



Canadian Study
of Parliament Group

ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL: THE
CONSTITUENCY DIMENSION OF
FEDERAL POLITICS

December 9, 2005
Ottawa, Ontario

CANADIAN STUDY OF PARLIAMENT GROUP

The Canadian Study of Parliament Group was created with the object of bringing together all those with an interest in parliamentary institutions and the legislative process, to promote understanding and to contribute to their reform and improvement.

The constitution of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group makes provision for various activities, including the organization of conferences and seminars in Ottawa and elsewhere in Canada, the preparation of articles and various publications, the establishment of workshops, the promotion and organization of public discussions on parliamentary affairs, participation in public affairs programs on radio and television, and the sponsorship of other educational activities.

Membership is open to all those interested in Canadian legislative institutions.

Applications for membership and additional information concerning the Group should be addressed to the Secretariat, Canadian Study of Parliament Group, Box 660, West Block, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6. Tel.: 613.995.2937, Fax: 613.995.5357, www.studyparliament.ca

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

On December 9, 2005, the Canadian Study of Parliament Group (CSPG) held a conference on the "Constituency Dimension of Federal Politics".

The conference was organized and chaired by Dr. William Cross, Political Science, Carleton University, and Dr. Lisa Young, Political Science, University of Calgary. Both are members of the Board of the CSPG.

Drs. Cross and Young assembled an interesting cast of participants at the well-attended conference that was held in the Centre Block, Parliament Hill. The participants included political scientists from Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, Members of Parliament (MPs) and former MPs.

In the morning sessions, the participants tackled subjects ranging from the financing of nomination campaigns to the record of candidates from visible minorities to problems plaguing the nomination process. In her luncheon address, Marion Dewar, Former Parliamentarian and Former Mayor of Ottawa, discussed the need for MPs to encourage their constituents to participate in the political process in general, and not view the MP narrowly as a problem-solver.

In the afternoon sessions, participants discussed local campaigns and drew comparisons between the approaches used in the UK, Ireland and Canada. The Hon. David Kilgour discussed the relationship between MPs and constituents from the standpoints of constituency work, party discipline and duty. There was a discussion of the typically haphazard organization of the office of elected representatives. The final presentation highlighted how the federal structure affects constituency service.

Throughout the day, the audience engaged in animated discussion with the various panelists. As always, the audience contributed immensely to the fruitfulness of this interesting conference.

Of course, conferences do not organize themselves. We would like to thank JoAnne Cartwright for all of her support, without her the conference wouldn't have been as successful. We would also like to thank the Parliamentary Interns who took notes at each session. Finally, thank you to all the panelists, both the authors and the academics and practitioners who provided us with a full day of thoughtful and insightful analysis.

Dr. William Cross
Dr. Lisa Young

Dr. William Cross
Carleton University
CSPG Board and Conference Co-Chair

The theme of the day's conference concerned the constituency dimension of federal politics, and Dr. Cross began by reminding participants of the famous quote by the late great Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Tip O'Neil: "all politics is local."

With a federal election to come on January 23, 2006, Dr. Cross highlighted the timeliness of the conference and noted that for many citizens, the constituency is the key political unit. As a practical matter, Canadians often turn first to their local constituency offices when faced with problems beyond the scope of their own influence. Formal political participation also begins at the local level, through the nomination and election of local candidates. These processes, however, can create barriers to such political participation.

PANEL I: THE CHALLENGES OF CANDIDATE NOMINATION

Chair: Dr. Jennifer Smith
Dalhousie University

Panelists: Dr. Lisa Young
University of Calgary

Dr. Jerome Black
McGill University

Derrek Konrad
Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians

Nominations: Does Money Matter, and Do the New Regulations Work? - Lisa Young

Lisa Young's presentation was centred on an analysis of the process by which Canadian political parties nominate candidates at the federal level. Dr. Young began by noting that recent changes to campaign financing legislation were initiated partly in response to claims that existing financing regulations constituted a barrier to women interested in seeking federal party nominations. Dr. Young also mentioned that, contrary to popular belief, most nomination races are fairly inexpensive and low-key; high profile and expensive nomination battles are the exception in Canada, not the rule. In 2004, 62% of nominations were contested, and only in a very few nomination races did monies spent come close to reaching spending limits. Only 36 individuals contesting nominations spent more than \$10,000 on their campaigns.

Dr. Young's presentation was based on an analysis of data from Elections Canada and on the results of a survey of candidates who ran for party nominations in the 2004 federal election. As of 2004, amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* require individuals contesting party nominations to register with Elections Canada and, if they spend more than \$1000 on their nomination campaign, to file a report with Elections Canada disclosing who contributed to their campaign and how much was spent during the campaign. Restrictions have also been imposed on the size and source of contributions. Data collected from Bloc Québécois candidates was

not included in the final results, as the response rate among that party's candidates was particularly low.

Dr. Young offered a detailed examination of patterns in spending for nomination contests. Among the notable results here was the finding that \$ 5000 was the average amount raised by individuals for their nomination campaigns. In this area, a marginal difference exists between female and male contenders - women seeking a nomination raised on average \$ 5000, while their male counterparts raised an average of \$5200. In most races, men also spent more money than their female opponents. The only exception here was the NDP, where, on average, women seeking a nomination spent slightly more than men. The average amount raised by individuals who won their nomination battles was \$6300, while those who lost raised an average of \$4600.

On average, Liberal nomination candidates raised the most money with an average amount of \$6000. Conservatives raised an average of \$ 4800. Bloc Québécois candidates raised an average of \$2700, and NDP candidates an average of \$2600. Most of the money raised by nomination contenders came from individual donors. Unions contributed very little money, while corporations were the source of approximately 15% of monies raised.

Dr. Young also outlined the effects of new regulations governing the conduct of these nomination contests. She found that spending limits mostly did not impact a candidate's decision whether or not to seek a nomination. Also, for most individuals seeking their party's nomination, limits on corporate and union contributions to their nomination campaigns did not influence their decision to run. Most nomination candidates were actually supportive of spending limits, and felt that the spending limits in place were about right. Individuals seeking the Conservative Party of Canada's nomination were least likely to share this sentiment.

Dr. Young's main conclusions were as follows:

- Limiting the size and source of contributions does not appear to have much impact on candidates' abilities to mount competitive nomination contests.
- The new spending limits imposed seem to impact only a small number of nomination races.
- There is little evidence to suggest that more women will seek federal party nominations under the new regulations.
- Individuals seeking federal party nominations were generally favourable to the new regulations. Support for the new regulations was high, even though they are not fulfilling the specific policy goals for which they were implemented.

Visible Minority Candidates in the 2004 Federal Election – Jerome Black

Jerome Black focused his presentation on an examination of links between the political representation of visible minorities at the federal level, and the processes by which Canadian political parties nominate candidates for federal elections. This was examined because the number of visible minorities who seek party nominations has a direct impact on the number of visible minority candidates that take part in federal elections, which then directly impacts the number of visible minority MP's in the House of Commons. Dr. Black focused specifically on the nomination of visible minority candidates by the five largest parties for the 2004 federal election.

Dr. Black began by defining visible minorities as persons of non-British, and non-French descent who are not aboriginals. He identified this group as the most distinctive and most under-represented category of minorities. It was noted that the proportion of visible minority candidates and visible minority MP's is consistently below the proportion of visible minorities in the general population.

Dr. Black offered an estimate of the number of visible minority candidates who ran for the five largest parties in the 2004 federal election. He found that the Conservative Party of Canada nominated the most visible minority candidates (10.7%). The Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party were next with 8.4% and 9.4%, respectively. 6.7% of Bloc Québécois candidates were visible minorities, while 4.9% of Green Party candidates fell into this category

Dr. Black also examined the constituency dimension on candidate nomination in his analysis. Two contextual factors were discussed in relation to the nomination of visible minority candidates: (1) the competitive status of the parties that they are chosen to represent, and (2) the diversity of the constituencies that visible minority candidates run in. It was found that visible minority candidates were more likely to be nominated in diverse constituencies – 44% of visible minority candidates ran in ridings visible minority groups comprised over 30% of the population. Dr. Black also found that visible minority candidates were just as likely, even more likely in the case of the Liberal Party, as other candidates to run in ridings where their party was considered to be competitive.

Dr. Black also offered some possible reasons for the ongoing political under-representation of visible minorities. He observed that it might take time before new immigrants begin to actively engage in the political process. He also theorized that the networking practices of political parties might, intentionally or inadvertently, constitute barriers to the nomination of visible minority candidates.

Ground Realities: Federal Political Nominations in Canada – Derrek Konrad

Derrek Konrad's presentation was based on his first-hand experience as a politician involved in the nomination processes of local riding associations. He also discussed the results and implications of a survey recently conducted by the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians (CAFP).

Mr. Konrad began by noting that 80% of former parliamentarians who responded to the CAFP survey were of the opinion that the current nomination practices of political parties have problems that are "serious" or "somewhat serious." Among the problems cited were: a lack of party accountability, the appointment of candidates by party leaders, party membership practices, and a general lack of rules and standards governing the nomination process. Respondents were divided on whether these problems should be addressed by political parties themselves, Elections Canada, or both.

Mr. Konrad emphasized that nomination processes are central to Canadian democracy and he stressed that the process must therefore be characterized by integrity to avoid alienating grassroots political actors. Some of the measures for reform recommended in the CAFP survey report included removing the authority of party leaders to appoint candidates directly, setting minimum ages for party members, and setting minimums residency times in constituencies for candidates.

Mr. Konrad also touched on his own personal experience with the nomination process to illustrate some of the problems with current nomination practices. He noted the scarcity of regulations governing party nomination processes, and he observed that existing rules are open to interpretation. Mr. Konrad cited examples where riding associations were able to impede certain candidates from seeking a nomination by making it very difficult for them to do so. He also criticized the absence of an independent appeals process for potential candidates who find themselves at odds with their local riding association.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Konrad described the nomination process as part of a continuum leading up to an election. Since nominations are part of the democratic process, he argued that it is essential for Canadians to be sure nomination processes are fair and open in all parties. He reiterated that all party members in a given riding must be allowed to vote in nomination races. He also suggested that since political parties make use of public funds, they should be accountable to the general public, not just to themselves.

Toward the end of his presentation, Mr. Konrad also noted that it is particularly important for nomination processes in Canada to be fair, and transparent, as the Canadian model of democracy is exported abroad to countries looking for inspiration on the path to democratic systems government. As such, the Canadian system should be above reproach, argued Mr. Konrad.

Discussion

A variety of issues were raised during the question and answer portion of this panel. Some of the most notable points made were as follows:

A question was asked regarding what should be used as a reasonable benchmark when assessing the numbers of visible minorities seeking party nominations. It was noted that visible minority populations tend to be concentrated in urban centres, and that it may not be appropriate to expect the nomination of visible minority candidates in ridings where visible minority communities are very small.

Dr. Black responded by saying that there is an element of supply in the nomination process insofar as it is likely easier to find competent nominees when there is a larger pool to draw from in a given riding. However, he also insisted that the relationship he described earlier is not a spurious one. He said a real, important relationship does exist.

A question was also asked regarding whether or not all minority groups should be considered the same, as some are more systematically mobilized than others. Dr. Black acknowledged that there are key differences between minority groups. He said that this is an important point to keep in mind and he noted that more research is needed in this area.

A question was also asked of Lisa Young concerning the nomination of female candidates. The questioner asked whether statistics exist regarding the numbers of women who seek party nominations. Comparable statistics exist for the number of female candidates and female members of parliament, and it would be interesting to know how they relate to nomination statistics. Dr. Young responded that she has not yet compiled the statistics in question.

Another question was also raised regarding the prerogative of national party leaders to name candidates without necessarily consulting local riding associations. Dr. Black noted that this

practice can, potentially, be used to improve the representation of visible minorities by removing certain barriers to their nomination, although he also acknowledged that the practice often poses other problems. Derrek Konrad responded that this tendency among national party leaders can be troublesome. He suggested that an open process, the selection of highly qualified candidates, and the existence of independent rules and of an independent appeals process would help this problem. Lisa Young concluded with the observation that while all politics may be local, nomination processes are increasingly national in character.

LUNCHEON ADDRESS

Marion Dewar

Marion Dewar opened her speech by raising the issue of low voter turnout in Canadian elections. She believes that this results, in part, from the failure of Members to interact with their constituents and make them understand their role as Members of Parliament in Canadian political institutions.

Once Members are elected, the public's expectations of them change. During election campaigns, candidates are heavily involved and highly visible in their ridings. Subsequently, this relation changes. On the one hand, many Members assign some of their responsibilities to their employees, with the result that the employees are often the ones dealing with the public. On the other hand, constituents view their relationship with their Member as "service-based," contacting them primarily for assistance in a particular situation. Once the situation is resolved, constituents no longer think of their Member, let alone the institutions.

Ms. Dewar therefore believes that the public must be reconnected with political institutions to spark their interest in Canadian politics. To do this, Ms. Dewar says that politicians must rethink how they interact with their electors.

Currently, Members often depend on their staff to find out about the challenges facing their constituents. Yet their employees cannot necessarily be familiar with all of the challenges affecting constituents. To stay on top of the challenges in their communities, Members must spend more time in their riding, meeting people and listening to their concerns. Members cannot be said to represent their constituents if they do not have the knowledge or the ability to present their concerns to their respective caucuses.

To identify concerns that deserve to be brought before the House, the employees must have a relationship with constituents and be able to separate the concerns of public interest groups from those affecting the entire community. Members are often in reactive mode, addressing complaints rather than meeting with constituents to listen to their concerns.

Ms. Dewar concluded by stating that individuals need to be encouraged to chat with their Member, while Members need to be encouraged to meet with their constituents and ask them about their concerns. This would create a real dialogue on public policy, and ensure that Members truly represent the interests of the Canadian electorate. Canadians must feel involved and listened to by their representatives if we want them to take an interest in political institutions.

PANEL II: CONSTITUENCY CAMPAIGNING IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Chair: Dr. William Cross
Carleton University

Panelists: Dr. David Denver
Lancaster University, UK

Dr. Munroe Eagles
State University of New York, Buffalo

Dr. Michael Marsh
Trinity College Dublin

Local Campaigning in Britain – David Denver

Beginning with a historical perspective of the British case, Professor Denver noted that in the 19th century all campaigning was local. Aided by the development of mass media, however, national campaigning increased in importance during the 20th century. From about 1950 to the 1980s, local campaigning in the constituencies was very much the ‘Cinderella’ of election campaigning – poorly resourced, little researched, and widely thought to be a meaningless ritual which had no effect on election results.

During the 1990s, however, the local campaign was rediscovered and began to be reassessed both by academic researchers and party professionals. According to Professor Denver, with Labour in the van, the parties began to take local campaigning much more seriously than before. Considerable resources were invested and well-thought out strategies were devised. By 2005, in the eyes of the major parties campaigning was the central focus of campaigning.

Paralleling these developments, academics began to demonstrate the fact that effective campaigning could have significant effects on the electoral outcomes.

As highlighted by Professor Denver, this re-assessment of the local campaign has been coupled with a growing involvement of Party Headquarters. Having previously been left to local ‘amateurs’, the party professionals now seek to plan, direct and monitor local campaigns. Party Headquarters determine the targeting strategy and targeted campaigning is now the name of the game in all parties. In the key seats, Professor Denver explained that they even carry out from national level campaigning tasks that were formerly the preserve of local volunteers, such as canvassing the support of electors and contacting supporters on polling day.

In his assessment of British campaigning on the ground from 1992-2005, Professor Denver relies on a unique set of surveys of local campaign organizers, which enables us to track developments in campaigning at the local level. To a large extent local campaigners still employ traditional methods and techniques but – spurred on by their headquarters – there is also evidence of innovative modern methods being increasingly adopted. As elaborated by Professor Denver, the number of elections signs during a campaign has decreased while that of leaflets has increased. Moreover, although canvassing is still used as a classic mobilization technique, the percentage of voters canvassed has decreased. A noteworthy problem for all parties is that the numbers of volunteers involved in local campaigning – polling day volunteers

in particular – have tended to fall. However, Professor Denver also observed that the more contested seats will draw a higher volunteer turn-out.

In summary, Professor Denver contends that the phrase “all politics is local” is perhaps too strong. National trends can and indeed do affect voting outcomes while the local effort makes marginal difference, particularly in key or swing seats. In effect, it is the case in Britain that the local campaign becomes part of the national campaign and vice versa – unlike the Canadian case, which does not demonstrate such strong integration.

Politics is Local: the Constituency Connection in Canadian Federal Elections – Munroe Eagles

Elections in Canada are frequently portrayed in academic research as great national events, with results determined by considerations of governmental performance, leadership quality, or key issues. However, as Professor Eagles reminded participants, there are always local races. The constituency, as he put it, is a micro-environment for electoral competition. Accordingly, he sees two distinct dimensions which can be said to compose a Canadian election: the “air war”, and the “ground war”.

Media tend to reinforce the centralization of elections by concentrating their attention on the “air campaign” surrounding party leaders, party platforms, and polling data on popularity, thereby contributing to the impression of campaigns as “horseraces”. As Professor Eagles pointed out, while these are doubtless important considerations, the reality is of course considerably more complex. In important respects federal elections are actually a composite of 308 constituency elections held simultaneously. This reality is well-known to parliamentarians, their challengers, and local activists. These individuals are the key figures in the “ground war” that takes place largely outside the media limelight in the constituency trenches.

In his presentation, Professor Eagles argued that Canadian parties organize the air campaign, but as of 2004 at least ground campaigning remains very much a candidate-driven and locally controlled affair. It was highlighted that for the last three decades, the ground war expenses of candidates exceeded that which was spent on the air war. Indeed, the first task of a candidate is talking to voters through door-to-door canvassing and phone calls; and most volunteer energy goes into this. However, strict campaign spending limits since 1975 have capped spending at \$68,000, meaning that candidates live within their means to raise what they can and spend what they raise.

The 2004 federal election data collected by Young et al. show that that posters and door-to-door canvassing are almost always important to Conservative, Liberal and NDP voters. However, as noted by professor Eagles, there is very weak campaign coordination between party leadership and the constituency. Unlike the UK, it doesn't appear that national campaigns target the margins. This was confirmed by the 2004 election data, which showed that most candidates receive no or very little support from national headquarters.

According to Professor Eagles, spending matters in terms of votes (and seats) won. Moreover, a candidate's ability to raise and spend money is dependent on his or her level of support in the riding. Thus, the more a candidate spends, the less well-off are his or her competitors. But, campaigning also matters – number of volunteers and effort can be measured separately from monies raised. A strong effort on the part of volunteers also equates with greater support of the candidate.

Finally, Professor Eagles argued that the centre-local balance in campaigning may well be shifting in response to the post-2004 regulatory regime governing campaign and party financing. With maximum contribution limits on corporations and unions of \$1000 per annum and maximum individual contributions of \$5000 per annum, these new regulations have the potential to transform the Canadian party landscape with more central involvement in the local campaign.

Local Campaigning in Ireland – Michael Marsh

In Ireland there are 42 constituencies with three to five members each and approximately 18,000 electors per seat. The Irish electoral system of the single transferable vote (STV) in multimember constituencies gives an unusual degree of freedom to the voter to choose between candidates. The ballot lists the candidates in alphabetical order, indicating the party of each. To cast a valid vote, the voter must indicate his first choice by placing a '1' next to a candidate's name. That is sufficient for a valid vote but the voter may go on to indicate second, third and later preferences using the numbers 2, 3 and so on up to the number of candidates on the ballot.

Such a system provides a strong incentive for candidates to run personal campaigns, which they do, focussing on the services they can bring to their own areas. At the same time, parties seek to run their own national campaign, focussing on what they can do for their country. National campaigns are now highly professional, making widespread use of marketing and PR skills and information.

Yet the local element remains a significant part – many would say a critical part – of the operations. Professor Marsh highlighted 2 key local features which explain the vote in Ireland:

- 1) The need for lower preferences – parties vie for rankings, not for 'one' vote.
- 2) Incentives for personal voting – which creates two types of competition; between parties and within parties.

Parties may put much effort into deciding who should run in each constituency but they do so within severe constraints. Selection remains a local operation and controls are largely indirect (Falligan, 1999, 2003). The candidates themselves will still fund their own campaigns for the most part, and they will decide how far they will run despite it. And as Professor Marsh pointed out, these local campaigns generally take the very old fashioned form of the door-to-door canvass, supplemented by a presence at schools, supermarkets, train stations and shopping centres. Candidates will also put up many posters and will seek publicity in the local press, and increasingly as the broadcast media market becomes decentralised, on local radio.

Professor Marsh explored the nature and extent of grass-roots campaigning in Ireland while using evidence from the 2002 Irish election study in which 75% of electors were contacted. Notable statistics concerning the extent of person voting include: less than half of voters have any kind of party attachment; 62% said that the candidate is more important than the party; 46% would vote for the same candidate even if he or she ran for a different party (only 37% said definitively that they would not).

He described a very extensive system of door-to-door campaigning carried out both by the candidates themselves and by teams of party workers with around four fifths of voters reporting that contact was made with their home. 55% of homes had a candidate visit; while virtually no phone campaigning was observed. Although some doubts remain about whether such

campaigning matters in the modern era, Professor Marsh provided evidence for the existence of strong links between vote choice and contact, with association evident between lower preferences and contact as well as first preferences and contact. Young voters in particular were much more likely to vote if they've been canvassed. Professor Marsh concluded that this provides good evidence for the argument that personal campaigning, and in particular campaigning by the candidates themselves, matters in Irish general elections.

Discussion

As one participant remarked, while the panelists discussed the local and national character of campaigns, there was no mention of regional variations. In response, Professor Denver noted that there are no significant regional differences in England but in Scotland and Wales, regional variation does matter. Professor Eagles conceded that while this is not his focus, regionalism is a huge factor in Canada and that he did try to control for this in the data which he collected. As for the case in Ireland, Professor Marsh replied that region is a non-issue in the structure of a campaign. Although some regional consciousness exists, it is moveable, unlike here in Canada.

PANEL III: THE CHALLENGES OF CONSTITUENCY SERVICE AND REPRESENTATION

Chair: Dr. F. Leslie Seidle
Institute for Research on Public Policy

Panelists: Hon. David Kilgour
Member of Parliament for Edmonton – Mill Woods – Beaumont

Peter MacLeod
London School of Economics, UK

Dr. David C. Docherty
Wilfred Laurier University

Hon. David Kilgour

Drawing on his many years in office, Kilgour reflected on the relationship between MPs and constituents. He contended that in principle, MPs provide a public service to their constituents and should stay close to the people they represent; however in practice, the highly centralized nature of Canadian politics has a tendency to lure politicians away from those constituents. He discussed the public service nature of constituency work, the high degree of party discipline in Canada, and the duty to connect with constituents.

Constituency work: Kilgour cited immigration services as an area where constituencies are on the frontline, trying to tackle delays and navigate the discretionary aspects. He emphasized how important it is to get good constituency staff, and what a rare breed they are. He characterized the necessary skills as somewhere between a ringmaster and a den mother.

Party discipline: The problem, according to Kilgour, is that the party whip is not the best judge of local opinion, but enforces a formidable degree of party discipline in the Canadian system. Canada is the “Whip’s Shangri-La,” where the whim of the Prime Minister and cabinet is

sufficient to push through a bill within a matter of months. Discipline emanates from the PMO through caucus liaisons, the chief and regional whip, a battery of tame columnists and editorials, and an army of party faithful on ground. Moreover, the best trips and promotions go to the most obedient MPs. There is also the possibility of benefits accruing to the MP's spouse or children.

The net effect in Canada, he said, is that MPs quickly forget their constituents. By comparison, the American House of Representatives is full of party rebels like Carolyn Parrish. The Westminster model in the United Kingdom, and it should be noted, in Canada before 1900, has had a much lower degree of party discipline, where even ministers are known to vote against the government.

Duty to constituents: Kilgour maintains that MPs must never forget who elects them. During deliberations over Bill C36, the same-sex marriage bill, he took the measure of surveying public opinion in his riding; in the event, his personal judgment was on the side of the majority.

The Low Road to Democratic Reform: Constituency Offices, Public Service Provision and Citizen Engagement – Peter MacLeod

Following a cross-country tour of Canadian constituency offices, MacLeod invited colleagues to look at the basic infrastructure of local politics. He argued that constituency offices are an important but under-appreciated point of political interface. He further suggested that attention to constituency offices might be more relevant than other forms of “high road” reform. Finally, he discussed the peculiar status and disposition of constituency office staff.

Political interface: MacLeod took a design perspective on constituency offices, asking what it can tell us and what its potential is. Though the offices are often the citizen's main point of contact with politics, they are typically “marginal, scrappy, haphazard spaces.” The pioneer of constituency offices was Flora McDonald who needed a constituency office because she lacked the professional infrastructure of other politicians, such as a law practice or business. To keep in touch with constituents, she tithed her own salary to hire a grad student in Kingston. In Ed Broadbent's view of deliberative democracy, the constituency office serves as talking shop. However, with the expansion of government and downloading of government services, the offices have become the backstop for the bureaucracy.

“Low road” reform: Canada's bureaucracies for reform produce many initiatives with little traction. Current reforms favour high political capital. MacLeod argues that constituency offices are closer to citizens and more likely to engender and embody political change. The proximity to citizens is a relative factor in trust and can help close the credibility gap. The haphazard infrastructure of offices may reflect the decline of deference and attitudes to authority as well as what might be termed “liquid modernity:” the demands of plural and fluid responsibilities.

Constituency staff: Constituency staff are not party political people per se. They may tend towards a certain “red Tory” profile, recognising both human need and government limits. The lessons of their public service are to let the managers manage; it is the constituency offices on the front line, actually solving problems and seeking redress. The work is not inherently attractive, with low pay, low job security, and staff on the receiving end of public complaint. Some more formal training schemes for staff are being developed. However much of the skill set relies on emotional intelligence, which is more innate than acquired. Staff are often in a unique position to speak truth to power, as they do not have to pay tribute to the MP.

Constituency Work in Canadian Legislatures – David C. Docherty

In his presentation, Professor Docherty argued that constituency service is a constant, not a variable. Moreover, he put forth that constituency work in Canada is a success story, and Canadians are generally well-served by members of Parliament at the local level. It remains the single activity that every elected legislator, federal or provincial, actively participates in on a regular basis. This is despite the fact that there is little evidence available to suggest that constituency work has little outcome on electoral success.

The presentation examined two aspects of present constituency service: the professionalization of constituency service, and the time dedicated to constituency work. Professor Docherty pointed out that the main task in constituency service is getting beyond the physical barriers and although the internet would seem the easiest solution to this, email access and use has not been constant across ridings.

Constituency service in Canada is indeed complicated by the federal character of its politics, and as Docherty remarked, not all citizens know which politicians do what. Members of Parliament and Members of provincial legislatures are regularly approached regarding issues that fall outside their jurisdiction. Thus, the expectation develops that if a legislator doesn't turn an issue over to his or her jurisdictionally competent counterpart, then he or she is responsible for fixing the constituent's problem. This has also made the process magnanimous in that very little partisan approach is taken to constituency work.

Professor Docherty concluded his presentation with a brief examination of the possible impact of electoral reform on constituency work, namely what will happen if and when we elect members without a constituency, as would be the case with some form of proportional representation (PR). Evidently, as constituency work depends on having a constituency, those members selected from party lists will not be responsible for constituency work. Also, given the current practice of naming legislators to cabinet on the basis of regional considerations, a move to PR would affect this deliberate construction of cabinet.

Discussion

In response to questions, Peter MacLeod offered some suggestions on improving the use of constituency offices:

- Combining CO with other community spaces e.g. schools, town halls
- More care and investment in CO infrastructure e.g. consultation friendly design and environment; e.g. 2 wing chairs
- Travelling stadium commons: bringing parliament to the people
- Improved training and remuneration for CO staff