

Stacking up who's talking (or not) on Parliament Hill

Samara finds New Democrats register most words, with NDP MP Peter Julian most talkative

CBC NEWS

Published on: May 13, 2013

A charitable organization that studies Canada's democracy wants to get tongues wagging on the Hill by talking about, well, talking.

In honour of the summer reading season, Samara studied how much MPs and parties spoke in the House of Commons in 2012 and matched some members up with notable works of Canadian literature.

For example, NDP MP Peter Julian said 226,027 words in the House of Commons last year, the most among the 302 MPs counted in the survey.

That compares with the word count in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*.

Julian's top rank might have been helped along by a filibuster he mounted as NDP finance critic last spring – voicing many objections to the federal budget in a 13-hour speech that stretched over two-and-a-half days of sitting time in the House of Commons.

The MP who said the fewest number of words in 2012 was Fisheries and Oceans Minister Keith Ashfield, whose 922 words matches up with the content of the Robert W. Service poem and children's book *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. Ashfield was sidelined last October after suffering a heart attack.

All in all, the roughly 8 million words said in the House in 2012 would be enough to fill 28 copies of Pierre Berton's *War of 1812*, according to Samara.

NDP MPs speak the most

Despite making up 53 per cent of the House, Conservative MPs spoke 36 per cent of those approximately 8 million words – including 28 of the 30 quietest federal politicians.

The NDP, with 33 per cent of the MPs, spoke the most of any party at 44 per cent. Five of the top ten spots of most talkative members were New Democrats.

The Liberals (16 per cent of words, 11 per cent of MPs) and Green Party leader Elizabeth May (0.3 per cent of the 308-member House, but 2 per cent of the words) spoke above their weight.

Meanwhile, the Bloc Québécois had both one per cent of MPs and one per cent of the words, while Independent MPs Bruce Hyer and Peter Goldring spoke 0.4 of the words in the House.

Female MPs, who make up 25 per cent of the House of Commons, had 31 per cent of the words.

MPs under age 35, who constitute 9 per cent of the Commons, only factored into 11 per cent of what was said.

May more than doubles other leaders

Speaking of Elizabeth May, the lone Green Party MP spoke up third-most from the back bench, saying 174,783 words – the equivalent of Naomi Klein's *No Logo*.

A copy of *A Complicated Kindness* by Miriam Toews matches the 76,447 words then-Liberal leader Bob Rae said.

For the record, current Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau said the least of all Liberal MPs counted with 5,408 words.

NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair's 44,498 words would be enough to fill Rick Mercer's *A Nation Worth Ranting About*.

Finally, Prime Minister and soon-to-be hockey history book author Stephen Harper's word count of 26,758 matched up with Kim Thuy's *Ru*.

Bloc Québécois leader Daniel Paillé couldn't be counted in the survey because he doesn't hold a seat in the House.

Look who's talking (or not): the top tens

To calculate its results, Samara examined 54 days of debate in three periods of 2012, then projected those word counts over the full 129 days the House sat that year.

The study didn't include words spoken in parliamentary committees and used the English translation of words spoken in French.

Three MPs who resigned in 2012 (Bev Oda, Lee Richardson, Denise Savoie) were not counted at all, nor were three other MPs who regularly sat in the Speaker's chair (Andrew Scheer, Barry Devolin, Bruce Stanton.)

Three MPs who arrived following the Nov. 26 byelections (Erin O'Toole, Murray Rankin, Joan Crockatt) were not counted in the MP totals.

Top ten most-talkative MPs

1. Peter Julian, Burnaby—New Westminster (NDP) = 226,027
2. Kevin Lamoureux, Winnipeg North (Liberal) = 222,451
3. Elizabeth May, Saanich—Gulf Islands (Green) = 174,783
4. Kellie Leitch, Simcoe—Grey (Conservative) = 120,835
5. Jack Harris, St. John's East (NDP) = 113,819
6. Roger Cuzner, Cape Breton—Canso (Liberal) = 87,687

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2013/05/10/pol-mps-talking-words-in-house.html>

7. Lisa Raitt, Halton (Conservative) = 87,591
8. Libby Davies, Vancouver East (NDP) = 85,689
9. Don Davies, Vancouver Kingsway (NDP) = 85,360
10. Jinny Sims, Newton—North Delta (NDP) = 82,770

Top ten quietest MPs

1. Keith Ashfield, Fredericton (Conservative) = 922
2. Rob Anders, Calgary West (Conservative) = 963
3. Peter Penashue, Labrador (Conservative, currently contesting a byelection after March 14 resignation) = 977
4. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon, Miramichi (Conservative) = 1,051
5. Alice Wong, Richmond (Conservative) = 1,068
6. Mark Strahl, Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon (Conservative) = 1,135
7. Rodney Weston, Saint John (Conservative) = 1,369
8. Diane Ablonczy, Calgary—Nose Hill (Conservative) = 1,641
9. Blaine Calkins, Wetaskiwin (Conservative) = 1,667
10. Earl Dreeshen, Red Deer (Conservative) = 1,670

Note: Cabinet minister Keith Ashfield suffered a heart attack in mid-Oct. 2012 and was therefore absent due to illness for part of the time studied to compile this list.