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Are Canadian living standards deteriorating?

by FRANK STRONACH

Declining life expectancy for Canadians. Plunging math scores among Canada's high school students. Fewer doctors. And longer wait times for emergency care.

These were some of the headlines from the past week or so. They're warning signals ? just a few in a long and growing list ? about our country's declining living standards.

A Statistics Canada report that didn't receive much attention showed that life expectancy for Canadians has dropped for the third straight year. In countries with high living standards, life expectancy should be rising, not falling.

The second troubling headline related to the health and well-being of Canadians came from a report published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal. The report showed Canada was lagging behind a number of other OECD countries in various key health indicators. According to the report, Canada was one of the worst countries in the category of total number of physicians per resident and was at the very bottom when it came to receiving timely treatment in emergency care or access to a medical specialist.

But that's what happens when the economy no longer functions properly ? there's less and less money for social programs like health, and fewer dollars to look after the most vulnerable and fragile in our society.

And while health is one of the most important indicators regarding a country's quality of life and overall living standards, so too is education.

An OECD report published last week revealed that the math scores of Canadian high school students continue to fall year after year. In fact, according to the report, they've been dropping for almost 20 years now.

That can't be good in an economy that is increasingly reliant on technology and science, two fields where math skills are critical.

The other worrisome headline from last week was related to a Statistics Canada report showing that Canada's economy is shrinking, household spending is flat, and exports are declining.

When added together, all of these troubling symptoms about the state of our healthcare, education system and economy begin to paint a picture of slow and steady decline.

It's what happens when we import more and export less, when we stop manufacturing products here in Canada, and when a growing percentage of the wealth we do create gets eaten up by our bureaucracy and interest payments on the national debt.

A country that no longer focuses on the creation of wealth will invariably see a decline in its living standards and the unraveling of its economic fabric.

So how do we go about restoring our living standards, which used to be among the highest in the world?

I believe the best way to do so is through the establishment of an Economic Charter of Rights and Responsibilities ? a charter that would make our tax system simpler and fairer, boost the incomes of millions of Canadians through profit sharing, unshackle small business to create millions of new jobs, and put the brakes on out-of-control government spending while slashing red tape.

An economic charter would also improve the nutrition of Canadian children and give young Canadians the opportunity to learn technical trades and pursue good-paying careers.

Most of all, an economic charter of rights would help us restore the high living standards that made Canada one of the most desirable countries in the world.

To learn more about the economic charter and how it could generate economic growth and prosperity, email me at info@economiccharter.ca. Or to learn more about the economic charter, visit: www.economiccharter.ca.