# Harassment allegations hit Ottawa like a bombshell, says MP Ryan Cleary

[CBC News](http://www.cbc.ca/news/cbc-news-online-news-staff-list-1.1294364)Posted: Nov 07, 2014 10:19 AM NTLast Updated: Nov 07, 2014 1:19 PM NT

Revelations this week that two Liberal Members of Parliament, including one from this province, have been suspended from the party for alleged incidents of harassment have hit Ottawa like a bombshell, says Ryan Cleary, the NDP MP for St. John's South-Mount Pearl.

In an interview Thursday with CBC Here and Now, Cleary acknowledged it's been a tough few weeks on Parliament Hill.

On Wednesday, Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau announced he had suspended Avalon MP Scott Andrews and Quebec MP Massimo Pacetti over allegations of "serious personal misconduct."

Both are alleged to have harassed two sitting female MPs from the NDP caucus.

The matter is now being investigated by the House of Commons board of internal economy.

**Parliament Hill harassment horror stories risk rousing mob mentality**

**Collective catharsis of veiled allegations presents new challenge for journalists**

By Kady O'Malley, [CBC News](http://www.cbc.ca/news/cbc-news-online-news-staff-list-1.1294364)Posted: Nov 12, 2014 5:00 AM ETLast Updated: Nov 12, 2014 8:44 AM ET

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If there's one thing we've learned over the last few weeks, it's that virtually everyone who has spent time within the orbit of Parliament Hill has at least one story of sexual — or, at least, sexually charged — harassment to tell.

There are first-person accounts of behaviour that seems to run the gamut from eyebrow-raising inappropriateness to borderline (or beyond) criminal sexual assault. There are cautionary tales or self-deprecating confessionals shared in confidence by friends or co-workers, or offered as advice to a new arrival — or, indeed, recounted dispassionately, even offhandedly, as just another anecdote of life on the Hill.

There are the half-remembered rumours and speculation long since retired from the precinct rumour mill that suddenly, retroactively, seem horribly plausible.

In an incendiary column published in the Hill Times this week, former Liberal minister Sheila Copps said she had been [sexually assaulted by a colleague](http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/news/sheila-copps-says-she-was-raped-and-sexually-assaulted-1.2830561) during her tenure as an Ontario MPP at Queen's Park. Based on her description of events, it wouldn't be difficult for someone with access to the provincial committee archives to produce a short list of potential attackers.

**No going back**

Copps also claimed that "more than one former Speaker" — it's not clear if she means House, Senate or both — has been the "subject of a complaint" in the past.

While likely not technically defamatory, at least in a legal context, such a charge has the effect of retroactively tarnishing the reputation of the relatively small number of former parliamentarians to serve in that role at the past.

**Former Parliament Hill staffer alleges 2 MPs sexually harassed him**

**CBC commentator Ian Capstick says harassment took place several years ago**

Ian Capstick, a political commentator on CBC News Network's *Power & Politics*, alleges he was sexually harassed by two former members of Parliament, both men, when he worked as a political staffer several years ago.

"Inappropriate touching hurts, and it stays with you for a long time," Capstick told host Evan Solomon.

Capstick claims he was sexually harassed on a regular basis by one MP and in another circumstance, says he was sexually touched by another MP. He says he told the second individual at the time that it was inappropriate.

Capstick says he didn't report either man's behaviour.

"Why did I do that at the time? Because I felt powerless," Capstick said.

Ian Capstick is a political commentator on CBC News Network's Power & Politics and managing partner at MediaStyle. (MediaStyle)

"You feel absolutely without power to be able to report somebody who is 30 or 40 years, in some instances, your senior and is perhaps at a status where you just simply as a 21-year-old can't challenge that person."

**How Parliament Hill harassment exposed me to the dark side of power**

**At the office or at ever-present cocktail parties, it can be hard to avoid sexual harassment on the Hill**

By Laura Payton, [CBC News](http://www.cbc.ca/news/cbc-news-online-news-staff-list-1.1294364)Posted: Nov 10, 2014 12:07 PM ETLast Updated: Nov 10, 2014 12:07 PM ET

It's difficult for young workers navigating the adult world of Parliament Hill. That naiveté makes it even harder for them to deal with incidents of harassment, writes the CBC's Laura Payton.

When I was a university student working in a senator’s office, one of his staff, who was older than my father, would come in, kiss me on the top of the head and rub my shoulders. I was 20 or 21 years old.

I assumed at first he had to realize how uncomfortable that would make me feel, and how wrong it was for someone who wasn’t a close relative to show that kind of affection. I thought that it couldn’t possibly happen every time he was there. It did, for the whole year I worked in that office.

I’ve worked on or close to the Hill most of my adult life, since I arrived in Ottawa as an 18-year-old Senate page. And while the mild sexual harassment I’ve experienced has evolved as my role has changed, it’s always lurking — from "I like your tights" (a married 50-year-old senator) to the hand of whichever male lobbyist I barely know that seems to find its way to the small of my back at social events.

It’s tough enough transitioning into adulthood without having to negotiate sex and power, but there it is — an additional challenge when you’re already trying to figure out how to interact with adults who aren’t teachers or friends of your parents.

When you’re emerging from the cocoon of a university campus, it’s hard to know what is appropriate to say and do around colleagues 20 or 30 or 40 years older, and what’s appropriate for them to say and do around you. That uncertainty makes it all the harder to have the confidence to tell somebody that you object to what they just said or that you want them to stand a little less close to you. Many of us were raised to be polite and taught to respect authority.

So how do you muster the courage to tell someone to back off without hurting their feelings?

You have a right to tell someone they’re making you uncomfortable. But an aspiring political staffer might fear the consequences of that conversation and the possibility that a grudge will mean a bad reference.

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| **Corresponding Questions:**   1. Why do you think much of the sexual harassment that takes place on Parliament Hill goes unreported? (Analysis) 2. Based on this article, how comfortable would you be with having a mother, sister, aunt, or other family member working in Parliament? (Evaluation) |