage-free. Canadians can also keep submitting paper petitions, even since the launch of our electronic petitions website.

Finally, whether you are visiting Parliament Hill or live nearby, the meetings of the House and its Committees are open to you, with some exceptions. If you have particular needs, you can contact us, and our staff will try to accommodate you. Of course, all our buildings and facilities are wheelchair-accessible.

In addition to all the measures I have just mentioned, the House has recently begun a major project: to create a plan to identify, remove and prevent barriers to the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in parliamentary proceedings. This work is being done in accordance with the Accessible Canada Act. Stay tuned!

#### Conclusion

I hope this article has been of interest and given you fuel for discussions with your colleagues. I want to thank the CPA and *The Parliamentarian* for the opportunity to write this article.

And thank you for coming to Canada for the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. I hope you will have time to discover Halifax, including its fabulous spoon-shaped harbour, the only one of its kind in the world.

See you soon!

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> *The Parliamentarian*, Vol. 103, No. 1, 2022, pp. 22–25.



# STATUTORY ENTRENCHMENT OF THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: THE NOVA SCOTIAN EXPERIENCE

In 2015, United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Agenda) as a means of achieving well-being and prosperity for people and the planet. Central to the Agenda are a set of seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<sup>1</sup> touching on matters such as poverty, health, education, energy, communities, and climate. Achieving these ambitious goals will be challenging and requires decisive action by Member States and their sub-national units.

While much of the challenge will come in determining how to meet the SDGs and taking the necessary follow-through actions, an important first step is holding governments to account for progressing towards and ultimately achieving the SDGs. One such method is by having legislative bodies in Member States statutorily entrench goals relating to sustainable development. This approach has been utilised in Nova Scotia for over 15 years, with satisfactory results and widespread acceptance among Parliamentarians from all parties represented in the Assembly. The success of this approach in helping Nova Scotia advance its own specific sustainable development goals suggests a potential for broader use as Member States seek to implement their own goals and targets in furtherance of the Agenda.

## Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act

The story of Nova Scotia's experience with the entrenchment of statutory sustainable development goal begins in the Spring of 2007 under the Government led by Hon. Rodney MacDonald (Progressive Conservative), when Bill 146, the *Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act*<sup>2</sup> (the EGSPA), was enacted by the Legislature of Nova Scotia. The EGSPA enumerated the key principles on which it was based, including recognition of the interconnectedness of the health of the economy, the environment and the people of Nova Scotia and of the need to manage the environment and economy for the benefit of present and future generations. It then set out as Nova Scotia's long-term objective

the full integration of environmental sustainability and economic prosperity, and to that end to:

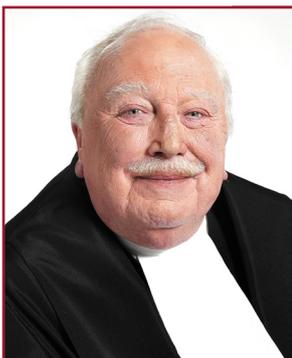
- (a) demonstrate international leadership by having one of the cleanest and most sustainable environments in the world by the year 2020; and
- (b) provide certainty to all sectors of the economy through the Government's economic development strategy . . . and establish clear environmental goals while improving the Province's economic performance to a level that is equal to or above the Canadian average by the year 2020.

Next came the centrepiece of the legislative scheme - in furtherance of the long-term objectives, the EGSPA set out a series of specific economic and provincial goals to be achieved by varying deadlines not later than the year 2020. These goals included legally protecting a specific percentage of Nova Scotia's land mass, adoption, and meeting of specified environmental standards, reductions of greenhouse gases and other emissions, and the development of particular strategies, policies, and regulatory tools.

The Minister responsible for the EGSPA was mandated with reviewing and reporting on the progress made toward achieving the goals and the adequacy of the goals themselves. The EGSPA was to be the subject of a comprehensive public review by the Nova Scotia Round Table on Environmental Sustainability (the Round Table) every five years. It also included various regulation-making powers and authority to enter into agreements in furtherance of the goals, but much of the work to be accomplished in achieving the goals was left to policy and authority under other existing legislation. Fundamentally, the EGSPA was about enshrining sustainability goals in statute and requiring a frequent and open assessment of the progress being made to ensure ongoing accountability by the Government of Nova Scotia.

## Green Economy Act

In 2012, the Round Table's review<sup>3</sup> of the EGSPA determined that



**Hon. Keith Bain, MLA** is the Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. He was first elected to the House of Assembly in 2006, then re-elected in 2009, 2017 and 2021 to represent the constituency of Victoria-The Lakes. Before being elected Speaker in 2021, he had served as Deputy Speaker, Chair of the Progressive Conservative Caucus, critic for Community Services and for Labour and Workforce Development and Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Prior to 2006, he was an elected member of the Victoria District School Board, President of the Victoria County Fire Chief's Association and Vice-Chair of the Cape Breton-Victoria District School Board. He has been a business owner for 35 years.



of the 21 goals set out in the EGSPA, 13 had been completely or nearly achieved and substantive and timely progress was being made in relation to most of the remaining goals. The Round Table review recommended, among other things, greater integration of environmental and economic priorities and the addition of new goals and updated targets for existing goals. Partially in response to this, under the Government led by Hon. Darrell Dexter (New Democratic Party), Bill 136, the *Green Economy Act*<sup>4</sup> (the GEA), was enacted. The GEA was not a replacement for the EGSPA but rather a means of updating it and preserving its usefulness, taking the form of an amending Bill. The amendments added to the EGSPA definitions of “sustainability” and “sustainable prosperity” and expanded the definition of what constitutes “legally protected” land. It also updated the key principles on which the EGSPA was based to

include a reference to Mi'kmaw<sup>5</sup> concept of *Netukulimk*, described as meaning:

*‘the use of the natural bounty provided by the Creator for the self-support and well-being of the individual and the community by achieving adequate standards of community nutrition and economic well-being without jeopardizing the integrity, diversity or productivity of our environment.’*

The inclusion of *Netukulimk* was a specific recommendation of the Round Table. It promotes *Etuaptmumk* (Two-Eyed Seeing) which views problems through the lenses of Indigenous knowledge and Western science to reconcile those perspectives and encourages solutions that integrate learning from both knowledge bases.

The GEA redefined the long-term environmental and economic objective of Nova Scotia to be the achievement of sustainable prosperity, and to that end to:

- (a) establish clear goals that foster an integrated approach to environmental sustainability and economic well-being; and
- (b) work towards continuous improvement in measures of social, environmental and economic indicators of prosperity.

The lengthy list of goals set out in the EGSPA was updated and expanded by the GEA, including to set new targets for later years and set entirely new goals in relation to the meeting of standards, emission reductions and the development of particular strategies, policies, and regulatory tools. The obligations for Ministerial review and reporting of the EGSPA were updated to require the Minister responsible for the EGSPA to consult with Ministerial colleagues in relation to those matters falling within their respective mandates.

#### Sustainable Development Goals Act

In 2019, with most of the goals of the EGSPA having been attained, the Government led by Hon. Stephen McNeil (Liberal) introduced Bill 213 to repeal and replace the EGSPA with the *Sustainable Development Goals Act* (the SDGA).<sup>6</sup> The SDGA enumerated the

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principles upon which it was based, which reflected the evolution of thinking on sustainable development from 2012 and included the notion of the “circular economy” for the first time. The principles also continued to incorporate the concept of *Netukulimk*. The SDGA also maintained the long-term objective of achieving sustainable prosperity.

While some specific goals were set out, including ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to at least 53% below 2005 levels by 2030 and achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, the SDGA differed from the EGSPA in that it left most goals for achieving sustainable prosperity to be established by regulation. While this allowed for an extensive post-enactment consultation period on the goals and greater flexibility to update goals without the need to return to the Legislature to pass amending legislation, it arguably reduced accountability by allowing the Executive branch to set the goals unilaterally through delegated legislation.

The great strength of the EGSPA was the aspect of statutory entrenchment of sustainable development goals. The goals were subject to debate in the Legislature, and once set in statute, could only be amended by passing a Bill to that effect. If the government were unable to achieve a goal, it had to return to the Legislature to amend the EGSPA (and subject the amendment to the scrutiny of the Legislature) or accept the political consequences of being in breach of the statutory goal. While non-justiciable and therefore not legally binding, the statutory goals carried significant political weight.

The SDGA passed Third Reading in the Legislature on a recorded vote, with the unanimous support of all Members present. However, it was left to take effect on proclamation. While the Government led by Premier McNeil and his successor, Hon. Iain Rankin (Liberal),

continued through the stage of public consultations on the new goals to be established by regulations to be made under the SDGA, a general election in the summer of 2021 led to a new Government being formed by Hon. Tim Houston (Progressive Conservative) and a return to the approach originally taken under the EGSPA.

**Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act**

In the fall of 2021, Bill 57, the *Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act*<sup>7</sup> (the EGCCRA), was enacted by the Legislature. The EGCCRA repealed both the EGSPA (which was still in force pending the proclamation into force of the SDGA) and the unproclaimed SDGA. Building on the best aspects of the predecessor Acts it repealed, the EGCCRA formally incorporated the concept of *Etuaptmumk* alongside that of *Netukulimk* and enumerated guiding principles similar in nature to those of the SDGA. To achieve the long-term objective of sustainable prosperity - unchanged from both the EGSPA and the SDGA - the EGCCRA set out specific goals in relation to greenhouse gas emissions reductions, climate change mitigation and adaptation, active transportation, the protection of land, water and air, the modernisation of the environmental assessment process, sustainable procurement, agriculture and food, the growth of the circular economy, support for business, training and education, and diversity, equity and inclusion. The ability to set additional goals by regulation was retained, but the EGCCRA marked a return to the approach of entrenchment in statute being the primary means of establishing goals. The EGCCRA was the subject of extensive debate in the Legislature, with amendments proposed by Opposition Members in the Committee of the Whole House on Bills being passed to include a goal that the Government work with



Left: Province House in Halifax is the home of the Nova Scotia Legislature. The Legislature has met in the building every year since 1819, making it the longest serving legislative building in Canada. Province House is considered to be one of the finest examples of Palladian architecture in North America and construction started in 1811.

Originally designed with two chambers located at the opposite north and south ends of the building, the former Legislative Council Chamber is now known as the Red Chamber. The main Legislative Chamber is laid out with seating for Members facing one another and balconies above with seating for visitors and the media.

Province House was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1996, in recognition of its status as the longest serving legislative building in Canada.



## THE CPA SMALL BRANCHES NETWORK IN CANADA AND ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH

The CPA Small Branches network represents the smallest jurisdictions in all regions of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) to identify their particular needs and requirements in parliamentary strengthening, development and cooperation. The network's mission statement is: *'To empower small Parliaments to overcome national and global challenges through cooperation, advocacy and the strengthening of parliamentary democracy and good governance'*.

The CPA Small Branches network currently comprises Commonwealth jurisdictions with populations under 500,000 and operates within the framework of the CPA. It is governed by an elected CPA Small Branches Chairperson and a Steering Committee of representatives from each of the seven CPA Regions that include CPA Small Branches: Africa; Australia; British Isles and the Mediterranean; Canada; Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic; Pacific; and South-East Asia.

The CPA Small Branches Strategic Plan (2021-2023) sets out the network's priorities including a focus on thematic priorities, such as environmental governance, sustainable economic development, technology and innovation, and human rights, that reflect both the diversity and commonalities between the CPA Small Branches' membership. Central to the Strategic Plan are the issues that small Parliaments and jurisdictions across the Commonwealth face in what is a rapidly changing world. The network has a particular focus on climate change and supporting the smallest jurisdictions who are proportionally greater affected by environmental issues. The network also delivers a number of initiatives towards strengthening



the development and resilience of small Parliaments and Legislatures.

Resources for the network include toolkits for Parliamentarians on climate change and a handbook for Lay Members of Parliament. Recently, the CPA Small Branches network also participated in high-level meetings including COP26 and CHOGM 2022 as well as working with UN Agencies and international partners to amplify the voices of small jurisdictions.

The CPA has a long history of working with its Small Branches and since 1981, has held an annual CPA Small Branches Conference for Parliamentarians from some of the world's smallest Parliaments and Legislatures to promote cooperation and share best practice. After a gap of two years, the 38th CPA Small Branches Conference will be held on 21 and 22 August 2022, during the wider 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Halifax, Canada between 20 and 26 August 2022, hosted by the CPA Canada Region.

In the CPA Canada Region, four CPA Branches are part of the CPA Small Branches network - Northwest Territories; Nunavut; Prince Edward Island; and Yukon. The CPA Canada Region's representative on the CPA Small Branches Steering Committee is currently Hon. Nils Clarke, MLA (Yukon).

African Nova Scotian communities to take immediate and long-term action on their climate change priorities and to create a panel to address environmental racism and make recommendations for redress. The EGCCRA passed Third Reading on a recorded vote with unanimous support from all Members present.

### Conclusion

The evolution of the statutory entrenchment of sustainable development goals in Nova Scotian legislation is ultimately an optimistic story of innovation, accountability, and cross-partisan consensus. The initial decision to entrench Nova Scotia's sustainable development goals in statute created a unique mechanism for making the Government accountable for its progress. While not legally enforceable, the entrenchment served to create goals that could not easily be revamped to suit political expediency and turned out to be more durable than those set by mere policy. The threat of breaching one's own statute or having to come before the Assembly to amend the statute after a process of rigorous debate gave the Government ample incentive to ensure goals were achievable and, in fact, achieved.

All parties have bought into the approach of the original EGSPA, with Governments led by three different Premiers from all three parties represented in the Assembly putting forward amendments or successor legislation that built upon the successes and innovations

of that which came before. This cross-partisan consensus has allowed the legislation to develop harmoniously. With the approach of statutory entrenchment of sustainable development goals having proved to be effective in Nova Scotia, it holds potential for use in other jurisdictions aspiring to implement the SDGs and searching for a way to ensure accountability on the path towards achieving them.

### References:

<sup>1</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

<sup>2</sup> S.N.S. 2007, c. 7 <<https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/PDFs/annual%20statutes/2007%20Spring/c007.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> Marty Janowitz, Report to the Minister of Environment Regarding The Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act (EGSPA) (Round Table on Environment and Sustainable Prosperity Report, 30 March 2012) <<http://www.novascotia.ca/nse/dept/docs/egspa.report.2012.pdf>>

<sup>4</sup> S.N.S. 2012, c. 42 <<https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/PDFs/annual%20statutes/2012%20Fall/c042.pdf>>.

<sup>5</sup> The Mi'kmaq are the people indigenous to Mi'kma'ki, an area that includes most of Atlantic Canada and all of the Province of Nova Scotia.

<sup>6</sup> S.N.S. 2019, c. 26 <<https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/PDFs/annual%20statutes/2019%20Fall/c026.pdf>>

<sup>7</sup> S.N.S. 2021, c. 20 <<https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/PDFs/annual%20statutes/2021%20Fall/c020.pdf>>



# THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF QUÉBEC'S CITIZEN ROUND TABLE: BOOSTING QUEBECERS' PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS AND ACTIVITIES

## A state-of-the-art Parliament

Ever since the visitor pavilion opened in 2019, the National Assembly of Québec has been finding new ways to bring Quebecers closer to their institutions – closer to their “people’s house”. The new facilities are resolutely modern and have made it possible for us to offer visitors a whole new experience. Our goal is to reform and update our civic knowledge base, and to disseminate it taking full advantage of technological breakthroughs.

Our spaces are now home to a myriad of different activities for the public. Concerts, conferences, screenings, exhibitions and interactive workshops breathe new life into the parliamentary routine, and help people discover our emblematic institution. The National Assembly is now a partner in its community and becoming a place everyone wants to see and experience!

This concern for inclusion and education has also transferred into parliamentary activities and proceedings, which are the true bedrock of the National Assembly’s mission. The Assembly carries traditions that are hundreds of years old, but it is also aware of how important it is to adapt to its time. These days, disinformation is casting doubt on the legitimacy of democratic institutions, so openness and transparency have become all the more indispensable. This is why the Assembly recently held focus groups to get a better understanding of people’s democratic needs and aspirations – so that the knowledge gleaned could be incorporated into reflection on the ongoing evolution of Québec parliamentarianism.

The Citizen Round Table was one of the inclusive undertakings designed to bring Parliament closer to the people.

## The Citizen Round Table: an innovation

The Citizen Round Table was a consultation on ways to facilitate Quebecers’ participation in parliamentary proceedings and activities. Tying directly into the parliamentary reform launched

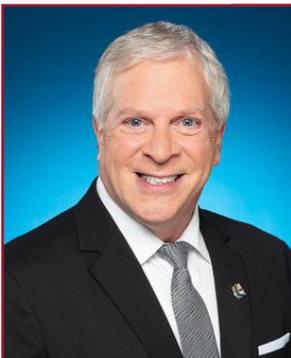
during the 42<sup>nd</sup> Legislature, which it has been my honour to preside over, the Table was designed to inform parliamentary thought on aspects of the reform that concern mechanisms for public participation at the National Assembly.

My fellow MNAs agreed to the Citizen Round Table in spring 2020. Truly committed to the innovative project, they were looking for a consultation method and themes that would stimulate the public’s interest. We deeply hoped that people from all walks of life, whether or not they were familiar with politics and parliamentarianism, would take part in the exchanges in order to provide the Assembly’s ongoing reform with information on people’s perceptions and concerns.

It is important to note that this process was unprecedented for our institution. It was the first time in its history that our Parliament had used focus groups in a public consultation to gain a better understanding of people’s different experiences and worries as citizens. In fact, even though our institution is often in the spotlight, it is rarely subject to a structured process of deep examination and criticism by the public. By establishing the Citizen Round Table, the National Assembly was taking the risk of having to face public criticism, but it was also gambling that the analysis would spur improvements in its practices.

The consultation had many objectives:

- First, to better grasp and gain a deeper understanding of people’s points of view, perceptions and needs with respect to public participation at the National Assembly;
- To find out what are the main obstacles to public participation in parliamentary proceedings and activities;
- To identify concrete ways to improve existing mechanisms for public participation and establish new ones if needed;
- Lastly, to gather ideas and proposals so that they could be integrated into MNAs’ reflections on parliamentary reform.



**Hon. François Paradis, MNA** is the President of the National Assembly of Québec. First elected to office on 20 October 2014 in a by-election, he is the Member for Lévis and he became the President of the National Assembly in 2018. Previously, he was a TV and radio host and anchor, journalist and producer of public and current affairs programs. He authored the book *‘Ma Job ou Ma Vie’*, published in 2014, in which he recounts his fight against cancer of the vocal cords. He was also a conference speaker and communications trainer for many organisations and businesses.



*“The Citizen Round Table was a consultation on ways to facilitate Quebecers’ participation in parliamentary proceedings and activities. Tying directly into the parliamentary reform launched during the 42<sup>nd</sup> Legislature, which it has been my honour to preside over, the Table was designed to inform parliamentary thought on aspects of the reform that concern mechanisms for public participation at the National Assembly.”*

#### The Citizen Round Table: meaningful participation

In order to take the pulse of the Québec public as a whole and ensure the focus groups would be representative of Québec’s diversity, the National Assembly launched a public call for applications on 19 April 2021. The deadline to apply was 19 May 2021.

Several means were used to reach the greatest number of people possible. On the National Assembly’s website, a special page promoted the Citizen Round Table. Ads also appeared in traditional and digital media, and on our social networks (*Facebook, Twitter, Instagram*).

Dozens of groups representing different citizen profiles were approached to encourage their interest in the consultation process: women, men, LGBTQ+ communities, different age groups, Indigenous groups, ethnocultural communities, people living with a disability, people living in the different administrative regions, etc.

I also got involved by participating in a promotional video shown on our various platforms. I gave interviews with different media outlets in order to raise the initiative’s profile. My fellow MNAs were invited to share the call for applications in their ridings.

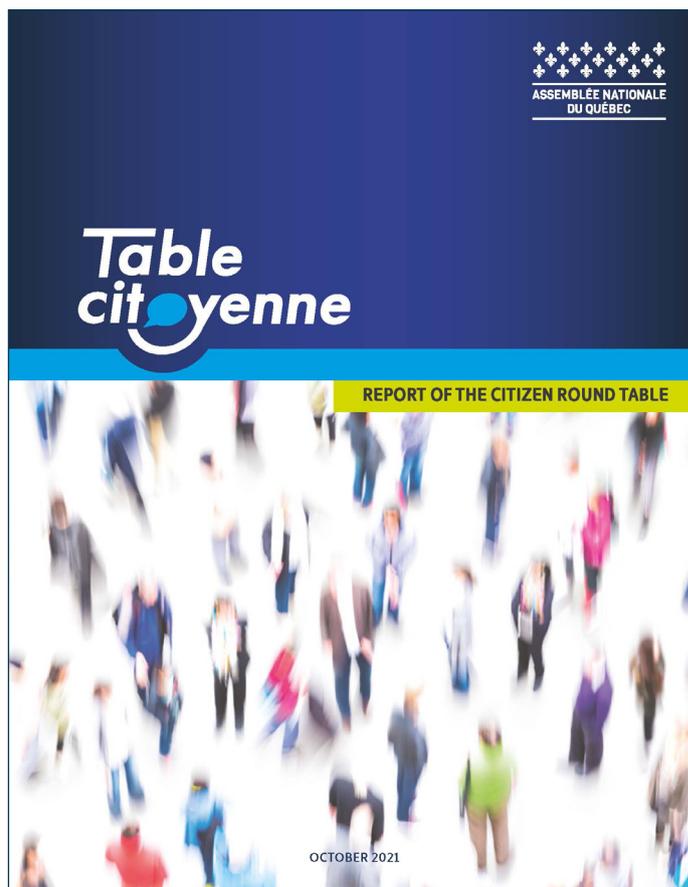
The National Assembly received 347 applications, of which 330 met the eligibility criteria. We were pleased to see that the people who applied were representative of the diversity of Québec’s population.

For the National Assembly, the call for applications was a success! Our inclusiveness and representativeness strategies had borne fruit. The positive response showed us that what we were on the right track.

Initially, we selected 56 people through a draw designed to produce a representative sample based on variables such as gender (male, female, non-binary), age, Indigenous identity, ethnocultural diversity, linguistic diversity (French, English, other mother tongue) and region (17 administrative regions of Québec).

#### The Citizen Round Table: rich, wide-ranging exchanges

Owing to the global situation in 2021, the Citizen Round Table and focus groups were held virtually. The 44 participants were divided



into seven groups, each of which met once for two and a half hours between 14 and 17 June. The discussions were scheduled either during the day or in the evening, so that everyone could take part.

Out of a concern for representativeness and inclusiveness, the groups were formed in accordance with specific profiles. For example, English speakers, people with disabilities and people living in different regions of Québec were placed in three distinct groups to expedite crucial discussion. Each focus group was moderated by a member of the National Assembly staff.

All of the participants identified problems that create obstacles to participation at the Assembly. They proposed concrete ways of improving existing consultation mechanisms, as well as new methods. The exchanges focussed on the following themes: dissemination of information and communication with MNAs, petitions, public consultations and other initiatives and solutions regarding public participation.

In order to facilitate discussion, the National Assembly used an interview grid, and made a commitment to protecting participants’ anonymity. We were hoping people would speak freely, and we encouraged them to do so. The content of the remarks confirms that the exchanges were unfiltered, which makes them even more meaningful. Raw material made available in this way provides better foundations to guide our thought.

In addition, the participants were unanimously enthusiastic about this type of consultation process. The post-consultation survey found a very high rate of satisfaction. In fact, many people called on the Assembly to repeat the exercise on a regular basis.



**The Citizen Round Table: an invaluable aid**

The discussions were highly informative, but after they were over, the National Assembly continued the work. A working group made up of administrative staff from various directorates compiled the responses and took note of the participants' suggestions, while preparing a highly relevant and substantial report, which is available online.

The report contains 96 courses of action suggested by the participants. It was tabled in the National Assembly during the 20 October 2021 sitting and made public the same day, signaling both a strong commitment to put the report to good use and the MNAs' serious intent.

After the report was published, a follow-up Committee was created to examine the feasibility of engaging on the courses of action suggested by the participants. The changes in question would involve many different directorates. This step also allowed us to gather complementary ideas from administrative staff and to revise a number of existing practices.

**The Citizen Round Table: resolutely forward-looking**

A consultation process like the National Assembly's Citizen Round Table can be an inspiration to any institution or administration that aspires to greater openness and inclusion in order to reflect the reality of the population it serves. It is a way of implementing a

broad civic programme that is essential in democracy: a programme designed to ensure that the voices of those who compose our society can be heard.

I have full confidence that the Citizen Round Table will have positive outcomes for all Quebecers and significant effects on public participation mechanisms at the National Assembly in both the medium and long term.

Some of the courses of action have already led to changes in public participation practices and tools at the National Assembly. Others will have effects in the medium or long term, depending on the priorities identified by the MNAs. This initiative has been an undeniable success, and it has opened up new avenues for consulting citizens and continuing to improve democratic practices at the National Assembly.

I encourage you to experiment with such a highly formative exercise. As the President of the National Assembly of Québec, it makes me proud to see that our institution is more alive, open and relevant than ever. Thanks to initiatives like the Citizen Round Table, it will be able to keep pace with the challenges of our time.

\*The author would like to thank Laurie Gosselin-Bélanger for her contribution to drafting this article.

**Below: The National Assembly of Québec.**





# PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS ARE THE KEY TO CREATING AN ACCESSIBLE PROVINCE: MAKING NEW BRUNSWICK ACCESSIBLE THROUGH CONSULTATION

Most of us take for granted the ability to walk along uneven sidewalks, streets and roads unimpeded. We do not think twice about climbing stairs into an office, store or home; or being able to open doors with ease. We can hear warning alerts like sirens and horns, see obstacles in our path and recognise potentially dangerous situations. Most of us are able to process information and make decisions without any cognitive delays or impediments. But not everyone is able to live and function in the same way.

As Members of the Legislative Assembly representing the interests of all our constituents, we are focusing on the role of Parliament to consult with the people of New Brunswick on accessibility to discover how we may do better.

## Consultation Experience

On 9 June 2021, the Legislative Assembly by way of Motion 78 appointed the all-party Select Committee on Accessibility in New Brunswick of which I am the Chair. The Committee is charged with conducting consultations with community stakeholders and government departments involved with the disability community and reporting to the House with recommendations once those consultations are complete. The Committee's consultation exercises are intended to inform the government on what matters to New Brunswickers during the drafting of future legislation addressing accessibility barriers in New Brunswick.

New Brunswick currently has the second-highest rate of disability in Canada at 27% compared to the national average of 22%. The need to seek solutions which allow New Brunswickers to move freely around public buildings and spaces, to have access to all employment opportunities through accessible workplaces and access to digital content and technologies, and to receive barrier-free services is fundamental. Consultation is the first step in

proactively eliminating and preventing barriers to ensure greater opportunities and access to services for people with disabilities in an effort to ensure that New Brunswick falls in line with Canada's international human rights obligations, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and complements the *Accessible Canada Act*.

In October 2021, 18 provincial stakeholders appeared before the Committee to explain the real barriers faced by people with disabilities in New Brunswick. These experts detailed many issues not previously known to Committee Members, such as the intersecting nature of disability and the scope of barriers faced by people living with one or many disabilities.

In light of the information shared during this round of consultations, the Committee unanimously agreed to expand its mandate and hear directly from the general public with recommendations to address the challenges outlined in the motion. The result of this round of consultations was 24 written briefs from both individuals and other stakeholders vital to making a difference for people with varying degrees of disabilities who call our province home.

After considering personal testimonies from the public about individual and systemic barriers present in the province, the Committee met again on 1 March 2022, where certain provincial and federal stakeholders appeared before it to offer additional advice and to answer questions from Members.

In an effort to ensure a thorough consultation process, the Committee again unanimously agreed to hold another round of consultations in October 2022 to hear from any stakeholders who had not yet been able to appear. These numerous consultation efforts on accessibility in New Brunswick drew common messages, the most frequent being that people with disabilities want to be



**Hon. Kathy Bockus MLA** was elected to the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick in the September 2020 general election to represent the riding of Saint Croix. She currently sits on five Standing Committees of the Legislative Assembly: Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship (Chair), Social Policy (Chair), Private Bills, Estimates and Fiscal Policy and Law Amendments; as well as two Select Committees: Accessibility in New Brunswick (Chair) and Public Universities. Born and raised in the Saint John region, Ms Bockus had a decades long career as an award-winning journalist before becoming an elected Member. She decided to run for election because she wanted to help people solve their issues and support the economic sustainability of the region.



heard and want to be directly involved in the decisions that affect them.

“Nothing about us without us” was a refrain we heard over and over. “We need to be asked, not told, what we need,” advocates said.

### Importance of Parliamentary Consultations

Consultation work is a key tool that helps elected Members carry out the will of the people who inhabit the province. To this end, consultations not only frequently occur at the Legislative Assembly, but various tools are entrenched in its rules and practices to ensure participation opportunities for the general population. One such method of consultation occurs via Legislative Committees.

These Committees are an extension of the House and undertake responsibilities that the Assembly as a whole would find difficult, if not impossible, to carry out. Committees exist to expedite the work of the House and to allow for more thorough study of complex or technical questions. Committees are also able to consult with the public on important matters, allowing Members to hear from people from all walks of life in the province.

The Select Committee on Accessibility in New Brunswick is one such example of the consultation mandate. With three political parties currently represented in the House and the Committee’s membership reflecting this makeup, the nature of this Parliamentary Committee’s consultations has welcomed diversity in its approach. The political diversity present within the Committee’s membership has led to a greater variety of invited participants across political and geographical lines and subsequent questions and responses from Members during the hearings. The cooperative nature of the all-party Committee also serves as an example to consultation participants that their elected representatives take their mandate seriously in the banishing of barriers.

### Responses by New Brunswickers

Participants in the consultation exercises have highlighted barriers in the following areas: the built environment, housing, employment, education, information and communication technologies, transportation, and the design and delivery of public programs. Presenters repeatedly asked Committee Members to develop

**“Consultation work is a key tool that helps elected Members carry out the will of the people who inhabit the province. To this end, consultations not only frequently occur at the Legislative Assembly, but various tools are entrenched in its rules and practices to ensure participation opportunities for the general population.”**

their recommendations regarding accessibility standards using a disability lens that recognises every person’s inherent dignity and right to protection against discrimination and equality under the law. Practically speaking, the act of consulting is a significant step in recognising the importance of asking people to participate in the development of decisions that affect their lives.

The Committee was made aware of the intersectionality experienced by people with disabilities and the need to acknowledge these to prevent legislative or policy gaps in future legislation. Many examples came to light, including the fact that 70% of visibly disabled people also have invisible disabilities, such as multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), learning disabilities, mental illnesses, chronic illnesses, and autism, among many others. It is important to note that intersectionality goes beyond visible and invisible disabilities: it also extends to the fact that people with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, have addictions, or be members of other vulnerable populations.

In addition, the Committee was asked to adopt a social model of disability, which prioritises the person instead of the disability when considering barriers. This is in contrast to the medical model approach, which focuses on the disability or a perceived problem instead of the person and results in reduced opportunities for people with disabilities to make significant societal contributions.

When speaking about specific areas where barriers exist, it was recommended that the provincial government conduct accessibility audits on public structures and to move beyond the minimal level of accessibility when developing standards. It was suggested that the definition of “accessible housing” be broadened to include mixed housing opportunities that could in turn lead to increased informal community supports. Groups also encouraged the enforcement of national building codes, particularly to ensure that apartment housing complexes have evacuation plans for people with disabilities and making all washrooms wheelchair accessible in public buildings.

In the vein of employment barriers, participants emphasised how the dignity of work is paramount, and that people of all abilities want meaningful employment which creates, among its benefits, the opportunity for better interpersonal relationships, which in turn improves mental health and provides an escape from poverty. One specific barrier to accessing meaningful employment begins with online job applications: challenges occur when there are difficulties in using a computer due to visual or mobility difficulties or when access to the internet is sparse or non-existent. These elements put people with disabilities at a disadvantage before even having an opportunity to compete against people without disabilities. The Committee was also advised that employers must understand that supporting the work of disabled employees is vital to the success of those employees and the company’s overall business success.

The Committee heard that there is room for a variety of improvements in the public educational system, like the need for dedicated invisible disability supports, better training for support staff and teachers, and better assessment tools that lead to earlier diagnoses and earlier access to appropriate assistive technologies. Further to the removal of barriers within the school system, practical transitional supports for graduating students are needed to increase the chances of success in the employment realm.



Above: The Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick.

‘We have the technology’ is a popular commercial refrain that has proven true as New Brunswick has navigated societal changes during the recent COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and restrictive emergency measures. The Committee was advised to use that technology - whether it be in developing new assistive technologies such as specialized ergonomic devices or computer programs that use voice-to-text programs, or in adapting existing physical or technological infrastructure to increase digital literacy and offer remote work options in an effort to increase participation in all aspects.

Transportation gaps for people with disabilities exist in both urban and rural New Brunswick communities. These gaps were outlined by several advocacy groups who recommended both general efforts to raise awareness of disabilities and specific examples to remove existing barriers, such as accessible transportation for people with mobility disabilities, better access to vehicle retrofits for those in municipalities where no accessible public transportation exists, and workplace parking accommodations to name only a few. It is important to recognise that transportation barriers compound other accessibility barriers, which adversely impacts people’s health and community participation.

Participants recommended, among other public program initiatives, the creation of programs to assist in the development of entrepreneurial skills for people with disabilities, increased financial support, household income policy changes, and the creation of a single direct access point for people with disabilities enrolled in multiple governmental programs. Several participants also

identified the need for increased assistive support for neurodiverse children and adults.

### Conclusion

It is important to note that the Select Committee on Accessibility in New Brunswick’s public consultation exercises intended to identify existing barriers for people with disabilities were held during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which presented participatory barriers in and of itself that demanded a certain level of accommodation from Committee Members. This irony was not lost on the Committee but instead served to applaud the enthusiasm and show support for all participants.

The information presented to the Committee gave all Members a deeper understanding and appreciation of the work being done within the disability community, and it is with a renewed sense of dedication and respect that the Committee strives to break down accessibility barriers in the province.

Do we have the answers now? Not all of them, but thanks to the commitment of people with disabilities and disability advocacy organisations who have participated in parliamentary consultations, the Committee has information and that’s an essential place to start.



## COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES (CPWD): A NETWORK WITH ITS ORIGINS IN THE CPA CANADIAN REGION

Recognising the need to increase the representation of persons with disabilities in political institutions, the **Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD)** network was established in 2019 to facilitate activities and programmes to champion and increase the representation of persons with disabilities in Commonwealth Parliaments and to work towards the mainstreaming of disability considerations in all CPA activities and programmes.

The then Speaker of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia (2013 to 2021), Hon. Kevin Murphy was instrumental in establishing the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network. However, discussions about the need for such a network had been ongoing in the CPA Canadian Region for several years previously.

The early stages of the network came from the CPA Canadian Region in late summer 2017 when the CPA Nova Scotia Branch and the Legislature of Nova Scotia held the first gathering of Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. The unique challenges faced every day by Parliamentarians with disabilities from across the Commonwealth were highlighted at the first conference of its kind, which brought together over 30 Commonwealth Parliamentarians with disabilities, carers and parliamentary officials from eight of the nine regions of the CPA.

The conference enabled Parliamentarians to network and share experiences, good practice and innovations from Commonwealth jurisdictions that are designed to support their full participation in political and public life. Members pledged to continue to advocate for more people with disabilities to stand for public office and improved access in Legislatures across the Commonwealth. Recognising their responsibilities as role models, Members discussed how they could use their positions to promote and work towards more representative and inclusive Legislatures across the Commonwealth.

At the opening of the conference, Hon. Kevin Murphy said: *“It is a privilege to welcome my fellow Parliamentarians with disabilities to Halifax, Nova Scotia for this unique Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities Conference. Nova Scotia became the 3<sup>rd</sup> province in Canada to pass accessibility legislation that ensures fair and equal access for all citizens. It is my hope that we will collaborate to develop and make recommendations to the CPA to create a formal network of Parliamentarians with disabilities within the Association.”*

A CPA statement at the conference said: *“The World Health Organisation reports that around 15% of the world’s population, or an estimated 1 billion people, live with some form of disability or different ability. Persons with disabilities have a great deal to contribute to our society and democracies and must be given equal opportunities and the right support. The CPA recognises the importance of creating inclusive Parliaments and has supported the inclusion of special interest groups,*



*recognising their importance in strengthening parliamentary democracy across the Commonwealth. To be reflective of the societies we serve, it is important that persons with disabilities are given opportunities to be represented in Parliament. However, despite constituting 15% of the world’s population, Parliamentarians with disabilities are in the minority or non-existent in most Commonwealth Legislatures, and significantly underrepresented in governance and other levels of decision-making.”*

Following its approval at the CPA General Assembly held at the 64<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network was established in 2019. The network held its first meeting in the autumn of the same year when the first CPwD Chairperson, Hon. Kevin Murphy was elected by the CPwD Regional Champions, who represent the nine regions of the CPA. The CPwD Regional Champions promote the rights of Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities in their Region and represent disability interests within the CPA.

In August 2020, an investment fund was established through the CPA to improve the physical accessibility of Parliaments, such as the procurement of assistive technology or supporting persons with disabilities to seek higher office.

The CPwD network also introduced its Disability Inclusive Communications Guidelines, which provide guidance to Commonwealth Legislatures on how to enhance and sensitise their communications with persons with disabilities with examples of best practice that can be adopted by both Parliaments and Parliamentarians in order to continue to ensure that they sensitively address Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with disabilities.

In 2021, Hon. Dennitah Ghata, HSC, MP, from the National Assembly of Kenya was announced as the CPwD Chairperson in succession to Hon. Kevin Murphy.

The CPwD network reaffirmed its priority of promoting disability inclusion in Parliaments with the launch of its new three-year strategic plan in September 2021, setting out its core priorities for the next three years. Developed following a series of consultations with the nine Regional Champions of the network, the CPwD Strategic Plan 2021-2024 set out the network’s outputs and thematic priorities and focused on addressing the following areas of concern and key priorities:

- Leadership positions for Parliamentarians with disabilities
- Sensitising Parliaments to the needs and rights of persons with disabilities



Above: The early stages of the network came from the CPA Canadian Region in late summer 2017 when the CPA Nova Scotia Branch and the Legislature of Nova Scotia held the first gathering of Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

- Methods for the implementation of the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The CPA Secretary-General, Stephen Twigg, welcomed the launch of the CPwD Strategic Plan 2021-2024 and stated: *"Diversity is a huge strength of the Commonwealth, which the CPA reflects in our important networks like CPwD. The new CPwD Strategic Plan outlines our commitment to mainstreaming disability issues in our work and supporting Parliaments to be more inclusive."*

In October 2021, the CPwD Africa Region hosted the network's first-ever Regional Conference in Nairobi, Kenya which brought together Parliamentarians from across the CPA Africa Region, including many Parliamentarians with disabilities, to discuss the theme of *'mainstreaming disability considerations in legislative agenda in the 21<sup>st</sup> century'*. The hosting of a CPwD Regional Conference represented another landmark moment in the short history of the network.

The CPA Canadian Region continues to support the network and the CPwD Regional Champion for the Canada Region is Hon. Dan Coulter, MLA from the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia where he serves as the Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility and is a campaigner for education and the right to safe working conditions.

Today, the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, within the wider Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, facilitates activities and programmes to champion and increase the representation of persons with disabilities in Commonwealth Parliaments and works towards the mainstreaming of disability considerations in all CPA activities and programmes. The network supports elected representatives with disabilities in 180 Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth and ensures that issues of persons with disabilities are brought to the fore in parliamentary debate and legislation.

Ensuring a disability perspective in all aspects of policy and legislation formulation, effective implementation and enforcement of existing accessibility and disability laws and policies, as well as providing for equal employment opportunities and training, are among the measures that contribute to the greater inclusion of people with disabilities.

For further information about the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, please visit [www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org) or email [hq.sec@cpahq.org](mailto:hq.sec@cpahq.org).



# WOMEN IN POLITICS: THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ASSEMBLY AS THE FIRST WOMEN- MAJORITY LEGISLATURE IN CANADIAN HISTORY

When I was first elected to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly in 2015, I was one of only two women returned to the nineteen-Member Legislature. The other woman elected was our current Premier, Caroline Cochrane. In 1990, the United Nations declared that, in order for women Parliamentarians to have a notable impact on public policy, they need to number at least 30% of a Legislature's total membership. Despite well-intentioned efforts to encourage more women to seek elected office in the Northwest Territories (NWT), we had been stuck at just over 10%, the lowest level in Canada, for years. Among the world's democratic nations, Canada itself ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in terms of gender representation at 28.6%.

On 8 March 2018, International Women's Day, I moved a motion calling on the Legislative Assembly to adopt a goal of increasing the representation of women in the Legislature to 20% by the 2023 general election and to 30% by 2027. The motion was carried unanimously. Now what? It had always seemed to me that the number of women elected is a function of the number of women who let their names stand. Political parties can play an important role in ensuring that women's names are on the ballot, as can many systems of proportional representation. But in the NWT's "consensus" system of non-partisan government, neither of these options was on the table immediately. In our system, all Members are independents. It was time to get bold and creative.

Following the passage of my motion, the then Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, Hon. Jackson Lafferty MLA invited the Premier, Caroline Cochrane and I to his office to discuss a potential solution he had heard about when attending the 63rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Bangladesh in 2017. In partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), several small island nations in the South Pacific had been experimenting with various proactive measures to increase the representation of women in their respective Parliaments. For example, in 2013 Samoa amended its constitution to guarantee that women hold a minimum of five seats in its 49-seat Legislature. If the minimum number of women is not returned through the normal electoral process, additional seats are added to make up the shortfall. In the first

Samoan election after the introduction of the so-called "Temporary Special Measure," the number of women participating increased to 9%. Four women were elected through the 'normal' channels, resulting in the creation of one additional seat which was allocated to the unsuccessful woman candidate who achieved the highest percentage vote.

The notion of Temporary Special Measures resonated with me as a potential bold and innovative policy to proactively overcome the longstanding and stubborn underrepresentation of women in NWT politics. As there are no political parties in the NWT Legislative Assembly, the potential to upset the balance of power through the appointment of additional Members who had lost their respective elections was a non-issue. At the very least, it was my hope that the mere suggestion of such an unusual policy would generate a serious discussion about women in politics and encourage more women to let their names stand.

After consulting with Caroline and I, the Speaker tabled a discussion paper on Temporary Special Measures in the Legislative Assembly on 31 May 2018. In response, the Assembly established the 'Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly' and named me as Chair. The Special Committee was supported by two women staff of the Legislative Assembly in the capacities of Committee Clerk and Research Advisor. The Committee's formal mandate was to identify barriers that women faced in seeking and attaining public office and to generate discussion and feedback about potential Temporary Special Measures such as those in place in the South Pacific. Informally, I approached the Committee's travel throughout the NWT to conduct hearings as a recruitment drive. One hundred and twenty (120) NWT residents participated in the Committee's public hearings, 90% of whom were women. I encouraged each one I met to consider seeking elected office in an upcoming election.

The Committee's final report, tabled on 4 June 2019, did not recommend the immediate implementation of Temporary Special Measures. Rather, it called for a plebiscite on the issue if future elections did not yield the desired 20% and 30% representation of women.



**Hon. Julie Green, MLA** is a Member of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories representing Yellowknife Centre since 2015. She was the Chair of the Special Committee to Increase the Representation of Women in the Legislative Assembly and has held several Ministerial roles with responsibility for Health and Social Services, Persons with Disabilities and Seniors. Prior to her election, she worked as a journalist with CBC and Far North Oil and Gas Review before focusing on advocating and fundraising for services centered on women, families and children in need at the YWCA Yellowknife and other organisations.



Above: The Legislative Assembly of Northwest Territories.

The Committee's report also included important recommendations to make the Assembly building and its proceedings more family friendly and to remove some of the common barriers women face when considering a career in politics. These included the inclusion of childcare as an allowable election and constituency work expense, the hosting of Campaign Schools for Women throughout the NWT, campaign expense rebates for women candidates, the establishment of a leadership training program for women at the Territory's public college, enhanced public education on the role and workload of an MLA and parental leave for sitting MLAs. The recommendations were adopted unanimously by the Legislative Assembly and have been largely implemented.

The results of the 2019 general election were better than I could have possibly hoped for. In total, twenty-two women were nominated as candidates. This was the largest pool of women to ever let their names stand in a Territorial election, both nominally and as a percentage of total candidates, and more than double the number who had run in the previous two general elections. As expected, and most importantly, nine women were elected constituting 47% of the Assembly's nineteen seats. In some ridings, women were elected for the first time. Overnight, our Assembly went from the least gender balanced Legislature in Canada to the most, far exceeding our stated representation targets for both 2023 (20%) and 2027 (30%). The Premier and four of the six Cabinet Ministers appointed were women. Following a by-election in 2021, Ms Jane Weyallon-Armstrong was elected in the Monfwi constituency making the NWT the first Legislature in Canadian history, and one of the first in the Commonwealth, to include a majority of women in its membership.

We are now more than half-way through the 19<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. It has not been all smooth sailing. The COVID-19 pandemic struck just three months into our term, hijacking our priorities and limiting our ability to coalesce as a group. A high-profile Integrity complaint against one of our colleagues, resulting in the first expulsion of a sitting Member from our Assembly, was painful and

divisive. Nonetheless, it is my view that the current, gender-balanced Assembly is living up to its promise of "doing politics differently." The Territory's response to the pandemic resulted in some of the highest vaccination and lowest mortality rates in the country. Cabinet has demonstrated a greater willingness to cooperate with all non-Cabinet Members in identifying solutions to long-standing public policy challenges and the adoption of operations and capital budgets. We have witnessed more women appointed to senior positions in the bureaucracy, judiciary and government-owned corporations. "Social envelope" issues are getting equal billing with infrastructure and economic development files.

Only time will tell whether the NWT's success with a gender-balanced Legislature will prevail. One of my longstanding mantras has been "If you can see it, you can be it." The participation of women at the highest levels of elected public office in the NWT is now normalized. The proverbial glass ceiling has been smashed. It may take some time for the fruits of a gender-balanced Legislature to make its way through the policy making and implementation vortex. But I can say, confidently, from inside Canada's first majority female Legislature, that it will happen. Women are not a special interest group. They constitute more than half of Canada's population and bring unique and vital perspectives to the work of government. The time is long overdue for all Canadian and Commonwealth Legislatures to get serious about removing the barriers and creating the conditions necessary for women to take their rightful places in our elected Parliaments. Each jurisdiction will require its own particular and innovative solutions. As public faith in our democratic institutions comes under increasing strain, we must ensure that these institutions are reflective of the populations they serve and inclusive of previously under-represented world views. If the NWT can go from last to first in the span of a few short months, and without the help of political parties or proportional representation, the sky is the limit for other CPA Regions and Branches in the Commonwealth.



## GENDER EQUALITY IN CANADA'S PARLIAMENTS AND LEGISLATURES: THE WORK OF THE CWP CANADIAN REGION

Created in 2005, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Canadian Region is composed of women Parliamentarians from Canada's Provincial and Territorial Legislatures and its Federal Parliament. As the Chair of the CWP Canadian Region and the Canadian representative on the CWP International Steering Committee, I am pleased to provide an overview of the history of women's representation in the Parliament of Canada and in the Canadian Provincial and Territorial Legislatures, along with a brief discussion of the CWP Canadian Region and its upcoming activities.

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) is the network of women Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's 180 Parliaments and Legislatures. The CWP network provides a means of building the capacity of women elected to Parliament to be more effective in their roles, improving the awareness and ability of all Parliamentarians, male and female, and encouraging them to include a gender perspective in all aspects of their role - legislation, oversight and representation and helping Parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions.

Recognising the need of increasing women's representation in political institutions, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) was founded by women delegates at the 1989 plenary CPA Conference so women at future conferences could discuss ways to increase female representation in Parliament and work towards the mainstreaming of gender considerations in all CPA activities and programmes. In 2004, the group was formally recognised in the CPA Constitution and its elected CWP Chairperson became part of the CPA Executive Committee.

### The history of women's representation in the Parliament of Canada and Canada's Provincial and Territorial Legislatures

There is a long history of women's involvement in Canadian politics. From 1917, when the first woman was elected to office in Canada, the number of women Parliamentarians has, broadly



speaking, grown at the Federal, Provincial and Territorial level. Women's representation in the Canadian House of Commons exceeded the 20% threshold for the first time in 1997 and reached over 30% in the 2021 federal election.<sup>1</sup> In the Senate of Canada, as of January 2022, 45 of the 92 appointed Senators (48.9%) were women. However, progress remains slow, as of 1 May 2022, Canada ranked 59<sup>th</sup> in the world for the percentage of women in national Parliaments.

#### A. The Parliament of Canada

Numerous women have served in the Federal Parliament in Canada, as is explained on the CWP Canadian Region website: *In 1921, Agnes Macphail became the first woman elected to the Canadian House of Commons and the only woman to serve in the 14<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Canada.*<sup>2</sup> *In the Senate of Canada, Cairine Wilson was sworn in as Canada's first female Senator in 1930, and the Senate's first female Speaker, Hon. Muriel McQueen Fergusson, was appointed in 1972. Several years later, in 1980, Rt Hon. Jeanne Sauvé became the first female Speaker of the House of Commons. She also became Canada's first female Governor-General in 1983. In a Canadian first, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Justin Trudeau MP appointed equal numbers of men and women to the federal cabinet in 2015, a practice he continued following the 2019 and 2021 elections.*<sup>3</sup>

Further, Canada has also had one woman Federal Prime Minister, Rt Hon. Kim Campbell, who served from 25 June 1993 to 4 November 1993.

#### B. Provincial and Territorial Legislatures

Women have also served as elected officials and leaders in Provincial and Territorial Legislatures across Canada. As

highlighted on the CWP Canadian Region website: *In 1917, Louise Crummy McKinney and Roberta Catherine MacAdams Price were the first two women to be elected to a Legislature in Canada, and in the British Empire, when they were elected to the Alberta Legislative*



### CANADA MARKS CENTENARY OF FIRST WOMAN MEMBER OF THE FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Canadian Senator Donna Dasko recently highlighted in the Senate chamber that 2021 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the first woman was elected to the Parliament of Canada in the 1921 federal election.

Agnes Campbell Macphail (1890-1954) was a Canadian politician and teacher from Grey Southeast in Ontario, who served as a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons of Canada until 1940. Moving to provincial politics, from 1943 to 1945 and again from 1948 to 1951, she served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario representing the Toronto riding of York East. Active throughout her life in progressive Canadian politics, she worked for two separate parties and also promoted her ideas through column-writing, activism and legislation.

With 30% female Members of the Canadian House of Commons today, Senator Donna Dasko reminded the Senate of Canada during a debate that more needed to be done to achieve gender equality across all institutions and with more women candidates coming forward for election, greater support was required.



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*Assembly. Between 1918 and 1970, the remaining provinces followed suit and began electing women to their Legislatures... In the Territories, G. Jean Gordon was the first woman elected to the Yukon Territorial Council in 1967, serving until 1970. In the Northwest Territories, Lena (Elizabeth Magdalena) Pedersen was the first woman, and the first Inuk woman to be elected to the Northwest Territories Council in 1970. Finally, in Nunavut's first election in 1999, Manitok Catherine Thompson was the first, and only woman among the 11 female candidates to be elected to the Nunavut Legislature.<sup>4</sup>*

In British Columbia, Rita Margaret Johnston was Canada's first female Premier, selected as acting Premier on 2 April 1991 and serving until 17 October 1991. Catherine Callbeck in Prince Edward Island became Canada's first elected woman Premier in 1993. Further, in the Northwest Territories, Nellie J. Cournoyea became the first Indigenous woman to lead a Provincial or Territorial Legislature upon her election as Premier in November 1991.

Today, the proportion of women Parliamentarians varies across the different Provincial and Territorial legislatures. As noted on the CWP Canadian Region website, "As of June 2022, six of the 13 Provincial and Territorial Legislatures had more than 35% female representation: Northwest Territories (52.6%); Quebec (44%); the Yukon (42.1%); British Columbia (41.4%); Ontario (37.9%); and Nova Scotia (37.3%)." Further, as of June 2022, two of Canada's 13 current Premiers are women, Hon. Caroline Cochrane of the Northwest Territories and Hon. Heather Stefanson, Premier of Manitoba.

### C. My experience in Ontario

As a rural Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) at the Ontario Legislature, I am proud to serve as Regional Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Canadian Region. It is a three-year term. During my tenure, I have represented Canada during the pandemic in a variety of CWP International initiatives due to the ease of participation realised via a virtual format. It is very much appreciated that throughout the Commonwealth, a unifying priority is the goal to enable women to engage, and to ultimately increase the number of women elected at all levels of both Government and the Legislature.

At Queen's Park, the Legislative Assembly of Ontario also showcases a 'Remarkable Assembly' of trailblazers on its main floor for all to appreciate and celebrate. The Remarkable Assembly exhibit serves to inspire and prove women can actively and effectively affect change through legislation and by leading as an example for others to follow. Both elected and appointed women are recognised in this display for their leadership and the trail they blazed. These women range from Agnes MacPhail and Margaret Rae Luckock, the first elected women in Ontario (1943); to Julia Munro, the longest serving elected woman MPP in the history of Ontario's Legislative Assembly (1995-2018); to Kathleen O. Wynne, the first woman Premier (2013-2018); to Deb Deller, the first woman Clerk (2007-

2016) and Jackie Gordon, the first woman Sergeant-at-Arms (since 2017) at the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

### Upcoming activities and events for the CWP Canadian Region

Women's representation in Canadian Legislatures and the Federal Parliament is not yet equal to that of men, but the general trend is improving. Gains have been made in part thanks to the efforts of organisations across Canada who have worked to increase women's representation in all levels of Government and Parliament. For example, the CWP Canadian Region aims to increase representation in Parliaments and Legislatures across Canada while also providing opportunities for discussion and development of current and future Parliamentarians.

The CWP Canadian Region pursues these objectives through annual CWP Parliamentary and Regional Conferences, outreach programs and campaigns in schools across the country. Over the last few years, the CWP Canadian Region has undertaken a number of projects including the release of the 'She Should Run' initiative – a framework guiding the launch of a non-partisan campaign in schools for women across Canada.

As regards upcoming activities, the CWP Canadian Region Conference will be held in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in July 2022. Moreover, the CWP Canadian Region will also welcome the international CWP network to the 7<sup>th</sup> triennial conference of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) to be held on 21 and 22 August 2022 as part of the wider 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Halifax, Canada from 20 to 26 August 2022. As the Chair of the CWP Canadian Region, I look forward to these opportunities to share experiences and discuss issues important to women Parliamentarians around the world.

### References:

<sup>1</sup> CWP Canadian Region, Women in the Parliament of Canada and Provincial and Territorial Legislatures.

<sup>2</sup> The story of Agnes MacPhail was featured in *The Parliamentarian* 2021 Issue Two, p. 195 in recognition of the centenary of her first being elected to the Parliament of Canada in 1921.

<sup>3</sup> CWP Canadian Region, Women in the Parliament of Canada and Provincial and Territorial Legislatures.

<sup>4</sup> CWP Canadian Region, Women in the Parliament of Canada and Provincial and Territorial Legislatures.

**Hon. Lisa M. Thompson MPP** is the Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Canadian Region and the Canadian representative on the CWP International Steering Committee. She is a Member of the Ontario Legislative Assembly representing Huron-Bruce and is the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. First elected in 2011, she has held several roles in the Legislature.





# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN CANADIAN LEGISLATURES

Lessons from the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia on diversity and inclusion.

## Introduction

Multicultural communities are a valued source of diverse knowledge and experiences and, most importantly, help build understanding, inclusiveness and mutual respect. As representative institutions, Legislatures have an important role in supporting and strengthening these communities. Legislatures have often been a place of exclusion and discrimination where many of Canada’s multicultural communities have been barred from voting, running for office and, in some case, even entering the buildings themselves. Over time, there have been political and institutional efforts to improve diversity across Canadian Legislatures, including at the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, such as removing barriers to membership and making politics and physical buildings a more welcoming place for everyone. There is still a long way to go to create institutions reflective of our increasingly diverse population and it is incumbent upon all Parliamentarians to continue this work and champion the voices of diverse communities.

British Columbia benefits from tremendous diversity. The province is home to over 200 First Nations, as well as Inuit and Metis peoples, each with their own unique histories and cultures. There are more than 30 different First Nation languages and close to 60 dialects spoken in the province. British Columbia is also home to 4.5 million residents with ancestries from around the globe, and nearly one-third of British Columbia’s population was born outside of Canada. The province’s diverse society is enriched by the vital relationships woven through all of these communities.

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia is becoming more reflective of this diversity. In October 2020, British Columbians elected a record number of women to their Legislature, with women holding 37 of 87 seats in the House - nearing gender parity. Over 20% of seats are currently held by Indigenous and racialized peoples which is nearing the 25% of visible minorities that make up BC’s population. The Legislature Assembly of British Columbia also includes Members who represent the LGBTQ2S+ community and those with different accessibility needs. The diversity of elected

representatives is increasingly reflective of the broader population. This representation of British Columbia’s diverse voices facilitates stronger connections and understanding of diverse communities.

## History of restrictions on representation of Members

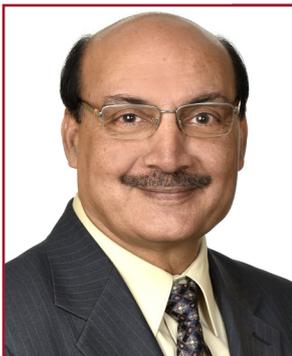
Despite recent successes, there is no denying that Legislatures like British Columbia were not always a welcoming place for all. There was a time when many of the Members today would not have been allowed to run for election or even vote.

British Columbia’s first provincial Parliament consisted of 25 elected men with property holdings even though the broader population was already much more diverse. In 1872, it passed the *Qualification and Registration of Voters Act* which prevented both Indigenous and Chinese peoples from voting in provincial elections. This Act was amended in 1895 to also deny the right to vote in provincial elections to those of Japanese descent, even if they were Canadian citizens, and amended again in 1907 to exclude South Asians from voting in provincial elections. As well, in 1888, British Columbia’s *Constitution Act* was amended to deny Chinese people the right to run for election to the Provincial Legislature.

These restrictions were due to fears that non-European settlers would monopolize the job market due to their willingness to work in difficult and challenging positions for lower wages, so laws were implemented to limit their power, including voting and holding public office. In 1909, the *Public Service Act* was passed, which included a section stating that only British subjects could work for the public service, except where expert technical knowledge was required.

Over time, albeit very slowly, the Legislative Assembly started to become a more diverse and inclusive place. For some women, the right to vote in British Columbia and the right to run for office happened in tandem in 1917. However, this only applied to women who were considered British subjects and many women of colour and Indigenous women were still disenfranchised.

The first woman Member, Mary Ellen Smith, was elected as an independent during a 1918 by-election in the constituency of



**Hon. Raj Chouhan, MLA** is the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. He was first elected as the MLA for Burnaby-Edmonds in 2005. In the Legislative Assembly, he has served as Deputy Speaker, Assistant Deputy Speaker and as Official Opposition critic for labour, human rights, multiculturalism and immigration. He immigrated to Canada in 1973 and as a student in India, he was actively involved in student union activities. He is the founding President of the Canadian Farmworkers' Union and served as the director of bargaining for the Hospital Employees Union. He continues to support organisations in his community that promote neighbourhood safety, refugee assistance and health and wellness programs for seniors.



Above: The main chamber of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

Vancouver City to replace her late husband. She later joined the Liberal Party of the day and was appointed as a Cabinet Minister in 1921, the first woman in the British Empire to hold such a position. It's important to note, that despite being a leader for women's rights, Smith's legacy is complicated by her troubling and racist perspectives.

As the province took small steps towards diversity and inclusion, racism and discrimination persisted in many ways. For example, 1947 amendments to the *Provincial Elections Act* barred from suffrage every person who did not have '*an adequate knowledge of either the English or French language.*'

Other important firsts include Dr Frank Calder, a Nisga'a Chief, who in 1949 became the first Indigenous person elected in British Columbia and to any Provincial Legislature in Canada in 1949. Rosemary Brown, the first Black woman elected in British Columbia and to any Provincial Legislature in Canada was elected in 1972. In 1991, Rita Johnson became the first woman Premier in British Columbia and all of Canada. Three years later in 1994, Members elected long time MLA Emery Barnes as the first Black Speaker of any Legislature in Canada. The first woman Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, Iona Campagnolo, was appointed in 2001, followed by the first Indigenous Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, Steven L. Point, in 2007.

### Institutional Changes to Support Open and Welcoming Space

Each of these 'firsts' has brought us closer to better representing the population of British Columbia, but electoral representation is not the only way parliamentary institutions need to adapt to be more inclusive and welcoming. Proceedings, physical structures and events also provide opportunities to connect with communities and to remove barriers for Members.

Although multi-faith prayers were always permitted in the Chamber, in 2019 the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia formally adopted changes to its Standing Orders to better reflect

and affirm long-standing practices recognising diversity. The Legislative Assembly amended provisions in the Standing Orders providing for an opening prayer by replacing the word 'Prayers' with 'Prayers and Reflections'. This change acknowledges the range of faith-based, non-denominational and non-religious traditions that Members may wish to draw upon in delivering a prayer or reflection.

The Legislative Assembly also amended the Standing Orders with respect to dress. Although traditional cultural, Indigenous and religious attire have long been deemed acceptable dress without objections raised, the Legislative Assembly officially affirmed in 2019 a long-standing process of placing discretion with the Speaker in relation to cultural attire in the House. A new Standing Order 17B with respect to dress expectations was added and provides that Members shall dress in professional contemporary business for all proceedings of the House, and further states that Indigenous, traditional cultural and religious attire are appropriate dress. Standing Order 36 was amended to remove the word 'uncovered' and reads "*Every Member desiring to speak shall do so from their assigned place and address the Speaker.*" Removing this term formally affirms the rights of Members to wear religious and cultural head coverings while speaking in the House.

Like many other buildings of the time, the Parliament Buildings of British Columbia were not built with accessibility in mind. Recent renovations have aimed to provide barrier-free entrance. This includes the opening of the barrier-free main entrance of the Parliament Buildings in March 2013 as well as the addition of a barrier-free ramp within the building, washroom upgrades, automatic door openers and keycard locks, and accessible emergency exits. A more representative Legislative Assembly also meant more women's washrooms were a necessary addition, as well as the addition of gender-neutral bathrooms throughout the building. Additionally, in efforts to make the Legislature more



welcoming for parents, the Standing Orders were amended to exclude an infant being cared for by a Member from the definition of a ‘stranger’, allowing children, aged from newborn to two years old, to accompany a parent into the Chamber. To support parents more broadly, a space for colleagues or their family members who may be feeding or caring for an infant to use while on site was opened in November 2021.

It is also necessary to ensure that the Legislative Assembly welcomes our diverse communities from British Columbia and around the world. In British Columbia, this has been done through offering guided tours in multiple languages, and celebrating cultural and religious events at the Legislature, such as Diwali and Hannukah.

### Reconciliation

The history of our institutions can also pose barriers to inclusion. For many, our political institutions are colonial symbols. The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia has passed many Bills that have impacted Indigenous peoples including implementing the reserve system, enabling residential schools, and restricting rights and cultural practices. The Parliament Buildings themselves were built in the heart of Lekwungen-speaking territory, peoples known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.

To address the colonial legacy, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia has undertaken reconciliation efforts to improve its relationship with local Indigenous peoples and communities. Notably, in 2007, an agreement was reached between the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations and the Canadian and British Columbia governments to settle the land claim in which the Nations were compensated for the land on which the legislative precinct sits. Additionally, in 2020, the Legislative Assembly created an interdepartmental Reconciliation Working Group that identified key actions to support initial organizational reconciliation initiatives in 2022-23, including providing support to the Office of the Speaker to lead external consultation and engagement on behalf of the institution with Indigenous peoples.

A major milestone on the Legislative Assembly reconciliation journey was the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

Act which was passed unanimously in November 2019. The Act establishes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous as the province’s framework for reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action. On the day the Bill was introduced, the Legislative Assembly began proceedings with a blessing by Elder Shirley Alphonse of the T’Sou-ke Nation, a land acknowledgment by Elder Butch Dick of the Songhees Nation and the performance of a prayer song by the Lekwungen Traditional Dancers. After the Bill received First Reading, the House adopted a motion to suspend proceedings and defer routine business so that Indigenous leaders, Grand Chief Ed John, Cheryl Casimer, Regional Chief Terry Teegee and Grand Chief Stewart Phillip could address the Legislative Assembly. Each highlighted the historic significance of the legislation which provides a framework for restitution, redress, revitalization and reconciliation and a modernisation of the relationship between the province and Indigenous peoples.

In March 2022, the provincial government released its Declaration Act Action Plan, which was developed in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous peoples. The Action Plan outlines 89 specific actions that every Ministry in government will take to create a better province for Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia including a requirement that government work with Indigenous Peoples on implementing the Action Plan, as well as reporting out on progress on implementation through an annual report.

As the Legislative Assembly continues on its reconciliation journey, there are still many lessons to learn. In May 2021, Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc announced the discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children on the grounds of the former Kamloops residential school. On 28 May 2021, many survivors, allies, and family members gathered on the front steps of the Parliament Buildings for a vigil, leaving behind memorial items. Later that evening, security officers extinguished the candles and collected the mementos when compassion and sensitivity should have been exercised instead. Recognising this mistake, the Legislative Assembly committed to caring for the memorial items during this period of mourning, with the steps and ground of the Parliament Buildings becoming an important touchstone as more and more unmarked grave sites were unearthed across Canada.

### Conclusion

The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia has come a long way to be more welcoming and representative of the province’s diverse populations, but more can and should be done. British Columbia and Canada’s diverse society is enriched by the vital relationships woven throughout our multicultural communities. Individually and collectively, we each have an important role to play in championing diverse voices and ensuring our political institutions are welcoming places. Building connections with these communities through removing barriers to membership, making politics and our physical buildings a more welcoming place, and through reconciliation efforts, are vital for thriving political institutions and societies.

***“It is also necessary to ensure that the Legislative Assembly welcomes our diverse communities from British Columbia and around the world. In British Columbia, this has been done through offering guided tours in multiple languages, and celebrating cultural and religious events at the Legislature, such as Diwali and Hannukah.”***



# REFLECTING ON HISTORIC REPRESENTATION IN THE MANITOBA LEGISLATURE

The 2019 Provincial election in Manitoba was historic; the first Black Members were elected to the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. I was not only one of three Black MLAs elected, but also, the first queer, gender non-binary person elected to any level of governance in Manitoba's history.

Reflecting on that historic moment is important. In doing so, we must recognise there are very real systemic factors that contributed to these forms of representation not holding elected positions in the Manitoba Legislature until 2019. As we move forward, and work to eliminate anti-Black racism and the barriers that contribute to the ongoing underrepresentation of Black peoples in elected, administrative and supportive roles; this reflection must also be applied to the lack of representation of trans and non-binary people, not only in physical presence, but also in the absence of representative and inclusive language.

Trans and non-binary people have always existed. In spite of centuries of colonial transphobic violence, Two Spirit, trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming peoples have continued to advocate for human rights and push public awareness surrounding the diversity of gender identities; leading to a significant growth in public education and understanding in recent decades.

As I prepared to join our NDP Caucus and the Assembly more broadly, I was acutely aware I would be entering a space that

may have never considered the presence of a non-binary MLA. I reflected on this reality deeply and understood I had a responsibility to play an active role in the Manitoba Legislature taking steps to become an inclusive place. This, to represent the diversity of genders, not only by way of elected representatives and staffing, but also, in language, policy, and culture.

Shortly after being elected, all MLAs were sent paperwork which requested us to select our salutations. The options, Mr, Miss, Mrs, Ms, were presented as the available options. I sent a response articulating why the available salutations were not appropriate options for me and asked if 'MLA Asagwara' would be an amenable option.

To my relief, I was quickly met with an affirming response from the Clerk's office which advised not only was this a permissible option, but the option would be applied generally moving forward. I was also made aware this change provided an important opportunity for efforts to be made to enhance the use of neutral language and for French translation services to establish gender neutral salutations and pronouns.

This was the first step providing me reassurance the Assembly was committed to taking steps to end the colonial erasure of people of non-binary gender identities in the Legislature and to be more accurately reflective of the communities which exist in Manitoba, across the country and globally. This approach, rooted in a willingness to listen, learn and apply those learnings to creating a culture of greater understanding and representativeness has been consistent in my interactions with the Clerks and Assembly staff.

In my short time as an MLA, my observation has been that one of the greatest drivers of the culture in the Manitoba Legislature is the participation of elected MLAs. The attitudes, beliefs, and actions of elected Members influences not only the discourse and dynamics in the Chamber, but also, contributes to the cultural fabric of the Legislature itself. Making necessary and progressive change in this area has proven to be of greater challenge.

Pronouns are a fundamental part of a person's identity. Respecting pronouns is one simple way we can show respect for someone's identity, create an environment where they feel safer and affirmed. This is a basic human right that should and must be adhered to. Over the years since being an elected official, I have been misgendered

***“The 2019 Provincial election in Manitoba was historic; the first Black Members were elected to the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. I was not only one of three Black MLAs elected, but also, the first queer, gender non-binary person elected to any level of governance in Manitoba's history.”***



**Hon. Uzoma Asagwara MLA** is a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba representing Union Station since 2019 and is Manitoba's first gender non-binary MLA. Previously a member of the Canadian National Basketball Team for two years, Uzoma worked full-time as a registered psychiatric nurse specialising in adult and youth mental health. Uzoma was a member of the former Premier's Advisory Council on education, poverty and citizenship, and has worked as a grassroots community activist, educator, entrepreneur and mental health advocate.



Above: The main chamber of the Manitoba Legislature.

many times in the Chamber. I am well practiced in gentle corrections and reminders for those who err unintentionally; however, there were occasions, where in my personal observation, misgendering was not accidental and even one occasion where a Point of Order was raised due to a transphobic joke being made to my hearing.

Further, it was evident there was no strategy in place to ensure the standard of respecting pronouns was met.

With the emergence of virtual accessibility to spaces and heightened societal awareness regarding the impact of political decision making, the behaviors of elected Members within the Chamber have never been more accessible to the general public. Now, more than ever, citizens are looking to elected leaders for guidance and to set a strong example for how we want the world to be. Respecting human rights, regardless of political affiliation, is a standard that must be met in a place as esteemed as the Legislature.

This increased visibility of Chamber proceedings resulted in Manitobans reaching out over social media and sending emails to myself and the Speaker, to express their disappointment after a recent incident of a Member misgendering me during Question Period. The outpouring of concerns and anger was swift. This particular incident was the catalyst which led me to write the Speaker of the House directly to express, not only my concern regarding the ongoing misgendering in the House, but also, the lack of action to ensure all MLAs adhere to a standard of inclusion and respect for trans and non-binary representation in the Chamber. I also felt it important to articulate the impact of misgendering on a personal and public social level and extended the offer to meet to provide further clarity and work towards a solution.

Within a matter of a few days, on 11 April, the first Monday following the incident, the Speaker requested a meeting where we discussed these matters and she advised me in our meeting that she would be addressing the House that same day regarding the issue. During our proceedings, the Speaker read into the record a statement which made clear that addressing people by their identified pronouns was to be a respected and adhered to practice in the Chamber.

That moment was powerful.

Admittedly, I was not expecting a statement as clear and resounding as that which the Speaker articulated. This precedent would establish a much-needed and overdue expectation that not only ensures that all MLAs are respected in the Chamber but all those who enter the Chamber; and ultimately, the Manitoba Legislature can expect this.

This important precedent communicates to Manitobans despite political or personal differences, respecting basic human rights is an expectation to be upheld and practiced. The Legislative Assembly being a sound example of that - as it should be.

There is still much work to be done and I am always pleased to see the steps quietly being taken by those in the Assembly to advance human rights. Progressing language to neutral and inclusive in documents, whereas previously there were only binary terms used, is just one other example. It's always important to note that I am no longer the only person who uses MLA as their salutation. Other MLAs have found this new option to be their preference.

These changes all contribute to our Manitoba Legislature being one that is for all Manitobans, welcoming to all visitors and could serve as inspiration for others to take steps to make their own spaces and places more inclusive, representative and less harmful to trans and non-binary people.

I am so grateful to be a part of that journey and history.

**STATEMENT BY THE SPEAKER OF THE MANITOBA  
LEGISLATURE, HON. MYRNA DRIEDGER, MLA, 11 APRIL 2022**

I have been reflecting on recent events in this House. As you know, I have had many concerns about the deterioration of decorum in this place which I have shared with you before and, unfortunately, feel that I have had to do that on too many occasions.

However, today I need to raise a more specific issue regarding decorum. This is not a procedural matter, but rather a matter of courtesy and respect.

The world has changed a great deal in the 151 years this Assembly has been in operation, and it has even changed a great deal in the last 10 or 20 years. Specifically, the manner in which individuals wish to be addressed has been a part of recent wide ranging changes in our society.

As Members should know, in our society today many people have expressed that they do not identify with gender-specific pronouns, but instead ask to be addressed with gender-neutral pronouns. The right to be addressed with gender-neutral pronouns must be respected without question and without judgment, both in this Assembly and in our society.

I strive to comply with these wishes at all times as I believe it is a matter of respect and understanding, but, unfortunately, I know that on occasion I do make mistakes and I have misgendered. I apologise for that and I will strive to do better in the future. I would ask the same of every Member in this House.

We can do better and we must do better.

Accordingly, I would like to remind all Members that everyone deserves the respect of being referred to by their preferred pronouns, including gender-neutral pronouns. This aligns with the respectful policies we strive to uphold in this Chamber.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.



# TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK? RECENT CHANGES TO THE PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS PROCESS IN ALBERTA

In 1993, the Legislative Assembly of Alberta adopted changes to its Standing Orders that transformed the way that Private Members' Bills are considered. Formerly a means to put forward policy proposals to be debated for one hour and then dropped to the bottom of the Order Paper, now, after the reforms, Private Members who were fortunate enough to receive a favourable placement in the Bills draw stood a reasonable chance to see their Bill proceed through the various stages of the legislative process. Some Private Members might even see their Bill become law. Two and a half decades later, further amendments to the Standing Orders that purported to enhance debate and consultation on Private Members' Bills have instead undermined the advances achieved earlier. This article explores how the Private Members' Bills' process has evolved in Alberta, with a particular focus on recent changes, their intended effects and their actual outcomes.

Following the general election of 1993 in Alberta, in which the Opposition significantly increased in size, the Government and Opposition collaborated to increase the participation of Private Members in the parliamentary process. House Leaders on both sides of the Assembly engaged in discussions and soon reached an agreement to change the Standing Orders affecting, among other things, the Private Members' Bills process. Prior to 1993, Private Members' Bills were little more than policy proposals, which, if called for debate, received one hour of debate after which they were dropped to the bottom of the Order Paper, never to become law unless adopted as Government Bills, a rare occurrence. Now, through a suite of Standing Order amendments, Private Members' Bills maintained their place on the Order Paper, and time limits for

debate at each stage of consideration were established for Private Members' Bills. In addition to amendments, the House leadership also agreed that voting on Private Members' Bills would occur without whips, freeing Members to vote on their conscience regardless of party affiliation.

The results of these Standing Order amendments became clear over time. The number of Private Members' Bills that were debated and proceeded through the legislative journey beyond Second Reading debate increased markedly. In the 22<sup>nd</sup> Legislature (1989-1993), the Legislature immediately preceding the reforms, only two Bills received Royal Assent, and one of those did so as a Government Bill. However, as **Table 1** indicates, starting in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Legislature a trend emerged in which fewer Private Members' Bills were introduced but considerably more of them received Royal Assent. In addition, while the majority of Private Members' Bills that received Royal Assent were Bills sponsored by Private Members of the Government caucus, more such Bills sponsored by Opposition Private Members were passed, peaking in the 29<sup>th</sup> Legislature, when five of the eight Private Members' Bills that received Royal Assent were sponsored by the Private Members from the Opposition.

Despite this progress, the Private Members' Bills process was still not without its challenges. Barriers remained. As noted in an article on the Private Members' Bills process in Alberta, Dr David McNeil, former long-time Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, argues that a lack of consultation continued to be an issue. Dr McNeil writes that *"there is evidence that the speed of the process once debate commences on a Bill at Second Reading does not allow for significant consultation with interested parties, especially the government entities [that] would be responsible for implementing the legislation."*<sup>1</sup> The result is that *"a significant number of Bills [have been] delayed or hoisted despite a significant level of support among Members on both sides of the House."*<sup>2</sup> Government Private Members' Bills were subsequently vetted by caucus or Government Standing Committees. However, this was not a public process or one that involved all the caucuses of the Assembly. Moreover, this was no help for Bills sponsored by Opposition Private Members.

In 2007 and 2008, further Standing Order amendments established Policy Committees, which, among other things, became venues

***"This article explores how the Private Members' Bills' process has evolved in Alberta, with a particular focus on recent changes, their intended effects and their actual outcomes."***



**Hon. Nathan Cooper, MLA** is the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. He was first elected in 2015, representing the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. In 2019, he was elected to serve as 14<sup>th</sup> Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and he also serves as Chair of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. Prior to election, he was Chief of Staff and Director of Legislative Affairs for the Wildrose caucus. Previous to this, he served two terms as councillor for the town of Carstairs. He is a strong supporter of the Rotary Club's charitable and youth activities.



<b>Legislature</b>	<b>Bills Introduced (total and by caucus)</b>	<b>Bills receiving Royal Assent (total)</b>	<b>Bills receiving Royal Assent (Government caucus sponsor)</b>	<b>Private Members' Bills receiving Royal Assent (Opposition caucus sponsor)</b>
30 <sup>th</sup> (2019- Present)	32 total - 12 Opp; 20 Gov't	8	8	0
29 <sup>th</sup> (2015-2019)	43 total - 22 Opp; 21 Gov't	8	3	5
28 <sup>th</sup> (2012-2015)	21 total - 6 Opp; 15 Gov't	8	6	2
27 <sup>th</sup> (2008-2012)	51 total - 17 Opp; 34 Gov't	9	7	2
26 <sup>th</sup> (2004-2008)	42 total - 19 Opp; 23 Gov't	5	5	0
25 <sup>th</sup> (2001-2004)	65 total - 18 Opp; 47 Gov't	15	14	1
24 <sup>th</sup> (1997-2001)	98 total - 37 Opp; 61 Gov't	15	15	0
23 <sup>rd</sup> (1993-1997)	164 total - 97 Opp; 67 Gov't	9	9	0

**TABLE 1: Introduction and Royal Assent, Private Members' Bills 1993-2022**

to which Private Members' Bills could be referred and receive the consultation and additional review they were lacking. Indeed, a number of Private Members' Bills were referred to these Committees in the years since. These Bills were subject to public meetings, entertained written submissions from stakeholders and members of the public and generally underwent rigorous debate and deliberations before the Committee reported recommendations to the Assembly.

Invariably, the Private Members' Bills that were referred to Committee were referred in the Spring sitting of the Assembly, meaning that they could be reviewed over the summer and early fall before being reported to the Assembly during the Fall sitting. Hence, the robust consultation that was lacking previously was now achievable. Furthermore, the legislative process could now be paused so that the needed consultation could occur.

Problem solved, right? Not quite. In fact, only a small percentage (11%) of Private Members' Bills were referred to the Policy Committees for review. Instead, the vast majority proceeded as they had in the past, with no further consultation or review at Committee. Clearly, there was still some work to do to further improve the Private Members' Bills process.

Shortly after the April 2019 general election, in which the United Conservative Party gained a large majority of seats in the Assembly, the Government proposed a series of Standing Order changes, some of which affected consideration of Private Members' Bills. On 28 May 2019, a Government motion that included Standing Order amendments was moved proposing the establishment of a new Committee of the Assembly, composed of Members from the Government and Opposition proportionate to their representation in the Assembly, whose work would involve, in large measure, the initial review of Private Members' Bills. Indeed, all Bills would be

automatically referred following First Reading to the new Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills. In essence, this Committee's work was to review the Bills and report to the Assembly within eight sitting days whether the Bills should proceed or not to the next step of the process, Second Reading.

For its proponents, this proposed amendment was beneficial in that it would strengthen the review by allowing all Private Members' Bills to be considered in Committee. The new Committee would facilitate the work of the Assembly by vetting the Bills, an element of review that was mostly missing during previous Legislatures. Ultimately, the new procedure would allow more Bills to be given Royal Assent by identifying those Bills that were ready to proceed through the remainder of the legislative process. During debate on the motion, the Government House Leader indicated to the Assembly that he was

*"very excited" - 'to have a Private Members' Bills Committee be able to work on Private Members' business, something that, when we were in opposition, we asked for for a very long time, to be able to make sure that we could work on legislation as Private Members, and in the Assembly Private Members could work on that legislation to be able to help us get more [Bills] passed during Private Members' days.'*<sup>3</sup>

Members of the Official Opposition were not convinced. Their concern was that instead of enhancing the process with more robust consultation and review, the Committee referral would work instead to delay the progress of Private Members' Bills and, therefore, in the words of the Leader of the Official Opposition, *"significantly reduce the number of Bills that get debated"*.<sup>4</sup> As another Member of the Official Opposition pointed out, prior to the proposed amendment, few Private Members' Bills received Royal Assent; with the amendment in place, Private Members' Bills would be even less likely to proceed through to the end of the process.<sup>5</sup>

The motion passed and the Standing Orders were amended. The question remains, what were the consequences of having all Private Members' Bills referred to a Committee dedicated to doing this work? Has the new procedure facilitated Private Members' Bills proceeding to Royal Assent? Were the gaps in the Private Members' Bills process closed and was the process improved?

The statistical evidence on the matter is mixed. While there were eight Private Members' Bills passed during the 29<sup>th</sup> Legislature, from 2015-2019, out of a total of 43 Bills introduced (19%), so far during the 30<sup>th</sup> Legislature (2019-present) eight have received Royal Assent out of 32 Bills that received First Reading (25%). Over the longer term, from 1993, when the initial reforms were instituted, to the present, approximately



15% of Private Members' Bills received Royal Assent. Hence, the early results demonstrate that Private Members' Bills are becoming law at a rate that compares favourably to the long-term results.

What does the new procedure entail for Private Members' Bills sponsored by Opposition Private Members? As noted, in 1993 the agreement between the House Leadership stipulated that votes on Private Members' business would not be whipped. In other words, Members would be free to vote as they wished on these matters. As such, presumably more Opposition Private Members' Bills would become law. However, this has not happened. Only 10 out of a total of 517 Opposition-sponsored Bills introduced since 1993 (2%) have received Royal Assent. The number of these Bills that passed ranged from 0-2 per Legislature from 1993 to 2015 (see **Table 1**) and only exceeded these figures during the 29th Legislature when, remarkably, five of eight Bills that received Royal Assent were Opposition Bills. None have done so thus far during the 30<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

There are further difficulties with the new process. Not only have Opposition-sponsored Private Members' Bills not become law at a rate even vaguely approximating that of those sponsored by Government Private Members, but an additional concerning trend is that such Bills are not even making it to Second Reading debate. Of the 12 Bills sponsored by Opposition Private Members introduced since the 2019 Standing Order amendments, the Committee has recommended that only five such Bills proceed to Second Reading. Of these five Bills, only one has actually been moved for Second Reading. What has happened is that although the Committee made the recommendations for the four remaining Opposition-sponsored Bills 'to proceed', it did so late in the legislative session with few Private Member Mondays remaining on the calendar and much other Private Members' business to consider before these Bills would become available for Second Reading debate, according to the order of precedence. So, while the one Opposition Bill has proceeded to Second Reading, involving two hours of debate time, the remaining Bills only received 60 minutes of debate, on motions to concur in the Committee reports. Ultimately, these Bills were removed from the Order Paper.

As a result of these developments, one may conclude that the new Committee process to recommend the disposition of Private Members' Bills has been characterized by overt partisanship, with the fate of Bills being determined based on party lines. The original intent of the House leadership to allow Members to vote on Private Members' Bills unencumbered by partisan considerations seems to be failing.

But what of the Committee process itself? Does it allow Bills, and especially those that are not to be proceeded with, a venue in which more robust consultation and review may occur, supplementing and enriching the debate that occurs in the Assembly? To answer this question, we must delve into the Bill review process.

The standard review process undertaken by the Private Bills and Private Members' Public Bills Committee involves a presentation from the Bill sponsor and a technical briefing from the relevant Government Ministry, with Committee Members being able to ask questions. As an option, the Committee is also able to invite stakeholders to speak to the Bill and how it would impact them. Each of the two caucuses may invite up to three stakeholders to make presentations, which are followed by questions. Following the Committee review, the Committee must prepare its final report, recommending that the Bill proceed or not proceed to Second



The Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

Reading. All of this must take place within eight sittings days of the Bill's referral to the Committee.

So, to evaluate this process, it should be noted that the presentations by both the Bill sponsor and the Ministry with the questions-and-answers sessions are positive developments, allowing Members to review additional information on the Bill they might not have otherwise. Inviting stakeholder presentations is likewise beneficial, for largely the same reasons. Of the 32 Bills that have been referred to the Committee to date, 15 have been commented on by stakeholders, meaning the majority only received the basic review. Of these 15, five have been Private Members' Bills sponsored by Opposition Members. It should be noted that while the Committee may opt to consult stakeholders on each Bill referred through the passage of a motion, consultation is limited as follows: each caucus is able to put forward three stakeholders (six total) and each stakeholder may present for five minutes with 15 minutes for the Committee to ask questions. A further constraint is that the timeframe within which the stakeholders must be organised to present to the Committee – eight sitting days – which may limit the availability of stakeholders. In addition, while the possibility for public meetings on the Bills is provided for under the Standing Orders, this is not practicable for the same reason: essentially a two-week window within which Bills must be reviewed and reported back to the Assembly. Thus, while the Committee review has added somewhat to the Bill review process, it is not the robust review that had been identified as lacking and consequently requested in the past.

To conclude, it is clear that to date, the Committee process for Private Members' Bills has not interfered with the objective of having more Bills become law. However, it is equally clear that the new process has done nothing to ensure that all Bills, regardless of sponsorship, are given an equal opportunity to succeed. It is concerning to see the trend that has emerged in which Opposition Private Members' Bills stand little chance of proceeding to Second Reading debate let alone through to the different stages of the process. Private Members' business can be most successful when it is least influenced by party politics. As such, the Committee process could stand considerable improvement to become a more effective and non-partisan means of evaluating and reviewing Private Members Bills in Alberta.

## Canada: Key Facts

### Introduction

Canada's capital city is Ottawa, and the country has a total population of 36,307,820. Its currency is the Canadian dollar.

### History of Canada

The first people to come to Canada arrived between 15,000 and 30,000 years ago across a land bridge that joined Asia and North America. Around A.D. 1,000, the Viking explorer Leif Eriksson reached Newfoundland, Canada however the settlement didn't remain. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, both French and British settlers arrived. Land disputes between farmers and fur traders led to four wars between 1689 and 1763. Following the final war, called the French and Indian War, the British governed Canada, however French influence continued and remains strong in different parts of Canada today.

In 1867, Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick combined to form a dominion with its own Government, Parliament and Prime Minister with Manitoba joined soon after. In 1931, Canada became an independent nation and further provinces and territories joined the country. Today, Canada is made up of ten provinces and three territories.

### Canada's governance

Canada is a Federal Parliamentary democracy. The Canadian head of state is the monarch of Canada, Queen Elizabeth II. The monarch is represented by a Governor-General. Laws are made by Canada's elected Federal Parliament.

The Parliament of Canada is the Federal Legislature of Canada, seated at Parliament Hill in Ottawa, and is composed of three parts: the monarch, the Senate, and the House of Commons. By constitutional convention, the House of Commons is predominant in the legislative process, with the Senate reviewing legislation, although it may initiate certain Bills. The Governor-General provides royal assent to make Bills into law.

The Governor-General appoints the 105 Senators on the advice of the Prime Minister. The 338 Members of the House of Commons (MPs) represent an electoral district, usually called a riding, and are elected by Canadian voters from each district. The Governor-General, on behalf of the monarch, also delivers the Throne Speech at the opening of each new Parliament. The current Parliament, which began in November 2021, is the 44<sup>th</sup> Parliament since Confederation in 1867.

### International diplomacy

Canada has been an influential member of the Commonwealth and has played a leading role in the organisation of French-speaking countries known as *La Francophonie*. Canada was a founding member of the United Nations and has been active in a number of major UN agencies and other worldwide operations.

In 1989, Canada joined the Organisation of American States and signed a free trade agreement with the United States, a pact that



The Federal Parliament of Canada is located in the capital city of Ottawa.

was superseded in 1992 by the North American Free Trade Agreement (which also includes Mexico). A founding member (1961) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Canada is also a member of the Group of Seven (G7), which includes the world's seven largest industrial democracies.

### Canadian people and culture

In many ways, Canada is multiple nations in one. The official languages of Canada are English and French, however many other languages are spoken across the country. Descendants of British and French immigrants make up about half of the population with other European and Asian immigrants making up different groups in society. First Nations peoples make up about four percent of the population. Inuit people live mostly in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Many Native Canadians live on their traditional lands, but many others have moved to cities across Canada.

### Economy

Canada has a highly developed mixed-market economy, with the world's eighth-largest economy as of

2022, and a nominal GDP of approximately US\$2.221 trillion. It is one of the world's largest trading nations, with a highly globalised economy. Canada's mixed economy has a relatively low level of income disparity.

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growth of Canada's manufacturing, mining and service sectors has transformed the nation from a largely rural economy to an urbanised, industrial one. Like many other developed countries, the Canadian economy is dominated by the service industry, which employs about three-quarters of the country's workforce. However, Canada is unusual among developed countries in the importance of its primary sector, in which forestry, agriculture and the petroleum industry are some of most prominent components.

Canada is one of the few developed nations that are net exporters of energy. Atlantic Canada has vast offshore deposits of natural gas, and the province of Alberta also hosts large oil and gas resources.

Canada is also one of the world's largest suppliers of agricultural products; the Canadian Prairies are one of the most important global



producers of wheat, canola and other grains. Canada also has a sizeable manufacturing sector centred in southern Ontario and Québec, with cars and aeronautics representing particularly important industries.

**Geography and landscape**

Canada covers a huge land area of 9,970,610 square kilometres. Located on the continent of North America, Canada stretches across 4,600km from north to south and spans more than half of the Northern Hemisphere. The distance across the country is 5,500km from east to west, covering six time zones. Canada is the second largest country in the world, however only 0.5% of the world’s population live there.

Canada has a varied landscape, with majestic mountains, rolling plains,

forested valleys, and beautiful blue rivers and lakes. The Canadian Shield, a hilly region of lakes and swamps, stretches across northern Canada and has some of the oldest rocks on Earth. Major mountain ranges include the Rockies, Coast, Laurentian and major rivers are the St Lawrence and Mackenzie.

Canada shares a 5,525-mile- (8,890-km-) long border with the United States (including Alaska) - the longest border in the world not patrolled by military forces - and the overwhelming majority of its population lives within 185 miles (300 km) of the international boundary.

**Wildlife and nature**

Canada’s remote north and extensive forests are home to lots of wildlife, from bears, wolves, deer, mountain lions, beavers and bighorn sheep,

to smaller animals such as raccoons, otters and rabbits. The country’s lakes and rivers – which contain about 20% of all fresh water on Earth – are full of fish such as trout and salmon.

Canada’s prairies (open grasslands) in the south are home to American buffalo and pronghorn antelope and in the sprawling evergreen forests of northern Canada, moose and black bears are amongst the animals that can be found. Even farther north, herds of reindeer and musk ox roam the cold, bare tundra.

Canadians work hard to protect their native wildlife, and the country has 41 national parks and three marine conservation areas.

**Climate of Canada**

Because of its great latitudinal extent, Canada has a wide variety of climates. Ocean currents play an important role,

with both the warm waters of the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic and the Alaska Current in the Pacific affecting climate. Westerly winds, blowing from the sea to the land, are the prevailing air currents in the Pacific and bring coastal British Columbia heavy precipitation and moderate winter and summer temperatures. Inland, the Great Lakes moderate the weather in both southern Ontario and Québec. In the east, the cold Labrador Current meets the Gulf Stream along the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, cooling the air and causing frequent fog.

The northern two-thirds of the country has a climate similar to that of northern Scandinavia, with very cold winters and short, cool summers. The central southern area of the interior plains has a typical continental climate - very

cold winters, hot summers, and relatively sparse precipitation. Southern Ontario and Québec have a climate with hot, humid summers and cold, snowy winters, similar to that of some portions of the American Midwest. Except for the west coast, all of Canada has a winter season with average temperatures below freezing and with continuous snow cover.

**Sources:**

- National Geographic
- Wikipedia
- Britannica

Image: Shutterstock\_151505150



Map of Canada showing the country's ten provinces and three territories.



## Canada and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

- Canada, as one of the CPA's nine Regions, includes 14 CPA Branches made up of the Provincial and Territorial Legislatures as well as the CPA Canada Federal Branch at the Federal Parliament.

- Canada and Newfoundland were two of the six original founding Members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association in 1911. The CPA Canada Federal Branch and the CPA Newfoundland (and Labrador) Branch were both formed on 1 January 1912. Canada joined the early Commonwealth in 1926, although legislation to enact this membership was passed in 1931 under the Statute of Westminster.

- The CPA Canada Region's Branches were established in the following years: Canada Federal (1912); Alberta (1946); British Columbia (1928); Manitoba (1938); New Brunswick (1933); Newfoundland and Labrador (1912); Northwest Territories (1974); Nova Scotia (1932); Nunavut (1999); Ontario (1930); Prince Edward Island (1941); Québec (1933); Saskatchewan (1937); Yukon (1975).

- The CPA Canada Region is governed by a Regional Council which is made up of representatives from each of the Legislatures of Canada. The Regional Council meets once a year. The CPA Canada Region undertakes a number of programmes and activities. The CPA Canada Region also publishes *The Canadian Parliamentary Review*. The publication was founded in 1978 to inform Canadian Legislators about activities of the CPA Canada Region's Branches and to promote the study of and interest in Canadian parliamentary institutions.

- The CPA Canada Region has hosted the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference five times in its history. The most recent was the 50<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in 2004, which was held in Toronto, Ontario. At the same time, the 24<sup>th</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference was held in Québec. In 1994, the 40<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and 14<sup>th</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference were held in Alberta. In 1985, the 31<sup>st</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and 5<sup>th</sup> CPA Small Branches Conference were held in Saskatchewan. In 1977, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was held in Ottawa, Canada and in 1966, the 12<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference was held in Canada for the first time.

- The CPA International Executive Committee Mid-Year Meetings (ExCo) have been held in the CPA Canada Region multiple times including: Ottawa, Canada (2019); Yukon (2011); British Columbia (1993); Québec (1989); Newfoundland (1986); Prince Edward Island (1971).

- Between 1993 and 2001, Hon. Arthur R. Donahoe was appointed as the 4<sup>th</sup> CPA Secretary-General, the first person from Canada to hold the role. A lawyer and Queen's Counsel by trade, he was the former Speaker of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly (1981-1991).

65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth  
Parliamentary Conference

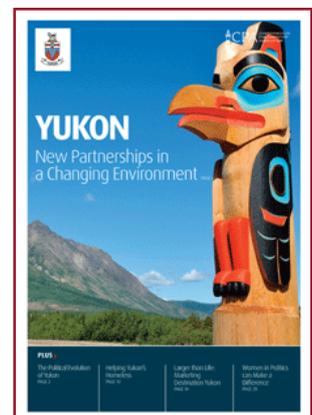


- Another former Speaker of the House of Assembly of Nova Scotia (2013-2021), Hon. Kevin Murphy was the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network from 2020-2021.

- In 2002, Hon. Bob Speller, MP from the Parliament of Canada was elected as the Chairperson of the CPA Executive Committee, the first time that a Member from the CPA Canada Region had served as CPA Chairperson. However, following a close election defeat in the Canadian Federal elections in 2004, he relinquished his CPA role.

- For many years, the CPA Canadian Federal Branch hosted the annual CPA Canadian Parliamentary Seminar which brought together Commonwealth Parliamentarians from across Canada and the Commonwealth to examine the challenges of parliamentary democracy.

- The current CPA President (2019-2022) is Hon. Anthony Rota, MP, Speaker of the House of Commons at the Parliament of Canada on behalf of the CPA Canada Region as host of the 65<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.



Supplement to *The Parliamentarian* on Yukon published in 2011 when the CPA Yukon Branch hosted the CPA International Executive Committee Mid-Year Meetings.

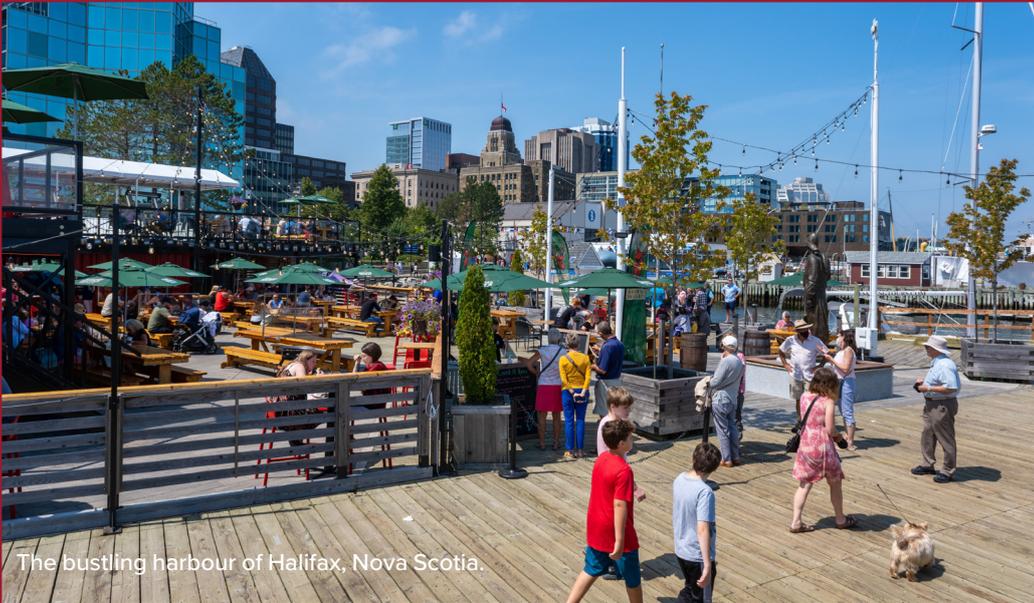


**CPA** COMMONWEALTH  
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# Commonwealth Parliamentary Association



The majestic landscapes of northern Canada.



The bustling harbour of Halifax, Nova Scotia.



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*The Parliamentarian*  
Journal of the Parliaments of  
the Commonwealth

This series of articles from  
the CPA Canada Region is  
published as a supplement  
to: Vol. 103  
2022: Issue Two  
*The Parliamentarian*  
ISSN 0031-2282

Issued by the Secretariat  
of the Commonwealth  
Parliamentary Association  
(CPA), CPA Headquarters  
Secretariat, Richmond  
House, Houses of  
Parliament, London  
SW1A 0AA, United Kingdom  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7799 1460  
Email: [hq.sec@cpahq.org](mailto:hq.sec@cpahq.org)  
[www.cpahq.org](http://www.cpahq.org)

Publisher: Stephen Twigg  
CPA Secretary-General

Editor and designer: Jeffrey  
Hyland [editor@cpahq.org](mailto:editor@cpahq.org)

With special thanks to  
Members of the Parliaments  
and Legislatures of the CPA  
Canada Region who have  
contributed to this issue  
and to the team at the CPA  
Canada Federal Branch for  
assistance with co-ordinating  
these articles.

Images: Individual CPA  
Branches, Shutterstock  
and CPA Headquarters  
Secretariat.

Printed in:  
United Kingdom by  
Warners Midlands, PLC; and  
Singapore by Times Printers  
Private Limited.

Published in July 2022  
as a supplement to *The  
Parliamentarian*, the  
Journal of Commonwealth  
Parliaments.

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