



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Here's an important lesson

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be," advises Polonius to his son Laertes in Shakespeare's Hamlet - an important lesson. Unfortunately, it's one that's been lost on the current federal government. What fatherly words of advice might old Bill Shakespeare have to offer Finance Minister Paul Martin, especially as he prepares for his upcoming budget. They might sound something like this:

"Something is rotten in the state of Canada - and it smells like a deficit."

Yes, the federal government has reduced the deficit somewhat, but it will still borrow \$24.3 billion this year. And it has yet to project when we can expect a zero deficit.

The reason for such slow deficit reduction is obvious. The past two years have seen increases, not decreases, in total federal spending. It's risen by almost \$1 billion over the last two years.

Putting an end to massive borrowing requires much more aggressive reduction targets with a view to total deficit elimination. Martin should revise his deficit targets from \$17 billion in 1997-98 to \$12.2 billion in aim for a '0' deficit in 1998-99.

"Take arms against a sea of troubles - reduce taxes."

For decades, Canadian governments have tried to spend their way into prosperity. It hasn't worked. Despite having spent billions of dollars on business subsidies, make-work infrastructure programs and the like, the unemployment rate remains in the double digits.

The single most important measure that the federal government can take to create an environment for jobs and growth is to cut taxes.

Let's Talk Taxes



with PAUL PAGNUELO

An across-the-board reduction in marginal tax rates, an increase in the basic personal or spousal amount deduction or a reduction in the GST to the equivalent of \$4 billion would put more money back into taxpayers pockets.

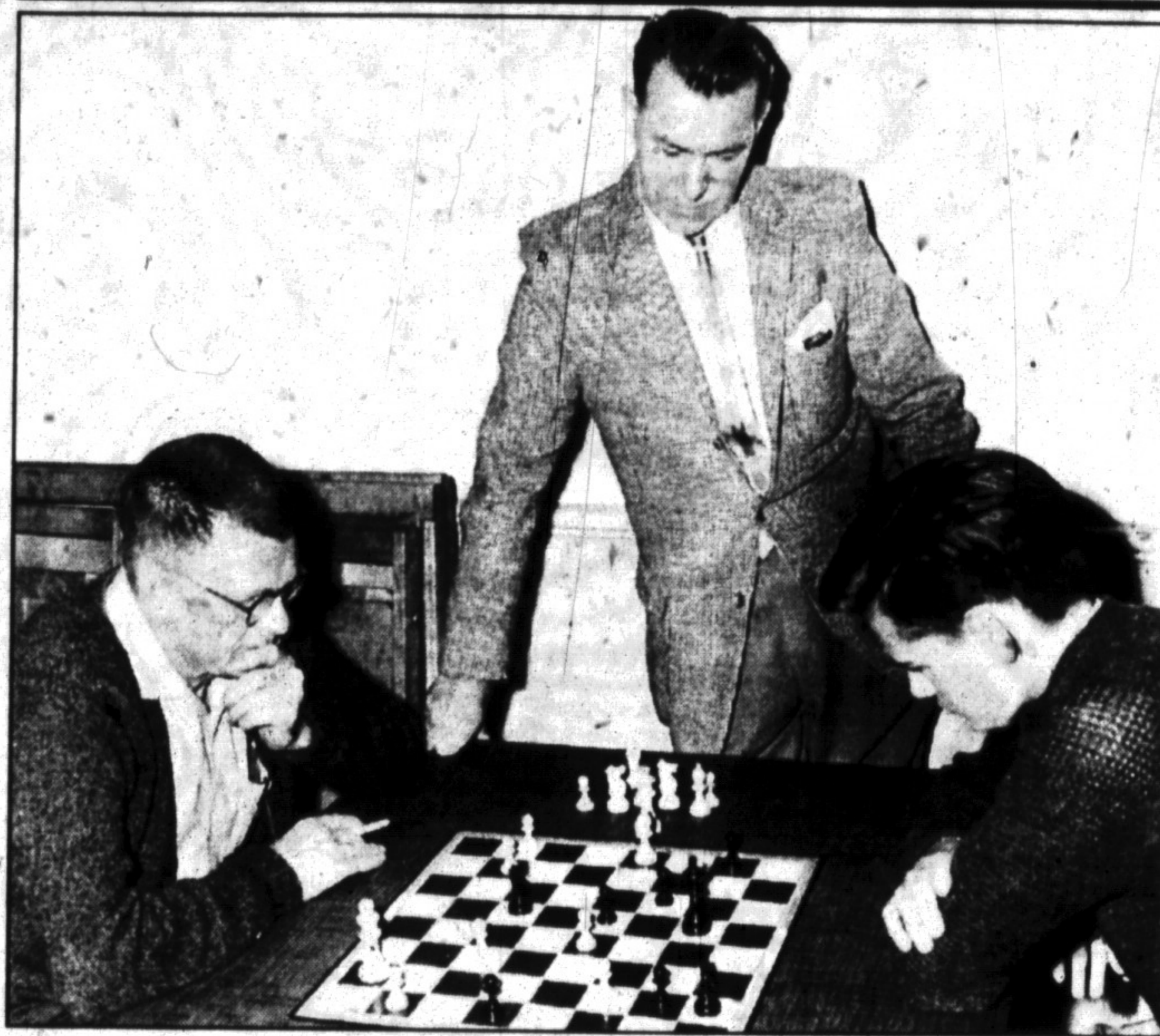
"To spend or not to spend, that is not a question."

We have no choice but to reduce federal spending. Fortunately, that's not a problem.

Savings could be obtained by eliminating the \$4.6 billion in appropriations to Crown corporations; by selling all or part of the \$58.7 billion in assets held by federal corporations; by eliminating \$3 billion from Industry Canada's business subsidy spending; by reducing the \$2.6 billion Canadian Heritage budget and eliminating billions in special interest group subsidies; and by reducing Employment Insurance expenditures by 10 per cent through a tightening up of eligibility rules. And that's just for starters.

Prince Hamlet's tragic flaw was his inability to act - precipitating his own death and that of the Danish Crown. Paul Martin should not make that same mistake.

Looking Back ...



Milton chess club members met on winter Monday evenings in an upstairs room at the town hall in 1963. It was its third year of operation with a roster of 18 members. Ron Harris, club president, is shown at left warding off a stiff challenge by Steve Syson as club secretary, Alex Howitt, looks on.

Has government gone insane?

Somewhere government has gone awry.

For years we have elected governments when all they have ever promised is to spend our money in ever increasing amounts. Somewhere we have stopped equating this road and that stadium and this fancy town hall, with our money.

Some sanity must return to the system. Some people believe our currency is on the brink of collapse. If that were to happen, economic chaos would rip through this country, the like of which has never been seen, even in the Great Depression. The human misery would far outweigh any hardship that people are now enduring due to substantial cuts to our government spending.

I do not believe any sane person would have willfully created the governmental system we are now saddled with. However, it has become so entrenched the fact is, there is hardly any will



Reaume with a View

with BRAD REAUME

to fix it. There are too many people who have a stake in the status quo and too many people who have been doing very well in the era of multi-billion dollar deficits.

All that borrowed money went somewhere. It went to bloated bureaucracies. It went to consultants who were no more expert than those they were consulting for. It went to fancy administration centres. It went to a bloated, unaccountable education system. It went to fund innumerable public concerns which were self-regulated, self-indulgent and simply unbridled by any true public scrutiny.

The people have to elect administrators of the public funds who are paid for keeping costs down and necessary services up. We have to go back to a financial square one and determine what it is we are trying to achieve.

The electorate has to take some responsibility. Sure they can vote out those who have done a poor job on their behalf, but first they have to know a poor job has been done.

Sure, taxes have to be collected to take care of regular maintenance on roads, garbage pick-up and emergency infrastructure reserves, but that's it. Most of the huge pot of money, which largely goes to fund education, should be returned to people who pay it. Who is better qualified to spend your money than you are?

One way to enforce public responsibility is to hit people directly in the pocket book. Charge people to access education after grade 8. Charge them \$1,000 a kid - you'd see a much better education system and more interested kids.

Why is the end of high school the magic level for full funding? Perhaps it is enough to fully fund teaching the basic skills, which presumably occurs during the years children are legally compelled to attend school.

Come on parents, get in the educational game

Educational reform is doomed to fail unless parents get on the ball, according to an important new book.

Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do is blunt and hard-hitting. Authors of the book published by Simon and Schuster say you can't improve educational standards and practices, in fact you can't even level the playing field by reforming schools.

The impetus has to be with parents, for they are the ones dropping the ball. It's scary stuff. They have the data to back them up.

The book, co-authored by psychologists Laurence Steinberg and Bradford Brown and sociologist Sanford Dornbusch, argues that schools are fighting an uphill battle. Grades and standardized test scores have been gradually decreasing for 20 years. Parents and peers are centred out as the culprits.

Most parents aren't involved in their children's education and most peer groups view studying and grades as unimportant, something that will get you labelled a nerd.

Caring about school, grades and learning will get you exiled from most peer groups these days, and that reflects on how parents are bringing up the kids in those peer groups. In the end, it all comes down to parents.



Psychology in the '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

The authors conducted a three-year study of more than 20,000 urban and suburban high schools. The students covered the full spectrum of socioeconomic and ethnic/minority groups. The results were startling:

- Peers scorn getting good grades - less than 20 per cent of students said their friends cared about getting good grades. Almost 20 per cent said they hid their intelligence. They intentionally tried not to get good grades for fear of being labelled a nerd.

- Parents are not involved in their children's education - more than 40 per cent of parents had never attended a teacher conference, a school program or even met the teacher. Only 20 per cent of parents attended their school programs and conferences regularly. Worst of all, the kids reported more than half of their parents were not

phased or concerned by grades of C or worse.

- Students don't study very much - a third of students said they spent most of the day goofing off. The vast majority of students spent four hours or less per week doing homework.

- Students cheat - about two of every three students admitted they cheat on tests.

Lest you think this is just a U.S. study and therefore not relevant to the Canadian culture, you better think again. The same trends in educational grades and standardized test scores have been found in Canada. Previous columns have documented the prevalence of cheating and negative peer pressure in Canadian schools. The results apply to us and our children.

Who are these parents who aren't involved in their children's education? These are the parents who don't care, parents who are too busy, parents who don't know what to do or how to help. Lots of parents say all the right things, but do nothing. Lots of parents are truly stressed or busy, perhaps bringing up children in a single-family household and working full time.

Caring does require a parent to encourage a child, explain the value of learning. It requires a parent to monitor whether their child is studying. Keeping up, get his or her assignments in and behaving well in class. This isn't going the extra mile. It's basic stuff. Yet, it's shockingly rare.