

Centre on the Future of Government

Summary of Public Service Roundtables

- September 2019
- January 2020
- September 2020
- October 2020

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OVERVIEW

The Centre on the Future of Government (CFG) has been established under the University of Ottawa Professional Development Institute. CFG leverages capacities for collaboration and flexibility and the deep knowledge of program development and leadership that exists in the Professional Development Institute. Serge Blais, Executive Director of the Professional Development Institute, is confident that the new programming will strengthen the long collaboration of the Institute with the Public Service of Canada.

The CFG, in addition to several open-enrollment events, organizes an annual Public Service Roundtables Series focused on convening experts from the public and private sectors and leading academics in subject areas of interest to the senior levels of government – Deputy Ministers and Assistant Deputy Ministers. The programming fosters thoughtful discussion on emerging trends with a focus on advancing forward leaning public policy issues.

To date, two Public Service Roundtables have been offered – **September 2019** and **January 2020**. The summaries of the Roundtables below reflect discussions while respecting non-attribution to allow for open discussion. The two roundtables were well received. Participants found the speakers engaging and provocative and were keen to engage in debate and discussion as a group. It is intended that the Roundtables will be offered several times a year.

KPMG (Canada) and the Institute on Governance (IOG) contribute to making this programming possible.

SEPTEMBER 2019

Deputy Ministers Roundtable on Energy Transition

Speakers:

- **Peter Tertzakian**, Executive Director, ARC Energy
- **Scott Vaughan**, International Chief Advisor to the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED) and a Senior Fellow at the International Institute for Sustainable Development
- **Monica Gattinger**, Director of the University of Ottawa's Institute for Science, Society and Policy (ISSP), and Chair of Positive Energy

Objective for the Roundtable: To explore how best Canada can transition to a less carbon-intensive future. There were 18 people in attendance, including Deputy Ministers.

There is tension between achieving CO2 reductions to meet domestic and international climate goals, while recognizing the economic importance of the domestic oil and gas industry. While overall the oil and gas industry is operating efficiently and the carbon tax is not a significant factor, the market is squeezed and destabilized by the risk premium being assessed by the financial sector and markets. Expiring oil and gas production is not being replaced through investment in new fields, although international modelling shows

that renewable energy sources are not growing fast enough to replace and expand supply to meet domestic or international demand. Very few consumers or governments are talking about significant reductions in total demand.

There is a challenge of focusing consumers and citizens on carbon reduction versus oil and gas production. If Canadian oil and gas is emitting less carbon than other energy sources in use globally, then Canadians should export and displace higher carbon energy sources. Dialogue across polarized groups in Canada is critical. Many Canadians prioritize limiting climate change by reducing the domestic carbon footprint. Solid evidence needs to be provided to Canadians on the relative emission levels of oil and gas production in Canada and internationally.

Discussions reflected on how Canadian oil and gas volume has tripled, while emissions have fallen in intensity. This should be a good news story, but rather, the lack of trust in all levels of government on this issue was highlighted. It is possible that a neutral third party is needed to bring the two sides of the spectrum together. There is a communication challenge of delivering facts and science to Canadians on this issue. In the public domain, the two sides of the debate are distrustful of data or evidence from the other perspective. There was a sense that the federal and provincial governments needed to improve the messaging and coordination on this issue.

JANUARY 2020

Assistant Deputy Ministers Roundtable on Exploring Conditions for Success to Advancing Reconciliation

Speakers:

- **Claudette Commanda**, of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, and Elder in Residence at the University of Ottawa
- **Jaime Morse**, a Michif with Nehiyaw and German ancestry, originally from Lac La Biche in Alberta
- **Melissa Irwin**, Inuk and instructor at Nunavut Sivuniksavut,
- **George Lafond**, member of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation (Treaty 6) in Saskatchewan shared his personal experience, including as policy advisor to Federal ministers, Treaty Commissioner and elected Tribal Chief
- **Pitseolak Pfeifer**, born and raised in Iqaluit with over 25 years of experience in Inuit advocacy
- **Darren O'Toole**, a descendant of the Bois-Brulé (Wiisakodewniwag) of the White Horse Plains in Manitoba, teaches Aboriginal law at the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law
- **Jennifer David**, a member of the Chapleau Cree First Nation

Objective for the Roundtable: To better understand the context and environment for Indigenous groups in Canada; to better understand objectives and aspirations of Indigenous groups; to develop awareness and tools to allow for better federal policy and programming.

Acknowledgement and opening prayer by Claudette Commanda.

The day was divided into Past, Present and Future:

Past: Jennifer David, Jaime Morse and Melissa Irwin
Covering: First Nations; Metis; Inuit history

Present: George Lafond and Pitseolak Pfeifer
Covering: land claims and treaty experience, north and south of 60

Darren O'Toole
Covering: Impact of UNDRIP in domestic legislation

Future: Jennifer David moderated, all presenters active

A group of 20 senior government leaders, including Assistant Deputy Ministers, Indigenous leaders and private sector representatives met for this spirited Roundtable discussion. Participants were keen to explore the issues raised over the morning and use the group setting to open discussions on sensitive and deeper questions.

These discussions included:

- the need for improved data and analytics to allow for better decision-making, more efficient funding and reporting, and better long-term investments;
- the importance of social media in allowing Indigenous youth to communicate, especially in sharing and expressing music and arts culture;
- the challenge for leaders of small Indigenous communities in understanding the policies and practices of three levels of government;
- a call for better coordination of program requirements and guidelines that would allow for more focus and efficient resource use;
- the potential value of a “wellness indicators” in Indigenous communities that could help in assessing the success of various programs;
- and the importance of supporting Indigenous people and Indigenous perspectives in the federal workforce.

There was considerable interest in continuing this dialogue in future Roundtable discussions and within the federal workplace.

SEPTEMBER 2020

Deputy Ministers Roundtable on Disruption 2020: Post-COVID 19

Speakers:

- **Janice Charette**, High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- **Janice Stein**, Founder of the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy at the University of Toronto
- **Edward Carr**, Deputy Editor of The Economist
- **Jennifer Shulman**, Economic Services and Life Sciences, KPMG

Objective for the Roundtable: The focus of the Roundtable was to consider the medium-term impacts of COVID 19 and what changes might be expected over a 5 year+ horizon. 14 people participated, including Deputy Ministers from 5 departments.

Janice Charette moderated the session and opened with a series of questions to Janice Stein and Edward Carr on how the COVID crisis was situated in the global environment and how it amplified or muted ongoing global shifts. Janice Stein spoke of COVID accelerating the trending retreat from globalization; deepening the conflict between the USA and China; expanding fractures in the digital global structure are highlighted by the failure of the existing governance structures; widening inequality highlighted by the ability of the wealthy/professionals to shift to work from home; continuing shifts in energy impacts; and the resurgence of big government in the form of spending due to COVID. Edward Carr followed up with his views on how impacts of the 2008 financial crisis continue to play out with moderated global demand; low interest rates; and significant government fiscal response. Edward Carr noted the great leap forward in digitization and workplace flexibility due to COVID and the longer-term priority of ensuring that resources, such as broadband and computer equipment, and mental health supports are there for workers now working remotely.

Jennifer Shulman opened a discussion on a possible vaccine discovery and rollout timeline and the potential for this to further entrench inequalities. She noted the importance of the government's COVID response in building trust in government communications and decision making, versus skepticism on how resources are used and allocated. Further, she reflected that the ability to learn and work digitally will create disparities in wealth and economic opportunities unless there is concerted efforts to provide necessary tools and access for all.

Discussions reflected how monetary policy was losing importance and power as an economic lever, while fiscal policy was taking over, with the potential of more highly indebted countries and increasing economic fragility. Finally, government should simplify the collection and use of data to support decision making and allow ID management of citizens.

OCTOBER 2020

Deputy Ministers Roundtable on Inclusion, Equity, and Belonging: Supporting Careers and the Path to Leadership for Black Government of Canada Public Service Professionals

Speakers:

- **Errol Mendes**, Professor of Law, University of Ottawa (Moderator)
- **Larry Rousseau**, Vice-President, Canadian Labour Congress
- **Richard Sharpe**, Lead of the Federal Black Employee Caucus
- **Maria McKay**, Senior Manager, Advisory at KPMG Canada

Objective for the Roundtable: The purpose of the Roundtable was to examine how systemic racism and discrimination continues to limit access for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour to advancement in the federal government. The event coincided with the recent publication, by the Clerk of the Privy Council, of the Diversity and Inclusion Commitments 2020-21.

A total of 42 people participated, including Deputy Ministers, ADMs, and Directors.

The moderator challenged the panelists and participants to focus on a fact-based discussion and on concrete measures that senior leaders can take to counter systemic racism in the higher levels of government. A participant noted that general statistics on quotas don't give a clear picture of the situation in various occupational groups and that levels of representation vary widely amongst departments. A discussion ensued on the dangers of tokenism and reverse discrimination. Participants noted that the merit and best fit need not be in opposition to inclusion and hiring and retention targets. Targets allow for a focus on progress and a concentration of effort.

One of the presenters felt that recent positive change has occurred as a result of pressure from the workforce and called for the direct involvement of senior leadership. Managers, it was argued, must be empowered and encouraged to take bold actions. Although Human Resource Services must be part of the process, HR practices can be procedural and rigid, and leadership from mid and senior levels is needed to drive change. It was suggested that diversity should be institutionalized but that accountability cannot be diffuse.

A program launched several years ago consisted of senior leaders being mentored (as opposed to their typical role as mentors) on issues of inclusion and participation.

A concluding comment reflected on how the panelists have been "positively provocative" and applauded the group for engaging fully in a frank and open discussion. It was important to "face the uncomfortable" and prepare for potential backlash when government leaders move to correct the underrepresentation of black employees and other underrepresented groups. This would be similar to the backlash following actions to enhance gender balance. The backlash should be seen as the reaction of the overrepresented group coming to terms with the impacts of equity.

A special thanks to our supporters



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