



Chalmers Conference 2005

Advocacy and the Parliamentary Process

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PREFACE

On Friday 15 April, 2005, the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA) held the 6th Chalmers Conference, at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. Building on the success of last year's pre-election conference, this year the emphasis was on how government makes policy, and advocacy within the parliamentary system.



Wendy Lill addresses Chalmers Conference delegates during the Networking Breakfast

Purely coincidentally, political indicators in the week leading up to the 2005 Chalmers Conference were that an election might come much sooner than originally expected. To quote CCA's National Director Jean Malavoy: "*We are back this year with a new election fever. It looks like Chalmers is always well positioned for this. Last year's conference was held immediately prior to the election call and focussed on advocacy efforts to ensure the renewal of 'Tomorrow Starts Today' funding. This year's conference continues that theme, with a focus on how government makes policy, and the parliamentary committee process.*"

As has become the custom at Chalmers Conferences, the morning started early with a networking breakfast co-hosted by the National Arts Centre. The Chalmers Conferences are structured primarily for arts organizations; however, the networking breakfast is open to all, organizations and individuals, CCA members and non-members, and provides an opportunity for those working in the cultural sector, as well as those with an interest in culture, to get together on an informal basis.



"IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE!"

***"A creator and politician with real experience -
an excellent choice and very useful."***

Chalmers Conference Delegate

This year's guest speaker was playwright and former NDP Member of Parliament for Dartmouth, **Wendy Lill**. Drawing from her own experience in the House, all seven years as a member of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, Ms Lill compared the current atmosphere in Ottawa as akin to the fall of Saigon - "*the helicopters have landed on the roofs and everyone is scrambling to position themselves to get out, or in this case, somehow, to come out on top when the dust settles*".

She provided breakfast attendees with some personal insights into the parliamentary committee process. Among her key points were:



"If there isn't a photo-op, an opportunity for a grab and grin, it's tough going!" - Wendy Lill

- Government politicians respond to public pressure. This must be front and centre when deciding where to put one's energy and resources.
- Public support is essential if one is to be heard above the clamour of conflicting interests.
- Politicians respond to polls. If it's not showing up in the polls, it probably won't make it into a line item in the Budget.

Ms Lill also shared her observations on parliamentary committees - how to approach them, what Members need to hear in a submission, what works and what doesn't, and how best to get one's message across.

- Talk to the MPs, both in their ridings and on the Hill. Ensure they have been well briefed on the issues of concern to your organization.
- Prior to committee presentations, provide MPs with questions ahead of time - together with the background documentation containing the answers that you want to get on the record. Some issues are so complex MPs won't know the pertinent questions to ask and are grateful for suggestions.
- Advocacy groups provide stability in very fast changing environments, ensuring the interests of their members are not lost in the shuffle of federal politics.



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Ms. Lill concluded her remarks by encouraging cultural organizations not to give up hope when it comes to advocating before standing committees - to muster the energy for one more report, one more submission.

"Culture is important. To say 'It is Art and Culture that truly legislate the heart of the nation' - believe me, it is worth doing. Just do it. Say it. It does make a difference."

The full text of Ms Lill's speech is available, in English only, on the CCA website.

DESPERATELY SEEKING A POLICY



"Inform, educate and entertain," Sarmite Bulte on how organizations can get their messages heard on Parliament Hill. (Fromleft to right: Bev Oda, Ed Broadbent, Maka Kotto, Sarmite Bulte)

The highlight of this year's Chalmers Conference was the panel of MPs representing all parties. The round table was comprised of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, **Sarmite Bulte**, (MP for Parkdale-High Park) together with two culture critics (**Maka Kotto**, Bloc Québécois MP for St-Lambert and **Bev Oda**, Conservative MP for Durham) and veteran politician **Ed Broadbent** (former leader of the NDP and MP for Ottawa Centre - the riding in which CCA has its offices). The panel was expertly moderated by CPAC host **Ken Rockburn**.

The following points provide a summary of the comments made by the MPs during the round table.

Committee process

Strengths

- The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage acts as a sounding board for the sector.
- The reports produced are extremely good, with valuable recommendations.
- Committee discussions and recommendations can help influence the process even if it appears there is little immediate action.



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- Committees shape their own agendas; ensure you know the Chairs and communicate frequently with them.
- Committee members bring issues to party caucuses and can have an influence on them.
- The minority government situation means some government MPs could side with opposition MPs on certain issues, rather than toeing the party line. This makes the committees stronger.

Weaknesses

- Recommendations are not always acted on; it's usually a question of political will.
- Committee resources are "abominable" - there is a great need to improve the intellectual content and research resource capacity.
- Committee members change every few years making it difficult to continue a process begun with a different group of people.

How to get your message heard

- Get to know MPs throughout the year; invite them to exhibitions, plays, concerts, etc.
- MPs also appreciate opportunities to meet with the boards of cultural organizations, to get to know them better, and hear their plans for the future.
- Provide MPs with background documents, fact sheets, and statistics on your issue, to back up your arguments, including potential ramifications, both locally and nationally.
- Make common cause with other groups, providing a broad and diverse constituency
- When several representatives from one organization are presenting in different venues, ensure there is coordination so the issue is moved forward rather than simply repeated.
- Educate MPs on the intrinsic value of the arts, but don't be too "esoteric". If necessary, find simpler terminology to get the message across.
- Ensure you maintain your integrity by providing the same information to all political caucuses.
- It is essential the Minister of Finance hear and understand the message, in addition to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.
- Don't forget to thank MPs for their support and efforts.



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On the need for a federal cultural policy

"The issues that need to be considered and resolved if the government is to have a real cultural policy are huge. How will the national arts institutions that have grown out of European culture respond to an increasingly ethnically diverse country? After several decades of neglect, how are Canada's museums to manage their collections? Should the CBC reinstate regional programming? How should Canadian television make the switch to digital and high-definition? How is Canadian youth to be introduced to the arts, and how are future Canadian artists to be trained? How can the government ensure a Canadian presence on the Internet, movie screens and television? How is copyright reform to balance the rights of creators with the demands of users? How are such notions of intellectual property to be reconciled with the completely different traditions of aboriginal Canadians? Should Canadian tax law recognize the unique professional situation of artists? [The Government] must decide on a direction and stick with it, if it is to have a cultural policy that is worth anything more than the paper it's written on."

- Kate Taylor, The Globe and Mail,
20 April 2005

"If ever there was a time, as a Canadian, I say we needed to address the aspect of a national cultural policy, it is now. It really is now, And it's serious.... The State has a lot of power still in this globalized world and it should be used much more constructively and imaginatively in our country in terms of shaping a new cultural policy." - Ed Broadbent

"The Minister has clearly indicated that she wants to establish a national cultural policy ... so I would say there is that political will indeed.... The arts are truly positioned right now to become a huge priority on the national landscape..." - Sarmite Bulte

"It is because of the absence of this policy that the United States, through Hollywood entertainment, has been able to take such a huge share of the Canadian market.... we need this type of policy." - Maka Kotto

"We would love to see an over-arching cultural policy come forward. I think we, as a country, have to reaffirm our commitment to the arts and culture, and that can be done with an over-arching, clear articulation of the position on culture in this country, and the role it plays." - Bev Oda

One delegate reminded the conference that training should be an integral part of a cultural policy. Mr Broadbent added that special tax policies for artists, in recognition of their unique role in society, should be given serious consideration. He also felt the best way to develop such a cultural policy was to appoint a Royal Commission with a 14 month mandate: 12 months to do the work, and two months to write the report.

Ms Bulte added it would be entirely appropriate for the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage to consider such an issue, and that the sector should have this discussion with the committee chair.



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It was also recommended that any examination of a federal cultural policy include asking why previous ones have failed - all too many artists still live in poverty.

On Copyright

Certain users' groups (primarily educators) are insisting artists waive their rights to copyright in the "public good".

Mr Kotto confirmed the need to protect creators and writers, stating that less than 10% of them live on copyright income - most earn very little, yet we continue to ask them to make sacrifices.

Ms Oda felt the position educators are taking is that what is available on the Internet is freely accessible, but she cautioned this should not mean free of charge.

Ms Bulte, who chaired the committee that produced the *Interim Report on Copyright Reform (May 2004)*, disagreed with the users' argument that the Internet is a public right, stating it was in the public's interest to ensure that our creators are protected and allowed to create. This particular report was unanimous, which is extremely rare.

Mr Broadbent cautioned that a minority government ignores a unanimous committee request at its own peril.

There was agreement by the panel that the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is probably unusual in its harmony and collegiality, with a positive vision and minimal partisan positioning.

In order to ensure fair representation from groups and individuals, committees currently either bring people in to Ottawa for presentations (expenses paid), or the whole committee "goes on the road" (this only takes place if all parties consent to the process). It was suggested that another scenario might be to make use of current technologies and bring people together using teleconferencing or videoconferencing.



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The 2005 Chalmers conference also provided two expert, hands-on, sessions on how government and Parliament work

THE POLICY PROCESS

“An excellent primer into the federal process.”

Chalmers Conference Delegate

Glen Milne, a consultant with over 30 years' experience working with the federal government under his belt, devotes part of his work to improving policy capacity. He provided delegates with an overview to the labyrinthine workings of the government policy making process.



His book, *Making Policy: A Guide to the Federal Government's Policy Process* - originally published in 1977 and revised frequently since that time to ensure it is up-to-date - was included in the delegates' conference kits.

He provided some fascinating, and less well-known facts, such as:

- Canada's federation has 2 + 1 levels of sovereign governments: federal, provincial/territorial (including municipalities), and emerging First Nations.
- The Prime Minister has extremely far-reaching powers, including responsibility for over 4000 appointments.

In addition to outlining the powers of the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office, Mr. Milne discussed the changing role of parliamentary committees, the importance of polls in policy decision-making, and the importance of departments in applying pressure on the PMO and PCO.



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He described the current political climate, with a minority government, as being a good time to be an MP - a vulnerable government needs to keep all MPs onside, giving individual Members considerably more power than under a majority government. The Opposition also has an increased voice, as a minority government is essentially in a bartering relationship with opposition parties.

He also indicated that in the development of policy proposals, the most important question for parliamentarians is 'Can this policy also assist in other sectors of the economy or society', which includes checking that it is not in competition with other policies being promoted.

Those wishing to purchase copies of Mr Milne's book, available in English and in French, should contact him at ggdm@istar.ca.

A GUIDE TO PARLIAMENT

*“Very engaging, interesting and clear;
I learned a great deal.”*

Chalmers Conference Delegate

Following Mr Milne's insights into the government policy process, **Tranquillo Marrocco**, the Deputy Principal Clerk of the Committees Directorate at the House of Commons and a director of the Canadian Study of Parliament Group, led delegates through the newly refurbished parliamentary website.

In describing Parliament as "a treasure", Mr Marrocco stated that Parliament's "golden eggs" were really useful nuggets of information and urged delegates to take advantage of them.



“Think of Parliament as a treasure,” Tranquillo Marrocco presents during the morning session.



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His presentation, using a connection to the parliamentary website as his guide, provided direction into how and where to find the necessary information on what's going on in the newly enhanced role of Private Members' business - all of it is now put to a vote; Status of House business - a quick way to find out what happened to a bill or other business; and where to view the progress of any bill, and how to understand the process.

In discussing petitions, Mr Marrocco emphasized the need to stress areas of consensus or common interest. (This was a recurring theme throughout the conference, and an important message to all those in the cultural sector.)

New information on the website includes:

- Each committee and sub-committee is allocated a four-letter acronym which serves as the committee's "tracking device". The acronym for the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is CHPC; its email address is chpc@parl.gc.ca.
- Witness information can now be accessed from the main committee page, both organizations and individuals who have appeared, together with their presentations.
- Click on the FAQs for the answers to most questions, including such useful resources as *A Guide for Witnesses Appearing Before House of Commons Committees and Preparing a Submission to a House of Commons Committee*.
- *Subscribe*: allows you to receive the most up-to-date information on committee business and reports.
- *ParlVU*: an opportunity to listen to what was said in the House on a specific day.
- *LEGISInfo*: Find it under "Bills"; prepared by the Library of Parliament, it is a portal on each bill.
- Legislative summaries, also prepared by the Library of Parliament, are primarily for committee members but available to the public.
- *The Virtual Library* provides various briefing documents which have been prepared for MPs.

TOMORROW BELONGS TO THEM

CCA brought together four young managers, plus a moderator - who also fits this label - to continue the dialogue carried out at previous Chalmers Conferences: what draws young people into the cultural sector, what are their principal interests and concerns, and what makes them stay in the sector.



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From left to right: Carole Myre, Joanne Rycaj Guillemette, James Missen, Shannon Litzenberger and Kristian Clarke

The panel was comprised of:

Kristian Clarke, co-Executive Director of Canadian Arts Representation - Ontario (CARO).

Following a degree in art history, a Master's from Britain in country estates, and a stint as an intern with the Canadian High Commission in London, Kristian took a hands-on post-graduate programme at Humber College at the end of which he landed a job at CARO. He worked his way up from intern to Membership Coordinator; he now shares his current position as Executive Director.

Shannon Litzenberger is the management intern at the Canadian Dance Assembly. Shannon came to the position "by accident", first as a dance artist and later an administrator, founding her own dance collective. She is just completing her Master's degree in dance at York University.

Joanne Rycaj Guillemette took a degree in visual arts, specializing in photography, before moving to the Ontario College of Art and Design. An internship at Harbourfront awoke an interest in administration prompting a further course in arts administration, which included two more internships. She is currently Assistant to the Executive Director, and Membership Coordinator, at the Ottawa Art Gallery.

After a degree in psychology and theatre, **Carole Myre** embarked on a career as an optician. Realising it wasn't what she wanted, she made an about-face and trained professionally with *Théâtre la Catapulte*. She has been Theatre Advisor for the *Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario* for the past 8 years, and is involved in community arts as the director of the megashow *L'Écho d'un peuple* - combined cast and crew: over 300 people; audience last summer: 30,000.

James Missen entered the CCA on a two year cultural policy internship, having taken an undergraduate degree and Master's in film studies, and following an administrative stint at the Canada Council for the Arts. He also teaches film studies as a part-time lecturer at Carleton University. He is currently the Interim Policy Advisor at the CCA.

One key characteristic each of these young people demonstrated was a passion for their work, a passion for culture!



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Mentorships, job sharing, and other quirks of the sector

- When the previous Executive Director of CARO left and there was no one to fill her shoes, Kristian and a colleague decided to co-manage the organization. He had received considerable mentoring over the previous few years. The board was hesitant to begin with, but it has proved a very successful partnership. *"It could not have worked if there had been two personalities who were super strong and not very diplomatic."*
- The newly formed Canadian Dance Assembly was experiencing difficulty finding a seasoned manager to lead the organization, so it went looking for a management intern. Supported by two mentors chosen specifically for their areas of expertise, Shannon is being trained for the position of Executive Director over a two year period. *"This is a truly dynamic model which is working really well... there are also huge benefits for the mentor and for the organization."*
- Joanne's interest in her job extends well beyond the usual 9-5. She is frequently to be found working as a volunteer in the gallery in the evenings, learning other aspects of running the gallery.
- Carole has been seconded from the school board until June, and is able to draw on the experience and expertise of many individuals in the community to complement her own theatrical skills. She has learned to delegate more responsibilities, and is currently writing out her job description and training people to replace her next year.

Each of these individuals has had to balance careers as professional artists with current "jobs"; they have learned to multi-task, to acquire numerous skills, and to remain flexible.

"There is still no one way into the profession and no clear path for career progression. As a result of all these factors, the job of the cultural manager and the knowledge and expertise required remain something of a mystery for many people.

In addition, managers are often their own worst enemies - acceding to unreasonable working conditions and pay and thereby appearing to accept the under-valuing of their profession. There is a growing awareness within the field that managers have to take responsibility for changing attitudes, beginning with their own."

Creative Management in the Arts and Heritage: Sustaining and Renewing Professional Management for the 21st Century: A Proposed Action Plan for Creating Winning Conditions - Jocelyn Harvey, May 21-22, 2003.