



A Peek Behind Closed Doors

Recently released documents uncover powerful business influence over SPP process

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The [Corbett Report](#) has obtained minutes from the highly-secretive Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) Ministerial Meeting held in Ottawa on February 23rd, 2007. ([click to view](#))

This meeting — attended by political heavyweights from Canada, the United States and Mexico — received much criticism in the Canadian press at the time for being needlessly secretive. This was in fact the main focus of a Canadian Press report from that day headlined "[Officials play down criticism that talks too secretive](#)" which noted how "North American ministers deflected criticism that they had consulted only big business for their talks on trade and security rules, suggesting Friday there are 'different venues' for public interest and labour groups to raise their concerns and suggestions." Indeed, the government officials present at the press conference were forced to address issues of secrecy when the press conference was [disrupted by protestors who were angry about the secretive nature of the talks](#). Such criticisms were not without their merit. In attendance were such key government representatives as Peter McKay (Foreign Affairs Minister of Canada), Stockwell Day (Public Safety Minister of Canada), Condoleeza Rice (U.S. Secretary of State), Michael Chertoff (U.S. Homeland

Security Chief) and Patricia Espinosa (Mexican Foreign Minister). On their agenda, according to the CP article, were matters traditionally left to elected representatives to debate in legislative settings, including a meeting devoted to "finalizing a North American plan on dealing with a flu pandemic and another on a common regulatory environment in all three countries."

The secrecy surrounding the talks come as no surprise to those who have been following the Security and Prosperity Partnership. The SPP is carrying out a merger of the three sovereign North American nations in what has been euphemistically dubbed a "dialogue" in order to commit an end-run around the legislative process which would have made such a merger politically impossible. The process started when then-Prime Minister Paul Martin of Canada, then-President Vincente Fox of Mexico and President George W. Bush of the United States [announced the creation of the SPP](#) at Baylor University in Waco, Texas on March 23rd, 2005 at a press conference which was heavy on hyperbole and scant on details. Facts coming out of the subsequent leaders summit in Cancun, Mexico on March 31st, 2006 [were similarly sparse](#). The official websites of the SPP from all three countries (the [Canadian](#) the [American](#) and the [Mexican](#)) provide few details of how government representatives are working to carry out the SPP's initiatives.

Indeed, the SPP completely circumvents the democratic process since it is a "dialogue," not a "treaty" or even an "agreement" between the three governments, meaning government representatives can claim they are attending SPP meetings as private citizens. The office of Stockwell Day [refused even to confirm Mr. Day's attendance](#) at the secretive North American Forum meeting in Banff, Canada in September 2006, saying it was a "private meeting and generally I don't confirm private meetings of the minister."

[The minutes of the February 23rd meeting](#) — obtained under the Access to Information Act and released on June 21, 2007 — show a continuing cloak of secrecy around matters of national importance. The most noticeable aspect of the document are the blacked-out passages. There is not a single section of the document that has not had information excised at the behest of the Ministers, citing the sections of the Act dealing with information obtained in confidence and information which could be "injurious to the conduct of

international affairs, [and] the defence of Canada." What little information has not been excised proves what protestors feared at the time: that business interests wield a great deal of influence over the entire process while regular citizens are left out of the discussion, permitted even from learning the details of the SPP's implementation.

The most startling passage of the document concerns the North American Competitiveness Council (NACC), which the minutes themselves note was a "body created by Leaders in 2006 to give the private sector a formal role in providing advice on how to enhance competitiveness in North America." The idea that business interests are really in control of the process is suggested in the following passage:

Exchanges following a formal presentation of the [NACC's] report uncovered frustration relating to the private sector's seeming inability to influence the pace of regulatory change "from the bottom up." [...] The subtext was clear: in the absence of ministerial endorsement, bureaucracies are unlikely to act on the more challenging recommendations. [...] The complex and far-reaching nature of the recommendations suggest that governments will need ample time to review and consult internally — and trilaterally — but it seems clear that the NACC will be looking for an early commitment to moving forward quickly.

This shockingly candid passage makes it clear that the business interests are actually in charge of the process, giving the politicians marching orders and demanding that these orders are followed, and followed quickly. Perhaps this is not surprising when one discovers that the SPP in fact did not start life as a governmental "dialogue" at all, but rather as an [initiative launched by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives \(CCOCE\)](#) in January 2003. According to the CCOCE's own documents Council members comprise the CEOs of 150 leading Canadian businesses which "administer in excess of C\$2.1 trillion in assets, have annual revenues of more than \$500 billion" and, it seems, have a number of ranking governmental officials from all three North American nations in their back pocket.

The other worrying news to come out of the meeting minutes

is the revelation that Canadian Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day proposed at the meeting "the establishment of a coordinating body on Emergency Management" which like all other SPP initiatives will drastically curtail democracy in each of the three countries by leaving vital matters of national security in the hands of unelected foreign nationals and bureaucrats. The effects of such initiatives have already been felt in other areas, as Canada [has already announced plans to lower pesticide standards](#) in order to bring Canada's comparatively high standards in line with America's standards, which rank among the lowest in the developed world. One can only imagine what will result of this three-way race to the bottom in this "body on Emergency Management" which will presumably be tasked with coordinating disaster response.

One thing which emerges very clearly from these documents is that secrecy is not only an unnecessary component of the SPP process but is detrimental to our democracies themselves. Without public representation and input, the corruption of the process by business and political elites is a virtual certainty. There is no accountability where there is no transparency. The citizens of Canada will not stand for such a process, and demand representation at [the upcoming leaders summit](#) in Montebello, Quebec on August 21, 2007.

Contact your Member of Parliament by clicking [here](#).

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