

RENAISSANCE CONFERENCE 2009

EMERGING STRONGER



Saturday, March 7, 2009

*Scarborough Civic Centre
150 Borough Drive
Scarborough, Ontario*

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

23rd Annual Renaissance Conference Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction from the Chairperson	Page 4
2.	Summary of the Address by the Keynote Speaker, Don Drummond, Senior Vice President, TD Bank Financial Group	Page 5
3.	Emerging Stronger through economic & infrastructure Investment	Page 9
4.	Emerging Stronger through a strengthened workforce	Page 13
5.	Emerging Stronger by bringing everyone along	Page 17
6.	Overall Lessons from conference	Page 21

Renaissance Conference 2009

Emerging Stronger

March 7, 2009

INTRODUCTION - by Murray Johnston, Conference Chair

March 7th 2009, marked the 23rd 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 Emerging Stronger. This theme was very timely considering the global economic challenges facing us in early 2009. We were fortunate to have the highly respected Don Drummond, Senior VP and Chief Economist, TD Bank Financial Group, as our Keynote speaker. Don Drummond gave a comprehensive, informative and challenging speech, and reports on the various workshops were also presented. The morning workshops included presentations by experts in three areas:

1. Emerging Stronger through economic & infrastructure investment
2. Emerging Stronger through a strengthened workforce
3. Emerging Stronger by bringing everyone along

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, Margaret Best and Wayne Arthurs. Also thanks are due to the Hon. Brad Duguid and Lorenzo Berardinetti MPP for contributing their knowledge and experience to their respective workshops.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Don Drummond

Senior Vice President and Chief Economist, TD Bank Financial Group

Executive Summary of Don Drummond's Remarks at the 2009 Renaissance Conference

Ontario's economic outlook

Mr. Don Drummond was pleased to share his analysis of the current economic outlook for Ontario. Commenting on the current situation, Don Drummond indicated Ontario's economy would likely get worse before picking up again by 2011. He pointed out that Ontario sends about 80% of its exports to the United States, leaving it extremely vulnerable to the growing economic crisis.

Don Drummond provided an overview of the highlights of the current economic situation in Ontario and his outlook for a prosperous Ontario economy by 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CURRENT ECONOMIC SITUATION IN ONTARIO:

Don Drummond said the economic outlook is "pretty bleak" for 2009. In fact, the recession resembles the deep recession of the early 1980s; prospects are tepid for 2010 and full recovery is not expected till 2011. Unemployment is expected to rise markedly over the next year as Ontario confronts tough fiscal challenges ahead and it faces a structural deficit of \$18B or higher. Indeed Ontario has been in a structural deficit for a long time which has come about because rising health care and education costs are consuming more and more of total spending.

A financial stimulus is required to deliver a boost to the economy in 2009 and 2010. We should not wait to see the outcome of the stimulus in the USA. Differences between the economies require a made-in-Ontario policy solution. The North American nature of the auto industry, however, suggests that any support for that sector should be done in conjunction with the Americans, rather than in reaction. Nothing should be done in the guise of short-term stimulus that is not in Ontario's long term economic interests.

Today China and other emerging Asian economies present new competition, particularly since China's entry to the WTO in 2001. Chinese imports shifted from just T-shirts and toys, to machinery and mechanical goods. Since 1997, China and India have improved their productivity by app. 50%, while Ontario's productivity advanced only 8%. Real per capita incomes have risen more than 500% in China and more than doubled in India since 1980, but Ontario companies have not taken advantage of that through higher exports.

Between now and the year 2020, one option for Ontario would be to allow emerging economies to use their huge surplus savings to purchase our assets while we use the proceeds to maintain our consumption standards. To stay at the top of the world economic order we need ample, well-paying jobs matched to strong output growth. An economy can only sustain high wages if it has strong productivity.

OUTLOOK FOR A PROSPEROUS ONTARIO ECONOMY BY 2020:

Don Drummond spoke of the outlook looking toward 2020 and what would help generate economic recovery. He said that with an aging population and a low birth rate in Ontario, immigration will be the source of labour force growth to the year 2020 and beyond. So Ontario must work with the federal government to improve the selection and settlement of immigrants, as well as to improve the economic benefits of immigration. Maintaining the number of immigrants will pose severe strains in a weaker labour market given the poor record of recent immigrants coming into a strong labour market. Ontario needs to be more active in identifying the categories of workers most needed and in ensuring that those chosen will be able to work in the occupations more appropriate to requirements.

Don Drummond indicated the following:

- Ontario needs to invest more in longer-term infrastructure, including public transit
- Ontario needs to ensure it maintains a reliable electricity system
- Ontario introduced a number of environment-related measures like the environmental assessment (EA) and the Green Energy Act which is making Ontario a leader in the environment and the renewable energy field.
- Ontario has a competitive tax system except for a few non competitive elements:
 - (a) Ontario needs to reduce high marginal personal income tax rates that apply to low- and modest-incomes. The relatively high rates for high and moderate income families dull the incentives to work, save and invest.
 - (b) The sales tax system in Ontario is inefficient and increases the cost of doing business, which if left intact would act as an disincentive to home based businesses.
- Ontario's productivity would benefit from enhanced trade, especially if there was a move to making more distinctive or niche products.

Don said Employment Insurance should be reformed. Federal-provincial collaboration is required to simultaneously ensure those who lost their jobs will receive protection and to sharpen incentives for people on welfare or in low-paying jobs to raise their income through work, savings, education and training.

The Bank of Canada is expected to cut rates significantly — Rates may be slashed further and the central bank may have to mimic its U.S. counterpart in lowering rates to almost zero. The U.S. Federal Reserve cut its overnight borrowing costs in mid-December to a range between zero and 0.25%.

Marginal effective tax rates are highest at low and modest income levels, the focus of any relief should be on cutting the marginal rates — Consideration could be given to shaping the marginal rate cuts across the brackets rather than making it uniform. This would go a long way to making Canada more competitive for skilled international labour.

Mr Drummond spoke about Toronto's position in the Global Financial Services Centre Index (GFCI). There is potential for Toronto's financial sector to be in the top 10 of world powerhouses. Despite the current global economic situation, Toronto ranked twelfth in the Global Financial Services Centre Index.

Don Drummond emphasized that the stimulus package should be applied in consort with related measures being introduced in the USA in order for the effect to be successful. No one country should go it alone; the solution to the world crisis will come from a coordinated effort among the G20 nations, with the right blend of stimulus and regulation.

China, India and other increasingly industrialized nations are now exporting highly technical and advanced products into the Canadian and US markets. They are seriously encroaching upon the more highly valued products for which we are endeavouring to prepare our workforce to be equipped to compete successfully in the current global market. Otherwise, sociological problems may develop in Canada as our blue collar and technical workforce could be faced with a lower standard of living reducing our middle class population.

As Don Drummond noted, the Canadian labour market is somewhat fractured and somewhat reluctant to accept new immigrants into their professional associations and unions. This underlying problem could be eliminated by introducing government regulations to rationalize the entry qualifications required to practice in the line of work the entrant has been trained. In addition, we should set up convenient and practical upgrading training programs to bring the new entrant up to the required standard. This is part of the importance of the concept of "making sure that no one is left behind. To sustain a robust economy everyone is needed to contribute."

We should consider changing welfare plans to include using the outlay of funds directed toward welfare, in part, toward assisting and aiding these people to get into productive activity such as retraining, skills training, upgrading in education, including literacy programs, thereby providing opportunities for them to re-enter the system in a positive way.

In summary, Don Drummond was hopeful for Ontario weathering the worldwide economic storm provided we work cooperatively with other jurisdictions to introduce measures to get the economy moving again. We have to improve the following sectors:

- (1) Employment - improve its competitiveness (training, integration of immigrants)
- (2) Infrastructure - create a good basis for business to flourish including improved public transit facilities coordinated by a reformed and more authoritative transit authority
- (3) Financial system - reform sales taxation to make it more efficient (harmonized value added taxation)

WORKSHOPS

Emerging Stronger through economic & infrastructure investment

Chair: **Bas Balkissoon** , MPP

Panellists: **Richard Joy**
VP Policy & Government Relations, Toronto Board of Trade

Edward Levy
Transportation Consultant to BA Consulting Group

Hon. John Wilkinson, MPP Perth-Wellington
Minister of Research and Innovation

* **Hon. Gerry Phillips, MPP Scarborough Agincourt**
Chair of Cabinet

- Hon. Gerry Phillips joined the panel after the break as Minister Wilkinson had another engagement.

Opening Remarks

Ed Levy indicated that in today's challenging economic situation there is a need for action now to improve our economic infrastructure. He spoke about Metrolinx as a key to establishing a suitable transportation infrastructure and of their plans for an integrated transportation network across the GTA region. He believed a well integrated transportation system was essential in enabling Ontario cope with changing business needs and changing demographics.

Ed noted that there was still some way to go to ensure agencies such as GO and the TTC work as one to enable transit users to have an easy seamless transit experience. In his view, the establishing of true integration at the main hub of the system was overdue. The redevelopment of Union Station as the main hub and the setting up of alternate transportation hubs is essential.

Richard Joy said an integrated transportation infrastructure was the number one priority at the Board of Trade. Metrolinx's excellent comprehensive plan for the future of transit will cost over \$50 billion and the provincial government has committed about \$10 billion so there is a shortfall of about \$40 billion, some of which was hoped to be funded by the

federal government. The challenge is to raise money to cover the shortfall. Richard believed there needed to be more involvement of the private sector and this should be done through a reorganization of Metrolinx to depoliticise the body. Greater Vancouver's Translink includes the private sector and should be used as a model.

Richard spoke of the changing economy and the need to adapt our rules and regulations to facilitate the transition to a greener economy. He referred to the Zenn car as an example of an initiative requiring changes to the Highway Traffic Act.

Richard indicated that the stature of Toronto's financial sector was growing in global significance and we need to build on that success as a niche market. Establishing a single securities regulator based in Toronto would go a long way to building on that success.

John Wilkinson spoke of how the provincial government has recognised that Ontario needs to be the first to identify the best ideas for the future and to adopt them. Research and innovation are crucial to the province's economic future and to the health and well-being of Ontarians. With the creation of the Ministry of Research and Innovation, Ontario is ready to look into the future. The Ministry is designed to help good ideas get off the ground and to seize global opportunities. Since much research is now done in the private sector a Blue Ribbon panel made up of members from the private sector was established. We are part of the global economy and need to look at how we can benefit from globalization in a manner that is sustainable and interconnected to the human village. Ontario is world class at creating ideas but we need to turn these ideas into jobs. John said this "blue ribbon" panel has the job of identifying what we are good at in Ontario and then facilitate their introduction and use. John said the McGuinty government has set up an "innovation agenda" to ensure we are ready for the economy of the early 21st century. John's examples of successful innovative solutions were in the fields of medicine, communications and energy.

Open Discussion

Funding of Transit Improvements via Road Pricing

John Wilkinson indicated that an alternative to charging tolls for road use could be by charging differential auto insurance rates based on actual road use. This could include time of day and distance travelled.

How to treat essential business use of vehicles

A questioner asked how we could recognise the essential use of vehicles for business purposes and not penalise legitimate use. It was felt that this could be taken into account in establishing the charging formula to recognise type of use.

How to ensure that transportation plans become reality and are not just archived. Too often NIMBY objections obstruct implementation.

Ed praised the government for passing legislation to shorten the Environmental Assessment of new projects to six months. Many participants stressed the need to move projects ahead as time was of the essence.

Status of transit link to Toronto Pearson Airport

An economic assessment is underway. Metrolinx is involved in the project and it is hoped that construction work could start in less than a year.

Possible ways to raise the \$40 billion shortfall for the Metrolinx Transportation Plan.

Suggestions included using private sector through Public-Private Partnerships, dedicated funding through the gas tax and revenue from multi-zone fare cards.

Progress in the introduction of SMART Cards.

A Smart card for the Metrolinx area called the Presto card is already in the works for travel across the GTA and this may include fare by distance and time of day. The card could also be used to pay for parking. Work still needs to be done to include the TTC in this system as issues need to be resolved in splitting the fees collected across the region and administration costs

Use of School Buses in Rural Areas

A suggestion was made regarding the possible use of school buses to transport seniors and others while buses are idle or during the regular transport of students. There are issues in respect to police checks if seniors may be transported with children.

Status of Implementation of Smart meters and time of use pricing for electricity

Newmarket and Milton are now completely installed. Bas Balkissoon indicated that 2011 is a target date. One obstacle is the software that needs to be available to all of the utilities.

Emerging Markets

A participant asked if there were plans to invest in emerging markets such as countries in Africa.

John Wilkinson noted that the Minister of International Trade and Investment, Sandra Pupatello is always looking for opportunities. He noted that we need to take advantage of the strength that is in the diversity of our contacts allowing us to do business throughout the world.

Employment Insurance - need to rationalise access

It was noted there is a difference between the number of people who collect employment insurance and the number of people who are unemployed as many do not qualify for benefits. There is a real need to look at neighbourhood surveys to determine where governments can best assist. There is an uneven distribution of services to help local communities.

Gerry Phillips commented on the work that is being done through groups such as Tropicana, Agincourt Community Services, Centre for Community Information, and West Scarborough Legal Services.

Access to funding for infrastructure such as renovations to community housing including looking at energy reduction to save money.

Gerry Phillips noted that money is being provided through the Social Houses Services Corporation and the Ministry of Environment that loans out money which is paid back through the energy savings. The Toronto Atmospheric Fund has also provided money for retrofits.

Closing Comments

It was generally agreed that the future of our cities was central to our success as a country. The attitude of the federal government towards cities needs to change. We need to ensure the urban agenda becomes a priority at the federal level.

The participants were hopeful for the potential of Metrolinx to be a catalyst to achieve great improvements to public transit and to succeed as a regional transit authority for half the population of Ontario. Perhaps it could be a model for similar regional transit authorities across Ontario.

Emerging Stronger through a strengthened workforce

Chair: **Margarett Best , MPP**

Panellists: **Ann Buller**
President & CEO Centennial College

Dr. Gervan Fearon
President, Tropicana Community Services & Associate Dean York University

Brad Duguid, MPP Scarborough-Centre
Minister of Aboriginal Affairs

Opening Remarks

Ann Buller spoke about Ontario Community Colleges which were founded in the 60's. In turbulent times, community colleges are particularly suited to help people adapt and be more productive as the colleges are more flexible in their approach to training.

Ann talked about what we can do to increase worker skills and help them adapt to the "new economy". She spoke of the need for a long term strategy which recognized that post secondary education was a necessity in today's emerging economy whether this would be gained at a college or university. In fact, applied education can be very innovative and could be the best fit for today's workforce needs. To encourage more school kids to get involved, we have to attract First Generation students because if parents have post-secondary education, the children are more likely to follow in their footsteps.

Ann said we should assist people build a "portfolio education", that is, a well-rounded comprehensive assembly of skills and experiences. We should be flexible and ready to change how we do things so as to be innovative and open to fresh thinking and methods to meet the needs of today.

Dr. Gervan Fearon reminded everyone of how society has adapted over the years to cope with big changes in the world. We have successfully navigated through the Agricultural Revolution, Industrial Revolution and the Information Revolution. We are now in a Knowledge Economy, one in which those who do best make sure they keep their skills up to date.

Now we are facing a big change or "revolution" in the way we do business. Fortunately, Canada has a respected governance structure (eg banking) which builds confidence. Gervan spoke of the need to improve ethical standards in business and we need leadership to make this happen.

Brad Duguid noted that Gervan & Ann are prime examples of talent we have in Scarborough- Gervan grew up in Scarborough & Ann promoted great programmes at Centennial. As Dalton McGuinty has said our top priority is our people. We have recognised that we can't compete with China's and India's cheap labour. Instead we need to compete using our skilled, educated workforce and we must generate a culture of innovation. We have made good progress in improving our education as witnessed by labour peace, higher test scores and increased numbers of graduates.

Brad spoke of the work being done to improve access through the government's Reaching Higher Plan. Through this plan \$6.2 billion will have been invested in post-secondary education. The McGuinty government understands that, in today's knowledge economy, education is the prerequisite for prosperity. The brains and know-how of Ontario's skilled workforce will be the competitive edge of the 21st century. The Province wants to take care of its workers. We are enhancing rights and support for temporary workers so they can find permanent employment. We have to raise everybody up to prepare them for better more highly skilled jobs. Our objective must be to have the best, most skilled, educated workforce in the world.

Margarett Best praised the contributions of people such as Gervan and Ann and their institutions in helping people meet the challenges. Government can't do it alone.

Open Discussion

How to improve the image of technical/applied workers

Ann Buller said there is a need to dispel the myth that undervalues technical/applied education at colleges. Centennial's programmes have been externally rated for high standards. Ann said they are working with industry to increase access for apprentices. There are ongoing initiatives to get more women into technologies. Ann Buller also noted that Centennial has a Fast Track programme for foreign professionals. Gervan Fearon said that the Jane & Finch satellite location of York University has a link with Seneca College to allow accreditation from both institutions.

Brad Duguid emphasized that we have to focus on getting our children into post-secondary education as 70% of jobs in the future will require that level of education.

Centennial College's Portfolio Programme

Ann Buller said portfolio education is an integral part of the Learning Experience at Centennial College. Students are taught the use of portfolios to document their learning development as global citizens throughout their program of study. More details are available at the Centennial College website - www.centennialcollege.ca

What is Minister Duguid's ministry doing to support aboriginal education?

Brad Duguid noted that aboriginal education is a Federal responsibility, but the province is affected by aboriginal disenfranchisement. Brad has met with the other provincial education ministers to promote aboriginal education.

How does Centennial College link up with University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC)

Ann Buller said Centennial College has 5 joint programmes run with the UTSC. These enable UTSC to focus more on Applied Education as a discipline.

What is being done by government and educators to promote transition of immigrants with professional skills into the Ontario workforce?

Brad Duguid noted that foreign professionals are a boon to our economy but there are two issues which impede their acceptance:

- (1) current skills may not be in demand
- (2) delays in getting accreditation

Brad said there is a programme to help foreign trained medical personnel work as assistants in medical offices to maintain skills while they are waiting for accreditation.

Ann Buller noted that foreign/immigrant professionals are in demand as teachers, instructors at colleges and said these immigrants should be advised of the benefits of retraining.

Dr. Gervan Fearon said that immigrants often have difficulty in communicating their skills so they need assistance. Gervan did also note the opportunity for immigrants to showcase the connection back to their home country to increase business links for Canadian companies.

A member of the audience informed those attending that the Professional Engineers have invited the Fairness Commissioner to audit their regulations to enable improved access for

Foreign professionals to accreditation. It was also noted that the system of education from primary school to post-secondary is much better than 30 years ago.

"How can we give immigrants realistic expectations about the struggles they will experience once they come to Canada? - Examples are: employers that do not accommodate daycare schedules, immigrants that require extra subsidy support as they try to adapt to Canada, and the state of demand for their skills etc.

The panellists understood the difficulties experienced by new immigrants. Ann Buller noted that Centennial College's "Global Citizenship" programme helps raise awareness of cultural barriers and assist people to work through them.

Closing Comments

Among the panellists, there was general agreement that to compete successfully in a changing world, we need to instil a culture of innovation, be open to fresh thinking in business and build a highly skilled workforce. We also need to focus more on post secondary education including an increased emphasis on apprenticeship programmes.

Emerging Stronger by bringing everyone along

Chair: **Wayne Arthurs , MPP**

Panellists: **Mark Chamberlain**
President of Trivaris Ltd.

Bonnie Harkness
Executive Director of United Way of Ajax-Pickering-Uxbridge

Michael Mendelson
Senior Scholar at the Caledon Institute

Joan Wideman
Past Chair, Ajax Board of Trade

Lorenzo Berardinetti
MPP Scarborough Southwest

Opening Remarks

Bonnie Harkness foresaw that the need for charitable services will increase in contrast to donations which will decrease. In fact, 20% of Canadians provide 80% of donations. She said the challenge for charities is to deal with the effective use of scarce resources: As a solution, she proposed the following:

- Sufficient Funding -- encourage more to donate, even a small amount
- Partnership -- merger of similar agencies to reduce overhead
- Volunteerism -- help nonprofit ride out the storm

Joan Wideman wondered how business leaders could help bring people through these difficult times. She said we believe in strong communities and she thought this could best be accomplished by business people being active / proactive in the following areas and issues:

- infrastructure - i.e. safety, social services, transportation
- social conscience -- fundraising for specific social groups
- assisting small business (65% of the members of the Board of Trade are from small business)
- job creation through infrastructure projects
- focus on retraining of workers
- apprentices -- more needed, perhaps through tax incentives
- focus on new and emerging technologies, for the jobs of tomorrow

- improve access to transportation
- healthy living and prevention should be the focus of health care
- communication infrastructure, particularly beyond the "401 corridor"
- reduce government spending, eliminate duplication of services

Michael Mendelson believed strongly that the Ontario Government should continue its poverty reduction strategy. He highlighted the following:

- Establishing the Ontario Child Benefit tax credit was an important initiative
- Maintain / strengthen (revise, reform and change) the social safety net during recession (when needed most)
- Focus on education, training, and upgrading of skills

Mark Chamberlain emphasized that we have to "make sure you're solving the right problem!" He said it was important to take a wider longer view of the economic situation. One should not only look at the fiscal deficit; but we must remember that we also face a social deficit and an environmental deficit.

Making investments in people creates a "high performance society", where nobody is left behind in such areas as :

- pre-natal care
- early education (best "bang for the buck")
- living wage
- affordable housing

Mark pointed out that Government is by nature cautious, but nevertheless, even in these challenging times, let us do what needs to be done, to ensure everyone is brought along when the economy turns around and recovers.

Lorenzo Berardinetti reported that the Government was keen to ensure its Poverty Reduction Strategy goes forward to ensure full participation by all in the economy and society. He mentioned :

- There will be targets and measures (25 in 5 -- 25% reduction in poverty within five years)
- Ontario Child Benefit will increase
- Investments in education (early childhood, lower class sizes, colleges and universities)

Open Discussion:

How can we be a more resilient society (as there will be more "ups and downs" in the economy in the future)?

Mark Chamberlain said that making investments in people (such as early education and nutrition) increases the probability of a more resilient society. Bonnie Harkness said that building support systems sends a message to the poor that "you won't be left alone". It was recognized that government must make choices and the choice was not just whether to provide services, but at what level should they be provided. It seemed to be agreed that there should be flexibility in education and training. People should become life long learners and money management skills should be included in the school curriculum.

Are we communicating in an overwhelmingly negative way?

It was agreed that while the economic situation is serious and worthy of attention, it was also important to increase the effort to celebrate our successes. Mark Chamberlain believed that nutrition and exercise are as important as reading, writing and mathematics. We should take care to spread the skill of good money management to everyone.

What can be done about the underemployed?

Mark Chamberlain pointed out that we must ask, what are we training people for, and how? More importantly, when seeking a job, one must demonstrate the ability to think, learn, and communicate for the jobs of the future. We should be training people in the skill of life long learning so they are able to deal well with new ideas and new technology.

Michael said we need to create a society where everyone has the opportunity to reach his / her potential; the individual must then take advantage of the opportunity. Bonnie stressed the need for upgraded trade schools and greater apprenticeship opportunities.

Lorenzo noted the availability of the government's Skills Training Fund.

What one item would you like to see in the upcoming Ontario budget?

Most panellists pointed to the need for the educational priorities of early years education and worker retraining. Bonnie Harkness pleaded for everyone to give a little to help those most in need. Wayne Arthurs summed up the responses by reminding the audience, "people are the economy" so the budget needs to focus on people.

What can be done to encourage the growth of small business?

We should take steps to develop a culture of innovation and creativity and there should be more networking and monitoring, which will enhance the chances for success.

How do we guide people through a "maze of advice" to help them through these challenging times? In the UK the Citizens Advice Bureau advises people on their rights and responsibilities and helps them to find the advice they need through the appropriate resources.

Several speakers referred to the availability of an integrated data base for many municipalities (eg. Toronto 211), which provides a directory of many government services. It was agreed this service was not well known and there was some potential for further coordination of assistance and perhaps the UK body may provide some ideas and experience. The provincial government directory is ServiceOntario: www.ontario.ca, and the federal government directory is Service Canada: www.servicecanada.gc.ca.

Concern was expressed by one questioner about taxes - specifically harmonization of PST and GST and whether tax increases should be on income or sales.

Wayne Arthurs pointed out that "harmonization" is a politically charged issue that would have to be explained carefully to the public. Michael Mendelson noted that harmonization could improve productivity of small business; however, this increases the burden on consumption (should tax credits be extended?). Joan Wideman indicated there was some potential for increased paper work.

What should be done differently to support people with disabilities?

Mark Chamberlain believed this was a question on our values. What kind of society do we value? We should provide a living wage. Michael Mendelson said we should extend entitlement criteria to the Federal Disabilities Benefit.

Closing Comments

It was generally agreed that retraining was key to enabling people to become equipped with the appropriate work and life skills that are or will be required for the changing economic world. There has to be a focus on preparing for the jobs of tomorrow in the work environment. However, Money Management needs to be an integral part of the school curriculum, likely as part of Life Skills.

We must assist people through the challenges resulting from the adjustments to the economy that will occur /by maintaining and improving the social safety net.

Overall Lessons from Conference - by Ian Elder, Editor

Much was learned at the conference which should help Ontario chart its way successfully through the economic challenges facing it, provided it adapts to the new global economic order. The solution to the world financial crisis will come from cooperation of the G20 nations who subsequently agreed on initial collective action to stabilize the world economy and secure recovery and jobs. Work is still required to produce the appropriate mix of stimulus and regulation.

For employment, we have to ensure Ontario prepares its people for the jobs of tomorrow through retraining and helps to create a culture of innovation and fresh thinking. The Ontario government was to be praised for its attention to the urban agenda and for its success in encouraging the development of an excellent transportation system especially in the Greater Toronto Area. Business appeared to be in favour of the streamlining of the sales taxes and the Ontario government is now taking action to harmonize the Ontario sales tax and the federal GST.

Conference participants were also keen to make sure good proposals get accepted and there is a commitment to getting things done. While consultations with the public must be thorough and transparent, we need to ensure that essential work does not suffer too much delay. Indeed the blue ribbon panel established by the Ministry of Research and Innovation would seem to be an ideal way to ensure things get done.

Acknowledgements and Appreciation

The organizers of the 2009 Renaissance Conference would like to express their appreciation for the contributions of the following:

Rapporteurs - Emna Dhahak, Jane Veit, Brian Whitmore and Joe Bush 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 2009 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.

