



From the Editor / L. Ian MacDonald

## Big Ideas

Welcome to our special issue on big ideas. The world is driven by big ideas; in politics and public policy, in economics, in technology and, increasingly, in medicine. All of this in a world transformed; in a digital age.

Consider that, only a quarter century ago, the Internet had no commercial applications. Or that, just a decade ago, the smart phone was developed by BlackBerry. These platforms have revolutionized the way we work and communicate. Consider also that Apple, Google and Microsoft are three of the four largest companies in the world in terms of market capitalization.

Whether in the public or private sector, big ideas generally have two attributes in common—leadership and innovation.

Contributing writer Robin Sears offers some notable 20th century examples of political leadership, from Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan on free trade, to Pierre Trudeau on the Charter of Rights. These were transformational policies on which leaders were prepared to spend, rather than hoard, their political capital. In 1962, John F. Kennedy famously told a Rice University convocation that “we choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy but because they are hard.” In South Africa in the 1990s, Nelson Mandela, who had spent 27 years in prison, negotiated the peaceful end to apartheid and became the father of a united country. Where is such leadership today? Sadly lacking, concludes Sears.

For his part, our lead foreign affairs writer Jeremy Kinsman looks at a world in turmoil in late 2014—from ISIS to Ebola, from Ukraine to Hong Kong—and suggests that Canada, the US and Mexico should heed Reagan’s 1979 call for “a North American Accord,” beyond free trade, “to make the continent ‘the strongest, most

prosperous and self-sufficient area on earth.’”

BMO Vice Chair Kevin Lynch, a former clerk of the Privy Council, offers an assessment of Canada’s prospects in today’s profoundly changing world. In an era of multipolarity, economic realignment and disruptive technological change, Lynch writes that Canada is hindered by incrementalism and “short-termism” in public policy making. He offers a clear assessment of Canada’s comparative and competitive strengths and challenges in the global economy.

Gordon McBean, president of the International Council for Science, writes that “sustainable development needs to be implemented to enable future generations to meet their needs for an ethical and equitable planet.” A truly big idea.

From Big Data to Big Ideas, Pierre Meulien, Fiona Brinkman and Jennifer Gardy write how genomics will change our world in health care, industry and the energy-environment space with a “breath-taking wealth of new information” to be “digested and directed.” And Stephen Scherer, Head of Applied Genomics at Toronto’s Hospital for Sick Children, makes a strong case that Canada is already one of the world’s leading genomics countries. “I would argue in the top three,” he writes. “When I attend international conferences, everyone is talking about what is happening across Canada.”

Electronic Medical Records (EMRs) will play a critical role in modernizing Canadian health care, predicts Joe Natale, president and CEO of TELUS, a leading provider in the field. Noting that EMRs have a penetration rate of only 57 per cent of Canadian doctors, Natale writes that: “Governments across Canada need to drive EMR adoption to 100 per cent of physicians by 2020. They can do that by changing the compensation model

for physicians and health care professionals, linking pay to outcomes that are tracked through EMRs.” Definitely a big idea.

Carolyn Dudley and four colleagues from the University of Calgary consider the challenges, in both childhood and adulthood, to the one Canadian in 68 with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and note that “the incremental costs of supporting the ASD population over its neurotypical peers in Canada can be estimated to \$3.4 billion for each annual birth cohort.” What’s to be done? They propose a very achievable six-point policy framework.

Immigration Minister Chris Alexander writes that while Canada has received more than two million newcomers since 2006, the emphasis in immigration is shifting from a supply-based to a demand-driven system, closer to labour market needs.

Contributing writers Derek Burney and Fen Osler Hampson offer some big ideas of their own on Canada’s role in the world in an excerpt from their book *Brave New Canada*. The book is already in a second printing from McGill-Queen’s University Press. In a strong review, John Barrett writes that the authors offer “clear insights and compelling recommendations.”

And in a review of *The Morning After*, by Chantal Hébert with Jean Lapierre, Historica Canada President Anthony Wilson-Smith writes of the authors’ “many and startling” revelations in the backstory of the 1995 Quebec referendum, in which Canada was almost lost. A gripping story, and a national bestseller.

Finally, in a *Guest Column*, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May looks back at a big idea that really worked—the 1987 Montreal Protocol on ozone depletion, which *The Economist* also rates as the most effective mitigating policy against climate change, by far. **P**