

## BC Youth Parliament members return to the House

By Premier Abby Head  
94<sup>th</sup> British Columbia Youth  
Parliament

I am pleased to report that the 94<sup>th</sup> BC Youth Parliament session was a tremendous success. Members from near and far made it to Victoria from Dec. 27<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> and joined us in the Legislative Assembly.

I was nervous about returning to an in-person gathering after two years of holding our sessions on Zoom. Will we know when to bow? When to stand? My protocol fears were alleviated after the first sitting when members jumped back into the swing of things and we collectively remembered in-person parliamentary procedure. The energy that filled the Chamber was everything I remember from previous years. It was like we never left.

This was a great reminder of the way BC youth can come together and learn alongside one another. It was a testament to why our organization has offered such a valuable experience for so many generations. I am so excited to see this group of members embody our motto of “Youth Serving Youth” through the various projects we take on.

*Photo by Chad Hipolito*

*Continued on Page 4*



### AFMLABC brings greetings to BCYP's 94<sup>th</sup> Session

By Brian Kieran  
OOTD Editor

On Dec. 29<sup>th</sup> I had the privilege of bringing greetings to the 94<sup>th</sup> BCYP from AFMLABC President Dave Hayer and the board of directors.

My brief remarks were delivered on the floor of the House ... a first for me. My time in the Legislative Press Gallery in the 1980s and '90s was spent in the bleachers above the floor and behind the Speaker's throne.

I reminded BCYP members that the AFMLABC is a non-profit corporation created by an act passed in the Chamber in 1998 and that its legislated mandate includes: “To serve the public interest by providing non-partisan support for the parliamentary system of government in British Columbia.”

In keeping with this mandate the association created the AFMLABC Hugh Curtis BCYP Fund with the sole purpose of financially supporting two BCYP members who wish to attend this annual parliamentary session.

I concluded: “Your engagement and enthusiasm, your work in this Chamber and in your communities and your amazing Camp Phoenix are an inspiration to our retired MLAs and to those of us sliding down the back side of the political rainbow.”

Her Honour

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

# Thank You and Miscellany

**Welcome and thank you** to LifeLabs, the newest advertiser in *Orders of the Day*. We appreciate all of the organizations who support this publication and our Association.

**Thank you** to those of you who, when sending in your Member dues or subscription renewals, added a donation to help cover production costs.

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*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

What a treat to launch OOTD into 2023 with a full head of steam. This Winter issue is anchored around the inspiring leadership of the BC Youth Parliament. To see these emerging public policy advocates and politicians-in-training at work on the floor of the House in December was truly inspiring.

In support of our coverage of the 94<sup>th</sup> BCYP Session (Pages 1, 4, 5 & 9), I was pleased to discover that the Rideau Hall Foundation had partnered with the Samara Centre for Democracy to probe and analyze the state of youth civic learning and engagement in the context of the pandemic (Pages 6 & 7). Nurturing and solidifying youth civic engagement as a democratic competency is what the BCYP is all about. And, the Rideau/Samara study gives their endeavors context and perspective.

On Page 10, there's news of a "Strengthening Democracy" initiative being spearheaded by former premier Mike Harcourt and former Social Credit/BC Liberal cabinet minister Graham Bruce. We often mention that former MLAs from opposite sides of the House find, in retirement, that they have more in common than they realized back in the day. It is so fitting that Mike and Graham have set partisanship aside to join forces to find ways to ensure that our democratic institutions continue to be robust in these challenging times.

Finally, we sadly report the passing of former NDP cabinet minister and litigator par excellence Gary Lauk. Our thanks to Gary's life-long friend Michael Markwick for contributing his tribute (Page 8).

The deadline for submissions for the March issue of OOTD will be Feb. 20<sup>th</sup>. Let me know ahead of time if you have something to share – [ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com](mailto:ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com).

# The President's Report

As we are starting 2023, I wish everyone a very happy, healthy, and prosperous year ahead.

Sadly, in November, one of our former MLAs from Vancouver Centre – a former NDP cabinet minister – Gary Lauk passed away at 82. Gary, a distinguished lawyer, served in government from 1972 to 1986. I want to express our heartfelt condolences to his family and friends.

The AFMLABC was approached by former MLAs Mike Harcourt and Graham Bruce regarding their Strengthening Democracy initiative. Our board of directors had a Zoom/in-person meeting on Jan. 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss their proposal which is the subject of an article on Page 10.

The board passed a motion to encourage Mike and Graham. While not participating formally, we have a sincere interest in their success. We have advised them that a member of the board may contribute in an advisory capacity.

The Association, initiated 1987, was formally framed in legislation in 1998 (updated in 2003 and 2015). The act mandates these objectives: "To put the knowledge and experience of its members at the service of parliamentary democracy in British Columbia and elsewhere; to serve the public interest by providing non-partisan support for the parliamentary system of government in British Columbia; to foster a spirit of community among former MLAs; to foster good relations between current and former MLAs; and, to protect and promote the interests of former MLAs."

My personal view is that the Strengthening Democracy initiative is a good and timely idea. As a former MLA, I support it. As Graham states, our democratic institutions are fragile and almost every day we hear concerns about the stability of democracy.

We must do everything we can to sustain the health of our democracy as millions of people have paid with their lives to protect our democratic way of life. We cannot take it for granted. Personally, I wish former Premier Mike Harcourt and former MLA Graham Bruce success with their venture. It will not be an easy task.

I'd like to congratulate all the participants of the very successful 94<sup>th</sup> BC Youth Parliament session held at the Legislature in December ... particularly the two recipients of Hugh Curtis Fund grants. I'd also like to thank Brian Kieran and his wife, Donna, for attending BCYP session to share greetings on our behalf.

If you have any suggestions, advice, or just want to talk, please feel free to contact me at [daveshayer@gmail.com](mailto:daveshayer@gmail.com).



Dave Hayer  
President

## TIME TO RENEW



## 2023 Member Dues and OOTD subscriptions are due!

Annual membership for former MLAs in the Association is \$60 (unchanged from previous years) which includes the subscription for Orders of the Day (OOTD).

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# BCYP passes bills to set the stage for 2023 agenda

By Premier Abby Head  
94<sup>th</sup> British Columbia Youth Parliament

During the 94<sup>th</sup> Session of the BC Youth Parliament, cabinet proposed four pieces of legislation, all of which were fruitfully debated and passed.

We passed the Parliamentary Activities Act, that governs parliament's actions for the next year. We also passed the Camp Phoenix Act, that lays the groundwork for Camp Phoenix, a five-day sleep away camp for children ages 8 to 12 who, for social or financial reasons, could not otherwise attend summer camp.



*Photos by Chad Hipolito*

In addition, our Service and Leadership Among Youth Act outlines the logistics for our Youth Service Committee Projects. Lastly, we passed the Supply Act that authorizes the necessary spending and mechanisms of fundraising. This legislation is a reflection of the service commitment of each member, each of whom is dedicated to serving their community and improving the quality of life for youth in our province.

Throughout the sessional year, we are excited to have ongoing fundraisers, service projects and regional youth parliament events. We will also be working toward running our youth service committees, the fundraising gala, and ending the year with Camp Phoenix.

I want to extend my thanks to the Association of Former MLAs of BC for their ongoing support of BCYP. Your grant plays an integral role in making the session financially accessible for members and your ongoing support and encouragement provides us with great inspiration.



*Huan Ge Zhang, who represented the riding of Saanich North and the Islands, participates in Question Period and Sukhmani Sandu, who represented the riding of Surrey-Panorama, takes her place debating the Camp Phoenix Act 2023 in BCYP's committee of the whole.*

# Two BCYP members grateful for AFMLABC assistance



*Photo by Sky Losier*

The two BC Youth Parliament members pictured above with OOTD editor Brian Kieran – Vanessa Asaad and Leif Lafrance – gratefully received grants from the AFMLABC Hugh Curtis BC Youth Parliament Fund to help them with the costs of attending the 94<sup>th</sup> BCYP Session held at the Legislature from Dec. 27<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>.

Vanessa served this session as the Provincial Secretary and Minister of Donor Engagement. She is from Coquitlam and is a Grade 12 student attending Centennial Secondary School.

Vanessa enjoys volunteering in her community whenever she can by participating in environmental, social, and humanitarian work. She loves voice acting, particularly in the animation and narration fields. Her favourite pastime is creating character voices for cartoons.

Vanessa is passionate about social justice, female empowerment, economic, global, and political issues. When not studying or working, Vanessa enjoys reading and loves to travel to many different places around the world. She initiated the first ever female empowerment and social club, Girl Talk, at her school with the vision of creating a safe and non-judgmental space where high school girls can socialize and talk about their issues.

She participated in Minerva BC's Learning to Lead™ leadership program where she won Minerva's Youth Leadership Award in 2022, wrote a blog about her leadership experience, and shared how Girl Talk came to fruition.

She told OOTD: "My name is Vanessa Asaad and I am a second-year member of the British Columbia Youth Parliament. I have been awarded a full bursary courtesy of the Association of Former MLAs BC and the AFMLABC Hugh Curtis BC Youth Parliament Fund.

"I just wanted to personally and sincerely thank the former MLAs who granted me this bursary which has helped me immensely. I am truly honoured to have been given this amazing opportunity which has allowed me to attend the 94<sup>th</sup> British Columbia Youth Parliament in person in Victoria this year.

"Thank you so much for your support and generosity. I had a great time being in cabinet in parliament and representing my constituency."

Leif, 19, is currently working as a waiter to save money for university. With aspirations to become a blacksmith, Leif is also furthering a music career. Spare time is taken up with hiking, reading, writing and playing music.

Leif says: "I'd like to express my deepest gratitude for the grant given to me. Without it I wouldn't have been able to attend this year's BCYP. The time I spent debating with like-minded passionate peers was truly unlike any other. It was a formative experience that will stick with me for years to come. For giving me that wonderful opportunity I will be eternally grateful. Thank you so much for all the work you do."

(More BCYP coverage on Page 9.)

# Youth engagement as a democratic competency

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected youth across Canada, negatively impacting their education, employment, and mental health. This circumstance threatens to create a “lockdown generation” that could face severe social and economic barriers for years to come.

In many instances, existing barriers have been exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly for youth that identify as black, Indigenous or as persons of colour. Among the hardest hit are those who also identify as women or gender diverse youth, youth that are 2SLGBTQIAA+ or youth that are living with disabilities.

Over the course of the pandemic, young people have faced unprecedented challenges to accessing services and opportunities. Yet, they have not stayed silent. With lockdowns and other public health measures restricting in-person forms of community organizing, young people have increasingly turned their use of social media toward civic ends. On Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and other platforms, young people have expressed their opinions about the government’s handling of the pandemic, shared health and safety information, and participated in global movements for social, racial, and climate justice.

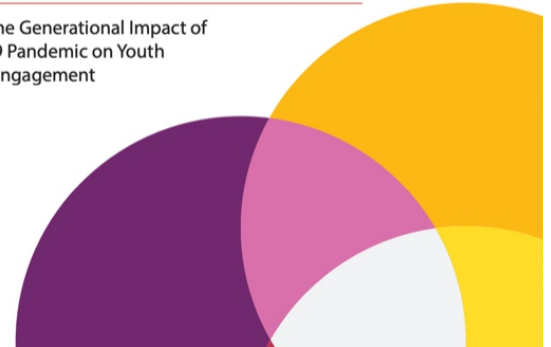
Despite this engagement, however, young people remain less likely to vote than older age groups and are less interested in traditional forms of democratic participation. According to Statistics Canada, young people are more likely to participate in non-electoral activities such as signing a petition or participating in a demonstration than older people. In addition, Elections Canada has found that the gap in voter turnout between young people and seniors is increasing. In 2015, there was a 20 per cent gap between these groups. By 2019, this gap had increased to 25 per cent with 54 per cent of youth aged 18 to 24 voting compared with 79 per cent aged 65 to 74.

While this circumstance is complex, a key element, particularly during the pandemic, is that young people feel largely ignored by politicians and decision-makers despite the fact that their futures are on the line.

In such a context, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revitalize democracy by solidifying youth civic engagement as a democratic competency. Doing so will require robust and creative solutions that secure what we are calling “civic onboarding.” Civic onboarding refers to the process of introducing young people to the knowledge, skills, and habits they need to become active and engaged members of their communities. This is not a top-down approach to civic literacy but rather one that speaks to, and alongside, the diverse experiences and concerns of youth in Canada. It is a process that requires listening to the voices of young people and meeting them where they are at to build trust and connection.

## LEARNING LOSS AS CIVIC LOSS

Addressing the Generational Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Democratic Engagement



The Rideau Hall Foundation partnered with The Samara Centre for Democracy to learn more about the state of youth civic learning and engagement in the context of the current pandemic and the potential generational impact this will have on young people in Canada. As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, we are met with the opportunity to address the tremendous challenges facing Canadian youth by investing in their civic literacy. Doing so would accelerate Canada’s recovery from the pandemic and revitalize our democracy. This is an urgent matter. The generational impact of the pandemic risks entrenching disproportionate inequities that hinder the democratic participation of diverse communities. We cannot allow the learning loss caused by the pandemic to become our civic loss.

The pandemic has made clear that young people remain politically engaged and civically active – just not in ways that may be discernible based on traditional metrics. Young people may be less inclined to vote or join a political party, but that does not mean they are politically apathetic. Given the correlation between civic participation and well-being, online engagement by youth makes a difference, especially in socially distanced circumstances.

This reality presents both challenges and opportunities for civic literacy in Canada. It seems clear that digital media literacy is becoming more and more vital to a healthy democracy. While digital media literacy is taught in elementary and secondary schools across the country, what is taught varies widely. An approach that highlights both the possibilities and potential risks of online political engagement would better prepare young people to successfully navigate our complex media ecosystem. Similarly, an approach to civic education grounded in “Critical Global Citizenship Education” (an education approach that challenges the traditional world order built on colonialism) might better prepare young people to understand Canada’s role in a world shaped by asymmetrical power relations and particular histories of conquest and colonialism.

*continued next page*

There is also an argument to be made that while we usually expect civic education to take place in elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities could step into the breach and play a hands-on role. This would catch students who did not receive a comprehensive civic education earlier, and also strengthen the democratic knowledge of those who already have a solid foundation.

Post secondary students are still developing their opinions and identities, making it an ideal time for them to gain the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to become active and responsible democratic citizens. In the U.S., some colleges and universities are heeding the call, making some form of civic education mandatory. Undergraduates at Purdue University, for example, are now required to complete a civics literacy program in order to graduate.

In summary, dedicated civic onboarding support across the following three areas would meet youth where they are, enabling their civic onboarding in a manner that addresses the challenge posed by the pandemic and ultimately securing a generation of active citizens:

### 1) INVEST IN DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY

When young people want to engage civically, they go online. Yet few have received digital media literacy training, leaving them underprepared to engage in a media ecosystem rife with misinformation, data breaches and complex algorithms. Digital media literacy is key to keeping youth safe online and enabling them to evolve as active citizens.

### 2) CHALLENGE THE DOMINANT LEADERSHIP PARADIGM

The existing leadership paradigm focuses on making young people into individual leaders. Yet this model can be limiting for those who do not fit a homogeneous default image of what a leader looks or acts like. Young people need to know that they do not have to be a Greta Thunberg or a Malala Yousafzai in order to be active participants in our democracy. At the same time, as a society we must ensure that we are not inadvertently streaming diverse and varied leadership potential away from our democracy.

### 3) CULTIVATE SOFT SKILLS

Civic literacy involves knowing about policies and how government functions, but it also entails being socialized into our political environment. Here 'soft skills' that support civility and build confidence to participate in decision-making processes are key. This approach is aimed at enabling a healthy democratic culture, one in which people understand how to disagree in a respectful manner, respond to conflict and communicate in an effective way. By steadily cultivating noncognitive skills, young people can grow to feeling empowered and secure in a range of political contexts that help to normalize civic participation as a part of everyday life.

**CONCLUSION:** The pandemic provides an opportunity to revitalize our democracy. While young people are actively addressing global social, climate and racial justice issues, they are less interested in participating in traditional democratic processes, such as voting, because they don't feel represented in our political processes.

To address this, we must invest in civic onboarding that is responsive to the needs and evolved standards of young people. In our present moment, there is tremendous democratic potential that can have a generational impact – a dedicated and strategic effort is required to harness that power.

The way forward must be explicit, intentional, and ideally measurable. Also, it must centre on the needs and voices of young people themselves and see youth as active partners in building an inclusive and representative democracy. While this has always been true, it is of utmost importance as we start to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic.



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# Gary Lauk – “a fearless advocate for the underdog”

By Dr. Michael Markwick and friends

On Nov 21<sup>st</sup> our beloved friend Gary Vernon Lauk passed away at his Vancouver home.

A true renaissance man, Gary combined a lasting commitment to public service as an elected member of the Legislature and uncompromising work as a lawyer to protect legal rights of the individual through the justice system.

He had a powerful personality in everyday life where he balanced extraordinary wit and fiercely-held views of history, politics and religion. At his wonderful dinner parties he regaled all with insightful conversation and would burst into song with his favourite operas. Gary was a lover of entertaining, good food and wine. He was proud of his wine collection. Gary's legacy, and music, lingers on.

Born in 1940, Gary's upbringing in Vancouver, Mission, and New Westminster formed him for a life of dedicated service to the people of British Columbia. He worked shoulder to shoulder with his colleague Emery Barnes in the two-member riding of Vancouver Centre. Premier Dave Barrett relied on Gary to be an architect of the province's first NDP government entrusting to him core obligations in cabinet and several financial portfolios including Minister of Economic Development. Gary was an admired politician in the best sense. He had good relationships on both sides of the aisle; he played floor hockey with his ministry staff at lunch; and his witty speeches in Hansard were a "must read."

Devoted to advancing the interests of his constituents as an MLA, Gary was elected and re-elected to the Legislature from 1972 until 1986 when he yielded his seat to former Vancouver Mayor (and later premier) Mike Harcourt.

Gary remained a fierce and uncompromising advocate for the most vulnerable members of the community, especially at the most challenging moments of their lives. In these ways, he created pathways to public service that today allow historically marginalized communities to claim their places at the centre of the democratic life of our province.

Gary distinguished himself as a lawyer, informing the deep compassion he held for his clients with his astute, authoritative command of the law and his sense of justice. Gary was unstinting in the collegial support he gave to lawyers across North America.

Among the very best jury trial lawyers in the province – he was outstanding – Gary was committed to preserving trial by jury as an essential foundation of the justice system. Gary was a fearless advocate for the underdog against insurance companies, corporations and government.



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A devout Catholic, Gary found comfort and joy in his faith. Gary generously supported the restoration of Holy Rosary Cathedral's magnificent pipe organ, the only one of its kind on the West Coast. Gary was part of the Newman Association, a Catholic alumnae group that raises money for university scholarships for deserving Catholic students. He enjoyed the warm companionship of his fellow parishioners at St Mark's, UBC, where he regularly attended Mass.

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Dr. Michael Markwick is an Ethics and Human Rights Officer on the Capilano Faculty Association who delivered the eulogy at Gary's funeral Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> at St. Mark's Parish, UBC. Here is a brief excerpt:

“Gary Lauk helped me to be more faithfully, more perfectly, the specific person I have been created to be.

“That, quite frankly, is the easy part ... The tough part is to try to estimate the ways he has had a transformative impact on British Columbia and its ongoing pathway of becoming a free, just and emancipating democracy; the ways he changed the lives of his clients through his unrivalled capacity to help juries and judges do justice; and the ways his loving, agonizingly humble service to the Church especially in the holy spaces of St. Mark's and Holy Rosary Cathedral allow the best and most merciful ministries of the Church to shine out.”



# The House brims with “potential, passion, ambition”

Addressing the 94<sup>th</sup> BCYP, Acting Deputy Attorney General Barbara Carmichael said: “It feels special to be here in person. These gatherings haven’t been something we’ve been able to take for granted lately, and I’m sure many of you are eager to reconnect with those you know, and to forge new connections and friendships.

“This is a room overflowing with potential, passion and ambition, and I congratulate all of you for being here and for your service and leadership. Thank you.”

Carmichael urged the BCYP members to “be open to unexpected opportunities and don’t be afraid to say ‘yes’ when they are presented.”

She said she has often had “the privilege of sitting in this very Chamber, supporting and advising ministers during debates on estimates and the various pieces of legislation I have been involved in developing. It was, and continues to be, a remarkable and rewarding experience. All of these experiences occurred because I kept being open and kept saying yes.

“My next key point is about mistakes – mistakes are good. Or as we say in my office ‘we like new mistakes.’ What matters isn’t that you make them – everyone makes them – what matters is owning them, fixing them to the extent possible and learning from them.

“Mistakes and failures are inevitable; it is part of being human. And I’m sorry to tell you – it never ends.

“In closing, even with a multitude of mistakes, I have been incredibly blessed in my career – I get to work with great colleagues, on very interesting issues, and make a difference for the people of British Columbia.

“I am so glad none of my original (career) plans worked out. As you face setbacks or disappointments (which I most definitely have), I hope you remember that in the long run, many of them are not rejections, but redirections towards something better.

“Thank you once again for the warm welcome. I look forward to serving you all in my capacity as acting Deputy Attorney General, and I especially look forward to watching your accomplishments, innovations and ideas in the years to come.”



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# Former prominent politicians unite to strengthen democracy

By Brian Kieran  
OOTD Editor

Back in the late 1980s and early '90s former premier Mike Harcourt and former Social Credit/BC Liberal cabinet minister Graham Bruce were separated by two sword lengths in the Legislature.

Today, those symbolic swords have been sheathed and these two retired politicians have joined forces to fight in common cause to strengthen democracy at a time when our democratic institutions and our civil society are under assault.

Few would argue with Graham Bruce's observation that our democratic institutions are "fragile."

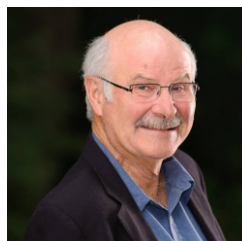
"On almost a daily basis," he says, "there is an article, commentary or new book concerning the stability of democracy. Do we take our democracy for granted? Are we sleepwalking into the abyss thinking that 'they' will ensure all will be well and our democracy will remain in place?"

"The attacks on democratic norms around the globe are real, and we would be foolish to ignore the impact this can have on Canada. Is now a time to engage in a country-wide discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of our democracy in Canada?"

Harcourt describes the threats to democracy as internal – "apathy of voters, polarization of politics, misuse of social media and anonymous threats to politicians and media" – and external – "dictatorships both authoritarian ones like China, Russia, and evolving ones like Hungary, Poland, Brazil, the Philippines and Turkey."

This odd couple have teamed up to launch a Strengthening Democracy initiative to engage with multiple stakeholders – non-partisan parliamentary organizations, civil society advocates, municipal and local government influencers and engaged youth – to reinforce and strengthen our democracy and institutions and help them be more resilient, robust and successful.

Their work has just begun. Establishing a working group of like-minded stakeholders is the first step on a path to developing a plan of action with concrete deliverables. The list of potential partners will be extensive and hopefully may include organizations such as associations of former members of legislatures here in BC and across Canada, the BC Youth Parliament; UBC's Summer Institute for Future Legislators; the Union of BC Municipalities, the Lower Mainland's Public Policy Institute; the Vancouver and Victoria Foundations, the Samara Centre and many more.



Mike Harcourt



Graham Bruce



Harcourt and Bruce joined forces in July 1991 at the South Cowichan Lawn Tennis Club at Cowichan Bay where they trounced Global TV's Keith Baldrey and the T-C's Les Leyne at doubles.

As Bruce warns, authoritarian influences are creeping into our civil institutions. As was reported in OOTD recently, an Angus Reid Institute study finds Canadians are still mostly fond of the democratic political system, but a significant minority express enthusiasm for non-representative, authoritarian forms of government.

Obviously, this sentiment is more pronounced in the United States. However, a majority of Canadians (56 per cent) say they don't trust government in general to act in their best interests. And, two-thirds of Canadians (64 per cent) say they don't believe they can influence political decisions that affect their lives. This sentiment is much more common among young men aged 18 to 34 (77 per cent) than other demographics.

This is the thin edge of the wedge, but it is not that thin. More than 15 per cent of Canadians say that having a strong leader who does not bother with parliament or elections would be a good way to govern. Even more troubling, 18 to 34 year old men are three times as likely as any other demographic to say: "Some countries are better off with authoritarian rule."

"We have a lot of work to do to reverse this democratic drift. And, that work must start now," Harcourt says.

Bruce adds: "We will be developing an open-ended strategy to invite a wide range of participation that encourages the core element of a democracy, respectful free speech."

If you would like to get in on the ground floor of this ambitious endeavor send an email to:  
[info@strengtheningdemocracy.ca](mailto:info@strengtheningdemocracy.ca)

# Is our democracy at risk because of our indifference?

By Gary Rabbior  
President  
Canadian Foundation for Economic Education

We live in a democracy – a democracy built upon the hard work, and even the deaths of many who came before us. Yet, let's be honest, we take it for granted. It is a right, a privilege, and is essential to our freedom and liberties.



But, I believe it is at risk in many of the so-called developed nations, long the bastions of the protectors of democracy. And our indifference may mean we pay a very heavy price in the future. Why the risk? Let's consider the essence of democracy and why it is supposed to work. Democracy is based upon the citizens of a free society periodically making decisions as to who will govern them – who will set the laws and who will put policies in place to make life better.

To function properly, the citizens in a democracy should be sufficiently knowledgeable to make informed decisions regarding the options presented to them by competing political candidates.

For this to be the case there needs to be (a) a quality education system – a combination of formal schooling, trusted and able media, and other information technologies that are used by the citizenry to become well-informed on the current issues; (b) issues and options that are reasonably understandable, enabling citizens to make informed choices; and (c) a fair, open, regular, and easily accessible system by which citizens are able to exercise their decisions through voting for their preferred candidates and parties.

But what are today's realities? We have a society – and world – changing at an incredible rate. Our education systems struggle to keep pace. We have always struggled with the challenge of keeping curriculum relevant, but now that challenge is evolving into an impossible task.

At the same time, our media outlets are pressured by change and shifting economic realities. The media is no longer able to invest in research and coverage as it once did. Coverage is not as broad or as in-depth. Readers and viewers are increasingly focusing on headlines and quick new Twitter-type hits that cannot possibly provide in-depth coverage, background, or contending opinions in a single space.

We now have a world in which anyone can be a news source, posting thoughts, opinions and images willy-nilly often with little credibility and usually with no verification. So-called news sources now proliferate like a media wild west and it is difficult to discern credible sources from those that may in fact be seeking to influence thought through lies and misinformation.

Issues are becoming increasingly complex – more challenging to understand and more difficult for citizens to formulate informed opinions on. The question is: Are we evolving into a complex world where, without significant improvements in public education and information, it is getting impossible for voters to make informed political decisions?

The turnout of voters for many elections is dismal. Why is that? Because they don't care or because they don't understand the issues and options to make a confident, informed decision? Or both? Will voter indifference, combined with vulnerability to simplistic political solutions to complex problems, threaten our democracy – at least our democracy as we hope it would be – and how it would operate?

The results of many elections around the world tell me we are at risk. But, I don't see anyone trying to do much about it. How are we going to close the gap between the increasingly complex issues that modern societies face and the ability of the citizenry to make informed political choices?

It is time, I believe, for us to try to influence change so that we create a society that we want rather than one that has simply evolved from indifference.



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HELPING WHEN LIFE CHANGES



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# Government and opposition – there is a difference

By Simon Gibson

As a newly-elected MLA back in 2013, I was thrilled with the opportunity to serve. I soon was settled into my constituency office, hired staff and began to learn of the various responsibilities and procedures.

In Victoria, I was assigned another office in the Legislature and met with staff who provided me with helpful assistance and “navigation” throughout the buildings. It was a busy environment and I spent much of my time in the Legislative Chamber contributing to the discussion, and energetically endorsing the prepared ruminations of colleagues.

At the time, serving as a government MLA, I took for granted the close relationship I had with cabinet ministers and even the premier. I was a parliamentary secretary and traveled to various communities and regions of our province. I also served on Treasury Board which provided me with the opportunity to contribute to the high-level capital budget discourse.

Securing funding for important constituency projects was a priority and I worked hard to respond positively to the numerous requests. Over four years as a government MLA, I made many “good news” announcements representing millions of dollars.

I was conscious, too, of my status as I was especially appreciated by the local councils, chambers of commerce, regional districts and other agencies. My perceived ability to influence government policy – which might have been the case – was acknowledged and valued.

My relationship with provincial staff was appreciated. While employees are strictly nonpartisan – which is to be valued – they responded assiduously to requests made by constituency staff. The encouragement of relevant cabinet ministers, no doubt, may have been beneficial.

In addition, the manner which I was treated as a government MLA was something I began to take for granted. There were many receptions, open houses, and even one-on-one meetings that were designed to build goodwill and understanding with government. The attention was not always exclusive to government members, I discovered, but there was, nevertheless, a greater level of consideration that seemed to be bestowed on our caucus members.

Just four years later, I discovered firsthand the transformation from being in government to that of being in opposition. Our government was defeated in 2020 – by a slim plurality – but I was re-elected as the MLA for the Abbotsford-Mission constituency.

My leader was not the premier but the leader of the opposition. Colleagues no longer had cabinet or parliamentary secretary portfolios. We were not “in power.” The other team had been successful at the polls and so I now found myself looking at policy-making from a distance.

The constituency office continued – and my loyal staff remained in their positions. However, in Victoria, the story was quite dissimilar. Government members, I learned, have the more spacious and desirable offices.

All members are moved to different areas of the Legislature’s buildings in consideration of their role either in government or opposition.

More profound was my dramatically reduced impact on both policy and the opportunity to secure needed funding for constituents. The contrast was significant as I had no access to cabinet, nor, of course, to the premier. My constituency staff continued to do their best by following up on requests, but they noticed the level of response was sometimes less expeditious.

Local councils and other public bodies continued to be respectful and extended invitations to attend many functions; however, there was the obvious realization that I now lacked the influence and ability to access budgets. Provincial funding announcements for my constituency were sometimes made by government members from neighboring ridings – in conjunction with the relevant minister.

I was no longer a parliamentary secretary or a Treasury Board member, but was assigned to Public Accounts and the Finance Committee – composed of members from government and opposition. These committees were consistently chaired by government MLAs. While I had the opportunity to contribute to the dialogue and ask relevant questions, I was excluded from any decision-making which would happen elsewhere.

*continued next page*

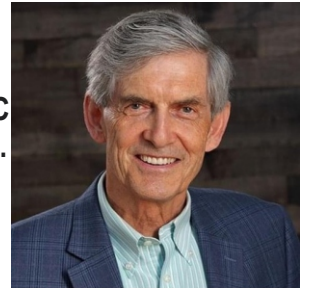
I'm an optimist by nature and tend to stress the positive side of an issue (whenever possible), so I must admit that I would sometimes chafe in my role as an opposition "critic." Virtually all opposition MLAs were assigned such responsibilities which meant finding fault with practically every pronouncement made by government.

The dichotomy had transformed from one of "it's all good news" to "it's all bad news." The Legislature, especially during Question Period, became a forum for systematic condemnation.

On reflection, perhaps the most vivid contrast between the distinct roles of government and opposition members was evident during the catastrophic flooding of Sumas Prairie last year here in Abbotsford. All three levels of government actively addressed the myriad issues facing the community. Perhaps surprisingly to some observers, the local MLA – and MP - both representing opposition parties, had nominal profiles during the disaster. Their representations had little impact on their respective governments.

Our British parliamentary system of government is sometimes referred to as "The Westminster Tradition" and is built upon many years of history. While I have identified some of the frustrations of serving in opposition, nevertheless I have appreciated the balance in our system and the capacity government has to lead while receiving careful scrutiny from opposition.

**(A frequent contributor to OOTD, Simon Gibson was elected in 2013 to represent Abbotsford-Mission for the BC Liberals. He served two terms. Before his election, Gibson was a member of Abbotsford City Council for more than 30 years. He has returned to his role as a councillor.)**



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# Glen Clark wants to help; eyes the housing file

By Andrew MacLeod  
Legislative Bureau Chief for *The Tyee*

As David Eby settles in as British Columbia's new premier and begins tackling tough issues, one person letting it be known that he's available and wants to help is former NDP Premier Glen Clark.

"I would like to do something if I could that would be helpful on some issues," Clark said in an interview. "Where I can be the most help, you know."

One possibility he sees would be at BC Housing, where the CEO job came open when Shayne Ramsay retired in August.

Clark was premier from 1996 to 1999, a position he won at 36 after serving four years as finance minister. After he left politics the Jim Pattison Group hired him and he eventually became CEO. Clark has resigned, but remains on the boards of Canfor and Westshore Terminals. Pattison is a large shareholder in both.

"It was a good time for me to just step away and see if I could do something else, so now I'm looking for something else to do," Clark told *The Tyee*, noting that the company is in good shape with strong leadership and younger leaders coming up.

"I think I could help on the housing file," said Clark, who turned 65 in November.

"Obviously they've got some challenges that are worth fixing and the premier's made a bunch of commitments on housing that I completely laud him for, so now they've got to execute."

Besides BC Housing, he's open to other possibilities, he said.

"The government has lots of challenging issues to deal with, so they may feel my knowledge could be better used somewhere else, and I'd be interested in that too as long as it's something worthwhile that would allow me to make a difference."

Clark said he's been letting key people know "in the last little while" that he's available, though there's been no formal application or process for the BC Housing job or any other position.

When it comes to returning to the public sector, he acknowledges he comes with some baggage from his time in government when he was often seen as a scrappy, polarizing figure.



"I have two or three advantages, maybe they're disadvantages," Clark said.

There's the experience running both large and small companies for Pattison, giving Clark management experience alongside his historic public sector experience, he said. But, also, there's the courage, willingness and ability to take on tough problems.

"The big advantage is I'm not running for anything, so I don't have to be popular," said Clark. "If there was something difficult for example that the government wanted to try to tackle that required somebody that wasn't worried about being popular, I'd be happy to do it."

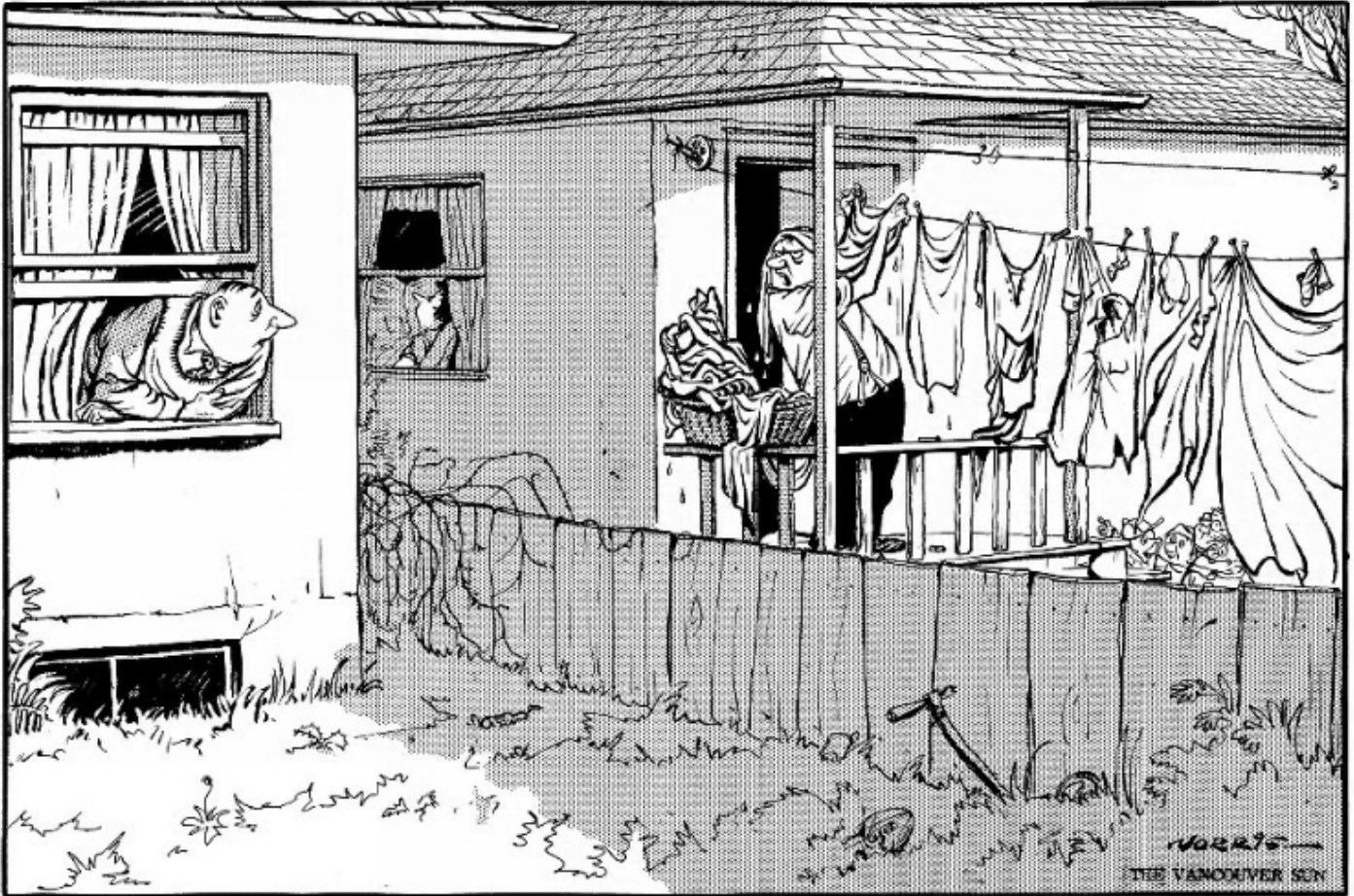
After decades in top positions in the public and private sectors, it's not like he needs to work. "I'm doing fine," he said. "I don't need a job, I don't need a position, I don't need a patronage appointment. I don't want any of those things."

Really, Clark said, he's looking for some way to make a difference. "I'm only interested if there's something that I can help tackle and that's really up to others to decide if there's something they think I could do that could be helpful."

He said he very much likes Eby's direction so far on priorities of health care, housing and security. "He's really sharpened the focus of the government on some issues people know are challenging and need help and he's obviously marshalling resources in a different way," Clark said. "He's not one of these guys who just wants the position. He's clearly a guy that wants to make a difference."

That's an approach Clark recognizes and thinks he can help with.

# Len Norris



January 2, 1954

*"It seems that shortly after midnight, I made some sweeping resolutions ..."*

## 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).

February, 7 decades ago

## Vincent Massey becomes 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian-born Governor General

With Vincent Massey's appointment as Governor General, a new tradition began – he was the first Canadian appointed to the post, and from that day the Governor General has always been a Canadian citizen. If the innovation had any detractors, they were soon won over by Massey's exceptional qualities in the viceregal role.

Massey believed the Crown belonged to Canadians, and as the Sovereign's representative his job was to strengthen that bond. He combined a respect for the Crown and its ceremonies with a commitment to using the Office of Governor General to promote Canadian unity and identity. He was tireless in his travels, visiting every corner of the country – where plane or ship couldn't reach, he went by canoe or dog team.

Massey's speeches often praised Canada's cultural diversity, and he emphasized the need to learn both English and French. Whether he was speaking to the Jewish Congress, being honoured by the Blood First Nation in Alberta or visiting fishing villages in the Maritimes, he was a champion of all Canadians.

Encouraging the arts was one of Massey's noteworthy achievements. His promotion of a national festival of the arts began a movement that eventually led to the founding of the National Arts Centre. At Rideau Hall, he established writers' weekends to help create a Canadian literary identity. The then-fledgling Stratford Shakespearean Festival received his enthusiastic support and he lent the prestige of his position to the opening of numerous art exhibitions. In 1953, he established the Governor General's Awards for Architecture, and he presented Canada Council awards to many artists, including the composer Sir Ernest MacMillan.

However, Vincent Massey was careful not to concentrate exclusively on any one area; he encouraged excellence in every field. His greatest ambition, creating a Canadian honours system, was not realized during his term, but his efforts helped lead to its creation in 1967, and Massey was one of the first Companions appointed in 1967. He established the Governor General's Gold Medal for the Institute of Chartered Accountants in 1954, and the Massey Medal to recognize national exploration, development, and description of geography for the Royal Canadian Geographical Society in 1959. Canada was developing a new confidence through its accomplishments in science, business and the arts, and Vincent Massey helped foster this positive identity.



Massey revived the use of the state carriage in 1953 for the coronation celebrations of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Amid much pageantry, the carriage brought Vincent Massey and his staff to Parliament Hill under escort by members of the RCMP. Massey introduced Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's coronation speech, broadcast in London and around the world.

Massey's term as Governor General was extended twice, first by Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent, and then by Prime Minister John Diefenbaker. He left office on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1959.

Massey came from a prominent Canadian family – successful in business and active in philanthropy. His brother was the popular actor Raymond Massey, and his father was president of the Massey-Harris Company, known worldwide for manufacturing agricultural equipment.

His early education took place at St. Andrew's College. He continued his studies at the University of Toronto and then went on to attend Oxford – an early experience of England that gave him a lasting appreciation of its traditions and institutions.

After returning to Canada, he became Dean in Residence of Modern History at Victoria University in Toronto. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1915, he married Alice Parkin, daughter of Sir George Parkin, a former principal of Upper Canada College and secretary of the Rhodes Trust. Sadly, Alice died in July 1950, 18 months before her husband's appointment as Governor General. As a result, his daughter-in-law, Liliias, acted as Chatelaine of Rideau Hall while Massey was in office.

**Source: The Office of the Governor General of Canada**