

Office of Joint Secretary (GA)

I was nominated to attend the Parliamentary Officers' Study Program at the Parliament of Canada held from 3-13 February 2014. The details of the program are enclosed.

The program offered an in depth understanding of the Canadian Political and Parliamentary System with the presentations being made by senior officers of both Houses of Parliament on a wide spectrum of issues ranging from the Political System to International Affairs, Table Office, Legislative Process and IT related advancements, Office Management, Committees, Office of the Law Clerk, the Broadcasting Directorate, Human Relations Management, Strategic Planning, Office of the Auditor General, Library of the Parliament and the Ethics Regime for the Parliamentarians.

In all, there were 12 participants – three from the Canadian Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador, Legislative Assembly of Ontario and National Assembly of Quebec each; one each from Germany, Kenya, Ghana, Guernsey, Hong Kong, Iceland and India and two participants from Thailand. The list of participants is enclosed.

One of the most interesting features of this training program was the fact that joint presentations on each topic were made by officers of both the Houses in a completely coordinated manner thereby making it very easy for the trainees to understand the differences and similarities between the two Houses. As Secretary-General is aware, the Senate in Canada is a nominated body while the House of Commons is an elected one. We also got the opportunity to view the Speaker's parade, the President of the Senate's Parade as well as Prime Minister's Question Hour in the House of Commons. Since we were attending this Question Hour one day prior to the presentation of the Budget in Parliament, we witnessed the interesting exchange of issues between the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper and the Leader of the Opposition. We also got to see the new and upcoming leader of the Liberal Party (currently the second largest opposition) - Mr. Justin Trudeau.

The Senate of Canada is presently under intense scrutiny because a scam of excess claim of travel expenses by three Members has rocked it. In fact, on the day we called on the President of the Senate, Senator Noel A. Kinsella, three Members were charge-sheeted and the Auditor General office was auditing their bills. Simultaneously, the new Leader of the Liberal Party Mr. Justine Trudeau announced that the Liberal Party Senators in the House will no longer be a part of the Party and can consider themselves independent. In a Senate where only two parties are represented, the Conservatives and the Liberals, such an announcement by the Opposition Leader has led to a lot of internal churning about the relevance of a nominated and ageing Senate in a democratic set-up.

Most of the presentations were very frank and forthcoming while describing the problems facing the Senate today.

I also had separate meetings with the Clerk of the Senate Mr. Gary W. O'Brien as well as Mr. Eric Janse, Clerk Assistant and Director General to look at the feasibility of Senate to Senate interaction between the Rajya Sabha and the Canadian Senate. Both officers were highly receptive to the idea. The Clerk suggested that we could write a formal letter in this connection and assured that there would be a favourable response.

The meetings with the President of the Senate – Rt. Hon. Senator Noel A. Kinsella, Speaker of the House of Commons – Hon. Andrew Sheer, Clerk of the Senate – Mr. Gary W. O'Brien, Clerk of the House of Commons – Ms. Audrey O'Brien and Ms. Sonia L'Heureuz – Parliamentary Librarian, were very productive and the dignitaries were extremely happy that an officer from the Indian Parliament was attending the training programme. It was a good learning experience and very informative to have discussions with all the above dignitaries.

There were some interesting areas which I feel could be studied by our officers for adoption. They are as follows –

- (a) The instant Stenographic Machine which all Parliamentary Reporters and Stenographers use. As they punch the stenographic annotations on the machine, the total script appears on the computer screen. This was demonstrated during our meeting itself and the discussions we had were punched in by the Reporter and instantly displayed on the screen.
- (b) Officers of the Table have a detailed morning discussion everyday before the Session so that they are clear as to what are the points that have to be discussed. In this meeting, only the officers are present and we as observers were permitted to sit in the meeting. It was interesting to see the frank discussions especially the role of the Journal Office in the Canadian Parliament which deals with holding informal discussions with Party Whips to find out the course of events for the next day's business in the House.
- (c) The Parliament Boutique – the Parliament of Canada has a very nice Boutique with cups, T-shirts and several other Canadian mementoes being sold. The boutique offers a 20% discount on the prices to all Members and also provides them with a service of personalized gifts which means Members can have their names

inscribed on some of these souvenirs before they purchase it for gifting to others.

A set of all the documents made available as detailed below is put up for kind perusal.

1. Official Program;
2. A brochure from Parliamentary Library containing leaflets on Educational Programs and Resources; Teachers Institute; Ask the Library; Committees Practical Guide (Ninth Edition – Revised); Party Standings of 41st Parliament; Order Papers & Notice Papers; House of Commons Debates; Organization Structure; Current and Emerging Issues; and a Hindi Version of information on Parliament of Canada – Democracy in Action;
3. Brochure on the Senate Communications containing information booklets on The Speaker of the Senate; FAQs about The Senate of Canada; Canada A Constitutional Monarchy; The Senate Speaker's Parade; At Work in the Senate; The Salon de la Francophonie – One of the Treasures of Parliament; The Speaker of the House of Commons; The Memorial Chamber; The Parliament Buildings, The Library of Parliament; The Parliament of Canada Democracy in Action; At work in the House of Commons; How Canadians Govern Themselves; The Senate today; Canadian Aboriginal Art at the Senate; Our Country, Our Parliament; Biography of the Speaker of the Senate – Honourable Noel A. Kinsella; and papers on A Week in the Senate and Canada Factsheets;
4. Guide to the Canadian House of Common;
5. Glossary of Parliamentary Procedure.

(Sharada Subramaniam)
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Secretary-General