
OPINION

Calling MPs: time's running out to have your say on parliamentary experience

By SAMARA CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY STAFF (/AUTHOR/SAMARA-CENTRE-FOR-DEMOCRACY-STAFF) JUN 19, 2019

Samara Centre for Democracy is interested in learning what MPs believe they need to be effective in their work representing constituents, reviewing legislation, scrutinizing the government, and serving on committees.



MPs posed for one last photo before the move from Centre Block to West Block. *Bernard Thibodeau photograph courtesy of the House of Commons*

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*“There’s no orientation. There is no training. There is nothing on how to be effective.” – former MP Reg Alcock, *Tragedy in the Commons**

For the past month, the Samara Centre for Democracy has been urging all Members of Parliament to take part in our 2019 MP Survey. We’re grateful to the members from all parties who have taken the time to respond anonymously, and wish to encourage those who haven’t already responded to take a few minutes and make sure their voices are heard. In particular, we’re seeking MPs’ opinions on the orientation they received, and what they wish they had known when they started the job.

Over a decade ago, the Samara Centre set out to improve Canadian politics by interviewing former MPs about the challenges facing our political system. As the quote from former MP Reg Alcock demonstrates, the results were often disturbing: many former MPs felt they received little meaningful orientation for the job, despite the immense pressures they faced and the complex procedures that govern Parliament.

Four years ago, we began to complement our MP exit interviews with annual surveys of serving MPs. While the exit interviews allow former politicians to take a deeper look at the operation of Canadian democracy with the benefit of hindsight, the surveys ensure that we know what issues current MPs are facing, and whether any progress has been made responding to the challenges MPs identified previously.

Prior surveys focused on MPs’ perceptions of incivility in the House of Commons. We found that MPs don’t like heckling, but that it’s really a symptom of broader problems in the state of debate. In 2018, we partnered with the All-Party Democracy Caucus to ask MPs how well Parliament performed in a range of areas, and what reforms they would support to strengthen the institution and empower individual members. The results helped to inform several of the reform proposals considered by MPs this spring.

This time, we’re asking MPs to reflect on their experiences in the 42nd Parliament, including the training they received when they arrived on the Hill. We’re interested in learning what MPs believe they need to be effective in their work representing constituents, reviewing legislation, scrutinizing the government, and serving on committees.

For example, should MPs receive media training? What about coaching on how to review the annual department spending estimates? Is it more important for MPs to know how to manage their staff or how to safeguard their mental health? And what advice would MPs give to new MPs arriving this fall? In a time when technology is changing how MPs communicate with citizens and the political discourse is growing increasingly polarized, it’s crucial to understand how the daily work of an MP is changing, and whether MPs have the resources they need to meet the demands they face.

Knowing the highs and lows of the 42nd Parliament, and the value that MPs give to training on different aspects of their job will help to ensure the next cohort of MPs is better prepared to handle their new responsibilities from day one. So if you’re an MP and want your voice to be heard, please take a few minutes to answer the survey and join your colleagues who have already responded.

Both digital and hard copies of the survey have been sent to all MPs, but please contact info@samaracanada.com (mailto:info@samaracanada.com) if you would like another copy. And if you aren’t an MP, please join us in encouraging your federal representative to participate in this vital research.

Samara Centre for Democracy is a non-partisan charity that advocates for citizenship engagement.