

## Out from the Shadows: Political Staff as Public Administrators

### Chapter Summary

The role of political staff in public administration was predominantly established to serve the ministers and Members of Parliament. They serve both the political and non-political staff as well as acting as a liaison with businesses and the public. The political staffs that work for ministers are defined as exempt staff, as they are not accountable to the government as public servants. Several theorists have argued that the role of political staff has created a new political governance (NPG) model in Canadian public administration. Savoie (1999) argues that this court government operates from the middle and suggests that there is an increased role, responsibilities, and influence for political staff. Aucoin (2012) argues that political staff represents a new system of government and that they are pervasive and not only found in the Prime Minister's Office.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is the most resourced and best staffed of all of the government's ministerial offices. Under the leadership of former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, the PMO was re-organized to put more power back into the political administration, especially with cabinet committees and a stronger PMO to alleviate any influence on policy-making from senior public servants. Since Pierre Trudeau's leadership, the number of exempt staff has grown exponentially in the areas of communication and issues of the day. As the author suggests, the number of exempt staff has also increased significantly in the Minister's offices. Although originally designated as a "special assistant," exempt staff assist Members of Parliament in their Ottawa offices and the category also includes those employees who are employed in the MP's local constituency offices across Canada.

The increasing role of political staff has garnered further attempts to both regulate and define the accountability relationship that exists for both their employer and their role in Canada's political bureaucracy. It is understood that MPs and ministers are accountable for their political staffs. Further, the 2015 Open and Accountable Government Guide included a code of conduct for

ministerial exempt staff. The essential roles of exempt staff in Ministers' offices have become increasingly significant for policy decisions, communications, the media, and issue management.

## Annotated Weblinks

- 1) <https://lop.parl.ca/content/lop/ResearchPublications/prb0602-e.htm>

The Library of Parliament publication on ministerial staff outlines a wide variety of issues related to employment, accountability, standards of ethical conduct, and international comparisons of “exempt staff.”

- 2) <http://www.revparl.ca/english/issue.asp?param=212&art=1493>

“In Defense of Political Staff” by Ian Brodie in Canadian Parliamentary Review 35(3) from 2012 outlines the important role that exempt or political staff play in our Canadian political system.

- 3) [http://www.revparl.ca/39/2/39n2e\\_16\\_zcspg.pdf](http://www.revparl.ca/39/2/39n2e_16_zcspg.pdf)

This article by Will Stos (2016) in Canadian Parliamentary Review provides an overview of two expert panels on the role of political staff in parliamentary government in Canada. Its recent and important dialogue and the discussion and examination by key players in the political process and academics provides further insight into the role and importance of political staff to Canada's parliamentary system.