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President's message

Should I stay or should I go?



by Joe MacDonald, PAAC President

With much fanfare and chest thumping the City of Toronto announced the creation of the Office of the Lobbyist Registrar as one giant leap for transparent and accountable municipal government. Reeling from the MFP Inquiry, Council acted to put all the "baddies", real and imagined, on notice. No longer would back room deals and the exchange of brown envelopes be the modus operandi of city politics. Not here, not now, not ever again.

By-laws were passed, a Registrar was appointed, a budget struck and work began

to implement those regulations of council and to create a working registry for lobbyists. Now, it appears the wheels are falling off, and not because of industry pressure. First, the Lobbyist Registrar budget was trimmed in half by council. Marilyn Abraham, the Lobbyist Registrar, has announced she is leaving the post under a fair bit of pressure from a council that is uncomfortable with the way the registry works. This situation is untenable - both for council and for those regulated by the Lobbyist Registrar.

The confusion that surrounds the registry throws the entire project into question. If Council is firm in its desire to follow in the footsteps of the federal and provincial governments, then it must accept the responsibility to provide the resources necessary to make it work. Once in place, Council, as well as the industry it wishes to regulate, must abide by the rules they establish.

As most of you already know, the PAAC has supported moves by the federal, provincial and municipal governments to create a transparent and accountable process for lobbyist registration. The industry has made it clear that we have nothing to hide, that as professionals in public affairs and government relations we accept the need for some level of public scrutiny and the establishment of an overall level playing field. Constant sniping and muttered criticisms do little more than undermine the credibility of the Lobbyist Registry System as well as council itself.

So, what is "Public Affairs"?

A quick look through the career site on the PAAC web site - in fact, any job search site - leads me to think there isn't any clear consensus about what constitutes "public affairs". While most in the industry know what it is they do, how they do it and with whom, Human Resources departments are apparently not privy to the same information.

"Public Affairs" is almost always lumped in, willy-nilly, with "communications", or "public relations". It is almost always the case you will find a job listed as "Communications & Public Affairs" only to find it's actually a communications position, full stop. This is true whether it is a junior position or senior position.

Public Affairs refers to a broad set of activities that may or may not involve communications/media relations, public relations and government relations to affect, at some level, public policy inputs and outcomes. It is not "communications". It is not "public relations". It is not "government relations". It is the application and management of all of these tools to support corporate and organization goals and reputation, either among the broader public or policy makers.

A bit of a pet peeve, I know, but on a rainy Friday morning I felt the need to share!

It is my pleasure to welcome these new members to our association:

- Liz Latimer, Consultant - Latimer & Associates
- Jason Lesage, Public Affairs Officer - British Columbia Lottery Corporation
- Ron Reaman, Vice President, Federal - Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association
- Shanna McDonald
- Guy Therrien

The National Do Not Call List under the microscope

by Joe MacDonald, PAAC President

If You Loved Me . . .

Every one of us has experienced the dread this statement produces. The fact most (all?) of us are a tad weak in the mind-reading department matters not. What does matter is that we are expected to act in accordance with some unspoken demand, and that we do so correctly. Otherwise, we are seen to be lacking in concern for the well-being and interests of the others involved.

Thankfully, public affairs and government relations professionals can do more than guess; we have access to the very best in market and public opinion research to help us, and our clients navigate the sometimes treacherous waters of public affairs and public policy. Nevertheless, all is no longer as it seems. The CRTC, under pressure to protect the privacy of Canadians and their right to an uninterrupted dinner hour, has developed the National Do Not Call List. As of September 2008, Canadians will be able to ensure mass marketers and others do not call them by adding their phone numbers to a national list. This will, without question, provide peace of mind for those who find the steady stream of such calls a bother and an imposition. This is good.

What may not be "good", are the implications of the creation of a National Do Not Call List for the practice of public affairs. For the most part, the debate/discussion about the National Do Not Call List has revolved around those who use phones for marketing purposes - charities, mass marketers - opinion research firms, and those campaigning to eliminate all calls, all the time. Very little has been said about the impact on public affairs and government relations.

The PAAC is going to fill that gap on June 16th at the Albany Club. As part of our commitment to raising issues of interest to the public affairs community, we are hosting a "round table" discussion on the National Do Not Call List and public affairs. To date we have a representative from the CRTC to explain the list, how it works and who is affected. We also have representatives of the Market Research & Intelligence Association (MRIA) who will fill in some of the gaps about the impact on market and opinion research

I would encourage you, and your clients, to make a date for the morning of June 16th because what you don't know really can hurt you.

Right sizing education as enrolment decreases

by Melanie Cummings, PAAC Editor

Since 2003, enrollment in Ontario public schools has dropped by 90,000 students, yet 95 per cent of Ontario's 2.1 million students attend public schools. For Don Valley West MPP Kathleen Wynne, her focus as Minister of Education in Ontario is

to close the gap between achievers and underachievers.

The task is not an easy one. Diversity is huge in Ontario, said Wynne.

Nonetheless, the ministry is striving to see 75 per cent of all Grade 6 students in the province achieve 70 per cent or more on the annual standardized testing exam in reading, writing and mathematics.

At the secondary level, the Minister hopes to graduate 20,000 more students from high school.

Her ministry is getting a jump-start on this goal by honing in on Grade 6, 7 and 8 students, emphasizing the importance of completing their secondary education.



Ontario Education Minister Kathleen Wynne

It's the methods by which these goals are achieved that take into account the far-reaching diversity among students, schools and communities.

"We want to help kids to do the work they can do, and achieve what they can to have the best life possible. Not every student travels along a smooth path. We need to find ways to get them back into system, she added.



Elaine MacNeil, President of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (left) and Ontario Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne. OECTA sponsored the April 29 PAAC presentation by the MPP.

"All children can learn and achieve high standards and every teacher can teach in a supportive environment."

More kids are learning to read; numeracy skills have increased and teachers are learning to teach differently. At the secondary level there's been a real cultural shift in that more students are connecting with employers, getting hands on opportunities through increased co-op programs, said Wynne.

But even as progress builds, she is bracing for the inevitable arguments over the need to increase education funding, especially in light of lower enrolment due to a declining birth rate.

"The reality of this will hit us like a tonne of bricks" said Wynne. "The argument has to be interrupted because we haven't done all the repairs that need to be done in the education system. There are still frontiers that need to be broached and gaps to be closed."

Children from low-income households, crown wards, special education students, aboriginals, new immigrants, boys, and those whose first language is neither English nor French, do not fare as well academically as others.

For example, no matter which side of the debate one takes in the decision by the Toronto District School Board to create an Afro-centric school, it's the statistical reality (that black students don't fare as well as their Caucasian counterparts) that underpins the issue, she explained.

Targeted initiatives such as professional development and embedded support for teachers through support workers and administration, removing barriers, creating safe schools, ensuring equity and sustaining improvement are important toward closing this achievement gap.

A Declining Enrolment Task Force, which is in the works and will be announced in a couple of weeks, will seek ways to encourage co-operation among provincial ministries involved in delivering services to children, such as the ministries of: Children and Youth Services, Citizenship and Immigration and Health.

The Book Man Dirty Politics



Book review by Stewart Kiff

Confessions of a Political Hitman: My Secret Life of Scandal, Corruption, Hypocrisy and Dirty Attacks that Decide Who Gets Elected (And Who Doesn't)
(Sourcebooks, 309 pages) Author: Stephen Marks

Digging up political dirt on your opponent is as old as politics itself. Dirt sticks. People remember cutting attacks and it affects their voting decision - or, whether they vote at all. When solid information is unearthed that makes an opponent look bad, it becomes a very powerful tool that can be released at key times in a political campaign - precisely when it will have the most impact in switching votes.

Modern political campaigns have a polite term for the muckraking that is involved in digging up the goods on political opponents. It is called 'Opposition Research', also

known by its short form, 'oppo'. Funny enough, the actual information that is produced is also called 'oppo'. Good 'oppo' is truly invaluable in winning a tough campaign. And a great 'oppo' - the person, who produces the dirt, is a rare and valuable asset.

Stephen Marks, the author of *Confessions of a Political Hitman*, as well as a ceaseless self-promoter, claims to be one of the finest 'oppo' men ever. Criss-crossing the United States over a 12 year career that began in 1994 and continued until 2006, he recounts in this autobiographical memoir the countless political campaigns he worked for on the Republican side: from state campaigns to national presidential campaigns.

In spite of the flashy title, the actual work involved in opposition research is actually very unglamorous. First, the candidate rarely wants to even acknowledge that they actually have hired a professional muckraker. So Marks worked in isolation, completely alone, and generally in contact only with the campaign manager. It was standard practice to avoid contact with anyone in the campaign, so that his existence would not be fodder for gossip and so that any interesting facts he found would not leak out.

His work would often be done long before the campaign began, increasing his isolation. This grunt work is basic research that is known to detectives and private investigators everywhere. It begins with a thorough check of physical court records in the target candidate's hometown, particularly for divorce records, bankruptcies and lawsuits that shed light on the target. Following that, Lexis-Nexis is used and all publicly available records are pored over. The hours are long and the worksite is the basement record rooms of small county courthouses across the United States.

Surprisingly, Marks is very sparse on advice about research techniques. He seems bored even to describe them in useful detail. Instead, he relies on spinning the facts he actually does find and especially looking for hypocrisy between the candidate's current positions and actions in the past. His favourite cases were former defense lawyers running for office, because he could inevitably discover through court records evidence of their defending the most egregious offenders of social mores, which would completely contradict the candidate's official policy on law and order.

What makes this a great read is that Marks is also an unhinged exhibitionist. He is self-centered and amoral, yet he characterizes himself as a "political innocent." Yeah, right. His profession is to uncover, document, comment upon and even exaggerate, the failings of others. By definition that is not the work of an innocent. His self-delusion, however, is to the reader's benefit. While being self-centered and self-indulgent may beserious character flaws, they make for great and sometimes salacious autobiographical details.

He condemns many of the candidates he investigates for the slightest trace of hypocrisy, particularly their sexual indiscretions. Yet, throughout the book he details, proudly, his predatory and deceptive sexual exploits in his character as "oppo-man". His hypocrisy and lack of self-awareness is stunning.

He ends the book having changed from a right-wing idealist into a centrist cynic. He now claims to be a reformed man, who has quit his itinerant lifestyle and has settled down to more savoury work. His "oppo-man" character has been left in the past.

This book does not merit a top recommendation because it lacks enough practical

advice about how to do opposition research. Whether credible or not, there are few better train-wrecks of a book that so shamelessly delve into the actual nitty-gritty of trashing an opponent. It is an unusual take about a subject that has been rarely covered with such authority.

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.

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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