

# Citizens' Forum

## Consolidated "As it was said" Report

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**NOTE: This "as it was said" report reflects the comments made by one or more participants in the Citizens' Forums. It reflects the participant's comments and not necessarily those of any other participant, Marjory Loveys, or the Liberal Party.**

Three Forums of two hours each were held, in Brockville, Gananoque and Kemptville. Each session began with a short introduction and the posing of four questions to orient discussions. Participants broke into subgroups ("Tables") to develop their ideas which were subsequently brought to a concluding wrap-up discussion. The following "as it was said" report documents the ideas developed by each "Table" in response to the four questions.

### 1. What more could be done to help create jobs in your community and throughout Eastern Ontario?

#### BROCKVILLE

##### Table 1

- More incentives for apprenticeships to trades; the jobs here are in the trades
- Lower or remove company taxes to attract new companies to our city

##### Table 2

- Get or better use an economic development office

##### Table 3

- Hard to know how to reverse the loss of manufacturing but we should try everything
- Consider a carbon tax levy on companies that ship raw goods offshore (a long distance) so as to keep value-added jobs here - It wouldn't be so easy to re-import manufactured goods if they were taxed for the energy costs of shipping them around the world.
- Free trade is a misnomer: it should be fair trade. There are still all kinds of protectionist actions and the tariffs are still unfair from some countries.
- We should concentrate more on education to get better brains because the world economy is driven more by brains than brawn. We should reduce the cost of university education
- We need green jobs
- It is a shame that we have lost the lead in nuclear physics e.g. our unwillingness to invest in Chalk River, Candu, etc.
- Our infrastructure is dismal: we lack trains and buses good roads. When compared to Europe we should be able to connect to tour our villages, and there is no public transportation for the unemployed

**Table 4**

- Have more of a dialogue with our partners across the River in the US and look into selling our products, particularly agricultural (we would have to determine whether the marketing boards would factor or not into such trade)
- We are on the E-W, N-S corridor but everything passes through the riding. We don't seem to be able to take advantage of this corridor. E.g. Although Prescott is a deep water port; we don't take advantage of it and of water transportation.
- We have a reasonably-priced work force in the riding, excluding North Grenville that tends to look towards Ottawa
- We have to look at the technological economy but we will never have the type of industry like Phillips Cables again.
- We should have solar energy production like they have in China. We should insist on a percentage of solar energy being Canadian and capitalize in this area. People want the (solar) panels, so we should build them here.

**Table 5**

- Have people retire when they are able, in order to make way for young people
- Not sure we will get our industries back and we may have to do with less
- We seem to be becoming more of a residential area, with males about 50 or 60- whereas in Ottawa they are 30- to 40 and there is more diversity. But it is a great place to live with a lot of advantages.
- Community colleges could offer more tech programs so that our young people don't just leave and not come back. How can we bring them back?
- Too many municipalities are fighting over industries and the industries don't know who to deal with.
- All the good manufacturing plants are gone as well as the jobs in the psychiatric hospital
- Jobs are gone to Mexico because of Free Trade.

**GANANOQUE****Table 1**

- This is a tourist town, with very seasonal activities in Gananoque
- More stores are closing all the time, perhaps because the taxes are too high for businesses?
- We should help support our farmers and our businesses and support each other by buying locally
- There should be money to help start-up of small businesses
- The Gananoque farmers' market ran into impediments: no crafts allowed, high rental for space on main street
- The arts are a source of local employment: e.g. Thousand Islands Playhouse

**Table 2**

- We need assistance in establishing tourism facilities as American tourism is falling off and our community is suffering.
- We need to get people to come here for longer periods of time eg. the shoulder season and winter season.
- There should be more coordination and cooperation with other communities in the region regarding tourism. After all, if we have 3 world designations, there should be

something worth promoting!

- We should increase marketing to the Baby Boomer generation and market this region as a destination for retirees.

## **KEMPTVILLE**

### **Table 1**

- Get rid of red tape for small businesses and provide financial assistance for them, for the purchase of equipment for example
- Ask retired business people to help start-up businesses via mentoring
- Given the proximity to Ottawa and the lower land costs, Kemptville should be able to attract new businesses
- There is a limit on the amount that can be claimed (about \$7,500 per employee). This limits the ability to hire more employees so we should consider repealing C31.

### **Table 2**

- Simplify processes for entrepreneurs to start new businesses: eg. access to capital, more one-stop supports, etc. What exists now is limited to specific groups such as youth and aboriginals.
- We need a whole industrial strategy to help small businesses.
- Push for bigger industries to come to rural areas (lower wages, lower realty taxes, etc.)
- Housing and service industries are growing in Kemptville.
- There is a new economic development thrust in North Grenville to help retain existing businesses.
- Small entrepreneurs need more support, education about marketing, etc.
- Our community has lost small services like a book store, jewelry store, etc and big box stores are coming.
- We might get some data from Stats can to help us plan

### **Table 3**

- There is a problem in the performance of the community Futures program because the staff are all ex-bankers and although the Board makes the final decisions, the staff make the recommendations. Banks are risk averse. We need stronger economic development agencies with a CED focus to move beyond the principles and strategies of banks.
- We need an agricultural policy that supports small businesses including the family farm.
- We should encourage farmers and consumers to buy local, and encourage fair trade.
- We desperately need access to risk capital, as differentiated from Community Futures, but such programs were cancelled by Industry Canada.

## **2. How well is our social safety net and support for families (*employment insurance, health services, pensions, etc*) working during this recession?**

### **Brockville**

### **Table 1**

- Need more national day care so parents can go to work
- Need longer EI during a recession when jobs are scarce and food banks are growing

#### **Table 2**

- Don't change Public Service or Military pensions: I'm worried
- Health services are good overall; nurse practitioners are good
- We need more protection for pensions, disability pensions, and severance

#### **Table 3**

- Frightened about young people's prospects and their education debt load
- There are a lot of Mac Jobs and part-time jobs with no pensions and no benefits
- The tax system is not family-friendly and they should look at young people as assets and not just costs
- Our own pensions and health care system are at risk if the prospects are not good for young people; we should be paying for their education in return
- We are experiencing lay-offs in extended families
- There is a lack of "first call protection" for pensions and pensions are under-funded
- There should be a ceiling on CEO wages and a direct reasonable ratio to the lowest paid worker in the plant
- CPP rates are too low and we should think about an optional supplemental plan; so many workers now have no pension plans and don't make enough to save for their pension. Maybe have no private pension plans and just one big CPP?
- We need a way to include part-time workers in CPP
- We need more Quebec-style quality day care e.g. \$6 per day vs \$100 per month with no quality standards
- Consider pre-natal policies and more early childhood education

#### **Table 4**

- We need EI for self-employed people: if a person is willing to pay both sides of the EI, then they could draw on it. If they are still on after one year, then they are retired.
- We like the early childhood learning program that the Liberals had in their platform but Harper threw aside. Ignatieff says we must move forward with this.
- We should look after our seniors, especially those who had pensions that fell out from beneath them e.g. Nortel Pensions should be legislated, and huge bonuses for Executives are immoral.
- At the car industry in Windsor, employees were getting twice the wage as their Detroit counterparts.
- The senior population is growing and needs pension protection, with money managed by another entity.

#### **Table 5**

- There are too many part-time and contract jobs but the EI scheme is not geared to the part-time worker
- It is perhaps shocking to think how many people depend on the government and scary to wonder if the benefits will last given the provincial and federal deficits
- There could be a drug plan for those on minimum wage. More people should be made aware of the Trillium Plan re medications.
- There should be reasonable medical and dental plans for those on lower incomes.

## GANANOQUE

### Table 1

- People are satisfied with their health care, especially the Brockville Hospital where the wait times are less than at the Kingston (teaching) hospitals
- We need more home care so that people can stay in their homes longer
- Something should be done to help self-employed people be eligible for employment insurance
- There should be portability of pensions.
- Part-time employees don't pay into CPP
- We should make benefits more transparent.
- We need to put funds into children's mental health, some programs were cut.
- We need to put funds into child care to make it easier for parents to work
- We should subsidize those who want to study child care education.

### Table 2

- Many people don't qualify for EI and with last year's lay-offs they are coming the end of their benefits, need to address this
- We need more in and out provisions for people who change jobs often or have several jobs
- The nature of the work force has changed and EI hasn't kept up. Work programs need to be rethought to ensure social support systems that fit the current work force.
- Private sector pension plans should be legislated to avoid shortfalls
- There should be CPP adjustments for those who contributed less.

## KEMPTVILLE

### Table 1

- The EI period is too short. It should be proportional to the amount of time a worker has been contributing. We also need some emergency extension to help in periods [of recession] like this.
- Training options need to be provided to help in the transition to a new job. Certificate programs need to be provided (WHIMS, Fell program, CP)
- We need transferable pensions.
- EI should be available for the self-employed. The current (recently introduced) scheme is flawed.
- All of the above should be considered even without a recession

### Table 2

- It took one individual who was laid off a full year to get access to retraining. There was poor co-operation amongst the various retraining programs and colleges. The process to apply for retraining was horrendous with huge delays and spaces got filled before the process was completed. There was a 50 page booklet and process to go through: he had to find out the training costs in 5 different local colleges, speak to local businesses to find out the labour market demand following retraining. Unemployed people without a vehicle would be out of luck in this kind of process, and the local training coordinator was not helpful.
- We need more proactive, helpful supports for unemployed people.

- Day care is an issue. The quality of private facilities is spotty, and expensive. The federal subsidy is a joke and hardly covers real costs. We need accredited teachers.
- Student loans are heavy and students must start paying them at the end of their schooling even if they don't have a job. It makes it impossible to think about saving for retiring because we are still "looking back". We need job placement coming out of school.

**Table 3**

- There is a problem with who can apply for EI and who is eligible to draw down.
- Pensions need to be protected and funded and untouchable even during bankruptcies.

We must reduce the deficit maybe by raising taxes.

**3. Give your opinion on how well Canada is dealing with climate change and other environmental challenges.**

**Brockville**

**Table 1**

- We are not doing enough [about the environment]
- Canada could be a world leader
- We should improve cross-Canada shipping and truck emissions
- There should be a country wide reduction of car idling
- Individuals should be made more aware and able to recycle and compost
- Increase a person's tax if there is a specific reason e.g. Major household pick-up
- Provide incentives for solar panels in homes; have local companies make the panels and hire local staff for installation, thus benefiting our economy
- Impose greater restrictions on factory emissions
- Impose greater restrictions on food coming into Canada and make the food better labeled

**Table 2**

- We shouldn't wait for the USA
- We could cut back on the tar sands and clean up the water
- The provinces seem to be taking the lead and the Feds should show more leadership

**Table 3**

- It seems we are not going to be doing very much, we are falling behind by matching the US approach
- We are avoiding our responsibilities
- It is a confusing problem and we feel overwhelmed about where to go
- People can change e.g. with a small tax and a little information we now use shopping bags and recycle our bags, we have learned fast.
- We should subsidize green energy
- Do more R&D like the Europeans who are leading in energy-efficient appliances
- We should pay close to the real costs for our water and our energy and this will drive change
- Why did small cars have to be invented in other countries?

- We should stop the idling of cars, especially at all the Tim Horton's
- Overall, we are not doing enough and we need to study and figure out what to do
- We should re-visit nuclear energy and take the fear out of it.

#### **Table 4**

- We are avoiding dealing with any of it and our government is not committed to it. We have gone from having an interest in it to the opposite direction. We let go the man who knew the most about it. It is dangerous to rely on the USA regarding climate change because Congress is not likely to let [positive] changes happen and their economy is down so they won't be doing anything.
- The science on climate change is not perfect but deniers blow small issues out of proportion. The blocks to build Fulford Mansion were brought over on the ice but the St Lawrence doesn't even freeze any more.
- We cannot deal with nuclear waste or CO2, and cap and trade is only a money maker.
- We are losing our water resources by pumping in raw sewage e.g. in Montreal. Jets are also dumping fuel and polluting our water.
- Our government should be fighting the environmental challenges and not following the US example: we are not comfortable about this.
- Canada is not dealing with the question, and is pretending there is no problem. The government is using a business model but it is not working except for those who are profiting. In California, they are running out of water because the EPA forced dam closures to protect a fish species.
- There are two ways to make people change:
  - We either regulate and make people change
  - Or we incentivize and get them to be more conscientious about the environment.
  - But we are doing neither!

#### **Table 5**

- Corn-based ethanol is ridiculous as they are taking away food from people who need it.
- We in Ontario and Quebec should stop complaining about the Alberta tar sands because we need them
- Given Free Trade, will we run out of water?

### **GANANQOUE**

#### **Table 1**

- We should all protect the land around us
- We should scale back the tar sands project
- Government could help private companies invest in new energy technologies e.g. Solar cell production
- Some disagreement over the benefits of nuclear energy.....

#### **Table 2**

- Canada's reputation is shameful!
- We need a carbon tax
- We need to encourage a value-added component in our industries e.g. not sell raw wood but wood that has been processed in Canada

- We need public transport assistance for people in small towns, retirement residences, etc.
- We need more transportation options e.g. high speed trains
- We should subsidize smaller inner city buses
- We should favour sustainable activities through targeted job creation, favourable tax systems

## **KEMPTVILLE**

### **Table 1**

- We are not happy. We have gone from having one of the best reputations to one of the worst.
- It is a cop-out to follow the USA
- We must rely on individuals to be responsible.
- We need more aggressive targets to shoot for.

### **Table 2**

- The government of Canada is not dealing with climate change. Some businesses and the provinces are dealing with it better and are leading.
- There are limited recycling opportunities in North Grenville
- We need more support for alternative energy sources e.g. wind and solar
- The government seems to be doing less now e.g. they dropped the tree nursery program so volunteers took over the Kemptville program.
- There should be more incentives to use eco-friendly things such as hybrid cars that are very expensive.
- Packaging is excessive
- There is a lack of public transportation especially para-transpo in all areas.

### **Table 3**

- The government has made very little progress on this despite its target.
- There is a patchwork quilt of regulation across the country because of the absence of national leadership.
- Canada's performance has been disgraceful.
- We need a greater emphasis on a hydrogen economy.

## **4. What other messages would you like to convey to the Government of Canada as it prepares the forthcoming Budget?**

## **BROCKVILLE**

### **Table 1**

- Involve the other government parties in the budget process before passing the Budget with a reasonable amount of time
- Bring in income tax improvements for single middle class and for seniors.
- Have elected Senators

### **Table 2**

- We need: a) Child care and b) A plan to tackle the deficit

- Stop downloading to the Provinces
- Don't cut back on transfers to Provinces
- We shouldn't stop any programs

### **Table 3**

- Keep the stimulus package going for another year, until it has worked through the system
- We need to withdraw from Afghanistan as soon as possible because it is a waste of money, but we are committed to 2011

### **Table 4**

- Social justice should be a budget item: EI for those who are self-employed
- In spite of the Tories saying we are not safe on our streets, we are safer than we were 10 years ago. Be socially responsible and stop fear mongering.
- We need to look into reducing our Defense budget and start looking after our citizens in the North who need clean water and sewage systems.
- We need to diversify our economy and not put all our eggs in one basket: the USA. We should move closer to the Commonwealth countries.

### **Table 5**

- Wait and see what's in the Budget and if we don't like it force an election.
- Reduce the Public Service because too many receive high wages.
- Find new export areas.
- Get out of Afghanistan and put the money into health care.
- How can we manage without raising taxes?

## **GANANOQUE**

### **Table 1**

- We need more support for small businesses
- We need support for child care
- We must eradicate child poverty
- We should increase the gas tax and use the money to subsidize energy efficient building (e.g. LEED)

### **Table 2**

- Raise the GST!
- Conduct an income distribution re-examination
- Reinstate supports to social services
- Ensure that people below the poverty line don't pay taxes
- Move up the marginal tax rate.
- Provide infrastructure and capacity support to NGO's and social services because they deliver essential services to Canadians
- Stop being mean-spirited and nasty!
- Quit assembling the Harris gang in Ottawa
- Conduct an electoral reform with a preferential ballot e.g. first, second, third issue
- Shoot for 50% of women candidates in winnable ridings

## KEMPTVILLE

### Table 1

#### Afghanistan:

- Get the tanks out of the warehouse in Montreal and over to Afghanistan
- We should help our Afghani supporters (translators, guides, etc) like the USA. Give them refugee or immigrant status and when we pull out take care of them.
- The logistics problem with issuing visas needs to be fixed (embassy in Afghanistan has been closed due to security concerns and consular activities moved to Pakistan).
- Help Omar Kadr.
- We cannot let Afghanistan down and must stay until 2011 but we need to take the initiative and find solutions. Organize a Peace Conference with a neutral Chair or moderator.
- We need more reconstruction (although things built outside the protected areas are destroyed)
- The current strategy must change.
- We need to educate our own people about their culture and language [to improve cultural awareness and sensitivity]

### Table 2

- There are lots of people below the poverty line especially in rural Canada. The minimum tax levels should change so that people below the line do not have to pay taxes.
- Support for farms only comes through tax rebates, and the \$500 sports rebate only helps the middle class, not the poor. One in three people cannot afford to have their kids do sports (e.g. the cost of playing hockey is prohibitive) and this makes a huge class difference.
- We are concerned about aboriginal policy.
- Marginal, incremental tax rates should be higher e.g. if you earn \$70k you may pay the same tax rate as someone who earns \$200k.
- We are concerned about the reduction in food inspectors and the quality of food products imported from other countries.
- Many poor quality foreign products are coming in and undercutting domestic products.
- We should think about our national policy on water, and protect it and prohibit sales to the USA.
- We are concerned about the democratic deficit in Harper's polarized government.

### Table 3

- Be honest about how we will slay the deficit.
- Make Parliament work for ALL MP's and not just government MP's.
- Bring in a national policy on water.