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## Like the gun laws before it, UIC needs drastic reforming

Don't get me wrong, I hate the Reform Party. Aside from the fact that the face Preston Manning puts on in the red-neck parts of Alberta differs greatly from the relatively moderate-sounding one he puts on nationally, the party's basic platforms represent a backward-looking and reactive way of looking at Canada's problems. We're facing complex challenges, and Reform's simplistic solutions aren't going to lead Canadians out of the constitutional and economic wilderness.

Having said that, it must be said that Reform has some good ideas, albeit for the wrong reasons. Ending the sacred cow of universality of social programs is one of them.

Reform's idea of turning control of health care over to the provinces is a dud. I want to know that if I move to Saskatchewan, I'm going to receive the same quality of care I do here in Ontario. And the only way to guarantee national standards is to maintain the federal government's role.

However, what about unemployment insurance? Most of us know people who have abused the system, and, being from the economically depressed Maritimes, I know people who abuse it regularly. And who can blame them? If the government's going to make UIC that easy to abuse, then why not go ahead and do it?

As I see it, a big problem with pogeys is that it's a program that was designed for another period in Canadian history. When first introduced, taking social assistance of any kind was almost considered immoral, and was virtually unheard of. Of course, there's always been people who abuse the system, and there probably always will. But in the early 1960s, when UIC was introduced, abusers were the exception. Carrying them was easier because, as a rule, people still considered the program a privilege.

But today, the stigma attached to taking social assistance—and UIC in particular—has been virtually wiped out. Worse, many people seem to think they're entitled to the money, and complain it's not as generous as it should be. In many cases, UIC has been transformed into almost an occupation in itself, with some people having spent more of their lives on pogeys than working.

In fact, the program is being used to artificially support population levels in areas with high unemployment. In the past, the government has funded make work programs in these areas in order to give people enough weeks of work to qualify for UIC for the rest of the year. Stop gap and expensive solutions like that have helped lead us to the mess we're in now.

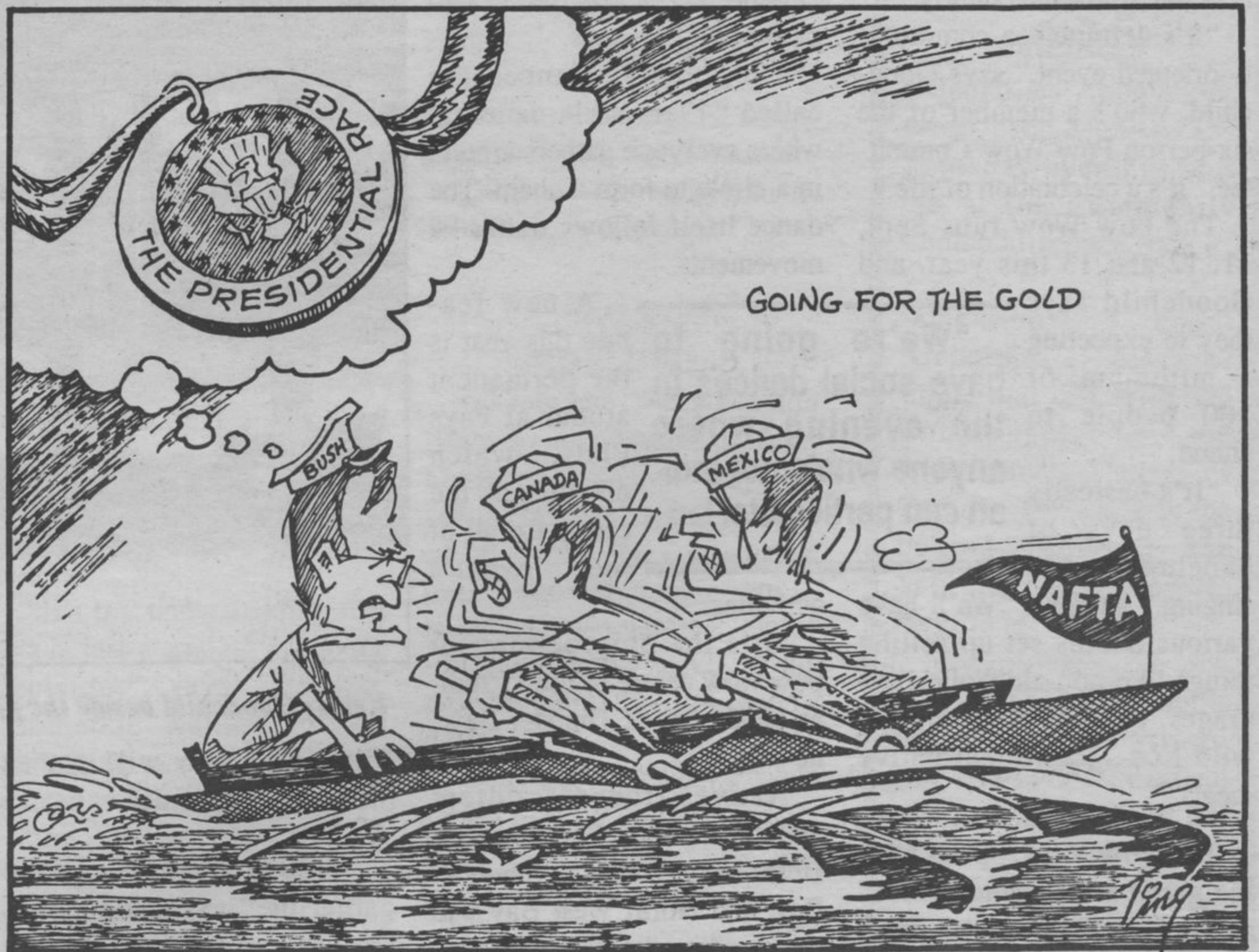
Also, can anyone tell me why someone should be getting UIC when their spouse already has an income? If your wife or husband is already making a good wage, there's no way you should be getting social assistance.

Clearly, something must be done. At the very least, people who receive unemployment should have to enter a training program. That way, their chances of eventually getting a job would increase. And the universality of the program should be ended, which would mean people who want to receive benefits would have to pass a means test. This may be humiliating to some, but would discourage those who don't need it from applying.

And we just can't afford them anymore.

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I had a great vacation, travelling around Nova Scotia, visiting friends and listening to Scottish music. One of the highlights of the trip, however, was watching Dom Filane fight in Barcelona. When I told everyone he was from Schreiber, they did everything but call me a liar—until the CTV announcer gave his hometown over the air. Having a Olympic athlete is a source of tremendous pride for any community, and is doubly so for a community the size of Schreiber. Well done Dom!



## Earth a sitting duck

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen  
Old Blues Riff*

You got troubles? I've got troubles. I've got taxes I haven't paid, letters I haven't answered, chores I haven't taken care of, and friends I haven't hugged. I've got problems. Everybody's got problems.

And not just the personal variety. Look at the international scene. Bloodshed in Asia. Starvation in Africa. Unrest in Europe. AIDS. Drugs.

One could get really depressed about the range of bummers out there, waiting to bushwhack one. And that's without even addressing the common, garden-variety viper that besiege us every day—which is to say the oil-backed lawyer, the fog-spewing bureaucrat and the fork-tongued politician.

A guy could really work himself up into a rant about all the terrible and unpleasant things out there—but a guy should be careful.

There's a danger of overreaction. I mean, what if a guy got all hot and bothered over the presence of mosquitoes...

Just before a horsefly came along?

Something like that may be happening right now. Here we are, down here on earth, shouting ourselves hoarse about German reunification, the cod stocks, civil rights in Zimbabwe, when it looks like we should be paying attention to what's happening upstairs.

There's a team of NASA scientists that certainly thinks so. For the past several years they've been training electron microscopes on outer space, with particular attention to asteroids—those chunks of space junk winging aimlessly through the cosmos. Their conclusion? Earthlings should buckle up their seats pronto. We're long overdue for a head-on

collision.

Of course, our battle-scarred old planet slams into intergalactic flotsam all the time. That's what shooting stars are—bug splats on the windshield of Spaceship Earth, as it were. Most of them are harmless—nothing more than space gravel bouncing off the rocker panels.

But that's not to say all encounters will be necessarily benign. NASA scientists calculate that there might be as many as 4,200 asteroids out there that are more than three-fifths of a mile across. What would such an asteroid do if it were to collide, forehead to forehead with, say, downtown Moose Jaw?

It wouldn't be attractive.

Scientists are pretty well agreed that an asteroid smashed into the earth about 65 million years ago. It blotted out the sun for months and helped wipe out the dinosaurs. It also created a terrestrial pothole big enough

to accommodate the Caribbean Sea. They reckon the asteroid was no more than nine miles in diameter—by space standards, a mere bowling ball.

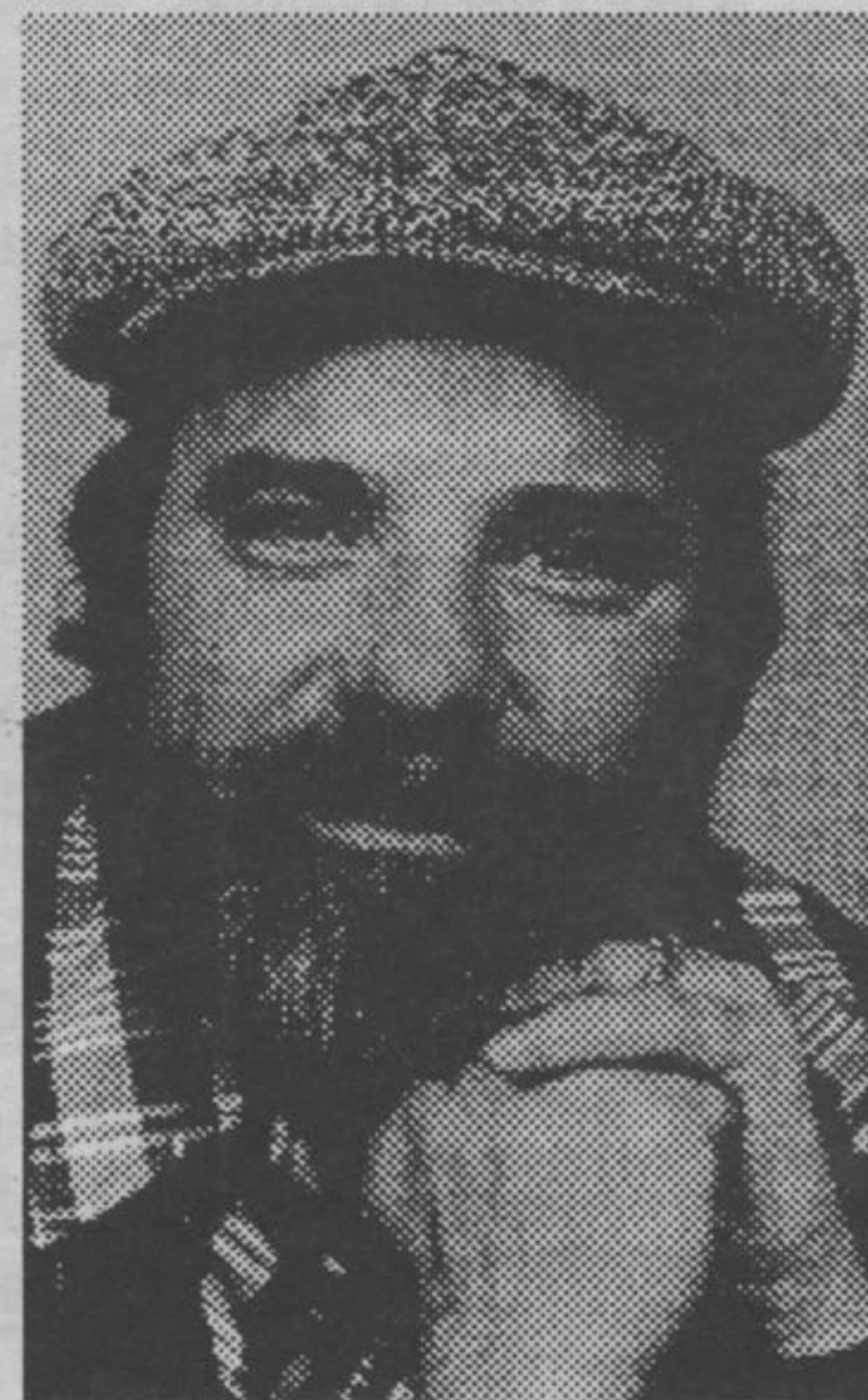
Should we all start looking over our shoulders? Probably not, but a glance skyward once in a while wouldn't hurt. Our planet is like a sitting duck in a galactic shooting gallery. According to NASA's Doctor David Morrison, "the risk is real."

Which is not to say we should all immediately make out our wills.

Or quit our jobs.

Or call up distant loved ones in the middle of the night to babble incoherently about how much we love them.

Still...it does kinda put the Constitutional Debate in perspective, doesn't it?



**Arthur Black**