

PE Renewal: The New Way Forward

When the Republican National Convention came to St. Paul, Minnesota, in September, the staff at Canada's Consulate General in Minneapolis realized the benefit of being a pilot mission for the New Way Forward renewal initiative. By Sasha Sutcliffe-Stephenson

MY colleagues and I at the Minneapolis Consulate General work on priority Canada-U.S. issues, including the border, agriculture, transboundary waters, the Great Lakes and energy. We don't typically experience the volume of high-profile visits that larger U.S. missions do, but we knew all bets were off when the Republican Party picked the Twin Cities as the site of its 2008 national convention.

Last year, Minneapolis was selected as one of 16 pilot missions to implement DFAIT's New Way Forward initiative in the Political Economic (PE) section. This initiative defines the scope of the seven core services the PE program offers: information and analysis, policy development, policy integration, advocacy, access, program delivery and visits guidance. It is intended to help missions focus on the highest-priority issues and on activities and outreach that add the greatest value.

Preparing for Government of Canada activities on the margins of the Republican National Convention, as well as the Democratic National Convention in Colorado, involved a great deal

of communication and planning from staff on the ground in Minneapolis and Denver. The process also required coordination with colleagues at Headquarters and at the Embassy in Washington, which was responsible for sharing political **information and analysis** from the conventions with Ottawa and missions around the U.S.

In Minneapolis, one of the core services we have improved is **access**, building relations with key contacts. A prime example is the Consulate's association with the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs. It was through this relationship that the Consulate General secured an invitation for Ambassador Michael Wilson to speak about Canada's role in Afghanistan. The venue: a public policy round table hosted by the Institute during the week of the convention.

In terms of **advocacy**, we collaborated with Minneapolis-based General Mills and the Minnesota Agri-Growth Council to host a round-table luncheon with key stakeholders. An audience of 30 senior executives from leading U.S. agriculture and food companies heard Ambassador Wilson and Stockwell Day—then Minister of Public Safety—emphasize the importance of keeping supply lines efficient, streamlining border operations, and communicating the benefits of international trade. This event was organized in close cooperation with the Consulate General's Commercial section. Indeed, our work throughout the week of the convention was very much a "whole-of-mission" affair.

The New Way Forward's **visit-guidance standards** allowed us to focus on appropriate services and referrals when we were addressing requests from such high-profile Canadian visitors to the convention as Cabinet ministers and MPs. We were well-equipped to give them advice and assistance and to offer them a list of "alternative service providers" as necessary.

Applying many of the principles of PE renewal, we were able to focus on activities that added value and delivered a program that helped advance the government's—and our department's—key priorities.

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Sasha Sutcliffe-Stephenson and Consul General Martin Loken in front of St. Paul's Xcel Energy Center, site of the Republican National Convention.