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# Canadian Advocacy in Washington, D.C.

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by Roy Norton

*Classically, embassies focus on government leaders, channeling their representations through the foreign ministry. The Canadian Embassy in Washington has been distinctive in seeking to influence not only the U.S. State Department and the White House, but also the various Cabinet Secretaries and the thousands of senior officials in the U.S. government. The Embassy goal is to 'partner' with as many like-minded Americans as possible, as these American voices are the most effective in achieving mutually desirable outcomes. In 2004, to facilitate wide partnership, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade created the Advocacy Secretariat at the Embassy. This article details the purposes and activities of the Secretariat.*

For decades, Canada distinguished itself from most foreign governments represented in Washington by directly approaching the Congressional leadership, Committee Chairs and Members of Congress on the principle that as a 'co-equal' branch of the U.S. government with power to initiate legislation having significant effect on Canadian interests, Congress is a target as important as the Administration. The opening, twenty years ago this May, of Canada's new Washington Embassy – the only embassy situated between the Capitol and the White House – reinforced Canada's effectiveness in reaching out to Congress.

The Advocacy Secretariat is organized into three sections – Congressional and Legal Affairs Section (CLAS), Public Affairs (the largest), and Provincial/Territorial & Parliamentary Affairs (PTPA).

## **Congressional and Legal Affairs Section**

CLAS develops and maintains relationships with Members of Congress and their staff, conducts outreach, monitors and reports on legislative developments, and develops and implements strategies appropriate to each issue. Canada can sometimes achieve success

by low visibility and quiet persuasion, resulting in a Member dropping an amendment harmful to Canadian interests. However, some issues require high visibility; for example, Congress' vote in the fall of 2007 to delay by 17 months the implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative at land borders. [Provinces and territories were extensively consulted during the WHTI debate, particularly regarding provincially-issued Enhanced Drivers Licenses]. The annual 'All Politics is Local' blitz of Congressional leaders on the Hill (by Canada's thirteen Consuls General in the U.S.) is another example of successful high visibility outreach. CLAS organizes calls on the Hill for official visitors to Washington, most particularly by Canadian cabinet ministers. CLAS also maintains extensive data banks of critical information about the positions of Members of Congress and their staff, as expressed in interactions with Canadian officials, including MPs.

## **Public Affairs Advocacy**

Public Affairs carries out multiple advocacy functions including media relations. In addition to the more-than-thirty Canadian media representatives based in Washington, Public Affairs reaches out to the hundreds of general interest and specialized U.S. broadcast, print and Internet media whose

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information base and analysis are relied upon by decision-makers. Official visitors from Canada are a valued support in cultivating the American media.

Public Affairs produces highly-focused and targeted information and advocacy materials and also purchases sophisticated data that is used by the Embassy in Washington and by Canada's Consulates General to support Canada's U.S.-wide advocacy efforts. Public Affairs uses the full range of new media tools (including, for example, websites, *Facebook* and *Twitter*) in order to connect with targeted audiences. Military public affairs specialists also collaborate with Public Affairs; together they have created acclaimed successes such as the Embassy's 'Boots on the Ground' campaign, drawing Americans' attention to Canada's significant military contribution in Afghanistan.

Public Affairs also manages outreach to the tens of thousands of Canadians living in the U.S. who have signed up to the *Connect2Canada* (C2C) network, which has developed an informed Canadian Diaspora as an effective advocacy force to support Canada's diplomatic network in the U.S. Using exclusively electronic means, the Embassy keeps Canadians resident in the U.S. aware of important issues, equipping them to share Canadian positions and perspectives with decision-makers and influencers in their communities.

As well, Public Affairs targets and cultivates the most influential and prolific 'thinkers' in U.S. academic institutions and think tanks which are often sources for policy ideas, recommendations and advice for the Administration, Congress, and the media. Successive U.S. Administrations have regularly turned to universities and think tanks when staffing the upper echelons of government. In Washington, D.C. alone, there are more than 100 think tanks with over 4,000 staff. Some have annual budgets greater than that of the Canadian Embassy. Public Affairs ensures that universities and think tanks are aware of Canada's views as they prepare, tender, and disseminate advice to U.S. decision-makers.

In addition to think tanks, Public Affairs reaches into universities and high schools, promoting both Canadian Studies in the U.S. and enrolment at Canadian universities. In large part, the result of these efforts is that thousands more Americans than ever are studying at Canadian universities and colleges.

The Cultural Relations component of Public Affairs uses Canadian cultural products (exhibits, films, performers, authors, and Canadian cultural icons) to promote Canada and draw target audiences of

influential Washington-based decision-makers to the Embassy. Increasingly, these events are made possible under the *North American Partnership Program*, a consortium of federal government departments and agencies committed to advancing Canadian interests in the U.S. and in Mexico. The Embassy collaborates closely with the provinces and territories on cultural promotion.

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### **The Provincial/Territorial & Parliamentary Affairs (PTPA) Section**

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If PTPA were a business, its motto might be 'proudly serving Provinces, Territories and Parliamentarians since 2004.' The Section was created in recognition of two facts:

- provinces and territories have genuine interests in Washington – interests that can most advantageously be advanced in concert with the Embassy of Canada;
- Parliamentarians, because of the rapport they can develop with their elected U.S. counterparts, contribute significantly to advancing Canadian objectives on Capitol Hill.

#### *Provinces and Territories*

PTPA's 'constituent groups' take full advantage of the available services. From 2004 through mid-2009, PTPA coordinated nineteen visits to Washington by Provincial Premiers, Territorial Leaders and their delegations, and another 40 visits by provincial/territorial Ministers and/or senior provincial and territorial officials. Together, those programs constitute 65 percent of the visits for which PTPA has been responsible over the five years since its inception.

As part of federal government policy,, provinces and territories can 'co-locate' a representative from their public service in a Canadian Embassy. As of mid-2009, three Canadian provinces have established a total of twenty-six co-locations in Canadian posts worldwide (Alberta-7; Ontario-11; Québec-8). Provinces and territories are motivated by a variety of factors including cost effectiveness in deciding in which cities to co-locate with Canadian embassies. Alberta is physically present in the Washington Embassy and Québec has an office in D.C. Other provinces and territories engage assistance on either a continuous or ad hoc basis.

At the Embassy, PTPA is the primary service centre for all the provinces and territories, and it strives to ensure that information generated within the Embassy is pertinent to and shared with the provinces and territories. PTPA coordinates the Embassy's advice to provinces and territories on advocacy options and

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opportunities, feeds provincial and territorial input back to Embassy colleagues, and generally ensures that specialist officers at the Embassy are always alert to the relevant provincial and territorial aspects of issues they are working on.

PTPA also contributes to achieving concurrence between federal, provincial and territorial objectives so that Canada can speak effectively and with a strong voice in its advocacy both in Washington and to American audiences throughout the United States. In 2009 alone, PTPA was involved in the highly public visits of 3 Provincial Premiers, who came to Washington to further their policy priorities. Saskatchewan Premier Wall visited Washington, calling for greater U.S. government support for carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology. Manitoba Premier Doer spoke to an important Washington conference on the environment, underscoring the importance of close coordination between U.S. and Canadian efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. And Ontario's Premier McGuinty met with industry representatives in Washington to press for changes to U.S. Buy American policies. PTPA led the Embassy's involvement in the D.C. programmes of each of the visiting Premiers.

Some of the most effective advocacy on behalf of provincial and territorial interests and objectives takes place in state capitals. In order to facilitate this advocacy in the regions of the USA, PTPA works closely with the thirteen Canadian Consulates General across the U.S. Provincial Premiers and Territorial leaders, ministers and legislators have developed good working relationships with their counterparts in the individual states. They enjoy privileged access to their U.S. equivalents – most especially, Premiers with Governors, whether in the context of the National Governors' Association (the NGA) or individually.

While premiers meet with the governors, they have no official relationship with the NGA. By contrast, most Canadian provinces and territories are actually members of one or another of the major national organizations representing state governments/ legislatures (the Council of State Governments – CSG, and the National Conference of State Legislatures – NCSL) or, in the case of the CSG, of one of its regional associations. PTPA is in close and constant contact with the Washington, D.C.-based staff of those organizations, and with the D.C. offices of individual U.S. governors – 47 of whom have staff representing

their interests in the national capital. All are potential advocacy 'partners' of Canada.

### *Parliamentarians*

Federal, provincial and territorial Parliamentarians are among Canada's most effective advocates in the United States, especially when they meet with U.S. legislators in the context of bi- (or multi-party) groups. Maximizing the corollary advantages is one of PTPA's principal advocacy functions.

The Embassy enjoys remarkable access to Members of the United States Congress. However, they are busy people, and it is to Canada's advantage when, in the context of Parliamentary visits, it proves possible to access multiple Members of Congress at critical times. Functioning as it should, the Embassy accompanies parliamentarians on their calls, follows-up where appropriate, and gains first hand awareness of the principal concerns of U.S. legislators. When Canadian parliamentarians from more than one party collaborate well to advance non-partisan messaging on behalf of Canada's objectives in the U.S., Canada's overall advocacy agenda is strengthened.

Thirty-five percent of the visits managed by PTPA since its inception in 2004 have been by parliamentarians. The largest share of those has been by full House of Commons or Senate committees. In the first six months of 2009 alone, five committees visited Washington. While information gathering, relationship building and advocacy are part of the agenda of such visits, what is most important is that the Committees' visits offer additional opportunities to bring Canadian perspectives to the attention of key players in the U.S. policy-making process.

Recent examples of successful advocacy by Canadian Parliamentarians include several visits in the spring of 2009 by House of Commons Committees: the Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee focused on convincing its U.S. counterparts that 'Country of Origin Labelling' is counterproductive to U.S. interests; the Finance Committee impressed on its counterparts that U.S. re-regulation of its financial systems must recognize the integrated North American market, including for financial services; the International Trade Committee presented Canada's views on myriad trade irritants, particularly on the 'Buy American' elements of the U.S. Stimulus Bill; the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee asserted Canadian interest in working closely with the U.S. on shared global objectives; and, the special committee on Afghanistan encouraged a

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greater American focus on bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan.

Bringing the Canadian perspective to the front is also an important part of official visits to Washington by Parliamentary Groups – especially the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group (IPG).

While relatively few in number, the reach achieved during IPG visits has been considerable. Invariably, the delegation breaks into groups of a size that can be accommodated in Members' offices. After extensive briefing at the Embassy, the IPG delegation visits the Hill, sequentially calling on U.S. Senators and Representatives or staff. During such visits, a wide range of issues is raised. For example, during their February, 2009, visit, the Canadian parliamentarians pressed their U.S. counterparts on issues such as border facilitation (including the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative), agricultural barriers, and Buy American, among others.

Because they tend to have recurring contact with their U.S. counterparts, IPG members strive to build enduring personal relationships. The Canadian and U.S. Sections hold an annual two-day meeting; U.S. Senators and Representatives join their Canadian colleagues, spending invaluable time together. Additionally, Canadian IPG members attend annual

and regional conferences across the U.S. of some of the organizations representing U.S. states.

### **Advocacy Challenges**

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Competition is great in Washington for the attention of decision-makers and influencers. Business and labour representatives, NGOs, and more than 35,000 registered lobbyists in D.C., engage full-time in persuading the powerful of the merits of their cases. American advocates enjoy advantages unavailable to foreign governments. In the last election cycle, more than \$1 billion was spent by candidates for the presidency and by incumbent national legislators. By contrast, Canada must rely on the power of our arguments and the innovativeness of our approaches.

In an unusual June 1, 2009 editorial, the *Globe and Mail* detailed the advocacy functions performed by the Embassy, commending successful campaigns waged and the tools created and deployed in support of them.

The Embassy's business is education and persuasion. Canada is in the very top tier of foreign governments advocating in Washington because we have organized ourselves to creatively deploy a range of advocacy tools and to secure the attention of decision-makers when it is important for us to do so. With that as our goal, the Embassy serves as an unrelenting advocate in Washington for Canadian interests.