

Canada – United States
Inter-Parliamentary Group
Canadian Section



Groupe interparlementaire
Canada – États-Unis
Section canadienne

Report of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

**76th Annual Meeting of the Council of State Governments’
Southern Legislative Conference (SLC)**

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, United States of America

From July 9 to 13, 2022

Report

A. DELEGATION

From 9–13 July 2022, Fayçal El-Khoury, M.P., represented the Canadian Section of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group (IPG) at the 76th annual meeting of the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC). He actively participated in a number of conference sessions, including the presentation on energy, the Supreme Court Update, the Women in Leadership Forum, and the presentations on cybersecurity and public safety. Activities included tours of three energy sites — oil and gas, wind, and solar energy facilities — a history museum and several public institutions.

B. DELEGATION OBJECTIVES

An annual conference and marquee event, the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) is the premier public policy forum for southern state legislatures. The event brings together old friends and colleagues who look forward to seeing each other every year, their children who have “grown up” together in youth programs, and spouses and guests who renew old friendships and make new acquaintances, while substantive and policy-rich programming highlights innovative, as well as practical, solutions to the challenges facing members and the region.¹ The Canadian government and its international representatives — such as ambassadors and consuls — are invited to the conference to hold bilateral discussions with the southern states, with a view to networking, collaborating and engaging in dialogue on various public policy and international affairs topics and issues.

The Council of State Governments (CSG) is the only nonpartisan association of state officials that serves all three branches of government in the 50 states and U.S. territories. The CSG Southern Office (CSG South) serves the southern legislatures of Alabama, Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. The Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) joined CSG South in 1959, and annual conferences have been held since then. The SLC focuses on various issues that affect the business and operations of the southern states. In 2022, the SLC identified precision agriculture, road user fees, the right to repair, logistics infrastructure and electric vehicles as issues to watch in 2022.

C. ACTIVITIES

The Canadian section of the IPG has long been involved in activities aimed at strengthening the relationship between Canadian parliamentarians and their American counterparts. Members of the Canadian Section of the IPG have attended the annual meetings of the SLC since 2005. Their engagement with U.S. state legislators and other stakeholders has enabled them to more efficiently achieve the objectives of the inter-parliamentary group, namely, to identify points of convergence on national policy, initiate dialogue on points of divergence, encourage exchanges of information, and promote better understanding on shared issues of concern.

In addition, these meetings are a significant opportunity for the Canadian Section of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group to provide input and gather information

¹ Southern Legislative Conference. <https://csgsouth.org/southern-legislative-conference/>

on state-level issues that affect Canada. At this event, the delegate conveyed to state legislators the nature, magnitude and importance of the relationship between Canada and the U.S. South. He also identified areas of new and existing cooperation and collaboration.

D. OBJECTIVES OF THE CANADA-UNITED STATES INTER PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

The four key objectives of the Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group are to find points of convergence in the respective national policies of Canada and the United States, initiate dialogue on areas of divergence, encourage exchanges of information, and promote better understanding among Canadian and American legislators on shared issues of concern. Members of the Canadian Section of the IPG pursue their goals primarily by meeting with their congressional counterparts in Washington, Ottawa and occasionally in other locations in Canada or the United States. Members also make connections with governors and state legislators at national and regional conferences.

Since the Canadian Section’s meetings with U.S. federal legislators are conducted under the Chatham House Rules, this report gives a general overview of the issues raised at these events by Canadian and U.S. legislators without naming participants.

E. EVENT ACTIVITIES

The event included the following activities:

- Presentation on the energy sector outlook
- Tour of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City
- Visit to the Oklahoma State Legislature
- Supreme Court Update
- Women in Leadership Forum
- Presentation on abortion
- Presentation on guns
- Presentation on public safety
- Tour of energy sites (gas and oil; wind energy; solar energy)

F. CONTENT OF PRESENTATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Day 1

On the first day of the event, Mr. El-Khoury attended the presentation on the energy sector outlook. He had a discussion with the Oklahoma Secretary of Energy and Environment, who was appointed in 2019 by Oklahoma’s newly elected state governor. In this capacity, he oversees over 30 state agencies, boards, compacts and commissions. He is also responsible for advancing policies that encourage economic growth and sensible

regulation that fosters responsible energy production while protecting natural resources and ensuring clean air, land and water for all Oklahomans.

For context, shortly after the conference, the U.S. Senate approved legislation that “contains ‘the boldest clean energy package in American history’ to fight climate change while reducing consumer costs for energy”²; At the same time, the war in Ukraine continued disrupting the global energy market and putting governments and public finances worldwide under enormous pressure.³ Canada’s participation in bilateral discussions on climate change is a response to the United States’ need to have a foreign policy and diplomacy enabling it to put energy on the agenda and coordinate similar energy policies abroad, which makes Canada an important ally in the international policy spillover process.⁴

Overall, it was emphasized that we should collectively work to ensure better multi-level and interstate governance of environmental issues. Research and development efforts should seek better coordination among environmental agencies and ensure that stakeholders, including state governments and the public, have greater access to new technologies. Protecting the air, water and land are still the main challenges, and the priority should be attaining net-zero emissions.

2. Day 2

On the second day, Mr. El-Khoury discussed a number of issues, primarily concerning social and environmental policy, with an Oklahoma state senator and a state representative, as well as with Her Excellency, the Consul General of Canada in Dallas, and the Delegate of the Quebec government office in Houston. The day also included a tour centred around cowboy history and heritage and a visit to the Oklahoma State Legislature. The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City “is America’s premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the Museum, located in Oklahoma City, collects, preserves and exhibits an internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts while sponsoring dynamic educational programs to stimulate interest in the enduring legacy of the American West.”⁵

3. Day 3

On the third day of the conference, Mr. El-Khoury attended a presentation on the Supreme Court. Topics discussed included issues of particular relevance to the United States, such as abortion, women’s rights, guns and protecting citizens.

Abortion was a topical issue during the conference. In late June, the U.S. Supreme Court “opened the door for individual states to ban or severely restrict the ability for pregnant women to get abortions.”⁶ The international reach of this issue has implications for Canada, as “following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States, people in

² Richard Cowan; David Mogan; Rose Horowitch. “U.S. Senate approves bill to fight climate change, cut drug costs in win for Biden,” Reuters, 7 August 2022

³ UNCTAD, “Global impact of war in Ukraine: Energy crisis,” August 2022

⁴ Jason Bordoff. “Biden’s Historic Climate Bill Needs Smart Foreign Policy,” Foreign Policy, 17 August 2022

⁵ National cowboys and western heritage museum. <https://nationalcowboymuseum.org/>

⁶ Robin Levinson-King; Chloe Kim; Paul Sargeant. “Abortion: What does overturn of Roe v Wade mean?,” BBC, 29 June 2022.

states with restrictive abortion laws are looking for resources beyond their local clinics — including even across the country’s northern border.”⁷ At the conference, Mr. El-Khoury stressed the significance and the scope of the decision to overturn *Roe vs. Wade*; several of his American counterparts concurred, expressing their disagreement with the U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The guns issue has also been a hot topic in the United States for a few decades and, in recent years, it has increasingly become one in Canada too. “Nowhere in the world is gun control more controversial than in the United States, where gun possession is constitutionally protected but where murders (including mass murders) committed with guns are extremely common; the United States has by far the highest homicide-by-firearm rate among developed countries.”⁸ In Canada, the government “tabled gun control legislation in May that includes a national freeze on the importation, purchase, sale and transfer of handguns in Canada. That law did not pass before Parliament took its summer break, and is set to be debated again when MPs return to Ottawa in the fall.”⁹ In the same vein, the legitimacy of engaging in formal and informal discussions such as those held in Oklahoma is evident from the perspective that “increasingly, in many ways America’s gun problem is becoming Canada’s gun problem. Even though the US has become an international poster child of gun control laws gone awry, there’s a lot more commonality here in Canada than people might be willing to admit.”¹⁰ During the conference, Mr. El-Khoury held discussions with his American counterparts. Overall, he felt they were evenly divided on the issue of gun control legislation; he took the opportunity to learn more about how guns are regulated and the differences between the United States and Canada in this regard.

Mr. El-Khoury took part in the Campaign Against Hunger. Afterward, he attended a presentation on women’s leadership in governance and politics in general. He held interesting discussions with his peers and counterparts and made sure to present Canada as a world leader when it comes to women’s participation in politics and governance. He told his colleagues that, since 2015, successive governments have been able to achieve gender parity, which earned him a short standing ovation from the audience. He then asked his counterparts and conference speakers whether they thought it would be possible to see the same happen in the United States at the various levels of government and within institutions; this question was endorsed by the Consul General of Canada in Dallas.

His day concluded with two sessions that had a primarily international focus and were based on the good bilateral relationship between both countries, one on cybersecurity and the other on public safety. “As in other zones of commerce and theatres of operation, Canada and the United States are deeply integrated in cyber-space. Both nations derive

⁷ Zoya Wazir. “How Canada Factors Into the Post-Roe Landscape,” 28 July 2022.

⁸ Brian Duignan. “Gun Control in the U.S.,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*

⁹ Laura Osman; Jordan Omstead. “Ottawa to temporarily ban handgun imports until permanent freeze comes into effect,” *CBC*, 5 August 2022.

¹⁰ Leyland Cecco. “Is the US’s gun problem becoming Canada’s gun problem?,” *The Guardian*, 29 May 2022.

benefits from cybersecurity cooperation.”¹¹ There were several useful discussions on the challenge of finding common cybersecurity strategies and the importance of continuing and strengthening cooperation between the two countries to that end.

4. Day 4

On the final day of the event, he attended the closing plenary and toured three key energy sites in the southern region of the U.S., an oil and gas site, a wind farm and a solar power facility. An engineer by training, he used his expertise to speak with others about the future of energy in North America and the world, addressing complex aspects of the green transition. In the evening, the State of Oklahoma organized a state dinner, where, together with representatives of the Canadian consulate, he held discussions with U.S. senators and House representatives with a view to wrapping up the event in general, talking about the various topics discussed during the conference and finding ways of keeping in touch for future collaboration opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Hon. Michael L. MacDonald, Senator,
Co-Chair,

Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

Hon. John McKay, P.C., M.P.,
Co-Chair,

Canada–United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

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Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION

Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group

ACTIVITY

76th Annual Meeting of the Council of State Governments Southern Legislative Conference (SLC)

DESTINATION

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, United States of America

DATES

July 9-13, 2022

DELEGATION

SENATE

¹¹ Alexandre Moens; Seychelle Cushing; Alan W. Dowd. “Cybersecurity challenges for Canada and the United States,” 2015, Fraser Institute, p.6

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Fayçal El-Khoury

STAFF

TRANSPORTATION	\$2,035.50
ACCOMMODATION	\$1,561.21
HOSPITALITY	\$0.00
PER DIEMS	\$882.62
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$0.00
MISCELLANEOUS/REGISTRATION FEES	\$729.74
TOTAL	\$5,209.07