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President's Page

STUDENT VOICES ON PARLIAMENT HILL

MSU leaders attend the CASA Lobby Conference in Ottawa to advocate for student interests



Mary, Chris and Vishal meet with David Sweet, MP for the local riding of Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale.



Chris and Mary hard at work preparing for meetings with the Prime Minister's Office and other policy executives



Last week, President-Elect Mary Koziol, current President Vishal Tiwari and myself took a trip up to Ottawa to attend the

2010 lobby conference of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA). Having worked with CASA for a year now, I can concretely say that this was the most productive and beneficial of all the conferences CASA has held.

For one, we actually got work done for students (as opposed to dealing with internal governance issues). In my last CASA related piece on the President's Page, I talked about the potential that CASA could wield if the MSU could help make it work. The lobby conference of last week allowed

us to see what that potential could be once realized. Representatives from across Canada gathered in Ottawa to meet with their elected officials within federal government, on the topic of post-secondary education.

Contrary to the popularly held conception that the federal government has no involvement in post-secondary education, the federal government has both an interest in the success of post-secondary education and a responsibility to our universities. We've seen the results of this interest in the Knowledge Infrastructure Program, which resulted in numerous investments at McMaster, including the nuclear reactor, as well as a cancer research centre. The government also plays a large role in student financial aid, with the Canada Student Loan Program contributing about 60% of the total funds in a student loan.

We spent the week lobbying on six issue areas: Creating a dedicated post-secondary transfer from the federal government, reforming Canadian student loans, bringing down interest rates, diversifying graduate scholarship opportunities, strengthening Canada's commitments to aboriginal students, and meeting Canada's learning information needs.

Now, these are very broad issue areas. Based on information available about the MP, Senator or bureaucrat being lobbied, we would select three of these topics to highlight. This ensured that our efforts were as focused and efficient as possible.

Between Mary, Vishal and myself, McMaster had meetings with some key players in Ottawa, including the Prime Minister's Office and some senior policy staff in Human Resources

& Skills Development Canada. Additionally, CASA held a reception on Parliament Hill for politicians, and we were able to discuss our issues with Minister of Finance Jim Flaherty, Minister of Transportation John Baird and Minister of Defence Peter McKay, along with a host of other government MP's that attended.

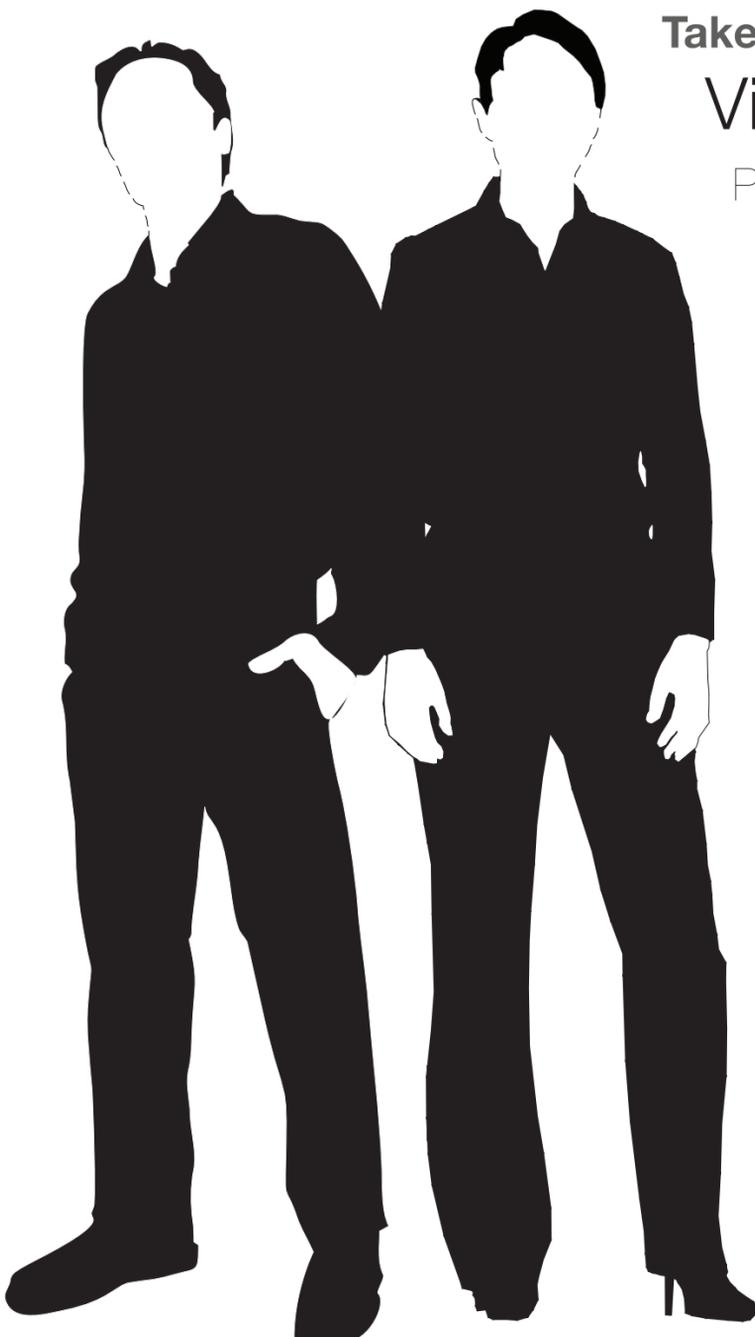
The conference set the stage for what is sure to be an interesting year for lobbying at the federal level. Students certainly face challenges with a government operating in a deficit climate, but the MSU remains committed to utilizing CASA to advocate for a national post-secondary education strategy.

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Take a walk in these shoes:

Vice-President Finance

Part two of a three-part series profiling the MSU Vice President positions up for hire this April



So what does it take to be VP Finance? This position is unique in that it requires a fine balance between student representation and

a very internal portfolio.

The VP Finance's main responsibility has to do with the day-to-day operations of the MSU. As the CFO, you are responsible for where money is spent, for the management of staff and for the general operational and financial health of the organization. What makes this position even more unique is that you must also bring with you a very political element. You must make your decisions knowing that you are ultimately responsible to the Student Body through the Student Representative Assembly (SRA). This means that the decisions you make must be in the best interest of the organization and must simultaneously be in the best interest of students as well.

The VP Finance is presented with the challenge of striking a compromise between a financially responsible decision and a decision that protects and promotes student services. VP Finance candidates must demonstrate the ability to address the fiscal responsibilities of the organization as well as defend these decisions as they

relate to the student experience. The most significant responsibility of this office is the preparation of the annual budget and communication of financial numbers to the SRA so that it can be communicated to students.

There are, however, some very significant opportunities besides the administrative duties of the VP Finance. In any Vice President position, you have the opportunity to affect change and take positive measures towards improving student life. As VP Finance, you get to sit on numerous committees including the MSU's sponsorship and donations committee, Clubs funding committee, Student Services Committee and Student Program Support Fund Committee. Through these committees, you have a direct say in how the MSU and the University spend money to foster student involvement and engagement.

If running a \$10 million organization, meeting with politicians and University administration and networking with more than 600 staff and volunteers seems like something that interests you, then ask me about running for the VP Finance position on April 11th for a once-in-a-lifetime job.

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