

Keep the old at work, and you keep the young unemployed

MAX FAWCETT

On Tuesday, the Ontario government announced that it will ban mandatory retirement starting in 2006. Ontario joins Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nunavut, Yukon and the Northwest Territories in deciding that mandatory retirement amounts to a human-

rights violation — discrimination against Canadians over 65 years of age. The government says everyone's a winner.

But appearances can be deceiving. The cancellation of mandatory retirement is a swift kick in the groin to Canadians who, like me, are under 30 and waiting for an opportunity to put their education to good use. Mandatory retirement was the light at the end of a tunnel of oppressive student debt and postsecondary degrees whose value has decreased over the past 20 years. So we'll bide our time, slinging beans at a coffee shop, waiting tables or working in junior, low-paying, contract-to-contract jobs as our \$50,000 degrees collect dust and our student-loan debts collect interest.

Matthew Price, a visiting assistant professor of history at the University of Toronto, observes that "every job that someone doesn't retire from is a job that isn't available to us . . . and there's a genuine possibility that new jobs are not going to materialize, which is a disaster for those of us who are younger and don't have tenure-

track jobs already." Mandatory retirement was the gentle shove that would have pushed Prof. Price's aging colleagues out of their tenured positions to make room for academics his own age. Now we'll have to wait a little longer.

Ontario Labour Minister Chris Bentley paid lip service to the concerns of Ontarians my age, opining that "the labour market is going to be looking for more and more workers — workers wherever they can. There will be lots of opportunities for young people." He is, to be blunt, wrong. There are labour shortages in the Canadian economy, but they aren't in sectors affected by mandatory retirement. For every soon-to-be-senior working in the public service, in post-secondary institutions or in the health-care field, there's a posse of talented, highly educated young Canadians waiting to take that place. The critical labour shortages are in the skilled trades, from electricians and plumbers to high-technology professions such as Internet technology. Not exactly professions teeming with retirees.

Opponents of mandatory retire-

ment like to argue that it is a human-rights issue. They have a point, but if eliminating mandatory retirement upholds the rights of those being retired, it denies to others who are unemployed or underemployed the right to meaningful work. For seniors who truly wish to continue working, whether for economic reasons or for their own sense of self-worth, there are plenty of opportunities: They could, as we do, find part-time work in the service or sales industries. Or they could volunteer for those public-service organizations that do important work and are desperately short of talented and experienced people.

I'm not surprised that our elected officials (who wouldn't dare offend anyone who votes as regularly as older Canadians do) have succumbed to the pressure applied by opponents of mandatory retirement. After all, Canada's most powerful elected official is 66. In a year-end interview with CBC Radio's *The House*, Prime Minister Paul Martin argued that "the whole question of mandatory retirement, of forcing people to do

things they don't want, simply doesn't take into account that people are individuals. They've got different needs. They've got different ambitions." That Canadians under 30 have ambitions to earn reasonable wages while doing stimulating, relevant work doesn't seem to register.

John Munro, an emeritus professor of economics at the University of Toronto, describes mandatory retirement on his website as an "odious practice." What seems odious to me is that my generation's claim to the dignity that comes from satisfying and educationally relevant work has been denied in favour of protecting the dignity of senior citizens who have been reaping the benefits of their seniority for decades. The interests of younger Canadians don't seem to have been factored into discussions of mandatory retirement, a debate that, for all intents and purposes, is now over. I suspect our interests were barely considered in the first place.

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Twilight of the dinosaurs



MARGARET WENTE

My first car was a Honda Civic. I bought it used for \$2,000, and it was awful. The body rusted out in record time, and the engine used a quart of oil a week. But it was cheap and, after somebody rear-ended it, I got another one, and soon Honda learned how to make better cars. It never occurred to me to buy an American-branded car. Like most people I know who are my age, I've never owned one, and I don't see why I ever would.

Those rusty Civics were the beginning of the end for General Motors. I have seen the end of the end on the streets of Beijing. It's called a Chery QQ. As you might guess, it's a rip-off of a Chevy. The Chery isn't a very good car, either, but it's way better than my first Honda and, at \$5,700 (U.S.), it outsells its GM rival in China by about 6 to 1.

China already exports cars to Malaysia and Iran. We're next.

GM is the dinosaur, and the people who make Cherys are the agile little mammals. Having barely survived the 20th century, the company that was once the emblem of U.S. industrial might is heading toward extinction. GM is drowning in red ink, and its debt is junk. Now it plans to cut 25,000 more jobs. But don't shed too many tears for the workers — the current union contract guarantees them full pay and benefits if their plants go on extended shutdown.

"GM has become essentially a giant health-care provider that also makes some cars," says economic historian David Sicilia of the University of Maryland. It only has about 160,000 employees left. But another million people — retirees and their families — are covered under its giant social umbrella. Its annual health-care bill alone is \$5.6-billion (U.S.), and it probably spends less money on hubcaps than it does on Lipitor.

But GM's biggest problem is that it can't seem to make cars that people want to buy. Its best-known brands — Pontiac, Buick, Chevrolet, Cadillac — remind people under 30 of the cars their grandparents used to drive. This image problem is almost insurmountable. And the company doesn't have enough money to invest in developing new products because it's on the hook for all that Lipitor.

In a desperate effort to rein in health-care costs, GM is trying to encourage its middle-aged, overweight workers to adopt healthier lifestyles. This isn't exactly your yoga-and-aerobics demographic. Instead, the company offers tips on how to avoid a heart attack during deer-hunting season. "Never drag a deer if you have heart disease," goes one tip.

This could be a losing battle. One Wall Street Journal reporter filed a story from the front lines of Zachow's Tavern in Janesville, Wis., where GM workers who make Chevy Suburbans like to go for lunch. Lunch is cigarettes, deep-fried pork rinds, beer and shots of Scotch. "They only have less than a half hour for their breaks," the owner said. "If they get two or three beers down, that's it." A sign in the corner reads: "Finish your beer. There are sober kids in India."

In China, the workers on the Chery line are neither middle-aged nor overweight. They don't knock off work for deer-hunting season, and I bet none of them takes Lipitor. If they don't want the job, there are millions more who do. Meantime, China now produces as many engineers each year as the United States does. Even the engineers make a fraction of the wages of the guys in Janesville. China now produces most of the components you need to build a car. The quality is poor, but it won't always be.

Even Honda isn't safe. A while back, Honda tried selling motorcycles in China; six months after it entered the market, however, a Chinese knockoff appeared for half the price. Honda bought a few and took them apart. It turned out the Chinese motorcycles were almost as good as Honda's. Defeated, Honda packed up its motorcycles and went home.

"For God's sake, time is running out," said Canada's smartest auto man, Frank Stronach. His company, Magna International, supplies parts to the U.S. car firms. He has no illusions about their future. He knows you can't keep dinosaurs on life support forever. And by the time my 14-year-old niece gets around to buying her first cheap clunker, it could be a Chery.

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The perils of ignoring precaution

How to avoid the bear trap: Sometimes, it takes a tragedy to teach us what we already know, says **JEFF GAILUS**

Isabelle Dubé may not have had much warning before she was killed by a young grizzly bear, the now infamous No. 99, near Canmore, Alta., on Sunday. But decision-makers and bureaucrats had plenty of notice that such a tragedy would be increasingly likely if development were not carefully planned in Canada's foremost mountain boom town.

There is more than a little irony at the centre of this tragedy. Isabelle was a friend of mine. Our daughters are about the same age, and we would run into each other at birthday parties and soccer games. We mountain-biked and skied together, or at least as together as my tired old legs would allow. On more than one occasion, we talked about the growing conflict between wildlife and recreation. She was concerned, and rightfully so, that rampant development had given golfers and newly arrived homeowners the lion's share of the land and left the locals (both humans and wildlife) to fight over the scraps.

For years, a war of sorts has been raging in Canmore. Starting in the 1970s, the government of Alberta sold off thousands of acres of Crown land in the narrow confines of the Bow Valley, hoping that Canmore would grow into a tourist destination to rival Banff.

Rightfully concerned with the effect of rampant development on their community, Canmore residents demanded limits be put in place to ensure that enough of the surrounding landscape was maintained in its natural state for the

use of recreationists and wildlife. Studies, hearings and open houses were conducted, and all recommended that functional wildlife corridors be maintained to keep wildlife populations healthy and, more important, people safe.

An example: In 1993, biologists Martha McCallum and Paul Paquet wrote a wildlife management plan for Stone Creek Properties (now SilverTip, the community behind which Isabelle was killed), noting: "The provision of wildlife corridors is probably the most important mitigation measure to protect people from bears by providing the option of an undeveloped travel route for bears."

The report goes on to say that "functional wildlife corridors require both protection of continuous corridors and prevention of wildlife disturbance within the corridors. . . . Wildlife corridors can be protected from human disturbance by providing adequate park and recreation facilities adjacent to corridor areas. This approach will reduce the demand for recreation within the corridors and provide a transitional buffer between the corridors and other human development."

This sage advice, provided 12 years ago, was largely ignored. Alberta approved wildlife corridors that didn't meet the minimum recommendations set out by some of North America's best biologists, and it approved development plans that were sure to create conflicts between user groups, and between people and wildlife.

This, accompanied by less-than-



MARTY WESTMAN/KRT

precautionary human- and bear-management practices, has led to many a dead grizzly bear and several human injuries since 2000, and is as much to blame for Isabelle's death as the handling of Bear No. 99. These tragedies will only continue as more houses are built and more people are squeezed into the Bow Valley.

The real question, one I think Isabelle would like us to answer, is: What now? How can we prevent a similar tragedy from happening again?

Canmore must adopt the guidelines developed by the BearSmart

program. This can easily be accomplished by limiting additional development and implementing nationally recognized BearSmart guidelines that help people and bears to co-exist. Posting signs to warn residents and trail users and closing trails (and golf courses) when a bear is present — both of which Alberta's Fish and Wildlife department has been reluctant to do — will reduce, if not eliminate, the potential for trouble. Delivering aggressive and consistent aversive conditioning (noise, rubber bullets, barking bear dogs) can

teach bears — like No. 99, a young

subadult ripe for a firm tutorial in the ways of living near people — where they are welcome and where they are not. Had these precautions been taken last week, this tragedy may well have been avoided.

We don't have a choice in this matter, not really. Sitting, as it does, on the doorsteps of Banff National Park, Canmore will never entirely rid itself of bears, and our culture has long since matured past the point of shooting every member of a potentially threatened species that wanders into view. But we can make the Bow Valley safer for both people and the bears with which we are destined to share it.

Keeping people safe and bears alive in a poorly planned municipality won't be easy. It will take leadership (and money) from the government of Alberta, and will require the co-operation of the entire community. It doesn't mean we can't enjoy the amenities Canmore has to offer, but it will mean that we — golfers and mountain bikers and developers alike — will need to exercise more restraint. Such is the "obligation" that accompanies the "right" to turn an important wildlife movement corridor into a resort community that will one day rival the great excesses of Aspen and Vail.

Under the circumstances, I think Isabelle would have wanted us to at least try.

Jeff Gailus, a Canmore writer and conservationist, co-ordinates a BearSmart community program and is writing a book about the history and future of Canada's Great Plains grizzly bear.

Don't look now, but our U.S. security blanket is unravelling



LAWRENCE MARTIN

Have we reached the limits of American integration?

After more than a century of a progressively deepening economic relationship with the United States, is the trend line about to change?

The casual assumption has been that it was irreversible, that Canada and the United States would become more and more commercially intertwined until they rolled up into a big economic ball, separated by not much more than their names on the map.

That may still turn out to be the case, but there is enough evidence to start questioning the assumption.

The rise of China: U.S. dominance is threatened by an eco-

nomics superpower that has four times its population. Through the last century, Canada lived next door to No. 1, and all the eggs naturally fell into the one basket. This is likely to change. Our trade volumes will diminish south of the border and move to the new economic magnets — China and, perhaps, India.

U.S. fiscal and trade deficits: They are deplorable, the dollar is in decline, and the social security net is headed for crisis. Most experts will tell you that the long-range 20-year fiscal U.S. picture has seldom been so bleak. In these circumstances, Canada would have to start offloading some of its cross-border trade dependence. It's already happening, due to the declining American dollar.

Globalization: It may not be dying, but it's hardly the big wave any more. The anti-unification votes in Europe, the rise of American nationalism and the signs of a return to nationalism elsewhere will have an impact on Canada. Pressure for more market consolidation in North America is petering out.

Quebec, formerly a leader in the free-trade drive, has soured on the United States.

Values: Most studies, including one on religion this week, show that Canadians and Americans are no longer converging. They are, in fact, diverging. If anything, conservative forces are in the ascendancy in the United States, while Canada remains on its soft-centrist liberal track.

The American model: This no longer has the appeal north of the border that it once had. Canadians like the American people and admire American ideals. But they see a society moving further away from those ideals. The laundry list includes egregious human-rights abuses, a war brought on by the peddling of false information, treaty-breaking unilateralism, arms spending at fiscally ruinous levels, and a fraying democracy that sees a 99-per-cent rate of return for incumbents in the House of Representatives.

Since Confederation, Canada-U.S. relations can be divided into four periods.

Until the 1930s, we were still in the bosom of Britain, and our relations with the U.S. were distant. Through the Second World War, Mackenzie King and Franklin Roosevelt fashioned far-reaching economic and defence accords and a partnership between the countries. Under John Diefenbaker and Pierre Trudeau, periods of stress followed, exemplified by a nationalist movement to counter foreign ownership. Brian Mulroney, in the fourth phase of the relationship, restored and built on the King-Roosevelt bonds. His free-trade initiative corresponded perfectly with the era of globalization.

Integration was so much in vogue in this period that any expression of Canadian patriotism was subjected to facile labelling as "anti-American."

Today, much has changed. The troubled relationship has similarities to the late 1960s and the 1970s when Richard Nixon, Vietnam, Watergate and racial tensions soured Canadians on their neighbour. But, while bilateral bliss was restored following that period, there is less

likelihood of it happening now. Though the 9/11 terrorist attacks have led to a broadening of co-operation on the security front, even in that area — missile defence being an example — there is discord.

So we could be entering a watershed period, when Canada's overwhelming dependency on American trade begins to recede and greater degrees of separation characterize other areas of the bilateral relationship. This would mark a new chapter in our development, one in which we could shed remaining vestiges of the client-state mentality, become a more independent actor and, out of economic necessity, pursue new markets and a northern vision.

There are pluses, but the risks are greater. For the last century, it's been easy — a blessing — to live next door to the most powerful economic engine in history. But if that engine sputters and gives way to a new giant, the security blanket is gone. The transition period for Canada will be long and harsh.

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