



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation regarding
the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Annual
International Seminar**

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

**Delhi, Republic of India
November 19 – 24, 2011**

Report

This year's seminar was held in New Delhi, India and the theme was "Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy." There were 29 attendees representing each region in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association designs this seminar to be particularly useful to new members of Parliament. The goals of this seminar were centred around helping Members understand and expand their ideas of good governance through presentations and discussions on various subjects. These topics included:

- The Commonwealth and the Role of the CPA
- The Parliamentary and Political Scene in India
- The Role of the Presiding Officer, The Parliamentary Staff and the Standing Orders
- The MP and the Political Party
- Parliamentary Ethics, Transparency and Accountability
- Parliamentary Committees and the Committee System
- The Relationship between Parliament and the People
- Financial Scrutiny of the Executive
- Services for MPs
- Right to Information
- Parliament, Gender and Human Rights
- Parliament and HIV/AIDS

Also included in the program was participation in a Cultural Programme and dinner with the Honourable Speaker of the Indian Parliament, as well as a day long trip to Agra to view the Taj Mahal and Fort. For delegates who had never been to India, this was a wonderful opportunity to experience the country's rich history.

Mr. Gill was directly involved in two of the sessions. He was honoured to Chair the session on Parliamentary Ethics, Transparency and Accountability. This is an extremely important topic and vital to the ongoing health of global democracy. The Hon. Jim Wilkinson of Tasmania, Australia gave the presentation. Many thought provoking questions and comments were raised in the following discussion.

Mr. Gill also had the privilege of delivering a presentation on the topic of the Relationship between Parliament and the People and discussed the importance of remembering that in a democracy the ultimate power of the state lies with the people. It is therefore extremely important that Members of Parliament maintain open communication and receive continuous feedback from constituents. This is a two-way street however, not only do Members of Parliament need to reach out to their constituents, but it is equally important to have engaged citizens. In many of our Commonwealth countries, this engagement is waning. There are many reasons why citizens may choose to disengage. As MPs, one needs to acknowledge and be aware of what causes disengagement in our communities. Two major reasons for disengagement are the lack of transparency around government spending and the fact that many of our Parliaments are not representative of the population, lacking women, visible minorities and those with physical disabilities.

In the conversation that followed, the issue of voter turnout was highlighted and it was interesting to learn about Australia's approach to this growing concern. In Australia, voting is mandatory and if you do not vote you have to be able to explain why you were unable to do so. If your explanation is not deemed acceptable you may be subject to a fine. It was intriguing to speculate how such a system would affect Canadian politics and public sentiment.

In this session, as in others, it was fascinating to learn about the significant differences that exist within the Commonwealth even though we all use the Westminster System. For instance, in the Indian Parliament, all committee meetings are held in camera and Ministers never appear before committees. This is a significant difference to the Canadian parliamentary process. As well, the Indian Parliament does not elect its speaker by secret ballot. The speaker is elected by a show of hands and the Opposition parties have to agree on which candidates may run for the position.

The presentation and discussion on the Financial Scrutiny of the Executive was another productive session. Ms. Margaret McDougall, MSP, presented on Scotland's developing system and their determination to change what was felt to be, "the private government of public money" inherited from the Westminster system, in which often a single committee of MPs examines the entire budget for a country. She suggested that good budget scrutiny incorporates five features: a long term perspective, establishes a link to broad organizational objectives, focuses budget decisions on results and outcomes, involves and promotes communication with stakeholders and it provides incentives to government management and employees. These are excellent goals to have in mind when planning and scrutinizing a country's finances.

While all of the sessions were well prepared we often ended up following similar patterns and repeating ourselves in discussions, due to the broadness of the topics. Many of the delegates felt that the seminar required only two days as opposed to four in order to cover all of the relevant material without feeling repetitious. Overall, Mr. Gill felt it to be a great privilege to attend this seminar and to have been provided with the opportunity of meeting many colleagues from around the world.

The Canadian Branch wishes to extend many thanks to our host, the Indian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The seminar was an excellent experience due to their hospitality and planning.

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Russ Hiebert, M.P., Chair
Canadian Branch
of the Commonwealth
Parliamentary Association (CPA)

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
ACTIVITY	International Annual Seminar
DESTINATION	Delhi India
DATES	November 19 – 24, 2011
DELEGATION	
SENATE	
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Parm Gill, M.P.
STAFF	
TRANSPORTATION	\$3 670.60
ACCOMMODATION	\$0.00
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$0.00
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$3 670.60