

Opinion

Welcome recovery due to tough medicine

Finance Minister Paul Martin is positively glowing about the state of the nation's economy. His accomplishments are nearly certain to be the wind under Jean Chretien's wings to power for yet another term.

But look to the basis of Martin's bragging rights.

The federal government cut transfer payments to the provinces drastically - such that Ontario's health and educational systems went into a 'shrink it or lose it' position.

At least part of the federal success has come from shuffling the burden of debt to provincial taxpayers.



Viewpoint

Jo Ann Stevenson

Praise for Mike Harris isn't forthcoming from many other sources, but to find a politician willing to take us back to solvency despite risking popularity is a rare find indeed. As well, he's doing it without whining and pointing fingers at the federal government.

In the face of union and social service strikes and

threats, misjudgments by media and all the rest of the public resistance that Harris and his ministers have faced, it would be difficult to find another as committed to the task.

His focus on the job to be done is reminiscent of the former bank governor John Crow who dished out the public medicine of high interest rates while we squawked and swallowed reluctantly.

Paul Martin has deflected a closer look at federal waste which by many accounts is horrendous. The closer the government to the people, the better such waste can be

watched. We need to do more squawking at the federal level if we feel the Harris government is cutting too close to the bone.

We can look to a brighter future in Canada because of John Crow. Ontario remains in transition, but the four year forecast is good because of Mike Harris. Jobs will follow naturally, not artificially.

Meanwhile we need to keep an eye out for real need around us as social programs are falling through the cracks.

And let's put the credit where it belongs for this blossoming recovery.



It's smoker hostile out there

There was a time, not so very long ago, when lighting up a butt was considered attractive, even sexy. Bogey and Bacall, Crawford and Coward—everybody who was anybody smoked. We smoked in airplanes and buses, in doctor's waiting rooms and restaurants. Nobody asked if they could smoke when they came to your house. Of course they could smoke. That's why you had ash trays all over the place.

Well, no more. Smoking is definitely and officially no longer glamorous. U.S. President Clinton has officially denounced it. Our own Prime Minister, (while gleefully continuing to pocket the tax money charged on each pack of cigarettes) has publicly allowed that "it's a bad 'abit".

Joe Camel, a cartoon character invented by the makers of Camel cigarettes, has turned out to be just about the worst idea a Madison Avenue hack ever had. "Uncle Joe" has become a lightning rod for the American Anti-Smoking Movement—a symbol of everything they detest and

deplore. As a half-page ad in a recent edition of the New York Times asked: "After all, who should tell kids about tobacco? Their parents or Uncle Joe?"

We live in smoker-hostile times. Anybody addicted to the weed will find him or herself segregated in restaurants, ostracized at social gatherings and frowned upon the instant they flick their Bic.

The building I work in has been declared a smoke-free zone. Nicotine junkies have to hike themselves off to a depressing little smoking room on the second floor. Others stand around in clumps on the sidewalk, puffing, coughing and avoiding the eyes of pink-lunged, self-righteous colleagues.

It could be worse. Last month, 6,000 employees of Motorola's two plants in Illinois, received a memo informing them that they risk being fired if caught smoking on Motorola property—and that includes in their own cars while in the company parking lot.

There's a town in California where it's illegal to smoke anywhere outdoors.

So how do I feel about the escalating Smoker's War? Ambivalent, actually. I've been on both sides of this particular No Man's Land. I kicked a 25-year habit, stayed clean for five years then strayed again. As I write, I haven't smoked for three months, but I don't kid myself. I know I'm only one puff away from being a two-pack-a-day man.

I know that smoking is a grubby, expensive, debilitating and thoroughly addictive habit, I also know that non-smokers can be, you'll pardon the pun, a pain in the butt.

Aside from kids naive enough to be conned by the likes of Joe Camel, I don't know a single smoker who's happy about being addicted to nicotine. Most smokers could stand a little sympathy and compassion. What they don't need is some snooty, Holier-than-thou zealot preaching at them. Cut them some slack, folks. They're smokers, not lepers.

And if you're really feeling generous, spare a kind thought for John Taylor. He smoked his last cigarette in the snow outside a public building in Utah last January.

When he finished his cigarette, John Taylor walked inside the public building, which happened to be the Utah State Prison Execution Shed. John Taylor was then shot to death by a Utah firing squad.

The State of Utah forbids smoking inside any public building.

Getting killed is still perfectly legal.



Basic Black

Arthur Black

Editor's mail

Columnist certainly fits with Harris' party

To the Editor,

I would like to respond to Andrew Mair's Opinion column (Oct. 26). From the tone of his column (he refers to The Days of Action demonstration as a "farce") he certainly fits in well with the Mike Harris government.

If he thinks because of some unfortunate incidents (fear and frustration can push some people into doing things that they normally would not do) that the thousands and thousands of people that turned out to protest the slash and cut tactics of our present government was a "complete fizzle" - he needs to get into the real world.

He obviously is not among the many thousands of Ontarians who have lost their jobs, or are being refused transportation on Wheel Trans, have lost daycare for their children, etc. etc. (I could go on infinitum)

If Mair thinks "apathy and distaste" will be the hallmark of The Days of Action I wonder what he thinks the hallmark of this present government's agenda will be.

Bob Rae realized the necessity of cutting back, but chose to try to do it in a human way - people didn't

want to listen. This government is cutting off the whole leg to remove the tumor. But, I guess, as long as it isn't their leg - they feel it's OK.

Unfortunately, if we wait until this government is voted out - there won't be enough of our amputated leg left to walk on.

Evelyn Tobias
Markham

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