

In From the Margins:

Community-of-Interest Media in the Parliamentary Press Gallery

by

Dale Smith

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Journalism

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

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Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-71546-8
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-71546-8

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Abstract

This thesis examines the work of community-of-interest journalists in the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery between May 2009 and the end of June 2010. This includes a look at the mandate of each community-of-interest media organisation present in the Gallery, a careful reading and analysis of the output of their reporters, an examination of whether their output matches their mandate, and of how each organisation fits within the Press Gallery.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
List of Tables.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Chapter One: Literature Review	7
Chapter Two: Methodology	31
Chapter Three: Political Stories During the Period in Question.....	36
Chapter Four: <i>Canadian Catholic News</i>	54
Chapter Five: <i>BC Christian News/CanadianChristianity.com</i>	73
Chapter Six: <i>The Epoch Times</i>.....	91
Chapter Seven: <i>Xtra</i>.....	106
Chapter Eight: Conclusion	124
List of Interviews.....	140
Bibliography	141

List of Tables

Table 1 – Output of Deborah Gyapong.....	63
Table 2 – Breakdown of <i>Canadian Catholic News</i> articles.....	64
Table 3 – Output of Lloyd Mackey.....	80
Table 4 – Breakdown of <i>BC Christian News/CanadianChristianity.com</i> articles....	81
Table 5 – Output of Matthew Little.....	98
Table 6 – Breakdown of <i>The Epoch Times</i> articles.....	99
Table 7 – Output of Dale Smith.....	115
Table 8 – Breakdown of <i>Xtra</i> articles.....	115

Introduction

Canada's Parliamentary Press Gallery has housed an increasingly diverse membership of media organisations since it was first incorporated in 1880. Upon its creation, the Press Gallery was the sole domain of the major newspapers of the country, and it remained such for the first half-century of confederation. But with the incorporation of the Canadian Press into the Gallery's membership in 1917, the make-up of media outlets began a slow process of diversification.

As part of that diversification, more smaller outlets arrived which did not represent individual cities, but rather particular communities of interest, such as an ethno-cultural community, or a religious community such as the Catholic population of the country. These communities also represent a broader diversification of the Canadian public – something the mainstream media is not always sensitive to, given the rise of the ethno-cultural press.

It should be little surprise that these communities-of-interest developed their own relationship with federal politics and national public policy, but from their own viewpoints rather than those adopted by the mainstream media. As the Parliamentary Press Gallery is traditionally viewed as the pinnacle of political journalism in Canada, the entry of these communities-of-interest into the Gallery's ranks is a logical step.

However, it is not necessarily a given that communities-of-interest have sent media representatives to the Press Gallery. Many continue to engage with federal politics at the local level, often because of the high costs involved with having a

reporter in Ottawa full-time. However, those that do have Press Gallery memberships often stand apart from their Press Gallery colleagues. In what ways do they differ from their mainstream media colleagues? How does their reporting differ from that of the mainstream press? How do they engage with Parliamentarians in a different way than the mainstream media does? And what does their engagement say about their community's interaction with federal politics and national public policy?

Research Question

This thesis will examine the role of community-of-interest media in forming and shaping the perceptions of federal politics and national public policy within those communities. What I suspect is that these organisations, though a somewhat marginal presence in the Gallery, can often be found pursuing different stories than the mainstream (such as not focusing on the budget), and are rather looking at stories more relevant to their own communities-of-interest. When confronted with a story that is also being chased by the mainstream, they will often approach it from a different angle or by interviewing different sources than a mainstream outlet would.

Depending on the way in which they deal with these sources or approach these stories, they produce a different story than appears in the mainstream, which can influence how these issues are seen within their communities-of-interest.

Analysing the way these issues are presented in these community-of-interest media, we provide a better understanding of how these specialised media approach federal

politics and national public policy, and the kind of role that they play in shaping the perceptions of their community.

Significance of Study

There has to date been very limited scholarship on the Parliamentary Press Gallery, as well as little examination of the intersection between community-of-interest media and political reporting. Given Canada's demographic make-up and the oligopolistic nature of our mass media, the impact of Canadian community-of-interest media is under-explored in academic terms.

In the broader context of political and civic engagement in Canada, community-of-interest media outlets could provide new ways of "speaking to" these audiences who are otherwise marginalised or disaffected by the mainstream. These outlets allow communities-of-interest find to their own niche within the political discourse. This can be through connecting their issues to the political centres in Ottawa, or through individual MPs who represent their particular communities-of-interest by means of the descriptive and virtual representation theories, rather than their geographic ridings.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Canada's Parliamentary Press Gallery has evolved from its early days as the verbatim recorders of debates in the House of Commons for partisan newspapers, to its present incarnation of a collection of print and broadcast journalists – along with their associated technicians – who give a more independent reporting of the business of the nation.

But as these changes take place, and the Press Gallery's membership evolves, expanding to incorporate broadcast outlets as well as print, and seeing a more diverse membership, the changing media landscape has also pressed challenges upon the membership of the Gallery. Media outlets are converging and reducing their presence, and other smaller outlets have closed their bureaux on Parliament Hill in favour of relying on coverage from wire or other news services, all of which changes the make-up of the Gallery.

In the midst of these challenges, some smaller community-of-interest media have sent their own reporters to the Hill and into the ranks of the Press Gallery. Their very presence in the Gallery changes these outlets' relationship to federal politics in this country because of the access afforded to them. At the same time, media convergence has also had an effect on federal reporting, and these smaller community-of-interest media have moved into the Gallery to fill gaps in coverage that their communities-of-interest perceive. The confluence of these two events creates a dynamic of changing coverage within the Press Gallery.

The Parliamentary Press Gallery

The definitive history of the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery remains unwritten. It is an institution that is frequently mentioned and remarked upon, but those mentions are fleeting at best. Prior to 1962 there has been only one study of its operations, which looked at the changes that had taken place from its inception. (Seymour-Ure 1962) In the absence of any definitive, scholarly history, the bulk of knowledge about the Gallery consists of a collection of mentions in broader journalism texts, as well as a series of biographies of some of its former luminary members.

There are some milestones in the Gallery's history mentioned frequently, including the arrival of The Canadian Press (CP) in 1917. Up until this point, the Gallery consisted of daily newspaper reporters sent to Ottawa, and at that time, most of those reporters were partisans, as was the norm of newspapers of the day.

While a de facto Parliamentary Press Gallery existed in the Canadas shortly before Confederation in 1867, and its formation upon Confederation credited to the Honourable Thomas White in 1867(Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery 2010), it did not have any official organisation until 1880.

A group of reporters, sent to Ottawa to cover the activities on Parliament Hill, formed the self-governing Press Gallery Association. They drafted a constitution; they set the ground rules for membership. They permitted themselves to be tucked under the wing of the Speaker of the House of Commons. To this day, the Gallery is still responsible to him. (Dempson 1968, 2)

From its earliest days, the Parliamentary Press Gallery was a choice assignment for journalists at the height of their careers. Until Hansard was

established in 1875, the sole records of Commons business were the newspaper clippings compiled by Gallery members. (Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery 2010) While their copy was partisan, and by many accounts, the Gallery was divided into two hostile camps at the turn of the twentieth century, there was still a sense that the thirty or so members formed a “school in national affairs for journalists.” (Desbarats 1996, 95) Even in 1950, long-time Gallery member Arthur Ford called it “postgraduate school for newspapermen.” The combination of partisanship and this sense of an elite “training ground” led to the charges of an atmosphere of “clubbiness” in the Gallery in that period. (Andrew and Soroka, *From Ink-Stained Wretches to Talking Heads: A Short History of the Press Gallery* 2006, 10)

At that point, one of the perquisites afforded to Gallery members was a leather-bound trunk filled with \$40 worth of stationary. Many of the journalists supplemented their income by filling in as official recorders for committee debates, as only the Chambers were covered by Hansard at the time. (Desbarats 1996, 95)

The arrival of CP in 1917 supplanted the Canadian Associated Press, established in 1903. Most Canadian newspapers became members of CP, which soon became a major “clearing house” for news across the country. One of the defining requirements of the wire service’s arrival in the Press Gallery was that its copy had to be stripped of partisanship in order that it could be used by any paper across the country, without offending any member or their established biases. (Taras 1990, 52)

With the arrival of an unbiased news source came a change in the tenor of reporting news from Ottawa. Divisions between news and opinionated columns widened, (Taras 1990, 52) and it had the secondary effect of neutralising the

supremacy of newspaper journalists in the Gallery. That supremacy was further diluted when magazines like *Maclean's* and *Saturday Night* obtained Press Gallery membership in 1942. (Andrew and Soroka, *From Ink-Stained Wretches to Talking Heads: A Short History of the Press Gallery* 2006, 11)

The Canadian Press, in its capacity as a “clearing house” for news for media organisations around the country, not only acted as a news supplier, but as a “critical reference point for editors and producers about the priorities and play that stories should receive.” (Taras 1990, 87) The *Globe & Mail* was also an important agenda-setting newspaper, and the opposition parties would use whatever the *Globe* was writing about during Question Period the next day. (Taras 1990, 88) This demonstrates the influence that newspapers in the Press Gallery exhibited for a period.

Journalist Peter Dempson arrived in Ottawa in 1950, working for Toronto's *The Telegram*. He describes the Press Gallery's famous Centre Block haunt, the “hot room,” as such:

The floors creak. The garish tiles pop up periodically. The desks – big, awkward wooden ones, some metal – are scarred with cigarette butts. The floor tiles are also pockmarked from cigar or cigarette ashes. Fluorescent lights beat down harshly; they are seldom extinguished...

The Gallery abounds in squalor and filth. It cries for fresh air. Just as quickly as the char staff cleans up the premises, the place becomes a shambles. Dust films the piles of newspapers, the yellowed pages of Hansard that lean grotesquely on desks.

Empty beer bottles are found everywhere. Empty glasses, with the remains of scotch, rye or gin, clutter up the room. Pop bottles clog portable ashtrays. Chocolate bar wrappers, aimed indiscriminately at wastepaper baskets, lie on the floor...

Electric fans whirr on hot days, bringing little relief to the congested quarters and newsmen cramped over their desks. Motors in the water coolers purr; the water bubbles. There is a cigarette machine, a beer dispenser, and a soft drink vending machine. (Dempson 1968, 3)

While Dempson doubtlessly took some license with this description (it is difficult to believe that the floors would creak, given that the Centre Block is constructed primarily of stone), this is a world apart from the Gallery of the present day, which is bright, clean (or at least relatively so), and a non-smoking environment where the bar and beer machine have long-since been banished. Yet Dempson's description paints a picture of the way that journalists in the Gallery operated in the heyday of print.

The admission of broadcast journalists into the Press Gallery in 1959 was the next major change in the makeup of its membership. This late date is due in part to the fact that print journalists would make appearances on radio programmes as commentators for additional income, and they feared the loss of this position should radio journalists become accredited by the Gallery. They also feared that radio stories would get out faster, thereby scooping the privileged newspapers or sabotaging their work. This was only exacerbated with the arrival of television in 1952. (Taras, *The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics* 1990, 72)

Within 15 years of their admission into the Gallery, broadcast journalists outnumbered newspaper journalists, and by the late seventies, electronic Hansard and the presence of television cameras in the House of Commons again changed reporting. (Andrew and Soroka, *From Ink-Stained Wretches to Talking Heads: A Short History of the Press Gallery* 2006, 11) With broadcast journalists came a shifting demographic – instead of older, more established journalists making their way into the Gallery as a crowning achievement in their careers, television

journalists tended to be younger and with shorter careers, moving from place to place. Newspapers followed television's lead, which led to a turnover in print reporters as well. (Taras, *The Newsmakers: The Media's Influence on Canadian Politics* 1990, 73)

The demographic shift not only applied to age, but also to gender and diversity. While the Press Gallery originally was very much an old boys' club with the occasional female interlopers – most especially Genevieve Lipsett-Skinner, who became a member of the Gallery in March 1922 (Lang 1999, 268) – the number of female journalists didn't really start to become significant until the 1970s. Lipsett-Skinner was the only woman among thirty-three men. In 1946, there were two women out of sixty-two members, and by 1985, there were 55 women out of 319 Gallery members. (Taras 1990, 75) In 2005, that number was 119 women out of 368 members, or 32 percent. (Vongdouangchanh 2005)

Progress has been significant on that front, though there has been virtually no examination of the issue. While there are books on the subject of women in journalism such as Marjorie Lang's *Women Who Made the News*, or biographies of some luminary female members of the Press Gallery such as Marjorie Nichols' *Mark My Words*, there are few accounts of the experiences of women in the Press Gallery. (Nichols and O'Hara 1992)

Similarly, there has been almost no study of visible minority journalists in the Press Gallery – an institution that has been overwhelmingly white throughout its entire history. In 2005, the Ottawa newsweekly *The Hill Times* published a feature article on ethnicity in the Press Gallery, which found that 18 of the 368 members of

the Press Gallery – or 5.1 percent – were visible minorities. When foreign correspondents were removed from that count, it was 14 out of 351 domestic members, or 4.2 percent. At this time visible minorities made up 13.4 percent of Canada’s population. (Vongdouangchanh 2005)

In the same article, however, CBC reporter David McKie , who is black, suggested that a reporters socio-economic background was more important to the perspective he or she brought to their coverage than race, given that race is not as defining a characteristic in Canada, nor is it as significant in political discourse as it is in places such as the United States. Others disagreed and stated that the Press Gallery should have been more reflective of Canadian society. The article also quoted Sylvia Stead, an associate editor at the *Globe and Mail* who suggested that newspapers were always “behind the times” in terms of their hiring. (Vongdouangchanh 2005)

The most comprehensive study of the Press Gallery in recent years was completed by the Observatory on Media and Public Policy, at McGill University. It analysed Gallery membership and media ownership between 1950 and 2004, and tracked the decline in newspaper members while broadcast members dominated. With convergence and a changing media landscape, it also noted declining numbers of newspapers belonging to the Press Gallery. Between 1989 and 1999, their number dropped from a record high of 24 to a record low of 14. By 2004, nine of those papers had not returned – three no longer existed, while six no longer sent journalists as members. (Andrew and Soroka, *From Ink-Stained Wretches to Talking Heads: A Short History of the Press Gallery* 2006, 12)

The authors of the study conclude that the erosion of newspaper supremacy in the gallery corresponded to Canadians' preference for broadcast over print news, and that by extension, the declining market share of newspapers contributes to the concentration in ownership, and thus pooled representation and a greater reliance on chain news service. Politics sells fewer newspapers, so owners reduce and economise their coverage. (Andrew and Soroka, *From Ink-Stained Wretches to Talking Heads: A Short History of the Press Gallery* 2006, 12)

Its data on ownership and the numbers of journalists representing which particular agencies highlights which organisations are represented in the Gallery. Among that group were journals and news services from smaller communities of interest going back several years, from the short-lived Canadian Native News Service in the late seventies, to Christian News Ottawa. Magazines have included the *Ukrainian News* in 1968, to the *Canadian Catholic News*, *Christian Current Ottawa*, and the gay and lesbian publication *Capital Xtra* in 2000. While this study focuses on print, multicultural broadcaster OMNI television is also represented in the Press Gallery. (Andrew and Soroka, *Ottawa Press Gallery Study* 2009) The raw data collected by the Media Observatory hasn't been analysed or contextualised in any fashion, and thus serves solely as a starting point for future research.

It may also be worthwhile to examine the data on freelance members of the Press Gallery, since they may also be writing for the smaller community journals, while working for several clients to make a living. My own Press Gallery membership is as a freelancer, and I contribute to several smaller community-of-

interest media outlets such as the *Xtra* chain, as well as the national GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans) magazine *Outlooks*.

While there is limited scholarship on the Press Gallery, it is scattered and does not contain anything directly relevant to the roles that smaller community-of-interest media has played within the Gallery.

Media Convergence

One facet of this examination into the presence of community-of-interest media in the Parliamentary Press Gallery is the role that media convergence has played on the mainstream media. It has occurred through cross-ownership in Canada, creating the media empires of CanWest Global (now dissolved, its print assets sold to a group of investors and hedge funds with the leadership Paul Godfrey restructured under the moniker of the Postmedia Group, and its television assets to Shaw), CTV globemedia (which is in the process of being divided, where Bell Canada has re-acquired CTV, and the Thomson family under Woodbridge regains majority control of the *Globe and Mail*), Quebecor, and Rogers that now dominate the landscape.

From the Davey Report of the Senate in 1970, and the creation of the Kent Commission in 1980 to examine the concentration of media ownership in Canada, there have been concerns with the effect of convergence on reporting. While the Kent Commission concluded in 1981 that chain-owned papers were not always worse off editorially than independent papers – and going so far as to praise the

then-Southam chain (Skinner and Gasher 2005, 63), in later years there are concrete examples of corporate interference in news coverage.

The Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications examined the Canadian news media in 2006, and repeated concerns about shrinking bureaux, both foreign and domestic (Senate 2006, 9-12), and that the presence of fewer reporters meant fewer stories were covered.(Senate 2006, 4) It also cited the lack of oversight by federal regulators on news content (Senate 2006, 14-19), and that the national public broadcaster, the CBC, is underfunded and has an unclear mandate.(Senate 2006, 19-21)

The committee's conclusions regarding the Canada Magazine Fund and the Publications Assistance Program (Senate 2006, 41-42) were not addressed by the government when it merged the two programs as the Canada Periodical Fund in 2009, which saw more restrictive guidelines for funding, and saw many smaller publications, including those of community-of-interests, lose their funding as a result.

While convergence has been described as a trend by academics such as David Taras, many of his hopes for positives such as more high quality television in English Canada competing with American programming, or a greater re-integration of Quebec and English-Canadian media through Quebecor's ownership of both French and English-Canadian media outlets have not occurred. Taras also raised concerns about the concentration of power in too few hands. (Taras, Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media 2001, 234-235)

Most Canadian studies of the ills of convergence revolves around the actions of the Asper family when their CanWest Global chain acquired the Southam papers, and began exerting their personal agenda on the editorial control of those papers. According to Peter C. Newman's biography of Asper patriarch "Izzy" [Israel], Izzy felt that "as owner of the publications, he recognized no reason why they shouldn't reflect his point of view." (Newman 2008, 13)

Tales of the firing of Russell Mills from the *Ottawa Citizen* in June 2002 for publishing an editorial critical of Jean Chrétien – when Chrétien was a personal friend of Izzy – at a time when the CanWest chain was implementing centralised editorials (Shade 2005, 102) was a touchstone for a chain of events that highlighted concerns of some about the concentration of media ownership.

President and CEO Leonard Asper defended the firing by saying that Mills had breached company policy with "too much homogeneity in coverage of events in Ottawa" and that all editorials were to be vetted by corporate headquarters in Winnipeg. (Shade 2005, 103)

News of the creation of a centralised news desk in Winnipeg circulated in January of 2003 (Shade 2005, 106), while another worrying trend was the admission of an *Ottawa Citizen* editor that he inserted the word "terrorist" into an Associated Press wire story on a conflict in Fallujah, based on CanWest policy of renaming certain groups as such (Shade 2005, 107).

In her examination of these trends toward centralised control and censorship in the CanWest chain, Concordia University Associate Professor Leslie Regan Shade says:

As with media convergence and concentration, the Aspers would have us think that the public interest is being met by the creation of new, unbridled cross-platform content. But as CanWest has demonstrated, through its control of editorial content and its attitude toward journalists, this is a chimera. Media convergence and concentration have eroded the ideal of a newspaper as a “distinctly local enterprise.” (Shade 2005, 113-114)

The most significant change after the death of Izzy Asper involved a switch in partisan allegiances from the Chrétien Liberals to the Harper Conservatives with David Asper personally endorsing Stephen Harper. Bev Oda, a former CanWest executive, was named Heritage Minister in Harper’s cabinet. Derek Burney, who headed Harper’s transition team, was named chairman of the CanWest board of directors. (Edge 2007, 7)

This uncomfortable closeness to the party in power did not happen out of the blue, with the Aspers’ use of the *National Post* to begin framing political issues from their particular lens – be it to discuss taxes in an increasingly negative light (Edge 2007, 97), or commissioning polls to try and demonstrate that Canadian mainstream opinion was not far removed from those of the Canadian Alliance or Conservative parties. (Edge 2007, 98)

As part of that convergence and concentration CanWest Global decided to pull out of the Canadian Press collective in June 2007 in an attempt to save \$4.6 million in annual dues. The company argued it would be better off putting that money into bolstering its own news service. (Edge 2007, 237) Not only was the more dispassionate voice of CP reporting removed from the pages of CanWest newspapers, but also this change would have an effect on the representation of their individual papers in the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

There were no longer individual reporters or bureaux for each CanWest paper in the Press Gallery. They had all been replaced by CanWest News Service (now the PostMedia News Service), ensuring that there is a central voice for all coverage coming from Ottawa as opposed to the views of each paper. No longer would events in Ottawa be viewed from the lenses of those individual papers for their local readers to see their concerns addressed.

An example came from former CanWest reporter Elizabeth Thompson in her final blog post as a reporter for the *Montreal Gazette* in the Parliamentary Press Gallery. As she watched other CanWest papers shut their Hill bureaux in favour of the CanWest News Service, she saw the value of having that local voice in the Gallery. "As an English Quebecer it was important to me for English Quebec to have eyes, ears and a voice on Parliament Hill where some of our nation's most important decisions are taken."(Thompson 2009)

Thompson left CanWest and the *Gazette* and later joined the Sun Media/QMI bureau in the Press Gallery.

From its acquisition of the Sun Media chain in 1998, of the Canoe.ca online platform in 1999, its 2000 purchase of Vidéotron and TVA, and Toronto 1 TV in 2003, (Gorman 2004, 1-3) and the Osprey Media chain in 2007, Quebecor has become one of the largest media chains in the country. It has also created another Parliamentary bureau that represents the chain as a whole rather than have its individual papers belong to the Gallery. Sun Media also announced plans to pull out of the Canadian Press by June 2010, which meant all of its Ottawa content came from its own Sun Media/QMI bureau after that point.

Community-of-Interest Media and Federal Politics

“Community media” is a term fraught with ambiguity. In most cases, it is synonymous with local media, but that has little to do with the scope of this particular study. Likewise the term “ethnic media” is too limiting to the variety of community-of-interest media included in this study.

In the introductory chapter to his volume *Community Media in the Information Age*, Nicholas W. Jankowski struggles with the definition of “community media.” His first step is to identify a definition of community.

...Community is conventionally identified with a relatively limited geographical region – a neighbourhood, village, town, or in some cases a city. This geographic determinant is often contrasted with ‘communities of interest’ whereby members share some cultural, social, or political interests independent of geographic proximity. (Jankowski 2002, 5-6)

I will use Jankowski’s definition, as the outlets examined in this thesis are more of the community-of-interest variety, representing ethnocultural, religious and other minority groups.

Communities-of-interest are at their very hearts “imagined” communities, which also affects how their media outlets are constructed, and how those outlets construct them in return. American sociologist Michael Schudson argues that media are a central institution, if not *the* central institution of constructing American nationhood, city-hood and community-hoods. He traces the way in which newspapers were key instruments of commercial and political integration in the eighteenth-century, and of urbanisation in the nineteenth by providing a community

identity that held together when it was no longer a face-to-face community. (Schudson 1995, 42) In other words, it imagined a community because all of the members could not know their fellow-members and yet they retained a form of kinship.

Schudson also cites Phyllis Kaniss in looking at the way that community newspapers search for stories with symbolic capital (Schudson 1995, 15). Given that the values and institutions of communities provide symbols for mobilisation (Brass 1991, 74), this ties in with the need for community-of-interest media to find those symbols that act as the cultural differentiae by which they define themselves and the stories of interest to them.

Community-of-interest media can also provide these symbols of social continuity and stability, and by using local stories and spaces for birth, marriage and death announcements allow the community members to affirm their public selves. (Aldridge 2007, 61) This declaration of public selves becomes another feature of ethno-cultural media, which seeks community visibility that is missing in the mainstream, and can be extended to community-of-interest media as well.

The establishment of ethno-cultural media has been a part of creating and transforming diasporic networks. Mass media and communications scholar Roza Tsagarousianou places this in the context of the modern media landscape:

This is especially so at a time when analyses of the ownership and control of contemporary media indicate a concentration of media ownership in 'Western' societies, the intensification of processes of homogenization of media output that these trends entail. This process of concentration of ownership and control within the commercial sector of the media industry has been complemented by the shake-up of public service broadcasting that has been taking place over the past decade... (Tsagarousianou 2002, 212)

Tsagarousianou also points out that the emergence of new technologies, coupled with broadcast deregulation in places like the United Kingdom (Tsagarousianou 2002, 218) helped to open up new markets, most of them “niche” outlets that included those catering to ethno-cultural minorities. (Tsagarousianou 2002, 212)

By 2006, there were more than 250 ethno-cultural newspapers in Canada, as well as 14 full-service multi-lingual radio stations. Predominantly centred in the major urban centres of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, these outlets represent more than 50 cultures and more than five million Canadians who fit neither the French or Anglo-Saxon founders of this country. (Ojo 2006, 343) Ethno-cultural media contributes to the sense of community identity by meeting the specific information needs of a community, and are sometimes considered a community cultural resource as they can facilitate cultural citizenship in ways that other media cannot. (Ojo 2006, 344)

Given that mainstream outlets have had problems with portraying visible minorities, either rendering them invisible through selective depiction, or misrepresenting them through various stereotypical lenses (Ojo 2006, 346), it should come as little surprise that ethno-cultural communities would create outlets that would offer more realistic portrayals of their communities. These outlets have little trouble finding news stories about visible minorities in a variety of activities, which serves as an indictment of the mainstream’s inability to do so. (Nancoo and Nancoo 1997, 48) This extends to communities-of-interest who see their own invisibility or marginalisation and use their own media outlets to the same ends.

American political scientist and communication theorist Harold Lasswell argued the functions of mass media in society are 1) surveillance of the environment, 2) correlation of the different parts of society, and 3) transmission of social heritage. (Nancoo and Nancoo 1997, 32, Lasswell 1948) For ethno-cultural or community-of-interest media, the third function takes on an especially prominent role by publicising cultural information such as meetings and festivals, but they also provide that forum for their own language and culture within the cultural diversity of Canada. (Ojo 2006, 351-352)

Ethno-cultural media operate in a mix of English and French, or other languages such as Chinese, Punjabi and Creole. For the black community, most operate in English because many immigrants come from Caribbean or African countries with British colonial ties, even though other spoken languages in the Montreal area alone include French, Yoruba, Igbo, Creole, Hausa, Akan and Gonja. (Ojo 2006, 352)

Ethno-cultural media can also help preserve language and culture. It also becomes an entry point for civic engagement in a language more comfortable for newcomers as *Corriere Canadese*, Toronto's Italian-language daily newspaper, argued before the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media in 1970:

Most new arrivals are fluent in only the language of their country of origin. They arrive in Canada poorly equipped to take an equal place in our society. Their knowledge of this country is rudimentary. Our way of life is foreign to them, our culture strange. (Lam 1997, 235)

While there are a variety of ethno-cultural media outlets and there are diasporic elements to these communities that are not necessarily concentrated in one geographic region (though most ethno-cultural diasporic communities in

Canada are concentrated in the major urban centres), there nevertheless seems to be a geographic element to their coverage. This appears to be the case, whether it is with black newspapers in Toronto and Montreal (Ojo 2006), Chinese papers in Toronto (Lam 1997) or the South Asian papers in the greater Vancouver area (Karim 2002), though it can be argued that the strong focus on local events is part of what drives this regional focus.

The use of these ethno-cultural or community-of-interest media is especially salient as means for civic engagement with the Canadian political process. Over their various studies, Black and Leithner have found evidence that immigrants readily become involved in the Canadian political process, that immigrants largely consume ethno-cultural media, and that that consumption declines gradually the more time they spend in Canada. (Black and Leithner 1997, 208) They go on to cite two competing forces within ethno-cultural media – a positive role in introducing newcomers to the host society’s norms by providing them with relevant and needed advice, while tempering isolation and hardships. The flip side is the negative aspect of maintaining pre-existing group ties, identification with homelands, and blunting attempts at acculturation, making it less likely that these newcomers will receive messages relating to Canada’s politics. (Black and Leithner 1997, 210)

While Black and Leithner challenge some of the ambiguity around this particular dual construction, it is a useful starting place when investigating the roles that ethno-cultural media plays in civic engagement. They found that the ethno-cultural media plays a qualified positive role, and furthermore does not shield

individuals from messages about political life in Canada. (Black and Leithner 1997, 223)

The findings of the Black and Leithner study should be tempered by the fact that their data was obtained from a 1983 Metropolitan Toronto study, mostly focused on European immigrants and those from the British West Indies, which meant that few visible minorities were surveyed. (Black and Leithner 1997, 222)

Lawrence Lam's study of Chinese media in Toronto, published in 1980, examined the degree to which Chinese ethno-cultural media was a useful source for help or information for newcomers, and those ethno-cultural media outlets assisted in their acculturation process. He found that media was not an important source-type for these newcomers, as their "personal communication network" was a more valuable resource for most. (Lam 1997, 233)

Lam's study examined the two Chinese-language daily newspapers in Toronto, though he noted that there were ten overseas editions of Chinese newspapers available in the city, and that nearly every Chinese household had a subscription to at least one foreign newspaper, magazine or periodical. Lam describes the two Toronto dailies, *Shing Wah* (China Awake) and *The Chinese Express*, which were the prime focus of the study:

Shing Wah is a fifty-four year-old paper with an editorial stand supportive of the Taiwan regime. *The Chinese Express* is a relatively recent addition to the market. It was actually founded by the former *Shing Wah* editor, who wanted to escape the issue of Asian politics. Despite the editorial difference the two papers are very similar in form and context: both are published locally six times a week, run to fourteen or sixteen pages daily and have a circulation of about 5,000 copies each. They are family newspapers and they have adopted, intentionally, a "don't-rock-the-boat and don't-knock-the-advertisers" philosophy. Local coverage such as the power struggle or gang activities in the community takes up a fairly small portion of both papers, since each has

only three or four local reporters. Investigative pieces are rare; many of the news items are unabashedly borrowed from English newspapers, e.g., the *Toronto Star*, *Globe and Mail*, and wire services. (Lam 1997, 238)

Lam also noted that over the two-week period of his study, there were few pieces of Canadian news – even though a general election had just taken place in Quebec – and no local Toronto news, yet there were several pieces of Hong Kong news. While the stories did reflect the ongoing activities of the Chinese community, they were largely concerned with immigration, and instances of covert or overt discrimination against minority groups. (Lam 1997, 239)

Lam concluded that these ethno-cultural media outlets were of little importance to the Chinese community in learning about Canadian culture and society. Not only has the Chinese community in Toronto matured considerably since the study was done in the late 1970s, so has its economic clout. Lam's findings might be different today, as might be the degree to which the Chinese-language papers still focused upon homeland or Hong Kong politics rather than local or national Canadian politics and events.

Carleton Communications professor Karim H. Karim examined the civic engagement of the South Asian community in the Greater Vancouver Area through use of ethno-cultural media. The South Asian community is a diverse group, which includes migrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal, along with members of their diaspora in eastern and southern Africa, the Caribbean, Fiji, Europe and Southeast and Eastern Asia. Linguistically, they include Punjabi, Tamil, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali and several other languages. (Karim 2002, 234)

Nevertheless, much of their media is under the broader umbrella of South Asian news rather than simply India, Pakistan, or sub-regions like the Punjab.

Karim points out that levels of civic engagement vary widely, from the cultural content of literary magazines and television programmes on the Bollywood film industry which don't contribute to civic engagement, to the discussions on public affairs in a Canadian context found in the more established weekly newspapers that contribute a great deal, while many smaller publications concern themselves with homeland news. There are also a number of radio and television stations, and some radio programmes have even had success in engaging the community on issues like family violence – a type of engagement the community had previously shunned. (Karim 2002, 235)

Karim's study primarily looks at the weekly paper *The Indo-Canadian Voice* during the period leading up to the November 27, 2000 federal election:

South Asian media in British Columbia have a special interest in civic issues, since members of the communities are actively involved in politics at municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Ujjal Dosanjh, the premier of BC at the time, is of Punjabi descent, as are a number of the cabinet ministers. Herb Dhaliwal in the federal cabinet is also a British Columbian of Punjabi origins. Political coverage in the *Indo-Canadian Voice* tends to revolve around elite South Asian and non-South Asian actors, although one of the primary areas of focus is the Sikh community in Surrey (a suburb of Vancouver). This newspaper, along with the English-language *The Link* and the Punjabi-language *Indo-Canadian Times*, appears to be one of the largest-circulation South Asian publications in BC's Lower Mainland. (Karim 2002, 236)

Karim refers to Black and Leithner's 1988 study in qualifying that the sheer volume of political coverage demonstrates a pre-existing civic engagement for the *Indo-Canadian Voice's* producers, as well as its subjects and readers. (Karim 2002, 238)

Nevertheless, Karim's study demonstrates the impact that ethno-cultural media can have on the electoral process, especially for communities that have a degree of concentration as they do in Surrey:

When politicians attempt to reach these electorates in their own cultural idioms, ethnic media become key vehicles. This strategy is apparent in the content of the *Indo-Canadian Voice*... Politicians of various backgrounds gave interviews to – and held special press conferences for – journalists of ethnic media. They wrote letters to editors of ethnic newspapers and appear on ethnic broadcasters' talk shows. The strength of Greater Vancouver's 46 ethnic newspapers is evident in their total circulation, which is reportedly larger than the combined figures of the city's two main English-language papers. (Karim 2002, 239)

Karim also points out that the *Indo-Canadian Voice* provided space for a variety of political and social actors to present their views despite a heavy editorial presence. The feedback mechanism allowed for greater debate within the community, (Karim 2002, 239) which feeds into a constructivist notion of a back-and-forth dialogue of a community that creates its own image.

Despite this attention to the political figures from all three levels of government, the coverage that Karim cites is entirely through a local lens, which doesn't provide any particular look at how these community media are interacting with the Parliamentary Press Gallery, either through sending their own reporters, or accepting stories from a centralised or wire service (especially with respect to an English-language paper like the Vancouver weekly *The Indo-Canadian Voice*). In fact, there are no South Asian news services currently as members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, which demonstrates that even with high levels of civic engagement, these ethno-cultural communities remain engaged with federal politics at a strictly local level.

It also remains to be seen if digital technologies will better connect these ethno-cultural communities, or communities-of-interest, with federal politics in Canada. While there has been some examination of the way that the Uyghur diaspora in America is using the Internet to better preserve its own culture and for its own particular political goals (Kanat 2005), there is little study on what this looks like in a Canadian context.

Similarly, while there has been some examination of ethno-cultural voting patterns in the United States as it relates to the use of ethno-cultural media (Jeffres 1999), there doesn't appear to have been any similar studies completed in Canada, thus giving us little idea as to how our own ethno-cultural media interacts with federal politics.

Conclusion

In the face of a homogenising media landscape, and the emergence of community media in its wake, there is still no scholarly understanding of the way that these two factors have played out in the context of the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

There is no definitive history of the Press Gallery, despite a smattering of clues, and no scholarship on the role that smaller community media has played in its membership. As well, the role of freelancers in the Gallery requires study to determine how they interact with those small media outlets as well.

As well, gaps in knowledge exist as to how ethnocultural media and the media of communities of interest interact with federal politics. There is a greater understanding of their interaction at the local level, there are no obvious links between ethnocultural media and the Press Gallery. Is there much interaction? Do these communities even feel that this is an option for them or their particular readership, or do they simply follow the old adage that all politics is local?

There is also no real understanding of the full effect of media convergence on the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

This thesis will offer some evidence on these questions that should fill in some of these gaps in knowledge.

Chapter Two: Methodology

It should be little surprise that communities-of-interest become engaged with federal politics and national public policy from their own particular viewpoints rather than those presented by the mainstream media. As the Parliamentary Press Gallery has traditionally been viewed as the pinnacle of political journalism in Canada, the entry of these communities-of-interest into the Gallery's ranks is a logical step.

However, not all communities-of-interest publications have sent media representatives to the Press Gallery. Many continue to interact with federal politics at the local level, often because of the high costs involved with having a full-time reporter in Ottawa. Most ethno-cultural media outlets in this country, such as the South Asian communities in the Greater Vancouver Area, have a strong sense of civic engagement with Canadian politics, but none of those media outlets send reporters to Ottawa. Rather, they concentrate on covering national political issues strictly at the local level.

Communities-of-interest whose media outlets have Press Gallery memberships will engage with federal politics from their particular viewpoints, often standing apart from their Press Gallery colleagues in doing so. In what ways do they differ from their mainstream media colleagues? How does their reporting differ from that of the mainstream press? Do they engage with Parliamentarians in a different way than the mainstream media does, and what does their relationship say about their community's interaction with federal politics and national public policy?

Interview method

Determining the ways journalists from these community-of-interest publications differ in their reporting from the mainstream media begins with how they see their role in the Press Gallery.

The primary research consisted of interviews with the Ottawa-based reporters and their off-site editors of four community-of-interest media that have taken up membership in the Gallery: *Epoch Times*, *Xtra*, the *Canadian Catholic News* and *BC Christian News*. Each has largely national audiences for their communities-of-interest while reporting on Ottawa from the perspective of those communities. They differ from many Press Gallery reporters who work for media organisations with a specific geographic base, though that has been rapidly changing in the face of media consolidation, so that there are fewer “local” reporters on the Hill, and most produce content for an entire chain. In this way, these four outlets report for national – or indeed international – audiences, for the Chinese expatriate/Falun Gong, queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, etc.), Catholic and Christian communities respectively.

The interviews largely concentrated on process – how stories are selected, editorial direction, feedback from readers, and relationships with sources both on and off of Parliament Hill. My own reflections as a reporter for *Xtra* on Parliament Hill were used in place of an interview with an *Xtra* reporter.

Reading and Review

The second part of the primary research involved a careful review and reading of how these four community-of-interest media outlets cover specific issues compared to how they are covered in the mainstream press. This included an examination of issues that are not covered by the community-of-interest media that are covered by the mainstream media. Differences between the various outlets provide a better understanding of how the community-of-interest media relates with its target audience as opposed to the message that delivered by mainstream media outlets, and the role these outlets play in shaping their community's perceptions about federal politics and national public policy.

This examination covered the fourteen months' output by each of the four outlets, from the beginning of May 2009 until the end of June 2010. Wherever possible, articles were taken from their online archives, though some online archives, such as *The Epoch Times* are incomplete (two online issues for May 2009 were missing from the website, and any additional online articles did not have a complete archive). As well, as *Canadian Catholic News* operates as a cooperative, it was difficult to track the placement of individual stories, as each member paper selects its copy from an internal website which each edits accordingly. There is no central means of viewing online the entire output out of their Press Gallery reporter.

For *CCN* coverage, I reviewed the online archives of the *Catholic Register* and the *Western Catholic Reporter* for the entire fourteen-month period. I also was able to access the *Prairie Messenger* archive up to the May 5, 2010 issue, at which point

the archive stopped. *BC Catholic*, the only other member paper with content online, employed a pay wall, and so I did not review its archives. These three archives, along with the articles posted on *CCN* associate member website CanadianChristianity.com – the online site for *BC Christian News* – gave me a representative picture of what reporter Deborah Gyapong produced for the *CCN*.

The analysis tracked issues covered, issues the various outlets did not cover (such as the federal budget for most outlets), which MPs or other sources the journalists used – on or off Parliament Hill, and the breadth of the points of view presented on each of those issues to their audiences. This also tried where possible to include whether the journalists spoke to the individuals quoted in their stories, or whether quotes came from secondary sources.

The data compared the role or “mission statement” of these publications as described by their editors and reporters with the actual content of their publications. It should also be noted that there is no consistent common way of determining circulation and readership, as each publication provides its own data using its own metrics.

Research Ethics

As a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, and the contributor for *Xtra*, I used my own experiences in place of what would have been a reporter interview, to compare and contrast with the work of the other three reporters from community-of-interest media in the Press Gallery.

I also interviewed my editor as part of my research. Attention was paid to this fact during the ethics clearance process, as was the knowledge that my own opinions may differ from those of my editors. This element of social risk – that differences of opinions between co-workers or peers could cause discomfort – was considered minor, and the social risk for other interview subjects was similarly discussed as part of the ethics process and the consent for participation in the study.

The subjective nature of evaluating my own reporting as a part of the reading and review portion of the research required me to take specific care not to inflate the value of my own body of work when compared to that of other community-of-interest reporters examined in this thesis. I remained conscious of that requirement throughout my research and writing.

Chapter Three: Political Stories During the Period in Question

2009-10 was a volatile time in Canadian federal politics, but also a time when Parliament sat less than in most previous years. The two-month-long prorogation announced on December 30th, 2009, however, did not slow the news cycle in a substantial way as a wave of protests erupted around the country, and a number of issues related to the very nature of Parliamentary democracy came up both before and in the months following prorogation.

This chapter examines fourteen months in that political news cycle, from May 2009, until the end of June 2010. I will be reviewing the major themes of the news cycles, and each will be part of a month-by-month breakdown of events and issues prominently in the news, which will also serve as a baseline of comparison in subsequent chapters for analysis of the coverage provided by individual community-of-interest outlets.

May 2009

Economic concerns dominated the headlines as the downturn continued. This not only included direct government stimulus activities through infrastructure spending, but also concerns over American protectionism through the “Buy American” provisions in US stimulus legislation. Possible changes to Employment Insurance regulations were also a brewing source of political discontent, as opposition parties demanded a 360-hour national qualifying standard and the

elimination of the two-week waiting period before an unemployed person could collect benefits, which the government rejected.

The Liberal convention was a major event, which not only saw the confirmation of Michael Ignatieff as leader, but also included policy resolutions on a carbon tax, child poverty, the Kelowna Accord, a national housing policy, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, alternative energy and an end to the ban on gay men donating organs. On the party governance side, the Liberals adopted a one-member one-vote system for future leadership contests. Ignatieff also declared that he wanted the party's platform ready for June. This was also the height of the Conservative "Just Visiting" attack ads, aimed at Ignatieff.

Concerns also grew over the H1N1 flu, which had economic impacts including a ban on Canadian pork products in China. A potential shortage and medical isotope crisis loomed with news of leaks that the Chalk River nuclear research reactor. Other health-related stories included news that a prominent Canadian AIDS researcher was decamping for Florida due to lack of funding for his work.

Foreign affairs concerns focused on the EU ban on seal products, which would adversely affect Canada's annual seal hunt. This was further highlighted when Governor General Michaëlle Jean visited Nunavut, and ate a piece of raw seal heart as a gesture of support for the hunt. The civil war in Sri Lanka led to massive Tamil protests in Canada, including large-scale demonstrations on Parliament Hill and one demonstration, which shut down the Gardiner Expressway in Toronto.

Another closely followed story was the plight of Sudanese-born Canadian Abousfian Abdelrazik, trapped in Sudan after unproven terror charges put him on a no-fly list.

Rounding off the main issues covered during the month were an investigation into Liberal MP Ruby Dhalla for her alleged mistreatment of foreign live-in caregivers, the testimony of former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney at the Oliphant Inquiry, and the tactical political considerations of rescheduled opposition days, leading to speculation of a potential summer election.

June 2009

While the economy remained very important in June, much of the Press Gallery coverage turned to the political concerns of the end of the sitting, and the potential for a summer election that could be triggered over a number of issues. The promise of an EI “working group” between the Liberals and Conservatives that would sit over the summer to work out reforms to the system averted an election.

The Conservative government’s crime agenda – albeit part of the end-of-sitting rush to get legislation passed – received attention for a bill on a national sex offender registry, a bill limiting conditional sentences, legislation to allow victims of terror to sue states that sponsor them, and a bill on drug offences, particularly marijuana.

Fiscally, there were stories on the impact of new rules requiring passports at the Canada-US border, the potential sale of crown assets to help balance the budget,

and the bonuses afforded to the CPP Investment Board at a time of economic decline.

Access to Information lapses were another big story, with the sudden resignation of the Information Commissioner. The Lobbying Commissioner was confirmed around this same time, and there were concerns about CSIS withholding information about an individual being detained on a security certificate.

July 2009

Early in July controversy arose around the fact that the Toronto Pride GLBT festival had received funds from the government's Marquee Tourism Events programme. A backbench Conservative MP complained to a pro-life website about the funding, and shortly thereafter, the minister in charge, Diane Ablonczy, had the file taken from her portfolio. Stories followed about how Divers/cité – another GLBT festival in Montreal – had its own funding request denied.

The Bank of Canada governor declared the recession to be essentially over, but concerns over EI continued, as the Liberals and Conservatives held meetings of their “working group” on the issue. As well, there were complaints that the government was heavily advertising its “Home Renovation Tax Credit,” even though the measures to implement it had not yet passed Parliament.

Immigration was a big issue, with Canada requiring visas for visitors from the Czech Republic and Mexico, stories about the decline in new permanent residents as compared to temporary foreign workers, and the immigration minister

trying to differentiate “good” immigrants from “bad” ones who used the refugee system in bogus ways. The Immigration and Refugee Board also put out a release on violence against the Roma people, who were a large portion of refugee claimants. There was some renewed interest in the claims of certain American war resisters in this country, and a series of stories on a Canadian trapped abroad, focused in particular on a woman named Suaad Hagi Mohamud, trapped in Kenya.

There was also a brief flurry of stories that accused Prime Minister Harper of pocketing a communion wafer at the Catholic funeral of former Governor General Roméo LeBlanc.

August 2009

Employment insurance reforms continued to dominate the political coverage in August. The Liberal and Conservative “working group” eventually broke down, in part when the Conservatives were accused of having padded the cost of the Liberal plan to make it look unpalatable. The provincial premiers also discussed the issue at their annual conference, along with H1N1 flu and Buy American provisions. This continued also to fuel speculation of an autumn election.

The Liberals capitalised on the Conservative government’s handling of stimulus funding by touring sites where funding announcements had been made, but no work had begun.

An NDP convention in Halifax considered rebranding the party simply as the “Democratic Party,” as some believed it was time to drop the “New” in their name,

but the resolution was never debated. Later in the month, Jack Layton met with Prime Minister Harper about EI reforms.

In foreign affairs, DNA testing confirmed the identity of Suaad Hagi Mohamud, and she was eventually returned to Canada, albeit after further delays. At a North American Leaders' Summit in Guadalajara, Mexico, it was announced that the RCMP would assist in the training of Mexican police in the midst of that country's drug war.

September 2009

Election speculation dominated the political media early in the month, especially after the Liberal caucus retreat in Sudbury, Ontario, when leader Michael Ignatieff declared that he could no longer support the government. Ignatieff prepared a confidence vote, released a series of ads that had him appearing in a forest (derided in the media as "Narnia"), and an early return to Parliament. And yet, no election happened as the NDP struck a deal whereby the Conservative government would add a billion dollars worth of new EI programmes in exchange for NDP support in the House.

The Conservatives found themselves under fire, beginning with a leaked tape of Harper rallying the party at a gathering in Sault Ste. Marie where he decried the kinds of Liberal appointees to the bench and other top posts had he not been in power. His government was criticised by the opposition for its spending on advertising for its "Economic Action Plan," including the way that inappropriate

partisan links were on government websites. Harper's decision to bypass a speech at the UN in favour of a photo-op at the Tim Horton's headquarters in Oakville, and revelations by a soon-to-be-dumped candidate that his riding hadn't received stimulus funds because it was currently help by a Liberal, added to the media fires.

Both the opposition and the media scrutinised and criticised the stimulus spending programme, while the Parliamentary Budget Officer was critical of the government for not having a deficit reduction plan. Planning to deal with the H1N1 flu pandemic faced criticism, culminating in embarrassment over a shipment of body bags to a northern First Nations reservation.

The government was also under attack for plans to scrap funds for artists touring abroad, and its bill to add seats to the House of Commons based on a new population distribution formula. As well, Rahim Jaffer, former MP and Conservative caucus chair and husband to cabinet member Helena Guergis, was arrested for drunk driving and drug possession.

In terms of foreign affairs, Harper visited Washington DC for a meeting with President Obama that lasted forty-two minutes. There was also a G20 meeting in Pittsburgh, designed to coordinate policy to counteract the economic downturn.

October 2009

A possible stalling in economic recovery preoccupied political media in October, along with figures that showed that stimulus funds were disproportionately spent in Conservative ridings. Most disproportionate of all was

the spending in the riding of the Industry minister, Tony Clement, though much of that was explained as spending in advance of the G8 summit to be held there in June 2010. Conservative MPs posing with government novelty cheques – most emblazoned with the Conservative party logo or their own signatures – became fodder for opposition MPs, as was the need for the government to put up signs declaring their “Economic Action Plan” for routine maintenance, which included the replacement of doorknobs at a government building.

With increasingly frustrated MPs unable to get accurate numbers on the stimulus spending, struggles erupted between the opposition and the government, dragging in the Parliamentary Budget Officer. As well, criticism arose about “muzzling” of officials at the hearings being held by the Military Police Complaints Commission on the treatment and possible torture of detainees in Afghanistan. This slowly erupted with the testimony before a Commons committee of diplomat Richard Colvin.

Harper scored a media coup by playing piano at the National Arts Centre unannounced, alongside Yo-Yo Ma, as outlets lapped up the clips. The Liberals were not spared media scrutiny as they went through a highly publicised backroom shake-up.

There were also continuing tensions over the slow rollout of the vaccine for H1N1, including the lack of vaccine trials in Canada, and the availability of an unadjuvanted version of the vaccine for pregnant women.

November 2009

Partisan debate around stimulus spending continued as announcements did not include data on promised job creation, Conservative candidates appeared at the announcements in opposition-held ridings, and accusations that spending stimulus was slowest to rollout in Quebec. This included criticism of Manitoba Conservative MP Shelley Glover for bringing party-branded water bottles to a school as rewards for students in French immersion, and complaints that the Olympic torch route went through more Conservative ridings than opposition-held ones.

A bill to scrap the long-gun registry passed second reading thanks to the support of several Liberals and NDP MPs, which provided a great deal of commentary about unity in those parties. The opposition questioned the new citizenship guide unveiled by the Conservatives, especially some of its omissions – including no mention of gay rights. There was also an emergency debate on the H1N1 vaccine. Other domestic concerns included problems with the temporary foreign workers programme, the Auditor General pointing out the lack of emergency preparedness planning by the government, the lack of a coherent climate change policy on the eve of the Copenhagen summit, an EI bill to extend parental leave benefits to the self-employed, and a bill to crack down in Internet Service Providers with regards to child pornography.

Prime Minister Harper travelled to Mumbai, and later announced an agreement to sell nuclear technology to India. There were also concerns raised in Canadian political circles about an anti-homosexuality bill being debated in Uganda.

There were four by-elections this month, a visit by Prince Charles and his wife, Camilla, and a rash of Conservative “ten percenter” mail-outs accusing the Liberal MPs of anti-Semitism – especially targeting Liberal-held ridings with large Jewish populations.

December 2009

Partisan acrimony in the House of Commons rose throughout December, with opposition frustration over government stonewalling. The government released its final stimulus “report card” to journalists on a plane en route to Beijing, but the way it tracked spending made it impossible to compare with previous reports. As well, the opposition voted in Parliament to demand the government turn over documents related to Afghan detainees, which the government ignored, citing national security concerns.

The multi-faith NGO KAIROS had its funding for development work in the Middle East cut by the government, and accusations circulated that it was because of pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli sentiment on KAIROS’ part – this while the furore over the ten-percenters accusing Liberals of anti-Semitism continued to circulate.

The Liberals had to deal with tales of a plot by Bob Rae loyalists to force Michael Ignatieff from the leadership. Toward the end of the month, there was some flurry in the media regarding Liberal MP Scott Brison’s Christmas card, where he posed with his husband.

The Governor General travelled to Mexico, Guatemala and Costa Rica, while Harper went to China – where the Premier rebuked him for not having visited sooner – as well as to the Copenhagen summit on climate change.

The year in politics ended with Harper phoning the Governor General on December 30th to request a prorogation of Parliament until the beginning of March.

January 2010

Prorogation dominated the first part of January, as opposition parties demanded a change to the rules that would prevent similar prorogations in the future. Mobilisation of anti-prorogation supporters through Facebook and other social media platforms, culminated in several rallies across the country the weekend before the House was originally due to return.

The Liberals and NPD declared that they would return to Ottawa on the 25th as planned. While the NDP simply held a caucus meeting before returning to their ridings to “consult with Canadians,” the Liberals spent the next several weeks holding roundtable discussions on a variety of issues, ensuring that all of their MPs and Senators were “at work” in Ottawa. Prior to this, Ignatieff had undertaken a campus tour across the country and used the Internet to hold several “virtual town hall” meetings.

The government continued to refuse to turn over the documents on Afghan detainees, while it also chose not to renew the term of the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission, further delaying its inquiry on the treatment of

detainees. As well, a party loyalist, whom the outgoing chair described as being unqualified, replaced the head of the RCMP Complaints Commission whose term had ended. Rights and Democracy, an arms-length government agency, was in the headlines thanks to government appointees on the board denouncing prior spending on projects and organisations that they considered to be anti-Semitic. Staff resignations followed and public feuds erupted in op-ed pages across the country. The Canadian Council on Learning also had its funding cut.

A devastating earthquake in Haiti helped to change the media narrative, as Canada responded swiftly to the crisis. Harper attended the World Economic Forum at Davos, Switzerland, where he unveiled plans for the G8 and G20 summits that would turn the focus of development goals to maternal and child health.

February 2010

While prorogation and the earthquake response in Haiti were both prominently figured in the media, so was the Vancouver Olympics. The Conservative government faced criticism for harmonising greenhouse gas emission targets with the US, the appointment of five new Senators (giving the party a plurality in the Senate), the lack of response to a Supreme Court ruling that Omar Khadr's rights had been violated while he languished in the American prison at Guantanamo Bay, and the shelving of a planned HIV vaccine manufacturing facility in Winnipeg. Accusations of interference to promote secrecy continued after stories that an

assistant to former Natural Resources minister Christian Paradis' intercepted a response to an Access to Information request.

The Liberals unveiled their childcare platform, while they questioned whether or not Harper's pledge to support maternal and child health would include access to safe abortions. NDP leader Jack Layton revealed his battle with prostate cancer, but said that he would remain active as party leader, and later met with Harper to try and gain concessions before the return of Parliament. The Bloc Quebecois also faced scrutiny after its former leader, Lucien Bouchard, said that sovereignty wasn't going to happen.

The continued breakdown at Rights and Democracy remained in the media, as did the government's decision to appeal a provincial court decision on Insite – Vancouver's safe injection site – to the Supreme Court, Conservative MP Maxime Bernier's defence of climate change sceptics, and on the government's decision to fund an evangelical-run youth centre in Winnipeg. The mainstream media did not widely cover the way in which Conservative cabinet minister John Baird's sexuality was outed on CBC radio by a provincial Conservative candidate trying to win the provincial by-election in Toronto Centre.

March 2010

The long-awaited return of Parliament meant March was a very busy month. While there was a great deal of attention paid to budget by the mainstream media, questions of Parliamentary privilege surrounded the release of Afghan detainee

documents. The government ignored calls for a public inquiry, released piles of heavily redacted documents, and appointed former Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci to review those documents to determine what needed to be kept secret.

The budget froze military and international aid spending, and indicated cuts to the civil service would occur through attrition. Questions remained around infrastructure spending, and there was also a brief flurry of coverage surrounding proposed cuts to programmes that subsidized public Internet use in libraries and in remote areas, though that was later rescinded as an “honest mistake.” The budget also provided for a new national securities regulator, opposed by Quebec and Alberta.

The government refused to provide costing for new prisons necessary to accommodate the increase in incarcerations that its new mandatory minimum sentencing laws would create. Former Conservative caucus chair Rahim Jaffer was let off with a \$500 fine as part of a plea bargain for his impaired driving and drug possession charges, while his wife, Minister of State for Status of Women, Helena Guergis, faced public pressure after a profane outburst in the Charlottetown airport.

A Liberal opposition day motion in the House of Commons to provide safe abortions as part of the maternal and child health development goals was defeated when some Liberals voted against it. The government’s decision not to fund safe abortions also came under criticism from US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and the UK’s foreign secretary. The House also debated a Bloc private members’ bill on euthanasia, as the private members’ bill on the long-gun registry continued in committee.

The Liberals held a weekend-long policy conference in Montreal called the “Canada 150 Conference,” to prepare for the country’s 150th anniversary. The party did score a victory in the House of Commons when Liberal MP Scott Brison negotiated an amendment to the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement with the Colombian government, which provided the Liberal support necessary to pass the bill.

April 2010

A number of issues carried over into April – safe abortions as part of the maternal and child health plans, the continued problems at Rights and Democracy, the debate over the long-gun registry in committee, and debate on the euthanasia bill, which died at second reading. Several issues did escalate, such as the release of documents on Afghan detainees, which resulted in a ruling by the Speaker of the House of Commons that Parliament was supreme, that MPs had a right to see the documents, and that he expected parties to come to an agreement on how to go about it while still respecting national security concerns.

The conduct of Helena Guergis and Rahim Jaffer received considerable coverage after a story in the *Toronto Star* about what were presented as Jaffer’s questionable business connections. Guergis was forced to resign from cabinet and then removed from caucus after the Prime Minister stated that allegations about her activities had come from a “credible source,” though he would not disclose the nature of the allegations. Access to Information was also in the spotlight, not only

with continued questions of government interference, but also a failing grade given to several departments by the Information Commissioner.

The Commons health committee undertook an investigation into the shelving of the HIV vaccine production facility, the bill to add seats in the House of Commons came under more fire from Quebec, and the notion of sex offenders receiving pardons gained a great deal of attention, with the government promising to bring forward a bill to end the practice. The Victims of Crime ombudsman criticised the government's spending on his programmes, and later found his budget slashed and his position not renewed. A bill to reform the refugee system was also introduced and debated.

May 2010

The debate intensified over funding for safe abortions as part of the maternal and child health development aid and came to a head with Conservative Senator Nancy Ruth encouraging aid groups to "shut the fuck up about abortion" until after the G8, lest the wording of the release be tightened to exclude it explicitly. Shortly thereafter, the annual March for Life took place on the Hill, where anti-abortion groups praised the government's stance on the issue.

While the investigation into Rahim Jaffer and Helena Guergis' activities continued, so did questions about political interference on Access to Information requests. The government declared political staffers would no longer appear as witnesses at committees, with ministers taking their place under the principle of

“ministerial accountability,” which led to accusations of contempt of Parliament. The cost of building new prisons to accommodate those affected by the justice bills going through Parliament, and the long-gun registry bill, also attracted attention.

More NGOs continued to lose funding, particularly those who served women such as Match Canada. The year’s Marquee Tourism Events excluded Toronto Pride, leading to more questions about ideologically driven decisions as the government changed the program requirements after all the submission of applications to exclude Pride celebrations.

Other financial issues in the spotlight included the Canadian navy’s operating budget, the costs of the upcoming G8 and G20 summits, money for an experimental MS treatment, and the size and breadth of the omnibus budget implementation bill. Negotiations continued on releasing the Afghan detainee documents, as did negotiations for passage of legislation to limit pardons for sex offenders.

All parties came under fire from the media and the public after the Board of Internal Economy denied the request of the Auditor General to do a performance audit on the House of Commons’ operations, though this became conflated into the issue of MPs’ expenses being unchecked. As well, new concerns were raised about offshore drilling in Canadian waters in light of the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and the imprisonment of two gay men in Malawi produced questions from all parties.

June 2010

The G8 and G20 summits were major topics during this month – in the weeks leading up to it, the focus was on the exorbitant costs of the event, followed by the protests and riots that took place during the summits themselves. Several other topics carried over as the political season wound down – the safe abortion question as part of the maternal and child health goals for the G8, the bill to scrap the long-gun registry, the question of offshore drilling in Canadian waters, plans to stop prisoners getting pensions and pardons for sex offenders.

Partisan acrimony was also on display, especially as Conservative cabinet ministers began disrupting committees rather than allowing them to hear from their staffers. In contrast, the Commons passed the refugee reform bill, the result of considerable inter-party cooperation, and all parties eventually relented in allowing the Auditor General to audit the House of Commons' expenses.

The Oliphant Commission released its report on the dealings between former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Karlheinz Schreiber, while former Justice John Major made public his report on the 1985 Air India bombing. The Braidwood inquiry into the Taser death of Robert Dziekanski also released its report.

There was some media attention devoted to the possibility of a Liberals-NDP merger or coalition, though both parties quickly dismissed the rumours of talks. At the end of the month, the Speaker of the House, Peter Milliken announced that he would not be seeking re-election, and the Queen and Prince Philip visited the country.

Chapter Four: *Canadian Catholic News*

Canadian Catholic News is a cooperative, currently composed of seven full member papers, and six associate members. The cooperative traces its history to the papal visit of 1984, when Catholic newspapers across the country wanted to share copy. The papers talked about it until launching the cooperative in May of 1988. Eventually, it grew to a point where they decided to fund a full-time correspondent in Ottawa, starting in 1992. Art Babych held the position for twelve years, and upon his departure in 2004, *CCN* hired Deborah Gyapong to replace him. (Gyapong, *Canadian Catholic News origins traced to 1984 papal visit 2009*)

The purpose of the *Canadian Catholic News* is “to present a Catholic perspective of world news and events,” says Jim O’Leary, publisher and editor of the *CCN* as well as publisher and editor of the Toronto-area member paper, *The Catholic Register*.

The *CCN* website describes itself as:

A co-operative news service serving Catholic media across Canada, brings together the efforts of Catholic newspapers, radio and television across Canada, to provide an accurate, dependable coast-to-coast picture of the Catholic Church in action. It also provides a look at the issues affecting the common good through the prism of Catholic social teachings. (Canadian Catholic News 2010)

This need for a Catholic perspective matches its logic in putting a journalist in the Parliamentary Press Gallery. “Obviously Ottawa is a place that generates a lot of news, where the legislators are,” O’Leary says. “A lot of the topics they discuss are of interest to anyone who’s interested in reading newspapers, anyone interested in

the news, and a lot of the issues concern the moral issues, the human rights issues, the social justice issues, the type of issues that we are particularly interested in following. Generally speaking, we find that's not always the focus of the secular media, and when the issues overlap directly with religions, they tend not to have the background and experience to always get it right. So if there are stories, it's not uncommon to say misinterpretations, or inaccuracies or things of that nature when they're talking about the Church." (O'Leary 2010)

CCN's Ottawa reporter, Deborah Gyapong, began her journalism career at a weekly newspaper in Nova Scotia in 1981. "I gradually started working for CBC, first CBC radio on a casual basis in Halifax, then I began working as a researcher in television, and in 1988 I got my first television producer's job at CBC," Gyapong says. As part of her coming to work with CBC Newsworld, she moved to Ottawa in 1989. "The bulk of my journalism career was in television as a television producer – so seventeen years of my career were at the CBC."

After numerous budget cuts, Gyapong left the CBC in 2000, and worked briefly as a communications officer in the Leader of the Opposition's Office, when Stockwell Day headed the Canadian Alliance Party. "I got fired when Stephen Harper came in, within two or three days of his winning the leadership," Gyapong says. From there, she started up a communications business, helping people to prepare book-length manuscripts for publication, while she wrote articles for evangelical papers and finished her own novel, which was published in 2006. When that freelance work dried up, Gyapong responded to the *CCN* job posting in 2004.

“They were looking for an Ottawa correspondent for Roman Catholic papers, and it wasn’t a requirement that you be Roman Catholic, and I’m not,” Gyapong says. “So I applied, and I got the job.” As well as writing, Gyapong also shoots photos for her stories. (Gyapong 2010)

Gyapong says that she doesn’t have a firm daily work pattern because the nature of journalism makes planning and routines. “The papers that I write for are mainly weeklies, but they all go to bed at different times, and many of them are developing websites, so there’s that appetite for getting the immediate news,” Gyapong says. “But there’s also a thought to having to write things that are going to have a shelf-life, that are going to be meaningful two weeks after the fact. That is tricky to meet those demands, and not end up working twenty-four/seven.”

She does scan newspapers that she gets at home, as well as the Internet, but finds that she doesn’t have to look far for ideas. “When the House is in session, it’s like trying to drink from a fire hydrant, and it’s a matter of choosing what stories you’re going to do, and I feel like ‘I’ve got to write about all of this,’ and a lot of time the papers don’t have room for everything that I write,” Gyapong says.

“One of the things about the Catholic Church is that it’s not as monolithic as people outside it may think, and there is a wide range of interest among the different editors that I write for, so it could be anything from poverty and social justice issues to the life and family issues, euthanasia, to international affairs. There’s a whole gamut of things.

“It’s not just covering the Hill the way a daily would, but I also have to do the value-added of what the Catholic response is to the things that are happening, or

how this might impact the Church, or what the Church is doing in relation to these things, so it's like there's this extra little thought process that has to go on, and in some issues, people in the Catholic Church are not agreed on these things, so I have to try to find that balance of the different opinions, let's say on the budget or something like that. Catholics can be all over the map on how the government does its budget, and there's no one way that the Pope says that you have to look at the economy, except that you be ethical and that you give to the poor, but exactly how you decide to do that is a matter of prudential judgement." (Gyapong 2010)

She comes up with most of her story ideas. "The balance would tip in the favour of the reporter," O'Leary says. "She has her finger on the pulse, and then she communicates with me or with Paul Schratz out in British Columbia – he's the co-chair of the [CCM]. Mostly with me though because I'm close and in the same time zone, so Deb tells me what types of things she is working on, what types of stories are coming up that might be of interest, and we have a chat. And then she goes ahead and does it, and from time to time, I'll come across something that I think is of interest, so I'll call or email her and ask her if she can follow up on a particular thing. But if I were to guess, probably 80 percent generated by her, and the other 20 percent by others." (O'Leary 2010)

While Gyapong admits that it can be isolating in Ottawa, the perspective afforded by her editors can help her to filter out stories that there would be little interest in by the memberships, and she embraces suggestions they make. "I want to please them, I want them to be happy with what I'm covering."

Member papers also make suggestions on stories with regional interests, such as a person from their dioceses being in Ottawa, or someone getting a Governor General's medal from their province, or similar. (Gyapong 2010)

Gyapong is in touch at least weekly with her editors, and again by email when she files a story, which gets sent to each editor, as well as uploaded to an internal website where editors can select which stories they want to run in their individual papers. O'Leary will communicate more often when the House is in session, often daily, either by phone or email. That drops to around twice a week in the summer months. (O'Leary 2010)

The co-operative nature of the *CCN* means that editing copy is largely dependent upon the needs of each member paper. "I'm terrible as a proof-reader and a copy-editor – I'm a big picture kind of thinker, so they thankfully get edited for spelling and those little things like that," Gyapong says. "I have to also realise that sometimes I write long, and they have a small hole, so my story may end up considerably shorter. The other thing is because I have so many things to cover, and I know that different papers have different things, it's harder to write short than it is to write long."

She also gets a chance to review major edits before publication. "I have asked that if the lede or their substantial rewriting involves paraphrasing, or something like that, that I have it shown me before it gets published, so they're good about doing that," Gyapong says. Unlike her experience in working for television news, where clips are selected and stories are written around them, Gyapong finds that she prefers writing long and editing down, especially as it provides context for

quotes that may be paraphrased. This may mean losing whole sections, but oftentimes the edit will be good enough that she won't even be able to tell what was missing.(Gyapong 2010)

“For us [*The Catholic Register*], like any newspaper, it's edited and as much as we can, fact-checked, and then everything at the end of the day is determined by the amount of ads and the amount of space on each page,” says O'Leary. “Your article has to fit the hole. Deb – she's an experienced author and reporter, so her copy doesn't require a lot of rewriting or heavy editing.”(O'Leary 2010)

Gyapong says that she doesn't receive much in the way of reader feedback.

“I will get the occasional negative thing that gets in my way, but it's rare,” she says. “I get personal reader feedback when I see people, and people tell me that they like what I'm doing, or they felt that such-and-such a story touched them, or whatever, but I don't generally get a lot of email or feedback.”(Gyapong 2010)

O'Leary says that feedback will depend on the story. “Sometimes you get no feedback other than each year you hope the subscribers renew and you take that as positive feedback. But if it's a hot-button issue, then for sure you're going to generate some feedback. Recently, when [Quebec] Cardinal [Marc] Ouellette was taken to task for comments he made about abortion, I don't know if you saw that story in the mainstream press, and we followed up on that story of course here, and there was a lot of reaction to something like that. For two reasons – one, it seems like people were attacking the Church, and the other, whenever you're talking about the issue of abortion, it's probably the hottest button issue. Things like that, issues anything you write about – abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, gay rights – of

course sexual abuse in the Church is a big one. You'll get reaction regardless of what you say – it just generates conversation. But if it's just the general ebb and flow of the day, the news, then a lot of the times an article may not get any reaction or one or two letters to the editor.”

O'Leary says that comments come in a variety of forms, on the website, to emails, phone calls, and pen-and-paper letters to the editor, with the fewest on the web. “If people have something to say, our readers generally want to say it directly to us than putting it up on the web for everyone to see.”

The feedback has some impact in shaping what issues get additional coverage. “Obviously you want to write about the things that people want to read about, so if you get a lot of feedback on an issue, then we certainly tend to look for a follow-up,” O'Leary says. “Sometimes a follow-up means interviewing more people, going deeper into a story. Sometimes it can mean adding more clarity to a story, sometimes it means doing a follow-up on a particular person, after the hot issue dies down, but you'll do a feature on one of the main principals in the story. If there's no feedback, then the story will have its run for a day or two, then it will quietly die.” (O'Leary 2010)

O'Leary judges *CCN*'s impact largely by feedback. “Occasionally if a story can generate a reaction at some government level, with respect to if it's not legislation, then it's an opposition Member of Parliament standing up and bringing the issue forward with a question in Question Period or in a committee or something like that,” O'Leary says. “Those are the main areas. The other one I guess would be from

time to time, the mainstream press will follow-up on a story we started, so that would be the other one I suppose.” (O’Leary 2010)

New communication tools like blogging or social media do not currently figure highly into the *CCN*’s reporting. Gyapong maintains a personal blog that began as a platform to publicise her novel, which also serves as an outlet for her “compulsion to share the interesting things” she comes across on the Internet. (Gyapong 2010) O’Leary also notes it’s a function of resources. The *Catholic Register* has recently started a blog written by a freelancer, and *BC Catholic* has been more active with using the tools, but O’Leary has found no demand for blogging from his readers. “I think our readers aren’t necessarily the most technically savvy,” he says. “Our readers aren’t young, so there’s not been much pressure to go quickly there.” (O’Leary 2010)

Gyapong maintains a strict policy. “I’m very old school in the fact that I will not burn my sources,” she says. Conversations off the record stay that way, and even if she may personally disagree with sources, she feels that building a trusting relationship is paramount over the long-term. “Since I’m a journalist, it’s important for me to have people from everywhere feeling free to talk to me. If I were a columnist, I could be free to burn whomever I felt like burning, or to criticise them publicly or this kind of thing. I try to keep good rapport and a kind of trust happening.”

Gyapong keeps closer tabs on certain Catholic MPs in all parties, though she admits to having more access to the Conservative party, mainly stemming from her work in Stockwell Day’s office ten years ago. “There are Liberals that I also have

very good relationships with that I've built over the years, and in the NDP," Gyapong says. "I did a story on the Catholics in the NDP and their commitment to social justice. I want to do one on the Bloc too – it's one of those things where some of those feature-type stories when the fire hydrant is going, you don't have time to do."

She has maintained a group of sources off the Hill that represent differing voices within the Church – including some bishops and cardinals – as well as other faith-based organisations. "Sometimes you tend to go what's easy to get because you're in a hurry," Gyapong says. "And then it's always easy to go back to the same people over and over again, so that's one thing that I'm always on the lookout for, widening the pool of people that I talk to, and finding people that are knowledgeable about certain issues and can provide different perspectives. But that's not always easy."

Her relationships with other members of the Press Gallery go back fifteen years to her time with the CBC, but she admits to not spending much time on the Hill, as working from home is easier. Depending on what is going on, she will be on the Hill between one and three days a week.

"I would say my relations with people in the Press Gallery are cordial, but I don't have the same kinds of daily demands," Gyapong says. "I'm not interested in the horse race – I mean I'm interested in it personally, but I'm not interested in some of the machinations about what gaffes such-and-such a person is in. My interest is much more on policy, or on ideas on that kind of thing, rather than whether so-and-so is ahead or not, or how their poll numbers are doing, or that kind of thing."

“I have to pay attention to private members’ bills, which most of the people here can deem totally irrelevant,” Gyapong says. This can include bills such as Liberal MP John McKay’s Bill C-300 on ethical mining practices, requiring her to learn more about Canadian mining companies operating abroad, and she paid a lot of attention to Bloc MP Francine Lalonde’s euthanasia bill.(Gyapong 2010)

The coverage

Between May 2009 until the end of June 2010, Gyapong wrote approximately one hundred and seventy-seven stories, eighty-eight of which were related to federal politics or federal public policy. There was some crossover in stories that counted as federal political stories and those which did not, such as with the National March For Life series of anti-abortion rallies. Because most of those stories dealt with local organisers, they did not count unless they involved federal MPs, as one story did.

The non-political stories that Gyapong wrote largely dealt with Church matters – the ongoing stories of sexual abuse allegations, internal politics with member organisations, ecclesiastical discussions with different Christian churches, and profiles of certain Church leaders.

Table 1

Total articles written:	177
Federal political articles only:	88

The coverage itself broke down as such:

Table 2

	<i>Canadian Catholic News</i>
Social Policy	52
Politics	16
Economy	4
Immigration	2
Justice	6
Foreign Affairs	8

Note that the total may be missing a few articles, as they may not have picked up by the three CCN member papers that have accessible archives online.

Social Policy

Social policy was the largest theme covered by Gyapong for the *CCN*, with two particular issues, euthanasia and abortion, dominating the coverage. There was a smaller yet significant focus on the aboriginal Truth and Reconciliation Committee stemming from the Prime Minister's apology for the First Nations residential schools.

Coverage included twenty articles written on euthanasia, along with another two on the need for palliative care, which is seen as the alternative to assisted suicide or euthanasia. Most focused on a private members' bill by Bloc MP Francine Lalonde. Bill C-384, titled "An Act to amend the Criminal Code (right to die with

dignity),” which sought to amend “the Criminal Code to allow a medical practitioner, subject to certain conditions, to aid a person who is experiencing severe physical or mental pain without any prospect of relief or is suffering from a terminal illness to die with dignity once the person has expressed his or her free and informed consent to die.” (Library of Parliament 2010) It was debated and defeated in the House of Commons in this fourteen-month period. In most cases, however, these articles quoted Catholic or allied groups such as the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition. MPs were mostly quoted from Hansard rather than interviewed.

Abortion was next, with fourteen articles, plus one about the March For Life on Parliament Hill. This was already an issue before access to safe abortion became a flashpoint around Prime Minister Harper’s plans to use his G8 leadership role to address developing world maternal and child health issues. There was a number of articles written on that subject and related debates in Parliament, including Catholic officials and other allied organisations denouncing some politicians – mostly Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff and MP Bob Rae – over their support for access to safe abortions abroad.

While Gyapong wrote about the retirement of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) national chief, Phil Fontaine – who it was noted had met the Pope over the residential schools issue – there were five stories about the upcoming Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings to begin across the country. One of the sources was a lawyer representing some fifty Catholic entities in relation to residential schools issues, while Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl was often

quoted. There were also two related stories about the AFN and its plans to help reduce poverty – particularly child poverty – on Canadian reserves.

Beyond those subjects, social issues coverage was widely scattered. One article concerned the potential loss of the postal subsidy for magazines in the country, as it would affect several *CCN* member papers. Another addressed a Conservative private members' bill on human trafficking, with a third highlighting a debate between Minister of Human Resources Diane Finley and her Liberal critic, Nova Scotia MP Michael Savage, on the subject of childcare. On another occasion, Gyapong quoted several Catholic-affiliated groups expressing concern over a Senate report on the rights of child, which criticised allowing spanking in Canadian law, suggesting banning the practice could violate the rights of the parent. She also covered an NDP private member's bill on extending explicit human rights protection to transgendered and transsexual people, but the only person quoted in the article was the spokesperson for REAL Women, an anti-feminist organisation.

There were also two articles about the loss of charitable status by a Calgary street preacher. The second article quoted a Canada Revenue Agency official saying that the proper documents had not been filed to keep up the status, though there were worries expressed by Calgary Bishop Fred Henry and others that the status had been pulled because the street preacher in question had made questionable remarks about gays and lesbians.

Politics

As Gyapong indicated, her political coverage ignored the horserace of polls and most of the party back room machinations. There were a few stories on political manoeuvres – prorogation, the committee hearings on Afghan detainees, and on the status of legislation that interested the *CCN*, such as the euthanasia and human trafficking bills. The only real “scandal” coverage involved Harper being accused by the Saint John *Telegraph-Journal* of pocketing a communion wafer at the funeral of former Governor General Roméo LeBlanc, but two of the three stories on the issue dealt with two separate apologies made by the *Telegraph-Journal*.

More common were stories about the intersection of religion and politics, such as those on the 2009 and 2010 National Prayer Breakfasts, one on how the Liberals are apparently losing the Catholic vote, one on concerns about anti-Christian bigotry in Parliament after comments were made by Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe and Catholic NDP MP Pat Martin about Opus Dei, and one article where Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl complained that atheist MPs were given a “free ride” rather than have their beliefs scrutinised. Gyapong also interviewed both Stephen Harper immediately after his visit with the Pope in Rome, and Green Party leader Elizabeth May, who is noted for her Anglican beliefs.

Other political stories included one about the Catholic Women’s League delivering a list of its resolutions to Parliament Hill and its meetings with MPs of various parties, a story on an endowment set up in Governor General Michaëlle

Jean's name at St. Paul University in Ottawa, and one on a fight between a public servant and her union, because she did not want her dues being used to advocate for equality for gays and lesbians.

Foreign Affairs

Foreign aid was the most common issue covered by the *CCN* under the theme of foreign affairs. The earthquake in Haiti attracted the most attention, with three articles about the involvement of Catholic organisations in relief work, some of which used quotes from cabinet ministers responsible for the issue. Two additional stories dealt with Development & Peace (D&P) – the Catholic Church's official international development organisation – and the ecumenical religious aid organisation KAIROS, which had its funding cut by the federal government. While Gyapong wrote several articles on D&P, only one had a federal political dimension. The rest largely dealt with the internal politics at the organisation.

She also wrote two stories on nuclear disarmament, one of which quoted several renowned advocates on the subject such as Nobel Prize winning chemist John Polanyi, and one article on how Canadian bishops wanted Prime Minister Harper to ask Israel to relax its heightened security during the Easter Holy Week in that country. There was little direct engagement with MPs on these stories, and most simply quoted statements made by ministers on the topics at hand.

Justice

Most of the justice issues covered by *CCN* revolved around Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, which regulates hate-speech by telephone and Internet. Many have taken this up as a free speech issue, with religious groups worried that their messages denouncing gays and lesbians might be condemned as homophobic “hate speech.” This came up in three articles, as well as a fourth about a Canadian Human Rights Commission report, included comments from groups such as the Catholic Civil Rights League, who panned the report.

The other two articles concerned a bill before Parliament dubbed an “anti-child porn bill” by the *CCN* headline, which would allow police departments to obtain records of an individual’s Internet use from their Internet Service Provider without a court order. The other examined restorative justice being showcased at a trade show, and quoted Canada Correctional Services community engagement assistant commissioner Reverend Pierre Allard and Conservative MP David Sweet.

Economy and Immigration

There were far fewer articles in these two areas, although Gyapong did cover the 2010 federal budget, complete with commentary from relevant faith-based organisations, which none of the other three community-of-interest publications did. There was a second, related budget story about the need for new tax credits for

charitable organisations, which quoted several organisations advocating for the change.

The other two economic stories dealt with how the economic crisis undercut efforts at poverty reduction, and one on Liberal MP John McKay's bill on ethical mining practices. Gyapong did interview McKay for the article about his bill, and as Gyapong mentioned, there has been strong interest by the *CCN* member papers about ethical mining practices.

There were only two articles on immigration, and more specifically refugees. The first was a response by faith leaders who were critical of comments that Immigration Minister Jason Kenney had made regarding bogus refugee claimants, while the second was a précis of a bill on refugee reform tabled in the House of Commons. While that bill made it through the legislative process during the period covered by this study, there were no follow-up articles on the subject.

Political actors quoted

Throughout her reporting, Gyapong rarely interviewed MPs, perhaps because she is rarely on the Hill, preferring to work from home. She is never at Question Period and very rarely at the foyer scrums afterward, though I did once witness her having a vocal debate with Liberal MP Bob Rae on the issue of access to safe abortions as part of the G8 maternal and child health goals at one of the microphones set up there. Around that time, she wrote an article that accused Rae of "hijacking" an event dedicated to maternal and child health in the developing world.

As well, her “value added” reporting of why these stories matter to Catholics, means she more frequently interviews members of that community for reaction to legislation or proposed legislation than she does with the MPs and other political actors involved in debating and passing the bills.

She did quote a few MPs more regularly including Conservative MP Rob Bruinooge, who is the chair of the Parliamentary Pro-Life caucus, Liberal MP John McKay, who the party has designated to reach out to the faith communities, and NDP MP Joe Comartin, who is a Catholic. Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl also appeared in some stories, not only in relation to his work with First Nations around the Truth and Reconciliation Committee and poverty issues, but also because of his religious beliefs (such as the interview in which he complained that atheists get a “free ride”).

Gyapong did manage interviews with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Green Party leader Elizabeth May in order to discuss faith issues, and there appeared to be some interaction with NDP leader Jack Layton around the 2010 National Prayer Breakfast, especially in relation to his diagnosis of prostate cancer at the time.

Conclusion

Gyapong’s reporting followed a pattern similar to most reporters in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, usually citing two or three sources in every article, and reporting widely on issues of the day. Where Gyapong’s coverage differs most from

mainstream reporting is the way in which a sole point-of-view is presented, usually from a moral standpoint, and the sources tend to confirm this position, while there is little attempt made to challenge this point-of-view. This should not be surprising, given that the *CCN*'s mandate is to present the news from a Catholic point of view, which by definition has a certain sense of morality to it.

Chapter Five: *BC Christian News/CanadianChristianity.com*

Long-time Press Gallery member Lloyd Mackey has written about the intersection of faith and politics for many years, and while semi-retired, he remains a member in the Press Gallery for two different publications for the same community-of-interest. This thesis will be examining his role with one of those two, *BC Christian News*, and its online platform, *CanadianChristianity.com*.

BC Christian News began in 1982 as the publication of the Christian Info Society, a non-profit charitable organisation with its main goal “to promote and enhance unity and community within the Christian church in Canada.”(Christian Info Society 2010)

Based in the Greater Vancouver Area, serving primarily Southern British Columbia, the print edition covers a geographic area of Vancouver to Chilliwack, Vancouver Island, and the Thompson-Okanagan. While it primarily focuses on the Metro Vancouver & Fraser Valley areas, supplements serve both Vancouver Island and Thompson-Okanagan areas. Its website is of more national in scope and content.

“In a nutshell, we try to unite Christians, I would say,” says managing editor David Dawes. “One of our mottos has been ‘Linking Christians in ministry and purpose’ – we don’t use that one anymore, but that’s kind of what we’re about.” (Dawes 2010)

Its website includes a “Statement of Faith” with which members are expected to comply. It states members accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,

the sovereignty of God, the divine inspiration of the Holy Scripture, that Christ has risen from the dead and is the only path to salvation, and that they expect the personal, visible and imminent return of Jesus. (Christian Info Society 2010)

This makes the Christian Info Society fairly broad in terms of the various denominations of Christianity. Its publications cover stories on various churches and denominations, and it has recently become an associate member of the *Canadian Catholic News* in terms of subscribing to and republishing its content.

“We do try to show that there’s a spectrum in the Christian community, so whether you want to use terms left and right, there are both,” Dawes says. “Maybe not extremes, [but] a spectrum. Yeah, there are extremists on both sides, but we try to cover the more conservative and some of the more liberal as well, and do it fairly.” (Dawes 2010)

BC Christian News has a circulation of 35,000, while its website claims a million hits a month. It is a monthly publication, while the website is updated weekly. Typically there are three stories posted to the website in a week – one story whose content is shared with the print edition, one story drawn from another Christian news source, usually *Canadian Catholic News*, and the *Ottawa Watch* column produced by Lloyd Mackey.

Editor-at-large Lloyd Mackey began his journalism career in the early 1970s as a reporter and later editor with the *Chilliwack Progress* (currently a member of the Black Community Newspaper Group, publishing three times per week) after nearly heading for a career in Christian ministry, with an undergrad degree from a Bible college. From 1980 to 1984, Mackey attended Simon Fraser University to

obtain an MBA, during which time he helped establish what is today called *BC Christian News* in 1982.

In 1998, Mackey and his wife moved to Ottawa, and became involved with a similar kind of Christian newspaper, later incorporated into *Christian Week Ontario*, a small newspaper group similar to the Christian Info Society with operations were largely focused in Manitoba and Ontario. After entering into semi-retirement at age 65, Mackey continues to write for both – mostly with *BC Christian News* in his role as editor-at-large, but also with *Christian Week Ontario* as editor emeritus. (Mackey 2010)

Mackey has mentioned in his *Ottawa Watch* column that his wife Edna works in the Parliament Hill office of Conservative MP Maurice Vellacott. He has also stated that the column is the basis for a planned book he hopes to write. Mackey is the author of two previous books on faith and politics – *Like Father, Like Son: Ernest Manning and Preston Manning*, published in 1997, and *The Pilgrimage of Stephen Harper*, published in 2005 and renamed *Stephen Harper: The Case for Collaborative Governance* in an updated printing a year later.

While Mackey has the title editor-at-large for *BC Christian News*, he is in fact more a freelance journalist in his role in the Press Gallery, and therefore does not speak for the Christian Info Society. His current association with *BC Christian News* as a Press Gallery reporter was something that Mackey initiated on his own accord, says Dawes.

“He’s a co-founder of Christian Info Society, and I would say that’s his operation. We do get a column from him, which we pay him for, but as far as my

knowledge, it wasn't something that we arranged. I would say that he brought it about, and we benefited from it." (Dawes 2010)

Mackey includes in his daily work scanning newspapers – mostly online – many of them community papers in BC and Ontario, as well as a number of religious publications and sites. From there, he discusses with his various editors the stories he'll pursue.

"I also write several stories a month – usually anywhere between four and ten, depending on what's going on, for CanadianChristianity.com and usually a smaller number of stories for *The Christian Week* organisation," Mackey says. "They will often be about something that's going on in Ottawa that has some faith-political interfacing notes, or something going on in other parts of Canada where my understanding of politics and religion can help and can bring some perspective to the story." (Mackey 2010)

Dawes says the process for story assignments is something of a give-and-take, where he takes Mackey's ideas, and passes along those from his own boss, the organisation's president, Flyn Ritchie. "More than fifty percent we assign – say three-quarters maybe. Very rough estimate," Dawes says.(Dawes 2010)

The *OttawaWatch* column is Mackey's own initiative. "There's no end of things that I can write about, and if anything, I sometimes suffer from over choice, but I try to keep it down to about six or seven hundred words an item," Mackey says. "That actually I send out to a list of about 300 religious leaders – well, leaders in Canada, mostly religious, some who are not necessarily religious or Christian, or

some other kind of religion, but they're interested in what goes on in this." (Mackey 2010)

Mackey says that he is in touch with his various editors two or three times a week. Dawes says that he usually communicates a couple of times every month with Mackey, and that Mackey often does stories for the paper's Island section, given Mackey's origins there and his contacts in the area, though he is called upon to do national stories as well, as "he knows his politics." (Dawes 2010)

The analysis of Mackey's contributions shows that outside of his *OttawaWatch* column, his focus is heavily weighted toward local stories for the paper's Island and Okanagan sections, while many of his national stories are about religious institutions and not federal politics. Over the period of fourteen months studied, Mackey produced only eleven federal politics stories, as opposed to thirty-seven local and national stories. He often also compiled the monthly round up of upcoming local events at the back of both the Island and Okanagan sections, but those were not included in this analysis.

Mackey says his work gets moderate editing. "Sometimes, they'll want more information, so I'll provide more information," he says. "Sometimes they do some fact checking because something that I have said might have sounded ambiguous, but I would say that generally, the editing which is done is the same kind of editing that I would have done back in my editing days." (Mackey 2010)

Dawes is more generous in his assessment. "He's one of our better writers, I would say, so I would say the most I would edit out would be maybe a little too much detail about things that aren't quite pertinent to the story – they are of

interest, but when we're stuck for space, I'll have to whittle it down, but he's definitely one of our better writers. I don't have to do a lot of editing from a technical point of view – it's more for space.” (Dawes 2010)

Mackey gets posted responses on the website for about half of the stories he writes, but most of the comments are anonymous. “I also get a response from some of these 300 or so Christian leaders or religious leaders that I send Ottawa Watch to, and they'll interact with me somewhat,” Mackey says. “Sometimes I'll say to them well look, what you're saying maybe needs a little broader exposure – why don't go you to Ottawa Watch on the site and post what you've just said to me, and sometimes they'll do that.”

Mackey also suspects that his non-combative and “collaborative” style of journalism is one reason why he tends to get more positive comments than negative ones. “I've tried to create situations where you can get people talking together, or talking back and forth, and exchanging things with a sense of good will,” he says.

“People suggest to me ‘Lloyd, why can't you be more like Michael Coren?’ Or maybe they would say why can't I be more like Ann Coulter or her opposite number on the left side? But that's not the way I am. I'm now seventy years old, so I'll probably keep on being that way. I tend to say to them that I'm a militant moderate – if there's anything I can't stand, it's intolerance.” (Mackey 2010)

Dawes says that they tend not to get a lot of direct reaction from readers unless it is on a controversial subject, and that feedback has little to do with determining which stories they select to cover.

While Mackey only infrequently contributes to outside blogs such as Holy Post or Benediction Blogs, he is not actively engaged in social media platforms. The Christian Info Society is not involved in social media or new communications, though it does attempt to keep up to date online content, especially with its youth magazine *Options*.

Mackey says that he tries to keep in touch with MPs and some Senators that he knows are faith-based, or who have shown interest in faith-based issues, though he tends to speak more to Protestants than Catholics.

“One of the things that I’ve tried to do is scan the horizon with respect to groups that are in and around the Hill, some of them advocacy groups, some of them more pastoral care groups, and I’ve tried to keep on seeing what stories they might be producing that would be of interest to my readership,” Mackey says. “It’s interesting to note that there’s probably at any given time, there’s probably around twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five groups that are either based in Ottawa or get somebody into Ottawa often enough to push some buttons.”

Mackey tends to focus on groups that fall in the evangelical, charismatic and reformed areas, and to a lesser extent Catholic and mainstream Protestant, and the interaction between them.

“Others tend to be a little more isolated, but I’ve been able to develop quite a few stories that have probably illuminated what a number of these groups are trying to do,” Mackey says. “And here again, in some cases, I’ve done a story that might have been picked up by CanadianChristianity.com, and then a little later, somebody like Doug Todd at the *Vancouver Sun*, a religion and ethics writer there, or some of

his equivalents in some of the other publications in Canada, will pick up on the story and do it for a broader audience. But I was there first.”

Mackey adds that he maintains a reasonably cordial relationship with these MPs, but each party is aware that he is a journalist, and he remains careful as to “which lines he crosses.”

Mackey finds other Press Gallery members to be “generally congenial” on a personal level, but adds that he doesn’t get into much socialising or working on projects together. He does, however, stand up for members of the Gallery or the mainstream media when members of the faith community disparage them.

“I will tend to say well, just do two things – one, don’t feel that they’re the enemy, and secondly, try to view them as being able to provide you with a perspective of seeing yourself as other people see you” Mackey says. “But I will also suggest to them, don’t let somebody push you over-aggressively.”(Mackey 2010)

The coverage

Between May 2009 and the end of June 2010, Mackey wrote eleven federal politics stories for *BC Christian News* and *CanadianChristianity.com*, as well as fifty-nine *OttawaWatch* columns.

Table 3

Total articles written:	107
Federal political articles and Ottawa Watch column only:	70
Federal political articles only:	11

Between the federal politics stories and the *Ottawa Watch* column, coverage broke down as such:

Table 4

	<i>BC Christian News/ CanadianChristianity.com</i>
Social Policy	13
Politics	39
Economy	1
Immigration	1
Justice	1
Foreign Affairs	15

Some of the columns contained several subject matters – this chart captured the predominant one in each article. Some of the columns less identifiable as federal political issues, such as personality profiles, also fit into the “Politics” category.

Politics

The “Politics” theme was the largest one covered by Mackey. Most of this fell into two categories – commentary or occasional interviews with individual MPs whose faith Mackey was keen to explore, or issues that allowed for what Mackey termed “collaborative” politics. In his columns, Mackey pointed out examples of cross-party cooperation, and would often call for a loose coalition of “blue Liberals” or “urban Conservatives” to work more cooperatively, modelled on the activities of the BC Liberal Party.

This search for collaboration often seemed overly optimistic as he frequently cited examples of where it had occurred, or could occur. This included a reading of how Michael Ignatieff's willingness to deal with faith communities through Liberal MP John McKay could be seen as a gateway for more cooperation with Prime Minister Harper on a faith-based level, or how Harper's minority government compared to Lester B. Pearson's in terms of opportunities for cooperation with other parties. When cabinet minister Lisa Raitt was caught on tape making an overly frank and negative assessment her colleague Leona Aglukkaq's abilities, saying that Aglukkaq was having difficulty adjusting to the partisan atmosphere of Parliament after her experience in a consensus-based provincial government, Mackey was quick to point out the kind of "tag-team" and consensus-building activities that the pair engaged in during the medical isotope crisis. When the UK election resulted in a coalition government, Mackey quickly drew comparisons with how it could happen in Canada between the Conservatives and Liberals, and Mackey also used the opportunity for cooperation as a defence for Harper's December 2009 prorogation.

The other main focus of Mackey's political stories – the faith backgrounds or "back-stories" of MPs who were spotlighted in the media for whatever reason – frequently played out in his columns. This included everything from the annual National Prayer Breakfast, cabinet shuffles, or controversies such as when Conservative MP Brad Trost complained to a pro-life website that junior minister Diana Ablonczy had given government funds to Toronto Pride – the city's GLBT festival – and that the photo she posed for with the group included drag queens. When Stephen Harper was accused by the Saint John *Telegraph-Journal* of pocketing

a communion wafer at the Catholic funeral of former Governor General Roméo LeBlanc, Mackey called Harper's church to find out its policy on communion, especially given the secondary "controversy" of Harper, an evangelical Protestant, accepting the host at a Catholic mass.

As he pointed out in his interview, Mackey also wrote about faith groups that were having meetings either on Parliament Hill or in its proximity, such as a Billy Graham School of Evangelism event at the Chateau Laurier, or faith-based happenings at a Manning Centre conference. He also looked at the pro-life event known as "TheCRY."

Mackey also wrote about the intersection of faith and politics through examples such as Harper's comments to the French-language *Prestige* magazine that he was more concerned about "verdict of God" on his life than those "of historians" especially in relation to his family, an Evangelical Fellowship of Canada study of voting trends between 1996 and 2008 that showed that evangelical voters were moving from the Liberal to the Conservative party, a June 2010 press conference by the Canadian Muslim Forum which spoke about the Islamophobia they face in Canadian society, and the release of the book *The Armageddon Factor*, which examined the way that Christian nationalist groups were influencing the government. Mackey interviewed *Armageddon Factor* author Marci McDonald and was far more generous to her than most other socially conservative commentators, focusing on the fact that McDonald did identify herself as a Christian from a "mainstream denominational setting," and that her book contained extensive source notes that should contradict the factual errors that she had been accused of.

Most of Mackey's stories had few sources – one, possibly two, and rarely the political actors involved. Many of his columns about the faith backgrounds of MPs came either from conversations with the MPs or Senators, but those were rarely written in interview format.

Social Policy

Mackey addressed social policy in several columns and articles. One of the most frequently mentioned was Manitoba Conservative MP Joy Smith's private member's bill on human trafficking, which many religious groups had singled out as a bill worthy of support. Mackey was also keen to remark about Smith's evangelical-rooted religious convictions, and the adulation she earned in religious communities, such as when Christian activist Faytene Kryskow's organisation gave Smith their "hero award" for her trafficking bill.

Mackey also wrote several articles about the aboriginal Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as a "National Forgiven Summit" organised in Ottawa by local Cree Chief Kenny Blacksmith. His interest in the subject likely reflects the religious dimension to the history of aboriginal residential schools, and the vested interest that many churches that operated them have in the outcomes of the TRC process. Blacksmith, and TRC chair Justice Murray Sinclair, as well as some of the churches with vested interests were sources for Mackey, but he rarely dealt with the federal political actors aside from using quotes from press releases.

He also covered Bloc MP Francine Lalonde's euthanasia bill. For those columns, Mackey focused on the faith backgrounds of MPs such as Manitoba Conservatives Rob Bruinooge – who spoke against the bill – and Stephen Fletcher, who as a quadriplegic abstained from voting. Mackey wrote more than one column on the formation of a Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, that involved NDP MP Joe Comartin, Liberal MPs Michelle Simpson and Frank Valeriote, and Conservative MPs Kelly Block and Harold Albrecht. He keenly pointed out that this was an example of cross-party cooperation and he also sought out the faith backgrounds of these MPs.

Mackey also examined the cross-party cooperation among another group – the HIV/AIDS & Tuberculosis Caucus, which had four female co-chairs, one from each party. Mackey highlighted the religious views of only Conservative MP Lois Brown, whom he described as an MP who happily accepted the descriptor of a moderate faith-based social conservative, though he did not mention that Liberal MP and co-chair Ruby Dhalla was Sikh, which could have provided him with an example of interfaith cooperation.

Mackey also covered pro-life organisations and in BC level, but as they did not involve the federal political scene, these were not included in this analysis.

Foreign Affairs

One of Mackey's more significant themes involved Canada's foreign relations. While issues such as Afghanistan and peace activism received a couple of mentions

each, he often focused on foreign aid and the religious groups that delivered it, such as World Vision. This was nowhere more evident than during Mackey's references to the earthquake in Haiti, which he assessed through that perspective. This was also the perspective taken in the stories about the way in which the government denied CIDA funding to the ecumenical religious NGO KAIROS, under charges that it was engaging in anti-Semitic activities.

The columns devoted to the maternal and child health goals of the G8 and G20 conferences virtually ignored the question of access to safe abortions as part of those goals, in contrast to that becoming the focus of *Canadian Catholic News* coverage. Mackey concentrated on the Christian aid group Save the Mothers, and its Uganda mission coordinator Jean Chamberlain Froese, drawing attention to their work, and reprinting part of an exchange he had with Froese about how misguided Jack Layton's comments about the third-world conditions among Canadian aboriginals were in comparison to her work in Uganda. Mackey devoted attention to the compromise proposed by Liberal MP Keith Martin on the maternal and child health goals. Martin suggested that countries divide up the responsibility for delivering aid, so that some countries could concentrate on family planning goals including contraception and access to safe abortions, while others including Canada, focused on goals such as micronutrients and access to midwives. This proposal fit nicely with Mackey's larger narrative about politicians seeking compromise and cooperation.

More unexpected was the series of columns and an editorial co-written with Mackey's wife, Edna, on the couple's trip to Jordan. These columns looked at the

issues of interfaith cooperation encouraged by Jordan's government (described as a benign monarchy), and how the country was tackling the issues of "honour killings," and how that related to an incident in Kingston, Ontario, where a recent immigrant from Pakistan was accused of drowning his first wife and three of his daughters by submerging their car in the Rideau Canal. Again, however, these stories fit into Mackey's larger narrative of cooperation between faith communities.

Economy, Immigration, and Justice

These three topics were barely mentioned in Mackey's coverage. In fact, the only reference to the economy and recession was as an anecdote about stimulus spending as it related to one of Mackey's old newspaper colleagues, who talked about truth in newspaper advertising, and percentage figures of total expected sales, and how he had trouble seeing both of those concepts in the government's current plans. Likewise justice only came up in relation to the legal challenges in BC to polygamy laws, and rumours that former BC Attorney General Wally Oppal, who had tried to shut down a radical Mormon community in Bountiful, BC, under polygamy laws – may be contemplating a federal nomination.

Mackey's only immigration story dealt with refugees under deportation orders seeking sanctuary in churches. This was a lengthier article, which was focused on whether the Canadian Border Services Agency may violate the policy of Church sanctuary in order to enforce deportation orders, especially as it related to Russian refugee claimant Mikhail Lennikov, who was seeking refuge at a Vancouver

Lutheran church because the government cited his past KGB work as against the national interest. Mackey quoted scholars on the concept of sanctuary itself, rather than examining the federal political angle of the current deportation laws or regulations. He did mention the objections from Liberal MP Ujjal Dosanjh and NDP MP Peter Julian to Lennikov's deportation, he didn't go beyond that to address the broader federal political and public policy issue involved in the sanctuary cases.

He did though make a fleeting reference in an *OttawaWatch* column to the cross-party cooperation exhibited largely by Immigration Minister Jason Kenney and NDP critic Olivia Chow over the refugee reform bill. However, as it was in the context of examples of cooperation in the broader context of those instances, the story was included as a piece about politics, not immigration, in this analysis.

Political actors quoted

Mackey relied on a specific group of MPs and one Senator for his stories and as sources, and most tended to be Conservative. While Stockwell Day is often mentioned in the mainstream media when it comes to religious figures in politics, and Mackey did also mention him, he also pointed frequently to Vic Toews as a Mennonite – though Mackey did not mention the less-than-flattering circumstances around Toews' divorce, after Toews impregnated a young staffer despite his espousing "family values." Mackey also noted fellow cabinet minister Diane Ablonczy is an evangelical Christian, and new junior minister Rob Moore's upbringing in a Pentecostal pastor's home.

As mentioned above, Mackey would often bring up Conservative MP Joy Smith's evangelical faith whenever noting her private members' bill on human trafficking. Mackey also frequently mentioned some of the more vocal faith-based MPs like Rob Bruinooge, who currently chairs the Parliamentary Pro-Life Caucus, and Brad Trost, who often acts as a champion for pro-life groups like Faytene Kryskow's 4MyCanada. Mackey also mentioned how willing some MPs were to engage the faith communities, even when he couldn't discern just what their own religious convictions were, such as was the case of MP Dona Cadman when she came to Diane Ablonczy's defence over the Pride funding incident. Mackey noted that Cadman didn't self-identify as an evangelical Christian, but that she paid close attention to the substantial evangelical community in her riding.

Mackey also often featured two Liberals – MP John McKay, who is quite vocal about his evangelical and pro-life beliefs, and Senator David Smith, who is a Baptist. McKay was frequently quoted, and cited as a source for the kind of faith-based cross-party cooperation that Mackey wished would occur more frequently.

Windsor MP Joe Comartin was the most frequent New Democrat highlighted by Mackey. Comartin is a practicing Catholic. He also mentioned former NDP MP Bill Blaikie, an ordained United Church minister, but it was in the context of the article written on how evangelical voters were abandoning the Liberal party.

Conclusion

Mackey's reporting, while certainly salient to his particular community-of-interest, seems more suited to his examination of the backgrounds of parliamentarians and the faith-based political machinations that happen on the Hill, rather than reporting on events as they happen. In this respect, Mackey's column would be something that the community-of-interest would read in addition to the mainstream coverage of events on Parliament Hill as their faith-based "value added," to gain some of the back stories to the players involved rather than relying solely on that coverage to know what is happening. It is perhaps fitting that CanadianChristianity.com has become an associate member of *Canadian Catholic News* in that it can get content on faith-based stories from there, while Mackey adds colour commentary that fills out the picture for his community.

Chapter Six: *The Epoch Times*

The Epoch Times is an international paper with Canadian editions in English, French and Chinese, and strong roots with both the Chinese Canadian community, and the Falun Gong movement. Started as a Chinese-language paper in New York in May 2000, it expanded to the Internet in August of that year. Regional bureaux and local editions followed, until *The Epoch Times* became the largest Chinese newspaper outside of Mainland China and Taiwan. The English edition launched on the web in September 2003, and in print in August of 2004 in New York. Again, it spread through their regional bureaux. (The Epoch Times 2010)

“The newspaper was founded ... primarily as a response or an alternative to the predominantly slanted coverage in a lot of the Chinese-language papers,” says editor Jason Loftus. “Overseas, there’s a pretty predominantly pro-Beijing [tone] in a lot of the media, and some influence with regards to that as well.” The paper is now distributed in 30 countries. (Loftus 2010)

The paper describes itself as an independent voice in print and on the web that upholds “universal human values, rights and freedoms” in its approach and content. It says its independence enables it to present a diversity of opinions that are unavailable elsewhere. It also states:

A special strength of the *Epoch Times* is our coverage of China. Today the world is increasingly looking to China, as this troubled giant goes through tremendous changes. Business and political leaders, and also world citizens, want to understand better what is happening there. We are able to provide well-sourced stories that no one else has through the original reporting done by the Chinese-language edition of *The Epoch Times*... We uphold and defend

freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly. We are also strong advocates for freedom of belief, and for all human rights, for all people.

We seek to speak out for those who are oppressed, and cannot speak for themselves. We speak to those in conflict, trying to show the common humanity they share, and the compassion that will help them truly respect the rights of others.(The Epoch Times 2010)

This Chinese background differentiates it from other Canadian media in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, though it operates in the Gallery solely in English, with most reporting done for the English-language Canadian edition.

“At first the English-edition featured a lot more Chinese news coverage than would be typical,” says Loftus. With time and development, the English edition has become increasingly general interest, though there is still the strong connection to the Chinese community and the coverage there.

Content is shared between the English and Chinese-language editions on a case-by-case basis. “They cater to a different audience, so there’s not an absolute overlap but we do share content,” Loftus says. “Sometimes as well, we’ll share source material and write articles separately – interviews, these kinds of things, we can share those.” (Loftus 2010)

The Epoch Times states it has a Canadian readership of more than 300,000 per week in English, French and Chinese-language editions. Each issue is usually sixteen pages, with national news on the first three, followed by two pages of world news. The editorial page always contains a serialised excerpt of a series of nine lengthy negative commentaries on the Chinese Communist party, some of which have inflammatory titles such as “Why the Chinese Communist Party is an evil cult.” The Arts section usually mentions the Shen Yun Performing Arts show, a traditional

Chinese dance company which *The Epoch Times* sponsors, and such stories appear in the style of an advertorial. *The Epoch Times* will also use Reuters copy for some stories, especially astronomy-focused science stories.

Ottawa-based reporter Matthew Little joined *The Epoch Times* after working at the *Whitehorse Daily Star*, the *Vancouver Province*, and a few other weekly and bi-monthly magazines. “It was actually a place I submitted articles to a long time ago, before I actually went to school for any kind of journalism training,” Little says. “I practice Falun Gong, and the paper was started mainly by a lot of Falun Gong Chinese practitioners, because the media control in China and North America. When I heard there was an English edition started, I got interested and I wanted to work for it.”

After joining its operations in Toronto, he came to Ottawa to become its Press Gallery correspondent, providing both print copy and photographs. “It was just a natural progression,” he says. “I’d covered a lot of politics up in the Yukon for a different newspaper, and I liked that. Then I went to general assignment at a CanWest paper in Vancouver, and there was an opportunity to do general assignment in Toronto, so I came here for that. And then we didn’t have somebody in the Press Gallery, actually. We were covering it remotely and making phone calls. I can’t remember whose idea it was, but somebody suggested it, and my publisher approved, so I went to Ottawa.” (Little 2010)

“Whether it’s the Chinese community, or for the English audience, obviously what’s happening on Parliament Hill or with federal politics is of interest to our readers,” Loftus says. “It’s really in line with just trying to be on top of what’s

happening on the Hill, have a presence there, and be able to regularly report and have our finger on the pulse of what's happening there." (Loftus 2010)

Little monitors the news to stay familiar with the big issues, but also pays close attention to legislation on the House of Commons Order Paper. "We're not necessarily as a newspaper interested in the inter-party kind of squabbles, so to speak," Little says. "We tend to focus a little more on the legislative side of things. ... Depending on where any legislation is at, I'll go back and read any testimony in committee that maybe I missed. Not necessarily all of it, but try to familiarise myself with the positions and the advocates for different sides, and talk to some MPs, often informally at first to try to find out where they think things are at, and move from there towards more formal interviews or other research to write an article."

Little is generally on the Hill two days a week, depending on which committees are in session. "I used to go almost daily, but I found it wasn't really useful," he says. "Question Period was something I used to go to a lot, but I wasn't getting a lot of what I needed from it, and it was more worthwhile to follow some committees and try to follow those debates there."(Little 2010)

Story ideas tend to come from Little himself, with Loftus describing it as more than ninety percent from the reporter. "Matt works quite independently," he says. "I'm a springboard for him, and a filter at times as well in terms of he'll bounce ideas, I'll help to refine those. Obviously there's some editorial direction, but for the most part, he's generating his own story ideas because he's on the Hill, he's seeing what's happening."(Loftus 2010)

The pair speak daily, though that can depend on timing in the weekly production cycle. Both also say that Little's stories get little editing, unless for space, though there are copy-editing and proofreading processes in place at the paper.

"Usually it comes down to copy editing kind of stuff," Little says. "Sometimes it can be more substantive, and depending on the story, it will generate more discussion if it's something, or it's a little more sensitive, and we publish a lot of stuff where we have legal concerns, so if it's that kind of thing, it will generate more discussion." (Little 2010)

While Little says that he doesn't receive much direct feedback from readers – most is informal through friends or editors – he doesn't feel he works in a vacuum. Loftus, however, says that the publication's Parliament Hill coverage generates a sizable portion of its reader feedback.

"It's in line with why we established a Parliament Hill correspondent – we figured people are interested in that," Loftus says. "Basically the feedback we are getting resonates with that assumption."

That feedback helps shape story ideas or coverage for ongoing issues. "If there's an oversight in your story, if you've missed a fact, or there's another angle that someone feels that's important that's been missed ... you often hear about it," Loftus says.(Loftus 2010)

Blogging and social media are not yet a part of *The Epoch Times'* political coverage. Little says it's something he is supposed to be doing, given that the paper has hired someone to help reporters use new media, but he hasn't started yet.(Little 2010)

“Globally *Epoch Times* has a Twitter feed for readers to follow, but in terms of individual correspondents having them, we don’t have that organisation-wide at this point,” Loftus says. “We do have a national Facebook page where we post some of our original Canadian content. Obviously we’re part of a larger organisation globally, so we have a global Facebook page, and we also have a national one for the English language, but I would say that we’re not as far along as other media in terms of the use of Twitter and blogging, and those kinds of things.” (Loftus 2010)

Many of Little’s sources stem from the paper’s critical stance toward the Chinese Communist Party, and its independence from the Chinese regime. He says that relationships with MPs that will give him inside scoops or other information that hasn’t been reported elsewhere will often come about because of the editorial stance. He has built a familiarity with other MPs through scrums, which has built to more informal talks. “There’s some familiarity there so that when you call their office for some specific comment, maybe they’re a little more comfortable to talk to you in more detail, or return your phone calls faster.”

Little maintains a professional distance from his MP sources. “I do try to have a more congenial relationship, but the problem is sometimes if it gets too familiar it seems like they expect me to do certain things or be somewhat partisan to a certain extent, and that gets uncomfortable, so that’s something I haven’t really mastered yet, but I definitely like a certain amount of familiarity. I’m more comfortable with that kind of a more friendship-type relationship with a lot of my sources who aren’t politicians.”

His relative newcomer status within the Press Gallery, and occasional attendance on the Hill, means that his relationships with many members is not very strong, though that is changing, especially after events such as CSIS Director Richard Fadden recently suggesting Chinese agents were trying to influence Canadian politicians. Little found that during the public safety committee hearing into the subject, other reporters recognised his paper's years of investigative reporting on the topic, and were more apt to talk to him about it. "It seems like that relationship is a little bit more developed than it was before as far as knowing each other by our work. But as far as talking about current stories, just a few people." (Little 2010)

Loftus measures *The Epoch Times'* impact on their community-of-interest audience in several ways. Tracking impressions of stories online, and through emails and letters is the most direct one. "We've had stories from time to time become part of debates, whether it's in the House or in other media – stories that are picked up. So there's that factor as well, gauging the influence and the significance of the stories we're working on, so I'd say there's both aspects to it."

Some of its stories that have been picked up by other media outlets resulted from *The Epoch Times'* collaboration with its Chinese-language edition. "Just before Hu Jintao arrived in Ottawa in June, we had the recordings from the Chinese embassy official who had been rallying the students and offering to cover all of the expenses for these students to come out and, call it, 'battle' with the protesters that they expected against Hu," Loftus says. That story was picked up in the *Toronto Star*, as was a story about Hu's cancelled press conference, which also was picked up in *Le Devoir* and Norman Spector's blog on the *Globe and Mail* website.

“These kinds of things have popped up before,” Loftus says. “I think in 2006, there was a case where there was an embassy official who was basically sent home for some of his spying activities, and we had uncovered that story, which the PMO later confirmed.”

The coverage

Between May 2009 and the end of June 2010, Little wrote eighty-seven stories, fifty-five dealing with federal politics. Much of Little’s non-political coverage occurred in February 2010, when he was assigned to the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games doing everything from covering the city’s preparations, to athlete interviews. As well, when the House is not sitting, he often writes from Toronto on other subjects.

Table 5

Total articles written:	87
Federal political articles only:	55

The coverage itself broke down as such:

Table 6

	<i>The Epoch Times</i>
Social Policy	5
Politics	17
Economy	11
Immigration	2
Justice	1
Foreign Affairs	19

Foreign Affairs

As expected from a paper with a strong focus on China – and especially criticism of the Chinese Communist Party – there was a great deal of attention paid to foreign affairs, particularly Canada’s relationship with China. *The Epoch Times* did its most lengthy and engaging stories in this field, including several analysis pieces.

There were two different lengthy articles focused on Commons committee hearings on torture and human rights abuses in China, especially as it relates to Falun Gong practitioners, and allegations that China engages in organ harvesting from imprisoned practitioners. Little quoted the witnesses appearing before the committee, including former MP David Kilgour, and mentioned the hearing’s organiser, Conservative MP Scott Reid.

Other Canada-China stories revolved around official visits between the countries. They examined Canada’s policies towards China, analyses on the

importance of China's internal affairs to Canada, and the dangers from spies, surveillance and sexual lures faced by those going on official trips. For these stories, Little often quoted two sources – Michel Juneau-Katsuya, former head of CSIS Asia desk, and Clive Ansley, a Canadian lawyer who was one of the first Westerners to practice in China. There were also frequent quotes from Chen Yonglin, a former Chinese official who defected to Australia.

There were several stories, in print and online, covering the June 2010 visit by Chinese President Hu Jintao to Ottawa in advance of the G20 summit in Toronto. These stories quoted groups demanding Canada raise the issue of human rights with China, and an analysis that questioned the Conservative government's commitment to promoting human rights in China. Most quoted the same group of sources as other China stories, including a number of Falun Gong practitioners who told horror stories of experiences in China and of family members who had disappeared.

Little also examined the allegations made by CSIS Director Richard Fadden. These stories highlighted inducements that Chinese officials made to encourage Canadian politicians to be more sympathetic to their causes, and asked why some politicians, including Ottawa Mayor Larry O'Brien, had withdrawn support for Falun Gong practitioners in Canada after making trips to China.

The Epoch Times also covered Canadian trade relations through the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, and the impact of Buy American legislation on Canadian trade. One story addressed foreign aid to Haiti after the January 2010 earthquake, and another story on the G8 foreign ministers meeting at the end of March 2010 examined nuclear disarmament and the threat of terrorism. There were

also two Iran-related stories, one about UN sanctions supported by Canada, and the other on a report that outlined the international risks they posed on the grounds of their pursuit of nuclear weapons, genocidal incitement of hatred against Israel, state-sponsored terrorism, and the systematic human rights abuses against the Iranian people.

In most of Little's coverage there were very few direct quotes from Canadian MPs, choosing instead comments from members' statements to either the House of Commons or to the media in press conferences or press releases.

Politics

The Epoch Times also paid a great deal of attention to the political stories of the day. These included speculation about an election in the fall of 2009, environmentalist hecklers who briefly disrupted Parliament, the issue of prorogation of Parliament, the Rahim Jaffer/Helena Guergis drama, the Speaker's ruling on Afghan detainee documents, the Auditor General's request to do a performance audit on the House of Commons (which became a public debate about MPs' spending), and the issue of the ministers appearing at committee when it was their staff that the committee wanted to hear. There were also articles on the debates around G20 security costs, and the political machinations which led to the Liberals to losing their own motion on access to safe abortions as part of the government's maternal and child health G8 goals.

Other stories broadened the scope of reporting on the political issues of the day. One looked at the political disengagement of average Canadians as outlined in Rudyard Griffith's book *Who We Are: A Citizen's Manifesto*. Another noted moments of civility in the House of Commons that happen during Statements by Members preceding Question Period. Another political article argued that the "rowdiness" of Parliament kept talented people away from politics, quoting Liberal MP Keith Martin and NDP MP Joe Comartin.

Most of these stories relied on secondary sources such as Hansard and committee transcripts for quotes from MPs, including taking quotes from MPs made to other media outlets rather than directly speaking to the politicians.

Economy

The Epoch Times is the only community-of-interest publication in the Gallery that paid significant attention to economic matters with stories on stimulus spending, the costs of tobacco smuggling to the economy, a look at a Supreme Court of Canada decision on how cities could tax crown corporations, plans to institute a national securities regulator, including Quebec's objections, voluntary code of conduct for credit card companies, and rising interest rates. The paper also examined the agreement between the forestry industry and environmental groups on forestry operations in Canada's boreal forests, and the Fisheries committee's look at the problem of sea lice on Canada's fisheries and aquaculture industry.

Two stories that stood out among the group were about the use of genetically engineered (GE) corn and allegations by researchers about its detrimental affects, along with comments from a biotechnology regulator from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. *The Epoch Times* also published a number of articles sceptical of Western medicine (consistent with Falun Gong doctrine's dismissal of medicine), as well as others quoting various examples of pseudo-science (such as one article which claims certain blast patterns and ruins indicate that ancient cultures must have possessed nuclear technology) in its Science section. The conspiracy-theory tone of the researchers critical of the use of GE corn fit into this pattern of science scepticism.

Social Policy

There were few social policy stories in *The Epoch Times*, and some of those had an economic angle. A couple of stories examined aboriginal issues, such as Aboriginal Day and the First Nations University. There was also a story on the Own the Podium programme, which led up to the Olympic games, quoting Minister of State for Sport, Gary Lunn. The other two stories covered federal spending on television programming, and the regulations around it, as well as proposed copyright legislation. Again, there were few direct quotes from MPs in these stories. Most quotes came from secondary sources.

Immigration and Justice

The Epoch Times rarely covered these issues. It published stories linked to two pieces of legislation – a refugee reform bill, and a bill to crack down on false immigration consultants. The latter quoted only the sources from the press conferences announcing the bills, while the first did include an interview with Immigration Minister Jason Kenney.

The only justice story looked at legislative plans to crack down on organised crime, quoting the Conservative chair of the Justice committee, as well as the Liberal co-chair.

Political actors quoted

Politicians do not appear frequently in *The Epoch Times*. Stories analysed quoted only one or two MPs directly, although Little did interview Immigration Minister Jason Kenney on his refugee reform legislation. Kenney has been actively promoting the Conservative party with ethno-cultural communities in Canada, and likely would have paid special attention to *The Epoch Times* for that reason, as well as the fact that it was an immigration bill.

Conclusion

In some ways, *The Epoch Times* operates as more of a mainstream, general-interest outlet given its reporting on issues-of-the-day and political scandals, except in stories about China, where its coverage was heavily biased against the Chinese regime. Little seldom quoted MPs directly and as a result, his issues-of-the-day reporting seemed superficial in comparison to mainstream media coverage of the same issues. This was compounded by the fact that as a weekly paper, the stories tended to be little more than summaries of past events, not anything new. The paper's Chinese sources were almost exclusively a small group of experts, and there was no indication about how Canadian parliamentarians reacted to the evidence presented in the special committee hearings, or about any of the issues at hand. Since most of the reporting could have been done remotely, given the heavy reliance on secondary sources otherwise available, it is difficult to assess the value of *The Epoch Times* having a Parliament Hill reporter.

Chapter Seven: *Xtra*

Xtra!, a division of the not-for-profit Pink Triangle Press, evolved from the gay liberation magazine *The Body Politic* in 1984, to cover Toronto's gay scene. In 1993, it launched editions in Vancouver (*Xtra West*) and Ottawa (*Capital Xtra*) to cover the queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, etc.) scenes in those cities. Eventually, it revamped its website Xtra.ca to try to become a national queer news platform, reproducing content from the three print editions, and unique material for a national audience. In 2010, it rebranded all three print editions simply as *Xtra*, adding each city's name to the title.

"As a gay and lesbian community newspaper, we're always looking for stories that directly affect our community," says Xtra.ca web editor Brent Creelman. "On the Hill, we're often looking at more progressive issues as well – not just gay and lesbian issues, but progressive issues around crime bills, decriminalisation of prostitution, and basically any progressive social issue. It's been pretty wide-open I think – we're open to covering different things." (Creelman 2010)

Xtra has historically seen itself engaged in "activist journalism," and many of its earlier writers refused to consider themselves journalists because they had political agendas to fulfil. The Pink Triangle Press mission statement, "Daring Together," demonstrates its particular mandate as an organ of sexual liberation in Canada, and for those looking to challenge gender or "bend the borders of desire."

We engage our chosen public – readers, listeners, clients and each other – as worthy equals, with respectful camaraderie. In all our work we do our best, so drawing out the best in others. We entice and we incite; we challenge and

we lead. ...We assail the work of censors. Our drive is to arouse debate, to inform and to enlighten in a fair and honest way.(Pink Triangle Press 2010)

While activism has been the particular motivation of the not-for-profit corporation, as the organisation's parliamentary reporter, my reporting for *Xtra* strives to be fair and balanced, while still recognising that there is a viewpoint shared by the audience that is not necessarily served by the mainstream press. Unlike some of the other community-of-interest journalists in the Press Gallery, I rarely contribute photos to my stories, though I have produced and edited two video stories.

Xtra Toronto has a press run of 40,000 bi-weekly reaching 76,000 readers, Vancouver a run of 22,000 bi-weekly reaching 39,600 readers, and Ottawa a run of 17,000 monthly reaching 30,600 readers. (Until the rebranding exercise in 2010, *Capital Xtra* was publishing every three weeks). *Xtra.ca* claims 150,000 visitors a month. Most of the stories I write from the Press Gallery are destined for *Xtra.ca*, though several are reprinted in one or more of the print editions. Occasionally, longer analysis pieces will be specifically destined for publication in the print edition, and will appear on the web at the same time.

The decision to assign someone to the Hill came in 2008 after a major revamp of *Xtra.ca*, which also increased its freelance budget. Tasking a freelancer to the beat was also a question of staff resources. "It's been really important to have you on the Hill, not just reporting what's going on, but you've probably given some politicians a sense of what issues are important to the gay community through your reporting," Creelman says. "You're keeping the discussion going about those issues,

and I think without that, maybe we wouldn't have been able to advance as far as we have, say on the Canadian citizenship guide issue.”(Creelman 2010)

I began freelancing for *Xtra* in late 2004 upon my arrival in Ottawa, after previously writing for the national GLBT magazine *Outlooks* in Calgary. I continue to write for *Outlooks*, and serve as its political editor (in a freelance capacity). I am also still a freelancer for *Xtra*, and have been a freelance contributor to *The Hill Times*, *The Ottawa Citizen*, *The Canadian Press*, and *Xpress*. While I had been freelancing in addition to a regular job until mid-2008, at that point I became a full-time freelance journalist.

My day begins by going through several online news sites – the *Canadian Press* feed from Yahoo News, the *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* online, Macleans.ca's blog central, the CBC.ca/politics portal, and the National News Watch aggregator site. Many stories I find here I will include in my daily round-up blog for Xtra.ca. I will then contact Creelman, and begin work on the story selected for the day before I heading to the Hill for Question Period and the scrums in the foyer afterwards. After the scrums, I will finish writing my story for the day (assuming there is a story for the day) and file for around 5 or 5.30, while also watching one of the political news shows. At the end of the evening, I'll go through all of my news sites again and select the stories for the blog, which I post after midnight, to be available “first thing in the morning” for readers.

I generate most story ideas, and have free reign over content on the blog, keeping within a gay and lesbian/progressive perspective. “I know that Marcus [McCann – Editor of *Xtra's* Toronto and Ottawa editions] and in a few cases Matt

[Mills – Editorial Director of Pink Triangle Press] has assigned a feature or an issue to look at, but definitely for the most part it's been pitch-based," Creelman says. "A lot of that is because you're so closely following what's going on, on the Hill, and you often know what's going on before we do even."(Creelman 2010)

I communicate with my editor almost daily, and several times a day if I am filing. I keep him updated on progress and my estimated filing time – especially if the story is timely and should go online that day.

Most stories do not receive much editing beyond a few style-specific changes, and occasionally for length. From time to time, paragraphs may be rearranged to improve story flow. The blog is barely edited, though a copy editor was hired early in 2010, and she occasionally makes changes for style. Creelman estimates that he spends maybe fifteen minutes to half an hour editing a story, usually for clarity and grammar

"If I have more time, I like to check some facts if something doesn't seem right, I'll spend some more time looking into the facts and making sure that it's a-okay, but time is tight, so it often usually goes up with minimal editing," Creelman says. "There's just such a demand to have new content on the website all the time that we don't have the resources to spend too much time editing one particular piece, and you put a lot of faith in that the facts are all right, and to make sure that it fits our style, and there's no mistakes."(Creelman 2010)

I receive very little direct feedback on stories – no more than three or four emails over the past year from readers, usually through the address I have posted on my personal blog. I do occasionally hear from other reporters in the Gallery who

liked my stories, and on a couple of occasions, mainstream blogs like Macleans.ca have linked to my blog posts or stories. There is also a comment section on the website, but most of that feedback tends to be from the Xtra.ca online community, and much of it is negative. I am often accused of having a Liberal bias, though most of these comments come from self-described NDP party members. Other negative feedback comes from more right-wing commenters who feel that the coverage is too “leftist.”

“We have received some feedback that we were biased towards progressive parties, but that’s really just aligning with the company’s mission to cover progressive issues, so that is sort of a non-issue,” Creelman says. “We do have a problem with trolls on the website in general, and I feel that the federal politics coverage has been singled out by some of these trolls – they’re latching onto our anti-Conservative agenda, and kind of ranting against it but it’s hard to quantify how many compared to other stories.”

Trolls aside – troll being an Internet term for people who make inflammatory comments on websites for the purposes of starting fights – there are few comments on federal political stories, though they are shared actively on Facebook and Twitter. “The stories are quite well read, they score quite high on our traffic reports, but the comments right on Xtra.ca are kind of low compared to some of the other stories we’ve covered,” Creelman says. “When the piece is more of an analytical or it takes a stand, we obviously see more discussion in the comment section, people disagree, going back and forth.”(Creelman 2010)

I don't tend to regard the comments in story selection because there are few that generate any useful ideas.

Xtra is most active of the four community-of-interest publications in this study in using new communication tools in its political coverage. The most obvious one is the Xtra.ca federal politics blog, Hill Queeries, which I maintain, generally Monday-to-Friday. It includes a daily round up of news stories that would be of interest to a progressive audience, rather than solely the queer community. When the House is in session, it is augmented by a recap of Question Period, often with the links to daily headlines. Part of my value-added for the gay audience is a short style commentary on the MPs, which I dub "sartorial snaps" for stylish MPs, and "style citations" for those whose wardrobe choices I feel deserve critique. I also maintain a somewhat sarcastic/ironic tone throughout the blog as a humorous way to disarm readers.

On top of the daily round-up posts, I will usually add one or two extra posts per week, which could range from recaps of special press conferences or committee hearings, and Q&As with gay and lesbian Parliamentarians on issues, bills or trips they have taken as part of their duties. The goal is to make these MPs more accessible to readers, and to use their connection to the queer community to open the audience to other issues that they might not otherwise have considered. For example, gay Liberal MP Scott Brison is his party's international trade critic, so I spoke to him about his work on the Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

As the editor of the website, Creelman promotes use of these new communication tools. I have resisted using Twitter, partially because of time

constraints and a general unease with the micro-blogging concept to date, but there is an automatic Twitter feed of all of my Hill Queeries blog posts. I have on occasion contributed to the general *Xtra* Twitter feed during debates, sending text messages from my mobile phone to Creelman, who would convert them to Twitter messages.

“The reaction to [the Twitter feed] hasn’t been super-hot, but no more or less hot than the other automatic Twitter feeds we’ve set up for our other blogs really,” Creelman says. “We’ve been trying to build traffic to the Hill Queeries blog through linking that Progressive Blogger ring, and trying to form some connections to other Canadian progressive political bloggers to build traffic that way, and build interest.”

Compared to other *Xtra.ca* blogs, Creelman says that the numbers for Hill Queeries are pretty good. “Excluding our national breaking news blog, of the local blogs I think it’s number two. The number one blog is the Vancouver blog, but it’s really only because of the celebrities, pop culture gossip stuff that brings in a lot of stuff. I think for what it is, it’s developing. The readership is growing, which is good. It’s building at a steady pace, and building a quite loyal following.”

Feedback on the Hill Queeries blog is positive. Creelman says that he and other editors find it a good resource to keep abreast of events from one site. “And of course the unique aspect that you add, like the ‘sartorial snaps’ are fun and adds a little bit of flavour that you might not find in some mainstream political reporting. It’s a little gay angle that you add, even if there’s not anything happening, there’s always the gay fashion critique.”(Creelman 2010)

I also maintain a personal blog called Notes From the Press Gallery, posting links to all of my *Xtra* and other stories and elsewhere, and usually add commentary.

I most closely follow the six openly gay and lesbian Parliamentarians – Liberals Scott Brison, Mario Silva and Rob Oliphant, New Democrats Bill Siksay and Libby Davies, and Conservative Senator Nancy Ruth (as well as Bloc MP Réal Ménard before his resignation). As a result, I have developed a very congenial working relationship, and Rob Oliphant and his husband were my guests at the 2009 Press Gallery Dinner.

Beyond that group, I am becoming well known among the MPs, such as the immigration and justice critics for the various parties. They seem pleased I am paying attention to issues that are otherwise being overlooked by the mainstream press (such as the hearings on the Canadian HIV Vaccine Initiative). As well, some MPs have become aware of my Hill Queeries blog, and will remark to me about my comments on style choices. My relations are better with opposition MPs than with those on the government side, as I interact less frequently with them, often because most don't make themselves available for comment, despite repeated interview requests.

I have also dealt with several Senators on issues and legislation. Of the community-of-interest reporters in this study, only Lloyd Mackey deals with Senators, and so the institution is under-reported by these publications – much as it is with the mainstream media.

Like Deborah Gyapong, I try not to burn sources, while demonstrating a level of professionalism that will engender trust. I believe this helps ensure that Parliamentarians talk to me or return my calls, while endearing me to the communications staff of several of the parties as well as several of the outside

sources. For example, my coverage of the refugee reform bill meant the Canadian Council of Refugees was referred member organisations to alert me to their appearances before committees, and to events related to the legislation.

I am becoming better known the longer I have been in the Gallery, and most reporters seem genuinely interested in the stories I'm pursuing. One described my work as presenting issues through a "unique lens" that they couldn't match.

As for the impact of my stories, Creelman points to several tracking mechanisms such as Google Analytics traffic reports, and the ability to tell how many people have shared stories on Twitter and Facebook. "We can judge the reaction by seeing how, when we publish a story like that, and say we have a link at the bottom of the story to a Facebook page for people to take action, we can see the increasing interest," Creelman says. "We can use our voice to push people to action. It's always interesting to see how our reporting can influence people to take action on an issue. For example, the trans rights [bill], we linked to Facebook groups and ways that people could contact their MPs to encourage them to speak out in support of the bill. It's hard to measure that, but I think it has an impact."

These issues have included prorogation, the Canadian citizenship guide, the refugee reform bill, and the pro-coalition demonstrations in December 2008. As well, other media such as *The Canadian Press* and the CBC have picked up issues based on my reporting.

The coverage

Between May 2009 and the end of June 2010, I wrote seventy-four stories, sixty-five of which were related to federal politics. A few of the other stories were local for the *Xtra* Ottawa print edition, though some were about nomination races for federal candidates. There were also a few arts and entertainment pieces.

Table 7

Total articles written:	74
Federal political articles only:	65

The coverage itself broke down as such:

Table 8

	<i>Xtra</i>
Social Policy	18
Politics	18
Economy	1
Immigration	13
Justice	9
Foreign Affairs	6

Note that in the total is somewhat low because of time constraints related to my studies.

Social Policy

There were a couple of recurring topics in my coverage of social policy issues. One involved three articles including interviews with various MPs and activists about NDP MP Bill Siksay's private member's bill on extending explicit human rights protections to trans people. *Xtra* was the only news organisation reporting on the issue, except for one CBC mention.

I also closely followed the cancellation of the government's plans to build a vaccine production facility as part of the Canadian HIV Vaccine Initiative (CHVI). I was one of the few reporters in the Gallery covering the issue. I also wrote two articles on the Canadian Access to Medicines Regime bill, which is about providing low-cost HIV/AIDS drugs to developing countries. This subject received much more coverage on the Hill Queeries blog as I covered Senate committee hearings on the bill (before it died at prorogation).

I wrote two articles on the issue of gay veterans receiving an apology and compensation for being discharged from the military prior to 1992 for their sexual orientation. This began as an initiative by the NDP veterans' affairs critic, Peter Stoffer, and was pursued by gay Liberal MP Rob Oliphant when he became his party's veterans' affairs critic. I also wrote two articles on issues related to censorship at the border as a result of the Canadian Border Services Agency detaining materials, such as films for a festival. This is a long-time grievance that *Xtra* has covered on behalf of the queer community.

I also wrote several other health stories, from a Liberal convention resolution on lifting a ban on gay men from donating organs, to a resolution from the NDP convention on creating a queer health strategy.

I covered the launch of the Parliamentary HIV/AIDS & Tuberculosis caucus, and interviewed some of the MPs involved, but other stakeholders as well such as Dr. James Orbinksi from Dignitas International. I also wrote about the launch of an all-party caucus on anti-Semitism, co-chaired by gay Liberal MP Mario Silva.

I also did two video pieces for *Xtra* in May of 2009 – one on the 40th anniversary of Pierre Trudeau's Bill C-150, which decriminalised homosexuality in Canada, and another on International Day Against Homophobia, which took place days later.

Politics

Much of my coverage for *Xtra* concentrated on politics, and the personalities behind it. One particular issue dealt with festival funding, and specifically Pride festivals. My analysis considered this as a politics issue because it revolved around accusation that funding was denied as a result of biases and discrimination against the queer community by the government. I wrote four stories on this issue, as well as contributing to a separate story about Conservative MP Brad Trost, who raised the issue of the government funding Pride Toronto to LifeSite News, which was the flashpoint for the story in the mainstream media.

I also wrote about election speculation, the vagueness of the Liberal policy platform, a forthcoming NDP convention, and an editorial about the value and mechanisms of nomination races to help demystify politics for the average reader. My goal has been to help average readers become more engaged with the political process, so my reporting was not about horse-race poll numbers, but rather about the underlying political processes involving the parties.

I wrote two pieces on prorogation – an interview with NDP House Leader Libby Davies, and an editorial about the issue. I also covered the government's quickly withdrawn plans to review the lyrics of the National Anthem, in part because of involvement of Conservative Senator Nancy Ruth, who is openly lesbian, who lobbied to have the lyrics changed, stemming from her feminist convictions.

I also covered politicians, writing twice about the resignation of gay Bloc MP Réal Ménard, including an interview on his last day. I also spoke with NDP MP Judy Wasylycia-Leis when she resigned her seat. While she was not a queer MP, she was the party's critic on many of the issues that I covered closely. I interviewed Green Party leader Elizabeth May on the issue of access to safe abortions as part of the G8 maternal and child health goals, and speak with her fairly frequently when she's in Ottawa, often doing Q&A sessions for the Hill Queeries blog.

I also wrote an editorial on the outing of Conservative cabinet minister John Baird on CBC radio – a story the mainstream media was reluctant to touch. I argued about why it mattered from the perspective of showing that not all queer voices were from the political left, and spoke about the work of Senator Nancy Ruth as an openly lesbian member of that caucus.

Immigration

Given that it's a common complaint of advocacy groups that queer refugees are often found at a disadvantage in our immigration and refugee determination system, this became hook for much of the coverage on the topic of immigration. In 2009, there were two stories on a Bloc private members' bill that would implement the Refugee Appeals Division established in the Act, but never brought into force. This was followed by a story on plans to reform the refugee system, and then six articles on the bill the government tabled relatively early in 2010, which passed the House and Senate before the summer recess. These articles again quoted critics and committee members from all parties, as well as experts from community groups.

I also wrote three articles on the issue of the government leaving out any mention of queer rights or same-sex marriage in its revamped citizenship guide. The first story focused on reaction from various gay and lesbian MPs and other critics such as NDP MP Olivia Chow, while the other two focused on NDP efforts to see these sections reintroduced after a *Canadian Press* story revealed that they had been removed at the direction of the minister's office.

Justice

Coverage also focused on some of the government's tough-on-crime agenda. This included a two-part feature series on the "criminalisation creep" of HIV in

Canada, which highlighted Supreme Court decisions, and interviews with MPs about changing laws to limit criminalising the spread of HIV. As well, a piece on the government's plans to enhance the national sex offender registry raised questions about the types of offences being considered for inclusion, given that there remains an unequal age of consent in Canada for anal sex, and other sexual offences that have at times been used to target queer people.

Two stories examined the government's tough-on-crime agenda, largely from the perspective of its efficacy and cost, and stressed the ballooning costs projected before the mainstream press saw this as a major issue. This brought me into contact with a number of MPs and Senators on the justice and public safety files. Another article examined the government's plans to reintroduce a drug offences bill in the Senate. *Xtra's* editorial policy favours drug law liberalisation, but that was not a consideration in writing the piece.

Xtra also supports free speech (to the point of disagreeing with most hate speech laws), so I also wrote two pieces on the Commons justice committee's plans to re-examine Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, which regulates certain types of hate speech. There would have been more stories had the committee not abandoned its work in the wake of prorogation in December 2009.

Foreign Affairs and Economy

There were a few foreign affairs issues covered during this period, but unlike other outlets, generally there was very little focus on foreign aid. I wrote two stories

on the American HIV travel ban, which prevented infected people from entering the country (which was eventually lifted), which included contacts with US advocacy organisations, and the US Embassy in Ottawa.

Three stories involved the status of queer people in Africa – one on a US State Department human rights report regarding Zimbabwe, which detailed human rights abuses including the practice of “corrective rape,” one on the imprisonment of two gay men in Malawi, and a brief piece on the Governor General’s spring 2010 trip to Africa in the context of the aforementioned developments in those countries. For the two longer stories, I interviewed the foreign affairs critics of opposition parties in Canada, and the stories also included statements from the department of Foreign Affairs, as well as quotes from past statements by either the Minister or Prime Minister.

The other foreign affairs-related article was an interview with Liberal trade critic Scott Brison about trade issues with countries such as China and Colombia. Brison, being openly gay, was really the “queer angle” to the piece, but I used it as an opportunity to highlight trade and human rights issues that Parliament was debating.

The only financial piece I wrote involved an event on the Hill for the Ontario and Quebec GLBT Chambers of Commerce, supported by a number of MPs – both gay and straight. I interviewed most of those MPs, including NDP leader Jack Layton, for this story.

Political actors quoted

For all stories, I have tried to interview Liberal and NDP MPs, and depending on the issue, the Bloc as well, though some of their critics are not conversant in English. Whenever possible I have tried to get government responses, but if the MPs decline interview requests, then I use their quotes from statements made in the House, or press conferences and news releases, although I have had some better luck getting Conservative comments by attending committee hearings. I have also interviewed Senators regarding bills they are considering.

It has been a happy coincidence that those six parliamentarians have held critic portfolios particularly salient to the issues that interest *Xtra*, so there was an automatic queer angle to the stories. These included Rob Oliphant's time on the Commons public safety committee, as well as Libby Davies' role as NDP House Leader.

Compared to other community-of-interest journalists, my success in interviewing MPs comes from attending Question Period daily, as well as the foyer scrums afterward where it is relatively easy to buttonhole them. It is also usually easy to get comments from MPs by sending in a note from the foyer asking to speak to them. More often than not, they will come out to talk to me about whatever issue I am covering that day – something that is more difficult to achieve when telephoning MPs offices, as there is a wide range of responsiveness from the various MPs.

Conclusion

In contrast to the other community-of-interest outlets, I have concentrated more on speaking to the Parliamentarians involved in my stories – both those who are members of the queer community and those who are not, in not just the House but also the Senate, which is often ignored by most outlets, including mainstream media. Whereas the other community-of-interest outlets will focus on policy over the horse race, I try to make the political process accessible to readers. In comparison to mainstream reporters, I come at stories from the angle of the queer community, presenting the “unique lens” that through which issues can be presented rather than simply quoting justification for their position in a moral debate, as other community-of-interest outlets will.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The separation of mainstream and community-of-interest media in the Press Gallery is more than just a psychological separation of taking the road less travelled when it comes to coverage. Instead of following the Gallery's "pack mentality," the community-of-interest journalists largely go their own way, sometimes touching on the issues of the day, but often not. Staying away from the horserace, and other preoccupations of the broader Press Gallery, these community-of-interest outlets often get into far more substantive issues than covering the day-to-day back-and-forth of politics.

But the separation can also be a physical one as well. For most of these journalists, membership in the Gallery may provide access to the Hill, but it doesn't necessarily mean congregation with their peers. When Marci McDonald referred to Lloyd Mackey as a "bespectacled loner" in the Gallery (McDonald 2010, 20), it wasn't much of an exaggeration. Neither Gyapong nor Little is on the Hill consistently, and both are infrequent participants in the foyer scrums, which is where a lot of the interaction between journalists – as well as between journalists and politicians – happens.

Their coverage differs, and these community-of-interest outlets don't follow many of the same stories as their mainstream colleagues. Economic stories, for the most part, are ignored or covered in a limited way at best. For most, it is questions of social policy that are the important issues, and each community-of-interest has a particular set of social issues that it retains a vested interest in following. This

shouldn't be a surprise. Sometimes the mainstream media will pick up on these stories – perhaps because of the coverage itself. Sometimes it will be the result of conversations between community-of-interest and mainstream journalists in the foyer. Other times it will be because it is in the news of the day. In those circumstances, mainstream coverage may in fact be inferior because they don't have experience in the subject in question, or a proper understanding or vocabulary of the issue at hand.

In a way, these community-of-interest journalists are like beat reporters, which are slowly disappearing in the mainstream media, as the pressures of convergence and the changing landscape have forced most specialist reporters to become generalists. While the community-of-interest reporters may similarly have to approach their stories as somewhat of a generalist, with a range of issues that they may be covering, they will also have a particular lens through which they examine those issues, which can act like a kind of beat system. Their focus is how does the issue affect their community-of-interest, or how should it or is it being communicated to them?

There is a varied output from the community-of-interest media in the Gallery, and a varied level of engagement with federal politics. For *BC Christian News* and Lloyd Mackey's *OttawaWatch* column, the more pressing questions are who are the political players, what is their religious background, and do they get along, more than a question of which particular bills were being debated. The *Canadian Catholic News* tracks a small number of issues, and keeps them in the minds of its readers, as well as offering the Catholic perspective on those issues. For *The Epoch Times*, the

focus is most definitely on Canada's relationship to China, and the many ways in which it is fraught with danger under China's current regime. *Xtra* specifically looks for the queer angle to cover, though it also had the greatest degree of contact with politicians of any of the four media organisations.

So what does it all mean?

Living up to their mandates

Each community-of-interest publication has a particular mandate or "mission statement" by which it frames its coverage. So did they all live up to it?

CCN describes its mandate as providing "a look at the issues affecting the common good through the prism of Catholic social teachings," (Canadian Catholic News 2010) while publisher and editor Jim O'Leary adds that their purpose is "to present a Catholic perspective of world news and events." (O'Leary 2010) In these respects, Gyapong accomplished this through her "value added" reporting – news was presented through the prism of Catholic social teachings, especially around moral issues such as abortion and euthanasia.

This contrasts to *BC Christian News/CanadianChristianity.com*, whose mandate is a much more nebulous attempt to "show that there's a spectrum in the Christian community... We try to cover the more conservative and some of the more liberal as well, and do it fairly." (Dawes 2010) Nevertheless, while the reporting and observations in Mackey's *OttawaWatch* column focused on the religious backgrounds of politicians and their interactions with faith-based organisations,

there wasn't a great diversity of Christian thought in political life presented. By his own admission, Mackey focuses on groups that fall in the evangelical, charismatic and reformed areas, and to a lesser extent Catholic and mainstream Protestant denominations. Certain explicitly Christian politicians like Liberal MP Rob Oliphant, an ordained United Church minister, were never mentioned in any of Mackey's columns, even though Oliphant represents a particular mainstream Christian denomination. As well, Oliphant's status as an openly gay man who is married to his same-sex spouse would indeed showcase the broad spectrum of Christian thought in Canadian politics, but it was effaced entirely from coverage.

The Epoch Times' mandate is somewhat more generalised, but singles out human rights, freedom of the press, speech and assembly, and its coverage of China as its strengths. "We seek to speak out for those who are oppressed, and cannot speak for themselves," its mandate statement declares. (The Epoch Times 2010) However, the focus of its coverage was very narrowly focused on only one oppressed group – Falun Gong practitioners in China. Their plight was also the primary lens through which China – and in particular their condemnation of the Chinese government – was covered.

Xtra's more activist mandate, with its particular focus on sexual liberation, did feature somewhat in coverage, in particular with special attention paid to legislation concerning sexual offences that may have adverse affects for the queer community, and the "criminalisation creep" of HIV. The mandate also talks about how "We assail the work of censors," (Pink Triangle Press 2010) and this was again covered, with both examining the actions of the Canadian Border Services Agency,

and the Commons justice committee's plans to study Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, which is seen as a free speech issue. As well, I think that I fulfilled the part of the mandate that describes how "Our drive is to arouse debate, to inform and to enlighten in a fair and honest way," (Pink Triangle Press 2010) by striving to present opposing viewpoints on issues, and trying to speak to politicians representing all sides of those issues.

Shaping federal politics for their audiences

One of the issues this thesis examines is the way in which these community-of-interest publications shape federal politics for their audiences. There is no consistent answer to this question as each publication approaches politics in its own distinctive way.

To a certain extent, there is a narrowcasting of issues within these publications to appeal to their community-of-interest. Where one can get news on most any political issue from a mainstream source, they instead cater to the issues they feel their particular community-of-interest will respond to most – though ironically they all appear to get very little response from readers – or the issues where they can provide their own unique perspective.

In the case of *CCN*, Gyapong describes this as the "value added" – the Catholic community's response to the business of government, which can't be found in the mainstream. This shapes politics for the Catholic community in terms of the moral dimensions of the stories that they concern them – euthanasia, abortion, foreign aid,

and a host of religious rights. Issues are defined by what the Catholic community – politicians, church figures and activists – says about them, though the community is not monolithic – rather than engaging the political actors on all sides of an issue. Excerpts from debate may be reported on, or opposition positions presented as a foil for community voices.

With the *BC Christian News* and Mackey's *OttawaWatch* column, coverage is shaped less around the issues being debated – most issues-based federal reporting comes via Gyapong and its associate membership in the *CCN* – but rather through the personalities involved. *OttawaWatch* largely chronicles the players, both government and other religious associations in Ottawa, and their interactions. Issues are assessed in terms of how well the parties involved cooperated and worked together to achieve their ends. If they didn't, then Mackey offers suggestions on how they might, using their religious faiths as bridges over ideological differences. Mackey's presentation of politics is optimistic and idealistic, and this becomes often apparent in reader comments, as they will criticise his advocating reaching out to those parties or players that members of the Christian community see as being outside of their particular belief system.

For both of these outlets, reporting is done largely within the confines of their religious communities, and doesn't much engage with the external nuts-and-bolts politics of the issues at hand. This also frames politics in a narrow way because it removes some of the other considerations for public policy and debate over issues as issues are examined largely within a moral light, based on their particular codes of moral conduct.

The Epoch Times shapes its coverage of politics in a fairly mainstream way with the exception of the issue of China. By his own admission, Little has limited utility for the political theatre of Question Period, and he focuses his time on committees. This is reflected in his work, for example, when Little contrasted the relative civility of Members' statements to Question Period, reiterating the mainstream notion that Question Period is little more than shouting and generally embarrassing behaviour. Little is also more likely than some other community-of-interest journalists to follow the stories of the mainstream press – like the Guergis/Jaffer affair – though in a more superficial way.

In coverage of China, however, *The Epoch Times* overlays everything with a great deal of suspicion about the regime in charge, and of the influence it has over Canadian politicians at various levels. By delivering warnings on the kinds of tactics that Chinese agents and officials will use to influence Canadian officials, it also paints Canadian politics as relatively easily susceptible to this kind of foreign influence. Whether this message is delivered to a Chinese Canadian population that feels suspicious of the Chinese government, or to an audience of Falun Gong practitioners that feel victimised by the Chinese government, its political coverage of Canadian politics emphasises the threat posed by the Chinese government.

At *Xtra*, I have tried to shape coverage to make it more accessible to a broad audience – not only for a queer audience, as well as demonstrating that the queer community may have concerns that aren't being addressed elsewhere. This has meant a style that engages with politicians more closely than other community-of-interest outlets, and a greater focus on the political process.

This can mean not only explaining the difference between a bill being debated at second reading and in committee, but also requires a focus on party mechanisms like nomination races and party conventions, where individual members can have more input. I have even written editorials that reject the mainstream belief that “politics is broken” in favour of a message of “here’s how you can get involved at the ground-level and get involved to make the changes you want.” None of the other community-of-interest outlets touched on party conventions, even though both the Liberals and the NDP had policy conventions in the period studied. By ignoring those mechanisms for public participation in the process outside of an electoral cycle, the result is a view of politics as something that is not accessible to the community-of-interest, or the general public. Rather, it keeps it isolated from the community-of-interest.

There was also the additional consideration that there are few queer-specific lobby groups and expert organisations to engage in order to find a queer “value added” for some of the stories on broader issues of social justice that *Xtra* covers. This has forced me to seek out a wider array of sources than may be the case with other outlets.

New ways of speaking to their audiences

In a sense, community-of-interest media provides a new way of speaking to audiences about politics. After all, without their unique perspective, much of the

mainstream media's coverage can marginalise these communities and their concerns. But how successful are these particular outlets in achieving this?

By having a media outlet that represents their concerns and interests, these communities-of-interest should find their own niche within the political discourse because they have a better sense of connection to the political centres in Ottawa. They might also foster better communication with MPs that represent their particular communities-of-interest, who could then present issues in a way that better appeals to their own audience.

Having MPs represent communities-of-interest by means of their race, religion, gender or sexuality, in addition to geographic ridings is akin to descriptive and virtual representation theories of democracy. It may be one way in which to engage other voices in the federal political process. This was certainly demonstrated with most of the media outlets studied – *BC Christian News/CanadianChristianity.com* regularly dealt with several different MPs and one senator of differing faith backgrounds, while *CCN* mostly interacted with Catholic MPs, or MPs designated to speak to faith communities. Similarly, *Xtra* spoke a great deal to the publicly gay and lesbian Parliamentarians from all parties.

This sort of engagement was not obvious with *The Epoch Times*, which had no links with any Chinese-Canadian Parliamentarians in their English edition, nor did it identify any practitioners of Falun Gong in Parliament. There may be a different relationship at a local riding level between Chinese-Canadian MPs and *The Epoch Times* Chinese language editions, but its sole journalist in the Press Gallery

did not deal with those MPs in any of the stories published under his byline in the English edition.

Where *The Epoch Times* did see its perspective reflected, as with the other organisations, was in its coverage of issues relating to China, and the various critics of the regime. It highlighted the truths about the Chinese regime as it sees them, the dangers of dealing with the Chinese government, and the particular concerns of Falun Gong practitioners in that country. They spoke frequently with former MP David Kilgour, who has studied the Falun Gong issue and believes the claims of organ harvesting to be true, and tended to focus on those who they believed sympathised with their particular aims and goals.

The way in which federal politics engages these communities

Examining the back-and-forth interactions between politics and communities through journalism can also provide a sense of the impact that community-of-interest media in the Press Gallery can have on their respective communities. After all, as *Xtra's* web editor Brent Creelman stated, having a presence in the Gallery was as much about letting MPs know what issues were important to the community that *Xtra* represents as it was knowing what's going on in Parliament (Creelman 2010), which could also be expanded to *The Epoch Times* and their concerns.

In some cases, political parties designate specific politicians to communicate with those communities. One example often cited is Liberal MP John McKay, who is his party's outreach person to members of the faith community. This can have

differing impacts, however. On the one hand, it can demonstrate to these communities that the party cares about their issues by designating a contact person. On the other hand, it can end up being a limiting exercise such as in McKay's case. While McKay has roots in Baptist and evangelical denominations, the Liberals also have an ordained United Church minister, Toronto MP Rob Oliphant, in their ranks, who may be more suited to reaching out to certain members of that faith community. Neither *BC Christian News*/CanadianChristianity.com nor *CCN* ever spoke with Oliphant, which means that his own experience and perspective in the faith community goes unheard by that very same community media.

There may also be dangers in designating a contact person, however, as it can raise expectations among the faith community in this case, that the party is more likely to listen to and respond to its concerns. If the party doesn't, that contact person can become a liability, as the faith group may believe that his or her role is simply a way to deflect their concerns. It may also have the effect of appearing to treat complex and multifaceted communities as simplistic by presenting a single person to deal with the whole of them, despite the fact that their own experience with that community may be restricted to a small segment of it.

The NDP also have a dedicated critic for queer issues, MP Bill Siksay, who often acts as a party spokesperson on those issues. While it would certainly have been easier for me as a journalist to simply call up Siksay for every story I wrote for the designated queer NDP perspective, I wanted to include other points of view, and also avoid a kind of "source fatigue" where I would only be speaking to the same two

or three MPs for every issue. I didn't speak to any openly gay or lesbian MPs in the course of writing some stories simply because it wasn't appropriate to do so.

With *The Epoch Times*, the community-of-interest nature of the outlet likely helped obtain an interview with Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, who has been aggressively targeting ethno-cultural communities and their media to build support in their communities for the Conservative party. Kenney's personal and public hostility toward Communist regimes was also likely a consideration in his engagement with *The Epoch Times*, as well as his promotion of human rights during a visit to China several years ago.

The presence of these community-of-interest reporters in the Gallery does not seem to have created a coordinated impetus by the parties to use those outlets to get their messages out to those communities-of-interest. While there has been some movement – the use of John McKay as a designated outreach person for faith communities on behalf of the Liberals, and the NDP employing a dedicated communications officer for speciality and ethno-cultural media – this is not coordinated or often used. None of the journalists reported anything in the way of contact with the parties' communications offices on ways that they might be using these outlets for differentiated messaging.

One could point to the interview that Jason Kenney gave to *The Epoch Times* as an attempt at speak to ethno-cultural media outlets as part of his outreach programme, but that was one single time on an immigration issue. When Stephen Harper travelled to China, for example, at no point was there a story in that outlet about Harper's plans to deliver a message about human rights abuses in China, even

though they would have been a receptive audience to such a message. That said, the Conservatives have made a coordinated effort to bypass the Parliamentary Press Gallery and the national media whenever possible, and offering interviews and media access to local media only, hoping that they will be less critical of the government. This would include local ethno-cultural media outlets, which do tend to engage with federal politics on a strictly local level.

From my own experience, when I first began reporting on the Hill I was contacted by the NDP's specialty media officer with a story idea about MP Bill Siksay, which began my reporting relationship with him, which evolved to a point where I no longer need to go through staff to speak to him. For the Liberals, however, there was no dedicated outreach to me as a reporter from *Xtra* initially, but that began to change the longer I was there, and the more I got to know the communications staff that are present in the Foyer after Question Period. At the end of May 2010, when funding for Toronto Pride was an issue for the Liberal Party, I was approached by the staff of the Opposition Leader's Office as well as the party's tourism critic about facts and figures that their research had turned up, as they saw this as a message that could be directed to a queer audience.

The presence of these community-of-interest journalists in the Press Gallery presents an opportunity for parties to better engage with these communities-of-interest, and to provide specific and directed messaging for that targeted audience. Until that presence is better utilised, however, these outlets will remain in a rather marginal state in comparison to the rest of the journalists in the Gallery.

In the end

There was a sense of uniformity to the four community-of-interest reporters in many ways. All pursued stories that in a way conformed to the particular stereotypes of stories that interested their own communities-of-interest over the mainstream issues of the day, all were more interested in the legislation and policy work than in the horse race of weekly polls, and most were more engaged with the committee process that has largely gone ignored by the mainstream media.

Where they differed was in the level of interaction they had with Parliamentarians. This ranged from virtually non-existent, to interacting with a designated few MPs, to interviews with as many MPs and Senators as possible from all parties. I had initially believed that the interaction with Parliamentarians might be one of the areas where community-of-interest media may have a particular strength, given the notions of descriptive and virtual representation theories of democracy. This, however, was not borne out in fact.

These outlets do provide a unique view of federal politics to their particular communities-of-interest, but it is virtually always in addition to mainstream coverage of issues rather than replacing it. The “value added” of this coverage can address the concerns of these communities-of-interest that may otherwise feel marginalised by that mainstream coverage, but ultimately cannot replace it. What it does is partly address a gap in the public discourse, but so far their potential remains untapped.

One of the consistent patterns between all four organisations is that each tends to be reactive rather than proactive when it comes to issues that happen on the federal political scene. Rather than using their reporters to drive issues by questioning MPs about upcoming events and nascent issues, their reporters instead tend to provide their community-of-interest's with reaction to events. While some of this has to do with the fact that with single-member bureaux on the Hill, as Gyapong described it, finding stories can be "like trying to drink from a fire hydrant" (Gyapong 2010) in that there is a constant flood from which to pick and choose from. One can also point to the editorial involvement.

Among the four outlets, there is a consistent pattern of simply turning the responsibility for story selection over to the reporters. While the reporters have the sense to know what stories would generally attract the attention of their community-of-interest audience, it nevertheless implies that these editors and publishers are investing money and resources into maintaining a Parliament Hill bureau without having a strategy behind it. While *Xtra* does have an activist mandate, and many of its stories will follow that approach, there is still primarily a reactive element to the stories that were reported. This lack of strategy can mean lost opportunities for these communities-of-interest when it comes to setting agendas where their members have a vested interest.

The contributions these outlets make to journalism, however, ensures that there are different and unique voices being heard in the broader discussion of federal public affairs in Canada. While members of these communities-of-interest are covered by the mainstream media, they do not necessarily speak to these

communities-of-interest about the issues that concern them because of the demands of a homogenising media cycle that must ensure that the news it produces appeals to as broad an audience as possible. By having these community-of-interest journalists in the Press Gallery, these viewpoints can be expressed, and their concerns can be brought to Parliamentarians by ensuring that they know that there is a constituency interested in the issues being debated.

List of Interviews

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- Matthew Little, *The Epoch Times* – Friday, July 9, 2010
- Brent Creelman, Web Editor, *Xtra.ca* – Wednesday, July 14, 2010
- Deborah Gyapong, *Canadian Catholic News* – Tuesday, July 20, 2010
- David Dawes, Managing Editor, *BC Christian News* – Wednesday, July 21, 2010
- Jim O’Leary, Publisher and Editor, *Canadian Catholic News* – Wednesday, July 21, 2010
- Jason Loftus, Editor, *The Epoch Times* – Thursday, August 5, 2010

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