

Jim: “Keep my obit simple ... no sentimental stuff”

By Stephen Hume

Jim Hume, the irascible reporter, loved to get his descriptive teeth into the pomp and circumstance of a funeral for a deserving public figure and then yank the heartstrings, but Jim Hume, the man, wanted nothing of the sort for himself.

“Keep my obit simple, keep it short, stick to the facts, no sentimental stuff,” he instructed when told that his hospital bed was surely the boat that would carry him across the River Styx.

He'd have been the first to say that his death on April 13 at the age of 98 did not mark the end of an era in British Columbia journalism. Jim was of the firm view that life's a constantly unravelling story – the only one with real legs, he liked to say – and reporters keep reporting it from one generation to the next as they have since Herodotus. But, his death certainly closed a remarkable chapter in the story.

Jim covered politics in BC for 70 years. He was still providing unsolicited advice to premiers and cabinet ministers when he departed.

The first politician he interviewed was then-BC Premier Boss Johnson. From that start, Jim then bagged the next 11 premiers, too. He covered prime ministers from Louis St. Laurent to Stephen Harper.

He wangled the Boss Johnson interview that got him started in the newspaper game while delivering bread to the premier's house as a driver for McGavin's bakery. Before that, he'd worked at a BapCo Paint factory, hand-logged old-growth timber west of Sooke and on the Saanich Peninsula, and crewed a scow that motored from lower Johnson Street on Victoria's Inner Harbour past the Legislature Buildings, where he later worked, to deposit the city's reeking overnight garbage in the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

“Same job, different locale,” he liked to quip after reporting on yet another careful political speech of platitudes and talking points.

He had a standing bet on the Grey Cup – he always bet the West – with Prime Minister Lester Pearson.

Some premiers swore at him, but they all respected him. He was hard and uncompromising in his pursuit of a story but also uncompromisingly fair in his reporting of it.



Jim became such a fixture of the Press Gallery that he was eventually granted a lifetime membership. He was given the Bruce Hutchison Award for lifetime achievement by the Jack Webster Foundation. He got the Queen's Jubilee medal for his community work which ranged from donating more than a thousand pints of blood to the Canadian Red Cross to working with prison inmates with the John Howard Society.

Fifty years ago, when approached by a group of teenagers, he helped them found the Velox Rugby Football Club, serving as the first president – the team won its league championship the first year and went undefeated the second.

He could write about anything and did, from lacrosse games to flower shows to a quiet but deeply philosophical janitor at Alberni's Indian Residential School named George Clutesi.

He wrote about the trauma of packing the carbonized body of a child burned in a plane crash out of the bush, about the pair of grave robbers who terrorized a small Vancouver Island town, about the legendary basketball referee who moonlighted as city manager (or was it the other way around?). He tracked down a BC man who had executed Irish pacifist Francis Sheehy Skeffington in the street during Dublin's Easter Rising in 1916.

He drank tea with Queen Elizabeth in Victoria, beer with the Irish Republican Army in Belfast, too much scotch with actor John Wayne at Boat Harbour.

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Her Honour

The Honourable Janet Austin, OBC

Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia

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

Thank You and Miscellany

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From the Editor's Desk

Jim Hume's boys have been inundated with expressions of love and loss. Nic emailed this: "Ah, there have been a lot of tears over the past days. I've been taking a lot of solace in the fact that Dad lived so well, and fully independently, until his last couple of days. Very, very few people can say that."

In the pages of this issue of *Orders of the Day*, we celebrate his life ... and what a life. My thanks to the *Sun's* Vaughn Palmer and the *T-C's* Les Leyne for their help. You can find their excellent tributes in their newspapers, tributes that would have humbled Jim.

Pre-COVID, over lunch in the splendid Shield and Dragon English Pub at his handsome digs at the Berwick Royal Oak, Jim remarked that he was living in a train station, standing on a platform where he and his fellow aging ticket holders waited for the last train out of town.

Jim was not being morbid; he was just being Jim, an in-your-face realist. It certainly wasn't a knock on Berwick; he was a major booster of the facility, and the kind attention afforded him. Simply put, he was acutely aware of his mortality and, thus, the importance of his remaining time amongst us. That awareness did not depress him; it encouraged him to keep on wordsmithing as long as he could approach his weekly deadline with clarity, purpose and inquisitiveness.

More and more, Jim used his blog, *The Old Islander*, to remind us that we are condemned to repeat the crimes and failings of humanity as long as we refuse to learn from the lessons of history. As a teenager in England during the German blitz, he knew the price of freedom, peace and dignity was dear indeed. In this issue, Jim's final blog is our History Page piece, a tribute to his focus and perspective.

Don't forget to fill out the mail-in member survey on Page 16 or take advantage of our newly streamlined – press "SUBMIT" – version on the formerbcmla.com website in the News & Events section.

The President's Report

Along with all readers of OOTD I was saddened to learn of the recent passing of Jim Hume. He was an extraordinary journalist who wrote so well until almost the very end. His contributions to OOTD added much to this publication. Our condolences go out to his family.

A column by Jim Hume written as recently as March 25, 2022, commented on the futility of the war in Ukraine. Entitled "A Never-ending Tragedy," it closed with a verse he'd learned many years ago: "War begets poverty, poverty peace. Peace begets plenty and riches increase, but riches bring pride, and pride is war's ground, and war begets poverty, and so we go round." I thought this aptly captured the precursor to wars and, sadly, the almost inevitable nature of this scourge.

As the war in Ukraine has continued, the immense human suffering continues, even though the world's media has moved on a bit and there isn't the same focus as there was in late February and early March.

Similarly, the atrocities carried out against the Uyghurs in China, or the massacres carried out by Boko Haram in Central Africa seldom make the news. Maybe it's because we find conflict inconvenient to our privileged lives, or maybe it's because of our limited attention span ... but the suffering continues. We need more Jim Humes to remind us of the true nature of humanity.

Jim Hume had lived through the ravages of war in England in the 1940s. He knew of what he spoke. He will be missed.



John Les, President

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Jim Hume

His friends ranged from Frank Calder, the Nisga'a hereditary chief whose court challenge half a century ago forced Canada to recognize aboriginal title. Emery Barnes and Rosemary Brown, BC's trail-blazing Black politicians, union leader Jack Munro and premiers as different in point of view as socialist Dave Barrett and uber capitalist Bill Bennett were all on a first-name basis with him.

Jim was an old school reporter who stuck to the principle that reporters belong in the background, not the foreground – that reporters like him told stories about what they witnessed and that the best reporters never wanted to become part of the story.

And yet here he is, the story, no way around it, and I, as the eldest of his six sons and the one specifically tasked by him to write it, I guess I'm inescapably part of this story, too, no way around that, either.

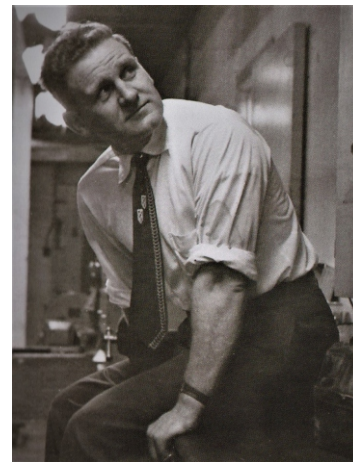
So maybe, before getting to the unsentimental facts, I'll tell a story about the two of us that illuminates his commitment to the reporter's trade.

I was 17, and I'd parlayed my job as editor of my school newspaper into a freelance gig covering high school sports for the weekly newspaper in the small Alberta town of Stony Plain. He was gruff about my lack of diligence in math and chemistry but pleased that I took the newspaper stuff seriously. He'd started his newspaper career as a sports reporter, too, advancing from writing freelance features for *The Islander* section of *The Victoria Daily Colonist* under the byline Mark Stirling to a full-time column with *The Nanaimo Free Press: On the Rebound with Jim Hume*.

One black, sub-zero night, I was on my way from the high school gym where the Memorial Marauders basketball squad had just defeated somebody. There was blowing snow. The wind chill was cruel. Parka hoods were up. Windshields were frosted. I stepped into a crosswalk where I was hit by a car driven by one of my classmates, torpedoed into a snowdrift from which I was extracted, bloody and unconscious from a head injury.

I awoke in hospital, my head wrapped in a mummy-like shroud, my memory of the accident blank except for the part where I was on my way to file a story, which I clearly hadn't done. Jim raced to the hospital from the newsroom at *The Edmonton Journal*, made sure I was stable, reassured my mother, returned to the accident scene with the RCMP constable, found my bloodied copy and crumpled scoresheets in the snow and made sure I met my deadline.

Jim was born December 27, 1923. He was the fourth of five children – only two would survive childhood – born to a disabled First World War veteran and a farmer's daughter.



Jim on the job at The Nanaimo Daily Free Press in 1955 (above left) and The Edmonton Journal in 1963 (above right.)

They had married in 1917 after the soldier was discharged, unfit for further service due to wounds. His father lost an eye, a shell fragment had blown away a shoulder blade, and he'd been shot in the thigh and through the throat.

Thomas Dodds Hume was a professional soldier serving in India when his regiment was sent first to Nuneaton to re-equip, then to the disastrous Gallipoli Landing. His 1st Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers earned six Victoria Crosses that morning but at an enormous cost – more than 600 of its 1,100 men fell in a few hours.

Ann Startin was the daughter of a local farmer. She was 22, worked by day in a munitions factory and, after her shift, volunteered, helping nurse the grievously wounded who had been evacuated to a hospital in Nuneaton, just down the road from Coventry, itself a medieval cathedral city refashioned into an armaments hub.

Jim was born in the backroom of a poor brick row house. There was no electricity. No telephone. No radio. Heat was from a coal grate. Travel to his grandad's farm was on the back of a pony cart, feet dangling above the cobblestones. A man on a bicycle rode through streets with a long pole, lighting the gas lamps.

Yet Jim died managing his own website, blogging and posting his usually calm but sometimes trenchant commentary. In his last weeks, he was observing for his internet readers the parallels and differences between 1939 and 2022.

He heard the announcement of war with Hitler on a radio his mother had taken years to buy on a layaway plan, hoarding pennies and farthings. He watched the invasion of Ukraine unfold in real time on Twitter and Instagram and wrote about it in posts on Facebook.

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And as he watched the suffering in Mariupol, he said it reminded him of the night the German Luftwaffe sent more than 500 bombers to destroy Coventry. By morning, two-thirds of the city's buildings had been damaged, and a new word had been coined "Coventration," bombing a city's core with sufficient intensity to create a firestorm.

The images, Jim said, triggered memories of the sound of bombs walking toward him across neighbourhoods; the seven factory workmates killed when a bomb exploded in the cafeteria where they were having tea after work – he hadn't stayed because his mother needed him at home; the sight of a neighbour's little daughter lifeless in the gutter with her yellow hair streaming out in the rain; the tickering sound incendiary bombs made when dropped by the thousands; his war-wise father stopping him from joining his first aid crew and rushing to the city burning on the horizon because, the old man said, "You don't run into a barrage, you wait until it lifts. You're no use to anyone as another casualty. Is that what you want to be? Somebody's problem?"

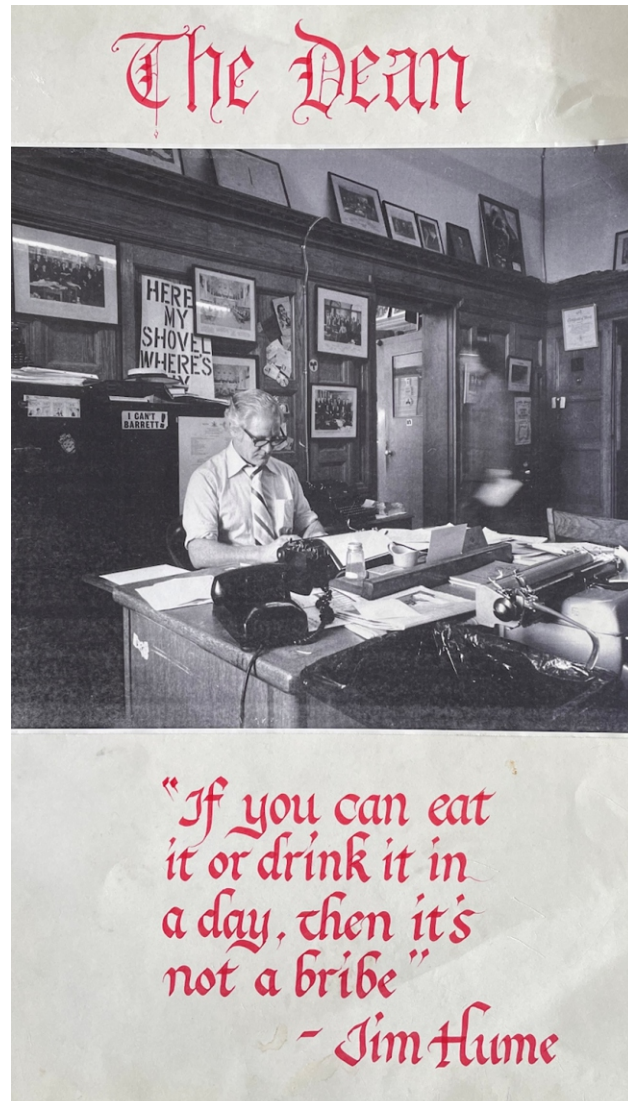
It was an admonition and advice he often gave his own sons.

In that sense, Jim often said, he'd been witness to an abruptly changed world in which nations waged total war against civilian populations – Coventry, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Aleppo, Mariupol. As a 16-year-old, one of his jobs was tying together the thumbs and big toes of civilian bomb fatalities so they'd be more manageable for stacking when rigor mortis set in. As an adult, he visited Hiroshima to remind himself that total war does not respect race or nationality and is waged by all against all.

At 18, deeply religious, he refused to take up arms and was sent to a conscientious objector's prison camp to work as a field hand, harvesting Brussel sprouts. His cellmates were a conductor of the Welsh national orchestra, a Communist Youth League organizer, and a professor of classical antiquities. The eloquent debates, fierce arguments and outright fights were, he said, a superb education for a teenager who'd never thought about such things as internal colonization, working-class rights, and the common stereotypes used to propagandize racism as a tool of imperialism.

He emigrated to Canada in 1948 aboard the *RMS Aquitania*, the ship that had carried the wounded back to Britain after Gallipoli, landed in Halifax and set out for BC with his wife, Joyce, pregnant with their second child and with me, 18 months old.

In Victoria, he took the only work he could find, driving the garbage scow. Later, he went logging with a double-bitted axe and a misery whip. Next, he delivered bread to the wealthy back doors of Uplands.



Then came his big break, the interview with Boss Johnson. He was offered a job as a sportswriter in Nanaimo, was asked to open a bureau for the paper in Alberni where a fifth son was born, went to *The Penticton Herald* as managing editor, then to *The Edmonton Journal* to write politics before returning to write for *The Victoria Daily Times*, serve as News Director at CFX Radio, then *The Victoria Daily Colonist* and eventually *The Daily Times-Colonist* when the papers merged.

He was divorced from his first wife, Joyce Potter, and later married Candide Temple with whom he had a sixth son. He was predeceased by both Joyce and Candide and is survived by sons Stephen (Susan), Timothy, Mark (Margaret), Andrew (Buni), Jon (Chrystal) and Nic (Anna) and more than a dozen grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

A short, simple obit he did not get. But that's his fault. He shouldn't have lived such a full and eventful life.

Jim Hume - Tributes in passing

Jim Hume – A life well lived ... in full measure

I delivered the paper when I was a kid, so I threw Jim Hume onto doorsteps. I read Jim Hume as a student; I read Jim Hume as a member of the Legislature, and I read Jim Hume as premier.

I didn't always agree with him, but to have his vast knowledge of events in and around British Columbia, particularly from a Victoria perspective, has been really extraordinary.

That was a life well-lived, observing and commenting on the events of our time, that's what journalists want to do, and Jim did that in full measure.

Premier John Horgan

Old school ... first get it right

Jim Hume was a legend in journalism. He was old school in the very best meaning of the term.

I first met Jim shortly after being elected in 1991. He always took time to chat; was always interested in what was going on. I remember him saying to me what was important in journalism was to "get it fast, get it first, but first get it right" when the day was finished.

I would sometimes head up into the gallery, and he'd be pounding out his column on a typewriter, with a bottle in the drawer!

I'll always remember at the press gallery dinner, at the end of the evening, he would usually break into a chorus of the hymn "Jerusalem."

Journalism and BC are poorer with his passing.

Mike Farnworth

No pulling the wool over his eyes

I first met Jim Hume when I was 19 years old, working my way through university by serving beer in the Colony Pub at the corner of Hillside and Douglas in Victoria. (Yes, of course, I lied about my age. Didn't we all in those days?)

It was a short walk from the *Times-Colonist* where Jim worked, and he regularly stopped for a beer after work. Sprinkled amongst our many conversations on current affairs, he regularly gave the lecture: "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" – referring not only to where I was working but the company I was keeping at the time.

The next time I saw Jim was in the corridors of the Legislature, shortly after I was elected MLA in 1991. We both enjoyed a laugh as he repeated: "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?"

Jim Hume was a giant amongst Press Gallery journalists. There was no pulling the wool over his eyes. He saw through the most subtle political agendas – but he always used such wit and grace when he chose to thrust and turn the knife.

Over the 55-plus years I knew Jim Hume, my memories of him are consistent: He was a genuine and truly honourable man who had an incredible gift with words, which he always used with honesty and integrity.

Jim once told me he wanted to die with a pen in his hand. With the support of friends like our esteemed editor, he came pretty close. That his last column is on such a topical issue as Ukraine is a testament to that. Still up to date at age 98. Wow!

Joan Sawicki

He honoured history so much

Jim was a gentle giant of journalism, and his legacy is substantial. He interviewed people in his career that some people today cannot even remember. He left the AFMLABC's newsletter a legacy in the pieces that he did for us and in the pieces he wrote for thousands of readers of many newspapers across our country, as well as his other writings.

I loved that he respected and honoured history so much. We were blessed to have been able to know him. I don't know all of his six sons. I do know the writings of Steve and Mark, who inherited his gift for writing.

Penny Priddy

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Sitting in his kitchen in the middle of the night

"You had best avoid the likes of Jim Hume and Marjorie Nichols." That was some of the first advice I received as a young, newly appointed assistant to the Honourable Alex Fraser. Thank God I didn't take it. I still miss Marjorie, who left us far too early, but fortunately, my friendship with Jim went on for almost 45 years.

There were my work dealings with him, but then there was sitting in his kitchen in the middle of the night enjoying his scotch while sampling homemade clam chowder, quite possibly after a night out with our mutual pal, the Honourable Don Philips.

Or, finding ourselves the only people still up, again in the middle of the night, again with scotch, on BC Ferries' Queen of the North sailing down from Prince Rupert on another of those Bill Bennett Cabinet Tours. There are great memories of escapades, challenges and even tragedies, but my time with Jim was always enjoyable, educational, and often fascinating. I learned so much from him. Jim had one of the most curious minds, and it was full of fascinating information that was truly global in scope and his grasp of history remarkable.

He never ceased to amaze me with the breadth of his knowledge and ability to apply historical facts to current public affairs to provide context. That made him not only an influencer of public opinion through his columns, but Jim's view mattered with his colleagues in the gallery and, yes, often influenced how they might treat a story.

His never-failing wit didn't hurt either. I always gave him a bad time about working for the Times Communist but never missed his byline regardless of where it appeared, including in *The Old Islander* all these years later. I want to thank Brian Kieran and Donna Hains for the support they provided Jim with his more recent columns.

Pre-COVID, Ramona and I had lunch with Jim in his pub and enjoyed lots of laughs and memories of times gone by and friends no longer with us. We were planning on a repeat. Now we will toast him, often! Jim Hume was truly the captain of his soul.

Jess Ketchum



Jim in the Gallery (1976.)

Never try to set your hook too early

There they sat. Pounding away on typewriters, phones cradled to their necks. Scribbling in notebooks. No one looked up as I entered the Press Gallery for the first time in the spring of 1973.

I blurted out: "I'm looking for Andy Steven"... hoping that one of these curmudgeon-like characters might respond. No one flinched, but then one who appeared to be the oldest and grumpiest caught my eye and uttered: "He's not here," and immediately turned back to his work.

Another scribe, Charlie La Vertu, got up from his desk, opened a filing cabinet from which he produced a flagon of red wine, poured himself a drop in his pewter chalice and said: "Help yourself ... Andy will be around sooner or later." It was around 10:30 a.m. I responded: "Jeeze, don't you think it's a little early to be drinking?"

The old grumpy guy got up from his desk, looked me in the eye and with a sly grin said: "Son ... what does time have to do with drinking?" That was Jim Hume. I quickly replied: "Nothin', I guess?" Hume: "Right answer."

As a rookie BCTV News film cameraman, I found there was sometimes a mild level of snobbery among some gallery members towards my kind. This was never the case with Jim. I eventually became a full-time member of the Press Gallery and great friends with Jim. It was a relationship that survived through the ups and downs of all these years. He was a mentor who counselled me in many things such as: Never tolerate a BSer, never lie and, most importantly, never try to set your hook too early when buck tailing for bluebacks in Brentwood Bay on frosty November mornings.

Russ Clifford

Canadians' trust in democracy is disturbingly low

By Frank Oberle
Writing in *Beyond the Hill*
Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians

These are not great days for governance in Canada. The level of trust Canadians have in their governments and democracy is disturbingly low, and many voters think that elections offer just one outcome – elected representatives who are seen to put ideology over the needs and expectations of citizens.

In the late 1960s, close to 80 per cent of Canadian citizens, like their American counterparts, expressed high levels of trust and support in their government. In the years since, some more recent surveys indicate numbers between 20 and 30 per cent. Citizens are losing faith.

When governments are not trusted, consequences present themselves: Increasing difficulty in obtaining citizen support for new directions and blanket rejection of government policies, regardless of their merit; citizen disengagement in democracy, leading to an increasingly uninformed electorate; and less compliance with government mandates and rules. All of this leads to poorer government performance because governments have more difficulty acting, which in turn leads to further mistrust of government – a vicious circle.

Canada's governance model has never been accused of being too open, engaging, transparent or consultative. In fact, recent governments can be accused of moving in the opposite direction. Yet those very values – openness, engagement, transparency and consultation – are a large part of what defines our modern society. These are the values that citizens are increasingly becoming used to in their everyday work and private dealings – except with their government.

To assess Canada's prospects in this climate of revolutionary change, we must first and foremost be assured of the stability of our political system. We must give Canadians cause to recover a much higher degree of trust and confidence lost during the last few decades. We must find a new commitment to the most basic and cardinal principles of democracy.

There are numerous models of electoral rules and procedures among the western democracies, from which certain components might be selected to construct a system for Canada which would be worthy of people's support, faith and trust – as an essential first step toward progress.

Given the enormous power our constitution has invested in the Office of the Prime Minister, it is nothing less than preposterous to leave it to just a tiny number of citizens (a select group of members of a political party) to cast a ballot in support of aspirations for leadership.

In a general election, it is not uncommon to see a prime minister installed in office with less than 40 per cent of the popular vote cast. Democrats elsewhere would consider it no less peculiar to elect candidates to the House of Commons or any of the provincial legislatures with anything less than 50 per cent of popular support.

Perhaps the best example to demonstrate the hazards of governing without the people's trust was the result of the 1993 election. Leading up to that election, it had become imperative that only a major fundamental reform of the taxation system could prevent a serious calamity to our fiscal and monetary integrity. In this instance, the government looked to its partners in the free market economies throughout the western world for inspiration and guidance. It was discovered that all of them, except the United States, rely on a consumption tax as the main pillar for their revenue requirements.

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I was a member of the Brian Mulroney cabinet at the time. Monitoring the public mood, none of us was under any illusion that we would be respected for choosing the right, over any politically expedient, approach with the imposition of the Goods and Services Tax. No one, however, would have anticipated the verdict delivered by the electorate. Not only did we lose 150 of the 152 seats we held at the beginning of the election, but the party itself did not survive the aftermath.

On the issue of electoral reform, one would need to focus on elements of the present system that would bring it into conformity with practices in most other jurisdictions and all the generally accepted principles of democracy.

The conclusion is hard to escape. Canada's current system of governance is simply not up to the challenges of today's society, much less tomorrow's. Instead of delivering innovative policy solutions, challenges such as electoral reform, citizen engagement, globalization of trade, climate change, health care, and economic inequality have become intractable issues.

Even more pressing, perhaps, are the disturbing trends toward the realignment of the world's superpowers' military, economic and ideological influence and strength which will manifest itself in the new world order.

If we want to take our rightful place in that order, we cannot avoid committing to a fundamental change in the order by which we govern ourselves. We need solutions. Now.



(The Hon. Frank Oberle was the Progressive Conservative member for Prince George – Peace River from 1972 to 1993.)

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Pandemic notwithstanding, deficits are disappearing

By David Macdonald
Senior Economist
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Despite COVID-19's devastating impacts on the country, provincial deficits are on track to disappear much faster than initially predicted.

In fact, most provinces are either already in a fiscal surplus position or will be in the next fiscal year as the economy recovers. And thanks to persistent, historically low interest rates, provincial debt payment-to-GDP ratios are also in better shape today than after the last recession. The figures are current as of March 1st, 2022.

Initial budget estimates were far off the mark: In the first year of the pandemic, most provinces initially overestimated the recession's impact on revenue and the amount of money they would spend on COVID-19 mitigation efforts – perhaps underestimating how much heavy lifting the federal government would end up doing. Every province ended up revising their initial budget estimates, but the bigger provinces made major revisions, particularly in 2021/22.

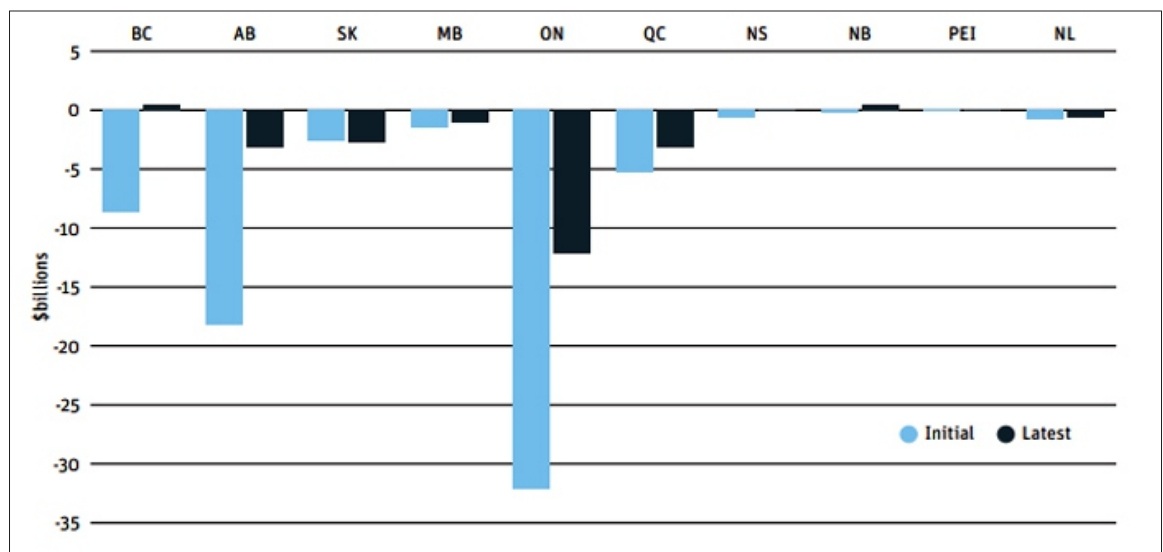
Ontario clocked in with the largest revision: Officials initially estimated a deficit of \$32.1 billion, which was later cut in half to the actual result of \$12.1 billion – a downward revision of \$20 billion. Alberta's revision to its projected deficit was proportionately larger: It fell from \$18.2 billion to \$3.2 billion, a revision of over \$15 billion. BC completely erased its \$8.7 billion deficit with the projection of a small surplus in 2021/22.

The most significant single factor behind lower deficits was the substantial underestimation of provincial tax revenue when the pandemic started. Typically during recessions, tax revenue declines as individuals and businesses make less and, therefore, pay less in taxes. However, the economic contraction had ended by 2021, during which nominal GDP grew by 12.5 per cent, followed by 6.6 per cent growth in 2022. The result: Tax revenue was \$59 billion higher than expected in 2021/22.

Deficits are now doing a dramatic disappearing act: Thanks to rapid economic growth and lower than planned spending, six provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick) will show surpluses this year or next. In the aggregate, all provinces cut their deficits in half in 2020/21 and by two-thirds in 2021/22.

In 2020/21, total provincial deficits were revised downward, from the original \$93 billion projection to the actual amount, \$48 billion. In 2021/22, the provinces' combined initial projected deficit of \$70 billion fell to \$22 billion – two-thirds less than the initial projection. Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and PEI should have a very manageable deficit to GDP – less than one per cent by the next fiscal year. At that level, even small changes in economic growth can quickly turn a deficit into a surplus. Saskatchewan will have a deficit-to-GDP ratio at or near two per cent in 2022/23. What's telling about provinces taking more time to balance their books is how much this may be a policy choice, unrelated to the impact of COVID-19. Ontario and Saskatchewan collect among the least in revenue (adjusted to the size of their economy).

continued next page



Initial vs. latest projections of provincial deficits, 2021/22

Pandemic tax cuts were counterproductive: Upside surprises in own-source revenue (money collected from business ventures, property taxes or other activities, including tax revenues) was the primary driver of deficit revisions in the first two years of the pandemic. If a province collected less in taxes as a proportion of GDP, to begin with, it would gain proportionally less if economic growth quickly recovered.

Consequently, it would register deficits for a longer period of time compared to other provinces. In fact, some low-revenue provinces further reduced their revenue during the first two years of the pandemic by handing out tax cuts. Ontario provided a dozen tax breaks since the start of the pandemic. Those revenue changes will cost the Ontario government \$1.35 billion in 2021/22, which is the equivalent of 10 per cent of the province's deficit that year. Saskatchewan reduced its revenue across several areas during the pandemic. In 2021/22, the total cost of these revenue reductions was \$591 million, which amounts to 22 per cent of Saskatchewan's budget deficit. While expenditures are often blamed for a deficit, in the case of post-COVID-19 deficits, revenue – not expenditures – is the cause of prolonged deficits in those provinces. The bottom line: Ongoing deficits past 2022/23 aren't being caused by the impacts of COVID-19; those deficits are being caused by a policy choice to not collect enough in taxes to cover provincial spending.

Despite new provincial debt incurred to combat COVID-19, the provinces are now in a better budgetary position than in 2009/2010 after the previous recession. Much lower effective interest rates have completely offset the impact of higher debt on provincial debt servicing costs in every province except Alberta. While seven out of 10 provinces have higher net debt-to-GDP ratios compared to

2009/10, nine out of 10 provinces are paying less interest, as a proportion of GDP, than they were after the last recession, which saved provinces \$6 billion in 2021/22 alone.

Bottom line: Despite early pessimistic estimates, the pandemic went easy on provincial finances. Revenue roared back far faster than initially hoped, primarily due to federal actions. This happened directly through massive new provincial transfers and indirectly in that strong economic growth rapidly drove up provincial tax revenue. With surpluses on the horizon or already here and low debt carrying costs, the provinces are in a solid position to reinvest after two very rough years for Canadians.

Long-term care improvements and health care system resiliency are areas in obvious need of public investment to combat future pandemic waves. Strong provincial finances should also serve other priorities, like addressing climate change or redressing inequality. Now that the worst has hopefully passed, it's time for the provinces to pass their good fortune onto their residents by building a more sustainable, resilient public service and supports system.

(David Macdonald joined the CCPA as its Senior Ottawa Economist in 2011, although he has been a long-time contributor as a research associate. Since 2008, he has coordinated the Alternative Federal Budget, which takes a fresh look at the federal budget from a progressive perspective.)



Turn to Page 16 for an important member survey

For many years, the highlight of the AFMLABC social calendar has been the annual banquet. Well, that came to a grinding halt in 2020 when COVID-19 turned our lives upside down and the gathering at Government House was cancelled. It was cancelled again in 2021 and at their March Zoom meeting, the Executive decided, with much reluctance, to forego an Association fall dinner again. It is simply impossible to predict, with any confidence, what lies ahead at the end of the summer.

To ensure the 2023 gathering is one to remember, the Executive does not want to proceed without member input.

Please respond to the survey on the back page. Clip it out and mail to the address shown. With the help of the Legislature Library staff we have posted this survey on our website (www.formerbcmla.com) and you can submit it with a click of your cursor rather than hassle with snail mail.

Letters

The OOTD Mailbag

In memory of His Royal Highness Prince Philip

Dear Editor:

In thinking of the life of HRH Prince Philip, Speaker Harvey Schroeder remembers:

It was a bright sunny day in Victoria when Mr. Speaker hosted Prince Philip for the Duke of Edinburgh awards and reception.

Harvey Schroeder stood on the steps of the parliament buildings, his black robe swirling around his ankles, awaiting the arrival of the Prince. He arrived on schedule, driving a beautiful, old convertible – in his shirt sleeves. He slowly got out of the car, adjusted his shirt sleeves, shrugged into his jacket, and walked around the car to meet Mr. Speaker on the steps of the building.

After the necessary formalities and greetings, the Prince stood and looked out at the blue waters of the inlet when Mr. Speaker turned to him and said: “Shall we go in?”

Prince Philip replied: “Sounds like we are going to jail.”

Where upon Mr. Speaker replied: “I am sure we can arrange it – if that is your wish.”

The Prince, with a twinkle in his eyes – smiled. The two men turned and walked up the steps together and into the building.

Ellamae Schroeder

(Harvey was the Chilliwack MLA – 1972-1986 and BC's 26th Speaker – 1978-82)

Political legacy: Daffodils and much more

Dear Editor:

A few days ago, my wife and I were travelling Highway #1 from Abbotsford to Vancouver. We were appreciating the respite from the rain, and she pointed out a plethora of bright yellow – so visible in many sections of the median.

Daffodils – thousands of them were brightening the way for commuters and road-weary truckers in the midst of grey asphalt and brown underbrush.

A florist by the name of Grace McCarthy many years ago initiated the idea of daffodils along the highway. She was an MLA and cabinet minister at the time, serving with Premier Bill Bennett in the latter years of Social Credit.

The daffodils are her legacy and an annual reminder of her simple but pleasant vision. In reality, though, few travellers will have any recollection of Grace McCarthy. She passed away in 2017, and only a few older citizens and former Socreds – like me – could even recall her name.

She was also influential in Expo 86 and the Vancouver Trade and Convention Center planning, but, again, her involvement will largely be forgotten.

Legacy is an emotive word, one that can cause us to reflect on our lives and the contributions we have made. All former MLAs – even current Members – will likely be mindful of how we might be remembered.

As an Abbotsford city councillor and regional district board member, I recall that my name was engraved on a number of plaques on civic projects throughout the community. Some of these plaques have since been discarded, and the buildings have been replaced by new and more modern facilities.

In our Legislature, there are large pictures everywhere of MLAs at their assigned seats. (I even can find myself in two or three.) With each passing day, however, the memory of these individuals will diminish.

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I am now inclined to think that legacy is more about the satisfaction of making a contribution through elected office, as opposed to personal recognition and enduring notoriety.

We do want to be remembered, of course, even after our passing, but, in general, such recollections – hopefully positive – will be predominantly limited to close friends and family. After all, who can even name their great grandparents?

While in elected office, whether federal, provincial or local, there is a degree of recognition that may be valued. Someone might notice us at the supermarket, or we are acknowledged at a public meeting in our community, but this is mainly superficial.

Our legacy, then, is the realization that we have worked hard for our constituents and have attempted to stand up for their interests.

We may not always be remembered by name; however, we can receive gratification knowing we have served for a season and contributed positively to our community, province and country.

Simon Gibson
(MLA, Abbotsford-Mission, 2013-2020)

We've Moved

(our post office box)

**Please note the Association's
new mailing address for your
future correspondence:**

**P.O. Box 30024
Reynolds P.O.
Victoria, B.C. V8X 1J0**

UVic awards two scholarships in the name of AFMLABC

Dear Ken Jones:

Happy Spring! I'm happy to say that campus is now busy with students, staff and faculty, all following COVID protocols and being respectful of space and provincial guidelines. But it doesn't really matter if students are learning at home or in the classroom. Their financial pressures don't go away.

However, some of this weight has been lifted because of donors like you. In fact, over 50 new awards for graduate and undergraduate students were created last year.

We have heard from hundreds of students with words of thanks, and here are just a few excerpts:

"This generosity has enabled me to pursue my academic goals and potential in a way that I did not think was previously possible due to financial constraints."

"Awards such as this make me feel very motivated to continue studying what I love and what I am passionate about."

"Your generosity is truly inspiring, and I hope that one day I will be able to give back to the community and help students achieve their goals, just as you have helped me."

"This bursary reminds me that hard work is rewarded and that there is so much kindness in the world."

We are pleased to inform you that the following students received \$830 Association of Former MLAs of BC. Student Scholarships this year: Karyn Hurlbut and Meghan Corbett

Your gift allows these students to focus on what is important, their studies. Thank you for your generosity. If you have any questions, please email me at agree@uvic.ca.

Heather Groppe
Donor Relations Agreement Officer, UVic

Hume's last *Old Islander*

Vladimir Putin has skipped a few history lessons

By Jim Hume

It is said that Russian President Vladimir Putin is a student of history. If that is true, he must have skipped a few study sessions during the years he was climbing the ladder in the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs – better known as the NKVD, later as the KGB, the “secret police” of Russia much favoured as the ultimate disciplinary arm of Joseph Stalin and treasured by Russian leaders including Putin.

Had he been paying attention during his years as a rookie cop, Putin might have learned from the ill-chosen suggestions written by Stalin in the early 1930s on how to control an unhappy peasantry and, later in the same decade, how to prevent a defeated, but not conquered, military force from rising against you.

In the opening paragraph of a detailed report on the great famine in Russia in the 1930s, Wikipedia tells us: “About 5.7 to 8.7 million people are estimated to have lost their lives. Joseph Stalin and other party members had ordered that “kulaks” were to be liquidated as a class and became a target for the state. The richer, land-owning peasants were labelled kulaks. They were portrayed as class enemies, which culminated in a Soviet campaign of political repression, including arrests, deportations, and executions of large numbers of the better-off peasants and their families from 1929 to 1932. Major contributing factors to the famine included the forced collectivization of agriculture as a part of the first five-year plan, forced grain procurement combined with rapid industrialization, a decreasing agricultural workforce, and several severe droughts.”

It happened before Putin was born. But the lesson remains. “Liquidating” a class of people is not an acceptable form of birth control; and will never erase a memory of betrayal and murder among those fortunate enough to survive.

In Ukraine, President Putin's invading army is concentrating on breaking and controlling civilian morale with terror. Poland sits just across the border and has a military much smaller than Russia's, but an alliance (NATO) with other nations and a memory for old grievances Russia has been trying to deny since 1945 when the Second World War ended.



Putin appears determined to muscle Russia back to the power it once held under Stalin by posing a threat to Poland. Nothing major, just a few rocket launchers, military close to the border and one missile fired from a distance and exploding just inside Ukraine. In the navy, it's called “a shot across the bows.” On land, it could be a version of “false flag” – a warning shot that could be construed as a threat.

If that was Putin's intent, Poland hasn't blinked. It has opened its doors wider to refugees. It has good cause to look Putin in the eye. Back in the First World War, Germany invaded Poland and launched an air attack on Warsaw that shocked the world.

Among the many savageries of that conflict is one still under discussion ... still high on Poland's settlement list. Old-timers may recall it. Several generations may have forgotten. But not Poland. It will never forget the Katyn massacre of more than 20,000 Polish military officers captured when Russia invaded Poland two weeks after Germany launched its Blitzkrieg.

Russia denied the charge until 1990 but refused to accept its classification as a war crime or act of murder. In November 2010, the Russian State Duma officially condemned Joseph Stalin as being responsible for the massacre. But, you can follow the detailed trail of little truth and fewer consequences with a reference to Google and these depressing historical footnotes: “Russia and Poland remain divided on the legal description of the Katyn crime;” and “archive searches are continuing” to hopefully provide “complete disclosure of Russian documents.”

I just hope nobody blinks while we are waiting.

When I think of Portugal, I think of stone

By Geoff Plant

(Excerpts from his travel blog “Feels Like Far”)

I think I'd rather have a nap than try to generate profundities about this little excursion, but there are two things to say.

One, we discovered that travel is possible again. And, by travel, I don't mean an excursion to Okanagan wine country, but long plane rides over oceans to places where English is not the first language ... It was the right place to come at this time: The vaccination rate in Portugal is very high – in the mid-90s – and for the most part folks are still wearing masks here, at least whenever they are inside. And, we've seen no evidence that the imposition of mask mandates has caused political strife. So, we've felt safe, and it's been fun to see people from all over the world here being tourists just like us.

Two, I took a picture today of one of the stone towers of the castle. I take at least one picture every day when the main subject is stone. Stone in a wall, stone carved into an image of a saint or king or cherub, stone as a bench or the facade or pillar of a building. In Portugal, stone is the surface of sidewalks and roads, too. Stone, in all these manifestations, is one reason I love Europe. Stone lasts. It's a visible, physical manifestation of a human urge to do things that last, so different from the prevailing ethic of my hometown Vancouver, where everything has to be new, always new, and then even newer. In Vancouver, on my street, houses are routinely torn down because they have become old in thirty, forty or fifty years.



(left) Stone ages slowly, often in ways that simply add beauty

(right) Portugal: Terracotta roofs, whitewashed walls and bright skies

In Europe, in places like the towns of Portugal, there are, of course, lots of new buildings, office towers of glass and steel, and high design which is as bright and shiny as can be imagined. But, you rarely have to look far before you realize that the store you just entered is attached to a medieval wall, that the road you're walking on was first built two millennia ago by the Romans, or that the lintel on the doorway dates from the 16th Century. Stone is not permanent. It ages, it wears, it discolours. But it does so slowly and often in ways that simply add beauty because character matters.

When I think of Europe, and the reasons why I love to come back, and the reasons why I am so glad we were able to make this trip, I think of lots of things: Terracotta roofs, whitewashed walls, bright skies, cold glasses of beer or wine at cafes, museums, art, gardens, boxwood hedges, shutters, wrought iron balconies, laundry hanging out to dry on wrought-iron balconies, narrow lanes and streets that change their name every few blocks, crumbling masonry, espresso coffees at any time of day, pastries, sunsets, tree-shaded courtyards, cloisters, columns, statues and fountains, graffiti, and of course people, polite people, people with senses of humour, people who forgive your inability to speak their language while they apologize for the difficulty they have with ours, and the food and the long walks and the days spent somewhere where the first thing you think of is simply that it's just wonderfully different.

And, I think of stone.

(Geoff Plant represented the riding of Richmond-Steveston for the BC Liberal Party. He served as Opposition Justice Critic. Plant served as the Attorney General of British Columbia and Minister responsible for Treaty Negotiations from 2001 to 2005.)



Member survey

We're planning the next celebration ... with your input

The pandemic has forced members of the AFMLABC to endure two years of not so splendid isolation and this year makes three. At their March Zoom meeting, the Executive decided, with much reluctance, to forego an Association fall dinner again. While they are excited about the relaxation of many COVID-19 mandates, it is impossible to predict, with any confidence, what lies ahead at the end of the summer.



The annual banquet, held for many years at Government House, takes months of planning and promotion. Just finding a speaker of prominence prepared to donate his or her time and effort is an annual challenge. Ensuring members and guests turn out in robust numbers is also a hurdle that has serious budget impacts.

To make sure the 2023 gathering is one to remember, the Executive does not want to proceed without member input. Please consider the following questions and mail your replies to:

The 2023 Gathering, P.O. Box 30024, Reynolds P.O., Victoria, B.C. V8X 1J0.

1. Should the 2023 event be held at Government House or somewhere on the Mainland that is more accessible to the majority of members? Do you have a venue in mind? Please include your place of residence (and name, if you wish).

2. When is the best time for a get together ... September as usual or perhaps in the spring, April or May?

3. Should the evening feature a full, formal, sit down dinner, as has been the case at Government House, or would a more casual hors d'oeuvre/finger food presentation be more appropriate?

4. Is a prominent speaker important? If so, any suggestions? Is there some other kind of event feature that would appeal to you?

5. The bar service at Government House has been hosted at the expense of the Association. Would a no-host bar be acceptable?
