

As I Depart • An Interview with Al Kilpatrick *By Ron Hoffmann*

Trade Post speaks with outgoing Deputy Minister for International Trade, Allen Kilpatrick as he prepares to retire from the public sector after 35 years. Rather than slowing down, Al Kilpatrick is pursuing new challenges as VP, International Business for Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd.

TP: *Deputy, you've seen many changes in Trade Commissioner Service (TCS) over the years. What do you think the most significant have been?*

Kilpatrick: You know, changes over even the last 15 years have been pretty dramatic. Not long ago you really were almost the sole source of information for the business community. No one second guessed you. Almost anything you did was adding value, especially in more remote areas. The idea of having to ask yourself whether you are adding value didn't occur to you. Now you really do have to think in these terms.

The complexity of the job has also increased. Now we're finding joint venture partners, pursuing investment opportunities and dealing more with service companies.

One thing which has not changed though, and I think will always be our strength, is the importance of networking and interpretation; the ability to provide introductions and personal assessment of individuals and decision-makers. Here the big companies need us as much as the little ones do.

TP: *If you look into a crystal ball, what do you imagine the TCS will look like in another 10 years?*

Kilpatrick: Well, I honestly believe that 10 years from now the TCS will be no less important than it has ever been. In fact, I would argue it will be more important. The job will continue to evolve, but as we move further along the globalization scale, there's hardly a Canadian company which doesn't have to be concerned about the impact of international developments. Furthermore, as the new trade issues impact more and more on domestic policies, I'm convinced the market for our services is going to increase among government departments as well.

TP: *With all the frustrations facing newer officers, will we continue to attract, and keep, good new people?*

Kilpatrick: That's a good question. Its one of the most challenging and worrying.

Compared to when I joined the TCS, newer officers do not think about careers in the same way. The whole concept has changed. I am told that statistics are beginning to show that we're losing quite a lot of people after the first posting. People are saying as they

enter the Department, I'm not sure I want to stay longer than 6-7 years. To me this has a lot of implications, for how we manage and how we train.

I still strongly believe that there is no job, that I'm aware of in the government, that can match a foreign service job — certainly for the first 10-15 years of your career. There are very few jobs where you can get the same level of responsibility, or take as much initiative, especially at posts. There's a degree of satisfaction you can not get elsewhere in government.

TP: *How would you describe your feelings leaving the Department after a long and distinguished career?*

Kilpatrick: I guess you don't really come to terms with it until your last day in the office. Obviously, my feelings are mixed. I have enjoyed very much of what I've done over the years. The major attraction of this career is the variety. Every post brings a different experience. I'm leaving, feeling lucky to have had a good career. I have worked with great people here and abroad.

TP: *If you had one piece of advice for new officers joining the TCS, what might that be?*

Kilpatrick: Relax and enjoy your career in this Department. It's fun and rewarding. There's probably too much introspection, too much concern about where your career is going. Maybe it's easier for me to say that because I have done well, but perhaps I'm still naive enough to believe that if you work well, work hard, you'll get rewarded.

TP: *Is there anything else you might like to say as a departing message?*

Kilpatrick. I think our services are as relevant as ever and that we need to spend more time advertising them. The TCS is a wonderful resource, but not widely enough known.

TP: *Deputy, on behalf of the Trade Post and the TCS, we wish you much enjoyment and success, and look forward to seeing you in the future.*

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