

# Paths to (and from) Parliament

David Docherty  
Wilfrid Laurier University

# Present state of Parliament

- ▶ No golden age of Parliament – but we are close to the stone age at the moment
  - ▶ Parliament is dysfunctional
  - ▶ Many good people are elected but they are frustrated
  - ▶ It is hard to attract good women and men to serve
- 

# Institutional disincentives

- Power is too concentrated
  - Too many members run for office by running against the office
  - Party discipline trumps individual initiative
  - A lack of resources and time hampers scrutiny
  - Rules discourage career paths
  - So perhaps the question should be...
- 

# Why would anyone want to follow this path?



Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

# Are there many paths?

- ▶ No “best” path to Commons
- ▶ Few follow local, provincial, federal path
- ▶ Local is the most common
  - No real gender difference
- ▶ Provincial rules create some disincentive for running nationally – one must be committed to move

# Who leaves for Ottawa?

- ▶ Municipally it is a mix
  - Reward for past service
  - Movement up a career ladder
- ▶ Provincially
  - Individuals with bad timing (Ontario 1984, 1990)
  - Individuals with frustrated ambition
  - Individuals who lost power

# Path to Senate

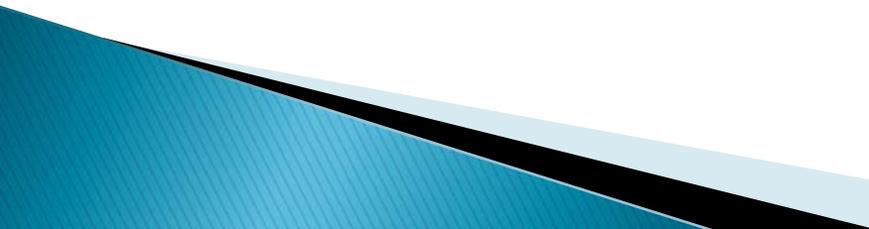
- ▶ Interestingly enough does not necessarily go through House of Commons
    - Fewer former MPs serve in Senate now than in previous Parliaments – from almost 50% in 20<sup>th</sup> Parliament (1945) to 23% in 40<sup>th</sup> (present)
  - ▶ More representative than House both in terms of gender and ethnicity
  - ▶ Senate is now a vehicle for representation and reward for past party (not elected service)
- 

# Paths away from Senate

- ▶ For the first time this is a question that we can/should think about
- ▶ Implications from Prime Minister's proposed changes?
  - Should Senator's be allowed to hold outside appointments?
  - Will Senator's be jumping back into private or non-profit sector after eight years?
  - Will Senate pensions need to be dramatically increased?
  - Will some good appointees now say no?

# Paths across the Commons

- ▶ Party loyalty is decreasing at rates not witnessed in modern Parliaments
  - ▶ In the first “loose fish” Parliament of 1867, 17 members switched partisan allegiances
  - ▶ In the 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 27 members switched, not including the merger – largest number of floor crossings since Union government of First World War
  - ▶ Why is this interesting?
- 

- ▶ Crossing crosses party lines – NDP and Reform/Alliance were joining Liberals, Liberals joining Conservatives
  - ▶ Some were switching levels and parties at the same time (Ujjal Dosanjh, Bob Rae)
  - ▶ Floor Crossers are no longer being punished for switching in mid term – suggesting that voter's loyalty is no longer a concern
  - ▶ Suggests that paths to parliament may have entered an era of free agency
- 

# Paths away from Commons

- ▶ More MP's are leaving Commons but not leaving elected life
  - ▶ Path from Parliament increasingly leading to provincial and municipal office
  - ▶ Three by-elections called to fill mayoral aspirants
  - ▶ Why are members “downsizing?”
  - ▶ More policy influence and rejection of present house norms
- 

# What can be done to stop the paths from Parliament

- ▶ Make political careers more attractive
  - ▶ Have more candidates run for an office **they** hold in honour
  - ▶ Provide members more opportunity to satisfy policy ambition
  - ▶ Decrease party discipline and importance of leader over all else
  - ▶ Return to “club” like atmosphere of Commons
    - Not in the WASP sense
    - But a shared sense of civic duty and common role all MPs play
- Then maybe path looks like

