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LA CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE DU CANADA

***Notes For
Keynote Address
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To

***A Special Meeting of the
Global Business and Economic Roundtable
On Addiction and Mental Health***

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Kyoto, the financial markets, energy, the dollar, international trade – these topics routinely have the attention of business. But that’s not true for the subject which brings us together this morning.

In fact, until this morning, how likely would it have been for a group of senior business people – always no time to spare – to gather in the boardroom of one of our major banks prepared to give over a whole morning to talk about mental health.

Not very likely.

But here we are – bearing witness, I suspect, to an issue whose time has come. After seeing the data, no wonder. The statistical information Bill sent us is quite jarring – and in the face of the story that the numbers tell, it seems obvious –

- That, yes, business should care about this subject.
- That, yes, we have a stake – a strategic interest – in the mental health of the labor force.

But obvious or not – and, let’s be frank, for many it’s not obvious at all – the point needs making – and the words need saying. We have a vital interest in these matters. And this morning, I would like to highlight the reasons why.

Let me begin with the proposed Charter on Mental Health. Here’s what jumps out at me.

First, the disabling impact of mental health disorders on men and women who are in their prime working years. This concerns me.

Second, the low rates of detection of these conditions when, at the same time, for those who get the treatment they need, the success rate is 70 or 80 per cent. This discrepancy concerns me too.

Third, the dollar figures. This concerns us all.

In Canada –

- It already costs \$6-8 billion a year to treat those who suffer mental health problems. Yet, we are only getting to one out of ten who need help.
- It already costs businesses and the economy \$11 (eleven) billion a year through production loss, absenteeism and downtime, wage replacements and disability payments.

- Yet, Dr. Bill Gnam (*pron. Nam*) – who is here this morning, who is a member of the Roundtable’s scientific advisory committee, who is an accomplished physician and economist and who gives us this number – tells us this is a conservative estimate.
- On top of that, it already costs \$11 billion to manage the effects of drug and alcohol addiction each and every year.

These costs are big news for business and we ignore them at our own peril.

As do the trend lines in these matters.

- One in five people will suffer a mental disorder this year. That’s Canada, the U.S. and the five countries of Western Europe recently surveyed by the International Labor Organization.
- Lifetime prevalence rates which are statistically higher – touched two-thirds of Canadians and nearly half the U.S. population.
- Psychiatric disorders growing 50 per cent over the next 15 years a component of the global burden of disease.
- By 2020, depression and heart disease causing more havoc in the job markets than other category of disease or injury.
- Suicide and violence – moving up the scale of significance as a source of human disability in the global economy.

The costs of mental illness apparently are going up. But that’s not the only perspective I would encourage us to adopt. Most of these costs pay for the disability and impairment among people which materialize in the form of lost production and job performance.

Which means business costs of mental illness in this country are, by definition, mostly a business cost. This merits our attention. As does a final point I wish to mention.

Aside from the dollars and cents, these mental disorders are attacking our future – our children. Consider their average age of onset now being recorded –

- Anxiety, age 12;
- Substance abuse, age 18;
- And depression, age 21.

This means that a large number of people enter the work force already bearing their burden of undetected and untreated mental health problems. This is not a burden they need shoulder alone. But often do.

Earlier this year, Michael Wilson wrote the Finance Minister and the G-20 Ministers urging them to put mental health on the economic agenda of nations.

Michael said this:

“If I knew then (when you were Finance Minister) what I know now about mental health and the economy, I would have put the subject on Canada’s economic agenda.”

This is appropriate hindsight with which we can all agree.

We live in an economy where we are asking people to be creative, to think, to be innovative, to have good relationships at work. These attributes are vital to the customer-oriented focus that all companies must have to continue to succeed. But the mental health crisis that is upon us flies in the face of these very attributes.

Talking about these attributes, Gordon Nixon says, they are, (and I quote) “vital to the ability of companies to compete and to be innovative themselves.” The Charter for Mental Health which we are being asked to consider today uses Gord's words to anchor a statement of principle on this subject.

The Charter also sets out a series of objectives to prevent mental health disability through the early detection of mental health problems before they become disabling or lifelong.

A promising goal. And it begs this question.

Why haven't we paid enough attention to this subject before now? Well, that's the deep reality of this whole subject. Why haven't there been a lot of things.

From one generation to the next, mental health issues have been scorned by myth and misinformation, fear and apprehension, shame and secrecy. Stigma – in other words.

In fact, Paul Garfinkel and his colleagues at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health have made fighting stigma a top priority.

Stigma explains why something like this Charter hasn't happened before.

Earlier this year, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce allied itself with the Roundtable and its work. We help get the word out to business.

In Vancouver, a month or so ago, the Board Of Trade provided a platform for Premier Gordon Campbell to endorse the Roundtable for his province. Now a Roundtable for British Columbia has been launched. The BC Chamber of Commerce is at the table.

In Calgary, the local Chamber of Commerce helped put mental health on Alberta's business agenda. The same for the Halifax Chamber of Commerce at a business meeting which Michael addressed.

In smaller cities and towns – often in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association – chambers of commerce are getting their members involved and I am proud of them for doing so.

So, this morning, I encourage each of us here to do the same thing – to put mental health on the business map. The Charter will help do that.

We are here this morning to do a good thing and a smart thing.

To the people who got us here – Michael, Don Tapscott, Tim Price, Paul Garfinkel, John Evans, Red Wilson and Bill Wilkerson – thank you for your leadership.

I believe addiction and mental health belong on the business and economic agenda of this country – and on that of our trading partners. This is no pipedream. No unreachable star as the Charter document puts it.

This initiative – this Charter – is what Charlie Baillie calls “a new way of thinking.”
And that we can use.

Thank you.