



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation respecting
its Participation in the 14th Plenary Assembly and the 44th
Meeting of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas -- Medellín,
Colombia -- Canadian Section of ParlAmericas (CPAM)**

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

**Medellin, Colombia
November 15 to 17, 2017**

REPORT

COMPOSITION OF THE DELEGATION

From November 15 to 17, 2017, a delegation of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas participated in the 14th Plenary Assembly and the 44th meeting of the Board of Directors in Medellin, Colombia. The theme of the Assembly was “Parliamentary Actions to Promote Responsible Political Discourse.” The delegation, led by the Honourable Robert D. Nault, MP, Chair of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, was composed of the Honourable Tobias C. Enverga Jr., Senator; Mr. Randy Boissonnault, MP; Mr. Richard Cannings, MP; and Mr. Bev Shipley, MP. Mr. David-Andrés Novoa accompanied the delegation in his capacity as Association Secretary.

44th MEETING OF THE PARLAMERICAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The 44th meeting of the Board of Directors of ParlAmericas was held on Wednesday, November 15, 2017. The President of ParlAmericas, Mexican Senator Marcela Guerra, provided an update on the organization’s most recent activities. Next, the host of the Plenary Assembly, Colombian representative German Blanco, welcomed the members of the Board of Directors and described the activities and sessions planned for the Plenary Assembly. Mr. Blanco mentioned that the issue of “fake news” and media coverage of legislative issues would be the focus of most of the presentations. The representatives of the various ParlAmericas networks then reported on their activities.

Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality

Ms. Ligia Fallas, member of the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly and Vice-President (Central America) of the Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality, reported on the Network meeting that had taken place in Argentina on May 23 and 24, 2017. This was an opportunity for legislators and social movement activists to meet to discuss new avenues (such as social media) for promoting gender equality. The next meeting of the Network will take place on May 22 and 23, 2018, in Trinidad and Tobago. The proposed theme of the meeting is “Climate Change and Gender Equality.”

Open Parliament Network

In the absence of representatives of the Open Parliament Network, Ms. Alisha Todd, Director General of ParlAmericas, provided an overview of the workshops promoting the concept of open parliament. Among other things, these dealt with international standards on the regulation of solicitation and strengthening accountability through fiscal transparency. It was also announced that the Network will be monitoring the commitments of member countries with regard to the resolutions they have adopted, in order to publicly demonstrate progress. On this front, Canadian MP Robert Nault stressed that discussions of fiscal transparency must consider the fact that the legislative budgetary process varies from country to country, notably as a function of the number of legislative members. While there are some common elements promoting transparency (like the Internet), a uniform approach is not necessarily practicable. The next meeting of the Network will take place on April 11 and 12, 2018, in Lima, Peru.

Parliamentary Network on Climate Change

Mr. Javier Ortega, member of Panama's National Assembly and President of the Parliamentary Network on Climate Change, reported on the second gathering of the Network, which was held in Panama City on August 3 and 4, 2017. The meeting, which was jointly organized by ParlAmericas and Parlatino, dealt with two themes: "Legislation as a Parliamentary Tool to Fight Climate Change" and "Renewable Energy." The participating parliamentarians agreed on a declaration aimed at supporting the goals adopted at the Paris Conference of the Parties (COP21). At this meeting, Canadian M.P. Dan Ruimy was elected to a two-year term as Vice-President (North America). The next meeting of the Network will take place in Panama City on October 5 and 7, 2018.

Other items on the agenda

Mr. Francisco Guerrero, Secretary for Strengthening Democracy at the Organization of American States, provided the Board members with an overview of democratic trends in the American hemisphere. He informed members that there will be almost 15 elections across the continent in the coming year, and that several of them will likely be marked by close outcomes, the chronic refusal of losing candidates to admit defeat, and disputes waged via social networks.

Member of Parliament Robert Nault, in his capacity as Chair of the ParlAmericas Finance Committee, presented the strategies and opportunities that the ParlAmericas International Secretariat is currently exploring with a view to identifying new sources of funding to support the expansion of its activities. One of the points raised was a review of the membership fees for all countries. According to Mr. Nault, the annual fee paid by Canada is among the lowest for all the international organizations of which it is a member. He believes that the Parliament of Canada could contribute more for its membership in ParlAmericas.

Finally, in his role as President of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas, Mr. Nault announced that Canada will be hosting the 2018 Plenary Assembly in Victoria, British Columbia. The theme will be "Promoting Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development". The various sessions will deal with economic, political and social inclusion, and will provide participants with opportunities to learn more about the Aboriginal communities of Vancouver Island. The Assembly will take place September 9 to 12, 2018.

SKILLS TRAINING: NAVIGATING INFORMATION: ONLINE RESEARCH METHODS TO SUPPORT PARLIAMENTARY WORK

On the afternoon of November 15, 2017, parliamentarians were offered a training workshop to learn about online tools that can be used for research and political analysis. The training was provided by Mr. Pablo Thaler, specialist in political analysis with the Political Analysis Section of the Organization of American States (OAS) Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy.

To begin, participants were asked to talk about how they go about obtaining the information they need for their work as legislators. Some indicated that they mainly seek inspiration from examples of legislation in other countries. Others said they browse the web to find news from around the world and to understand what their voters have to say

about certain issues. The majority of participants questioned the accuracy of the news they find online, however, given the proliferation of “fake news”.

The parliamentarians then explored various online search tools and received advice on how to obtain better results. For example, using Google and other search engines, the participants were asked to conduct searches containing as many terms as possible in order to reduce the number of results, while favouring the use of technical terms in order to elicit more relevant results. The trainer also discussed sites that manage and analyze social media content. [Twitonomy](#), [Trendsmap](#) and [Queryfeed](#) were presented as no-cost options.

More secure ways to search the web were proposed in order to enable legislators to obtain less biased results. These include tools for navigating anonymously with web browsers or using search sites like [DuckDuckGo](#) or [TORProject](#). Participants were also encouraged to delete cached files and tracking cookies, as this will help to avoid filter bubbles that isolate users from websites that present contrasting viewpoints.

Mr. Thaler concluded his workshop by presenting a tool developed by the OAS Secretariat for Strengthening Democracy that collects news articles daily: [Americas Digital Information System](#) (ADIS). This is an open-source database that uses algorithms to systematically analyze and validate articles collected in real time. Users can sort, extract and even create alerts for news that interests them. This tool enables users to be kept informed while avoiding “fake news”.

INFORMATION SESSION WITH CANADA’S AMBASSADOR IN COLOMBIA

Wednesday evening, the Canadian delegation met with Mr. Marcel Lebleu, Ambassador of Canada in Colombia, for an information session about bilateral relations between the two countries. Ambassador Lebleu focused on three key themes during the session.

First, he informed the delegates of the progress made in implementing the peace agreement between the Colombian government and FARC rebels in anticipation of the legislative and presidential elections that will take place in 2018. The Ambassador also pointed out that in recent years, Colombia’s education budget has surpassed its defence budget, evidence of the transition that is taking place in the country.

A discussion followed about foreign investments in Colombia in response to the political stability the country has been experiencing in recent years. Canadian companies are particularly present in the mining sector, which has a great deal of potential, despite the significant number of illegal mines. Companies are also exploring the area of road infrastructure. Indeed, the lack of developed road infrastructure, due to geography among other things, has forced the Colombian government to proceed with numerous projects for roads and other related infrastructure. The Ambassador indicated that Canadian companies could take advantage of these investment opportunities in Colombia, and all the more so following the Odebrecht scandal, which has left a gap in the infrastructure sector.

Finally, there was a discussion about the political crisis in Venezuela and how it is impacting on Colombia. More and more Venezuelans are crossing the border to obtain goods they can’t find in their own country, or simply to seek refuge. The impact of this crisis is also being felt at the regional level. Ambassador Lebleu mentioned the

importance of the *Lima Group*, which brings together countries that share the same concerns with regard to democracy and the protection of human rights in Venezuela.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

The activities began on November 16, 2017, with the keynote address of the 14th Plenary Assembly of ParlAmericas, delivered by Dr. Pablo Boczkowski, Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Northwestern University. The speech dealt with how citizens interpret the news in the social media era, and how political discourse must change in order to reduce the impact of fake news.

According to a preliminary study by Dr. Boczkowski, there are four major factors that determine how citizens perceive the news. The first two are *strategic curation* and *mindful processing*. These are considered to be rational, as the study subjects tend to analyze the news to determine whether or not it is true. The emotional factors, which are *emotional interpretation* and *subjective attachment*, also play a role. In both cases, the emotions aroused by the news can generate a different understanding for different readers. Some of these factors have been exploited to allow “fake news” to be spread, which has had a negative impact on political discourse. According to Dr. Boczkowski, however, politicians could limit that impact if they consider making three changes.

First, political discourse must shift from divisiveness to common ground. The reality is that targeted attacks are used in politics because they produce results. In the long term, however, they jeopardize the possibility of a compromise between the parties involved. Secondly, inclusive discourse must be favoured over differentiating discourse. Differentiating is an effective way of mobilizing groups in order to win their votes. However, it generates a large number of separate communities that are difficult to reunite afterwards. Finally, there must be a balance between short-term electoral needs and long-term governance. Electoral discourse that works in the short term very often ends up undermining the viability of traditional political parties.

OPENING OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

The President of ParlAmericas, Mexican senator Marcela Guerra, presented the members with an annual report that described the efforts and accomplishments of each of the ParlAmericas networks over the previous year. Ms. Alisha Todd, Director General of ParlAmericas, reported on the organization’s financial report, mentioning the significant financial contribution of the Government of Canada and the member countries.

FIRST SESSION: RAISING AWARENESS TO ADDRESS THE “FAKE NEWS” CHALLENGE

The first session of the Plenary Assembly was entitled “Raising Awareness to Address the ‘Fake News’ Challenge.” It was moderated by Mr. Francisco Guerrero, OAS Secretary for Strengthening Democracy. The session explored how computational propaganda and the distribution of fake news via social media create challenges for democratic processes and political representation.

Panellist Nicholas Monaco, researcher with the Digital Intelligence Lab, introduced the concept of computational propaganda, which he defined as: “Malicious use of software to megaphone or dampen political messages online, with the goal of manipulation of

public opinion”. Mr. Monaco provided examples of the role of computational propaganda in the 2016 Brexit referendum and U.S. presidential election. He suggested some potential solutions for curbing the negative impacts, notably meetings of academic experts, private sector executives and legislators to study the problem from different angles, as well as more transparency around advertising/automation. In short, the solutions must be both human and computational.

Ms. Natalia Arbeláez, Academic and business coordinator for the Colombian news site [La Silla Vacía](#), presented a journalistic fact-checking initiative called “Lie Detector”. This platform reviewed allegations circulating on WhatsApp and digital media in the context of the Colombian peace referendum for both the Yes and No campaigns. The analyses of these allegations were then dissected on the website in order to examine them objectively.

Ms. Kiran Maharaj, President of the Media Institute of the Caribbean, gave a presentation entitled: “Fake News and the Future of Journalism: Looking through the Caribbean Window”. In her opinion, the oral tradition in the Caribbean culture has always been important for spreading news, true or false. Today, that tradition continues, but it has been amplified and accelerated by the use of social media. She believes that Caribbean journalists need to be “creative disruptors” to change the mentality of preceding generations. For this they require better equipped newsrooms, better investigative reporting and better laws to protect freedom of information. Ms. Maharaj also proposed providing financial compensation for debunking “fake news”.

SECOND SESSION: PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICES TO FACILITATE MEDIA COVERAGE OF LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

The second session of the Plenary Assembly took place on Friday, November 17, 2017. The theme was “Parliamentary Practices to Facilitate Media Coverage of Legislative Issues”. The participants presented successful institutional practices in parliaments for facilitating the access of journalists and the media to accurate, balanced and comprehensive information on parliamentary issues. The moderator was Mr. Patricio Vallespín, Member of the Chamber of Deputies of Chile.

The first presentation was given by Ms. Blanca Ibarra, Director General of the Television Channel of the Congress of Mexico. She explained how the channel’s interactive features and audiovisual content have made it an international model for legislative communication with citizens. The work of this channel is supported by a bicameral committee of the Mexican congress, which promotes the creation of new content and the strengthening of the digital platform. This provides for supporting the principles of “open parliament”, in which parliamentarians and citizens can interact directly with each other.

Next, Mr. Wesley Gibbings, President of the Association of Caribbean Media Workers, outlined some good practices that can be adopted by parliaments to facilitate media coverage of legislative issues (notably live parliamentary broadcasts, journalist access to proceedings and the availability of parliamentary documents). Mr. Gibbings also discussed the challenges facing journalists, including hostile political environments and social media.

Finally, Ms. Cristiane Brum Bernardes, Researcher at the Education, Training and Improvement Centre of the Chamber of Deputies of Brazil (known as CEFOR in Portuguese), presented that chamber's communication strategy, and the various types of coverage found on its website. These include live streaming of plenary sessions, committee meetings and other legislative activities. The strategy ensures greater legislative transparency, as journalists can access parliamentary work at any time.

THIRD SESSION AND ROUNDTABLE: PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN PARLIAMENTS

The final session of this plenary assembly was called "Promoting Responsible Political Discourse in Parliaments". It involved a dynamic discussion led by Ms. Norma Morandini, Director of the Human Rights Observatory at the Senate of Argentina and former parliamentarian. The panellists shared their reflections on fostering social inclusion through responsible political discourse.

The first panellist, Mr. Randy Boissonnault, Canadian MP and Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 Issues, spoke about government initiatives to promote inclusion and equality for LGBTQ2 groups. He indicated that the Prime Minister of Canada intended to provide a formal apology to LGBTQ2 Canadians affected by discriminatory government policies. A bill would also be tabled to expunge the records of people convicted of same-sex crimes under old laws. Finally, Mr. Boissonnault indicated that his government would be reinstating the Court Challenges Program, a government initiative that provides financial assistance to enable citizens to assert their rights before the courts.

Mr. Miguel Jaramillo, Director at Marketing Político y Gobierno Consulting in Colombia, gave parliamentarians advice on maintaining integrity and trust in the context of "fake news". In his opinion, politicians tend to generate news rather than initiating a conversation with citizens, who are becoming increasingly interested in participating in decision making. He also explained that parliamentary communication teams must make their messages more exciting, while avoiding sensationalism, because it is important to attract the attention of citizens.

Senator Irene Sandiford-Garner of Barbados concluded the panel by asking how politicians can overcome the use of negative messages and change the tone of the discussion. In her view, citizens are tired of being presented with negative messages and are looking for civilized debate. Politicians should therefore use social media to show who they really are, and eliminate the rhetoric and nationalist discourse. Dialogue and empathy should prevail in debates between politicians.

CLOSING OF THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY

The Plenary Assembly concluded with the reading of the declaration that had been adopted by the delegations of each parliament represented. The declaration recognizes that participation in democratic processes requires that citizens have access to truthful, rigorous and diverse information for constructive and critical dialogue on public issues, and that while the digital communications era democratizes the distribution and consumption of information and news, it also generates new challenges for sovereignty, governance, security and democratic stability.

IN MEMORIAM

In memory of the Honourable Tobias C. Enverga Jr., who passed away suddenly on the morning of November 16, 2017, in Medellin, Colombia, while participating in the ParlAmerica's Annual Plenary Assembly as a member of the Canadian delegation.

Senator Enverga was a committed member of the Canadian Section of ParlAmericas. He served as an advisor on the Steering Committee, and regularly participated in activities organized by the ParlAmericas International Secretariat. He also helped strengthen ties between Canada and Latin America and the Caribbean, notably by sponsoring the bill respecting Latin American Heritage Month. He was a dedicated parliamentarian and deeply respected colleague. He is survived by his wife, Rosemer Enverga, and his three daughters.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Robert Nault, P.C., M.P.

Chair

Canadian Section of ParlAmericas

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Section of ParlAmericas
ACTIVITY	14th Plenary Assembly 44th Meeting of the ParlAmericas Board of Directors
DESTINATION	Medellin, Colombia
DATES	November 15 to 17, 2017
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Tobias C. Enverga Jr., Senator Hon. Robert Nault, P.C., M.P. Mr. Randy Boissonnault, M.P.
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Bev Shipley, M.P. Mr. Richard Cannings, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. David-Andrés Novoa, Association Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 21,116.59
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 3,183.10
HOSPITALITY	\$ 526.15
PER DIEMS	\$ 1,134.25
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 451.33
TOTAL	\$ 26,411.42