
Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Celebrate Women's Success

Myrna Driedger MLA

The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, as part of the larger Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, works towards better representation of women in legislatures throughout Canada and the Commonwealth. In July, the 2013 Steering Committee Meeting and Conference of the CWP was held in Edmonton. This article looks at the agenda of the conference and strategic projects for the CWP (Canada).



The CWP-Canadian Region is governed by a steering committee that promotes the views and concerns of women parliamentarians throughout the region and is responsible for developing programs to further the aims of the CWP within the region. It is composed of one representative from each province and territory and one representative from the federal parliament. Each member serves a three-year term. Its operations are overseen by a Chair, who also represents Canada on the CWP Steering Committee-International.

The other members of the Steering Committee for CWP Canada are:

- Linda Reid, British Columbia
- Mary Anne Jablonski, Alberta
- Laura Ross, Saskatchewan
- Leanne Rowat, Manitoba

- Lisa Macleod, Ontario
- Rita De Santis, Quebec
- Pamela Lynch, New Brunswick
- Wendy Bisaro, North West Territories
- Charlene Johnson, Newfoundland & Labrador
- Pam Birdsall, Nova Scotia
- Jeannie Ugyuk, Nunavut
- Carolyn Bertram, Prince Edward Island
- Lois Moorcroft, Yukon
- Susan Truppe, Federal

Created in 2005, the CWP – Canada Region is composed of women parliamentarians of the provincial and territorial Canadian legislatures and the federal parliament. Its aims and objectives are to:

- Provide opportunities for strategic discussion and development for future and current parliamentarians
- Increase female representation in our parliaments
- Foster closer relationships among Canadian women parliamentarians
- Foster relations with other countries having close parliamentary ties with Canada; and
- Discuss, strategize and act on gender related issues in Canada and internationally.

Myrna Driedger represents Charleswood in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. She is Finance Critic and Deputy Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party. She is also Chair of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians in the Canadian Region of CPA.

The CWP pursues these objectives by means of annual Commonwealth parliamentary conferences, outreach programs and participation in campaign schools across the country.

“Women who have achieved success have won victories for us, but unless we all follow up and press onward, the advantage will be lost.”

Nellie McClung

The 2013 Steering Committee Meeting and Conference

We were pleased to welcome Meenakshi Dhar, Assistant Director of Programs from CPA (London Secretariat.) to attend our meeting in Edmonton. We recognized the newly elected Speaker from British Columbia, Linda Reid and extended a heartfelt

thanks to Charlotte L'Écuyer, MNA from Quebec, who stepped down from the Steering Committee. Lisa Macleod, MPP from Ontario also stepped down as a Steering Committee member and both of them have contributed significantly to the success of CWP Canada. We wished them well in all their future endeavours.

This past year was pivotal for CWP – Canada, and much was accomplished in 2012-13. For example:

1. Steering Committee “Terms of Reference” have made a significant impact on the success of CWP. Because we are now working with three-year terms for members, we have excellent continuity which has enhanced productivity.
2. We have completed the first major stage of a strategic plan, whereby “mission”, “vision” and “value” statements were developed and adopted.
3. We incorporated a “Women of inspiration” component to our annual conference to recognize a Canadian legislator/parliamentarian who has inspired us through her successes and accomplishments.



Myrna Driedger, Premier Alison Redford and Mary Anne Jablonski at the CWP meeting in Edmonton in July 2013.

4. With a collaborative effort by a working group of CWP Steering Committee members, an Outreach Program Framework was developed to support program planning for legislators/parliamentarians who participate in an Outreach Program. It includes the descriptions of the CWP, its mission/vision/values, objectives and aims, a list of women's campaign schools, possible program ideas and resource information.
5. Under the direction of the Steering Committee, the CWP Secretariat finalized a brochure describing the role and activities of the CWP-Canadian Region. This brochure will be a valuable tool in marketing and growing our organization.
6. The Chair of CWP was invited to represent Canada at an International Parliamentary Conference on politics in London (UK). It was jointly hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – UK, and the British Group Inter-Parliamentary Union (BGIPU), in accordance with the organizations' shared purpose of strengthening parliamentary democracy through inter-parliamentary dialogue. There were 60 delegates representing 50 countries from around the world in attendance. Topics ranged from national case studies, the democratic deficit inherent in the underrepresentation of women in parliaments, media and social media, tools for empowerment, political parties and quotas, and gender-based violence.
7. We held a successful 6th annual Outreach Program in Quebec City in March, with 11 CWP members participating – representing the legislatures of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island, and the Northwest Territories. Our 7th Outreach Program will be held in Newfoundland in 2014. The next part of our strategy is to measure the success of the CWP Canada Outreach Program. A small committee was struck to develop and draft evaluation criteria.
8. With the aim of increasing our profile, we intend to have an article in every edition of the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*. This reaches 2,000 parliamentarians, four times each year.
9. A letter was sent to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, congratulating her on her Diamond Jubilee.
10. Our database of all elected female legislators/parliamentarians in Canada was maintained and updated.
11. The Chair was invited to speak on a panel at the September, 2012 International CWP meeting in Sri Lanka. The topic was "Is there such a thing as a Women's Agenda in Parliament?" At this same meeting she was elected as Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee of the CWP-International.

During the meeting, an election was held to fill the newly vacant Vice-Chair position. Linda Reid, from British Columbia was elected.

Educational Conference

Twenty-six participants attended the CWP Conference in Alberta. We kicked off the conference by recognizing Premier Alison Redford as our "Woman of Inspiration." It was the first time a woman premier spoke to our organization and it is worth noting that at the time six of Canada's premiers were women. We were very grateful to have this opportunity to hear her views on factors that determine the number of women in politics. To her – family influence and role models were important.

She concluded the speech by saying:

"The role of parliamentarian is a difficult one, regardless of gender. For women, the challenges in a tough environment are never easy. But they are made easier with mentorship, friendship and encouragement which is what Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians do. Our parliaments and our country, are stronger and better for it."¹

We also had as a presenter Lesley Scorgie, bestselling author of *Rich by Thirty* and *Rich by Forty*. Leslie is a passionate spokesperson for encouraging financial literacy. In 2011 she was recognized as the Women's Executive Network's top 100 Most Powerful Women in Canada.

Another dynamic presenter was Margaret Bateman, Partner & CEO of Calder Bateman. In providing strategic planning, she handles a wide range of public policy issues in healthcare, economic development, municipal affairs and the environment. Formerly, she managed senior management, communications and planning roles in the Alberta Government for 17 years.

CWP Canada looks forward to another exciting year and the role we can play in attracting more women into politics. As Premier Redford said:

"Every little girl who can see a woman making a difference in the lives of others – whether she is volunteering once a month, or holding public office, or perhaps she is a young woman who goes back to school and upgrades her skills and ends up becoming an engineer – that is one more little girl who will be inspired to follow suit."²

I hope even more legislators join us on our journey.

Notes

- 1 See Alison Redford, "Reflections on Politics and Gender," *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, vol 36, no 3, Autumn 2013, pp. 2-3.
- 2 *Ibid.*