

Something is Rotten in the City of Ottawa More Than Usual, That Is

by Marko Peric

Not long ago, there was a debate in Ottawa over funding for disease research. Some MPs felt that a certain disease was getting inordinately large amounts of federal money. Needless to say, this drew criticism from lobbyists connected with the disease in question.

The disease in question is AIDS. Probably everyone knows that AIDS is an incurable illness, with the unique trait of being fatal 100 percent of the time. Unless North America sees a major outbreak of ebola or hanta, AIDS will probably continue to dominate the media as the Black Death of the late twentieth century.

The funding question arises in the fact that the federal government put more than 43 million dollars into HIV research. How many Canadians died from AIDS in the preceding year? About 1500. Now, look at breast cancer. More than five thousand women died from this disease -- far more than died from HIV-related diseases. Yet our government allocated less than four million dollars to breast-cancer research. The real clincher comes when one looks at cardiovascular disease. Over 70,000 Canadians died from various heart attack and stroke ailments, but only \$4.3 million went into research. Something is seriously wrong here.

Most likely, all the attention and money thrown at HIV are due to the aggressive lobbying by AIDS organizations. Last fall there was a national AIDS march which was promoted to the point that every Canadian who went

anywhere near a TV in the month preceding the march must have been well aware of it. Countless celebrities have appeared in public shows wearing red ribbons to signify their support for AIDS groups. And as some MPs have pointed out, the government literally pours money into HIV research.

The one thing that this money has proved is that aggressive lobbying can get results. AIDS organizations have made increasing amounts of noise over the past few years, and celebrity endorsements certainly haven't hurt. For their efforts, the federal government has thrown millions their way. Is this the way to find cures to diseases?

Imagine a world where lobby groups fight tooth and nail for every cent of federal money they can get. Thousands of people make a living by imploring the public, the government, and big corporations to please send money. Musicians come up with even more heart-wrenching songs, begging for funds for every society under the sun. Organizations put each other down in an effort to get a higher profile and those ever-precious dollars. Begging for cash becomes a highly profitable industry.

Is this a bad dream, or is it already reality? In all our fighting over the vanishing dollar, have we lost sight of the people in the hospital beds? The fact that the government gave ten times more R&D money to AIDS than it gave to cardiovascular disease and breast cancer research certainly has to make one wonder.

letters

Pins For Michael

I have a friend whose name is Michael. Michael is 18 and has Muscular Dystrophy. Michael saves buttons and pins. His goal is to be published in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the most pins saved. It is time to speed up the process. He is short by about 4000 pins -- 5000 pins would be a real prize.

Now the perfect logistics would be for 100,000 Islanders to send him a pin. 50,000 Islanders would be great; but I would settle for 5000 Islanders collecting pins and sending them to Michael Smith. I would like to challenge the university community to help Michael reach his goal. Just send your buttons or pins to Yogi c/o UPEI Shipping and Receiving.

Come on UPEI -- let's help Michael reach his goal in 1996.

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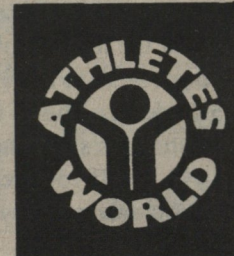
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