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VISITS TO “DECISION-MAKERS”-  
October 2004- January 2005

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During October, November and January a number of visits to decision-makers took place. Representatives from the executives of Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs (CCUBC), and Canadian Society of Zoologists (CSZ) contributed to the discussions concerning issues of importance to the Life Sciences community. The CFBS ED participated in additional visits with the Canadian Consortium for Research (CCR).

**Issues:**

Before providing details associated with the various visits I would like to give some impressions that seem to be emerging. In distancing itself from the previous administration, this minority government has reduced its focus on the “innovation strategy” which was front and centre during the last 7 or so years. Whether this attitude will result in a reduction in support for research is currently unclear since we hear from several quarters that innovation is still on the radar of the government. The comments or events that cause us some disquiet are:

- i.) The government’s reallocation exercise and its possible impact on granting agencies.
- ii.) In some quarters the buzzword is commercialization; will this attitude compromise the support for the more basic aspects of innovation.
- iii.) Given that Canada has achieved the top position in G8 in terms of public investment in research; is doing more of a good thing a good thing?

While it is clear that there is, in government generally, an appreciation of the value of supporting research, it is still unknown how high a priority the current parliament will give this item in its upcoming budget. With a large number of new parliamentarians, very few of whom are scientists, means that when we interact with them it is important that we provide the best arguments that can be mustered in explaining how research is an investment in the future economic and social viability of this country. Given the many financial demands on the public purse, it is critical that it be understood that investment in innovation is the best guarantee in Canada’s future wealth.

***In our recent interactions with “decision-makers” a major emphasis has been to:***

- i.) Sustain the gains Canada has made in attracting highly qualified personnel (HQP) by virtue of the research support they can expect from Granting Agencies in coming to/returning to Canada. In the absence of such sustained support Canada can easily slip back since attracting creative individuals is currently a world-wide competition.
- ii.) Expand the number of higher value graduate student awards to ensure that outstanding individuals are not deterred from entering graduate programs for financial reasons.
- iii.) Help develop common purpose in the need for HQP. Create better communication with the Provinces by designating one Federal Ministry with permanent responsibility for interacting with Provincial Ministers of Education.
- iv.) Ensure that the Office of the National Science Advisor (NSA) to the Prime Minister is funded at a level that permits it to function effectively.
- v.) Provide the Federal Granting Agencies with greater flexibility for forward planning by considering a multi-year approach to government funding allocations including a 10% carry-over between years.

## **I Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs (CCUBC) Visits:**

In October representatives from the Executive of the Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs met with the following government offices:

1. **Minister of Labor's Office: Katherine Abbott**

While we expressed the opinion that the innovation strategy was a good policy direction the reply to us was that the "innovation strategy" under that name was probably dead and that "commercialization" is the current buzzword. We heard that there was deficit of highly qualified personnel in biotechnology and a concern how to replace individuals who will retire during the next decade.

We were advised to help "educate" new MPs on the benefits of research since many of these individuals know very little about science and we should make them aware that innovation affects business in Canada and innovation needs to be supported. It was also emphasized that it is important to partner with other scientific societies to present similar positions on issues. We have heard also that companies rely heavily on research done in universities; more so in Canada than in any other OCED country.

2. **Environment Canada: Philip Enros, Director, Science Policy & Ole Hendrixson, Science Advisor, Biodiversity Convention Office**

This section of the government expressed interest in partnerships with universities and was pleased with the National Disease Centre established in Winnipeg. Concerning SARA there, currently, is insufficient science to develop implementation plans. A great need is evident in the environmental technology sector. The broad priorities of Environment Canada are a) biodiversity; b) environment technology; c) fresh water; d) atmospheric science; and e) the North.

The new Minister (Stephan Dion) and Deputy Minister (Sammy Watson) are reorganizing the Department and wish to make EC a science and technology pillar and a more central agency. They challenged CCUBC to identify issues that are facing Canada. They also suggested that there was a need for an Environmental Council for Canada, already one in the U.S., to deal with HQP and complex environmental problems. We heard that the move to a "biobased" economy was raising ethical, economical and legal issues. Hard science is lacking in the mix. A suggestion was made for a science fellows program whereby we get scientists to work on Parliament Hill and/or assigned to committees.

Currently, Environment Canada is being reorganized although the plan has not yet been revealed. There needs to be information regarding how Kyoto and SARA will translate into a research plan.

3. **Human Resource Development Canada: Marelene Foulem, Senior Policy Advisor**

It is realized that there is an increasing demand in government, industry and universities for PhDs. The federal government sends a minister to meet with provincial education ministers once or twice a year. Joe Volpe, HRDC (who has now moved to Immigration) is the person currently doing this. We heard of new sources for student loans. Feds making an effort to work with the provinces. A discussion occurred on a dedicated budget for post secondary education the \$ 85 million going to a new Canadian Institute on Learning with focus on life-long learning.

4. **Human Resources and Skill Development: Neil Bouwer, Director General, Learning Policy Directorate**

A meeting in the new department of Learning Policy revealed directions that were currently being pursued. The Department has been established to consider strategic policy and exist only to provide advice to government. A group is analyzing various programs including student loans. In addition, efforts are being made to consider other strategic policies as advice to the minister. Currently, members of the department are charged with considering post secondary education reform. The Bob Rae report (for Ontario) was mentioned as the type of analysis being considered in addition to national objectives for PSE reform.

5. **House Standing Committee on Human Resources: Peter Adams, M.P. Parliamentary Secretary**

He mentioned some of the recent changes relating to universities: Faculty hires from outside Canada have been streamlined, establishment of a Canadian Academy of Sciences. Peter Adams, also, expressed hope for the impact of the Science Advisor (Arthur Carty).

A concern continues to be lack of continuity between years in federal-provincial interactions. He reported the Canada Learning Bond and the recently established RESP tax break. The need for a designated federal transfer to universities similar to Health was raised and discussed. This would indicate that the money was spent by the provincial governments on education. Without guarantees increased federal funding may be placed in provinces' general revenue.

6. **NSERC: Norman Marcotte, Director**

Discussions took place regarding "NSERC's Reallocation Exercise". It was noted that each GSC has a responsibility for evaluating the reallocation exercise. Some of the benefits of the recent exercise:

- 1.) 5 year discovery grants;
- 2.) reallocation cycle will be changed to 5 years;
- 3.) feedback was indicated; and
- 4.) more discussions will take place to ensure fairness.

Not yet certain of the format and the actual process has not yet been well-defined. There was also discussion concerning different metrics in the reallocation process to make sure the process is fair. Need to make the case for growth of the discipline, increased number of grants. Problems arise concerning the size of grants and the efforts to encourage CRC/CFI recruits back to Canada. Views were voiced concerning the balance between discovery grants and targeted grants.

7. **Association of Universities and Community Colleges (AUCC): Clare Morris, President, Robert Best, Vice President, National Affairs and Michelle Gauthier, Director of Research & Policy Analysis**

A meeting with members of AUCC was helpful in confirming many of the ideas that we were proposing and in learning of AUCC's concerns. We agreed that there is currently a different environment in Ottawa's Politics. Many of the new faces in Parliament are unfamiliar with the university profile. Some consider universities as elitist and are viewed as having received a great deal of funding over the past 7 + years. They are now looking for pay-back of the dollars invested in research. *It is important, therefore, to articulate the benefits of education and research to Canada.* We need compelling stories about how investment in research in universities (where one-third of Canadian research is performed) has created a world class environment research in Canada and demonstrate economic impact ( ie. jobs and wealth creation) of research and innovation.

We have a generation of researchers who are highly mobile and thus Canada must *maintain the perception*, built up in the recent past, *that Canada is serious about the support of innovation to retain these creative individuals.*

Of importance is increased university accountability which continues to be a big issue. Must convince taxpayers that money is being wisely spent and yielding benefits. The program of indirect costs of research needs better reporting and transparency since it will be reviewed in its third year.

## II Canadian Society of Zoologists (CSZ) Visits:

In November representatives from the Canadian Society of Zoologists met with the following individuals and organizations:

1. NSERC: Dr. Thomas Brzustowski, President
2. Department of Finance: Elisha Ram, Senior Economist
3. CFI: Robert Davidson, Director of Programs
4. Environment Canada: Dr. Keith Marshall Assistant Director, National Wildlife & Charles Francis, Chief Migratory Bird Populations
5. Dr. Arthur Carty, National Science Advisor
6. CCAC: Dr. Clement Gauthier, Executive Director

### 1. NSERC: Dr. Thomas Brzustowski, President

Discussions with Dr. Brzustowski and his colleagues related to the “Government’s Reallocation Exercise”. We came away with the belief that *the granting agencies would not be cut*. Given the large number of new applicants and the momentum that has been generated in science over the past 7 years there might be increased funding. He also indicated that there was no desire to change either the direction of growth or the funding balance that currently exists. Brzustowski also emphasized the importance of research commercialization and the need for increased wealth generation for the Canadian economy.

### 2. Department of Finance: Elisha Ram, Senior Economist

Our meeting with Finance included Maja Djukic, an economist with Economic Development and Corporate Affairs Branch, focused on the Federal Reallocation Exercise. Mr. Ram explained that the goals of the exercise were to maintain accountability to the Canadian taxpayer and attempt to ensure “value for money” by reducing expenditures on low priority items in order to fund higher priority ventures. Mr. Ram also emphasized the need for greater private sector involvement in research funding to raise the proportion of GDP that is invested in Canadian research.

### 3. CFI: Robert Davidson, Director of Programs

With CFI a major point of discussion concerned “sustainability of infrastructure” generated by CFI and the costs of infrastructure support. CFI recognized this and is trying, when possible, to provide necessary funds. A second focus was on the CRC program. CFI, we learned, was interested in a single combined application for researcher and infrastructure particularly aimed at young scientists. This action will ensure that investigators have the grant support to complement the CFI infrastructure. Concern was also expressed in the disparity that exists in “have-not” provinces which lack sufficient matching support required for the program. CFI now sees it goal as investment in the long-term.

### 4. Environment Canada: Dr. Keith Marshall Assistant Director, National Wildlife & Charles Francis, Chief Migratory Bird Populations

The CSZ meeting with Environment Canada (EC) focused on climate change, biodiversity and habitat conservation. In decision making it is important to consider both the need of the environment and the economy. New issues being considered include environmental medicine and health, which also includes a wildlife disease strategy and integrated land management. Of interest was also the interact of EC with NGO’s and universities to improve gathering of basic data to assess the status of our wildlife and environment. Canada also has a need for long-term ecological monitoring involving multidisciplinary multi-departmental approach.

### 5. Dr. Arthur Carty, National Science Advisor

In our visit with Dr. Carty he emphasized that the currentt Federal reallocation exercise was not concerned with science funding. He also described the nature of the Canadian Academies of Science and how it would function in both an advisory role for the Prime Minister and on the international stage and as a possible funding agency for projects of broad scope. Of major concern to the Federal Government is private sector research and development support. Dr. Carty encouraged commercialization of research at the universty level and industrial

innovation while also acknowledging the importance of intellectual property rights for researchers. In closing he discussed the need for and maintenance of a long-term and sustainable science strategy for Canada.

6. **CCAC: Dr Clement Gauthier, Executive Director**

Discussion took place with CCAC for an exchange of ideas and to keep abreast of any new policy developments.

### III **Canadian Consortium for Research (CCR) Visits**

Of note also are two Canadian Consortium for Research(CCR) meetings.

1. Finance Canada: Robert Dunlop, acting DG & Elisha Ram
2. Industry Canada: David Fransen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy Branch, and Dr. Marshall Moffat, Director, Knowledge Infrastructure Directorate, Innovation Policy Branch

1. **Finance Canada: Robert Dunlop, acting DG & Elisha Ram**

These involved interactions with Robert Dunlop, acting DG in Finance Canada and his colleague Elisha Ram. The gist of the discussion was as follows; “Canada has achieved top position in the G8 in terms of public investment in university research. We think that this is a good thing but why should we conclude that more of the same will also be good? Why wouldn’t it put us into diminishing returns? Give us good arguments which tell us that continuing the increase would give a good return on investment. Maybe that money would be better used satisfying some other vital need.” *For researchers this is the challenge. It is important to show, when we can, the impact and the benefits of our endeavours.*

2. **Industry Canada: David Fransen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy Branch, and Dr. Marshall Moffat, Director, Knowledge Infrastructure Directorate, Innovation Policy Branch**

Mr. Fransen opened, in response to our introduction, by saying that the innovation strategy is not dead-although the name might no longer be used. There is a commitment to R and D and to innovation. It is true, however, that there is more emphasis on commercializing university research and working cooperatively with the private sector. Mr. Fransen agreed that the substantial investment in research should not be jeopardized-but that the community should not expect dramatic levels of increase. He also pointed to the difficulty of showing tangible returns for such investments (short timeframe etc).

Fransen also spoke about international scientific cooperation. His challenge to us was, rather than simply asking for more funds, concentrate on what the Country needs and what is the appropriate level of support for the component parts of the research enterprise.

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