

The Council of Professionals

This paper describes an elitist council which addresses a serious weakness of Canada's constitution and asks your support for this method of strengthening it, while maintaining our present democratic process without change or disruption.

The organization and financing of this **Council** must not come from a government or political party but from Canadian professionals through their organized societies, present and future. Since professional qualifications are conferred by our institutions of higher learning, impetus for this Council should also come from the Governing Boards of our Universities, their Presidents and Faculty Deans.

Engineers have the best opportunity to make a positive economic impact on our society since the world has become technical and the "applied scientist" fits nicely into this new environment. But they have little control since much of their work is processed through elected bodies which are influenced by polls. This introduces the "curse of politics" (*Economist*) which is the making of decisions on the basis of emotion rather than scientific logic. But it is to science that we must turn to produce the productivity that we need to meet our inexorable escalating costs due to demographics and the politician's promises that become "rights".

To have any influence on public policy, the engineer must have direct access to the voter via the media.

Canada's standard of living measured in real wealth is declining steadily. There are now twelve countries ahead of us. Our gross domestic product (GDP per capita) ranks us even lower. There are countries such as Sweden, Switzerland and Singapore that are more efficient and enjoy a higher standard of living than us, even though they have fewer or no significant natural resources. Singapore has no coal, oil, natural gas, hydro power, agricultural land nor minerals. It even has to import drinking water from the Malay States. The only significant asset all these countries have is their people; to achieve their high standard of living, they use their brains.

Canada has an abundance of natural assets. We have agricultural land stretching for thousands of kilometers, water and hydro power. We have fossil fuels, and forests. We have minerals including gold, copper, lead, zinc, uranium, iron ore, phosphates, potash, and the list is nearly endless. Name it - we have it. Our country lives by depleting these natural assets and inevitably, as our southern neighbour has now discovered, they eventually run out. Also one of the principal responsibilities of engineers is to produce products that last longer. Increasing productivity without increasing value adds to landfills and depletes our resources and increases the costs of raw materials.

Our form of government, as in all successful countries, guarantees our freedom, gives us personal protection and access to justice. We have the pre-requisites of a successful form of government because it is acceptable to our citizens. But it has this serious weakness. Our government at all three levels, unlike private industries that compete with each other, performs badly in the technical and scientific areas. As stated, we suffer from what the *Economist Magazine* succinctly calls "the curse of politics". These three levels of government consume

nearly 40% (2007) of the G.D.P. and the policies devised to counter the recession of 2008 will increase this figure close to a critical point. Even income from the sale of plentiful resources and taxes on our competitive private sector will be unable to bear the burden of expense and waste in terms of numbers of public employees, their wages and entitlements and the entitlements of our people. Canada also has many industries supported by government to create jobs and not necessarily economic production that are a burden on the taxpayer.

The idea of an advisory council is hardly new. Plato proposed something of the kind 2500 years ago. Almost every advanced country has excellent councils of one sort or another; some permanent like *The Fraser Institute*, *Canada West Foundation*, *C.D. Howe Institute*, *Chief Executives of Canada*, and others short term, convened in an attempt to solve an emergent problem.

For decades, worldwide, councils have researched problems so there is no scarcity of good ideas and practical solutions. The difficulty lies in their implementation. The principal impediment to implementation is the political imperative wherein emotion trumps logic. The short term emotional reaction of voters influences the judgment of an elected representative by threatening the security of his/her elected office.

Our system renders us unable to take a long term view, procrastinates on advanced planning and therefore ultimately forces implementation of hasty solutions, often under stress and years late, with inevitably higher associated costs.

To prosper we must have a constitutional system that encourages change, when needed, and directs that change using the best knowledge and the finest minds available, in a world where change is occurring at an increasing pace. Our constitution must be pro-active.

Our present constitution functions well in social areas because man's basic nature has not changed materially in the last few thousand years, but functions badly in the new hi-tech scientific areas. But people do not like change because it threatens their security. To survive in his chosen career the politician mirrors the attitude of the majority. Because of this characteristic of homo sapiens, that of feeling comfortable in a familiar environment, the politician promises to retain this environment. A common example is the spending of the taxpayer's money to maintain the voter in an area of Canada where circumstances have wiped out his employment. To determine the attitude of the voter, the politician resorts to polls which give him the public's prejudice of the moment.

Since the present form of the constitution will neither adapt nor change, and the politician will be "turfed out" if he suggests unpopular legislation, it becomes necessary, in order to make the existing system function better, to change the "checks and balances". This may be done by giving the public direct access to the best advice available. To be effective that advice must come from men and women that are:

1. separate from the political system and the media, 2. knowledgeable and experienced, 3. financially independent, 4. dedicated by professional oath to serving the public, and 5. trusted by the voter.

Every adult (a.k.a. voter) personally knows at least two professionals, and polls indicate that they are trusted. This relationship will give credibility to the appointment of one member from each profession to an advisory body we would call a Council of Professionals.

The conscientious politician would welcome this advisory group because this Council could introduce directly to the public all the “politically incorrect” legislation that he would like to introduce but cannot without threatening his career.

The great advantage of this proposal is that it does not have to be sold to the public. Few parents choose a political career for their offspring. Most will encourage their children to prepare for a professional career even when it involves a considerable financial sacrifice. This desire transcends cultural, religious and linguistic considerations.

It is significant that qualified graduates, before entering their respective professions, are required to take an oath, for example the Hippocratic Oath of physicians obligating them to serve their fellow man and not a government, political party or religious group. Engineers have their iron ring ceremony. The legal and accounting professions have a comprehensive code of ethics.

The closest comparison to **The Council of Professionals** would be the Supreme Courts of countries that have achieved credibility through performance. The proposed **Council**, like the law courts that depend upon evidence produced by litigants, would acknowledge the research produced by existing councils, universities, and experts all over the world. The **Council's** recognition of the source of the research would enhance the public prestige of the contributing institutions.

The Council members would achieve celebrity status through the media, using the long established methods practiced by the movie industry to create stars or by political parties to create national heroes e.g. John F. Kennedy.

Here are some examples that illustrate how our present system fails to make correct decisions; a failure which leads to a massive waste of public funds.

New Subjects to be studied by Council of Professionals:

Enlarging the Council, Comparison to Supreme Courts, Engineering and Science, Energy strategy for Canada.

A few examples of subjects politicians avoid discussing seriously: Charities, Indigenous peoples, Marketing Boards, Pensions, Medicare and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Municipal Planning in North America.

Taxes are unpopular, but cannot be avoided. For efficiency the Federal government endeavored to consolidate and make uniform throughout Canada a value added tax (VAT). It began by initiating a harmonized sales tax (HST) in some compliant Provinces anticipating others would follow suit. It cost one Provincial Premier his job and also threatens the popularity of others. This efficiency measure is unlikely ever to be implemented across the country. The substitution of a VAT for corporation taxes was credited with the economic miracle of post war Japan and is supported by all knowledgeable economists, but is unpopular with the great majority of contemporary voters.

A proposal has been made to establish a new town on clear terrain assembled by eminent domain. Its residents would enjoy vastly improved economic efficiency over those residing in conventional cities; which is where 80% of us live. Canada's present demographics are a perfect fit, creating a market that is independent of our country's economics. It is a plan initiated by Sweden and Finland over half a century ago but is strongly opposed by voters in Canada. The proposal is therefore rejected by the politician since he is influenced by public polls even though

the Canadian family with an income of \$76,000 (2009) would save over \$10,000 per annum in the new town because of its efficiencies.

May I refer to a speech given by the newly retired Dean of Business of the University of Toronto in 1976. He spoke of the contingent liabilities of government, now enshrined as “rights”, and produced figures that would, without painful tax increases or by default equally painful inflation, mathematically bankrupt the country. No politician ever mentions these known problems because one cannot be the bearer of bad tidings and still hope to be re-elected.

One of the major technical advances of the 20th and the early 21st centuries is the rapid development of communication, which led to the introduction of polls that politicians use to alert themselves about up-to-the-minute voter opinions. This instant access to public opinion has some obvious advantages. As stated, it also has some serious negative outcomes.

Our political process is not designed to cope with many aspects of modern technology and in some areas has become dysfunctional. The present system works well for maintaining justice for the individual, protecting property and personal rights, etc. that are the *sine qua non* of a successful, peaceful society. Polls cannot however address problems involving science, high technology, medicine, international trade agreements, economics, etc. Polls determine the short term opinions of average people, few of whom are endowed with adequate skills and knowledge to evaluate possible solutions in such matters and they vote on an assessment of the immediate impact that any proposed legislation would have on them personally. People judge (vote) emotionally not logically. A politician often finds himself in a conflict of interest position since his actions are influenced by the pressure of the popular vote. To properly exercise his franchise in an election, therefore, the voter must have direct access to the judgments of those people he admires and trusts. Polls confirm he trusts professionals, thus professional acumen will find expression in legislation.

Credibility of professions (from recent polls):

Doctors 88%, Engineers 88%, Judges 78%, Accountants 76%, Bankers 72%, Journalists 49%, Lawyers 49%, and in descending order insurance brokers, real estate agents, publicists, car salesmen. Lowest – politicians 14%. A recent poll in Britain that asked the people if they believed the politician lied had an 82% affirmative vote.

A **Council of Professionals**, as herein envisaged, does not pre-empt the responsibilities of any existing institutions such as Parliament, Provincial Legislatures, City Councils or their advisors. It would pronounce on a limited number of subjects involving long term policy where, at present, legislation strays from scientific logic. It would publish opinion only in clear cut situations so as to affirm its credibility. It must attempt to be right in the long term even though popular contemporary opinion might differ.

As stated, Canadian governments often do not tackle known problems when the best solution might be politically risky. Also any problem that has a time frame beyond the next election date, (e.g. Medicare, since it takes eight years, for example, to educate a specialist) is of little interest to members of an incumbent government who would be pilloried for raising taxes to cover the costs for a decade and who would not be seeking a mandate when the benefits of today's economic sacrifice would be made evident.

An elitist group in our society must take the initiative and devise consistent, firm, long range policies and communicate them to the voter. Universities have the responsibility of selecting our

most talented young men and women, then giving them the technical knowledge and the moral and ethical precepts necessary for them to qualify for and practice in their chosen professions. They produce the qualified individuals responsible for making all modern societies efficient and productive. It is in such institutions that eager, bright students are taught not only their disciplines but also the moral and ethical precepts needed to produce a successful society.

The legally organized professions are the initiators of the proposed **Council** and are the controllers of standards, both technical and ethical, and must provide the funds needed to attain the objectives. This would require only a small tithing. The sum of \$100 from each accredited professional would produce \$55 million per annum. The **Council** could be expanded up to seven or nine members by the first group of four appointing someone from other disciplines not recognized by provincial legislation as self-governing professions. This is the process successfully used by the International Olympic Committee to select their members.

It is almost axiomatic that successful countries are dependent on the knowledge and developed skills of their educated people. One of government's major expenditures is for education. It is important, moreover, that a balance be maintained so that no surpluses or deficiencies of educated people develop-- as this can lead to waste. The demands of societies differ. Singapore, for example, needs a different mix than Canada. A surplus of angry, educated, unemployed youth can lead to social unrest while a deficiency retards productive growth.

To repeat, the world's most successful nations are those that develop their most valuable and sometimes only asset; they educate their people. These nations also provide the political environment, a democratic society.

Countries with which we compete have immediate access, at the speed of a jet plane, to all of our talent. Our political process actually has often opposed the advice of our best minds while foreign countries use it.

Our present democratic system (which took over a millennium to develop), which Winston Churchill described as "better than all the others that have been tried", is not changed by this proposal and therefore will maintain all of the better features of the present form of government.

This recommended form of **Council** creates what the economist calls an externality. It requires the initiative of two of our existing institutions, both of which are of the highest quality.

(1) Our universities that educate our finest young minds to create the professionals that produce all the world's successful societies.

(2) The professional societies that are required by provincial legislation to monitor quality and ethics. Each **professional society selects its member of the Council**.

Engineers, lawyers, physicians, accountants and architects communicate easily with one another because they speak a common language using universal professional terms. If other countries organized similar Councils, they could easily standardize laws and business practices and facilitate international relationships.

Having developed a national engineering firm, the Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada honoured me with the appointment as President and I represented Canada at a convention held in Europe. Since the professional in a discipline speaks a common technical language, the association discussed and arrived at mutually understood conclusions with remarkable ease, regardless of religion, nationality or customs. If other countries formed a Council of Professionals, they would provide the same amicable contacts as with the Association of

Consulting Engineers (and also the International Olympic Committee) between nations regardless of historical frictions and wars.

The western nations' form of democracy is spreading throughout the world, and the Council of Professionals, if adopted by Canada, would quickly move into other nations, helping these new democracies to amicably communicate with one another.

As a professional, you are in the unique position and have the responsibility to select the individual with the intellectual capacity, experience and communication skills to be your spokesman, and become a national icon. The profession has credibility – give it a voice.

Man does not like change and therefore the new policies needed to adapt to the rapid changes in our present world are unpopular. The credibility of our form of government is now so low that even minor changes are difficult. Long-term policies, which require changes of greater magnitude are impossible and an independent body using our maximum skills is a prerequisite to introduce to the voter the necessary adaptations to conditions over which our nation has no control.