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SECTION

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The makings of a cabinet minister

Media praise for McDermid

Although many politicians consider the press their enemy, Brampton-Georgetown MP John McDermid shouldn't, not now anyway.

According to a survey undertaken by The Herald of some Parliament Hill reporters who cover trade, reporters think highly of the parliamentary secretary for international trade.

Alan Toulin, economic correspondent for the Toronto Star's Ottawa Bureau says Mr. McDermid does a good job of defending government policy.

Mr. Toulin said he's heard the MP addressing various groups and said Mr. McDermid articulates government trade policies very well.

"There have been some tough issues. I thought he did a good job in making the government's case on the softwood deal," the reporter said.

It's hard to judge a parliamentary secretary because he operates in the shadow of the minister, Mr. Toulin said.

Free trade reporter with the Canadian Press, Alan Bass feels that based on ability, Mr. McDermid has a chance at a cabinet seat.

"But it's always difficult for talented backbenchers from Ontario to get a cabinet seat because there are so many MPs from Ontario," Mr. Bass said.

The reporter gave Mr. McDermid a B plus for his work as parliamentary secretary for international trade.

"I think he does his job well. (Pat) Carney, (International Trade Minister) relies on him to a certain extent," Mr. Bass said.

There was praise also for Mr. McDermid's performance as parliamentary secretary for energy.

"I think he did a very good job then. Carney was doing a lot of travelling and he had to hold the fort a lot while she was gone," the C.P. reporter said in a telephone interview from Ottawa.

Mr. Bass said the MP is intelligent, a quality necessary for a cabinet minister. He's also very loyal to the minister.

The fact Mr. McDermid's name keeps coming up whenever there's talk of a government shuffle is an indication of the respect Mr. McDermid is held in, he said.

"Maybe his day will come at some point, but making cabinet is a tricky business and regional considerations are a problem," Mr. Bass pointed out.

Working for Pat Carney puts Mr. McDermid in the position of working for one of the most influential ministers, the reporter said.

"I think he's been fairly impressive. Carney obviously likes him. She brought him over to trade. That's a fairly unusual thing. It indicates she feels strongly that he's an asset to her, someone she trusts and relies upon," Mr. Bass said.

CBC-TV reporter Al Holman gives Mr. McDermid an A on his performance as parliamentary secretary for international trade and energy.

"I think he's very good. He's given a job and he does it," Mr. Holman said. "I'd say McDermid has an excellent chance of getting in cabinet... a better than 50-50 chance of getting in if there's a shuffle."

The only holdback to McDermid's getting in is the surplus of talent from Ontario, Mr. Holman said, noting the requirement for regional representation in cabinet.

"I've watched John for the last six or seven years. I don't know him well as a person," Mr. Holman said. "He's gained confidence and feels surer of himself than when he first came out here, but then so have I."

Globe and Mail Ottawa Bureau reporter Christopher Waddell also thinks Mr. McDermid has a good chance at making the cabinet. He said the MP would fit in very well in the cabinet.



MP flattered by rumors

Any politician worth his salt would like to be in the federal cabinet, says Brampton-Georgetown MP John McDermid.

The 47-year-old Brampton resident is aware his name is being bandied around as a candidate for a cabinet post in the Mulroney government.

"It's very flattering that my name is being mentioned," Mr. McDermid told The Herald. "I just carry on with my job. If it happens, I'll be thrilled. If it doesn't, I'll carry on as is. That's political life."

Not getting into the cabinet won't mean the end of the world, he said. However, it is a goal for the former journalist.

"If I'm ever fortunate enough to be appointed to the cabinet I want to be a good cabinet minister, so that people say afterwards 'He did a great job,'" Mr. McDermid said.

The MP is currently parliamentary secretary for international trade, working with Trade Minister Pat Carney since last October. Before that, he was her parliamentary assistant in the Energy portfolio.

Tumors that the prime minister is considering a cabinet shuffle started speculation that Mr. McDermid would be named to the cabinet.

"One of the problems with this type of speculation is a lot of people get caught up in the speculation, a lot of my supporters, friends and even my wife," Mr. McDermid said. "I try to remain aloof of it and keep telling everybody until I'm called to appear before the governor-general. I won't believe it. When it doesn't happen, it's such a disappointment to people. That bothers me about the speculation."

It happened last summer, also, but nothing came of the rumors. However, the two postings with Pat Carney have brought the MP more into the limelight.

"There are some interesting things happening to me now where people are requesting me to speak and if they can't get me, they won't get anybody else," Mr. McDermid said.

Heard recently at a trade seminar in Washington, he was sought after for another seminar in Kansas City March 21.

"That kind of thing is happening. Sure, it's because of the position you have," the MP said.

He's developed a great deal of confidence in public speaking thanks to all these speaking engagements.

"Because I'm up speaking a lot more, I think my speaking presentation has improved dramatically."

Mr. McDermid said. "I still get butterflies when I have to speak. Most performers get them too, as I understand it."

What other skills is he developing which can serve a cabinet minister well?

Mr. McDermid is taking French lessons, when he's not away because of business.

"It's not entirely a necessity, but it sure is a major asset," the MP said of being bilingual. "I think it's very important, not only for Canada, but overseas as well."

Born in Quebec, Mrs. McDermid is bilingual. She even used to teach French, at one point.

Go ahead and brag, Mr. McDermid was told. Tell us the qualities you have that a cabinet minister should have.

"I've got lots of energy, a good basic knowledge of the country and the feelings of the country at the grass roots," Mr. McDermid said, overcoming his modesty. "I'm fairly level headed, a good listener, and have experience in a cabinet minister's office albeit provincially, so I know how ministers' offices are run and how ministers should conduct themselves."

The MP used to be chief of staff for Claude Bennett when Mr. Bennett was Minister of Industry and Tourism.

Being an MP since 1979 has helped him learn a tremendous amount, especially about Canada, Mr. McDermid said.

"I probably have a far greater love for my country than when I first started out," he acknowledged.

Critic gives a generous rating

What do John McDermid's opponents and peers in the House of Commons think of him?

Attempts to get comments from International Trade Minister Pat Carney and External Affairs Minister Joe Clark were unsuccessful. Mrs. Carney is his boss, and Mr. Clark the prime ministerial candidate he strongly supported.

What about his opponents? Often your best critic is the one sitting opposite, waiting to pounce on your mistakes, NDP critic for international trade Steven Langdon spoke to The Herald. He was unexpectedly nice about Mr. McDermid.

The MP for Essex-Windsor predicted a cabinet shuffle would move Mrs. Carney out of international trade because she's done so poorly, and said Mr. McDermid has a chance at replacing her.

"I think that John is one of those people in the House who is quite sincere, works hard, is quite committed, and I think this has shown up in his work as parliamentary secretary for trade. On the assumption that he's not setting the policy himself, I'd give him a B plus, I suppose," Mr. Langdon said, grading Mr. McDermid's performance as parliamentary secretary for trade.

The NDP critic was much less generous in grading Mr. McDermid as parliamentary secretary for energy, giving him a D in that role. Mr. Langdon said he found Mr. McDermid far less comfortable with the energy portfolio than he is with trade.

"I think John would do a good job as a cabinet minister in this government," Mr. Langdon predicted. "I can think of at least a dozen ministers I have less respect for than I have for John."

He called his opponent an intelligent, committed and honest man who works very hard, reasons Mr. McDermid deserves a chance at cabinet.

It can't all be glowing words, can it? Surely Mr. Langdon has some criticism of his opponent in the House.

"John's problem, if he has a problem, is he's too serious as a politician, too agonized in the way he comes across to people," Mr. Langdon said. "He has not got the smoothness and the sense of openness that you get from the best. He's a bit tense."

"He cares a lot about what he's doing, therefore the image he projects is a little bit of a troubled one," he said.

The NDP critic compared Mr. McDermid with Tom Hockin, the MP appointed Minister of Finance in the last cabinet shuffle.

"If I compare why Tom Hockin went into cabinet and McDermid didn't, I think it's Tom's smoothness and his sense of capacity to reach out and appear a little more open and friendly than is true of McDermid," Mr. Langdon said.

By the same token, the MP said Parliament could do with more people who are a little less well polished and glib and a little bit more hard working and blunt in the way they deal with things.

Because Mr. McDermid is one of those politicians who cares and thinks and is pretty committed to the conclusions he has reached, he's less flexible than most members of the House of Commons, Mr. Langdon said.

Stories by Ani Pederian

He declined to grade the MP on his roles as parliamentary secretary, saying he hadn't been to enough events where Mr. McDermid was on show or with an audience feeding him tough questions.

He seems to do a competent job and seems to be able to handle the questions he's been asked and understands the areas he's covering," Mr. Waddell said.

Giving trade to Mr. McDermid is a good move because so much of Ontario's economy is trade based, and matching him with Pat Carney in the energy portfolio was a good balance also, because the Minister is a westerner and Ontario is the province that consumes most of the energy from the west, Mr. Waddell said.

Cabinet post requires careful time juggling

Politics, especially federal politics, isn't the easiest on family life, admits Brampton-Georgetown MP John McDermid.

He's been a federal MP since 1979, and he should know.

If he were a cabinet minister, it would be worse, Mr. McDermid anticipates.

"I probably wouldn't get home as much as I do now," he said. As it is, he tries to get home to his riding every weekend.

"Fortunately Layale's got a job, which eases the burden somewhat, and we have no children. It would be extremely difficult if we had young kids growing up. It would be like having a single parent family," Mr. McDermid said.

His activities as parliamentary secretary for Cabinet Minister Pat Carney have brought Mr. McDermid to the fore, putting more demands on his time.

"I'm starting to get MPs asking me to come into their riding to speak, so I'm away a little more," he said. "We're getting a little taste of it (cabinet minister's life) now."

There's also the option for Elaine McDermid to accompany her husband on these weekend trips.

Mr. McDermid sees how difficult it is for his co-workers to juggle their private life and their jobs.

Pat Carney, for example, is a single parent. Every Christmas she takes her son to Hawaii and they get to know one another again, Mr. McDermid said. This past Christmas, Ms. Carney was severely criticized for talking off while-free trade negotiations were going on.

Deputy Prime Minister Donald Mazankowski of Vegreville, Alberta, goes home maybe every third weekend, because of his schedule in Ottawa.

"That's got to be tough," Mr. McDermid said. "For us, it's easy."

Although there are some days Mr. McDermid says he wishes the telephone had never been invented, they're balanced off by the days at the McDermid cabin in the Caledon Hills.

Elayne and I get up there, even if it's only to go up there and sit beside the Credit River on a Sunday afternoon," he said. "It refreshes me and gives me enough to keep going."

Then, there's always the one-week ski vacation the couple take annually.

"I really enjoy that. I get away from it all," Mr. McDermid said.

Rating John McDermid as cabinet material	Y = Yes N = No	Do you think he has a chance of... (check all that apply)													
		1. succeeding as a cabinet minister	2. succeeding as a cabinet minister in international trade	3. succeeding as a cabinet minister in energy	4. succeeding as a cabinet minister in other areas	5. succeeding as a cabinet minister in other areas	6. succeeding as a cabinet minister in other areas	7. succeeding as a cabinet minister in other areas	8. succeeding as a cabinet minister in other areas	9. succeeding as a cabinet minister in other areas	10. succeeding as a cabinet minister in other areas				
Steven Langdon, NDP Critic for International Trade		Y	N	D	Y	Y	N	N							
Alan Toulin, Toronto Star Ottawa Bureau economic correspondent		Y	A		Y				Y	N	Y				
Alan Bass, Canadian Press, Ottawa trade reporter		Y	B		A	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y				
Al Holman, CBC-TV Ottawa reporter		Y	A		A	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y				
Christopher Waddell, Globe and Mail Ottawa Bureau reporter		Y				Y	Y		Y	Y	Y				

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