



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
to the 19th Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar**

**Canadian Branch of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**

Edinburgh, Scotland

October 28 to November 3, 2007

The Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was represented by the Hon. Joan Fraser, Senator and the Executive Secretary of the Branch at the 19th Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar held in Edinburgh, Scotland from October 28 to November 3, 2007 and has the honour to present its

Report

This annual Seminar provides delegates from around the Commonwealth with the opportunity to meet with and develop working relationships with their parliamentary colleagues. The theme for the 19th Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar was “*Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy*” and brought together 39 parliamentarians representing all regions within the Commonwealth. Among the delegates were several presiding officers, including the Speakers of St. Lucia; the newly appointed Speaker of New Brunswick and the host of the Seminar, Alex Fergusson, MSP and Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament.

“Learning about practices and procedures elsewhere enables Members to come to a better understanding of the reasons for adopting the particular practices and Standing Orders of their Parliaments. The Seminar is held in a different Region of the Commonwealth each year.”

The objectives for the longstanding continuation of this particular activity sponsored by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) include:

- assisting Members in refining and expanding their notions of good governance;
- assisting Members in sharing information and learning from other Commonwealth Parliamentarians; and
- promoting an interest in the work of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The Official Opening Ceremonies for the Seminar were held in the Debating Chamber of the Scottish Parliament, where delegates were welcomed by officers of the Scottish Parliament and entertained by a local children’s choir. A highlight of the opening ceremony was the music provided by the choir which sang folksongs from around the Commonwealth. Following the official opening remarks by the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament and host of the Seminar, Alex Ferguson, MSP, delegates were provided with a tour of the newly opened Parliament Building. As a newly devolved state within the United Kingdom, the Scottish people are extremely proud of their very forward-looking parliamentary building, and it has been designed and built to ensure openness and transparency in the workings of their parliamentarians.

The tour ended with the delivery of the delegates to a meeting room where the first Session was held. Discussion topics for the Seminar included:

- The History and Role of the Commonwealth and the CPA
- Parliamentary and Political Scene in Scotland
- The Role of the Speaker/Presiding Officer
- The MP and the Political Party

- Future Forum: Political Café
- Standing Orders
- The Right to Information
- Legislature, the Executive and the Public Service
- The Role of the Ombudsman
- The Relationship Between Parliament and the People: Parliamentary Ethics, Transparency and Accountability
- Parliamentary Committees and the Committee System
- Financial Scrutiny of the Executive
- Gender, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights
- The Role and Responsibilities of an MP

The issues of access to information; the role of the ombudsman, questions of ethics, transparency and accountability as well as the financial scrutiny of the Executive have been topics of growing interest to parliamentarians around the Commonwealth and have been featured at several recent CPA Conferences and Workshops.

In keeping with the usual practice of these Seminars, the discussions were led by the participants and one of the parliamentarians representing the host Branch. Senator Joan Fraser was called upon to lead the discussion on the topic of “Gender, HIV/AIDS and Human Rights”. She noted that despite progress in adopting legislation to protect the human rights of all Canadians and to eliminate discrimination on the basis of gender, race or medical conditions, all parliamentarians must remain vigilant in following up on the legislation, ensuring that implementation is not left to backslide. Many of the participants agreed that once legislation on these issues has been adopted, there is a tendency to “check it off the list” and assume that it is being implemented smoothly.

Throughout the discussions on the various topics, parliamentarians had the opportunity to learn of the difficulties of smaller legislative bodies to fulfill their responsibilities as a result of small staffs and little or no research support for individual members regarding legislation and policy studies. This is particularly apparent in the specific areas of financial scrutiny of the Executive; ensuring access to information not only for their citizens, but also for the parliamentarians themselves. The exchanges between the participants were informative and useful in identifying best practices and policies implemented in legislative bodies of various sizes.

An integral part of these annual Seminars is the opportunity it provides to the host Branch to introduce the delegates to various aspects of their country’s culture, history and current economic drivers. This was also the case with the 19th Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar. Delegates were taken on a day-long tour of Scotland which included opportunities to experience the historic aspects of its culture along with visiting a state-of-the-art science and technology museum located in Glasgow. The day ended at a dinner hosted by the Lord Mayor and council members of the Glasgow City Council.

Despite the somewhat heavy schedule of meetings and discussions, the delegates found themselves disappointed when the Seminar ended as it had provided them with the opportunity to network and learn from their parliamentary colleagues from other Westminster-style parliamentary systems.

The Canadian Branch wishes to extend to the host Scottish Branch, CPA, their thanks and gratitude for the excellence of the program, professionalism of the Seminar Staff and the warmth of their hospitality through the Seminar.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair,
Canadian Branch
of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) on behalf of the
Hon. Joan Fraser, Senator

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	19 th Commonwealth Parliamentary Seminar
DESTINATION	Edinburgh, Scotland
DATES	October 28 – November 3, 2007
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Joan Fraser
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Ms. Carol Chafe, Executive Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 4,790.40
ACCOMMODATION	\$
HOSPITALITY	\$
PER DIEMS	\$ 699.04
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$
TOTAL	\$ 5,194.47