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Thanks for the introduction.

Nova Scotia opened its Ottawa office 19 months ago. Since then, I've been finding my way in the capital. Trying to figure out how things work. How things get done.

I suspect one could – or at least I could -- spend my whole career there and the system would remain mysterious.

But today, I want you to think about our province's historic relevance on Parliament Hill and reflect on how we can make ourselves more relevant.

Consider our position in Canada over the last 100 years.

You'd have to conclude that, generally, Nova Scotia was not relevant in Ottawa.

For short periods of time we did get their attention. Perhaps during World War Two. But, usually we're not.

That lack of relevance can and has hurt us. Change to the Atlantic Accord is the most recent and most hurtful example. By way of contrast, no government would disavow the Auto Pact.

To further set the stage for my remarks, our political history suggests that when Ontario's manufacturing economy falters, our east coast interests are further sacrificed for the "national" interest, i.e. Central Canada's interest.

Let me build on those themes.

Donald Savoie's book, *Visiting Grandchildren*, published last year, traces the evolution of federal regional economic development initiatives. He makes the point these programs have not had sustained leadership.

Well-meaning people have made honourable efforts. But consistency and conviction have been lacking.

New ministers and new governments create their own programs and their own acronyms. Then they water down the programs until they disappear.

Politically, because of our numbers, and because of the breach of the Confederation-era promise of substantive representation in the federal cabinet, we've been on the margins of Parliamentary representation and influence.

In the current federal cabinet, our regional representation is low even by historic standards.

The political minister for Nova Scotia has an enormous workload, including acting as political minister for PEI. There is one Parliamentary Secretary from Atlantic Canada.

Other than Minister MacKay, there are only two Atlantic ministers. There are more voices in the cabinet from Calgary than there are from Atlantic Canada.

We're similarly under-represented in the senior bureaucracy.

The Prime Minister has made about 40 senior appointments since taking office. Based on the biographies from the PMO, only two of these have spent any significant time working in Canada outside Ottawa.

Most of the appointees grew up in Ontario / Quebec. That's where they've lived their lives.

Incidentally, other provinces could make the same case. But there was a senior appointment for a guy from Saskatchewan. He heads up the Coast Guard. I know, that's a cheap shot. But the irony is compelling.

You might say none of this is new. And, you'd be right. Romeo LeBlanc, as quoted by Donald Savoie, noted: "*You now have deputy ministers and assistant deputy ministers of fisheries who have never been on a wharf.*" P. 285

At a more macro level, the Public Policy Forum issued a report in June that said: "Ottawa grows increasingly isolated while the country – and the world – becomes increasingly connected and interdependent."

One person consulted in the creation of that report described Ottawa as "two square miles surrounded by reality."

So, that's one facet of working for Nova Scotia in Ottawa – an insular federal bureaucracy and a Parliament run by, and for, the centre, but now with a lean to the West.

But, of course, there's more to policy making than politicians and bureaucrats.

According to Savoie, there are 42 lobbying firms and 1,500 registered paid lobbyists in Ottawa. He quotes a senior Treasury Board Secretariat official who speculates that "*something like 70 percent of cabinet documents are now prepared by outside consultants.*" p. 281

The think tanks are also influential in setting and shifting the public debate.

Collectively, the Institute for Research on Public Policy, the Public Policy Forum, the Canadian Policy Research Networks, and the Conference Board of Canada have more than 80 directors. Only three are from Nova Scotia.

These research organizations may see themselves as national but, like the bureaucracy and like the Parliament, their orientation is regional, i.e. Ontario and Quebec.

Here's a good example of what I'm talking about.

The Institute of Intergovernmental Relations at Queen's University correctly anticipated in 2006 that the 2007 federal budget would make significant changes to Canada's fiscal arrangements.

The Institute organized a conference and produced a brochure. The brochure said prophetically: "At stake (in the budget) will be the fiscal position of the provinces and territories and the values that underlie the Canadian economic and social union."

At this conference – a conference on the fiscal position of the provinces and territories and the very values that underlie the Canadian economic and social union -- there were 19 speakers. Only one from Nova Scotia.

Perhaps most revealing of all, the conference was part of a broader series entitled : "Mobilizing minds for a better Ontario."

To push the point, the inference here is that when Queen's talks about the values that underlie the Canadian economic and social union, it's really talking about mobilizing minds for a better Ontario.

The so-called national media are also a factor. I don't have empirical data to support an allegation of bias but the overt expressions of indifference or contempt are easy to find.

A June 13 editorial in the Globe said Nova Scotia and Newfoundland "*want all the cheese they can gobble up without triggering the trap.*" The editorial concludes: "*the mice should be careful not to bite off more than the country will let them chew.*"

A column in the National Post was even more explicit. The headline read: "*Atlantic Canadian greed knows no bounds.*"

So, we're the greedy mice and we need to be careful about what the country might do to us.

To return to a point touched on earlier, the political environment is making it more difficult for us to be seen and heard.

While the national economy is very strong, the Ontario economy has lost 190,000 manufacturing jobs in the last two years.

Not surprisingly, Ontario has launched its own campaign seeking “fairness” for Ontario from the federal government.

On its fairness website, the Ontario government says: *“Ontario continues to believe that the Equalization program has grown too large, is not contributing to Canada’s long-term prosperity, and that the formulas used to calculate payments are not fair to Canadians living in Ontario.”*

The Globe supports this argument.

A July 23 editorial said: “Ontario’s plight should be near the top of everyone’s lists – if only because it is Ontario’s taxpayers who fund so many of Ottawa’s programs.”

Two weeks later, a Globe editorial described changes to the Atlantic Accords as “minuscule.”

The editorial also noted that Ontario taxpayers pick up 43 percent of the tab of equalization and “it’s time that (the PM) and his MPs went visibly out of their way to demonstrate their concern for Ontario.”

Days later, Aug 9, the Globe returned to the same theme. This all sounds like a campaign to me from what professes to be a national newspaper.

Incidentally, I thought Canadian taxpayers paid the same rate of federal tax wherever they live. I thought Canadian taxpayers funded national programs equally, consistent with their taxable income.

So, a Canadian making \$60,000 a year in Sydney Mines pays precisely the same amount into equalization as a Canadian making \$60,000 a year in Oakville, Ontario.

The Globe must understand the tax system differently.

So, when it comes to the parliamentarians, the bureaucrats, the national news media and the think tanks, we're generally not relevant.

That's why the feds can feel sufficiently emboldened to, for example, unilaterally change the Accord.

Now, some of you might say that, objectively, we're a small population and that our tiny voice in the national cacophony is simply our proportionate share.

But, do we want to be ignored or do we want to have some real influence? Obviously, we want influence.

Before turning to that, I'm going to talk briefly about the decision to establish the Office of Nova Scotia in Ottawa.

I'm a former newspaper reporter and, when I was a reporter, we often carried stories about some delegation or another going to Ottawa to demand something.

It was the "flavour of the month" mentality. Ambulance chasing. Fire fighting. Whatever it was, it was not a strategy.

Three years ago, the senior leadership in Nova Scotia said it was time to become strategic. A process was initiated that led to five priorities being identified for Nova Scotia in Ottawa.

These priorities were presented to the provincial cabinet and cabinet has twice re-affirmed them.

Incidentally, the priorities are: the fiscal relationship, the Atlantic Gateway, human development, lasting health and sustainable communities.

The next step was to establish an office in Ottawa to help advance those priorities while gathering information, providing feedback, identifying opportunities and ensuring continuity.

It was also intended that the office would provide infrastructure that would obviate the need for senior public servants to work from the foot of the bed at the Delta while negotiating deals worth tens of millions of dollars.

As former Premier Hamm told me -- and as Premier MacDonald has reinforced -- this is Nova Scotia's office, not the Government of Nova Scotia's office. So people doing good work on behalf of our province in Ottawa are always welcome in our office on the 17th floor of Constitution Square.

Almost two years later, the office seems to be working.

That's not a commentary on my own efforts. Rather, it's simply to say that having modern work space is a good thing for those with business in Ottawa.

We've had about 300 persons use the office, and, at least on some matters, we seem to be ahead of where we otherwise would be.

But there is much to do and I'll talk more about that in a minute.

I've already said that I'm a former reporter. I'm also a former PR guy. And by the time I get through this speech, I might be a former bureaucrat.

One of the things that PR taught me is that all of us consume information through our own life filters.

Each of us responds to the same information differently. Our response is based on our own experiences with the subject or with the person communicating the information.

So, as we think about building influence in Ottawa, it's important to reflect on how we are seen.

As Nova Scotians, we're proud of our provincial commitment to debt reduction.

And, we have reason to be proud, for example, of the lofty ambitions and obligatory annual scorecards provided for in the province's Sustainable Prosperity Act.

This legislation sets environmental standards that are ambitious and our performance against these standards will be transparent.

Premier MacDonald is putting himself, and his government, at political risk, through this legislation. But that's the nature of leadership.

Now, if you're in Ottawa, are these clear signs of Nova Scotia improving its own neighbourhood or is this the anomalous behaviour of greedy mice?

If you're in Ottawa, and you spend the day talking to your friend in the next office and reading The Globe and Mail, would you see these progressive steps for what they are?

Perhaps not. Perhaps instead you'd remember seeing the Council of Atlantic Premiers web site. Perhaps you'd see the bias in favour of lobbying *in lieu* of action on matters under our own control.

You'd notice that 10 years ago the four governments supported insurance legislation harmonization and announced a plan to make it happen.

A decade later, we're still talking about harmonization while simultaneously adding new regulations unique to each province.

Or you might look at the Agreement on Internal Trade web site (www.ait.aci.ca). There you'd see a 2002 ruling from the Dispute Resolution Panel.

The panel ruled that New Brunswick was unfairly preventing Nova Scotian milk from being sold in New Brunswick stores.

The Panel gave New Brunswick 60 days to drop its barriers. Eighteen hundred days later, the barricades are still up. Nothing has changed.

On the face of it, development of hydro resources in Newfoundland and Labrador, a natural gas pipeline from the Irving LNG terminal to the US border, and development of an Atlantic Gateway in Nova Scotia are good initiatives for the region.

If you're in Ottawa, do you think Atlantic Canadians are mutually supportive of these projects?

Collectively, as Atlantic Canadians, as Maritimers and especially as Nova Scotians are we consistently sending positive signals through the halls of power in the nation's capital?

If not, what can we do?

Here's one idea. Maybe there's merit in changing the way we present ourselves to Ottawa.

Is Nova Scotia not a great place to try out new ideas? Can we become known as a national incubator for bold policies and programs?

For example, what if we were to help social assistance recipients get a post secondary education without losing benefits?

What if we were to train those on social assistance for specific jobs that need to be filled now?

What if we were to work with the private sector and school boards to give high school students real life work experience as part of the curriculum?

What if we were to custom-build training programs on behalf of the private sector and guarantee jobs for those who successfully complete the program?

What if, just as an experiment, we were to allow a rural community to build and maintain its own two-classroom school? Government would lease back the school and provide the teachers.

As many of you know, we're already doing all of these things. And, in many cases, these initiatives are unique in Canada.

Here are some other things we're doing.

On a per capita basis, more high school students have access to the International Baccalaureate program in Nova Scotia than anywhere else in the world. Students who graduate with an IB will have impressive and internationally recognized credentials. They will also have a 'leg up' on their contemporaries.

Nova Scotia is the first province to hire a social marketing specialist and we've put in place a school nutrition program designed to tackle obesity.

Working with dozens of community literacy groups, we've created the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning. This school has helped thousands of Nova Scotians belatedly complete high school.

But, what if we were to do more of this -- much more of this?

And, most importantly, what if we were to document and publish our results, for the whole country to see, just as we are going to do with the Sustainable Prosperity Act?

Here are a few other ideas designed to make us more relevant in Ottawa.

Our Embassy in Washington recognized that Canada's interests would be better served in the United States if we could put the right information in the right hands at the right time.

The Embassy developed a capacity to instantly reach key legislators and key influencers on issues important to Canada.

The Embassy also developed a system to communicate with thousands of people in the US who are either citizens of Canada or friends of Canada.

Nova Scotia's hand would have been strengthened in the Accord discussions if we had had the capacity to deliver a "call to arms" to thousands of friends of Nova Scotia living across the country.

If we were in regular contact with these people, we would also have a better chance to bring them home along with their friends and neighbours to travel, to work, to invest.

Maybe we should think beyond Canada.

One of my colleagues draws an analogy with the movie business. He notes that Canadian actors generally must succeed in Hollywood before they are recognized at home.

Maybe Nova Scotians needs to make it in Bollywood before we're recognized in Ottawa. Does India, in fact, hold special promise for our ports, our universities, our technology sectors?

More generally, if we take a more international view, will that help to enhance our reputation in Ottawa?

What about our universities?

I sense that our universities feel they are under-appreciated by government. Within government, some hold the view that the universities are not doing enough to improve their own efficiency or to contribute to the growth of the region.

Can our universities lead focused, thoughtful discussion around the key issues that face Nova Scotia over the next decade?

Could our universities and an organization like Nova Scotia Voluntary Planning stimulate a community-wide dialogue leading to consistency and conviction?

Back to Ottawa. Can we better infiltrate the federal system?

Let's get more secondments between federal and Maritime governments and more secondments from our private sector to the federal government.

Let's get more federal deputy ministers to visit our communities. To stand on our wharves, literally and metaphorically.

The deputy secretary to the federal cabinet delivered a speech in June '06 in which she acknowledged that senior bureaucrats do not get out enough.

She said they would be encouraged to take an extra day or two when traveling outside Ottawa to meet and talk informally with people.

In response, I wrote a letter offering to facilitate that effort when senior bureaucrats visit Nova Scotia. My letter went unacknowledged. So, like Avis of old, we've got to try harder.

We also need to be disciplined, over the long term, about our messaging.

Historically, we've been inconsistent. Premier MacDonald has talked about the "New Nova Scotia" with a clean environment, technology jobs, healthy, well-educated citizens and Nova Scotia as a global transportation hub. A clear and positive message.

But we've also talked about the fact that we smoke too much, drink too much, eat too much of the wrong things and exercise too little. And we ask for more money from the feds because we're sicker.

Collectively, can we discipline ourselves to stay silent on things that are ultimately not in our best interests to be talking about in Ottawa?

And recognizing that the key politicians, bureaucrats, media, lobbyists and think tank types are mostly within the two square miles of Parliament Hill, can we make better use of paid and unpaid media to reach these people?

Come to Life, the NS branding initiative is a start. How can we make the brand more robust, more visible?

These are just a few ideas. Together, we can come up with many more and even better ones. The point is to further refine and energize our strategy and stick with it. Conclude with this thought.

When the province opened its office in Ottawa some wondered whether the office was necessary. Some said we already have Members of Parliament. Why another person?

Here's my answer:

Not one of the 50 key bureaucrats in Ottawa has a mandate to think uniquely or even frequently about us. To date, their life experiences, and their day-to-day reality, is that Nova Scotia does not matter.

There are 1,500 lobbyists in Ottawa. None is dedicated uniquely to our issues.

We're basically invisible in the news media and in the work of the think tanks.

And there are about 400 MPs and Senators who actively think about and advocate for other parts of the country.

So, for me, the question is not whether we can justify an Ottawa office. The question is how to mobilize our own citizens, and friends of Nova Scotia elsewhere, to start paddling in a common direction.

The paddling metaphor is intentional.

Last month, Nova Scotians were again wildly successful at the Canadian Canoe / Kayak Championships. We won 40 percent of the gold medals. We were the top province.

A couple of weeks earlier a young woman from Lower Sackville, Jillian D'Alessio, won gold paddling at the PanAm Games.

An interviewer asked Jillian: “Why does Nova Scotia do so well in this sport?”

I thought it was a great question and Jillian replied by saying that role models and training had a lot to do with it.

Clearly, it has nothing to do with how many lakes we have. Ontario, Quebec and most other provinces can “out lake” us.

And, it has nothing to do with equalization. On the face of it, we have no unique advantages over other provinces.

But, when it comes to canoeing and kyaking, we’re a have province. We’re the winners. We’re the province others emulate. We have a sub-culture that breeds success, that expects success and celebrates success.

How can this record of success be duplicated?

I don’t know the precise answer but I agree with what the New Brunswick Self Sufficiency Task Force said in a slightly different context:

“Leaders at all levels of ... society must step forward to make it happen.”

And that seems like a good place for us to start and for me to end.

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