Cooperating on Cities: A "Wicked" Problem for Canada's Governments

Friday, July 30, 2004 – A rapidly changing economy and demographic changes are putting Canada's cities and communities to the test. Yet, without significant changes to the way decisions are made concerning their unique challenges, they face these stresses with one or both hands tied behind their backs.

In ***A "Wicked" Problem: Three Challenges, Three Orders of Government***, a presentation to the Annual Conference of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, in Edmonton, CPRN President, Judith Maxwell argues that because of the pivotal role of cities in the modern economy, governments must act to relieve the pressure.

She divides municipalities into three groups – the 6-9 largest cities, 15 mid-sized cities, and smaller cities and communities. Each group poses different problems and opportunities for change and demands different solutions.

Maxwell maintains the old style interventions will no longer work to address and resolve what she calls the "wicked" problems of cities today. "Wicked" problems are problems so complex that no one actor or government can address them on its own, not to mention without the involvement of community organizations and citizens themselves. The situation demands a new model of governance.

Maxwell looks at the barriers to collaboration and the ingredients for successful change, and she draws on experience abroad to help suggest a way for different levels of government to approach the "wicked" problems of our cities.

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

Atlantic Canada – A Different Vision

For each of us, Canada is both a real and an imagined country. The mental picture we have of it and its component parts is part personal experience, part history, part myth, and often lags the reality.

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In April, our board member from Halifax, Allan C. Shaw, received the Public Policy Forum's Award for Contribution to Better Government at a testimonial dinner in Toronto. In accepting the award, Allan spoke about an emerging Atlantic Canada, one that belies the mythical impression many have of this beautiful seaside region, laden with "lobster pots, whales and fiddlers", as he put it.

Instead, Shaw talked of an equally vibrant Atlantic Canada, rooted in high quality education, research and innovation, and, of course, cultural expression. He called on Canadians to "look beyond the stereotypes" and emphasized the similarity of challenges in the Atlantic region to those faced by other regions of the country. The key, he argued, is equality of access to the national resources needed to help meet those challenges.

"Stronger regions will build a stronger country," he said.

To access or download a copy of his remarks, click here.

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