

“Do Constituents Suffer when their Representative is the  
Speaker? Evidence from Queen’s Park”

by

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The speakership, as it has been described, is the ‘linch-pin of the whole chariot’.<sup>1</sup> Critical to the functioning and safeguarding of our democratic principles is an impartial Speaker that presides over the debates and law-making in our parliamentary institutions. The role of Speaker has evolved in different ways across jurisdictions and although each legislature has adopted their own guiding set of principles, rules, and traditions, non-partisan impartiality remains a cornerstone of the speakership in any parliamentary democracy.

An important feature of the Speakership is that elected members choose one of their own to preside impartially over the house. As a result, the elected representative chosen as Speaker must detach themselves from partisan politics and refrain from influencing debates or taking part in discussions in the legislature. However, the Speaker is still an elected member chosen by their own constituents to represent their interests in parliament. One of the most important ways a member can fulfill this duty is by raising issues in the legislature, and as Speaker this avenue of representation is taken away.

The purpose of this paper is to explore whether being the Speaker in a Westminster style of government is detrimental to his or her constituents in terms of representing their views. My research primarily comes from interviews with the current and past Speakers of the Ontario Legislature, in addition to interviews conducted with senior city officials and local press in a Speaker’s respective riding. The first part of this paper will focus on the results of my interviews which will centre on the following: how the constituency’s relationship changes with their Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) when their representative becomes the Speaker; the various techniques employed by Speakers to ensure the needs of the constituents are met; the advantages and disadvantages of having one’s MPP as Speaker; and lastly, argue that constituents are not at a disadvantage because their representative is the Speaker. The second half of this paper will speak to the much larger issues that arise out of my research: the first being the general decline in the importance of work that is conducted on the legislature floor; and secondly, the lack of maturity in Canada’s and subsequently Ontario’s parliamentary institutions. Overall, constituents do just as well, if not better when their representative is the Speaker.

Before I begin, this paper focuses primarily on Ontario’s experiences with the speakership. Each province, never mind each country with a Westminster style democracy, observes different traditions and rules that make their own speakership unique. In Canada for instance, the Ontario Speaker wears the traditional robe whereas in Quebec this tradition stopped 30 or 40 years ago, and in some jurisdictions Speakers attend caucus meetings in others they do not. The analyses below speak to specifically Ontario experience and as a result may not perfectly, with all Ontario’s nuances, be adapted to another jurisdiction. However, the more general findings and analysis of the speakership in Ontario could loosely explain the experience of other Speaker’s across Canada. This is above and beyond the scope of my paper but important to note nonetheless.

My research has been gathered mainly through two mediums: a literature review of research already conducted on the topic and interviews (to see a list of interviewees see Appendix A). To date, most of the work studying the relationship between a Speaker and his or her constituents comes right from the horse’s mouth: the Speaker. Although it is important to examine the experience an elected member has when he or she becomes the impartial arbiter of

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Laundry, The Office of the Speaker in the Parliaments of the Commonwealth (London: Quiller Press Limited, 1984), 10.

the house, it is a very unbalanced and one-sided way of looking at the relationship. There has been very little work conducted showcasing the views and experiences of the actual constituents themselves, which is a critical perspective in truly obtaining a comprehensive evaluation of the relationship. To achieve this end, I not only interviewed Speakers that have served in the Ontario Legislature, but I interviewed various press and local city officials in some of their ridings to gauge the public sentiment. I interviewed five of the seven Speakers that have served at Queen's Park since 1990, and I conducted interviews with municipal officers and local press in the ridings of current Speaker Steve Peters (Elgin-Middlesex-London), and former Speaker Michael Brown (Algoma-Manitoulin). I found to go even further back in the history of those who served as the Speaker, city councils had overturned, boundaries had changed and journalists had come and gone.

Although the focus of this paper is on the Ontario experience, we are faced with a Canadian speakership anomaly right now in Ottawa: the Speaker is not a member of the governing party. Speaker Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands) is only the second Speaker to experience this, James Jerome being the first, and has served as the impartial chair of the House of Commons since 2001. Speaker Milliken, a Liberal, was first elected to the chair when his own party was in power, and was re-elected as Speaker when the Conservative Party occupied a minority government in both the 2006 and 2008 federal elections. In light of this unique situation I interviewed Speaker Milliken in addition to senior city officials and press in his riding. Through exploring this interesting dynamic I hope to determine if Speaker Milliken is better served compared to his liberal counterparts because of his long-standing neutral and impartial role in the House of Commons. The findings of my research are summarized in the following pages.

### ***A Relationship in Transition***

***“Indeed, our focus had been completely on the negative side. We were worried that our voters would see it as a muzzle, tying my hands behind my back – and maybe it would be so.”<sup>2</sup>***

James Jerome on contemplating becoming Speaker.

Every Speaker grapples with the question of what their newly acquired role will mean for the constituents they represent. They worry about the level of service they can provide, if their constituents will feel silenced, and if they will be able to advance the general interests of the riding in a successful way. Although these reservations hold weight when we gauge the initial reactions of constituents when their elected member becomes Speaker, over time it becomes clear that Speaker's concern themselves with these problems a bit too much.

To begin, Speaker's, press, and city officials admit the relationship is minimally affected by the impartial and non-partisan role the Speaker assumes. Primarily, some Speaker's face some public backlash in response to their new role, but on the whole the public sentiment is overwhelmingly positive. To take a page from the experiences the current Ontario Speaker, the Honourable Steve Peters faced when becoming Speaker we can gain some invaluable insights into the relationship. Of the six mayors I interviewed in Speaker Peters riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London, none had anything negative to say about their MPP's position as the Speaker. When asked about the public sentiment in the riding after such news was released,

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<sup>2</sup> James Jerome, Mr. Speaker (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart Limited, 1985), 31.

again the perception was positive. The Mayor of the Town of Malahide, John Wilson states that, “the local press and conservatives in the riding tried to play up the angle that we no longer had a representative in government or in opposition. However, those comments quickly dissipated because they were unfounded.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Mayor for Thames Centre, Jim Maudsley, heard rumblings of a “he’ll lose a vote on it”, but he admitted that, “one vote isn’t going to make a difference when there is a majority government in power.”<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that these types of comments and feelings were similarly mirrored in other press and city official interviews both in Speaker Peters and in former Speaker Michael Brown’s riding.

My research paints the image that a Speaker’s relationship with their constituents is not at all affected by their impartial role, although it may be slightly different. David Warner, Ontario Speaker from 1990-1994, stresses that, “From the outset, you have to let your constituents know that you are still there for them, but again in a different way... you conduct your business in a manner they are not used to.”<sup>5</sup> Many Speakers’ interviewed highlight that constituency work is still constituency work, expectations are still expectations and constituents as a result do not experience any changes in the day-to-day correspondence with their MPP. In addition, mayors expressed no difference in their MPP’s availability, ability to respond to individual concerns, and to remain visible in the constituency. Sylvia Hofhuis, a mayor in Speaker Peters riding notes that he is still available every Friday in the constituency and that he always has the ear of her or any other individuals in the riding.<sup>6</sup> Many other prominent city officials note that since the staff remains the same in both offices they still have a good rapport with the office and have the same access to their elected MPP. Most of the time, however, it is more of the staff doing the political pushing than the member, but it is all the same in the end.<sup>7</sup>

The biggest challenge noted by Ontario’s Speakers is the difficulty they face in communicating to their constituents. Former Speaker, Michael Brown expresses that “I had greater influence at Queen’s Park because of my role as Speaker, but I had trouble communicating that to my constituents.”<sup>8</sup> It all starts with being very clear with your constituents on what you can and cannot do in your capacity as Speaker. Journalists in both Speaker Peters and Brown’s riding talked of the confusion constituents felt over the role of the Speaker. When James Jerome, former Speaker for the House of Commons, recalls a conversation with his predecessor, Speaker Lamoureux, Jerome notes that, “The first thing he said to me was that if I became Speaker, I would begin explaining the role the day after I was elected and I would never stop. No truer words were ever spoken!”<sup>9</sup> Discovering how to communicate and connect with your constituents in a public way that is appropriate is arguably one of the principal changes an elected member and their constituents face when the elected representative becomes Speaker. Speaker Peter notes that because he cannot attend cheque presenting ceremonies his constituents, “may not be able to identify that work he did behind the scenes to get that money flowing.”<sup>10</sup> This is further affirmed by Mayor James McIntyre who

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<sup>3</sup> John Wilson, telephone interview by author, 9 April 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Maudsley, telephone interview by author, 9 April 2009.

<sup>5</sup> David Warner, in person interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvia Hofhuis, telephone interview by author, 20 April 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Rick Hamilton, telephone interview by author, 21 April 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Brown, in person interview by author, 4 March 2009.

<sup>9</sup> James Jerome, *Mr. Speaker* (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart Limited, 1985), 133.

<sup>10</sup> (Hon.) Steve Peters, in person interview by author, 9 March 2009.

states that, “Steve can’t communicate in the same way he used to which is sometimes hard.”<sup>11</sup> However, a little creativity can go a long way. David Warner would make himself more prominent in unique ways. In addition to releasing non-partisan press releases, he started presenting awards, certificates and scrolls wherever he could to make himself more visible to his constituents.<sup>12</sup> Overall, the relationship between a Speaker and his or her constituents remains relatively the same, just the communication style must change. Nevertheless, if a Speaker is clear and concise on the limitations of their role, different will not be seen in a negative light.

### *Methods and Avenues Available to Air Constituency Concerns*

***“I go about solving their problems in any way a member would. Regardless of what side you are on, when you get a practical problem to solve with respect to workers’ compensation or a drug benefit or whatever you just do it. That does not change no matter who you are in the house.”***<sup>13</sup>

David Warner

There is consensus among Speakers that have served at Queen’s Park that the avenues and methods that are used to air constituency concerns is the exact same as any backbench MPP, the only difference being that they cannot stand up on the legislature floor on behalf of their constituents. Speaker Peters likens his lobbying techniques to the experience of opposition members, he states that,

Since I no longer have a Minister’s ear in weekly caucus meetings, I do a lot of my correspondence through letters, just like an opposition member. I can also talk directly to Minister’s which again is no different from being in opposition. You always see opposition members crossing the floor and talking to Minister’s. It happens all the time.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, Mike Brown noted that he did a lot of his lobbying on the phone, while the other Speakers mentioned a mixture of letters, phone calls, and individual meetings with Ministers. Although they can all agree that the avenues and methods they employed were similar to those as a regular MPP, it cannot be denied that Ministers would “sit up and notice more,” as former Speaker Gary Carr (Oakville) has stated.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that it is a generally understood principle that the Speaker should not be embarrassed by their service as Speaker and as a result Cabinet Minister’s and the Premier should always lend an ear to the Speaker if they have constituency concerns. Peters, Brown, Curling, Carr, and Warner all recognize that there were always special considerations on the part of senior bureaucrats and Cabinet Minister’s to *listen* and hear the Speaker out, but they also

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<sup>11</sup> James McIntyre, telephone interview by author, 20 April 2009.

<sup>12</sup> David Warner, in person interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>13</sup> David Pond, “Interview: Ontario’s Presiding Officers – David Warner, Gilles Morin, Dennis Drainville, Noble Villeneuve,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 16 (Autumn 2003): <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Sites/LOP/Infoparl/english/issue.asp?param=146&art=975>

<sup>14</sup> (Hon.) Steve Peters, in person interview by author, 9 March 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Gary Carr, telephone interview by author, 2 March 2009.

distinguish that if they received funding it was more a result of that it was their turn and it was a good project versus an attribution to their role in the legislature. Warner states that, “There is a possibility you can get more done, but it depends on the circumstances and what you are pushing for.”<sup>16</sup> For instance, Warner can name several instances where he lobbied for a particular initiative or piece of funding and got nowhere. He talked of his work in trying to get a much-needed dialysis unit for the local hospital in his riding. Warner lobbied three different governments and even pushed harder when he was Speaker. His riding did not get the dialysis unit until the first term of the Michael Harris government. Curling seconds this opinion in saying that, “I sometimes feel the work by members is overemphasized. How much money you get depends on what is in the budget, and what the budget dictates.”<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, many constituents agree that their member’s ability to advance the interest of their riding have to do more with the rapport they have with other members as opposed to their role. Mayor Joyce Foster of Gore Bay located in Michael Brown’s riding expresses that she believes that the work Brown did for the riding while Speaker was more indicative of the good standing he has garnered around Queen’s Park since 1987, not his role as Speaker.<sup>18</sup> Mayor Jim Maudsley in Speaker Peters riding has said that, “The municipality has done very well on our applications for grants. However, I don’t know if that was because it was our turn, or because we have the Speaker as our MPP.”<sup>19</sup>

On a closing note, from several of the Speaker’s interviewed I got a sense that they felt there was little to lose because of their inability to speak freely on the legislature floor. A lot of them talked about how what happens on the floor is more about “show business” and how there are less and less people tuning into politics and the legislature. This is an issue I will be dealing with later in my paper.

### *Advantages of Having your MPP as Speaker*

***“I feel we are better served because of Steve’s role as Speaker. If we have an issue he is better connected so he can get us the meetings with the right people much more quickly.”<sup>20</sup>***

Mayor Jim Maudsley, Thames Centre

The common viewpoint held is that ridings represented by a Speaker have a very subtle advantage compared to a backbench MPP. Speaker’s, journalists, and senior municipal leaders all expressed to some degree that a Speaker, because of their role, had enhanced ministerial and bureaucratic contacts and thus a better where with all to facilitate meetings. The Mayor of Elliot Lake, Rick Hamilton in Brown’s riding contends that, “We all had the belief that because Mike couldn’t be political, that there would be additional considerations made when he made a call or request for a meeting or a project.”<sup>21</sup> However, some journalists believe that the implications of having their Speaker as MPP do not soak down to the day to day concerns of regular people. Eric Bunnell from the *St. Thomas Times Journal*, highlights that they would only truly see if

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<sup>16</sup> David Warner, in person interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Alvin Curling, telephone interview by author, 16 March 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Joyce Foster, telephone interview by author, 21 April 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Jim Maudsley, telephone interview by author, 9 April 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Rick Hamilton, telephone interview by author, 21 April 2009.

there was a major difference in service from Speaker Peters if they were grappling with a large issue, for example if a truck plan was closing in the riding.<sup>22</sup> This reveals that since there are no rumblings either way in terms of better or worse service in the riding, constituents are arguably served just as well compared to any backbench MPP.

When conducting my interviews, city councillors and Speaker's made it very clear that the riding is served just as effectively, if not more so when the MPP is Speaker. Warner reports that when running for re-election in the 1995 election, the government calculated that he received the second highest level of funding in the entire province and that he was encouraged to use that information in his campaign.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, Warner still had three child centres a special needs apartment, and that four cooperative housing buildings constructed while in the Speaker's chair.<sup>24</sup> When asking Carr if he can cite any specific examples where he was able to help his constituents in his riding as Speaker, he responded with, "I got all the funding I needed."<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, local city officials in Speaker Peters and Brown's riding reassure that service has not slipped as a result of having the Speaker as their elected representative. In Speaker Peter's riding: Mayor Hofhuis reports that there has not been any less funding, which is the most important things; Mayor Wilson stresses that the "proof is in the pudding" all you have to do is look at the cheques and you can prove all the naysayers wrong; and Mayor Warwick note that his municipality has received significant infrastructure funding in the last two years. The only local municipal politician in all my interviews who denied there was any advantage was Mayor Foster in Brown's riding, and as I established in the prior section, she attributed their successes to the rapport Brown had with his colleagues, not his position in the legislature. All these insights support the notion that constituencies with their MPP as Speaker are not put at a disadvantage in terms of obtaining continued development in their riding.

Furthermore, a majority of the city officials in Speaker Peters riding pointed out that they are better served now because Peters is no longer a Cabinet Minister. In my interview with Speaker Peters he pointed out that when he was a Cabinet Minister he was expected to always be on the road, attending fundraisers, and in turn had very little time to spend in the constituency.<sup>26</sup> This brings an interesting perspective to the debate because it reveals how subjective the issue is and how strong a force perception is in politics. If you take a look at a Speaker's position prior to taking the chair, it puts in to perspective why their constituents may feel a certain way. For instance both Warner and Curling were in opposition for a number of years and when their party came into power they were both elected as Speaker, whereas Carr, Brown, and Peters had been in government for a few years before occupying the impartial chair. These factors could, and probably did, impact the perceptions their constituents had on the level of service they received when their MPP was Speaker. This is undoubtedly beyond the scope of my paper, but is important to note nonetheless.

Lastly, everyone interviewed made reference to the enhanced prestige of the riding when the Speaker is their representative, in addition to the added perk of a "behind the scenes tour" when visiting the legislature. Both journalists and municipal politicians alike noted how proud they were personally when their MPP became Speaker in addition to the overwhelming positive

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<sup>22</sup> Eric Bunnell, telephone interview by author, 19 March 2009.

<sup>23</sup> David Warner, in person interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gary Carr, telephone interview by author, 2 March 2009.

<sup>26</sup> (Hon.) Steve Peters, in person interview by author, 9 March 2009.

response they heard from individuals throughout the riding. Those that heard negative comments and/or concerns about their MPP became Speaker, noted that those feelings quickly dissolved. According to Curling, many constituents equated his role to that of a cabinet minister, and in fact a lot of them were disappointed when he left the post to become Ambassador for the Dominican Republic, half way through the term.<sup>27</sup> Mayor Wilson and Mayor Maudsley were particularly proud of Speaker Peters, because his election to the chair showed how well respected he was around Queen's Park. These are the types of comments that littered the interviews I conducted and further proves that constituents represented by the Speaker are not put at a disadvantage.

### *Disadvantages of Having your MPP as Speaker*

***“There is a perceived negative because of a Speaker’s commitment to impartiality, but these feelings really haven’t amounted to anything”<sup>28</sup>***

Robert Perry, Journalist for the Aylmer Express

There are very few disadvantages constituents face by virtue of their MPP being Speaker. When I asked this question to local press and municipal politicians the answers were “no”, “not at all”, “I can’t think of any”, and any other way you could articulate that message. Former Speaker’s state they face problems when running for re-election, but this is clearly more of a personal inconvenience as oppose to one constituents encounter. Warner talked about how he found it challenging to present the government’s record without being overly partisan and that opposition candidates attacked him because of his role as Speaker: they would say things like “you really don’t have an MPP” and that “I was unable to stand up for the riding because I couldn’t be partisan.”<sup>29</sup> He also drew the comparison between being an urban and rural MPP, the latter facing greater difficulties in communicating to their constituents. According to Warner, when a Minister visits an urban riding it does not attract as much attention as it would in a rural and/or northern riding and since a Speaker cannot attend a cheque presenting ceremony constituents will not associate the development with their individual MPP.<sup>30</sup> Brown also touched on this sentiment stating that “party affiliation and visibility in the community is much more important in the north and as a result running without being overly partisan is difficult.”<sup>31</sup> However, these issues outline shortcomings for personal political gain rather than a disadvantage in representation for the constituency. Therefore, being the Speaker in a Westminster style of government is not detrimental to his or her constituents in terms of representing their views.

### *The Case of Speaker Peter Milliken*

***“Peter, what have you done for us lately?”<sup>32</sup>***

Jordan Press, Journalist for the Kingston Whig Standard on what the public is saying about their MP

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<sup>27</sup> Alvin Curling, telephone interview by author, 16 March 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Perry, telephone interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>29</sup> David Warner, in person interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Brown, in person interview by author, 4 March 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Jordan Press, telephone interview by author, 23 April 2009.



When examining the Canadian political experience, it is very rare for an elected representative to sit for more than one term in the Speaker's chair. From time to time it does happen, we saw Lucien Lamoureux do it in the 1960s, James Jerome do it in the 1970s, and currently in Ottawa, Speaker Peter Milliken can boast as having one the longest terms to date: 8 years. What is particularly interesting about Milliken's experience is that he has served as Speaker both when his party was in power and now when his own party is in opposition. When interviewing senior municipal officials and journalists in the Kingston area, the issues in the previous sections of this paper rang true when Milliken's own party formed government. However, the opinions and perceptions of Milliken's constituents have changed quite drastically since the Conservatives seized power in 2006. I will be focusing on this experience in the subsequent paragraphs.

Municipal politicians in Milliken's riding of Kingston and the Islands, who wish to remain anonymous, convey that Milliken's ability to serve the constituency significantly altered when the Conservatives came into power. One municipal politician states that,

I don't want to be critical of Peter, but his position as Speaker does not give him or us any advantages anymore, it actually limits his ability before Parliament. For example, usually there is another MP appointed to sort of keep an eye and be a voice for the Speaker, but that changes when the Speaker is not a part of the party that is in power. At least his party colleagues can stand-up and be critical on issues facing their constituency. Peter can't.<sup>33</sup>

Another senior city official expressed a similar opinion saying, "It is an advantage when the Speaker is a member of the governing party, but it is negative when the Speaker is a member of the opposition."<sup>34</sup> The same senior municipal official however still stresses that, "Milliken is one of the longest serving members Kingston has ever seen and this speaks mounds to his rapport not only in the constituency but on the Hill. It was a political calculation on the part of the Conservatives. It's a shame for Peter, really it is."<sup>35</sup> Philip Laundy, former Clerk of the House of Commons reflects a similar sentiment when speaking about James Jerome re-election to the chair, after a change in government. Laundy states,

Mr. Jerome, a Liberal, was re-elected as Speaker, a tribute to the high regard in which was held as a result of his performance in the previous Parliament, although it is fair to comment that had the election result produced a clear majority for the new government, a different decision might have been taken.<sup>36</sup>

These feelings reveal that not only do constituents believe they suffer when their representative is the Speaker in a situation where his or her own party is not in power, but that political parties may only extend consideration to a Speaker's concerns when that individual is one of their own.

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<sup>33</sup> Anonymous "B", telephone interview by author, 21 April 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Anonymous "A", telephone interview by author, 17 April 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Laundy, The Office of the Speaker in the Parliaments of the Commonwealth (London: Quiller Press Limited, 1984), 108.

Obviously this is just one example and we have not experienced enough situations quite like this one to verify this assumption, but it definitely begs the question if principles and considerations given to the Speaker are only followed when that impartial chair is from one's own party.

Additionally, even Speaker Milliken is unsure of how his role as Speaker affects his ability to represent his constituents. When asked if he believes his role as Speaker gives him an advantage over his Liberal colleagues he said, "I would suspect so, but I don't think I am treated differently than any other member. I am in a good position to gain access to Cabinet Ministers, so I may be a little luckier than my colleagues in the same party."<sup>37</sup> When I interviewed Jordan Press from the *Kingston Whig Standard* he had just returned from a 48-hour stint in Ottawa shadowing Speaker Milliken and from that experience he gave me some great insights in Milliken's day-to-day dealings. While in Ottawa, Press did notice that Milliken had better access to MP's, Ministers, and senior bureaucrats, but talked of how people in the riding do not understand or see this side to Milliken's work and hence have a "what have you done for us lately?" attitude.<sup>38</sup> From my conversations with Press and with senior municipal politicians in Kingston it became clear that there is an apparent disconnect between what happens on Parliament Hill and what people perceive on the ground in Kingston. However, in politics perception is everything: you could be the hardest working elected representative around Queen's Park or Parliament Hill, but if your constituents do not see it, it means nothing. Press stresses that it is Milliken's inability to communicate in a meaningful way to the riding that has aggravated the feelings of "what have you done for us lately".<sup>39</sup> Referring back to the first part of my paper, I discussed how communication is the biggest challenge faced by elected members once they become Speaker. To reiterate my point, if a Speaker is clear and concise on the limitations of their role, they find a way to communicate this to their constituents, and learn how to make themselves more visible in an appropriate way, doing things differently will not be perceived negatively in the community.

Additionally, Press touched on a variety of other circumstances that has negatively impacted Milliken's perception in his riding. First of all, there is a lack of communication and visibility in the community. According to Press, the Hon. John Gerretson (MPP for Kingston and the Islands), and the Hon. Hugh Segal (A Senator who hails from Kingston) are both seen regularly and covered frequently in local newspapers which he says may "rub people the wrong way when they don't see Milliken as much".<sup>40</sup> For instance, when the riding got funding for the LaSalle Causeway and when the 2009 budget was introduced, Segal made all these announcements in the riding. As a result, constituents think Segal is doing a lot of the work on Parliament Hill.

Furthermore, another contributing factor is that maybe Milliken has been Speaker for too long. At Westminster, Speaker's run uncontested by the major parties, allowing a Speaker to not be disadvantaged by their inability to engage in partisan politics. In Canada, we do not observe this tradition, which greatly weakens a Speaker's capability to run competitively in an election. When Press talked about the issue of Milliken running in elections he said, "Every election it is the same thing: Peter goes to the debates and doesn't really take a personal stance on an issue. People have a short memory in politics and when you're running on your platform from seven

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<sup>37</sup> (Hon.) Peter Milliken, telephone interview by author. 9 March 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Jordan Press, telephone interview by author, 23 April 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

years ago, it just doesn't cut it."<sup>41</sup> Since Milliken cannot appear overly partisan, even during election time, he is forced to run on his record from before he was Speaker and rely on the national Liberal Party platform. As a result, people in the riding are becoming more and more frustrated and hence the "what have you done for us lately?" This predicament outlines the lack of maturity and understanding for the role of Speaker in our parliamentary democracy, which is an issue I will deal with later on in this paper.

Overall, constituents are served just as effectively if not better when their elected representative is the Speaker, except for in the rare case when the Speaker is selected from the opposition benches. As the above research indicates Speakers still sift through constituency work the same and lobby Cabinet Minister's like any other member would, the only difference being that they cannot speak publicly about partisan politics. Speaker's also exhibit a perceived edge in having better access to ministers and the senior bureaucrats. To sum it up quite perfectly I would like to borrow some words from Brown, "if it wasn't better, it definitely wasn't worse."<sup>42</sup>

Until now, this paper has focused solely on a Speaker's relationship with his or her constituents and both parties' respective opinion on the issue. In the latter part of this paper, I hope to speak more broadly to the larger issues at play that have contributed to the general feeling that constituents do not suffer when their member is Speaker. The two matters of interest I will be focusing on are: the diminishing importance of work conducted on the floor of the legislature and a lack of maturity in Canada's parliamentary democracy. Both of these issues have considerably influenced the perception people have of the speakership in the Ontario and Canadian context.

First of all, the lack of attention paid to legislative proceedings, the attrition of decorum in the house, and the erosion in the influence of the individual member have contributed to the decline in the importance of work that is conducted on the legislature floor. To begin, both the media and elected members are guilty of paying less and less attention to the business that occurs in the legislature. From my own experience, you can find an abundance of members in the house during question period, but after that the legislature floor is a ghost town. When petitions are presented and when bills are debated, the three parties only make sure there enough members are in the house to meet quorum. Carr runs with this point in saying, "I think speeches in the house are important, but no one is there to listen to them anymore. It used to be a worthwhile exercise, but it is now a waste of time."<sup>43</sup> In addition, when asked about the presentation on petitions in the legislature, Carr added that although this was never a strong avenue to air concerns, it should be. He asked, "How helpful is it when I am presenting a petition and only a few members are there to hear it? It is not a constructive use of time."<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, the lack of attention paid to politics is the result of a shrinking press gallery. People are tuning out of Queen's Park and as result papers have continually cut their press bureau around the legislature. I sadly witnessed the *Globe & Mail* cut back on its politics coverage when Murray Campbell was let go in March. Political coverage is thinning because there is no appetite for it anymore, which is a direct result of both citizens and elected members not paying attention or caring about what occurs on the floor. The legislature should be a forum where the concerns and opinions of the people it represents are heard and contemplated by our

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Brown, in person interview by author, 4 March 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Gary Carr, telephone interview by author, 2 March 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

lawmakers. If no one is listening, how useful is this technique in getting your constituents what they need? The answer is it is not. “People do not follow politics in general anymore, especially anything that happens beyond question period,” stated Warner.<sup>45</sup> Brown states, that “what happens on the legislature floor is important, but it is more effective for show biz. It is not the best forum for getting things done.”<sup>46</sup> That is why individual members will make phone calls, write letters, and speak to ministers in the halls because these are the methods that are successful in getting things done. I will not argue against the fact that issues boasted about on the floor may bring more profile to a particular issue, but on the whole a lot of the lobbying is done out of the public eye. Therefore, since speaking up on the legislature floor is not the most effective means of communicating constituency concerns, a Speaker’s constituents are not disadvantaged because the Speaker employs other methods that are more effective.

In addition, the deterioration of civility and decorum in the legislature has also led to the waning importance of house business. Sit down and watch an hour of Ontario’s question period and you will see what I am talking about. The constant name calling, snide comments, and behavior that is unbecoming of adults, unfortunately overshadows the important work that sacred hour is set out to do: hold the government to account. A quick Ontario Hansard search reveals that the number of times the Speaker has had to stand up and scold the members for either disrespect for decorum or unparliamentary language has increased greatly since the early 1980s. In the 1980s, the Speaker stood up on 20 accounts; in the 1990s on 57 counts; and from 2000 to present, 55 times. When I interviewed Gary Carr, he reminisced about a time when the legislature was not as partisan or contentious where, “if a Minister was coming out and two ridings were affected and one of those ridings was represented the opposition member would be invited out as well.”<sup>47</sup> It is also an inalienable truth that we as humans tend to romanticize the past, so whether or not politicians were more righteous and noble in the past is up for considerable debate. However, as I established before, perception is everything in politics and if the public thinks things are worse than they were twenty years ago, whether it actually is or not does not matter. The decrease in decorum and civility undoubtedly turns people off of politics. Angus-Reid, a well respected national polling organization revealed that only 14% of Canadians trust its politicians, which was the lowest percentage of all the professions in 2006.<sup>48</sup> Part of this result can be attributed to the way our politicians act on the legislature floor. The childish behavior that is observed in the legislature does nothing to enhance democracy or the image of our politicians. I see these politicians on a daily basis, I see how hard they work and that they are here for the right reasons, but they are not giving themselves or the career the recognition it deserves when they act immaturely in the legislature. The current behavior of our legislators has impacted the effectiveness of our parliamentary institutions and has contributed to the lack of attention individuals pay to legislative proceedings.

Moreover, another factor that has contributed to the shrinking importance of house business is the dwindling, or perceived dwindling, of the independence of the individual member. A number of Ontario Speaker’s expressed that an aspect of the role they enjoyed was that they did not have to continually tote the party line and be a cheerleader for the government of the day. When asked about communicating to his constituents, Speaker Peters stated, “I enjoy

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<sup>45</sup> David Warner, in person interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Brown, in person interview by author, 4 March 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Gary Carr, telephone interview by author, 2 March 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Ipsos News Centre, “When it Comes Down to Professions, Whom Do We Trust?” <<http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=3333>> (15 March 2009).

the type of freedom I have with this role. I do not have to follow government script and speak,”<sup>49</sup> whereas Carr enthused that, “It was the one job where I got to make the decisions; you don’t get much of your own control as an MPP.”<sup>50</sup> Nowadays, government backbenchers are seen as props to push forward the agenda of their Premier and his or her advisors. In April 2009, Jim Coyle, a well-respected journalist from the *Toronto Star*, whose work is frequently quoted during question period, wrote an article entitled, “Many are guilty in demeaning in the legislature.” I would paraphrase Coyle, but I would do a massive injustice to his work and eloquent style. Coyle touches on this very issue when he says,

All the MPP’s, too, who got elected by their communities, then checked their brains and backbones at the door when they arrived, bowing and scraping the premier’s office, selling their souls for the chance of a cabinet post, reading the talking points and dumbed-down messages written for them by those who’d never has the courage to put their names on ballots, all those who forgot the job was to represent their riding at Queen’s Park, not the other way around.<sup>51</sup>

In this article, Coyle partly blames MPP’s for the demeaning of business in the legislature. However, this is not the first time this sort of rhetoric has been expressed. Carr, after his stint as Speaker spoke out on various occasions on his frustration with Ontario’s parliamentary institutions. In a *Toronto Star* article, Carr recalled when he voted against Harris’s proposed downloading legislation and how Harris began to marginalize him afterwards. Carr also noted that the 2003 Progressive Conservative platform was written by “unelected people” and was shown to the caucus the day before it was released.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, the currently elected members had no input. It is a “don’t hate the player, hate the game” kind of scenarios, where all parties in the legislature have been guilty. I quoted Jim Maudsley earlier in this paper saying “I heard he’d [Speaker Peters] lose a vote on it, but a vote isn’t going to make a difference,” and no words could be truer. When a bill comes down party discipline ensures that a member will vote a certain way. At Queen’s Park where a free vote is very rare, there are not many occasions for you to speak out or distance yourself from your caucus on an issue. I have seen member’s who leave the house when a vote is called because they are not willing to vote the same way as the rest of the caucus. This point is important because it highlights even further why constituents with their Speaker as the representative do not suffer by having a voice on the legislature floor. If Speaker Peters was a sitting member with a vote, he would have to champion the party line or leave the house if he did not agree and with a majority Liberal government in government right now, one vote is not going to make a difference. The importance of having one’s voice on the floor could change if free votes were allowed more often in the legislature.

Secondly, a lack of maturity in our parliamentary institutions has attributed to an insufficient understanding of the role of Speaker in addition to hesitancy among our parliamentarians to respect the continuity of the speakership. In his memoirs, James Jerome when talking about becoming Speaker says, “I began then, and continued for six years, to try and explain – especially to my own voters the rather delicate relationship between Speaker, political

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<sup>49</sup> (Hon.) Steve Peters, in person interview by author, 9 March 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Carr, telephone interview by author, 2 March 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Jim Coyle, “Many are guilty in demeaning of the Legislature,” *Toronto Star*, 8 April 2009, section A pg. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Ian Urquhart, “From partisan to referee,” *Toronto Star*, 5 July 2003, section F pg. 2.

party, Government, and constituency.”<sup>53</sup> A number of former Ontario Speaker’s, journalists, and municipal officials talked about an initial confusion that swept through their respective ridings when their elected representative became Speaker. In addition, former Speaker’s when asked about running for re-election noted that the other parties would criticize the role of Speaker, painting them as silent when it came to representing the constituency’s views. Individuals running against the Speaker play on the ignorance of citizens in attacking the Speaker by virtue of his impartial role. It is clear that opponents spit on the Speaker to gain a political edge, when they know the role of Speaker is not a political muzzle.

According to Warner, we need better “quid pro quo” in our parliamentary democracy to facilitate better public understanding of not only the role of Speaker, but of our parliamentary institutions.<sup>54</sup> For instance, Warner cited the example of Speaker’s running uncontested in the United Kingdom. “The constituents understand Conservative, Labour, it doesn’t matter. The role of Speaker is respected, and opposition would not dare criticize what he or she does,” concluded Warner.<sup>55</sup> In the United Kingdom, Speaker’s do not run uncontested per say, but the major political parties will not run a candidate against the Speaker.<sup>56</sup> This shows a mutual respect between the Speaker and the house he or she provides over, and in return allows for very little confusion among the general electorate on the role of Speaker.

There have been few attempts at the provincial and federal levels to bridge the difference between the Canadian and British speakership. In the late 1960s early 1970s, both Donald C. MacDonald in Ontario and Stanley Knowles at the federal level introduced private member’s bills intended to support a more permanent speakership. They both suggested that a new riding be created entitled “Queen’s Park” in Ontario and “Parliament Hill” in Ottawa, and once the Speaker was elected, they would vacate their original seat which would require a by-election in his or her original riding. One of the biggest criticisms as expressed by Phil Laundy, former Clerk of the Canadian House of Commons, is that by having a special seat for the Speaker it would violate the important principle that, “the Speaker derives his authority and the respect of members essentially from the fact that he is one of them.”<sup>57</sup> After considerable debate, neither private member’s bills were passed. However, we are politically immature compared to the mother of all Parliaments, Westminster. When Jerome talked about the possibility of a permanent speakership he said, “Turning again to the British experience, we must realize that they have been at this for four or five centuries longer than we have. Their practice has evolved very gradually and the designation of the Speaker on the election ballot is only one manifestation of it.”<sup>58</sup> Maybe we are not just there yet as a province and as a country to allow the Speaker to run uncontested from the major parties in an election. To make this switch there needs to be unanimous support by the major parties for them to not run a candidate against the Speaker, if they see him fit to sit as Speaker for another term. Speaker Lamoureux of the House of Commons in 1968 made the bold move to run as an independent. He talked to the other parties,

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<sup>53</sup> James Jerome, Mr. Speaker (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart Limited, 1985), 138.

<sup>54</sup> David Warner, in person interview by author, 12 March 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Roderick Lewis, The House Was My Home (Toronto: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 1987), 49.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Laundy, The Office of the Speaker in the Parliaments of the Commonwealth (London: Quiller Press Limited, 1984), 110.

<sup>58</sup> James Jerome, Mr. Speaker (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart Limited, 1985), 146.

supported his bid and did not run candidates in Lamoureux's riding.<sup>59</sup> In 1972 ran as an independent again, but the major parties did not extend the same courtesy.<sup>60</sup> When Speaker Jerome was running for re-election, he tried to gauge support from the party leaders to run uncontested, but I guess Lamoureux's experience was just a fleeting moment in Canada's history. More recently, the re-election of Milliken to the chair over the last federal elections may hint at a transition to continuity of the speakership, but it is too soon to tell. If there was mutual consideration among parties to respect the independence of the Speaker during the term and election time, there would be less negative propaganda surrounding the role of Speaker. These sorts of transitions take time and until parties agree to better respect the role of Speaker, there will still be a certain degree of confusion about how the role impacts a Speaker's constituents. Therefore, confusion and negativity that sometimes surround the role of Speaker may be feelings that diminish in the future as our parliamentary institutions mature.

In conclusion, constituents that are represented by the Speaker are not disadvantaged because of the Speaker's non-partisan and impartial role, unless the Speaker is a member of an opposition party. First of all, constituency work is still diligently taken care of in the same way as any other member. Secondly, there are stronger and more effective methods and avenues to meet the needs of your constituents that do not involve talking about them on the legislature floor. These include writing letters, making phone calls, and bumping into Cabinet Minister's around Queen's Park. Furthermore, constituents and Speaker's feel they have a subtle advantage over ordinary members. Speaker's can facilitate meetings more quickly and although everybody lends the Speaker their ear, it does not necessarily mean the funding comes down with pipe more frequently because they are Speaker. In addition, few interviewees cited disadvantages from having their representative as Speaker other than the challenges with communicating to constituents and running for re-election, which is more of a personal obstacle. The only instance where constituents felt negatively towards the role of Speaker was with Speaker Milliken where local city officials contested that constituents are worse off because he cannot be openly critical of the government. Lastly, these feelings and perceptions are a result of the declining importance of work conducted on the floor, more precisely the decreased independence of individual members, deterioration of decorum, and the shrinking focus on legislative proceedings, in addition to the immaturity of our parliamentary institutions. As our parliamentary institutions continue to evolve, new traditions and norms will transform how our legislative process works, whether this involves an expanded repertoire of conventions and traditions for the Speaker, only time will tell. However, I think I am safe in saying that any change in tradition would make it easier for the Speaker to represent his or her constituents not harder. To end, I would like to leave you with a quote by James Jerome:

How can a Speaker serve his constituents when he can't speak on their behalf? How can Speaker reconcile needed constituency assistance, which must of course come from Cabinet, with the essential principle of objectivity and impartiality and the solemn responsibility to preserve the Opposition's rights to attack the Government? How can a Speaker seek a party nomination and go through an election campaign without criticizing any of the parties in Parliament? How can there be genuine impartiality when every Speaker since Confederation (until 1979) was the nominee of the party in power? The fact is,

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<sup>59</sup> James Jerome, *The Speakership in Canada* (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, 1978), 14.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

again like so many unwritten conventions, is that it shouldn't work, but it does.<sup>61</sup>

If there is anything that I have learned over my last ten month at Queen's Park is that politics may look one way in theory, but totally different in practice, and that sometimes things just work without any logical explanation at all.

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<sup>61</sup> James Jerome, Mr. Speaker (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart Limited, 1985), 133.



## APPENDIX A

### List of Speakers Interviewed:

| <b>Name</b>    | <b>Riding</b>             | <b>Service as Speaker</b> |
|----------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Michael Brown  | Algoma-Manitoulin         | 2005 – 2007 (Ontario)     |
| Gary Carr      | Oakville                  | 1999 – 2003 (Ontario)     |
| Alvin Curling  | Scarborough – Rouge River | 2003 – 2005 (Ontario)     |
| Peter Milliken | Kingston and the Islands  | 2001 – Present (Federal)  |
| Steve Peters   | Elgin-Middlesex-London    | 2007 – Present (Ontario)  |
| David Warner   | Scarborough-Ellesmere     | 1990 – 1995 (Ontario)     |

### List of Municipal Officials Interviewed:

| <b>Name</b>      | <b>Municipality</b>    | <b>Speaker</b> |
|------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| Cliff Barwick    | Mayor of St. Thomas    | Steve Peters   |
| Joyce Foster     | Mayor of Gore Bay      | Michael Brown  |
| Robert Gallagher | Mayor of Blind River   | Michael Brown  |
| Rick Hamilton    | Mayor of Elliot Lake   | Michael Brown  |
| Sylvia Hofhuis   | Mayor of Central Elgin | Steve Peters   |
| Donna Latulippe  | Mayor of Thessalon     | Michael Brown  |
| Jim Maudsley     | Mayor of Thames Centre | Steve Peters   |
| James McIntyre   | Mayor of Southwold     | Steve Peters   |
| John Wilson      | Mayor of Malahide      | Steve Peters   |
| Graham Warwick   | Mayor of West Elgin    | Steve Peters   |
| Anonymous A      | City of Kingston       | Peter Milliken |
| Anonymous B      | City of Kingston       | Peter Milliken |

### List of Journalists Interviewed:

| <b>Name</b>  | <b>Newspaper</b>         | <b>Speaker</b> |
|--------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Eric Bunnell | St. Thomas Times Journal | Steve Peters   |
| Jeff Helsdon | Tillsonburg News         | Steve Peters   |
| Robert Perry | Aylmer Express           | Steve Peters   |
| Jordan Press | Kingston Whig Standard   | Peter Milliken |
| Anonymous C  | Anonymous                | Michael Brown  |

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