



PAAC E-News

Public Affairs: Your Online Newsletter

February • 2008

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The wheel of change moves on



by Joe MacDonald

PAAC President

The Public Affairs Association of Canada has gone through significant changes since my first involvement. All of them necessary, some easier than others. We have, for instance, continued to refine and develop our web site to meet the changing needs of our membership. We have built our annual conference into the largest of its kind in Canada. The PAAC Award of Distinction recognizes the contributions of the most respected practitioners of public affairs in Canada.

Our event and conference registrations are now easily completed on the PAAC web site and this will continue to get better as we smooth out some of the little glitches and bugs. Finally, the entire look of the association, from logo to letterhead, was redesigned to better reflect a growing and dynamic professional association. Very much of this work

has been completed over the past nine years and all of it has been chronicled in the PAAC Newsletter.

The newsletter was one of our first projects for a significant makeover and to accomplish this we went in search for someone who combined all the talents of an editor, writer, and photographer. A tall order indeed, but we were lucky enough to find these skills in the person of David Silburt. The results of this partnership have been everything the board, and I hope the members, could have wished for.

For those who attend our breakfasts, luncheons, conference and other events you'll know David as the person popping up and taking your picture or busy scribbling notes while our guests share their insights with us. It is David who takes this material and, month after month, prepares a newsletter that is entertaining and informative if not sometimes controversial. He has, over time, prodded successive presidents to get their copy in on time, brought others on board as regular contributors and provided a photographic record of the people and events that have helped the PAAC grow over the decade.

He brought a critical eye to every event he covered and he wasn't shy about expressing a different opinion when he felt the urge, all of which made the PAAC newsletter worth the read. In every case and at all times he was professional and respectful of his subjects and his audience.

Now, however, David finds other demands on his time make it impossible for him to continue to work with the PAAC. I'll leave it to David to introduce our new writer/editor in his final column at the end of this newsletter. Meanwhile, on behalf of the board and the membership of the PAAC I want to wish David well and thank him for his contributions to our association. It was fun, it was interesting and it was worth the read.

Now, I'd like to welcome our newest members:

- M. Linda Oliver, Vice President, ITAC, Ottawa
- Rudy Ticzon, Community & Policy Advisor, The Law Society of Upper Canada, Toronto
- Rachel Dao; Coordinator, Public Affairs; The Institute of Chartered Accountants, Toronto
- Jennifer Mowbray, Student, Ottawa
- Stuart Johnston, Vice President Policy & Government Relations, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Toronto
- Forrest Parlee, Associate, Burrard Communications Inc., Vancouver, BC
- Daniel Demers, Director of Public Issues, Canadian Cancer Society, Ottawa
- Ian Faris, President & CEO, Brewers Association of Canada, Ottawa
- Elise Maheu, Director of Government Relations, 3M Canada, Ottawa
- Paul Yeung, Senior Manager, Government & Regulatory Affairs, RBC Financial Group, Toronto
- Akilah Dressekie, Communications Specialist, Rouge Valley Health System, Toronto
- Tom Robson, President, The Portland Group, Toronto

- Christopher McLean, Director, Government Relations, CNIB, Toronto
- Andre Fortin, Director of Public Affairs, Brewers Association of Canada, Ottawa
- Jeff Roach, Coordinator, Corporate Communications Program, Seneca College, Toronto
- Brian Klunder, Director, Fundraising and Membership, Liberal Party of Canada, Ottawa

Please feel free to contact me with your input and ideas at joe.macdonald@sympatico.ca

[Analysis](#)

Toronto educrats poked a hole in their own boat

The Toronto District School Board didn't wait long after Dalton McGuinty vanquished John Tory on the faith-based schools issue before floating a similar proposal of their own: Afro-centric schools. Once they did, editorial opinions began to flow freely. When they marked Black History Month by approving the idea, the flow of written opinions became a gusher. Yet most writers merely aired arguments in favour of the idea or opposed to it. There has been little attempt to think it through from a public affairs perspective. Let's do that now.

This is a developing study in two areas of specific interest to PAAC members: public policy and public affairs communications. TDSB claims their black-focused school can still be open to all, yet the intention is clearly to attract a preponderance of black students. To their credit, the school officials did not construct an opportunity to simply launch a black-focused school and later brush aside as racist any person who claims it's not working. They framed their proposal in terms that lend themselves very readily to measurement. Its success or failure will be very clear, very soon, by the very terms defined by its proponents. That's their problem.

Those proponents say they want to accomplish two goals. First, to facilitate greater achievement and discourage dropping out among black students, who have a very much higher dropout rate than the general mixed school population. Officials hope to do this by providing a curriculum and environment that seems more welcoming and palatable to black students. Second, the TDSB hopes that, by preventing those students from dropping out, they will prevent them from dropping into the street culture of gangs and violence. Their assumption is that the destructive street culture waits outside the school and students who stay in school can avoid it, which is why they hope this initiative will curtail violence involving black students.

The success of both of these goals will be quickly measurable. Officials cannot avoid measuring dropout rates by launching an elementary school, from which pupils cannot drop out. If they do that they'll look silly. It will have to be a high school. Nor can they skew the result by locating their school in a Toronto neighbourhood untroubled by

violence. There are none. The new school will be launched in 2009, which means by 2010 or 2011 its success or failure will be clear. Either its dropout rate will be lower than it is for black students in most mixed-population schools, denoting success of the idea, or it will be other than that, denoting failure. Either violent incidents involving its students will be fewer in comparison to those involving black students at schools with a standard curriculum, denoting success, or they will be have some other status, denoting failure.

This situation sets up the TDSB for profound embarrassment, and its public affairs people for many sleepless nights staring at the ceiling, in two possible instances. One is if the school fails and the other is if it succeeds. That's the part Toronto educators failed to think through to the bitter end. That's what's missing from most published opinions in the press. Those who oppose the idea make a good case that it amounts to segregation. Those who favour it make a good case that black students drop out too much, and something must be done. But we haven't yet seen an unblinking look at its consequence, which will be a setback for the principles of equality and inclusion - all the issues over which black people once protested and linked hands and sang *We Shall Overcome*.

If the school fails to enhance black student achievement, or fails to curtail violence, or fails to do either, that will be interpreted - by those anxious to promote unkind thoughts about their black fellow citizens - as a line of evidence that nothing can be done to save these kids; that even a school of the black people, by the black people and for the black people isn't enough. If it succeeds, those same voices will say segregation was right all along. Other voices, such as those of huddled masses yearning to be free of everything outside their religion, will say, 'what about us?'

So welcome to a case study of an assured public affairs debacle, to play out in your daily press, very possibly for the rest of the professional careers of everyone responsible for it. The Toronto District School Board, in its attempt to try something, anything, to better serve its black students and families, has contrived to do much more than defile the dream a man named King once spoke of in the ringing and righteous voice of freedom itself. It has done more than reawaken divisive issues of divided public education. By creating this public policy initiative without thinking the matter through, Toronto education officials set themselves up to look like chumps for years to come, and there isn't a public affairs professional alive who can stop it now.

-D.S

The right book



Book Review by Stewart Kiff

Comeback: Conservatism that Can Win Again
by David Frum

Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again is the newest book by well-known Canadian author and Washington D.C. political activist and commentator David Frum. The timing of this book's release, in the heat of the presidential primaries, is very clearly intentional. As the race to replace the current Republican President of the United States pushes ahead, Frum provides a deftly written analysis of what lies at the heart of the current American Conservative malaise.

Frum is part of both the Canadian and American political scenes, as a regular contributor to the *National Post* in Canada and many U.S. publications, and a skillful blogger at the National Review Online. But his stint as the president's speech writer early in the current Administration did the most to raise his profile, particularly south of the border. His tenure as a Special Assistant in the Bush White House is probably best remembered for the phrase, Axis of Evil, used to describe Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Since leaving his White House post Frum has written from the conservative perspective for a lengthy list of high profile publications, and is a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

David Frum's previous work includes *The Right Man: The Surprise Presidency of George W. Bush*, his insider account of the Bush White House, and his audacious look at the 1970s entitled *How We Got Here: The 70's: The Decade That Brought You Modern Life (For Better or Worse)*. In his more recent work, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*, Frum and his collaborator Richard Perle authored a bold and contentious conservative approach to defeating terrorism and insuring domestic security for the United States.

With *Comeback*, Frum seems resigned to a Republican loss in the 2008 presidential campaign. Instead of waiting until after the defeat, he argues, it is now, during the campaign, that American Conservatives should openly debate their ideals and engage the voters. In particular, he thinks Republicans must become players on environmental and health care issues instead of allowing the arguments to be framed by Democrats as problems that can only be solved by government intervention and direction. Frum is also not afraid to criticize his own movement for abusing the public trust during its years of

power in Washington.

As much as this book is about refocusing Conservative ideology, it also reads as a game plan for electoral victory. At times Frum sees fault with the Republicans' inability to connect with voters; at other times he suggests they have to state their message a little differently so that voters will actually understand how Republicans are trying to help. With this book, David Frum is sure to solidify his reputation as a savvy conservative strategist.

This short 213-page easy-to-read book distils down to six key goals what must be done for the conservative movement to succeed once again in Middle America. These goals range from the basics, such as a better deal for the middle class and winning the war on terror - which have been the bread and butter of the current administration - to "new" conservative issues such as the environment. He sees the green movement as something that must be brought into the conservative fold. With its emphasis on stewardship and planning for the future, he views it as a natural part of Republicanism, not to mention a key plank in future electoral success.

On the down side, the book in some places seems heavily edited, leaving sections without character. Compared to former House of Representatives Speaker Newt Gingrich's book on much the same topic, Frum chooses to be smart over practical. While Gingrich's *Winning the Future: A 21st Century Contract with America* delivers a clear and workable electoral platform, Frum would rather wow you with his wit.

Yet, although Canadians who are not engaged by American political discourse will find little in this book that seems relevant to them, I recommend it for people who have a strong interest in American politics, particularly Republican party politics.

These days it's interesting to see how much Frum has matured as an author and as an analyst, such as in his calm and comfortable recent CBC-TV interview on *The Hour* with George Stroumboulopoulos. His thoughts and his writings have become much stronger and this book is a well-paced and easy to read primer, from a thoughtful Conservative perspective, on ways that the Republican Party can retool itself for future elections.

Recommended.

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

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[The Web Editor](#)

In with the new, out with the old

by David Silburt

Beginning with the next issue of the PAAC E-news you will have a new web editor and writer on this site. She is veteran freelance journalist Melanie Cummings, and you should welcome her with enthusiasm.



Melanie Cummings and her notebook will become a familiar sight at events.

Melanie will cover PAAC events in a clear and graceful writing style she has honed over a dozen years in the most brutal Darwinian crunch there is: freelancing for magazines and newspapers, generating story ideas and following them through to the finish. With PAAC representing more members than ever before, and with the organization working hard to raise its national profile in coming months, be assured that a skilled professional will be on duty to cover all Toronto-based events, and to put a fine polish on articles submitted to PAAC from an increasing base of members across Canada.

Your new writer/editor also brings a deft human touch to the writing, and is an outgoing people-person to boot. I have already assured her that writing for this organization is a fine creative opportunity, and a chance to meet important, interesting and erudite people who have an influence on Canadian democracy. Meet her and greet her at the next PAAC event. Then read her, beginning with the next issue of the E-news.

I'm setting aside freelance work to devote more time to ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development, and the editorial board gave me permission to tell you about it before I

go. ErinoakKids is the largest Children's Treatment Centre in Ontario, treating kids with disabilities that can tear your heart out. Many cope with spina bifida, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, or autism, and some have multiple disabilities. Where most young people today idolize sullen rappers, potty-mouthed singing stars or shallow movie actors, these kids idolize people like Terry Fox and Rick Hansen.

As the onboard writer and media relations guy, it's my job to get media people to pay attention to the cause of these kids - their towering challenges, how hard they work to overcome those challenges, and the soaring sense of victory they find in achieving things other kids take for granted. Their disabilities can indeed tear at the heart, but their courage can lift it up. Some of the young people who have gone through this place packed more humanity into abbreviated lives than many of us can hope to find in our full-length versions. There are stories to be told about them, and about the professionals who treat them.

There are many ways to be a white knight for this cause, if anyone cares to saddle up, and here are three. As untold media relations people before me have learned, I now know how tough it is to persuade journalists to take up the issue of these kids. If anyone has influence to help make that happen, please get in touch with me. Some years ago a novel of mine, a work of commercial fiction, died for lack of a literary agent. If anyone with influence can help break through that logjam, all the proceeds would be contracted to ErinoakKids - I don't want Dime One for myself. ErinoakKids is building a Foundation to raise major funding for a new treatment complex. It seeks corporate donors and influential people interested in being part of that Foundation. Some of you may fit that description, or have influence with those who do. Please call me.

If anyone with influence would like to help with any of these things, my contact information appears at the bottom of this column and will remain available through PAAC. I can promise you that doing what you can to help these most noble of children will make you feel like a better person. At least, it works for me.

This concludes my term as writer/editor for the Public Affairs Association of Canada. Melanie will take it from here. It was a privilege to serve, and thank you for reading my stories.

David Silburt - 905-491-4449 - dsilburt@erinoakkids.ca

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
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Toronto, ON M5A 1H5

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