

Getting to know the Americas Strategy Secretariat

By Nathalie Trépanier

“What is the Americas Strategy Secretariat?” is a question we are often asked. The short answer is that the Secretariat (RLXS) and its ADM (RLX) coordinate and oversee Canada’s re-engagement in the Americas—Canada’s second foreign policy priority.

In February 2007, Prime Minister Harper announced that his Government would make re-engagement with the Americas a key priority. During a visit to the region in July 2007, the Prime Minister explained that our re-engagement in the region would be focussed on three objectives: increasing prosperity mainly through the promotion of trade liberalization; enhancing security through a focus on transnational crime, drugs, pandemics and natural disasters; and promoting fundamental values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

To ensure our ability to deliver on this commitment, our Deputies (USS and DMT) established the Americas Strategy Secretariat. The Secretariat was conceived as a small, temporary policy/implementation unit. It was given a mandate to develop a “whole of government” policy and action plan, to deliver on this government’s commitment to showing leadership in the Americas. The current Secretariat is comprised of 10 dedicated officers and support staff drawn from both the political and trade branches, as well as CIDA. After a few homeless months, they are now located in the former Team Canada offices on the first floor of 125 Sussex.

The Secretariat functions as a matrix, relying upon contributions from a larger virtual team within DFAIT and across government. Through a series of inter-departmental working groups and consultations with provinces, business, academics and non-governmental organizations, the Secretariat is intended to serve as a clearing-house, stimulating in-

terest and action on the Americas in an effort to bring greater synergy and coherence, and ultimately, impact to our engagement with the Americas.

“Through our ‘whole of government’ approach to the development and implementation of the Americas Strategy, we are striving to attain a higher level of coherence and effectiveness in promoting key Canadian interests and values. We want to demonstrate in a convincing manner that good foreign policy can delivery on key domestic priorities of greater economic prosperity and security for Canadians,” said Alexandra Bugailiskis, ADM and Executive Coordinator of the Americas Strategy.

As a coordinating body, the Secretariat relies heavily on the resources and expertise of the geographic and functional divisions at DFAIT, and from our missions abroad. Clearly, the geographic divisions (mainly covering North, Central and South America and the Caribbean, as well as regional institutions) and the missions serve a key function to this end, as they maintain primary responsibility for bilateral and regional relations. But the Secretariat also

looks to colleagues within the functional and communications divisions for guidance and consultation on issues that are critical to our re-engagement. The Secretariat receives strong support from CIDA and other partner departments such as DND, Health Canada, Heritage, HRSDC, Justice, NRCan, etc.—over 20 government departments and agencies are actively involved.

The Secretariat provides a new model for responding in a timely and flexible manner to emerging government priorities. It is resource-light, as it relies on team work and horizontality in both the development and delivery of foreign policy. Its success will be measured by its ability to mobilize an effective “whole of government” effort that will transform our relationship with the Americas and eventually fade into the sunset, without threatening the momentum and long-term sustainability of our engagement.

Canada’s re-engagement in the Americas is already well underway thanks to all of you who are contributing to this priority. We look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve our objectives in developing a more prosperous and safer neighbourhood.



From left to right, front row: Margaret Buhajczyk, Nathalie Trépanier, Donna Sivyer, Alexandra Bugailiskis, Donald Mackay, Rouben Khatchadourian, Suzanne Bériault. Back row: Vikas Sharma, Michael Williams, Leeann McKechnie, Roman Hruby, Danièle Ayotte.