

# Opinion/Letters

## A "Dear Bob" letter to the Premier



**NORTHERN  
INSIGHTS**

by Larry Sanders



Dear Bob:

I spent the evening of Jan. 21, as did over two million other people (according to the ratings organizations), watching your television address. I've spent a lot of time since then reviewing the media coverage of Tuesday night and listening to other people. I'm quite worried that somehow, your most important message is getting lost. Now it's my turn to speak up.

Your critics in the business community and the Opposition seem to want you to go beyond "telling it like it is", to telling us what you're going to do. They slam you for not presenting a fiscal and economic development plan at the same time you opened the books to tell us how bad things are. The business press and the mainstream media seem to have focused on the possible \$14.3 billion deficit, while sounding alarm bells about imminent cutbacks in hospitals, municipalities, schools, and post-secondary education.

I guess they expected you to go beyond "opening the books" to delivering a provincial budget, live to Ontario's living rooms. I think they missed your main point.

### Fellow with a red tie

I understood you to be saying nearly the same thing as a fellow with a red tie named David Peterson said in Sault Ste. Marie in November 1986 at something he hosted called the First Conference on Northern Business and Entrepreneurship.

Peterson's message was aimed at northerners seeking relief from chronic unemployment and social malaise, while your message was aimed at a whole province full of people feeling the same way. Setting those differences aside, I think you can see the similarity between what you said Jan. 21 and Peterson's appeal to northerners over five years ago:

"We must have a heavy reliance on northerners to develop ideas and solve their own problems. Our government is prepared to play its role. But the leadership and the co-operation have to come from here."

Remarkably, you used similar words:

"We'll be there to help in the restructuring. No one is going to be out there on their own. But that is the challenge. Take a deep breath, plunge in, with a determination to be fair, to be realistic, and above all, with a profound commitment to protect our network of public services."

Both you and Peterson were calling for partnerships and grass roots initiative, and that's asking a lot. People don't trust each other easily any more, having made it through the "Me First" 1980's recession, only to be laid off, lied to, and told to "stop whining" in this decade's more severe downturn.

### Right thing

Even though working creatively in new partnerships is difficult, I still think you and Peterson are asking for the right thing. There are lots of opportunities for new partnerships and creativity right here in Northern Ontario. I offer four of my own modest suggestions:

1. Merge all the deficit-ridden hospitals in Thunder Bay into one efficient teaching hospital to serve all of northwestern Ontario with state-of-the-art medical services. Ron Saddington, the executive director of McKellar General Hospital, said after watching your address on Jan. 21 that the current three acute care hospitals in this city are "a luxury we can no longer afford."

2. Stop funding competitive economic development organizations that spend more time seeking supremacy over each other rather than grass roots economic redevelopment. Squabbling and "turf wars" aren't helpful if we want to take up your exhortation to restructure ourselves for tomorrow's economy.

3. Rethink the cut in reforestation efforts (especially tree planting) coming up this spring. The local tree seedling growers are saying that the declining federal and provincial funding for forest renewal will, if not corrected, lead to many millions of tree seedlings being shredded this spring, just like they were two years ago. Northerners want to do our part to renew the forests, but we can't do it without seedlings.

4. Bring together the Credit Unions of northwestern Ontario to discuss ways to pool resources and expertise to be part of the economic restructuring.

The banks have shown they won't do this. I'm sure you read the speech by Matthew Barrett (chairman of the Bank of Montreal) the day before you made your television speech, calling on Ottawa to "mobilize a substantial pool of funds (and) direct it to a special national program focused on the unemployed".

However, Barrett has refused to consider using some of the considerable profits of his bank (\$595 million last year alone) to contribute to his "fund". In contrast, Credit Unions have a long history of helping people in good times

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## Local Boards should be run at local level

The following is the text of a letter sent by Thunder Bay-Atikokan MP Iain Angus to Community Industrial Training Committees, Labour Councils, Chambers of Commerce, Municipal Governments, Community Futures Committees, and provincial and federal politicians. In it, Angus argues that local boards should continue being locally controlled.

I have had the opportunity to review the discussion document "Local Boards: A Partnership for Training", along with "A Proposal to Establish Local Labour Force Development Boards", as well as information on the "Canadian Labour Force Development Board."

While I fully support the thrust of the documents and the proposed policies, I have severe reservations about the proposed structure for Northwestern Ontario, the decision making and funding process.

As I understand the current proposal, there are to be two local boards in the Northwest; one for Thunder Bay District and one for the combined Districts of Kenora and Rainy River. It is also my understanding that neither of these so called "local boards" will be assigned their own budgets, but will have to apply to the central Ontario Training and Adjustment Boards (OTAB) on a project-by-project basis. Finally, it is not clear to me that each of the Local Boards will automatically have their own staff.

I have had a brief discussion with a few members of the existing CITCs, as well as receiving correspondence from concerned players in the Rainy River District. I have also met with Thunder Bay CEIC Manager Walter Malchuck for a background briefing.

Based on my understanding of the proposals, and the varied needs of the Northwest, I offer the following suggestions:

### Option A:

My primary preference would be the retention of the existing CITCs, their boards, staff and budgets, so they can continue to do an excellent job in their communities or areas of jurisdiction. This, I believe, would not be in conflict with the overall thrust of the new Federal-provincial approach to training, and in fact could be the delivery mechanism for the OTAB policies. I believe that all the players in the Northwest should argue for this option . . . as a tactic to ensure that at the very least, the current proposals are modified to suit our needs.

### Option B:

1. Each of the Provincial Districts of Kenora, Rainy River and Thunder Bay should have their own local board
2. Each of the seven existing CITCs should automatically be a sub-committee of the Board in their District.
3. Each board should have its own budget to manage under the broad policies established by OTAB
4. Each board should have its own staff, controlled by them, and not by any other agency.
5. Each CITC sub-committee should have its own budget and staff commensurate with the budget and staff currently provided to them as a CITC.
6. Each CITC sub-committee should have should have representation on the "local" board (obviously there have to be some cross-regional negotiations to ensure that the 8: 8: 4: 2 ratios of participation [labour/business/social action/educators] is adhered to.
7. Even if the "local" boards are given financial independence from the OTAB, I believe it is necessary that there be representation from each of the local boards on the OTAB *even if that requires OTAB to be increased in size.* The only other approach would be rotation of two seats between three regions.

I would encourage each of you to give consideration to the above proposals. If we are to ensure that training committees are able to respond quickly to the changing needs of the Northwest Economy, there must be local control. To have to go to Toronto for permission isn't going to work. In the same way, for one community to have to go to a great distance within the Northwest, either to Thunder Bay or to Kenora, isn't going to work either. We must reduce the distance, and we must reduce the layers we go through.

I would appreciate reaction to the above.

Yours truly,  
Iain Angus

## Letters to the Editor

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