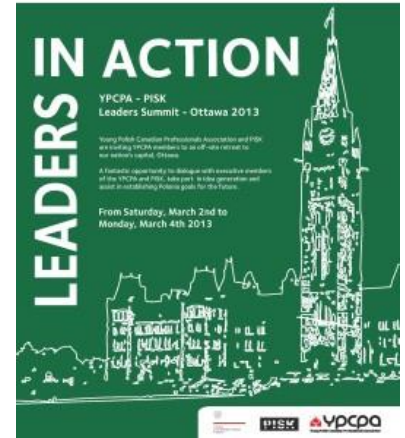


A DAY ON THE HILL – “LEADERS IN ACTION”

By [Monika Wyrzykowska](#)

Gothic gargoyles, crimson carpets, and masonry fit for a monarch—these are just a few of the sights young leaders of the Polish-Canadian community took in as they visited Parliament Hill in Ottawa in March for a “Leaders in Action” summit co-organized by the **Young Polish-Canadian Professionals Association (YPCPA)** and the **Polish Students Initiative of Canada (PISK)**. Coming in on the heels of the first summit in September 2012, the day was meant to introduce us to the inner workings of the Canadian political system and to also meet and greet with some of its main actors.



And our day truly was jam-packed with action. After being ushered in through



IN CONVERSATION WITH MEGAN LESLIE, NDP DEPUTY LEADER AND ENVIRONMENT CRITIC

security, we started off the morning with round-table discussions with members of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition. Peggy Nash, MP for Parkdale—High Park and the NDP’s Finance Critic, is a familiar figure in the Polish-Canadian community; after all, her riding is home to Roncesvalles Ave. and its many Polish institutions. Ms. Nash discussed her vision for a fair and balanced economy since, in Ms. Nash’s words, “the role of the Opposition is to also be propositional.”

From the economy we moved on to the environment with the NDP’s Deputy Leader and Environment Critic Megan Leslie, MP for Halifax. Ms. Leslie’s passion for the subject was infectious and sparked a discussion about natural resources and the price of pollution. We also discovered a Polish connection—Ms. Leslie’s half-brother and -sister are both Polish!

We continued to ask questions of our outstanding tour guide who showed us around Centre Block. One of the highlights was the Library of Parliament, watched over by the keen eye of a marble Queen Victoria statue dating from 1871.

Shortly thereafter, we sat down to a very welcome luncheon hosted by Joe Comartin, MP for Windsor-Tecumseh and Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons. Many thanks must be given to Mr. Comartin, who was instrumental in putting this visit together in collaboration with our ever-present mentor, Jerzy Barycki of Windsor. The luncheon featured MPs of varying experience in the House: as Mr. Comartin put it, we had the “rookie” MP Władysław Lizon, “the intermediate” MP Peggy Nash, and “the elder” MP John MacKay. MP Ted Opatz also joined us for lunch. We heard many inspiring stories, from Mr. Lizon’s role in the Polish-Canadian community, to Ms. Nash’s



LUNCHEON HOSTED BY JOE COMARTIN, MP, DEPUTY SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

beginnings as a social activist in her riding, to Mr. MacKay's success in passing a Private Members' Bill that helped prevent fires due to unattended cigarettes. We were also able to share some of our own achievements—from YPCPA's recent [expansion to Calgary](#) to PISK's [Iskra Project](#) to [U of T's PSA](#)'s intercultural initiatives.

No visit to the Hill would be complete without sitting in on Question Period. This is where those biting one-liners and comebacks that grace our evening news unfold live. The issue of the day seemed to be employment insurance reform, with the Hon. Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, Diane Finley, being called upon frequently to answer questions from the Opposition.



LEADERS OF THE POLISH STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO, PISK, AND YPCPA

Fittingly, we concluded our day with a reception co-hosted by the Polish Ambassador and the Deputy Speaker. Ambassador Zenon Kosiniak-Kamysz introduced a large poster exhibit, which illustrated the story of yet another incredible link between Canada and Poland: the odyssey of Polish treasures from Cracow's Wawel Castle and from Warsaw's Royal Castle to Canada. Read more about this incredible story [here](#).

What did we take away from this experience? More than just a few firm handshakes... We all learned more about the political decision-making process in our country and gained more confidence to engage in the public policy debate in matters related to our Polish-Canadian community and beyond....and Monday was just the tip of the proverbial iceberg! It capped off a busy weekend, which included a wonderful reception hosted by His Excellency, the Ambassador of Poland to Canada; a discussion about the future of the [Quo Vadis](#) movement with Prof. R. Sokoloski and Dr. W. Perchal; a commemoration of the Day of Doomed Soldiers at the [Polish Combatants' Association](#); and a workshop discussing the current state of the CETA-Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement hosted by Rafal Lapkowski, Trade Advisor and Second Secretary of the EU delegation to Canada.

Thank you to everyone who generously shared their time, knowledge, and expertise with us and made the "Leaders in Action" summit such a great success.

