Citizen Engagement – An Essential Ingredient of Democracy

Friday, September 26, 2003 – There is evidence to suggest that Canadians are disengaged from the political process. But to conclude, as some do, that this signifies a lack of interest on the part of citizens may be to confuse cause and effect.

Citizens taking part in one of CPRN's recent intensive dialogues on issues of national importance have demonstrated their interest in and commitment to contributing to policy development. What's more, the experience of tussling with a major issue in concert with other Canadians strengthens that commitment.

Disengagement, then, is as likely to reflect a lack of opportunity to exert influence on the political process as it is a lack of interest.

CPRN's experience also shows that citizens are less ready to grant legitimacy to decisions taken without their involvement. Political leaders and policy makers ignore that reality at their peril.

Legitimacy of decision-making, of course, is only part of the logic of engagement. The diversity and complexity of Canadian society also demands it. The social intelligence to be derived from citizen involvement is critical to effective policy-making today.

In a presentation to the Canadian Centre for Management Development this month, Mary Pat MacKinnon, Director of CPRN's Public Involvement Network, draws lessons from CPRN's growing body of experience with citizen engagement.

In ***Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future: A 21st Century Social Contract***, she outlines the rationale, the ingredients and appropriate methodology for a successful exercise in citizen engagement. She also reviews the results of CPRN's Citizens' Dialogue on Canada's Future and their policy implications.

You can access or download a version of her presentation by clicking here.

Judith Maxwell to Speak in Vancouver

CPRN's President, Judith Maxwell, will address the Vancouver Board of Trade on Tuesday, October 7th, 2003.

Her talk is entitled, *Children Are Everybody's Business*. For further details, click here.

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