

# The Canadian Scene

## New Yukon Speaker

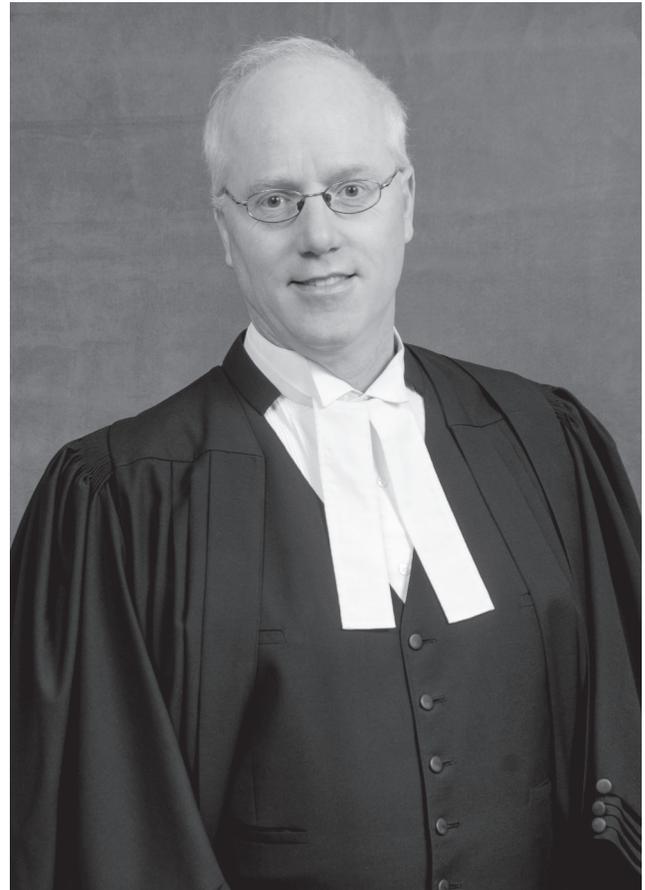
On January 12, 2017, the 34<sup>th</sup> Yukon Legislative Assembly convened for the first time since the November 7, 2016 general election. The first order of business on the one-day Special Sitting was the election of a Speaker. On motion of Premier **Sandy Silver**, seconded by Leader of the Official Opposition **Stacey Hassard** and Third Party House Leader **Kate White**, the Assembly elected **Nils Clarke**, the Member for Riverdale North, as its Speaker. Mr. Clarke was the sole nominee for the role.

The Premier had announced his intention to nominate Mr. Clarke on December 3, 2016 at the swearing-in ceremony for Cabinet.

In a December 6, 2016 news release, the Premier stated, "I am certain that [Nils Clarke's] vast experiences have prepared him to maintain the civility and order of the assembly. I am confident Nils will carry out this critical role with the diplomacy and good will needed in the assembly.... good ideas can come from all sides and I am counting on Mr. Clarke to create a positive and dynamic environment in the assembly to support all MLAs to the job Yukoners sent us to do." Mr. Clarke noted that he was honoured by the nomination and "look[ed] forward to helping to ensure that the work of the entire legislative assembly can proceed with civility and efficiency for the benefit of all Yukon citizens."

In his address to the Assembly upon his election as Speaker, Mr. Clarke spoke of "the importance of the Speaker's role in ensuring the business of the Legislature is conducted in an independent, fair and respectful manner." He added, "To that end, it is the Speaker's duty to be impartial and to treat all members equally and without favour. This high standard must be met in order to maintain the confidence and respect of the Legislature, and I commit today to make my best efforts to do so."

Mr. Clarke succeeds former Speaker **Patti McLeod**, who was re-elected as the MLA for Watson Lake in



**Nils Clarke**

November, and now sits in the Assembly as a member of the Official Opposition.

In the 24 years preceding Mr. Clarke's election as an MLA in November, he practiced law in Yukon and since 2000 he has served as the Executive Director of the Yukon Legal Services Society. Mr. Clarke has represented clients from all Yukon communities, and at all levels of Yukon Courts, including the Supreme Court of Canada.

**Linda Kolody**

Deputy Clerk, Yukon Legislative Assembly

## 38th Canadian Regional Seminar of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

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The 38th Canadian Regional Seminar of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association was held in Quebec City from November 10 to 12, 2016. Some 30 delegates from across Canada's provinces and territories came together for fruitful discussion on various topics, including electoral reform, fighting climate change, promoting diversity in parliament, and women in politics.

The working sessions began with a presentation on electoral reform by **Jordan Brown**, a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island. The workshop facilitator was **Jacques Chagnon**, the President of the National Assembly of Quebec. Mr. Brown spoke to the audience about the Committee on Democratic Renewal, of which he is a member. Its mandate is to examine ways to strengthen the electoral system, the representativeness of MLAs, and the role of the legislative assembly. The Committee held public consultations and made recommendations. In the fall of 2016, based on one of these recommendations, Prince Edward Island voters were invited to participate in a referendum on electoral reform. They were asked to rank the five proposed electoral systems in order of preference. After eliminating three of the five options, voters chose mixed member proportional representation. After Mr. Brown's presentation, the seminar participants discussed the features of various electoral systems. A number of delegates emphasized the importance of considering the consequences of electoral reform. Others addressed how difficult it is to choose the right wording for a referendum question. Mr. Chagnon ended the session by praising the initiative by Prince Edward Island's Legislative Assembly.

The second working session was chaired by **Tom Osborne**, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador. **Gilles LePage**, a Member of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, spoke about the effects of climate change in his province. He mentioned the rising temperature of the Restigouche River, intense heat waves that threaten the forests in his riding, and shoreline erosion along Chaleur Bay, stating that additional measures will be needed for New Brunswick to reach its greenhouse gas reduction targets. As a member of the Select Committee on Climate Change, Mr. LePage took part in consultations at which more than 150 stakeholders expressed their views. He said that each individual and each sector of New Brunswick's economy will be affected in some way by climate change. This means that each person

has a responsibility to take action to protect the future of our province. The working session raised a number of questions. Some participants discussed the need to prepare future generations for the changes observed, such as training workers in the renewable energy sector. Others raised questions about how to leverage economic growth while fighting climate change.

The electrification of transportation and Quebec's *Act to increase the number of zero-emission motor vehicles in Québec in order to reduce greenhouse gas and other pollutant emissions* were discussed during the third working session. It was chaired by **George Qulaut**, the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. **Richard Merlini**, a Member of the National Assembly of Quebec, noted in his presentation that the transportation sector is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in Quebec. He presented Quebec's *2015–2020 Transportation Electrification Action Plan*, which allocates funds for electric school buses, pilot projects for taxi fleets, and various incentive programs such as the *Drive Electric* program. This program provides a rebate for the purchase or lease of a hybrid or electric vehicle. Mr. Merlini pointed out that Quebec is the first province in Canada to pass a law on zero-emission vehicles. The Act requires the automotive industry to sell a minimum number of hybrid or electric vehicles each year through a tradable credit system. Session participants were very interested in how the government negotiated with the automotive sector while the Act was being drafted. They also wanted to know about the process for selecting which measures would be used to encourage drivers to choose electric or hybrid vehicles.

To conclude the first day of the seminar, Manitoba MLA **Sarah Guillemard** shared her experience as a newly elected member. **Chris Collins**, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, chaired the session, during which Ms. Guillemard explained why she decided to go into politics and the doubts and questions she had during her campaign and when she took her seat in the legislature. Stating that she felt a bit uncertain about her new duties, Ms. Guillemard stressed the importance of asking colleagues and the people around you for help. She believes that vulnerability can be an asset in politics rather than a weakness. Experiencing feelings of vulnerability may lead a member to look for more support from others. Various participants around the table talked about how difficult it is for elected officials to reveal their uncertainties, for fear of giving their political opponents ammunition or damaging their image. Participants then discussed ways to make the political environment more welcoming and collaborative.



Delegates of the 38th Canadian Regional Seminar of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The second day of the seminar focused on promoting diversity in parliament and on women in politics. **Francis Watts**, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island, acted as the moderator for this session. British Columbia MLA **Marvin Hunt** spoke about the demographic changes in his riding, primarily the increase in visible minorities. With regard to the importance of democratic institutions that adequately reflect the people they represent, he asked the following questions: What are the criteria of a representative parliament? If half the population is female, should half the number of elected officials be women? Mr. Hunt said that, beyond theories about what makes a parliament a representative institution, it is essential to create the conditions that make everyone feel they can participate in the political system, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or religion. Representativeness is a major challenge, and all stakeholders—including citizens, political parties and parliaments—must take measures to overcome this challenge.

**Caroline Simard**, Member of the National Assembly of Quebec, spoke at the seminar’s last session. She

provided information about the Committee on Citizen Relations’ self-initiated order to study women’s place in politics. During their study, the members of the Committee considered a wide variety of measures that could be implemented in the National Assembly to encourage women to be involved in politics. They wanted to understand what obstacles prevented women from running for a seat in parliament. They were looking for ways to overcome these obstacles. Following Ms. Simard’s presentation, session participants discussed how difficult work-life balance can be for everyone in the politics. A number of stakeholders identified this as the reason that relatively few women are involved in politics.

Overall, the 38th Canadian Regional Seminar of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association provided an opportunity for candid discussions among delegates. Participants from all over Canada engaged with each other on a variety of topics, finding common ground on many issues.

**Sophie J. Barma**  
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\*As of March 31, 2017

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