

EDITORIALS

Consult the people

The public should decide
health care's future

It's time to involve everyone in the health-care debate.

Fundamental changes are being implemented in the way health-care services are provided across the country — primarily as a result of federal and provincial government funding cutbacks.

Yet to date, discussion about the nature and extent of those changes has largely been restricted to politicians, government bureaucrats and health-care providers such as doctors and nurses.

That is not good enough.

Dr. Judith Kazimirski, president of the Canadian Medical Association, says it's time the debate became truly public.

Kazimirski told the Herald editorial board that in her view, health-care services across the country are deteriorating and that there is now "solid evidence that a crisis is developing."

Kazimirski and politicians across the country — including Alberta Premier Ralph Klein — maintain that reductions in federal funding for health care are forcing the provinces to do things differently. Obviously, with federal government expenditures on health care to be reduced by \$7 billion by the end of 1998 and a further \$1.4 billion to be cut by 2000, health-care providers will be forced to do things differently.

To date, doing things differently has, by and large, meant cutting back services and closing hospitals.

As a result, what Kazimirski calls "a real fear" has been building in the minds of the public.

"When they see waiting lists and hospitals closed, they worry that when they need a particular health-care service, it won't be available," says the CMA president.

At the same time, there is a need for a thorough discussion on the pros and cons of multi-tier health care.

While the Klein government's decision to allow and fund selected private clinics has left Alberta on the cutting edge of privatized health-care services, continued funding reductions at the federal level will almost certainly force other provinces to consider similar operations.

To this point, health-care consumers have largely been excluded from the debate over whether multi-tier health care is desirable, even cost-effective or even which services might best be delivered in a multi-tier environment.

That must change. The job of creating a vision for future health-care delivery in this country is too important to be left solely in the hands of those with vested medical and monetary interests.

Kazimirski's challenge should be taken up and a method of public discussion and consultation developed swiftly so that Canadians can give their politicians some guidance on what sort of health-care system they want and how much they're willing to pay for it.

A taxing dilemma

Ottawa can help Calgarians avoid
the misery of an airport levy

The federal government needs to show more flexibility in renegotiating its 1992 lease agreement with Calgary Airport Authority and help Calgarians avoid the implementation of an airport improvement tax.

Any tax — even one that is half the \$17 charge first bandied about by airport authority president Ernie Caron last June — is unpalatable.

Yes, the non-profit airport authority is in a difficult position. Calgary, as pointed out by Southam columnist Giles Gherson on Sunday, has become one of the country's busiest airports. Seven million travellers are expected to use the airport by year-end and significant capital expenditures (at least \$250 million) will be needed to keep passengers and freight moving smoothly into the next century.

But asking users to fund the improvements is an emotionally charged and distasteful issue — especially when the federal government is raking in millions of dollars in unexpected income as a result of increased traffic at our airport.

The bad publicity and negative feelings engendered by Vancouver's despised airport tax should be reason enough for Calgary airport officials to steer clear of any tax — even a \$6 or \$8 levy.

If Prime Minister Jean Chretien's Liberals are serious about making electoral inroads in Calgary, they will have to display more goodwill than has been the case to date.

Re-working the airport authority lease to allow an increased portion of airport revenues to be re-directed toward capital improvements would be a good place to start.

It would be a tangible gesture of political and economic goodwill that few Calgarians could ignore. And given the increased revenue produced by the airport, it would still be a win-win situation for all parties.

Holding firm to the current agreement will remind local voters that the federal Liberals are a money-grubbing bunch more concerned with politically correct gestures than with doing what is best for all regions of the country.



GUEST COLUMN

Yom Kippur bridges gap to God

Eliezer Segal teaches in the department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary. Today is Yom Kippur.

Whether in first-century Alexandria or in contemporary Calgary, Yom Kippur — the Jewish Day of Atonement — has maintained an inexplicable hold even over Jews who in other respects have become severed from their spiritual roots.

The holiday's power is not diminished by its dearth of tangible symbols, historical associations or links to the cycles of nature.

The following two vignettes illustrate the awesome force that can be exerted by this sacred day:

In 1911 Rudolf Otto, a young German lecturer in theology, undertook a journey to North Africa, India and the Far East. The Day of Atonement that year found him, a Christian, in the Moroccan town of Mogador, where he visited the local synagogue.

Amidst the material squalor of the setting, Otto was overwhelmed by the grandeur of the Hebrew chanting, particularly of the "Kedushah," that sublime prayer in which the community emulates the angelic adulation of the visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel: "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts!"

In this experience were sown the seeds of Otto's lifelong fascination with the experience of holiness in world religions.

In *The Idea of The Holy* he explored the essence of the "mysterium tremendum" that engulfs individuals when they stand before the power of a "wholly other" majesty that transcends rational understanding.



ELIEZER SEGAL

In Otto's analysis of the holiness experience, it is the process of atonement that allows us to bridge the chasm of profane unworthiness and enter into a relationship with God.

In another episode that occurred shortly afterwards, the spell of Yom Kippur saved Judaism from losing one of its most creative and heroic teachers:

Like many of his Jewish contemporaries in turn-of-the-century Germany, young Franz Rosenzweig embarked upon a quest for personal religious solutions to the puzzles of human existence.

Though unsatisfied by the aridity of the prevailing philosophical schools, his superficial Jewish education had not equipped him to encounter attractions of liberal Protestantism, which professed to embody the essence of enlightened universalism.

In 1913 Rosenzweig resolved to adopt Christianity, a move that was conventionally viewed as a necessary prerequisite to full acceptance into European culture and society.

However he wished to enter the new religion "as a Jew," and therefore determined to spend the last days before his conversion in Jewish settings, emulating the founders of Christianity who had seen the new faith as a fulfilment of their Judaism.

When Rosenzweig confided his plans to his mother, she threatened to have her apostate son turned away from the Yom Kippur services in the central synagogue of Cassel. It thus turned out that Rosenzweig attended worship on Oct. 11, 1913, at a tiny orthodox house of prayer in Berlin.

The experience was an overpowering one. Rosenzweig never described precisely what it was that transformed him in that Berlin synagogue, but we know that immediately afterwards his perspectives underwent a complete reversal, and that the prospect of conversion was "no longer possible."

In later writings Rosenzweig emphasized that, beyond feelings of personal exaltation and communal solidarity, Yom Kippur constitutes "a testimony to the reality of God that cannot be controverted."

He described movingly how on that day every Jew "confronts the eyes of his judge in utter loneliness as if he were dead in the midst of life..."

And yet, in spite of the apparently unbridgeable gap between individual and Creator, on Yom Kippur "he is as close to God... as it is ever accorded man to be."

Whatever it was that Rosenzweig experienced in that Berlin synagogue, it impelled him to devote the remainder of his life to studying and teaching the Jewish tradition.

His *Star of Redemption* remains one of the most challenging works of Jewish theology. His collaboration with Martin Buber produced a fresh new German translation of the Hebrew Bible and under his leadership the Frankfurt "Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus" inspired some of German Jewry's most distinguished intellectuals.

Perhaps it is Yom Kippur's very defiance of historical or natural context that cries out against the facile determinisms of modern ideologies.

Starkly alone before our Creator, we acknowledge that the power to change life's course belongs to no one but ourselves.



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GAMES AGRICULTURE CANADA PLAYS

Wheat board survey springs leaks

Questions loaded to fit
agriculture minister's
pro-monopoly agenda

EDMONTON

As reported by The Canadian Press, federal Agriculture Minister Ralph Goodale commissioned pollster Angus Reid to survey farmers this summer on their reactions to proposed changes in the Canadian Wheat Board.

Goodale didn't want to share the results with anyone. He was hoping he would be free to spin whatever decision he makes about the future of the wheat board — probably to leave it largely as is — as representing the will of the majority of farmers. Doing so would be easier if he were the only one in possession of the results.

Unfortunately for Goodale, and fortunately for the friends of change and democracy, Agriculture Canada is in need of a good plumber.

Almost from the moment Goodale received his copy, poll results started leaking out. Saskatchewan Reform MP Gary Breitkreuz got a copy.

I got another from a senior official at Agriculture Canada, through an intermediary.

And while it's true that the conclusion reached by the pollster is that farmers are fairly evenly split on whether to liberalize the wheat board or maintain it as is, that conclusion was reached only after horror-story follow-up questions, planted by Agriculture Canada itself, were asked of respondents who

showed initial support for change.

To get to a roughly 50/50 split, Angus Reid's pulse-takers, at the direction of Goodale's officials, manipulated, massaged, browbeat and arm-twisted those moderately in favor of reforming the board.

If on first blush any of the 760 producers surveyed indicated that he favored change, as two-thirds did (32 per cent for "a major overhaul," 36 per cent for "minor improvements"), he was then asked if he would favor change if it meant the price for his grain would fall or if he had to pay extra for price insurance.

Only after asking these and other worst-case questions did pollsters find an even split in opinion.

I'm sure majority support for the board could have been found if the follow-up questions had gone further still.

"Would your support for reforming the Canadian Wheat Board change in any way if you knew those changes would reduce the number of hours of sunshine, shorten the frost-free growing season or increase the incidence of crop blight?"

"What about if it meant your children would have to go without food or adequate footwear?"

Instead of the story being that producers are split, it should be that even when they are told that things might get worse for them without the board, slightly more than half of all grain growers on the Prairies are willing to risk it just to get out from under the board's monopolistic thumb. That includes producers from traditionally pro-board Saskatchewan.

But what would the results of the survey

have been if producers had been asked good-news follow-ups?

Freer trade has been a major blessing for Canada's export manufacturers, financial service firms and energy sector, among others.

Many economists and grain traders believe it would be a boon to farmers, too, and with as much justification as the doomsayers at Ag Canada, in whom statist thinking is so ingrained that it never occurs to them that producers might be better off without all the

"help" they get from Ottawa.

In the name of fairness, respondents should also have been asked whether their reservations about wheat board reforms would be assuaged if they knew changes would lead to increased demand for their grain and higher prices.

At the very least, producers should have been reminded that even if reforms do not lead to higher prices, they will probably reduce the cost of the bloated wheat board bureaucracy, meaning there would be more money available to producers out of the same total sales. "How would you feel about the changes then?"

The pre-follow-up responses of farmers match the results of the producer referendum held last fall by the Alberta government. They match those of polls done annually since 1991 by the Dunvegan Group and polls taken for the Saskatchewan government and for various grain brokers.

Come to think of it, given that Ag Canada's poll is the only major one in the past two years that shows opinion evenly divided — a result that plays into Goodale's goal of rejecting most changes — maybe all the leaks weren't an accident after all.



LORNE GUNTER
Edmonton Journal



RALPH GOODALE: Determined to keep wheat board intact