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2014

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CONTENTS

GRANT BISHOP	3
Missing from the mayoral debates: Toronto's fiscal cliff	
LOUIS-FRANÇOIS BRODEUR	4
Universities need to pay more taxes	
LINDA HATHOUT	5
The future of our cities	
VÉRONIQUE HERRY-SAINT-ONGE	6
More money, fewer problems?	
JOVANA KALUDJEROVIC	7
Academic and private partnerships lay the foundation for Canada's global competitiveness	
JESSE KANCIR	8
MATTHEW KINGTON	9
Canadian cities need new, diverse sources of revenue	
MORVAN LE BORGNE	10
Élections fédérales 2015 : les grandes villes canadiennes encore perdantes?	
EMILIE NICOLAS	11
SARAH ROBINSON	12
It's time to upgrade First Nations content in public schools	
RANN SHARMA	13
Building future entrepreneurs for a changing Canadian economy	
RAVEN SMITH	14
Entrepreneurship & the urban aboriginal renaissance	
PANKAJ SOOD	15
Toronto - A globally competitive city?	
JENNIFER ZWICKER	16
You are where you live	

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Missing from the mayoral debates: Toronto's fiscal cliff

GRANT BISHOP

There are less than three weeks before Toronto's municipal elections. Amazingly, for all the attention on transit, there is little talk about the city's dire finances. But city politicians – especially would-be mayors – don't like to talk about Hogtown's fiscal crunch. It's much easier to punt the ball to the inevitable budget crisis next December/January.

Toronto will face a budgetary shortfall of \$450-million next year and \$325-million in 2016. Unable to run in the red, the city will have to fill the gap. But you won't find this whopping figure mentioned, let alone addressed, in the summary of Toronto Council's approved 2014 budget. Nor will you find it in the backgrounder touting the city's great new programs. This underscores the problem with budgeting in the Big Smoke: we're focused on filling holes year-to-year. We need a multi-year view to avoid the fiscal cliff.

Next year's challenge is significant. The \$450-million shortfall represents roughly 4 per cent of Toronto's spending. Even accounting for projected growth in the assessed value of Toronto's property tax base and assuming a 2 per cent increase in Toronto's residential property taxes, city staff forecast a budgetary shortfall of \$300-million.

On page 13 of Toronto's "2014 Operating Budget Corporate Report", you'll find the stern warning: "Based on these firm estimates the City will be challenged to find efficiencies and other cost savings or revenue changes to address the pressures." They also caution: "Annual inflationary tax rate increases are insufficient to cover inflationary expenditures (specifically compensation costs in certain City Programs)."

Admittedly, a significant part of the decline in Toronto's revenues over the next two years – a \$86-million decrease in 2015 and \$43-million in 2014 – results from the province's decision to eliminate the Provincial Toronto Pooling Compensation funding (a provincial measure to subsidize Toronto's disproportionate social housing expenditure burden relative to other Ontario municipalities). Nonetheless, the province had phased in the elimination over three years. Indeed, virtually

all of the looming expenditure challenges are clearly visible on the horizon for Toronto's City Council.

This is a failure of transparency and courage. The numbers aren't unpredictable; they're just uncomfortable. And, for our municipal politicians, it is easier to procrastinate on the hard choices, rather than have an adult conversation today.

In contrast to Toronto, cities like Calgary and Vancouver have already committed to multi-year budgeting processes to enforce transparency and fiscal discipline. Calgary develops budgets on a four-year cycle (conveniently matching the term for elected councilors). The aims are to ensure that Calgary's long-term goals are linked to short-term spending decisions and to provide ongoing scrutiny for the quality and sustainability of services. Vancouver's annual budget also has an explicit three-year look-ahead that outlines how operating expenditures and revenues will be balanced over the horizon. Those cities' budget documents make the numbers – and the choices – clear for citizens. Knowing the numbers – and publicizing any deviation from the planned trajectory – makes it easier for citizens to hold their municipal governments to account.

The sustainability of city finances and services also affects a city's economy. In the global market in which Toronto competes for investment and talent, the municipal fiscal outlook is a critical consideration for businesses' decisions about where to establish operations.

The Toronto Board of Trade has long called for multi-year budgeting. The Board's pre-budget deputations to Toronto's City Council this past year emphasized "the importance of introducing multi-year budgets as a means of providing tax payers and businesses with longer-term certainty on the direction of City services, finances, and tax levels."

Ben Dachis and Bill Robson of the CD Howe Institute have also stressed the importance of multi-year budgeting for Canada's cities: "Looking only one year ahead exacerbates many problems, such as the neglect of

interactions between capital commitments – spending on, say, transit infrastructure – and related future operating commitments." As they contend, "multi-year budgeting can guard against one-time fixes that ignore long-term consequences."

Given the perennial fiscal handwringing to which Torontonians have become accustomed, it's obvious that we're guilty of that short-term thinking. It is lamentable that none of the leading mayoral candidates have stepped forward to address this gap. Multi-year budgeting is the obvious antidote to our annual crisis, and Toronto's mayoral contestants should pledge to swallow that medicine.

GRANT BISHOP will serve as a clerk at the Federal Court of Appeal in 2014/2015, having articulated at a business law firm in Toronto where he focused on competition law. With degrees in geological engineering, economics and law, he previously held research roles at the Bank of Canada, World Bank and Toronto-Dominion Bank.

Universities need to pay more taxes

LOUIS-FRANÇOIS BRODEUR

More taxes, not less, could benefit Canadian universities. Most Canadian universities don't pay municipal taxes. They should. This is the only way to develop a meaningful relation between municipal governments and universities, as two profoundly dependent institutions.

What would Montreal be without its 150 000 post-secondary students? How attractive would Toronto be for investors without its three flagship universities and many other institutions of higher learning? Why is there almost no relationship between Greater Vancouver universities and the municipalities where eight of the province's 11 universities are located? And in the most general sense, what would Canadian cities be like without their 250 000 international students who bring an important cultural contribution to cities?

Canada's big cities need their universities and universities need their cities. But neither side seems to realize it.

Constitutional arrangements are at the root of the problem: municipalities and higher education fall under provincial jurisdiction. And provincial governments across Canada have exempted institutions of higher education from municipal taxes in order to control their transfer to municipalities. Without this exemption,

municipalities could levy taxes on provincially-dependent institutions, opening a back door in for them to extract money from provinces via municipal taxes on universities and colleges.

Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of this obsolete arrangement is the almost complete absence of relations between universities and cities, and this is a problem – for them and for Canada. Important opportunities for Canada, for cities and for universities are being missed. By working together, universities could become ambassadors for cities, serving local communities better and cities could contribute to the attractiveness of universities.

Change is required because things have changed. While still largely provincially-financed institutions, universities have come to diversify their sources of revenues, first with federal government's support of research, then

with the increased weight of the fees levied on students and today with the emerging importance of private donations. Also, universities now look toward international stage for partners and now compete with institutions from abroad. The scope of action of universities is much broader than it used to be, reaching beyond provinces.

At the same time, cities are being called upon to play a greater role than ever in Canadian society. This new municipal movement finds expression in a new dynamism that can be seen in the distribution of local services, urbanism and grassroots political involvement in local affairs. Calgary's Naheed Nenshi and Quebec's Régis Labeaume, for example, are redefining what it means to be a mayor in Canada. New projects are burgeoning all over Canada: parklets in Vancouver, revitalization of public housing in Toronto, community-managed green spaces in Montreal. New practices are also taking form from participatory budgeting to the greening of alleys. But universities aren't benefiting from this newly found dynamism.

The field of higher education in Canada and the role of municipalities have changed dramatically. We can no longer think of cities and universities independently. Universities and cities will grow stronger by developing their mutual relations. Both can gain from stronger collaboration. And this can be expressed in a new fiscal relationship.

By paying municipal taxes, universities will become important stakeholders of municipal governments and their voices will be heard. Areas of collaboration appear evident. For a start, cities and universities can collaborate to adapt public libraries to the scholarly community and universities can make their rich collections available to the public. That would be for the benefit of all. A second area of potential collaboration is sports. University pools, soccer and football fields, arenas and other athletic facilities could benefit the whole community. Conversely, cities could chip in on these costly infrastructures. Universities often include important green spaces. These too could benefit to the whole

community. And then there is public transportation. A universal access to public transport for students, professors and employees could provide the critical mass of users to build an efficient service attractive to all city residents. Universities night classes could be added to the basket of services municipalities offer to their residents. All these can be improved through stronger links between municipal and university administrations.

The equation is simple – a vibrant academic community will contribute to the vitality and international reputation of the city; a thriving university will attract professors and students from around the world, those will in turn become ambassadors for the city, and also potential residents and contributors to the city's economic, cultural and social life. And universities need successful cities as a crucial ingredient in attracting leading professors, top researchers and international students.

It is time to think about how to build the relationship between cities and universities. One first step is for universities to pay their taxes and get the voice they deserve in the cities that are their home.

LOUIS-FRANÇOIS BRODEUR is a doctoral candidate in administration at HEC Montreal where he explores professors' academic freedom. Currently on the board of governors of Fonds de recherche du Québec—Société et Culture (FRQSC), he has previously served as president of Force Jeunesse.

The future of our cities

LINDA HATHOUT

As I am leaving my downtown Winnipeg office at 6 p.m. on a chilly winter evening, I find an Aboriginal man wearing several overcoats lying face-to-the-ground in the doorway. On closer examination, I find—thank goodness—that he is alive. A security guard calls for police to find him a warm place to sleep. I wish this were an isolated incident. In my city, it is not.

Winnipeg is full of tragic stories—stories that fill me with sorrow, then anger, then determination. They are stories of trauma experienced by the Aboriginal community—part of my community:

Tina Fontaine, 15, murdered and left in the river. She fled her reserve after her father was killed and her mother had run away to the city. She fled to us. We failed her.

Brian Sinclair, 45, homeless, a wheelchair-bound amputee. He waited for care in the emergency unit of the city's main hospital for 34 hours. Nobody noticed. He died waiting. Brian came to us for help. We ignored him. We left him to die, alone, in the one place sworn to help everyone who comes without question.

Phoenix Sinclair, 5, murdered. Nobody noticed she went missing for nine months.

These are not exceptions, but rather the result of systemic inequalities stemming from 150 years of abuse and isolation. While Manitoba boasted one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country in 2006 at 4.2%, three times as many Aboriginal people (15.4%) were out of work. The average income for non-Aboriginals in 2005 was almost double that of an Aboriginal Manitoban. Seven out of 10 incarcerations are Aboriginal, despite only representing one out of 10 Manitobans. In 2001, Aboriginal adults in Manitoba were 4.2 times more likely to have diabetes. The rate of diabetes-related amputation is 16 times higher if you are Aboriginal. Manitoba Aboriginals are also 10.7 times more likely to get HIV. In Canada, 75% of Aboriginal girls under the age of 18 have experienced sexual abuse. Aboriginal women are seven times more likely to be killed, according to the native Women's Association of Canada.

But is there no ray of hope? We have seen growth in Aboriginal cultural pride, and an

increase in the number of aboriginals seeking post-secondary education. We elected a Metis mayor and Minister of Canadian Heritage. Manitoba provincial educational policy integrates Aboriginal perspectives throughout the curriculum.

But it still is not enough. The current approach is not working. In predominately Aboriginal Point Douglas, the poorest neighbourhood in our city, the poorest in our country, the prospects for children born between 2000-20005 are worse than those born in the previous decade; infant mortality is actually increasing. The unemployment rates are not improving, and tragedies continue. So the “stand aside and wait for time to heal” approach isn't working.

The problems that result in these tragedies are of our own making. They are born of a history of bad federal policies. We need everyone to understand. We need to call upon our Aboriginal, municipal, provincial and federal leaders to do more, to lead boldly and to take action.

We need to talk about the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. We need more public dialogue, we need new ideas. We need to remind our communities that our cities will rise and fall over the next two decades based on the wellbeing of ALL our citizens. We need to see these tragedies as a threat to us all, not just to the Aboriginal community. We need more public engagement that help our Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to understand one-another's realities. Once we understand each other, we can envision a future that builds on the Aboriginal foundations of our country to make us strong and innovative.

We need to design great communities, where we can be more than our individual social groups. We, you and I, need to cultivate empathy that deals with these tragedies as a personal call to reflection and as a collective call to action, as we saw at the August 2014 vigil for both Fontaine and Faron Hall that was attended by 2,000 Winnipeggers.

It needs to start with a focus on Aboriginal youth—to make sure that they get access to the best education and support. We need more

teachers and before and after school programs, to provide a nurturing environment for children and families to develop. This is the foundation from which the next generation can grow strong.

The future of our city depends on how well we understand and articulate the strength of Aboriginal peoples' historic and contemporary culture in our common civic identity.

Let's hope that the 2015 brings stories of our communities striving to be better together, instead of another story of sorrow and anger. I am determined that the next stories be stories of hope, stories of redemption, stories of how our city came together to end this sadness and maybe rebuild the marriage.

LINDA HATHOUT holds a BSc. in industrial engineering and an MSc. in science, has worked on the railroad, in aerospace and at LEGO in Denmark, and was a reserve communications officer in the Canadian Armed Forces. She is passionate about improving Canadian healthcare and has spent the past 10 years helping to re-engineer healthcare services in Winnipeg.

More money, fewer problems?

VÉRONIQUE HERRY-SAINT-ONGE

Mayors in Canada are a hot topic these days. From the election of John Tory in Toronto and the re-election of Gregor Robertson in Vancouver, to the dynamism of Naheed Nenshi in Calgary, Don Iveson in Edmonton and Denis Coderre in Montreal, municipal politics has got people talking. With good reason. Canada is an increasingly urban nation, and its mayors are becoming more important players.

However, in our political system, mayors lack the authority and revenue to respond to the challenges of the 21st century. To meet the growing demands of cities, Canada needs to start looking at giving them more power, to treat them as city-states.

City-states give cities a special status. They come in all shapes and sizes. Some are sovereign like Singapore and Monaco, while others like Berlin have increased taxing and administrative powers. They are also known as charter cities. Michael David, Mort Grostern and Michael Lozeau argue that city-states “essentially give a devolution of powers required to create an environment that supports the city’s economic and cultural goals.”

And that’s what Canada needs. Our cities face growing populations, responsibilities and costs. There’s increasing pressure on infrastructure, and issues under other jurisdictions, such as immigration and health care, are becoming local. But cities don’t have the formal authority or a voice at the national table to deal with these. They have limited power to raise revenues through taxes, or to run a deficit.

Attempts to address this include the introduction of “City of Toronto Act” in 2009 and the current negotiation of a “Big City Charter” in Alberta. But these still fall short of giving cities all the power and money to meet their needs and demands. Unlike European and American cities which have access to many sources of revenue, Canadian cities mostly, if not completely, rely on property taxes and these charters haven’t met their taxation demands. If Canada wants its cities to be globally competitive it needs to give them tools to leverage sustainable, predictable revenue to address their growing responsibilities.

Denis Coderre and Québec City mayor Régis Labeaume have asked the province for more powers for their respective cities. Said Coderre: “I don’t understand why our destiny should be controlled by the government in Québec City or in Ottawa [...] As a true metropolis, Montreal should have the autonomy to decide where it should spend its money.”

That has been the theme on cities lately. Nenshi recently argued in Toronto that cities need “stable, predictable and long-term revenues.” Alan Broadbent, CEO of Avana and an advocate of giving cities province-like powers says “while elections enable citizens to choose their leaders, redistribution of powers to large urban regions would empower those mayors and councillors to give their cities much more control over their destinies.” Cities should be able to access a different range of taxes either through an income or sales tax or by re-arranging transfer payments to cities. Cities as city-states, would be invited to the table at the provincial and federal level in order to have a say in decisions by other order of government that directly impact them. This is necessary for Canada to thrive in the 21st century. As Jeffrey Simpson recently noted that “what happens in the big cities counts hugely for the entire country’s economic development, cultural accomplishments, social integration of immigrants, innovation and overall well-being. If cities don’t work, the country won’t work. It’s as simple as that.”

So we’re talking about it, but we still need to act on it. The political confines of our federalism system with its roots in the 19th century make this challenging. Can Canadian cities move towards increased autonomy and a new kind of federalism without a constitutional debate? Can this be achieved within the political system in Canada? Would the provinces want to give up their power and control over cities and would the federal government allow it?

What’s clear is that the status quo isn’t working. Canadian cities can’t be treated like teenagers anymore. They need to be recognized as adults who can make their own decisions.

VÉRONIQUE HERRY-SAINT-ONGE, a chase producer with TFO TV’s public affairs show, 360, holds a master’s degree in journalism. Her interest in politics and women’s issues, and her academic research on these topics, has won her major scholarships and awards. In 2013 she was selected as a Leader of Tomorrow at the St. Gallen Symposium in Switzerland.

Academic and private partnerships lay the foundation for Canada's global competitiveness

JOVANA KALUDJEROVIC

Young skilled workers drive innovation, foster growth and bring change. Human capital is more important than physical infrastructure in a city's global competitiveness.

To attract talent and retain it universities and colleges have been strategically integrated into the city. Yet, obsolete policies in Canada have been hindering collaborations that enable universities and cities to foster research and development, commercialize products, and help business start-ups. As a result, Canada has been suffering from chronically low labor productivity despite an educated work force. It ranks 13 out of 16 among developed countries, leading only Finland, Switzerland and Japan. To improve Canada's labor productivity, we need incentives to nurture partnerships between the academic and private sector in our cities.

Improving productivity is not about working longer or harder; it's about working smarter. It's about finding more effective ways to produce goods and services so that more can be produced with the same amount of time and effort. It's also about producing products and services that are worth more in the marketplace. To achieve this, Canada must encourage modern ways of teaching, invest in higher risk projects, build high-profile multi-disciplinary research institutes, and foster transition of innovations to market.

First, to increase labor productivity, Canada must reward academic programs and institutions that allow students to learn within the real-world context. In 2012, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development identified Canada as the world's second most educated country; 55% of young adults have a college or university degree. Yet, many of these graduates are unable to channel their knowledge into practical applications that enhance innovation and labor productivity. This is partially because learning no longer takes place primarily in the classroom. With over 69% of Canada's labor force involved in information-based service jobs (i.e. managerial, professional, technical, sales and office)

there is a need to modernize the curriculum and teach students about teamwork, business and entrepreneurship.

Second, to compete internationally Canada must increase funding for high-risk research projects. Over the past two decades, private and government-run research laboratories across Canada have become less innovative. As a result, there has been a high demand on academic scientists to bring expertise and research to the table. With increased demand and rapidly rising enrollment of students in post-secondary institutions, the academic research capacity has continued to grow dramatically, while federal research and development budget has remained fairly stable.

The investments in higher education R&D by the federal government—through the creation of the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Canada Research Chairs program – has increased from 0.44 to 0.71 percent between 1996 and 2009, but since then has settled to 0.66 percent. To support training of students and research projects, the allocation of federal funding has shifted towards more conservative research with very low number and amount of funding being allocated to high-risk projects.

Without risk, there is often no reward. So Canada's sliding global competitiveness is due in large part to its weak innovation performance. To produce value-added products and services for domestic and international markets policymakers need to reconsider the current funding objectives and ensure a stable environment of funding. Moreover, they need to provide incentives that reward collaboration between universities and private sectors in urban centers.

Third, to improve labor productivity Canada must invest in building high-profile multi-disciplinary research institutes. Academic institutions across Canada are facing increased pressure to position themselves between research and teaching. To stay afloat many universities are cutting research funding and tenured positions. A more effective strategy

to boost innovation is to create high-profile multi-disciplinary institutes like those being established in Toronto and Montreal – the Mars Institute and the McGill University Health Center—that break down traditional academic barriers by creating incentives for new areas of research, seeding new courses of study and driving innovation.

Finally, Canada must develop policies that bring innovation to market. The escalating pace of technology development calls for enhanced and novel technology transfer processes to capture these developments. In academic institutions, professors are responsible for identifying commercializable innovations. It is anticipated that about 50% of all commercializable inventions are disclosed putting a significant barrier to commercialization of inventions. To foster transition of innovative products to market there is a need to add successful entrepreneurs to university academic staff on research intense campuses nationwide.

Many academics fear that partnering with industry in cities poses a threat to creative thinking. However, change and partnership itself provide education that aids development of novel skills and serve as conduit for future recruitment of top talent. To boost labor productivity, Canada must incentivize modern modes of teaching, invest in higher risk projects, build high-profile multi-disciplinary research institutes, and foster transition of innovations to market.

JOVANA KALUDJEROVIC is an award-winning scholar, a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Fellow at the Harvard School of Dental Medicine, and the youngest, and only Canadian elected as the International Endocrine Scholar by the American and European Society of Endocrinology. She applies her expertise in nutrition and infant development to global health by working with NGOs, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Untitled

JESSE KANCIR

Supporters say that establishing a new medical school at York University is a way to develop a medical innovation hub in north-west Toronto and that more physicians will help address Canada's growing problem of healthcare accessibility. However, this proposal would exacerbate both an emerging surplus and poor distribution of physicians in Ontario and Canada. We should focus instead on increasing or decreasing medical training spots based on the health needs of the population.

Historically, Canadians' relatively low-health accessibility has been explained by physicians choosing more lucrative specialties over general practice. Also, doctors are concentrated disproportionately in Canada's largest cities; while 18% of Canadians live in rural areas, only 8% of physicians do. This regional and practice mal-distribution contributed to Canada's dead-last ranking for timeliness of care in a 2014 Commonwealth Fund report.

Pressures will mount for changes in training spots as Canada becomes increasingly urbanized. One response to these twin forces of mal-distribution and urbanization is to increase the number of medical trainees in our medical schools or to create new schools entirely. Opening the tap, however, is one of those solutions that Mencken describes as being 'clear, simple, and wrong.'

Canada's problem with physician human resources is not primarily about numbers. In fact, we have a problem with the distribution of physicians across the country and between specialties. This has led to the dual realities of significant problems with access to primary care while, simultaneously, there exists under- or unemployment for certain medical specialties. The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada reported in 2013 that approximately one in six newly-graduated specialists were unemployed or underemployed. The prospects are particularly dismal for orthopaedic surgeons, of whom less than half have full-time work. In my own experience during clinical rotations as a medical student, I met residents who were pursuing

extended specialization to buy time.

The problem runs much deeper than mismatched supply today; fundamentally, there has been no pan-Canadian physician human resource planning. Medical training spots seem to be allocated on well-intentioned guesswork or political promises. Collectively, we need the federal, provincial, and territorial governments along with representatives from organized medicine to develop physician-training models that take into account both demand-and-supply in these labour markets and to adjust the numbers and locations of training spots across the country.

Such a proposal may be contentious. Would this result in the closing of a resident training program in Toronto, shifting these training spots to a centre of excellence established in Montreal? Would this mean reducing the numbers of specialists across the entire country? The questions are complex, involve contract negotiations between medical schools and the provinces, and require federal leadership.

Fortunately, the first steps have been taken through the establishment of the Physician Resource Planning Task Force. For over a year, this unique collaboration between levels of government and national medical organizations has been building a pan-Canadian supply-and-demand model for physician human resources that will encourage smart, informed decisions on training spots. For this we need commitment and political will. This may even test intergovernmental relations in healthcare federalism. And yet success is the only option in a country significantly behind other developed countries in terms of access and where training a medical graduate is approaching an estimated \$1,000,000.

Patients deserve better than short-sighted proposals designed to win votes. Thoughtful, collaborative planning based on the current and projected health needs of the Canadian population is the only way to ensure we will meet the health needs of Canadians both in rural and urban settings.

JESSE KANCIR is a resident physician at UBC in Public Health and Preventive Medicine and a 2014/2015 Chevening Scholar at the University of Cambridge where he is an MPhil candidate in Public Policy. He has served as the President of the Canadian Federation of Medical Students and as board director of the Canadian Medical Association.

Canadian cities need new, diverse sources of revenue

MATTHEW KINGTON

The current transit referendum in Metro Vancouver is sparking fierce public debate. While champions of the “Yes” campaign sell a transit utopia created by a 0.5% increase in the Provincial Sales Tax, champions of the “No” campaign point to the cringe-inducing waste in certain government agencies responsible for the administration of the region’s transit.

The problem with the arguments on both sides is that they ignore the real question in this referendum: as cities in Canada assume more and more responsibility for investment in infrastructure, Canadians need to address how to diversify municipal revenue sources.

Broadening the transit referendum discussion to cover municipal revenue sources seems unattractive to all parties. The Yes side would worry about diluting its core message of the specific benefits provided to Vancouverites. The No side would oppose a discussion of diversifying tax revenues for municipalities because all it wants to discuss regarding taxes is how to reduce them. The only thing that Vancouverites may find less “sexy” than a heated debate over transit infrastructure investment is a debate on municipal revenue sources.

That’s too bad. The problem is that it is the very discussion of municipal revenue sources – or the lack of them – which has resulted in this current transit referendum before Metro Vancouverites.

Over the last 60 years, the municipal share of capital investment in infrastructure has increased from approximately 27% to 48% of the national total. This increase is the result of federal and provincial government downloading financial responsibility for infrastructure, and a massive increase in the size and complexity of municipal infrastructure requirements. While the municipal share of financial responsibility for infrastructure has increased, the access of cities to more sources of revenue has not. This has created an estimated \$100 billion deficit in infrastructure in Canada.

Property taxes and user fees comprise approximately 50%–80% of municipal govern-

ment revenue in Canada (varying by province). While user fees are more flexible in dealing with the rising cost of materials and services associated with building and maintaining infrastructure, property taxes are not. As the cost of goods, materials and services associated with developing and maintaining infrastructure increases with inflation, revenue coming from property taxes will be unable to address the growing infrastructure deficit.

In comparing Vancouver and other big Canadian cities to some of the world’s major cities, one sees a large disparity in revenue sources. New York, Tokyo, Paris and Berlin each have over 10 kinds of revenue sources, including sales taxes, personal and corporate income taxes, sin taxes and motor vehicle charges. This diversity in revenue sources – particularly those tied to inflation – allows these cities greater flexibility.

Though it is important to note the diversity of revenue available to large cities around the world, it is also important to realize that these sources arise from fundamentally different governmental arrangements. Giving Canadian municipal governments the ability to raise new, more diverse revenue sources independently would require changes to the status of municipal governments under the Canadian constitution, a debate unlikely to happen.

Instead of re-opening the Constitution, let us have a discussion on collaborative approaches between the provinces and their cities, as well as the need to match the downloading of federal and provincial expenses with the downloading of associated revenues.

The collaboration between Metro Vancouver and British Columbia in organizing this transit referendum has received limited discussion, probably because it is about raising taxes. Regardless of the outcome of this referendum – which remains uncertain as the voting begins this week (March 16), Vancouverites, and all Canadians, should consider this referendum as the beginning of a long overdue discussion.

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Élections fédérales 2015 : les grandes villes canadiennes encore perdantes?

MORVAN LE BORGNE

À quelques mois des élections fédérales, les quatre métropoles canadiennes Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto et Montréal trouveront-elles enfin leur champion pour reconnaître leur statut particulier et leur rôle prépondérant dans la réussite du pays ? En mars 2014, les maires Coderre et Labaume rendaient public un document intitulé «*Un nouveau pacte pour les grandes villes du Québec*» dans lequel ils réclament un statut particulier, de nouveaux pouvoirs et de nouvelles sources de revenus. Cette sortie fait écho à des demandes similaires partout au pays, de Vancouver à Calgary, en passant par Edmonton et Québec. À l'automne 2014, le maire de Calgary, Nahid Nenshee, invité vedette d'une conférence de Canada 2020, n'a cessé de marteler que si sa ville est plus peuplée et crée plus de richesse que certaines provinces canadiennes, il n'a pas plus de pouvoir qu'un maire d'une communauté de 100 habitants.

Le poids économique, environnemental et social des quatre régions métropolitaines du Canada est indéniable. 51% de la population canadienne vit dans ces quatre grands centres. Montréal et Vancouver génèrent à elles seules, plus de 50 % du P.I.B. de leur province. Ce poids grandissant est une tendance forte à l'échelle mondiale. Les défis et enjeux des métropoles («*global cities*») sont désormais ceux des pays : santé, sécurité, flux migratoires, pauvreté, pollution, transport et infrastructures. Les maires des métropoles canadiennes demandent donc plus de pouvoir et plus d'argent pour faire face à ces défis. Ils se heurtent pourtant depuis des décennies à plusieurs freins.

Tout d'abord un frein constitutionnel. En matière municipale, la portée des compétences provinciales est quasi sans limite. Par exemple, pour emprunter, la plupart des villes doivent obtenir l'approbation d'une commission nommée par la province. Par ailleurs, avec la nature régressive et restrictive de l'impôt foncier, les recettes des municipalités ne suivent pas obligatoirement la croissance économique ou l'inflation comme le permet l'impôt sur le revenu ou la taxe de vente.

Une tentative pour palier à ce vide a eu lieu il y a quelques années, en Ontario. Le gouvernement provincial a officialisé, en 2007, le statut particulier de sa métropole avec le *City of Toronto Act*. Un statut qui lui accorde, par exemple, des pouvoirs supplémentaires pour passer des règlements et établir de nouvelles sources de revenus. Mais plusieurs observateurs ontariens s'accordent pour dire que la ville de Toronto ne sait pas encore se servir de ces pouvoirs particuliers. Troublant paradoxe... Au Québec, ces derniers mois, la situation de Montréal semble vouloir évoluer vers le mieux. Le gouvernement Couillard s'est d'ailleurs fait élire en promettant une reconnaissance réelle du statut de métropole de Montréal et l'octroi de pouvoirs particuliers. Souhaitons que les négociations en cours avec le ministre Moreau soient un véritable pas en avant et un exemple pour tout le pays.

Mais le problème des villes ne serait pas uniquement constitutionnel. Il s'agirait en fait d'un problème d'attitude. De la part d'Ottawa, notamment. C'est ce qu'affirmait, en octobre 2014, Anne Golden (ancienne PDG du *Conference Board of Canada* et spécialiste des politiques publiques municipales), invitée avec les maires de Calgary et Vancouver à commenter le rôle des grandes villes canadiennes dans la réussite du pays.

Il faut dire que le désintérêt d'Ottawa pour ses métropoles prend racine dans la réalité électorale du pays. Hormis quelques rares exceptions, l'allégeance politique des grandes villes est monolithique et stable. Bref, les métropoles ne font pas ou ne défont pas les gouvernements «supérieurs». Les efforts de séduction des partis politiques fédéraux se font donc ailleurs, en région.

Plusieurs experts du pays s'entendent pour dire que la situation est complexe, et que les solutions sont peu évidentes. La réouverture de la Constitution, par exemple, a peu de chance de se concrétiser compte tenu des nombreux autres enjeux et priorités qui se rattachent à cet exercice périlleux (statut du Québec, réforme du sénat, etc.). Par ailleurs, le gouvernement fédéral est d'ordinaire peu

enclin à intervenir dans les affaires municipales par peur de faire de l'ingérence dans les champs de compétences provinciaux.

Pourtant des solutions devront être trouvées, car l'avenir du pays se jouera notamment dans ces quatre métropoles. Les enjeux auxquels elles font face ont des incidences sur le Canada tout entier en matière de performance économique, de cohésion sociale et d'impact environnemental. Mais les métropoles devront arrêter de fonder leurs seuls espoirs sur le bon vouloir des provinces et du fédéral. Elles devront sans doute sortir d'un rôle de quémandeur pour assumer, cette fois, un vrai leadership. Au risque de déplaire, notamment aux provinces. Elles devront surtout arrêter de se voir en concurrentes et collaborer activement pour parler d'une seule voix.

La prochaine campagne électorale fédérale nous dira si les grandes villes du pays auront enfin trouvé un champion à Ottawa. Un champion capable de comprendre leur réalité de plus en plus complexe. Un champion capable de comprendre que le Canada a besoin de ses grandes villes pour faire compétition dans un monde global. Un champion capable de réaliser que le pays a changé. Que de rurale il y a 150 ans, la nation est désormais urbaine. Cela commande un changement de vision et de perspective, aux plus hauts niveaux.

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Untitled

EMILIE NICOLAS

This week, Canada's big city mayors are gathering to champion an urban agenda. Although their demands vary, all are based on the need to recognize the key role big cities play in the country. And they are right about that. The six largest metropolitan areas (Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal, Calgary, Edmonton, and Ottawa) are home to nearly 50 per cent of the country's population and generate close to half its GDP. It is time big cities were recognized as players in Canadian federalism.

The world is urbanizing. This century belongs not to America or China but to the metropolis. According to the McKinsey Global Institute, "cities – not states – are the islands of governance on which the future world order will be built". We, in Canada, need to catch up to this reality.

Because we are unlikely to reopen the constitution in this country, we must find solutions despite the legal framework that defines municipal governments as creatures of the provinces with no constitutional autonomy. Practical, realistic solutions should aim instead to foster a more collaborative federalism.

Bringing about a culture shift in municipal governance and intergovernmental relations is possible. But city governments need to coalesce, speak with one voice, and show the provinces and the federal government the way forward.

This idea is not entirely new. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) does convene a Big City Mayors' Caucus (BCMC) but it represents the interests of 22 Canadian cities, ranging from Windsor (population 216,000) to Toronto (population 2.5 million). As a result, the interests of the members of the BCMC – like those of the FCM more broadly – can vary greatly. In other words, important networks do advance the agenda of Canadian cities, but none addresses the challenges of Canada's largest cities.

Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montréal do not encompass all urban Canada, but they do largely define it. Together, these four cities have more than enough weight to push an urban agenda. While the larger metropolitan areas of these centres are important at all institutional levels, their mayors act as *de facto* spokespeople for their metropolitan regions.

Finally, adding other important cities – for example Edmonton, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Halifax, and Québec City – to such a collective could strengthen its voice without jeopardizing its characterization as a "big cities" group.

To become a persuasive advocate for an urban agenda, a collective of Canada's biggest cities should seek consensus and identify the major challenges, create mutual understanding on issues, and develop common public policy objectives to meet those challenges.

This is how it would work. Mayors meet at least on an annual basis. They do research, publish studies, and communicate clearly why the challenges of Canada's big cities are challenges for all Canadians, and why the status quo is not sustainable.

Their collective is also connected deeper than the mere political strata. With a tri-sectoral approach to collaboration and integration – politics and public service, business, and civil society – intermunicipal initiatives could be sustained notwithstanding municipal elections.

Such a collective would big cities face an increasing number of challenges that fall within and outside of their jurisdiction such as aging infrastructure, the integration of new Canadians, housing, emergency preparedness, and climate change readiness.

So far, cities have often asked to be invited to the 'table'. Eventually, a Big Cities Collective would be setting a new 'table' to discuss common goals and present these to the provincial and federal governments when required. In setting a new table where decisions are sought and made, cities will be able to influence the agenda. The message to other governments will be to engage for fear of missing out.

As the voice of Canada's big cities collective resonates across the country, its influence will grow. A central collective will help Canada's big cities advance an urban agenda.

It will be no small feat for cities to achieve this unity. It could take years, but once the collective forms, the political weight of its unified voice will grow.

The time to begin is now. With a federal election approaching, big cities should seize the occasion, set a new agenda, and finally, be heard.

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It's time to upgrade First Nations content in public schools

SARAH ROBINSON

Last year, controversy over the proposed First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act seized the country. It led to the resignation of Shawn Atleo, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations. During this tumultuous time, it was abundantly clear that First Nations peoples care deeply about our children's education.

The First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act, tabled by the federal government in April 2014, intends to improve K-12 education for First Nations students. But the legislation, which has been delayed since Atleo's resignation, has one inherent shortfall that needs to be acknowledged: it only applies to schools on reserves, because reserve lands are federal jurisdiction. It cannot encourage educational improvements for the some 60% of First Nations peoples, including students, living in urban areas where education is a provincial matter.

Like their peers, most First Nations students in Canada's cities attend public schools. Unfortunately, much Aboriginal content in provincial curriculum is unsatisfactory, inadequate and portrays history from a non-Aboriginal perspective. In 2000-2001, the Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies conducted a national student awareness survey in which 80% of participants said they were dissatisfied or strongly dissatisfied with existing Aboriginal content in public school curriculum. *Two-thirds said they might never have discussed contemporary issues related to Aboriginal peoples while in elementary or secondary school classrooms.* For both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, these figures are unacceptable. (In a recent CBC 8th Fire episode, reporter Connie Walker spoke to citizens on the street to learn what average Canadians know about Aboriginal peoples. The results were dismal.)

For the thousands of First Nations students going to schools in towns or cities, being taught inadequate or incorrect information about us and our cultures is alienating. It is even more appalling when teachers themselves propagate racism, such as Winnipeg teacher Brad Badiuk who famously posted derogatory comments on social media against First Nations peoples.

First Nations leaders, federal and provincial governments have a responsibility to Canadians to ensure that our shared history is taught accurately and thoroughly to future generations. All have a responsibility to First Nations students, regardless of where their school is located, to ensure that their education is top quality. The First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act is not enough.

We need a revolution in public school curriculum.

In Canada, education is the responsibility of provincial governments. However, municipalities, and teachers living within them, have tools at their disposal to help tackle the curriculum gap now. With the majority of First Nations peoples living in urban areas, it is time for cities to act.

Urban schools face certain challenges incorporating strong Aboriginal content. To start, curriculum must work within provincial parameters. Next, there may be multiple Aboriginal cultures in or near a municipality, making it difficult to define local content. Lastly, teachers are often products themselves of urban public school systems. They may have a weak understanding of Aboriginal issues and feel uncomfortable teaching them in their own classes.

Despite these challenges, greater understanding of First Nations issues can be realized at the municipal level with political will. First, to set broad tone, cities can pursue stronger relationships with local First Nations and Aboriginal groups. A recent and commendable step forward is the City of Vancouver's formal acknowledgement that it sits on unceded (not formally surrendered) First Nations' land.

Second, there is flexibility for teachers to develop local courses or content that complement provincial programs of study and prescribed learning outcomes. Urban school boards can create opportunities for teachers to come together to develop local Aboriginal content relevant to their municipality. This will support more consistent local curriculum in classrooms across the city and will allow teachers to learn from one another.

Third, it is essential that school boards create opportunities for local First Nations

and Aboriginal groups to work with teachers to develop this curriculum, perhaps through collaborative forums.

Fourth, school boards or groups of teachers can organize cultural awareness training to help them learn more about Aboriginal cultures.

Beyond reserves, urban Canadians have an opportunity to build bridges with First Nations peoples through education. Social change begins with knowledge, understanding, awareness and empathy. We can reimagine the relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations peoples in this country and turn the page on our past. The First Nations Control of First Nations Education Act may find a path forward sometime in the future, but *now* is the time to create meaningful change for thousands of First Nations students in urban areas. Cities must lead the way.

SARAH ROBINSON, a member of the Saulneau and Fort Nelson First Nations in B.C., holds a BA in First Nations Studies and has worked for many years with First Nations, federal and provincial governments. She is director of operations at the Toquaht Nation on Vancouver Island, and is active in environmental groups such as Clayoquot Biosphere Trust and the Central Westcoast Forest Society.

Building future entrepreneurs for a changing Canadian economy

RANN SHARMA

In 2013, one in 20 young Canadians (some 225,000) was neither in school nor in the labour market. The most vulnerable? High school drop-outs, Aboriginal and visible minority youth, students lacking professional experience and those who can only secure part-time and contract work. For those with an education, many new graduates are unable to apply their high-cost education in a saturated employment market. In Toronto, Canada's financial capital, youth unemployment is close to 20 percent. Yet the response from one of Canada's largest employers of young people, the City of Toronto, seems limited to creating summer jobs in parks and housing maintenance.

But can these types of jobs truly help students develop the skills needed to excel in a competitive job market?

The federal government has not increased funding in youth employment since 2007. Even so, the answer seems to be to add more employment programs. The Broadbent Institute, a left-leaning think tank, estimates that programs such as Youth Job Guarantee with a \$1 billion investment would be key to developing

Canada's future labour force and addressing youth unemployment rates. It argues that a \$670 million annual investment derived from tapping into the savings of

Canada's largest employers, along with an equal amount matched by the federal government, should do the trick.

We must ask whether we really need more job training programs. What if we could take a billion dollar investment and develop our young people as entrepreneurs?

Experts and economists are warning that technology first wiped out blue collar jobs, and then outsourcing affected white collar jobs and now newer technology is targeting 'knowledge work'. Management and office roles are being eliminated due to automation and technology surpasses the accuracy and speed produced by humans.

Students don't just need jobs. They need to develop entrepreneurial skills such as sales, marketing, fundraising and networking, to potentially create their own opportunities. Current employment training programs and short-term placements are not a sustainable long term solution to developing full human

potential. While plans for job creation and employment programs for young people remain a focus in municipalities, this approach will not lead Canada to a competitive global economy. If our cities are to flourish, we need immediate investments in creating future entrepreneurs.

Studies show that 80 per cent of new jobs come from companies five years old or less. As the impact of the 2008 recession lingers, with newer technologies that require less human capital and outsourcing that reduces the costs of labour, cities need to foster environments for entrepreneurial development. By utilizing and promoting innovation hubs and programs such as Toronto's MaRS and Venture for Canada, young people can gain value of the importance of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurialism.

MaRS's Studio Y is one such program. Now embarking on building its second cohort of youth and training them for social entrepreneurship, the program ensures that students learn core business lessons. Venture for Canada is another innovative program that places new graduates in growing start-ups to gain hands-on business skills. These types of programs give young people the chance to learn and understand the critical thinking that goes toward recognizing gaps and problems, asking the right questions and then sussing out the opportunity or solution through entrepreneurial leadership. While not everyone will become an

entrepreneur, it's a mind- and horizon-broadening opportunity for young Canadians that will serve them and our nation for the better.

By nurturing young entrepreneurs and exposing young people to business start-up cultures early on, we can build stronger cities. Young people are best poised to adapt to the challenges of underemployment and a changing economy in the new Canadian urban landscape. Here lies an opportunity to exploit the potential for innovation in our cities. Imagine the benefits to Canada if among those 225,000 unemployed young people we can find Canada's next entrepreneurs.

Canada must develop its young people into entrepreneurs by encouraging them to pursue goals beyond employment alone. Ensuring Canadian youth have meaningful opportunities is essential to the development of our cities.

RANN SHARMA is the global human resources director for Free The Children. She is a member of the Women's Executive Network Wisdom II Mentorship Program and sits on the University of Toronto's Career Centre Advisory Board. She holds degrees from Lancaster and Trent universities.

Entrepreneurship & the urban aboriginal renaissance

RAVEN SMITH

In 2011, Statistics Canada found aboriginal peoples the fastest growing segment of the population. More than half live in urban areas and almost half are under 25. This reflects a population that is young, growing, and increasingly urban. The 2010 Urban Aboriginal People's Study conducted by the Environics Institute found that "within these cities, urban aboriginal peoples are seeking to become a significant and visible part of the urban landscape."

This points to a cultural renaissance in our cities. "One of the most optimistic findings... is the strong sense of cultural vitality among urban aboriginal peoples in Canadian cities," stated the report.

For many urban aboriginals, including myself, this desire to contribute to the rich fabric of our home cities and to re-connect to our traditional culture is at the root of the urban aboriginal renaissance. While much of the country's focus has been on the voices of Idle No More, there is also another side to this renaissance happening in the halls of businesses reflected in urban native entrepreneurship.

Take Lisa Charleyboy for example, who in 2013 launched *Urban Native Magazine*, an online lifestyle magazine "dedicated to providing the best in fashion, Arts & Culture, Entertainment, Lifestyle, and Business content from all sources across Turtle Island/North America." Charleyboy's magazine is focused on the lifestyle she evokes, of young, modern, yet culturally connected and urban. Not only is Charleyboy herself an example of how rising native entrepreneurs and business people are re-shaping their industries and cities, her magazine is an example of how urban aboriginal peoples are blending what they have learned in mainstream society and their new urban environments with a renewed focus on Native culture.

Or take Sean McCormick, founder and CEO of Winnipeg headquartered Manitoba Mukluks which was recently named Canada's fastest growing footwear company by PROFIT 500's list. McCormick says, "I dream of a day when we're not a business helping a community; but rather, a community helping ourselves... we will continue to build the dream of building a vibrant, global brand that Aboriginal people can feel proud of – and be part of."

Clint Davis, vice-president of aboriginal banking at TD Bank says that aboriginal small business is growing at a rate that is six times faster than in the non-aboriginal market and that aboriginal entrepreneurs tend to be about 10 years younger. And these urban aboriginal entrepreneurs have a desire to contribute to their communities.

Rachel Cote, a sociologist funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, has interviewed 80 city-dwelling aboriginal entrepreneurs since 2006 as part of her research and found that "many entrepreneurs saw the ability to support their communities – whether through reserve-based development projects, mentorship programs or scholarships – as a fundamental element of their approach to business."

What does this mean for Canadian cities? The Centre for the Study of Living Standards Report in 2009 says that if aboriginal Canadians were, by 2026, able to increase their level of education to the level of non-aboriginal Canadians in 2001, this would mean an additional \$179 billion in GDP. Fostering and supporting urban aboriginal entrepreneurship is an important step in achieving economic independence. It will also serve to enrich urban aboriginal communities and broader urban environments writ large.

This is exemplified by Skwachays Lodge in Vancouver, Canada's first aboriginal boutique hotel and a unique social enterprise that uses its profits from hotel guests to support indigenous artists who live in its artist residence. The hotel also runs an Urban Aboriginal Fair Trade Gallery on the main floor of the lodge showcasing the work of Native artists. These kinds of unique business models show how native entrepreneurs can serve to enrich their urban environments.

We need more Lisas and Seans. We need more social enterprises like Skwachays. We need more support and mentorship for Native youth so that they can find their voice in the work place. One of the things I love most about entrepreneurship is its ability to create unique combination of new solutions to age-old problems. As such, potentially a large part of the aboriginal renaissance will take place as

a result of connecting the young and growing urban aboriginal population to each other and to the networks that enable them to infuse businesses, through entrepreneurship, with the richest aspects of native culture.

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Toronto – A globally competitive city?

PANKAJ SOOD

Check any list of globally competitive cities and Toronto usually shows up within among the top ten. However, is that warranted? Is Toronto really in the same league as New York and London?

The answer depends on what makes a city globally competitive. Cities like New York and London have long been considered to be globally competitive. They play a key role in world affairs based on their socio-economic strengths. Their success can be attributed to geography, history, industry and commerce.

But the rise of globalization, supported by advances in transportation and communication technology, has accelerated transformation of other cities that are vying for their spot on the global stage. Cities like Toronto have an opportunity to become influential global cities but these opportunities can be easily squandered if we don't invest wisely in developing infrastructure and a culture that would attract high quality talent.

As the global economy evolves, traditional drivers of economy such as manufacturing are being replaced by knowledge-based businesses. The new workforce needed to support knowledge-based businesses is highly mobile and has a global mindset. Working professionals are willing to move to new regions to support their lifestyle such as a greater reliance on public transit for commuting and living in areas that are culturally rich.

So how does Toronto become an attractive destination for highly skilled talent?

Anyone who has had to endure lengthy delays on the subway or waited hours in an emergency room in Toronto will probably jump on any good opportunity to move elsewhere. Our public transportation system is limited and unreliable. Our roads are crumbling and moving around the city is slow. In hospitals, wait times keep increasing. With housing in the city becoming unaffordable and fundamental services like public transportation and healthcare needing attention, who would choose Toronto?

Well, think again. Toronto has a vibrant and diverse population. You can have dim sum for lunch, go to theatre and finish the night with a Moroccan meal, all without stepping on a plane. The diversity of population, the social inclusion and celebration of various cultures makes Toronto a unique place.

Toronto has a solid foundation and a multicultural population that can support a truly world class city. However we have not invested in developing and maintaining infrastructure that would be equally important for making Toronto attractive for a highly skilled talent.

Our challenges result from bad policies on healthcare and transportation. Budget cuts, or small budget increases, while dealing with an increasing population, has put an increasing strain on quality of public services. We have two options: increase revenues or cut services. Toronto has tried increasing revenues (raising the land transfer tax a few years ago was supposed to achieve this). But Toronto is still struggling to maintain services that residents expect.

Toronto needs to invest today to become competitive tomorrow. Instead of focusing on tax cuts or tax credits to attract new businesses, Toronto should focus on improving infrastructure and fundamental services. Key priorities, such as expansion of public transit, should be identified and commitments made to support these developments without bureaucratic delay.

An example of lengthy delay would be the public transit link between downtown and Pearson Airport, which will finally open this spring. In contrast, Delhi has built 90 kilometers of track in about the same time. If cities like Delhi can make decisions and act, what is holding us back? Investing in priority areas will require some services to be cut however the short-term pain would be necessary to ensure a brighter future for Toronto.

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You are where you live

JENNIFER ZWICKER

The health of a city and the health of its residents are inextricably linked. As Canada continues to urbanize — with nearly two-thirds of us living in cities — there is dramatic association between urban sprawl and chronic diseases such as obesity. As the Ontario College of Family Physicians says: “Sprawl impacts negatively on well-being by eroding social capital, robbing people of all ages of the opportunity to have a balanced, healthy lifestyle, degrading the natural environment, and increasing the stress of commuting, which not only impacts on mental health but also physical health.”

The suburban ‘white picket fence’ lifestyle promoted after World War II brought with it a host of changes affecting personal health. Separation of residential areas from other land uses, increasing reliance on automobiles and extended commuter time and distance travelled made it more difficult for people living in neighbourhoods characterized made it difficult to get sufficient daily physical activity. This link between fitness and health is well established. It’s time we started treating these lifestyle disorders with lifestyle solutions starting with one of the biggest factors: where we live.

Currently, one in four Canadian youths is overweight or obese. Young Canadians now suffer from Type-2 diabetes and high blood pressure, previously seen almost exclusively among adults. Chronic diseases cost Canadians at least \$190 billion annually. With an estimated 75% of the health of the population determined by factors outside the healthcare system, local and provincial governments must understand the need for programs and services. Actuarial and economic analyses suggest that Canada’s current health care system is not sustainable beyond a 25-years window without a fundamental shift towards chronic disease prevention.

We cannot afford to ignore this new health care reality. The prescription for this growing chronic health care epidemic lies in creating more complete communities and writing a more preventative health prescription. Healthcare policy and funding allocations must better recognize the value of preventative measures. The Public Health Agency of

Canada has identified that there is a major gap between existing policy tools and health promotion through community design.

Municipalities are well situated to influence key determinants of health and inequalities. Bylaws impeding healthy living can be changed. Land-use design and zoning changes can promote active living and healthy lifestyles in neighbourhoods. An emphasis on fewer single-family houses and more multi-unit residential homes is fundamental. Encouraging higher density of neighborhoods with proximity to services may be achieved in part by pricing utilities to reflect the higher infrastructural and maintenance cost of delivering services to suburban development in comparison to more compact development.

The design of our neighbourhoods including walkability, affordability, transportation, the availability of parks, safety, access to healthy food markets and shops, should be part of the chronic disease prevention conversation. Imagine a health care discussion including the improving of the walkability of all urban neighbourhoods, of reducing intersection density, community safety and the implementation of transportation policies that promote physical activity through safe, well-lit bicycle and pedestrian routes. Expanding public transit lines and bicycle paths could help to reduce the essential role a car plays in suburban communities and lifestyle changes.

It won’t be easy to transcend the lines of budget allocation or the jurisdictional orders of government. While health care is generally considered a provincial issue it makes economic sense to consider preventative healthcare opportunities in the design and function of the neighbourhoods and communities that form our nation’s cities.

As Winston Churchill said we “shape our buildings, thereafter, they shape us”. Building preventative health policy thinking into built form municipal policy requires collaboration across departments and jurisdictions to enhance capacity for building health promoting, sustainable communities that are livable for all members of society. The future of our cities and our health care system depends on it.

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