



Import



A WEEKLY REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Welcome to this edition of Import. In it you will find summaries of new and interesting issues and developments in health and human services, as well as "In My Humble Opinion," a short analytical article by an Agora Group affiliate. Please feel free to visit The Agora Group's web site, which can be accessed by pressing the "our affiliates" button on the Consultant Network web site: consultant-network.ca.

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MCGUINTY ANNOUNCES ONTARIO CABINET MEMBERS, COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS

Ontario's new Premier Dalton McGuinty announced his Cabinet lineup recently, and it contained a few surprises. George Smitherman, a Toronto MPP noted for his combativeness during the election campaign, was named Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Smitherman served as chief of staff to Toronto mayor Barbara Hall and as an advisor to federal cabinet ministers David Collenette and Herb Gray. At the provincial level, he served as an assistant to Premier David Peterson. He will be helped by two Parliamentary Assistants:

- Peter Fonseca of Mississauga, a motivational consultant and newly elected MPP who was at one time an Olympic marathon runner for Canada
- Monique Smith, a bilingual lawyer from the riding of Nipissing. From 1997 to 2003 she was chief of staff for McGuinty in his role as leader of the official opposition. She also served as director of operations for the 1999 provincial Liberal campaign.

Sandra Pupatello of Windsor, formerly the Liberal health critic, became Minister of Community and Social Services (the ministry that has now reverted to the name it had before the previous government dubbed it the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services). First elected in 1999, Pupatello is also Minister



Responsible for Women's Issues. Before election as an MPP she served as the general manager of the Rotary Club of Windsor and earlier as executive director of the Essex County Kidney Foundation of Canada.

Dr. Marie Bountrogianni, first elected in 1999, becomes Minister of Children's Services. Before her election she worked for ten years as Chief Psychologist for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and was an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at McMaster University.

One surprise was the appointment of newly elected London MPP Chris Bentley as Minister of Labour. Bentley, a lawyer specializing in criminal and labour law, has a special interest in addiction services. Bentley has often participated in the 24-hour relay to raise funds for London's hospitals and he has completed three Boston marathons.

Interesting too is a move by the new government to create several Cabinet policy committees that give Liberal backbenchers as well as Cabinet members input into Cabinet deliberations – most notably:

- the 14-member Health and Social Service Committee chaired by Michael Gravelle, MPP for Thunder Bay-Superior North. Smitherman, Pupatello and Bentley all serve on this committee.
- the Community Affairs Committee, chaired by Dominic Agostino, MPP for Hamilton East.

The mandates of these policy committees suggest a desire by the new government to work against the silo mentality, and to engage in dialogue with communities: the committees are meant to *"encourage co-operation among ministries on broader government objectives and promote consultations with stakeholders"*.

Meanwhile, McGuinty and his Ministers continue to warn that because of the deficit faced by the Ontario government, some liberal campaign promises may not be met and the implementation of others may be delayed. According to a report commissioned by the new government and conducted by former provincial auditor Erik Peters, the projected deficit is \$5.6 billion. Although Peters did not include "identified risk" figures in his calculation of the deficit, he did identify risks that may make the deficit worse to the tune of \$940 million, including residual system-wide hospital deficits (up to \$350 million), other health-care expenditures (up to \$150 million), justice sector funding pressures (up to \$150 million) and education sector funding pressures (up to \$65 million). Peters also proposes measures to reduce the chances that hidden deficits will arise in future, without hamstringing government flexibility:

"I urge the new government to consider legislation dealing with fiscal responsibility. The objective would be to improve accountability through greater transparency in and quality of budgets and updates such as the quarterly "Ontario Finances". This approach would be more effective in ensuring fiscal accountability than legislation that limits government's flexibility in responding to fiscal challenges".

Erik Peters' report is at <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/erikpeters/default.asp>.

In light of the financial situation it is likely that the government will focus initially on low-cost or no-cost initiatives such as revisions to legislation and rolling back controversial Conservative moves such as its takeover of several school boards, rather than major expenditure programs. The government's recent announcement that it will hold an inquiry into the circumstances at Ipperwash that led to the death of Aboriginal protester Dudley George is another example of such an initiative. The government's short-term strategy may also involve the creation of processes and structures for greater consultation with citizens and stakeholder groups.



COURT RULES IN FAVOUR OF COMMUNITY LIVING ST. CATHARINES

Two past editions of *Import* have covered the precipitous withdrawal of provincial funding from Community Living St. Catharines (a multi-program agency serving people with developmental disabilities) by Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services in February 2002 after several incidents that led to physical injuries in the agency's facilities. Community Living St. Catharines, with support from Community Living Ontario, argued that the cancellation of its service contract was done without prior notice, and without an opportunity for the agency to counter any claims that it was culpable in terms of the incidents at its facilities.

In September 2003 the Ontario Divisional Court directed the Ministry to restore funding and return seized property to Community Living St. Catharines immediately. The Ministry sought leave to appeal the decision, but on October 29 the Divisional Court rejected the application for leave to appeal, opening the way for restoration of activities and assets of Community Living St. Catharines.

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION BOOSTS BARRIER-FREE EDUCATION

On October 27 the Ontario Human Rights Commission released a consultation paper entitled *The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving Barrier-Free Education for Students with Disabilities*. The report details the actions required to remedy barriers faced by students with disabilities seeking accommodation of their disabilities in elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools in Ontario. The Commission says it expects the Government of Ontario, school boards, educators, school staff, colleges, universities, parents and affected students to cooperate with the Commission by recognizing their responsibilities in the accommodation process and taking action where recommended. Said Chief Commissioner Keith Norton, "*Until all players responsible for the accommodation of students with disabilities accept their responsibility, the goal of providing these students with the education necessary for them to reach their potential will remain elusive*". Said David Barber, President of Community Living Ontario, "*We look forward to working with the government to implement the recommendations in this report and we are confident that the result will be a greatly improved education system for all students, including those with disabilities.*"

According to the report:

"...it is apparent that many students with disabilities do not have equal access to educational opportunities in Ontario, either at the primary and secondary, or at the post-secondary level. The key barriers are inadequate funding, physical inaccessibility, cumbersome and time-consuming accommodation processes, negative attitudes and stereotypes, and a lack of understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all parties under the [Human Rights] Code and Commission policy".

The report is based on the Commission's research and feedback received during a consultation with students with disabilities, parents, school boards, colleges, universities, government ministries, educators, teachers unions, and others between July and December 2002.

The report is available at <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/consultations/ed-consultation-report.shtml>.



NEWFOUNDLAND ELECTS NEW GOVERNMENT, APPOINTS MINISTERS

Newfoundland and Labrador recently voted out the Liberal government headed by Roger Grimes and elected the Progressive Conservatives under lawyer and cable company executive Danny Williams. Williams appointed Elizabeth Marshall as the province's new Minister of Health and Social Services. An accountant, Marshall has 23 years of experience in the provincial public service, including positions as Deputy Minister of Social Services and Deputy Minister of Works, Services, and Transportation. She served as the province's Auditor General for a term of 10 years.

Williams also took essentially the same approach as Ontario in commissioning an external review of the province's finances. On November 6 Williams announced a request for proposals would be issued to start the process of selecting an external reviewer.

ONTARIO SUPPORTS NATIONAL HEALTH COUNCIL, AGREES TO MOVE ON ONTARIO HEALTH STANDARDS COUNCIL

On October 24 Ontario's new premier promised Ontario's support for the National Health Council that was a key feature of the report of the Romanow Commission. Creation of the council has been mired in wrangling between several of the provinces and the federal government. McGuinty has asked his Health Minister, George Smitherman, to proceed immediately to seek Ontario's nominations for the National Health Council.

As well, on November 5 Smitherman said Ontario would act on a campaign promise to create an independent Ontario Health Standards Council. It will track health-care measurements such as waiting lists, the elimination of emergency room backlogs, and the hiring of more nurses and doctors. Smitherman made the remark in a speech to the Ontario Hospital Association convention, and cited the Council as one move in progressing from crisis management to strategic planning for Ontario's health system.

TERRITORIES TO WORK TOGETHER ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

The three northern territories have agreed to develop a strategy to deal with family violence. A working group was formed at the federal/provincial/territorial meeting of ministers responsible for the status of women, held in Edmonton two weeks ago. Peter Kilabuk, Nunavut's minister responsible for the status of women, said, "*The goal of this working group is in keeping with our government's overall goal to improve the quality of life for Inuit women in Nunavut.*" The group will look at violence against women, particularly violence against native women. It will issue a progress report in December. "*The elimination of family violence must be a priority for all jurisdictions. Its devastating effects on our families, communities and society must end.*" said Northwest Territories Premier Stephen Kakfwi.

MANITOBA: BAN SMOKING PROVINCE-WIDE

On November 10 Manitoba announced that an all-party committee examining environmental tobacco smoke has arrived at six recommendations that would result in a province-wide smoking ban affecting all enclosed public places and indoor workplaces:

- the provincial government should enact legislation calling for a complete ban of smoking in all enclosed public places and indoor workplaces where the provincial government has clear jurisdiction



- the legislation should come into effect on October 1, 2004 and a public education campaign should precede the implementation date
- the provincial government should instruct the Department of Health to consult with the Advisory Council on Workplace Safety and Health to develop the legislation which would deal with definitions and enforcement procedures for use in all enclosed public places and indoor workplaces
- the provincial government should continue to provide appropriate resources to support education, prevention and cessation initiatives, especially those targeted at youth, as part of a comprehensive approach to tobacco control
- the provincial government should work with the hospitality industry to develop strategies for addressing anticipated negative economic impacts resulting from a province-wide smoking ban
- the ceremonial use of tobacco should be exempted from the ban and the Aboriginal community should be consulted on an appropriate definition of ceremonial use.

If Manitoba passes legislation in accordance with these recommendations, it will be the first Canadian province to institute a province-wide ban. However the Territory of Nunavut passed a law in its legislature on November 3 that will ban smoking in public places, and within two years prohibit smoking in bars. The Nunavut law passed with little controversy. Nunavut has the highest smoking rate in Canada (61% of people over 15 years old).

At present Manitoba – like Ontario – places responsibility for smoking bans on the shoulders of municipalities. Ontario's City of Thunder Bay decided to deal with this responsibility by holding a two-question plebiscite on smoking as part of the ballot for the November 10 municipal election. The first question asked if council should pass a bylaw prohibiting smoking in any enclosed place to which the public has access, and the second question asked if the city should prohibit smoking in workplaces. The "yes" side won both questions overwhelmingly.

NURSES HONOUR WAR SERVICE

This year the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) continued its annual tradition of laying flowers on Remembrance Day at the Nursing Sisters' Memorial in the Hall of Honour in the centre block of Parliament Hill in Ottawa. The Memorial, built through fundraising efforts led by the CNA, was unveiled in 1926.

Canada had 3,000 nurses serving in World War I and 4,000 serving in World War II. Many Canadian nursing sisters and soldiers lost their lives serving in both world wars and the Korean War. Today, about 900 nurses continue to serve on Canadian bases around the world.

Of the 3,000 nurses who served in the First World War, none remain alive today. Of the eleven Canadians still alive who served in the War, one woman is among them – Alice Strike of Halifax, 106 years old, who served as a clerk with the British Army, married a Canadian, and immigrated to Canada after the War.

DONATION HONOURS "PAPER SON"

On November 3 the Chinese Canadian National Council donated \$6,500 to the Scarborough Hospital on behalf of Shui Jim Wong, also known as On Wong, who died homeless and without legal immigration status at a Scarborough shelter in March 2002. These were funds left over after a fundraising campaign to provide funeral expenses for Wong.



Wong came to Canada in the mid-fifties when it was difficult for Chinese citizens to immigrate here. Canadian law changed in 1947 when the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1923 was repealed and Chinese in Canada were first made eligible for citizenship. But even under the 1947 law (which was not repealed until 1960) Chinese immigration was severely limited. Only the wives and children of Canadian citizens and residents of Chinese descent were allowed to emigrate from China. The children who were permitted to come to Canada were usually fathered by Chinese men returning to China to visit wives and families who had not been able to join their men in Canada.

So Wong entered Canada the way 11,000 other Chinese nationals did during that restrictive period - as a "paper son", assumed the identity of a Chinese male who had died, or taking the identity of someone who had returned to China and who was willing to sell his identity papers. And like a number of other paper sons who wanted to avoid contact with authorities, Wong did not avail himself of an amnesty program in the mid-1960s. In 2000 he finally applied for citizenship, but despite positive reviews by the immigration department for his case, his application was rejected.

Wong's social worker and lawyer were preparing an appeal when Mr. Wong suffered a fatal heart attack.

PARLIAMENT PASSES "WESTRAY LAW"

Bill C-45, also known as the Westray Law or more formally as *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (criminal liability of organizations)*, has passed in both Houses of Parliament. The bill arose in response to Nova Scotia's Westray mine disaster in 1992 in which 26 miners were killed in an underground explosion that occurred despite repeated safety warnings to the mine's owners and managers.

The law amends the Criminal Code of Canada to make organizations criminally liable for actions by "senior" members even if they are not directors or executives, and imposes a legal duty on anyone who directs work, including employers, to take reasonable measures to protect the safety of employees and the public. The law also allows a court to put a company on "probation" and order that certain policies or procedures be put in place.

The full text of the Act is at http://www.parl.gc.ca/37/2/parlbus/chambus/house/bills/government/C-45/C-45_1/C-45TOCE.html.

A GIFT FROM SOMEONE WHO KNOWS ABOUT PAIN

Detroit Red Wings goaltender Curtis Joseph (Cujo) has donated \$280,000 to a long-term pain management initiative at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. On behalf of Cujo's Kids Charitable Foundation, Cujo has supported Sick Kids with close to \$1 million since 1999. Cujo's Kids Charitable Foundation supports an endowment in pain management at The Hospital for Sick Children Foundation called Cujo's Kids Endowment Fund for Pain Management. The purpose of the fund is to support the area of pain management in the Department of Anaesthesia.

Previous support from Cujo's Kids Foundation led to the creation of "Cujo's Crease Satellite Anaesthesia Room," at the hospital, a one-of-a-kind special procedures room decorated to look like an NHL locker room. Cujo's Crease is the haematology/oncology sedation room and sees over 150 children a month for treatments and diagnosis that are performed under general anaesthesia.



THE DECLINE OF A REGION?

Canadians have taken this country's prairie provinces for granted, just as Americans take their Great Plains states for granted. They will always be there, doing much the same as they've done in the past – an essentially rural, breadbasket region.

But there are increasing warnings that these provinces and states (which combined form a single large ecological region) have been living on life support for the last century.

Recent research suggests that the latter part of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth century – a period when most of the farming settlement took place on the prairies – have been the wettest period in the last thousand years. In short, it was during this abnormally wet period that we came to believe the West was a promising agricultural area, and we settled it accordingly. Although the devastating “dust bowl” drought of the 1930s led to the abandonment of several marginal prairie areas for farming, the research evidence suggests that the drought of the 30s was relatively mild compared to earlier droughts that sometimes lasted for twenty years or more.

And evidence is building that the prairies and the Great Plains are returning to their more natural condition – arid and semi-arid land.

University of Alberta freshwater ecologist David Schindler warns of the danger, abetted by global warming that will heat and dry the prairies. According to Schindler, the prairies' water supply comes largely from snow melt (which irrigates the prairies in the spring) and glacier melt (which provides the summer's water) from mountain areas that abut the prairies. But as glaciers shrink as a likely effect of global warming, the prairies' most reliable water source will decrease and glacial meltwater will no longer replenish the aquifers underlying the prairies – aquifers that have already been depleted by water withdrawals for agricultural irrigation. Schindler also says the great rivers of the prairies (on which the West's largest towns and cities are located) have already shrunken considerably, and may become mere creeks in future.

Prairie provinces are doing what they can to deal with what may be a losing battle for water, and to deal with the inevitable friction among water users when supplies are scarce. Saskatchewan, for instance, has created a provincial Watershed Authority to administer the allocation of water for all uses, promote the efficient use of water for environmental and socio-economic benefit, and undertake and coordinate watershed studies.

A recent *Washington Post* article *Prairie Towns Die Slowly in Canada* profiles Saskatchewan's plight – a province in which the number of small farms dropped by more than 20,000 since 1986. Saskatchewan is the only province to show a population decline according to recent census figures, and the level of out-migration from Saskatchewan became a hot issue during the province's recent election.

Solutions to the drying of the prairies are not simple. One option is more efficient use of available water – but at best this may be a stopgap measure. A second solution is the diversion of water from more distant (probably northern) areas. But this involves mega-engineering projects that neither Canada nor the US feels it can afford.

A third and more socially radical option, however, is being increasingly discussed, particularly in the US. This is the development of the Buffalo Commons – a proposal originally put forward in 1987 by Frank and Deborah Popper of Rutgers University. This would involve allowing vast interconnected tracts of the Great Plains (and by extension the Canadian Prairies) to revert to their natural grassland state (a state in which drought-tolerant



species of grass predominate). After the Poppers' idea gained attention, the Great Plains Restoration Council, a non-profit citizens' organization, was formed to create an area of at least one million contiguous acres that will be:

"...a restored and reconnected area from Mexico to Canada, where we humans learn to work together across borders that were artificial in the first place. The Buffalo Commons means the day when the fences come down. The buffalo will migrate freely across a restored sea of grass, like wild salmon flow from the rivers to the oceans and back. Settled areas can – like they do in Kenya – fence the animals out, not fence them in."

Overly poetic? Utopian? Unnecessary for states and provinces that can abandon their farming heritage in favour of resource extraction or some other foundation for their economic and demographic base?

Time will tell

NOVA SCOTIA FUNDS MENTAL HEALTH PROJECTS

On November 5 Nova Scotia's health minister announced funding for seven local projects involving people who use mental health services. Most projects have a strong focus on awareness and education:

- Attention Deficit Association of N.S. in Lower Sackville receives \$20,389 to develop an information kit for parents and care providers on attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder
- Building Community Capacity for Mental Health in Bridgewater receives \$25,500 to establish a mental health information network, promote mental health knowledge and develop and maintain a district network of mental health consumers, family members and community organizations
- Survivors of Abuse Recovering (S.O.A.R.) Society receives \$37,300 to enhance its ability to deliver peer counselling, support groups, co-facilitation, community education and outreach. The group serves Hants, Kings and Annapolis counties and has assisted Yarmouth area residents in setting up a S.O.A.R. chapter
- Schizophrenia Society, Cumberland County Chapter, receives \$15,000 to provide half-day workshops in five communities to raise awareness of schizophrenia and mental illness
- Crossroads in Sydney receives \$20,000 for seed money to develop a business proposal and to secure additional funding to start a laundry service that will employ mental health consumers
- Eating Disorder Action Group in Halifax receives \$29,560 to develop and pilot a train-the-trainers manual, and to build capacity across the province for eating disorder self-help and support groups
- Share & Care Self-Help and Support Group in Bridgewater receives \$1,000 to produce public education materials.

BC AUGMENTS SHELTER FUNDING

On November 10 British Columbia's Ministry of Human Resources announced it will spend more than \$800,000 to provide 213 additional emergency hostel and shelter beds for British Columbians in need as part of its cold/wet weather strategy. Fourteen cities and towns in the province will receive funds from the award.



US INTEREST IN IMPORTING CANADIAN DRUGS INCREASES

As previous editions of *Import* indicated, a number of American states and cities have launched plans to import prescription drugs from Canada (often drugs that were manufactured in the US in the first place) as a cost-control measure, since the cost of pharmaceuticals is generally lower in Canada than the US due to bulk purchasing in Canada, and government controls on drug costs. This has been opposed by US pharmaceutical companies as well as by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), which bans the practice on the grounds that there is no guarantee that drugs from Canada are safe to use. Wanda Moebius, a spokesperson for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, has said that importation "*will turn Canada into a 'post office' for drugs made elsewhere around the world that are not made to safe standards and are then shipped through Canada to American citizens*". Pharmaceutical manufacturers also say the practice siphons off profits that could be used for research.

A recent Associated Press survey of the costs of ten commonly prescribed drugs show that the drugs are 33% to 80% cheaper in Canada than in the US.

Despite opposition from drug manufacturers, the FDA and the Bush Administration, the US Congress is considering legislation that would legalize drug importation from Canada. The House of Representatives has already passed a bill allowing drug importation, and more recently a bipartisan group of senators introduced a bill into the US Senate that would allow pharmacists and wholesalers to purchase or reimport US-made drugs from Canada and 24 other industrialized nations. However, congressional negotiators of a medicare reform bill appear to be rethinking a proposal to legalize drug reimportation as part of the larger medicare reform bill.

At a congressional hearing in Boston on October 28, representatives of a number of states and cities shared their plans to pay for drugs from Canada. Often these are drugs to fill prescriptions paid for by states or cities as part of government employee benefit plans, although states are also interested in the initiative to pay for pharmaceuticals for prisoners.

During the hearing, Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty said savings from reimporting drugs for Minnesota's 50,000 public service employees could be in the tens of million of dollars. He added, "*I don't want to overstate this, but there is a rebellion. People are already flipping off the government and doing an end run.*" Pawlenty plans to set up a web site that would direct state residents to state-approved Canadian pharmacies, to offer incentives to state employees who buy their drugs through the web site and to consider involving the state as a reimporter of bulk purchases of drugs.

Boston's mayor has indicated his city is considering importing drugs from Canada, and more recently the state of Wisconsin has joined the bandwagon. Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle has announced he plans to meet with officials from at least one Canadian pharmacy to discuss a program to reimport lower-cost US-manufactured prescription drugs from Canada for state health insurance programs. Doyle said that based on a review of a web site that sells prescription drugs from Canada, the state could purchase several medications commonly prescribed to prison inmates at a 17% to 49% discount. The council of Montgomery County in Maryland is also exploring drug reimportation, and in the November 4 election in New Britain, Connecticut, the incumbent mayor lost to a candidate who campaigned for drug reimportation.



As well, Michigan has expressed interest in a similar plan, and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg has signed a petition circulated by Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich that calls for the FDA to allow cities and states to reimport prescription drugs from Canada.

Countering concerns about safety raised by the FDA, a recent Illinois state report says prescription drugs sold in Canadian pharmacies are approved by a Canadian regulatory system that uses standards "substantially equivalent" to those in US. However PharmacyChecker.com, an independent research firm that evaluates online pharmacies and compares prices, in September surveyed 20 Canadian online pharmacies and concluded that 70% of them did not meet researchers' criteria for protecting consumer safety and privacy, providing reliable contact information, ensuring privacy of information or offering secure financial transactions.

US debate on the issue has raised warning flags in Canada, based on concerns that US drug manufacturers may curb their supply of drugs to the Canadian market to express their opposition to reimportation of those very same drugs back into the US. This could lead to shortages of pharmaceuticals for Canadian consumers. But it is a US jurisdiction that has taken the most direct action to assess the threat of reduced drug supply to Canada. On November 4 Connecticut's Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said he has launched an investigation into possible collusion among US drug companies to reduce drug supplies sent to Canada. Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, Wyeth and AstraZeneca are among the companies being investigated. Blumenthal said collusion to reduce supplies sent to Canadian pharmacies that sell to US customers would violate US antitrust laws.

Pfizer Canada, GlaxoSmithKline, Eli Lilly and Bayer have raised the prices of many of their products in Canada by between 4% and 8% in the last few months. AstraZeneca now also requires Canadian pharmacies that receive products from the company to provide written assurance that they will not sell the medications outside of Canada. Sylvie Dupont, secretary of the Canada's Patented Medicine Prices Review Board, said pharmaceutical companies must inform the board every six months about price increases and that the board can roll back increases considered excessive or that exceed the inflation rate.

Approximately 120 Canadian online pharmacies sell about US\$700 million worth of prescription drugs each year to Americans. In January GlaxoSmithKline, the world's second-largest pharmaceutical maker, announced it would curtail shipments to Canadian wholesalers supplying the online pharmacies. Several other companies quickly followed suit.

OUR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOUR IS EVERYONE: MUSLIM WOMEN PERSEVERE

Three Muslim women – one of them Canadian, one Iranian and one from Pakistan – have recently been thrust into the public eye, each for her own brand of perseverance.

Monia Mazigh is the wife of Maher Arar, the Canadian citizen imprisoned and tortured in Syria after being transported to Syria (via Lebanon) by US officials – quite possibly on the basis of "evidence" provided by Canadian officials that suggested Arar had terrorist links.

Mazigh might have quietly protested what she considered the Canadian government's lack of aggressive action in securing her husband's release, but instead she relentlessly pressured the government for almost a year and assembled a team of human rights advocates and lawyers – including Barbara Olshansky, deputy legal director at the Manhattan-based Center for Constitutional Rights – to facilitate her husband's release. Nor did she accept assurances from Canadian officials that they were working effectively but quietly in the background, and that her



husband was not being tortured. As well, it was Mazigh's actions that prompted Youssuf Almalki, the brother of Abdullah Almalki (another Canadian citizen jailed in Syria) to "go public" on behalf of his brother.

Mazigh and Arar are now part of a growing chorus of voices calling for a public inquiry into the Canadian government's role in the deportation of Arar to Syria, and into Canada's actions on behalf of landed immigrant William Sampson, who was sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia and was recently released. Whether an inquiry is held or not, Mazigh will have played a key role in a debate over whether quiet diplomacy, or more aggressive measures, should be used by Canada in protesting unjust imprisonment of its citizens in other countries.

Iranian lawyer and human rights activist **Shirin Ebadi** is the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2003. She will formally accept the prize in Oslo on December 10. Ebadi represents Reformed Islam, and argues for a new interpretation of Islamic law which is in harmony with vital human rights such as democracy, equality before the law, religious freedom and freedom of speech. Ebadi also champions the rights of members of Iran's Baha'i community, who have faced institutionalized persecution under Iran's Islamic revolutionary government. She is the founder and leader of the Association for Support of Children's Rights in Iran.

As a lawyer, Ebadi has been involved in controversial political cases. She was the attorney of the families of writers and intellectuals who were victims of serial murders in 1999-2000 in Iran. She has worked actively – and successfully – to reveal the principals behind an attack on students at Tehran University in 1999 where several students died. As a consequence, Ebadi has been imprisoned on numerous occasions.

In awarding her the prize in October the Nobel Committee said:

"Her principal arena is the struggle for basic human rights, and no society deserves to be labelled civilized unless the rights of women and children are respected. In an era of violence, she has consistently supported non-violence. It is fundamental to her view that the supreme political power in a community must be built on democratic elections. She favours enlightenment and dialogue as the best path to changing attitudes and resolving conflict."

Since the Nobel award was announced Ebadi has received several death threats daily, and has been assigned bodyguards by the Iranian Interior Ministry.

Ebadi recently joined the Iranian legal team representing the family of the late Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi. Kazemi, of Iranian descent, died from a blow to the head after being taken into custody for taking pictures outside Tehran's Evin prison.

Ironically, Ebadi was detained briefly by US officials in 1996 at Kennedy Airport on suspicion that she might be a terrorist. Ebadi was on her way to receive the Human Rights Watch Hillman Hammett Prize for human rights work.

Khalida Bibi, a 39 year old woman from Takya village in Pakistan's North West Province, was one of this year's recipients of the Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life, awarded by the Women's World Summit Foundation. Bibi, who is illiterate, was married at 17 and has six children. In 1996 she benefited from a development program which empowered her to apply for credit to buy three sewing machines so she could open a small vocational center in her own home. So far Bibi has trained 40 women. She is also very active in biodiversity conservation



and her great knowledge of indigenous seeds made her popular in the village. Her household became a village seed bank with more than 70 kinds of seeds from different crops. She grows both indigenous and hybrid seeds to test their productivity and conserves only the best quality that she then distributes to other women farmers in the village.

VATICAN HOSTS CONFERENCE ON DEPRESSION

As part of an ongoing series of international conferences on health and pastoral care, the Vatican is hosting a conference this year on depression from November 13 to 15. The conference series is organized by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care. This year's conference includes an interfaith dialogue on the meaning of depression and malaise, seen from Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist perspectives. Among the speakers is James Mathew Wingle, Bishop of Saint Catharines, who is a member of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care and who will speak on *Pastoral Care: The Rejection of Suffering and the Search for Personal Wellbeing*.

IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: SOME THOUGHTS FOR MISTER MCGUINTY

Mr. McGuinty:

You have a problem. Many promises, little money – and expectations that you will act as the province's navigator, charting a course into new waters for a province battered by neo-con storms for the past few years.

It is understandable if you try to solve problems of service underfunding by providing dribbles rather than torrents of money over the first year or so of your mandate. It is also understandable if you emphasize low cost or no-cost legislative and policy changes until you have a better handle on revenues and expenses.

But you might also do something that you did not promise to do during the campaign – something no other party promised to do either. You can repair the tattered relationship between the Government of Ontario and the array of civic organizations in Ontario – the voluntary and charitable boards, faith-based organizations, support groups and other civic groupings that form the partners – not the servants – of government. These are the very organizations, neither part of government nor part of the market economy, that have been dismissed for a decade as “special interest groups” – organizations that have been expected to display accountability to government, while finding little government accountability in return. Repairing the rift involves more than a few token consultations. It means adopting a joint vision with the civic sector, a vision based on the indispensability of both government and civic society.

You can make a start, for instance, by helping develop a Civic Forum for Ontario – a body not unlike the Scottish Civic Forum, a grouping of civic organizations that works with government (even though it does not always agree with government) to promote the wellbeing of Scotland's citizens. Finding out more about this Forum is a simple trip to its web site at <http://www.civicforum.org.uk/index.html>. Or you could just as easily examine similar civic forums in the Republic of Ireland, or Northern Ireland, or London England, or Europe.

Or better still, take a short ride from the Pink Palace to a little office on Lawrence Avenue and visit the folks at the Coalition of Voluntary Organizations of Ontario. Before your visit, take a look at the COVO web site at <http://covo.on.ca/index.htm>. Find out who and what it is, find out how it can become the nucleus of an Ontario Civic Forum, find out how your government can support COVO or a civic forum that arises from the genetic



material COVO can provide. Find out how you can work with a Civic Forum while resisting the urge to have your government micromanage it.

Mister Premier, you need partners, not enemies. Civic society can be your ally, not your nemesis.

And one symbolic point, Mister McGuinty. You have already adopted the silliness instituted by the last two administrations of referring to your administration as the “McGuinty Government”. Mister Premier, it is not your government. It is the government of every citizen of this province, a government entrusted to you for a brief period, because 46.45% of the voters of this province wanted it entrusted to you.

Keep in mind – the caretaker and the owner are different. But that does not mean they cannot work together if each is aware of its capacities and its limitations.

John Butler, The Agora Group

FROM THE QUOTES VAULT

“There is a Chinese saying, ‘Borrowing flowers to honour the Buddha’. I dedicate this award to a group of people whose sacrifices have made all of our lives better ones: a group of Canadians who helped build this country through hard labour and for which they received nothing. In fact, they received less than nothing. For their hard work, they were repaid with decades of legislated racism. I am talking about the Chinese immigrants who came here before 1947, the true pioneers in my community, without whom there would be no Canadian railroad linking this country together.... June Callwood once wrote about a Chinese man who worked in her grandfather's store. She recalled him living here all alone. He would tell her stories about his family back home and even show her pictures. He was not able to bring his family over. He died alone in a country that never really welcomed him”.

excerpt from an acceptance speech by lawyer Avvy Yao-Yao Go, on receiving the Women's Law Association of Ontario President's Award, 2002