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2017 North American Think Tank Summit: Think Tanks, Politics, and Power of Positive Thinking

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Disciplines
International and Area Studies | Political Science | Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration

Comments
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Fourth Annual
North American
Think Tank Summit
April 19-20, 2017
Washington, DC

Think Tanks, Politics, and
Power of Positive Thinking
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2017 4th Annual North American Think Tank Summit centered around the “Think Tanks, Politics, and Power of Positive Thinking” theme, with a wide range of topics discussed during the panels. This theme was inspired by the current trends and developments such as political elections and technological innovations in the North American countries. The rise of China, resurgence of Russia, and the conflicts in the Middle East have posed immediate national security threats to the stability of North America not only in the realm of the military, but also in cybersecurity, information, and economics. Meanwhile, Washington has been faced with a political transformation. There has also been a transformation of the information environment: long terms reports are being replaced by infographics and video and other ways of giving and consuming information, websites have become the most important way to communicate the ideas you want to share, a decline in newspaper readership, and the rise of partisan media which results in people refusing to believe different sources. There’s also a temptation for think tanks to take a less bipartisan makeup and outreach.

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

In the panel titled “Pivotal Politics US Think Tanks, Public Policy and Governance: A Senior Executives’ Perspective”, most speakers agreed that this new information environment has led think tanks to try and compete with news agencies by

1. Becoming less bipartisan and choosing sides,
2. Giving into temptation of publishing stories and attention-grabbing pieces rather than thorough research and unbiased policy analysis,
3. Not making an effort to reach a wider audience.

The panelists agreed that if think tanks want to have a positive effect on policymaking and be taken seriously no matter what is the political climate in their respective countries they must adhere to standards and principles of high-quality, accurate, and legitimate research. There was also a discussion about inclusion and diversity in the think tank community. Diversity of people means diversity of perspectives, which will allow think tanks to be more accountable and innovative.

In the panel on “Think Tanks, Regional Politics, and Public Policy: A Tri-Lateral Perspective”, US, Mexican and Canadian think tank presidents addressed the challenges of partnership and policymaking amidst challenges to the North American economic and political relationships. One of the issues that was brought up during this discussion is that while domestically think tanks in North America have been able to garner recognition and
attention from their respective governments and public, on the world stage they are regarded only as a group of academics. Think tanks have shifted away from their original purposes of educating the general public to focusing their efforts on policymakers. However, refocusing on educating the people about trade, climate change, economics, etc. will influence policymakers in a whole new way. As far as the relations between Canada, US, and Mexico, the panelists discussed the differences and similarities between the environment in which think tanks operate. In Canada, think tanks are not perceived as elite policy-influencing bodies, instead they collaborate with journalists and utilize all types of publishing formats depending on target audiences. Canadian and US think tanks have been deepening their relations, especially as the trade tensions intensified. Meanwhile, Mexican think tanks focus more on legislators and policymakers.

In the panel that focused on the Summit theme, the panelists addressed the 2016 US Presidential Election, which, they argued, challenged conventions and the existing social order. Stretching themselves thin in order to engage globally and thus not focusing enough attention domestically was identified as one of the main issues of think tanks leading up to these elections. Now that the Presidential administration has changed guards, think tanks must adapt to the new environment and make an effort to engage with local communities. During the breakout groups, more specific issues for the different regions of Canada, US, and Mexico were discussed. Some of those issues were deeply divided sources of information, partisanship in the US, decreasing funding in Mexico, translations and wider reach of audiences, and participation on the local levels.

**Conclusion**

Overall, this Summit gave the participants, both think tank experts and media professionals, a chance to discuss relevant issues and propose innovative solutions.

Some of the key takeaways were:

1. There is a need for technological innovation in the think tank space.
2. Diversity and inclusion could improve both, think tank’s reputations and their research.
3. While global engagement is important, investing more in local and domestic partnerships/projects/research could be very beneficial in combatting “fake news” and distrust of elite research institutions.
Wednesday, April 19

Location: The Atlantic Council
1030 15th Street, NW, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20005 USA

5:30-6:00pm Registration and Cocktail Reception

6:00-6:10 Dinner Hosts Welcome:
Fred Kempe, President, Atlantic Council
Niels Veldhuis, President, Fraser Institute
Director, McKinsey Global Institute

6:10-6:30: Welcome and Opening Remarks Think Tank Presidents, Mexico, US and Canada

- Graham Fox, President, Institute for Research on Public Policy (Canada) (Confirmed)
- Wendy Chamberlin, President, Middle East Institute (United States) (Confirmed)
- Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan, Former Mexican Ambassador to US (2007-13) (Mexico) (Confirmed)

6:30-7:30pm Opening Panel and Discussion
News, Information and Analysis vs. Personality, Politics and Provocative Tweets

Introduction of Panel: James G. McGann, Director, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Program, University of Pennsylvania

Panel: A panel of leading journalists from the major media outlets new and old will explore the issue of Facts, Fiction and Bias in the Media and its impact on think tanks, politics and governance.

Panelists:

Susan Glasser, Politico (Confirmed)
Andrew Sherry, Vice President, Communications, Knight Foundation (Confirmed)
Elisabeth Bumiller, Washington Bureau Chief of the New York Times (Confirmed)
Jay Solomon, Wall Street Journal (Confirmed)
Chair: John Dickerson, Host, CBS Face the Nation (TBC-AS-CSIS)

7:30-8:45 Dinner

Thursday, April 20

Location: Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20036

8-8:30 Breakfast
8:40am Welcome: James McGann, TTSCP, Lauder Institute
8:45-10am Opening Plenary: US Think Tank Presidents Panel

Pivotal Politics US Think Tanks, Public Policy and Governance: A Senior Executives’ Perspective

A panel of presidents and senior executives of US think tanks will be asked to reflect on the current state of think tanks, public policy and governance in the US and provide specific constructive steps think tank should take to address the foreign and domestic policy challenges we face.

- Chair: Strobe Talbott, President, Brookings Institution (Confirmed)
- Richard Fontaine, President, Center for a New American Security (Confirmed)
- Sara Wartell, President, Urban Institute (Confirmed)
Think Tanks, Regional Politics and Public Policy: A Tri-Lateral Perspective

US, Mexican and Canadian think tank presidents will address the challenges of partnership and policymaking amidst challenges to the North American economic and political relationships. The panelists will also explore the role think tanks play in floating policy trail balloons and Track II diplomacy.

Chair: Karen Donfried, President, German Marshall Fund of the U.S. (Confirmed)
José Luis Chicoma, Director General, Ethos Policy Lab (Confirmed)
Niels Veldhuis, President, Fraser Institute (Confirmed)

Opening Plenary and Round Table Discussion:

Topic: Think Tank, Politics and Power of Positive Thinking

The 2017 Presidential Election in the US challenged conventional wisdom and the existing political, economic and social order. Understanding these undercurrents and their implications are critical to shaping future policies and avoiding problematic consequences. Think tanks have a key role to play in these turbulent times by shaping a constructive response to the economic and political fallout currently challenging the postwar economic and security architecture. This Round Table session will focus on identifying innovative, constructive programs and strategies for meeting the policy and organizational challenges facing thinks tanks and policy makers in 2017 and beyond

Chair: Ivo H. Daalder, President, Chicago Council on Global Affairs (United States) (Confirmed)
Opening Remarks: #1 Speaker: Spencer Overton, President, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (Confirmed)
#2 Speaker: James G. McGann, Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, University of Pennsylvania (Confirmed)

Lunch Plenary Keynote and Discussion

LUNCH:
Lunch Plenary Discussion:
Topic: Think Tanks Now More Than Ever Before Leadership, Vision and Values
What role should think tanks play in providing the leadership, vision and a set of values that are required to shape public policies and guide the policymaking process?

Keynote: Lee Edwards, Distinguished Fellow in Conservative Thought B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles & Politics Institute for Constitutional Government, Heritage Foundation (Confirmed)

Discussants: Josh Burek, Belfer Center, Kennedy School of Government Harvard University (Director, Global Communications and Strategy) (Confirmed)
Vanessa C. Mendoza, Executive Vice President, Manhattan Institute (United States) (Confirmed)

Breakout Groups 2:00-3:15

The Breakout Groups are designed to identify and share best practices and effective strategies for meeting the key challenges and opportunities facing think tanks in Canada, Mexico and the US.

Topic #1: Beyond Politics and Paralysis: Think Tanks, Policy Solutions and Effective Governance

One of the key factors in 2016 election cycle in the US and other capitols around the world is what one might described as a crisis of confidence and a loss of trust in key institutions of government and elected officials. What steps can think tanks take to break this negative cycle? What are some examples of innovative strategies and programs that are helping to restore the public’s trust in our key public and private institutions? Are recent poll indicated that 79% of Americans what their elected officials to work together to find common ground and work together to address the policy problems facing the US.

Chair: Nelson Lim, Executive Director, Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania and Senior Social Scientist RAND (Confirmed)

Opening Comments:
#1 Speaker Mexican or Canadian TT
#2 Speaker Robert Traynham, Vice President, Communications, Bi-Partisan Center (Confirmed)

Topic #2: The Real Digital Divide: Technology, Trust and Public Engagement
A recent study suggests that a sizable segment of the population has lost trust in their elected officials and key public institutions. The study found that people now place their trust in their Facebook Circle of Friends for information about the world. What role are think tanks playing to build trust and bridge the public engagement divide.

Chair: Bridget Lowell, Chief Communications Officer, Vice President for Strategic Communications and Outreach (Confirmed)

Opening Comments:
#1 Speaker Mexican or Canadian TT
#2 Speaker

Topic #3: Getting Beyond the Bubble and the Beltway

A major fault line that was revealed during Brexit referendum and the presidential campaign in the US was that a sizable segment of the electorate felt their concerns were not being heard by the establishment in the political capitals around the world. Specifically that Wall Street and Washington were not listening to Main Street and Middle America. What are think tank programs are effectively engaging the public outside our nation’s capitals?

Chair: ???
Opening Comments:
#1 Speaker Mexican or Canadian TT
#2 Speaker Joe Barnes, Bonner Means Fellow, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy (Confirmed)

3:15-4:15pm Closing Plenary Session: Democracy, Disruptive Technologies and Politics: Riding the Tiger or Being Eaten by It

Chair: Edward Luce, Columnist and Commentator, Financial Times (Confirmed)  
Andrzej Cetnarski, Managing Director, Founder, Intrepid Ventures Global Limited and KSG, Harvard University (Confirmed)  
Randolph Court, Chief Operating Officer, Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (Confirmed)  
Brooke Oberwetter, Manager, External Affairs, Facebook, Inc. (Confirmed)  
Caroline Atkinson, Head, Global Policy, Google Inc. (Confirmed)

4:15-4:30pm Conclusions and Future Plans

5:00-6:30pm Closing Reception and Think Tank Networking Event  
Location: Mexican Embassy
Luis Rubio, President of Comexi, Founder, CIDAC (Mexico) (Confirmed)
Rohinton P. Medhora, President, Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) (Canada) (Confirmed)
Bill Burns, President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (United States) (Confirmed)

Closing Keynote Address: Ambassador Geronimo Gutierrez, Mexican, Ambassador to the United States

List of Confirmed Think Tanks 2017 North America Think Tank Summit

1. Acton Institute (United States)
3. Atlantic Council of the United States (United States)
4. Atlas Foundation (United States)
5. Asia Society Policy Institute (United States)
6. Belfer Center, KSG, Harvard University (United States)
7. Bipartisan Policy Center (United States)
8. Brookings Institution (United States)
9. Canada West Foundation (Canada)
10. Canadian Global Affairs Institute (Canada)
11. Center for Economic Development (United States)
12. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (United States)
13. Cato Institute (United States)
14. Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) (United States)
15. Center for Global Development (CGD) (United States)
16. Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) (Canada)
17. Center for a New American Security (CNAS) (United States)
18. Center for Strategic and International Studies (United States)
19. Center for Transatlantic Relations, SAIS (United States)
20. Centro de Estudios Espinosa Yglesias (CEEY) (Mexico)
21. Chicago Council on Global Affairs (United States)
22. Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales (COMEXI) (Mexico)
23. East West Institute (United States)
24. Ethos Public Policy Lab (Mexico)
25. Fels Institute of Government, University of Pennsylvania (United States)
26. Foreign Policy Research Institute (United States)
27. Fraser Institute (Canada)
28. Fundar, Center for Analysis and Research (Mexico)
29. German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) (United States)
30. Heritage Foundation (United States)
31. Hudson Institute (United States)
32. Human Rights Watch (HRW) (United States)
33. Information Technology and Innovation Foundation (United States)
34. Institute for Research on Public Policy (Canada)
35. Inter-American Dialogue (United States)
36. International Peace Institute (United States)
37. Independent Institute (United States)
38. James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy (United States)
39. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (United States)
40. Manhattan Institute (United States)
41. Mercatus Institute, George Mason University (United States)
42. McKinsey Global Institute (United States)
43. Middle East Institute (United States)
44. Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (United States)
45. National Bureau of Asian Research
46. Peterson Institute for International Economics (United States)
47. RAND Corporation (United States)
48. Resources for the Future (United States)
49. Stimson Center (United States)
50. Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania (United States)
51. Third Way (United States)
52. Urban Institute (United States)
53. Woodrow Wilson Center (United States)
54. World Resources Institute (United States)

2017 North America Think Tank Planning Committee

Atlantic Council of the United States (United States)
Belfer Center, Harvard University (United States)
Brookings Institution (United States)
Cato Institute (United States)
Center for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) (Canada)
Center for Strategic and International Studies (United States)
Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales (COMEXI) (Mexico)
Ethos Public Policy Lab (Mexico)
Fraser Institute (Canada)
Fundar, Center for Analysis and Research (Mexico)
Hudson Institute (United States)
Institute for Research on Public Policy (Canada)
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy (United States)
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies (United States)
Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, Lauder Institute, University of Pennsylvania (United States)
Urban Institute (United States)
Woodrow Wilson Center (United States)

**Hosts and Partners 2017 Summit**

Atlantic Council (Opening Dinner)
Fraser Institute (Opening Dinner)
McKinsey Global Institute (Opening Dinner)
Brookings (Summit Venue)
Urban Institute (Summit Lunch)
Mexican Embassy (Closing Reception and Networking Event)
“Helping to bridge the gap between knowledge and policy”

Researching the trends and challenges facing think tanks, policymakers, and policy-oriented civil society groups...
Sustaining, strengthening, and building capacity for think tanks around the world...
Maintaining the largest, most comprehensive database of over 8,000 think tanks...

All requests, questions, and comments should be directed to

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Director
Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program
The Lauder Institute
University of Pennsylvania
About TTCSP

Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program

The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) of the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world. Often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP examines the evolving role and character of public policy research organizations. Over the last 30 years, the TTCSP has developed and led a series of global initiatives that have helped bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, environmental issues, information and society, poverty alleviation, and healthcare and global health. These international collaborative efforts are designed to establish regional and international networks of policy institutes and communities that improve policy making while strengthening democratic institutions and civil societies around the world.

The TTCSP works with leading scholars and practitioners from think tanks and universities in a variety of collaborative efforts and programs and produces the annual Global Go To Think Tank Index that ranks the world’s leading think tanks in a variety of categories. This is achieved with the help of a panel of over 1,900 peer institutions and experts from the print and electronic media, academia, public and private donor institutions, and governments around the world. We have strong relationships with leading think tanks around the world, and our annual Think Tank Index is used by academics, journalists, donors and the public to locate and connect with the leading centers of public policy research around the world. Our goal is to increase the profile and performance of think tanks and raise the public awareness of the important role think tanks play in governments and civil societies around the globe.

Since its inception in 1989, the TTCSP has focused on collecting data and conducting research on think tank trends and the role think tanks play as civil society actors in the policy-making process. To date TTCSP has provided technical assistance and capacity building programs in 81 countries. We are now working to create regional and global networks of think tanks in an effort to facilitate collaboration and the production of a modest yet achievable set of global public goods. Our goal is to create lasting institutional and state-level partnerships by engaging and mobilizing think tanks that have demonstrated their ability to produce high quality policy research and shape popular and elite opinion and actions for public good.
The Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies
The Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies offers an M.A. in international studies and conducts fundamental and policy-oriented research on current economic, political, and business issues. It organizes an annual conference that brings academics, practitioners, and policy makers together to examine global challenges such as financial risks, sustainability, inequality, and the future of the state.

University of Pennsylvania
The University of Pennsylvania (Penn) is an Ivy League school with highly selective admissions and a history of innovation in interdisciplinary education and scholarship. Its peer institutions are Harvard, Stanford, Columbia, Brown, Dartmouth, and the University of Chicago in the US and Oxford and Cambridge in the UK. A world-class research institution, Penn boasts a picturesque campus in the middle of Philadelphia, a dynamic city that is conveniently located between Washington, D.C. and New York, New York. Benjamin Franklin founded the University of Pennsylvania in 1740 to push the frontiers of knowledge and benefit society by integrating study in the liberal arts and sciences with opportunities for research and practical, pre-professional training at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Penn is committed to meeting the full-demonstrated need of all undergraduates with grant-based financial aid, making this intellectually compelling integration of liberal and professional education accessible to talented students of all backgrounds and empowering them to make an impact on the world.

TTCSP Recent and Forthcoming Publications:
The Fifth Estate: Think Tanks Public Policy and Governance (Brookings, 2016) [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/chapter-one_-_the-fifth-estate.pdf]
How Think Tanks Shape Development Policies (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) [http://www.upenn.edu/pennpress/book/15244.html]
Global Think Tanks, Policy Networks and Governance (Routledge, 2010) [https://www.routledge.com/Global-Think-Tanks-Policy-Networks-and-Governance/McGann-Sabatini/p/book/9780415779791]