

## Happy Holidays



## Let's celebrate diversity, understanding and unity

By Dave Hayer  
AFMLABC President

The BC Parliament Buildings are all lit up with bright Christmas lights. The Christmas tree in the Rotunda of the buildings is welcoming and festive. The holiday season, winter, and Christmas are almost here.

Christmas is about our connections with family, friends, and our wider community. It is about understanding and celebrating diversity and unity and the traditions that enrich our lives and bring us closer to each other. Christmas, Hanukkah, Eid, Bodhi Day, Kwanzaa and Omisoka are just a few of the multicultural and religious celebrations we can enjoy in Canada at this time of year. I wish you all a very merry Christmas, and I hope you all enjoy the celebrations that are meaningful to you and your family.

I also hope you will extend your festive spirit by helping others in need. This season is a critical time when support is greatly appreciated, and we each have the opportunity to extend a helping hand and bring hope to others.

In BC, Canada and around the world, individuals, families, community organizations, and businesses are facing challenging circumstances. I humbly request that, if you can, please help non-profit community organizations financially or by volunteering your time. Every bit helps. Donate to your favourite charity. Volunteer at a hands-on project in your community; help people in need with warm clothes or blankets. Practice compassion and kindness.

I extend my heartfelt good wishes to you all and your loved ones. I wish joy, peace, and happiness to all.

*continued on Page 3*

## Inside and out, BC's Legislature is celebrating

*Outside, the Legislature radiates and reflects seasonal charm and warmth (credit – Twin Travel & Cruises); inside, the creative side of library science dominates with a bookish tree in the Legislature Library (For more on the Library Tree created by Peter Gourlay's staff elves turn to P-15).*



**Gordon Gibson Jr., an AFMLABC founder, passes - Page 4 & 5**

Her Honour

The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC  
Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia

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The Association of Former MLAs of British Columbia is strictly non-partisan, regardless of members' past or present political affiliation. Founded in 1987, the Association was formally established by an Act of the British Columbia Legislature on February 10, 1998.

*Orders of the Day* was conceived, named and produced in its early stages by Bob McClelland, former MLA and cabinet minister, following his retirement from office. Hugh Curtis ably helmed this publication up through May 2014.

# From the Editor's Desk

It is never easy bidding farewell to a valued friend of OOTD. That was achingly so in 2022 when Jim Hume caught the last train out. I am so pleased to be able to share him in absentia in this issue (Pages 8 & 9). His Christmas stories are magnificent.

And, it is similarly hard to say goodbye to Gordon Gibson, a loyal and engaged reader of the newsletter. He helped found the AFMLABC because he believed there was a non-partisan role for former parliamentarians to play in the service of good governance.

For the past two months, OOTD has published a readership survey. We have also made it available on the website – [www.formerbcmla.com](http://www.formerbcmla.com) – in an auto-reply format of kindergarten simplicity. Responses have dribbled in ... no, "dribbled" is an exaggeration, make that "limped."

Hope springs eternal in this holiday season, so I live in hope that a few of you will be motivated over the holidays to visit the website and contribute to the betterment of your newsletter.

The few responses I have received are informative. It appears that respondents read OOTD cover-to-cover and generally approve of the content. A common thread is a desire for articles that enhance dialogue around good governance and the strengthening of our democratic institutions. There is a concern that the current political drift is working against the delivery of good governance.

One fully engaged OOTD reader gave the newsletter a satisfaction rating of 4.5 out of five. "It would be a five if members contributed more," he wrote. Drum roll, please.

This is the survey page on the website. It's easy to find and complete. It makes its way to my desk with a simple click.

Happy holidays from your Orders of the Day team.





# The President's Report

As 2023 winds down and 2024 approaches, I want to thank everyone who has helped us throughout the year with Orders of the Day, the Association dinner, and other meetings and functions. We could not have succeeded without the help and support of everyone.

I also want to say special thanks to Librarian Peter Gourley and all the staff of the Legislature Library for their help with OOTD, research and upkeep on our website, [www.formerbcmla.com](http://www.formerbcmla.com); the Speaker – the Hon. *Raj Chouhan* – and the Speaker's staff and the Clerk of the House – Kate Ryan-Lloyd – and her staff; OOTD Editor Brian Kieran, Rob Lee in charge of design/production/research and Donna Hains for her volunteer editing and secretarial support; and, all the members of the AFMLABC Board of Directors, volunteers and OOTD advertisers.

Finally, I am very sad to share that one of our colleagues, Gordon Gibson, passed away on November 11<sup>th</sup> at the age of 86. Our deepest condolences to all his family and friends. He will be missed by everyone.

Gordon was compassionate, intelligent and courageous. He was an author, political columnist, and BC Liberal MLA for North Vancouver from 1974 to 1979. He was the son of James Gordon Gibson Sr, who also served as a Liberal MLA,

representing Lillooet from 1953 to 1955 and North Vancouver from 1960 to 1966.

In 2001, Gordon was hired by the BC government to make recommendations on the structure and mandate of the Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reforms in BC. His recommendations were accepted.

Gordon was one of five former BC MLAs who founded the Association of Former MLAs of BC in 1987. They represented every political party that was active in BC at that time. On Christmas Eve of 1987, they incorporated this organization to use the knowledge and experience of its members for the service of parliamentary democracy in BC and elsewhere and to serve the public interest by providing non-partisan support for the parliamentary system of government in BC.

I met him a few times over the past 30 years and knew him to be a well-respected Canadian who dedicated his life to public service and helping Canadians. His contributions will be remembered.

With appreciation,  
Dave S. Hayer



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# Gordon Gibson Jr., an AFMLABC founder, gone at 86

***Gordon Gibson III – "It is with great sadness that I share the news of my father's passing. He was a brilliant and courageous man who dedicated his life to public service and to making Canada a better place. He was also a loving and supportive father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He will be missed dearly, but his legacy will live on through his family and his writings. Thank you for all your condolences and tributes. We love you, Dad."***

***Prime Minister Justin Trudeau – "Gordon Gibson Jr. was dedicated to his fellow British Columbians and all Canadians. He cared deeply about our institutions and Western Canada's place in our country. I was saddened to hear of his passing, and I'm keeping his loved ones in my thoughts. He will be missed."***

Gordon Gibson Jr. – former BC Liberal leader, Association of Former MLAs of BC (AFMLABC) founder, political columnist and author – passed away Nov. 11<sup>th</sup> at the age of 86. His death was caused by a chronic illness.

In 1974, Gibson won a byelection in the riding of North Vancouver-Capilano under the Liberal banner. The following year, three Liberal MLAs defected to the Social Credit Party three months before that year's general election, leaving Gibson and party leader David Anderson as the only two Liberals in the Legislature.

Anderson declined to be renominated to the leadership, and Gibson was approached to lead the party into the election. He was the only Liberal elected that year. He remained party leader until 1979, when he resigned to run for a seat in the federal House of Commons in the riding of North Vancouver-Burnaby. He was defeated in both the 1979 and 1980 federal elections by Progressive Conservative candidate Chuck Cook by less than 2,000 votes on each attempt.

In 1987, Gordon got together with Garde Gardom, Dennis Cocke, Donald Marshall, and Jim Nielsen to discuss a way of maintaining contact with former MLAs. There was agreement that such an undertaking had to be nonpartisan. The founders of the AFMLABC represented every political party that was active in the province at that time. On Christmas Eve of 1987, the organization was incorporated under The Society Act.

Gordon had attended the University of British Columbia, earning a degree in economics and political science. Seeking to further his understanding of public administration, he continued his studies at Harvard University, where he obtained a master's degree. Armed with a solid educational foundation, he was ready to embark on his political career.



Gordon's political career was marked by his unwavering commitment to the Liberal Party and his tireless efforts to bring about positive change. In the late 1960s, he joined Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's team as a policy advisor and later served as a special assistant to Finance Minister John Turner. These experiences allowed him to gain invaluable insights into the inner workings of government and shaped his progressive views on various issues.

Gordon's contributions extended far beyond his political career. He was a prolific writer and author known for his thought-provoking books on Canadian politics and society. His works, such as *The Benevolent Dictator* and *Plan B: The Future of the Rest of Canada*, offered fresh perspectives and sparked important conversations. Additionally, he was a sought-after guest on radio and television shows where he shared his expertise and engaged in meaningful discussions.

Gordon was also involved in various civic and charitable causes, such as the Fraser Institute, the Canadian Constitution Foundation, and the Vancouver Foundation. He received several awards and honours for his contributions, including the Order of Canada and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. He was inducted into the Order of BC in 2008.

Gordon was married to Jane Gibson and had three children: Gordon III, Sarah, and David. He also had seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

## Gordon Gibson's words 20 years ago resonate today

Why worry about such an esoteric subject as democratic reform? After all, Canada is reasonably free and prosperous. Surely we should concern ourselves with more urgent things, such as health care or, the value of the dollar, or threats to national unity. Well, it turns out that we might be far better off in all these areas if our democratic system worked better.

Canada could be, in fact, should be the most harmonious and prosperous land in the world. We are not, by a considerable way. Our living standard is much lower than in the U.S. or in many other, smaller countries. The public is broadly cynical and apathetic with respect to our political process. We have major regional alienation.

Essentially, all central government postures – from foreign and defence policy through banking legislation, issues of our relationship with the United States, health policy, to environmental issues – stem not from open and informed public debate but rather from the behind-closed-doors accommodation of a governing elite to polling data. There is nothing wrong with a government seeking to react to public attitudes. There is much wrong with failing to inform those attitudes in the first place.

And though it may seem a hopelessly naïve view, surely government should be about something more than being re-elected, important as that is.

Outside of politics and the courtroom – two famously unproductive venues – our society is built on the cooperation of voluntary transactions. This cooperative model includes the idea of competition, but we try to set the rules so that the competition benefits markets rather than rigging them.

In Canadian legislatures, the opposite applies. Governments, of course, are based on coercion rather than voluntary transactions. But worse, legislatures in the Westminster system are based on destructive competition. To achieve anything, one must be in government and preserve that position at all costs; to gain government, one must destroy the one currently in place. In a vicious cycle, this forces our representatives to constantly choose sides, contest rather than cooperate, and distort and misrepresent issues to the public in the pursuit of advantage. That is the system, and the lion is not about to lie down with the lamb. However, some things can be done to mitigate this reality.

The main driver of the adversarial system is the rule of winner-take-all. Where there is no second prize, the competition is single-minded and ugly, and the public is forgotten. A critical parliamentary reform is the development of second prizes. These already exist in minor ways: The opposition is entitled to set the subject for debate on a few selected days, and parties are entitled to designate their own committee members.

There should be much more. For example, the official opposition party has typically received the support of at least one-third of Canadians, and together, the opposition parties generally have over half of the vote. Why should not the leader of the opposition have the right to appoint some small fraction of the members of various boards and commissions, as is the practice for the minority party in the United States? Quite apart from anything else, nothing readies a group for government like genuine experience and responsibility beforehand. Why should not certain non-partisan (or so one would hope) committees of Cabinet, like those responsible for CSIS and the RCMP or national defence, include an opposition member, subject to standard confidentiality rules?

In the end, parliamentary reform is the simplest thing in the world. All the power to achieve it lies within Parliament; it need only decide. However, party discipline and voluntary servitude preclude that. Until parliamentarians are truly free to represent those who elect them – who would rather have cooperation and oversight and representativeness than contestation and secrecy and one-person rule – significant reform is unlikely.

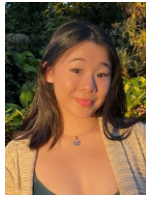


**(Editor's note: Gordon's full 4,500-word op-ed essay in the Winnipeg Free Press from 2003 can be found at <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/article/fixing-democracy-canada>.)**



# BCYP's 95<sup>th</sup> session will legislate the path forward in 2024

By Adrienne Chow  
Minister of Public Relations  
95th British Columbia Youth Parliament



From December 27<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>, youth from across the province will come together to devote their holiday time to the British Columbia Youth Parliament's (BCYP) annual legislative session at the BC Legislature.

Members will debate plans and projects for the upcoming year, learn about parliamentary procedure, and discuss resolutions and positions on major national and international issues. As usual, members will debate and vote independent of party politics. Government legislation is proposed but can be (and often is) amended as the membership sees fit.

This year, BCYP will debate several amendment acts to BCYP's consolidated legislation: The Supply Act, the Parliamentary Activities Act, and the Camp Phoenix Act. BCYP differs from other student mock parliaments in that all the legislation passed at the session this month will be carried out in the upcoming year.

The Supply Act encompasses BCYP's fiscal activities, legislating revenues and expenses for the upcoming year of service projects. BCYP's service projects are legislated through the Parliamentary Activities Act.

Our projects occur province-wide and include fundraising projects such as our annual gala, group service projects, and Regional Youth Parliaments. Regional Youth Parliaments focus on fostering parliamentary education and collaborative debate in high school-aged youth.

The Camp Phoenix Act outlines BCYP's biggest service project, the sleepaway summer camp for kids, regardless of social or financial need. All our staff at Camp Phoenix are volunteers who are leaders within their communities across the province. They take the time out of their busy lives to be staff at Camp Phoenix and make the project a reality.

Through these events, BCYP furthers its goals of promoting community service, education in the parliamentary process, and training in leadership, public speaking and debate.

## Stocking stuffers for all ages at the Legislature Gift Shop



By Karen Aitken,  
Parliamentary Education Office

If you are in our beautiful capital city, you should pop into the Parliamentary Gift Shop for some unique shopping gifts. There is something for everyone on your holiday list.

For the children in your life, there are colouring books, crayons, colouring pencils, backpacks and stuffed animals (Steller Jay and Spirit Bear or Big Horned Sheep and Elk from our Coat of Arms).

For everyone else, there are hand-made silk scarves, jewelry, goat milk-scented soaps, sequoia-scented candles, golf balls, ball caps, ties and our BC Tartan items that are always popular at this time of year.



Or, if looking for a gift basket for colleagues, you can choose a number of items and create a basket for pick up.

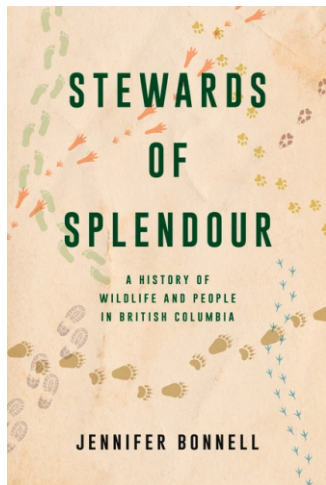
Of course, there is also the beauty of visiting the Parliament Buildings during the holiday season to see the decorations, lights, and the very large tree in the Lower Rotunda. It makes for a great photo opportunity.

The Parliamentary Gift Shop is located on the first floor of the Parliament Buildings adjacent to the exit. It is open Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Visa, Mastercard and debit are accepted.

If you purchase in bulk (25 or more of the same item), you get a 20 per cent discount. A free gift-wrapping service will be extended to former MLAs as well. Contact [GiftShop@leg.bc.ca](mailto:GiftShop@leg.bc.ca) for more details

# Stewards of Splendour: A History of Wildlife and People in BC

Review By Rod Silver  
Retired Manager, BC Habitat Conservation Trust Fund



Bruce Strachan had an unusual situation. The veteran Prince George South MLA was the province's Minister of Environment, and interior residents were very concerned about a planned hunt for Ogopogo – the legendary monster of Okanagan Lake.

This was to be no ordinary hunt for the ancient water spirit for the Secwepemc and Sylix peoples.

It was the summer of 1989, and as Strachan recalls: "There were reports in the Sun and Province newspapers that a U.S. newsgroup was planning on visiting Lake Okanagan and combing the lake with a submersible camera complete with a harpoon. Their intent was to film and possibly capture Ogopogo."

Bruce talked to his ADM, Jim Walker, to see if there was a way to put a stop to any potential harassment. It was an intriguing problem: How does one protect an animal that may or may not exist?

With help from the Ministry of Attorney General staff, Walker came through with a clever solution and crafted an addition to the Wildlife Act protecting "a vertebrate, over three metres in length, resident in Lake Okanagan, which is not a White Sturgeon." It worked; the U.S. news crew called off its hunt, and Ogopogo had a new legal status.

The Ogopogo incident is one of many examples of wildlife conservation work of elected officials and governments that author Jennifer Bonnell describes in her new book *Stewards of Splendour: A History of Wildlife and People in British Columbia*.

Published by the Royal BC Museum, the 496-page, five-section publication was initially designed to be a modest 60-to-80-page report to help educate new generations of government staff and to capture the institutional memory of some 80 interviewees. Bonnell, a tenacious researcher and talented writer, soon found herself with 13 chapters of spellbinding history that provides a unique and detailed record of the work to conserve BC's endowment of fish and wildlife and their habitats.

The text is richly illustrated with the kind assistance of the BC Archives, GeoBC and professional photographers. The result is an outstanding 250-year history of people and wildlife in British Columbia, spanning the pre-contact period of Indigenous wildlife stewardship to the present.

Writing in the book's foreword, the co-chairs of the Wildlife Advisory Committee of the province's current Together for Wildlife Strategy and the Executive Director of the Ministry of Land Water and Resource Stewardship state: "This impressive history could not come at a better time, as the people of British Columbia focus their efforts toward meaningful reconciliation among First Nations, provincial and federal governments; the safeguarding of biodiversity; and re-envisioning the natural resource sector for more sustainable outcomes."

**(Editor's note: Originally from Vancouver Island, Jennifer Bonnell teaches Canadian and environmental history at York University in Toronto. She is also the author of *Reclaiming the Don: An Environmental History of Toronto's Don River Valley* (University of Toronto Press, 2014), which won the Canadian Historical Association's Clio Prize and Heritage Toronto's best book award in 2015. For more on her work, visit [jenniferbonnell.com](http://jenniferbonnell.com).)**

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## In 1931, hot cocoa and ginger snaps meant total decadence

By Jim Hume

AFMLABC Honourary Life Member

(1924 – 2022)

We never had a Christmas tree when I was growing up. In the Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s, we couldn't afford one – and there were no evergreen forests near my English industrial-town home from which to steal one.

We had holly, lots of it with bright red berries. We had mistletoe, indignantly avoided until I discovered girls. We had some greenery poached from the yew trees in St. Mary's churchyard, and paper decorations galore, hand and homemade, to be hung in abundance from the kitchen ceiling and every available wall spot.

Manufacturing the brightly coloured paper links, cut-out bells, and small green trees was a kitchen table project for the long winter nights leading to Christmas Eve. While Dad was down at the Wheatsheaf making sure the beer met consumer standards, Mother would order the kitchen table cleared, scissors found, paper and paste prepared, and production started. I was confined to mixing the paste – made from flour and warm water – and dabbing the ends of the strips before they were pressed together to form another link in the ever-lengthening chain.

My sister would complain throughout that I was deliberately smearing her fingers with paste. I would respond with seven-year-old, blue-eyed innocence no mother could deny, that it wasn't my fault she couldn't keep her fingers out of the way.

The assembly line evenings always ended with mugs of hot cocoa and fresh-baked ginger snaps. Total decadence.

Two or three evenings before Christmas Eve, party night was declared as Father unveiled HIS (made from berry picking to bottling by mother) latest batch of Elderberry wine. The neighbours were invited in for a tasting, during which Dad graciously accepted their approval of HIS wine, and Mother just smiled.

With seasonable toasts completed, Mother would usher the neighbours out and the genuinely happy task of "dressing" the kitchen for Christmas commenced. In short order, it was transformed from a poky place to a cave worthy of Aladdin.



With the gaslight turned low, the coal fire in the kitchen grate burned with a warmer glow, and the holly berries were brighter. A few Christmas baubles glittered on the mantelpiece, and our paper chains and streamers hung from the kitchen clock and every nail on every wall. It was three days to Christmas Eve – and we were ready. Poor, but ready.

Christmas morning always began with the opening, however cold the dawn, of the window to the bedroom – and bed – I shared with my brother: Our clear-voiced singing of "Christians Awake, salute the happy morn ..." preceded a seemingly interminable wait until we heard the kettle boiling downstairs. It was the signal that tea could now be made to settle the nerves of parents as the children scrambled through a hasty porridge breakfast and then the small – very small – piles of presents on the scrubbed-white kitchen table.

Waiting for the kettle was a ritual maintained in my own family until the youngest left the nest. And, silly though it may sound, in my 90s, I still half listen for the kettle to whistle on Christmas morning before opening a Christmas gift. It's a time for me to remember when no one in the family had to worry about the safe or sensible features of toys because there were no toys. When, to a little boy's dismay, there were only hand-knitted "pullovers" (sweaters), which I was assured I would "grow into," along with hand-knitted gloves and socks, a book or two and always, from my wonderful Aunt Emily, a small "variety box" of Cadbury's chocolates. Aunt Emily's husband owned a corner grocery store, hence the touch of luxury.

*continued next page*



We regarded ourselves a fortunate family even in the depths of the depression, with Dad on poverty-level dole. Mother's father had a small holding on the edge of town where he raised a few chickens, had a cow, and grew vegetables. Courtesy of Granddad, Christmas dinner was always chicken – but not roasted. Granddad's gift chickens needed an extra hour on the slow boil to be made edible. But it was chicken, and with a few vegetables and light-as-feather dumplings, followed by homemade Christmas pudding smothered with hot custard, it was a feast of royal proportions – enjoyed with a touch of guilt because our neighbours, lacking granddads in the country, sat at tables close to bare.

There never was a Christmas in my growing up that Mother, who scrubbed floors and took in laundry to make ends meet, didn't ask us to remember how blessed we were. It's why, decades later, I can still call up the warm vision of that old Christmas kitchen and appreciate how blessed I was.

(Editor's note: AFMLABC Honourary Life Member Jim Hume left us in 2022, but he left so much in his wake. At Christmas in 2015, he penned the OOTD column above about a humble Midlands working-class family weathering the Great Depression with grace and dignity. Jim was a fan of Adirondack Murray's log cabin poetry about Christmas and the passage of time: "Ah, friends, dear friends, as years go on and heads get gray, how fast the guests do go! Touch hands, touch hands with those that stay; strong hands to weak, old hands to young, around the Christmas board, touch hands. The false forget, the foe forgive, for every guest will go and every fire burn low and cabin empty stand.")



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# The impact of online incivility on political discourse

By Rakashdeep Singh Kainth

The digital age has ushered in a new era of political engagement, with the internet and social media platforms playing central roles in how we discuss, debate, and shape our political landscape. It has made it easier for all of us, citizens and politicians alike, to express our views, connect with others, and participate in the democratic process.

However, this digital realm has also given rise to a significant challenge: Online incivility. This problem isn't limited to one country; it's a global issue affecting democracies around the world, and it's time we had a serious conversation about it.

Picture the internet as a vast digital arena where we all gather to talk about politics. It's a space that's supposed to encourage open dialogue and free expression of ideas. Yet, there's a troubling trend: People often engage in rude and hostile behaviour online, especially when discussing political matters. This incivility is a problem that goes beyond political candidates; it affects us all, eroding the foundations of our democratic processes and institutions.

In today's world, the internet is an integral part of our daily lives, and it has transformed how we engage with politics. It offers unparalleled accessibility, allowing people from all walks of life to join the political conversation, stay informed, and voice their opinions. However, this newfound accessibility is not without its challenges. The internet can be a breeding ground for misinformation, political polarization, and the spread of hate speech. It's a double-edged sword that offers both opportunities and threats to our democratic ideals.

Online incivility isn't just a matter of impoliteness or rudeness. It can deter capable individuals from considering a career in politics. The toxic online environment, rife with personal attacks and negativity, can discourage people from entering the political arena. This has significant implications for the diversity and representation of political candidates. Moreover, it can erode the public's trust in political institutions. When people perceive politics as a hostile and unwelcoming space, they are less likely to participate, resulting in decreased voter turnout and widespread disillusionment.

In the realm of democratic theory, there are two important concepts: the "marketplace of ideas" and "deliberative democracy." These ideas have long guided our understanding of how open discussion and informed decision-making underpin the democratic process. However, the rise of online incivility poses a significant challenge to these principles, casting a shadow over the democratic ideals that have historically shaped our political landscape.

The marketplace of ideas concept suggests that a wide range of ideas should circulate freely in a free and open society. The competition of these ideas should lead to the discovery of truth, benefiting society as a whole. In simpler terms, it's like a big marketplace where everyone can bring their ideas, and the best ones will rise to the top. This is how we learn and make progress as a society.

Deliberative democracy theory emphasizes the importance of reasoned, informed discussions among citizens in making collective decisions. It suggests that individuals should engage in thoughtful, evidence-based conversations to ensure that policy choices align with the public's best interests. In other words, we should talk calmly and sensibly when making important decisions.

Online incivility disrupts these fundamental democratic ideals. It muddles the marketplace of ideas with negativity and hostility, making it challenging for diverse viewpoints to thrive. It also undermines the principles of deliberative democracy by discouraging informed and respectful deliberation. In the online world, these important democratic principles are under threat.

In 2020, a study conducted by academics Heidi Tworek and Chris Tenove at the University of British Columbia unveiled the troubling prevalence of online incivility during political campaigns. Their analysis of over a million tweets directed at candidates during the 2019 campaign paints a stark picture of the dark side of the digital arena. The findings are clear: A whopping 40 per cent of these tweets were uncivil, with 16 per cent being outright abusive, while only seven per cent carried a positive tone. These statistics reveal a sobering reality that deserves our immediate attention.

The internet, once seen as the modern marketplace of ideas, has paradoxically become a breeding ground for online abuse. Instead of nurturing constructive debates and diverse perspectives, it has become a platform that sows discord and toxicity. These statistics are more than just numbers; they represent a critical turning point in the evolution of our democratic processes. We must address this issue to protect the core of our democracy.

The impact of online incivility extends beyond politicians to affect the very essence of our democracy. One crucial aspect to consider is the gendered dimension of online abuse. Studies have shown differing perspectives on whether online abuse is gender-based. Anatoliy Gruzd's study (Toronto Metropolitan University) argues that the violence online is not necessarily gender-based. On the other hand, research by Angelia Wagner (University of Alberta) suggests that women politicians are more likely to receive demeaning, insulting, and violent messages on social media.

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This gendered dimension is particularly concerning when we look at the experiences of women politicians who face relentless gender-based trolling. The online abuse doesn't stop until a candidate either withdraws or concedes, leaving a stain on the democratic process. The gendered dimensions of abuse perpetuate serious issues of gender discrimination and violence that persist in our society.

When female politicians, or any group for that matter, receive demeaning, insulting, and violent messages, it disrupts the ideal of informed and respectful deliberation. This intimidation hinders open discourse and can lead to a chilling effect, where individuals, especially those from marginalized or underrepresented groups, refrain from engaging in discussions out of fear of abuse.

Online incivility also has a significant impact on "floating voters." These are individuals who don't have a strong allegiance to any political party and are open to changing their voting preferences from one election to another. However, the corrosive effects of cyberbullying, character assassination, and online abuse extend beyond the immediate targets. They adversely affect the perception of the political landscape for these crucial swing voters, leading to hesitancy and disillusionment.

Floating voters are typically individuals who weigh various options and need accurate information to make informed choices. When they encounter hostility and misinformation, it becomes challenging for them to engage in thoughtful deliberation. This is critical to the deliberative democratic process, which depends on informed, respectful discussions for rational decision-making.

The impact on candidates, especially women politicians and activists, is profound. Online abuse can deter women from pursuing political careers, drive them away from politics, or make them withdraw from online political conversations, ultimately undermining their impact in the political sphere. The intersection of gender and race in the realm of online abuse is a critical aspect to consider. Women of colour not only face a heightened risk of certain forms of online harassment but also must navigate the unique challenges that arise from the intersection of these identities.



This compound discrimination magnifies the obstacles they encounter in the political sphere and adds layers of complexity to the impact of online abuse on their political careers and civic engagement. While women of colour candidates may not be the primary targets of online abuse in the general sense, they are disproportionately subjected to specific forms of online harassment. This includes sexist, racist, and violent abuse, making them more vulnerable than white women or men of colour. In fact, they experience four times the level of violent abuse compared to white candidates and twice as much as men of colour.

To address this critical issue, we must take action. Governments and international institutions have a role to play in promoting transparency and accountability on online platforms. It's essential to foster a civil and constructive online environment where democratic ideals can thrive. Our democracy's future depends on our collective effort to combat online incivility, ensuring that the digital realm remains a space for meaningful dialogue, diverse perspectives, and informed decision-making. This is not just a matter of politics; it's a matter of safeguarding the very foundations of our democratic society.

**(Rakashdeep is a graduate student in the UBC School of Public Policy. He is also the facilitator for "Strengthening Democracy BC," an initiative led by former premier Mike Harcourt and former cabinet minister Graham Bruce that has the blessing of the AFMLABC Board of Directors.)**

## Holiday Diversions answers - from Page 14

*Answers to Holiday Quiz - A Christmas Carol*  
 1) BELLE  
 2) FAN  
 3) CRATCHIT  
 4) NEPHEW  
 5) FOUR  
 6) MARLEY  
 7) DILBER  
 8) TURKEY  
 9) GREEN  
 BAH HUMBUG  
 (If you picked the exact opposite answers, you get a description of the main character!)

*Answers to Christmas Scramble*  
 1) SLED  
 2) GREET  
 3) CHIME  
 4) SKIING  
 I dropped a copy of "A Christmas Carol" on my toe. It hurt like...  
 THE DICKENS



# Posturing parliament – Canadians are not impressed

With the new speaker of the House of Commons, Greg Fergus, attempting to reset the tone of debate this fall, there is apparently much work to be done to bring back decorum to parliament in the eyes of Canadians.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians critical of their House of Commons. Asked to describe the sentiments that come to mind when they think of the exchange of ideas between their parliamentary members, the top descriptive terms are "posturing" (54 per cent), "useless" (46 per cent), and "dishonest" (38 per cent).

In fact, of the 10 items listed, five positive and five negative, respondents are more likely to choose all five negative terms than their rosier alternates.

The negative assessment of debates in the House of Commons is not just coming from afar. Those who watch parliament proceedings frequently are more likely to describe the discussions as "dishonest" (58 per cent) and "disrespectful" (45 per cent) than those who aren't avid followers.

While the nation can feel divided these days, the country is largely unified in its negativity regarding its political representatives.

Every group of partisans among past Conservative, Liberal, New Democrat, and Bloc Québécois voters are more likely to describe debate in the House as "posturing" than not.

Some of this disenchantment may also be due to Canada's tradition of party discipline. Three-quarters of Canadians say that MPs vote to follow the views of their leader, so any real debate about issues is largely performative.

Canada's House of Commons proceedings are available through the Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC) on cable or online. Witty comebacks and retorts from Question Period have also become regular fodder for social media.

More than half of Canadians say they at least watch parliamentary proceedings sometimes, including 11 per cent who are more frequent observers and 46 per cent who watch occasional clips in news stories or social media. One quarter (24 per cent) say they rarely check in



on what's happening in the House of Commons, and approaching one in five (17 per cent) never do.

Men are more likely than women to say they frequently follow the House of Commons, while women are twice as likely to say they never watch or read anything about parliamentary proceedings.

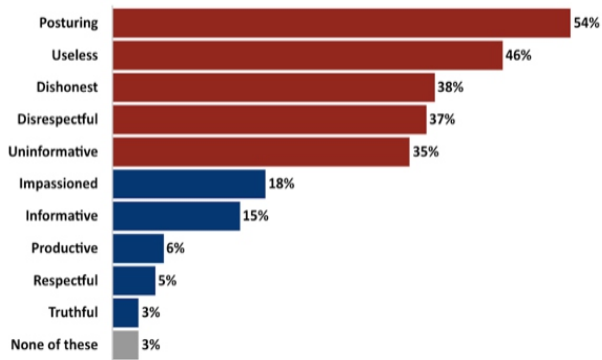
Before becoming leader of the Conservative Party last year, Pierre Poilievre made a name for himself during House of Commons Question Period, fueling his popularity on social media. With Poilievre at the helm, 20 per cent of past Conservative voters say they regularly tune in to parliamentary sessions, double the number of past Liberal (nine per cent) and NDP (eight per cent) supporters who say the same.

The House of Commons was forced to choose a new Speaker this fall after the previous one resigned for inviting to parliament a former Ukrainian soldier who fought in a Nazi division. The change in the position may provide an opportunity for a reset in culture, with many in the House believing "there is a profound and pressing need to repair political discourse in the House," according to the *Toronto Star*. One week into his tenure, new Speaker Greg Fergus attempted to make a speech about decorum in the House, which devolved into heckling.

These recent events do little to dispel Canadians' apparently negative opinion of their legislative body. Canadians most chosen words to describe debates in parliament are "posturing" (54 per cent), "useless" (46 per cent), "dishonest" (38 per cent), "disrespectful" (37 per cent) and "uninformative" (35 per cent). More positive terms, such as "impassioned" (18 per cent) and "informative" (15 per cent) are chosen by fewer than one-in-five. One-in-20 or fewer choose "productive" (five per cent), "respectful" (five per cent), or "truthful" (three per cent).

*continued next page*

Given what you've seen, read, or heard about debates in parliament, what three words would you use to describe them?  
(All respondents, n=1,878)



Across the political spectrum, past voters view debates in the House of Commons as "posturing." Past Conservative voters are much more likely to view them as "dishonest" (54 per cent) than those who voted Bloc (21 per cent), Liberal (27 per cent), or NDP (33 per cent) in 2021. Past Liberal voters are the most likely to believe the discussions in parliament to be "impassioned" at one in four (25 per cent).

Frequent watchers of debates in the House are more negative than not in their assessments; three in five who say they regularly watch parliamentary debates describe them as "posturing" (58 per cent) or "dishonest" (58 per cent). One-quarter (27 per cent) in that group also call them "uninformative", but they are less likely to use this description than those who check in on the House of Commons occasionally (37 per cent) or rarely (40 per cent).

A handful of Canadians view the discussions in the House of Commons with a more positive lens. Canadians under 45 are twice as likely as those older to believe there is heartfelt passion in the debates. Younger Canadians are also more likely to view them as productive and truthful. However, those under 35 are also more likely to offer no opinion.

The tone of conversations in the House of Commons is apparently one issue for Canadians. Another may be the lack of power individual members of parliament have to express their opinions. Most Canadians (73 per cent) believe because MPs follow their leader, there is no honest debate about the issues.

Across the country, at least seven-in-10 in every region say there is no real debate over the issues in parliament. Women are less likely than men to say this is the case but are also more likely to say they are unsure.

A majority of all past voters believe there is no real debate on the issues in parliament, though a smaller proportion of NDP (68 per cent) and Liberal (71 per cent) voters believe this to be the case than past Conservative supporters (81 per cent).

Most Canadians, regardless of how often they tune into parliamentary proceedings, agree about the lack of genuine debate on the issues in the House of Commons, but those who regularly watch are much stronger in their assertion.



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For more on insurance brokers and the benefits they provide to B.C. families go to [bcbroker.ca](http://bcbroker.ca).

HELPING WHEN LIFE CHANGES



# HOLIDAY DIVERSIONS

## Holiday Quiz - "A Christmas Carol"

by Rob Lee

Most of us have read "A Christmas Carol" or seen one of the movie versions during the month of December. Test your knowledge of the holiday classic!

1) In the book and many movies (but not the 1951 version) what is the name of Ebenezer's fiancée?

BELLE      HOLLY

2) What is the name of Ebenezer's sister?

ALICE      FAN

3) Last name of Scrooge's clerk?

CRATCHIT      FEZZIWIG

4) How is Fred related to Ebenezer?

NEPHEW      SON

5) How many spirits visit Ebenezer?

THREE      FOUR

6) Last name of Scrooge's partner Jacob?

MARLEY      JORKIN

7) What is the last name of the laundress?

WILKINS      DILBER

8) What does Scrooge send to the Cratchit house for dinner?

TURKEY      GOOSE

9) What colour is the robe worn by the Ghost of Christmas present?

YELLOW      GREEN

**BONUS:**

Write the underlined letters from your nine answers in the space below to reveal a line from the story.

\_\_\_\_\_

Answers on Page 11

## Christmas Scramble

Unscramble these four clues,  
one letter to each square,  
to form four wintry words

by Rob Lee

DELS  
○ □ □ ○

TEREG  
□ □ ○ □ ○

HEMIC  
○ ○ □ □ ○

INKGIS  
□ ○ □ ○ □



Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

Ans: ○ ○ ○      ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Answers on Page 11

## Len Norris



"One of the rare over-30 types I've found able to engage in meaningful dialogue..."

December 12, 1968



# Building the Legislative Library Book Tree



Legislative Library Director Peter Gourlay and his dedicated staff have got the building of their annual seasonal Book Tree down to an amazing example of creative library science.

He says: "It starts on the ground floor of the Library stacks where we house our periodicals. There are many large volumes here – such as the Canadian Lumberman – that make a perfect base for the tree. The books and other decorations are pulled the day before putting up the tree and are stored in the Gathering Room, just off the Library Rotunda. As the form of the tree is taking shape crunched paper is used to prevent the books from sliding inwards, and to help keep the slope of the tree consistent. The book presents are put around the base of the tree. Everything is carefully tracked and stored on a spreadsheet, including the title and location of the books, their colour, and how many volumes are normally used. Staff have a detailed set of instructions they follow."



## Please support BC Youth Parliament

The Association of Former MLAs of BC seeks your support for BC Youth Parliament and its annual session in Victoria. Donations can be made to the "AFMLABC Hugh Curtis British Columbia Youth Parliament Fund," which is managed by the Victoria Foundation.

By phone: Call 250-381-5532 to make a donation by credit card directly.

By cheque: To the Victoria Foundation, #200 - 703 Broughton Street, Victoria, B.C., V8N 1E2.

**Make your cheque payable to The Victoria Foundation.** Note the name of the fund in the cheque memo line or in a cover letter.

Online: Go to [www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca](http://www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca). Click on "Giving" in the navigation bar and then on "Make a Donation." After that just follow the prompts to find the AFMLABC Hugh Curtis BC Youth Parliament Fund.

If you have any questions about how to make a donation to the Victoria Foundation, please contact Sara Neely, Director of Philanthropic Services, at 250-381-5532 or [sneely@victoriafoundation.bc.ca](mailto:sneely@victoriafoundation.bc.ca).

"It's like Christmastime, waking up."

# MackKay and Harper join forces to create the CPC

The Conservative Party of Canada is marking its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this month after the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative parties ratified their merger in December 2003, giving rise to the Conservative Party Canadians know today.

On Oct. 16<sup>th</sup>, 2003, then-PC Leader Peter MacKay and then-Alliance Leader Stephen Harper announced an agreement-in-principle to unite the political right under a single Conservative Party. The PCs and the Alliance were thought to be dividing right-leaning voters, and their merger was aimed at presenting a stronger competitor to take down the Liberals, who held a majority government under Prime Minister Paul Martin.

MacKay and Harper shook hands on the deal and announced it at a joint news conference. "I actually had difficulty sleeping last night," Harper said at the news conference. "It's like Christmastime, waking up."

Before the merger, the once-powerful PCs were struggling through a period in which they held the fewest seats in party history over three elections. Their majority government had been soundly defeated in the 1993 election, leaving them only two seats in the House of Commons. They clawed their way up to 20 seats by 1997 but slid back to 12 after the 2000 election.

The Canadian Alliance, meanwhile, had only improved marginally over the seat count of its predecessor the Reform Party, with 66 seats in the House of Commons in the 2000 election.

"This agreement ends vote splitting," MacKay said at the news conference. "It means two plus two can equal more than four. It means winning," he added.

And it did mean winning, if not right away. The merger was ratified on Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>, 2003, and Harper was chosen as the party's leader the following spring. Harper led the Conservatives to win 99 seats in the 2004 election before seizing a minority government in 2006 and going on to govern for a decade.

At the time of the merger announcement, Diane Ablonczy of the Canadian Alliance was excited about the new union. "It's about time," she told CTV News. "Canada's been suffering because there's one governing party and a bunch of also-rans."

However, the merger was not universally accepted among the PC ranks, where some railed against the social conservatism of the Alliance.



*Progressive Conservative leader Peter MacKay and Canadian Alliance leader Stephen Harper share a laugh at a news conference announcing a merger deal with the two parties, in Ottawa (CP photo)*

MacKay, in particular, faced heavy criticism for allegedly breaking a promise to one of his PC rivals. MacKay had been chosen party leader in May of 2003, after brokering a deal with rival leadership candidate David Orchard. Orchard had thrown his support behind MacKay to break a deadlock in the leadership campaign on the condition that MacKay vow not to merge the PC Party with the Canadian Alliance.

Five months after winning the PC leadership, MacKay was sitting side-by-side with Harper at the merger announcement.

Former PM and PC leader Joe Clark was among MacKay's more vocal critics. "Winding down the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, which this does, deprives the country of the only other national entity that could form government," Clark said at the time.

Others among the PC ranks were also upset. Andre Bachand, another PC leadership candidate who lost out to MacKay, labelled the merger as "sleeping with the extremists." He resigned from the party before the merger became official, though he later made an unsuccessful attempt to win a seat for the Conservatives in the 2008 election.

MacKay became one of Harper's top cabinet ministers, handling the Foreign Affairs, National Defence and Justice portfolios during his tenure. However, he decided not to run in the 2015 election and served out his term as Minister of National Defence before stepping away from his MP post.