

CURAC ONTARIO REGIONAL CONFERENCE “HAVE YOUR SAY”

Held at the G. Raymond Chang School of Continuing Education
Ryerson University, Heaslip House, 7th Floor
297 Victoria Street, Toronto M5B 1W1
On Monday, October 15, 2012

Reported by Ihor Stebelsky

PROGRAM:

This one day conference was very well organized. It consisted of:

9:30 – 10:00 Registration

10:00 – 10:15 Opening Remarks

- Sandra Pyke (York) – Conference Chair and CURAC Vice President
- George Brandie (Queen’s) – CURAC President
- Ken Rea (Toronto) – CURAC secretary, webmaster
- Sandra Kerr (Ryerson) – Director, Programs for the Fifty Plus

10:15 – 11:15 First Session of Roundtables 4 topic tables

11:15 – 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 – 12:30 Second Session of Roundtables 4 topic tables

12:30 – 2:00 Lunch Break

2:00 – 3:00 Third Session of Roundtables 6 topic tables

3:00 – 4:00 Plenary Session:
Presentation of summaries of 7 topics discussed at the
roundtables by each topic’s facilitator

TOPICS DISCUSSED

The conference invitation listed 8 topics, requesting the registrants to select three, in order of preference. The 2 most popular topics required three sessions of roundtables, 3 topics needed two sessions, and 2 topics were discussed in only one round each. The eighth option, “Other topics of interest,” did not attract registrants and was not held.

The topics (their number of sessions) and their facilitators were:

1. Post-secondary Education in Ontario (3) – Peter Russell (Toronto)
2. Drummond Health Recommendations (2) – Doug Creelman (Toronto)
3. A Single Provincial Pension Fund (2) – Janet Rowe (York)
4. Co-housing (1) – Al Stauffer (York)
5. Relations with Unions and Associations (2) – Donald Gillies (Ryerson)
6. Future of Regional Meeting (1) – Ken Rea (Toronto)
7. Retiree Benefits, Privileges and Perks (3) – Joan Cunnington (Seneca College)

I participated in the discussions of the following three topics:

Session 1 (10:15 am) Topic 2 – Drummond Health Recommendations

Session 2 (11:30 am) Topic 7 – Retiree Benefits, Privileges, Perks

Session 3 (2:00 pm) Topic 3 – A single Provincial Pension Fund

Each table which I attended had about ten participants, including the facilitator. Each facilitator kept the discussion focused on relevant aspects of the issue and aimed towards arriving at a consensus for conclusions that would be summarized in the plenary session. The conclusions reached are summarized below.

TOPIC ISSUES AND CONCLUSIONS

Topic 1 – Post-Secondary Education in Ontario

The starting point in this discussion was the McGuinty government planned changes stemming from the Drummond Report (<http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/reformcommission/>), Chapter 7 and its 30 recommendations. Some of them have been severely criticized in the *Star* (Louise Brown, “Ontario considers sweeping change to colleges and universities,” Sept. 02; Heather Mallick, “McGuinty government’s planned education overhaul will be catastrophic,” Sept. 07).

The summary of the discussion made the following points regarding the Drummond Report and its recommendations:

- Post-Secondary education was approached as government business with little reference to faculty input.
- Missing in the Report was the issue raised in the Rick Miner report *People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People: Ontario’s Labour Market Future* (February 2010).
- Little was said about innovation and development, PhD and IT programs, what works and what does not.
- Differentiation of universities into tiers was deemed too politically charged to be discussed in the Drummond Report.

Topic 2 – Drummond Health Recommendations

Discussion began with a review of “Chapter 5: Health” of the Drummond Report. The report, it was noted, addressed ways of controlling spiraling costs, user payment based on means, and improved efficacy of health delivery. For example, Recommendation 5-88 would link the Ontario Drug Benefit program more directly to income and thus impact the retirees

financially. “A minimal step would be to make the portion of pharmaceutical costs paid for by seniors rise more sharply as income increases. The other, preferred, option is to sever the link to age and instead link the benefit to income only.”

The summary of our discussion included the following points:

- Recommendations in the Drummond Report are generally well placed.
- Many are “motherhood issues,” such as shifting towards health promotion from after-the-problem treatment. However, the problems, such as how to pay physicians to attain healthier population, are not adequately addressed.
- Sharing of electronic records by care-givers is a good idea. These records, it should be noted, belong to the patient.
- There is a lack of continuity in health care delivery. Integration of health care should be done seamlessly through the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) not only among the required health care providers, such as Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) but also in concert with social programs.

Topic 3 – A Single Provincial Pension Fund

In its Chapter 7: “Post-Secondary Education,” the Drummond Report includes Recommendation 7-27: to “Establish a single pension fund administrator for all university and college pensions, while recognizing differences in pensions.” That recommendation has been set in motion (see <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/consultations/pension/>). Bill Morneau was appointed to conduct public consultations and report.

Our discussion may be summarized with the following points:

- There is a lack of information on how this will be implemented.
- There are dangers and risks and lack of our input into how the fund would be invested.
- There is no guarantee that a larger fund will do better than a small, well-managed fund.
- University endowment funds would need to be separated from their contributions to the single pension fund, thus limiting the size of the consolidated pension fund.
- Cashing in funds for the purpose of consolidation can generate losses, creating a transitional cost.

Topic 4 – Co-housing

This topic can be viewed on the Canadian cohousing network website <http://www.cohousing.ca/whatis.htm>

A summary of the discussion included the following:

- It is a worthwhile concept.
- CURAC should publicize the concept.
- An interest group should be formed.

Topic 5 – Relations with Unions and Associations

Representatives of seven different universities participated in this round-table topic, drawing from their institutional experience.

The main points in the summary were:

- The Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) is dominant.
- Faculty retirees are a minority.

Topic 6 – Future of a Regional Meeting

This first CURAC Ontario regional conference, inspired by the CURAC Atlantic Region conferences, is intended to provide opportunity to exchange views and concerns related to post-secondary retiree experience in Ontario.

Summary of discussion:

- Hopefully, not need another organization.
- Individuals are needed to get things done.

Topic 7 – Retiree Benefits, Privileges, Perks

This topic was discussed at a table in each of the three sessions and attended by 24 participants. Discussion ranged over pensions, health benefits, e-mail, office and parking perks, and large variations from institution to institution. At my table it was noted that at some universities (McMaster, Queen's) emeriti get perks that regular retirees do not, such as free parking and no-charge athletic facilities. At other institutions (Brock, York) relations between retirees and their university are poor. York stood out, with the university paying premiums on retiree health benefits, including drugs, dental, vision, and extended care (see <http://www.yorku.ca/yura/pensionbenefits.html>).

In summary, it was agreed that retirees should be treated with more appreciation and recognition for their contributions.

ADJOURNMENT

Before departing, participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the proceedings using a questionnaire. Forty participants, including eight facilitators, attended the conference.