



PAAC E-News

Public Affairs: Your Online Newsletter

October • 2007

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What if they reviewed a Lobbyists' Act and nobody came?



*by Elaine Flis
PAAC President*

The latest province to talk about a Lobbyists' Registration Act is Alberta, and the initial indications are not encouraging. No, it's not a case of an Act about to be imposed without consultation. Incredibly, as reported by our colleague Jim Dau of The Prismatic Group GR consultants in Alberta, the only people to show up at public hearings were some from not-for-profit organizations and a few executive

directors of associations. There has been little or no input from members of the GR community in Alberta.

According to Jim, the Alberta GR community is not trying to grapple with the legislation at this stage of the game. One reason, says Jim, is that "The devil is in the details of the regulation, which is at least a year down the road." Another is that the Alberta GR community is not well organized. There are, of course, two things to say to that. One is that Alberta is part of Canada, and GR people there are welcome and in fact encouraged to ally themselves with PAAC. The other thing to say is that this community needs to offer local, Alberta-focused input into the development of legislation, early in the process.

Alberta not-for-profits have legitimate concerns about how registration might impact volunteerism, which is the lifeblood of NPOs everywhere. "My guess is that the government will relent on that one pretty easily," Jim told us recently. So, filled with the spirit of optimism that has always been the hallmark of those in our sister province to the west, the plan from a GR perspective is to monitor the public hearings and see who shows up to present in future, and see what develops.

The feeling out west is not to worry, added Jim. There are committees involved, and their reports will percolate up to the Minister, Treasury Board President Lloyd Snelgrove. His ideas will go to his caucus colleagues, then to the provincial Cabinet, and then one would hope they would be expressed in amendments to the legislation which is now on the order paper. The likelihood, however, is that when the Alberta legislature rises in December the bill will die on that order paper - only uncommon speed in the process can prevent that. Ergo, there is no feeling of urgency.

Yet if the bill dies, it will return next spring, by which time an election in Alberta is likely to be forming up on the horizon. That, of course, could put the issue of 'controls on lobbyists' into an election campaign, where the cry from the public is typically in favour of bringing down the hammer on what Ulysses S. Grant dubbed "those damned lobbyists."

So on the one hand, Albertan GR people have a reason to think legislation of some sort will come much later in 2008 and regulations no earlier than 2009. "Lots of time to get organized if something is awry," says Jim Dau.

Perhaps. But then again, perhaps leaving things without input could result in less well-considered regulations than the industry deserves. I'd suggest that GR people should rise to the occasion, and provide input early in the process. We have often said that the work of lobbyists helps the democratic process; it does not usurp it. Alberta lobbyists should take that to heart right now - and make their contributions to the process not only as Albertans, but as members of the Public Affairs Association of Canada.

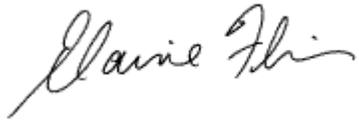
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Now, it's my pleasure to say hello to our newest members:

- Leanne Maidment, Canadian Automobile Association, Ottawa
- Sarah Hamza, Purolator, Mississauga
- Shelley Romoff, The Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto

- Judy Burns, Amgen Canada Inc., Mississauga
- Jodi Shanoff, LCBO, Toronto
- Jim Williamson, Pfizer Canada Inc., Kirkland, QC
- Amy Ouellette, Ontario Hospital Association, Toronto
- Cara Francis, Ontario Hospital Association, Toronto
- Tamarah Harel, Ontario Hospital Association, Toronto

Feel free to contact me: eflis@crfa.ca



[Election analysis](#)

In politics, God isn't so great

When Greg Lyle, Justin Graham and Joe MacDonald of Innovative Research Group (IRG) gave us their election-launch look into the IRG crystal ball on Sept. 10, the polling numbers were, in Joe's words, "mushy." They were so close to the line between a minority (54 seats) and a majority (55) that, given the breakdown of the issues, Lyle's fateful words at the end were, "The election is the Liberals' to lose."

The reason, of course, was that campaigns matter. The McGuinty Liberals started out with a five-point lead over the challenger Conservatives, and their standings featured good strength on the issue of health care, which was the top-of-mind issue with the public. Although the Conservative campaign would stress McGuinty's infamous broken promises, that early five-point lead spoke of a forgiving electorate. People were generally positive about the way the province is governed, said Graham, and Lyle's closing pronouncement was a statement of confidence that a good Liberal campaign could maintain or enhance that early lead.

The factor that could change things, we were reminded, was media coverage. Greg Lyle told us how he previously established a cause/effect relationship between what the media are talking about and which party is rising in public support. When newsies write about issues for which Liberals are strongest, Liberal support goes up. When they write about issues for which Conservatives are strongest, good things happen to Conservative numbers. Ditto the NDP. So partisan media would use their power to try to push their readers or viewers in a direction of their choosing. A media fight would take shape. *Well...*

Education, education, education

As it turned out, the media had little choice but to follow the main story of the campaign, which was faith-based schools. In an election where pollsters agreed that big chunks of the electorate remained undecided, uncertain, or at least without passion on most issues, the one issue that raised blood pressures was the funding of religious schools. John Tory would say broken promises and

Dalton McGuinty would say inclusive education. John Tory would say Ontarians want to get tough on criminals and Dalton McGuinty would say Ontarians want inclusive education. John Tory would say let's cut taxes and Dalton McGuinty would say let's save education. John Tory would say don't let waiting lists continue for autism therapy and Dalton McGuinty would say don't let money be diverted from public education. John Tory would say jobs, jobs, jobs and Dalton McGuinty would say education, education, education.

Tory prodded McGuinty for attending Catholic schools. It wasn't enough. He got an endorsement from Jewish groups who favour government-funded schools for them. Nice try, but not enough. He talked about a Mennonite school doing no harm. Yawn. He said it was hypocrisy to allow religious school funding only for these groups. But the thing that stuck in voter's craws was Muslim schools and the worry that they might teach extremist views. Nobody wanted to talk about this in the open, so it remained unsaid, which helped the Premier avoid specifics, and thus avoid a backlash. Steve Nease, ace cartoonist in the Metroland community news chain, absorbed a backlash of critical letters after publication of his cartoon depicting John Tory strapped with explosives, exhorting, 'God is great!' over a caption that said: Political Suicide Bomber. Inflammatory? Perhaps. But it cut to the issue as nothing else in the public prints.

John Tory tried gamely to explain his position on schools, which included safeguards and qualifiers. The Liberals swept aside the qualifiers and stayed on-message, championing the cause of inclusive public education and never saying the M-word. Tory didn't dare say it either. Other issues were introduced, with or without Conservative campaigners behind them, but always without success. A man ambushed McGuinty in a hospital while TV cameras happened to be rolling ("I've got cancer and you're not helping any!") and the Premier smoothly avoided a verbal jousting match. Public education remained the main issue.

Fork-tender Tory

By the final week, a campaign that had been the Liberals to lose had become John Tory's to lose, and he did so with a move straight out of Dalton McGuinty's fondest dream: The Conservative leader announced that, in deference to public opinion, the funding of faith-based schools would no longer be an absolute commitment but subject to a free vote in a Tory government. Wrote Warren Kinsella in his blog: "Stick a fork in the Tory Thanksgiving turkey. It's done."

What the Tory campaign did, first bringing up the explosive issue of religious schools and then backing away from it, was astonishing. But the John Tory campaign was notable also for the things it did not do. Tory never said Muslim schools would be prevented from teaching extremism because he would bring them under provincial control as well as funding. He never used the Mixed Member Proportional representation referendum, which was a government brain-child from the start, to scare the public even worse than the school funding issue could, although he might have done so with visions of appointed, unelected politicians holding a balance of power. He tried to focus on health care at various points in the campaign, but except for a brief mention of autism waiting lists, he never focused on the particular issue of *children's* health care.

In our September 10 pollster's event with the IRG people, Justin Graham predicted, "This will be a challenge; trying to get a message out that gathers

people." But in the end, the Conservative campaign met that challenge. They found the one issue that could sideline Dalton McGuinty's greatest liability, gather the public against Conservatives, and decide the election. Broken promises? What broken promises? John Tory got out a sharp stick and poked at a sleeping issue involving religion, the most volatile issue in politics. He messed with God. For that, he was damned.

-D.S.

[The Book Man](#)

'Harper's Team' is a must-read



Book Review by Stewart Kiff

[*Harper's Team: Behind the Scenes in the Conservative Rise to Power*](#)

by Tom Flanagan

It is hard to believe that five years ago Stephen Harper and Tom Flanagan were a couple of mildly successful right wing policy wonks and Canadian Conservatives were fragmented and listless. The new century saw the decline of the Canada's right wing voice and was heralded by key Liberal provincial victories; the Conservative journey to irrelevance seemed to have no end.

Today the Canadian political landscape today is vastly different. Harper has been transformed into the respected, though hardly loved, Tim Horton's-drinking Prime Minister of Canada. Tom Flanagan, who can justly be characterized as Harper's right brain, was one of the prime architects of the Conservative Party retooling and Harper's climb to the top of the parliamentary heap. Under Harper's leadership the once vapid Conservatives are a party that continues to grow in popularity to the point where they are currently on the verge of successfully replacing the federal Liberals as the leading federalist party in Quebec!

Tom Flanagan's new book, *Harper's Team: Behind the Scenes in the Conservative Rise to Power* is a valuable and unique look at the ascension of the Stephen Harper led Conservatives from a seemingly ineffective opposition to Canada's current government. A book like this from someone with the credibility and analytical ability of Tom Flanagan is rare, and the insights he has into our current Prime Minister and his brain trust, are unavailable from any other source.

By any standard, this is a great story. Tom Flanagan was an integral part of every important move Harper ever made. He spotted the young Harper, who

was a student of his at the University of Calgary, recognized the man's potential, and has long been one of the key players in Harper's inner circle. He has been a key advisor to Harper for the past five years. So Flanagan is uniquely positioned to provide insight into the Harper team and how it accomplished the political transformation that has played across the country.

At its heart, this book is a nuts-and-bolts, practical look at political growth and electoral success the like of which has not been seen since John Lashinger's *Leaders and Lesser Mortals*, published in 1992. And unlike the equally enjoyable *Right Side Up* by Paul Wells, *Harper's Team* has the added cache of being written by one of the key figures in Harper's decision-making team. Indeed, the friendship between the stoic and brainy Harper and equally brainy Flanagan is part of the unique appeal of this book.

For the political practitioner, this book is full of descriptions of campaign techniques as currently practiced by the Conservative Party. It's a useful update, especially considering the transformation of political practices that has occurred since the arrival of the Internet.

Flanagan, as he details in this book, has avoided the public spotlight since coming to serve with Harper in Ottawa. He learned quickly that a lead staff person to the Leader of the Opposition does not voice an opinion, no matter how interesting, which differs from that of the leader. That's why Flanagan, a published academic particularly well respected on the subject of Louis Riel and other native topics, has essentially been silenced until now.

As a Canadian Métis, I have a strong appreciation for the quality and thoughtfulness of Flanagan's previous academic work on native issues. I have read his book on Riel, and found it a substantial and important contribution to the scholarship on the subject. Yet Flanagan has served as a kind of *über-nerd* bogeyman for those who have wanted to criticize Stephen Harper, usually for his critical views on Riel and native issues. Usually this is political posturing, and sadly, it is often done by those who have never read his work.

Regardless of your political philosophy, it is hard to reconcile the harsh criticisms that have been levied against Flanagan with the tone and content of this newest book. It is clearly written, thoughtfully argued, easily accessible and deliberate and measured in tone. Moreover, the writing and publishing of this material is very much in the public interest.

The best part comes towards the end as Flanagan discusses the creation and execution of the Conservative ad campaigns and Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaigns in the failed 2004 campaign and successful 2006 campaign. Always the teacher, Flanagan concludes with "The Ten Commandments of Conservative Campaigning." This section contains items on unity, moderation, inclusion, and self-discipline.

A remarkable book and very worth your time.

Highly Recommended.

PAAC member Stewart Kiff is the President of Solstice Public Affairs. He welcomes your feedback and suggestions, and can be reached at

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[A novel idea](#)

'Best Laid Plans' hardly goes astray

Book review by Guy Skipworth

[The Best Laid Plans](#)

by Terry Fallis

By day Terry Fallis runs a PR and communications company, but by night he has been writing his first novel. *The Best Laid Plans* follows the story of a political operator who quits as speechwriter for the Leader of the Opposition in Ottawa. Daniel Addison discovers his girlfriend doing something she shouldn't be doing with the Opposition House Leader. The political staffer sets off to begin a career as an English professor at the University of Ottawa or "U of Zero" as some like to refer to Ottawa's other university. Addison isn't exactly rolling in dough as he leaves his poorly paid job and goes about looking for an apartment in his rusting Ford Taurus station wagon.

However, the dark and manipulating Chief of Staff for the Leader is not about to let Addison leave the Hill and the cause without one last directive. Addison is told he must find a candidate and serve as campaign manager in a rural riding where his party has absolutely no chance of winning.

Anyone who as ever worked on a losing campaign will recognize the troubles and challenges Addison encounters. Not only is he not a "local," there is no infrastructure, no membership list to speak of, no money and the incumbent is the very popular and TV- friendly Finance Minister.

The main plot of the story revolves around Addison's attempts to find someone with a pulse willing to let their name be on a ballot and then manage a desperate campaign.

The first target is the previous candidate. Muriel Parkinson had served as the candidate without-a-hope for the past three elections. Unfortunately, as Muriel is 81 and living in a nursing home, she is not keen to answer the call once more for the party and go down to yet another defeat. Or as Muriel herself points out, the incumbent "is so high in the polls he starts each day with a nosebleed" whereas "I've got the shakes and I've been to the bathroom 13 times in the last three hours."

Eventually, a candidate is found and allows his name to stand as long as he doesn't have to attend any all-candidates debates, knock on doors or have any lawn signs. The fun begins when we learn the back of the station wagon will serve as campaign headquarters.

If you've worked on Parliament Hill you will recognize the cast of characters from

the Machiavellian Chief of Staff, to the not-quite-ready-to-be-PM Leader of the Opposition.

Those who have had to endure working with a buffoon who can play politics but is shallow as Lake Nipissing will enjoy the skewering of the Chief of Staff. In one scene the political operator is speaking to a group of campaign managers and boasts that "we're right there with our Smart Health and Smart Cities programs. I forget exactly what those initiatives are, but I'm certain they're groundbreaking."

However, the story's main attraction, for those who have worked on local campaigns, is the ongoing debates and disagreements between the reluctant candidate and the even more reluctant campaign manager.

In addition to the main story line of the local campaign, there is an entertaining and very funny mix of sexual exploits, a developing romance, and an almost believable turn of events leading to a crazy conclusion that will keep the reader turning the pages wondering how the campaign will unfold.

While *The Best Laid Plans* is a novel, a good part of the book serves as a public affairs handbook. The book is filled with tips on speech writing, media relations, event planning, and politics. Fallis, who worked in Ministers' offices on Parliament Hill and at Queen's Park, appears to be someone who wishes politics could be more honest and more forthright. The author has a keen eye for the cynicism that prevails within the backrooms of politics and the media who cover the antics of public affairs.

After five years working on the Hill the main character describes himself as "naïve, innocent and excited when I arrived. I was embittered, exhausted and ineffably sad when I left." Those working in Politics are divided in two camps. Cynical Political Operators (CPO's) and Idealist Policy Wonks (IPW's) toil in a world where "polls trump policy and politics pummel leadership."

Fallis' humour is sort of the P.G. Wodehouse style and I was laughing out loud by the third page. Writers are often advised to "write what you know." Fallis combines his political insights with his engineering degree. Throughout the book Fallis blends in engineering references which sometimes left me skimming over technical phrases and complete paragraphs. On the other hand, Fallis applies some of Newton's laws of physics to the game of politics. Readers will be interested in how the same laws and principles that govern science and engineering also apply to politics. One of the book's main characters notes that load testing is crucial to materials science where stress and strain are applied to various materials until they fail. "I've already identified several Ministers the PM clearly did not load test adequately before appointing them."

The Best Laid Plans has several references to the personalities and issues currently at play in Ottawa. Readers should enjoy both the story lines, and matching the fictional characters in the novel with actual operators on Parliament Hill.

Guy Skipworth is a Director of the Public Affairs Association of Canada.

[The Web Editor](#)

Da body da body da body

by David Silburt
PAAC Web Editor

From the moment he first floated his faith-based schools funding initiative, John Tory had been taking a pummeling over it. Like boxers in one of those *Rocky* movies, there were the two leading contenders; Tory working to Dalton McGuinty's face with his broken-promise jab, trying to open the tax-hike cut over the Premier's left eye a little more, while McGuinty kept working to Tory's midsection on faith-based schools. (Visions of Burgess Meredith in the corner, wringing his cap in his hands and growling, 'Go to da body! Da body da body da body!') The Premier wasn't flinching, that constant gut-pounding was bustin' up the challenger, and by the third week of the campaign Tory was trying hard to change his tactics. He decided to talk about the care of autistic children.

I should have expected this. When your web editor is not writing for PAAC or another client, I'm the writer and media relations guy at ErinoakKids, the province's largest children's treatment centre helping kids with various disabilities, and autism is one of them. The name, ErinoakKids, is new - we unveiled it along with a snazzy new logo in a media event this past June, and John Tory was there with a full entourage, chatting up the ErinoakKids CEO, Linda Rothney, pausing to jot down notes, then taking the podium to speak in support of the place. With Ontario elections now hard-wired to a schedule, it should have been clear that this fellow was doing his homework.

Then on September 25th, his religious schools policy a campaign fiasco, Tory issued a press release reaffirming his June remarks vowing special attention to autism treatment, and - *bang!* - autism care and waiting lists become an election topic. ErinoakKids treats autism, so some media people were interested in us. That's a two-edged blade. The place is a non-profit organization that must remain politically neutral, but we must also remain reasonably open to the news media, because those kids need a champion. Of course, sometimes a media request cannot be met. When a TV reporter phoned from the parking lot, asking that a client parent be sent out to be interviewed on the spot about access to services, the answer had to be no, for reasons including but not limited to privacy obligations.

Global-TV did not call on short notice. They were willing to schedule interviews ahead of time for a backgrounder on autism treatment, to show viewers what all the talk was about. The answer to that had to be yes, and the result was a very professional and non-political TV report by Global's health reporter Allison Vuchnich, who very diplomatically kept politics out of it except to acknowledge in her closing stand-up that this issue was becoming a political bone of contention. ErinoakKids people were not asked to dive into politics.

Unfortunately, the media relations guy went so far as to offer similar backgrounder interviews on the issue to a print reporter who responded in the affirmative - but she wanted a specific response to that Tory press release. That was something the top brass at ErinoakKids could not do - give a statement concerning a political issue. The result was that, after promising the print reporter material she could use for a background story, the media guy could not

deliver what she in fact wanted.

Did she feel short-changed on access we provided to another news agency? Maybe. A promise broken? Ouch. But the lesson is that media relations gets tricky when your organization is determinedly non-political but happens to be the go-to place for information that suddenly takes on political overtones. There be dragons.

Another lesson is that some things defy control, and in a fit of enthusiasm it's possible to make a promise and then find it would be imprudent to keep it. Which is why there's now one more flack in town who is a little more sympathetic when that sort of thing happens to the other guy.

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.

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Public Affairs is E-published by the Public Affairs Association of Canada
18 Eastern Avenue
Toronto, ON M5A 1H5

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