



Bilateral Visit from Members of the Parliament of Canada

14-15 March 2016

Houses of Parliament



Report





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1. Background

1.01. CPA UK and CPA Canada have a long history of facilitating successful thematic parliamentary bilateral delegations on behalf of their respective parliaments.

1.02. Following the reconstitution of the Canadian Federal Parliament after the November 2015 General Election, a delegation of Canadian Parliamentarians visited Westminster from 14-15 March 2016 to solidify ties between both the UK Parliament and the Canadian Parliament, as well as Commonwealth organisations and institutions based in the UK. This was especially relevant in light of the appointment of the new Secretary General of the Commonwealth, the Rt Hon. Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC, in November 2015 and of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Akbar Khan, in October 2015.

2. Objectives

Through meetings, discussions and briefings with both Parliamentary and Commonwealth colleagues in the UK the programme focussed on the following objectives:

- 2.01. Issues of mutual interest with counterparts from the UK parliament
- 2.02. The Restoration and Renewal of the UK Parliament
- 2.03. The Role of Backbench Members, the Backbench Business Committee and the Petitions Committee
- 2.04. The Role of the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology
- 2.05. Issues of mutual interest with Hon. Speaker Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Committee and Akhbar Khan, CPA Secretary General
- 2.06. Issues of mutual interest with the Rt. Hon Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC, Commonwealth Secretary General Designate

3. Participants

The delegation from the Canadian Federal Parliament was:

- 3.01. Yasmin Ratansi MP (Liberal), Leader of the delegation and Chair, CPA Canada
- 3.02. Kelly McCauley MP (CPC)
- 3.03. The Hon. Senator David Smith PC QC (Liberal)
- 3.04. The Hon. Senator Claude Carignan (CPC), Leader of the Opposition in the Senate
- 3.05. Elizabeth Kingston, Executive Secretary Canadian Branch of the CPA





4. Summary

4.01. *Executive Summary*

4.01.1. The visit, which took place over the course of two days (Monday 14 March 2016 - Tuesday 15 March 2016), helped solidify ties between the UK Parliament and the Canadian Federal Parliament, as well as with Commonwealth organisations based in the UK. Through various meetings and discussions, the delegation gained a greater understanding of recent changes to parliamentary procedure in the UK, such as the establishment of the Backbench Business Select Committee in 2010 and the Petitions Select Committee in 2015, along with an insight into current political issues in the UK and the Commonwealth. There was also a constructive exchange of good practice between UK and Canadian Parliamentarians with regards to their respective parliamentary renovation projects, as well as between the Canadian delegation and the UK Parliament's Office for Science and Technology (POST).

4.02. *An Insight into the UK Context*

4.02.1. As Monday 14th March 2016 was Commonwealth Observance Day, the delegation were able to attend the Service in Westminster Abbey. This year's theme was 'A Young Commonwealth', recognising the contribution and potential of young people across the Commonwealth. Following the service, the delegation met with Diana Johnson MP, Shadow Minister for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This was an opportunity for the delegation to get an insight into the current UK political scene, with Ms Johnson focussing on areas such as the upcoming EU Referendum on 23rd June 2016, the UK economy and the UK political parties. This meeting successfully set the scene for the meetings that followed on Tuesday 15th March.

4.02.2. The delegation also met with Members from the British-Canada All-Party Parliamentary Group. The UK political context was once more discussed, as was the importance of maintaining the healthy relationship enjoyed between the UK Parliament and the Canadian Parliament.

4.03. *Utilising Science and Technology in Parliament*

4.03.1. The delegation met with Dr Chandrika Nath, Deputy Head of the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST). Dr Nath highlighted the differentiation between the work carried out by POST and other parliamentary offices, such as the Library or Committee Specialists. POST's research is unique in that it can be more proactive in the research it undertakes as it is not determined by requests from Committees or individual Members, like other research outputs might be. It is therefore able to be independent and objective in the research areas it chooses to focus on. POST can then determine gaps in current research and pre-empt issues which are likely to receive parliamentary attention.

4.03.2. Given that there is no current equivalent to POST in the Canadian Parliament, this session was of great interest to the delegation. Dr Nath described how each legislature adopts a different system depending on its context and priorities. The delegation were then interested in the practicalities involved in creating an office like POST, in terms of both the level of funding required and the timescale required to set up the Office in the UK Parliament following pressure from Members. Whilst it has been suggested





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that a Parliamentary Science Officer position might be created in Canada, it still needs to be determined as to whether or not this Officer will serve only the Government or if the Canadian Parliament will also be able to utilise their services.

4.04. *The Restoration & Renewal of Parliament*

4.04.1. The meeting with Members of the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster proved to be a successful exchange of knowledge and good practice in terms of both the UK and Canadian parliamentary renovation projects. The Canadian Federal Parliament began its renovation project in 2001 and so the delegation had a great deal of advice to offer the Joint Committee Members. The discussion was led by Baroness Stowell of Beeston MBE, Leader of the House of Lords, and Chris Bryant MP, Shadow Leader of the House of Commons. Also in attendance was Rt Hon. Lord Wallace of Tankerness, Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, and Rt Hon. Lord Laming CBE DL, Chairman of Committees in the House of Lords.

4.04.2. The discussions focussed on the Canadian experiences of moving Members out of their Parliamentary offices and the length of time which these renovations were taking. The financial impact of renovations was also discussed, as was how best to portray the renovations of Parliament as a worthwhile public expenditure to the media and the general public. As a result of the conversation on the Canadian experience of Parliamentary renovations and the importance of public opinion, Chris Bryant MP noted that the renovation of the House of Lords might be more challenged by the public than the House of Commons' renovation, given the debate over the recent years on the role of the Upper House. Both the UK Parliamentarians and the Canadian Parliamentarians agreed upon the need to preserve their respective Parliaments, especially given the history of the buildings, but agreed that there was generally more supportive public opinion in Canada than in the UK, as well as Members who were more willing to move out of their parliamentary offices.

4.05. *The Role of Backbench MPs in the UK's Committees*

4.05.1. One of the main focusses of the visit was the role of backbench MPs, which was contextualised through meetings with Members of the Backbench Business Committee, Gavin Newlands MP and Bob Blackman MP. Mr Newlands discussed the creation of the Committee and its main functions, highlighting the importance of the independence of the Committee and the parliamentary business hours being used more effectively. Mr Blackman built upon these points, describing how important it was for the Committee to then fill all of the hours which had been allocated so as not to undermine the importance of backbench business. This session was of great interest to the delegation as backbench business in the Canadian Parliament is decided by the Speaker through consultation with the Party Whips. Mr Blackman went on to note the work of 1922 Committee, which represents backbench MPs from the Conservative Party. The Westminster Hall debates were also of great interest to the delegation, given that this second Chamber is so often used for backbench business and, again, no such equivalent exists in the Canadian Parliament.





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4.05.2. The focus on the role of backbench MPs was built upon through a meeting with the Chair of the Petitions Committee, Helen Jones MP, and Ian Blackford MP, a Member of the Committee. The Committee, even though it was only established in late 2015, has already carried out their first inquiry into brain tumour research. This was the direct result of an e-petition which had been launched. A recurring question throughout the meeting was how MPs can remain objective when deciding what is suitable or not suitable to table for debate. It was shown that, as long as there was nothing offensive about a petitions content, a petition with a sufficient number of signatories would always be responded to adequately. Ms Jones supported this system as it allows for issues which would not otherwise reach the floor of the house to be considered in Parliament. This meeting allowed for an exchange of good practice between UK Parliamentarians and Canadian Parliamentarians in terms of how petitions and e-petitions are dealt with by the respective Parliaments.

4.06. *Canada & the Commonwealth*

4.06.1. The delegation also met with the new Secretary General of the Commonwealth, the Rt Hon. Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC, to discuss upcoming challenges in the Commonwealth and the outcomes of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November 2015. As the delegation was travelling to Malta following their visit to Westminster, these discussions would be built upon. They also met with the new Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Akhbar Khan, and the Chairperson of the CPA International Executive Community, Hon. Speaker Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP.

4.07. *The Role of Crossbench Peers*

4.07.1. Senator Claude Carignan also held several private meetings with relevant UK counterparts in his capacity as Leader of the Opposition in the Senate. In 2014 the Liberal Party introduced changes which saw Liberal Senators now sitting as Independents and no longer a part of the Liberal Caucus. This reform was carried out in an attempt to reduce the partisanship of the Senate. A consequence of this reform has been an inevitable increase in the number of Independent Senators, the practicalities of which, Senator Carignan, as Leader of the Opposition, wished to explore during his time in Westminster. Senator Carignan met with Rt Hon. Lord Hope of Craighead KT, Convenor of the Crossbench Peers, and Baroness Stowell of Beeston MBE to discuss good practice in both the UK House of Lords and the Canadian Senate.

5. Programme

Monday 14 March		
0930	Arrival at Portcullis House Met at Reception by Lauren Tait, Programme Officer CPA UK	
0945	Welcome to CPA UK Andrew Tuggey DL, Chief Executive CPA UK	CPA Room





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1012	Tour of the Houses of Parliament	Westminster
1130	<i>Tea and Coffee</i>	CPA Room
1145	<p>The Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST) <i>POST is the UK Parliament's in-house source of independent, balanced and accessible analysis of public policy issues related to science and technology. This session will consider the role played by POST, the need for independent analysis and the impact POST has had on policy.</i></p> <p>Dr Chandrika Nath, Deputy Director of the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology</p>	CPA Room
1245	<i>Lunch</i>	CPA Room
1400	<p>Commonwealth Day Observance <i>Her Majesty The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, accompanied by His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, TRH The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall and TRH The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, will attend this year's Observance for Commonwealth Day at Westminster Abbey. The Observance this year takes the theme of 'A Young Commonwealth,' recognising the contribution and potential of young people across the Commonwealth.</i></p>	Westminster Abbey
1610	<p>Return to Cromwell Green Entrance Met by Lauren Tait</p>	Westminster Abbey
1630	<p>An Insight into Current UK Issues Diana Johnson MP, Shadow Minister for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office</p>	Interview Room 1 Norman Shaw
1730	<i>End of programme</i>	
1800 - 2000 (optional)	<p>Official Reception for CPA UK and UNDP's International Parliamentary Project on Sustainability, Energy & Development <i>CPA UK, in partnership with UNDP, will be co-hosting the International Parliamentary Project on Sustainability, Energy & Development from 14-17 March 2016 in Westminster. It will be attended by both Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth parliamentarians.</i></p>	CPA Room
Tuesday 15 March		





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0950	Arrival at the CPA Secretariat, 7 Millbank Met at Reception by Lauren Tait, CPA UK	CPA Secretariat, 7 Millbank
1000	Meeting with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat Akhbar Khan, CPA Secretary General Hon. Speaker Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Chairperson of CPA International Executive Committee	CPA Secretariat, 7 Millbank
1100	The Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster <i>This session will consider the role of UK Parliamentarians in the future of the role of the Palace of Westminster, as well as a discussion on the overall project itself. This will include recommendations of the Joint Committee, current public opinion and a consideration of the overall cost-effectiveness of the project, measures taken to ensure the sustainability and environmental credentials of the process.</i> Rt Hon. Baroness Stowell of Beeston MBE (Con), Leader of the House of Lords Chris Bryant MP (Lab), Shadow Leader of the House of Commons Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab), Shadow Leader of the House of Lords Rt Hon. Lord Wallace of Tankerness (LibDem), Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords Rt Hon. Lord Laming CBE DL (Crossbench), Chairman of Committees Richard Ware, Programme Director of Restoration & Renewal of the Houses of Parliament	CPA Room
1245	Lunch with the British-Canada APPG <i>In attendance: Andrew Rosindell MP (Con), Andrew Percy MP (Con), Lord Steel of Aikwood (LibDem), Paul Flynn MP (Lab), Lord Balfe of Dulwich (Con), Lord Wasserman (Con), Chris Law MP (SNP), Helen Jones MP (Lab), Conor Burns MP (Con), Rob Marris MP (Lab)</i>	CPA Room
1400	Meeting with Commonwealth Secretary General (designate) The Rt Hon. the Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC	Peers Guest Room
1500	<i>Tea and Coffee</i>	CPA Room





1530	<p>The Backbench Business Committee</p> <p><i>This session will explore the role of the Backbench Business Committee and its impact on parliamentary business.</i></p> <p>Gavin Newlands MP (SNP), Member of the Backbench Business Committee</p> <p>Bob Blackman MP (Con), Member of the Backbench Business Committee</p>	CPA Room
1700	<p>The Petitions Committee</p> <p><i>Consisting of backbench MPs, the focus of this relatively new Committee previously fell under the remit of the Backbench Business Committee. Discussions will consider the Committee's level of influence and the increased level of parliamentary engagement with the public through petitions, particularly e-petitions.</i></p> <p>Helen Jones MP, Chair of the Petitions Committee (Lab)</p> <p>Ian Blackford, Member of the Petitions Committee (SNP)</p>	W3, Westminster Hall
1800	<i>End of programme</i>	

6. Outcomes & Follow-Up

6.01. Following the programme, Dr Nath, Deputy Director of the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology, intends to have follow-up discussions with the Canadian Parliament. The delegation were particularly keen to engage with Dr Nath and POST to discuss how similar services could be provided in the Canadian Parliament. CPA UK will help facilitate these meetings between the Canadian Parliament and POST.

6.02. CPA UK will be running a Bilateral Visit to Ottawa in FY 2016/2017 to meet with CPA Canada and relevant counterparts in the Canadian Federal Parliament. Outcomes of the programme will be discussed in greater detail and assessed, particularly with regards to backbench MPs and the convening of Crossbench Senators. The visit to Malta, which immediately followed the Westminster programme, will also be discussed in further detail.

7. About CPA UK

7.01. CPA UK is one of the largest and most active branches in the CPA community and delivers a unique annual international outreach programme in Westminster and overseas. CPA UK works to encourage parliamentary diplomacy and build parliamentary capacity on behalf of the UK Parliament and the wider CPA. Through activities such as conferences, seminars, delegations and parliamentary strengthening teams, CPA UK provides Members with a practical, current and first-hand perspective on international issues facing fellow parliamentarians across the Commonwealth. Working with CPA UK's international outreach programmes also enhances Members' understanding of issues facing diaspora communities in their own constituencies.

