



PAAC E-News

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[President's message](#)

Welcome to our special Conference E-news



by Elaine Flis
PAAC President

It is an honour to greet all PAAC members today as President of the Association, and to introduce our special Conference edition E-news. I'll have more to say about the Association and its future directions in future columns, beginning in December. In the meantime, I invite and encourage all members to enjoy this special edition of our newsletter.

On Thursday, October 27, our Conference, *The Art and Science of Public Affairs*, featured plenary sessions at the opening, at lunch, and at its closing. Spread out like a professional development feast in between were a dozen breakout sessions, in four time slots which allowed people to choose which sessions to attend. The theme was, *Emerging Issues in Public Affairs*. To cover those sessions for the E-news we had one

writer/photographer, providing coverage of selected events.

This month's E-News begins with coverage of our pre-Conference, October 12 luncheon event, then segues into selected Conference sessions, in chronological order. We always endeavour to cover this event as completely as possible, but to enjoy its full impact you had to be there.

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Now it is my privilege to welcome the newest member to the Public Affairs Association of Canada: Dennis James, at Ryerson University.

And welcome, all readers, to our biggest E-news of the year. _

[The new slate](#)

Meet your PAAC Executive and Directors

As a result of the elections at our Annual General Meeting prior to the Presidents' Reception, your PAAC directors are (alphabetically by last name): **Ed Arundell, Ian Bacque, Chris Churchill, Kim Donaldson, Elaine Flis, Kim Lynch, Ruth Merskey, Caroline Pinto, Michael Ras, and Guy Skipworth.**

Officers of PAAC: **Elaine Flis**, President; **Ruth Merskey**, Vice President; **Ed Arundell**, Secretary-Treasurer; **Ian Bacque**, Events Chair.

Ex-officio: **Chris Benedetti**, Past-President; **Joe MacDonald** Ryerson Chair. _

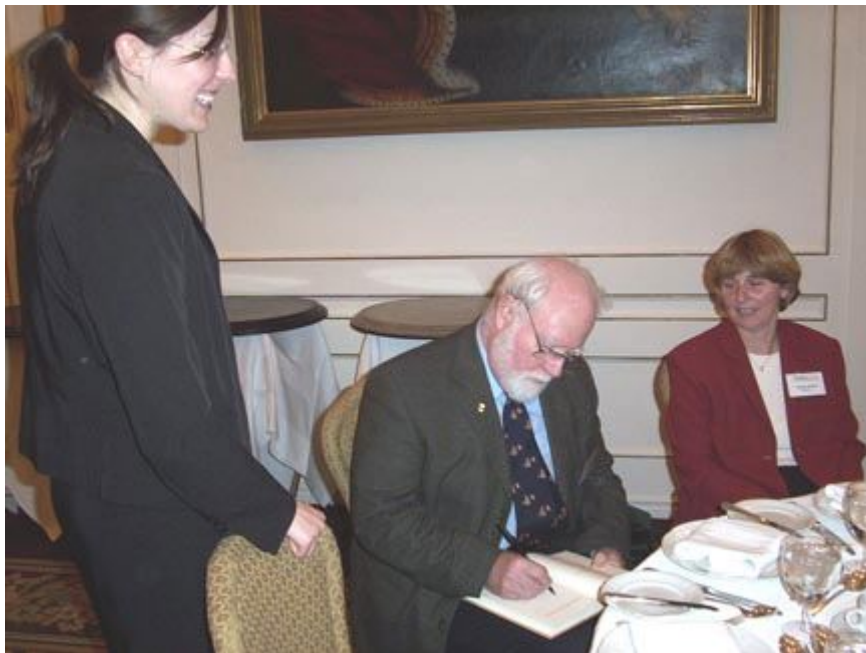
[Event report](#)

Cabinets, First Ministers and Westminster democracy

University of Toronto Political Science professor **Graham White** addressed a PAAC luncheon on October 12, to discuss his latest book, *Cabinets and First Ministers*. Published by UBC Press, the book challenges the theory that Canadian government is a dictatorship *sans* the salutes, with power too concentrated at the top.



Graham White with PAAC President Chris Benedetti (above, now Past President) and signing a copy of his book (below) for guest Nicole Goodman of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme.



Graham White has been writing scholarly works about politics since he completed his Ph.D. thesis in 1979. He was approached to write *Cabinets and First Ministers* as part of the UBC Press Canadian Democratic Audit series. For the project, he drew upon notes from hundreds of interviews done over the years at the highest political levels. At his PAAC presentation White admitted, "The conventional wisdom is that our political system is increasingly undemocratic because of a huge concentration of power at the top." Journalist Jeffrey Simpson, in his book, *The Friendly Dictatorship*, argued that view. Longtime public servant Donald Savoie, author of *Governing From the Centre: The Concentration of Power in Canadian Politics*, argued that view with particular bluntness,

saying that Cabinet has become a 'focus group' for the Prime Minister.

But White doesn't buy it. Oh, sure, there is concentration of power in the PMO. "Not for nothing is the First Minister called Da Boss," he quipped. But White said things are not quite as bad as Simpson and Savoie believe. Time and again in interviews, cabinet ministers told him that the Prime Ministers under whom they have served were much less autocratic than their public image would suggest. Example: Jean Chrétien, who as finance minister under Pierre Trudeau was once made famously angry when Trudeau overruled him on an important issue, has since said only nice things about Trudeau, as quoted by White: "In cabinet, Trudeau listened more and compromised more than the public thought he did." Former Agriculture Minister Eugene Whelan told White something similar, as did others. Trudeau's public image may have been that of an autocrat, but White insists the man genuinely sought consensus. "The people I talked to were not a random sample," he added. "I looked for people who matter."

First Ministers, he pointed out, are a special breed. It's no accident that they have survived a brutal Darwinian political process to get where they are. "One of the reasons First Ministers are powerful is that they really are smarter, tougher, more experienced and harder working," he said. Yet White's years of interviews with people who matter - and who were present at the events about which they have opinions - tell him it's a mistake to focus on instances when a First Minister walked into a room and autocratically told everyone how it's going to be. There are many more instances when the same First Minister deferred to one of his Cabinet Ministers, accepting his or her views on a matter of policy.

In White's view, the same news media that might wish to paint a Prime Minister as an autocrat in fact act as a powerful check on any Prime Minister, simply through the force of their aggressive reporting and criticism. That factor is compounded by the rising involvement of ombudsmen, and of interest groups. "The network of interest groups is far more sophisticated than even a few decades back."

White's years of interviews with premiers and ministers both prime and not so prime support this thesis that First Ministers cannot routinely use their powers to bulldoze their way along, because there are just too many eyes upon them. They use their power only selectively. "All First Ministers are autocratic some of the time, some First Ministers are autocratic a fair bit of the time, but no First Ministers can be autocratic all of the time."

All of White's analysis leads to his bottom line, which is a rejection of calls for major reforms to our political system in pursuit of a more democratic democracy. He speaks, he said, as "an unabashed fan of the Westminster system," because he sees Westminster style democracy not as a hidebound anachronistic institution of powdered wigs and cobwebbed thinking, but as a flexible and adaptable approach to democracy. "It is not a barrier to change," he said. "If someone argues against a principle of reform because it offends a principle of Westminster democracy, that person is either misinformed about the issue or simply using it as an excuse to oppose something he just plain doesn't like."

As it happened, Prof. White's praise for Westminster traditions came one day after Ontario Finance Minister Greg Sorbara was forced by those very traditions to resign when media reports revealed the RCMP was conducting a criminal investigation into the

activities of Royal Group Technologies, a company with which Sorbara is involved right up to the knot in his designer tie. To White, this proves the Westminster system, with its long tradition of pressuring a pol to 'do the right thing' in such circumstances, works.

Feel free to contrast Sorbara's actions with those of Tom DeLay, of the U.S. House of Representatives, who hung grimly to his post as house majority leader until he was indicted on criminal conspiracy charges and hauled away to pose for a mug shot in which he displayed a vacuous Alfred E. Neumann grin for the published photographic record. A nice, tasteful Westminster-style resignation would have done him, and the institution he represents, more good than that.

White's view therefore: Keep Westminster democratic traditions. For further details, read his book.

[Conference 2005: The Presidents' Reception](#)

Ontario Speaker honours PAAC Past Presidents

The Public Affairs Association of Canada's premier event of 2005 was our October 27 Conference, *The Art and Science of Public Affairs*, which focused on emerging themes in public affairs. But the evening before the Conference, things were already underway at the Sutton Place Hotel. There our Presidents' Reception took place immediately after the Annual General Meeting, where our members voted for a revised Executive, led by Elaine Flis as the new President of the Association.

Below: Flis is backed by Past Presidents (L-R) Graham Murray, Chris Benedetti and JoeMacDonald, high above the city at the Sutton Place's Stop 33.



At the Presidents' Reception, our special guest was Ontario's newest Speaker of the

House, **Michael Brown**, who made special award presentations to our Past Presidents for their achievements in furthering the profession.



Above - Immediate Past President Benedetti (R) with Ontario Speaker Michael Brown. **Below** - Past Presidents Chris Ballard (L) and David Yudelman share a chat.





Class of 05 - Our past presidents and our newest one came together at the October 26 Presidents' Reception. In the foreground, that's guest presenter, Ontario Speaker Michael Brown, and Past President Graham Murray flanking President Elaine Flis. In the rear (L-R) there's John Wright, Kevin McGuire, Norman Cheesman, David Yudelman, Chris Benedetti, Joe MacDonald, Chris Ballard and PAAC founding President Ed Arundell.

[Conference opening plenary session](#)

Squalls, sunshine and tending the garden

Longtime foreign service expert and career diplomat **Michael F. Kergin** was the featured speaker at the opening plenary session of our 2005 Conference, up on the 33rd floor of the Sutton Place Hotel, where you can see for miles and miles from the glassed-in dining room.



Above: Michael Kergin trades comments across the table with newly elected PAAC President Elaine Flis. **Below:** Kergin strikes

a pensive pose, considering serious matters.



Kergin sees farther than most. His words carry the weight of a foreign service career that began in 1967 and led him through various diplomatic postings for Canada around the world, including several to Washington. He served as Canada's Ambassador to the United States from 2000 to 2005. Now he's Dalton McGuinty's Special Advisor on Border Issues. The title of his talk: *Weathering the Canada-U.S. Relationship: Squalls or Sunshine?*

Weeds and herbicides

Kergin quoted former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, who compared diplomacy to tending a garden - pulling up the weeds and encouraging better things to grow. "I want to see if I can predict challenges in our relationship with the U.S.," Kergin told his PAAC audience. "I want to identify some of the weeds, and suggest some herbicides."

Weed One is terrorism. The possibility of another successful terrorist attack inside the United States some time in the next few years is high, simply because Americans continue to maintain an open society even in the face of an infiltrative war against them. That could change with the next big bomb. Kergin said such an event would catalyze a fortress mentality that would not be much good for Canada. Further, if such an attack had its roots in Canada it would lead to an even more negative impact, particularly in Ontario.

There is a huge flow of trade between the two countries. The Ambassador Bridge alone carries more trade between Canada and the U.S. than that which flows between the U.S. and Japan, much of it potentially useful to people whose idea of creativity is finding new ways to commit murder. Containers can be used to smuggle weapons or people; foodstuffs can be poisoned. Concerns of these things in the aftermath of a new attack would backlog trade at the very least. There would also be a diversion of investment, as Americans looked for relief from the cost of inspection delays causing a higher inconvenience curve associated with doing business in Canada. Suddenly, the traditional benefits to U.S. firms doing business here - the availability of educated, English-speaking Canadian workers, the lower cost of our dollar, favourable Canadian locations - would be overcome by risks Americans would no longer be willing to take. Investment would shift south, within the fortress borders.

A herbicide against this weed? "We could mitigate its effect," said Kergin. But only through an attitude shift, if Canadians can fully acknowledge the real threat of terrorism,

including the economic aftershocks that go far beyond the initial tragic loss of life. We could resolve to take more action in concert with U.S. allies. "If Canadians do not perceive the threat of terrorism, I regret that they will not support measures against it."

Increased co-ordination

Kergin said the U.S. wonders if we are policing our side of the border as enthusiastically as we might. Could there be more co-ordination of our immigrant and refugee programs to take into account a legitimate concern? Are we doing our bit to extradite bad guys and to filter immigrants coming into Canada? True, questions of Charter rights loom large for Canadians, and "since 9/11 there has been a debate about how much you can restrict rights," he said. But both countries need to protect citizens, and there are ways to do it that aren't being done yet, he suggested. There is much duplication. Food inspections, now done separately for products going first out of Canada and then into the U.S., could be harmonized to a single set of regulations, improving security while smoothing trade.

"We need to improve and harden our infrastructure," he added. There are only five major trade border crossings, four over water, and they are all potential choke points. Potential herbicides in this garden would include the creation of more crossings and the use of technology such as biometric ID ('smart cards') to both improve security and speed traffic. But such measures would require accommodation. Example: It would make sense to put U.S. inspectors on the Canadian side, where there is room to park trucks undergoing inspections, and let them work with Canadian inspectors to get the job done prior to a speedy crossing for the truckers. But U.S. border guards carry firearms and are unlikely to agree to give them up. Could Canadians accommodate? Or must a potential trade enhancement fall to jingoistic concerns of 'sovereignty?'

Weed Two: The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, an American measure which will require all U.S. citizens, Canadians, citizens of the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda, and citizens of Mexico to have a passport or other accepted secure document to enter or re-enter the U.S. by January 1, 2008. "It'll kill incidental travel by Americans," said Kergin, including trips across the border to shop, attend a sporting event, or do other things on the spur of the moment. Most Americans don't routinely carry passports. Neither do most Canadians. So this will be a belly blow to travel and tourism, and will severely inhibit businesses which require routine employee travel across the border.

Kill bill

The herbicide for this is lobbying the U.S. Congress to kill the bill in the name of commerce, tourism, and reason. After all, passports aren't that secure anyway - the world is full of criminals and terrorists who got their passports easily, especially Canadian passports. So it's a much better idea to develop more secure ID than to use passports. Still, lobbying to kill this bill must be backed by the assurance that Canadians are committed to security, if it is to have credibility.

Weed Three: A growing mood of protectionism Stateside. Americans may still own the strongest economy in the world, but they increasingly feel that it's vulnerable. If Asia in general and China in particular got it into their heads to hurt the U.S. they could do that by dumping dollars they hold in international markets. The U.S. Federal Reserve would

then increase interest rates, which would increase the U.S. trade deficit - already pushing \$700-billion - and create domino destruction at all levels of the U.S. economy, with collateral damage in Canada. Protectionist measures, explained Kergin, get passed when Congress is in a foul mood on trade issues, but although President Bush is bullish on trade, he's also a lame duck now, without the political leverage to shove back against such a Congress.

Therefore there is a need on both sides of the border to support a co-operative trade stance against such moves, which is why it's important to weather the small squalls - like softwood lumber. Tend that garden. Many countries would secretly love to be where we are, snuggled up to the biggest economic engine in the world, and loaded with saleable resources and an action-ready workforce. NAFTA has been good to us, Kergin said. The U.S. will always need our products, energy, and workers, and anyone who doesn't think that makes Americans our friends does not grasp the big picture. "Corporate interdependence will always favor the relationship."

In the light of that, he said, a branch of the protectionist weed is U.S. opposition to NAFTA rulings which go against them. Because if settlements are not trusted or at least accepted, "we're back to the laws of the jungle," and what happens next is internecine trade brawling that benefits nobody.

Kergin's bottom line: Our relationship with the U.S. is a garden worth tending. "We need to work at it, maintain dialogue, and tone down the rhetoric," he said. "The periods of sunshine will outlast the squalls." _

[The attack of the giant nanny](#)

Tobacco-fueled discussion gets audience smoking

Given the descriptive blurb which appeared in the Conference brochure, some people in the morning breakout session, *The Nanny State: Is Government Taking Over?* were startled to learn that presenter **Nancy Daigneault**, President of Mychoice.ca, focuses primarily on the unfairness of rampant anti-smoking rules in society.



Nancy Daigneault, of Mychoice.ca

Yes, her organization is funded by the Canadian Tobacco Manufacturers' Council, she said. No, it's not simply a voice for Big Tobacco, she said. It was launched, "by ordinary people who choose to smoke," and who are increasingly offended by what amounts to a *pogrom* against them at all levels of government and even popular culture. "Nanny Statism knows no bounds."

To begin with an example from outside the smoking controversy, she told the tale of an Royal Calderdale Hospital in Halifax, England, which recently banned cooing to babies, "because it infringes on the rights of babies." Later they pulled in their politically correct horns and said it was to keep germs away from the infants. Still, said Daigneault, this was an extreme example of the kind of thing she worries about. Authorities and governments have switched from protecting people from each other to protecting them against themselves. But she made it clear that her organization's main cause is anti-smoking rules. Why? "Because we pursue the issues our members are interested in."

Assaults against smokers have reached such an extreme, she said, that an Ontario government commercial aimed at dissuading teens from smoking went so far as to say smokers smell "like dog crap." Mychoice.ca received many angry calls and emails from members who had encountered insults fuelled by that TV spot.

Daigneault said the campaign to push smokers further and further into social purgatory has cost charity bingo money, cost the government gaming revenues from casinos where smokers would otherwise have liked to go, and caused collateral damage to pub owners such as those in Toronto, who dutifully built closed-vented smoking areas at the behest of City Council, costing each business owner tens of thousands of dollars, only to see the city turn around and ban those too.

Health risk equivalence arguments figured in Daigneault's presentation: How the risk from second hand smoke is less than the risk from urban pollution which you can't avoid anyway; and how studies have never proved the level of risk from second hand smoke, an assumption upon which the nanny nonsmoking laws are based. Some people have even made serious suggestions to refuse or curtail medical care for smokers. "If we

continue with the nanny state saving people from themselves, we move toward a situation in which people who refuse to be saved have fewer rights," she said. It's a threat to universal health care.

Anti-smoking activists have spent years playing leap-frog, with each new nannylaw setting the precedent for the next. Will health care 'activists' next use the issue of obesity to leap-frog a steadily escalating series of food policing measures to the point where fat people are denied health care because they refuse to live by nanny's rules? Can such nightmares lie far beyond *Bill 164, A Smoke Free Ontario Act*, which is set to ban smoking everywhere nanny can imagine, be it a park or a parked car?

Said an audience member: "I didn't think this session would turn out to be a lecture on the evils of anti-smoking." Heads turned. And suddenly, what we had in the second part of the Nanny State breakout session was A Full, Free And Frank Exchange Of Views, uncorked. Emotions, though packed in civility, came to the fore.

Daigneault countered that anti-smoking measures are only the most obvious and current example of runamuck Nanny Statism, which is admittedly an issue that looms much larger than smoking. Another audience member concurred, saying, "The family unit is the only thing that stands between us and the ultimate power of government."

Yet another listener, as the voice of sweet reason, suggested industries can get out in front of considerations such as health issues by developing guidelines intended to defuse the introduction of laws that might lead to worries of Nanny Statism. But even he had to admit, "We do seem to be going down a slope where the idea of accommodation is weakening," whether the issue is smoking or the next big area of activism: the health risks of junk food. "The notion of debate is weakening."

Yet resistance is not futile. The session audience also discussed what happened some months ago when Ontario's great nanny in the sky decided to ban fresh sushi, decreeing that all fish must first be frozen. The government did this to protect Ontarians from parasite infections, but foodies know that fish-borne parasites are but a tiny risk, and they weren't willing to tolerate this assault on a favorite treat. The law was therefore beaten back, with the result that today in Ontario, while it's harder than ever to find a place to smoke, at least you can still get a decent plate of sushi. But does this mean Nanny can be beat?

Maybe. Maybe not. You certainly can't catch liver disease sitting next to a drunk, any more than you can catch a case of mushmouth by sitting next to a writer who's had so much coffee he tells somebody, 'thanks for a great profession' when he means, 'thanks for a great presentation.' But the woman who chooses to smoke while sitting next to you might also have chosen to give you an attack of asthma - or the seeds of something a whole lot worse - and that makes it personal. That's what gives Nanny more power against smokers than she is likely to muster against fish served raw or sins fried in deep fat.

[Speaking of news](#)

Strategies to avoid media relations pitfalls

Communications consultant **Eric Bergman**, of Bergman & Associates, was in charge of the morning breakout session, *Bits & Bites: How To Avoid Biting Off More Than You Can Chew*. It was all about strategies for speaking to the media, something many PAAC members or their clients have to do regularly, and something about which Bergman knows a lot. Using audience participation and the Socratic Method, Bergman focused on the concept of staying on-message - and why it's time to set that principle aside in favour of communication methods that work better.



Eric Bergman, named a master communicator by the International Association of Business Communicators.

"One definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result," said Bergman, and the concept of staying grimly and obstinately on-message is a case in point. Indeed, much of what he had to say echoed the thoughts of political scientist Chanchal Bhattacharya in an guest article published in the August 2005 PAAC E-news. Bergman and Battacharya clearly agree that a spokesman who uses this technique risks squandering all credibility.

Suppose you're a spokesman for a manufacturing facility; you're jousting merrily with the media and the question is: Do you pollute? If you say simply yes, you're being honest but handing out a damaging quote. But a prepackaged message, repeated to each probing question, does damage as well. Challenging the prejudicial language is better than reverting to message. So you'd say, "Does effluent leave this facility? Yes. Does it exceed government guidelines? No."

The key is to pause, answer - and then stop. "The hardest thing to do is to answer a question and then stop talking." Remember, reporters ask questions for a living and they're good at it. Print reporters will probe more because they need more detail than TV reporters, who seek that quick sound bite and little else. Rely on the print journalists to ask skillful questions to elicit detail for their stories. In the process of answering them, you will educate everyone in the room.

But if you stubbornly repeat a canned message regardless of what they ask or how they ask it, you're not helping the reporters. You're not making them like you. And you're not making them want to get your message out. You're likely doing the reverse, creating animosity and disbelief. "Yet we load our people up with key messages and tell them to inject them at any opportunity," said Bergman. This amounts to teaching spokespeople to talk more and say less. Far better to talk less and say more - encourage more questions, keep answers short and to the point, and let the reporters discover your message in their notes when they sit down to write.

If there is a reason why you can't answer a question - something is before the courts or there are issues of confidentiality or privacy, or if you must hold back for competitive reasons - say so openly. That's transparency; you may not be informative but you're not being evasive.

Reverting to message is the opposite, and it can come back to haunt you: To see how, session moderator Joe MacDonald said we need look no further than the George Bush and the Tony Blair administrations' different approaches to unkind questions regarding Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction. President Bush and his people remained rigidly on-message while Blair and his people were forthright about how their belief in WMD developed. Blair retained more credibility in the long run as a result. Bush? His administration had to pay the price in credibility when they had to explain slow hurricane disaster responses to reporters who had come to see them as evasive and untrustworthy.

The moral of Bergman's story is the oldest rule in the business: Buy the ticket, take the ride. Said Bergman: "As a profession, we had better accept a new paradigm - that staying on-message is fundamentally unethical."

[PAAC Award of Distinction](#)

Elyse Allan speaks of reaching out

The recipient of the Public Affairs Association of Canada's 2005 Award of Distinction is **Elyse Allan**, President and CEO of General Electric Canada, a position she has held since October 2004.



Elyse Allan (right) with new PAAC President Elaine Flis.

Allan has worked at GE in various capacities and been a senior executive at Ontario Hydro, but when she spoke during the luncheon session at our 2005 Conference, she concentrated on her work as President and CEO at the Toronto Board of Trade where, she said, "I learned the value of reaching out to the community, including the Enemies At The Gate."

Organizations like the Toronto Board of Trade are bound to have them. Maybe not enemies but at least detractors; people who are opposed to you because they don't believe you have their interests at heart. When she came to the Board, that organization was seen as embodying everything the ordinary citizen distrusts: Big, rich, self-centered capitalistic business people; an insular organization, heavy with inertia. She saw it as her job to change that perception.

"The Board had been stereotyped," she said. Wrongly stereotyped, she added - they aren't big business at all; they represent mostly small and medium-sized business. But to change the perception, Allan saw to it that their governance committee involved unions, homeless advocacy groups and others with good reason to want a voice. These new alliances, formed to pursue the issue of affordable housing in Toronto, served the Board of Trade well in later issues and discussions, said Allan. "By developing close relationships with people based on common objectives we were able to develop a new way of doing business."

At first, she said, it was like dogs meeting and sniffing one another warily, not sure if foe could become friend. But enemies at the gate became allies in good cause, she said, and now her challenge at GE is to communicate a larger awareness to the public of her company's work beyond making light bulbs, using the same skills that served her at the Board of Trade.

To that end, GE has launched a program to position itself on the side of the

environmental angels, developing products and technologies that serve the cause of environmental friendliness. To get the public and press onside, the plan includes getting all 320,000 GE Canada employees to volunteer in their communities, because it never hurts to be able to remind the press that every warm body from the mailroom to the penthouse suite is a community volunteer. Lead by example, that's Allan's advice.

Indeed, the thrust of her talk was all about the power of reaching out and building consensus - the things that are always missing wherever businesses and interest groups come into conflict, bringing enemies to the gate. "It's all about reaching out," said Allan.

For bringing the power of her convictions to the practice of public affairs, Elyse Allan is the 2005 winner of the Public Affairs Association of Canada's Award of Distinction.



Award winning talk - Above, (L-R) PAAC President Elaine Flis, Award of Distinction recipient Elyse Allan, PAAC Past President Chris Benedetti and Michael J. Nowlan, CEO of CCMatthews, which sponsored the luncheon.

[The big issue](#)

Ethics: Black and white and read all over

The issue that looms over all politics, GR and business these days is ethics. Each day we read about who has them, who doesn't, and who is the latest to be outed for ethical lapses. That's why the afternoon breakout session, *Ethics: Separating the GR Black and White*, was a session not to be missed.

It was a panel session featuring **Warren Kinsella**, Principal and General Counsel at Navigator Public Policy Group; **John Matheson**, Principal at StrategyCorp; and **Lynn**

Morrison, Lobbyist Registrar, Office of the Ontario Integrity Commissioner.



The distinguished panel (L-R) - Lynn Morrison of the Office of the Ontario Integrity Commissioner, Warren Kinsella of Navigator Ltd. and John Matheson of StrategyCorp.

Session moderator Ian Bacque opened by reminding one and all that the issue is particularly timely, not only because of PAAC's newly unveiled Statement of Ethical Principles, but because there is so much ethics blood in the water at all levels of business and government these days, on both sides of the Canada/U.S. border.

Which is beyond true. Against a multinational background of people lying to judges, outing CIA agents for partisan reasons, and stuffing their pockets with loot, be it cash or candy, this session was where the action was. First, Lynn Morrison reviewed the state of the Lobbyist Registration Act of Ontario. It's an act based first and foremost on the principle that lobbying is legit because access to government should be open, and such access requires expert guidance, much as access to the law requires the services of a lawyer. But the Act has been around since 1998, and in 2005 she said, it is in need of review. "Community standards of ethical behaviour are higher than they have ever been," said Morrison. "What was once acceptable is no longer acceptable." Such a review will have to focus on differences between federal and Ontario rules, she added, because "the same problems that existed in Ottawa still exist in Ontario, and any differences will cause confusion."

Yet reading the news in November of 2005 left little room for confusion about public anger. Still strong in the public's nostrils were the revelations of Madame Justice Denise Bellamy concerning dirty dealings at Toronto City Hall. Closely following our Conference was the release - the day after Halloween, if you care for irony - of the Gomery Report. Gomery blamed AdScam on Jean Chrétien essentially because it happened on Chrétien's watch, yet he 'exonerated' - Gomery's term - Paul Martin by making him the Sergeant Shultz of the Finance Ministry, i.e., he saw *nnnnothing*; he knew *nnnnothing*. Pretty scary stuff. But does the public believe it? An Ipsos-Reid poll revealed that Liberal popularity took a duck dive in the immediate aftermath of the report.

In the face of all that was in the air at the Conference as well as that which we knew was to come, Morrison predicted a trend toward stronger ethics enforcement, without which any legislation means, well, *nnnnothing*. The public sector is becoming a tougher arena,

she said. "In order to have a scandal in the private sector you have to steal a lot of money. In the public sector, it just takes a chocolate bar."

Yet Canadian public sector people are fully capable of meeting either standard. Justice Gomery's report was yet to come, but by the day of the Conference David Dingwall's remarks about candy, gum and the various entitlements to which he felt entitled to entitle himself in the course of conducting public business were already the stuff of legend. Which brings us to the remarks of Warren Kinsella, who took the podium next to give what he called "my own chocolate bar and chewing gum chat."

This is not the first time Warren Kinsella has stood before a PAAC audience and talked of ethics. He has never showed an inclination to cut anybody much slack on the issue of ethics, but he's against public lynchings. He's also against doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. Calling for public enquiries, for example. Every time there's a scandal people call for a public inquiry, he said, but it's not the answer. And although written codes are good to have, it's silly to think they can improve behaviour, because you can't learn ethics by reading about them. "That's like believing you can read about sports to become a better athlete," said Kinsella. "Instead, we should encourage an ethical culture that starts in the heart, not on the page."

Unkind example: Justice Gomery's report on other people's ethics was released at a media lockup the week after the Conference. The lockout, Kinsella reported, was run by a company that had been granted a sole-source contract without any tendering process. Kinsella's point: Deeds speak. Ethics? It's high time to proceed as the Nike ads once advised us - *Just Do It*.

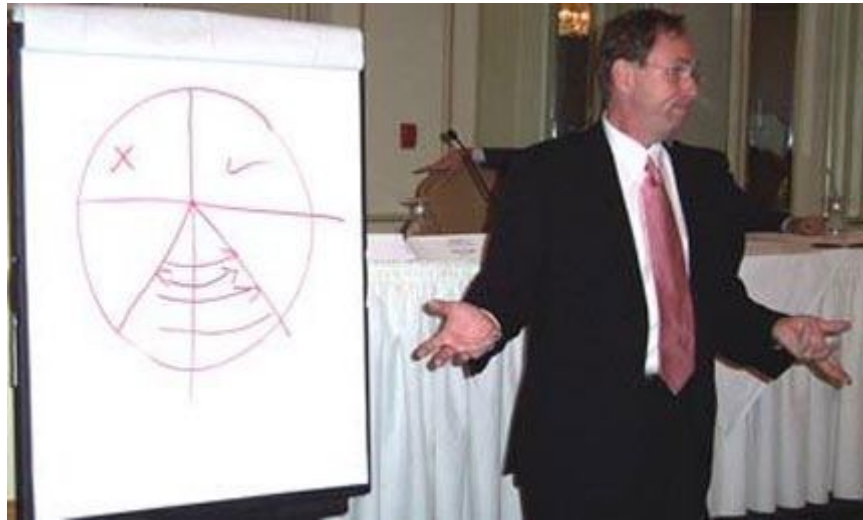
John Matheson agreed it's high time to set the ethical bar on a higher notch. "Declare war on the notion that there is a grey area," he said. But he was much more sanguine about the role of a written code - at least as a step on the journey. "There must be a code of conduct with sanctions built in, if we are to take the profession to the next level," he said. "It's about defining what is really important - and then enforcing it. Only when you have defined what is important can you pass judgment on what isn't important, like candy bars." Matheson said public affairs is on its way to being a true profession with a formal professional designation, and, "the ethics package is an essential step toward that."

Kinsella agreed about the importance of sanctions, and stressed the point. He reminded us that sanctions against transgressors are the key to the profession's credibility. And he wondered: Suppose a PAAC member is accused of some sort of ethical transgression, found guilty by the definitions we publicize - and then the phone rings and it's the Globe and Mail wanting to know what we're going to do about it. "If we can't do anything about it," said Kinsella, "we're a joke."

A window on the 'persuadable middle'

John Wright, Senior VP at Ipsos-Reid, has given us polling seminars before, walking PAAC audiences through the intricacies of various methods and techniques, explaining how they differ and why. In the afternoon Conference session, *Using Polling Strategically*, he went beyond those seminars to concentrate on how to use those methods - what information to look for, what it means, and how to use it to advantage.

Polling techniques are more immediate and accurate than ever, he said. Even telephone polling is still a source of accurate information, despite the hang-up factor. And in addition to old standbys like phone polls there are now Internet panels, household panels and other methods that make it possible to gather more data, and better data, than in the past. The trick is what to make of it all.



There you have it - Polling guru John Wright used slides, charts and experience to map a route to the Holy Grail of his business: The Persuadable Middle.

In any issue of interest to a pollster's client, there are those who are dead set against the issue and those who are full-on for it. They often cannot be persuaded to change views. "I'm interested in the persuadable middle," said Wright. After all, his clients are not polling for the joy of it. They want to achieve buy-in to an issue by communicating a message to people who will be receptive to it. "You have to identify the public opinion pivot-point," Wright said - the point at which the right message delivered the right way can tip the seesaw your way.

Public opinion can be the way you discover where you've got trouble, like the canary in the coal mine. It can also be the way you know where you've got nothing to worry about - Wright recalled the time a client worried about public reaction to something they were doing, but "we did a rapid overnight (poll) and found out that only six per cent of the public even knew their name," Wright said. "It was like a traffic accident where nobody

got a license number."

The art and science of polling, used properly, can also help you learn what the issue really is. It may not be what you thought it was. And every issue, he said, has its own "apparent truth," which is definitely worth remembering in a world where appearance is reality, at least for issues where public opinion matters. President George W. Bush learned this recently when Harriet Miers blew up in his face like an exploding cigar.

Wright's rules: "Put on your BIG ears. If there's one thing I've learned, it's to listen." That's how you learn who is in the middle, what the real issues are to them, and how to recruit them into a focus group so you can see the whites of their eyes as they discuss the issue. "Put on your big ears and listen to the evolution of the rhetoric," Wright repeated. "It's those people in the middle of an issue who are critically important."

[Closing plenary session](#)

Politics and journalism: Where the twain have met

Beware of the dark side...If once you start down the dark path, forever
will it dominate your destiny...

-Master Yoda

...Then again, it's not at all clear which side is darker, politics or journalism. One thing is clear: The panelists at our closing plenary session, *Entering The Twilight Zone: When The Dark Side Goes To The Darker Side*, have lived on both sides. They've made the switch from idealistic journalism to idealistic politics, and done so with their enthusiasm and ethics intact.

The panelists were: **Senator Jim Munson**, a longtime CTV fixture who became Director of Communications for the Prime Minister of Canada and eventually was named to the Senate; **Greg Crone**, a print journalist who has done time on the Kitchener-Waterloo Record, the late Financial Post and the National Post and who is now Senior Communications Advisor to - and the biggest fan of - Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant; and **Ontario MPP Jennifer Mossop** (L-Stoney Creek), who earned her journalistic stripes at the Hamilton Spectator, Hamilton's CH TV and the CBC before hearing the call to public life.



Not so dark - Past journalists Jennifer Mossop (left) and Greg Crone (background, left) chat with PAAC Past-Presidents Graham Murray and Chris Benedetti (right) before the final plenary session got underway.

Munson had been fired by CTV when he suddenly got a call from Jean Chrétien, who offered him a job. Today, he says, being fired by CTV was "my liberation notice." It was a chance for him to bring some of the insights of the journalist to the other side of the fence.

One such insight is that it's self-destructive to try to dodge reporters. "There is a tendency for politicians to see journalists as a danger to be avoided," Munson said. But it's better for communications professionals to make themselves available to journalists, to nurture their trust as well as opportunities to say your piece.

Munson also strongly believes professional communicators should be treated as professionals. Often, he said, communications people are asked to sell a policy that was developed without their input, then they take the flak if it falls. "For some reason, organizations see communications as something like packaging at the end of an assembly line." But Munson's theory is that communications people should be involved with development, so that the people who will sell a policy also believe in it. They should not be back-roomers, like the Wizard of Oz working behind the curtain. "You've got to be in the room, not behind the curtain."

Jennifer Mossop said it was journalistic curiosity that turned her into a politician. She had covered politics for 20 years, first as a print journalist and then as TV broadcast journalist. And she wondered why anyone would want to do politics. "How do they lure you to do that?" She found out in 2003, on the cusp on an election, when the Ontario Liberals ran into a spot of trouble. Seems their candidate in the Stoney Creek riding was suddenly unavailable to run. "The candidate was busted for fraud five days before the writ was dropped," explained Mossop. This is always a terrible setback in politics, but although it left the Liberals short a candidate, they are never short of ideas. They courted Mossop as a last-minute replacement. That's how she came to be escorted into what she described

as the charismatic presence of Dalton McGuinty. "After 40 minutes with him I came away thinking, he might be the real deal."

Mossop spoke glowingly to the PAAC audience about McGuinty, who first intrigued her and eventually convinced her to run in place of the candidate who had run short of luck. Whereupon the idealism which originally fuelled her commitment to journalism crystallized into a commitment to no longer just sit by and talk about what others were doing. She resolved to step forward and do things herself. To make it a better world for her new baby daughter, she said. She was something of a dark horse candidate, but she surprised a lot of people, including herself, by winning the seat.

Mossop believes journalism is a good training for politicians because it teaches people to ask questions, get at the essence of an issue and communicate well to others - all useful skills for someone developing and then selling a policy. Her enthusiasm for the job is huge, and it shows: "Politicians in this caucus really do care" - and it seems genuine - "Politics is restoring my faith in humanity" - and she speaks of it with conviction - "I feel like I'm doing relevant work. More than when I was on the sidelines talking about it."

Greg Crone also jumped ship as a result of transferred idealism. As a small town kid in his formative years when Watergate hit the news, he was hugely impressed at how a couple of dedicated reporters brought down a president. In that spirit he followed the journalistic path. But one day he found himself neck-deep in the overheated frat-boy atmosphere of beered-up journalists in a newsroom that looked just a bit too much like a set from the movie, *The Front Page*. And he said to himself, "Crone. This is not sustainable." He decided things would not change, so he would have to change his own situation.

Crone has no regrets about his decision to change careers. "Have I been able to maintain my idealism? Yes. We are able to effect change. Not just criticize, but get things done," said Crone. "I believe I have been able to maintain that sense of idealism in support of Michael Bryant."

Indeed, all three guests said different versions of the same thing. Mossop said, "When I went into journalism I was going to save the world." A corny sentiment, perhaps, but one which they all had in common when they started their careers. And the other thing Crone, Mossop and Munson found in common is that while their idealism led them first to journalism, in the end they left because journalism could no longer support it.

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