

Report on Parliamentary Officers' Study Program
organized by Parliament of Canada

I was nominated to attend the Parliamentary Officers' Study Program organized by the Parliament of Canada from April 18 to 29, 2010. The Program started off with the registration of the participants on the 18th April, 2010. Besides me (representing the Parliament of India), there were participants from the Parliaments of Australia, Bhutan, Croatia, Finland, Nigeria, Pakistan and Thailand. There was also one participant from the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories (Canada).

The Program over the next 9 days covered a varied subject of interest and contained the following topics --

- How Canadians Govern Themselves
- The role of the Second Chamber
- Legislative Process
- Daily Programs in the Senate and the House of Commons
- International & Interparliamentary Affairs
- Journals & Private Members' Business
- Impartiality of Table Officers & Relations with Members of Parliament
- Technical Systems in the Chamber
- Library of Parliament
- Role of a Member of Parliament
- Office of the Law Clerk & Parliament Council
- Table Research Branch
- Financial Cycle & Business Supply
- Committees
- Role of a Senator
- Administrative Setting of the House of Commons
- Strategic Planning
- Financial Management
- Human Resource Management
- Senate Legislative System & Broadcasting
- Ethics Regime for Parliamentarians

Besides the above-mentioned structured programs, there were visits organized to attend the Sessions of both the House of Commons & the Senate ; visit to the Parliament Library ; Meetings with the Speakers and the Clerks ; and interactive Sessions with the officers of the Canadian Parliament and other participants.

Some of the key features of the Canadian Parliament that I found worth noting and mentioning here are :-

- The Senate (Upper House) is an appointed House of 105 Members. The Members once appointed remain a Member until they attain the age of 75 years. The Members are appointed at the discretion of the Prime Minister. This peculiar feature allows the Senate to take different stand on issues as they do not have to go to the electorate for votes. There have been instances of Members resigning their seats because of the extremely long tenure.
- The Senate also acts as the divorce Court of Canada.
- Unlike the Indian System, Ministers who are Members of one House are not allowed to enter the other House. Most of the Members of the Cabinet are chosen from the House of Commons and the Government Leader in the Senate is appointed a Minister which leaves him/her answerable to the Senate on behalf of the Government - be it answering questions or reply to a debate.
- In so far as the functioning of the Committees is concerned, whenever a witness is called to appear before the Committee, such meetings are held in public. The Committees also hear witnesses through video conferencing.
- Subject Specialists are recruited as analysts who provide assistance to various Parliamentary Committees. Therefore, in a Committee, the Clerk acts as the Process Expert and the Analyst as the Content Expert.
- The Parliament Library Service is common to both the Houses.
- The Parliamentary privileges have not been codified and cases are dealt with an individual merit.

The Program, as may be seen, was quite exhaustive and informative. The interactive Sessions proved rather useful in not only understanding but led to constructive discussions on the methods being adopted/ followed by different Parliaments in their working.

On the whole, the Program was quite informative and helped me personally to better understand the functioning of the Parliaments of some other countries. It also gave me an opportunity to meet and interact officers from other Parliaments.

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