



BOURSIERS
SAUVÉ
SCHOLARS

**Scholars' visit to Parliament Hill
Tuesday March 22nd
2011
Report by Andrew Sniderman**

"When the leaders of the country sat across the lunch table to talk politics and narrate anecdotes with us, I knew that I was sitting where the future of the country takes shape, and that I was witnessing it." (Anu George from India)

"An amazing hands-on lesson in Canadian politics! The best: listening the budget debate next to Thiha, who's from Burma. He whispers: 'This is democracy, eh? It's good... it's good.'" (Carlos Rueda from Peru)

The Scholars were fortunate enough to visit Ottawa on Budget Day. The energy and excitement on the Hill was palpable. We started the day with an hour-long meeting with David McGuinty, the Liberal House Leader. Given his vast international experience, he was a perfect match for the Scholars, having worked in many of our countries from which we hail. He explained the context of the day (budget, the contempt ruling by the Speaker) and quickly opened the floor to questions. The ensuing discussion centered on Canada's climate change policy, the conflict in Libya, and many other topics.

After our meeting, we gravitated to the nearest cafeteria, where we happened to run into Member of Parliament (MP) Marlene Jennings, who joined a table for an informal discussion ranging from women in politics to the issues of the day. Soon, we were off on a private tour of Parliament led by Liberal Foreign Affairs Critic Bob Rae.

Rae walked us through the Senate, library, and all the intervening foyers. He talked about the historical significance of the impressive paintings and carvings, especially the references to the First World War. We even walked through the Opposition Lobby. Mr. Rae's tour ended at the Parliamentary restaurant¹ where he engaged Scholars on foreign affairs. We were also joined by several other MPs: Scott Brison, Irwin Cotler, Marc Garneau, Peter Stoffer and Justin Trudeau.

They held forth on their respective portfolios, resulting in a lively and wide-ranging discussion ranging from Libya, human rights, immigration policy, youth engagement and, the issue of the day: the Budget. After some opening remarks, we broke into smaller groups to talk with each MP.

We headed to watch Question Period from the visitors' gallery – as guests of Marc Garneau, the MP for the riding in which the Sauvé Foundation is located – and, for many Scholars, this was their first experience of Parliamentary democracy. For 45 minutes, we watched the various Opposition parties fire questions at the Government. Rouzbeh (of Iran) and Thiha (of Burma) were particularly flabbergasted that such a thing occurs every day of the week when the House is sitting.

Finally, we headed off to the Darcy McGee's pub to watch the Budget speech, and following the leaders of the other opposition parties, Jack Layton's pronouncement that the NDP would not support the budget. The perfect way to conclude our day: news of an impending election, which all the Scholars were now sure to follow.

¹ There, we hosted a lunch for MPs of all political stripes. Unfortunately, not all who had confirmed were able to make it due to Committee meetings and budget lockups.