



President's Message / Rapport du président 2010/2011

From too big to fail to simply too big, AIMS began and ended the year with special guest speakers looking at the entitlement culture that has taken hold in much of the developed world and the havoc it has wrought.

Andrew Ross Sorkin, the award winning writer for the New York Financial Times captivated an audience of over 400 guests at a major AIMS dinner with tales from inside the financial meltdown. Bringing his trademark frankness and wit to the podium, Sorkin explained not only how he gained access to all of the "insiders" to this sordid tale of greed, regulatory ineptitude and government good intentions gone awry, but how the problem – even though foreseeable and indeed foreseen – was allowed to get out of hand, and how we might, not will, avoid repeating these mistakes going forward.

Twelve months later Tony Clement, President of the Treasury Board, was talking about the same themes: a well intentioned group of very smart people, starting out to make things better for everyone, gradually getting caught up in the belief that they and their associates were the smartest people in the room, that they have the answers and that only they can deliver them. Very smart, capable people believing as a consequence that they should be rewarded for their efforts and that they are, in the end, entitled to their entitlements. Other than the number of zeros in the pay cheques and perks, the story lines were eerily similar.

It was not surprising then that the proposed solutions were much the same: an end to cronyism, to corporate welfare, to special deals for special interests. That both Sorkin and Clement called for more openness, more caution about the value of the government's helping hand, and more focus on and resources for the things government should do and do well.

That is a message AIMS readers will know well, and one that permeated many of the pieces we published this year, whether the piece calling for a reality check in Nova Scotia by AIMS Board member and community gadfly Don Mills, or "Careless Intentions", the piece by AIMS Director of research Don McIver highlighting how, like in the US housing bubble, the government's best intentions can often do more harm than good for depressed regions like Atlantic Canada.

Government encouraged and occasionally mandated monopolies, and the perverse consequences of the same, also took centre stage this year in a series of pieces on the electricity marketplace. Whether looking at the proposed sale of NB Power, the unique potential of Muskrat Falls, or the "green investments" so popular with governments around the globe, the evidence continues to suggest that accurate pricing and true competition does more to achieve sustainable and affordable electricity use than any other tool.

The same is true in health care with Europe continuing to move ahead of North America in terms of the quality of health outcomes and health delivery as they allow both flexibility of payment and provision – a stark contrast to the hidebound rules that have long held sway in Canada and that are taking root in the United States. Indeed, our commentary "How Europe plans to save Canada from itself" is a unique look at a little known benefit that free trade with Europe might bring across the pond: better and faster access to new and innovative drugs, and more investment in pharma R and D.

Of course, any AIMS annual report would be short changed without a comment on our continued pressure for informed and expanded choice in education. With the tuition support program (TSP) now a fully integrated part of Nova Scotia's public education system, our efforts have turned to exploring the benefits of expanding this program into rural areas of the province. As well, we believe that the success in Nova Scotia of public vouchers for children with special needs to attend private schools is a model for other cash strapped provinces to follow. Costing not one dollar more, there is no question the TSP makes a difference for kids who were being failed by more traditional schools. In fact, that belief that education should change to fit the child and not the child to fit the education, is what brought AIMS into partnership with a new grassroots movement in Nova Scotia known as "Students First". Every child, regardless of their interests or abilities, should be able to find a school that as closely as possible meets their needs.

In the pages that follow you will get more detail on these and many other subjects. AIMS is, after all, a full service think tank, and few issues of importance to you pass us by unnoticed.

In total, AIMS published 44 papers and Commentaries through fiscal 2010-11. Our staff and authors were featured in more than 400 news stories in print and broadcast across the country. Op-eds written by our staff and authors appeared in the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Calgary Herald, as well as all the major newspapers in Atlantic Canada. According to the reach of these media outlets, AIMS comment and analysis was read, viewed or listened to by millions of people through the year.

Our presence on social media has expanded exponentially, and our material is used regularly by tweeters and bloggers examining public policy from all different perspectives. Indeed one of my favourite experiences is having someone who "knows" they won't agree with us before they hear a speech or read something we have published realize at the end how much in line their thinking is with ours.

None of this would be possible without the generous financial support of philanthropic foundations, corporations, and the general public. Whether it is a contribution of \$20 or \$20,000, the generosity of our donors allows us to continue to do the work we do. I want to thank them all for their continued faith.

AIMS' work would not be possible without dedicated and committed staff, Board and funders. I want to echo the thanks offered to the AIMS team by our Chairman John Risley and I want to offer my thanks to colleagues who departed AIMS this year: Vice President Barbara Pike and Director of Accountability Bobby O'Keefe. I also want to welcome our two new staff: Director of Research Don McIver and Communications Officer Paige MacPherson.

A special thanks for the members of the Board who continue to give freely of their time and advice. Their informed insight of the major issues facing this region and country is valued by the Institute. Their feedback, both positive and negative, adds to the work that we do.

My thanks as well to our Research Fellows: Patrick Luciani, David Zitner, David MacKinnon, Brian Crowley, Harry Koza, and Angus McBeath. There is also the Research Advisory Board under the chairmanship of Robin Neill, that reviews all our material after it is peer reviewed and before it is published. And let me not forget our many authors, too many to name here. Without them AIMS would fall quickly into oblivion. Being able to attract the very best minds on specific subjects ensures that we are consistently presenting you with the very best ideas, so that you in turn can engage in full and informed debate about the issues that matter.

Charles Cirtwill

President