

EMBARGOED until 12:01 am, July 25, 2018

To request an advance copy of the report or set up an interview, please contact:
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Former Members of Parliament report increased constituency casework and events getting in the way of parliamentary role and meaningful consultation

MP: "I did not put my name on a ballot so that I could do more of that work."

Toronto, July 25, 2018— With Parliament adjourned for the summer, Members of Parliament are busy in their ridings, looking to connect with constituents on the "barbecue circuit."

Canadians perceive MPs as increasingly remote and disconnected, despite the fact that MPs actually spend more time in their local communities than ever before. On the flip side, former MPs admitted in a series of exit interviews that they didn't know how to effectively engage citizens.

Since 2011, The Samara Centre for Democracy has performed over 134 exit interviews with MPs, the first and only example of this practice. In 2014, Samara released a book based on this ground-breaking research, the #1 National Bestseller *Tragedy in the Commons*.

Most recently, Samara interviewed 54 former MPs who sat in the 41st Parliament. We interviewed Members from all parties and from the front bench and back. They tell a story of frustration with the lack of opportunities or resources to meaningfully consult constituents, and of constituency offices overburdened by casework.

What former MPs said

- Constituency work overwhelms their time and uses up a lot of their staff's resources.
- They feel intense pressure from party leaders and constituents to be physically present at an ever-increasing number of events in the community.
- Casework—helping constituents overcome problems accessing public services—occupies a huge, and apparently growing, share of staff time and resources.
- Many reported feeling they were unable to engage meaningfully and consult constituents. They reported relying on traditional methods like town hall meetings, despite feeling they were just hearing from the same small subset of constituents over and over again.



Why it matters

- When MPs commit resources to constituency work, they have fewer resources and staff to help them with their essential parliamentary work of scrutinizing Government.
- The “barbecue circuit” provides few opportunities for substantive exchange or consultation with constituents.
- Problems with public services could be more equitably and fairly solved by focusing on solving system-wide problems, rather than only assisting the constituents who come looking for help piecemeal. At worst, using constituency offices for casework creates the potential for some citizens to receive preferential treatment.
- MPs want to find better ways to connect with, hear from, and speak to constituents. But to do so they need more time, resources, and support.

Beyond the Barbecue is the second in a series of three reports that make a case for MPs who are independent and empowered, thoughtful and engaged in three environments: Parliament, the constituency, and the party. The report also recommends a variety of reforms.

“Constituency offices should be reimagined as civic hubs and outposts of Parliament, rather than service centres,” says Jane Hilderman, Samara’s Executive Director. “This vision is achievable, but it requires institutional change such as professionalizing constituency offices in order to free them from casework, and dedicating more of their capacity to experimenting with innovative forms of public engagement and consultation.”

Please contact José Ramón Martí if you would like to receive an embargoed copy of *Beyond the Barbecue: Reimagining constituency work for local democratic engagement*.

**The full report will be available at 12:01 a.m.
on July 25, 2018 at the following link:
samaracanada.com/beyond-the-barbecue**



About Samara's MP Exit Interviews Project

From 2008 to 2011, The Samara Centre for Democracy conducted the first-ever systematic series of exit interviews with former Members of Parliament. In total, 80 interviews took place in the homes and communities of former MPs who sat in the 38th, 39th and 40th Parliaments (2004-2011). The discussions formed the basis of a series of research reports and the bestselling book *Tragedy in the Commons*.

Last year, Samara again reached out to past representatives, this time to MPs who had sat in the 41st Parliament (2011-2015) and who resigned or were defeated in the 2015 general election. We wanted to understand if the MPs' roles were changing—for better or worse. This research produced more than 100 hours of interviews with 54 MPs representing all parties and all parts of the country. *Flip the Script*, the first report in the new series, focuses on MPs in Parliament and is available at samaracanada.com/flip-the-script. The third in the series will be out this fall.



About The Samara Centre for Democracy

The Samara Centre for Democracy (formerly Samara Canada) is a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canada's democracy, making it more accessible, responsive, and inclusive. Samara produces action-based research—as well as tools and resources for active citizens and public leaders—designed to engage Canadians in their democracy.

To learn more about how our research and educational programming is building better politics and a better Canada, visit samaracanada.com.

