

Why does it always come down to money?

by Mark Pavilons

It's funny how many important actions always come down to money.

It's been said that money can't buy happiness, or that it can't build meaning into life.

But when it comes to major policies, mandates, protocols ? major change ? yes indeed money matters.

Martin Luther King Jr. noted that any country that spends more money on its military than social programs will be doomed spiritually.

Some argue that it's money, not ideas and principles, that reign in American politics.

Arthur Laffer observed that there's no ?public tooth fairy??and that you can't bail someone out without putting someone else into trouble.

Federal government spending in Canada reached historic highs in 2021, to a whopping \$445 billion. Queen's Park dished out roughly \$187 billion last year.

Fun fact:It would take a person like you and I 31 years, 251 days, 7 hours, 46 minutes, and 40 seconds just to count to 1 billion.

Sure, the pandemic has thrown all government spending, here and abroad, out of whack. We've poured billions upon billions into health care and fighting COVID. The result?Well, we are all familiar with current events. Third, fourth, even fifth shots are likely in the future.

It's like our economic engine is stuck in the mud, spinning its wheels, flinging cash everywhere, just to stay put. Forget about major non-pandemic issues like infrastructure and business stability. We can't even address those things properly until the books are balanced.

So, my friends, it all comes down to money, or a lack thereof.

We all know about the dangers of climate change. We've held global conferences, set emission targets and examined all kinds of green strategies.

The problem?Money. We have to spend money to achieve any small iota of positive change or progress.

Not to mention climate change, conflict between nations, poverty, disease, famine all rage on, regardless of our preoccupation with things. Our human condition is growing worse by the day.

The economy of Turkey is a prime example. Right now, people are lining up outside bread kiosks. The prices of medicine, milk and toilet paper are soaring. Some gas stations have closed after running out. Angry outbursts have erupted on the streets.

In December, annual inflation reached a staggering rate of 36 per cent, up from 21 per cent the previous month.

Experts are calling on gas prices here in Ontario to reach upwards of \$1.60 per litre this spring.

We've all noticed increases at the grocery stores. and it seems the cost of living is outpacing even modest salary increases, if you're

lucky enough to get one.

It's estimated that the monthly costs for a family of four in Canada hover around \$5,382.

The cost of living in Canada is more expensive than in 74% of countries in the world.

Despite our strong economy in this province and in the GTA, we're still feeling all of the same pressures. Price increases haven't gone unnoticed. As our buying power shrinks, we may be rethinking our own personal situations.

There are times I forget about reality, and it has nothing to do with my reckless youth. I often don't see myself as a somewhat mature, 50-something male whose life has reached its mid-way point. Retirement may be less than a decade away, or maybe not.

Given the current turmoil, I can't even fathom what the next year will bring, let alone what my twilight years have in store. So, I try not to think about it, preferring the ostrich approach and trying to meditate to soothing ocean sounds.

My wife keeps encouraging me to get life insurance, but at my age, it becomes a little expensive. I don't want my passing to be burdensome. I told her to simply tie me to a home-made raft and send me adrift in the Humber, Viking-style, minus the flaming arrows. Okay, one or two would be nice.

Money has always been part of our western culture and society. But there are places around the world where the barter system is alive and well. Some have returned to this age-old system out of necessity during the pandemic, where supply or trade dried up.

Even today in our crazy lives, the best places are those without money.

When I think of the best places and most relaxing times, my thoughts turn to summers at the Delawana Inn on Georgian Bay, or lakefront cottages borrowed from friends.

There, at high noon, money had no use, no meaning, no place among the windswept pines and pristine beaches. I could be penniless sitting on an ancient rock on the shoreline and not have a care in the world.

I think of times when Kim and I scraped together enough to get away for a week in the Dominican or Cartagena in the 1990s. I will never forget finding sand dollars with my toes in the waters of Sosua.

For those adventurous types, I imagine money and modern entrapments have little place on a scenic mountain top in Alberta or BC.

I am an avid fan of travel shows and documentaries of places around the world. The world is a pretty big place, with plenty to explore.

I heard that we travel, not to escape life, but to embrace it. There's a series on Netflix called Moving Art, and it's merely videos of people, places and animals around the world. No dialogue, just soothing music and visually stunning images.

We may not be able to travel to French Polynesia, Angkor Wat or Koh Sumui, but our minds can, through these episodes.

Our travel plans may be currently on hold, but hopefully the summer will bring some relief.

There are also incentives for vacationing within Ontario this summer. The beauty of nature is all around us. You don't have to visit Thailand to enjoy gorgeous lakes, mountains, oceans or picturesque sunsets.

Look into the eyes of your loved ones and explore the world together! Feel the world ? it was created just for us!