



Parliamentary
Internship Programme



Canadian Political Science Association
Association canadienne de science politique



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA



Parliamentary Internship Programme

Bulletin

2019 - 2020



Interns' Message

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the 2019-2020 Bulletin.

The Bulletin reviews our experiences over the past year, a year that was unlike anything we could have anticipated. We would like to extend a huge thanks to the many friends and sponsors of the Programme and to our incredible Director, Dr. Anne Dance, who has been a never-ending source of inspiration and support to us all. Thank you Anne for your unrelenting dedication to the Programme. You will be missed!

- The 2019-2020 Interns

A Message from the Director

Dr. Anne Dance

In 2018-19, the program celebrated its 50th anniversary; this year's cohort has had an even more eventful year. The group's work ethic, humour, and intellectual curiosity helped them weather the many ups and downs of a fall election and spring pandemic. Hadeel, Enya, Griffyn, Chris, Myles, Shona, Robyn, Madison, and Caroline: it has been an honour to work with you. I cannot wait to hear about your next adventures.



Thanks so much to Speaker Rota who graciously serves as the Patron of the program. Charles Robert, Clerk of the House of Commons, has shared his expertise and enthusiasm with PIP, and I am very grateful for his guidance. The interns and I have been extraordinarily fortunate to work with Melissa Carrier, Senior Administrative Assistant at the House of Commons. I also want to recognize the tireless assistance of Scott Lemoine, the House of Commons Administration representative to the program. Special thanks are also due to Stephanie Seiler for her impressive work designing PIP flyers and of course this Bulletin.

Over the last four years, I have had the privilege to learn from many extraordinary people, including Dr. Silvina Danesi, Executive Director of the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA), Michelle Hopkins, Tim Howard, Dr. Garth Williams, and the board of the CPSA. I want to sincerely thank the program's alumni, sponsors and friends, all of whom see the value in this special initiative and provide crucial financial support. I have really appreciated your guidance and advice.

Although I am leaving the program to pursue new adventures, I look forward to contributing to the PIP community for many years to come. And I know that the new PIP Director, Dr. Paul Thomas, will make this great program even better.

This 2019-20 Bulletin introduces readers to [PIP's 12th director](#) and provides a lively and thorough overview of the interns' 10 months on the Hill. Their [Highlights and Insights](#) section in particular is not to be missed: it illustrates the breadth and depth of the internship experience. I hope you will enjoy reading this year's Bulletin and appreciate the interns' humour, wisdom, perseverance, and passion for Parliament.

Meet the new PIP Director

Dr. Paul EJ Thomas



Q: Why did you want to become the next PIP director?

Over the past 50 years the Parliamentary Internship Programme has been invaluable in giving young Canadians a deeper understanding of how Parliament works and its importance to our country. My experience as an intern – and especially learning about the challenges that MPs face in representing their constituents and holding governments to account - literally changed the course of my life as I switched from a planned career international democratic development to researching and working to strengthen democracy in Canada itself. I applied to be the Director in the hopes of giving the next generation of interns a similar experience where they learn the strengths of our parliamentary democracy but are also inspired to continually look for improvements.

Q: What is your vision of the Parliamentary Internship Programme?

My vision for the Parliamentary Internship Programme is for interns to become critical thinkers about how to strengthen Canadian democracy. My hope is for them to gain academic knowledge about how our democratic system is supposed to function through our weekly seminars, practical experience about how it actually works in practice through their placements with MPs, and a comparative perspective about how our democracy could operate through the comparative study tours. I also want to continue the work of my predecessor Dr. Anne Dance in making sure the Programme is accessible to Canadians from all backgrounds.

Q: As a former intern yourself, what is one of your best PIP memories?

It's so hard to choose just one, but I will never forget our study tour to the Nunavut Legislature. Seeing how the Assembly blended the traditions of the Inuit people with those of Westminster parliamentary democracy – in everything from the use of a non-partisan “consensus government” to the seal-skin coverings on the legislative seats – opened my eyes to how flexible our democratic system could be to ensure that all people are included.

Q: Who is an inspiring political figure?

After my time as a PIP I had the privilege to work for Senator Yoine Goldstein, who sadly passed away this year. He had a different path than most other Senators in that he was appointed at age 71 and worked hard to leave a legacy before he had to retire at 75. Yoine deeply believed that politicians had to be guided by ethical principles, and often quoted his version of Rabbi Hillel's three questions: “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” But he was also practical and open to compromise, urging us to “Never let the perfect be the enemy of the good.” I try to keep these lessons with me as an ideal of what politics can be.

Highlights & Insights

Hadeel Aziz

Highlight: Every part of the program was fantastic. I found that the unfettered access we had to Parliament as a space, but also to the political parties we chose to work with, was unparalleled. It's an opportunity to compare and contrast party structure and organization that you'll never get again. I'm grateful for the opportunity to learn about parties that I wouldn't be able to access otherwise and deep dive into their unique traits.

Insight: Staffers are the backbone of an MP office. While an MP must be on House Duty or in committee or attending a stream of never-ending meetings, their diligent staffers are hard at work. While MPs are extremely hard working in their own right, without the support of their staff (who do the research, the writing, the outreach, and organization), it would be impossible for MPs to carry out their jobs at such a high standard. Staffers are incredible multi-taskers, fantastic at setting priorities, and able to keep up with the rapid pace of Parliament with an enviable grace.



Enya Bouchard

Highlight: The Parliamentary Internship Programme is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience which allows us to live according to the rhythms of Parliament Hill. I genuinely enjoyed both of my placements. I was very fortunate to work with two remarkable, hard-working and inclusive MP offices from both sides of the aisle. Working as a non-partisan political staffer offers an opportunity to be at the forefront of federal politics while working on various issues beyond political cleavages. In this regard, I am very grateful to have witnessed the behind-the-scenes of our Canadian parliamentary system, in addition to developing useful professional skills.



Insight: The beginning of the 43rd Canadian Parliament, marked by Members of Parliament arrival in the House of Commons, is in many ways a continuation of a political cycle and the start of an exciting new journey. As surprising as it may seem, being an elected official is a job without a clear description. MPs have various understanding of their roles, responsibilities and expectations. In a short period of time, they must learn how to navigate through the complexity of our parliamentary democracy and existing political culture. Nonetheless, I believe most MPs entered public life with the determination to create a meaningful difference. They are dedicated to their legislative work, constituents and political party.

Griffyn Chezenko

Highlight: The PIP experience has been a huge privilege and the realization of a dream. It is hard to select just a single highlight to the year, as there have been plenty. Reporting to work daily in the Parliamentary Precinct made me feel like I'd actually 'made it' in Ottawa. Working with such a strong and passionate cohort of interns has been amazing, and to be able to share the PIP experiences with people who are as interested in Parliamentary politics as I am has been wonderful. Our meeting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was a definite high point, if only because it made my family so excited and proud to say that one of their own met the PM! I would add that the visits to several legislatures were significant personal milestones and warm memories that I shall forever cherish!



Insight: Did you know that many MPs are just regular folks? There was once a time when I would be awe-struck in the presence of MPs, who seemed like celebrities, as many are frequently on TV. Having worked with and around MPs for months now, I understand that MPs come from all walks of life. Sure, there are still high-powered athletes, businesspeople, lawyers, and political operatives that get elected and dominate the media coverage of Parliament. But there are plenty of Members who hold ordinary occupations, who are raising a family, and who are driven by a desire to positively contribute to Canadian society, even if they're not the most famous or most outspoken people. There is a palpable need for more demographic diversity on the Hill to enrich and inform decision-making and the operation of MPs' offices. Still, it was nice to learn that shy people with a passion to serve can—with some hard work and elbow grease—still get elected to our House of Commons!

Chris Coulson



Highlight: It's very hard to choose only one notable event from our Internship. We did many things, visited many countries and cities, and met a number of notable figures. One constant aspect throughout our internship was the unbelievable level of access we had all over the world. High-ranking public servants, MPs, and other politicians were always frank and nearly always open to meeting with us. Moreover, when we were working in our MPs' offices, for the most part we were considered not only members of the team, but members of the larger political caucus and part of the intimate circle. Our MPs and their staff, research staff, and staff from the Whip's office always helped us and never had any hesitation working with us. This level of access was incredible, and shocking to me. From very in-depth conversations with our MPs

to conversations with the Clerk or the Prime Minister, it always blew me away how lucky we were and are to have these frank discussions. Two other big events that I liked a lot, and were also very significant, was our visit to NATO, and my time in a Bloc Québécois office. **(Cont)**

(Cont) Insight: Surprisingly, I have gained a new found appreciation for the partisan side of politics and the House of Commons during the Programme. I had a distaste for partisanship in any form, preferring more non-partisan ways of doing politics and seeing partisanship only as a necessary evil. To be sure, the bitter partisan show we often see is toxic to Parliament and politics. Many MPs wish to move beyond it, and there are numerous reform proposals and well-established forums for non-partisan discussion (Parliamentary Groups, Caucuses, etc.). But I was unaware of all the work and effort that parties, and party staffers, do to help their MPs through parliamentary and constituency activities. This work helps engage MPs and can make them more useful to both their constituents and as legislators. Parties are dual forums for discussion, where proposals can be presented, and amendments can be discussed in a more informal setting. Parties serve as extra resources for MPs; they might not always be beneficial, but they are nonetheless extremely helpful. This realization has, in turn, helped me appreciate the more formulaic aspects of our Parliamentary democracy.

My other more philosophical insight is that Parliament, and by consequence PIP, can withstand whatever is thrown at it, and persevere. These ranged from international crises, to national unity debates, a global pandemic, and something so simple as an election. This is not only a testament to the importance of great leadership, like Dr. Dance's, but to the resiliency we build in both ourselves and our institutions. There is of course, always more work to do to make institutions, organizations, and people more flexible and resilient but the perseverance of Parliament and PIP speaks also, I think, to something fundamental about being human.

Also, Hill staffer salaries are low. They deserve more money.

Myles Goodman-Vincent

Highlight: I cannot adequately describe what this year has meant to me. It was an experience that will always stay with me. Some highlights of the year, among so many, were the engaging meetings with Members of Parliament (MPs), journalists, prime ministers, and leaders within Canada and abroad – and on top of that, to share these experiences with such an intelligent and insightful group of interns and an absolutely incredible Director, Anne. There is so much to be grateful for, so many moments to cherish, and so many thanks to give. To the cohort of 2019-2020 interns, Anne, Melissa, the MPs and their staff, PIP alumni, and all of the friends of the Programme, thank you.



Insight: In every facet of parliamentary life, from procedure to research to committees, there are countless people working very hard. Throughout this year, I constantly gained new insights into our parliamentary ecosystem, ranging from newfound understandings of the work of MPs and their staff, to the specifics of House of Commons procedure and practice, to the extensive “behind-the-scenes” work that goes on in Parliament and around it. The hard work of staffers, employees of the House of Commons, the Library of Parliament, and of so many more individuals, institutions, and organizations are an integral part of our parliamentary system. There is so much work that can often go unnoticed, but which is essential for the function of our democracy.

Shona Moreau

Highlight: I expected a lot from the Parliamentary Internship Programme, and it delivered a lot. Finding one event or experience throughout the last year is therefore difficult; they were all, sometimes strangely, fabulous (especially the wonderful people). From PIP, though, there was a uniquely important lesson I learned, one that is too important not to share. That lesson is to understand what you are fighting for. We sometimes get bogged down in ideas of how things or events should be, or consumed by specific tasks or projects. But reality can sometimes throw you a curveball, and learning how to find value in the unexpected and to reconsider what you value is really important.



Insight: Parliament and politics are inherently physical. Within the current pandemic situation, this is only more apparent. When I say that it's physical, this does not only include space, but what occurs in that space: the people in the room, how the space shapes decision-making, the ideas discussed. To advocate for yourself, to sell an idea, or to highlight a problem, you need access to that room, to these spaces, to these relationships. Though communication technologies are very useful, I have come to appreciate that showing up and occupying physical space is instrumental for obtaining opportunities and critical insight. Being there, in that space, at the right moment, is everything.

Robyn Otto

Highlight: The Parliamentary Internship Programme has provided me with so many unique and meaningful experiences that will shape my life for years to come. Those experiences would not have been the same had I not been part of such a lively, intelligent and compassionate cohort. At the outset, I had no idea how much my fellow PIPs would add to my experience over the ten months of our internship. We have celebrated, commiserated and grown together. They have helped me foster a better understanding of our politics, our country and ourselves and I will forever be grateful to know this wonderful group of people.



Insight: Understanding regional differences is vital to understanding Canadian politics. Members of Parliament have different strategies and objectives because of their party affiliations, but also because of the particular circumstances of their ridings. By my observation, Members of Parliament and political staffers have limited understanding of the realities of life and culture in other regions of the country. That disconnect affects how decisions are made in Ottawa. To create better policy, we need to seriously grapple with regional differences and disparities.

Madison Pearson

Highlight: For me, the highlight of the program was the people I met: the other interns, who are now some of my dearest friends; the Members that I worked with and their staff, who demonstrated the competence and compassion driving political representatives; the director, Anne, who demonstrated with grace and dignity how to navigate life on the Hill; and, finally, the many people who took the time to meet with us throughout the year and around the world. The experience would not be the same without these supportive people, to whom we owe many thanks.

Insight: Experiencing Parliament is very different from studying Parliament. The public-facing mechanisms of Parliament—Question Period, speeches, Member's social media, and the like—are performative and generally aren't designed to make meaningful change. It's difficult to know what is going on within Parliament from the outside, and that makes it all the more challenging for Canadians to hold their government to account. We need to make our institutions more transparent, and we need to work to educate Canadians on the impact that Parliament has on their lives and how their action can make change at the federal level.



Caroline Woodward

Highlight: The whole Parliamentary Internship is one consecutive highlight after the next. As other alumni will likely attest, the year is very challenging to explain in under 30 seconds: after outlining the broad program parameters, I always find myself saying “oh and we also go on trips... and write a research paper... and meet fascinating experts through our brown bag lunches... and get invited to fun events!” What stood out to me particularly this year was being part of the teamwork and creative thinking that allowed the program to continue despite the pandemic. It was such a privilege to work with an incredible team and director – to me, the strengths of the program and the group only became more apparent when faced with “unique” circumstances. I expected a year of learning and adaptation – and 2019-2020 as a PIP certainly delivered!



Insight: One of the neatest aspects of the PIP is getting the chance to work in a non-partisan capacity in not one, but two partisan environments. One of the key take-aways I will bring with me is a more nuanced understanding of partisanship. The concept tends to take on negative connotations (for instance as a reference to groupthink or to blind deference to authority). There are of course very legitimate constructive critiques of how political parties operate in Canada, but this year showed me that partisanship is instrumental to our democratic system as it currently operates. Parties can be places that inspire young people to engage in politics, can serve as engines for policy development, and can be important community builders. A more nuanced picture of political parties and partisanship, I think, is important in considering possible institutional reforms.

Thank you to our Members of Parliament!

Hadeel Aziz

James Cumming, MP for Edmonton Centre
(Conservative)

Randeep Sarai, MP for Surrey Centre (Liberal)

Enya Bouchard

Andy Fillmore, MP for Halifax (Liberal)

The Hon. Erin O'Toole, MP for Durham
(Conservative)

Griffyn Chezenko

Élisabeth Brière, MP for Sherbrooke (Liberal)

Brad Vis, MP for Mission-Matsqui-Fraser
Canyon (Conservative)

Christopher Coulson

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Québécois)

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Shona Moreau

Earl Dreeshen, MP for Red Deer-Mountain View
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Robyn Otto

Pam Damoff, MP for Oakville North-Burlington
(Liberal)

Marilène Gill, MP for Manicouagan (Bloc
Québécois)

Madison Pearson

William Amos, MP for Pontiac (Liberal)

The Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner, MP for
Calgary Nose Hill (Conservative)

Caroline Woodward

Lloyd Longfield, MP for Guelph (Liberal)

Jenny Kwan, MP for Vancouver East (New
Democratic Party)

*Thank you so much to the MPs who
hosted us this year! It was an honour
working with you and your amazing staff!*

Riding Visits

One of the perks of the Parliamentary Internship Programme is for the nine interns to have the opportunity to visit the ridings of their MPs from Coast to Coast to Coast. Expected for some, a revelation for others: no matter where they are the interns immerse themselves in this enriching human experience. By doing so they open up to new horizons, perspectives and realities which enhances their understanding of Canadian society and politics.



Myles Goodman-Vincent in Banff, AB

Chris, Madison and Griffyn explored the French-speaking province of Quebec, respectively Montarville, Pontiac and Sherbrooke. Both Robyn and Caroline visited Ontario; that is to say Oakville and Guelph. In addition, Enya got a glimpse of the Maritimes by flying to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Thank you all for your warm welcome.



Madison Pearson in Pontiac, QC

In their first placement, Interns scattered across the country to accompany their MPs in their constituency. This year was filled with many highlights. In Western Canada, more specifically Alberta, Myles and Shona discovered the ridings of Banff and Red Deer.



Caroline Woodward in Guelph, ON

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred during the second placement, preventing the majority of us from travelling. Showing resilience in these uncertain times, the interns adapted to the realities of teleworking. While at home we all got to work closely with our constituency offices to address the huge influx of casework amid the ongoing health and economic crisis. In this context, we remained dedicated to assisting constituents.



Chris Coulson in Montarville, QC



Griffyn Chezenko in Sherbrooke, QC



Robyn Otto in Oakville, ON



Shona Moreau in Red Deer, AB



Enya Bouchard in Halifax, NS



Parliamentary Internship Alumni Association

The PIAA is coming off a banner year (2018-19) during which the executive and other members worked tirelessly on the program's enormously successful 50th anniversary celebrations. The executive built on this goodwill by organizing pub nights for alumni and the new interns in September 2019, November 2019 and January 2020. The PIAA executive also organized a brown bag lunch on minority parliaments with Philippe Lagassé for the interns and alumni in December 2019.

In partnership with PIP, a member of the PIAA executive organized a special online seminar with Professor Barbara Arneil for alumni and friends of the program. PIAA members provided welcome support for the 2020-21 recruitment process and connected prospective applicants to alumni for advice about their applications. As well, the fundraising subcommittee of PIAA completed its 50th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign on behalf of the Hales and Hurley Parliamentary Foundation. Thanks to the amazing generosity of alumni and friends of PIP, the campaign surpassed its \$50,000 target!

Legislative Study Tours

The Interns have had the opportunity to travel a lot this past year. Our first trip took place in Fall 2019, where our provincial counterparts, the interns from la Fondation Jean Charles Bonenfant, hosted us in Quebec City (thanks to VIA rail for the tickets!). Following that, we started 2020 with our European and UK legislative study tours to Brussels, London and Edinburgh. Here we learned about the European Union institutions, Belgium Federal Parliament, the Westminster System and Scottish parliament, and even had the chance to visit the NATO Headquarters.



Washington, DC, USA

In early March, we went to Washington, DC, where we learned about the American system of governance and took part in museum visits. Following our return from the United States, we had potential trips lined up to Nunavut in May, as well as in Montreal and Kitiganzibi Reserve in June, but due to the pandemic, those plans were cancelled.



Brussels, Belgium

All of these Legislative Study tours would not have been possible if not for the support of the British High Commission in Ottawa, the Delegation of the European Union to Canada, VIA Rail, the United States Embassy to Canada and the US Department of State. The parliamentary Interns are grateful to our sponsors and our hosts for the wonderful experiences.



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Edinburgh, Scotland, UK



London, England, UK

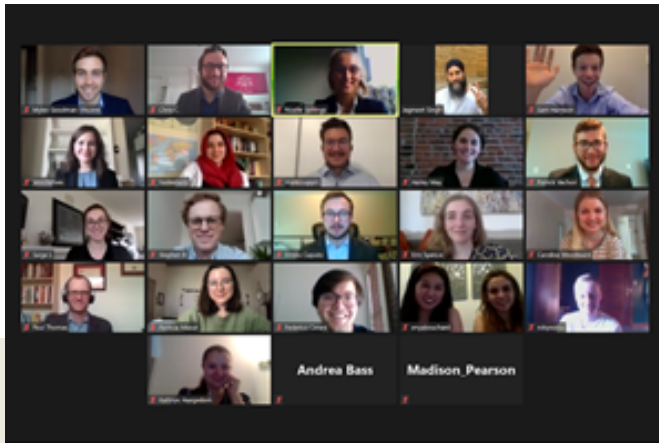
Incoming Study Tours

Every year, the PIP interns host several groups of our peers in Ottawa. In December, we were delighted to host the Ontario Legislative Internship Programme. The OLIP interns had a jam-packed, two-day visit, meeting with Members of Parliament, civil servants, journalists and civil society groups. While the OLIP interns were supposed to be the first of many visits we hosted, the pandemic had other plans.



Ontario Legislative Internship Programme

Thankfully, we were able to host “virtual visits” for the British Columbia Legislative Internship Program and the APSA Congressional Fellows through the wonders of Zoom. These visits gave us the chance to share our experiences working from home and to continue learning about federal politics.



British Columbia Legislative Internship Program

They were highlights of our year and they would not have been possible without the many speakers who graciously took part. We extend our sincere thanks to all who participated.



APSA Congressional Fellows

Research Corner

The 2020 Alf Hales Prize

Each year, the top paper from the previous cohort is awarded the Alf Hales Prize. In March 2020 Fregine Sheehy's paper, "Where Are all the Racialized Staffers?" was selected for the prize by a jury comprising representatives from the Institute on Governance, the Canadian Political Science Association, and the House of Commons. Fregine Sheehy received the \$1,000 prize and the two runners up (Nicholas Doiron and Guillermo Renna) each received \$500 at the 10th Annual Gaboury Symposium.

Research paper topics for 2019-20 include:

- 50 Shades of Blue: Examining Ideological Differences in the Conservative Party
- A Scoping Review of Current Research on the Canadian Parliament
- Fighting an Invisible Threat: The Challenge to Canadian National Security in a Cyber Warfare Context
- Harassment Prevention Policymaking in the 43rd Parliament
- Mental Health and Well-being on the Hill
- National Identity in Crisis: A Case Study of Canadian "Nation-ness" during the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic
- Order Paper Questions: A Content Analysis of Written Questions in the 42d Canadian Parliament
- Pathway to the Unknown: Procedures and Privileges in the Context of a Virtual Parliament
- Universal Basic Income in Canada as a Response to COVID-19

Intern Research Spotlight

Caroline Woodward

One of the features of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the prolonged and consistent use of press conferences by the federal government. As readers of the Bulletin will appreciate, our year as PIPs was marked by the pandemic. While continuing to support our MPs, we had the opportunity to witness how Parliament and government act in a time of crisis. Given my existing interest in nationalism and identity studies, I became quite intrigued by how the government uses national identity in its public communication during a crisis moment. My research paper examines this question through a qualitative analysis of the Prime Minister's daily statements.

Why advance this type of research? A small, but growing, body of literature explores the impact of natural disasters and other crises on the development of a national brand. Most of this literature has been confined to episodic disasters, which temporarily impact the ability of a country to compete economically, namely in terms of its ability to attract tourism and foreign direct investment. How a prolonged and global health crisis influences the articulation of a country's national identity by a federal government, however, has been given less consideration. In my research paper, I use the language and concepts from nationalism studies (borrowing from seminal scholars like Fredrik Barth, Rogers Brubaker, and Ernest Gellner) to draw policy-relevant implications for government communications strategies.

Spoiler alert (!), I ultimately argue that the federal government instrumentalized Canadian identity in its fight against COVID-19 by both appealing to past understandings of Canadian-ness and to an optimistic, albeit un-defined, version of the future.

The boundaries around Canadian-ness were thickened, with appeals to national duty and with restrictions on movement for non-citizens; this remained, contradictorily, couched in an understanding of the problem as spanning national borders. The particularity (in time and space) of this form of Canadian identity presents further evidence for understanding identity as episodic, rather than stable.

Many are beginning to think, write, and strategize about what lasting impacts Covid-19 will have on a host of areas – whether it be urban planning, the economy, travel, political institutions, workplace culture, or trade. I urge us to add identity (in its fluctuating and unstable form) to the mix and not to forget that it has always been an important factor in times of crisis. ■



Reflections

Le seul bloquiste non-partisan de la Colombie-Britannique : Working for the Bloc Québécois in the 43rd Parliament

Chris Coulson

I am, unmistakably, a British Columbian nationalist – a fact I present without pride or prejudice. Just ask any of my fellow PIPs. After a period punctuated by exasperated sighs, you will hear them relate one story or another about how I have underlined the “uniqueness” or “isolation” of British Columbia. (I do not think I am alone in this nationalism).

It might seem strange then that I would seek out, and relish, the opportunity to work with the Bloc Québécois as one of my placements. The general narrative of East vs. West, French vs. English, Quebec vs. Alberta/B.C. suggest that such a placement would be like oil and water.

To be sure, as part of my French immersion education, I became familiar with Quebec’s unique place in our Confederation, and the injustices to which its population has been subjected. I learned about la Nuit des Longs Couteaux – something most anglophones are not aware of. But this does not explain how I, an anglo from the far Western reaches of Canada, became so integrated au “sein de l’équipe,” known by many of the MPs and in regular contact with the Leader’s Office.

Analysts who have described the Bloc’s resurgence as the “third generation” are, in my view, correct. Under Yves-François Blanchet, the Bloc has experienced not only an electoral resurgence, but has undertaken a different approach to Parliament. Prior to the pandemic, they committed themselves to collaboration, and as a caucus, they have taken a stance against partisan or procedural gamesmanship. They have been

consistent in their defence of Quebec, but not in deference to Premier Legault – an approach that was on display when they negotiated an amendment to the new NAFTA with the Liberals. They also make up a powerful voting bloc, and hold the balance of power on many committees, making them an attractive strategic voting partner.

Both the caucus and the staff skew younger and are relatively “green” in a parliamentary context. Working in a very experienced MP’s office, our office became a sounding board for others. This relative lack of general experience made intra-caucus conflict low, as the teams of the House Officers (the party leader, whip, House Leader, and caucus chair) manage most fora.

I have learned that many Bloc MPs – including senior ones – see the current “national unity crisis” as having originated in the West, during spars between B.C. and Alberta – not with Quebec or the Bloc themselves. This has led to some interest in the idea of visiting B.C. and forming ‘inter-provincial’ (for lack of a better word) relationships. And the Bloc is deeply invested in cultivating international relationships.

All of these inputs have led to a unique dynamic with this third generation of Bloquistes – and an environment that ultimately made it easy to integrate anyone into the team of both the MP’s office and the larger Bloc team. The small, tight-knit caucus dynamic makes it easy to get to know everyone – including the MPs – and ensures that any addition to the team is welcomed. Overall, there was little suspicion at my presence, so long as I did the work and was competent in doing so. My interest in learning more about Quebec sovereignty only contributed to my integration into the broader caucus. Despite concerns from my MP about how my parents and family back home felt about me working for the Bloc, there was little shock or awe, and instead much praise. And besides, what better way to learn, from one group of nationalists to another? ■

Reflections

The Programme During the COVID-19 Pandemic

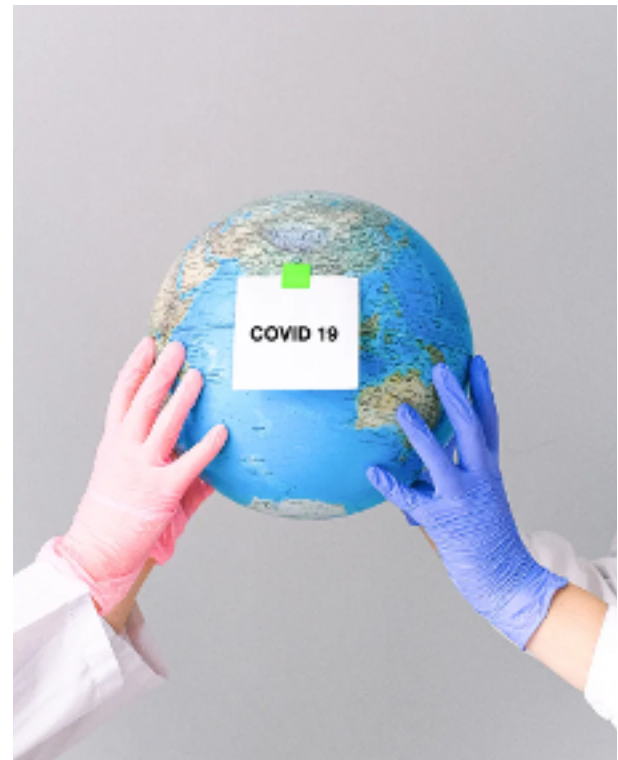
Chris Coulson

We all certainly thought the most unique part of this year's Programme would be the election - but of course, history moves in unforeseen ways! As the first PIP cohort to work through a pandemic, we couldn't release the Bulletin without addressing how it has changed our experience on the Hill.

Unique to many on the Hill - including our own MPs - we were abroad when lockdowns and the associated pandemic-related policies began to be implemented. To be sure, prior to our departure for DC, COVID-19 had already reached the West Coast of Canada and the US, but for many of us, being in the US Capitol as locales shut down around us and the average person became aware of COVID-19 made the pandemic real. The timing of our trip to the United States meant that if it had been a week later, we would not have departed for DC. In fact, had we scheduled our tour of the Capitol Building even a day later, it would not have happened. For some, there was significant anxiety on our last day in DC. What would things look like upon our return? Would we be able to leave the US? Thankfully, our departure was smooth.

We returned to a Parliament that had been shut down in our absence, without even the chance to pick-up our things from our offices and a chance to say goodbye to our MPs. In this chaotic moment, we crossed the floor and moved on to our second placements.

Working on the Hill in a work-from-home environment has been challenging and complicated. Many of us have yet to meet



our second-placement colleagues and MPs since starting to work in their offices. Committee work started off slowly, and has remained challenging, since we cannot staff our MPs in person. We are often working off our own laptops, experiencing all the challenges that come with accessing a secure network from our personal devices.

And yet, despite these difficulties, some sense of normalcy has set in. We have developed routines, and PIP caucus has still taken place every Wednesday. Many of us have daily or weekly meetings with our teams.

As we look to the future and welcome next year's Interns, questions still remain. Will interns still be working from home? Will there be a full hybrid Parliament? What will networking look like on the Hill? These are only some of the many unanswered inquiries that remain going forward. But one thing is clear: PIP will adapt and continue. ■

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