

BC Youth Parliament holds successful 95th Session



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



Youth from across British Columbia gathered at the BC Parliament Buildings during their winter break for the 95th Session of the British Columbia Youth Parliament (BCYP).

Ninety-seven community leaders, aged 16 to 21, spent their time practicing parliamentary procedure, engaging in



Honorary Lieutenant Governor Val Napoleon presides at 95th Session.
Photo Credit: BC Youth Parliament/Sky Losier

collaborative debate and learning about the importance of community service.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Honourable Raj Chouhan, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia and all the staff at the BC Parliament Building for their continued and enthusiastic support of the BC Youth Parliament.

As a non-partisan, youth-run organization, BCYP aims to promote youth service within the community. This year, the organization celebrates its centennial anniversary, having been established in 1924.

The 95th Session featured Val Napoleon LLB, PhD as our honorary Lieutenant Governor. Dr. Napoleon is a professor and Law Foundation Chair in Indigenous Justice Governance in the Faculty of Law at UVic. She also established the Indigenous Law Research Unit, a research centre that works in partnership with indigenous peoples and groups across Canada on questions of Indigenous law.

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Her Honour

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

Thank You and Miscellany

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

Correction. In the December 2023 issue we listed Rick Thorpe as residing in Victoria. The correct city is Penticton.

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Orders of the Day is published regularly throughout the year, and is circulated to Association members, all MLAs now serving in Legislature, other interested individuals and organizations.

Material for the newsletter is *always* welcome and should be sent in written form to:

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Or emailed to ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com
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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

Take a deep breath. The coming year promises to be one that will keep armchair politicians like you and me at the edge of our seats.

As Royal Roads professor David Black points out on Page 6, half of humanity will go to the polls in 2024.

And, as Demo Finland's Acting Executive Director Rilli Lappalainen cautions on Page 10, even though there will be more voting than ever, there will not necessarily be more democracy. In reality, many elections around the globe will be neither free nor fair. Political stability and progress are under pressure globally, and, as Lappalainen explains, political fragmentation will be a significant trend in Europe.

Here in wonderfully stable – by comparison – BC, the election next fall will be nothing less than fair and free. But, as David Black explains, that does not mean it won't be eventful. The polls he is following suggest BC is on the cusp of significant political realignment. On the horizon on the left of centre, there is the very real prospect of a historic third consecutive term for the NDP. On the right, BC United's bid to be the tent embracing liberal and conservative voters has collided head-on with a brand of conservative populism that has marginalized the right-of-centre mainstream.

For me, a reason to celebrate our political culture here at home always presents itself in the Winter issue of OOTD as we report on the annual BC Youth Parliament session at the Legislature in December. This year is no different. Our thanks and praise go out to 95th Parliament Premier Megan Ryan-Lloyd, her cabinet, the shadow cabinet and members at large for another year of outstanding political engagement and non-partisan leadership.

I've been doing this for nine years now, and every New Year, my wish is the same – for more contributions from AFMLABC members and readers. Letters, articles, news – OOTD needs more of it from you. It's not that hard; you can email me at ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com. Our copy deadline for the March issue is Feb. 20th. Let me know ahead of time if the wordsmith spirit has moved you.

The President's Report

On behalf of the Former MLAs of British Columbia, I wish everyone a very happy, healthy, and prosperous year ahead.

For many Canadians, New Year celebrations will continue with the Orthodox New Year, also known as Old New Year, celebrated on January 14th, and the Lunar New Year celebrations beginning on February 10th.

The Lunar New Year is both a cultural and religious celebration that begins with the first new moon of the lunar calendar. Canadians from many different ancestries, including Chinese, Korean, Singaporean, Malaysian, Filipino, Taiwanese, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese and others, will celebrate this 4722nd Lunar New Year's Day.

Lunar New Year is also known as Chinese New Year. This year, which is the Year of the Dragon, festivities will begin on February 10th and continue for 15 days, with the Lantern Festival marking the end of the celebrations.

The Vancouver Chinese New Year (Chinatown Spring Festival) Parade will be held on the second day of the Lunar New Year, Sunday, February 11th, at 11 a.m. Everyone is invited to participate in the parade, and more than 100,000 spectators are expected to line the parade route to enjoy the family-friendly celebration.

This year will commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Vancouver Chinatown Spring Festival Celebration. The festival is organized by the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver, Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver,

Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., Chinese Freemasons Vancouver Branch and Shon Yee Benevolent Association of Canada. More than 5,000 participants from community organizations, businesses, non-profit societies, and individuals from diverse cultural groups and professions will be involved in the event.

Youth Parliament

I want to congratulate all the participants of the very successful 95th BC Youth Parliament session held at the Legislature in Victoria from December 27th to 31st..... particularly the two recipients of our AFMLABC Hugh Curtis BC Youth Parliament Fund grants.

Youth aged from 16 to 21 from across the province of BC travelled to BC Parliament Buildings for a five-day simulation of the Westminster parliamentary system, legislating bills that govern the organization's community service projects, hearing from speakers from around the community, and engaging in a wide variety of fun social activities.

If you have any suggestions advice, or just want to talk, please feel free to contact me at daveshayer@gmail.com.



Dave S. Hayer
President

TIME TO RENEW



2024 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).

Fans of OOTD who are not former MLAs/Association members should send payment of \$40 to remain on the subscription list.

**Cheques should be made out to: The Association of Former MLAs of BC
and mailed to: P.O. Box 30024
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You can also make your payment electronically by going to our website www.formerbcmla.com.

- Go to the Payments page in the navigation bar and follow the prompts.
- Be sure to include your purpose for payment in the Comments section on the Payments form.

BCYP's centennial year focuses on regional events

During our 95th Session, BCYP members proposed and debated new projects and plans for the upcoming year. Among our largest projects this year are Regional Youth Parliaments (RYPs), various fundraising and service projects, and Camp Phoenix.

RYPs are our signature method of teaching 14-18-year-olds about Westminster parliamentary democracy. These events, hosted across the province, facilitate a practical experience in leadership like no other. Members debate resolutions of their choosing, draft bills and engage in collaborative debate, and learn parliamentary procedure. Members are given the opportunity to meet other youth in their communities and work in true democratic fashion to aid their growth alongside their communities. If you know of any youth passionate about civic engagement, leadership, and making a positive impact in their community, we encourage you to share this opportunity with them. You can learn more at bcyp.org/ryps.

Camp Phoenix, a five-day sleep-away summer camp run entirely by volunteers, serves children aged eight to 12 who, for social or financial reasons, could not otherwise attend camp.

In addition to these service projects, the House passed five acts: The Parliamentary Activities Act, the World Tour Act, the Enhanced Definitions of Institutional Titles (EDIT) Amendment Act, the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Amendment Act, and the Supply Act.

As well as debating and voting on project-focused legislation, BCYP members discussed important social issues through Private Members' Resolutions. Topics included drug decriminalization, lowering the voting age, and logging of old-growth forests. These debates allowed youth to engage with peers on a range of issues and hear opinions from all sides.

As per tradition, this session featured the presentation of awards, acknowledging outstanding contributions and achievements of members.

The Parliamentarian of the Year Award recognizes an individual from the previous session who contributed significantly in all three areas of BCYP: Participation in BCYP events, service, and fundraising. This year, it was awarded to Adrienne Chow.

The BC Speaker's Office Inspiring New Member Award recognizes members who made exceptional contributions to service and fundraising activities during their inaugural year. This year, it went to Brielle Tran and Kevin Nicklin.



BCYP Premier Megan Ryan-Lloyd addresses 95th Session.

Photo Credit: BC Youth Parliament/Sky Losier

The Fisi Award for Service recognizes exemplary dedication to serving the youth of British Columbia under the Youth Parliament's name, both in and out of BCYP. This year, it was awarded to Tommy Xu.

The BCYP Bond Shield was awarded to Brielle Tran. The Bond Shield is awarded to the parliamentarian who raised the most money in the previous year.

Finally, the prestigious Donald Fergus Paynter Memorial Award for Leadership was awarded to last year's premier, Abby Head. This award is given at the Senate's discretion to a member who, during their years of membership, demonstrated both exceptional leadership and noteworthy dedication to all aspects of Parliament's activities and made contributions substantially more than expected through the normal course of activities or made contributions which, because of their innovative nature, are likely to have an enduring impact.

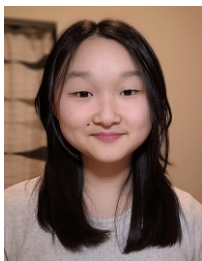
The 96th Parliament's House Leaders were also elected during the session. UBC student Annie Nguyen (Langley) was elected premier; SFU student Puneet Hundal (Tumbler Ridge) was elected Leader of the Opposition; and UVic student Isabella Harmel (Kelowna) was elected Deputy Speaker. This marks the third time in BCYP's 100-year history that women hold all three House Leader positions.

This session, we bid farewell to six aging-out members who have turned 21. It was with much sadness that the membership said farewell and thank you to them. The 95th Session of BCYP showcased the passion and dedication of its members, setting the stage for a year of meaningful debates, service projects, and fun.

We thank the Association of Former MLAs of British Columbia for their continued support of BCYP. We would like to give special thanks for their contribution of the Hugh Curtis Memorial Fund, which provides opportunities for broader participation in BCYP's Session in Victoria by helping to defray travel and accommodation expenses for two youth who live outside the Greater Victoria area.

BCYP members grateful for AFMLABC support

My name is Jade Kim. I am in Grade 11, attending Dr. Charles Best Secondary School in Coquitlam. At school, I am part of the media club, the Model United Nations Club and the Students4Students Club. As I strive forward, I aspire to use my knowledge and expertise to help youth through education.



To do so, I am currently part of Intercultural Youth Services Corp, an opportunity-driven program to encourage young leaders to create their own projects and be leaders in their community. Furthermore, I am a member of the Youth Leadership Millennium program hosted by S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Here I sharpen my skills to collaborate with others and learn about leadership and community services.

As for hobbies, I love learning new languages and often spend my days enhancing those skills. Currently, I can fluently speak Korean, English and French. As well, I am continuing to learn Japanese and sign language. Finally, I plan to host an event inviting inspiring young speakers to talk about their career path and goals to help high school students figure out what field they would like to study and what skills they plan to focus on to achieve their goals.

I sincerely thank the AFMLABC for helping me step closer to my goal. With the financial support that has been generously given to me, I am able to fully participate in BCYP without putting any stress on my parents. I am so grateful for this opportunity, and I will try to accomplish my various projects over the coming year. I am truly privileged to have had your support. For that, I thank the AFMLABC once again for its financial assistance.

My name is Lily Avendaño Gregory, and I am a third-year communications student attending Capilano University in North Vancouver. I moved to the Okanagan from Chiapas, Mexico, in 2017 and graduated high school in West Kelowna. I proceeded to move to the Lower Mainland for university in 2021.



I have been an active member of the British Columbia Youth Parliament (BCYP) since I was 16 years old, back in the 91st Session of BCYP (2019). I am passionate about giving back to my community and learning about the different cultures surrounding me and those around the world. Some of my hobbies involve discovering different hiking trails around BC, supporting and getting involved in the arts scene in Vancouver, and looking for new opportunities to hone my different skills.

I want to thank the AFMLABC Hugh Curtis Memorial Fund for sponsoring me this year so that I could return as a member of BCYP. This grant allowed me to return for my fifth year in this organization, and it was of great help, especially as a student. This year, I served as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Critic of Camp Phoenix in the Shadow Cabinet. I look forward to participating in our post-session activities! I feel extremely grateful that I could attend the session and participate in this wonderful experience once again. Thank you so much for this privilege, and Happy New Year!

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. 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.

Is a realignment of BC politics possible this year?

By David Black
Associate Professor
Royal Roads University

It's 2024 ... a year of elections. Across the world, half of humanity will vote in democracies as different and variably healthy as India, Taiwan, and the U.S., and in "electoral autocracies" like Iran and Russia. British Columbia's election, scheduled for Oct. 19th, won't be as fateful as some, but it will come at a time of unusual conditions on the province's political landscape.

On the left-of-centre, the latest poll (Abacus, published Dec. 4th) has the BC NDP at 44 per cent of the popular vote. Normally, that would translate into a comfortable majority, not much changed from the NDP's nearly 48 per cent share and 57 seats in the 2020 election. But the latest projections, Dec. 31st at the poll aggregation site 338Canada, have the NDP winning as many as 78 of 93 seats, up from their current 56. The BC United could win up to eight, the Conservative Party of BC up to five, and the Greens maintain their two.

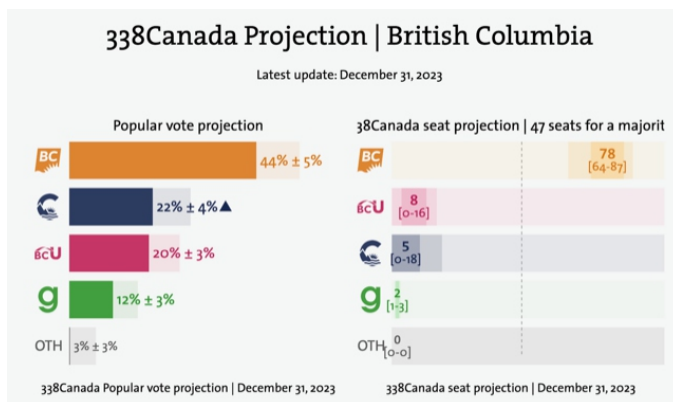
Should those numbers hold, it would mean the NDP would resoundingly earn its first-ever third consecutive term. But just as consequential for the NDP and British Columbians is that the likely prospect of re-election, allowing that much can happen in 10 months, provides David Eby's government a permission structure to continue with what are its audacious, often experimental, policy initiatives.

Whatever one's party affiliation or policy views, it would be uncharitable not to appreciate the daring nature of what the NDP is attempting. With just a half-term mandate since John Horgan's two years of pandemic government and resignation as premier in October 2022, Eby has moved aggressively on the four policy priorities he outlined in his "100 days" speech that same month.

There's affordability, notably the government's extraordinary interventions in housing; health, with BC being the first to sign the new bilateral funding agreement with Ottawa; public safety, with the three-year trial decriminalization of hard drug possession as its signal feature; and environment, centred on the defence of the freshly contentious carbon tax.

It's an all-in policy agenda addressing some deep and stubborn problems that are top-of-mind for BC voters and where the risk of failure is as great as the potential reward. It allows the mildly social democratic NDP to demonstrate, should the various policy bets begin to pay off, that bigger government can do the difficult things.

The situation right-of-centre is more complicated. The Conservative Party of BC is experiencing a remarkable



comeback. Its origins date to 1903, but the BC Conservatives had been moribund since Social Credit won its first election in 1952 and subsequently kept the centre-right in power almost without interruption for four decades. From just two MLAs in the Legislature today under the leadership of former BC Liberal John Rustad, the BC Conservatives are positioned to compete with United to form the Official Opposition if current polls are predictive.

Even though the parties are not formally affiliated, much of the BC Conservatives' success is undoubtedly due to the spillover of the federal Conservative Party's strong polls and the appeal of the "soft populism" personified in federal leader Pierre Poilievre. The confusion following the rebranding of the former BC Liberals as BC United under leader Kevin Falcon is also a factor. But the division right-of-centre speaks to a broader contest of ideas in conservative politics, one that is cyclical and has an analogue in the province's turbulent political culture of the 1990s.

The right-of-centre electorate was similarly split in the 1990s, enabling NDP governments under Mike Harcourt and Glen Clark to win despite scandal and the longstanding centre-right tilt in BC politics to that point. However, in the power vacuum created as the Social Credit Party slowly disappeared that decade, the revitalized BC Liberals and BC Reform contended to lead the free enterprise coalition.

This was a time federally of the hostile merger of the former Progressive Conservative Party and the ultimately victorious populist Reform Party, rebranded the Conservative Party of Canada under the leadership of Reform's former policy director Stephen Harper, who would become the CPC's three-term prime minister.

But at the provincial level, the centre-right tacked against the populist federal trend with the BC Liberals, a neo-liberal, technocratic, market-oriented party with little interest in social conservatism or populism, earning five consecutive election victories beginning in 2001. As is often the case, BC politics went its own way.

continued next page

Whether 2024 will see the populists win this contest with the moderates remains to be seen. But where neo-liberalism was a significant source of ideas and influence in the 1990s, it's a spent force presently. Lacking that ideological updraft, BC United is not merely competing with another party to its right, but with a populism that has redefined what it means to be conservative; a populism that, with its energy, colour, and contrarian style, has marginalized more mainstream centre-right options.

With the prospect of vote-splitting on the right, there has been talk of a merger or strategic coordination. But the BC Conservatives, in rhetorical as well as policy terms, are further to the right than the federal Conservatives, meaning BC United has more to lose in terms of its identity. Any kind of partnership or accommodation could risk moderate United voters leaving or sitting on the sidelines.

Whatever happens right-of-centre, the fall 2024 election might bring not just a humbling comedown for the once-commanding former BC Liberals but a possible structural realignment of provincial politics that resembles in reverse 1990s BC, one allowing the populists to claim leadership on the right.

Globally, 2024 is not just a year of elections but one in which so much beyond the "issues" is on the ballot and in the zeitgeist: The new "Cold War" of autocracy versus liberal democracy; traditional politics versus the anti-politics of populism; global challenges like climate change and migration.

Here, with our own election, there's thankfully less at stake. However, much of what we thought we knew about BC politics is being rewritten. With the more polarized nature of the four parties spreading across a wider expanse of the political spectrum, we can probably anticipate sharpened campaign debate this fall. It may be louder than we're used to, but there will be plenty to watch, to listen to and to learn from.

(David Black is an associate professor in the School of Communication and Culture at Royal Roads University, where he teaches political communication. He is a frequent commentator on politics and has a Ph.D. (York, 1999) in Social and Political Thought.)



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Is it time to rethink selecting political candidates?

By Simon Gibson

Our first trip to New York City earlier this year was a memorable experience for my wife and me as consummate visitors: Broadway shows, Times Square, Central Park, the Statue of Liberty, and even a Mets game – we rarely stopped moving.

Our guide, a retired history professor, obviously loved his city and was the ideal raconteur. He learned we were Canadians and was almost apologetic about the state of politics in his country. He had little time for President Biden or Donald Trump and made some poignant observations about their personalities.

He lamented how successful politicians in the US – at all levels – must be driven to the extreme and be highly narcissistic. The pursuit of power, he pointed out, is beguiling. He wondered if there were better ways to select leaders.

(It reminded me of a conversation I had with a senior BC police officer a few years ago. When interviewing prospective recruits, he told me he was concerned when applicants were practically obsessed with being a police officer.)

Selecting candidates for political parties is largely unregulated. In the federal or provincial arenas, parties schedule nomination meetings, which provide a forum for prospective candidates.

But how are these candidates chosen? Is there an invigilation process that includes criteria to preclude certain candidates?

Parties embrace values which become codified in a platform. Potential candidates are expected to subscribe to those values and proclaim them in their campaigns. Overt independence is not encouraged.

Highly motivated candidates – those seeking a party's nomination – will be expected to generate support and sign up supporters. The membership drive is at the heart of candidate selection.

In most instances, there is the drama of a meeting. Prospective nominees attempt to “pack” the room with adherents and give speeches to persuade the undecided or vacillating.

Contemporary innovation may eliminate the need for a meeting and allow party members to vote online. While the excitement and suspense of a meeting may be moderated, a greater level of participation may be expected.

Occasionally, the party may have a favoured candidate considered to have the potential to succeed, precluding the necessity for a meeting.

At least one party, I understand, will adopt specific criteria which may exclude certain members from even seeking a nomination. Presumably, such measures would allow desirable candidates to be selected who would otherwise be excluded and potentially defeated by a less desirable candidate.

Democratic ideals, then, could be compromised to some extent, although advocates, no doubt, would suggest that discerning a suitable – and seemingly electable – candidate is worth embracing such a method.

The arcane process of parties selecting their nominees certainly presumes significant motivation for such prospects. The entire enterprise could likely deserve the appellation “popularity contest.”

Popularity is justifiably essential: it is the currency of a political campaign, but are the New York City tour guide's remarks also worth acknowledging? Is spirited motivation a liability or an asset?

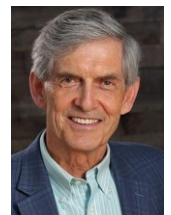
Should parties attempt to moderate the process by seeking out prospective candidates with ideals and qualifications that would make a valued contribution to the government of the day?

Is there a case to be made for giving less attention to ambition – with a greater acknowledgment of the altruistic personality of an individual who has excelled in a profession, trade or community role, for example?

I offer these remarks as someone who has experienced the fervour of a nomination meeting and the suspense of waiting for the ballots to be counted. On reflection, I would admit to being highly motivated – I wanted to win!

Perhaps it would be naïve to think that we could ever lessen the allure of political office and replace it with a more benevolent approach which embraces the “servant-leader” model. I believe an open discourse on this subject could alert political decision-makers to the value of seeking out prospective candidates with a less determined approach to electoral success.

(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.)



Alberta should keep its hands off our pension plan

Late last year, the Alberta government presented a commissioned report on the feasibility of leaving the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and creating an Alberta Pension Plan.

Immediately, the National Association of Federal Retirees (NAFR) asked members whether they supported the Alberta government's proposal to exit the CPP. Members reacted decisively. In one day, more than 10,000 members responded, with the majority – 95 per cent – opposing the proposal. When asked whether federal retirees should be actively involved in defending the CPP and the Quebec Pension Plan, 95 per cent responded with a resounding "Yes!"

Members also shared more than 3,000 comments with us, and the message was clear: The Alberta government should keep its hands off the CPP.

"I collect CPP. It isn't just my own CPP I'm worried about; it would be my children and their children. This is just wrong," said one member. This is a message that was repeated time and time again by survey respondents both in Alberta and outside of the province.

"This scheme is flawed, based on bad assumptions, and is a threat to retirement security for all Canadians," said one member from Alberta. "I would hate for myself as an Albertan to be further impacted by the whim of the [provincial government]," said another.

"Many respondents said the CPP is a vital part of their retirement income, and losing any of it will change their ability to pay their bills," said Association CEO Anthony Pizzino. "All Canadians deserve retirement income security, and weakening the CPP for all of them is unacceptable."

The CPP is one of the largest pension plans in the world, with assets that are sustainable for generations. It is the cornerstone of Canadians' retirement, giving 21 million participants access to a portable, secure source of retirement income. But the Alberta government proposed withdrawing from CPP saying it would enable investment in Alberta and cost less for Albertans because the province's population is relatively young.

Danielle Smith, during the leadership campaign of the United Conservative Party (UCP), said of the CPP:

"When you look at that program alone, that is clearly going to pay for whatever additional powers we take on board, whether it's a new Alberta provincial police, which they say is another \$170 million, or collecting our own personal income tax, which is \$200 million."

These estimates bely a fundamental misunderstanding of how the CPP works and the costs that would be associated with a new Alberta pension plan. It would take \$525 million to administer each year. Alberta's population is young because younger workers have migrated for oil and gas jobs, but that number has been shrinking over the past 10 years, which means the cost of an Alberta-only plan would increase over time.

Today, adults over 65 make up the fastest-growing age group in Alberta, accounting for 15 per cent of the province's total population, or more than 725,000 Albertans. By 2040, that number is expected to nearly double, exceeding 1.1 million. By the mid-2040s, one in five Albertans will be over 65.

The NAFR says an Alberta pension plan could be susceptible to political pressure when it comes to investing. Large investments in projects with poor long-term prospects and returns would negatively impact the pension plan's sustainability.

Pension plans are not a political bargaining chip. Albertans' retirement savings should pay for one thing only – their retirement pensions.

The proposed Alberta pension plan is especially risk-laden for those nearing retirement who have spent their careers contributing to the CPP and depend on it for a significant portion of their retirement income.

An Alberta-only pension plan would mean high administration costs to set up and run, as well as increasing costs for Albertans as the population ages, political interference in investments and uncertainty and risk for those who can least afford it.

Pizzino points out that a mere 21 per cent of Albertans feel the province should withdraw from the CPP, adding that the CPP continues to be well-funded and has always securely paid benefits.

(Editor's note: Recently in the *Globe and Mail*, Irwin Cotler and Noah Lew, members of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, discussed the advent of a new Cold War: "Today, Western leaders are seemingly unprepared for, and perhaps unwittingly avoiding, a return to yesterday's war – the Cold War. They are failing to acknowledge the fact that we are once again facing a bipolar world, not between two superpowers, but between two ideological alliances – liberal democracies and repressive autocrats engaged in an assault on the rules-based international order," they said. Below, democracy watchdog, *Demo Finland*, brings a European perspective.)

2024 elections spotlight the perilous state of democracy

By Rilli Lappalainen
Demo Finland's Acting Executive Director

In 2024, more than 70 elections will be held in countries with about 4.2 billion people – more than half of the world's population, which is a record. But even though there is more voting than ever, there is not necessarily more democracy. Many elections will be neither free nor fair.

Political stability and political progress are under pressure. Political fragmentation will remain a significant trend in Europe as well.

Governments will find it increasingly difficult to form stable, functioning majorities, and coalition-ruled countries will likely have to rely on larger multi-party agreements.

Decision-making continues to be constrained by the challenges of a minority government (France), instability and internal battles (Germany, Austria), a recent coalition collapse (Netherlands) or a government dependent on the support of several small groups (Spain).

Voters' dissatisfaction is channelled in elections: Growing dissatisfaction with the political system increases the likelihood that traditional centre-right and centre-left parties will tend to choose some of the more radical policies advocated by the far-right and far-left for their political programs. This trend affects both decision-making and election results. In addition to making the legislative process more complex, political polarization makes it more difficult to form governments and creates larger multi-party coalitions that can be unstable.

The far-right is likely to succeed, especially in Austria, where it is expected to enter the government after the September 2024 elections. Polls also show that far-right parties are on track to make significant gains in the June 2024 European Parliament elections. This is likely to affect the EU's political positions in areas such as immigration, climate change and EU enlargement.

The political frustration of the voters is further increased by the challenging economic situation. High energy prices and the cost of living continue to cause concern, even if real incomes return to growth.

Dissatisfaction with the provision of public services persists, even as many governments struggle to improve health care in the aftermath of the pandemic.

There is also much disagreement about how to tackle growing illegal immigration and how to speed up the green transition. Some countries see considerable public opposition to green policies. Internally, political parties are also increasingly divided – not least because there is no clear consensus on foreign policy issues such as the Israel-Hamas war, de-risking China and long-term plans for Ukraine.

Political polarization makes it more difficult to form governments and creates larger multi-party coalitions that can be unstable.

continued next page



BRITISH COLUMBIANS BENEFIT FROM PERSONAL SERVICE

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HELPING WHEN LIFE CHANGES



The most important elections in Europe will be in Great Britain, where anti-incumbency sentiment is strong. Theoretically, the government could postpone the elections until January 2025, but the most likely date is the last quarter of 2024. The Conservative Party has been in power for almost 14 years, but the opposition Labour Party leads polls on voting intentions by a margin of almost 20 percentage points. Although this lead will likely shrink during 2024 as the economy stabilizes and inflation slows, Labour will still, in all probability, get a functioning majority.

Outside of Europe, the greatest international interest certainly goes to the United States with its presidential elections. Presidential elections will also be held in Russia in March, but there is already little doubt about the outcome. As far as Ukraine is concerned, there is still no plan on when the presidential election will be held.

A good example of the challenges of electoral democracy is Mozambique, where the country's sixth municipal elections were held in October 2023. The ruling party, Frelimo, was declared to have won the elections overwhelmingly. The second largest party in the parliament, Renamo, did not get a majority in any municipality. Previously, Renamo had a majority in eight of 53 municipalities.

The elections were followed by demonstrations, petitions and demands to revise the result, as election fraud is believed to have occurred widely. The Constitutional Court corrected the result, the outcome of which – at the time of writing this blog – Renamo had obtained a majority in four municipalities. In addition, re-elections have been ordered in one other municipality and partial re-elections in three, which may still bring more election victories to Renamo. However, Renamo has expressed dissatisfaction and claims it won in still more municipalities.

The municipal elections started Mozambique's election cycle that continues in 2024, during which a new president, representatives of the provincial assemblies and members of parliament will be elected. Instead, local elections have continued to be postponed due to ambiguities related to their mandate and budgeting.

They were supposed to choose local councils, the creation of which has been a requirement of the opposition party, Renamo. It was hoped that the local councils would bring diversity to the country's governing bodies, which Frelimo dominates.

Disinformation may impact elections: In connection with the publication of the action plan of the UN Educational,

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) last fall, the research company IPSOS conducted an opinion poll for UNESCO in which more than 8,000 respondents participated in 16 countries where elections will be held in 2024.

The poll results show that 85 per cent of citizens are concerned about the effects of online disinformation at a time when social media platforms have become the primary source of information for the vast majority of them.

The same survey shows that 87 per cent of citizens believe this disinformation has already had a significant impact on their country's political life and fear that it will affect the election results this year. As a result, 88 per cent of respondents called on governments and authorities to quickly solve this problem by regulating social media.

Almost 90 per cent of citizens believe that disinformation has already had a major impact on their country's political life.

Access to reliable information is essential for democracy because, without it, citizens cannot make informed choices when voting in elections. The constantly developing artificial intelligence can also bring new rounds to election-related disinformation. Very realistic image, video or audio manipulations are increasingly difficult to identify and can erode trust even further.

The super year of 2024 elections will show how well the authorities, social media platforms and traditional media successfully combat electoral interference and disinformation. Citizens, whose media literacy is vital in assessing the reliability of information, also have a role to play.



(Political Parties of Finland for Democracy – *Demo Finland* – is a cooperative organization of Finnish parliamentary parties. It enhances democracy by strengthening the political participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in particular and by supporting dialogue between political parties. *Demo Finland* is also Finland's leading expert and advocacy organization on democracy support. *Demo Finland* is not ideologically, religiously, or politically tied to any particular movement.)

“Dark places” financially in a year of mixed reviews

As Canadians reflect on the year behind them, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute (ARI) finds 2023 receiving mixed reviews.

Considering factors such as their health, happiness and financial situation, two-in-five Canadians say the year was more good than bad for them, with one-third saying it was average and one-quarter more negative than positive about the last 12 months.

On the financial well-being front, however, Canadians are – as they have expressed to ARI throughout the year – in a darker place.

While the majority say they're satisfied with this aspect of life, two-in-five say they are not. More than half of those with household incomes below \$50,000 join the latter group, hoping that 2024 will bring more prosperity.

Using an additive score, ARI created four groups along a Life Satisfaction Index. These include Very Satisfied (24 per cent), Satisfied (25 per cent), Dissatisfied (28 per cent) and Very Dissatisfied (23 per cent). There are important variations in who comprises which of these groups.

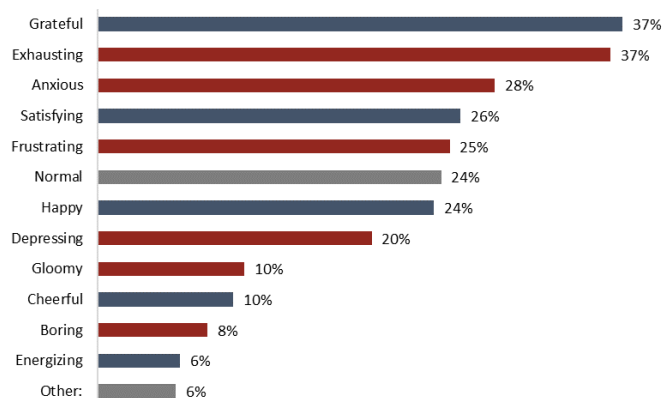
Consider that among visible minorities in Canada, 65 per cent are either Dissatisfied or Very Dissatisfied overall. Comparatively, for non-visible minorities, this proportion is a much smaller 48 per cent.

Those with kids in their household are more likely to be on the dissatisfied side of this equation as well (59 per cent) compared to those without children (48 per cent). Some of this is attributable to the role that income and age play in satisfaction with leisure, finances, and other aspects of life. Canadians over the age of 54 tend to be most satisfied with their lives, both men and women.

When it comes to Canadians' mental health, one-in-three say they're dissatisfied with how they feel currently. Young women are most likely to feel their mental health could be better – nearly half say this.

Comparing some of these data to responses from 2016, when the Angus Reid Institute last asked, there are notable trends. The first is that happiness levels have dropped slightly among the population. Seven years ago, before COVID-19 had spread about the globe and when the economic climate was more stable, four-in-five (79 per cent) said they were either “very” or “pretty” happy. In 2023, that proportion dropped to 70 per cent, with a nine-

Looking back on 2023, which of the following words would you use to describe your year?
(Up to three chosen; all respondents, n=1,516)



point increase in those saying they're “not too happy” with their life.

The proportion of people satisfied with their stress levels has also dropped five points over this period, though there is one improvement worth noting. There has been a five-point increase in Canadians self-reported satisfaction with their love life, from 64 to 69 per cent.

What we are left with is a population divided about how they would describe their year. The two most chosen words are “grateful” (37 per cent) and “exhausting” (37 per cent). As one might expect, how Canadians describe their year largely depends on where they find themselves on the Life Satisfaction Index.

When it comes to life satisfaction, age is important. Older Canadians (55+) are more than twice as likely than younger ones to be Very Satisfied, according to the Life Satisfaction Index. Two-in-five (40 per cent) men older than 54 are found to be Very Satisfied, the highest of any demographic.

The proportion of those in the top two categories of the index also rises, as one may suspect, with income level. Conversely, half (48 per cent) of those living in households earning less than \$25,000 annually are Very Dissatisfied.

Canadians living with kids are less likely to express satisfaction than those without. This is especially true when it comes to their physical health (53 per cent satisfied vs. kids not in household 62 per cent), leisure time (57 per cent vs. 73 per cent) and finances (46 per cent vs. 61 per cent).

Slim majority look forward to more good than bad

The problems of 2023 – inflation, international conflict, global warming – may have followed Canadians into the new year, but many are still welcoming 2024 with an optimistic view.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds a plurality of Canadians believe 2024 offers plenty of positive potential. More than two-in-five (44 per cent) say they expect the year to offer more good than bad, outnumbering those (40 per cent) who expect an average year. A minority of fewer than one-in-five (17 per cent) expect the worst from the year ahead.

There is plenty of hope from Canadians that they will see improvements in their physical health (46 per cent), overall quality of life (41 per cent) and mental health (39 per cent). Sources of despair seem to be finances (20 per cent expect it to worsen) and stress (19 per cent).

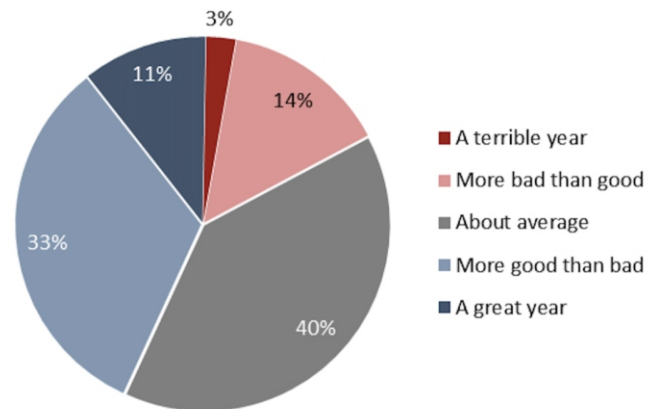
On the latter front, it's younger Canadians who are feeling the pressure. More than one-quarter (27 per cent) of those aged 18- to 34-years-old say they expect higher stress in the coming year, double the number of those older than 54 (13 per cent) who say the same.

Money woes appear to be a factor. One-in-four Canadians under 35 expect their economic situation to worsen in the year ahead. However, there is more optimism from men under 55, half of whom expect fiscal improvement in their personal lives. One-quarter (24 per cent) of those under 35 expect their financial situation to worsen in 2024.

The Angus Reid Institute's Life Satisfaction Index measures Canadians' satisfaction with nine elements of their life. Those dissatisfied after 2023 are less likely to be optimistic about their future. However, many (41 per cent) in that group expect neither good nor bad things from 2024. Meanwhile, the majority (64 per cent) of those who are very satisfied with their life are brimming with positivity for what the next 12 months will bring.

Regionally, there are larger pockets of negativity on the east coast. One-quarter in Atlantic Canada say they expect more bad than good from 2024, the most in the country. In Saskatchewan, more than half (52 per cent) see positive things for themselves from the next year. Half (49 per cent) of Quebecers also believe 2024 will offer more sweet than sour.

If you had to guess how the next year is going to go for you, do you feel like it's going to be...? (All respondents, n=1,516)



As Canadians look ahead to the year that might be in 2024, there is much more hope than despair when it comes to various elements of their lives. Canadians are most optimistic that the next 12 months will see improvement in their physical health, overall quality of life and mental health.

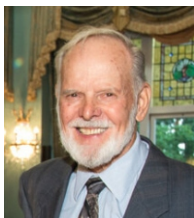
Previous ARI research showed that income level played a significant role in determining Canadians' life satisfaction. It also appears to play a role as Canadians evaluate their future. Canadians living in the lowest-income households are much more pessimistic about what 2024 will hold for their personal finances, stress levels, and physical and mental health than those living in higher-income households.

Parents found less satisfaction in their lives than those living in households without kids when asked to assess 2023, including their physical health; half said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with this aspect of their lives.

Looking ahead to 2024, parents express more pessimism when it comes to the leisure time they will get to enjoy. One-in-six (16 per cent) expect leisure time to worsen in the next 12 months. Just one-in-11 (nine per cent) of Canadians who live in households without children say the same.

Sports Hall of Fame welcomes AFMLABC's Cliff Serwa

AFMLABC member Cliff Serwa, one of two men who founded Big White Ski Resort, has been inducted into the Central Okanagan Sports Hall of Fame.



The Central Okanagan Sports Hall of Fame (COSHOF) announced its class of inductees for 2023 last November. Cliff and Doug Mervyn opened Big White in 1963.

The original builders and operators of Big White Mountain, Cliff and Doug first attempted to reach the top of Big White Mountain on cross-country skis when they were fresh out of high school.

"Snow and weather conditions in the Okanagan Valley are very much superior to those found at the coast, and coastal skiers are already travelling the ski circuit," Mervyn told a local newspaper.

Cliff, the grandfather of Olympic Gold Medalist and Big White athlete Kelsey Serwa, recalls the evening before opening day as "frenzied." Because the chalet was heated with a wood furnace, the stain on the tables they had recently built hadn't dried. Panicked, they covered everything in plastic so the skiers would have somewhere to eat.

The tables were one concern – whether or not people would show up on Opening Day was another. But, "miracle of all miracles," Serwa says, "people were willing to drive the distance." The parking lot filled; the hill was "terribly crowded."

Kelowna, which at the time was known as "Canada's Apple Capital," now had Okanagan Champagne Powder to offer during the off-season.

For the first year of operation, the road from the turnoff to the ski area, which Serwa describes as narrow and twisty, was one way. No uphill traffic was allowed after noon, and no downhill traffic from the resort was allowed before 1 p.m.

The Sports Hall of Fame honours local athletes, coaches, teams, builders and pioneers who have distinguished themselves. Pat Kennedy, COSHOF manager, says: "With so much sporting talent and passion in our region, we know that there will always be more incredible people and teams to honour."



In January 1964, the cutline read: "18 inches of fresh powder snow in a beautiful alpine setting is normal for Canada's newest ski hill – Big White Mountain – only one hour and 15 minutes by good road from Kelowna."

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Len Norris



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Free trade 30 rocky years later

NAFTA becomes USMCA thanks to “tear-it-up” Trump

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was a pact eliminating most trade barriers between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico that went into effect on Jan. 1st, 1994. Some of its provisions were implemented immediately, while others were staggered over the 15 years that followed.

Donald Trump railed against it during his 2016 election campaign, promising to renegotiate the deal and “tear it up” if the United States couldn’t get its desired concessions.

Shortly after his election, President Trump said he would begin renegotiating the terms of NAFTA to resolve trade issues he had campaigned on. The leaders of Canada and Mexico had indicated their willingness to work with the Trump administration. Although vague on the terms he sought in a renegotiated NAFTA, Trump threatened to withdraw if negotiations failed.

In July 2017, the Trump administration provided a detailed list of changes it would like to see to NAFTA. The top priority was a reduction in the United States’ trade deficit. The administration also called for the elimination of provisions that allowed Canada and Mexico to appeal duties imposed by the United States and limited the ability of the United States to impose import restrictions on Canada and Mexico.

Being “consistent with the president’s stance on liking trade barriers, liking protectionism,” Chad Bown of the Peterson Institute for International Economics suggested that the proposed changes would make NAFTA “in many respects less of a free-trade agreement.”

John Murphy, vice-president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, declared that several of the proposals tabled by the United States had “little or no support from the U.S. business and agriculture community.”

Pat Roberts, the senior U.S. senator from Kansas, said it was unclear “who they’re intended to benefit” and called for pushback against the anti-NAFTA moves as the “issues affect real jobs, real lives and real people.” Kansas was a major agricultural exporter, and farm groups warned that just threatening to leave NAFTA might cause buyers to minimize uncertainty by seeking out non-U.S. sources.

A fourth round of NAFTA negotiations included a U.S. demand for a sunset clause that would end the agreement in five years unless the three countries agreed to keep it in place, a provision U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross



No friend of our prime minister, President Donald Trump wanted to tear up NAFTA if he couldn't have his way.

said would allow the countries to kill the deal if it was not working.

Canada was sidelined from June to late August 2018 as the United States and Mexico held bilateral talks. In August 2018, Mexico and the United States announced they had reached a bilateral understanding on a revamped NAFTA trade deal that included provisions to boost automobile production in the U.S. The Economist described this as placing “Mexican carmaking into a straitjacket.”

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and then-Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland announced they would join the agreement if it were in Canada’s interests. Freeland returned from her European diplomatic tour early, cancelling a planned visit to Ukraine to participate in NAFTA negotiations in Washington, D.C., in late August. According to an August 31st Canadian Press story published in the Ottawa Citizen, critical issues under debate included supply management, pharmaceuticals, cultural exemptions and the sunset clause.

Although President Trump warned Canada on September 1st that he would exclude them from a new trade agreement unless Canada submitted to his demands, it is not clear that the Trump administration had the authority to do so without the approval of Congress.

On September 30th, 2018, the deadline for the Canada–U.S. negotiations, a preliminary deal between the two countries was reached, thus preserving the trilateral pact. The new name for the agreement, which came into effect on July 1, 2020, was the “United States – Mexico – Canada Agreement” (USMCA).