

## Stellar reviews for BC's newest Parliamentary Practice

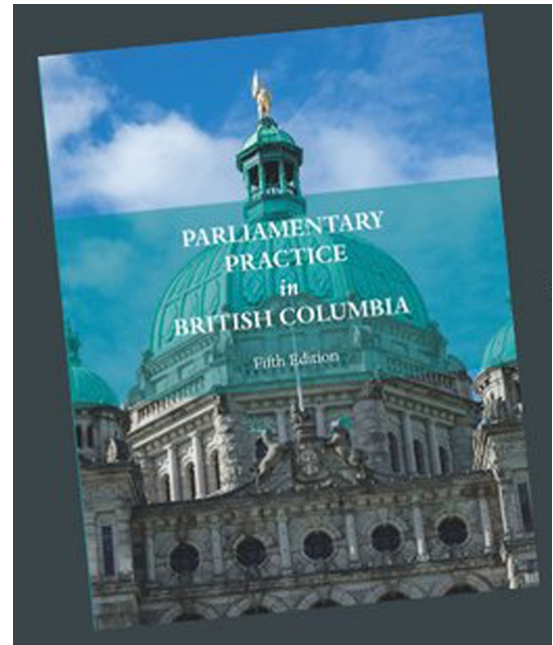
By Artour Sogomonian  
Legislature Clerk Assistant

In April 2018, three Legislative Assembly staff began an assignment to update the Legislative Assembly's procedural authority of choice, *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*.

Under the direction of Kate Ryan-Lloyd, now Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, Susan Sourial (Clerk Assistant, Committees and Interparliamentary Relations), Ron Wall (Manager, Committee Research Services) and I (Clerk Assistant, Parliamentary Services) plugged away at this significant undertaking for seven-and-a-half months of research and writing.

Throughout that period and for over a year thereafter, many Assembly staff contributed to the production of the fifth edition of *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*. Unfortunately, recent global events have prevented a formal book launch, but perhaps 2021 will bring such an opportunity.

Nevertheless, the book was formally released in February and is available for purchase through Crown Publications (readers may obtain their very own copy at [bcleg.ca/pp5](http://bcleg.ca/pp5)). I am pleased to report that the reviews have so far been stellar, from Members, staff, and other keen parliamentary observers. An online HTML version is under development and will be launched in the fall.



The first edition of *Parliamentary Practice* was published in 1981 and was written by then-Deputy Clerk, E. George MacMinn. It was an impressive feat – the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia became the first province to have its own procedural authority.

Kate Ryan-Lloyd's Preface to the fifth edition of the volume is reproduced in large part on Page 4 and provides an overview of why this visually-appealing fifth edition is so significant, and how it differs from earlier editions.

---

## George favoured the hands-on approach

By Ian Izard, Q.C.

*Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*, by George MacMinn Q.C., was first published in 1981. Now, in its fifth edition, it serves the vital function of providing guidance to the many actors in the business of the Assembly, including politicians, political staff, clerks and house staff, the press and others. The number of editions reflects the ongoing evolution of the Legislative Assembly in terms of its makeup, rules, and practices.

George MacMinn used a hands-on approach, doing his own research and consulting with other authorities and associates in the Commonwealth. He was a consultant to the Procedure

Reform Committee which recommended numerous changes to the Standing Orders in 1985, all of which are set out in the Second Edition.

Similarly, in the Third and Fourth Editions, changes in procedure and interpretation are listed. The Fourth Edition featured a review by the other clerks of areas of their responsibility.

Kate Ryan Lloyd is immensely capable and it will be interesting to see her direction in the Fifth Edition.

**(Ian was the BC Legislature law clerk and clerk assistant from 1977-2012.)**

---

**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 for the newsletter.

## Dues, Subscriptions and Donations

**Jeff Bray**, Victoria

**John Cashore**, Coquitlam

**Alf Nunweiler**, Prince George

**Brian Smith**, Victoria

**Lynn Stephens**, Langley

**Jack Weisgerber**, Nanaimo

**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:

P.O. Box 31009  
University Heights P.O.  
Victoria, B.C. V8N 6J3

Or emailed to [ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com](mailto:ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com)  
or [ootd@shaw.ca](mailto:ootd@shaw.ca)

Editor: Brian Kieran  
Layout/Production/Research: Rob Lee

Association Membership (former MLAs) dues are \$60.00 per year. Annual subscription rate is \$40.00 for those who are not Association Members.  
Payment can be sent to the above address.

## **Board of Directors 2019-2020**

**Jeff Bray** ..... President  
**Dave Hayer** ..... Vice President  
**Ian Waddell** ..... Secretary  
**James Gorst** ..... Treasurer  
**Penny Priddy** ..... Past President

## **Directors**

**Harry Bloy**                      **Tim Stevenson**  
**Ken Jones**                     **Patrick Wong**  
**Cliff Serwa**

## **Honourary Directors**

**Hon. Iona Campagnolo, PC, CM, OBC, LL.D**  
**Hon. Steven L. Point, OBC**  
**Hon. Judith Guichon, OBC**

## **Honourary Members**

**Hon. Darryl Plecas**  
Speaker of the Legislature  
**Joan Barton, MLSc., MPA**

## **Honourary Life Members**

**Jim Hume**  
**Ian D. Izard, QC**, Honourary Solicitor  
**E. George MacMinn, QC, OBC**

## **Life Members**

**(The late) Hugh Curtis**

*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.*

## A message from the editorial board

### AFMLABC members! Check “the box in the basement”

By Penny Priddy  
OOTD Editorial Board Chair

Former MLAs ... Orders of the Day needs your help! OOTD has an excellent reputation and is considered the best newsletter for former provincial parliamentarians in Canada. Brian Kieran and Rob Lee do a stellar job of finding interesting articles and producing this newsletter.

We need your help. There is one very important thing that Brian and Rob cannot do: They cannot write personal stories about your memories as an MLA. The most frequent request that we receive at OOTD is to include more stories, letters to the editor and opinion pieces from former legislators.

Here is how you can help! I expect most of us have a box in the basement, the attic or in storage. It is usually full of clippings, relevant papers and photographs of our time serving this province. I know that when I open mine I find things that make me laugh and things that break my heart. I find things that I am proud of and things that make me wonder.

During this time of COVID-19 we all have some extra time at home. Please go through the treasured memories contained in your box, dust them off and write us a letter or send us a story. We need your contributions to sustain OOTD. Please help.

In addition, we would welcome comments and observations from you about the challenges and successes that we see around us. Just imagine the next legislative session with all of the new requirements for safety.

Thank you in advance for your contributions. The next “Summer” issue comes out in the last week of July and the deadline for submissions will be July 15<sup>th</sup>. It would be great if you can send us a story on how you spent Canada Day. Through the fall and winter the monthly deadline for material is the 25<sup>th</sup>.

Photographs may be welcomed by our excellent Legislative Library. For more information contact Sheri Ostapovich, Technical Services Librarian, Legislative Library of BC, Room 359, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, BC V8V 1X4 or call 250.952.0807.

Brian Kieran can be reached at [ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com](mailto:ootd.afmlabc@gmail.com) or by mail at: P.O. Box 31009, University Heights P.O., Victoria, BC V8N 6J3.

# President's Report

As I write this, BC is just starting to re-open the economy. Phase Two guidelines have been published, and we all hope for a safe transition to Phase Three, the "new normal." In the coming weeks two phenomena may emerge: One will be a close watch to see if there is second wave of COVID-19; the other being a serious examination of the country's, and world's, response to the pandemic.

There is no question that BC has been one of the most successful jurisdictions – with a population more than four million – in containing COVID-19. There is also no question that our economy, and to a certain extent, our society have taken a significant blow.

There will be pressure on governments to reduce restrictions, even if a second wave hits. Open debate, with a variety of viewpoints will be critical in the coming weeks and months. Parliaments across Canada will need to find ways to allow for that open, public exchange of ideas.

To date, many feel that both the governments of BC and Canada have responded appropriately. However, as debates continue, citizens will need to hear elected leaders deliberate on the impacts and solutions regarding COVID-19. Now, more than ever in living memory, the Westminster style of democracy can help the country to understand the issues and choices it faces.

Canada needs our legislators in their seats, even if it is virtually, to lay out the ideas and solutions, to hold governments to account, to offer alternatives. Parliamentary committees could delve into some of these issues in greater detail. These could help Canadians to secure information from Canadian experts, and not just from social media.

Let me echo Penny's thoughts on Page 2. Here at Orders of the Day we would love to hear from you. As former MLAs you know what it is like to deal with difficult situations, whether in government or opposition. Let us know your thoughts as to how BC is dealing with COVID-19, what is happening in your community. What suggestions would you make for parliamentary procedure in a time of pandemic?

Take care and be safe.



Jeff Bray,  
President AFMLABC

## Get healthcare from home.



TELUS Health is working tirelessly to ensure innovative virtual care is available to every Canadian. **Babylon by TELUS Health** is a free app that can help relieve the current stresses on our healthcare system while reducing the risk of catching or spreading illnesses.



### See a doctor from your phone.

British Columbia residents can video chat directly with a licensed doctor.



### Check your symptoms 24/7.

Canadians across the country can use the AI-powered Symptom Checker.



### 4.9/5 App Store rating\*

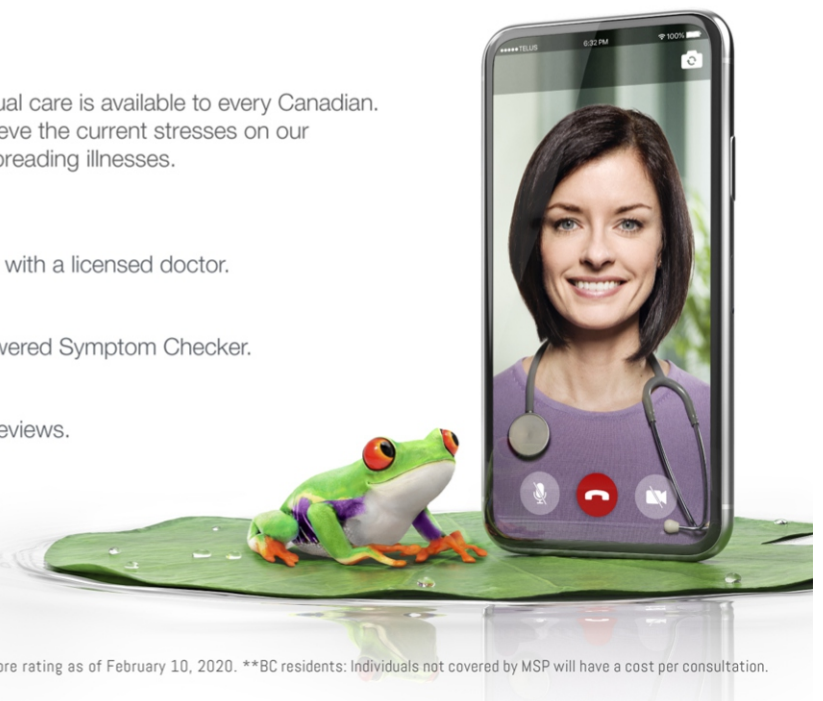
Loved by Canadians with thousands of five-star reviews.



### At no cost to you.

Consultations for BC residents covered by MSP.\*\*

### Download the free app.



\*App Store rating as of February 10, 2020. \*\*BC residents: Individuals not covered by MSP will have a cost per consultation.

---

# Preface: The Fifth Edition of Parliamentary Practice

By Kate Ryan-Lloyd  
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

The fifth edition of *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia* builds on the foundational work of E. George MacMinn, O.B.C., Q.C., who served as a Table Officer for 54 years and as Clerk of the Legislative Assembly from 1993 to 2011, and who authored the first four editions of the book. This new edition captures 12 years of developments in parliamentary practice in British Columbia.

The Legislative Assembly has been described as a practical or business-oriented institution with respect to procedural matters. *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia* is evidence of this approach, focusing on the Legislative Assembly's Standing Orders, their application and interpretation, and the experience of other legislative bodies with similar rules.

The fifth edition differs from earlier editions, which were organized numerically by Standing Order. The fifth edition is organized into 18 thematic chapters, with the Standing Orders, Practice Recommendations and pertinent excerpts from statutes featured throughout the supporting text. Content and commentary are significantly expanded, including new text on the roles and work of Members, the foundational elements of parliamentary procedure, voting and divisions, the legislative process, financial procedures and parliamentary privilege.

While the Legislative Assembly's procedural operations are the focus of this book, there is also some insight into the administrative operations of the Assembly and the machinery that supports the work of elected representatives and the work of the democratic institution of Parliament. More comprehensive content, numbered sections, callouts with key information, an improved index and a modern design are hallmarks of this edition. It is my hope that these elements make the content more user-friendly and accessible to Members and all British Columbians.

British Columbia will mark 150 years as a province in 2021. The Standing Orders that have governed the Legislative Assembly's proceedings have been updated over the years to reflect modernization of parliamentary practice and to meet Members' expectations and changing social values. Fundamentally, the Standing Orders have enabled the Legislative Assembly to conduct its work effectively and in an organized manner; they allow the government of the day to carry out its agenda while also allowing the Opposition to fulfill its important scrutiny role.



Since the publication of the last edition of this book in 2008, various Sessional Orders have been adopted, and several Standing Orders have been amended or added. This includes modification of the daily sitting times, a provision that infants in the care of a Member are permitted on the floor of the House and a new Standing Order that solidifies Speakers' directives on the use of electronic devices during parliamentary proceedings and much more.

This edition also reflects changes in parliamentary practice, most of which derive from decisions of Speakers on the application of the Assembly's rules and procedures. The spirit of cross-party consultation continues to influence the Legislative Assembly's practices and operations, particularly since the 2017 provincial general election, which resulted in the first minority Parliament in British Columbia in over 60 years.

Since 1981, Speakers and Members have recognized *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia* as the Legislative Assembly's primary procedural authority. As Editor of the fifth edition, I trust that it will continue to serve as a useful reference tool for Members, Table Officers and staff. It is also my hope that this edition will contribute to further transparency and understanding of how the Legislative Assembly operates. The online availability of this book is a step toward ensuring greater accessibility to this public institution, which is of importance to all British Columbians.

# Governance at a distance and through a lens

BC's politicians are preparing to resume government debates in the Legislature this month, but it will not be business as usual as pandemic social distancing protocols prevail and BC's Restart Program unfolds.

The spring legislative session came to a grinding halt mid-March as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe. It has only met once since then, for an emergency one-day session March 23rd with a minimal number of MLAs present.

Premier John Horgan has announced that the sitting will reconvene June 22.

He says the June session is "going to be new, it's going to be innovative and it's going to be a challenge."

"We'll be focused on getting the budget passed, getting the estimates process completed and a modest number of pieces of legislation that we believe are required to keep our agenda moving forward."

Horgan credits the House leaders of all three parties — the NDP's Mike Farnworth, the Liberals' Mary Polak and the Greens' Sonia Furstenau — for putting their heads together to craft plans on how the House can function within physical distancing rules.

"The three parties have been working with the clerk, and we have found an agreement where safe resumption of the legislature can take place," the premier says.

"MLAs will be returning to Victoria so we can conduct the business of the province," Horgan says. "Some will be here in person, some will be beaming in with technology, but at the end of the day, debate will take place, votes will be cast and democracy will be well served.

"It'll look different for debates; it'll look different for Question Period," he explains. "We're going to be using more technology, we're going to be using multiple rooms so we can keep MLAs at a distance. It's going to be an innovative time. It's going to be a challenging time. I think it will be an exciting time."

Horgan says changes are already being made inside the building as part of a collective effort to curb the spread of COVID-19. "For those who have been milling about the Legislature periodically, there seems to be an awful lot of television screens going up in places where there never used to be any."

When describing what that could look like, he likens the imagery to decades-old television shows. "I suspect we're going to see lots of *Hollywood Squares* or *Brady Bunch*-type images of multiple MLAs that are in different parts of the building, or different parts of the province, participating in the dynamics of the democracy of British Columbia."



At the Legislature this video studio is dubbed "Mission Control", and that takes on new meaning as government prepares to conduct the peoples' business at a distance.

Horgan says he will wear a mask in situations where physical distancing cannot be guaranteed, in accordance with the latest recommendations from health officials.

(Source: Canadian Press)

**More departures.  
More fare options.  
More choice.**

For trusted, affordable travel:  
Just Harbour Air and you're there.

FROM VANCOUVER	✈️	🚗/🚲	SAVE
Victoria, Inner Harbour	35m	3h, 5m	2h, 30m
Seattle, Lake Union, WA	50m	2h, 58m	2h, 8m
Nanaimo Harbour	20m	2h, 44m	2h, 24m
FROM VICTORIA	✈️	🚗/🚲	SAVE
Richmond, YVR South	30m	3h, 16m	2h, 46m
Pitt Meadows Airport	35m	3h, 29m	2h, 54m
Vancouver, Coal Harbour	35m	3h, 5m	2h, 30m

**H HARBOUR AIR SEAPLANES**  
For full locations and to book:  
harbourair.com | 1.800.665.0212

*And many more!*

# Letters

## I hope we continue to find our better angels



The kindness of strangers is what inspires me as we find our way through COVID-19.

As former MLAs we have all seen this kindness and likely experienced it often. One defining moment for me is the spring of 1996. I was undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer while maintaining an active role in the cabinet and Legislature except for Fridays when treatment was scheduled. I was so blessed to receive dozens and dozens of notes and small gifts from all over BC. People wishing me well. People who had recommendations for me. People who shared their cancer stories with me. People who said that they were praying for me.

It was unbelievable except that it did really happen. The majority of these people were strangers. They represented a range of ages, geography and backgrounds. The only thing that they had in common was their kindness. I don't know if they will ever know what an important role they played in my recovery. I could not be more grateful to them as my life continues on.

We see that kindness around us today in our communities. I see it in the groups of citizens who are reaching out to the community to find the people who need them. Not as easy to do as perhaps it could be. Knowing that many people in need may not have access to social media, they have worked through advocacy organizations and word of mouth to help get their message out. They are making trips to the grocery store, drug store and are sourcing masks. I also see the kindness in the groups of people singing outside of seniors residences. There are so many more examples.

My hope is that when we reach the other side of this pandemic that people can continue to, as Lincoln said, find their better angels.

Penny Priddy  
AFMLABC past president  
MLA & cabinet minister (Surrey-Newton) 1991 – 2001  
MP (Surrey North) 2006 – 2008

## A growing spirit of bipartisanship

Dear Editor:

Here are my belated dues and a donation. Keep up the good work with Orders of the Day.

The pandemic has crystalized a growing spirit of bipartisanship. Those three House leaders deserve much credit, working constructively together even before the virus.

In my legislative era (1979-89) we were mostly mired in partisan warfare.

Sincerely,  
Brian Smith Q.C.  
MLA & cabinet minister  
Oak Bay-Gordon Head (1979-1989)



Proud supporter of the Provincial and Federal governments. Offering exceptional value year round with our special government employee rate. Ideally equipped to handle all your meeting needs; flexible meeting spaces with natural light, exquisite food, thoughtful amenities and superb service.

To book a room, or to find out more, call 1.800.661.7550, or email: [reserve@hotelgrandpacific.com](mailto:reserve@hotelgrandpacific.com).

463 BELLEVILLE STREET, VICTORIA, B.C.  
[HOTELGRANDPACIFIC.COM](http://HOTELGRANDPACIFIC.COM)  
1.800.663.7550

## “We really do care very deeply about our elderly”

The last three months have galvanized British Columbians to voice their deep concern for the care and safety of our older population. As it became apparent that COVID-19 was most virulent in the elderly and as outbreaks began to occur in our long-term care homes, the entire province united behind efforts to keep our seniors safe.

Those who might normally find themselves on opposite sides of the bargaining table or the Legislature joined to put in place the necessary measures to get on top of a virus that was lethal and prolific.

A bipartisan committee of MLAs addressed the needs of seniors during the pandemic. They spearheaded the Safe Seniors Strong Communities program, which matches volunteers who want to help seniors, with seniors in need of help due to the pandemic. We saw an outpouring of support from friends, neighbours and families as they rallied to get groceries and medications to the elderly. In the first eight weeks, the program saw over 50,000 virtual visits, 10,000 grocery deliveries and over 10,000 meals delivered to seniors who were staying home and staying safe. As this program continues, it will be one of the positive lasting legacies that will come from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The spotlight on seniors has also highlighted other issues that will likely now receive much-needed attention. For example, we sometimes forget that seniors are the most likely age group to live alone and the least likely age group to engage in all the various virtual communication tools. Now, we are talking about how to ensure everyone can afford the Internet and how we need to look at the challenges of low-income seniors, who make up about one-third of seniors in BC.

With the catalyst of this pandemic, we have found that when the chips are down, we really do care very deeply about our elderly. This is an important message for policymakers. In the end, the government is the people and the people have spoken: We need improvements.

Our long-term care system has shortcomings that have existed for many years and this is not unique to BC. While it is important to recognize that many people have a positive experience with the care home they or their loved one lives in, many do not. It will be important in the months ahead that we look at the data and the evidence and understand the systemic issues that need to be addressed for our long-term care system to improve.



---

It will also be important to remember that part of reforming our long-term care system is to ensure we have a robust, client-centred home care and home support program to ensure that seniors are able to support themselves at home in the community for as long as possible. Interestingly, in BC we have about the same number of seniors receiving public home support as living in long-term care and there were no outbreaks of COVID-19 in our public home and community care program.

Low-income seniors need better support, especially those who have health care needs that cost money to address, and those who rent. The pandemic has revealed the vulnerability of low-income seniors who may have been able to keep their heads above water using supports such as senior centres and food banks, but when these were affected by the pandemic, the vulnerability of low-income seniors was fully exposed.

Going forward it will be important not to lose the current public support and political commitment to improve seniors' care. I am optimistic that we will, as we have come to realize in this pandemic that we really do care about each other.

Sincerely,  
Isobel Mackenzie  
Seniors Advocate

# Caring for the mentally fragile daunts us still

By Jim Hume, The Old Islander

It was 1869 when two sisters described as “middle-class school teachers” were declared insane and, by court order, removed from Victoria's 10-year-old hospital – The Royal – better known as “the Asylum,” a health care facility with accommodation for a handful of patients suffering what the doctors of the day called “routine” afflictions.

The “hospital” administrators were stressed to the limit trying to provide separate accommodation for male and female patients, and meeting what they regarded as the impossible demand to provide beds and care for “maniacs.”

The sisters were “teachers of the middle class and deemed insane.” They were ordered to be transferred from Victoria's hospital, certified as “insane,” and incarcerated in the Victoria City jail.

The charge against them? “These insane ladies were noisy and physically violent, and one refused to wear any clothing (so) they were kept locked in a bare brick cell ... with only male staff supervision.”

A third sister took up the battle on behalf of her siblings, challenged the touted “respectability” of Victoria citizens and drew commanding attention to the almost total lack of care for mentally impaired citizens.

Public hearings followed with resignations of old hospital officials, and, in 1873, the passing of the BC Insane Asylum Act as a shocked public forced subsequent governments to seek solutions for the care of the mentally ill. However, as recently as 1901, BC still listed the causes of insanity as “hereditary, intemperance, syphilis and masturbation.”

How to handle the mentally sick among us would continue to be a significant problem. In 1904, the government thought it was on the way to a solution when it purchased 405 hectares of land in New Westminster-Coquitlam (including Colony Farm) for the construction of a new therapeutic centre for the mentally ill. In 1913, the Male Chronic Building opened. Within a month, it was filled with 900 patients, double its planned capacity.

Colony Farm was part of what was now known as Riverview, a central model of psychiatric health care quickly named internationally as one of the most progressive asylums in North America. Its patients worked the grounds, and at its peak produced up to 700 tonnes of crops and 20,000 gallons of milk a year.

But the idea of big hospitals and institutions was losing favour as various regions of the province sought “closer to home” solutions. In 1998, the government announced plans to close Riverview, but two years later said a new 20-bed unit would be built to house patients who found it difficult to obtain treatment in home area residential centres.



*Riverview ... a set for scary movies.*

In 2000, Riverview and the provincial government were attacked for the hospital's use of controversial electroshock therapy. The dispute led to the resignation of the president of the medical staff who had fought against the practice. The same year a group of former patients launched a lawsuit claiming male and female patients had been illegally sterilized between 1933 and 1968. Evidence revealed 200 patients had been sterilized. Nine women received settlements totalling \$450,000.

Most of the land today is included in a land claim by the Kwikwetlem Nation and is recognized provincially as a botanical garden and architectural heritage site. Some old buildings are still in use by private companies, others stand empty like acid tears shed for a worthy cause that went awry.

And the problems of how to best handle the mentally fragile among us remains unanswered. If a fully modern care facility staffed with the finest mental health advice and backed by a working food-producing farm isn't the answer – what could be?

Not unsanitary instant – hovel tent shambles disgracing boulevards and parks. And surely not the unused rooms of basic motels built primarily for overnight stays not for extended living.



# After COVID-19 the little things will mean a lot

(Editor's note: The Vancouver Sun's Vaughn Palmer jumps ahead to the future to look back and appreciate the lasting and important takeaways from COVID-19.)

Excerpt from *The Great Pandemic*, a future history of our times:

British Columbians who lived through the great pandemic of 2020 would retain a mix of memories, some grim, others strangely reassuring.

Many of those reflections would be washed in sunshine, because in the early days of the outbreak, the province enjoyed an unusually bright period of spring weather that drove people outdoors and, all too often, into close contact with one another.

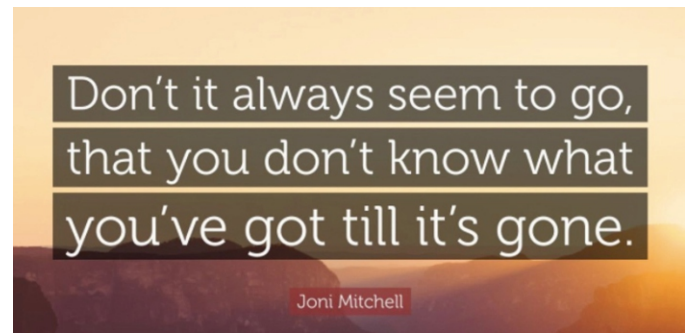
Another irony was the way the proper response to this crisis was precisely the opposite of another. For 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks, people were encouraged to carry on, trust and revel in close contact with their fellow human beings. With the virus, everyone was supposed to stay home, hunker down, isolate. The failure to do so to the extent necessary prolonged the outbreak and probably contributed to the second wave of infections in the fall of 2020 and early 2021.

But most who made it through were reluctant to indulge in recriminations. If honest, they remembered falling short themselves. Many people realized the seriousness of the situation listening to the province's chief medical health officer of the day, Dr. Bonnie Henry.

For some it happened the day Dr. Henry herself choked up when talking about the threat to seniors – then asked reporters not to make a big deal of it because it might worry her parents. (“My mother already says I look tired.”)

For others, it was the moment Dr. Henry stopped using her inside voice and began sounding like a parent whose patience had run out. “This is not optional,” she declared in the 10<sup>th</sup> week. “This is for everyone. And we do have the legal authority to enforce it.”

Eventually, as the weeks of living with the virus gave way to months, Dr. Henry and Solicitor General Mike Farnworth did have to resort to emergency powers. But they did not have to do so all that often. Sociologists are still writing papers about why the anticipated breakdown



of society never materialized during the pandemic. Though it would take longer to eradicate the virus than many realized in the beaming sunshine of March 2020, eventually it was beaten.

The miracle vaccine was so sought after, even anti-vaxxers were lining up for a shot.

Society emerged from 18 months of lockdown, bailouts and deprivation with levels of debt equalling those at the end of the Second World War. But for many there was the sheer pleasure of going back to work, of having something – anything – worth doing and colleagues to do it with.

The world was never quite the same afterwards, and not just because of the cordon sanitaire put in place at airports, ports and border crossings to reduce the threat of future outbreaks. Staycations are more common. Nesting, too. It was a time when people were grateful for the continuation of things they had always taken for granted: electric lights and refrigeration, garbage collection, fresh fruit in the stores, drinking water from the tap.

When it was finally over, people revelled in being able to do the things that they'd never imagined they would miss so much: Hugging. Sleepovers. Team sports. Going to the pool. Just sitting around with friends, shooting the breeze about nothing at all.

But really, as a reminder of a lesson learned the hard way, there's no improving on a few words from Joni Mitchell: “Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone.”

Be kind. Remain calm. Stay safe.

Vaughn Palmer, Vancouver Sun

---

# COVID-19: BC is a leader in a cross-Canada assessment

How has COVID-19 affected the operation of Canada's provincial and territorial legislatures?

Canada's federal system divides powers between the federal government and the provinces and territories. Many of the policy areas most vital for responding to COVID-19, such as health care, education, and workplace safety, are assigned to provincial and territorial governments.

With 13 different experiences of the virus, and 13 different provincial and territorial government responses in Canada, there are also 13 different sub-national parliamentary democracies of varying size, capacity, and partisan balance that are struggling to adapt to radically altered circumstances.

As past editions of the Samara's Democracy Monitor discussed, the basic structure of legislatures – which bring dozens of elected representatives from across a jurisdiction to a single room – makes them especially vulnerable to disruption by COVID-19.

As such, it can be tempting for legislatures to quickly give governments the power to respond to the pandemic and then suspend operations. Yet the enormous impact of these decisions – such as whether schools or businesses must close – as well as the variety of impacts on different cohorts of citizens, makes it vital that representatives closely scrutinize the choices made and their implementation.

Just like other workplaces, Canada's provincial and territorial legislatures have been searching for ways to resume their operations while complying with public health guidelines. But there's been surprisingly little innovation in this regard, with the majority of jurisdictions either remaining closed or relying on physical sittings with a reduced number of Members in attendance.

At the time of writing (June 3), three jurisdictions – Nova Scotia, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan – had not announced any plans to resume either legislative sittings or committee work. Aside from PEI, these happen to be the three legislatures that have already gone the longest without sitting or committee work, with Nova Scotia and Nunavut having not yet sat a single day since the pandemic was declared, and Saskatchewan having not sat since rapidly adjourning in mid-March.

Yukon is an outlier from other jurisdictions in that two committees, the Standing Committees on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees, and Public Accounts, have each held one virtual meeting on regular business since the pandemic began. However, all other legislative activity has stopped. The Public Accounts Committee, which is the only one at the Legislature chaired by the Opposition, completed two substantive reports at its meeting and also passed a motion to make the minutes of its meetings public going forward.

Just over half of all provincial and territorial legislatures have resumed more regular sittings or planned to do so in early June. The Alberta Legislature has been the most active, with four sitting weeks between March 15 and May 8, and plans for starting May 27 and continuing into June. The Manitoba Legislature has been sitting one day per week since the start of May, while Ontario resumed two sittings per week on May 19. The New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, PEI, and Quebec legislatures will begin their sittings on May 26.

These resumed sittings feature the usual daily routines, such as question period and the introduction of new legislation. Alberta has already passed two new non-COVID-related bills that were introduced after the pandemic was declared. However, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec are meeting with reduced attendance, leaving many Members unable to participate. It is also usually up to the parties to decide who can be present. New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, and PEI will try to include all Members by reconfiguring their chambers to increase distancing or having some Members sit in the public and media galleries. However, some Members in these jurisdictions may still be unable to take part due to underlying health issues, family responsibilities, or travel difficulties.

While these resumed sittings are a welcome development, it is unclear how long they will continue, or if they will make up for time lost due to the pandemic shutdown. For instance, before the pandemic, the Manitoba legislature was scheduled to sit for 26 days throughout April and May. However, under current plans it will sit for just five days over the two months combined, with no further meetings scheduled until the fall.

*continued next page*



To date, British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador are the only jurisdictions to approve fully virtual or hybrid legislative sittings. British Columbia is the virtual leader among the provinces, with the province scheduled to resume sitting June 22<sup>nd</sup> using a hybrid physical/virtual format, with some Members in the chamber and others taking part remotely from their home communities or other rooms in the Legislature.

In June, Newfoundland and Labrador's Standing Committee on Finance will also begin its annual pre-budget consultations using virtual meetings, and virtual consultations are being held by the assembly's special committee to review the Privacy Act.

Newfoundland and Labrador approved the move at the May 5 emergency session to reduce travel and so that more MHAs can participate than is possible solely through physical distancing (just 15 of 40 MHAs were present on May 5). MHAs have given a Select Committee of Rules and Procedures Governing Virtual Sittings until July 1 to determine how the proceedings will unfold.

It's important that we draw lessons from the experience thus far — especially given the risk that legislatures may once again need to restrict their activities in response to future waves of the virus.

### **Oversight delayed is oversight denied**

- Keeping legislatures closed until the emergency response is over means that Opposition parties may eventually be able to hold governments accountable for their choices, but aren't able help to shape the response in real-time.
- It is therefore essential that provincial and territorial legislatures resume regular and

ongoing scrutiny of their governments' response to the pandemic in a manner that allows all Members of each legislature to take part.

- Legislatures should also develop contingency plans to allow scrutiny and oversight to continue should a second wave of infections force renewed restrictions on travel and public gatherings.

### **Technological reluctance is harming participation**

- Given the movement to virtual and/or hybrid sittings or committee meetings by national and subnational legislatures worldwide – not to mention major cities across Canada – it is surprising just how little use Canada's provincial and territorial legislatures have made of such technologies.
- By definition, in-person sittings with a reduced number of Members will result in some voices being excluded, especially those who are from more remote areas or have underlying health conditions.
- Some smaller assemblies may be able to accommodate all Members while respecting social distancing by seating some legislators in the public or media galleries. However, most lack the space, and legislators still may risk exposure during travel to and from sittings.
- Any jurisdictions that remain unable to physically convene in full should follow the lead of BC and Newfoundland and Labrador by authorizing either hybrid or fully virtual proceedings, at least for question periods.

# The Bank of Canada and crisis management

By Scott M. Aquanno

The COVID-19 crisis has caused a tectonic shift in Canada's public finances.

On April 1, the Bank of Canada (BoC) began a major bond-buying program, following the tracks of the U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks around the world. This sudden and dramatic shift in bank operations and strategy is the latest stage in the BoC's relationship with government debt, financial markets, and the day-to-day lives of all Canadians.

The current moment demands an understanding of the bank's powers, and its history, and a reinvigorated debate about its evolving responsibilities. The BoC has exercised its far-reaching powers to shape the economic evolution of Canada through three distinct eras. From 1938 to 1974, the bank purchased large amounts of government debt, thus creating the money needed to finance federal spending on the physical infrastructure and public programs that laid the foundation for Canada as we know it today.

Following 1974, as governments around the world moved to weaken labour protections and reduce support for public services as a strategy to boost business profits, the bank forced governments to fund debt through private channels, with the result that public debt rapidly outpaced economic growth.

Following the financial crisis of 2008-09, the bank adopted a more flexible approach, closely observing innovative moves by central banks around the world. These innovations added new tools to the bank's policy toolkit.

In 2020, for the first time since the 1970s, large-scale purchases of government bonds are once again central to BoC operations. And while the bank itself is, by statute, politically independent from government, its policy decisions are far from politically neutral in their impacts. Through its recent actions, the bank has helped meet the urgent needs of vulnerable workers, businesses, students, and provincial governments.

As the COVID-19 epidemic abates, the Bank of Canada's ability to continue on this course will be called in to question. Canadian governments will be forced to contend with unprecedented budget shortfalls and the presumed need to finance debt through private borrowing. Without innovative action, such conditions could produce a new age of austerity: even if public debt markets are vastly



different following the pandemic, governments will, nonetheless, face pressure to reduce spending and limit debt.

The same conservative forces that proudly restrained public investment following the 2008 financial crash – and used necessary stimulus spending as an excuse to reduce public spending – will once again make their voices heard. The bank would be wise to consider innovative financing mechanisms to give governments policy alternatives beyond austerity.

Austerity brings about suffering at the community level. It erodes the ability of government to support strategically important sectors of the economy. It impedes bold efforts to confront the climate crisis. For the BoC to help governments steer away from austerity will require innovative thinking and unconventional policies that further reimagine its relationship to private and public markets.

A logical next step is to provide more comprehensive support to provincial and local governments, given that they will soon face unheard-of budget shortfalls and lack the revenue tools available to the national government.

A more ambitious strategy involves the development of a new public bank, backstopped by, but independent from, the BoC, that aims to support public investment and give governments access to cheap credit over the long-term. This would address two central constraints facing the BoC. First, such a bank could be democratically organized, with local branches across the country, linked to regional and national offices capable of coordinating decisions and ensuring investment is efficiently allocated to projects

*continued next page*

Canadians truly prioritize. Second, it would avoid the potential or perceived limits on monetary financing created by the international monetary system and by the bank's need to maintain credibility.

Needless to say, a public investment bank of this nature could play a key role in the decarbonization of the economy and in addressing the environmental crisis more generally, for it could support projects typically underfunded by private investors. It could also support other kinds of publicly mandated investment in strategic industries and invest in equities with the aim of influencing corporate governance strategies. The point is not that such a reorientation of concerns should be haphazardly applied, only that it is hardly unreasonable in light of the bank's adaptability and de facto non-neutrality.

Even though the return of austerity politics following the crisis is far from certain – to be sure this remains an open political question – the crisis has demonstrated the important role that governments play in the economy and the many-sided limitations of neoliberal programs. It has

provided an x-ray of the precarious and vulnerable working conditions underpinning economic growth and exposed the vast socio-economic fault lines produced by years of cutbacks and market friendly policies. But it has also created openings for political alternatives, in part because it has provided powerful evidence about the feasibility of innovative spending programs and put central banks in the political crosshairs. This all seems to suggest that an ambitious extension of the BoC's responsibilities is in fact the most practical option at this juncture.

As Canadians face an uncertain future together, an ambitious extension of the BoC's responsibilities is the most practical option.

**(Writing for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Scott M. Aquanno is an Assistant Professor in the Political Science Program at Ontario Tech University in Oshawa, Ontario. Dr. Aquanno holds a Ph.D. in political science from York University.)**



## BRITISH COLUMBIANS BENEFIT FROM PERSONAL SERVICE

As B.C. continues to grow, so does the demand for personalized service. That's why there are offices in virtually every community, with over 15,000 insurance brokers province-wide, ready to serve. Brokers provide families with advice and better coverage for their homes, vehicles and businesses.

Working together in the community, brokers help families by providing information about safety, emergency preparedness and other local issues.

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

HELPING WHEN LIFE CHANGES



**INVESTING WHERE WE LIVE.**

WE ARE COMMITTED TO CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING OUR PRINCE GEORGE BREWERY TECHNOLOGICAL UPGRADES MEAN QUALITY PRODUCTS THAT TASTE BETTER & STAY FRESH LONGER

PACIFIC WESTERN BREWING

PWBREWING.NET

---

# Canada can trade in a league of small open economies

By Livio Di Matteo  
Fraser Institute

The effects of COVID-19 will transform the international world order and affect Canada's role in it.

First, the meteoric rise of China, with its aspirations of world leadership and greater respect, will come to a crashing halt. Despite the importance of China's market to the world economy, there will be an increase in transactions and transport costs as the hyper-globalized pre-COVID world takes a pause given concerns about virus transmission.

There will still be global trade and travel but there will be new rules and precautions operating as a form of non-tariff barrier with resulting losses for producers and ultimately consumers. For Canada, trade with China will continue given the importance of our resource inputs to their economy. But they will eventually need us more than we need them and this should shape our trade policy accordingly.

Of course, there's also the long-term fallout from the Chinese government's delay in alerting the world to the seriousness of COVID-19 while simultaneously scouring the planet for PPEs. The Chinese government's desire to be treated like a superpower runs counter to the leadership and stewardship we've seen over the last few months. With great power comes great responsibility, and perhaps the best example of it during the 20th century was the American assistance for European recovery. While self-interested, the Marshall Plan nevertheless helped former foes and allies alike rebuild their economies after the Second World War. Notwithstanding its later efforts, the Chinese government's behaviour during the early phases of the pandemic has eroded trust. For Canada, the new rule in its international dealings with China should be trust but verify.

Second, the abdication of global leadership and retreat by the United States is nearly complete, reinforced by its chaotic handling of its own public health situation. The last four years have seen a populist-fuelled retreat from this vision of America in the world and we will all be poorer for it. The COVID debacle in the U.S., due to a lack of coordination and response, sends a distressing message to its trade partners and allies. For Canada, there can be no retreat from dealing with the U.S. given its importance to our economy. But we can no longer assume that all American interests are automatically our own.



Third, given what has transpired with both China and the U.S., the Europeans and the United Kingdom will ultimately assert new leadership, engagement and involvement in world affairs though they will not always sing with one voice.

The ultimate result from all this uncertainty will likely be an even more competitive and multilateral world order with Russia, Saudi Arabia, India and Brazil constituting additional elements of change and disruption. Yet this world will also be a source of opportunity for a resource rich and diverse outward looking country such as Canada.

We can benefit, but we must be nimble and adaptable in this changing world. Canada must actively engage with all players, but on its own terms, and must seek like-minded allies who are also small trade-dependent economies with stable, democratic and market-oriented institutions. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and the Scandinavian countries can serve as champions of small open economies in this emerging and more competitive world order. A league of small open economies may seem naïve, but one should not underestimate the powerful effects of mice that roar.

**(Livio Di Matteo is a Senior Fellow at the Fraser Institute and Professor of Economics at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, where he specializes in public policy, health economics, public finance, and economic history.)**

# Question Period

*offbeat news, humour, and things that make you go "hmm..."*

## Psst ... wanna buy a statue?

INDIA (Reuters) – As India's 1.3 billion people stay at home to fight COVID-19, authorities have reported a surge in cybercriminal activity – including one person who attempted to sell the world's largest statue.



Federal home ministry officials told Reuters there has been an 86 per cent jump in cybercrimes over the past four weeks as the pandemic brought the globe to a halt.

An unknown online scammer tried selling the "Statue of Unity" for \$4 billion by claiming the proceeds would help a state government fund the response to coronavirus.

The statue portrays Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, one of the founding fathers of India and was inaugurated in October 2018 in Kevadia, in the western state of Gujarat. It's almost twice the height of the Statue of Liberty in New York.

## The bass violin case was a fugitive

TOKYO (Reuters) – Yamaha Corporation has warned people not to try and squeeze inside musical instrument cases after reports former Nissan Motor boss Carlos Ghosn fled Japan concealed inside one.

"We won't mention the reason, but there have been many tweets about climbing inside large musical instrument cases. A warning after any unfortunate accident would be too late, so we ask everyone not to try it," the Japanese company said in a post on its Twitter account.



Ghosn – who is accused of hiding earnings, transferring investment losses to Nissan and misappropriating company funds – escaped from Japan for Lebanon. Japanese authorities have vowed to pursue him and have issued an international wanted notice for him and his wife Carole.

## What's Tory blue and now an artifact?

Last month we reported in QP that Ontario's newly-designed, Tory-blue license plates bombed.

Critics said the new plates – the same color as Premier Doug Ford's Progressive Conservative Party – were ugly and unreadable at night. Also, drivers wanted their original licence slogan – "Yours to Discover" – resurrected. They scorned the new slogan, "A Place to Grow."

Now, we can report that the naysayers have won the day. The plates are being recalled and the original plates and slogan have been restored while the government gets it right.



## Sign of the times

The El Arroyo restaurant, located in Austin Texas, is known for great Tex-Mex food, a wicked sense of humour and their low tech portable sign. The messages are updated daily and have become the subject of numerous websites and at least three books.

A recent sign said it best for all of us.



30 years ago this month

## The Death of the Meech Lake Accord

On Sunday evening, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1990, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the 10 provincial premiers marked the third anniversary of the Meech Lake Accord at a dinner in the architectural splendour of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec.

But no one was celebrating over the shrimp, beef and fiddleheads. Three of the leaders – New Brunswick's Frank McKenna, Manitoba's Gary Filmon and Clyde Wells of Newfoundland – had been elected after the accord was struck. They all had expressed serious reservations about it. As a deadline approached, the deal was unravelling.

Twenty days later, the Meech Lake Accord was dead. Canada then embarked on a half-decade of mistrust and disillusionment that brought the country to the edge of destruction.

The Quebec government had stood aside when the new constitution was signed in 1982. Supporters of the Meech Lake Accord said they wanted to set that right, to bring Quebec back into the Canadian family. Under the accord, the constitution would be modified to designate Quebec a “distinct society.”

The Quebec National Assembly ratified Meech Lake on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1987. For it to take effect, the country's other 10 parliaments had three years from that date to sign onto the arrangement. For a while, passage of the accord seemed inevitable.

But only for a while. Resistance built and support plummeted as a deal done in the dark came into the light. Former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, as opposition leader, poured scorn on Mulroney and the accord. Trudeau said an overly timid prime minister was giving the country away to the provinces. By the beginning of June 1990, almost three-quarters of the Canadian people agreed with Trudeau.

Mulroney worked furiously to retrieve the momentum during a six-day negotiating marathon that followed the dinner on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. McKenna came onboard. The other two dissident premiers each agreed to hold a vote in their legislatures. They did so, however, without enthusiasm.

The votes in Winnipeg and St. John's never took place. As a protest against the accord's lack of attention to



Indigenous issues, Elijah Harper, a Cree member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, said a soft but emphatic “no” to Gary Filmon's request for unanimous consent to put Meech onto the floor for debate. Clyde Wells, an outspoken opponent of the accord, found Harper's stance highly convenient. If there was not to be a decision in Manitoba, a vote in Newfoundland would be irrelevant.

Frantic federal-provincial negotiations continued right up to the deadline of June 23<sup>rd</sup>. They were not helped by Mulroney's admission, in a rash interview with the *Globe and Mail*, that he had deliberately left his final attempt to forge a consensus – “to roll all the dice” – to the last minute. Mulroney had given his opponents the moral high ground.

It became a national parlour game: Who had killed Meech Lake? In *A Deal Undone* journalist Andrew Cohen concluded that the politicians may have held the dagger, but that the whole country was an accomplice. “As much as English Canada misunderstood Quebec, and it did, Quebec misunderstood English Canada. It was predictable that Meech Lake would come to represent the flashpoint in a clash of wills.”

A Quebec commentator recalled that “the collapse of Meech was as close to an apocalyptic event as can be imagined in peacetime. The massive river of blue and white that flowed through Montreal for the fête nationale parade that weekend was proof Quebecers wanted the death of Meech avenged.”

A direct line runs from June 1990 to the 1995 Quebec referendum, the day when Canadians almost lost their country.

**(The Canadian Encyclopedia)**