

Politics: Canada's Political Wish List

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I am sitting in the ViaRail smoking/bubble car rolling through New B. on my way back to the promised Island. I came down from the hills a few days ago and lo and behold I found it was business as usual. Certainly feels strange to be in the new millennium. But one good thing about it is that I have no expectations. And no expectations means that it is hard to be disappointed. Nevertheless, I want to try to set myself up for a fall. With that in mind, I have crafted some new millennium resolutions for our country. Here is my political slant on things...

Atlantic Provinces:

Forget about "let it snow" and replace it with "let it flow." Oil that is, Texas tea. Hibernia and Sable Island are on line now pumping oil out of the ocean floor. This new source of wealth for the area vaulted Newfoundland into Canada's fastest growing economy. As the Albertans have discovered, every rise in the price of oil equals huge windfalls for the provincial treasury (and conversely price drops reduce provincial revenues). But the Albertans, under Peter Lougheed, learned, last millennium, that the best cushion against this is to diversify their economy to reduce the effects of price changes on oil. Newfies,

under Brian Tobin, are trying to do this with the huge nickel deposits at Voisey Bay that have the huge multinational Inco drooling. But they won't let them develop it unless they promise to process it on the Rock as well. That means a lot of jobs to that economy plus the related economic spinoffs off such a large investment. Add in the renegotiated Churchill Falls agreement with Quebec, and The Rock vaults into a potential "have province," sharing their wealth (imagine) with less fortunate parts of this great country. This should start stemming the tide of Newfoundland's greatest export: Newfies.

In Nova Scotia, the prospects are not so bright. Sable Island will provide revenues that should dig the province out of its annual deficit. The province's greatest strength, it seems to me, is its educational system. Numerous institutions exist. I think that if the government used this strength and partnered it with the private sector to create internships, we would see a huge reduction in youth unemployment. Hope starts with the dignity of a job and the freedom of a few bucks in one's pockets. It's other strength is the excellent port of Halifax. Communications have changed but transport needs will remain constant (both in the movement of people and goods). Geographically, Halifax is closer to Europe, which gives it a huge

advantage. If the port can adjust its infrastructure to the rise in use of container stocks, it could become the gateway to North America once again. It is one Panamanian Coup away from huge growth. The province's biggest problem is what to do with Cape Breton. The coal mines are closing and this distinct and unique area is in jeopardy of becoming an even greater economic basket case. It seems research is needed to find new, clean uses for coal. It might seem doubtful but look at Asbestos, Quebec. Their natural resource has become synonymous with cancer but research has found a use for the tailings processed asbestos leaves and this area is on the rebound.

PEI is in slightly better shape. The Confederation Bridge has created a "hassle free accessibility" (quotes because it should have been a tunnel) to one of our country's many gems. This alone has increased tourism by half a million visitors which means a lot of off island money is being pumped into the economy. The dark side is twofold because of the nature of the employment created. Most of that increase occurred during the summer cycle and in primarily the cyclical service industry. The Island needs to somehow remake itself into a four season attraction. With global warming, or whatever excuse they can provide to explain the reduction of snow, this won't be easy. But I have a few bold suggestions that could create the white

elephant every province should have. With a renewed emphasis on golf perhaps even the worlds' first outdoor covered golf course is needed. The Islands disposition seems to be conducive to a world class aquarium. Maybe finally get a tunnel!! Whatever they do, they must try to diversify and spread the money around. The Island has already begun to position itself as a knowledge based area. This will translate into more jobs.

New Brunswick seems to be in good shape as well. It has capitalized on its bilingual nature in attracting investment. Continuing to do so places it at a competitive advantage over other areas of Canada and the Maritimes. Perhaps a reduced dependency on Irving (which employs almost one in four) might help as well. On a national level, New B. should take the lead in showing that a bilingual province gives it that global edge (a warning Ontario and Manitoba would do well to heed). The economy is beginning to diversify thanks to their aggressive pursuit of capital. There might be short term costs to this (ie the tax breaks/bait) but working people pump a lot more into the economy than what unemployed take out. "Whatever it takes" should be a new catch phrase for all in the increasingly competitive nature of attracting global capital.

Overall, the Maritimes should consider some kind of political union. The threat of another level of govern-

ment is ominous but one must consider the position they sit in now. It is difficult for the region's concerns to be met on a federal level because of their relatively weak parliamentary provincial seat base. However together they would be quite a force that the rest of the country would have to pay heed to. 25 % of national power/say means a lot when perhaps the population numbers might not exist to support the claim in the future. The threat of course is in the loss of autonomy which I agree with. But if this union was only on a national level then the threat would be lessened because provincial structures would still exist.

Quebec:

The best thing that could happen to Quebec is stability. Lucien Bouchard can not provide this and we will have to wait until at least 2003 before we can see if Jean Charest can. The upside is that the demographics are such that the Pequistes only have a window of about 5 to 10 years to get their sovereignty project off. After that time, allophones, who are traditionally federalist, will ride their baby boom into a majority position in the province. Even with this instability, Quebec is growing. The economy is picking up and French entrepreneurship helping it get ahead. It is difficult to attract investment with the instability, but I would suggest a super project to get things moving while the economy is in an up cycle.