

The Canadian Scene

New Yukon Speaker

Watson Lake MLA **Patti McLeod** was elected Speaker of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on May 10, 2016, following the resignation of **David Laxton** earlier in the day. Laxton had served as Speaker since 2011, the same year McLeod was first elected to the legislature.

Premier **Darrell Pasloski** put forward McLeod's name for consideration, noting he was especially pleased that she becomes the first woman to serve as Speaker in Yukon.

"She brings a great deal of experience and skill to her new role, having already served during this mandate as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committee of the Whole," he said. "I am confident that she will do an excellent job in presiding over the work of this legislature in an impartial and fair manner."

McLeod said she was honoured to assume this new responsibility and thanked her fellow MLAs for putting their trust in her. "I will endeavour to serve this legislature and all Yukoners to the best of my ability," she added.

54th CPA – Canadian Regional Conference

From July 17-22, 2016, nearly 100 delegates from across Canada and several Caribbean countries gathered in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador to convene the 54th CPA – Canadian Regional Conference.

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) of Canada

Prior to beginning of the main conference, CWP delegates held two days of meetings to review their activities from the past year and make plans for 2016-2017. CWP Chair and British Columbia Speaker **Linda Reid**, convened the CWP's Steering Committee meeting by reading a letter sent to the United Kingdom's parliamentarians expressing sorrow of the murder of MP Jo Cox while she was running an event in her constituency. "As women parliamentarians we are faced with challenges and difficult situations that test our courage and we are all disheartened that Jo Cox, who was so bright and promising in her commitment and passion, was not able to complete her most important work as a parliamentarian in the British House of Commons," she wrote.



Provided

Patti McLeod

The steering committee heard jurisdictional reports from a number of delegates. Items of interest included:

- Yukon MLA **Elaine Taylor** noted 2017 marks the 50th Anniversary of the first woman elected to Yukon's Council
- Ontario MPP **Lisa Thompson** recounted details of the 2015 CWP Outreach trip to Ontario
- Saskatchewan MLA **Laura Ross** invited parliamentarians to attend the 2016 outreach event in Saskatchewan, beginning on October 1.

In concluding the steering committee meeting, Speaker Reid reminded attendees that she had set a goal of improving communications during her term as chair. She thanked Nova Scotia MLA **Patricia Arab** for her work in building a CWP website and establishing a presence on social media. She also lauded the work of the CWP campaign school and said it's an absolute joy to meet women who have been elected to office after attending it. Finally, she challenged delegates to nominate women for awards, such as the Order of British Columbia, as a way to honour the work of women of all walks of life.



BC delegates to the CWP meeting pose with guests from the Caribbean delegations.



A view from the visitor gallery at Newfoundland and Labrador's House of Assembly during a break in the CWP panel sessions.

The second day of CWP meetings commenced with greetings from jurisdictional host Speaker **Tom Osborne** and a reading by **Trudy J. Morgan-Cole**. The author of *A Sudden Sun*, Ms. Morgan-Cole's book brings Newfoundland's suffrage debate to life with real and fictional characters.

A panel on international outreach featured two members of the steering committee detailing recent trips to CWP meetings. Newfoundland and Labrador MHA **Lisa Dempster** reported on her trip to Guernsey. She noted that despite differences among participants, many of the themes they discussed and issues they faced were common. She also shared a powerful quote from the conference by United Nations Secretary-General **Ban Ki-moon**: "Too often leaders have used women to advance to power, but I believe we must use power to advance women."

Ms. Arab shared details of her trip to a conference Iman, Jordan which focused on women in conflict prevention roles. She explained that statistics reveal there are relatively few women peacekeepers leading missions, but there has been a discernible increase in the length of times of peace where they have been leaders. She also encouraged delegates to remember that partisanship should be left in the Chamber and not brought to meetings like these, explaining that one speaker at the conference spoke of the need for a sistership, to care for each other, to build esteem and to support each other. "Once we follow through and it's not just words, we will be unstoppable," she said.

A second International Outreach Panel featured three delegates from guest jurisdictions in the Caribbean. **Lillian E. Misick** of Turks and Caicos, **Nicolette Henry** of Guyana and **Natalie Neita-Headley** of Jamaica spoke about the role women have played in politics in their countries and what inspired them to seek office and the challenges they faced. They spoke of the need for political parties to select women to contest winnable seats, the importance of supporting other women in politics even if they are partisan opponents, and to share their success and knowledge with the next generation of women seeking public office.

In the third panel of the day Ms. Dempster offered a summary of gender-responsive budgeting based on a presentation she observed at the Guernsey conference. Government budgets have gender implications and these should be considered when planning and debating its elements, she explained. Some examples of questions to ask: what are the central issues of the budget, how are they framed, do these issues consider both men and women's experience, is gender-based data available for review?



CWP Canada delegates pose outside the Newfoundland and Labrador House of Assembly building overlooking St. John's harbour.

Gender-responsive budgeting has the possibility of influencing number of women parliamentarians. During the discussion period MP **Yasmin Ratansi** stressed that changing the mindset in the bureaucracy is also important as they implement and offer policy that gets funded.

A fourth session titled "Making Legislatures More Welcoming to Female Parliamentarians," featured presentations by local City Councilor **Sheilagh O'Leary**, Manitoba MLA **Nahanni Fontaine** and Ms. Ratansi. The panelists discussed creating work environments that were sensitive to issues such as child care, less intimidating in terms of heckling, and open to trying novel practices like e-voting and altering sitting schedules to support. Ms. Fontaine, the first Indigenous woman elected in an urban riding in Manitoba, shared some examples of emails and social media messages she receives on a regular basis containing graphic racist and sexist language. Ms. O'Leary commended some media organizations that have removed unmoderated comments sections from websites which helps to eliminate trolling behavior.

A final panel outlined Equal Voice (EV) Canada's "Daughters of the Vote" initiative. Marking 100 years since some Canadian women first achieved the right to

vote, the program will bring one young woman (aged 18-23) for each federal riding to Ottawa to literally take their seat in the House of Commons. Ontario MPP **Lisa MacLeod**, and EV Executive Director **Nancy Peckford** and Events co-ordinator **Denise Siele** celebrated that EV received 1,500 applications in just 10 weeks.

CPA – Canadian Regional Meeting Panels

Nova Scotia Speaker **Kevin Murphy** used the first session of the main conference to outline his proposal for a parliamentarians with disabilities subcommittee within CPA. Speaker Murphy told delegates that an exploratory meeting held in Halifax should result in a formal proposal to create a subcommittee called Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) composed of self-identified persons with disabilities who are current representatives. This subcommittee's objectives would be modelled after the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians and include: developing outreach, fostering closer relationships among parliamentarians with disabilities and providing a forum to discuss, strategize and act on issues relating to persons with disabilities internationally. The CPA has approved this idea in principle and a tentative meeting scheduled for late 2017.



Delegates listen intently during a panel on indigenous influences in parliaments. BC Speaker Linda Reid spoke about initiatives to recognize indigenous culture and tradition within parliaments, while MLAs Nahanni Fontaine and Amanda Lathlin spoke about their respective paths to becoming parliamentarians.

Three panelists from Newfoundland and Labrador spoke about recent examples of how this social media use has affected the legislative process within parliament and among the people who cover a parliament's activities. Speaker Osborne outlined a ruling he had to make about MHA **Steve Kent** tweeting from the legislature, before yielding the floor to Mr. Kent for general thoughts on how social media has changed the way parliamentarians communicate with constituents and why parliamentary institutions should adapt. **James McLeod**, a reporter for the *St. John's Telegram* recounted an experience where his Twitter handle was quoted in Hansard when he was live-tweeting a late-night filibuster. He also speculated that as hand-held devices become even more commonplace and dynamic, Speakers will likely find themselves having to make rulings based on very novel things. "Someone is going to have deal with PokémonGo this year in a legislature," he said to laughter.

Bruce Stanton, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons, presented information relating to recent issues encountered by presiding officers at the federal level in a session on "Chair Occupants and Committees." Noting the importance of all party committees and joint committees, he also spoke about decisions regarding independent MPs who are seeking to present for committee debate and to make amendments to legislation.

A fourth session focusing on honouring aboriginal ancestry and influences in legislatures saw Speaker Reid discuss her legislature's recent practices, including installing artwork, prayers in the legislative assembly, and a ceremony where a 'talking stick' was presented and stationed beside the Speaker's chair (see the *Canadian Parliamentary Review* Vol 39, No. 2 cover). Indigenous Manitoba MLAs **Amanda Lathlin** and Ms. Fontaine offered powerful presentations



Representatives from the federal branch of the CPA-CR, Prince Edward Island and Turks and Caicos pose following a ceremony where a memorandum of understanding for a twinning initiative between the two island jurisdictions was signed.

about their respective journeys into public office, the particular obstacles indigenous women face, and how indigenous peoples can reclaim space in legislatures. “Amanda and I were not meant to be here,” Ms. Fontaine said. “Indigenous women are seven times more likely to go missing or murdered. Just by being here we are bringing indigeneity into this space.” A subsequent discussion period covered issues such as recent practices by some parliamentarians to acknowledge the historic connection of Indigenous people to the land when giving speeches, other jurisdictions’ efforts to bring in indigenous influences to parliaments, and efforts to do outreach such as the Québec’s Circle of Women Parliamentarians signing a memorandum of understanding with women aboriginal leaders in the province to encourage regular meetings and discussions.

Jacques Chagnon, President of the National Assembly, updated delegates on initiatives Québec’s legislature has taken with respect to security. He played a short video detailing security upgrades that maintain the historic qualities of the building, including live Web cameras that allow officials to keep

an eye on the legislative grounds remotely. Québec is also looking at upgrades to constituency offices and encouraged attendees who are examining their own security practices to note successful initiatives elsewhere, such as Sweden’s cost-effective mail-screening process.

Prior to the CPA - Canadian Regional business meeting, a panel featuring Speaker Reid, Senator **Elizabeth Hubley** and MP **Alexandra Mendes** updated delegates on ongoing twinning arrangements between Canadian Legislatures and Caribbean Parliaments. This session culminated with a ceremony where a memorandum of understanding between Prince Edward Island and Turks and Caicos was signed.

Two final panels, on newly elected parliamentarians’ expectations about the role versus reality (with presentations by Newfoundland and Labrador MHA **John Finn**, Manitoba MLA **Jeff Wharton** and Saskatchewan MLA **Nicole Rancourt**), and one on strengthening relationships between legislature and community (with Speaker Osborne), both significantly

touched upon the issue of decorum and heckling within legislatures, particularly during extended discussion periods following the presentations.

Ontario MPP **Catherine Fife** asked about parliament as a unique environment where bullying and harassment becomes normalized. Manitoba Speaker **Myrna Driedger** noted that in no other workplace would heckling be allowed, but on the other hand, it does help parliamentarians to blow off steam during debates. She said a balance need to be struck. New Brunswick Speaker **Chris Collins** argued that heckling limits the ability of certain people to participate as actively and effectively as they would otherwise.

Speaker Osborne outlined the challenges presiding officers face when they attempt to create a positive presence in the face of controversial legislation, difficult budgets, and scandals. He noted it can be a particular challenge in jurisdictions such as

Newfoundland and Labrador where the legislature is attached to the government building. On the issue of order/decorum, Speaker Osborne revealed that when he was a newly elected member in the Assembly there was a sort of initiation where a dedicated minister heckled him as a new member. In recent years, after witnessing the behavior present during some debates, teachers who have brought school groups for tours of the Assembly have stated they do not plan to return in the future because it was such a poor example for young, impressionable people. Upon becoming Speaker, he established decorum, provided training and delivered instructions to parliamentarians where consequences for misbehavior were clearly spelled out. He touted a significant improvement in the number of points of order – there were 15 points of order over 39 days whereas previous session had more than 200 points of order in the same number of days, and one day had over 40. Community stakeholders have also noticed improvements, he added.



Bob Pope

The official conference photo for the 54th CPA – Canadian Regional Conference in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador.

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*As of September 30, 2016

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