

Foreign Affairs Committee chair:

You ask, 'How can we help?'

Photos by Dyanne Wilson

Dean Allison is the first MP for the riding of Niagara West-Glanbrook, which was created in 2004. He was re-elected in 2006, 2008 and 2011 and is now chairman of the standing committee on foreign affairs and international development. In response to Canada's sanctions against Russia, he has been sanctioned for travel to Russia, a distinction he says makes him proud. He spoke to *Diplomat's* editor, Jennifer Campbell.

Diplomat Magazine: According to your mandate, you study and report on matters referred by the House of Commons or topics chosen by the committee itself. Would you name a few examples of each that are currently being studied?

Dean Allison: We're working on a couple of things. One is the protection of children and youth in developing countries. That's sort of been put off, because we're looking at what's going on in Syria right now. The study we're working on now is Canada's response to violence, religious persecution and dislocation caused by ISIL. A lot of times, we're working on a couple of things. The other thing is, because of our involvement, there will also be a couple of meetings coming up on what's going on on the ground in Iraq and Syria. It's always in flux. We tend to always have one or two longer-terms projects, but the news of the day will always circumvent a study that doesn't have to be done tomorrow.

DM: Are there deadlines on any of your studies?

DA: We do try to work around timelines, summer recess and breaks.

DM: Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development is the department principally under your scrutiny. What sorts of things are you concerned with there?

DA: There is a separate trade committee, so we concentrate mostly on foreign affairs, humanitarian response, what's going on in the world and humanitarian aid.

DM: Do you deal with refugees?

DA: Not so much. That's mostly done by the immigration committee. Our subcommittee on human rights has done some work on North Korean refugees, so there is some overlap.

DM: As you mentioned earlier, your responsibilities for trade were moved to a new trade committee in 2006. Did that division make sense?

DA: I think it does. For a period of time, I was chairing Foreign Affairs and sitting on International Trade. As a government, we made trade a bit more of a priority. The challenge is that we have so many topics the members want to cover, and we don't have time to do them all. If trade were in our [purview] we may never get to it.

DM: How does the committee encourage democratic development in the world?

DA: One study we did during this mandate was the role of the private sector in achieving Canada's international development interests. There are a number of Canadian companies all over the world that are doing things and we're already there with CIDA or DFATD. So we looked at how can we leverage these Canadian companies on the ground. If we're doing things already, is there something we could do to leverage our dollars in a bigger way? That's an oversimplification of the report — there are a number of recommendations in it. That is one example.

DM: Can you give me an example of a Canadian company with which you might partner? Mining comes to mind.

DA: An example of an organization is the Micronutrient Initiative that does a lot with vitamins and minerals and maternal and child health. They're looking for partners. There's a company called Tech Resources [a large Vancouver-based mining company] and they partnered in Senegal. It's just interesting to see, as we encourage mining companies to step up with corporate social responsibility, how some of these companies are actually doing a pretty good job and others could



DYANNE WILSON



On Canada and the U.S.: "There's always been a healthy tension."

become more involved. The work the Micronutrient Initiative does is outstanding. And Tech Resources had no mining interests in the countries in which they were partnering, so it was just something they thought they should do.

DM: What, in your opinion, is the state of relations between Canada and the U.S. at the moment?

DA: I think it's good. There's always a healthy tension. I don't think it's ever really mattered who's in government, whether it's a Republican or a Democrat. Whether it's softwood lumber or pipelines, it doesn't really matter. I think the U.S. typically will act in its own best interest, as I believe most countries do. Will we always agree? No, we won't. But I believe there are a lot of great relationships amongst parliamentarians and their legislators. And we see that in the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Friendship Group. Groups of our guys and gals go down and meet theirs. I would say, by and large, we have a great relationship, even though we don't agree on every issue.

DM: Your committee studied Ukraine in 2012. What's your take on what's happening there now?

DA: We studied it in 2011 and 2012, but it's a recurring theme, for a couple of reasons, I think. First, Ukraine is so important in the region. They are at the stage where they require outside help to help them build their democracy and, of course, we have a large Ukrainian diaspora. These are all very important reasons we've spent some time on this. Our committee went to Ukraine. We send delegates all the time to their elections, through the OSCE. There's a tension in that they want to do more with Europe, but they are close to Russia. It's about where they're situated.

DM: What can Canada do?



On Russia and Ukraine: "Russia likes to keep that part of the world destabilized."

DA: I think we can continue to do what we have been doing, which is to provide bodies, expertise, money. I'm pretty sure we've sent more than \$100 million over the past few years trying to help them. Just the other day, I saw that we're sending winter coats for their military. Anything we can do to help them build capacity within their professional service or in terms of humanitarian aid — these are all important things. Anything we can do to make them rely less on Russia and help them turn to Europe.

DM: What's your sense of Russia's ambitions?

DA: I think Russia likes to keep that part of the world destabilized. There's never really been an opportunity or Ukraine has never taken the opportunity to leverage its natural resources — it has a bunch of them. The fact that they rely on Russian energy makes them really dependent.

DM: Your committee meets to address unfolding international crises. Can you name a few recent examples of this?

DA: The one we're currently working on is Canada's response to violence, religious persecution and dislocation caused by ISIL. That kind of thing changes moment by moment. I hope in 2015, we'll get a chance to talk more about what's going on in Iraq and Syria. The protection of children and youth in developing countries doesn't relate specifically to what's going on in Syria, but we'll continue [to watch those developments, too.]

DM: What can you say about the study you just mentioned?

DA: I think we've learned a number of things. It's unbelievable just to hear some of the stories and I think we understand that we see an image of ISIL and it's almost like it's far worse in refugee camps. A lot of the people in these camps would love to go back to their homes, but it's



On the UN: "I don't believe the Security Council is always as effective as it could be."

obviously not that safe. It is interesting to see that no matter what's happened there, these people still view Iraq and Syria as their homes. We watch the evening news and we get some of it, but it's hard to imagine when you get a bigger picture. People are being slaughtered for their religious beliefs. All these things tug at your heartstrings. And you ask: How can we help?

DM: Is there an example of one atrocity that's stayed with you?

DA: We had a girl in committee who'd actually gotten away from Boko Haram. So we were getting to hear from a real survivor. Just to hear her story. She was on the truck, being taken away and she was able to escape, but some of her friends weren't. That's pretty amazing. It doesn't get any more real than that.

DM: Was she part of the 200 kidnapped by Boko Haram in April 2014?

DA: I believe she was, yes. There was an organization that wanted to give us an update. It was a situation where we just had one meeting on it. It tied into our protection of children and youth in developing countries, but it was more because it was timely.

DM: How do you think Canada should target its foreign aid?

DA: I think we've started a number of initiatives. We've untied our aid to make it a little more effective. There have been a number of things we've signed on to to make sure our aid is accountable and transparent. I like when we do countries of focus. When we're targeted, that's helpful. I think it's also helpful to deal with our allies on the ground. To make sure we're not duplicating things. I think we should continue to do that.

We obviously have a responsibility in terms of helping women and children live longer. That's important because it's something we can measure. There are

a number of foreign investment protection agreements being negotiated with African countries. Development dollars are important, but what's also helpful is foreign investment. I think we must look for ways to continually deal with the sustainability side of things. We need to help educate them and find them work. We can encourage more direct foreign investment by helping some projects be sustainable, so, for example, after some of these mining companies leave, these projects could continue that work on their own. Humanitarian aid and education are important, but we also need to make sure there are jobs and economic stimuli at the end of the day.

DM: How did you become chairman of the committee?

DA: My background is business. I started off as the seniors critic and then I was chairing HRSTC [Human Resources Skills Development Canada.] I was always interested in foreign affairs and international trade. They asked me after spending four years at HRSTC if I would chair international development. I said absolutely.

DM: How do you get along with your vice-chairmen, NDP MP Paul Dewar and Liberal Marc Garneau?

DA: Really well. I co-hosted a reception before the House rose, with Mr. Dewar and Mr. Garneau. I was just at a conference for Engineers Without Borders where I did a panel with Madame [Hélène] Laverdière and Mr. Garneau. We get along very well. I happen to also like them. Mr. [David] Anderson has a great knowledge of natural resources. Ms [Lois] Brown is a parliamentary secretary [to International Development Minister Christian Paradis]. Ms Laverdière has a PhD and was a professor before she joined the foreign service. Mr. Garneau,

[the first Canadian astronaut to fly three missions], also has a PhD. I often say "we actually have a rocket scientist here." They've both committed their whole lives to public service. We all come at it from totally different angles and I think that makes it unique because everyone has different experiences. If we were all engineers or lawyers or doctors, it would be pretty boring.

DM: Were there lively discussions on Canada's role — military and advisory — in Iraq and Syria?

DA: It's always a lively discussion. We talk about what we can do in terms of humanitarian aid. Sometimes our opinions will diverge a bit.

DM: Is the committee agreed on Canada's current role?

DA: We haven't discussed it lately.

DM: Regarding your report on strengthening Canada's engagement in the Americas, what can Canada do to improve, as your report put it, the "quality of democracy" in member states? I'm thinking of countries such as Bolivia and Venezuela.

DA: It's more challenging with countries like that. If you look at what's happening in Cuba recently — I just got off the phone with the ambassador. I happen to have been in Cuba over the Christmas holidays and they always have so much respect for Canadians. They look to us as honest brokers. With recent developments with the U.S., there we were in the middle. That's one of the roles we can play. Always being there. I don't think we should ever shy away from trying to hold governments accountable.

DM: How often do you deal with diplomats — Canadian diplomats and those posted to Ottawa?

DA: All the time and I'm always so im-

pressed with the quality of the people in our foreign service. I really believe that we have a great group of foreign service officers around the world. They have great jobs, but they also spend large amounts of time away from their families. I've never been disappointed by any of them, anywhere I've been.

Here in Ottawa, my door is always open to ambassadors. I've also hosted some round tables for them. We'll bring in seven or eight of them from various countries. I may not go to all the social things, but I always welcome ambassadors to my office and also reach out a couple of times a year by hosting round tables in the Parliamentary restaurant.

DM: There are several international organizations to which Canada is a member that come under your purview. I'll name each one and you can say how effective and important they are to Canada.

DA: Wow! You're going to put me on the spot! OK. Fire away.

DM: Let's start with the United Nations.

DA: I think it plays an important role, I don't believe the Security Council is always as effective as it could be, but there are organizations within the UN that do good work. It's a hugely bureaucratic organization, but that doesn't mean there aren't some bodies within it that don't do good work.

DM: Is it important that Canada be on the Security Council?

DA: I don't know that it's that important. I know that Canada is involved in a number of different committees. Not sure that one really matters.

DM: World Bank

DA: Yes, I think it's important. With what they do, I think we should have a seat there. They do good things, but because

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of all the money that goes through there, it's always good to have a bit of an oversight.

DM: IMF

DA: I would say the same thing. It's good to be a part of what they do.

DM: OAS

DA: Again, it's one of the few ways we can interact with the Southern hemisphere, so while it may not be perfect, it still provides a forum for us to have dialogue.

DM: G7 and G20

DA: Once again, they're important because they have a handle on what's going on with the world. As we see with the prime minister and his Muskoka Initiative, there was a platform there to talk about an issue of focus on maternal and child health. And we continue to work on that issue.

DM: NATO?

DA: All these organizations are not without their faults, but I think that when we go to Poland, when we look at Eastern Europe, it's important to those countries to know that NATO is close by.

DM: The Commonwealth?

DA: The challenge of the Commonwealth is that they've gotten away from a bit of their mandate. The challenge is that there are a number of Commonwealth countries that aren't as democratic as they could be. I'm thinking Sri Lanka.

DM: La Francophonie

DA: It's very important due to the fact that we have such a large French-speaking population. And also particularly now that we have a Canadian who's running the organization. [Former governor general Michaëlle Jean was named secretary-general of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie in November 2014.]

DM: OSCE

DA: I didn't know a lot about it before I got involved. It's one of the few organizations — it doesn't happen with NATO or the Council of Europe — in which we actually have a relationship with Russia and the U.S. at the same table. With the exception of the UN, there's no other organization where that happens now. It gives us a mechanism to have that dialogue. It's an organization that not many people know about but it's important. ▣