



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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ONTARIO THRONE SPEECH: WAIT FOR THE MONEY

Ontario's November 20 Speech from the Throne was a sober (some might say dismal) assessment of the Liberal administration's ability to meet campaign promises in light of a provincial deficit of \$5.6 billion, likely to grow to \$8.6 billion in 2006 unless the government takes action to increase revenues and control expenditures.

The government said it will roll back the latest portion of a tax cut for corporations, eliminate the seniors' education tax credit, maintain personal income tax rates at the current level rather than cutting them, and cancel the tax credit for private schools.

To control expenses the government will "eliminate the waste of taxpayers' dollars on partisan, political advertising", reduce "what the Provincial Auditor calls an over-reliance on highly paid consultants" and end the electricity price freeze. The government will also "ask its partners in health care, education, and the broader public sector to temper their requests for more with the realization that what we have now is at risk".

The government tried to balance its austerity message with several low-cost or no-cost measures:

- a provincial anti-bullying hotline and the establishment of anti-bullying programs at all schools



- development of a francophone education strategy
- entering into new agreements to convert proposed “public-private partnership” (P3) hospitals in Brampton and Ottawa into publicly owned hospitals
- introducing a “Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act” that would make “two-tier pay-your-way-to-the-front-of-the-line health care” illegal in Ontario and that would enshrine in provincial law the five principles of medicare and add accountability as a sixth principle
- greater independence for the province’s Chief Medical Officer of Health
- promotion of food safety
- legislation to create a new health quality council
- improving primary care through the creation of family health teams
- banning the disposal of untreated toxic sludge
- phasing out coal-fired electricity generating plants
- an increase in the minimum wage
- working with the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to make it harder for accused abusers to make bail
- working with police to develop risk assessments for those accused of domestic violence
- nutritional supplements for pregnant women on social assistance
- creation of northern development councils to link northern communities to the Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

In light of what the government called its “straight goods” Throne Speech, Ontario human service agencies may put their funding demands on the back burner for a while, choosing instead to put forward inexpensive proposals for legislative, policy or procedural changes to further the joint agendas of government and civic organizations.

The Throne Speech is at http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/english/Library/ThroneSpeech112003_ts.asp.

Of the healthcare-related initiatives, one with few details yet is the change in the “P3” hospitals planned for Ottawa and Brampton. In a November 21 media release McGuinty outlined the basis for new agreements to build and operate these hospitals:

- The hospitals will remain in public hands and be owned by their boards (rather than built and owned by the private sector and leased to the hospital corporations)
- The boards will direct all work by the private contractors
- The agreements will be made public
- The public will have full access to services at the new hospitals



- The hospitals are required to report back to the government on the project companies' performance.

The lack of more detail suggests the government may allow a continued role for the private sector in these hospitals, perhaps through private sector provision of non-clinical services such as laundry.

ONTARIO GETS SARS DOLLARS

On November 18 Prime Minister Chrétien announced that the Federal Government will give Ontario \$330 million compensation for SARS-related costs and losses. Ontario's previous Conservative administration had rejected a \$250 million offer made this past summer. Originally the Conservatives had estimated SARS-related costs in Ontario at \$1.13 billion, including \$945 million in health-care expenses and \$185 million in related costs such as post-SARS tourism promotion and compensation for quarantined workers. A report on the province's finances prepared recently by former provincial auditor Erik Peters pegged the health-related costs at a more modest \$660 million.

Premier McGuinty welcomed the federal move but pointed out it covers less than half the SARS-related costs. Opposition parties criticized McGuinty for not demanding that the SARS crisis be classified as a disaster by Ottawa, which would make the province eligible for compensation for 90% of costs (about \$900 million). McGuinty said Ontario may seek more federal compensation next year, when the full impact of SARS on the province is better understood.

QUEBEC: POLITICAL HEAVYWEIGHTS TO ADVISE ON SUPER-HOSPITALS

On November 3 Quebec Premier Jean Charest announced that former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and former Quebec Liberal Premier Daniel Johnston would co-chair a provincial government committee to look at the creation of super-hospitals in Montreal. The committee will report to the Quebec cabinet by late February 2004 so the Quebec government can decide by March on how to proceed. Plans to create the two hospitals – an anglophone hospital affiliated with McGill and a francophone facility affiliated with the University of Montreal – have been mired on controversy in terms of the costs of the facilities, where they should be located, the wisdom of doing away with existing hospitals and replacing them with the super-hospitals, and whether the hospitals will become parallel or complementary health care systems.

Charest said the committee will look at the feasibility of the projects, decide whether they meet criteria the government enunciated after its election victory last April, and look at whether the two projects complement each other.

The provincial government has set a funding cap of \$800 million for each project, which means initial plans may need to be downsized. At least another \$200 million will be needed for each facility from other sources.

FEDS, RED CROSS COOPERATE ON HOMELESSNESS

On November 13 the Government of Canada and the Canadian Red Cross (Ontario) announced the opening of a facility for homeless individuals and families in Toronto. The federal building at 1859 Leslie Street, formerly used by Industry Canada, was offered to the Red Cross under the Surplus Federal Real



Property for Homelessness Initiative of the Canadian Government, through the National Homelessness Initiative. The site will become a multi-service homelessness centre with office space and a warehouse.

The National Homelessness Initiative works in partnership with community organizations, the private sector and all levels of government to help Canada's homeless people by bringing together partners to encourage development of local solutions that address particular homelessness needs and issues. The Initiative helps strengthen and broaden partnership efforts to engage more federal departments and agencies, the business community, unions, and other private and public sector interests in addressing the needs of homeless people. Since the National Homelessness Initiative was launched in 1999, the Government of Canada has supported more than 200 projects, with funding of over \$125 million, to alleviate homelessness in Ontario.

A NATIONAL HEALTH COUNCIL: WHO SAID WHAT?

Prime minister-designate Paul Martin emerged from a pre-Grey Cup meeting with provincial and territorial leaders to announce that provinces and territories had agreed to the creation of a National Health Council to monitor Canadian health systems (a key recommendation of the Romanow Commission). Premiers Eves from Ontario and Klein from Alberta had previously expressed serious concerns about the Council, fearing it would become another level of bureaucracy.

However, on November 17 Klein denied there had been agreement at the meeting, and he cited Alberta's continued concerns:

"The mandate that causes us the most concern is the mandate that gives the federal government the authority to look at all aspects of health-care delivery, not just the reforms that they're going to initiate and fund. I've sent a letter to the prime minister (Jean Chrétien) expressing our concern that we're not satisfied with the mandate of the council and we're not satisfied with the amount of money that's going to be spent on the council. And therefore we've indicated to the prime minister we're not prepared to sign unless these issues can be resolved."

Klein also said the Council would infringe on provincial rights, and provinces would not presume to infringe on federal territory by demanding a right to input into things like the Canadian Armed Forces (conveniently forgetting that provinces might demand that right if they had to commit substantial provincial revenues to the Armed Forces).

Federal Health Minister Anne McLellan has said she will proceed with forming the Council, even if Alberta does not participate.

ALBERTA CUTS DEAL WITH DOCTORS

In most provinces, agreements between provincial medical associations and provincial governments on the remuneration and working conditions of doctors are two-party deals. Alberta, however, is touting its new agreement with its doctors as ground-breaking because a third party – Alberta's regional health authorities – are also signatories to the deal and have had some of their concerns reflected in the agreement.



The agreement, slated to run for eight years, contains several key provisions:

- \$100 million over three years to support 24-hour, seven-day managed access to services. Funding is conditional on physicians and regions entering into a formal Local Primary Care Initiative.
- Funding for physicians performing on-call services for health regions, like specialists seeing new patients and rural physicians providing emergency care in hospitals, to increase by \$11.9 million over the next three years.
- By the end of 2006 a total of \$65.6 million from the Physician Office System Program to automate paper-based office systems and link physicians to new technology like Alberta's Electronic Health Record.
- The financial aspects of the agreement re-open in three years so the agreement stays responsive to current conditions like population growth. By 2006, the master physician budget will have increased by \$282 million to \$1.65 billion.

A media release on the agreement is at <http://www.gov.ab.ca/acn/200311/15457.html>.

NOVA SCOTIA TEACHES KIDS TO USE 911

Children should be able to dial 911 in emergencies without unwittingly placing 911 calls for non-emergencies. Nova Scotia has launched an initiative to achieve both goals.

The province's Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) is about to provide 911 personnel and community policing officers across the province with sets of flash cards to use when talking to children in schools and community groups on what to do in an emergency. The poster-size cards depict different situations in which children may find themselves. Some situations require the children to call 911 for help while others require the child to respond without the need to call 911. As well, EMO's public education program has updated its 911 Teacher's Activity Pack, and a teachers' section which has been added to EMO's web site. Information on Nova Scotia's 911 education is at

http://www.gov.ns.ca/emo/911/911teachers_packs.htm.

PEI: ISLANDERS HELP KENYANS

In a small but heartening example of civic action, the Prince Edward Island-based organization Farmers Helping Farmers is reaching into the pockets of Islanders through its annual Old-Time Christmas Concert, a major fundraiser for the organization, on November 29. Proceeds from the concert, and from sales of performers' CDs and fudge, mulled cider and African crafts, will support the organization's work in Kenya.

Farmers Helping Farmers had previously raised enough money to allow the Muchui Women's Group in Kenya to buy 60 water tanks for farm families. Newly raised funds will be used to support development of a tree seedling business for these families, since there is a strong demand and government support in Kenya for planting trees to be used for lumber, fruit, shelter and firewood. Funds will also provide resources to teach women to grow the seedlings efficiently and to develop a business plan for marketing of their trees. Donors can also sponsor a complete tree seedling nursery for a farm family within the Muchui Women's



Group for \$150. Farmers Helping Farmers calls it "a unique gift for that special person or a great idea for an office Christmas donation".

The Canadian International Development Agency contributes two dollars for every dollar Farmers Helping Farmers raises to support projects. The web site of Farmers Helping Farmers is at www.farmershelpingfarmers.ca.

US DRUG REIMPORTATION FROM CANADA: THE PLOT THICKENS

We have extensively covered the reimportation of pharmaceuticals from Canada by US citizens, and by states and cities interested in reimportation to cut the cost of prescription coverage for employees, since drug costs are lower in Canada. Many of these drugs are sold to Americans through Canadian internet pharmacies.

The US government's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has adamantly expressed concerns about the quality of drugs reimported into the US.

On November 18 Health Canada signed a memorandum of understanding with FDA Commissioner Mark McClellan, that supports greater exchange of information between the countries, a more efficient evaluation system for pharmaceuticals, greater access to drugs for Canadians and more information about drug safety. However, Commissioner McClellan made remarks at the signing that suggest that the safety of Canadian drugs and of internet pharmacy practices are questionable, that internet pharmacy sales to the US could lead to drug shortages in Canada, and that Canada's drug pricing process is flawed and more money should be paid by Canadians for drugs, to narrow the price gap between the two countries. These remarks were so offensive to Health Canada that Health Minister Anne McLellan issued a media release later in the day that rebutted the Commissioner's comments:

"First, the Commissioner may have left the impression that unsafe Canadian drugs are going across the border to the United States as a result of the practice of internet pharmacy. Let me assure all Canadians that drugs approved for use in Canada are safe. We have one of the most rigorous drug approval systems in the world to assure safety, quality and efficacy. Health Canada's priority and mandate is the safety of drugs approved for sale in Canada....

Second, while internet pharmacy is an important domestic issue for the United States, it has received much attention here in Canada. Earlier this month, [Health Canada Assistant Deputy Minister] Ms Gorman wrote to provincial pharmacy associations, Medical Associations, Pharmacy regulatory authorities, Medical Regulatory Authorities, the National Association of Pharmacy and Registrar Authorities, the Canadian Pharmaceutical Association and provincial and territorial Ministries of Health, to remind them of their obligations and encourage those on the front lines to immediately report any shortages that may have been incurred due to the practice of internet pharmacy. As recently as yesterday, no jurisdiction had reported drug shortages as a result of the practice of internet pharmacy. Should we be made aware of shortages as a result of internet pharmacy, we will work with other federal departments, the provinces and territories and the colleges to prevent any negative impact on Canadians.



Finally, Commissioner McClellan made some comments about Canada's pharmaceutical pricing regime. The Patented Medicines Prices Review Board was created in 1987 under the Patent Act to protect consumer interests and contribute to Canadian health care by ensuring that prices charged by manufacturers of patented medicines are fair and reasonable. Changes to the Patent Act enhanced patent protection for innovative pharmaceutical companies, while at the same time, securing a commitment from Canada's research-based pharmaceutical companies to increase spending on research and development from 5% to 10% of sales. This regime, combined, with Health Canada's regulatory approval process, has ensured a safe supply of drugs at reasonable prices for Canadians."

US ambassador to Canada Paul Celucci waded into the fray by saying the FDA has provided evidence to Health Canada that Canadian rules requiring Canadian physicians to examine patients before cosigning a US prescription are being flouted.

DOLLARS AND HEALTH: ASBESTOS AND EUCALYPTUS

Two international disputes involving Canada highlight tensions between economics and health, and to many observers Canada looks like a bad kid on the block.

The first dispute has to do with a plan by an international conference on toxic substances to list a form of asbestos – chrysotile asbestos – as a cancer causing agent which poses a risk even at very low levels. If chrysotile asbestos is put on the list, countries importing it from producing countries would be warned of its dangers. The conference examining the issue is a body created by an international agreement called the Rotterdam Convention to control dangerous substances.

A scientific review panel told the conference that studies in Europe, Chile and Australia citing health risks from chrysotile asbestos, even at very low levels, are scientifically valid. Canada, however, is leading a group of nations including Russia, Ukraine, China, Zimbabwe, India, Indonesia, South Africa and Columbia, that oppose listing chrysotile asbestos as a dangerous substance. Most of these countries – most notably Canada, South Africa and Russia – produce chrysotile asbestos. The European Union, on the other side, is a leading proponent of listing chrysotile asbestos as a health hazard under the international convention.

Canada's position – that safety measures can be used in asbestos handling, and that replacements to chrysotile asbestos pose health risks – has irked the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) which says it "*condemns Canada and Russia for leading a revolt against the listing of chrysotile asbestos on a major international toxics convention, despite scientific findings showing that this substance is harmful for human health and the environment, and clear obligations under the treaty for such a listing*".

Says Julia Langer of WWF's Canadian branch, "*Canada's objection to listing chrysotile is embarrassingly self-interested and makes a mockery of the Convention's intent which is shared responsibility for health and the environmental protection between exporters and importers of harmful substances. Notwithstanding the hazards of asbestos at home, if developing countries really want to buy Canada's carcinogenic asbestos they should only do so with full disclosure.*"



In 1998 the Canadian Government (with support from Quebec, where this form of asbestos is mined) had tried but failed to head off an attempt by the Council of Europe to impose a ban on chrysotile asbestos.

Canada has also been blasted recently for investing in a vast eucalyptus plantation project in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. The plantation is described by its supporters as a “carbon sink”, since trees remove carbon dioxide from the air. Canada’s investment is meant to exploit a provision of the Kyoto Protocol that allows developed countries to invest in projects in the developing world to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The investing nation then gets “credits” that it can apply to meet its own Kyoto targets. Canada’s investment is indirect – it has provided \$15 million to a World Bank fund called the Prototype Carbon Fund that would underwrite the plantation scheme. The Swedish, Norwegian, Dutch and Finnish governments have also invested in the fund, along with a host of large private sector corporations.

The plantation scheme would be carried out by Plantar, a private sector timber company providing management services on 690,000 hectares of plantations for itself and other companies in Brazil. Plantar will harvest the trees to make charcoal for smelting pig iron, a process that would return carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere (although the scheme’s proponents say it less polluting than the current practice of using imported coke to produce pig iron). As well, chemicals used in eucalyptus plantations are a health risk, and these trees are prodigious users of water, posing threats to the water table. Such plantations already threaten the huge Guaraní Aquifer, lying under Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, that helps meet the water needs of more than 300 towns and cities including Sao Paulo, a city of 18 million people.

Plantar has a spotted reputation. More than 70 Brazilian community organizations oppose the Plantar project and have asked Canada and other investors to stop supporting it. A March 2003 letter to investors signed by 50 Brazilian NGOs says:

“Corporations like Plantar S.A. installed themselves in our states in the 1960s and 1970s during the military dictatorship, taking advantage of attractive tax incentives. Unfortunately, local communities who were directly impacted by the actions of the corporations were never consulted about whether they wanted this type of project for their region. The result was that Tupinikim and Guaraní Indigenous peoples were expelled from their lands, as well as traditional afroBrazilian communities and tens of thousands of peasants, increasing unemployment and, consequently, the despair of these populations who lost their lands and were left without their biodiversity and without their water, on which they were dependent.... Working conditions in Plantar’s areas are very dangerous. For this reason, in March this year the corporation was once again sued by the Regional Working Office (DRT), together with 41 other eucalyptus planting and charcoal producing firms in the state of Minas Gerais for not obeying Brazilian labour law. The company was also cited in a Parliamentary Investigation Commission (CPI) in the Parliament of Minas Gerais state as a company that is involved in the illegal and degrading subcontracting of work.”



Describing the plantation plan, Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki said:

"...such cheap schemes make a mockery of the importance of the Kyoto Protocol. I was one of Prime Minister Chrétien's biggest supporters when he adopted the protocol, and the federal government deserves credit for making it happen. But that hard work will go up in smoke if projects like this are allowed to continue while Canada continues its polluting ways."

US: OLD LAW, NEW TARGET

A US legal case is unfolding that has implications for jurisdictions where the rule of law is paramount. It raises the question of whether it is right to apply an old or obscure law to circumstances other than ones the law was designed to address.

The environmental advocacy group Greenpeace USA has been charged with criminal conspiracy by the US Justice Department, because two Greenpeace activists boarded a cargo ship off the Florida coast in April 2002. Greenpeace believed the ship was hauling contraband mahogany from Brazil. The activists wanted to draw attention to the issue by unfurling a banner with the message "President Bush, Stop Illegal Logging."

As a result of the boarding, the activists were charged with minor crimes and released shortly thereafter. Recently, however, the US Justice Department filed the criminal conspiracy charge against Greenpeace related to the incident, based on an 1872 law that allows charges to be filed for boarding a ship before its arrival in port, and for conspiracy to do so. The law was written to prevent organizations such as boarding houses from "sailor mongering" – boarding ships before they are moored, often using alcohol or prostitutes to lure crewmen ashore, leaving the vessel unattended. The law has been applied in only two cases, most recently in 1890.

Critics of the Justice Department's move say Greenpeace's boarding was a non-violent non-threatening sit-in to garner publicity and bore no resemblance to the circumstances for which the law was designed. Former Vice President Al Gore said the move is "*highly disturbing... Independent legal experts and historians have said that the prosecution – under an obscure and bizarre 1872 law against sailor-mongering – appears to be aimed at inhibiting Greenpeace's First Amendment activities*" (i.e. the right of free speech). In an editorial on the issue, the *Miami Herald* said:

"Indeed, this indictment is a puzzlement, coming so long after federal prosecution of the violators. There seems no point to it beyond vindictiveness toward a group that riles the administration. Is this the best use of federal law-enforcement resources? Is it selective prosecution? Why hasn't Justice applied the same standards to other groups, such as pro-life activists that use similar protest tactics? Using the mantra of domestic security to justify an overzealous prosecution doesn't parse. The Greenpeace violators were justly punished at the time. The case should be closed and all resources focused instead on genuine threats to homeland security".

On November 7 the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida and People for the American Way Foundation presented a friend-of-the-court brief to the Florida court on behalf of Greenpeace, saying the case is of "*profound importance*" because it "*imperils the core values of the Constitution.... For two hundred years, the United States government has refrained from prosecuting advocacy groups whose members*



occasionally engage in peaceful civil disobedience to convey a constitutionally protected message. The prosecution of Greenpeace indicates a sea change in that policy."

Says John Passacantando, executive director of Greenpeace, *"The parallel I see is with the McCarthy era – the overreach by the government to stifle its critics... It is a fight we are willing to take on ... a fight for our right to dissent peacefully in this country in areas we think society is wrong."*

If found guilty, Greenpeace USA faces a maximum penalty of five years' probation and a fine of \$10,000. More importantly, if convicted Greenpeace could lose its tax-exempt status in the US – something highly destructive to a non-profit organization, and likely to intimidate other non-profits that speak out aggressively.

Greenpeace says the ship that it boarded unloaded its mahogany in Charleston South Carolina for shipment to a forest product company, violating the United Nations Environmental Program Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, a treaty that the US signed. Said Greenpeace, *"Instead of putting Greenpeace on trial, the U.S. government should work with us to combat continuing crimes against the environment and against human rights in the Amazon."*

Greenpeace's version of the issue is at <http://www.greenpeaceusa.org/bin/view.fpl/16961.html>.

IRISH PM TOUTS SOCIAL CAPITAL

Editor's note: Last week's *Import* urged Ontario's new premier to repair the province's tattered relationships with its civic organizations. We should also point Mr. McGuinty to another leader's public understanding of social capital, of which civic organizations are an integral part. On October 31 the Republic of Ireland's Prime Minister Bertie Ahern gave a speech outlining his government's approach to fostering social capital. We quote extensively from this speech because it is refreshing to hear a leader talk of social capital in terms that put the issue of accountability within a mutually respectful relationship between government and civic society. We hope to hear a similar speech from Ontario's Premier in the future:

"I have long had a keen interest in the concept of Social Capital. When I spoke at a Conference on Social Capital in March, 2001 I said I believed that this concept had the potential to play a very positive role in the development and evaluation of public policy. I still very much believe that to be the case..."

The concept of Social Capital relates to networks, relationships and feelings of belonging, of trust and a sense of civic responsibility. These are things which shape the spirit of co-operation and quality of life in local communities and groups, and enables wider society to achieve desired policy goals more effectively. I suppose you could describe Social Capital as a kind of glue that holds society together.

As a politician I can tell you that I know full well the importance of networks and networking. However, the informal interactions and co-operation of everyday life are often taken for granted. It is clear that we need to recognise the value of this kind of co-operation. We need to appreciate the impact that it has on our society and economy and how national policy needs to take full account of this resource, both to foster it and to protect it.... Countries which have achieved higher levels



of social equality tend to experience higher levels of trust, voluntary effort and civic engagement. While we must guard against being overly simplistic in examining these issues it seems that strong social capital has positive associations with quality of public governance and civic engagement as well as personal well-being, health and life satisfaction. In short, societies that have strong social capital tend to be happier places to live.

This Government has been engaged with the promotion of social capital in a variety of ways. In the Programme for Government we have committed to work to promote social capital in all parts of Irish life through a combination of research and ensuring that public activity supports the development of social capital, particularly on a local community level. This commitment is demonstrated through, amongst other things:

- our commitment to social partnership and the inclusion of the community and voluntary pillar in that process*
- the review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the recent publication of the National Action Plan for Social Exclusion*
- the ongoing implementation of the White Paper Supporting Voluntary Activity*
- the publication of the Report of the National Committee on Volunteering...*

Recent times have seen a trend towards more rational and scientific methods of policy making and development. While by and large these developments are welcome, and evidence based policy making is far preferable to the ad hoc variety, we must be careful to ensure that we do not lose sight of the human effect these policies can have.... There has long been a recognition that we must move away from an overly-centralised State. Over the past decade much emphasis has been placed on local development and creating local structures to help tackle at local level issues that were of national importance.... We must ensure that the City and County Development Boards and the Community and Voluntary Fora cultivate local engagement and ownership of decision making while linking in with central government.

Above all it is essential that we strike the right balance between providing appropriate support for local communities and allowing them to help themselves. But I must stress that with involvement and ownership comes responsibility for citizens and communities. Government cannot be responsible for everything, nor can it be involved in all areas of social activity, nor should it be. Above all, we do not want to impose some kind of heavy-handed structure onto local communities that will stifle local endeavour. Government's main role must be to create a climate of trust through support and regulation. Our focus must be on supporting people in how they interact, organise themselves and help each other. We are talking about striving to achieve a new level of maturity in Irish society by working in the true spirit of partnership to achieve common ends".

Ahern's comments marked the release of the report *How Social Capital Can Help Local Communities to Better Tackle Socio-Economic Problems*. The report was produced by Ireland's National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), an organization set up by the Irish Government in 1993 "for the purposes of achieving consensus, on as wide a basis as possible, on major economic and social policy issues". The



report says Ireland's social capital is strong compared to many other European countries, but it points to some worrying trends and characteristics:

"There is some evidence that interpersonal trust is showing some decline in recent years, voter turnout is also declining, and is particularly low among the young, urban dwellers and lower socio-economic groups. In general, levels of social capital also tend to be lower in poorer communities. The data also suggests that the elderly, people living in rural and large urban centres, lower socio-economic groups and those who are disabled or engaged in home duties are experiencing considerable barriers in becoming actively engaged as citizens. The data also suggest that there is considerable untapped potential for more civic and community volunteering – 80% of the population is not currently involved in any type of volunteering on a regular basis."

A media release on the report, including a list of its major recommendations, is at <http://www.nesf.ie/documents/NESFPRESSRELEASE.doc>. As well a June 2003 NESF document, *The Policy Implications of Social Capital*, is available as a 157 page PDF file at <http://www.nesf.ie/documents/No28SocialCapital.pdf>.

IN MY HUMBLE OPINION: PARTNERSHIP 101

One of the great vignettes in Canadian history was the 1984 televised leadership debate between neophyte prime minister John Turner and Conservative contender Brian Mulroney. Responding to Turner's claim that he had no choice but to go along with a spate of patronage appointments made by departing prime minister Trudeau, Mulroney wagged his finger and said, "*you had a choice, sir. You could have said no*". This rejoinder went some way toward helping Mulroney to defeat Turner.

This phase ran through my mind recently as I read Ontario's Speech from the Throne, because the Liberal administration had several choices to make in preparing this speech. It is clear that they said "no" to two things:

- they said "no" to those who expected an immediate infusion of funds to augment services that had deteriorated when Harris and Eves were premiers.
- they said "no" to several Tory aims, most notably Conservative plans to reduce government revenues by offering seniors a mortgage deductibility scheme and by further cutting income taxes paid by Ontarians.

This may well be the disabling political legacy of the Throne speech – the government told us what the "nos" were, without providing compelling and visionary "yeses" that indicate what the government will do to better the province.

In fairness, the Liberals provided disconnected assurances that things will be done:

- They will raise the minimum wage, but without telling us what the government's vision is (if any) for narrowing the gap between rich and poor – a gap that is increasingly recognized as the most crucial social determinant of health.



- They promised to add “accountability” to the list of principles of medicare, they promised to raise tobacco taxes and they gave more power to the Provincial Medical Officer of Health, without telling us what the government’s vision is (if any) for moving health toward far greater emphasis on prevention and promotion.
- They appointed a new Minister for Democratic Renewal, without telling us what the government’s vision is (if any) for partnership between the proposed “transparent and accountable” public service and the civic sector.

Perhaps the government has a set of visions-in-waiting. As the speech says:

“Your new government will ask Ontarians to help write next spring’s Budget, by putting before them the real choices facing this province. It will put before the public ideas that are big and bold and even controversial.”

Let’s hope these “big and bold” ideas include addressing social inequities as determinants of health, making a major move toward health promotion and protection, and helping create a partnership (rather than a master-servant relationship) between government and civic society.

On this last point, I have no interest in turning *Import* into a diatribe against the Liberal administration in Ontario. The administration holds promise of opening windows for partnership between the government and the civic sector – windows kept shut by the previous administration. And to be fair, the recent Throne Speech talked of the government’s civic “partners”. But the devil is in the details, and it is hard to stay silent when we see government efforts – even minor ones – to close those windows.

One example of moving a window downwards is a November 17 media release from the Government of Ontario entitled *McGuinty government directs hospitals to audit infection control practices*. The release is found at <http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2003/11/17/c3087.html?lmatch=&lang=e.html>.

No one is likely to disagree with the intent of the release – to assure Ontarians that hospital infection control will reach the highest possible levels. Nor do I quibble with the power of government to “direct” hospitals to review their infection control practices. The government should also be congratulated for moving swiftly on the issue.

But I also believe every hospital in Ontario is eager to review its infection control practices to prevent a repeat of recent infection control breaches – yet nothing in the media release suggests the government recognizes that hospitals perceive an ethical or practical obligation to review their policies. The media release implies that government is the White Knight, riding into the fray to rescue us from hospital incompetency. The release includes a tart schoolmasterish lecture from the Minister of Health that can be taken as chastisement of all hospitals as unvigilant sloths:

“We expect hospitals to maintain the safest possible infection control standards and to be more vigilant about the sterilization of equipment”.



Granted, a later media release said the government was working with the Ontario Hospital Association on infection control, but the government had already defined itself as the “director” on the issue – and even the second release had a title implying that hospitals are passive recipients of government orders: *“McGuinty government establishes higher standards for hospitals on infection control audit”*.

How much more collegial it would have been to issue a media release saying. “Ministry and hospitals cooperate on infectious control review”. The release could still have said the government invoked its powers to direct hospitals – but it could have said the power was invoked with an understanding that hospitals are as committed as the government is to improving infection control, and that government and hospitals are acting as partners on the issue. The outcome would have been the same – adequate infection control – but it would have been framed in entirely more collegial terms. This master-servant terminology may get the province into a deeper mire over infection control, since the current message perceived by the public is already morphing from “dirty hospitals” to “cheap Conservative government made hospitals dirty” (and by extension, “new Liberal government should give them money to make them clean”).

Thank you, Mister Smitherman. We know you have the power to do good things. But we wonder if you understand that partnerships, not master-servant relationships, should define the way good things are done in Ontario. We wonder too if you understand the self-defeating nature of government claiming control of issues through its power to direct rather than to collaborate. If you claim (even by inference) that you will control issues and attempt to micromanage to exercise that control, then Ontario’s citizens will expect you to control all things – and your administration will be held accountable for things over which it has little or no control.

Put another way – if you claim all the credit, be prepared to shoulder all the blame.

John Butler, The Agora Group

FROM THE QUOTES VAULT

“Friends may come and go, but enemies accumulate.”

Thomas Jones (American educator and former President of the University of South Carolina), Wall Street Journal, 1975

“Don't think there are no crocodiles just because the water is calm.”

Malay Proverb