

# Immigration Levels Are Already Too High

BY MARTIN COLLACOTT

[Editor's note: This article was published in the *Ottawa Citizen* on August 12, 2011 and reprinted in the *Vancouver Sun* on August 17, 2011 as "Why our immigration levels can't climb too high."]

Jason Kenney, immigration minister, speaks to the Vancouver Board of Trade in July. Martin Collacott writes Kenney is right to ask what level of immigration Canada should have.

Former federal Liberal cabinet minister Robert Kaplan recently proposed that Canada increase its population to 100 million through increased immigration in order that we become more influential on the world stage. While some may find this visionary in its scope, it totally fails to take into account the realities of today's Canada.

Many of our larger cities are already groaning under the weight of high immigration intake that is increasing congestion, house prices, and costs to taxpayers. A recent paper by Herbert Grubel and Patrick Grady estimated that newcomers cost Canadians between \$16 and \$23 billion a year because of what they receive in government benefits over what they pay in taxes.

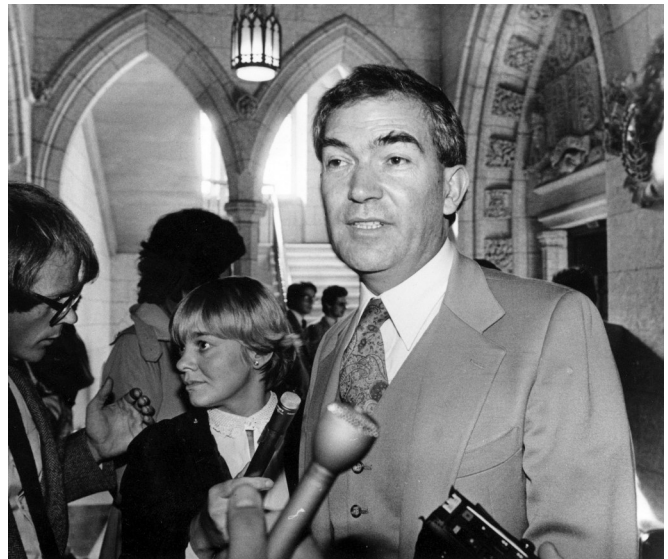
Added to this is concern over the increasing concentrations of immigrants who come from cultures and traditions very different from those of most Canadians. An example of this is the controversy over Muslim prayer sessions at the Valley Park Middle School in Toronto, where 80 to 90 percent of the students are Muslims. Such problems can be expected to occur more frequently, even at current levels of immigration.

Immigration Minister Jason Kenney is quite right when he questions whether Canadians are ready to accept higher immigration levels. He recently told the Vancouver Board of Trade that we do not have the resources or ability to integrate much larger numbers of immigrants every year and pointed out that we can't flood our taxpayer-funded services or put pressure on real estate markets.

While Kenney is the most effective immigration minister we've had in a long time and is prepared to acknowledge and deal with some of the most difficult issues, even he would appear to be off-base in his belief that most Ca-

nadians accept current levels of intake.

When Canadians state that they are happy about immigration in general, this should not be interpreted as meaning they are satisfied with the numbers we are bringing in, particularly if this affects them (which is the case in larger cities, where most newcomers settle). An Ekos Research survey released in November, for example, found that, while 71 percent of respondents said they felt immigration was good for Canada, this declined to 48 percent when asked if they thought it was good for their neighbourhood.



The late Robert Kaplan, former Solicitor General of Canada

A recent poll by Léger Marketing found that 55 percent of Calgarians thought their city was already too large and only 39 percent thought it had the right number of people. This means 94 percent didn't want it to become larger—which will be increasingly difficult to achieve unless we dramatically reduce immigration, since most of the population increase will be from this source. Only five percent of the people in Toronto and Vancouver wanted their numbers to increase. Yet Toronto is projected to grow by three million people and Vancouver by almost one million in the next two decades if current immigration levels are maintained.

That there should be a gap between what our leaders think we want and what the average Canadian wants is not surprising. The Center for Immigration Studies in Washington, D.C. found that among opinion makers in the United States (members of Congress, leaders of church groups,

---

*Martin Collacott served as Canadian ambassador in Asia and the Middle East. He is a spokesman for the Centre for Immigration Policy Reform and lives in Vancouver.*

business executives, union leaders, journalists, academics, etc.), only 18 percent thought immigration should be reduced compared to 55 percent of the public.

Although various reasons have been advanced for why Canada should continue with high immigration levels even if this causes problems for many Canadians, at least some fallacious arguments have been discarded. The present government, for example, does not attempt to perpetuate the myth that immigration is a realistic way of dealing with the costs associated with the aging of our population. A more pervasive fiction, however, is we must have large-scale immigration if we are to meet looming labour shortages and that Canada cannot prosper without a constant infusion of workers from abroad.

The fact is, most of our labour shortages can be met domestically if we make the best use of our existing workforce and educational and training facilities—rather than rely on quick fixes from outside.

Not only was this point made 20 years ago by the Economic Council of Canada, but it was reiterated and updated more recently by renowned labour economists such as Alan G. Green of Queen's University and David A. Green of UBC. David Green recently told a conference in

Vancouver that using immigration to fill labour-force gaps carries pitfalls and that natural market responses to labour shortages, such as pay hikes, can be obstructed when immigration increases the supply of workers and thus reduces wages.

Similar conclusions were reached in a major study released this month by one of Australia's leading academic centres that deal with immigration and labour market issues. The Monash University study found that immigration was not the best way of meeting labour shortages in key industries in that country and that the promotion of the idea that immigration was essential for this purpose was in part a "scare campaign" being waged by immigration lobbyists (Australians tend to be more blunt about such matters than Canadians).

While Canada should remain an immigrant-friendly country and invite newcomers to come here in reasonable numbers, it is clear that not only would we be foolish at this point in our history to embark on a massive increase in population by means of immigration, as suggested by Robert Kaplan, but maintaining anywhere near current levels brings with it almost no benefit to most Canadians and, indeed, is very costly. ■