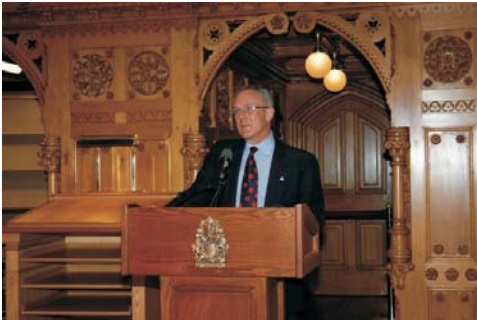

Interview with Canada's Parliamentary Librarian



In December 2005, William R. Young was appointed Parliamentary Librarian. One year into his tenure, Mr. Young speaks to the Canadian Parliamentary Review about the Library's important role in supporting Parliament and his vision for the institution's future.

Why did you want to take on the role of Parliamentary Librarian?

I must say, I was honoured to be considered for this role because it is one that draws on my passion as a political historian and my strong desire to help parliamentarians perform their roles on behalf of Canadians. My 19 years working at the Library has given me huge respect for parliamentarians as people who really want to make a difference for their fellow citizens, so I consider it almost a calling to help them to do this. I hope that my experience at the Library and beyond will help me to provide the kind of leadership needed to build on past successes and meet the challenges of 21st century parliamentary democracy.

What advantage do you feel you have as a longtime employee of the Library?

Like any employee who has served Parliament for more than a few

years, I've developed a keen respect for Parliament and I think this, combined with my deep appreciation and respect for the Library staff, is critical to providing leadership at the Library of Parliament. Those who work here are true professionals who recognize that the Library is unique. They feel quite privileged to work here. The foundation for the growth and development of this place has always been the Library staff's commitment to excellence. As we evolve and adapt to changing needs and challenges, I want to encourage our staff to try new things and to take risks in the name of constructive change. I hope that I can help build a culture where we use rules and processes to promote, rather than inhibit, innovation and progress.

Has the Library's role changed over the years?

At its most fundamental level, no. The Library of Parliament was orig-

inally created to support Parliamentarians by offering them the information and documentation that they need to effectively perform their duties—this *raison d'être* remains valid today. Over the years, however, there have been a number of important changes to the scope of the Library's work. The Library originally housed the national collection which is now located in the National Library and Archives of Canada. Today, our Information and Documentation Resource Service (IDRS) continues the job of collecting, maintaining and providing access to the Library's print and electronic collections, which now focus more specifically on the needs of parliamentarians. In the sixties, a research function was formally added to the Library's role and, today, our Parliamentary Information and Research Service (PIRS) provides information, interpretation, and analytical support to parliamentarians and committees. An-



The main building of the Library was closed for more than three years for renovations. The staff gathered (photo on left) in February 2002 to mark the closing and again in June 2006 for the re-opening ceremony. (Photo: Janet Brooks).

other major change came with the 1995 addition of Parliamentary Public Programs (PPP) to the Library, which essentially expanded our mission from providing information and support solely to parliamentarians, to providing information about Parliament to Canadians on behalf of parliamentarians.

What challenges is the Library facing today?

A critical challenge for the Library lies in adapting its work to help parliamentarians deal with the changing expectations of Canadians. As citizens call for more considered parliamentary debate of public policy issues, the Library must strive to ensure that parliamentarians have access to the best possible tools to do the job. That involves offering non-partisan, balanced and relevant information that may not otherwise be easily accessible, or not available in the format or time-frame parliamentarians need.

Of course, the tools, processes and skills required for performing

the Library's role have evolved dramatically in the wake of technological change and progress. There has been a virtual explosion in the volume of information now available from an endless array of sources, both good and bad. This means recognizing that the Library and its staff are not the only source of information for Parliament, but our role has not diminished. Instead, Parliamentarians increasingly call on our staff for assistance in coping with the information "noise" that they are bombarded with every day. Library employees have a keen sense of what information is required, when and in what form. They are highly-skilled researchers, librarians, technicians and communicators who work together to source and analyze credible information and then synthesize and package it in a way that meets parliamentarians' specific needs. As the Library's role continues to shift away from merely providing information to that of managing and brokering knowledge, a top priority for me is to ensure that our staff are

appropriately organized, motivated and equipped to succeed.

What do you hope to achieve as Parliamentary Librarian?

As I said, I have a deep appreciation of what parliamentarians are trying to do, and that motivates me to help them be as effective as they can be. So, in addition to identifying new ways to enhance the products and services we provide directly to parliamentarians, I want to ensure that the Library is the kind of well-managed and flexible organization that stays relevant and responsive to our clients' changing needs over time. In other words, the Library of Parliament can do its job best if, and when, it has its own house in order.

In that regard, I have spent a good deal of the past year working with the Library's managers on identifying our needs and challenges as an organization operating within the parliamentary context. We have engaged outside expertise to assist us and we have consulted extensively with those working on the front lines to provide service to parlia-

mentarians and Canadians. As an aside, I like to compare the past year's work to the assessment and planning we did to prepare for the four-year Library Building renovation project that was completed earlier this year. It was no small undertaking to preserve the historical and symbolic beauty of the original Library building, while equipping it with the technology and infrastructure it needed to serve a modern Parliament. The task required a great deal of study and consideration, the involvement of outside engineering and design expertise and thousands of hours of careful planning. Strengthening the foundations of the Library as an organization requires a similarly systematic approach ... again, with the aim of serving a modern Parliament.

In the second year of my tenure as Parliamentary Librarian, I will be taking action in areas that need work. Indeed, the work has already begun. The Library's management team has reviewed and updated the Library's mission and vision statements and is moving forward on establishing the business planning and performance measurement systems needed to support our operations. In December, the Library welcomed a new Director General of Corporate Services who brings a great deal of experience in re-thinking the way organizations do their business and managing organizational change. The management team is also working on improving the Library's human resources and communications practices to strengthen leadership at all levels and to facilitate greater staff involvement in planning and achieving results. Our purpose is very clear—to build the management infrastructure that will ensure the Library of Parliament is a well-managed, flexible and dy-



Special guests at the official re-opening were Speaker Peter Milliken (l) of the House of Commons, Speaker Noël Kinsella (r) of the Senate and Michael Fortier, Minister of Public Works whose department was responsible for the renovation and restoration of the Library.
(Photo: Janet Brooks)

namic organization that remains sharply focused on serving Parliament and Canadians as well as it has in the past.

What is the Library's... and your own... approach to client-service?

Well, the Library is a client-driven service organization with a long history of looking for new and better ways to meet the needs of its clients. So, even as we have undertaken to strengthen our internal management capacities, we have also continued to make a series of incremental improvements to our services.

For parliamentarians, we remain focused on providing ready access to balanced information and knowledgeable technologically-skilled staff. Over the past year, for example, we have enhanced our PARLMEDIA electronic news monitoring system, which now allows parliamentarians to choose when and how often they want to receive electronic alerts of the day's media

coverage, or of particular stories they may be following. We have also expanded our PARLINFO electronic database to include searchable bibliographies of current parliamentarians' published writings.

Of course, the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Officer function has become an immediate challenge for us as a result of the government's decision to create this position within the Library. I see this as an excellent opportunity to effectively support parliamentarians' efforts to scrutinize how government manages the money that Canadians entrust to it. Of course, we must carefully consider how best to organize ourselves to deliver such a service and work is now underway to examine options for proceeding. In that regard, we have asked the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians to help us tap into former parliamentarians' experiences and perspectives on the legislative review of expenditures. I

should note here that forging partnerships with external organizations, including other legislatures and library organizations across Canada and around the world, is another way in which we will continue to look for new ways to enhancing the value of our programs and services over time.

Finally, as we continue to review and evaluate our products, programs and services in the months ahead, I cannot place enough emphasis on the importance of systematically consulting parliamentarians on their experiences and their views—closer communication and targeted marketing is critical if the Library is going to meet the needs of a 21st century Parliament.

And where do Canadians all fit into this picture?

It has become a truism that Parliamentary democracies around the world are struggling with an increasingly cynical and skeptical public. Who is better placed than the Library to support parliamentarians

in connecting their constituents to Parliament in increasingly meaningful ways? I believe that offering the public authoritative and reliable information about how Parliament works is essential to maintaining Canadians' confidence in, and respect for, Canada's democratic traditions and processes.

We certainly have lots to build on as we already offer a wide range of unique opportunities to experience and learn about Parliament. Our Parliamentary Guides, for example, introduce hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to Parliament, including the beautiful newly re-opened Main Library building. Our educational materials and programs have won awards and are used across Canada and around the world. In November, the Speakers of the Senate and House of Commons hosted the 10th edition of the annual Teachers Institute. Organized by the Library, the Teachers Institute brings educators from across the country to Ottawa to meet parliamentarians and gain insights on contemporary democratic

governance. Over the years, this program has been applauded by teachers as dramatically enhancing both their appreciation for the work parliamentarians do and their classroom instruction about Parliament, governance, democracy and citizenship. We are now actively looking at extending this successful model for enhancing Canadians' appreciation for what happens here. Should we consider, for example, developing similar programs for seniors, for municipal leaders or for the voluntary sector? I believe these ideas deserve some consideration.

Do you have any final words to offer?

Only to reiterate that I see the Library as a client-driven institution that is building on a lengthy record of success. Most parliamentarians are here because they have a sense of purpose and public life—they are here to accomplish something. The Library's job is to help them succeed and to nurture the deliberative process for the benefit of all Canadians.