

**NRT**



**NATIONAL  
ROUND TABLE ON  
THE ENVIRONMENT  
AND THE ECONOMY**

**REFLECTIONS  
FROM PAST  
LEADERS OF  
THE NRTEE**

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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (Canada)  
Reflections from Past Leaders of the NRTEE [electronic resource].

Issued also in French under title:  
Réflexions des anciens dirigeants de la TRNEE.

Electronic monograph in PDF format.

ISBN 978-1-100-21765-9

Cat. no: En134-58/2013E-PDF

1. Economic development--Environmental aspects--Canada.
  2. Environmental policy--Economic aspects--Canada.
  3. Sustainable development--Government policy--Canada.
  4. National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (Canada).
- I. Title.

HC120 E5 N37 2013 338.971'07 C2013-980012-3

Design: Mouk

Suggested citation: Canada. National Round Table  
on the Environment and the Economy. (2013).  
Reflections from Past Leaders of the NRTEE.

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# INTRODUCTION

**AS WE MOVED TOWARD THE PERMANENT CLOSING OF THE NRTEE'S DOORS, WE LOOKED FOR WAYS TO CAPTURE AND PRESERVE THE ROUND TABLE'S 25-YEAR HISTORY. ONE OF OUR INITIATIVES WAS TO APPROACH THE NRTEE'S PAST CHAIRS AND CEOs FOR A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THEIR TENURE WITH THE ORGANIZATION, WITH CONSIDERATION OF THEIR INCOMING ASPIRATIONS, SUBSEQUENT WORKING RELATIONSHIPS, SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENTS, AND FONDEST MEMORIES.**

**WHAT FOLLOWS ARE THE PERSONAL WORDS AND REFLECTIONS OF OUR CHAIRS AND CEOs. WHAT STANDS OUT IS THEIR ENTHUSIASM, THEIR COMMITMENT TO THE CONCEPT OF THE ROUND TABLE, AND THEIR FOND AND LASTING MEMORIES OF THEIR TIME WITH, AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO, THE INSTITUTION.**

<b>CHAIRS</b>	<b>TENURE AT NRTEE</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS / PRESIDENT &amp; CEOs</b>	<b>TENURE AT NRTEE</b>
David Johnston	1988–1990	Dorothy Richardson (Executive Director)	1988–1991
George E. Connell	1990–1995	Ronald L. Doering (Executive Director)	1991–1996
Stuart Lyon Smith	1995–2002	David McGuinty (President & CEO)	1996–2004
Harvey Mead	2002–2004	Eugene Nyberg (Acting President & CEO)	2004–2005
Glen Murray	2005–2008	Alex Wood (Acting President & CEO)	2006–2007
Robert (Bob) Page	2008–2012	David McLaughlin (President & CEO)	2007–2012
Robert Slater (Interim)	2012–2013	Jim McLachlan (Acting President & CEO)	2012–2013



# CHAIRS

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## **DAVID JOHNSTON 1988–1990**

Inspired by the Brundtland Commission on sustainability, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE or Round Table) was established with the goal of making the concept of sustainable development a living reality in Canada. The Round Table's mission was rooted in a clear-eyed understanding that our desire for a modern economy and our duty to a sustainable environment are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually reinforcing.

Our greatest achievement, in my view, was to develop a clear and comprehensive definition of sustainable development and to have legislation enacted that required acts of Parliament to meet the criteria of sustainability.

Another of the real achievements of the Round Table was to establish a broad network of interested parties from senior levels of government, the environmental sector, the business community, and academia. It was unique to have Cabinet Ministers in the same room as people from other sectors on a regular basis. At that time, the roundtable concept was a relatively new one for many, and if it worked well it was thanks to the quality of those people who accepted the invitation to join and who agreed to work together in search of common ground.

The members of the Round Table carried out their mission with energy and creativity — undertaking exhaustive research, bringing together diverse interests, rallying the brightest minds, and providing unbiased advice to governments. I am proud to have been part of such a bold and successful experiment.

## **GEORGE E. CONNELL 1990–1995**

Dr. George E. Connell was appointed the second Chair of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy by the Prime Minister in February 1991. He presided over the completion of the first developmental phase in the life of the National Round Table and the beginning of its second chapter as a departmental corporation under its new legislation.



Unfortunately, Dr. Connell was unable to provide his thoughts for this retrospective, so instead we have chosen to let his own words from his years at the Round Table speak for themselves:

*The choices and decisions made by this generation will shape and influence the policy and economy of our portion of the globe for many generations to come.*

—NRTEE Annual Review 1990–1991

.....

*Sustainable development is an issue which transcends all boundaries and all constitutional matters. It must become a principle which serves as a primary building block for the constitutions of all nations of the world.*

—NRTEE Annual Review 1990–1991

.....

*Humanity is in the dangerous position of failing to appreciate the absolute nature of our collective dependence upon a stable environment. To ensure that Canada's future vision includes sustainable development, governments at all levels must work in concert with business, community groups and all Canadians. I hope that the National Round Table can help illuminate this debate and help us all achieve a national consensus.*

—NRTEE Annual Review 1990–1991

.....

*For Canadians the most important outcome may be the widespread realization that we have a remarkable opportunity to influence decisively the course of events on a global scale, to make the Brundtland vision a reality.*

—NRTEE Annual Review 1991–1992

.....

*We look forward to reporting to you, Prime Minister, in this new chapter of the National Round Table's history. Our new legislation gives the Round Table independent status as a departmental corporation. It does not radically change our mandate; however, it does give the Round Table a significantly greater measure of independence in its mode of operation, and it dispels whatever ambiguity existed concerning the relationship of the Round Table to the Government.*

*The Act also reflects the collective awareness of our legislators and the Canadian people that the journey to sustainable development will neither be short nor easy. The Round Table has signed on as navigator for the entire journey.*

—NRTEE Annual Review 1992–1993



## STUART LYON SMITH 1995–2002

### CHALLENGES THAT CONFRONT GOVERNMENT-FUNDED POLICY ADVISORY BODIES

Having been the Chair of two such bodies (Science Council of Canada and NRTEE), each for about seven years, it might be helpful for me to offer some general comments about how they operate and what can reasonably be expected of them.

First, they will always have a limited life span since they compete with and must be kept under some control by the bureaucracy. During my service, the NRTEE was in the happy position of reporting NOT through the competitive department (Environment) but rather to the Prime Minister and his designate at the time, the Minister of Finance. Contrast this with the travails of the Science Council, which reported to a weak and shaky ministry, namely the Ministry of State for Science and Technology.

The main strength of government-funded policy advisory bodies lies in their convening power that, in turn, relies on their perceived access to powerful decision makers. Industry will not send CEOs to meetings without access to the most senior decision makers, especially Ministers. Without CEOs and Ministers around, the main task of those who come to meetings becomes one of keeping an eye on things, lest something harmful be allowed to emerge. The usual result is to aim at consensus at all times, with “wordsmithing” used to paper over real differences. This is fatal if the hope is to influence policy.

### HOW WE DEALT WITH THESE CHALLENGES

What was needed was confidence that someone with decision-making power actually wanted the NRTEE’s advice and would act upon it. It was also deemed essential that all participants’ opinions be clearly portrayed with a right of detailed dissent. To avoid wordsmithing, we devised “State of the Debate” reports that, while indicating general agreement where it existed, forced everyone to say precisely what prevented them from joining any consensus. Ultimately, issues were clarified by means of this device and decision makers knew what their possible actions would arouse in terms of feelings on all sides. This resulted in the sides coming closer to each other and the remaining issues being well understood.

To further increase the confidence of all players when they participated in our events, we emphasized the “and” in the name of the NRTEE, accepting that environmental and economic costs had to be taken into consideration. We also always had two Vice-Chairs of the NRTEE, one from an environmental organization and one from an industrial organization. Some prominent environmentalists took exception to this “balanced” approach.



The fact that our time in office coincided with governmental austerity pretty well dictated our direction. Fortunately, the personal interest taken by the Minister of Finance allowed us to demonstrate that we could still influence government policy (e.g., many of our recommendations regarding fiscal measures related to energy efficiency and clean technology were adopted by the government). In football terminology, we could not expect many touchdowns but we steadily moved the yardsticks.

### SOME ADDITIONAL AREAS OF ACHIEVEMENT

The following are not in any order of priority:

- Convened several meetings across Canada to promote brownfield development, a topic that gained momentum and continues to attract considerable attention.
- Organized work and policy development in the area of health and environment, especially highlighting the effect of new pharmaceuticals on immature nervous systems, an area insufficiently tested under current regimes.
- Convened a week-long forum of Order of Canada recipients, addressed by all the leading scientists (pro and con) in the field of climate change. Conclusions from the forum were circulated to schools across the country.
- Introduced the concept of tradable GHG credits by bringing together international experts to explain the operation of such tools to Canadians.
- Carried out meetings across the Northwest Territories on non-renewable resources and Aboriginal peoples.
- Held national meetings at the request of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance to identify environmental indicators that should be followed alongside economic indicators so that Canadians can know where progress has been made and where it might be further needed. The indicators so developed have since become subjects for regular measurement and report by StatsCan and Environment Canada.
- Convened most of the leading economists in the country to find ways to report on Natural Capital (and related measures of Total Factor Productivity), not to alter GDP but to supplement it.
- Worked with several industries in the U.S. and Canada and with the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants to produce definitions and standard methodology for producing Eco-Efficiency reports on a regular basis. The aim was tracking waste minimization efforts and improving the productivity of material and energy inputs.





## HARVEY MEAD 2002–2005

I was a member of the NRTEE for three years in the 1990s before being named Chair in 2002. Our contact at that time was with the Minister of the Environment, even if the intent behind the law creating the Round Table was for it to advise the Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> I had the impression that our reports, in spite of their quality and pertinence, had relatively little influence on the government: being associated with the environmental sector constituted a diminution of the importance of the Round Table's work, as of that of the ministers involved. This was even the case, as far as I could see, for the work in parallel with that of the Round Table, chaired by the Ministers of Finance and the Environment at the time, dealing with a harmonization of fiscal regulation and environmental challenges.

On being named Chair, I hoped to be able to preside over an organization with more influence. I saw the NRTEE as a tool for improving dialogue within society on ways to integrate environmental and social challenges into the decision-making processes dominated by economic priorities, rather than as a major player in these processes themselves. This was not quite what was hoped for when roundtables were set up all across Canada, but it was a reality that one had to recognize.

Between the time I was a member and my being named Chair, the Table had been recognized as being in direct contact with the Prime Minister, an important development. Nonetheless, during my three years as Chair, my judgment was that, in spite of this relationship, our influence was quite minimal, and there was even a tendency to look for ways to reconcile our work with government policy orientations. This was particularly the case with the Kyoto file.

In my view, what was impressive about the NRTEE's work during my six years of association with it was something quite other. This was the enormous access that the Round Table provided for a multitude of stakeholders. The NRTEE was an important tool for stimulating dialogue among multiple perspectives, providing a rare, almost unique, chance for the constructive confrontation of ideas and interests. Senior federal officials were almost always among the members of NRTEE task forces, and I saw them as the principal source of the NRTEE's influence within the federal government.

My professional work was already focused on organizing and moderating group discussions, and I committed myself to making the plenary meetings as constructive as possible. I also decided to closely follow the work of the task forces in an effort to bring together the stakeholders from the different sectors involved. An NRTEE member chaired each task force, and I saw my role in this regard as one of supporting his or her work when it was brought to the Round Table as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy Act (S.C. 1993, c.31) says, "Minister' means such member of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada as may be designated by the governor in Council as the Minister for the purposes of this Act."



I believe that I succeeded in facilitating serious and fruitful dialogue among the members, for it was around the table that we debated the results of the work of the different task forces and of other activities aimed at advising the government on its policy orientations. I think it was a loss when the NRTEE abandoned the task forces after I left. The most important loss following upon the dissolution of the Round Table is not, in fact, that of an important advisor to the highest levels of government — the NRTEE was never that — but the loss of the honest broker known and respected throughout Canada by organizations and individuals deeply involved in the challenges associated with the country's development.

### **GLEN MURRAY 2005–2008**

*We are aware that some of our recommendations may be challenging and will generate fulsome debate. They are provided on the basis that an important NRTEE role is to consider long-term public policy solutions beyond current approaches. This is meant to inform the public policy debate to assist government and others to consider how best to transition to our proposed long-term climate policy framework.*

—Glen Murray, NRTEE Chair, in *Getting to 2050: Canada's Transition to a Low-emission Future*

Glen Murray was appointed Chair of the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy in 2005, just as the issue of climate change was beginning to take hold in Canadian public policy conversations.

During his tenure the NRTEE facilitated discussion of the environmental and economic elements of a number of key national and international issues. Stakeholders from a wide range of sectors contributed to important debates on ecological fiscal reform and energy, conserving Canada's natural capital in the boreal forest, capital markets and sustainability, and energy and climate change. The NRTEE led discussion and debate in these program areas, with particular emphasis on energy and climate change in the lead-up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (CoP11) conference in Montreal in the 2005.

In June 2006, the NRTEE released findings and advice to the government on a long-term climate change and energy strategy. This strategy was based on a scenario developed by the NRTEE that examined how, by 2050, Canada could meet the energy needs of a growing economy, achieve substantial reductions in carbon emissions, and improve air quality.



*Over the years, the NRTEE has developed expertise that positions us well to provide a unique and substantial contribution to Canada's performance. We are committed to maintaining a focus on our mandate and to helping the federal government face the sustainable development challenge head-on.*

—Glen Murray, NRTEE Chair, in *NRTEE Annual Report 2006–2007*

## **ROBERT (BOB) PAGE 2008–2012**

My years as Chair were exciting, stimulating, and challenging — but never dull. With the Government of Canada's sensitivities under Prime Minister Harper, there were always uncertainties about the NRTEE's future status. Following the election, Cabinet Ministers reviewed the rationale and performance of the NRTEE. Fortunately they confirmed the mandate and the funding. However, each budget thereafter we experienced worries about our future existence given the prevailing culture. We quickly chose to ignore the politics and proceed vigorously with our work plan. The quality of our reports would be the answer to our critics. As it turned out, as long as the Conservatives were in a minority position, we were relatively secure; once they achieved their majority, circumstances changed quickly.

My own experience with the NRTEE went back to the beginning when I worked with Jean Charest and others on the launching and the appointment of the first Chair. These were the heady days of the Brundtland Commission when we believed sustainable development would revolutionize government decision-making processes with the integration of the environment and the economy. I served a term as a member in the early 1990s, contributed to some of the later reports, and then was re-appointed as a member in 2007. I had a sense that I had always been part of the family. Many things had changed since my first term but the esprit de corps and the intellectual rigour had not. I was thrilled when asked to write the main narrative for the heritage/legacy paper but I worried how I could do justice to the great accomplishments of the NRTEE in such a short space. The Round Table produced over 100 major reports in 25 years, scoping out the many sides of sustainability. Yet there was an essential purpose in documenting some of the achievements for posterity and to answer some of our critics.

The Chair's relationship with the Minister is critical to the NRTEE effectiveness. My personal relations with the Ministers that I served were good but not frequent. John Baird opted to establish a non-political Privy Council process for the selection of the Chair, which was an important precedent. I enjoyed Minister Baird's enthusiasms,



his engagement, and his respectful dealings with the NRTEE. Minister Prentice met with the NRTEE the first day of his appointment to the Environment, but contact was infrequent afterwards. Minister Kent made personal efforts to meet with us including meeting about the two issues he referred for advice in 2011. With all the ministers, there was always the perception that the PMO was lurking in the wings.

The relations between the Chair and the CEO were another area critical to the success of the NRTEE. David McLaughlin and I had a smooth and comfortable working relationship. When looking at governance, it is important to remember that the NRTEE members were not a Board of Directors but they did have the final say on work plan and reports. The CEO had responsibility for personnel, budgets, and administration while the Chair did the annual assessment of the CEO. It was a governance structure with ambiguity and flexibility for the individuals involved, but one that was different from any I had worked under before.

I believed strongly that the NRTEE was a special organization, unique in purpose and characteristics, with an ambivalent relationship to government. It was both a privileged advisor to governments and a conscience proposing new ways as constructive criticism of the status quo. Some Conservative officials were uncomfortable that the government was financing criticism when they wanted cheerleaders. For me this issue emerged in the careful wording required in every letter of transmittal and in the briefing of senior officials. We got a few bombs thrown our way when the Minister was suddenly confronted by the media. However, there was no reason for having an NRTEE unless it was exploring new ground for government consideration.

In looking back over the last five years, I am proud of the ground-breaking work that we did on climate change. We delivered original and innovative analysis on carbon management, mitigation costs, competitiveness, pricing, adaptation, and policy options. Wherever I went across Canada this work was lauded because of our unique modeling that delivered real numbers. The Government of Alberta requested detailed briefings as background to its negotiations with Ottawa. One senior person at Imperial Oil told me candidly: "I do not agree with all your recommendations, but I sure appreciate your modelling and analysis that is addressing key questions ignored by others."

Our work on this began with a reference from the Minister seeking to consider policies similar to Obama's such as cap and trade. When Congress failed to pass the legislation, Prime Minister Harper backed away and attacked the Liberals for their carbon tax proposals. Our carbon pricing recommendations suffered from guilt by association. By 2011 and 2012, the PMO was unhappy with the NRTEE Climate Prosperity reports, having forgotten that it had originally requested this work. Most Canadian economists supported our carbon pricing proposals.



One of the most curious experiences for me was the NRTEE role under the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act (2007). Here the Commons opposition — with the majority — combined to embarrass the government on Kyoto by requiring it to produce an annual report on the progress in meeting the Kyoto targets, targets which the minority government under Prime Minister Harper had rejected. The NRTEE was then given 60 days to assess the accuracy of the report. Our reports led to a number of improvements including the emissions reporting methodology. While the whole exercise was a bit of a political game, it introduced a new role for the NRTEE as parliamentary watchdog. Our reports also avoided carefully the basic issue of Kyoto, which was a political minefield for the government.

One of my great joys was the privilege of working with members and staff on our reports. Like others I had long days and nights reviewing and commenting on drafts. I was greatly stimulated by the intellectual power around the table. On occasion I felt intimidated but also so grateful for the variety of backgrounds and experience that so strengthened our reports. I was sorry the Minister could not have heard these wonderful discussions that were in such contrast to the narrowly partisan discussions in the House of Commons and the media. Our work was an important aspect of creating real policy debate so crucial for the proper functioning of the democratic process.

In closing I consider it to have been a very great honour to have worked with so many talented and dedicated people. We fulfilled our mandate on policy advice and consensus building, and we usually had fun doing it. We leave an outstanding 25-year record of reports and activities that really did define the issues of sustainability for Canada. Some of our advice was ignored but many items were accepted. The public debate on policy was much richer from our work. This is a record we all can be proud of as we fade into the sunset.

### **ROBERT SLATER (INTERIM) 2012–2013**

The National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy has been a trusted organization for more than 25 years. It earned that trust by being nonpartisan, objective, analytical, and competent. As a loyal advisor it has told government what it needed to know rather than what it wanted to hear. The advice proffered in over 100 reports was always within the realm of the possible — if not immediately, then eventually.

The NRTEE was one of many innovations introduced by the government of Prime Minister Mulroney that were inspired by the landmark UN Brundtland report *Our Common Future*. Its distinguishing characteristics included the seniority of members from all sectors of society and their reporting access to the Prime Minister and the unique



mandate to integrate the environment and the economy in decision making. NRTEE members and thousands of other Canadians were provided with a forum to have the discussions with others that they should have been having but rarely did. The goal was to influence decision making and as Jim MacNeill noted, “if we change the way we make decisions, we will change the decisions we make.”

Two of the four reports prepared in the final year were in response to detailed references provided by the Government of Canada.

The NRTEE has always maintained its focus on the integration of the environment and the economy with the belief that collectively we are smart enough to have both a productive environment and a prosperous economy. In the last six years we have concentrated on two main issues—climate change and water. Over a series of reports we examined the consequences of a changing climate for Canadians across the country and the measures that could be taken to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide. We also examined the strain that water resources will be under and how traditional management regimes need to change. Our final report was important not only because it was our last one but also because it was emblematic of the entire body of work of the Round Table. It addressed one of the central issues of our time—can Canada bring solutions to the climate change issue and at the same time build an enterprise that will serve a huge global market and bring jobs and prosperity to our citizens? Our answer is a resounding “yes” qualified only by the resolve of governments to develop and implement policy in concert with one another and the willingness of the private sector to lead directed technology innovation.

Let me finish on a personal note. As a civil servant in Environment Canada, I served 22 Ministers of the Environment and was involved in both setting up the NRTEE and closing it. Starting is better. I am convinced that finding ways to integrate economic and environmental factors in the policies we make is more vital now than it has ever been. It has been both a welcome surprise to see the substantial progress of leading companies and a disappointment to see the continued struggle of most governments to make equivalent progress.

The intellectual capital of the Round Table will be preserved, the social capital will continue through friendships and working arrangements, and the very capable staff are moving on to new jobs and vistas. This was a bold experiment: we have all learned a great deal and that has helped make Canada a better place.



# EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS, PRESIDENTS AND CEOs

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## **DOROTHY RICHARDSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 1988–1991**

While my tenure as Executive Director was limited to only the first two and a half years of the Round Table's existence, I am more than happy to share a few reflections on what turned out to be an interesting learning experience for me personally, for the NRTEE, and for the federal bureaucracy.

In late 1988, Dr. David Johnston, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of McGill University, and I were tasked with giving substance to an Order-in-Council creating the NRTEE. It was to be a national, multi-stakeholder model designed to provide the Government of Canada with strategic policy input on sustainable development, an issue acknowledged to involve traditionally competing values and priorities.

Our initial challenge was to persuade sceptical executive representatives of the various stakeholder sectors that the process was a genuine attempt to facilitate an apolitical exchange of expertise and views that advanced the potential for consensus.

I was enormously pleased by the response, which in no small part was ascribable to the respect for and confidence in Dr. Johnston's leadership, the fact that he reported directly to the Prime Minister, and that the closed meetings were to be structured to encourage the frank dialogue that would be essential for building respect, trust, and discretion among members.

The diversity and sector authority of the members during my tenure provided optimism that their expertise, influence, and networks would eventually lead to their joint deliberations being more widely seen as relevant and instructive to not only their respective constituencies but also the wider public at large.

The presence of four Cabinet Ministers as equal partners around the NRTEE table dictated that we try to achieve as much independence as possible from any individual federal department's policy focus or budgetary/personnel constraints. Perversely, since the Round Table had not, at that time, been institutionalized through an Act of Parliament, little thought had been given to the structural details needed to establish the viability of such an independent organization within the existing administrative framework of the Public Service.



From my perspective as Executive Director, both these realities remained dishearteningly dominant managerially. Fortunately, they did not seem to affect the determination of the Chair or the members during those first exploratory years to grasp this unique opportunity to focus on a controversial issue that demanded significantly greater analysis to grasp its nature, significance, and potential for resolution.

I remember the excitement and the stress vividly!!

## **RONALD L. DOERING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 1991–1996**

### **ASPIRATIONS**

My initial goal was to get the NRTEE legislated as my experience was that it would not last long if it weren't. In fact, getting a commitment from the Prime Minister to legislate it was a condition of my agreeing to apply for the position. (As we were setting it up, both the Science Council and the Economic Council of Canada were being wound down.) With the independence and stability that we would obtain from legislation, it was my hope that we could become a modest but important advisory body to government. We also had the challenge of working closely with the various provincial roundtables that had grown up by this time and which had already achieved significant influence on their respective governments. Canada was in catch-up mode, and legislation enhanced our credibility with the broader roundtable movement.

### **WORKING WITH MEMBERS, SECRETARIAT AND STAKEHOLDERS**

With a very small staff, it was important to use the members themselves to do much of the work through committees; this had the additional benefit of getting the most from their expertise, encouraging interaction, and promoting a sense of ownership. This became the modus operandi for the early years of the NRTEE. We embarked on an ambitious publishing program to get our word out and to provide material to focus the sustainability debate. We had a regular newsletter with wide distribution that provided updates on the work of all of Canada's roundtables. By December 1993 we had eight books and 22 titles in the Working Paper series that raised the profile of the NRTEE and sustainable development.

### **GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT**

Getting the legislation through quickly in the midst of a very busy parliamentary period was a significant achievement. Personally, I believe that I provided the NRTEE with credibility and a good foundation in its critical early years. In hindsight, the most important NRTEE achievement during this time was to conceive of the need for and encourage the government to create the position of Commissioner of the Environment





and Sustainable Development and have it embedded in the Office of the Auditor General to give it resources, independence, and longevity. NRTEE member Barry Stuart and Chairs David Johnston (now Governor General) and George Connell were instrumental in getting the NRTEE to support a recommendation to the Prime Minister that was ultimately adopted. François Bregha played a key role in terms of research and analysis culminating in the Working Paper #21 titled *A Renewed Framework for Government Accountability in the Area of Sustainable Development: Potential Role for A Canadian Parliamentary Auditor/ Commissioner for the Environment*. I was personally involved in the negotiations with Central Agencies, the Deputy Minister of Environment (not a supporter), and the Auditor General. I regret to say that the NRTEE never got the credit it deserved for this important legacy achievement.

I most enjoyed working with the fascinating group of people that the roundtable movement brought together to work on some common-sense solutions to what is still the public policy challenge of our time.

## **DAVID McGUINTY, PRESIDENT & CEO 1996–2004**

### **ASPIRATIONS ABOUT THE NRTEE'S POTENTIAL**

When first appointed as President and CEO, I had two main aspirations. The first was to strengthen the organization, to make it more relevant and to generate more implementable change. There was an opportunity for the NRTEE to move beyond debating the need for change to delivering more concrete options. The second aspiration was to make it a more credible organization, in terms of the depth of analysis, results, process, dialogue, and, ultimately, impact. I wanted to make sure that the resources and goodwill that were being mobilized and deployed met with success. I recognized that the organization's power to convene could be enhanced, leading to increased reach and impact.

In working to achieve these outcomes, there was a need to remain faithful to the original purpose of the NRTEE as conceived at the Rio Summit. The NRTEE's mandate was to provide guidance to the federal government in a supra-departmental setting — guidance that amounted to helping to steer rather than row.

Without a doubt, there was an opportunity for the NRTEE to evolve into an organization that was primarily in the solutions business. There was a need to ensure that NRTEE processes were robust, using the best techniques and the best practices that could be drawn upon internationally.



## APPROACH TO ADVANCING ROUND TABLE ISSUES

The first important decision was to recognize that the Round Table would be constrained if the dialogue processes that it conducted were confined exclusively to its 25 members. Time constraints and expertise limitations had to be recognized, leading to a task-force model that effectively replicated the Round Table.

Secondly, significant efforts were made to involve the most competent, influential, and representative stakeholders. This would expand reach and help consolidate communities of interest in different critical areas being addressed by task forces.

Thirdly, systems were put in place early on to demonstrate the NRTEE's multiplier effect. Concrete metrics in dollar terms were devised, including quantifying time, travel, and financial contributions from stakeholders.

Fourthly, leadership from behind was indispensable. This involved assessing the abilities, interests, and availability of each member before deploying each and every one in the most appropriate setting. Some members became chairs of task forces; others were task force members or simply preferred to participate in our quarterly plenary meetings.

Fifthly, great effort was expended to engage senior decision makers at the federal level. Ministers, Deputy Ministers, and hundreds of senior officials were briefed or participated in the work of the organization. In fact, before a task force was created, Deputy Ministers of affected departments were contacted and asked to assign an ADM to act as an ex officio member of the task force.

Finally, a very comprehensive communications plan was developed and implemented. Literally tens of thousands of Canadian organizations and citizens were made aware of the work and findings of the Round Table.

## GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS

Without a doubt, the greatest achievement was the building of a high-performing team. Members, task force members, and staff worked seamlessly together. As a result, the NRTEE was able to support ground-breaking work by 6 to 12 task forces in existence at any one time.

Domestically, I was proud to help lead the NRTEE's work on brownfields, on green procurement, on domestic emissions trading, on co-management of our oceans, on ecological fiscal reform, on natural capital, and on environmental indicators. We delivered a whole new approach to thinking about cities, and we did incredible work in northern



Aboriginal communities. Our work gave rise to the Green Budget Coalition, which at the time integrated views from industry and environmental groups. We catalyzed the creation of academic programs while strengthening academic institutions.

## **EUGENE NYBERG, ACTING PRESIDENT & CEO 2004–2005**

### **ASPIRATIONS**

My aspirations for the NRTEE when I assumed the position of Acting President & CEO were to strengthen the organization's relationship to the Prime Minister's Office, the policy bureaucracy (especially in Finance Canada), and central agencies. As well I wanted to improve internal functioning of the organization by clarifying governance issues, improving upon and broadening participation in program planning, and strengthening communications with key stakeholder groups such as the broad public policy community, the media, and business groups, the latter of which had always been wary of the NRTEE. And lastly, a priority was to introduce more rigour into program management and evaluation, which entailed moving away from a focus on outputs to outcomes and results. This was necessary because of increasing accountability demands from central agencies and because evaluation provided indispensable feedback into the NRTEE's planning of its mission, priorities, and activities.

### **WORKING WITH MEMBERS, THE SECRETARIAT, AND STAKEHOLDERS TO ADVANCE NRTEE ISSUES**

My two objectives for members were to include them as partners with staff in taking oversight responsibility for program planning and implementation, and to act as ambassadors for the NRTEE to their constituencies or sectors and regions. Some success was achieved for the first and not much for the second.

Because of my being in an acting capacity I felt that it was especially important to keep staff informed, to engage them actively and regularly, and to draw upon their expertise in decision making. This also fit with my preferred management style and my concern about maintaining high morale in an uncertain environment.

As for stakeholders, I strongly felt that, because of limited resources, it was imperative to focus our efforts in engaging the priority groups identified above as partners and target audiences. Part of this strategy was to generate demand for our advice by key players in government such as the PMO and Finance Canada. We were successful in that this led to requests for advice on climate change issues from the PMO and an automobile "feebate" policy from Finance.



## GREATEST ACHIEVEMENTS

I proposed and tried to implement important governance and operational reforms. I described and promoted my views on the roles and responsibilities of members, the chair, and staff based on my long history with the NRTEE. This was necessary because lack of clarity had created unnecessary tensions and deflected the NRTEE from achieving its potential. Little traction, however, was achieved on this front.

Similarly, I thought that the appointment of the President & CEO should be done in a rigorous and non-partisan manner. This resulted in a landmark agreement with Prime Minister Martin that the NRTEE could take the lead in finding my successor. This entailed hiring an Executive Search firm to work with the Executive Committee to identify a short list from which he would make an appointment. This would have been a marked improvement over existing practice but was negated when the government was defeated before the process was concluded.

The major operational success was the design and implementation of an evaluation program that was recognized within the small agency community and the central agencies as a leading-edge effort. This helped to secure the NRTEE's reputation within the federal system for some time.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE NRTEE

The NRTEE played a distinctive and important role in promoting the environment by drawing attention to ways that concern for the environment and economy can be balanced. It provided an intellectually stimulating environment for all who were engaged in its efforts to break down policy silos and to act as a bridge between government and civil society and between adversarial groups in the economy. It was under-appreciated and not well understood because of its unconventional and non-confrontational mode of operation. It was a privilege to have been associated with it.

## ALEX WOOD, ACTING PRESIDENT & CEO 2006–2007

Standing on the Frobisher Bay ice in May 2006, watching NRTEE members and staff in spirited discussions with Inuit Elders, the singer Jewel, and Sir Richard Branson, I remember thinking, "I love my job."

Luckily, it was not an isolated feeling, as the job that I had as Acting CEO from January 2006 to August 2007 remains one of my favourite professional experiences. The fact that



it was so, and continues to be so, was a function of two factors: that I sat in that job during an unprecedented period of change and challenge in the NRTEE's history, and that I was lucky enough to work with some extraordinary people — both members and staff.

When I became Acting CEO of the NRTEE on January 1, 2006, the country was in the middle of a federal election. For the previous 13 years, the government had been formed by the Liberals, so there had been a certain degree of stability and predictability in the NRTEE's basic function and profile. Coming into the job, my basic expectation was that I would continue to operate the NRTEE in much the same way I had watched first David McGuinty and then Gene Nyberg do so.

Twenty-three days later, the election returned a minority Conservative government, and that expectation quickly gave way to two overriding objectives: survival and relevance.

The previous 24 months had been, in my view, one of the high points of the NRTEE's history. Growing international focus on climate change and the countdown to the climate change Conference of the Parties meeting in Montreal (held in December 2005) had led Prime Minister Paul Martin to appoint a new chair (Glen Murray) and a new board composed of many Canadian corporate heavyweights. The resulting energy and focus of the institution resulted in ground-breaking work, most notably the first “wedge analysis” done of Canada's energy and climate change options.

The strong research and consultation work carried out by the NRTEE during that time period did not insulate it from politics, of course. One of the big challenges we faced was proving ourselves to a new government that was initially suspicious of an organization that it associated with previous Liberal administrations (even though the NRTEE had been founded by a Conservative Prime Minister).

The most immediate concern was surviving the program review that the new government — like any new government — undertook. There were rumours circulating that the NRTEE would be part of an initial round of program reductions. But the government faced substantial criticism over some of its initial cuts, particularly of popular programs like the home retrofit Eco-Energy credit. That pushback, coupled with support we received from senior officials at the Department of Finance, gave the government pause and the NRTEE was spared to live another day.

Basic survival then gave way to the need to prove our relevance to the government. For this, in some way, we benefited from the fact that the incoming government had not made its own environmental policy development (as reflected in things like its



election platform) a priority. The policy gap that existed represented an opportunity for the NRTEE to provide advice that was robust, credible, and attuned to the government's political challenges. That advice, and the relationships we were able to establish with the new government over its first six months, lay the foundation for the NRTEE's work going forward.

While dealing with some of these external challenges, we also moved to make some changes to how the NRTEE conducted itself and how it brought forth policy advice to the government. By 2006, the Round Table had largely abandoned the "State of the Debate" model for policy research and analysis in favour of a more directed model. On the research side, this meant seeking to address specific questions instead of setting the broad lines of debate around a particular issue. Increasingly, those questions came from government directly, through "references" that would come to us. On the process side, our work moved away from the use of task forces of members and experts to guide program research to a more streamlined process. Consultations with stakeholders were moved to the later stages of the program, giving greater priority to the secretariat's expertise and experience in shaping policy advice in direct consultation with the NRTEE membership.

At the same time, one of the conclusions I drew early on in my time as Acting CEO was that we needed to seek new approaches to working with external stakeholders and organizations. That realization was partly an acknowledgment of the changing nature of how people and organizations were starting to work — for example, through partnerships. But it was also a recognition that partnerships were a useful way to broaden the NRTEE's reach and increase its effectiveness.

We initiated some conversations with the NRTEE membership on the need to look at some of these possibilities, armed with specific proposals. We found a membership that was split on the issue, with some feeling that such approaches would be beneficial to the NRTEE and others thinking that it would detract from the NRTEE's independent character. At the same time, we faced a number of difficult issues for which we needed to have a high degree of membership buy-in — not the least of which was the NRTEE's first attempt to define a policy framework for Canada on climate change that included a carbon price. Ultimately, my decision was to not move forward with any new partnership initiatives. Even though a number of members encouraged me to consider myself a fully empowered CEO, the main factor in my decision was the fact that, as Acting CEO, I answered directly to the Board (which had appointed me) and so needed to carefully manage their support and engagement.

To help close out this recollection, I want to point to some of the highlights of my almost two years' experience as acting CEO. First and foremost was the experience of working with some extraordinary Round Table members, from Glen Murray as Chair to



extraordinary people like Sheila Watt-Cloutier (who was responsible for bringing us out onto Frobisher Bay outside her home town of Iqaluit), Richard Drouin, Elyse Allan, Steve Williams, Tim Haig, and many, many others. I was also lucky to have a staff whose quality and dedication made me look good by association.

The basic lesson I learned, and that I carry to this day, is how the discussions and experiences we all shared — members and staff — fed directly into the energy and commitment that spurred the successes we had and allowed us get through the challenging times we faced.

### **DAVID McLAUGHLIN, PRESIDENT & CEO 2007–2012**

Nothing is forever and no organization is essential. But if there was ever a time for Canada to consider how to bring the environment and the economy together, it is now. The past five years saw a marked increase in the value and visibility of the NRTEE. My goal as President and CEO was to challenge us, as an organization, to matter. To out-perform expectations and do things better than before. To recruit and retain top-notch staff. We did all that and more.

What we did first was rejuvenate ourselves and renew interest in our work. The two go hand-in-hand. A strong secretariat, engaged members, and an ambitious, innovative work program were the essential ingredients for our success. That success translated into more reports based on original research and more convening with Canadians than ever undertaken. We started busy and stayed that way right to the end.

At the NRTEE we said our role was about “creating sustainable pathways.” Not a bumper sticker, this was how we saw the unique value of the Round Table — to bring ideas and people together from divergent interests and together come up with considered policy advice for governments. We took the long view: that sustainable development had to be about looking down the road. That is what led us to initiate the Climate Prosperity series — six original reports on how Canada could grow and prosper in a climate-changing world. Risks — yes — but opportunities too. That is how we looked ahead on behalf of Canada. For us the glass was always half-full. In doing so, we held ourselves to account by going beyond showing problems to identifying solutions.

Our partners were phenomenal. We extended our reach and deepened our knowledge by forging partnerships with respected Canadian and international organizations. I am particularly proud of our work with the Royal Canadian Geographical Society and their



dedicated October 2010 *Canadian Geographic* and *Geographica* issues that showed how global warming would impact Canada. From there we produced original maps and teaching lessons sent to over 12,000 schools across Canada. Beyond influencing the decision makers of today, we sought to inform the deciders of tomorrow.

Being an independent policy advisory agency to government is never easy. The past five years witnessed some challenging times. But our resolve never wavered. Our job was to give advice based on high-quality research and our unique convening ability. I often say “what’s controversial today is conventional wisdom tomorrow.”

Looking ahead, going where governments sometimes couldn’t yet tread, was why the Round Table existed and why it had value. I still believe that.

### **JIM McLACHLAN, ACTING PRESIDENT & CEO 2012–2013**

My time of leadership of the NRTEE was under very different circumstances than those who came before me. In August 2012, I was asked by the members to act as President & CEO to oversee the winding up of the organization in response to the government’s decision in the spring 2012 federal Budget. My job was not to build a legacy for the future but to attempt to sustain the one that had been created by my predecessors. I was not here to create but to respectfully lay to rest a quarter of a century’s worth of investment and dedication. It was an honour to be requested to undertake this, though it has proved more difficult than I anticipated. I leave hoping I have done it the justice it deserved.

My lasting memory will be of the staff who worked here — their grace, dedication, and competent professionalism through extraordinarily difficult times. Of how they stayed to see the last Round Table report safely out the door in the fall of 2012, of how they supported each other through difficult transitions, of those who came back on their own time after leaving for other jobs to provide me with much needed help in closing up shop. A single incident illustrates the kind of people who worked here. It was the day of the Budget announcement, when we learned of the demise of the NRTEE. This had come as a complete surprise to everyone and the natural reactions of staff were of shock, fear, and dismay. Yet that same night staff worked until midnight to ensure we met a deadline commitment we had made for the following day to the government, the same government that hours before had told them that they were no longer needed.

I have had the experience of working for a variety of private and public sector organizations in my career. None matched the NRTEE, and it has been my personal and professional pleasure and delight to work with such an outstanding professional, collegial group of people.