GUIDE TO POLITICAL SKILLS
A Member of Parliament’s (MP) day is always full. When in Ottawa, there is constituency work to be done, meetings to go to, committee work, Question Period each afternoon and House Duty. The House of Commons sits Monday to Friday, usually from September to mid-December and from mid-January to late June. Most weekends are spent in the riding, meeting with constituents and attending functions.

The parliamentary calendar includes breaks throughout the year allowing MPs to spend extended time in their ridings; there are rarely days off. The current parliamentary calendar can be found at www.parl.gc.ca.
DEVELOPING A STRONG PARTNERSHIP: PHYSICIANS AND MPs WORKING TOGETHER

The world of politics is very different from the world of medicine. An MP’s job depends on a keen awareness of the mood of the electorate. Even the slightest change in public opinion could signal defeat for an MP seeking re-election. This may seem alien to a physician whose profession is known for relying on science and medicine and not on opinion and persuasion.

Your MP must rely on you, the voter, to keep him or her informed. Ongoing communication is the only way your MP will know and understand how you feel about particular issues. As a physician, your role as a community leader and a member of a trusted profession gives you an advantage in advocacy.

Sometimes the issues that affect physicians and their patients will involve the federal government introducing or amending legislation to bring about desired results. It is far more effective to influence policy before legislation is drafted than after it has been introduced. Trying to change legislation that has become law is very difficult.

However, sometimes the issues that affect physicians and their patients do not require changes to legislation. Your MP is knowledgeable about how government works and if well informed, can approach the person who can influence non-legislative change. This might be a senior bureaucrat or a Cabinet Minister.

MPs need to be kept well informed. MPs talk to Ministers. MPs talk to other MPs in caucus. Cabinet Ministers are approachable and your MP (whether in government or opposition) can relay your concerns directly to them. If you know that something is not working well and have an idea about how it can be improved, you should talk to your MP who can follow-up with appropriate action. Offer to help move the issue forward.

PREPARING FOR A MEETING

CMA’s MD-MP Contact program assists members in preparing for an effective meeting with their MP:

- **BEFORE THE MEETING.** Review information about the riding and the MP whom you are going to meet. The CMA will provide you with this information.
- **BRING WRITTEN MATERIAL.** Bring a brief with you that you can leave behind. The CMA will provide you with this material.
- **KNOW THE ISSUE.** Prepare for your meeting by reading up on the issues, know CMA messaging and think of local examples that support your position.
- **ARRIVE EARLY.** It is always possible that the MP might be available early; if not, you can spend a few minutes chatting with the assistant. Remember, the MP’s assistant is very knowledgeable about the issues.
In most cases it is important to spend the first few minutes in small talk. For example, ask the MP how he or she finds commuting, committee work, etc. Tell him or her where you live, where your practice is located and what community activities you are involved in. Be careful about name-dropping; the MP might not appreciate the person named and this will not get your relationship off to a good start. After a few minutes of small talk, begin to raise the issues that are of concern to you and the CMA.

Remember that MPs come from all walks of life and have a wide variety of interests. Some MPs are strong-willed people who like to follow their own agenda. Most are adept at handling meetings. If they are opposed to or ill informed about an issue, a favourite trick is to throw out a question that you may know nothing about. The purpose is to put you on the defensive. Do not be intimidated. If you do not quite grasp the point of the question, say so. Take notes. Proceed with your points. Even if the MP indicates opposition, request that the CMA’s position be taken into consideration.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?”

A mainstay of MP work is meeting with thousands of constituents — all demanding the MP’s time and attention. So, it is natural for an MP to ask, “What do you want me to do?” In many cases, we are not looking for the MP to vote for or against a particular bill, but simply for support. Support can take the form of talking with or writing to the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Health in support of CMA efforts or championing a CMA position on the national stage. The CMA will provide you with the key asks on a particular issue.

**WHAT WE CAN DO FOR MPs**

From time to time, MPs will have key initiatives that you, as a physician, and the CMA can support. Offer to discuss the issue with the association or to work with the MP to ensure success. Remember, you are a key resource who can provide expert knowledge and an informed opinion. A typical meeting with an MP may go something like this.

**MD:** Thank you for taking the time to meet with me about issues of mutual concern, for example, transforming the health care system.

**MP:** Thanks for coming to see me. Tell me more about your concerns.

**MD:** I have brought some materials with me that I would like to go over with you to highlight key points and give you examples from my experience. (By sharing information with your MP, you will be able to establish that you are not just delivering materials, but are an experienced constituent who is qualified to act as a spokesperson for your association.)

**MP:** How do you propose we ensure that the system is transformed?

**MD:** Let me give you some specific suggestions that have been made by the CMA. (Provide examples and discuss them.)

**MP:** Thank you for presenting the CMA’s position. I would like to work with you and the CMA on these issues.

**MD:** Thank you very much. I look forward to working with you. (Always offer to serve as an information resource. If the MP has a health care advisory committee, offer to serve on it.)
A WORKING DAY IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

A working day in the House of Commons starts when the bells ring to call MPs to the house. The Speaker and the Clerks march through the Hall of Honour to the Commons Chamber, with the sergeant-at-arms leading the way carrying the mace. The Speaker goes to the raised chair at the far end of the Chamber. After he leads the members in a brief prayer, the House is called to order and the day begins. The House of Commons meets for about 130 days a year. Each day the House is in session it is said to be “sitting.” When Parliament is in session, the House sits Monday through Friday.

MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS
A 15-minute period is set aside each day for any member who is not a cabinet minister to make a statement on a subject of national, regional or local importance. Each statement lasts 1 minute.

ORAL QUESTIONS
This closely watched 45 minutes is best known as Question Period. It is a chance for opposition members, and sometimes government members, to ask questions of the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers. It is an exercise in accountability: any member can ask any minister any question about their area of responsibility, without letting them know in advance.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS
For 1 hour each day, members who are not cabinet ministers can have their bills and motions debated by the House. These items are selected in a draw and some of them are chosen to come to a vote.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS
Government Orders are any items of business (such as motions or bills) that the government puts on the House of Commons’ agenda.

NOTICES OF MOTION FOR THE PRODUCTION OF PAPERS
Members can ask the government to present certain documents to the House of Commons. The government can respond to the requests at this time.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS
Routine proceedings can cover many different areas. For example:

- Ministers and parliamentary secretaries table committee reports, responses to petitions and other documents
- Ministers make short announcements or talk about government policy and the opposition party’s reply
- Members present petitions to the House and committees table their reports
- Government bills are introduced and given first reading, and members introduce their private members’ bills for first reading

MEETING WITH AN MP

- Arrive early.
- Introduce yourself and let the MP know where you practise medicine (i.e., in the MP’s riding, in the same region, in the same province, etc.).
- Spend the first few minutes engaged in small talk.
- “We’re here to talk to you about …” Give the MP the information kits and pens provided by the CMA.
- Localize the issues! Bring the issues back to what you know best – what are you seeing in your practice, in your hospital, what are your patients telling you?
- You are not expected to be an expert in CMA policy! If you are asked a question that you don’t have an answer for, let the MP know that you will have CMA staff get back to him or her with the answer.
- Ask if the MP has any questions.
- Thank the MP for his or her time.
WHO’S WHO IN GOVERNMENT

THE PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister (PM) is the leader of the party in power. Traditionally, party leaders are chosen by members of their party at a leadership convention.

The PM’s power comes from being the leader of the party, but the PM is an elected MP above all else. Therefore, the PM can claim the “right” to govern based on the popular mandate. The “cloak” of popular support is important to the PM’s ability to control the party. It allows the PM to command obedience and support from cabinet and backbenchers alike.

The PM also has control over appointments to cabinet and other positions, including the Senate, the Supreme Court, and lieutenant governors of provinces and senior staff of the public service. Legally, appointment recommendations are made to the Governor General, but in reality the PM is never refused.

The PM alone determines the timing of elections, within the five-year term of Parliament. However, if the government is defeated on a major bill, or if it loses a vote of non-confidence, the PM has little choice but to call an election. The PM also has the power to organize government by appointing cabinet ministers and secretaries of state.

PRIME MINISTER’S OFFICE (PMO)

The PMO is the political office that provides support to the Prime Minister. Political appointees head it. It monitors political developments and their implications for the PM. Together with the Privy Council Office, it provides the PM with technical and political advice.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE (PCO)

The PCO performs some of the same functions as PMO, but it is staffed by civil servants. The PCO is responsible for the development and coordination of government policy. The PM appoints top-echelon staff, but there is little partisan politics. The PCO acts as the “eyes and ears” of cabinet coordinating the numerous departments and agencies.

CABINET

The PM and cabinet comprise the executive of the government. Their role is to provide leadership. The British North America Act established our parliamentary system and constitutional monarchy based on the British system. The Queen’s representative in Canada is the Governor General. Executive power is held in the name of the Governor General. The Governor General, acting on the advice of and in consultation with cabinet is called “Governor-in-Council.” Cabinet decisions carrying legal force are “Orders-in-Council.” The cabinet holds the real executive power in the federal government.

Canadians elect 308 MPs and from among those who are members of the party with the most elected candidates, the PM and cabinet emerge. The PM and cabinet formulate policy and direct administrative operations, supported by Parliament.

Cabinet is, for the most part, the PM’s committee of advisers. It is a collective decision-making body that operates according to three strict conventions: secrecy, collective responsibility and unanimity.
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<tr>
<th>CABINET MINISTERS</th>
<th>Members of Parliament</th>
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<tr>
<td>The PM chooses cabinet ministers from among the MPs in the governing party. They serve, for no fixed term, at the discretion of the PM. A cabinet minister is the political master of a government ministry and is responsible for setting its priorities and presenting its legislative projects to cabinet. A cabinet minister is ultimately responsible for all decisions made in his or her ministry.</td>
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<td>There are 308 federal ridings in Canada, and MPs are elected to represent the constituents in each one. Riding associations run election campaigns, with help from their national party. Parliamentary members come from every walk of life; they can be lawyers, teachers, entrepreneurs or physicians.</td>
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<th>MINISTERS OF STATE</th>
<th>HILL STAFF</th>
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<td>Ministers of state are junior ministers and have responsibility for departments.</td>
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<td>Each MP has two or three staff members who work in their office on Parliament Hill. These people deal with issues that concern constituents and need to be handled in Ottawa. As well, they research and provide advice on national issues, such as health care.</td>
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<th>PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES</th>
<th>CONSTITUENCY STAFF</th>
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<td>In consultation with cabinet, the PM appoints parliamentary secretaries. The parliamentary secretariat works under the direction of a minister. These positions are sometimes seen as apprenticeships for potential cabinet ministers.</td>
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<td>Constituency staff work in the MP’s riding office and deal with the issues of constituents on a day-to-day basis. They are the MP’s eyes and ears in the local area. Much of their time is spent on case work (meeting with constituents and solving problems). They also organize the MP’s schedule while he or she is in the riding.</td>
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<th>MINISTERIAL STAFF</th>
<th>RIDING ASSOCIATIONS</th>
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<td>Ministerial staffs are appointed and, as political appointees, perform liaison work with the department, constituency, party and Parliament. They provide the minister with political advice on both policy and communications. Generally they work from the minister’s office in the department. They can be very influential people.</td>
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<td>Each political party charters riding associations. They organize political operations at the riding level. Each riding association elects an executive every year to hold meetings, recruit members and organize fundraising activities. The riding association for the party that was elected in the riding reinforces the MP’s efforts. It is the responsibility of the riding association to find a qualified candidate to run at election time. Riding associations are entirely volunteer driven. There is no paid support staff.</td>
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<th>OPPOSITION PARTIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>All MPs have influence, whether they belong to the governing party or are members of a party in opposition. The party that elects the second greatest number of MPs is known as the official opposition. Opposition parties organize themselves into shadow cabinets and MPs are assigned critic roles based on ministers and government departments. Opposition MPs pursue issues of interest to their parities, to their critic areas and to their constituents.</td>
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HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

■ BEFORE IT GOES TO THE FEDERAL CABINET
Before a bill goes to cabinet, departmental officials must prepare a detailed proposal called a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC). Often, public consultations precede the preparation of the MC, and sometimes the media are enlisted to test public support. Individuals have the opportunity for input before the MC is written, and this is the best time to influence policy.

■ CABINET APPROVAL
Before a bill is introduced in the House of Commons, cabinet usually studies it. Once the MC is ready, lobbying begins. The Minister who is responsible for the bill will attempt to gain the support of his or her cabinet colleagues. This activity also involves political staff, who will discuss the proposed bill with other political staff. Once cabinet has approved the proposed bill, the Minister asks the members of the House of Commons for permission to introduce the bill. The minister reads the title of the bill.

■ FIRST READING
Once the minister has read the title of the bill, the Speaker of the House of Commons proposes that the bill be read a first time and printed. There is no debate. The MPs agree that the bill is numbered, printed and distributed so that MPs and the public can study it.

■ SECOND READING
Second Reading is the most important stage of the legislative process. The minister sponsoring the bill gives a speech in the House of Commons explaining why the legislation is necessary and the bill’s objectives. Debate by government and opposition MPs then begins on the principles of the bill. Specifics are not discussed at this stage.

■ COMMITTEE STAGE
After Second Reading debate, the bill is referred to a specific House of Commons committee for detailed study. The minister sponsoring the bill, departmental officials and technical experts may be asked to appear before the committee to answer questions. Based on their study, members of the committee may propose, discuss or vote on amendments to the bill. Recently, MPs have had a greater role in drafting legislation by allowing some bills to be sent to committee after First Reading where it can be reviewed and revised before being debated in the House of Commons.

■ REPORT STAGE
After completing its hearings, the committee reports back to the House of Commons with any added amendments it may have made. Report Stage debate begins as all MPs consider the amendments made by the committee. At this stage of the legislative process, MPs can also suggest other amendments to the bill. All amendments are subject to a vote. Once amendments have been voted down or accepted, the bill is subject to a vote in its entirety. If passed, the bill goes to Third Reading.

■ THIRD READING
Debate continues, but there can be no further changes made to the text of the bill. A vote is taken to accept or reject the bill, as is. If the House of Commons passes the bill, it moves to the Senate.

Traditionally, MPs are expected to vote the party line. In some cases, when the bill in question concerns a moral issue, the government may consider calling a free vote. This allows MPs to vote according to their conscience.
POLITICAL TRIVIA

1. **HOW MANY PHYSICIANS HAVE BEEN PRIME MINISTER?**
   One – Sir Charles Tupper (1 May 1896 – 8 Jul. 1896); he was also the first president of the CMA.

2. **WHO WAS THE LONGEST SERVING PRIME MINISTER?**
   William Lyon Mackenzie King (Liberal) 21 years, 5 months, 1 day.

3. **WHO WAS THE SHORTEST SERVING PRIME MINISTER?**
   Charles Tupper (2 months, 7 days).

4. **WHO WAS THE FIRST WOMAN PRIME MINISTER?**
   Kim Campbell served 4 months, 9 days.

5. **WHO WAS THE ELDEST PRIME MINISTER AT TIME OF ELECTION?**
   Charles Tupper (74 years, 9 months, 29 days).

6. **WHO WAS THE YOUNGEST PRIME MINISTER?**
   Joe Clark (39 years, 11 months, 30 days).

7. **HOW MANY PHYSICIANS HAVE BEEN MINISTERS OF HEALTH SINCE CONFEDERATION?**
   Ministers presiding over the Department of Health

   Ministers of Pensions and National Health

*as of July 2012

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**THE SENATE**

The Senate, known as the chamber of “sober second thought,” considers legislation passed by the House of Commons to ensure that it is in the best form to serve the country. Like the House of Commons, the Senate votes on the bill at each of three readings.

Following Second Reading, bills may be referred to a Senate committee for detailed study. If the Senate has any amendments to the bill after completing Third Reading, it will inform the House of Commons in writing. The bill is returned to the House of Commons for debate and voting on the proposed changes.

If the House of Commons rejects the amendments, the Senate may insist on them before it will pass the bill. If the House of Commons and the Senate cannot agree on the amendments, a conference is held with members of both houses of Parliament.

Once the same version of the bill is passed by both chambers, it moves to the final step in the legislative process.

**ROYAL ASSENT**

Royal Assent is approval by the Governor General. The ceremony is one of the oldest parliamentary traditions. The Speaker of the House of Commons and the MPs are summoned to the Senate Chamber, where the Senate Clerk reads the title of the bill and the Governor General or his or her replacement nods, giving Royal Assent to the bill and making it law.

**PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BILLS AND MOTIONS**

MPs can introduce private members’ bills and motions in the House of Commons. Countless bills and motions are introduced every parliamentary session, but very few are successful. However, they do highlight issues and promote debate.
TIPS

WHAT DO I SAY TO MY MP?

- introduce your organization
- explain its mission, goals and objectives
- introduce and explain the issues you wish to discuss
- talk about your patients using examples to illustrate both problems and solutions
- talk about solutions that are feasible
- offer your expertise whenever needed by your MP or whenever you think it might be needed
- be sincere and passionate without being too emotional
- take notes! Decide ahead of time who will be equipped as the official note taker

YOUR MP WANTS:

- to be well informed about local events
- reliable contacts for information about the constituency
- to be acknowledged for positive political action

YOUR MP DOES NOT WANT:

- to be talked down to or belittled
- to have his or her time wasted
- to hear repetitive versions of the same argument
- to be part of an emotional display of anger

FINAL TIPS

- Be on time for the meeting. Don’t take more time for the meeting unless it is made available.
- Answer questions honestly. If you don’t have an answer, offer to get back to your MP or the assistant with the information.
- Be a good listener.
- Ask good questions that will keep your agenda in focus.
- Plan a condensed version of your presentation in case the meeting time shortened. Be flexible.
- Prepare an information package of handouts including a one-page summary of your main points in large print. Have enough handouts for participants in your group, the MP and his or her assistants.
- Bring a camera and take pictures for your newsletter.
GLOSSARY

ACT OF PARLIAMENT A bill that has received Royal Assent

BILL A proposed law submitted to Parliament for approval.

BUDGET SPEECH A speech in the House of Commons by the minister of finance introducing the government’s plans concerning revenues, expenditures and general economic policy.

CABINET For the most part, cabinet is the Prime Minister’s committee of advisors. It is a collective decision-making body that operates according to 3 strict conventions: secrecy, collective responsibility and unanimity.

CABINET COMMITTEES Cabinet establishes the legislative agenda for the federal government. Cabinet committees oversee and coordinate activities within their areas of jurisdiction.

CLAUSE-BY-CLAUSE STUDY The final phase of a committee’s study of a bill during which each clause is considered individually.

CLERK OF THE HOUSE The chief procedural advisor to the Speaker and to members of the House of Commons.

CLOSURE A procedure precluding further debate at any stage of a bill or on any motion by requiring that a vote be taken at the end of the sitting.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE All members of the House of Commons meeting as a committee to study appropriation bills and any other matter referred by the House. A chairperson, rather than the Speaker, presides.

FIRST READING The step immediately following the granting of leave to introduce a bill in the House of Commons or the Senate. It is decided without debate, amendment or question put, and includes the printing of the bill.

FREE VOTE Party discipline is not imposed on individual members for the vote.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE LEADER The minister responsible for managing the government’s business in the House of Commons. This business includes negotiations with the House Leaders of the opposition parties.

GOVERNMENT ORDER An Order of the House of Commons placed on the agenda (the order paper), usually by a minister or parliamentary secretary dealing with business.

HOUSE OF COMMONS The elected lower chamber that, together with the Senate and the Crown, makes up the Parliament of Canada. Made up of 308 members, only the House of Commons is authorized to introduce legislation concerning the raising or spending of funds.

MAIN ESTIMATES Government documents providing a breakdown of expenditure plans for the coming fiscal year.

MINORITY GOVERNMENT A government formed by a party, or a coalition of parties, which does not hold a majority of the seats in the House of Commons. While a minority government does not hold a majority of seats, it usually does hold more than any other party or coalition and must maintain the confidence of the House to continue in power.

NON-CONFIDENCE MOTION A motion that, if adopted, signals that the government has lost the confidence of the House of Commons. The government then resigns or requests that the Governor General dissolve Parliament and issue election writs.

OPPOSITION CRITIC Member of the Opposition party responsible for presenting the party’s policies in a given area and commenting on the policies of the government.

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY A member of the government party who is named to assist a Minister.

POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE A committee created by the CMA’s Board of Directors with representatives across the country. The PAC acts as a strategy-setting body for political action in reference to federal government matters that directly or indirectly affect the medical profession. The PAC helps maintain an open channel of grassroots communication between the CMA and MPs at the constituency level by recruiting participants and by raising awareness of, and building interest in, the MD-MP Contact Program among members in their regions.

PRIVY COUNCIL Established by the Constitution Act, 1867, its primary role is to advise the Governor General on government matters. Cabinet acts formally as the Privy Council. Privy Councillors are appointed for life, given the title Honourable and entitled to use the initials PC after their name. Membership is usually extended to provincial premiers, former and present federal cabinet ministers, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, former chief justices, former speakers of the House of Commons and the Senate.
STAYING INVOLVED

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GETTING MORE INVOLVED?
The MD–MP Contact Program is a grassroots lobby initiative that matches Canadian physicians with their Members of Parliament (MPs). The MD–MP Contact Program builds on the unique relationship between physicians and MPs. Each is concerned about the health of Canadians — as patients and as constituents.

Founded in 1994, the program has brought together federal representatives and physicians to share information on issues of mutual concern.

Physicians involved in the program have reported that they have learned a great deal about the interests and priorities of their federal representatives while keeping their MP informed of health care issues in their riding.

MPs participating in the program have come to rely on their MD contacts as a valuable source of information on medical and health care issues.

DECIDING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN ABOUT GETTING INVOLVED AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE, CONTACT:

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1867 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa ON K1G 5W8
800-682-MDMP (6367)
grassroots@cma.ca