

LIBERAL BIENNIAL CONVENTION 2012 POLICY SESSION REPORT

Name of session: A Vision for Canadian Engagement Abroad

List of all participants (including moderator, panellists, Caucus reps, NPEP representative and rapporteur):

Marlene Jennings –former MP

Dominic Leblanc – Foreign Affairs Critic

Mark Eyking – Critic for International Technical Assistance

Peter Harder – Former DM of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Valerie Percival – Professor Norman Patterson School of International Affairs

Mary Pynenburg – Liberal Policy Committee

John McCallum, MP

Intervention from the floor: Anita Vandenberg – former candidate and election monitor in Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Approximate number of delegates/observers in attendance:

300 plus

Key points raised by panellists:

Peter Harder

Using the example of the change in World demography he stressed the extent and speed of change in the world to which Canada must adapt. Western nations are no longer dominate the list of the world's largest countries. It is also true that in many Western countries the size of the work force is shrinking, this compounds the effect of overall population changes, Global leadership is changing as a result.

The sustained rapid growth of China the extent of which Harder demonstrated with charts is unprecedented. Harder also demonstrated how important China trade has become to Canada using the

example of B.C. He noted that even among the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) China's growth is much greater and he also noted that it is much easier to do business in China than in the other BRIC countries, although corruption is still a big issue there too.

Harder pointed to a book by Wendy Dobson entitled "Canada, China, and Rising Asia: a Strategic Proposal" as providing some useful policy ideas.

Val Percival

Canada actively engaging in the global arena is crucially important, not only contributing to a more peaceful and prosperous world, but to a stronger and safer Canada.

This engagement takes many forms. But many Canadian foreign policy aficionados are deeply frustrated - despite the importance of international engagement, many Canadians don't seem to appreciate or value it. Perhaps that's because the work of our foreign policy community is like traffic lights. We don't realize how much we rely on them until they stop working. Keeping those lights fully operational is becoming more and more challenging. Engaging effectively in the world has never been more complex; foreign policy is increasingly unpredictable. Foreign policy decision making must be faster and more reactionary, but institutional mechanisms and international norms must be in place to facilitate a rapid and effective response.

Foreign policy decision makers must understand, respect and navigate the influence of an increasing number of actors. The influence of states such as Brazil, China, and India is growing. Their approach to foreign policy is rooted in differing traditions and cultures.

We should embrace social media to spread democracy, use the private sector to spur economic development within the world's poorest regions, engage Canadians living and working overseas as emissaries. But do these new and innovative approaches to foreign policy actually work?

Using the field of Health and Foreign Policy she concluded that there is no 'magic bullet' or visionary new idea that will by itself will dramatically change or improve foreign policy.

New tools must be embraced, but don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Responding effectively to this complex environment requires

- Key and clear principles and objectives;
- A professional and experienced cadre of diplomats to pursue those objectives;
- Active engagement across government departments;
- Active engagement with civil society, knowledge networks etc.

Anita Vandenberg

After being recognized by the Chair as a recent Liberal candidate who had been working abroad (in DRC) Anita Vandenberg came to the stage and argued that Canada is rapidly losing its credibility on the International Stage. We need to invest in international engagement and be more cooperative in our approach to it.

Key points raised by Caucus reps:

Leblanc

It is important that the government treat Foreign Affairs as an essential activity. However in a rapidly changing world we need to do things differently, we cannot simply return to old policies. We need new policies and new approaches. We need to re-examine our representation abroad and look at our relations with new actors. We need to return to multilateralism.

Policy needs to be coordinated among the many domestic actors. DFAIT needs to play a coordinating role. That role is not now being done effectively.

We face a major challenge in convincing the public that Foreign Affairs matters. We need to be better at conveying its importance.

While building a Foreign policy that is inclusive, a policy for all Canadians we need to ensure that we do not allow ourselves to be made captive of narrow interests.

Eyking

Using the example of his personal experience of working with CIDA in Panama, Eyking argued that by drawing on the interests and experience of Canadians we can make a valuable contribution to International affairs. Canada can play the effective role internationally that our public wants in part by drawing on the strong interest of Canadians in playing an active role themselves. We have the expertise that is needed. NGOs have done this in the past but much more can be done.

Key points raised by NPEP rep on member feedback and online resolutions:

Canada and the World

96. Canada's International Standing

Overall, members seem to be in agreement that Canada's international standing is a source of pride for Canadians and a very important issue to discuss. However, improving the situation may be easier said than done. Members are not in agreement over which government is to blame for Canada's loss in reputation: the current government, or past Liberal governments.

65. Canadian Corporate Responsibility outside Canada

There is disagreement among members over this resolution some believing that Canada needs to lead the world in corporate responsibility while others believe that this would "tie the hands" of Canadian corporations.

64. Promoting a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence

Members' comments on this resolution stemmed largely from a debate over the legitimacy of Canadian intervention in Afghanistan and Libya. Members who support this resolution said that it was the bare minimum. Members who opposed the resolution suggested that Canada needs to start with its own domestic issues and that it cannot interfere in every situation worldwide.

119. Policy on the Protection of Citizen's Rights Abroad

All four members who commented on this resolution were in support.

123. Development of International Education

There was no consensus among the very few members who commented on this resolution.

122. Creation of an International Convention on Small Arms and Ammunition

There were no comments on this resolution.

In her presentation the policy Committee representative also raise resolution 114 **Canadian Identity in the 21st Century** which does not properly belong here and was not commented on in this session

Highlights of Q and A session:

There were several questions on Israel and Iran, with a high degree of concern both about enhancing Israel's security and about Canada being dragged into positions and even conflicts by a policy that is too one-sided. The responses from caucus reps re-affirmed Canada's unflinching support for Israel, but made it clear that this support includes a willingness to speak openly when we disagree on specifics. Past Liberal support for a two-state solution was highlighted.

Panellists and caucus reps shared the audience's concern with Iran and stressed the need to work with allies to rein in their nuclear ambitions.

There was concern about the possible overuse of the responsibility to protect doctrine in response to which panellists and caucus reps while noting Canada's role in developing the doctrine also drew attention to both the specific constraints on the use of the doctrine and the central role of the UN in mandating such action.

There was as clear interest in Canada playing a positive role abroad, and concern was expressed with the decline of our role Africa. A proposal was made for a civilian Rapid Reaction Force but panellists felt that a standing force was impractical.

There were a couple of questions that expressed concern with Canada`s over dependence on resource trade and on a single market.

Finally the role of diasporas in shaping policy. In response both panellists urged great caution as Canada could easily find itself unwittingly becoming embroiled in foreign domestic conflicts. They noted we could easily tip over the line from promoting Canada`s interests to promoting someone else,s at pur expense.

Notable proposals, ideas, suggestions (research to be undertaken, outreach or seminars, roudtables or conferences to be organized, or ideas for caucus interventions in Paliament):

- No concrete proposals to follow up on.

Positive/negative feedback from audience and general mood in the session:

The session was generally very positive with a strong consensus that Canada was losing its authority on the International Stage.

Additional notes:

Conclusion (consensual objectives for the next 24-months, key elements of a work plan to guide us to the 2014 Policy Biennial):

The challenge of bringing the public to understand the stakes involved in Foreign Affairs and to take an interest in it was a recurring theme.