

OPINION

Cuts endanger our spot on world stage

CANADIANS ARE forever being invited to "punch beyond our weight" on the world scene, and we're usually happy to try. Our peacekeepers are stretched thin in Bosnia, Haiti and other places, but somehow get the job done.

Countries in need can still rely on us for some aid, even as we cut spending at home.

Our thinned-out diplomatic corps holds its own against the Americans in tussles over Cuba and trade, and works with them to promote disarmament and to thwart terrorism.

And we've been nominated for a Nobel Prize for trying to persuade countries to ban land mines.

Most Canadians take justifiable pride in all this. We fully expect to see Ottawa out there, promoting our sovereignty, independence, security and trade, and being a voice for common sense and compassion.

GORDON BARTHOS

Foreign Affairs



But these are penny-pinching times. Under Jean Chrétien's Liberals, the resources going into foreign policy have been shrinking — dramatically — and with a federal election coming that spending is coming under further attack.

Paul Martin's recent budget cuts a whopping \$862 million, or 6 per cent, from the spending envelopes that support our efforts abroad, according to the main spending estimates for 1997-98.

The foreign affairs and trade

ministry (our diplomats) will spend \$77 million less in 1997-98. The Canadian International Development Agency — which administers the biggest chunk of our aid — will be down \$146 million. And defence is cut \$639 million.

This downsizing is even more striking, measured over the five-year period since 1993, when the Liberals were elected. Taken together, the three key budgets have been chopped 20 per cent, not counting inflation, from more than \$16 billion to less than \$13 billion.

That's a huge bite from a modest base. As retired Maj.-Gen. Lewis MacKenzie has acidly, and correctly, observed, Canada is "trying to play hardball with a low-pitch budget."

A few years ago, our spending seemed modest enough; today, our diplomats, aid workers and military look back on that period as the salad days. The public has been willing

to tolerate this restraint to get federal spending under control.

But now Conservatives and Reformers are scrambling to woo voters by promising big tax cuts, to be achieved in part by even further downsizing our presence abroad. The NDP would mostly shift direction, pumping more money into aid and less into defence.

While none of the opposition parties is likely to be delivering Canada's next budget, their approach validates the downsizing that has occurred so far, and encourages still more.

Progressive Conservative Leader Jean Charest paid lip service this week to ensuring "a leadership role and voice for Canada in world affairs through serious engagement" on a wide range of issues.

But Charest then undercut himself by unveiling plans to chop a further \$1.5 billion in key areas, to help finance an across-the-board 10 per cent income tax cut.

Charest would cut \$325 million more from foreign affairs, \$473 million from aid and \$650 million from defence — places already hard-hit.

Reform party Leader Preston Manning derided Charest's tax cut as "Mulroney baloney." But Reform proposes a \$2,000 per family tax cut and a balanced budget by 2000, through \$15 billion in spending reductions of its own.

Reform has yet to make its figures public, but party insiders report it proposes to cut foreign affairs down to about \$1.2 billion in 1997-98, CIDA to \$1.1 billion and defence to about \$9.2 billion.

New Democrat party Leader Alexa McDonough hasn't unveiled her program. But MP Bill Blaikie, the party's point man on foreign affairs, believes that Canadian policy is tilted toward promoting trade at the expense of human rights, and he notes that the party seeks more generous aid spending, and favors adjusting military

The big chop

Under the Liberals, Canada is spending 20 per cent less on foreign affairs, aid and defence.

	93	94-97
	(\$ billions)	
Total	\$16.1	\$12.9
■ Foreign affairs	1.4	1.3
■ CIDA	2.7	1.7
■ Defence	12.0	9.9

SOURCE: Government of Canada, The Budget, main estimates 1994-95, 1997-98

spending to a less threatening world. Certainly, nobody is seriously contemplating spending more in this area.

The Conservative and Reform spending targets, in particular, look like an attempt to finance tax cuts, nothing more.

For people who care about Canada's ability to promote its interests in a dicey world, this is depressing stuff. Canada's diplomatic, aid and defence presence is being stretched so thin, its effectiveness is at risk.

Gordon Barthos' column appears on Friday.

Adult education is an investment

Hard to see logic in provincial cutbacks

BY JACK QUARTER

Ontario has done remarkably well in getting its youth to complete at least secondary school.

A Statistics Canada study, undertaken in 1995, indicates that 88 per cent of a broad sample of 22- to 24-year-olds in the province had completed secondary school — higher than any other province (and all the more impressive because 192,000 Ontarians speak neither English nor French).

Although there are many possible explanations for these high completion rates — not least of which is the lack of opportunity in the labor force for people without basic education — part of the success must be attributed to the province's investment in a variety of adult education or continuing programs that have made it possible for youth who had difficulties with high school to persist and obtain their diplomas, even though they did so at age 22 or 23 instead of 18.

There are 1.1 million adults in school board programs, and of these, 50,000 are in adult day schools, a movement that took off in the 1980s.

The demand for adult programs in public education has increased tenfold in the past decade, and probably would have continued to increase except for cuts in government financing for adult education. These cuts have included chopping in half a grant for adult literacy programs; hacking away the compensatory grant for adult and continuing education, which gave higher funding for boards that were rural or remote; eliminating funding

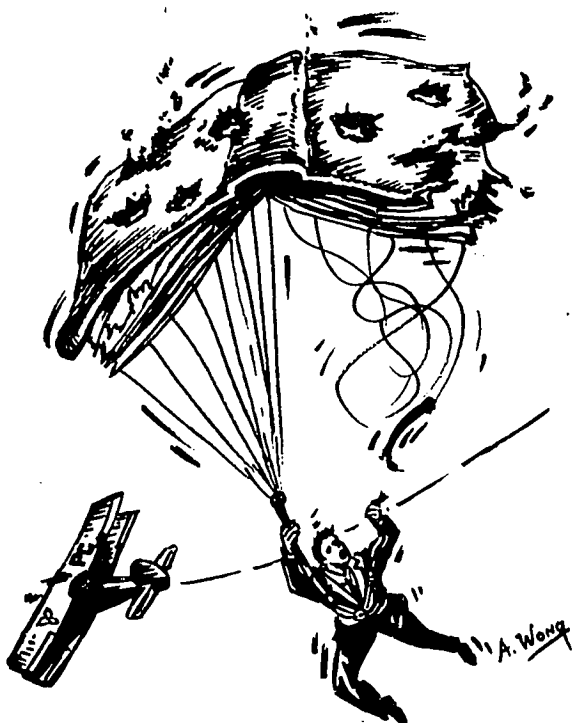
for partial credits, a program that greatly benefited those adults who either were working or had long distances to drive to reach school; and then a 55 per cent reduction of the per pupil grant for students over 21 and, in addition, a 47 per cent increase in the number of hours of attendance required to generate the grant.

The logic of these cuts is difficult to grasp because this same government has campaigned on getting people off welfare and back into the labor force. Yet its research indicates that 136,000 people on provincial welfare rolls were unable to find work because they

lacked basic literacy, numeracy and linguistic skills.

Another study (conducted by the Ontario Council of Adult Educators and the Continuing Education School Board Administrators) of 1,000 adult day-school graduates in 1995 found that while all students were unemployed prior to the research, 47 per cent were employed four months after graduation and 36 per cent went on to higher education. This study provides further evidence that adult education should not be viewed as an expenditure, but as an investment — helping people to get off welfare and into the work force.

Richard Gwyn's column will return.



ALFRED WONG FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Lot levies ball is back in Leach's court

OVER TO YOU, Al Leach. Today, a meeting of GTA mayors will get a look at

the text of a letter that is to be presented to the minister of municipal affairs on Monday.

It could turn into a fascinating test of whether the Harris government is ready to stick to basic principles it has been proclaiming here and about, or whether it is into looking after some special interest groups — in this case developers.

The letter says, in some pretty tough language, that negotiations between the developers and a committee of the GTA mayors have broken down.

They were negotiating development charges. These are a special tax that municipalities make developers pay for every new building they put up.

Municipal politicians, particularly in edge cities around Toronto, claim: they are operating on the principle that "growth should pay for growth."

People moving into new buildings should pay for the roads, sewer and water pipes, the police and fire stations, and even the libraries and rec centres they are going to use.

Developers have screamed that these development charges are forcing them to raise prices — in some cases by close to \$20,000 on a new house.

The developers thought they had a friend in Mike Harris. One of the first things Leach did when Harris appointed him to municipal affairs was to announce that he was going to roll back those awful development charges.

But last November, when he brought in his bill limiting development charges, local politicians staged a wildcat strike.

First Mississauga, then a half-dozen other councils, announced that they would hold up approval of new projects.

Leach beat a strategic retreat: He would negotiate over development charges if the municipalities would lift their freeze on new developments.

So negotiations began. They turned out to be heroic, exhausting and, in the end, fruitless.

The negotiating team for the city side had three of the GTA's most experienced mayors, Ann Mulvale of Oakville, Don Cousens of Markham and Mississauga's Hazel McCallion.

They set up subcommittees to talk with representatives of the municipal affairs ministry and the Urban Development Institute and those subcommittees, says Cousens, "put in literally hundreds of hours."

And the negotiators did make progress. They reached agreement on some 20 issues. But they couldn't agree on the issue of "co-funding."

Leach wants municipalities to put up 10 per cent of the cost of hard services, roads, sewer and water for new developments, and 30 per cent of the cost of soft services such as libraries, and recreation centres. This could add as much as 31

per cent to the average tax bill in Markham, Cousens says.

And just as important, Cousens says, it violates a basic principle on which edge cities in the GTA have always operated: people who already live in a municipality should not have to pay for the facilities that new people moving in are going to use.

The new people moving in should pay for these services through development charges. Arguing for the developers' side, Stephen Kaiser, president of the Urban Development Institute, says municipalities have been putting in "gold-plated" facilities and many more people than just fresh arrivals in new subdivisions are using them.

Kaiser would have a stronger case if the developers were promising to pass on to home buyers any savings that come from a reduction in development charges. But they are not offering any such guarantees.

Kaiser says it would be impossible for them to offer to reduce prices this way because while they are saving money on development charges, the cost of lumber and the cost of labor might be going up. So they could be losing money even if development charges go down.

Kaiser started off in the development industry pushing a wheelbarrow and he can argue with passionate conviction that development charges raise prices and kill jobs.

The mayors can argue, with equal passion and conviction, that rolling back the charges is just a gift to developers. So which side will get the backing of Leach and The Boss?

Harris has said that his government, unlike every other government in the history of the world, will do no favors for "special interests."

And Leach has said many times that the objective of the restructuring and downloading his government is engaged in is to give cities more independence. He wants Queen's Park to get out of the way and let Ontario cities make their own decisions.

So will Leach and Harris let cities make their own decisions about an issue that is as important to their future as development charges?

Or will Leach and Harris jump in and force cities to do a little something for the developers?

David Lewis Stein usually writes Sunday, Wednesday and Friday.

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Tapping immigrants' unused skills

BY RATNA OMIIDVAR

Ever chatted with a cab driver and discovered he had a Ph.D.? Had your pizza delivered by an engineer? Ever wondered why — despite the fact that Canada is actively recruiting highly skilled immigrants — many end up on welfare or in jobs where their skills are severely under-utilized?

The answer lies in an extremely complex and decentralized set of laws, regulations and practices that determine who in Ontario gets to practise a particular trade or profession.

Everyone — regardless of where they are trained — goes through the accreditation process. But for newcomers in Ontario, the first step is to have your academic credentials assessed by the applicable professional or trade association that administers the licensing process.

Credential assessment, in most cases, costs hundreds of dollars up front, takes time and requires the co-operation of foreign institutions to forward documents. There are no guarantees, and no refunds.

Professionally trained immigrants trade stories about wildly inconsistent and unfair as-

sessments — about people with master's degrees earned in Canada being told they must redo undergraduate degrees earned elsewhere; about two people from the same program at the same foreign university getting different results; and about people from war-torn nations being told there is not enough information to provide an assessment.

Whether based on fact or not, these stories create the impression that Ontario's licensing bodies are more interested in protecting their current members' jobs than in facilitating the integration of skilled newcomers into the economy.

In the late 1980s, the Liberal government of Ontario recognized that the economic integration of the foreign-trained was a serious problem and commissioned a task force to look for solutions. Its report — *Access! The Task Force On Access To Professions And Trades* — urged several systemic changes. One was the establishment of a centralized system of credential assessment.

Today — two governments later — that recommendation remains on the shelf despite support for it from all three parties

In December, 1995, the Conservative government scrapped provincial Employment Equity legislation and promised to replace it with its Equal Opportunity plan, which included a commitment to set up a "self-financing" academic credential assessment service.

More than a year later, we see no sign of this service.

Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta all have respected, centralized credential assessment services. Ontario — which receives more than 54 per cent of all immigrants entering Canada — has none.

Need accountable, consistent decisions

There are a few academic equivalency programs managed by educational or private institutions. But their assessments are not universally recognized — least of all by employers and licensing bodies.

What use is such a centralized service?

First of all, it is possible and legal for foreign-trained individuals to work in some fields in Ontario without a licence.

Engineers, for example, not only can, but must, work under the supervision of a licensed professional for at least one year before they are eligible for a licence. So, without an assessment service, how is an employer of someone with foreign credentials to know whether that person does, in fact, have the training he or she claims to have?

Second, if a centralized credential assessment service is accountable and consistent in its decision making, it will eventually earn the support of the licensing bodies.

In this era of global labor mobility, Ontario needs to realize that the effective use of foreign-trained individuals by improving their access to fair competition will only make the province more prosperous.

A recognized credential assessment service will give immigrants a tool to enter the labor market in the field in which they were invited here to work.

We have the world's resources. Let's use them.

Ratna Omidvar is executive director of Skills for Change, a Metro-based agency providing skills and language training to immigrants and refugees