

## **Alberta's office in Canadian embassy 'has opened can of worms'**

Trouble could arise if province at odds with federal government in White House talks

Lee-Anne Goodman

Washington — The Canadian Press Published on Friday, Sep. 03, 2010 7:17PM EDT Last updated on Saturday, Sep. 04, 2010 11:15PM EDT

Think-tank seminars on Canada-U.S. relations are usually as polite and uneventful as the relationship itself, but there were rare flashes of temper this week at the Hudson Institute when pointed questions surfaced about the wisdom of Alberta's presence at the Canadian Embassy.

Alberta is the only province with an office at the embassy, although Ontario is rumoured to be setting up shop this fall. Other provinces, including Quebec and Manitoba, have trade officials in D.C., though they don't work out of the embassy, where Alberta pays a hefty price for office space in the architectural jewel on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Glen Anderson, a Canada-U.S. relations expert at the University of Alberta, told the event that trouble could arise when provinces at odds with the federal government are also talking to White House officials.

"What if Ontario and Alberta have very different approaches and interests?" he asked. Alberta's presence on the scene, he added, "has opened a can of worms."

Those comments marked the end of hitherto peaceful discussions on a wide range of border, trade and security issues at the event entitled "Borders and Bridges: Recent Shifts in North American Relations."

One journalist who asked Mr. Anderson a follow-up question was accused of Toronto-centric bias by an Albertan colleague in the audience, serving up a helping of age-old Canadian regional tensions alongside the sandwiches and cookies to some of the baffled American academics at the lunchtime event.

"I am not sure that parochial Canadian, federal fights should be played out in Washington," Mr. Anderson told Kelly Jane Torrance, an Albertan who works in Washington.

"This Western alienation is palpable and to the extent that it plays out here, I think that's a little dangerous, and from an American point of view, confusing. It's 'Who are we supposed to be listening to?'"

Birgit Matthiesen, the Washington-based special adviser to the president of Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, said Mr. Anderson raised an interesting point.

If, as expected, climate-change legislation in the U.S. doesn't get through Congress, all signs point to the White House flexing regulatory muscles that will force businesses to reduce their carbon footprints.

"So you'll have two provinces, one resource-heavy, fossil-fuel heavy, and the other Canada's biggest manufacturing province and as sensitive to regulations and rule-making as businesses in the United States are," she said Friday.

"It may not be conflicting messages, but it will require the embassy and the ambassador and Ottawa to have a much more fulsome view of regulatory collaboration with the U.S. I am not pessimistic; that's not necessarily a bad thing."

The former Liberal government under Paul Martin opened up the embassy to the provinces to enable them to help advance regional issues in Washington. Alberta set up shop in the Capitol Hill locale in October 2004, apparently the only province that could afford to be there.

The idea had previously met with staunch opposition from some Canadian officials in a town where it's notoriously difficult to get Canadian issues on the radar. In the 1980s, ambassador Allan Gotlieb was dead-set against the notion.

Colin Robertson, who was the embassy pointman in D.C. under Mr. Martin, defended the practice on Friday.

"My view is that we need 1,000 points of contact with the U.S. system and the provinces are key players, especially the growing relationships between governors and premiers," said Mr. Robertson, now an adviser to the U.S.-based law firm McKenna, Long and Aldridge.

"It's not a question of speaking with one voice but rather a consistent message carried by many voices. Think hockey – you play with several lines to put the puck in the net."

If things get messy, he added, it's the ambassador's job to co-ordinate the message.

Paul Frazer, a former Canadian diplomat who advises Canadian clients in Washington, said it makes perfect sense to have the provinces in the U.S. capital pushing their messages.

"There were some strong views in the past – there was opposition to having the provinces have formal representation here given the nature of government here, working with Congress, and fears it could serve to confuse or mix messages," he said Friday.

"But at the end of the day, it was agreed that this was not going to be a problem and that the provinces have legitimate areas of jurisdiction, especially on natural resources, and they have some things to say."

He added: "People in government here are always open to views, but at the end of the day, they listen to the government of Canada."

Kevin O'Shea, head of political affairs at the Canadian embassy, told the seminar that it would be unthinkable to end provincial representation for fears the provinces and the federal government might have conflicting messages in their dealings with White House officials. More provinces may even be heading to the embassy, he added.

“There has been no consideration whatsoever to not having provincial representation in the embassy. Our experience is that it's working, and working well, it's a good idea – so good that we've actually drafted the former premier of Manitoba as the ambassador,” he said, referring to Ambassador Gary Doer.

“We're all for it.”

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/prairies/albertas-office-in-canadian-embassy-has-opened-can-of-worms/article1696005/>