

Canada pours on charm for oilsands

Washington embassy offers Timmies, McKenzie Brothers

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Canada's embassy in Washington hosted a half-dozen visits to the oilsands last year, inviting not just congressmen and their staff, but U.S. Department of Energy officials, think-tank experts and even journalists.

Yet as important as those visits were to promoting the oilsands and the Keystone XL pipeline, they represented only a fraction of the embassy's activities when it came to promoting Canada — and advancing the federal government's agenda.

Newly released records show the embassy sponsored a congressional visit to Alberta during the Calgary Stampede, fitness sessions featuring the creator of the

popular P90X exercise program, and even a screening of the 1983 McKenzie Brother movie *Strange Brew*, complete with Tim Hortons doughnuts and Canadian beer.

There were also several events promoting the War of 1812, including an art show and a lecture by a prominent military historian and adviser to former U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, who says Canada won the conflict.

The oilsands tours were the most expensive activities undertaken by the embassy at a cost of between \$20,000 and more than \$90,000 each.

The rest of the initiatives were relatively small, most costing less than \$10,000, and the embassy seeking partnerships where it could.

The documents, obtained by Ottawa-based research-

er Ken Rubin, do not give a clear total of how much the embassy spent on advocacy last year, though one planning estimate puts the number between \$500,000 and \$800,000.

Former diplomat Colin Robertson, who served much of his career in the United States, says the federal government used to spend much more on these types of activities.

And while some Canadian taxpayers may be upset that the embassy hosted a "tailgating party" during U.S. President Barack Obama's inauguration, or that congressmen took in the Stampede on their dime, Robertson says these things do work.

"My own observation is that these things do have effect, even if it is very diffi-

cult with an individual event to say A, B and C happened," he said. "This is all subtle and you don't move by great leaps but by inches."

Using the War of 1812 to advance Canada's interests might seem a curious choice, but Robertson noted the military is a key part of the American culture and that one in five members of Congress has military experience.

According to the documents, the subtext of the War of 1812 events was to highlight the 200 years of peaceful coexistence between Canada and the U.S., while highlighting Canada as an important friend and ally in North American and global security.

It was the same message Canadian diplomats hoped to convey when the embassy hosted a reception in honour of the Devil's Brigade, a group of Canadian and American

elite commandos who served together in the Second World War.

Similarly, the embassy "disguised an intense fitness workout" featuring P90X creator Tony Horton last September to highlight the strength and readiness of Canada's military, according to the documents.

"Sprinkled throughout will be a strong visual of Canada's military men and women who are dedicated to physical and mental well-being. There will be reminders of our evolving role in Afghanistan and our partnerships with other countries to engage in hot spots worldwide."

The embassy also donated several P90X workout videos to the Washington, D.C., school system, which officials said would reinforce the priorities of both governments, namely Michelle Obama's exercise campaign and Health

Canada's fight against child obesity.

The total cost of the event was \$1,500.

The vast trading relationship between Canada and the United States, as well as the integrated nature of the two countries' economies, also featured prominently in the diplomatic events.

This included VIP receptions held to mark the opening of an exhibit on Canada's 50 years in space as well as visits by the National Ballet of Canada and Cirque du Soleil, all of which were seen as an opportunity for Canadian diplomats to talk trade.

Trade was also the impetus behind the Stampede visit, which included a tour of beef and cattle operations in a bid to eliminate a new rule that would require Canadian beef and other agricultural products to be labelled.

That tour cost \$28,852.