

Former parliamentarians and congressmen take “differences” to universities

By Patrice Dutil

A new program on Canadian campuses will compare the way governance works in the Canadian and American systems.

The Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians (CAFP) and the United States Association of Former Members of Congress (USAFMC) announced, in September, the creation of a new program on Canadian campuses that will showcase the differences between the Canadian and American legislative systems.

“We’ve long perceived a need for a program like this, but I think the simultaneous American election and the parliamentary crisis last year that crystallized some of the confusions in Canadian minds about the two systems showed that we needed to approach this file more urgently,” said the Hon. Jack Murta, CAFP executive director.

The CAFP-USAFMC agreement will be managed through the CAFP’s “Parliament to Campus” program.

“This opportunity would synergize both the CAFP’s Parliament to Campus program, and the USAFMC’s Congress to Campus program,” said Murta. “It would also help further strengthen ties between the two organizations.”

Professors across Canada now have an opportunity to present both a former member of the U.S. Congress and a former member of the Canadian Parliament in their classrooms.

The approach is flexible: professors are invited to suggest particular topics or may choose the option of simply having ex-legislators discuss how their respective systems work and could be improved. As with the “Parliament to Campus” program, the accent is placed on having a conversation with the students and being open to their many questions and curiosities.

The process is already working, and the response from professors has been very positive. The program immediately



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triggered a response from the *Université du Québec à Montréal*. It requested ex-legislators from both sides to discuss parliamentary debates on health care. That event, hosted by UQAM’s *Institut d’études internationales de Montréal* and the *Observatoire sur les Etats-Unis*, was scheduled for early November 2009. Plans are afoot to hold similar events in Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver, with a goal of four events in the 2009-10 academic year.

“The U.S. embassy in Ottawa has been a tremendous help in getting this off the ground,” said Jack Murta. The U.S. Embassy agreed to cover the costs of former congressmen’s travel, including flights, lodging, meals, incidentals and local transportation. The administration of the program, including the

organization of visits, publicity and office expenses will be assumed by the CAFP.

Members of the CAFP and USAFMC donate their time to these programs and so receive no payment for their appearances.

“I think a program like this shows how creative the CAFP can be in responding to new educational needs,” said Francis LeBlanc, president of the CAFP’s Educational Foundation. “I look forward to many years of co-operation with the USAFMC and to working with it to help inform American students about the Canadian system.”

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