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Introducing Inroads 25

IN THIS ISSUE'S COVER FEATURE ON EDUCATION, the passage that resonated most strongly with me was a "qualification" in John Richards's article on school dropouts: "Even if elites engage actively, it is uncertain whether more money and different educational policies at the provincial level can improve outcomes in the trenches – in the thousands of classrooms in the hundreds of schools within a provincial school system."

This points to what seems to me to be the central truth about formal education: that ultimately it comes down to a teacher and a group of students in a classroom, to the relationship that the teacher builds with those students and the impact he or she has on them. A really good teacher can work miracles; a really poor one can cause lifelong damage.

And yet, we keep trying – at the school board, provincial or national level – to make education better and fix its problems. Those efforts are not entirely futile. Upper-level policies can create excitement around education or they can sap morale; they can provide teachers with valuable resources or saddle them with useless burdens; they can attract the best and brightest to the teaching profession or drive them away. Our section is largely about these efforts and the problems they are intended to fix.

One of our catalysts for choosing education as a theme was a landmark article in Le Journal de Montréal by former Quebec premier Jacques Parizeau drawing attention to the school dropout problem, especially among francophone students. An English translation of the article is included here. Parizeau's former adviser Jean-François Lisée has also addressed educational issues in a chapter in his recent book *Pour une gauche efficace*. He has adapted his critique for Inroads. John Richards looks at the dropout problem on a Canada-wide level, focusing especially on the crisis in Aboriginal education.

Christian Rioux and Magali Favre examine the changes in high school history teaching that have come about as a result of Quebec's ambitious educational reform, and find them seriously wanting. Henry Milner finds reasons why Ontario's compulsory civic education course, intended to boost youth political participation, had the opposite result. And Luc Allaire provides an overview of the educational system in Finland, widely regarded as the most successful in the world.

Finland's success has not only been educational. Jan-Otto Andersson draws on a broad range of economic, social, cultural and institutional indicators to explain why this remote and cold country has done so well.

Our other major theme in this issue was dictated by developments in Ottawa. Our last issue came out just after the ho-hum and apparently pointless October 2008 federal election. However, the events that transpired in the wake of that election were anything but ho-hum, and even though the proposed Liberal-NDP coalition was nipped in the bud, Canada's political landscape is very different as we go to press this time than it was six months earlier.

Two experts on our system of parliamentary government, Gary Levy and Bruce Hicks, place the drama of last November and December in historical perspective. In Levy's view, our institutions have become degraded because our political leaders have failed to adapt them to the series of minority parliaments we have had since 2004. Hicks focuses on the reserve powers of the governor general, which came into play in the decision to prorogue Parliament in December. He argues that governors general, like judges, should issue written decisions explaining the reasons for their actions.

Four knowledgeable Canadians offer advice to the new Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff. Tom Kent argues that the Liberals need to recover their vocation as a reforming party (as they were when he was a senior adviser to Prime Minister Pearson in the 1960s) and lays out a wide-ranging agenda for such a party. Peter Dinsdale urges Ignatieff to pay more attention to urban Aboriginal issues, while Nancy Olewiler focuses on environmental policy. And former Saskatchewan finance minister Janice MacKinnon maintains that Ignatieff's real challenge will come in the Liberals' traditional area of weakness, western Canada.

Also in this issue:

- Louisa Blair, who wrote a history of the English-speaking community in Quebec City and was astonished by the level of interest in it among francophones, draws on that experience to assess the recent controversy over the – ultimately cancelled – reenactment of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.
- Dominic Cardy argues that Canada's mission in Afghanistan is worthwhile, but that we need to do a much better job of defining the mission and committing ourselves to it.
- Reg Whitaker sheds no tears at the demise of the Global War on Terror in Barack Obama's America, but regrets its persistence in Stephen Harper's Canada.
- Arthur Milner suggests some ways to clean up Vancouver's notorious Downtown Eastside.
- Daphne Bramham asks whether newspapers can survive competition from the Internet – and what the consequences will be if they don't.

— Bob Chodos

GWOT – RIP

by Reg Whitaker

Political scientist Reg Whitaker writes a political column for Inroads and is a member of its editorial board.

The contrast could not be greater.

Shortly after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, President George W. Bush declared, in apocalyptic tones, a "Global War on Terror" (GWOT). The GWOT, successor to the Cold War as the grand strategic doctrine of global conflict, prevailed for eight years. Then, shortly after Barack Obama took office in 2009, his White House sent out a directive specifying that "this administration prefers to avoid using the term [GWOT]. Please use 'Overseas Contingency Operation.'"

That this signals much more than a mere change in bureaucratic nomenclature was starkly evident only two days into the new administration when the President swept away key components of Bush's GWOT: the infamous prison camp at Guantánamo was to be closed, and the CIA network of secret prisons abroad was to be terminated. Moreover, Obama nullified every legal order and opinion on interrogations (justifying torture and other human rights abuses and the limitless expansion of executive powers) issued by lawyers in the Bush Administration after 9/11.

Obama had campaigned on a message of "hope." While this might be dismissed as political rhetoric, the marker of *hope* was in fact a philosophical challenge to the foundation of Bush's global crusade. For everything advanced in the name of fighting terrorism under Bush had been premised on *fear*. "Terrorists" (Muslim/Arab) replaced "Communists" (Russian/Chinese) as the fearful Other that threatened the Free World both externally and internally. Evil was at the door and under the bed, and its armies were immensely resourceful and cunning. The very essence of freedom, democracy and Our Way of Life was in imminent peril.

So dire was the threat that the most extreme countermeasures were required. As the real architect of the GWOT, Vice President Dick Cheney, argued, America would have to "go over to the Dark Side" to beat the terrorists. Moreover, as with the Cold War, there could be no neutrality. As Bush memorably declared, "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." As America's increasingly disconcerted allies learned, "with us" meant "under us."

Just as the Cold War had been sponsored by a military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned us about, the GWOT was backed by a security-industrial complex of companies selling technological fixes for security threats that they themselves were warning against, or gaining contracts for private security services for the U.S. government's antiterrorist operations and military interventions abroad, as in Afghanistan and Iraq.

All this machinery ran on the fuel of fear. To be sure, the terrorist bogey was not conjured out of nothing. The 9/11 attacks did happen and almost 3,000 innocent people lost their lives, with more to follow in attacks on Madrid, London and other locations around the world. Democratic states were bound to respond strongly to such a violent challenge to their very *raison d'être*, the security of their citizens. Terrorism thus remains a very serious law enforcement and security problem for governments everywhere. But a law enforcement and security problem does not add up to a global war that would define an entire era. In declaring and conducting the GWOT, the Bush Administration overreached itself catastrophically. Its successor is left to clear the rubble.

Were Cheney and the neocons who ran the Bush Administration sincere in their apocalyptic prognosis? Perhaps. There must have been a great deal of self-delusion in a worldview that could bring about such calamitous results on all fronts. But there was a great deal of self-interest involved as well: the economic interests of the security-industrial complex and, most clearly, the political interests of the Republican Party, which was able to parlay 9/11 into Bush's

The marker of *hope* was a philosophical challenge to the foundation of Bush's global crusade. For everything advanced in the name of fighting terrorism under Bush had been premised on *fear*.

2004 reelection and a continued Republican lock on all three branches of government. The GWOT paid off handsomely for Bush and company – until its final collapse. But the fear on which it ran still remains, some of it justified, some of it deliberately kept alive by those who have benefited from it.

In the immediate frightened aftermath of 9/11, Western publics were anxious for reassuringly resolute words and actions by their leaders, and thus a ready market for Bush in his momentary Churchillian guise. But the GWOT doctrine was from its outset an incoherent set of ideas, phony nostrums with pernicious consequences.

First, consider the sheer inanity of the term itself: a *war on terror/terrorism*. You can't declare war on an abstract noun. States declare and make war on other states. Terrorism is a technique, not an enemy. If Franklin Roosevelt had followed Bush's formula after Pearl Harbor in 1941, he would have declared war not on Japan, but on air power!

Roosevelt did declare war on Japan. This war had an end point in Japan's surrender and the occupation of Japan by the American armed forces. There can be no such end point in the GWOT because the terrorists, as nonstate actors, hold no territory to surrender to occupation, nor any basis for negotiating a peace treaty that would conditionally retain their nonexistent sovereignty over their nonexistent homeland. A war with no end point, and thus no exit, served the Bushites well. It promised an unlimited supply of blank cheques from Congress and the American public for whatever the administration wished to get away with in the name of prosecuting the "war," and for riding roughshod over the Constitution in the name of "wartime" emergency.

How do you conduct a "war" against an enemy who has no home address? Bush answered that difficulty by striking out at targets that did have addresses. First was Afghanistan, for which there was some rationale inasmuch as the terrorists who had struck the United States were being offered shelter and support by the Taliban regime. However, after the Taliban were removed, U.S. attention waned. Eight years later, Osama bin Laden is still at large, still conducting a global terrorist network, still without an address (although perhaps with an area code for the caves of Waziristan). On top of this, the Taliban are back, big time – as 117 dead Canadian soldiers (at the time of writing) can sadly testify.

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Attention to Afghanistan waned because the Bush-Cheney neocons decided in their wisdom to invade Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein, whose address they did know, and who they said was behind 9/11 (false) and was hiding WMDs (nonexistent). These follies were justified under the claim that we were fighting them "over there" to prevent having to fight them "over here." As a strategic doctrine, this was nonsense, with serious consequences for neglect of security at home, evident in the incompetent handling of Hurricane Katrina.

The Bush Administration also neglected the hard task of marshalling multilateral cooperation in combating the real terrorist networks, all the while adding fuel to Muslim rage at Western policy and adding recruits to the terrorist cause, both in the Muslim world and in Muslim communities in the West. The GWOT mentality gravely damaged American foreign policy in the Muslim world, especially around the crucial Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Labelling opponents of the Israeli occupation, including those like Hamas and Hezbollah who were democratically elected, "terrorists" with whom you must never talk may please Israel but is an impenetrable barrier to progress toward peace in the region.

Perhaps the worst result of this era is the poisonous legacy of Cheney's "Dark Side": Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, extraordinary rendition, torture and human rights abuses form a dark stain on the reputation of a nation that likes to think of itself as the shining beacon of freedom.

Barack Obama is busy trying to erase as much of Bush's mess as he can in an orderly and reasonable time frame. It remains to be seen how successful he will be in turning eight years of folly around. Getting out of Iraq and extending the hand of friendship to the Muslim world are a good start.

But even as the spectre of the GWOT begins to recede in the land that spawned it, it lingers on in Canada. Under former management, Canada had the good sense to stay out of the Iraq folly. Under Stephen Harper, Canada clings to the Bush legacy. Conservatives insist, with no reasonable supporting case, on the need to reintroduce the controversial preventive arrest and investigative hearing powers in the Anti-terrorism Act that had been allowed by Parliament to lapse. Although Harper's government did vindicate and compensate Maher Arar, Canadian victim of American extraordinary rendition (while blaming the Liberals), it has failed to respond to the Arar Commission's recommendations for the much needed overhauling of the accountability process for national security.

Shamefully, Harper has stonewalled the entire opposition, the Canadian Bar Association, civil liberties groups and leading newspapers by refusing to bring home child soldier Omar Khadr from the horror of Guantánamo. His government has kept another Canadian rendition victim, Abousfian Abdelrazik, in Kafkaesque limbo in the Canadian embassy in Sudan on utterly specious, derisory grounds. And Immigration Minister Jason Kenney made Canada an international laughingstock by banning British MP George Galloway, who had freely visited Bush's America. In all these cases, the object appears to be to pander to the Tory right-wing base at the expense of civil liberties and basic decency.

The politically bankrupt and morally squalid GWOT is being buried in Obama's America, but it is being kept on life support in Harper's Canada.

Fixing Vancouver's Downtown Eastside

by Arthur Milner

Arthur Milner, Inroads' cultural columnist and a member of its editorial board, lives in Val-des-Monts, Quebec. He spent many years commuting between Ottawa and British Columbia.

In July of last year, I was in Vancouver with my grandchildren. We went to eat in Chinatown, which borders a part of the city known as the Downtown Eastside. It was a beautiful, cool afternoon. In a fairly small area, there were hundreds of people standing around talking and dozens more sleeping on the sidewalks. It looked like Vancouver just stopped – and something else began. For the next week, my grandchildren, aged 10 and 12 (who live in Thunder Bay and are no strangers to urban decay) asked questions about the people they had seen.

The Downtown Eastside has been a famous hellhole for years, and next year's Winter Olympics is giving it much-deserved publicity. A recent example is the multi-part series in the Globe and Mail in February and March, according to which the area has a population of about 6,000 (14 per cent are Aboriginal) and has the highest concentrations of poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, poor housing, prostitution, petty crime and mental illness in the country.

A great deal of money has been spent there, and it's home to more social services than you can shake a stick at, but few think it's getting better. Jenny Kwan, the cabinet minister who led the then NDP government's efforts to improve conditions in the Downtown Eastside, said after a recent visit, "I have never seen such desperation on the streets. I walk down there in the early hours ... and I am literally stepping over bodies" (Globe and Mail, February 14).

With all the attention it gets, you would expect there to be some coherent plans to clean up the area. If they exist, I haven't found them.

Globe and Mail B.C. columnist Gary Mason warns that "fixing the [Downtown Eastside] ultimately means engaging in some kind of showdown with the collection of social agencies, poverty groups, activists of all stripes who have consistently opposed changes that upset the status quo," and who have sold us "the specious notion that any attempt to dilute the neighbourhood of its concentration of poor, addicted and mentally ill is an attack on the most vulnerable" (Globe and Mail, February 14).

Mason is likely talking about people like Jim Green, community organizer and one-time NDP mayoralty candidate, and Margo Fryer, founder of a UBC program that operates a storefront learning centre in the Downtown Eastside. "I really don't like the word 'fix,'" says Green (Globe and Mail, March 2). He probably wouldn't like "clean up," "dilute" or "normalize" any better.

Green also says that "there needs to be a democratic ... grassroots voice" for the people who live there. Fryer, who admits that "the status quo is not acceptable," also looks to grassroots democracy: "We have to ... look for ways in which the community and its citizens can contribute their ideas and talent to the development of the neighbourhood" (Globe and Mail, March 9).

The area figured prominently in Gregor Robertson's mayoralty campaign. Interviewed on CBC radio's *Q* on March 26, Vancouver's new mayor talked about the Downtown Eastside as an example of the city's diversity.

I would have expected Vancouver's police department to be tougher and more concrete. Its recent "discussion document," *Project Lockstep* (February 4), comes right out and recommends centralizing poverty services under a "Director for the Most Vulnerable" – but it's all about helping individuals, not cleaning up the area. The subtitle says it all: "A united effort to save lives in the Downtown Eastside."

Gary Mason is sceptical about the police department's call for centralization, wondering whether there is "anyone out there with the kind of fortitude and royal jelly it would take to pull off change." But he mentions no specific measures to dilute the area – which leaves the imagination to run wild: water? immigrants? machine guns?

You cannot clean up the Downtown Eastside by treating the people who live there. It's like trying to empty the ocean one cup at a time. The water runs back in.

In fact, the whole of the Globe and Mail series contains not a single word about how one might fix, clean up or dilute the Downtown Eastside, except by treating the individuals who live there – that is, getting them decent housing, or more welfare, or better counselling. The theory seems to be that when enough of its residents are rehabilitated, many will vacation in Hawaii and France and the Downtown Eastside will become a neighbourhood like any other.

Let's say it clearly: you cannot clean up the Downtown Eastside by treating the people who live there. It's like trying to empty the ocean one cup at a time. The water runs back in.

It's also a bad place to treat people. Everyone knows that alcoholics who want to stop drinking have to stop hanging out with crowds of heavy drinkers. The Downtown Eastside is a massive, nonstop street party for drug users of all kinds. Its residents don't go to raves – they live in one.

There are two ways to clean up the Downtown Eastside.

The first is to legalize and regulate the sale of drugs – as The Economist has recommended yet again in its March 7 cover story. People wouldn't have to steal or sell sex to come up with the money it takes to keep themselves drugged. Most drug addicts can hold down jobs – just like alcoholics. Alcoholics need their drink, but they don't have to spend the whole day looking for it.

An added bonus! Legalize the sale of drugs and most of Vancouver's gang problem disappears in a flash. In the whole of the Globe and Mail series there is not a word about legalizing drugs.

It's a safe bet that drugs won't be legalized anytime soon.

The second way is to stop rewarding people for living in the Downtown Eastside and start rewarding them for leaving. Consider the incentives for staying: a large and supportive peer group, drug dealers on every corner and, of course, social services from subsidized housing to soup kitchens to safe injection sites.

We should learn from the experiences of other cities. (See, for example, "Where have all the homeless gone?", The Economist, August 14, 2004.) But there are, I would suggest, things unique to the Downtown Eastside that will require direct measures to encourage people to leave. A few suggestions:

- Make use of the poverty industry's experience and expertise by offering large prizes to groups and individuals who come up with the best residential treatment and other programs that lure and keep people away from the Downtown Eastside. Fund those programs generously.

People can always be counted on to discover that the neighbourhood they live in is particularly unsuited to a shelter or treatment centre. The flip side of NIMBY is the increased concentration of the poor, the addicted and the mentally ill in particular urban areas.

- Require that any new housing in the Downtown Eastside must replace at least an equal number of existing units.
- Don't introduce any new social services in the Downtown Eastside unless they are specifically aimed at getting people to move away.
- Offer (this week only!) a free, one-way ticket to anywhere in Canada more than 200 km from Main and Hastings. Accompany travellers to the airport, bus or train station. Throw in $100 cash. Keep track of who accepts the offer, with photographs and fingerprints. Repeat, depending on results.

Contrary to Mason's warning about "social agencies, poverty groups, activists of all stripes," the big showdown will be with ordinary people united under that old revolutionary slogan, "Not in my backyard!" People can always be counted on to discover that the neighbourhood they live in is particularly unsuited to a shelter or treatment centre. As a result, new services go to neighbourhoods where community organizations are weak. The flip side of NIMBY is the increased concentration of the poor, the addicted and the mentally ill in particular urban areas.

So if the Downtown Eastside is to be fixed, Vancouver's various neighbourhoods will have to be bribed or forced to accept residential treatment centres and other programs.

I lived in downtown Ottawa for many years. The beginnings of a Downtown Eastside can be seen in Ottawa, at the intersection of Murray and King Edward streets. Conveniently, it is on the east side of downtown.

The high cost of something for nothing

by Daphne Bramham

Daphne Bramham writes a social affairs column for Inroads and is a columnist for the Vancouver Sun.
(KIM STALLKNECHT PHOTO)

Why pay when you can get stuff free? The Internet has not only fuelled the desire to get something for nothing but has allowed people to believe that only the stupid pay for music, movies, video games – or news.

There's a certain reckless, albeit anonymous, bravado in this stick-it-to-the-man-and-the-big-corporations attitude. But it's a chimera that defies the most basic principles of economics. While everybody seems to accept that it takes millions of dollars to make movies, people either don't realize or don't care that it also costs millions of dollars to produce daily newspapers, which even in these troubled times remain the primary source of investigative reporting.

Perhaps people don't care because, traditionally, advertising produced so much revenue that the owners were able to sell their product at far below cost. Even in markets where the subscriber base is stable, a dollar a copy for a metro paper doesn't come close to covering production costs. But for almost everyone under 35, paying anything is too much. And why would they pay? In newspapers' rush to embrace the Internet, publishers have been giving away more and better information free online than they provide to their loyal paying subscribers. Check almost any North American newspaper on any given day and there will be at least one story that you would really like to read, but can't unless you go to the website.

Lost in the enthusiasm over all that information available for nothing on the Web is the fact that it costs both time and money to hit gold. There are almost equal amounts of junk and jewels on the Web, and that's not counting the porn and the scams. Sifting through information is what journalists do. What's more, newspapers are a major source of the information for twitterers, bloggers and so-called citizen journalists, as well as the mainstay of Google News. There's a reason for that. Newspapers are trusted to do good journalism on a wide range of subjects.

Social cohesion may survive without the shared experience of blockbuster movies or everyone knowing the latest about Britney Spears. But can our democracy survive without news – without shared knowledge of what is happening in the local community, the province, the country or the world? What happens if there is nobody at City Hall or the courthouse to report on what happens? What if there are no journalists filing freedom of information requests, asking difficult questions or ferreting out the stories that corporate and political spin-doctors try to hide? How are you going to know about a polluting industry in your community, a neighbour who has discovered an amazing cure, how your MP voted or what the Canadian troops are doing in Afghanistan? How will you decide how to vote? Will you even care?

The Pew Foundation's Project for Excellence in Journalism recently surveyed 145 citizen and 218 newspaper sites (labelled "legacy news" as if newspapers were already dead). On citizen sites, it found, "the range of topics is narrower and the sourcing somewhat thinner than on legacy news sites, and the content is generally not updated even on a daily basis."

"That isn't surprising," wrote columnist Stephen Hume, my colleague at the Vancouver Sun. "Lack of revenue seriously limits news-gathering resources. Enthusiasm only carries one so far."

The Pew study also found that newspaper websites carried 89 per cent news, compared to only 56 per cent on citizen sites and 27 per cent in blogs. Despite the perception that new media are bolder when it comes to covering controversial subjects, the Pew study found that the Iraq war, for example, has almost disappeared from citizen sites, but not from newspaper sites. What's missing from the citizen sites and blogs is investigative reporting. Even these days with anorexic staffing levels, newspapers still break most of the stories that provide the fodder for successful online publications like the Huffington Post.

Even among online journalists, a majority (54 per cent) of the 300 interviewed by the Pew Foundation said they believe journalism is headed in the wrong direction. According to the study, released in March, the majority also believe that the Web is changing the fundamental values of journalism for the worse. In particular, online journalists worry about declining accuracy, due in part to the emphasis on speed and being first with the news.

Increased Web competition is only a part of the story of the big media corporations' struggle to survive. Like most entrepreneurs this past decade, newspaper owners longed to be monopolists and, urged on by their pals on Wall Street and Bay Street, plunged their companies so deeply into debt that it will take a miracle for some of them to survive intact – even if they succeed in retooling to compete on the Web.

Extraordinary cost-cutting measures have been imposed. There is scarcely a newspaper in North America that hasn't cut staff substantially while imposing increased productivity demands. It's a rare journalist these days who isn't asked to blog, twitter, do podcasts and even shoot video in addition to their "regular" work. Coverage – even of election campaigns – has been curtailed. Out-of-town trips are increasingly rare. At some papers, staff have been told to limit the amount of photocopying they do, and then it must be on both sides of the paper. Buses have replaced taxis as the way to get to in-town assignments. Skype and 1-800 numbers are recommended for reporters placing long-distance phone calls.

In the United States, 33 newspapers or more are in bankruptcy protection. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer and Denver's Rocky Mountain News have folded. As I write this, the debt of the company I work for, CanWest Global Communications Corp. (owner of Canada's largest chain of newspapers and the Global Television Network as well as newspapers and television stations in Australia), is close to $4 billion. CanWest Global has suffered a $1.44 billion net loss in the first quarter of 2009, including a $1.2 billion writedown of "goodwill, intangible assets, property and equipment" in its publishing operations. That followed a $1 billion writedown of TV holdings in late 2008. In late April, it was given yet another two-week extension by its lenders and noteholders to try to avoid having to file for bankruptcy protection.

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Nor has anyone yet figured out how to make money from websites – a crucial step since advertising revenue in traditional news media dropped 23 per cent in the United States in the last two years, and that's before the recession was full blown. Canadian numbers mirror that.

Delivering the keynote speech at the Newspaper Association of America's recent annual conference, Google's chief executive, Eric Schmidt, recommended that newspapers move beyond being "trust content providers" to being "content aggregators and marketers." But he didn't provide any real specifics, nor did he offer to share with publishers the $22 billion Google News earns annually from advertising on its site that aggregates news from newspaper and other mainly mainstream media sites. Among the new financial models suggested by Canadian media owners is revenue-sharing: a fee built into Internet service providers' subscription rates, similar to the fee collected by cable companies and passed on to television stations and networks.

Even online publications are struggling to make ends meet. The cost of covering British Columbia's May provincial election was out of reach for the online Tyee (www.thetyee.ca), so its editor, David Beers, made an unusual plea for money while asking readers what issues they wanted covered. In his April 10 article, Beers said he and the staff "are paying close attention to the specifics donors mention when they make their contributions. For example in the environment category many have instructed us to focus on run-of-river energy projects and transportation." Further on, Beers wrote, "See an issue you'd like to bump up a little higher? Want to put something different on the Tyee's agenda – and in the minds of B.C. voters?" The gambit raised close to $20,000, but it also raised the ethical question of whether special-interest groups could buy favourable coverage.

Another Pew Foundation study, released in February, found rather surprisingly that the number of journalists in the Washington, D.C., press gallery hasn't declined along with the number of newspapers. But newspaper journalists have been replaced by niche reporters writing for specialized elite audiences, with narrowly targeted financial, lobbying and political interests, who are willing to pay high subscription fees. Among the special-interest buyers are defence contractors, oil companies and mobile phone alliances. As the study says, "For those who participate in the American democracy, the 'balance of information' has been tilted away from voters along Main Streets ... to issue-based groups that jostle for influence daily in the corridors of power."

I confess to more than a passing interest in the health and survival of newspapers. I can't help getting angry when I read media analysts who blithely dismiss economic concerns as something that someone else should think creatively about and then go on to say that media transformation is not endangering citizenship or democracy.

There is a reason that modern, liberal democracies provide special recognition and status for the fourth estate. There is a reason why one of the institutions that needs to be built in new democracies is a free – as in unfettered – press. The reason is that democracies thrive only if they have well-informed, educated and engaged citizens. For centuries, newspapers and their journalists have been committed to doing that. Somehow, some way, they need to be given the chance – whether in hard copy or electronically – to do it in the future as well.

Afghanistan

Canada can make a difference

by Dominic Cardy

Dominic Cardy has worked for democratic development agencies in many Asian countries, including Afghanistan, and now works for an international organization in Ottawa.

Afghanistan's so-called marriage law, much discussed in recent months, is a disgrace. It leads us to ask why Canadian and other soldiers are dying to support a government that denies women the freedom to control their own bodies. Reports about warlords in President Hamid Karzai's cabinet, prosperous opium farms and graft cracking the foundation of an economy our aid dollars are supposed to be reinforcing raise similar questions.

But the debate should not be about who is better, Karzai or the Taliban; the debate should be about Canada. What do we stand for, a country of 32 million in a world of more than six billion? Why did we send soldiers to this faraway point on the planet? And if we can answer those questions, and they lead us to see an obligation in Afghanistan, what should we be doing there?

Accidents of old empires favoured Canada with borders that allow us to be small-minded. We pretend the world's problems are far away, and enjoy the protection of our oceans and the Americans. Our self-image as humanitarians and peacekeepers is sentimentality, not internationalism. The reality is that our development programs are modest, our diplomatic footprint is small and our military suffers from erratic support and direction. We have benefited from good luck, but are now reluctant to share it with others.

Where we are blessed, Afghanistan is cursed. It lies in a tidal zone of struggle between world powers: Persian, British, Soviet, American. Waves of conflict have scoured the country, stripping it of everything except the most hardened political organisms. Afghan villages are fortified barnacles that have survived. They are led by conservatives because most people who are repeatedly attacked tend to become conservative, wary for good reasons of strangers and new ideas. Where we benefited from the Enlightenment, from the struggles between religion and secularism, left and right, Afghanistan has seen the modern world as a legacy of weapons left behind by foreign armies.

Are the rights we enjoy universally relevant?

Great powers are forced by their range of global interests to be hypocrites, doing one thing in one country while advocating the opposite somewhere else. The United States has to justify engagement with Iran, isolation for Cuba and free trade for all unless it threatens U.S. markets. As a small country, Canada has the option of being consistent, of reflecting its principles in its foreign policy. We have a power born of our small size and the protection the Americans are forced to offer us, more or less regardless of our specific policies.

To start, we need to choose between pacifism – with its unavoidable twin, isolationism

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– and, on the other hand, engagement with an often violent world. Many Canadians deny there is a choice to make. They want Canada's military restricted to unambiguous peacekeeping and our engagement to consist of worthy development programs. The first of several contradictions in this denial is that our development programs often require protection by someone else's army.

If principled pacifism and isolationism are rejected, we need to define the terms of our engagement. It is not easy. There is a consensus on what we mean when we talk about good government in Canada: a commitment to rights and freedoms, obligations and the adequate provision of collective goods such as health care and education. Most of all, we mean a commitment to the rule of law, to the

ideal that everyone will be subject to the same rules and the same punishments if they break those rules. We never reach that ideal but it serves as a goal and inspiration.

We would show little tolerance for any group in Canada that argued on cultural grounds for the execution of couples who married against their parents' wishes (as in Afghanistan) or the right of aggrieved cultural majorities to practise genocide on ethnically defined minorities (as in Rwanda). But do we agree that the rights we enjoy are rights that everyone should enjoy? On the left, many insist on accommodating traditional culture; on the right, on leaving people alone. Why should our concern for human rights end for people living on the wrong side of arbitrary borders drawn long ago in Washington, Paris and London? Sometimes foreign intervention works, as did British intervention in Sierra Leone or Vietnamese intervention to overthrow the Cambodian Khmer Rouge.

That doesn't mean Canada and other states should seek to intervene in every country where substantial human rights abuses exist. There is generally no stomach for such imperial overreach among Western citizens (the Taliban were left in peace until the 9/11 attacks), and in many cases the intervention does not work as intended (think U.S. interventions in Haiti). Opportunities for effective intervention are unusual but, when they are presented, we have no moral justification for refusing to take them on.

It is racist to say, as many on both left and right frequently do, that Afghans are inherently violent, or that democracy can never take root because of the country's "culture" or "values." These are excuses for leaving corrupt, extreme or violent elites in charge and letting them run a country in a way we would never recognize as legitimate in Canada. The essence of democracy is that the people choose their leaders and, in Helmand as in Halifax, this is a principle worth defending. We Canadians may collectively not be prepared to sustain the protracted costs, financial and human, of our Afghan mission. But we should not confuse a limited willingness to engage with the world with the self-justifying notion that the majority of Afghans want to be governed by drug-dealing warlords and the Taliban.

Clearly most Afghans today would not vote for legalizing gay marriage or separating religious authority from the state, and many oppose giving women fully equal rights. Today's Afghan democracy would not be today's Canadian democracy. But Afghans have shown support for voting by actually going to the polls; they have shown support for the education of girls by enrolling them in schools. In the face of rocks, threats and the ominous click of cell-phone cameras used to aid later abductions and murders, some men and women protested the recent marriage law on the streets of Kabul.

Because we entered this Afghan mission without a sense of ourselves and without a plan for military victory or for reconstruction, we are eroding our chances of reaching any goal. Most Canadians, and nearly all Afghans, agree that Afghanistan could use some of our peace, order and good government. Without peace there can be no order, and without order, no good government. These are not

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abstractions. There is no point building hospitals when armed groups are free to attack them, or registering girls for school only to make them an easier, concentrated target for suicide bombers.

If we Canadians decide that the rights we enjoy are universally relevant, and that circumstance has provided a reasonable prospect of their export to Afghanistan – in a way sadly absent from Burma, North Korea or much of sub-Saharan Africa – we must think carefully about where we are going, and exactly what we will do.

Making our mission work

To make our mission work: first define it, then commit to it. Defining our mission means accepting that the village and village leaders are the basis of Afghan society, and working to co-opt these men, one by one. This is the only way to reach military and, later, development goals. Our troops have done this, winning support through military protection and public works, but too often they have then been forced to leave, abandoning people who had risked their lives to side with us. Every time this happens we create an image of weakness, of being just another army passing through.

Defining our mission also means remembering an ancient military lesson. Only George W. Bush's incompetence could have made this lesson seem revolutionary. After years of losing the Iraq war because he didn't commit enough troops, the success of the "surge" is now mythical and its creator, General Petraeus, has become a latter-day incarnation of the legendary Chinese strategist Sun Tzu. But it's just common sense: in a counterinsurgency more troops are the first necessary ingredient.

Committing to our mission means that if we are in Kandahar, we should stay in Kandahar. Build support, one village at a time, with consistent occupation, followed by development. That will earn us respect and give the Afghan public concrete reasons to support our presence. Let us be honest about what we are doing, and why.

Committing to our mission also means accepting the deaths that are an inevitable part of war, and forging an understanding of why they are worth incurring. Starting this discussion is the government's responsibility and both the former Liberal and present Conservative governments deserve harsh criticism for dodging it. What's the point of democracy if there's no discussion about something as critical as sending soldiers to die?

Canada can make a difference in Afghanistan. We do not need to spend our time worrying about why the Americans are there; we need to know why we are there, and to plan a mission we can support with confidence. That means an ongoing Canadian presence in whatever part of the country we can afford to occupy, based first on providing security and then on providing for political and physical infrastructure.