

» Our View

Closure leaves many still seeking answers

The exercise to cut our exorbitant taxes at every government is necessary and important, and yet also has to be conducted in such a way that is not so shortsighted we see no gains.

One case in point is the closure of the Nanaimo Citizen and Immigration Canada office. The result is that many in Nanaimo who are looking to get answers, file papers and just obtain information not available elsewhere are now flooding the Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Centre.

It would be one thing had the federal government foreseen this and provided some funding for CVIMS to be able to handle the expected inquiries. But that's not what's happened. And this is happening across Canada.

At a time when Canada needs immigrants as our population is perilously close to zero-growth, we need to be investing in ways to bring the best and the brightest from other shores to this country.

It's interesting to note that as cuts like this are implemented, which fail to consider the broader implications, politicians at every level are getting pay and pensions far above and beyond what could be earned in the private sector.

In B.C. there has been the added scenario of MLAs who have simply refused to divulge their spending until the auditor general revealed the amazing mess of the legislature books.

Let's not underestimate the importance of having good MPs and MLAs and paying them well.

But that can't come without also thinking through the importance of properly funding vital areas like immigration.

The response by Citizen and Immigration is that many inquiries can be done through phone, Internet and mail. Sadly, anyone who has had any such dealing with a federal agency knows how that works.

Phone centres are often understaffed and though the workers there may be hard working and knowledgeable, too often they need to see documents. Add to that the fact that communication is always more effective in person and frustrations only grow.

No doubt a certain amount of information is available online; but locating it in the nest of thousands of files on the CIC website may be a challenge to

anyone. And not everyone is web savvy, or even guaranteed to have a computer.

The results of this decision will not be apparent immediately, but they will damage Canada's global reputation as a desirable as a place to immigrate. At a time when Canada is in fierce competition with other Western nations also suffering significant population declines, this country needs to be doing more — not less — to foster immigration.

And this is not about quantity but quality. The days of bringing in masses of immigrants to work as labourers are over. But we still need to bring in thousands of people who we know will add to the quality of this country. Making it a challenge to get into Canada by closing immigration office hardly helps that process.

It's trite but true that Canada has been built by immigrants, since the day of confederation and immigration has to continue at some level. But whatever level that may be we are doing a disservice — to those who we need to make our economy vibrant — by creating these kind of difficulties.

That the CVIMS can't fill this gap is evidence that this is an idea that may not be working as planned.

We all like the idea of using our tax money wisely, but this is an area where we really do need to spend money to make money. The future of this country lies with its immigrants.

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