Humans of the House Episode 6: Was It Worth It?

Episode Transcript

[music]

Sabreena Delhon: A dozen former Members of Parliament have told us about the highs and lows of being an MP in Canada’s House of Commons.

We’ve heard about their passion for politics. And we’ve heard about sacrifices – like working around the clock, online abuse, even death threats. Giving their all to the job, for years, sometimes decades.

So what happens when it’s over?

[music ends]

Ideally, MPs leaving office would pass on what they’ve learned to the next generation of parliamentarians. A handover of not just power but knowledge.

We don’t want MPs to simply walk away without giving us a chance to learn from them. As we’ve heard they have important insights that can help us transform Canadian politics and strengthen our democracy.

[theme music begins]

That’s what inspired us to talk to former MPs in the first place, to start the Samara Centre’s MP Exit Interview project – which this podcast is a part of.

We’ve heard how tough it can be to find your footing as a new MP, but today we’re asking: what is it really like for an MP when they leave office?

And before we get big-picture, we’re going to get very personal.

I’m Sabreena Delhon and you’re listening to Humans of the House.

[theme music plays and ends]

[music]

Sabreena Delhon: Of the dozen MPs featured in this show, there are three ways they left office.
One way: by resigning from the job. That usually triggers a by-election, which means there’s a vote for a new representative in the riding even though there isn’t a larger, general election.

Or, you might leave by announcing you won’t run again. So you perform your duties until the election is called.

The third way…you run and lose.

[music ends]

What does that feel like?

Matt DeCourcy: Awful. It was awful. And I get to say that because it's, it's the biggest defeat that I ever had in my life. Right? The biggest letdown.

[soft music starts]

If I reflect on some of the stuff we’ve talked about, I kind of built an identity for myself leading into politics and in politics, that was Matt DeCourcy this, you know, the Member of Parliament for Fredericton. And I adopted that identity and it was more than a job to me. It was a lifestyle. It was who I was.

[music fades out]

Um, so I felt really lost, felt really, really lost.

Sabreena Delhon: With experience in advocacy, and as a political staffer on the Hill, Matt DeCourcy was elected as a Liberal in 2015. He ran again in 2019 and lost.

His riding of Fredericton had always gone Liberal or Conservative but for the first time, voters chose a Green Party candidate. And Matt’s time as an MP was over.

Matt DeCourcy: I don't know that I was, felt let down by the community. I think I just more felt lost and didn't know how to, how to react to the way I felt about the community.

And I think a lot of other politicians will say this because it's the reality, but it's also like the last thing you want to hear if you're defeated, is that, look, it's nothing personal. It's not personal. For many folks, in office, it becomes a deeply personal activity, and so it is deeply personal to the person losing, and folks who aren't in that world couldn't understand. And the voter's not making a lot of decisions based on you the person, they're making all kinds of other decisions, and it takes a while to be comfortable with that, even if, if I'll never accept that it's not personal, because for me, it's very personal. And I think if you ask a lot of other people, they would say the same thing.

But I lost, you know, in October of 2019, and then we go into COVID, and I'll say two things. When COVID hit, and we were told to go hide, I was like oh my god, I get to go hide from the world for three weeks, three months. Perfect! I don't wanna see anybody.
don't wanna do anything. I don't wanna get dressed in the morning. This is perfect. And then it really, as it went on, it really started to take a toll on my mental health. Um…

**Sabreena Delhon:** Well how did you cope? 'Cause you've talked about how there's a big shift in your identity. Were the supports made available to you?

**Matt DeCourcey:** So the short answer is I don't, I didn't really cope all that well. And for a long time, I was pretty, pretty down. There are some supports currently available to members transitioning out of office.

We, we had access to, you know, a family resource plan and, and a number we could call, but I was not interested in doing that at the time.

[warm music]

And I'm really not interested in calling some random person and talking about things, you know, I've, I've since been like, all right, now it's time to talk to somebody, and I want to talk to somebody I know and trust in my community. And that's been really helpful for me, like over the last year, to have that sort of therapy and that reflection.

**Sabreena Delhon:** Looking back, what does Matt wish he'd heard when leaving?

**Matt DeCourcey:** This support will be there for you at the time and in the way that you need it…

[warm music fades out]

[peppy music begins]

**Sabreena Delhon:** MPs told us about different coping strategies.

**Cheryl Hardcastle:** It was really hard emotionally. And so thank goodness that there's so much that has to be done.

**Sabreena Delhon:** That's Cheryl Hardcastle who was an NDP MP for Windsor—Tecumseh. Packing up takes work.

**Cheryl Hardcastle:** It keeps you busy. And that is like a coping strategy for me. That really helped me.

You have, like, practical things, like empty the office. And close it down. You have 31 days to do all that.

[sounds: items being moved, items being thrown in the trash, a zipper zipping, rustling of waste bags, drawers closing]
You have somebody that reaches out to you in that bureaucratic support system in the House of Commons that says, I need you, I need your laptop by this date. I need this. It's very physical, it keeps you busy.

**Sabreena Delhon:** Like Matt DeCourcey, Cheryl won her riding in 2015 and lost in 2019. Remember when Matt said people would say, don't take it personally? Easier said than done.

**Cheryl Hardcastle:** I really did take it personally. It was very close.

**Sabreena Delhon:** Cheryl lost her seat by 629 votes and the riding went Liberal.

**Cheryl Hardcastle:** I felt like I was doing such a great job and that it was a loss for the community to move from NDP. And, I felt like, there must be, okay, there's light at the end of the tunnel, but I'm in this tunnel right now.

Yeah, so that part was tough. People give you condolences, but also like, I had to stay off of social media because you have like people who consider themselves pundits slamming you or saying you weren't there for them or whatever it is, and it does bother you because you know the real thing and, well I put it in my newsletter! I had a telephone town hall!

**Sabreena Delhon:** Social media and online comments, as we know, can feel like a one-way conversation.

**Cheryl Hardcastle:** “Oh, you're just a whiner, and that's what democracy's like,” so you just, okay, I'm gonna just be quiet and sort through this myself. ‘Cause I don’t wanna be that way.

*[soft music]*

**Sabreena Delhon:** “Sort through this myself.” It's lonely to lose. And you never know what's going on in someone’s private life at the time. Here’s James Cumming, former Conservative MP for Edmonton Centre. He became MP in 2019 and lost his bid for re-election two years later, in 2021.

**James Cumming:** Well that, yeah, that was quite a year. Well firstly there was a snap election. You didn’t get to serve a full term, and for whatever reason, the government of the day thought that they had to call an election in a pandemic. But it is what it is. They decided to do that.

*[music fades out]*

For me, it was a pretty tough period of time because A) we had gone through a leadership change. So, the party and my colleagues, we had to spend a bunch of time
with that, and had a new leader in place. You go into an election and you, and you fight hard.

And in my personal circumstances, I had lost my son during that period of time.

[soft music]

**Sabreena Delhon:** James Cumming’s son Garrett died at 35 years old. He was very politically-minded.

**James Cumming:** He also had Duchenne muscular dystrophy, so it limited his ability to do some of the things that potentially he wanted to do.

**Sabreena Delhon:** Garrett was a big motivation for James to go into politics in the first place.

**James Cumming:** I thought Garrett would have, you know, a front row seat of seeing how it works and be able to see through my efforts what we can do with public policy.

**Sabreena Delhon:** James lost by only 600 votes.

[soft music fades]

**James Cumming:** I went into more of a period of reflection because you know, I really didn't have a chance to take my foot off the gas. I'm as competitive as anybody could be, I think, uh, just my nature. But I'm pretty accepting when something doesn't go my way, and then you start to chart your course. Well, what's next? Uh, and that really was my focus after that.

**Sabreena Delhon:** Well, in these conversations, mental health and wellness has come up quite a bit. And I'm wondering what you were able to do to look after yourself during such a difficult period. And I also wanna say, I'm so sorry for your loss.

**James Cumming:** Yeah. Thank you. Um, you know, that's a hard question to answer because I don't, I don't think that, through that period of time, I managed as well as I could. The combination of all those things together is probably more of an issue than any one on its own.

So if it's just losing an election, I can tell you, I can get over that pretty quick. I respect the voters and I respect that they make those choices. Uh, but when you combine a bunch of things that, that is more difficult, throw some COVID into the mix and, you know, it was a tough period. But, you know, I'm not afraid to say that if you seek out help and there's, there's folks that can help you with strategies on how you manage through that. And that's what I did.

[soft music]
Sabreena Delhon: “Seek out help.” That sounds, not only smart, but necessary.

What kind of help is available to MPs who are leaving their jobs? In our survey of former MPs, we heard a few things:

[typing sounds]

Voice 1: You lose your sense of purpose very quickly. You go from not being able to keep up with your messages and calls to nobody returning your messages and calls overnight.

Voice 2: Once you are gone you are invisible to the party.

Voice 3: Treat it like grief. Offer in-person counseling, not just virtual. Connect us with former parliamentarians who’ve been there, perhaps as transition buddies, so we are not alone. Those early tender days, it’s good to see, hear and believe that there is life after politics.

[music fades out]

Sabreena Delhon: On the other hand, a number of MPs felt they had good support, and help from House of Commons staff.

Lisa Raitt was a Conservative MP for Milton, Ontario. She served in many cabinet roles, and was a deputy leader of the party. She ran and lost in the 2019 election. After over a decade in office, what was that transition like? Did she have support?

Lisa Raitt: Oh yeah. Big support. I had nothing but support. The staff at Parliament were fantastic and it's complex, right?

Sabreena Delhon: Can you tell us what it was like to lose your seat?

Lisa Raitt: It was fine. Don't worry about me. I knew I was gonna lose, I, so my husband was diagnosed with young onset Alzheimer's in 2016. I did not put the attention and the effort into the community social events that I should have, to win an election. I did not knock doors as much. And the Liberal candidate spent two years doing exactly what I was not going to do.

I chose not to do it. I chose not to do it. And I'm very comfortable with that decision. And we knew that given the changing demographics, given the influx of people, given the fact that I didn't get out to meet the new people as they came in, I was not gonna win. And that's okay. My kids were prepared for it and I was prepared for it.

And as a result that night was more about consoling the people that worked so hard on the campaign, and that was it. And that's, that was the key. Also I knew that I would be viewed, that was the first day of looking for a new job. So anything I said and did was
gonna be judged, and I better suck it up, buttercup. And make the best foot forward and do all the media reviews. If anyone asked you, “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Happy to talk, happy to talk, grateful for the time.” And I was. I was grateful for the time, so I’ve never been sad about losing, honestly, never been sad.

*[soft music]*

**Sabreena Delhon:** There were ways in which Lisa needed to adjust, from a lifestyle of going full-speed, around the clock, every day of the week, to a life after politics.

**Lisa Raitt:** It took me two years though, to not feel guilty about not working all weekend. I have to tell myself to slow down every day, ‘cause for 12 years I operated at a pace. *[laughs]* A real cadence, as we would say.

Now that I’m in private practice, I love how everyone tells me how busy they are. They’re not busy.

**Sabreena Delhon:** *[laughs]*

**Lisa Raitt:** They don’t know what busy is. “I give my life to my career.” No you didn’t. I did. I sacrificed my marriage and my kids’ upbringing. You didn’t do it. And by the way, you get paid a hell of a lot more than I ever did. Uh, so suck it up princess. Like, I literally say to people when they say, oh, you’re, oh, it must be so hard, you know, keeping up this lifestyle. I said, I was away from my home 200 days of the year when I was a cabinet minister.

I did it 12 years, 12 years, 200 days of the year, I did not sleep in my own bed. That's the one thing I wish Canadians knew, that their MPs, no matter who they are, work hard.

Like I now know what a weekend is. Holy mackerel, what a revelation that is! Before, I dreaded Friday, because I would have, oh, I don’t know, 17 events I’d have to go to and a couple of fundraisers, while still doing my work as a minister or as the deputy leader of the opposition or as the justice critic or, you know, whatever, that's the one thing I wish people knew.

*[slightly tense music]*

**Sabreena Delhon:** Slowing down, or trying to, doesn’t mean that it’s guaranteed to be a smooth transition.

**Scott Brison:** People leaving public life often leave under very traumatic circumstances.

**Sabreena Delhon:** That’s Scott Brison, who was first elected to the riding of Kings—Hants, Nova Scotia, in 1997. He announced he would not seek re-election in 2019. And yeah, if you do the math, he was an MP for 22 years.
Scott Brison: Public life is notwithstanding its challenges, is very addictive and hard to leave and an awful lot of people leave the field in a body bag or they’re airlifted off the field in critical condition.

And, it’s tough to, to sort of have the discipline to leave the field on your own steam when things are going fairly well.

Sabreena Delhon: Scott decided to “leave on his own steam,” as he calls it. So did Peter Kent, who was a Conservative MP for Thornhill, Ontario from 2008 to 2021. That’s when he announced he would not run again.

[music fades out]

Peter Kent: Disengaging from Parliament is complicated. There’s a lot of bookkeeping to be done. There’s a lot of equipment to be returned. There’s the transfer of financial documents and closing of books, and ensuring that staff are provided for, and whether they have pensions to claim, or whether they have new jobs that they might be able to find.

Sabreena Delhon: When you’re wrapping up a political office, you’re winding down a team of staff. And if you’re a cabinet minister –

Lisa Raitt: I shut down three offices at the same time.

Sabreena Delhon: Here’s Lisa Raitt again.

Lisa Raitt: And you know, where do you put everything?

How do you get it delivered? How do you move out? And you got thirty days to do it. And by the way, you’re wondering how you’re gonna pay mortgage. ‘Cause luckily you have a six month severance, which honestly, without it, I think people would be destitute.

‘Cause you’re fired overnight. Like that election day, you lose your pay for that day.

Sabreena Delhon: Wow.

Lisa Raitt: That’s it. You’re cut off. Yeah. So you do need that severance.

The other thing I wish people understood is that very few of us get a chance at another career after this. Very few of us. Many are blackballed. Many never get employment again.

Sabreena Delhon: Can you tell us a story about that?

Lisa Raitt: Sure. A guy that I knew, he was a parliamentary secretary. He also chaired a committee. So he had a lot of power. He was well known. He was well liked. He thought
that he was gonna walk into a great job after he lost his seat. Uh, he's had to move to a
different province because he was poisonous within his community.

Nobody wanted to hire him. Nobody wants to hire the ex-MP.

I, you know, I don't know if I would ever get hired in Milton. I got hired in Toronto…

Sabreena Delhon: Milton was Lisa’s riding.

Lisa Raitt: You know, no one wants to tick off the current MP by hiring the ex-MP. So
where do they go? We go into areas that specialize in communications, and you try to
use those skills ‘cause that’s all you kind of have left.

Sabreena Delhon: The high likelihood of very limited prospects after politics. Is that
something that’s spoken about plainly, in the political domain?

Lisa Raitt: Yes. And nobody wants to believe it, ‘cause they’re different. I am a very
lucky woman, John Baird’s a very lucky man, Rona Ambrose is a lucky woman, you
know, and you can see why some people wanna go back, look at how many MPs and
ministers end up going into municipal politics. Why? Because they’re not gonna get hired
by Suncor. They’re not gonna get hired to be a CEO anywhere. They may have talent,
but they don't have relevant private sector experience. At least I was a CEO, and I'm a
lawyer, so I’d be able to find something, but still, I'm not a practicing lawyer. I am in the
business of client relations, which is what I did as a cabinet minister.

[music]

Sabreena Delhon: Our research shows that it’s difficult for politicians to transition to a
non-political career. It’s hard for the community to see them as anything else. Even though MPs
come from all walks of professional life.

Romeo Saganash: I tell people that I started out as, as a photographer.

Sabreena Delhon: This is Romeo Saganash, from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou in
Quebec.

[music fades out]

Romeo Saganash: And I tell people I screwed up, became a lawyer, and I screwed up
even more and became a Member of Parliament.

Sabreena Delhon: You gotta love Romeo’s sense of humour. I’m sure it came in handy in
Ottawa. And now, Romeo’s out.

Romeo Saganash: Now I can go back to things I like, uh, writing, photography and so
on.
Sabreena Delhon: In case you think it’s retirement bliss for Romeo, he’s still working.

Romeo Saganash: I get a lot of offers. Throughout the country, even throughout the world, Costa Rica being the latest...

Sabreena Delhon: Romeo negotiates treaty agreements for Indigenous communities.

Romeo Saganash: That's what I enjoy most about, uh, this moment now. The work that I'm doing now is most enjoyable because I'm able to decide what I wanna do, for how long and, so many hours a day, not as many as before.

So that's just great.

Sabreena Delhon: Romeo was first elected in 2011 as an NDP MP. By 2019, he knew he wanted to move on.

Romeo Saganash: When 2019 was approaching, new elections were coming, and people around me in my riding insisted that I run again at least one more time. It was a definite no, it was a definite no. The work, the hours, the things that you have to deal with, it takes a toll on your soul and spirit. By that time, by early 2019, I knew that it was a definite no for me. And to go back to what I loved doing.

[uplifting music starts and ends]

[mid-tempo music]

Sabreena Delhon: In 2021, when Adam Vaughan announced he would not seek re-election as a Liberal MP, hyperpartisanship was one factor...

[Music fades out]

Adam Vaughan: The space for conversations was really hard to find in Parliament and COVID made it even more impossible. It was one of the reasons I left, I just didn't see a way of that ever coming back, and I didn't see myself comfortable in a take-no-prisoners, beat the opposition, constant campaign footing kind of scenario. It just was taking too much out of me psychologically let alone emotionally. Um, and it was hurting my politics and I didn't like it anymore. And that's one of the reasons I left.

Sabreena Delhon: COVID changed the shape of our work lives. Adam was no exception.

Adam Vaughan: COVID I think hardened a lot of politics, and it made brittle a lot of relationships and I think it also, it puts so much distance between the source of an idea and the execution of the idea that people no longer felt saw or heard their voice in government action.

And that I think has had consequences, coming out of COVID. I think you're seeing not a swing from left and right, or good or bad, or up and down. But I think what you're seeing...
is a massive distrust in being told anything. The voters don't like to be instructed on what's gonna happen in their life and what's good for them and that, there's a general sentiment, I think, that's now embedded in the electorate, which is, “Stop telling me what to do. And I will support people that wanna get out of my life because I'm tired of everyone being in my life.” And when that happens, that kind of radical individualism undermines collective action. And without collective action, you don't have a government. And yet we have major problems that need action and major communities that have been underserved through and before, during and after COVID.

There was never a more important time to have politics work. And yet we've created a situation where politics is no longer working and that's kind of scary and kind of sad and, and makes me a little happy I'm outta the game, but also a little worried for those that remain.

[soft music fades out]

**MIDROLL AD:**

**HANNAH SUNG:** This is a midroll ad. So you might be expecting us to sell you a mattress or some accounting software.

Well, listen. We wish you good sleep and fiscal organization — but no. We’re not going to sell you anything. This minute is for us. You and me.

I'm Hannah, one of the producers of this show, and we want to tell you why we made this podcast.

See, the Samara Centre for Democracy is on a mission to secure a resilient democracy with an engaged public and responsive institutions.

What does that mean? Well the Samara Centre wants to make it easier for you to talk about Canada’s democracy and participate in it.

So…talk to us. Tell us why you’re listening to this show. It’s simple to do. I know you’ve got your phone in your hand right now.

Post about Humans of the House and tag us on Instagram and Twitter: @samaracentre. That’s @ T-H-E-S-A-M-A-R-A-C-E-N-T-R-E.

We know why we’re doing this work. Tell us why you’re listening! Hashtag Humans of the House.

[soft music resumes]

**Sabreena Delhon:** Throughout the process of conducting these MP exit interviews, our team began to believe, more strongly than ever, that we need to treat the role of MP as a job – a
regular job. Sure, it’s a really important job, critical to our democracy, but it’s also just a job that needs to be done. For the job to be done well, the workplace needs to be fair, safe and protected, as much as humanly possible.

That’s why we do these MP Exit interviews. To help improve this one specific workplace that is crucial to a functioning democracy.

And we’ve been doing this work for over a decade.

We first published key findings in our 2012 book Tragedy in the Commons which became a bestseller.

In the final pages of the book, the authors looked ahead, to now. To this current batch of MP exit interviews, that you’re listening to. The authors didn’t know who this group of MPs would be. But they had questions.

Here’s Michael MacMillan, one of the co-authors of the book

[music ends]

Michael MacMillan: “What will those interviews tell us? We hope the political life of future MPs will have been something they planned and of which they were proud. We hope people talk about what it was like being part of one of the best teams they’d ever been on.”

[lively music begins]

Sabreena Delhon: So, what do our MPs say?

Matt DeCourcey: I think the last thing I wanna say is, and I know you'll get a wide range of answers to this very question, but I loved my experience. Like I, I wouldn't have changed it for the world.

Sabreena Delhon: Matt DeCourcey.

Matt DeCourcey: Yeah, there’s some disappointment in the end with it, but I got to go back to Parliament earlier this week for the memorial service of deceased former parliamentarians, and sit in the Senate chamber for that.

And for the first time I was like, I've got no resentment at all for any of this. This is just really special to be sitting in this room, honoring the importance of the service that these dozens of people who passed away this year offered the country, so that was pretty special.

Scott Brison:
I look back at my time in public life enormously thankful for the opportunity to serve.

**Sabreena Delhon:**

This is Scott Brison.

**Scott Brison:** Politics should not be a beauty contest in a leper colony. It should be a place where people of experience and accomplishment and character come forward to serve their fellow citizens. I still believe that, that's what politics can be and is. And I still encourage people to run. Someday, I hope, at least one of my daughters is interested. I will encourage them, because I don't think there's any place where you can make more of a difference than in elected life.

**Sabreena Delhon:**

What advice would Lisa Raitt give?

**Lisa Raitt:** My advice would be, it is worth it.

It is worth being an MP, 100%. Just have your eyes wide open when it comes down to what your future prospects are. Fully understand that the life after may not be as easy as you think it is and be prepared for it.

Just remember it's an honour to serve your constituents. The bad side of it is the partisanship. Dialing that down and dialing up the public service side I think, is the advice that I'd give myself. And that's the advice I'd give anyone who's coming into it.

**Cheryl Hardcastle:** No matter what, there is a place for you.

**Sabreena Delhon:** That's Cheryl Hardcastle.

**Cheryl Hardcastle:** Embrace that feeling that you have of hope.

We laugh at that, sometimes. “That's so naive.” Have that hope and that optimism about what we can do in our politics. And that way you'll always have that, that, that passion to be engaged, no matter what level.

[music ends]

**Sabreena Delhon:** It's pretty amazing to hear that from our MPs. That despite the insane work hours they've described, despite their real frustration with the tough path to making change, the complicated party politics, and the heartbreak at the end of their tenure, that they still keep a space for optimism. They still say it’s worth it. And they are sincere.

They still have that passion that started at home, in their communities.
**Cheryl Hardcastle:** I started volunteering in different organizations where I had young children and I wanted to be involved. And I saw the need for advocacy in recreational sports. It was hockey, finding primetime ice for girls. That's how it really started. And just talking to other people about these ideas when you wanna make changes.

**Sabreena Delhon:** If there's any thread of continuity, for every MP we’ve spoken to, it's community.

Community is you. And your friends. Your family. The people you shoot the breeze with. Maybe you organized changes to icetime for girls' hockey in your neighbourhood, like Cheryl. Maybe you shoveled your neighbour's driveway. You organized rides to the polls. You signed that petition online.

That’s civic engagement. That’s politics, that’s where it starts.

Harnessing the power that gets created by doing something together. And often, that starts at home.

[soft music begins and starts to fade out]

**Romeo Saganash:** My mom, I told her once that my only regret in life was not being able to grow up with my dad so that my dad can show me everything he knew.

**Sabreena Delhon:** Romeo was taken from his family and put in residential school, which is where he was when his father died.

**Romeo Saganash:** Like he was the most incredible craftsman. The canoes that he crafted, the hunter that he was. He was the provider of our family, and the provider for the community as well, because not all were fortunate enough to have a father like him.

And I told my mom once, I regret that I’m not, I wasn't able to be that hunter, and thereby the provider of my community. And she said, you're wrong. You’re wrong, Nabesh. She called me throughout my life Nabesh, which means little boy. [laughs]

She still called me ‘til the end of her life, Nabesh.

[thoughtful music]

She said, you do provide for your community. Do you realize how many agreements that you negotiated on behalf of your people, on behalf of your nation? How many jobs you created on behalf of your people in your nation, in your communities? That's providing. Because a lot of families, because of that, were able to put food on the table, that's another kind of providing, but you're doing the same thing as your dad. So I rest that regret now.
Sabreena Delhon: Doing the work on behalf of your community. On behalf of your nation. As an act of providing. No regrets.

[music fades out]

Sabreena Delhon: By the time Celina Caesar-Chavannes knew she would not seek re-election, the Liberal party was going through a very turbulent time with the SNC-Lavalin affair. You heard much of Celina’s story in the last episode.

She quit the Liberal Party in the spring of 2019 and continued serving the riding of Whitby as an independent. Until that fall, when an election was called.

After she left Ottawa, her memoir was published. It’s called, Can You Hear Me Now? And it’s filled with details on the everyday racism she experienced on the job. And the toll it took on her health.

Celina Caesar-Chavannes: At some point, you just say, you know what, I’m tired of beating my head against this wall, I’m good, I’m out.

Sabreena Delhon: Celina has been very open with her story. About her high hopes of going in with a government that promised to be transformative – but leaving demoralized. And there’s a reason she tells this story.

Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Telling my story, writing my story, I, I hope is not one that says, this story is so scary and you know, a nightmare that I won’t run, but it’s so scary. And it’s a nightmare. Thank you for telling it. So that I’m aware of what can be possible in there, because you did do some great things while you were there, but to have eyes wide open. So I don’t leave with worse mental health than I got in there with. Understand that I’m going to have to face some challenges, even when you’re trying to be friendly, even when you’re playing nice in the sandbox, and then make a decision on whether you wanna advocate from the outside or do it on the inside. And that decision is now fully informed by at least one other person’s experience.

Sabreena Delhon: Celina shares her story, low points and all, because she has a larger message.

Celina Caesar-Chavannes: I almost wanna just read like the last page, a couple just quotes from my book, right?

Sabreena Delhon: Sure.

Celina Caesar-Chavannes: So this is a letter that I wrote to some of the young women who helped me in the riding just some young women that I know.

“I’m going to ask women of all backgrounds to run and run in packs, get your girlfriends and their girlfriends and run like we have never run before. My experience in politics has
demonstrated to me that there is capacity to change political structures from the inside, but only if we are there in numbers. The treatment I received from the leadership in my own party is disappointing and regrettable, and I apologize for leaving before I had an opportunity to make any changes.

But I trust that women, especially women of color and other Black women who are way stronger and braver than I am, will finish this job. I know that our country will be better for it.”

And if I could skip to the last paragraph, in the acknowledgements of my book, I will say –

[hopeful music fades up]

“To the people of Canada and beyond: Your value is not determined by your title and your leadership does not require a title. The power has always belonged to the people. It is time that the people realize their power. It is not enough to hear my voice. We need to hear you, too. So my message is to just show up, to be there, to use your voice, and to change this country and this world for good.”

[music]

Sabreena Delhon: We’ve come to the end of our deep dive into the lives of 12 former MPs. If you’ve been with us from the very start, you’ve now heard every stage in their civic journey.

Our work at the Samara Centre has been a resource for aspiring MPs in the past. Maybe this time, that’s you.

But we can’t deny…what our MPs shared has at times been hard to hear. Going into this job can be tough. Leaving can be tough. And the time in between is an immense strain on an MP’s mental and physical health.

But we don’t want to leave you with a bad taste in your mouth – and neither do our former MPs! None of them regret devoting these years to public service. And it’s only with new voices – and more awareness of these challenges – that life in parliament can evolve.

We’re facing major threats to our democracy and moving forward requires trust in each other.

It’s our hope that drawing on stories like the ones you’ve heard in this show can help to make Canadian politics better.

Thank you for listening.

[music fades out]

[theme music]
CREDITS:

Big thanks to all the former MPs and thank you for listening to Humans of the House.

This podcast is produced by Media Girlfriends for the Samara Centre for Democracy.

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If you, like us, care about the human side of politics, help spread the word about our show. Rate and review us on Apple Podcasts. You’d be surprised how much it helps. Tell your friends, and if you teach, share this show with your class.

Thank you for listening.

[theme music ends]