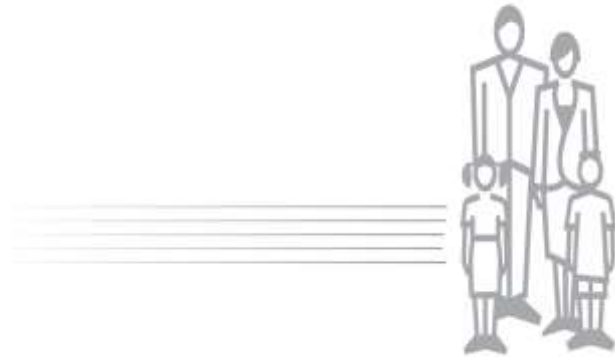


RENAISSANCE CONFERENCE 2008

MOVING FORWARD



Saturday, March 1, 2008

*Scarborough Civic Centre
150 Borough Drive
Scarborough, Ontario*

8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

22nd Annual Renaissance Conference Report

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Renaissance Conference 2008

Moving Forward

March 1, 2008

INTRODUCTION

March 1st 2008 marked the 22nd anniversary of the annual Renaissance Conference. It was sponsored by the following Members of Provincial Parliament across Scarborough - Wayne Arthurs, Bas Balkissoon, Lorenzo Berardinetti, Margaret Best, Brad Duguid, and Gerry Phillips.

The theme of this year's highly successful conference was Moving Forward. That one was considered highly relevant to issues and concerns facing Ontarians today. We were fortunate to have the renowned Dr. Charles Pascal, Special Advisor on Early Learning, as our Keynote speaker. Dr. Charles Pascal gave an entertaining, informative and thought-provoking speech, and reports on the various workshops were also presented. The morning workshops included presentations by experts in three areas:

- Moving Forward on Climate Change
- Moving Forward on Poverty Reduction
- Moving Forward on Education

As Chairperson, I would like to thank all the members of the organizing committee, the presenters, and panellists who so freely gave their time and expertise in making our conference a success.

In particular on behalf of the organizing committee, I would like to thank the Honourable Gerry Phillips for his vision and dedication in hosting the Renaissance Conference for over 20 years. We would like to thank the Chairs of the morning workshops - MPP's Bas Balkissoon, Wayne Arthurs and Joe Bush, a teacher for the York Catholic District School Board for taking on and excelling in that essential task. Special thanks are due to Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Hon. Margaret Best and Hon. Brad Duguid for contributing their knowledge and experience in their capacity as Ministers of the Ontario government.

Respectfully Submitted
Murray Johnston,
Conference Chair

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dr. Charles Pascal
Special Advisor to the Premier on Early Learning

Executive Summary of Dr. Pascal's Remarks at the 2008 Renaissance Conference

Dr. Pascal began his address by asking everyone to identify the three or four core values each person hopes would represent himself or herself. Dr. Pascal identified for himself such values as vision, passion, authenticity and equity.

Dr. Pascal went on to define leadership as it pertains to our society. Leadership is found in people whose policy makes the world a healthier, safer, more just place for everyone. Dr. Pascal explained that, in his view, all important societal issues are rooted (in the problem and / or in the solution) in equity; critical examples include poverty, the web of problems facing aboriginals, and institutional racism.

Dr. Pascal examined an issue -- the elimination of poverty -- to discuss obstacles to reform. In 1989, an all-party resolution was passed, unanimously, calling for the elimination of poverty by the year 2000. How much progress has Canada made since then? Dr. Pascal suggested two bureaucratic processes which hinder reform:

1) "Short term-ism"; complex reform cannot be accomplished in a year (example, the implementation of the Ontario curriculum); Dr. Pascal praised the Ontario government's long-term strategy and commitment to health care. Another positive example of long-term thinking is the mandate of the recently appointed cabinet committee on poverty reduction.

2) "Hardening of the categories" -- isolated, rather than integrated, policy making; implementation of meaningful reform requires careful examination of current policy and consideration of how a change in one policy area will affect another.

Dr. Pascal concluded by challenging the audience to be more inclusive, to "change the faces of who's at the table", in policy making. An example cited was the experience and advice provided by poverty activists, now being considered by the cabinet committee.

Dr. Pascal ended his remarks with a quotation from Lord Tennyson:
"Come, my friends; it's not too late to create a new world."

For further information on the Atkinson Foundation, refer to this web site:

www.atkinsonfoundation.ca

For further information on the Canadian Index of Well Being, please refer to this web page:

www.atkinsonfoundation.ca/ciw

For further information on the mandate and membership of the Cabinet Committee on reducing poverty, refer to this web address:

<http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/team/committe.asp?team=15>

WORKSHOPS

Moving Forward on Climate Change

Chair: **Wayne Arthurs, MPP Pickering-Scarborough East**

Panellists: **Rob MacIsaac**
Chairman, Metrolinx

Chris Winter
Executive Director, Conservation Council of Ontario

Hon. Gerry Phillips, MPP Scarborough-Agincourt
Minister of Energy

Opening Remarks

Rob MacIsaac spoke of transportation as a main contributor to greenhouse gas emissions with its effect on air quality and reported that Metrolinx has developed seven green papers, contributing to the development of a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) due later this year. Metrolinx is looking for input from the general public on these papers and the overall transportation plan and people should visit www.metrolinx.com for more information and are being asked for their thoughts.

Chris Winter noted that there is a political and social will to tackle the challenges of climate change and a high degree of acceptance of the need to conserve and not waste resources. Through its "We Conserve" program, the Conservation Council is facilitating the provision of simple solutions to deal with the deep challenges of climate change and the environment. The website www.weconserve.ca links people with products, services and incentives to make it easier to adopt conservation solutions. The "We Conserve" goal is to be a catalyst for the conservation movement to take hold and change our way of life.

Gerry Phillips indicated that the Government of Ontario recognizes the problem of Climate Change and has a blue print for action called the "Go Green" plan. This plan is being implemented, including the closure of coal power plants. The Integrated Power Supply Plan (IPSP) includes initiatives such as: increasing conservation to reduce peak demand, doubling the use of renewables such as wind, solar and hydro, closing all coal plants by 2014, increasing the proportion of energy obtained from nuclear, and developing flexible capacity through natural gas plants. Conservation is a key part and we can all participate. More information on the Go Green plan can found at www.gogreenontario.ca

Open Discussion

The government of British Columbia is a leader in Canada with its new Carbon Tax. Should we, in Ontario, remove the subsidies that allow polluting to be cheap?

- Chris Winter predicted there would be a Carbon Tax in Ontario by 2010 since the public accepts it as a necessary measure. Electricity charging is moving towards time-of-use metering with the surcharges being promoted as a money saving measure since demand will be switched to off-peak hours. Gerry Phillips noted that a cap and trade system would be preferable. The current electricity system infrastructure is being upgraded and the costs passed on fully to the consumer.

The challenge of government programs are that they need to be sustained to be accepted. They need to be built into the system by defining them on an individual level so that people will act.

- Gerry Phillips stated that we should promote sustainability on an economic level: green initiatives will not only help the environment, but will also save money. We also need to link conservation with the creation of jobs that will benefit the economy. Government ministries, local energy distributors and the Ontario Power Authority (OPA) are busy consolidating these measures into a completely sustainable conservation package. Both government and individuals together will help us be greener.

As transportation has a large impact on climate change, could we have electric trams in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton region? How fundamental is it to change transportation in a changing society?

- Electrification of the GO Transit Lakeshore line is being studied as part of the Move Ontario plan. Rob MacIsaac pointed to the federal/provincial jurisdictional difficulties needing resolution. Rail corridors are regulated federally, but owned by private entities. Regardless of who builds the tracks, ownership is either CN or CP, and the track use then has to be leased back by GO Transit. We need to work with these stakeholders to separate freight and passenger use. However, service will not be perfect until there is exclusive use. We need to look at how to balance goods movement and passenger service delivery and remain economically competitive in a global context.
- Chris Winter emphasized the need to transform urban development to create walkable, liveable cities, including creating and using local goods and services, such as local foods.

Should we focus on transit solutions as the expansion of the 400-series highway system only encourages people to commute and skip the green belt? How do we encourage people to live closer to where they work?

- Although transit is the key way to moving large numbers of people, Rob MacIsaac indicated we can't ignore other modes. Metrolinx is mode neutral but its goal is to show the alternatives to driving. People need to know costs associated with their actions. Therefore, using tolls charging for carbon emissions makes sense. Realistically, we are not going to get rid of cars but we should be providing alternatives in a balanced fashion. We need to ensure energy is guaranteed, affordable and environmentally sustainable. Chris Winter stated that it also comes down to balancing social engineering, economics and eagerness. Conservation of energy is the cheapest solution. People need to experience a better life through investing in conservation, transit and renewables.
- The Places to Grow Act has defined urban growth and employment centres but we can never be perfect in a modern economy. We need to make sure that, firstly, we maximize opportunities for people so that they have the opportunity to make the right decisions, and secondly, we develop our transportation network so that it conforms to and satisfies the needs of modern day life across the region.

While the plan is in place to shut down coal power plants, our coal usage has gone up by 13%. Why?

- Gerry Phillips said the increase is largely due to short term supply issues in 2007. New capacity has been and is currently being developed to enable us to reach the next shutdown target of 2011. We also need to manage our imports, largely from American coal plants. Ontario is the only jurisdiction to commit to removing coal from the energy supply mix.

With all the emphasis on solar, wind and hydro, we often forget about geothermal energy. What can we do to encourage it?

- Chris Winter stated that investments were committed to conservation and renewables, creating great opportunities for various solutions. Governments can provide subsidies and interest free loans to reduce costs and encourage its production. He noted that there is a pilot project on geothermal designed to create a local green power industry. Most geothermal projects will be underway once the experimental period is complete between 2010 and 2012. Gerry Phillips added that we need creative ways to fund the large capital investments, for example, getting local utilities to develop geothermal energy and then having consumers pay for it monthly on their energy bill. The sharing of the burden makes the work affordable.

What we need is a reward so that people and groups can be recognized for their innovative work. While the Green Star program is for retailers, is there a recognition program for other parties?

- The innovative Smart Commute program annually rewards employers who car pool and van share. This initiative has now fallen under Metrolinx authority and there will be an expansion to include other forms of recognition. Reward programs do exist through other agencies (i.e. Building Owners and Managers Association) but they are not well known by the public. Chris Winter said we need to integrate the Green Star program with other programs.

In regards to the smart metering program, can you please provide more details? What is being done about sub-metering in apartments?

- Gerry Phillips stated that local distributors have installed one million meters to date. These local distributors have also started to experiment with time of use pricing, and we have seen people use less during peak demand. Full implementation of time of use pricing will not be done until all smart meters are installed. Sub-metering in apartments and condominiums will happen over time, but the priority is on residential smart meters. It was also raised that there are other initiatives for high-rise

buildings, including a city of Toronto project to re-clad exteriors to make apartments more energy efficient.

Summary and Conclusions

In the face of climate change, we need to see a paradigm shift. A shift that will change the way we commute, develop energy and use our resources. This shift is already underway, as the social movement is around us. Given the options and appropriate structure, people will be able to make personal decisions that will improve quality of life. Climate change is the issue of our time, but the challenge is not insurmountable.

Moving Forward on Poverty Reduction

Chair: **Bas Balkissoon, MPP Scarborough Rouge River**

Panellists: **Craig Foye**
Lawyer, McQuesten Legal and Community Services

Gail Nyberg
Executive Director, Daily Bread Food Bank

Hon. Brad Duguid, MPP Scarborough Centre
Minister of Labour

Opening Remarks

Gail Nyberg noted that The Daily Bread Food Bank has long been concerned about low income families experiencing hunger. The "Who's Hungry Report" was a Food Bank Survey which indicated that food bank use has risen dramatically. The Food Bank had put forward a Blueprint to Fight Hunger advancing proposals which would go a long way to reduce poverty. Gail praised the Ontario Government for the anti poverty measures including the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) announced in the 2007 provincial budget. She said the OCB will help reduce child poverty and hunger. Other anti-poverty measures in the budget, including a welfare rate increase of 2%, will also contribute to a reduction of food bank use. Gail spoke of the merit of measuring poverty deprivation as is being done in Ireland where the government has successfully adopted an income deprivation scale to assess and monitor poverty.

Craig Foye explained that community legal clinics are independent not-for-profit corporations providing legal aid services to those who cannot afford private lawyers. Craig had proposed legislation to create a provincial panel to make annual determinations on social assistance rates. Legislation received First Reading prior to the Ontario election in October 2007. Craig was also supportive of the Ontario Child Benefit, saying this was a positive move.

Brad Duguid said the reduction of poverty is a key aim of the government and pointed to the progress made so far. Indeed, the Premier has appointed Deb Matthews, Minister of Children and Youth Services, as Chair of the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction. The Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction will develop a poverty reduction strategy.

With increases to social assistance, the creation of 20,000 new houses and 120,000 more child care spaces we are headed in the right direction.

Information about the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction can be found at www.growingstronger.ca

Open Discussion

There follows a summary of the open discussion of issues raised by the audience related to several aspects of dealing with the challenge of poverty reduction.

How should we look after immigrants?

To ensure immigrants do not become a victim of the current economic problems, the panellists agreed that we need to help them by finding them jobs and by accrediting their foreign experience and education.

Community programs

Brad Duguid said it was important to involve the communities and pointed to some successful programs like the various Tim Hortons' community programs. Government should not only create the programs, but also support the community programs.

Seniors in Need

The panellists agreed there needs to be additional focus on home care for seniors. It is most effective and beneficial to concentrate more on looking after seniors in their own homes than in, for example, a seniors' home. Help in the home can be provided in a variety of ways including meals on wheels, housework and medical care.

Young families in need

Gail Nyberg believed that more money is needed for daycare (full day daycare) as that would help parents work and earn sufficient money to support their families.

Homelessness

Craig Foye said we should spend more money tackling homelessness and poverty.

Definition of Poverty

Craig Foye noted the importance of understanding what poverty is and its effect on people and the economy. Several countries in Europe have instituted measures to both define and track poverty. It is important to measure the extent and distribution of poverty deprivation and to measure success in reducing it over time. Other countries in Europe have also developed strategies to reduce poverty and we should learn from them. Gail Nyberg emphasized the need for any such measures to be straightforward and understood by the public.

Temporary Workers in poverty

Brad Duguid indicated that the plight of temporary workers is a big issue. Such workers have lower incomes and often have no benefits so are more at risk of becoming victims of poverty. Employment insurance benefits need to be raised, however, this is a federal responsibility.

Summary and Conclusions

It was agreed that we have to make a concerted effort to reduce poverty although this will take time. The government has been consulting concerned organizations (e.g. food banks, labour agencies, legal aid agencies) to assist in producing a plan which will help people who have fallen behind and are experiencing varying degrees of poverty. Everyone agreed that we need to draw on experiences from other countries, not only to help improve the poverty situation, but also to measure our progress.

Moving Forward on Education

Chair: **Joe Bush**
Teacher, York Catholic District School Board

Panellists: **Dr. Mary Ashun**
Assistant Professor of Science & Math Education
Redeemer University College

Doug Joliffe
President of Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)

Margarett Best
Minister of Health Promotion

Kathleen Wynne
Minister of Education

Opening Remarks

Dr. Mary Ashun indicated that Ontario's education system and educators are doing a good job by international standards at the elementary level. She feels there is a need for passion in teaching. The main focus of elementary education should be teachers who themselves must be involved in continuous self-learning.

Margarett Best believed it would be mutually beneficial if there were better cooperation and understanding between parents and teachers. In many cases, parents will need to be educated as to the respective roles of parents and educators in ensuring the best possible educational outcome for the children as they prepare for life in work and play. In some cases, we will have to counter some cultural biases where schools may be viewed as having sole responsibility for their children's education. Access to a good education is, of course, important to adults as well as children; hence the desire for better apprenticeship programs.

Doug Joliffe noted that public education in Ontario has been a great experiment, providing more people with the opportunity to succeed in life. He noted that the McGuinty government continues to make significant strides in improving education since the cutbacks, but much more still needs to be done. He talked of the need to improve the funding of education.

Kathleen Wynne spoke of the need to close the gap in education between those who are doing well and those who are not, and more needs to be done to support those students who are not succeeding. We have to think of education being continuous over one's life and not just job focussed. There also needs to be more community use of schools - they are public assets. We must also be careful not to ask too much of students as we don't want them to burn out early.

Open Discussion

The following is a summary of the discussion and observations of both panellists and participants.

Public Education as part of life's experience

Ontario's education system and educators are doing a good job by international standards. While education has been the road to success, we must remember that in the Information Age education will become continuous and life-long. Education should be more than a means to getting a good job. It should be seen as an essential part of life throughout one's life.

Access to Education

Reza Moridi, MPP noted that early childhood education needs to begin as early as age two. He also noted that poverty and disabilities can adversely affect one's educational success.

It was agreed that everyone, regardless of age, background or financial situation, needs access to quality education. Secondary education must also include more opportunities for apprenticeships and co-op experience. Respect for others and their role in society must continue to be a focus.

The need for open education for all

Ontarians believe in inclusive education, with equal opportunity for all. There are, however, continuing barriers to reaching this objective. One's socioeconomic status can sometimes play a role in the type of education received. There needs to be greater understanding of cultural differences and educational expectations of new Canadians. We need to close the gap in educational performance between those who are doing well and those who are not; students who are not succeeding require support. On the subject of schools with an afrocentric curriculum, it was pointed out that this is a local initiative,

which is currently, under law, the prerogative of individual Boards of Education. This will not receive any special funding from the provincial Ministry.

Cooperation required between parents and teachers

Students are more likely to succeed when "school" and "home" are working together. Parents need to connect with teachers, not just for a report card interview or when a problem arises. Parents need to know that they need to be involved (and how) in their child's education. Encouraging parents, especially immigrant parents, to become involved in the School Council is another step to be taken. School Council meetings that are focused and deemed to be important to education will garner greater attendance.

How education is or should be financed

Funding remains an issue as the government moves toward modifying the funding formula. While strides have been made in funding since the years of cutbacks, education funding is still behind, in real dollars, since 1995.

Funding needs to be restored and enhanced to meet service and curricular requirements.

Summary and Conclusions

Significant progress has been made in the field of Education but there is still more to be done to ensure opportunities for all. It was mentioned that most teacher graduates are from humanities, rather than science programs, which could have an effect on student performance. Because the teacher remains the focus of the education process, it is important that students are taught by people who bring passion to learning and education; teachers themselves need to be continuous learners.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

The organizers of the 2008 Renaissance Conference would like to express their appreciation for the contributions of the following:

Rapporteurs - Joe Bush, Jay Paleja, Jim Singh, Paul Kossta and Mukunthan Paramalingham deserve thanks for their diligent note taking of the keynote address and the proceedings of the various workshops.

Report Editor - Ian Elder should be thanked for his work in producing the composite report on the 2008 conference.

Administration - We really appreciate Rose Gilmore for her countless hours of dedicated service in arranging the many aspects of the conference. Last but not least, we also recognise Allan Cobb for his continuing support before and during the conference.