

**OFFICE OF  
THE PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER**



**BUREAU DU  
DIRECTEUR PARLEMENTAIRE DU BUDGET**

# **Independent Fiscal Institutions and the Relationship with the Media**

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# The Challenge

“Without mass media, openness and accountability are impossible in contemporary democracies.

*but*

*Mass media can hinder political transparency as well as help it. Politicians and political operatives can simulate the political virtues of transparency through rhetorical and media manipulation.*

*This simulated transparency does not serve the underlying political values that motivate the metaphor of transparency. Instead, it is a transparency that obscures and obfuscates, that frustrates accountability and hides important information in a mass of manufactured political realities. It is a form of transparency that is not transparent at all.*

*so*

*>Our goal should be to understand how existing structures operate and to change them for the better<.”*

” J.M. Balkin, Yale University, How Mass Media Simulate Political Transparency, 1998



# Approach

*Open & Accessible, Product-driven, Analytical*

- 1) Shaped by legislative mandate, PBO mission and business model
  - a. provision of independent analysis
  - b. promote fiscal transparency and use of economic, fiscal and financial analysis
  - c. open, transparent publishing model
  
- 2) Rules of Engagement
  - a. Product driven (timing and substance)
  - b. Centers around web based publishing
  - c. Parliamentarians before media
  
- 3) Issues
  - a. Relationship to legislature and citizens
  - b. Change (perceptions and misperceptions)
  - c. Mainstream vs social media



# Experience

- 1) Evolution
  - a. Early stages – symmetric interests
  - b. Growing years and pains – towards a more balanced watch dog type relationship
  
- 2) Medium matters
  - a. At Committee – an open debate
  - b. Television and print – the challenge of sound bites and simulated transparency
  
- 3) Issues
  - a. Change is difficult
  - b. Change for the better ?



# Lessons Learned

*“There is nothing left anymore to learn the hard way”*

- 1) Invaluable
- 2) Draw a line in the sand
- 3) Double edge sword



*“There are only two forces that can carry light to all the corners of the globe... the sun in the heavens and the Associated Press down here.”*

[Mark Twain](#) (1835-1910) U.S. humorist, writer, and lecturer.

*“There is a terrific disadvantage in not having the abrasive quality of the press applied to you daily. Even though we never like it, and even though we wish they didn't write it, and even though we disapprove, there isn't any doubt that we could not do the job at all in a free society without a very, very active press.”*

[John F. Kennedy](#) (1917-1963) Thirty-fifth President of the USA

*“Get your facts first, then you can distort them as much as you please”*

[Mark Twain](#) (1835-1910) U.S. humorist, writer, and lecturer.

*“The most important service rendered by the press and the magazines is that of educating people to approach printed matter with distrust.”*

Samuel Butler, (1612-1680) British poet and satirist.