

Promoting Democracy Abroad: What Role for Canadian Legislators?

Hosted by the Carleton Initiative for Parliamentary and Diplomatic Engagement
in partnership with Canada's all-party Democracy Caucus

Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2018, at 4:45 p.m.
Sir John A. Macdonald Building
144 Wellington St., Ottawa

Remarks from Members of Parliament who formed the Democracy Caucus

- Anita Vandenbeld, M.P., Nepean-Ottawa West
- Elizabeth May, M.P., Saanich-Gulf Islands
- Kennedy Stewart, M.P., Burnaby-South
- Randy Hoback, M.P., Prince Albert

Presentation by

- Jean-Paul Ruszkowski, chief executive officer of the Parliamentary Centre

Panelists

- [Kevin Deveaux](#), parliamentary and political party development adviser
- [Peter Dimitroff](#), senior governance advisor and development program director
- [Jacqueline O'Neill](#), president of Inclusive Security

Moderator

- Maureen Boyd, director of the Carleton Initiative for Parliamentary and Diplomatic Engagement
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Maureen Boyd welcoming remarks

- Panel will examine the role of Canadian legislators in promoting democracy around the world

Anita Vandenbeld introduces the Democracy Caucus

- Debut of the all-party Democracy Caucus in Canada
 - Mandate is to promote healthy democracy within the country and abroad
- Members met with [Community of Democracies](#) and major political parties
 - Takeaway: each parliament goes back and creates their own democracy caucus to promote and ensure democracy
- What can be done to promote democracy in Canada?
 - Work across parties
 - Talk to each other about how to make processes and institutions work better
- Democratic gains made abroad in 1990s are not solidified
- Ruling party members world-wide pay attention to Canadian parliamentarians
 - Canadian leaders must support democracies in countries that are not as fortunate, where legislators face dangers for doing their work

Elizabeth May raises key questions

- How to create a more courteous and respectful environment for democracy to exist?
- How to respect the rights of individual MPs and their differences?
- How to work across party lines to achieve this?

Kennedy Stewart remarks

- MPs and backbenchers supported his book titled “Turning Parliament Inside Out”
 - Ideas were unanimously accepted against will of government at the time
 - An example of how individual parliamentarians can support notions of democracy

Randy Hoback remarks

- Parliamentarians around the world can take away from lessons in Canada
 - Learn from Canada’s mistakes and achievements

Jean-Paul Ruszkowski, CEO of the [Parliamentary Centre](#), gives presentation

- Today’s meeting coincides with the release of the 2017 democracy index
 - Results show democracy is weakening in nearly all regions of the world
 - Canada is rated sixth, below some Scandinavian countries
- Why is there a democracy deficit and what can legislators do about it?
 - Most governments are too preoccupied with pushing their own agendas
 - Political elites are largely disconnected from electorate
- Due to lack of resources, Canada is withdrawing from parliamentary work
 - Canada still seen as beacon of democratic governance and a trusted partner
 - Disenfranchised communities most affected by poor governance
 - Trust between politicians and electorate at the crux
- Moving forward
 - Unequal distribution of global wealth jeopardizes sustainable development and security
 - Close the gender equality gap which exists even in established democracies
 - Keep in mind aging population and youth
 - Impacts of the digital revolution

Maureen Boyd introduces panelists

- Three Canadians who work for non-Canadian organizations abroad

Question: What should be done to promote democracy abroad, and what is the downside of Canada not participating?

Kevin Deveaux responds

- This is an opportunity to use our democratic knowledge to ensure positive things happen
 - Not all groups we work with represent the values and brands of Canada
 - The challenge is to serve our notions of democracy in a cohesive, coherent, long-term way that can be translated to other societies

Question: How can governments and parties make strides toward increasing more women in politics?

Jacqueline O'Neill responds

- Politics is the final frontier of women's engagement in society
 - Canada is talking about a feminist agenda and shifting power dynamics
 - What you learn and experience at home is a blueprint of the state
 - Ex. Power relations in the home
- How women are treated is a predictor of state stability
 - Democracies with higher rates of violence against women are often less stable than non-democracies
- Women's growth is slow, but has a positive trajectory

Question: What are the advantages of working with Parliaments and parliamentarians as opposed to developing programs by sectors?

Peter Dimitroff responds

- Canadian values are injected into democracy, international and multi-national programs
 - Ex. Peacekeeping in the past
- Parliamentary support programs are important because:
 - It is cost effective to work within institutions
 - It acts as a force multiplier leading to interaction with development groups
 - It means regular engagement with parliament and executive
- Canada remains a model in the conduct and approach that MPs take toward their jobs
 - U.S. is losing its legitimacy as a serious nation
 - Funding and support is on decline under current U.S. administration
 - U.S. is applying "America first" principles of foreign development

Question: Given your experience as a former legislator, what should Canadian legislators do?

Kevin Deveaux answers

- Parliamentarians can better comprehend connections between military and sustaining democracy
 - There can be a lack of political understanding in international development – an inability to see the world through a political lens
- How can parliamentarians build on and understand what is happening?
 - Identify root causes and the challenges
 - Work with francophone countries
 - Build trust with other legislators and listen to what they have to say

Jacqueline O'Neill responds

- Top military members should be met with top military members – same as in parliament
- Increase participation of women globally in peace building, constitution processes, etc.
 - Rate of progress will hit 50 per cent of women in parliament in 50 years
 - Focus should be on women in countries emerging from conflict
 - Bring women into discussions on foundational decisions

Question: Are there specific contexts that Canada should be operating in?

Peter Dimitroff responds

- There is no hard and fast rule
 - Stay out of Iraq and Afghanistan due to cost and dynamics
 - Stay away from quagmire-ish stuff

Jacqueline O'Neill disagrees

- Conflict environment is an important space, if filled intelligently
 - Canada's voice matters in these areas on an international level
 - Ex. Canada's opinion on police oversight
- Canada's national action plan on peace and security
 - This is our brand – our brand increases as the U.S. brand declines

Kevin Deveaux comments

- Agrees that conflict countries should not be ignored
 - The key is for Canada to prioritize deep and long-term relations
- Development takes time – sometimes 10 to 15 or more years
 - Government of Canada priorities change every four years
 - Canada must identify priority countries to invest in and emphasize civil society

Maureen Boyd's last question: How can technology, including artificial intelligence, be best used?

Kevin Deveaux responds

- Committee set up low technology SMS systems so citizens could report concerns
 - Ex. If a school or road is not properly built
 - Creates a direct link to civil communities

Peter Dimitroff says

- Everyone has cell phones and can communicate in virtual spaces in absence of the physical space to gather and share ideas
 - Ex. Enables women in low-level agriculture to get a sense of market prices

Jacqueline O'Neill states

- Technology has highly gendered impact
 - Benefits include:
 - Gives women chance to organize and mobilize in new ways
 - Enables women to share their experiences in politics and government
 - Brings young people into the development picture
 - Risks include:
 - Online and in-person misogyny
 - Mass mobilization in systems that are unaware how to engage online
- AI has no social or political lens, unlike government
 - Ex. Google algorithms, automated job postings, Siri on phone

Comment from the audience: Democracy is an elusive term – Canada must be careful of what we are promoting when we say we are promoting democracy

Question from the audience: Why are we not promoting electronic voting systems?

Kevin Deveaux reacts

- The world is not ready for electronic voting systems
 - Consider the value of going to the poll and marking a ballot
 - Some people will face prohibitions and barriers that discourage them from voting
- Back to the earlier comment, when it comes to building democracy in other countries
 - Canada must be aware of the context, and the systems and best practices to be shared within the context of particular countries

Questions from the audience:

Is there hope when it comes to Indigenous legislators in Canada?

Why are we promoting democracy abroad? If no one asked for it, then what are we really doing?

How can we share Canadian values abroad without forcing them?

Peter Dimitroff responds

- In countries coming out of conflict, with informal or traditional institutions, it is important to try to support traditional dialogue and build up modern institutions
 - To ignore them would be a recipe for disaster
 - Ex. Afghanistan
 - As ad hoc councils emerge, it is important to recognize how to support them

Jacqueline O'Neill weighs in

- Cautions against holding back involvement, even without all the answers
 - Learn from wrongdoings
- Promotion versus responsiveness
 - Who is asking who for what answers? Are we looking for a power shift?
- Canada has a role in direct relations with civil organizations representing women

Question from the audience: How do parliament and civil society organizations go hand in hand in declining democratic spaces? What is the role of support to women's organizations?

Question from the audience: Where do you see democratic promotion fitting in when it comes to democratic competition and elections?

Maureen Boyd invites all panelists to give their last responses and remarks

Kevin Deveaux's last remarks

- Growing trend toward integration of civil society and government
 - More opportunities for political parties to extend reach and build support
 - Identify and promote women who can become leaders in their community
 - Parliamentarians need to look into whether Canada's policies support this

- Canada suffers from not having research institutes/foundations attached to major political parties as do Germany, U.S., U.K., the Netherlands and other countries that would allow parliamentarism to work together across borders

Jacqueline O'Neill concludes

- It is amazing to see the progress in certain dimensions of democracy
- Prioritize strengthening the capacity of select civil organizations in new democracies
 - Support for vulnerable women facing violent extremism, reduced free speech
 - Allows Canada to avoid engaging directly in political process

Peter Dimitroff closes

- Most U.S. programs have a civil society component
 - Some populations are not prepared to properly engage with parliaments
 - It is difficult to work with countries who cannot peacefully accept a loss
- Ex-elected and current officials are in the best positions to lead in democracy promotion

End of panel discussion

Carleton University president Dr. Alastair Summerlee gives closing remarks

- Canada's new multi-party democracy caucus is important
 - It shows that good governance can happen with the collaborative work of parliamentarians, civil society, universities, and individuals
 - It also takes the efforts of business and industry which was not discussed today
- Canada still needs to be aware and diligent about:
 - U.S.'s withdrawal in democratic processes around the world
 - Inclusion of Indigenous communities and thinking around how to engage them
 - Increasing the rate of women in parliaments worldwide
 - Changing demographics linked to ongoing changes in democracy

Discussion summary prepared by Dana Hatherly, Master of Journalism student, Carleton University