

## **RAPPORTEUR'S PRESENTATION – LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP FORUM**

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### **Introduction**

One of the things I appreciated about this Leadership Forum was its personal focus. Instead of weighty debates about policy, we had a chance to learn from each other and from an excellent array of resource people about how to achieve our personal and professional goals in today's world of government.

Considering the diversity of the participants' situations, it must have been a challenge to find resources that would be appropriate for a large proportion of those here, but my impression is that this seems to have been achieved.

I have organized my report into two sections: first, some observations on the three main "Reflecting" themes, and second, three overarching conclusions derived from the event as a whole.

### **"Reflecting" Themes**

The sessions on "Reflecting on the Personal" provided many insights and opportunities for interpersonal learning on the necessity of establishing a balance between personal needs and the external pressures of public service, as well as various techniques for doing so.

My two takeaways on this theme were:

- What you might call "Rob Ford Rule # 1," which is that you and you alone are responsible for managing your personal life in politics. Nobody else can do it for you, and you ignore this responsibility at your peril.
- The challenge is not what happens to you but how you deal with it. The sessions provided many lessons and tips on ways of coping with the multiple stressors of public life.

The sessions on “Reflecting on the Community” revealed some complex and profound changes taking place in our society. We may be dealing with a “triple whammy” resulting from the confluence of three factors:

- The **aging of the population** will mean that there are fewer people in the work force able to pay for the additional health and other services that will be needed by an older generation who are living longer, putting pressure on other priorities for public resources such as education, transportation and other infrastructure. This trend includes the aging of the baby boom generation, who have pension and other entitlements that are not going to be available to their successors.
- The **generation squeeze** identified by Paul Renshaw, who made a strong, if controversial, case that we are not supporting younger households that face more daunting hurdles than their predecessors, including high housing costs, high debt levels and inadequate child care and other services. There was a fairly strong reaction to Renshaw’s presentation, partly, I think, because many of those in attendance were of a generation that felt they had had their own struggles getting started – see “the aging population” above.
- The **evolution of services** as identified by Greg Halseth, in which the rapid expansion of the state post World War II has given way to an era of **retrenchment** as governments cope with weak economic growth, deficits, debt and ever-expanding demand for health and other services – see “the aging population” above.

From the sessions on “Reflecting on Relationships,” two main conclusions stand out for me.

First, I continue to be impressed by the strides being made in the evolution of productive relationships between First Nations and their neighbours. First Nations were well represented at this summit, sharing not only what was on their minds but also what is in their hearts and souls and showing the way to a better society. Thinking about this, I was again struck by the wisdom of the last line of the

Supreme Court of Canada's *Delgamuukw* decision, which was "*Let us face it, we are all here to stay.*"

The second conclusion, derived from Mayor Emeritus Peter Woods' stirring keynote presentation, was that all of us bear a responsibility for enlarging the tent of public service to draw in more women, more youth, more minorities and more First Nations. It is not enough for those of us already involved to give lip service to broader engagement, we must work actively to "make the space," as Mayor Josie Osborne put it, for others to join us in public life.

### **Overarching Conclusions**

Next, I would like to offer three overarching conclusions that I think emerged from the Forum as a whole.

First, **we're all in it together**. As Peter Woods stressed, we are all serving the same public and we need to reflect that perspective in our dealings with each other and other orders of government. Peter also emphasized the need to be united in our endeavours as local government, noting the power of having one organization representing local government at the provincial level in British Columbia and at the national level in Canada. I was reminded of this power of unity at one session here where a provincial public servant described the impressive ability of the people of the Peace River country to thrash out their differences in private and then come to Victoria and kick butt.

This brings me to Rob Ford Rule #2: Bad behaviour affects public trust in all politicians. This is disproportionate: an ounce of bad behaviour can destroy tons of public trust.

Second, **the revolution brought about by communications technology is a two-edged sword**. We learned about the tremendous power of technology to enhance communications and service relationships between citizens and governments, but Peter Woods' reference to George Orwell's *1984* reminds us of the vast increase in the power (and apparent willingness) of the state to invade individual privacy and freedom in the name of security.

Third, **effective, well-led local government is more important than ever** in helping communities cope with an unprecedented range of challenges. These include local challenges such as maintaining good services in a time of retrenchment as well as global challenges such as the effects of climate change and the globalization of the economy.

In closing, let me express my appreciation for your attention here at the end of an arduous few days, as well as for the many insights I have gained in participating in this Forum. Good luck in the remainder of your terms of office and in your encounter with the electors later this year.

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