



Connection

Ombudsman Ontario hosts gathering

“Ombudsman Ontario hosted a meeting of Canadian provincial and territorial Ombudsman as well as the Official Language Commissioners of Canada, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories on April 5 and 6.

This meeting was an opportunity to share points of view on issues of common interest. The new Commissioner of Languages in the Northwest Territories, Ms Fbbie Tatti, also attended. Quebec's new Protecteur du Citoyen, Ms Pauline Champoux-Lesage was not able to attend our meeting but was represented by her Deputy, Ms Lucie Lavoie and by Mr. André Sasseville.

Federal Ombudsman discussion

The issue of the appointment of a Federal Ombudsman continues to percolate with former British Columbia Ombudsman Stephen Owen who is now a Liberal Member of Parliament. He states that he intends to introduce a private Member's Bill proposing the establishment of a Federal Ombudsman, and I am informed by the Constituency Assistant to Jim Abbott, the Alliance Member of Parliament for Cranbrook, B.C., that he also intends to introduce a private Member's Bill to the same effect.

Doug Ruck, formerly Ombudsman for Nova Scotia was not reappointed and on the last day of his term, the government of that province announced that it was appointing the current chair



Canadian Ombudsman, from the top back row (l-r): Scott Sutton (Alberta), Lucie Lavoie (Quebec) and Barbara Tompkins (Saskatchewan); Barry Tuckett (Manitoba), Howard Kushner (British Columbia), Hank Moorlag (Yukon); Dyane Adam (Official Languages Commissioner) and Eva Arreak (Commissioner of Languages, Nunavut); André Sasseville (Quebec), Claire Pitre (New Brunswick) and Fbbie Tatti (Commissioner of Languages, Northwest Territories); Clare Lewis (Ontario) and Ellen King (New Brunswick).

of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission to be acting Ombudsman pending a review of Nova Scotia Agencies including the Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman. The issue which arises is whether the office of the Ombudsman will survive in that province or whether it will be merged with the Human Rights Commission over

which it has had jurisdiction. The Canadian Ombudsman Association wrote to the Premier of the province with copies to members of the Legislature expressing its concern with the review and with the potential merger with the Human Rights Commission. It is interesting to note

continued on page 2



Assistant Deputy Minister of Correctional Services, John Rabeau accepting an Ombudsman Ontario Recognition Award on behalf of recipient Christine Gregoire .

that the government of Newfoundland which had some years ago eliminated the office of the Ombudsman is now proposing to create that office once again. I understand a Bill to that effect is to be introduced in the Legislature.

Over the past few months this office has hosted two important events. In December, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the creation of the office of the Ontario Ombudsman, and we were privileged to be addressed by the Honourable R. Roy McMurtry, Chief Justice of Ontario, who in his former capacity as Attorney General for the province was the Minister responsible for introducing the Bill establishing this office. We were also addressed by

members of the Legislature and were honoured to receive a very large number of guests.

In February, we hosted the Ombudsman Ontario Awards ceremony at which awards were presented by me to 11 public servants who had demonstrated outstanding public service in complaints resolution. I am very pleased to have been able to participate in this process. Receiving nominations from members of staff and considering them with a staff committee in arriving at a decision as to whom these awards should be given was a most interesting experience. I was struck by how pleased the recipients and their families were that they had been chosen.

As we have just completed our financial year and are actively preparing for the delivery of our Annual Report, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of staff for their contributions over the past year in ensuring that this office fulfils its responsibility in a manner of which we can be proud."

Clare Lewis, Q.C., Ombudsman



Seven recipients of the annual Ombudsman Ontario Recognition Awards, in the back row, left to right: Al Farrer, Janice Bingham and Brian Vermeersch - Ministry of Natural Resources, and André Guitard - Ministry of Health and Long Term Care (Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office). In the front row, left to right: Dr. Paul Humphries - Ministry of Correctional Services, Joanne Leatch - Ministry of Community and Social Services (Social Benefits Tribunal), Ombudsman Clare Lewis and David Hatt - Ministry of Correctional Services. Christine Gregoire (Ministry of Correctional Services) and Tom Nash and John Munroe (Ministry of Natural Resources) were absent.

Photo by Perry Blocher

OWEN'S EXCELLENT IDEA: The man who tailored the role of ombudsman in British Columbia is now an MP. He should perform a similar service for the whole country

Reprinted from *The Vancouver Sun*,
March 8, 2001
By John Dixon

Vancouver Liberal MP Stephen Owen was recently reported in these pages as suggesting the formation of an office of federal ombudsman. The immediate occasion was the continuing furor over the PM's weird notion of what can pass as normal patronage. But the ombudsman idea has virtues that go far beyond the obvious need for genuinely independent oversight of the executive branch.

A vigorous and judicious ombudsman would enormously enhance the accessibility of the federal government, helping restore badly needed confidence in both its effectiveness and fairness. Ottawa has always been physically and culturally remote from many Canadians - particularly those of us in the West - but in the last generation it has turned into a monstrous conglomeration of large, complex, recondite bureaucracies.

Engaging this beast, either to complain, or simply to do business with

it, has grown more and more difficult. Who ya gonna call? is the first problem, and many Canadians never get beyond it.

In a simpler age, the answer was to phone your member of Parliament. That worthy expert would know everyone, and could intervene or at least get you started.

But the sheer scale and complexity of government activities, and the vast range of its regulative reach, have gradually outstripped the resources of

even the most experienced parliamentarians. Besides, the tightening of party discipline over the last generation has made government members, who used to have an advantage, into much more timid advocates for their constituents.

They don't want to be seen as rocking the boat, or criticizing, even by implication, the performance of any minister's department. And opposition MPs remain, as they always have, very much on the outside.

Thus the rise and rise of the lobbying industry, which assaults arrivals at Ottawa airport with large advertisements of their skill at getting access and results.

This is a real disgrace. Citizens should not have to hire flacks and re-treaded insiders to have effective dealings with their own government. Of course, the vast majority simply cannot afford lobbyists, and so the net effect is that there is a widening and deepening sense of alienation from government.

A federal ombudsman could make a positive difference. By institutionalizing the expertise needed to deal with the feds, and making it freely available to all Canadians, a good ombudsman would do much to put us back in touch with our nominal servants in government.

There are two objections to the idea of such an office that deserve comment. The first is that its success might actually work to speed the growing irrelevance of members of Parliament. But that depends upon how an office of ombudsman sets up its relationship with MPs. The Owen model-which he has been working on for over a decade-involves framing the office so that MPs could use it as one of their tools in helping their constituents. This would be a boon to both government and

opposition MPs.

The other objection is that the ombudsman idea is really a sort of "set a bureaucrat to catch a bureaucrat" scheme, and we don't need another expensive layer of bureaucracy. The Owen model takes account of this concern by proposing to use the already existing ombudslite functions within government as deputized elements of an umbrella office of the ombudsman.

This would lower the threat level for the players already on the field, and reduce duplication of effort.

"A federal ombudsman could make a positive difference."

Obviously, an ombudsman receives and investigates complaints about maladministration and unfairness, and, just as obviously, few governments are inclined to see any of this as good news. The complaint desk model is, however, too limited a vision of the ombudsman role.

Far from being a force that chips away at the credibility of government, a well-functioning ombudsman can act as a powerful interlocutor, not just explaining the needs of citizens to government, but making government more comprehensible to its citizenry.

When he was ombudsman in British Columbia, Owen brilliantly realized these benefits in what we now recognize as a kind of golden age for the possibilities of the office.

Much has been learned about fitting the ombudsman role to the Canadian experience over the last couple of decades, and Owen is the master of this lore. If I were doing the thinking for the federal Liberals, I would pick the start of this mandate to put him to work on a federal plan.

John Dixon is vice-president of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association.

"A View of Justice" coming soon

A new video produced as part of the Ombudsman's public education and community outreach program will be released this spring. The video is 11 minutes long and will be available in English and French. It will replace "Agent for Justice" which was released in 1998. The updated video features interviews with Ombudsman Clare Lewis, members of the Ombudsman staff and members of the public and will be used by Ombudsman staff when they conduct intake clinics and information booths. Copies of the video will also be distributed to cable stations across Ontario, and will be available on loan to community organizations and individuals who would like to learn more about the services provided by Ombudsman Ontario.

Annual Report

The 2000 - 2001 Ombudsman Ontario Annual Report will be presented in June.

Web site under construction

The Ombudsman Ontario web site is under construction. The re-design has been undertaken to make our web site more attractive, more user-friendly and more informative to the public that we serve. While the construction is taking place visitors to our site will not notice any difference to its appearance. Complaints and comments from members of the public will continue to be received by Ombudsman Ontario staff if sent via e-mail from the web site.

mission

STATEMENT

In striving to achieve our Vision, Ombudsman Ontario is committed to the following goals for fairness and service:

- Investigate and resolve complaints efficiently
- Deliver relevant, timely, impartial and accessible services
- Foster objective standards of governmental administration
- Act as a resource to governmental organizations and the public to prevent future complaints
- Increase public awareness of Ombudsman Ontario's services
- Be ethical and accountable
- Encourage teamwork through consultation and communication
- Monitor and evaluate our organizational performance
- Realize individual potential through proactive human resource practices

Contact information

1-800-263-1830 - English

1-800-387-2620 - Français

**(416) 586-3510 - TTY, hard of hearing
and deaf**

(416) 586-3485 - Fax

Website: www.ombudsman.on.ca

For general information, comments on this newsletter, or mailing address changes please call our Communications office at **416-586-3353**.

Offices

London Office

920 Commissioners Road E.
London, Ontario N5Z 3J1

Ottawa Office

Suite 110, 261 Montreal Road
Vanier, Ontario K1L 8C7

Sault Ste. Marie

111 Great Northern Road, Unit 2
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6B 4Y9

Sudbury Office

66 Elm Street, Suite #108
Sudbury, Ontario P3C 1R8

Thunder Bay Office

Suite 206, Office Gallaria,
1000 Fort William Road
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 6B9

Toronto Office

125 Queens Park
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C7

Who We Are

Ombudsman Ontario helps people resolve problems by investigating complaints they have with provincial government ministries, agencies, boards, commissions and tribunals. The office cannot deal with matters regarding federal or municipal government, the courts, school boards and the private sector. Ombudsman Ontario is independent of the government and is a place of last resort when other approaches to resolve complaints have been tried. Services provided are confidential.

About our logo

This is the symbol for Ombudsman Ontario. The "O" stands for our name. Inside, three sets of arms are coming together: one each for the public, the government and our office.



Communications Office
Ombudsman Ontario
125 Queens Park
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C7

