

REES' Pieces

We both have major problems

Canada and United States of America have major problems needing immediate attention to permit each country reach its greatness. South of the border faces historical problems involving racism, white supremacy, gun control and maintaining their influence in all corners of the globe rather than solving internal problems for their own 330-Million residents.

Canadians hated the government of the day causing cancellation of the "long gun registry", whereas the United States has problems concerning ability to carry guns. Within 24 hours two massive shootings in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio 31 people died and 51 were wounded. There will be an internal political battle whether or not Trump will take decisive action including asking the Senate to enact legislation, already passed by Congress, for his signature. I'll take our dislike for the long gun registry any day.

Canada's 37.06-Million residents are facing different problems. Too many communities don't have safe drinking water; housing conditions up north, urban and remote communities need immediate attention; provinces are relegated to "have" and "have not" status and no government or leadership within our political parties are willing to "bash heads" and bring people together for solutions.

"Problem solving" at the coffee clubs at Tim Horton's or other facilities are more logical than what comes from the mouths of political leaders, regardless of political party.

Decisions over coffee cups are by "wannabe's" who meet daily to solve global problems. They are politically correct because they have the common perspective of how any particular subject affects their community.

In zeroing in on Canada's problems, let's look at Atlantic Canada. Residents and businesses are drowning in high taxes, because governments of all political stripes failed to take action to provide solutions.

Many have said "we are over governed". The problem is not the number of elected, although there are too many, but rather two areas, which are explained below.

First, a 2015 policy paper by AIMS concludes in Atlantic Canada there are 31,686 public service employees, above the national average, of which there are 17,437 in Nova Scotia. Secondly, the wage gap is hurting the economy. In 2015 employees in the sub-national public (no federal) sector were compensated at a rate 47.5% higher than colleagues in the private sector - \$68,600 compared to \$46,500.

Nationally, the average gap is 26.5%. Median income for Colchester, according to Statistics Canada is \$42,782 almost \$4,000 less than the average for Atlantic Canada. Provincially income is listed at \$44,931.

The 2015 policy paper outlines how much the "excess" public servants are costing Nova Scotians. There are 101 excess employees per 1,000 population, 18 higher than the national average, equating to 17,437 employees whose compensation totaled \$1.027-Billion. The projected provincial budget deficit for 2015-2016 was \$308-Million.

If provincial and municipal governments, current or previous, had worked hard to reduce 33% of the excess public servants there would not have been a deficit. Equally understandable if the province and municipalities established a 10 year program to bring the public service in line with the national average they would save taxpayers \$-Millions per year.

Atlantic Canada could become one of the most prosperous regions in Canada, if the four governments embarked on a program to align the public sector to national average. In 2015, compensation for Atlantic Canada's 31,686 excess public servants totaled \$2.072-Billion, while the region's provincial deficits totaled \$1.699-Billion.

In 2015 the wage gap between public and private sector compensation was \$22,100 per year. Compensation for 17,437 excess employees above the private sector compensation level of \$46,500 totals \$385.357-Million per year. If, over time, the gap could be cut in half, it would save \$192.7-Million per year, without reducing staffing levels.

A 10-year program on two fronts - align employment levels through attrition, wage restraint, and other frugal management; plus reduce the gap between public and private sector compensation would save millions of dollars in each category.

Nova Scotia will have municipal elections in 2020 and a provincial in 2021. Deputy Ministers and municipal CAO's need to be planning now.

How many elected or want-to-be elected individuals will embrace reducing the cost of the public service to bring it more in line with national averages?

Maurice

Letters to the editor

This is an open forum for your opinions and comments.

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In the Moment

By Shawn MacPhee

With the end of summer upon us and school starting, I couldn't help but think of the cycle of growth and change that runs through all things. For the entirety of my children's lives, and even back as far as my own childhood, it has always been the same cycle. You go to school, have your holidays, summer break, repeat. Somewhere amongst this cycle, you (and/or your children) grow, learn, and change. As the cycle continues, it only gets faster and faster.

As I watch my children explore this cycle themselves, it is amazing to me. Almost as if in no time at all, they are getting taller, smarter, faster. To see these changes in my own children at this speed literally takes my breath away and scares me at the same time. Keeping in mind I am a single father; these changes are happening faster in my

eyes than most would see as my time with them is limited to begin with.

I find all this so breathtaking in one way as to be lucky enough to watch them grow up. With every day that passes, every school year that goes by, I am privileged to be a father. With that privilege, I get to watch these little people become something so much more than they were when I first saw them come into this world. I get to see these children grow and reflect parts of myself, parts of my former partner, and aspects of their own personality that I can only assume is completely their own and not of anything I can figure out.

At the same time, I am scared. As I am watching my children grow and change in this way, I can't believe how fast time is going. It was only yesterday that I remember holding them as little babies in my arms, hearing their cries, and staying up half the night to try and get them

back to sleep. Now, suddenly it feels like, I am watching them enter another year of school, holding intelligent conversations, and making jokes. Before I know it, they will be grown and off into lives fully of their own.

The only true thing to be taken away from all of this is to understand how precious time is. It will bring so many things your way, but as it passes, it will pass faster and faster with every year. So even though we can't control how fast time will pass, just be present in all the moments that you get to be a part of and realize how special they are.

Coming from a single father who doesn't see his children every day, and isn't able to be there for every moment that I would like to be, really make sure you take in the moments you get to be a part of while you are in them.

Shawn MacPhee welcomes your comments and can be reached at: shawn.i.macphee@gmail.com

Carbon Tax or Incentives - Which is Better?

By Bruce McCulloch

Although Canada produces only a small proportion of the world's carbon emissions in total, on a per capita basis, we are among the most prolific users of energy in the world. Canada has begun to show leadership on the world stage and in so doing has fostered domestic energy efficiency expertise that is now being exported to the rest of the world.

Fortunately, all political parties recognize the importance of tackling the climate crisis.

However, a recent discussion with a carbon tax opponent highlighted fuzzy thinking on how best to use public policy to influence citizens. The Conservative platform insists that incentives alone, for such things as electric cars and other energy saving initiatives, are the best tools to cut greenhouse gases. They plan to cut the carbon tax if elected. The Green Party, Liberals and NDP support a carbon tax.

It should be noted that the carbon tax vs. incentives argument is a moot issue in Nova Scotia as we have no carbon tax. We

have a cap and trade system. It does merit discussion, however, as the carbon tax is a federal issue and will certainly be discussed in the coming election campaign.

A carbon tax has been well documented as the most efficient way to influence consumer and market behaviour. For instance, drivers in Europe have adopted the practice of turning off their engines at stop lights because gasoline is so much more expensive there. Further, consumers decide what sized vehicle and home they can afford based in part upon fuel efficiency.

Higher energy bills overcome the inertia to change. In considering what needs to be done in their homes and cars, higher costs mean that people put a higher priority on energy saving initiatives. In BC, the carbon tax is a proven system that has worked well for over a decade. The economy is strong in that province, and the carbon tax has broad support even in many low-income rural areas. In cases where low-income people need help dealing with a carbon tax,

targeted programs can be implemented.

Incentives are good, but the money to support incentives needs to come from somewhere, in order to maintain fiscal balance. It therefore makes sense that we should tax the things we do not want (pollution) and use that money to incent the things we do want (clean air initiatives).

So, which is better - carbon tax or incentives? In fact, both are needed, as are many other actions such as appropriate regulations. As an example of appropriate regulations, the Nova Scotia government regulated Nova Scotia Power to have a 40% percent of the power produced from renewable sources by 2020. As a second example, developers have been regulated to conform to increasingly strict building codes, and now should be regulated so that all new buildings conform to the Zero Carbon Building Standard of the Canadian Green Building Council.

As carbon taxes increase the cost of products, buying habits change and consumption is reduced. As

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consumption of non-renewable energy declines, energy use decreases and the carbon tax is also reduced. And this is the fundamental reason why a carbon tax is so effective. Quite simply, energy savings are good for businesses, citizens, the economy and the planet as a whole. And this is the ultimate objective.

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