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Ottawa *Watch* 353: Sitting down over some drinks

By Lloyd Mackey

I would suggest that the kinds of “sitting down over drinks” occurring in the piece continue to be a part of the faith/political conversations in and around The Hill.

(Warning: the punch line alluded to in the headline is at the end of the piece.)

John McKay, the Liberal MP for Scarborough-Guildwood, in the near-eastern suburbs of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is an effective centrist critic of things conservative.

As it happens, his faith persuasion is evangelical Christian and he is not hesitant to say, when it is appropriate, that he wishes a few more sensible Christian values would rub off on both his Liberal colleagues and on fellow parliamentarians to both his left and right.

One of his chief claims to recognition was his success in getting C-293, a private member's piece of legislation informally entitled the *Better Aid Bill* through parliament, just over four years ago.

Before becoming the Liberal defence critic, McKay faced off effectively but not too voraciously to the now-departed International Development minister Bev Oda. To that end, the *Better Aid Bill* was one of the arrows in his quiver.

In the wake of Oda's resignation, McKay wrote a piece for *iPolitics.ca*. So as not to be accused of putting words in his mouth, I am providing the link to that piece, before adding my own comments. Here it is: <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2012/07/06/john-mckay-oda-its-not-about-the-orange-juice/>

And here are some of the points made by McKay in his *iPolitics.ca* piece, with my comment on each point adjoining:

- McKay noted that he was invited to speak recently to the United Nations Development Co-operation Forum of the Economic and Social Council in New York. That is pretty significant recognition from an international body, indicating that his perspective, in context, should be taken seriously.
- The core of his argument was that the *Better Aid Bill* was intended to reflect the very simple idea that “foreign aid should be for poor people.” He was, in fact, reflecting a value to which many Christians adhere. It is that Jesus, in his life and ministry, showed a preferential option for the poor.
- McKay postulated that Oda departed from the spirit of C-293, in part because, in his view, “Stephen Harper's firm grip extended into her department.” I would suggest there is a less-politically-charged way of looking at that point. It is that four federal ministries, each with somewhat varying objectives, are symbiotically

tied together. Those ministries are foreign affairs (John Baird), International Trade (Ed Fast), International Development (then Oda, now Julian Fantino) and Immigration (Jason Kenney).

- A thoughtful scanning of the politics and operations of those ministries will show, IMHO, that McKay's point needs some contextualizing. The effective functioning of International Trade, under Fast, will enable Fantino to lead International Development in a way that more accurately fulfills the "poverty alleviation" objective of the Better Aid Bill.

Without getting into more detail than necessary, it needs to be noted that International Development has helped to engineer some ground-breaking work (pun intended) with Canadian mining companies and development agencies, to increase educational opportunities, nutritional development and the empowerment of women and youth in countries where such companies are becoming active. A piece co-authored by Dave Toycen, president of World Vision Canada, appearing on January 31, in the *Globe and Mail*, provides more detail.

The link for that piece is at <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/ngos-are-part-of-the-mining-conversation/article1360219/>

McKay would likely be right, in the narrowest sense, that Toycen's approach does not strictly fit all the conditions of C-293. But, in context, the World Vision president answers to the bill's spirit.

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I would like to wind up by proposing a scenario.

It has become public knowledge that Michelle Rempel, parliamentary secretary to the environment minister, and Megan Leslie, her critic in the NDP, periodically sit down over a couple of drinks and discuss their – and their parties' – differences and commonalities on environmental issues. Apparently this occurs with goodwill and understanding and with an agreement to disagree, if necessary.

John McKay and Ed Fast are both skilled negotiators, growing out of their common lawyer experiences. And they both happen to be evangelical Christians. They are both, I would suggest, moderately conservative-to-centrist on economic and social issues. And they both have experience on matters international.

In other words, they are quite capable of talking the same language on several fronts.

I don't know what drinks their particular brands of evangelicalism would permit them to quaff together. But I would modestly suggest that, like Leslie and Rempel, they and their parties would benefit from meeting socially and comparing notes about things like international development and poverty alleviation, away from the glare of television lights.

Not all cross-party conversation has to take place in the bear pits of parliament and its committees.

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