



For Immediate Release
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***Institute for
Research on
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NEWS RELEASE

Explaining The Council of the Federation: A Unique Guide

On Friday, October 24, the provincial premiers gather to finalize the mandate and structure for a Council of the Federation, a new mechanism designed to improve intergovernmental relations.

In preparation for that meeting, the Institute of Intergovernmental Relations (IIGR) at Queen's University and the Institute for Research on Public Policy (irpp.org) in Montreal have gathered together leading experts on federalism and public policy to prepare a series of essays exploring the new body. The series is called *Constructive and Co-operative Federalism?: A Series of Commentaries on the Council of the Federation*.

The papers are intended for journalists, policy-makers and the public, and will be released on the two institutes' web sites.

The first two papers were published online today and they will continue to appear in the next two weeks on what is expected to be a daily basis. Journalists are invited to use them for education on the issues; as fodder for articles or columns, with attribution where appropriate; or as leads to interview the individual authors once their article has appeared.

The series and proposed dates of release are:

- ◆ **Wednesday, October 15:** Doug Brown on "Getting Things Done in the Federation: Do We Need New Rules for an Old Game?" The premiers' new Council of the Federation is meant to create more constructive and co-operative relations among themselves and with Ottawa. But will it be able to overcome the "old rules" by which the intergovernmental game is played? These rules are embedded in a constitution designed for independent, separate governments, and operate in a political culture that values competition and direct accountability. If the premiers are serious about joint decision-making, they will have to create a new Council with some clout to make important decisions quickly, binding on all parties.
- ◆ **Wednesday, October 15:** Ron Watts on "Intergovernmental Councils in Federations." With over two dozen federal countries comprising 40 per cent of the world's population, there are plenty of examples of how others manage intergovernmental relations. This paper examines how interdependence is handled through intergovernmental councils in six key examples: Australia, India, Germany, South Africa, Switzerland and the USA. While the precise form and function of those councils differs considerably, it is clear that Canada is well behind international practice in adopting a more formal role for intergovernmental relations.

- ◆ **Thursday, October 16:** Andre Burelle: "Conseil de la Fédération: du réflexe de défense à l'affirmation partenariale." The proposed Council of the Federation presents an opportunity to depart from the unilateral and domineering federalism of the past several years. The "new tool" of the Council could be valuable in enabling Canada to better handle the forces of globalization and the numerous issues that cross municipal, provincial and national borders. However, to be effective the Council should adopt co-decision rules along the lines of the European Union, which could operate both among the provinces and territories, and between them and the federal government. The author proposes in some detail what these new rules could look like. Without such institutional capacity, the Council would leave Quebec in particular in a difficult spot, relying on its traditional stances of opting out of the Canadian consensus.

- ◆ **Friday, October 17:** Hamish Telford on "Expanding the Partnership: The Proposed Council of the Federation and the Challenge of 'Localization.'" A Council of the Federation that represents the interests of the federal, provincial and territorial governments alone will not respond to the needs of the federation of the future. Canada is entering a world of "multicentric governance" in which local and aboriginal governments, as well as international organizations, will play an increasing role. Expanding the partnership to local and aboriginal government will require creative solutions, in which these governments might be more indirectly represented, or involved in some but not all of the Council's functions.

- ◆ **Saturday, October 18:** Harvey Lazar on Managing Interdependencies in the Canadian Federation: Lessons from the Social Union Framework Agreement. How would the new Council of the Federation work if the federal government joined? One answer may lie in how the Social Union Framework Agreement is working. To date, the SUFA has had little if any effect on the content of social policy when big dollars are involved, little visible effect on the intergovernmental process, and has not greatly improved relations. It relies too much on voluntary compliance, and it works within a competitive culture that changes only very slowly. For the new Council to work best, some way must be found to give it legal force and there are steps that might be tried in that regard without constitutional amendments. Moderate rhetoric from our political leaders is also an essential ingredient. The purpose of a Council should not be seen, however, as creating federal-provincial-territorial harmony. Rather, it should be seen as a more effective tool for managing intergovernmental dependencies. Managing those interdependencies will necessarily entail conflict as well as co-operation.

Scheduled for the week of October 20-24 (with tentative titles, and specific dates still uncertain) are:

- Roger Gibbins on "The Council of the Federation: Conflict and Complementarity with Canada's Democratic Reform Agenda."
- Alain Noel on "The End of the Quiet Revolution? Quebec and the Council of the Federation."
- Greg Marchildon on "The Proposed Health Council of Canada and Federal-provincial Relations: A Test of the Co-operative Approach."
- Claude Ryan on "Back to the Future? Council of Federation Proposals Then and Now."
- Bob Rae on "The Proposed Council of Federation: A Practitioner's Perspective."

The articles will be available at http://www.iigr.ca/browse_publications.php?section=39 or <http://www.irpp.org>.

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The Institute of Intergovernmental Relations
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The Institute for Research on Public Policy
is an independent, non-partisan think tank
based in Montreal.

Web sites:
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