

# Present Imperative

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ADM Drew Fagan

As DFAIT celebrates its centennial, outgoing ADM Drew Fagan, who joined the department in 2004 after two decades as a senior journalist with *The Globe and Mail*, offers some straight talk about the department's priorities, how it is perceived, and the challenges of transforming processes—and minds.

**OW:** How does your experience as a journalist help you now that you're at DFAIT?

It has had real value, because it has allowed me to see the processes as an outsider. But I also like to think that I was an "insider's outsider." People talked to me. People explained what was going on inside the system. Where I lack institutional knowledge—and sometimes I feel that I do—this is compensated by the perspective that comes from being able to see how a certain initiative or policy will be seen outside this building.

**OW:** How important is it to people within DFAIT that things are well received outside?

Sometimes it's not as important as it should be. It's difficult to do policy without having some sense of how that policy is going to sit.

**OW:** Why is it important to better sell ourselves?

DFAIT is a national organization as well as an international organization. This is a department that's hugely important to the country, but I'm not sure this is recognized to the degree it should be—even by those who specialize in the study of Canadian foreign policy. The department is working to address this through a variety of initiatives, whether it's more aggressive recruitment or more aggressive outreach, to make people more acclimatized to what it is we do around the world and why it matters.

**OW:** How is DFAIT perceived?

There is a lot of prejudice, I find, against the department, inside the system. This is the case for foreign ministries generally. There is always an image of diplomacy being "of your grandfather's age."

**OW:** What did you expect to find upon coming to the department?

I was warned that I would find hostility. I didn't. There were a number of people who took an interest in the fact that I would come here; they had a sense that the bureaucracy was a fairly insular place that didn't welcome people from the outside. It is also a very competitive place, and senior positions are at a premium. One person told me I'd eat lunch by myself for five years. The truth is, I do, but that's just because no one has time for lunch.

**OW:** Has the department met your expectations?

I joke that it's everything I expected—squared. I expected the process of government to be a little more Cartesian—government by rules and