

To run or not to run?
A survey of former Members of the Parliament of Canada, January 2001

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It is hardly novel to comment on the low level of confidence that the public has in political institutions. Political parties, Parliament and the public service have all suffered the same loss of esteem in the eyes of the public. Of course public institutions are not the sole focus of citizen disenchantment. Large corporations are held in almost equal distrust, but citizens seem more accepting of these latter organizations, perhaps as they correctly feel that branches of the state should be more accountable to citizen demands for both performance and reform.

At the same time that Canadians feel their public institutions are unworthy of greater respect, both Parliamentary observers and Members of Parliament themselves feel the independence of Parliament is under threat. Never a bastion of “loose fish” Members, the present Parliament is nonetheless less receptive to private members rebellions than earlier Parliaments in Canada. It is hardly surprising then that recent editorials in Ottawa newspapers (the Citizen and the Hill Times) have questioned why good men and women would seek to serve in the nation’s capital. There is general acceptance among students of Parliament that the vast majority of Senators and MP’s come to Ottawa with good intentions, serve honourably and make valiant (if some times not totally successful) efforts at properly representing their constituencies. Many of these Members seek changes to Parliament that would allow them to more efficiently represent people and try and improve credibility to our national legislature.

There is therefore a fruitful dialogue on the problems of serving in the Parliament of Canada, most of it centered on the question of why would any rational individual choose to leave a good job to become a Member of Parliament. Less studied, but just as important, is the question of why would anyone choose to leave Parliament? Put another way, what types of challenges do former Members of Parliament face when they try to re-enter the non-political world? Do the problems of Parliament dog men and women after they leave office?

In order to determine the types of experiences that Members of Parliament faced both in office and after leaving public life, the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians (CAFP) surveyed their membership. What follows is a brief summary of some of the results of the survey. The CAFP would like to thank all the former Members of the Senate and the House of Commons for the trouble and time they took in responding to this survey. It is hoped that the results of this survey will increase the public’s understanding about the problems facing Parliamentarians both during their service and after they leave office.

Survey Responses

The CAFP sent surveys to over 850 former Members of both the Senate and House of Commons. Over two hundred completed surveys were returned for a total return rate of just over twenty-five per cent. This return rate is high for mail surveys in general where a twenty per cent response rate is considered substantial. Academics who survey sitting Members of Parliament (both in Canada and in the United Kingdom) generally aim for a similar return rate and would be very pleased with a response rate that exceeds one quarter of all surveys sent out.

Returned surveys included former Members of Cabinet (twenty one percent of all former House of Commons Members) and generally reflected the standings in the House of Commons prior to the 1993 election. Forty-four per cent of respondents were Progressive Conservatives, thirty-eight per cent were Liberals, and fifteen per cent were former New Democratic MP's. Given the rather brief existence of the BQ and Reform/Alliance there are few former elected Members of these parties to return this survey. There was a wide range of responses in terms of legislative experience. The average years served among respondents was just over nine years in the House of Commons, slightly higher than the average years of service of all Members of the lower house (approximately seven and a half years at the end of most Parliaments).

As indicated above, we received some responses from former Reform and BQ Members, indicating that there was interest in this project from the most recent vacators from the House of Commons. However, we also received responses from veterans from the Diefenbaker and Pearson era including individuals who had spent time in either one of these former Prime Minister's cabinets.

Just under fifteen per cent of responses were from women, representing approximately the gender breakdown in Parliament in the past twenty years. However, given the low number of women Members (and former Members) in general, the report is unable to generalize any findings based on gender.

The survey response was highest among former Members of the House, reflecting their higher numbers in general (compared to former Senators). The small response rate from former Senators has meant that the report deals more specifically on the experiences of former elected Parliamentarians. This concentration on former House Members is not intended to diminish the important representative role played by Senators. Instead it merely reflects: a) the larger number of former MP's and b) the much larger response rate from these former Members of the lower chamber.

In sum, the responses reflect the type of representative that Canadians have sent to Ottawa for the past forty years. The data drawn from the responses are reflective of the views of most previous Parliamentarians. The survey included both closed and open ended questions. Most respondents took the opportunity to supplement their closed ended answers with some comments based on their own personal experiences.

The Benefits of Service

If Canadians were asked what motivates individuals to run for office, the types of responses might vary from “self-interest and ambition” to “pursue pet policy/partisan beliefs.” While it is true that ambition drives many individuals in political life (as it does in the worlds of business, academia, journalism and others) most Members who make it to Ottawa are driven by far more altruistic goals. Asked what first motivated Members to seek office, the primary reason for running for federal office was to serve the community in which they lived. As Table One below illustrates, this loyalty to community is constant for Members of all partisan stripes.

Table One Motivations for Seeking Office by Political Party				
	Lib	PC	NDP	Reform
Serve Community that elected me	1	1	1	1
Loyalty to Party	3	3	4	4
Pursue particular policy interests	2	2	2	2
Partisan Beliefs	4	4	3	3
To serve in the Federal Cabinet	5	5	5	5

Note: Numbers illustrated are ranked score where a 1 indicates strongest motivation and a 5 indicates weakest motivation.

The most notable result is the consistency across party. The first, second and final rankings do not vary between the four major parties represented. The only variation is between third and fourth rankings, where the more ideological New Democrats and Reform veterans place partisan beliefs higher than loyalty to party, while the Tory and Liberal former Members are more loyal to their party proper.

This motivation was followed through once these men and women made it to Parliament. Asked how they split up their work-day in terms of allocating their time, constituency work was the most popular choice. Respondents indicated that this duty took up just over one-third of their time, with legislative work taking up less than one-third and the remainder of their day spent split between policy, party and governmental duties. Depending which party formed the government some Members found themselves sacrificing both constituency and legislative

demands for government responsibilities. This was the only variation found between parties on this measure.

There were slight differences found among Members when it came to how they enjoyed performing their various elected responsibilities. Among those returning surveys, there was greater single interest in pursuing policy changes than there was in constituency work. However, this is partially due to the types of activities listed in the survey. As Table Two delineates, Members were given two types of constituency activities, helping individuals and protecting the interests of the constituency as a whole. If these two activities are combined, constituency work once again wins out.

Table Two Most enjoyable representative duty of former Members of Parliament Percentage of first choices					
	Lib	Cons	NDP	Ref	All
Helping constituents with govt red tape	14.3%	16.3%	33.3%	0	18.2%
Taking an active role in public policy formation	43.6%	37%	37%	60%	39.6%
Being an issue advocate inside caucus	10.9%	6.3%	0	0	7.0%
Serving the community that elected me	37%	39%	33.3%	40%	35.3%
Communicating govt policy to constituents	3.9%	0	0	0	1.6%

Note: Although in the case of the Reform Party, the responses add to 100 per cent, we should not expect them to in all (or any) cases. First, not all Members responded to all questions in this section of the survey. Second, each duty was asked in a separate question. Within each duty, the ranking percentages add to 100 per cent when broken down by party.

This cursory examination does help to substantiate what most close observers of Parliament and the men and women who serve in it have long understood. Members of Parliament are, with few exceptions, extremely dedicated individuals. They come to office hoping to represent their ridings. They spend the plurality of their time doing just that, and at the

end of the day, claim a great deal of personal satisfaction in performing that task. Stopping our analysis at this point might lead us to believe that all is well with the status of political careers in Canada. After all, Members get out what they put into it, and they seem to have accomplished what they wanted.

However, all is not well with the manner in which the political life cycle unfolds in Canadian national politics. While Members take great satisfaction in performing some of the very tasks that first caused them to serve publicly, they do so in the face of many barriers to effective, and enjoyable service.

The Costs of Service: Time in Office

The obstacles facing men and women in office come in two forms or types. The first of these are structural, that is they are problems that come from style of Westminster government that successive administrations in Canada have been content to practice. These problems include but are not limited to party discipline, long sessions, lack of independence of legislative committees and a sense that too much power resides with the bureaucracy. While these might seem like significant roadblocks, in reality, all they require to be fixed, is a willing government.

The second type of problem facing Members is personal and therefore more difficult to satisfactorily resolve. Personal costs of service include time spent away from family, long weekly commutes across the world's second largest nation and the problems associated with always being on public display especially under the media microscope. While less concrete, these problems are just as, if not more, felt by most representatives and are harder to ameliorate.

Table Three lists the mean score on a list of possible "costs" or "downsides" to life as a Member of Parliament. The score is based on a scale of one to ten, where one indicates the factor is not at all significant and ten suggests it is a very significant negative factor. The table helps us understand the relative weight of each of these possible frustrations.

Table Three Costs of Being a Member of Parliament			
	Mean	Median	Mode
Physical Exhaustion of Campaigning	3.8	3	1
Travel to and from Ottawa	5.2	5	5
Unappreciative press and public	5.2	5	5
Inability to achieve success in policy areas of personal interest	4.7	5	5
Sacrifice of family life	7.1	8	10
Fighting a seemingly intransigent bureaucracy	5.1	5	5
Public intrusion into personal life	5.2	5	5
Frustration at your inability to bring about change	5.8	5	5

The most obvious outlier in Table Three is the personal sacrifice that most MP's make when it comes to their own families. Enjoying the exhilaration of the hustle of the campaign trail, most Members do not find elections particularly exhausting. Travel to and from Ottawa and the constituency, and a public and press that does not value their work holds some irritation, as does their inability to instigate public policy changes. But all of these pale in comparison to the disruption of family life. The structural barriers (inability to engage in change, dealing with a bureaucracy that answers to Ministers and not Members), are less critical than the personal costs. In this sense, the problems that are harder to change are the ones that Members feel the most. It is hardly surprising that many Members leave politics feeling that they have missed an important stage in their families life, and blame their careers for this loss.

The long work hours, the travel, and the unwritten requirement to attend as many local functions as possible all come at the expense of time with ones' family. One way of minimizing this disruption is for a member to have his or her family move to Ottawa with them, providing their spouse is willing to give up their work. But this presents a problem back home. Many MP's feel that moving their family to the nation's capital sends the wrong signal about their commitment to their constituency. Of those responding to the survey, slightly more than one third had their family move with them to Ottawa after their election. And of these, under half had school age children. Sitting Members are willing to disrupt their own lives for public service, but

are less willing to interrupt their children's, even when it means that Members spend less time with their family.

This lack of time with family Members manifests its own difficulties. When asked the impact of elected life on family life, a full seventy-six per cent of Members indicated it was at least "somewhat stressful" (32% indicated "very stressful and 44% "somewhat stressful"). Interestingly, levels of marital stress were not diminished when families moved to Ottawa with the Member of Parliament. That is, there were no significant differences in levels of family stress between those whose families remained in the constituency and those who moved. Among the most popular causes of this form of stress was time spent away from family (either in the nation's capital or in the constituency), long hours of work, and missing family activities. Sixteen per cent of respondents blamed the stress of elected life for the eventual break up of their marriage. While this is significantly lower than the national average, the question asked about divorces could be specifically tied to the member's career.

The stress on family life of a Member of Parliament cannot be denied. Members do enjoy their representative responsibilities. Serving the public, and in particular their constituents is a source of great pleasure and pride. However, it comes at a tremendous personal cost.

Comments from former Members reinforced the empirical results of the survey. An opened ended question that asked for three types of stress that elected life placed on Members produced an overwhelming response in terms of absence from family and loved ones. Many Members indicated had they not had the tremendous support of their family, they could not have withstood the rigours of elected life. Others proffered advice to anyone thinking about a political career. "Wait until your family has grown, otherwise you will loose out on so many personal events and never get them back" is a paraphrase of a myriad of such concerns of former Members. Other former legislators commented that they missed out on much of their children's coming of age. More than one commented regretfully that they have seen more of their grandchildren growing up than they did of their own children, and blame themselves and the long and thankless working hours and travels of their political job for this misfortune.

Other Members indicated that their families, correctly but disappointingly, found that as legislators they had to put their jobs in front of family. As one Member tellingly indicated, "I am not sure any job is worth it, but when the public does not appreciate what we are doing, and I looked at what I was giving up [family time], it made my decision to leave office very easy." This Member was not alone in indicating that a combination of pressures made public service less rewarding than it might otherwise have been. Quite a few indicated that it was the combination of a lack of family life, and a public that were often unaware of these sacrifices, that became troubling. Others factors that heightened the impact of familial sacrifices included; long travel to and from Ottawa, inability to make long range plans with family, life in a fishbowl with an unappreciative press, frequent calls and visits to the family home at inconvenient [late] hours and a lack of financial security.

Saying Goodbye to Service: Life after Office

For many individuals, the transition from one career to another can be a time of great stress and anxiety. This is no less true for Members of Parliament than it is for other professionals, those in the business sector, and public servants. We should not expect former Parliamentarians to be immune from the problems faced with beginning a new career, or returning to a previous career after a substantial break. By and large, however, most respondents (83%) indicated that the transition “from elected life to a career after politics” was either somewhat or very successful.¹ At first blush, this might diminish concern over the fate of former lawmakers. After all, there are very few professions where three quarters of those leaving consider themselves content. However, the high satisfaction rate masks some very real problems that a significant minority of Members faced after leaving public life.

First, it is important to distinguish between those who left office by choice (voluntarily vacated) and hence were able to plan their departure, and those who lost their bid for re-election. For Members of the former group, leaving office can be seen in a fashion similar to individuals who orchestrate a change of career or plan their retirement. In other words, these individuals are controlling their own destiny. We should expect to see these men and women experiencing a more successful transition. For those that ran for re-election and lost, the transition should be less planned, more abrupt and less enjoyable. In fact, this is exactly what happens. Table Four compares the transition experiences of Members who left by choice with those who were defeated.

¹There was of course a significant overlap between the three-quarters of respondents who claimed that public life placed stress on their marriage and the eighty per cent of respondents who had a successful transition to life after politics. For many of these individuals, life after politics meant a return to a saner life style and relationship. However, the overlap was far from total and probably reflects the high number in both groups rather than a direct relationship between the two measures.

Table Four Transition from office		
	Successful transition	Less than successful transition
Voluntarily left office	61 (88%)	8 (12%)
Defeated at polls	72 (73%)	26 (27%)
Returned to previous career	70 (89%)	9 (11%)
Began new career	70 (77%)	21(23%)
Post parliamentary career salary higher	60 (98%)	1 (2%)
Post parliamentary career salary same	25 (81%)	6 (19%)
Post parliamentary career salary lower	33 (67%)	17 (33%)

Note: percentages are row per cents. For example, the first row indicates that of the 69 individuals who left office voluntarily, 61, or 88% had a successful transition, while 12% had a less than successful transition.

While a majority of those defeated still faced a relatively smooth transition, the difference between retirees and defeated Members is significant. A similar type of difference appears between those who returned to their previous careers and those who began a new (or third or more) career after politics. Those returning to the sanctity of their old profession were far more likely to enjoy a successful transition than those who either chose a new career or were not welcomed back to their previous job. Finally, there are salary implications that are associated with the levels of successful transition. Those who left politics for a salary higher than that of their elected one were more likely to enjoy a smooth transition than those whose job change came with a salary cut. We now begin to understand the conditions necessary for a successful return to pre-elected life. Members who control their own destiny, have a job to return to and who are in a position to make more money, are far more likely to enjoy the transition period. While seemingly obvious there are two points to be noted.

First, there is a sizeable cohort of MP's who are not in such an enviable position. While

many defeated Members did enjoy a good transition, those in the defeated camp are twice as likely to face a rocky switch as voluntary vacators. It should also be noted that the defeat rate in Canada is quite high, both compared to the retirement rate and to defeat rates in other nations. Over half of turnover is caused by defeat. With typical turnover rates of fifty to sixty-five percent, this means that at any given election we can expect anywhere from one quarter to one third of the House of Commons to be placed in this vulnerable position.

There is also a sense among many former Members that the position one holds in the House, and the way a member leaves, plays a major role in how soft the post-elected landing feels. At the top of the pecking order are Cabinet Ministers who make the decision to leave politics well ahead of any election call. As one such Member indicated “if you were in Cabinet and you know [sic] that there will be an election anytime after the next six months, you can start spending time looking for work. This is even better if your Cabinet portfolio is something in the economic or industrial areas. You are doing your job but at the same time you are looking for opportunities.” A second member said much the same thing and suggested that even among Ministers there was a hierarchy. This former lawmaker indicated that “there are some Cabinet Ministers who spent all their time in social policy. They helped a lot of people, but no companies were knocking on their doors after they left [elected life]. But if you were in something with lots of contacts in the business community the landing was much softer.”

Next on the list, are Members (Cabinet or private Members) who choose to step down. These individuals may not have the lucrative contacts that some in the Cabinet do, but they do have one advantage over some other MP's, they make the transition on their terms, not the voters. The benefits for individuals in this category are clear. As one such Member indicated, “once I knew I wasn't going to run again, I started planning for life after politics... I knew I was not going to make as much money for some time [after politics] but knowing this in advance made me plan more carefully... I loved being an MP, but by the time [the writ was dropped] I was very happy to leave.”

Members whose exit decisions are made by the voters have the most difficult transition. Longer serving Members with more generous pension benefits and Cabinet Ministers have an easier transition, but for many defeated Members, the election loss, coupled with a lack of planning for post-election adds up to a difficult transition time. One member put it this way. “It was one thing to lose and think about people you have served rejecting you. Add to that, ‘what am I going to do now? How do I keep up [financially]... The first six months after the election were very difficult, emotionally and in terms of financial security.”

The second point to be noted is that having a smooth transition and making more money post politics is a bit of a dubious honour. Among other things, it helps to highlight the low rate of pay and unwelcoming job conditions associated with being one of Canada's federally elected representatives. Once over the agony of defeat, all Members can at least look forward to the prospect of spending more time with their families and many can expect an increased standard of living. While the data do not allow us to draw definitive conclusions about the role of income in determining career choice, it is interesting to observe that those who left by choice were more

likely to enjoy higher post-elected salaries than those who were defeated at the polls. Forty-five per cent of retirees had higher post-elected salaries compared to thirty-five per cent of defeated Members. While the prospect of higher salaries alone might not be sufficient to drive dedicated men and women from public service, it certainly helps to tip the scales for those contemplating a step off the public stage.

Like any individual in the midst of a career change, Members who leave office can also expect to have varied experiences in their new (or previous job). One way of gauging their thoughts about political office is to measure their level of satisfaction in their new occupation. Overwhelmingly, former Members of Parliament indicate satisfaction with their new occupations. Fully sixty percent indicate that they are very satisfied and another thirty per cent indicate some satisfaction with their new occupation. Is this simply relief at leaving the thankless job of being a member? At first blush, one might be tempted to think so. As Table Five indicates, many Members seem happy to be in a new position even though the salary is less than what they were making as a Member of Parliament.

Table Five New Job Satisfaction and Salary Differential			
	Salary higher	Salary same	Salary lower
Satisfied with new job	52 (96.3%)	40 (93%)	41 (81.4%)
Not Satisfied with new job	2 (3.7%)	3 (7%)	10 (19.6%)

Note: percentages are column percentages. So the first column would read as follows; of the 54 individuals who had a higher salary after leaving office, fifty-two of them, or 96.3% were satisfied with their new job while 3.7% were not satisfied with their new position.

Not surprisingly, people in jobs that have a higher level of pay are more likely to find satisfaction with their new profession. What is more revealing is the number of individuals making less money who are happy in their new line of work. Over eighty percent of individuals making less money still claim at least some level of job satisfaction. One might be forgiven for thinking that such an analysis has little meaning given the pension implications of being a Member of Parliament. After all, former MP's can afford a lower salary since their pensions are more generous than most others. As it turns out however, the average years of service is lower among Members whose post-elected salaries are lower than their elected ones. That is, among those claiming higher post-elected incomes, the average years of service is over ten years. For those with lower salaries after service, the average length of time in office is just over eight years. In fact, forty-five per cent of Members in this category had less than six years of elected service, meaning that they receive no MP pension at all! Why then are they so happy with their new profession? In part at least, because they have more responsibility with their new job.

Comparing satisfaction levels in life after politics with the level of responsibility in their new positions, only twelve per cent of those surveyed were not satisfied with their new jobs, and all of these individuals had less responsibility in these positions. No one with the same or more responsibility in their new jobs claimed dissatisfaction with their post-elected position. For these individuals, responsibility and the ability to make change is a far more important factor in job happiness than the more tangible factor of salary. Most former Members of Parliament are more interested in making change than in making money.

Interestingly, there was no real relationship between levels of satisfaction in one's new profession and the cost of public service in terms of time lost with family. It was thought that Members who felt political careers exacted the highest toll on family life would be happiest in jobs outside of politics. If anything however, those who were more upset with the sacrifice of family time when in office were more likely to be less satisfied with their post-elected jobs. However, differences found in this particular case were not statistically significant and it is impossible to make any generalization about this finding.

Finally, if any proof is needed about the dedication to public service of the men and women who have sat in Canada's lower house, it can be found in the responses to one of the last questions raised in the survey, namely would you do it all over again if you could. We have painted a picture of former Parliamentarians who serve in a job that the public has little regard for. Many take a salary cut when they enter office and quite a few never recoup their losses after they leave Ottawa. Most spend inordinate amounts of time away from their family and regret that loss of time immensely. For some Members, life in Ottawa costs them their marriage. The stresses of the job are great and the level of party discipline and leader control often prevent them from engaging in the type of policy change that first prompted them to seek office. Yet when asked the question, "Knowing what you know now, would you still have served in office or would you serve again?" a resounding 86.5% of former MP's said they would. In fact more than one respondent indicated they hoped to run again in the future.

Despite the costs of service, many former Members indicated that the rewarding nature of elected service was a unique opportunity. As one member indicated, "I have had the luxury of numerous types of work and service, but nothing compares to being a Member of Parliament. To know that so many people have placed their trust in you is very humbling, and fulfilling that trust is extremely rewarding." Other Members indicated similar levels of humility and honour. Others indicated they loved the "pace of the job", that no two days were the same and that they were in on decisions that altered the fabric of Canadian society (issues mentioned included Free Trade, the 1982 Constitution and the Canadian Bill of Rights).

Some former Cabinet Ministers admitted that being a member of the executive was the pinnacle of their elected career. One such member stated that "I would do it all again, but not to be in Opposition or in the back bench. The ability to make changes in Cabinet was incredibly satisfying and quite honestly addictive. I certainly wouldn't do it again if I couldn't be in Cabinet." This type of comment was not untypical of other former Cabinet Ministers interviewed subsequent to the survey. Once again, the gap between Cabinet and private Member status is

apparent.

Among the Members who stated they would not do it all again, only one had served in the Cabinet. These individuals once again pointed predominantly to family stress as a factor in their negative reflections. A few Members indicated that the fault lay with them. One Member stated that “I ran when my family was too young. I couldn’t countenance something like that for anyone.” A second member said they should have “established my career and my family first, not during my career.” Similarly another former MP explained that the uncertainty, particularly with a young family, was a deterrent to thinking about a repeat in elected life.

Few indicated that the poor opportunities to affect change were enough to deter them. One member stated they were “too idealistic. When I came face to face with the reality of not being able to make the changes I wanted, I was frustrated. Anyone who has high expectations should stay away.” A second suggested that the present system of representative democracy in Canada was simply not working. However, it should be noted that while many former Members offered suggestions to improve the working of Parliament and unlock the shackles of party discipline, very few felt that the cost outweighed the benefits of service.

Finally, while the cliché that free advice is worth just that, the wisdom of individuals who have walked on a path that someday others will tread is often priceless. Former Members were asked what advice they would offer anyone considering a foray into national elected life. Again, the most popular response came down to matters closest to the heart and hearth. The overwhelming plurality of responses suggested that prospective Members should ensure that their family supports and understands the overwhelming commitment needed to properly fulfil the job of being an MP. In a similar tone, many respondents warned that anyone who is elected should put their family first, that the cost of not doing so is just too high a price to pay, even to serve the country. Others indicated that this was impossible and suggested that Members simply be prepared to understand that their families, and not the Members, will pay the price of their commitment to representing their constituency.

Other volunteered counsel was more direct and more pragmatic. Respondents suggested that would be legislators ensure they are financially secure. This concern with finances was particularly felt among Members who had been defeated and had not served in Cabinet. Other practical advice included suggestions to be realistic. A few Members indicated that anyone who “hoped to change the world would quickly realize this is not the place.” Other suggestions included; “make sure you want it badly enough” “make sure you are not on an ego trip” “go for it but beware of the pitfalls” “be aware of lawyers” “understand you will lose all privacy” “pay no attention to the PMO” and perhaps prophetically, “don’t stay too long.” Such advice, good, bad and ugly came from Members who both loved their service and would do it again if possible, and the fifteen percent who would have lived their elected lives differently if given the chance once more.

Discussion

The men and women who aspire and achieve federal office in Canada are a group of dedicated individuals. Most serve at the cost of some sacrifice. Travel to and from the constituency can be onerous. As the former Member of Parliament for the Yukon indicated, it is easier to fly from Ottawa to Venezuela than it is from the nation's capital to her home. The cost of service is high. Members lose time with their families that they will never recapture. We do not know how many divorces in Canada can be directly attributed to the job of one of the partners. From the accounts of former Members of Parliament, it is sixteen percent. This is an awfully high price to pay for the honour of serving ones constituents. Yet it is an honour that most of these men and women relish, to the point of saying that they would do it all over again if they could.

On the whole, most former Members are satisfied with their transition from elected life to post-elected life. Some have salary increases, while for others life after office means a drop in salary (this stands in direct contrast to former Senators and Representatives in the United States - the majority of whom do substantially better after serving their country). Yet even those who do not serve long enough to qualify for a parliamentary pension, and who take a cut in salary after leaving, seem relatively sanguine about their transition to a life after politics. It may be that the costs in terms of lost family time, make any cut in pay or loss of pension pale by comparison to being home with ones loved ones at the end of the day.

If there is a cohort of MP's who face more troubles than others, it is those who left office not by their choice, but by the votes of their constituents. Those who leave office by choice, who retire, have the luxury of planning their exit. For these former office holders, the transition takes place on their terms. They have the luxury of planning their departure and presumably can begin the search for other meaningful work (or retirement from paid work) prior to leaving the Commons. Those who are defeated are afforded no such luxury. It is these defeated individuals, particularly those who serve only one term and have no pension to fall back on (or depending upon their age, to look forward to) who are the most vulnerable. Considering that turnover rates in Canada are exceptionally high, and that rookie MP's make up the largest block among the defeated cohort, this is not a small problem. At the very least, it is one that is deserving of some more attention.

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