

**Parliament Hill Presentation:
for the Era 21 Networking Breakfast for Young Canadians**

*Paradigm Shift: Tomorrow's New Global Village
What does it mean for Young Canadians?*

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The world today has become accustomed to a short-term focus. Our reaction to media, world events, business, politics, natural calamities and war is all but a short-term memory. Successful people are those who are able to see the longer-term swings and work towards their goals and aspirations. The industrial revolution, air transportation revolution, the PC revolution, and the IT revolution, all ushered in a new paradigm. Those who adapted themselves have survived well; others have faltered or even bit the dust. In almost all such longer-term revolutions, it was the younger generation that became the change agents and led the movement. The irony is that such long term swings occur not as “one continuous movement” but more as a “collage of separate events that later fill-in” like a jigsaw puzzle.

So what's in the horizon for the next 20 or 30 years? What should young Canadians be looking out for to catch these signals? How should they be preparing themselves for the new global village that is emerging on the horizon?

December 6, 2001, was yet another landmark moment for multiculturalism in Canada. It was on this day that a motion was moved by Senator Poy to hail the month of May every year as “Asian Heritage Month”. Adopted by the Senate of Canada, this legislative action made official, what was already being celebrated in Canada and the United States for many years. The definition of “Asian” was inclusive and broad, and applied to *East, Southern, Southeastern, Central, and Western Asia*.

I wish to express heartfelt thanks to the [Je-Nee-kira Ding-Ken-esh] J' Nikira Dinqinesh Education Centre and the Ottawa Asian Heritage Month Society for this opportunity to speak. When I was asked by Senator Poy to speak today my thoughts went back to the inaugural Annual General Meeting of Engineers Without Borders at McGill University, in January 26, 2002. The auditorium was filled with young, bright, future leaders and the subject matter concerning international development was a complex one.

Today, I feel the same way, in the presence of such a distinguished gathering right here in the center of the nation's capital.

Engineers Without Borders

Engineers Without Borders Canada was formed in 2000 to tap into the Canadian engineering profession with the aim of reducing poverty throughout the world, thus contributing to the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals which was also formulated that year.

It all began in a coffee shop in northern Toronto. The two young co-founders, George Roter and Parker Mitchell, had both been passionate about development while studying at the University of Waterloo. They decided that there ought to be an opportunity for engineers to play a role in development. They sat down one morning, scribbled a business plan on a napkin and came up with the name. From there EWB was born.

When I first met George & Parker in December 2000, I had just finished my two-year term as the President of the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce and wanted to do something very different – so I bought into their vision. My role as the first Chair of EWB was to build a good board of directors, to provide good governance and to help it succeed in its endeavors.

We began with the idea that the Canadian engineering profession – students, professionals and companies – would contribute to development; *our challenge over the next three years was to define how.*

Our first hypothesis – that Canadian engineers are passionate about making the world a better place – was amply proved. Within two years we had over 3,000 members, 20 university chapters across Canada and had sent 40 volunteers overseas. *We continued to grow.*

Today, after five years we have a very sound organization, 9500 members, 22 university chapters, *a management team all made up of young people* and a very exemplary Advisory Board drawn from around the world. *We now send about 40 volunteers annually and have an operating budget of about 1 million dollars.*

Just this past Tuesday George and Parker were recipients of Canada's "Top 40 Under 40" Award. *They are both 28 years old.*

EWB is a case in point about vision, new ideas and participation by young people.

This brings me to the subject of my speech today

Historical Events

I have often wondered what it would be like to be in the middle of a major discovery. How does it present itself, what are the signals and how do we know that it is for real? In business terminology we call it authentication and validity.

How does one look for it, understand it and then confirm it?

How did the industrial revolution, the Women's rights Movement, the Gandhian non-violence movement, the Communist movement, the PC revolution, the Internet revolution, and now the wireless revolution all become a successful mainstay of our society for decades? In contrast, other equally noble initiatives such as renewable energy, global poverty eradication and population control are still struggling despite being initiated over 35 years ago.

In all of the above cases, the amount of investment, public awareness, mobilization plans, and government efforts had been strong. Yet some have succeeded while other languished.

The Paradigm

My own thoughts are that, the difference between success and failure in outcomes is whole-hearted youth participation. Whenever young people have embraced a cause, the cause has a successful outcome and when not embraced, no matter how important the cause, the outcome has failed.

I have also asked the question, does this mean that all youth-led initiatives are for good? Unfortunately, my conclusion is 'no'. Civil wars, ethnic cleansing, religious fundamentalism are all movements where youth have participated in large numbers. But the causes themselves, in my opinion, are not worthy of pursuit. So young people need to decide for themselves and debate with one another about the worthiness of the cause they embrace or their power will be manipulated by others.

The world today has become accustomed to a short-term focus. Successful people are those who are able to see long-term swings and work towards their

goals and aspirations. The irony is that such long-term swings occur not as “one continuous movement” but more as a “collage of separate events that later fill-in” like a jigsaw puzzle. In my view, what causes these seemingly independent events (separated by time and distance), is the basic attributes to see societal issues addressed, be it economic, social, or cultural.

Even the technological revolution has centered on this objective. The PC revolution was about bringing the power of computing to the average citizen. The Internet revolution was about putting information and knowledge in peoples’ hand cheaply and instantaneously, and the wireless revolution has helped developing countries leap-frog into today’s world at a fraction of the cost. All three technologies are about affordable communications and people connectivity.

All successful outcomes lead to peoples’ empowerment and their right to choices. *Thus, in my mind, the participation of the youth is a necessary condition and its outcome resulting in people’s empowerment and choices is a sufficient condition.* This is why civil wars, ethnic cleansing and religious fundamentalism cannot be classified as successful outcomes. *They do not lead to peoples’ empowerment and choices.* On the contrary, it is just the opposite; such events breed fear and desperation.

Current Major Trends in Progress

I have given you a picture of the past trends. So what are the current trends? There are at least a few major revolutions currently in progress:

POSITIVE TRENDS:

1. Seamless information integration and inter-connectivity (Internet, wireless, satellite communications converging with voice, data and images) is leading to fast and easy availability of any information anywhere around the world. Entertainment, distance education and healthcare are just three beneficiaries of this phenomenon. This allows individuals to search, converse, compare and seek expert opinions anywhere around the world.

Imagine getting an x-ray done here in Ottawa, which then gets transmitted to an Australian radiologist for a second opinion and coming back to your doctor all in the span of a few hours.

Or, how about an expert surgeon, guiding a team of other surgeons through a real-time video link as they operate on a patient halfway around the world.

2. *The rise of Asia in economic power has been a recent phenomenon.* Countries such as China, India, Korea, Vietnam, Israel, Malaysia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates are all on a major push for developing their “core-competences”. China is a manufacturing giant today, India has developed itself as a scientific knowledge hub, Korea has heavy industries such as automotive and shipbuilding, Vietnam is trying to emulate the China model, Israel excels in biotechnology, Taiwan and Malaysia have long held excellence in electronics manufacturing and Singapore & United Arab Emirates have influenced major financial transactions.

In doing this, the Asian countries have put aside old historical rivalries and have set out a new beginning. China will become India’s largest trading partner next year surpassing the United States at \$1 billion (USD) per annum. Both Japan and Korea have already established global brand names such as Sony, Mitsubishi, and Samsung, Hyundai and LG respectively.

3. *A third phenomenon is that youth entrepreneurship is on a meteoric rise.* When I was the President of the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce, I would often say that while my generation was eager to earn a pay-check, you, the younger generation want to work for yourselves.

The combination of information integration, the rise of Asia and the power of youth entrepreneurship, poses many challenges for organizations like governments as they have to respond quickly to changing needs.

A comprehensive structural reform and mind-set is needed to make these organizations meet current needs. Otherwise governments will run themselves out of a job.

NEGATIVE TRENDS OCCURRING TODAY:

1. *The foremost would be the acceleration of religious fundamentalism in many parts of Asia and Europe* including the first signs of a possible challenge by religion towards the state in the western world. I consider this trend negative, as history has shown that the combination of religion and politics leads to absolute power and does not enhance people’s choices. Simply put, it is another form of communism.
2. *Currently there are 40 or so wars (or strife) in progress, mostly in Asia and Africa.* The displacement of people against their wishes and human suffering has gone on far too long. There is a genuine threat of further

escalation into neighboring areas, much like a forest fire. *If this is left unchecked it will engulf continents.*

The above two negative phenomenon involving religious fundamentalism and civil wars both involve youth participation and it is up to you, our young generation, to make your peers understand that there is no useful outcome in pursuing this agenda. *Who knows, maybe your collective voice may be better received by them than ours!*

As you can see there is ample scope even today for our young generation to participate in the current trends and help make a difference whether in social sciences, engineering, trades or business or any other line of your choice. *However, it is very important that you contribute.*

Future Paradigms Possibly on the Horizon

This brings me to my final point. So what's in the horizon for the next 20 or 30 years? What should young Canadians be looking for to catch these signals?

Well, here is my list as I see it:

POSITIVE TRENDS:

1. *There will be a strong trend towards global collaborative approaches to tap into the best minds for speedier and less costly innovations and solutions in Science and Technology, such as R&D, design, manufacturing and sales. International partnerships will be the key driver.*

It is simply unsustainable and costly for every country to do it alone by building its own institutions and conducting its own design from first principles.

2. *On the social front there will be a strong push towards affordable healthcare, disease control and natural disaster mitigation.*

Affordable healthcare will become a fundamental right. Emergency preparedness has taken a high priority thanks to the SARS, Bird Flu, Mad Cow disease and the Tsunami crisis. This example can be extended to other areas such as earthquakes, floods, storms and so on.

3. *Environmental issues will seek global integrated solutions. Global warming and Kyoto are the very first collective policy platforms being mooted for emissions control. Many more such initiatives will follow encompassing water, watersheds and waste management.*

Mother Nature is very forgiving but when pushed beyond its limits, it punishes us with no mercy. Thus, the need for meaningful solutions is very evident.

NEGATIVE TRENDS:

The major diseases of the future will be stress and sexually transmitted diseases. Both these areas are heavily influenced by the younger generation and their choice of lifestyle. Clearly, our younger generation has to address this on their own.

Preparing for this Paradigm Shift

So how should young Canadian prepare for tomorrow's global village and participate in the upcoming paradigm shift?

While opportunities exist to contribute in any field of science, technology, social sciences and trades, *understanding world cultures and practices will become paramount to successful collaborations* whether it be business, politics, healthcare or social programs.

In this area Canada has a unique advantage thanks to its multiculturalism. We have amongst us representation from over 70 countries and 170 languages. In my humble opinion, each youth should attempt to do the following to prepare for this in the area of their own interest and choosing:

1. Visit at least one Asian or African country during your post secondary education (co-op term, vacation, etc.)
2. Begin collaborating through the Internet medium with other overseas school groups on any particular project of your liking.
3. Participate in at least one poverty reduction cause through volunteering.

If you begin doing this, your outlook towards the world will change. *You will begin to appreciate the fact that there are as many ways to lead life as there are people and no one has a monopoly on this.*

In closing, I am confident that Canada and Canadians will play a very important international role in the decades to come. *Our multiculturalism is our biggest asset.*

*Give what you have to offer
Set your boundaries high*

*The wildest dreams, all have a chance
If someone dares to try*

Keep your head high and promote Canadian values.