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[President's message](#)

Lobbyists lobby on lobbying, while not all agree they're villains



by Elaine Flis
PAAC President

When Stephen Harper took command in Ottawa, it was thanks to high hopes from just enough of the voters for him to win a minority. Among his promises were vows to run a more open government, and to "crack down on lobbyists." How beneficial it is to crack down on the very people who provide expert guidance to those who want access to government was never explained. Yet the crackdown came on schedule, and it's interesting to see that lobbyists aren't the only ones who question its wisdom.

Click [here](#) to access the web space of Terence Corcoran, distinguished journalist and editor of *The Financial Post*, then click on his column, The Right To Lobby. He makes arguments similar to my own recent thoughts in this space, and with the forceful writing of a journalist who owes no fealty to lobbyists, only to the truth of the matter. It's encouraging because it drives home the point that these objections are not merely the bleating of those whose allegedly nefarious work is being curtailed. They're valid points.

We continue to work to argue these valid points directly to the government on behalf of lobbyists, PAAC

members and all those who want access to proper guidance through the labyrinth of government. Interestingly, this issue is not the purview of the public accounts committee, as would traditionally be the case. A separate committee was established to deal with it, and so far the committee has not responded to lobbyist groups; they haven't returned phone calls. This is a discouraging situation given the Harper vow of openness, transparency and public engagement. Perhaps it will change. I'll keep you posted.

Coming soon

PAAC makes an entrance into Ottawa at the end of this month with an event to be held at D'Arcy McGee's on the evening of May 30th. Watch for further details on this, but in the meantime, members are cordially invited to clear a space in your calendar, and plan to be there.

Comings and goings

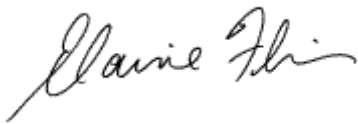
Please join me in bidding a respectful adieu to Ed Arundell, Vice President of G.P. Murray Research Ltd., who recently resigned from the Board of Directors of PAAC. Stepping up to the plate as Treasurer: Michael Ras, Vice President of Public Affairs at Hill & Knowlton Canada and one of our newer Board members. Ed, of course, is still a member, but stepped down as Treasurer and Board member. As you know, Ed was the founding President of PAAC, and the organization owes a great deal to his trailblazing.

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Now, it is my special pleasure to welcome our newest member to PAAC:

- Jeremy Adams, National Smokeless Tobacco Co.
- Daniele Gauvin, Liquor Control Board of Ontario
- Dale Hill, Labatt's Breweries of Canada
- Tina Marano, First Canadian Title
- Kelly Morgan, Thornley-Fallis Communications
- Michelle Pennell, Fleishman-Hillard Canada
- Andrew Weir, Tourism Toronto

Feel free to contact me with your thoughts, input and suggestions.



[Event report](#)

Don't write off those community newspapers

Bill Laidlaw, Executive Director of the Ontario Community Newspapers Association (OCNA) spoke to a PAAC luncheon audience April 11 at the Sutton Place Hotel to bring them this message: Those community newspapers that land on most people's doorsteps every week across Ontario - sometimes subscribed, sometimes not - are often a better bet for getting your message to readers than the major dailies most public affairs professionals focus upon. The reason: Where editors of daily papers are often reluctant to cover an event or follow up on a

press release simply because you want them to, those at community newspapers are much less confrontational.



Members and guests (above) pick up their name tags on the way in to hear Bill Laidlaw (below) of the Ontario Community Newspapers Association.



Laidlaw's association speaks for some 300 community newspapers in Ontario, 56 per cent of them owned by one of three media behemoths: Osprey Media Group, Metroland (part of the Toronto Star's parent company, TorStar) and Sun Media, which is part of Quebecor. OCNA is growing, with expansion plans focusing on papers in the Russian, Chinese, Iranian and other ethnocultural communities. Said Laidlaw: "I hope in the near future we'll have many of them as members, too."

Laidlaw's job is to make Ontarians aware of the importance of these thriving community newspapers. "People read them," he said, and they are not always weeklies. Many are, but some are published two or three times per week. They range in size from the Hornepayne *Jackfish Journal*, circulation 254, to the *Mississauga News*,

circulation huge.

Nor does OCNA circulation involve just sending papers out to people who never asked for them, who then plop them directly into the blue box or landfill. Statistics from ComBase (Community Newspaper Research Database), the research arm of the community newspaper industry, underlie Laidlaw's message that people accept, want and read community papers not only in Ontario but throughout the territory of all 700 member papers of the entire Canadian Community Newspapers Association, which begat ComBase in 2001.

Laidlaw wants PAAC professionals to appreciate how readily community newspapers can be used to get a message across. Maybe better than in dailies. Maybe a lot better. Those ComBase stats say more than 70 per cent of adults in Ontario read their community newspaper, which amounts to some 5.8 million readers. "When a paper is delivered, it stays in the house for a whole week," he adds. People read their weeklies (or biweeklies or triweeklies) to get the skinny on things like their children's hockey or soccer tournaments and the daily doings at local city halls - events poorly covered, if at all, by dailies obsessed with the shenanigans of world leaders, terrorists, demented Americans on tri-state crime sprees, and other troublemakers whom most people prefer to avoid.

Women are strongly represented in community newspaper readership, and that's good news for advertisers because women are the brains behind most household buying decisions - just click over to OCA or ComBase and you'll soon find all the statistics and lines of evidence you want to read. Indeed, community newspaper readers not only don't mind the ads, they read the paper as much to find out about the latest specials, sales, deals and sponsored events, as they do for the community news. "We have one-stop shopping if you want to get your ads in community papers across Ontario," said Laidlaw.

Yet for public affairs professionals, the best part about community papers is that their editors don't mind covering good news. They're willing to make it a story when fine apples are in season, and are not so intent on finding the worms in those apples. To that end, OCNA offers a press service. "If you have a message to get out we can help you do that," he said. Press releases can be sent through OCNA targeted to specific geographical areas. They go straight to editors' email in-boxes, and those editors want to read the releases. By contrast, Laidlaw stressed, "Editors of dailies don't always look positively on the business world."

This is true. Send out a press release about Ronald MacDonald making an appearance at an Easter Egg Roll and your community newspaper will likely respond with a story and photos posed next to the local Golden Arches, with a sidebar on the restaurant chain's charitable works. In a big-city daily your event is more likely to become part of an exposé on fast food chains targeting children, featuring an exclusive interview with Morgan Spurlock, the man who deliberately wrecked his own health with fast food and made a hit movie about it as an indictment of the fast food industry.

Well...these things happen. And there is certainly a place for exposé, alarmism and disinterment of the unquiet dead in modern journalism, the stated goal of which is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Still, when you're a public affairs person interested in getting a message to the reading public about something positive, upbeat or hopeful, isn't it nice to know there are community newspapers willing to listen, and leave the pursuit of evil to others?

-D.S._

How good is your political judgment?



by Stewart Kiff

Expert Political Judgment: How good is it? How can we know?

By Philip E. Tetlock

Lobbyists are by nature considered experts on politics. We are paid to offer opinions and assessments on a wide variety of political issues and events, so we hold our political judgment in high esteem and take considerable pride in the value it delivers to our clients. The expertise to deliver accurate and timely expert political opinion is a fundamental part of our skill set as lobbyists, and certainly one of the most challenging. Still, in spite of our best efforts, even our most considered and thoughtful predictions sometimes turn out to be wrong. This is both an embarrassing and frustrating experience. An understanding of how we develop our opinions and how to identify the errors in their development is something of considerable real value. And certainly, we all want to be more right more often, if only for the elevated gravitas.

Yet political judgment is usually evaluated relative to the conventional wisdom of the time, or the judger's personal bias, as opposed to any empirical measure. For very practical reasons, it is rare that experts are judged on how their political judgments perform over time - and whether, with the passage of time, their accuracy improves.

In *Expert Political Judgment*, psychologist Philip E. Tetlock, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, goes back 20 years to examine political judgments that were predictive of events to come, then he rates how accurate these opinions turned out to be. In the process he reveals all manner of nuances about how political judgments are developed, delivered, perceived and finally judged.

In November of 2005, just as the recent Federal election was called, PAAC members were witness to some fairly impressive political forecasting at the Stephen Clarkson presentation to PAAC promoting his new book. At that event, Clarkson, former Mulroney Cabinet Minister Tom Hockin and Navigator's Robin Sears all predicted Stephen Harper's Conservatives would win a minority government in the January 2006 election. Since the conservatives were behind in the polls at the time and the campaign had yet to begin, it was a daring contrarian opinion that could have easily led to a loss of face in less than two months. Moreover, even in this short period, a number of unforeseen events could and did rapidly shift public opinion -- such as the RCMP announcement of an investigation at the federal Ministry of Finance and an outbreak of gun violence in Canada's largest city. Such is the volatile nature of political events, and the vulnerability of predictions.

With that in mind the exceedingly high number of false predictions Tetlock found in his research should come as

no surprise. What appear to be seasoned and wise political judgments, when reviewed through the clarity of hindsight, often turn out to be laughably wrong. This won't be news to anyone and thankfully Tetlock doesn't dwell on this or present it as some revelatory insight. Instead, Tetlock, uses this fundamental finding to delve deeply into the very nature of political judgment and in the process he develops tools for analysing it retrospectively, such as "fuzzy-set adjustments" to award partial credit when predictions were mostly correct, and "difficulty adjustments" which award more points for taking on more challenging subjects.

The most helpful part of this book may be Tetlock's observation that what experts think is less predictive of their opinions' accuracy than the manner in which they think. Tetlock concludes that those with a broad base of knowledge -- "the foxes" -- tend to perform better over the long haul than "hedgehogs," whose backgrounds are specialized in one area and who work narrowly focused within it. Interestingly enough he also finds that there is an inverse relationship between what the media or the general public value in pundits and the best scientific indicators of good judgment. In short, the more obtuse and stubborn a media pundit is, the greater his or her chance of being both very popular and very wrong. Undoubtedly this is a relief to those of us who have long since given up being astonished at how Linda McQuaig or Ann Coulter continue being published, while exciting young and broad-minded thinkers like Andrew Potter toil in relative obscurity. It leads the reader to ponder the question of just how much time is wasted by the media giving value to arguments whose sole purpose would seem to be to provide a false dynamic to political discourse.

Expert Political Judgment stands out in the field as a work of exceptional acuity and value. I can't recommend this book enough. Every contentious lobbyist should put it on their professional development list for this year.

Highly Recommended.

Stewart Kiff is the Toronto Vice-President of Equinox Public Affairs. He welcomes your feedback and suggestions, and can be reached at stewart@equinoxinc.ca.

[The Web Editor's corner](#)

The return of the Spartans

by David Silburt
PAAC Web Editor

Go tell the Spartans, stranger passing by,
that here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

*- From Simonides's epigram to the Spartans at Thermopylae,
translated from Herodotus*

Last month a Canadian Forces soldier was killed alongside an American colleague during combat near Kandahar. The event precipitated a renewed call for a debate in the House of Commons concerning our role in Afghanistan. Eventually the Harper government gave in and allowed a debate, but not a vote. To avoid demoralizing the troops, he permitted only the debate, giving those who were calling for it what they wanted: a

stump for their views on the war. More recently, the discussion foamed up again when four more of our troops died in the line of duty. Since the issue is current, November 11 is too long to wait to write about the place of soldiers in the scheme of things. The proper time for Remembrance Day is right now.

Some choose to remember no further back than the Vietnam war. Some can remember World War Two and the need to defeat Hitler's dream of a Thousand Year Reich. Here's a memory from almost 2,500 years back, when soldiers fought a battle to preserve the Greek civilization which gave rise to our own.

It was 480 B.C., and a Persian army of 200,000 under King Xerxes, son of Darius, was on the march against an alliance of Greek city-states in a war of clashing cultures that had been going on for years. About 7,000 Greek defenders commanded by Leonidas, son of Anaxandrides, marched up the coast of the Malian Gulf, which runs off the Aegean Sea, to meet them. Leonidas made his stand at a place called Thermopylae ('hot gates,' named for the hot springs there) because it was defensible. It was a 20-meter bottleneck between tall mountains and the sea, where Xerxes could pit only 20 meters worth of his horde against the Greeks at any one time. Leonidas put his most elite soldiers, a force of 300 Spartans, at the front.

Xerxes's army hit the Spartans like logs going into a wood chipper. Spartans were the toughest hard-case soldiers in the world then, with better armament than the Persians, better discipline, better tactics and no reverse gear. The Persians, unable to surround the smaller force because of the bottleneck effect, began taking staggering numbers of casualties without making any headway.

Eventually, Xerxes caught a break. He bought some information about a pass through the mountains that would let his men get behind the Greek army. The Greeks knew about it too, and had some people guarding it, but they couldn't spare any Spartans for the job. They sent Phocians, who took one look at the task force of something like 10,000 men coming up the mountain, and departed the scene. So the Persians surrounded the Spartans and the rest was a battle of attrition.

Leonidas fought alongside his men. Xerxes watched from a nearby hill, probably with some guy fanning his face for him. When Leonidas went down, his men kept fighting. All of them died that day, but they were not defeated. Because the story of the battle of Thermopylae went out from there, and inspired the whole of the Greek military to fight like Spartans and never back down. Within a year they sent the Persians packing. Greek civilization continued to flourish.

Today we have a few things by which to remember the ancient Greeks. Democracy for one, which we generally agree is a good thing even when things get petty and narrow-minded in Ottawa. The concept of citizenship for another, with all those citizenship rights people are always asserting. A long tradition of free and open scientific inquiry for yet another, which is why we live in a world of scientific enlightenment and technological marvels.

The Persians are still with us too. These days we call them Iranians, but it's a moot question whether modern day Iran is an example of what the world would be like if the Persians had conquered the Greeks. By some thinking, Afghanistan under the Taliban is a more apt example.

There are those who would like to re-establish that regime, and expand it. Standing against that possibility now, as in 480 B.C., are Spartans. They are the modern soldiers of the U.S., Britain and many allies including Australians, Dutch, Romanians, our own very tough and dedicated Canadian servicemen, and others who do not run from combat as the Phocians once did. Our troops serve as volunteers, not conscripts. They are very good at what they do, and they believe in it. That's why Prime Minister Harper's decision not to allow a potentially morale-

killing vote on the war was a good one. People will exercise their democratic right of free speech in any case.

Meanwhile, if anyone wants to go tell the modern Spartans a message of support, there is a way to do it. Previously this space included a link to the web site, anysoldier.com, where readers can find contact information for American troops serving in front-line units, in order to write them a letter to buck up their spirits. Now our Department of National Defense has a web page where we can send a message to our own troops. It's limited to a message of 500 characters to be posted on an electronic bulletin board, but that's enough to tell them we haven't forgotten about them.

As for the original 300 Spartans, perhaps we can pause from time to time, in our world of democracy and citizenship rights and technological comforts, and remember them as well. And just maybe, by some quirk in this strange and infinitely surprising universe, they'll know.

Have your say

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