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North America confab 'undermines' democracy

Attendee of high-level meeting says officials wanted to hide it from public

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A closed-door meeting of high-level government and business leaders that discussed the merger of North America was designed to subvert the democratic process, charged an attendee of the confab in Banff, Canada.

Mel Hurtig, a noted Canadian author and publisher who was the elected leader of the National Party of Canada, provided WND the [agenda](#) and [attendee list](#) of the North American Forum at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel in Banff, Alberta, Sept. 12-14.

Hurtig said the "secret meeting was designed to undermine the democratic process."

"What is sinister about this meeting is that it involved high level government officials and some of the top and most powerful business leaders of the three countries and the North American Forum in organizing the meeting intentionally did not inform the press in any of the three countries," he said. "It was clear that the intention was to keep this important meeting about integrating the three countries out of the public eye."



Mel Hurtig

As [WND reported yesterday](#), the meeting was closed to the press, and the documents obtained by WND were marked "Internal Document, Not for Public Release."

The motive for U.S. participation, according to Hurtig, was "to gain access and control Canada's extensive natural resources, including oil and water."

As for Canada, he said, the Canadian Council of Chief Executives "wants to make sure that the 150 Canadian top companies who are their members who gain access to the American market and to American capital."

The office of Thomas d'Aquino, president and CEO of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, confirmed d'Aquino attend the Banff meeting.

(Story continues below)

The North American Forum consists of the three individuals who co-chaired the Banff meeting: George Schultz, former secretary of state under President Reagan; Canadian Peter Lougheed, the former Alberta premier and former leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta; and Mexico's Pedro Aspe, the former secretary of the Treasury of Mexico.

The North American Forum has no business office and no business address. Attendees at the Banff meeting contributed funds to cover the organizational expenses. Attendees, including government officials, were responsible for their own travel, lodging and per diem expenses.

A spokesman for the Canadian Council of Chief Executives said the [Council of Canadians](#), which he characterized as a "far left group," was the first to obtain and begin circulating the meeting's agenda and attendee list.

Meera Karunanathan, spokeswoman for the Council of Canadians confirmed to WND the group was responsible for obtaining and releasing the meeting agenda and attendee list. She took exception with the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, preferring to characterize her organization as "a citizens' advocacy group."

Karunanathan said the Council of Canadians released the North American Forum information because it questions the "privacy of a meeting that involves senior ministers of our government meeting with senior government officials in the United States and Mexico."

"The Canadian public has not been adequately informed about the on-going North American integration process, and we believe it is wrong for a meeting that involves top North American business executives and government officials to be held in secret behind closed doors," she said.

Jean-Yves LeFort, also a spokesman for the Council of Canadians, told WND the group opposes the effort to create a North American Union because "the NAU represents an elite corporate agenda and to us what is being planned would be an unacceptable loss of sovereignty."

Attending the Banff meeting was Robert Pastor, the director of the Center for North American Studies at American University. Pastor is widely known for his extensive writings arguing for the creation of a North American Union, a new super-regional North American government based on the model of the European Union, with the intent of subrogating the sovereignty of the United States.

Pastor was co-chair of the Council of Foreign Relations task force that in May 2005 released a report entitled "[Building a North American Community](#)."

About one-third of the listed members of CFR task force attended the Banff conference. One prominent participant in both was Carla A. Hills, who served as U.S. trade representative from 1989 to 1993 and was the primary U.S. negotiator for NAFTA.

On the second day of the conference, a session entitled "A Vision for North America: Issues & Options" was moderated by Thomas A. Shannon, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs.

Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of [Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters](#), Canada's largest trade and industry association, also confirmed to WND he attended the Banff North American Forum meeting. Beatty described the meeting as "an opportunity for a small group of people from our three North American countries to get together informally and discuss issues of common interest."

When asked why the meeting was closed to the press, Beatty responded the meeting was not a "decision forum" but a "discussion forum."

Beatty claimed Pastor's views were not universally shared by all attendees.

"My interest in attending the meeting was economic," he told WND. "How do we insure we keep pace with the explosion in competition in the North American industry? It's absolutely critical to the economic growth of our three countries that we stay competitive and successful."

Among the U.S. government participants listed was Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, though WND was told he did not attend. Also listed were U.S. Department of Defense Lt. General Gene Renuart, USAF Senior Military Assistant to Secretary Rumsfeld, and Major Gen. Mark A. Volcheff, director of Plans, Policy, and Strategy for NORAD-NORTHAM.

In what is apparently intended to be an annual event, the first North American Forum meeting was held last September in Sonoma, Calif., and a meeting for next September is to be held in Mexico.

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