

A Focus on Parliamentary Reform

In May 2015, the Canadian Study of Parliament Group (CSPG) held a one day conference exploring parliamentary reform of procedure and practice. Noting that reform "enables an ancient institution to adapt to a changing environment, including relatively new democratic values and expectations," the conference surveyed aspects of Canada's parliamentary evolution and "where it needs to go in order to maximize its contribution to Canadian political life."

The event brought together scholars, parliamentary officials and other interested observers to hear four excellent panel presentations and to discuss and debate how Canada's Parliament might continue to adapt to meet the needs of Canadians.

Using that conference as our inspiration, we're pleased to present a theme issue that continues this discussion.

Some of the CSPG panelists from the conference joined us for a roundtable on parliamentary reform. Not only did this discussion touch upon topics and presentations from the conference, but it also addressed some of the reform agenda emerging out of the last federal election. Participants alternated between optimism and pessimism when contemplating the likelihood of significant change occurring. Conference presenter Louis Massicotte also presents a quantitative review of changes in the Senate since the 1980s in this issue. He finds some notable changes in the diversity of representatives while observing a more mixed record on the Senate's effect on the legislative business in Parliament.

Still on the topic of the Senate, former Clerk of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly Ronald Stevenson offers some suggestions for incremental reforms of the Upper Chamber that may lead to an appetite for more substantive and challenging reforms.

Finally, law professor Lorne Neudorf and political scientist Marguerite Marlin address the potential for reform of subordinate legislation

(regulations) and parliamentary committee work, respectively. Neudorf examines the UK model for scrutinizing new regulations to alleviate concerns of governments using the regulation-making process to shield important public policy choices from public scrutiny. Marlin explores the challenges facing non-governmental actors who wish to exert policy influence through committees and how introducing certain accountability mechanisms could ensure governments respond to committee reports and lead to more focused committee studies that contribute to the legislative agenda.

The subject of parliamentary reform is a rich source of diverse material that will continue to be mined over the course of future issues. However, with this theme issue we hope to present a focused selection of material that highlights some of the current thinking on a number of issues and prompts additional discussion and response.

The *Canadian Parliamentary Review* welcomes letters to the editor and/or stand-alone articles responding to these articles or exploring additional related topics.

Will Stos, Editor

