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[President's message](#)

[Elaine and Chris go to Ottawa](#)



*by Elaine Flis
PAAC President*

Last month I talked to you about the Accountability Act and our reservations concerning some of its provisions. On May 29th, Past President Chris Benedetti and I were in Ottawa to make these reservations known to the people with the power to recommend changes: The Standing Committee on the Accountability Act. We went there to make our case to them directly. In other words, not to put too fine a point on it - we lobbied them.

We made our case in a concise presentation to the Committee, and we were careful to be constructive in our criticism. "The Public Affairs Association of Canada supports the spirit of the Accountability Act," we told them, "because it's all about transparency and accountability, which are cornerstones of ethical behaviour."

That said, we expressed reservations and offered suggestions focused on two key areas. First, the excessive monthly filing requirements for lobbyists, which we believe will prove to be more burdensome than they are valuable. Second, the five-year ban on lobbying activity after government service, which we believe will do more to drive good talent away from government than it will to control excesses. [Click here](#) to read our full presentation, and see what we focused upon for the Committee.

And what did the Committee focus upon? Judging by their questions, they were concerned about having enough time to consider fully this large and wide-ranging piece of legislation in

order to make well-considered recommendations. The Liberals and the BQ members particularly wanted to have more time for the job, and PAAC agrees that the wheels of government should not run over GR people in their unbridled haste. Frankly our impression was that the government favours a full-speed-ahead approach (for analysis, see Stew Kiff's book review on the Harper style later in this newsletter), an approach which takes advantage of the media-fed public perception that lobbyists must be cracked down upon, and the sooner the better. There's politics involved - opposition people cannot be cheerful about the prospect of political fallout in the event they are seen to try to block legislation the government wants and the public favours.

Still, let's not be gloomy. Opportunity exists here for GR professionals to participate in the development of the regulatory framework which will govern those potentially burdensome monthly filing requirements. PAAC will push hard to play a role in this. The government isn't the only group that knows how to go full speed ahead. We'll keep you, our members, informed.

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Meanwhile, we continue to enhance member services (see Chris Churchill's update, below), line up new events and work on making our upcoming fall Conference even bigger, better and more professionally useful than ever.

Your PAAC Board is busier than ever, and now it's also bigger. Today I am very pleased to welcome **Mr. Pierre Leduc** to the Board. Pierre is a Vice-President with the public relations and GR firm, Temple Scott Associates. He has served as Director of Communications for two Cabinet Ministers at Queen's Park and as Press Secretary and later as Executive Assistant to Mike Harris during Harris's term as Premier. Consistent with our commitment to reach out to other jurisdictions beyond Toronto, Pierre is Ottawa-based and brings an Ottawa viewpoint to our work, as befits an organization with interests so profoundly interconnected with what goes on in the nation's capital.

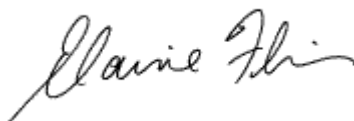
Which is also an excellent reason not to miss our upcoming First Annual Ottawa Spring Fling. It's on tap at D'Arcy McGee's Irish Pub for Tuesday, June 13. For details, check the Events page.

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Now it is my pleasure to welcome our newest members:

- Glen Stone, Toronto Board of Trade
- Hande Bilhan, Primerica Financial Services
- Charlie Angelakos, Labatt Breweries of Canada
- Patricia Marson.

Input? Suggestions? Contact me directly any time, at eflis@enterprisecanada.com



[Conference update](#)

Greg Sorbara to give keynote speech



*by Ruth Merskey
PAAC Vice President*

The Conference Agenda for 2006 is now set and I hope that these select details will whet your appetites. This year's program promises a wide range of opportunities to hear from some of Canada's most influential and thought-provoking speakers, including a Keynote Address from **The Honourable Greg Sorbara**, Ontario Minister of Finance. The title of his address is, *Accountability and Public Service: Road Kill on the Integrity Highway*.

In addition, panel discussions will focus on key public policy issues such as:

- Reputation Management
- Preparing for a Pandemic
- A Tale of Two Cities: Lobbying at the Municipal Level
- Democracy in Action: Doing the Right Thing - How Decisions Are Made

Keep an eye on this web site for updates and registration access. We're looking forward to seeing you all in October, at the 7th Annual PAAC Conference, *The Art and Science of Public Affairs*.

[Member services update](#)

Membership has its privileges...



by Chris Churchill

PAAC Director

...At least it does in the Membership Area of the PAAC web site. To provide additional content and service for our members, recent updates have been implemented on this site. Just log onto the Members Area and check out the new and enhanced features:

- Register and pay for PAAC events through the on-line registration service;
- Renew your membership on-line;
- Search the Member's Directory to make valuable connections with other PAAC members from across Canada;
- Search the archives for past issues of PAAC E-news or explore other helpful or interesting information.

These are just the first of many new enhancements that we'll roll out in the next few months. Keep your eye out for a dedicated page of information and updates on the Annual Conference where you'll be able to check the agenda, find more information and register on-line.

Don't forget to check back often to see other updates and information that will be implemented across the entire web site. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve the site or provide more useful content, let us know. We'll be happy to hear from you.

[Analysis](#)

[A way to look at reporters](#)

Governor General Michaëlle Jean touched on something important to public affairs as well as journalism and politics when she spoke at a widely-reported Canadian Press Gala dinner in Halifax in May. While taking care to praise the work of her one-time journalistic colleagues, the former CBC journalist chided the press in general for allowing the work of reporting news to be transformed into the more commercial pursuit of selling it as a commodity.

Jean told her audience that journalism was morphing into 'infotainment,' although she didn't say it so baldly, "as though the name of the game were to entertain at all costs," because therein lies larger audiences and more revenue. At one point her reported quotes seemed just a shade this side of a lecture, when she told reporters to do more critical thinking, "even when that requires effort, rather than give in to the temptation of info-shows, take the easy road, spread gossip which may be an outright lie..." Yikes. How her audience, which may have included some who helped spread gossip of how she and her husband Jean-Daniel Lafond may have once broken bread with separatists, must have squirmed.

Jean, who comes across as a genuinely nice person, blamed not reporters themselves but the tyranny of the deadline-driven news cycles under which they work. It was the kindest thing to say, which is why her remarks, though close to the truth, omitted a greater truth about journalism that is open for all to see - and possibly to use.

Journalism is a trade

The great Canadian journalist Walter Stewart often pointed out that, despite the trappings, journalism in Canada is a trade, not a profession. Anybody who has worked in journalism or in any branch of public affairs that strives to earn coverage by journalists, can see that this trade is increasingly agenda-driven. Witness the treatment of news, which broke at the end of May, that the U.S. Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) unearthed evidence of a possible massacre by U.S. soldiers in Iraq. Some reporters clearly embraced the news with relish. In one report, the story was described as "blossoming" into the worst scandal (read biggest black eye for America) of the war against terrorism. Since the event, if it proves to be true and prosecutable, amounts to soldiers throwing a My Lai onto innocent civilians, someone who was appalled at such a thing might have written instead that it was degenerating into such a scandal. But the word was blossoming. Many such straws in the journalistic wind, most of them anything but subtle, tell one and all which journalistic outlets are reporting and which are campaigning for a cause.

The current Canadian administration clearly knows that some media outlets which aggressively campaigned against them in the election are continuing to do so. Prime Minister Harper must see this, which is why the PMO sternly warned the Tory caucus to keep their mouths zippered concerning the media hype about two homosexual RCMP cops who were planning a marriage, just the groom and the other groom and their closest friends and family and however many of the nation's TV cameramen and social affairs reporters could get close. Harper believed, quite rightly, that the media would be trolling for any Tory with enough old-time tradition or religion in his system to say something that could be played up as intolerant.

This same belief is at the root of Mr. Harper's attempts to impose decorum onto press scrums, recently resulting in an unprofessional tantrum from reporters who walked out on his announcement about aid to Darfur. Politicians know that journalism is largely agenda-driven. Michaëlle Jean is too smart to miss it, but she's too nice to shout it out loud, preferring to appeal to these tradespeople's self-image of professionalism. Good for her.

Biases can be useful

Yet there is no reason for public affairs people to deny what lies open in the daily newspaper before them. The biases, pet causes and ingrained predispositions of reporters can be useful. Know who is interested in what stories, who is opposed to which causes, and where favorable coverage lies. Know also where it does not lie. Mr. Harper may be criticized for trying to act on such knowledge, but you won't be.

The late, great American writer H.L. Mencken, who died in 1956, once quipped, "The only way a reporter should look at a politician is down." That was in his day. Today things have changed, but by how much? How should we look at reporters when dealing with them in 2006? Some days it is a challenge to know.

-D.S.

[The Book Man](#)

Taking a second look at Stephen Harper



by Stewart Kiff

The Pilgrimage of Stephen Harper, by Lloyd Mackey

It is amazing what a difference eight months, and a stunning electoral victory makes. When this, the latest, Stephen Harper biography came out in 2005, it is safe to say there was a very low level of interest among political junkies for a faith-oriented biography of one of the least charismatic political leaders in recent Canadian history.

Fast forward to June 2006. Harper is the prime minister of an upwardly mobile minority government. His Conservative party is ahead of the Liberals by 10 points nationally, and is neck and neck in popularity with the Bloc in Quebec. He has arbitrarily changed the relationship between the Ottawa Press Gallery and his office. His government recently signed a five year soft-wood lumber deal with the United States resolving this contentious long standing issue. And, he has undertaken a "beau risque" style foreign policy, hinged upon military victory by Canadian forces over the Taliban in Afghanistan and, consequently, exposed the serious internal divisions within the Liberal Party of Canada. In short, he is on track to be a remarkable and contentious Prime Minister.

In this context, Harper - his life, his inspirations - more than merits a serious second look. A great place to begin that re-examination is this powerful and very positive biography by Ottawa press gallery member Lloyd Mackey. And while it is true that a lot has happened to Stephen Harper since the publication of this book, it has lost none of its relevance.

In fact, what is most interesting about this book is that the themes that it identifies for further discussion about Harper, his discipline, his petulance, his intellect, are also many of the themes that have emerged as characteristic of his reign as Prime Minister.

Observers who are surprised by Harper's recent overtures toward the voters of Quebec should remember that it was Harper himself, as documented in these books, who led the initiative to unite the Alliance/Reform and Progressive Conservative Parties of Canada. This overture came after years of writing off any possible rapprochement with Joe Clark's Progressive Conservatives. At the core of this flexibility is a discipline and focus that allows Harper to work towards his long term goals - namely Prime Ministership and, more ominous to those who are not conservatives, the replacement of the Liberals by the Conservatives as the natural governing party of Canada.

One of the great blind spots of the mainstream media is religious faith. For understandable reasons of respect for privacy, the mainstream media goes out of its way to not report on politicians' religious beliefs. What I really appreciated about Mackey's work is that he goes out of his way to find the religious underpinnings of Harper's beliefs and then relates them to his political actions.

At its worst, this work loses momentum when it goes into the minutiae of the Harper's intellectual and religious heritage. And, no matter how well done, the subject matter simply

does not take your breath away. It is tough to get worked up about this book.

I can, however, easily recommend this work; it is readable and has a fresh perspective and a focus on intellectual roots well suited to its elusive subject - Stephen Harper.

Love him or hate him, this man is going to have a big impact on Canada for the foreseeable future - and this book will give you a fresh and revealing understanding of the man.

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 most tolerant people in the world

*by David Silburt
PAAC Web Editor*

There is something awesome about the forbearance of the people of Canada in general and Toronto in particular. One fine morning not too long ago Torontonians awoke and headed out to work only to find that the workers of the TTC were on illegal strike for no good reason at all. The union had a valid work contract, but they shut down the city all the same.

People coped. They griped and muttered but they coped. They hitchhiked and offered rides to strangers and made friends, as Canadians tend to do in a common emergency. Of course, one limo driver filmed on CTV demanded a nice, crisp twenty-dollar bill from anyone who wanted to hitch a ride with him, but he was the exception. Most people helped others for free.

Citizens who felt blind-sided by the transit union were justifiably angry but they did not pummel bus drivers for revenge after the union was forced to back down by the courts. Even though the precision-organized illegal strike began about four-tenths of a second after an automated phone call to his members from bossman Bob Kinnear, President of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 113, the wording of the message was such that Kinnear maintained plausible deniability in the face of accusations that he ordered an illegal strike. His issue? Apparently, the union has outstanding concerns about the safety of drivers.

If the drivers are safer now, it's probably not because the union struck illegally and made everyone suffer in the heat for a day. It's probably because most people are law-abiding. Otherwise Mr. Kinnear would now have more assault complaints from his members than he could run and jump over.

Then early in June, police swept down upon Muslim extremists in an anti-terror operation that deeply unnerved Canadians, caught major international attention from news organizations around the world, and caused yet another huge spike in local media attention for their Number One Issue pertaining to the war on terrorists. Which is: Will there be a backlash against Muslims? And once again, the good citizens of Toronto bore up well.

True, there were minor incidents of smashed windows in a mosque in Etobicoke, by some cowardly night-creepers outraged at the idea that Al Qaeda sympathizers might want to bust off a three-tonne ammonium nitrate bomb in Toronto. Yet there was nothing like the wave of rioting and destruction that spanned Europe in the wake of the infamous Danish cartoons. Why?

Because CANADIANS ARE NICE PEOPLE, that's why. Torontonians especially are tolerant. They have been trained since birth to Turn The Other Cheek, and for the most part they do. Nor is there any evidence that this could change. They forgave Dalton McGuinty for his broken promises, now they've made nice with TTC workers after the recent labour storm, and except for a skulking few, they are not lashing out at Muslims in the face of terrorism threats.

That's Canadians for you. That's the citizens of Toronto. There is nothing anyone can do to them to make them rise up as one in violence, and this department wishes to acknowledge this in the strongest possible terms.

Here's to you, Toronto. Everyone, everywhere, will always know this city for being home to the most tolerant people in the world.

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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