

- President's Message: Decorum in Ottawa revisited
- Pub night pics: PAAC Spring Fling hits Ottawa
- Event report: John Baird responds on Accountability Act
- The web editor: Little green men and the nuclear critical mass

[President's message](#)

Decorum in Ottawa revisited



*by Elaine Flis
PAAC President*

Imagine a large room full of jeering, shouting people, one trying to talk while others do their best to shout him down. Occasional bursts of profanity can be heard. Is this a sports bar, perhaps filled with over-zealous fans watching a World Cup soccer match? No, I was thinking of my trip to Ottawa, where I had the opportunity to attend Question Period in the House of Commons for the first time in a decade. The boorishness on display was both distressing and nauseating.

I've talked about decorum here before, in light of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's declaration that he'll bring more of it to Ottawa, and Ontario Conservative Leader John Tory's claim that he wants to bring more of it to Queen's Park. I've harkened back to the day Mike Harris called someone an "asshole" in the Legislature, and how even the least accomplished lip-readers could tell Pierre Trudeau's famous "fuddle duddle" was no such tame expression. Gutter behaviour goes back a long way in our hallowed halls of Parliament. Yet when I was there recently to hear it on the spot I was struck anew by the lack of civility. It was the same lack of civility on

display in the Ontario legislature during the last Throne Speech, when the Lieutenant Governor - who as a non-partisan official should be spared the rudeness political partisans cultivate for their opponents - received little respect. Heckling came from all sides as if the L-G were a stand-up comedian, rather than the Queen's representative delivering an historic address.

Prime Minister Harper recently tried to impose decorum on press scrums by requiring reporters to add their names to a list in order to ask a question, so that Harper could work through the list and avoid the coarse yelling and disorder of the typical scrum. His attempt at press decorum only caused reporters to throw a collective hissy-fit and flounce out of his announcement of aid to Darfur. Perhaps the media can be edged toward better manners in some other way, later. Perhaps those in politics should work on the issue closer to home in the meantime.

The general lack of decorum among federal politicians has caught the attention of *The Ottawa Citizen*, which now publishes a daily "Civility Meter" to rate the level of decorum in the House. Will the Honourable Members respond to this by adjusting their behaviour to score higher (such as four stars, meaning 'spirited but mindful of manners,' or five stars, meaning 'politics and politeness become synonymous?'). The rating on a recent Friday was an encouraging four stars, so perhaps that's a good omen. But the members have a distance yet to travel on decorum road, judging by what I witnessed and what there has been to read in the press.

Recently NDP MP Pat Martin, in a heated discussion of the Accountability Act, said for the published record that the idea the House rushed its examination of the bill was "bullshit." In another widely reported incident, Conservative Pierre Poilievre and several colleagues made that universal 'up yours' arm gesture in the House, something which would cause a school teacher to send little boys to the office if it happened in a Grade Six class. It's not as if educated people have no alternative ways to express themselves. When will these fellows decide to live up to the "Honourable" they expect us to add to their names?

•••

Our June 27 breakfast session was an important one, with Treasury Board President John Baird graciously agreeing to give us his take on the Accountability Act. His speaking notes are posted on this site, and we have a report on the event below. Many thanks to Mr. Baird for attending, and thanks to those organizations which bought tables:

- Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants
- Ensignt Canada
- Global Public Affairs
- TELUS

•••

On behalf of PAAC, I would like to extend a heartfelt welcome to our newest members:

- Nobina Robinson, Seneca College
- Alexandra Kyriakos, Global Public Affairs
- Kim Wright, Global Public Affairs
- Mark Maloney, Global Public Affairs
- Irene Jones, Global Public Affairs
- Marion Zych, Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

- Julie Metcalfe, British Consulate-General
- Anneliesa McLean, Student

Please feel free to contact me with your input or suggestions, at eflis@enterprisecanada.com



[Pub night pics](#)

PAAC Spring Fling hits Ottawa

On June 13, PAAC held its first annual Ottawa Spring Fling at D'Arcy McGee's Irish Pub, at 24 Sparks St. in the nation's capital. Those who were there agreed it was a capital idea, underscoring the national presence of the largest national organization for professionals in Government Relations and other public affairs disciplines.



Above: PAAC Vice President Ruth Merskey (right) and Director Caroline Pinto welcome guests to the Spring Fling.



Above: Jean-Claude Trottier, of Francopol in Ottawa (right), shares a beer and a laugh with Ryder Lee of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

Event report

John Baird responds on Accountability Act



Welcome to PAAC: Public Affairs Association of Canada President Elaine Flis (left) welcomed John Baird, President of the Treasury Board (centre) to our breakfast session at the top of the Sutton Place Hotel. Handling the introductions and thanks was Events Chair Ian Bacque (right).

John Baird, President of the Treasury Board, was the guest of honour at our June 27 breakfast session where he was invited to talk about the federal Accountability Act, but it was Events Chair Ian Bacque whose anecdote underscored the reasons behind the Harper government's April introduction of the Act. Bacque told of being at a social function with his mother, who heard him tell somebody he's a lobbyist. In the time-honoured fashion of mothers trying to help their grown children, she had something to say. Suggested Mother Bacque: "Dear, I really think you should tell people you're a lawyer."



Above: PAAC Events Chair Ian Bacque offers a photo op with John Baird, left, and Toronto City Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong at right. **Below:** Baird prepares for his presentation.



Indeed, in a world where perception is reality - particularly in the political riptides where Baird and the Harper government swim - the Accountability Act is the new government's attempt to change the public perception of politicians, as well as the lobbyists with whom they interact. That's what Baird came to tell us with his morning presentation, *Creating a Culture of Accountability*. He wanted to allay any fears that lobbying will be more difficult under the new rules, although he was unrepentant that it will be different.

The idea behind the Act was not to make life tough on GR people, but to change the regrettable but widespread public belief that Ottawa is some kind of Casablanca North, dominated by arm-twisters, back-roomers, deal-makers, and string-pullers whose prime allegiance is to the belief they are entitled to their entitlements. "We're in office because Canadians wanted change. Canadians grew tired of the scandals, mismanagement and dithering of the previous government," he said. "This legislation is about moving from a culture of entitlement to a culture of accountability."

Flak from all sides

Baird was at pains to declare politicians and GR people to be *simpatico*; different faces of the same coin, practicing the Art Of The Possible. "We take a lot of flak from all sides," he said. "We both get kicked around by people at the water-coolers in the morning and by the media on the news in the evening."

He also said his government shares with PAAC a belief in the importance of accountability, openness and honesty - in government as in public affairs - and in the need to do something about public perception that these things are lacking. He had great praise for the PAAC Statement of Ethical Principles, the inception of which pre-dates his government. He went so far as to draw parallels between the PAAC commitments reflected in the SEP and the government commitment reflected in the Accountability Act, mentioning the four pillars of integrity, competency, courtesy and transparency.

Baird's presentation was direct, upbeat and often entertaining, but there was no mistaking a steely commitment to the Act, and a strong unspoken message that politicians who oppose it do so at their peril. "The Committee listened and questioned over 70 expert witnesses," he said. "On balance, I think we did get it right." By right, he means his government, with the help of the Committee, sweated the details to create something that is up to public expectations, even if it is not entirely to everyone's liking. "Now it goes to the Senate for Sober Second Thought," he deadpanned, invoking a ripple of slow gullet-laughter around the room.

Whether the chucklers were amused because they conjured up stereotypical images of senators, or by the prospect of a Liberal-dominated Senate forced to swallow Tory legislation rather than make Harper's day by risking an election on the issue, was never stated. Baird simply stressed that the Act aims to make everyone in government, from the Prime Minister to the mandarins, more accountable. Government Relations people are obliged to come along for the ride.

Follow the money

Will the Act generate more red tape? No, he said. Rules are intended to be simpler and more straightforward, not to bog down the civil service or stifle people in their GR work.

Is this Big Brotherism? Auditor General Sheila Fraser, and whoever might succeed her, will indeed gain new discretionary powers to shine a light into those dark places where money often hides. Yet who can complain about that? Baird said he believes most organizations are unconcerned about revealing what they do under the

Act, and have no problem with Fraser's enhanced ability to "follow the money."

What about banning donations by both corporations and unions, and capping individual donations? "Will this make it harder to raise money for a political campaign?" Baird echoed. "Well, if people rely on five-thousand-dollar-a-plate cocktail parties to raise funds, then yes, it will make it harder to raise money - and rightly so."

The five-year ban on lobbying after government service? "People should not get rich by bouncing between government and lobbying jobs, selling their contacts in the process." Some say this rule will harm recruitment in government jobs, Baird admitted. His cheerful *riposte*: "Retention will be a lot easier."

Are GR people being needlessly vilified? Only if they speak out loudly against the Act. Public perception is the 500-pound gorilla of the issue. "We're seeing heightened perceptions of conflict of interest in the relationships between public-office holders and lobbyists, and concerns that privileged access to government is reserved for a chosen few." Ergo, once the Act is passed there will be a new sheriff in town - a Commissioner of Lobbying who will investigate violations and enforce the new rules. The public will like that a lot.

Going major

Dislike some of the Act's details if you will, but Baird's presentation clearly reflected his government's booming confidence that they've got the public pulse on this one, and that the Act cannot fail to help the chances of this minority government going major. Any sober second thought that takes place in the Senate will have to be about the political cost of sinecured Liberals standing in its way.

"Public confidence is all about trust, and that must be earned each and every day," Baird intoned. "If this minority parliament accomplishes one thing, it will be to replace the culture of entitlement with one of accountability."

If that sounds like campaign talk, it probably is. In the next election campaign, the Accountability Act will very likely become a horse for Stephen Harper to ride.

A white horse.

[The Web Editor's corner](#)

Little green men and the nuclear critical mass

by David Silburt
PAAC Web Editor

This department usually avoids the use of the Perpendicular Pronoun for reasons of propriety, but this month I have direct experience to share. It's relevant to the developing public discussion concerning Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty's stance in favour of more nuclear power plants in Ontario's future. A public relations battle is to be fought on the issue, between 'green' activists fighting for a cause and politicians practicing the art of the

possible.

Premier McGuinty, who promised to shut down coal-burning power stations for the sake of the environment, has now recognized nuclear power as a way to help fill future needs - along with conservation measures, not in place of them. His plan to build new nuclear stations only to replace old units being shut down amounts to much less than what some energy experts believe we'll require to meet future needs, yet it's drawing criticism for being pro-nuke. To his credit, the Premier has not simply ducked the need to make future energy plans beyond the likely lifetime of his government. Choices must be made now.

Nor is it simply a matter of choosing a fork in the road, one route leading to clean and green and the other to pollution and disaster. There are tradeoffs to be made. You can't build more big hydroelectric stations than there are waterfalls to drive them, and it is by no means certain that conservation measures alone can cope with projected growth in energy needs. Cleaning up coal technology only helps to a point.

It still boils down to a question of whether you want to put your waste products up a smokestack into the sky or bury them in a subterranean vault. The latter choice is workable for a while, until new energy sources become available. The former would put a major dent in any commitment to the Kyoto Protocol, which Liberals support.

The usual anti-nuclear forces are entering protest mode, and they always bill themselves as environmental activists. You will be reading articles in the media about the dangers and costs of nuclear power, and counter-articles telling you nuclear stations remain the best available choice to spare the air. As you read the controversy, it's useful to bear in mind the thinking process behind causes. Many of the people you hear from will be reasoning backwards - not examining evidence and then reaching a conclusion, as in science, but first embracing a belief, then accepting only evidence which supports it, as in religion. Those driven by science can change their minds. People who 'get religion' on an issue cannot.

In 1981, I drew the task of writing a feature about nuclear fusion for the *Windsor Star* newspaper, because Ontario Hydro was putting money into a fusion fuels project. Commercial fusion power would not be like nuclear fission, which knocks apart big atoms like uranium-238 to release energy and leaves a lot of nasty atomic fragments flying around, including radioactive isotopes of cesium, strontium and iodine. Fusion reactors would jam together heavy hydrogen (deuterium) and extra-heavy hydrogen (tritium) to produce helium-4 and a great deal of energy, with no nasty fragments. But what environmental consequences might result? Scientists knew little about that in 1981, which made the reaction of the anti-nuclear cause at the time especially revealing.

I interviewed scientists about the fusion project and showed a draft article to my editor. He shook his head sadly. "You have to get the other side." *Other side? It's a what-if article, boss. It's high apple pie in the sky. What other side?* "You have to balance it," my editor said, and named a source who I won't name here because I don't want to get into a beef with him. It's a guy who favours an energy future full of windmills and solar batteries and bicycles. "Call him up and get him to say this is a disaster for the environment," my editor said. "Get him to say no nukes is good nukes. You know the drill."

The source certainly knew the drill. He told me how fusion reactor vessels might become radioactive and have to be buried after they were decommissioned, creating an environmental hazard. He told me a fusion reactor, attempting to contain a nuclear reaction at the temperature of the sun, might explode like an H-bomb. He said this probably knowing full well that in early fusion experiments a loss of control simply made the reaction fizzle out, and that any worries about explosions were merest conjecture. In fact, the whole idea was conjecture. We might as well have been talking about the environmental drawbacks of the matter/antimatter reaction that drives

the Star Ship Enterprise, for all the relevance it had to the science of the day. But he gave my article the 'balance' my editor craved.

My source was, of course, reasoning backwards. He represented a cause, fighting against energy solutions that are big, high-tech, hugely corporate and out of tune with the natural environment. He cruised through the science of the issue, accepting this and rejecting that, in whatever ways were necessary to reach a conclusion to which he was already committed, like a religion. It's what many activists do when they argue a cause.

You will read a lot of discussion in coming months and leading up to the next Ontario election, as McGuinty takes incoming fire from people who want to fight him over his limited acceptance of nuclear power by persuading the voting public that conservation and what they call 'alternative energy' - usually meaning co-generation and solar cells and wind farms - can make us a better, greener world.

Perhaps the green men are right about that. Nevertheless, it is useful to listen carefully for the sound of people advocating a cause for the sake of the comfort it provides them. Comforting beliefs, embraced in the manner of a religion, are nice. Yet science, to which all those practicing the art of the possible must eventually turn, is a window on reality.

We should all learn to recognize the difference.

Have your say

We welcome member input, whether it's a letter to the editor, a story suggestion or a proposal for a guest column. Feel free to email your input or suggestions to us. All submissions for publication on this site are subject to approval by the Editorial Board.

Editorial Board: Elaine Flis, Ruth Merskey, Chris Benedetti, Chris Churchill, Graham Murray.

Writer/Editor: David Silburt

Public Affairs is E-published by the Public Affairs Association of Canada
100 Adelaide St. West, Suite 705
Toronto, ON
M5H 1S3

Tel: 416-367-2223 • Fax: 416-367-3778