

HILL CLIMBERS: POLITICAL STAFFERS

PMO Press Office has whopping 27 staff

'That's a lot of staff to not get back to you,' says Don Martin.



BY JEFF DAVIS

The Prime Minister's Office has 27 staffers, but Hill reporters, accustomed to the mere trickle of information coming from the PMO these days, were surprised to learn there were so many.

The big wheels at the office are well-known on Parliament Hill: Director of Communications **John Williamson**, Press Secretary **Dimitri Soudas** and deputy press secretaries **Andrew MacDougall**, **Karine Leroux** and **Mike White**.

Beneath these well-known names, however, toils a sizeable pool of mid- and junior-level communications staffers. In fact, according to the Government Electronic Directory Service, the PMO press office has a total of 27 full-time staff. Among them are media officers, a regional communications adviser, a GTA media officer, communications strategists, special assistants, and executive assistants.

It could be that many of these staffers may be recent additions, added to manage the PMO's growing volume of photo and video releases, but Mr. MacDougall would not say last week whether the PMO Press Office has expanded recently, nor would he provide any real insight into what these 27 staffers do. Mr. MacDougall said just that not all worked on media requests.

In an interview two weeks ago, Associate Press Secretary **Sara MacIntyre** would also not say whether the PMO Press Office had expanded of late, saying simply it has "adequate staff." She said it has an "important role to play here in getting messages out and communicating directly to Canadians what are our priorities for the government and the Prime Minister."

Besides fielding "countless" media calls, Ms. MacIntyre said, the office is busy pumping out video and photo releases. These are distributed, she said, across Canada and are used by regional, ethnic, and online media such as blogs.

"We have received a lot of positive feedback on video and photos releases and the availability we have provided to media and communicating to Canadians," said Ms. MacIntyre.

Some members of the Press Gallery have been less enthused about the free content, and some told *Hill Climbers* they were surprised and somewhat confused to hear the PMO Press Office had a complement of 27 staffers.

"That's a lot of staff to not get back to you," quipped *Calgary Herald* columnist **Don Martin** when informed.

Susan Delacourt, a veteran Hill reporter with *The Toronto Star*, said she was not surprised to hear about the large number of PMO staff because of recent reports that the PMO's budget is on the increase. She added that the large staff size could be due to the government's highly centralized message control, and that the PMO Press Office appears to do the communications work of the entire Cabinet.

Ms. Delacourt said that most all two-way communication with PMO ended when Harper came to power four years ago, and that she views PMO's actions as closer to marketing or public relations than communications. She described the PMO press office as a "sales force."

"They're not interested in the conversations with journalists," she said. "They're interested in public relations and selling

you stuff."

Mr. Martin said the PMO is easier to work with these days.

"I think it's fair to say I get a lot more feedback now than I ever did during the previous two reigns," of former PMO communications directors **Sandra Buckler** and **Kory Teneycke**, Mr. Martin said.

"There is reasonable feedback in a reasonably prompt way. Now, am I getting a lot of info?... Umm, no," Mr. Martin said. "But at least they can give you a comment now, whereas before 'no comment' almost seemed to be their MO."

"Generally it's friendlier, if not more informative, relations with the PMO now."

Mr. Martin said media use PMO give-outs only as a last resort, and said he feared that access may further dwindle as the PMO steps up its image release service.

"The concern is whether photographers in the PMO have access to events that the regular media don't," he said. "That's something I hope we ensure doesn't happen because then we would be forced to use it, which may be part of the grand scheme of things."

"That is something I would hope the Press Gallery vigorously defends against."

Mr. Fix-it Cossette shifted to Rights and Democracy

Last week, *The Hill Times* reported that **Gérald Cossette**, an associate deputy minister at the Department of Foreign Affairs, had been tapped by foreign minister **Lawrence Cannon** to head up the government's Haiti Crisis Team.

It turns out his time at the helm of the Haiti response may be short-lived indeed, as Mr. Cossette was reassigned last week. As *Le Devoir* reported, the foreign minister has dispatched Mr. Cossette to report on the uncertainty at the government-funded Montreal-based Rights and Democracy.

Canada's official democracy and human rights promotion agency has been in turmoil recently, particularly since the sudden death by heart attack of its president **Rémy Beaugregard** on Jan. 7. Mr. Beaugregard's death came following a tense board meeting, in which some recent appointees to the board reportedly pushed the agenda of Rights and Democracy to the right, particularly on Middle East issues.

Ed Broadbent, **Warren Allmand**, **Jean-Louis Roy** and **Jean-Paul Hubert**, all former heads of the agency, wrote a letter to *Le Devoir* last week asking the government to take quick action to preserve the reputation of the Rights and Democracy.

And the 47 members of the Rights and Democracy staff signed an open letter calling for the resignation of board chairman **Aurel Braun** and members **Jacques Gauthier** and **Elliot Tepper**, and alleging that Mr. Beaugregard was harassed by board members.

Mr. Braun, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, told *The National Post* last week that it is "ludicrous" that board members contributed to Mr. Beaugregard's death.

Should Mr. Cossette be able to settle this very poisonous and very public dispute, expect him to become a full deputy minister before too long.

Ashfield names second chief of staff

Sticking with Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency file has proven to be a good choice for **Kevin MacAdam**, who was promoted last week.

During the recent Cabinet shuffle, the ACOA file was passed from Defence Minister **Peter MacKay** to National Revenue Minister **Keith Ashfield**. Mr. MacAdam, who was a senior policy adviser at the ACOA office, has become Mr. Ashfield's

chief of staff for ACOA.

This is a bit of an unusual move, as Mr. Ashfield now has two chiefs of staff: the other being **Fred Nott**, who will focus on the revenue file.

jdavis@hilltimes.com

The PMO Communications Team

- **John Williamson**
Director, Communications
- **Zoe Lawson**
Executive Assistant to the Director
- **Dimitri Soudas**
Associate Director, Communications/Press Secretary
- **Kevin Menard**
Executive Assistant to the Associate Director
- **Marc-André Plouffe**
Senior Advisor (Quebec)
- **Katherine Valcov-Kwiatkowski**
Executive Assistant to the Senior Advisor, Quebec
- **Dan Robertson**
Deputy Director, Government Communications
- **Sara MacIntyre**
Associate Press Secretary
- **Jeff Graham**
Manager, Government Communication
- **Karine Leroux**
Deputy Press Secretary
- **Andrew MacDougall**
Deputy Press Secretary
- **Mike White**
Deputy Press Secretary, Media Affairs
- **David Curtin**
Communication Strategist
- **Christena Stewart**
Communications Strategist
- **Michael Winterburn**
Communications Strategist

- **Sadia Qureshi**
Media Officer
- **Carl Vallée**
Media Officer
- **John Papadimas**
Regional Communication Adviser, Greater Montreal Area
- **Julie Carmichael**
Regional Communications Adviser (Greater Toronto Area)
- **Alan Sakach**
Regional Communications Adviser (Greater Toronto Area)
- **Kalev Suurkask**
Regional Communication Adviser (Greater Vancouver Area)
- **Laura Rogers**
Communications Assistant
- **Kirsten Ross**
Communication Assistant
- **Stephen Lecce**
Special Assistant
- **David Couturier**
Special Assistant
- **Karine Hopper**
Special Assistant
- **Genevieve Sicard**
Communication Assistant

—Source: PMO, Government Electronic Directory Services

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