

**THE GLOBE AND MAIL** **6-day home delivery****Globe Unlimited****JUST \$19<sup>99</sup>**  
/MONTHFOR 4  
MONTHS**GET IT NOW**

NORMAN SPECTOR

## Liberals, Tories made Statscan what it isn't

**Norman Spector**

The Globe and Mail

Published Friday, Jul. 23 2010, 8:08 AM EDT

Last updated Friday, Jul. 23 2010, 8:30 AM EDT

Perusing my morning read, I see that "Calls are growing for Ottawa to place Statscan [beyond the reach](#)

[\[http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/calls-grow-for-arms-length-statscan/article1649084/\]](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/calls-grow-for-arms-length-statscan/article1649084/) of political influence. ... Former chief statistician Ivan Fellegi said it's 'well worth exploring' whether to make Statscan independent while UBC economist David Green proposes transforming it into an arms-length agency similar to the Office of the Auditor-General."

Sure, this is an idea worth exploring. But it's also worth recalling that, when Statistics Canada was created by the Trudeau government out of the old Dominion Bureau of Statistics in 1971, a deliberate decision was taken not to make it an independent organization. That decision was re-affirmed in 1985 by the Mulroney government.

Instead, the Chief Statistician is appointed as a deputy minister. Like other deputy ministers, he or she serves "during pleasure" "under the direction of the Minister."

As I recall it from my days in Ottawa, the Chief Statistician participates in the weekly briefings chaired by the Clerk of the Privy Council. At these briefings, the Chief Statistician had access to inside government information, not to speak of a good opportunity to rub shoulders with his colleagues across government. Notably, it is these colleagues who today provide Statscan with about 15 per cent of its budget for work the agency undertakes for government departments on a cost-recovery basis.

Follow us on Twitter: [@GlobePolitics](https://twitter.com/@GlobePolitics) [\[https://twitter.com/@GlobePolitics\]](https://twitter.com/@GlobePolitics)