

UNMASKING THE FUTURE

2021 Environmental Scan

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TABLE OF

Contents

- 3** Introduction
- 6** Scanning the Horizon
- 8** A Roaring, but Shackled, Twenties
- 11** A Political Forecast: Shifting Polarities
- 15** A Civil Society Forecast: Stepping Up and Stepping Out
- 19** Feminizing Finance: The Age of She-economics
- 21** The Business of Government? Whatever We Want it to Be
- 24** Toward Universal Child Care: The Key to a She-covery
- 26** Flattening the Carbon Curve, Flattening the Rockies
- 28** Exorcising the Resource Curse: The Emerging Post-Carbon
Alberta Powerhouse
- 31** Clocking in to the 21st Century: A Workplace Revolution
- 34** A New (Digital) Deal
- 37** From Pity to Parity: Revisiting Income and Social Supports
- 39** Old Canada: Do We Stand on Guard for Thee?
- 42** The Experience(d) City: From a Place to Work to a Place to Live
- 44** Full Speed Ahead: The Electric, Eclectic Future of Transportation
- 46** There and Back Again: Rediscovering the Community Policing
Paradigm
- 48** Not OK, Boomer: Polarization or an Epidemic of Gullibility?

Introduction

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...”

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

“While the COVID-19 pandemic affects us all, the health impacts have been worse for seniors, essential workers, racialized populations, people living with disabilities and women. We need to improve the health, social and economic conditions for these populations to achieve health equity and to protect us all...”

Dr. Teresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada¹

On January 23, 2020, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists pushed the *Doomsday Clock* to 100 seconds to midnight (the first time in its 75-year history that the hand was close enough to be measured in seconds). In their media release, the scientists explained that the Clock had been moved “because the means by which political leaders had previously managed these potentially civilization-ending dangers are themselves being dismantled or undermined, without a realistic effort to replace them with new or better management regimes. In effect, the international political infrastructure for controlling existential risk is degrading, leaving the world in a situation of high and rising threat.”²



This was nearly 50 days before the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization, now having infected over 65 million people and producing 2.2 million fatalities. As the positivity rate in Alberta pushed past 10% into the end of 2020, the province endured a white-knuckled December.³ The economic slump that accompanied the pandemic, and the public health response to it, has been the worst downturn since the Great Depression. 135 million people worldwide have been pushed into poverty, 1.6 billion children have been taken out of classrooms, unemployment is sky high, and entire industries have been decimated. Students, women, and people of colour have been hit particularly hard by the economic fallout of the pandemic. Artists are in a surreal livelihood limbo, and arts groups and many sport and recreation organizations have seen their business models collapse.

Some have thrived: Jeff Bezos is \$90 billion richer, Elon Musk is \$69 billion richer, and Mark Zuckerberg is \$46 million richer, even as his company is complicit in leaving the state of global democracy on a knife's edge.⁴ But businesses that rely on in-person experiences are shuttering, and digital divides are compounding inequality. We've ended up using 250-300% more single-use plastics than we did before COVID-19, with potentially devastating consequences for our oceans, wildlife, and health.⁵ Public transit ridership has cratered. The financial precarity of the entire social impact sector, which employs more people than oil and gas in Alberta, has also been laid bare. Donations, earned revenue and volunteering are down. The federal government's budget more than doubled in 2020 to keep the economy from collapse. We are living through what Bill Gates terms “mutually exacerbating catastrophes”.⁶

Adding to the misery in Alberta specifically was a worldwide collapse of oil prices that began in December of 2019, exacerbated by the pandemic, as travel, trade and energy demand slowed to a trickle. Then, starting in May, following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, a reinvigorated #BlackLivesMatter social movement spread through North America and across continents, drawing attention not only to anti-black racism, but also reigniting the conversation about the deep, systemic exclusion and diminishment of Indigenous Peoples. Meanwhile, certain tech, workplace and lifestyle trends that seemed distant and uncertain, have been rapidly accelerated. No matter how rosy the future looks by comparison to the unforgettable year that was 2020 – and there are many reasons for optimism peppered throughout this Scan – the world, our country, our province, and our city are forever changed.

Every social class in Canada suffers more sickness than the class above it. This has long been true, but as the Public Health Agency of Canada recently pointed out, it is all the more pronounced with COVID.⁷ Some of us can work from home, and can walk outside in our back yard or in our expansive, park-adjacent neighbourhoods; while others work side-by-side cutting meat or staffing supermarket checkouts, only to return home to cramped, over-crowded housing where “self isolation” is something other people have the luxury of doing on the other side of the tracks. The most at-risk are the homeless and those in congregate care settings: Long-term care facilities, homeless shelters, group homes, and prisons.⁸

Canada’s response has been generally competent, but far from world-leading. We have also had a front-row seat to the dysfunctional side of federalism, with a bewildering patchwork of provincial and regional rules and regulations flummoxing Canadians. We have also spent a lot more money than other countries to keep some semblance of normal. And in hindsight, we’ve failed, as have most countries, to make military-scale investments in pandemic preparedness. We mark the remembrance of the World Wars every November 11, but we clearly failed to remember the Spanish Flu, which killed five times the number of people as the concurrent Great War, infecting one third of the world’s population.

If concepts like “resilience” and “adaptive capacity” were abstract before, languishing in the idiomatic lingua of philanthro-speak, they are blindingly clear and necessary to all now. We are in the throes of a bewildering frequency, volume and array of recovery and rebuilding conversations: The hashtags - #BuildBackBetter, #JustTransition, #GreenRecovery - are met with enthusiasm in some circles and enmity in others.⁹ The *Overton window* of possible policy prescriptions has almost certainly not been this wide open since the end of the Second World War. Many long-cherished assumptions have been upended. But try as we might to imagine a return to “normal”, it simply will never happen, as the pages that follow in this scan outline, topic by topic. Normal was yesterday. Tomorrow will only be “what’s next”.

In a strange and twisted way, COVID-19 is an existential alarm for the survival of our species, insofar as we are interested in living within a safe, humane civilization. Not only has it caused us to pause, to take stock of things that are important in this world - family, security, life, nature (either revelling in them, or lamenting their absence). It has made us look at the role of public institutions, civil servants, and responsible government with a renewed respect.

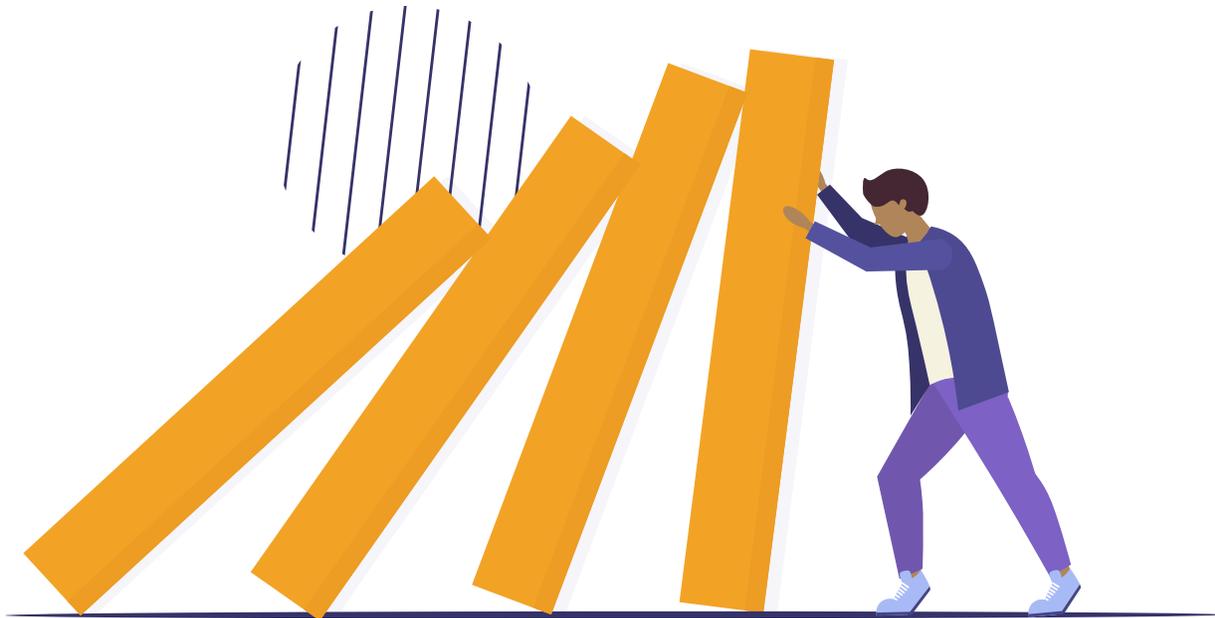
Societies that have responded well to the pandemic have strong social cohesion, good governance, informed and transparent leadership, and strong investments in public health. More frequently than not, those societies have been led by female heads of government. Taiwan, which dealt with the pandemic arguably better than any other country on earth, is a model of radical

transparency, openness and inclusion in governance at scale.¹⁰ It is also an example of the delicate dance between strong, proactive government and a strong, independent thicket of civil society organizations, large and small.

MIT economist Daron Acemoglu, speaking at the 2020 Queen’s Policy Forum on his recent book *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty* (co-authored with James Robinson), describes the narrow corridor that liberty must travel as between tyranny and chaos. The corridor is not between the walls of “free markets” and “big government”, a false binary that we’ve wasted more than a generation debating, with particular vigour in Alberta.¹¹ An ever-stronger civil society, philanthropy included, is necessary for balancing the ever-stronger power of both welfare states and corporate power. And a strong economy rests on, and is contained within, a strong society. A radical rebalancing of society in this vein, as Canadian management guru Henry Mintzberg and a growing chorus of economists are singing, is urgent and necessary.¹² Harvard economist Rebecca Henderson, for example, says that “we forgot that a prosperous and a thriving society is a stool with 3 legs”.¹³

There is also much more public empathy and support for many of the issues the philanthropic sector champions: Reform of long-term care, affordable housing, universal child care and early learning, as examples. There is more awareness and political will around issues that have been relative blindspots for philanthropy - systemic racism, addressing the benefits gap in precarious employment, and of course, the tsunami of change precipitated by the climate crisis, which will make the COVID pandemic look like a mere dress rehearsal.¹⁴

Accompanying this public interest and empathy is an awareness that we actually have far more choice - choice in policy instruments, in reallocating public expenditures and in shifting industrial production - than we previously were lulled into believing we had available to us. We now have an opening of the window of possibilities for once-in-a-generation public policy innovation, amounting to essentially a new ‘social contract’. The last Scan was titled *The Future is Made*, emphasizing the point that we are in collective control of our destinies. On reflection, this blithely ignored the possibility of a global pandemic. But then again, there is now ample evidence that the “inevitable” constraints on economic action and public policy are not inevitable at all. You can’t predict the future, but you can design it (well, much of it). Speculative design is a burgeoning new field, and calls for co-creation and co-delivery are everywhere, again where sectors overlap and with people living the reality on the ground.



The other great awakening for Canadian society is the realization that these issues are all interconnected. As physicist, systems theorist and deep ecologist Fritjof Capra, observes, "The more we study the major problems of our time, the more we come to realise that they cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means they are interconnected and interdependent."¹⁵ For example, consider how COVID-19 exposure is linked to physical proximity and pre-existing health conditions, which disproportionately affects the under-housed, which is connected to poverty, which is connected to food security, which is connected to agriculture, which is connected to extreme weather events, which is connected to climate change, which is connected to fossil fuel use, which is connected to oil and gas prosperity, which is connected to provincial fiscal capacity, which is connected to funding of health, arts and human service organizations. Yet, so much of our thinking and planning has been in a Cartesian, linear, mechanistic mode, including in philanthropy. Resilience and adaptation require holistic, integrative, interdisciplinary thinking that goes beyond a western positivist framework. This is why Indigenous inclusion is not simply a matter of reconciliation or right relations; It is a matter of our own survival and ability to thrive - in a different, less consumptive, less exploitive, less growth-obsessed, way. It is also worth recalling that it was First Nations communities who put in place the most robust, carefully thought-through back-to-school measures, far exceeding the confusing and contradictory gumbo of plans across provincial jurisdictions across the country.

How do we weather this storm well? How do we use this moment as a cathartic opportunity to let go of wasteful practices that degrade both ecosystems and human beings, and build back better than ever? Alberta has such an incredible wealth of natural assets, well beyond the fossilized organisms that have fueled the last century's prosperity. Now also lies the opportunity to invest in our diverse human assets. A low-carbon, high-innovation Alberta, where prosperity is broadly shared, including with future generations, is not utopian. It is urgent and necessary. While there may or may not be one last wild ride when the pandemic lifts and global demand for energy spikes again, the exorcism of the resource curse will be long, painful, and inevitable.

Edouard Morena from the EDGE Funders Alliance refers to the imperative of making "just transitions" Creating systemic change alternatives for a transition to a society that supports justice, equity and the well-being of the planet." There is a lot of conversation these days about "decolonizing philanthropy" or about the "unbearable whiteness of philanthropy". But it may be far more helpful to ask a simple question: Are we practicing our craft *to, for, with or of* the communities and Nations we purport to be allies of?

Beyond this, how will philanthropy help create prosperity for communities in a carbon-constrained world? How will it help rescue and strengthen democracy in a truth-constrained world? And, finally, how do we need to change our networks, our institutions and ourselves to get there?

Investment guru Jeremy Grantham cautions that as we consider "the race of our lives", where despair and complacency are equally unwarranted, we underestimate the severity and scale of the problem, and we also underestimate the potential and scale of the solutions.¹⁶ In this 21st year of the 21st century, the grandest of paradoxes is unfolding: It is truly the worst of times, and yet in some many ways, lying right under our nose, it is the best of times.

Scanning the Horizon

In March of 2015, at the request of The Calgary Foundation, the Institute for Community Prosperity provided a scan of major current socio-economic trends and developments, at the local, provincial, national and international scales, relevant to the work of the Foundation. New scans were then prepared in late 2016, late 2017 and late 2018. This is the fifth such scan. A scan was not produced in 2019, as instead we took a deep dive into one topic that we felt was critical to understanding the future of social good: Artificial Intelligence (AI).¹⁷

The 2021 scan, like the previous five scans (see the table that follows), is a selected and curated set of timely and topical issues, but it is far from comprehensive.

Topics Covered in Previous Scans

	2016 <i>If You Don't Like the Weather</i>	2017 <i>Into the Unknown</i>	2018 <i>Terra Cognito</i>	2019 <i>The Future is Made</i>
Economic Update and Forecast	●	●	●	●
Political Update and Forecast	●	●	●	●
Populism / Authoritarianism		●	●	●
Federal/Provincial Relations				●
Employment Precarity		●		
Fiscal Precarity (Alberta)	●			
Economic Innovation / Alternatives				●
Tech Trends (AI, Blockchain, etc.)	●		●	●
Climate Change	●	●	●	●
Trade			●	
Immigration			●	
Oil and Gas			●	●
Renewables and Energy Alternatives		●		●
Plastic				●
Nonprofit Sector Trends & Disruption				●
Data and Measurement	●		●	
Social Enterprise and Community		●		●
Economic Development				
Sharing Economy / Maker Movement	●			
Social Finance / Impact Investing	●		●	●
Social Innovation	●	●	●	●
Social R&D and Human-Centered Design	●		●	●
Systems Thinking and Collective Impact	●	●	●	
Youth Mental Health			●	
Cannabis			●	
Opioids		●		
Aging in Place / Long-Term Care	●		●	
Dementia		●		
Poverty (incl. Living Wage, UBI, etc.)	●	●	●	●
Affordable Housing			●	
Food Security			●	●
Education	●		●	
Indigenous Peoples / Reconciliation	●	●	●	
Cultural Spaces & Creative Infrastructure	●	●		●
Placemaking / Civic Innovation	●			●
Philanthropy Trends	●		●	
Leadership & Civic Engagement	●	●	●	
Racism & White Privilege				●
Misogyny / Women's Empowerment		●		

The 2021 Scan revisits some of the above issues, like civic innovation and long-term care, the context around which has been radically altered in light of the pandemic, but also looks at a number of topics previously not explored – electric vehicles, policing, coal, universal child care, and the changing nature of the workplace, for example. It is organized under a set of themes, each of which uses multiple lenses – social, cultural, political, economic, environmental and technological:

- *An Economic Forecast: A Roaring, but Shackled, Twenties*
- *A Political Forecast: Shifting Polarities*
- *A Civil Society Forecast: Stepping Up and Stepping Out*
- *Feminizing Finance: The Age of She-economics*
- *The Business of Government? Whatever We Want it to Be*
- *Toward Universal Child Care: The Key to a She-covery*
- *Flattening the Carbon Curve, Flattening the Rockies*
- *Exorcising the Resource Curse: The Emerging Post-Carbon Alberta Powerhouse*
- *Clocking in to the 21st Century: A Workplace Revolution*
- *The New Digital Deal: Toward Equitable Lifelines to Civilization*
- *From Pity to Parity: Revisiting Income and Social Supports*
- *Old Canada: Do We Stand on Guard for Thee?*
- *Full Speed Ahead: The Electric, Eclectic Future of Transportation*
- *The Experience(d) City: From a Place to Work to a Place to Live*
- *There and Back Again: Rediscovering the Community Policing Paradigm*
- *Not OK, Boomer: Polarization or an Epidemic of Gullibility?*

Information in this scan is derived from several sources, including news stories, op-eds, policy reports and academic literature.



AN ECONOMIC FORECAST:

A Roaring, but Shackled, Twenties

The pandemic shaped the economy during the past year so profoundly that any economic recovery, at any level, is tied indelibly to a COVID recovery. The global economy contracted by 4.7% in 2020, the worst single-year decline since the start of global GDP tracking in 1961, though notably only modestly worse than 1974 and 2009, the second and third worst years, respectively.¹⁸ Easy to overlook is that this is actually the third consecutive year of global contraction. Some industries will likely never return to their pre-pandemic level of vigour due to permanent structural changes in consumer behaviour or business models, notably bricks and mortar retail and airline travel. Business travel is forecast by some analysts to permanently decline by as much as 36%.¹⁹

With four effective vaccines (and counting) having finished clinical trials, two of which have already begun to roll out to the Canadian public, the economic outlook for 2021 is substantially brighter, particularly in the second half. Short term, growth will be hampered by temporary trade restrictions, continued shortages

of pharmaceutical supplies, and the ongoing US-China trade war (which may not necessarily be expected to improve under a Biden administration).²⁰ Longer term, rising economic nationalism, “de-globalization”, de-risking of supply chains, and buy-local movements will centre more production domestically, virtually everywhere.²¹ But this aside, there is a lot of pent-up consumer demand, particularly for deferred big-ticket item purchases that households have delayed due the uncertainty. It may mean that by 2022, the economy could be roaring back. Anticipating this, stock markets are already rocketing, with November having been the best month on record globally.²² While some have warned about a post-pandemic “Great Depression”, another “Roaring Twenties” is a more likely scenario, at least in the near term.²³

Canada’s economic outlook is slightly less rosy than the globe as a whole, weathering a slightly deeper contraction in 2020 than the world as a whole (a 5.5% contraction).²⁴ The Canadian economy will likely make up for most, if not all, of this contraction

“What’s true of all the evils in the world is true of plague as well. It helps [people] to rise above themselves.”

Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)

with a minimum 4.5% bounce-back in 2021.²⁵ Also, because of the extensiveness of the federal employment and business support programs, both the labour market and small and medium enterprises have greater resiliency than south of the border. This was revealed during the partial re-openings of late spring/summer when Canada had stronger recovery numbers than either the US or Europe. The real estate, finance and insurance sectors have been particularly resurgent (though more tepidly in Alberta), buoyed by low interest rates. Some sectors have actually thrived under the pandemic – notably online retail, tech and pharma – while others have been disproportionately hit – notably airlines, oil and gas, hospitality, and ‘experience’ economy sectors (sports, arts, entertainment, etc.). One thing that is clear is that the retail industry will never be the same, nor will work patterns and workplace set-ups (explored further in a later section).

The calls for a “green recovery” and #BuildBackBetter will be a particular challenge in Canada, despite the federal government’s stated ambitions. Canada, while ranked a healthy 21st out of 193 nations on our performance on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, is actually underperforming or stagnating on most indicators.²⁶ There are more seniors in poverty. Renewable energy as a percentage of energy consumption has been declining. Homicides, obesity and artificial fertilizer use are all rising. And we are faltering on some key innovation metrics, such as patent filing. One area where we excel is as a desired destination for potential immigrants the world over: Canada was far and away the number one choice, based on a recent global analysis of Google search terms relating to immigration inquiries (though interestingly it was not

“The long run is a misleading guide to current affairs. In the long run we are all dead. Economists set themselves too easy, too useless a task if in tempestuous seasons they can only tell us when the storm is past and the ocean is flat again.”

John Maynard Keynes, *A Tract on Monetary Reform* (1923) Ch. 3.

the number one choice of Americans).²⁷ Expect Canada to capitalize on this by upping immigration numbers, as the population ages and productivity and global influence are both challenged. The Century Initiative advocates for a massive increase in immigration to Canada to ensure continued national productivity, as does Doug Saunders in his book *Maximum Canada*.²⁸ Also expect more calls as well for temporary foreign workers, deemed “essential” during the pandemic, to become permanent immigrants, (or at minimum to be compensated as if they were landed immigrants or Canadian citizens).²⁹

The pandemic has massively deepened public deficits. Canada is on track for a \$381 billion deficit this year, which will result in the highest deficit-to-GDP ratio among the G20 nations this year.³⁰ For perspective, the federal government’s total expenditure in 2019 was \$355 billion. It remains to be seen whether this level of public expenditure was worth it, or whether it will be well spent. One argument in favour is to compare to the US, which was comparatively focused on “keeping the economy open”, yet shed more jobs per capita than Canada, and of course has been decimated by COVID-19. Similarly, the US is more likely than Canada to have a “K-shaped” recovery (thriving equity and money markets, and growing high-income jobs, but stagnating employment at lower wage levels).³¹ Also, despite Canada’s record high deficit – Canadian Taxpayers Federation’ Aaron Wudrick noting that we will hit the “sadly historic milestone” of \$1 trillion within weeks³² – we are a long way from the so-called “fiscal cliff”, as our net debt-to-GDP ratio of 50.7% is the lowest of any G7 country (compare to Japan at 250%, for example), and is also historically manageable (Canada’s debt-to-GDP at the end of World War II, for example, was 110%).³³ Also, the cost of servicing the debt is low, due to low interest rates, which are likely to remain low for at least another 3 years, and the fact that most of the debt is domestically-owed (in the 1990s, for comparison, most the debt was to foreign creditors). Canada’s bond yields also remain modestly positive for the time being (compared to over half of sovereign bonds worldwide trading in negative territory).

At the provincial level, the Alberta deficit rocketed from \$7 billion to an estimated \$24 billion in 2020, as oil and gas revenues dried up, as few new revenue opportunities are rolled out (the carbon tax having also been eliminated), and as the UCP government has political room and pressure to provide economic stimulus to select sectors. But Alberta’s debt-to-GDP level remains low at 22%, roughly in line with Saskatchewan and B.C., and substantially lower than the remaining provinces.³⁴ The bottom line is that both federal and provincial governments have a long runway to spend, and there is little political pressure to reign spending in anytime soon. Scotiabank, for example, estimates conservatively that a 65% debt-GDP is likely the upper limit of what is manageable before we see large inflationary effects and/or major calls for fiscal austerity.³⁵ Some economists are warning that in the near term, rising inequality (gender, class and race-based) is a much greater risk to economic prosperity and social stability than the fiscal imbalance.³⁶

Others have warned that the building blocks of another 2008-style market crisis are in the works, due mainly to excessive “moral hazards” like profiteering (rent-seeking by shareholders at the expense of productive investment and labour) and, in particular, financialization.³⁷ *Financialization* is the trend by which a greater portion of national

incomes and economies – including Canada’s – are in financial services (banking, insurance, financial trading, and so on). Easy credit and a tolerance for high levels of debt (vis-à-vis equity) has permitted households to be dangerously overleveraged, while their financial assets (ballooning mortgages in particular) are exchanged via increasingly exotic financial instruments in the money markets. The trigger could come from a prolonged, supercharged post-pandemic consumer spending spree that would lead to higher interest rates, leading to mortgage foreclosures and other lending defaults. The origin of such a crisis would again be the U.S., as Canada has a stronger regulatory environment and Canadians are not as over-leveraged (in fact, many Canadians have accumulated a large store of savings during 2020, despite rock bottom interest rates). But as with all U.S. shocks, the impact would be felt globally, and profoundly in Canada.

Alberta continues to dwell in the purgatory of the “lost decade of growth”³⁸, which began in 2014. The economy having contracted by just under 0.6% the previous year, our economic woes have of course been compounded by the stubbornly low price of oil. However, Alberta’s economy is forecast to bounce back modestly by over 3% in 2021, assuming oil prices remain stable.³⁹ Global demand for oil is expected to remain flat through 2023.⁴⁰ More troubling has been Alberta’s unemployment rate, higher than any other jurisdiction in Canada through 2020. Alberta also has a structural revenue problem: The 2021 Budget, to be tabled in February, will no doubt reveal continued declining provincial revenues alongside infrastructure investments and targeted austerity measures. Alberta’s public accounts remain hazardously tied to the market value of petroleum, rather than depending upon a more sustainable array of taxes and levies (although it is worth noting the new fee-for-use based approach to certain new public works). As energy writer Katherine Dunn opined in a recent article in *Fortune*, “paired with current sinking demand for oil and volatile prices, and broad shifts towards climate policies worldwide, the world’s petrostates must find other ways to sustain their economies.”⁴¹

After disparaging ‘diversification’ out of the gate, replacing targeted industry tax incentive schemes with an across-the-board corporate tax cut, and removing certain high tech-focused subsidies and incentives, the Province has warmed of late to the diversification imperative.⁴² It has been a steep learning curve to understand the new economy, but the new government has moved from pipelines to hyperloops in fairly short order. Minister Doug Schweitzer, speaking at Calgary’s Economic Outlook in October, acknowledged that diversification is both necessary to a recovery plan and desirable in its own right, pointing to Texas as an example. Schweitzer noted emerging Alberta tech success stories like Attabotics and Benevity, and the role of Alberta researchers in the vanguard of AI technology.



But so far, the investment still lags the rhetoric: The “Invest Alberta” strategy, focused on supporting innovation, entrepreneurship and the commercialization of research, is budgeted at \$6 million, a far cry from the oil and gas “war room’s” \$30 million.

Calgary’s volatility is even more dramatic, as the economy contracted by an alarming 10% in 2020, yet is poised for a 6.9% recovery in 2021.⁴³ The accommodation and food sector were hardest hit locally, with revenue shrinking by 36.9%. The arts and entertainment industry were also decimated, shrinking by 26.2%.⁴⁴ Unemployment will remain well above 10% for the coming year, with a lot of “unabsorbed labour” – those who are underemployed, misemployed or too discouraged to look for employment. Downtown office space can be expected to hover between 25% and 35% vacancy.⁴⁵ It will remain a tenant’s market, with offices also reconfiguring to cater to smaller and medium sized enterprises. Philanthropist David Bissett’s visionary \$30 million gift to SAIT to establish an advanced technology centre could prove to be a major catalyst. A renewed emphasis on reskilling, work-integrated learning and micro-credentialing, and much deeper applied community-researcher partnerships will help with this transition. These are themes emphasized in the work of *LearningCITY* YYC, by Calgary’s economic development authority, and which will likely be a cornerstone of where the Province’s post-secondary strategic emphasis lands in 2021.⁴⁶ It is highly unlikely that most of the jobs that have been shed in recent years will come back. They will be mainly new jobs, in new industries, requiring new knowledge and skills.⁴⁷



A POLITICAL FORECAST:

Shifting Polarities

World politics in the early part of 2021 will continue to be dominated by the pandemic and the Darwinian struggle for access to vaccines. Longer term, much of the world's focus will continue to be on a resurgent China, which ironically weathered the COVID storm better than almost any other country on earth.

While the "rise of China" seems almost banal to declare, having been a theme in foreign policy circles for the last four decades, this coming decade will see China definitely supplant the US as the global hegemon. As influential investment guru Ray Dalio has commented, "as you can see the United States is now the most powerful empire by not much, it is in relative decline, Chinese power is rapidly rising, and no other powers come close."⁴⁸ While the US remains number one in terms of absolute GDP, China is the clear leader when purchasing power parity (or PPP) is factored in, with a 27 trillion dollar economy, the largest the world has ever seen.⁴⁹ For the past few decades, China was essentially the world's factory, an industrial manufacturing base that has gradually built a strong and growing middle class.

Beijing's next five-year plan, which anticipates a weaker West, is focused on the knowledge economy: Science, technology and innovation. Aiming to displace Silicon Valley, the plan replaces the former emphasis on smelters and factories with labs, robotics and artificial intelligence (AI). Accompanying this is unprecedented global resource-prospecting, led by the acquisition of lithium and rare earth mineral mines, including from under the Canadian government's nose.⁵⁰ Already, three of the world's largest tech giants investing in

AI are Chinese firms, and China's cleantech investments already dwarf the rest of the world.⁵¹ While China is in focus here, in general, productive economies with a strong and growing middle class tend to also be clustered in East Asia.

China also expects that other countries will come to embrace its particular form of societal governance – a remarkably resilient though objectively authoritarian melange of market-friendly, globalization-embracing growth, accompanied by state-surveilled "socialism" without democracy. The world's reaction – Canada's especially – to an impending flight of Hong Kong citizens will be revealing.⁵² Anne Applebaum's *The Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* warns that "without a much more serious strategy to

“The ignorance of one voter in a democracy impairs the security of all.”

John F. Kennedy

curb or counter the forces that precipitated this crisis [in growing worldwide despotism] – Chinese illiberalism, EU inertness, Anglo-American self-harm and Russian information warfare – the prospect of a starless, moonless future for democracy will only grow.”⁵³ According to the Pew Research Center, 52% of respondents polled across 34 countries were dissatisfied with democracy. As Harper-era Citizenship and Immigration Minister Chris Alexander observed recently”

“The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index for 2019 ranks only twenty-two states as full democracies – fifteen in Europe plus three in Latin America (Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay), Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Recent concerns over the electoral system, immigration and asylum policy, inequality and the role of money in criminal justice and politics have relegated the United States to the ranks of the “flawed democracies.” And without a single full democracy in continental Asia or Africa, where three quarters of the world’s population now lives, how far have we really come in the struggle to make democratic freedoms a global reality?”⁵⁴

The good news for Canada, according to a new study by the Samara Centre for Democracy, is there is a clear and consistent shift revealing that not only are Canadians satisfied with democracy, but their trust in one another, and in institutions (especially government) is strong.⁵⁵ The same study revealed that Canadians are less cynical about political leaders, less nostalgic for the past, and considerably less likely than Americans (and for that matter, most of the world) to express populist sentiments.⁵⁶

Previous scans have noted the precipitous decline of the US as a global leader, but the putrefaction is all the more obvious these past few weeks.⁵⁷ Two and a half months after the US election, a democratic outcome prevailed over an attempted coup d’état, an armed insurrection anointed if not engineered by the outgoing President. While Biden won the popular vote by a clear 6 million+ margin, Trump still received the second largest vote count of any Presidential candidate in history, besting his own 2016 count by well over 10 million and counting.⁵⁸ Trump made polarization an art form, which served him well, as did many of the key economic numbers, pre-pandemic. But his diminishment of the pandemic, and his blitheness toward the world-leading body count (pushing 450,000 as of this writing, with over 4,000 deaths a day) were ultimately his downfall. COVID-19, more than Joe Biden, defeated Donald Trump.

“The better a singer’s voice, the harder it is to believe what they’re saying.”

David Byrne

Since last year’s election, the minority Liberal government has been able to govern almost as if they held a majority, benefitting from at least three factors: 1. The post-pandemic glow that visits most political leaders in a national crisis, 2. An NDP with few resources to campaign (and a leader continuing to poll low), and 3. A Conservative leadership race and the need for the Tories to build the profile of a new, untested, and relatively obscure leader. However, all three of these factors could quickly evaporate as the year unfolds: Revelations about Canada’s lack of domestic capacity to manufacture a vaccine have come to light. As our reliance on supply from companies manufacturing overseas results in potentially weeks-long shortages, the Liberal’s pandemic glow will dim.⁵⁹ New Conservative leader Erin O’Toole has so far deftly navigated pleasing his social conservative base (where Jason Kenney’s endorsement helped him greatly) while reaching across to moderates and even disaffected NDP’ers, even taking a swipe at the inability of free markets to solve 21st century problems.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Millennials and Zoomers pushing hard for a “green new deal”, and grown tired of Trudeau’s often vacuous virtue signaling, may begin flocking to Jagmeet Singh’s association with the wildly popular Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez. Singh’s biggest threat, on the other hand, may be from a resurgent Green Party, under new leader Annamie Paul (not to mention the Lazarus-like Bloc Quebecois). O’Toole’s task in building a ‘big tent’ conservative groundswell will not be easy: They will need to be seen as credible on the climate change file, one important election front, yet a substantial proportion of their base don’t even believe climate change is real. The Conservative’s policy position on climate change action was their largest Achilles heel in the last election.⁶¹ If the government does fall in 2021, and the Liberals are replaced (most likely by a Conservative minority), expect calls from within the party for Trudeau to be replaced, the most obvious successor being Alberta-born Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland.

As for the provincial scene, many twisted ironies and paradoxes have washed up on our landlocked shores: Premier Kenney has been placed in the unenviable position of walking the tightrope between the political pressures of restrictive public health measures, and the desire to keep business running and houses of worship open. An invisible virus took the winds out of the sails of the nascent “Wexit” movement, its future being less of a serious political threat than a cabal of disgruntled white nationalists and conspiracy theorists. It hasn’t helped the Wexit cause that federal subsidies to Alberta (and Albertans) are now even with, or even slightly exceeding, federal income tax paid by Albertans. Still, the new Wildrose Independence Party is polling in the double digits, enough to bleed critical rural votes away from the UCP.

It is unclear whether there is substantially more polarization in Alberta than in other provinces, but certainly there is more crystallization: Long a land of one-party rule, with a handful of other parties jockeying to be the runner-up, Alberta is now (for all practical purposes) a two-party province. One party is a popular, bankable brand, saddled with a deeply unpopular leader and a handful of controversial cabinet ministers.⁶² The other party is its mirror opposite - a stigmatized brand with a very popular leader. In successive recent polls, the UCP and NDP have gone from running neck and neck to the NDP decisively polling stronger, particularly in Edmonton and Calgary. If the UCP numbers continue to tank, a Kenney leadership review may not be far off.⁶³ While most other Premiers have enjoyed a leader-during-crisis uptick in popular support, Kenney's approval numbers have floundered. Tellingly, Albertans have shown greater approval for the federal Liberal government's response.⁶⁴ And this was before Alberta's COVID numbers started trending to being the highest in the country. Kenney has been relatively invisible compared with premiers in other 'hotspots', like Doug Ford and Brian Pallister, an approach that has been met with widespread dissatisfaction across the province.⁶⁵ The Premier's initial reluctance to implement stricter measures or to call out anti-maskers, as other provincial premiers have done, is further polarizing.

But the missteps that may haunt Kenney the most are not COVID related, but instead ironically relate to the UCP's alleged strong suit - support for the oil and gas sector, the one area where Albertans earlier in the fall believed they outperformed the federal government on:⁶⁶ The UCP invested \$1.3 billion in direct subsidies plus nearly \$6 billion in loan guarantees to TC Energy's Keystone XL pipeline. But that bet was contingent on a Trump presidential victory. On Day One of his Presidency, Biden followed through on his widely publicized election vow to kill Keystone. A reckless gambit in itself, Kenney has pre-emptively scuttled any faint hope of reversing this decision.⁶⁷ In the meantime, construction of "Trudeau's pipeline" - the one that some

Albertans claim (with a straight face) was purchased for \$4.5 billion to shut it down - is steaming ahead. TMX's costs, however, have ballooned nearly 3-fold to \$12.8 billion, and some industry analysts are questioning whether it is even needed.⁶⁸ But Kenney's most serious long-term issue may simply be one of style. Aping Klein's 90's era fiscal hawkishness, and the talking points of the "Calgary School"⁶⁹ but a generation too late, he lacks the humour and authentic populism that defined the former Premier's iconic status. Kenney brings a maudlin father-knows-best tone that lands poorly with too many urbanites, women in particular, and isn't folksy or populist enough to keep the base energized. He has kept his many campaign promises with respect to the "war room" (The Canadian Energy Centre), the public inquiry into "Anti-Alberta Energy Campaigns", the fair deal panel, and the red tape reduction initiative, but the first two have been a comedy of errors, while the latter two remain low key.⁷⁰ But the UCP's battles with doctors and other health professionals during a pandemic is a clinic in bad timing (pun intended).

A provincial election is a long way out, so much can change in the intervening period. An Alberta economy recovery will obviously play to the UCP's favour, as will any resurgence in the Alberta Party or provincial Liberal party's fortunes. The NDP, too strong right now to seriously entertain a "unite-the-left" push, which some have advocated for, along with a rebrand of "NDP", will ironically (and secretly) wish for a strong showing from the new Wildrose Independence Party to bleed votes from the UCP. The biggest unknown, however, will be the role of Political Action Committees (PACs), still relatively new to Canada, but which had a huge impact in the last provincial election (the largest PAC, the pro-UCP Alberta Advantage, collected more donations than any political party).⁷¹ Look for the influence of PACs, right and left, to play a big role in next year's municipal election. The Americanization of Alberta politics is afoot.

Calgarians will be going to the polls to pick a new Mayor in October, 2021. If current Mayor Naheed Nenshi runs again, unopposed by any high-profile progressive candidates, he will likely be a fourth term Mayor. If he doesn't, it will prove to be the most interesting race since the 2010 race, where Nenshi was first crowned. This race will happen under new rules brought in by the UCP Provincial government this past summer under the Local Authorities Election Act, which relaxes the rules on municipal campaign financing. The individual contribution limit, self-funded contribution limit and limits outside the campaign period have all increased, while the thresholds for third party advertisers and for disclosing financial statements have been relaxed. We can also expect to see a continued rise in third party messaging and financing.⁷² What this means from a practical standpoint, is that developers and other deep-pocketed interests will have more allowance to finance their candidate vis-à-vis, for example, an anti-poverty activist, who may rely more on smaller donations.

Very few people have declared their candidacy so far, only one of whom - Jeremy Farkas - is on City Council. It's not yet clear that the unconventional populist Farkas will be the 'establishment' choice in the way Bill Smith was in the 2017 race. Canada West Foundation CEO (and former Provincial cabinet minister) Gary Mar has been rumoured to have been courted by the UCP as their preferred Mayoral candidate.⁷³ Councillor Jeff Davidson would be a less surprising choice, were he to run, but as Calgary has not yet had a woman in the Mayor's chair, the smarter money would be on Councillor Jyoti Gondek, assuming the establishment can get their heads around backing a woman of



colour (a very generous assumption given the curious, and poorly explained, departure of the very capable Sandip Lalli as Chamber of Commerce CEO).⁷⁴ One outside candidate that has been courted to run is radio personality and former Wildrose Party leader Danielle Smith. But as she is not a Calgary resident, and her views skew well to the right of Farkas, she would have a tough time making inroads. In general, Calgarians have tended to prefer a centrist candidate: Nenshi's three immediate predecessors, Ralph Klein included, took office as card-carrying Liberals. And as yet, no high-profile progressive candidates have yet thrown their hat in the ring.

A growing political narrative we are seeing in North America, with respect to social media platforms and university campuses, and in Alberta, with respect to anti-mask rallies, is the political "right"

positioning itself increasingly as guardians of "freedom of speech", previously a cause more aligned to the liberal left. Ironically, Premier Kenney has become one of the staunchest defenders of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the brainchild of Pierre Trudeau, even exempting anti-mask protesters from mandatory outdoor gathering limits.⁷⁵ In some respects, this mirrors the claiming by the right in previous generations of political space accorded to "fiscal responsibility" and "family values", neither of which, to the extent they can be measured (say, by deficits in public accounts or by teenage pregnancy or divorce rates, respectively) have any empirically verifiable heft. But the stories we tell matter more than evidence. The left's defence of free speech in recent years, meanwhile, has been relatively anemic, and wholly absent in some circles. Just as "Red Tories" have been a dying political flavour for some time in Canada, so too is libertarian socialism.



A CIVIL SOCIETY FORECAST: Stepping Up and Stepping Out

“COVID-19 has ripped the Band-Aid off, exposing the glaring inequalities in income, job security, housing, access to technology, and access to justice in Canadian communities. These inequalities are structural, and not fixable by the philanthropic sector functioning with its established practices. The philanthropic sector risks becoming a provider of emergency supports while it fails to push leaders in the public and the private sectors to address the fundamental challenges. These emergency supports can, under some circumstances, perpetuate rather than ameliorate these structural inequalities.

I would ask: How are the programs that we support providing breakout opportunities from deeply established and long-standing patterns of structural inequality? Who has voice in shaping these programs? How much agency do community members and leaders really have in making the critical decisions about what will work within their own communities?”

Janice Stein
(Interview with *The Philanthropist*, November 9, 2020)⁷⁶

This is a scary time for civil society, where, on the one hand, it is called on to embrace all manner of new opportunities and challenges that lie at society's feet. According to Imagine Canada, 42% of Canadian charities have had to create new programs in response to COVID-19.⁷⁷ On the other hand, revenue is way down, volunteering is down, staff have been laid off by the tens of thousands, and potentially thousands of organizations across Canada are expected to fold over the coming months. Imagine Canada's estimated impact to charities alone (not including other nonprofits) is \$15.6 billion in lost revenue and 194,000 lost jobs.⁷⁸ The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) estimates that up to 20% of Alberta's charities could disappear as a result of the financial and human resources hardship of the pandemic.⁷⁹ Charities have seen the most precipitous drop in *earned revenue*, which has a particularly profound effect on the arts and culture sector.⁸⁰ Donations are also down: Two in five Canadians have cut back on their giving over the past year (although many actually boosted their holiday giving as compared with 2019, with most also prefer to focus on giving locally) and thousands of fundraising drives and events have been cancelled.⁸¹

Not surprising, but certainly not encouraging, is the finding that donors would give less to a given charity in the event of a federal grant program to support charities through the pandemic.⁸² While many have appealed, for decades now, that nonprofits "should be run more like business", this is a moment to highlight how out of step societal expectations and the regulatory framework actually are with the ability to "be run more like a business", or for that matter, to model resiliency: Nonprofits are discouraged from building reserves or owning capital assets against which they can borrow, and they employ a workforce largely starved of the perks and benefits enjoyed in other sectors. The most COVID-vulnerable groups – older adults – are also the most frequent volunteers, especially at charities like food banks and

community kitchens, services that are ironically in greater demand. As the CCVO argues, community prosperity will suffer as a consequence of the cumulative effect of these factors.

It may be a surprise to some to learn that the nonprofit sector in Alberta employs more people than oil and gas. Per dollar invested, it generates extraordinary returns on creating employment, quite aside from the purposeful, socially-productive nature of so many of the jobs in the sector. Serial social entrepreneur and Ashoka Fellow Shaun Loney, often speaks of the need for the nonprofit sector to "step away from the kids' table."⁸³ By this, he means our default mode should not be cap-in-hand, hoping for some scraps of acknowledgement from funders, but rather that it must find its voice, that it must get better at capturing and demonstrating its value, and that civil society organizations should be at every table, of every issue, of any import to the common good. As Philanthropy thought-leader Dr. Janice Stein urges,

"the most pressing problem, for a large part of the sector, is dependence, directly or indirectly, upon government funding that supports overhead and enables growth. The language of "partnering" obscures a dysfunctional relationship that is corrosive of the capacity to provide critical feedback to government and puts the sector in the untenable position of intermediating between vulnerable citizens and their governments."⁸⁵

The sector might even be so bold as to demand places on boards of directors – why does that dynamic only seem to flow in one direction? Economist Mariana Mazzucato similarly urges civil society organizations to break the state-market dichotomy by stepping up and asserting their legitimate role in economic discussions.⁸⁴ And as NGOs are expected to weigh in more frequently on economic matters, we will see more and more businesses weigh in on social issues, far beyond the "corporate social responsibility" of previous decades. We have seen large companies and corporate CEOs make bold statements on systemic racism, for example.

As if the pandemic wasn't bad enough, the charitable sector witnessed blow-back from the WE charity scandal, which in fact was a government procurement scandal, not a scandal endemic in some way to the operation of either WE or the charitable sector in general. Nonetheless, because the public expectation of the charitable sector's ethics is at such a high bar, and reasonably so, trust starts crumbling at the first visible crack. While trust in NGOs remains high (though no longer as high as trust in government), according to an Angus Reid Institute poll, "a majority of donors are of the opinion that the scandal is one that raises questions about governance, transparency, and management that are relevant for the whole charitable sector, while significant segments of donors say it has changed the way they feel about donating to charity overall." WE charity founders Craig and Marc Keilburger, in describing their approach as 'social enterprise', may well have unwittingly dealt the momentum around social enterprise development a major setback. The federal government still has not rolled out their social finance fund (aside from the first \$50 million 'readiness' portion), intended to be a transformative investment in the social enterprise movement. Perhaps most damaging of all, the WE scandal has undermined their legacy of turning young Canadians on to social change work, something they can take legitimate credit for in the past. This may have been one reason that other charities, and charity oversight bodies, were historically silent about criticizing WE's approach until it was safe to do so (and in their business interest to distance themselves from this sinking ship). In international development and philanthropic circles, WE's approach – particularly the 'voluntourism' aspect – has been highly controversial for years.⁸⁵



In turn, this speaks to a broader issue: The historic inability of the charitable sector to critique itself openly. The business sector has long done this. Read any business section of a major newspaper or any industry magazine, and there is open, detailed and nuanced evaluation of a given firm’s approach or decisions, from branding decisions, to CEO choice, to its investment in R&D. No such parallel exists for civil society organizations, so our criticisms remain hidden, tired brands and approaches linger far longer than they should, and feel-good assumptions about efficacy or impact take the place of research and informed insight. This may be about to change. As the business and nonprofit sectors come closer and closer together, whether by way of social enterprise, venture philanthropy, next-level corporate social responsibility, or systems-wide collaboration, there are many other revelations coming to light about what commercial and public good enterprises can learn from each other. In a recent book review on “The Corporate Social Mind”, well-known Canadian philanthropic leader Hilary Pearson observes that the traits that leading socially responsible global firms like Danone, Levi Strauss and Salesforce exhibit, mirror those of leading innovative nonprofits: “Articulated and lived values, a focus on benefit to society, a willingness to get proximate or listen to beneficiaries, a willingness to work collaboratively, the courage to advocate, the commitment to measurement of impact, an openness to innovation.”⁸⁶

Charities are also increasingly grappling with variations on the question of why there so many organizations concerned about the public good, yet so much of the public realm is profoundly unwell? We have many downstream charities helping to provide relief, but not enough working upstream, or too few with the capacity or interest to dig into root causes. And in the short term we’ve even seen instances of so-called “pandemic washing” – where social finance or community investment dollars are being deployed to “business as usual” approaches, reinforcing rather than reducing inequalities on the ground.⁸⁷ The whole point of social innovation is to not merely do good better, but to change the underlying patterns, conditions and norms. There has rarely, if ever, been a better time to meet this challenge. As we recover from the pandemic, and especially as we reconfigure our social contract, we

can expect ever louder calls for civil society organizations (nonprofits, charities, social enterprises, co-operatives, community and faith groups, labour organizations and so on) to be showing up, visibly and vocally, at decision-making tables at all levels. The Calgary Alliance for the Common Good is one such example of a coalition of (mainly) faith organizations exercising its voice in progressive municipal affairs.

Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) Policy Analyst Marokh Yousifshahi contends in a recent blogpost calling for a community-wide *community prosperity strategy*, “it is imperative that the sector not go back to the status quo but continue on a path to be more innovative, equitable, inclusive, and digital savvy.”⁸⁸ And as Dr. Alina Turner and I point out in a recent *Philanthropist* article on the subject of AI, “the sector can no longer afford to be the “clean up crew” for the market and systemic failings of macro-economic convulsions, as we enter this fourth industrial revolution.”⁸⁹ Indeed, speaking with students in post-secondary today, the entire social construct of “charity” seems grafted onto the modern world from

another time entirely, and certainly not seen as the driver of social change. Prepare for civil society's collective voice to become orders of magnitude stronger than it currently is, not merely on questions of social, cultural or environmental policy, but also on questions of economic policy, industrial strategy, international diplomacy, and technological development.

Other sections of this scan have spoken of the widened window of opportunity afforded by the pandemic. In some ways, it may be all the moreso in Alberta, although it is difficult to get an accurate read on how the government perceives the sector. On the one hand, the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society signals the desire for a renewed and positive relationship. And indeed, the conservative preference for nonprofit organizations to serve as service providers in lieu of government remains genuine. In general, community organizations are closer to the ground, closer to the people, and conservatives buy into this. On the other hand, the ethical duty to represent and amplify the voices of those who have been disproportionately impacted by COVID, by government policies, or market decisions, will test the degree to which nonprofits can serve as legitimate advocates, or whether - alternatively - they should "know their place" and keep quiet about matters of public policy. The public inquiry into the activities of environmental NGOs and foundations, and the combined effect of fiscal austerity measures and economic stimulus, which seem surgically designed to uplift commercial sectors and starve the caring and learning economies, suggest that the civil society-government relationship may be deeply fraught when it comes to questions of voice and public policy advocacy.

Regardless, nonprofit organizations are absolutely essential to recovery and to supporting Albertans resilience in the face of hardship. A recent article in the *Harvard Business Review* notes how non-profits have much to offer the private sector in their post-pandemic re-building and re-sharing efforts.⁹⁰ At the federal level, far less of historic importance as a funder to the sector, but important to charities as a regulator, there will be many, many new opportunities by way of new funding pots and sector-partnered strategies, both on the resilience and recovery front, and the green-recovery / *BuildBackBetter* front. But the sector's approaches to each level of government will be more discreet and distinct than in the past. One example: To obtain grants from the federal government, you must understand and demonstrate a gender-informed and intersectional lens to your work. But these same concepts may be the equivalent of "trigger words" for the Province: Witness Premier Kenney's derision of "kooky intersectionality" in a recent speech.⁹¹

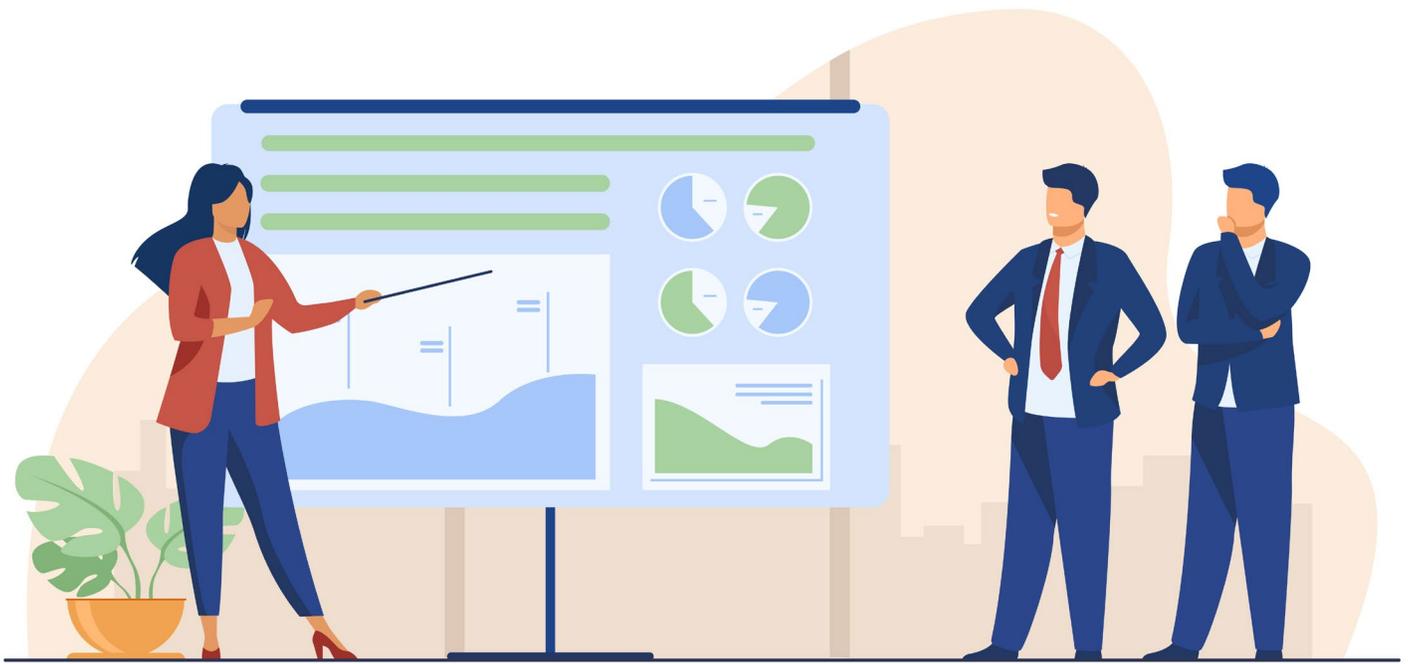
The most significant areas of new capacity that social impact organizations require, in no particular order, are public advocacy help (government relations especially), tech capacity

(discussed elsewhere in this scan) and data capacity. Volunteer Alberta recently undertook a *Challenge Dialogue* process, a deep, months-long consultation with nonprofits (or, in the language of the *challenge*, 'social profit' organizations). It revealed that the pandemic provides an opportunity to profoundly transform the sector: "This included the notion that now is the time that social profit organizations conduct a review of their relevancy and entertain different ways to serve the sector, which may include: expansions, mergers, collaborations, closures."⁹²

There are far too many social and fiscal pressures to ignore the drumbeat from donors, community members and the sector itself, of some version of the opinion "there are just too many organizations doing the same kind of work." The closure option is more or less a legal question of dissolution, but the other options are rich with potential, yet starved of capacity (both technical and financial).

Scaling organizations and programs is difficult, partly due to the limitations of the grants economy, but also to cultural, technical and jurisdictional factors (not to mention the absence of natural incentives to scaling that are present in the private sector). The work of collective impact and systems-focused social innovation initiatives like labs is long, time-demanding, and often frustratingly ambiguous work. But it is necessary, and can be extraordinarily fruitful: The collective impact of Calgary's affordable housing sector is more robust and powerful than in decades past, and the work of the Energy Futures Lab is feeding into the array of new and exciting directions for Alberta energy described elsewhere in this scan. If collaboration was a desire before the pandemic, it will be all the more necessary going forward. Those organizations with an ear to the ground - collaborating and co-creating with people with lived experience - will thrive. Those with a 'brand' or a time-honoured program, but lacking the collaboration or inclusion gene, will perish.

The third path - amalgamation, also known as mergers or acquisitions - has been an exceedingly rare phenomenon in the sector, with no more than a handful per decade province-wide. Yet, there is substantial interest from donors, funders and growing number of community organizations. Even the Premier's Council has surfaced mergers as a topic of interest.⁹³ The most high-profile merger of late, is the amalgamation of Aspen Family and Community Services Society with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary into a rebranded merged entity *Trellis*. The Institute for Community Prosperity has been chronicling this merger in two phases⁹⁴, and will produce a final document in the coming weeks that distills learning from this experience (and past mergers) into a tool that other nonprofits can refer to as they consider a merger.



FEMINIZING FINANCE:

The Age of She-economics

Pope Francis seems like an unlikely and perhaps incredulous place to start talking about the feminization of the economy. Yet, in his new book *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* the Pontiff observes “the perspective that women bring is what the world needs at this time”.⁹⁶ Indeed, as a social impact educator, the more I talked about social change in the classroom, the harder it became to ignore the elephant in the room: The economic system and the urgent imperative for alternatives. Conventional economic thinking and practice – dominated in the past few decades by supply-side “neoclassical” (also called “neoliberal”) thinking – has played a central role in perpetuating fissures, flaws and grotesque social and ecological outcomes. But since 2008, it has also been difficult to give credit to neoliberal economics even on its own merits – economic growth, vitality and productivity. While markets have indeed grown, there is little relationship anymore to the general prosperity of populations.

An analysis looking at the past 50 years across 18 OECD countries, further revealed that supply-side economic policies – tax cuts to the wealthy and corporations intended to spur growth and investment – produced no evidence of significant growth.⁹⁷

The Pope mentioned two economists, in particular. The first is Kate Raworth of the University of Oxford, who is pioneering an economic framework not based on exploitation (nor its shadow twin, deprivatization), but rather on an economy bounded by strong social foundations and civil institutions on the one hand (the centre of her ‘doughnut’ metaphor), and by ecological limits on the other hand (the outside perimeter of the doughnut). Raworth has also chronicled the counter-neoliberal revolutions within the discipline of economics itself that have been building now for a generation. The second economist on the Pope’s reading list is Mariana Mazzucato of the University College London.

The last couple of years have seen the ascendance into the mainstream of a new wave of female economists with a more evidence-informed, and socially-inclined reboot of the field: In addition to Mazzucato, Raworth, and Rebecca Henderson (mentioned in an earlier section) the new influential voices include deficit myth-busting Stephanie Kelton, disruption guru Carlota Perez (the Schumpeter of the 21st century), the profiteering-exposing analyses of Stephanie Stantcheva, and MIT’s Esther Duflo, who is righting the discipline’s historic neglect of poverty.⁹⁸ Dame Ellen MacArthur, though not an economist, has probably had the most profound *philanthropic* influence on new economic thinking, through her namesake foundation, a charity that works with business and education to accelerate the transition to a “circular economy” (a movement that now has serious traction among Canadian corporations).

“Back in Ancient Greece, when Xenophon first came up with the term economics, he described the practice of household management as an art. Following his lead, Aristotle distinguished economics from chrematistics, the art of acquiring wealth—in a distinction that seems to have been all but lost today.”

Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-Century Economist* (2017)

“We need to focus on economic nutrition. Right now, we are using money to kill life. An economy that works is one that serves people with dignity.”

Zita Cobb, Founder and CEO, Shorefast

A big part of the new economics is the recognition of human care. Blindingly obvious now, post-COVID, it was a blindspot for most of mainstream economics. The groundwork for building care into economic thinking was laid by early feminist economists like Marilyn Waring, whose work on holistic well-being-based measurements of economic prosperity laid the groundwork for New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s pledged replacement of the GDP in country-wide economic planning, reporting and policy making. Manulife Chief Economist Frances Donald has also warned that GDP is increasingly a useless measure for real progress⁹⁹ and there have recently been calls for an Indigenous imperative to an alternative GDP.¹⁰⁰ In a similar vein, Ito Peng, Canada Research Chair in Global Social Policy at the University of Toronto, has done extensive research on the “care economy”, and its role in underpinning a productive economy. The market value of care work (health care, education and services for children, the elderly and those with disabilities) is very low (hence why work is overwhelmingly female, employing mainly recent immigrants and people of colour). Yet, Peng estimates it is worth \$11 trillion/year (or at least 9% of global GDP).¹⁰¹ Incidentally, the history of the non-profit sector, which consists of over 80% female employment in Canada, can also be read in this light – it is undervalued, it is treated with a completely different set of rules than the marketplace (far more paternalistic, comparatively voiceless, and with fewer financing tools at its disposal).

Mariana Mazzucato’s work is a perfect launching point for the next topic. She is leading the intellectual charge for the re-assertion of strong public government investment in the economy, laying to waste (as if the Great Recession of 2008 already hadn’t) the last intellectual fragments of the neoliberalism so vaunted by Milton Friedman and his devotees in think tanks across North America and beyond.¹⁰² In conversation recently with Rotman School of Business Dean Roger Martin, the two powerhouse economic thinkers agreed that the obsession with “efficiency” at the expense of values like “inclusion” and “sustainability” has produced unacceptable levels of inequality and a weak middle class in North America, made worse by the fetishization of shareholder primacy.¹⁰³





THE BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT?

Whatever We Want it to Be

The late former populist Alberta premier Ralph Klein was fond of saying “Government has no business being in business.” It’s a fun turn of phrase, but one that bears no connection to contemporary reality. As Calgary-based new economy thinker Jason Ribiero has pointed out, this kind of pervasive anti-government discourse in North America has contributed greatly to killing North American innovation and competitiveness.¹⁰⁴ The Athabaska oil sands, to take just one obvious example, had no commercial value until decades of federal and provincial R&D funding going back to the 1950s started to pay off in the 1990s. Ever since the “Great Recession” of 2008, governments in North America have become accustomed to propping up commercial investment,

with a combination of large public expenditures (and large, normalized year-after-year deficits), rock-bottom interest rates, debt monetization and “quantitative easing” – the purchasing of bonds and other assets in order to inject money into the economy. “Modern Monetary Theory” appears to be replacing classical economics, with fiscal hawkishness in short supply. Even former Federal Research Chair Alan Greenspan claims that the US has no real debt/deficit problem.

Into this economic context rode the new UCP government in 2019, schooled in the philosophy of fiscal austerity and leaving the market to its own devices, but forced to confront a slumping oil and gas economy and Alberta’s fiscal over-reliance on this one sector. The former NDP government put a hard cap at \$700 million in provincial funding of the Calgary Olympic bid, but two years later, the public taps have opened up on all manner of stimuli. Pipelines have become de-facto public utilities, though operated by commercial entities.¹⁰⁵ The UCP are not afraid to spend, but the ledger is tipped in favour of subsidies to private industry and to “shovel ready” projects. The government has contributed over \$10 billion to a business stimulus package, including the aforementioned grants and loan guarantees to TC Energy’s Keystone XL project, following in the footsteps of the federal government purchase of the Transmountain (TMX) pipeline from Kinder Morgan.



As we've seen in Alberta and across Canada, the range of tools governments have available to them are vast, from liquidity injections (increasing the money supply) to regulation changes, credit and loan guarantees, deferrals, value transfers and equity investments.¹⁰⁶ But no matter the instrument, they all cost money. The International Monetary Fund is calling for massive public spending for a green global recovery. According to the IMF, wealthy nations have already announced over \$4 trillion US in direct fiscal stimulus to alleviate the immediate impact of the pandemic, with more to come as countries plan for the recovery phase. Estimates run upwards of \$10-12 trillion for the real cost of the cumulative stimulus.¹⁰⁷ The centrepiece of the Canadian government's November 30 fiscal update is a \$70-100 billion post-pandemic stimulus commitment, a 'down payment' on 'transformative initiatives' to include major investments in child care, job training and climate change action.¹⁰⁸ Canada is far from the only country to make new public green investments. Joe Biden has put forward a \$2 trillion climate solution investment plan linked to clean energy and jobs, even as he has been careful to distance himself from the "Green New Deal" that emerged from the Democrat's left flank. The state is back in a big way, and the fundamentals of macro-economic theory are being revised yet again.

But is all this spending cause for alarm? As the Economic Forecast section of this scan reported, the federal and provincial governments have a safe near-term runway for spending. There is ample political cover right now as well – according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, the public's trust in government, particularly in Canada, was 20 percentage points higher in May than it was last October (from 4th place, behind NGOs, business and the media, to 1st place), although this appears to have been a temporary bubble of trust in many countries. At 70%, trust in government among Canadians is the highest among western democracies.¹⁰⁹

But is it fundamentally problematic that government is so deeply embedded in stimulus, industry bailouts, re-training, R&D funding and all manner of other investments? Is government starting to get just too big and powerful? In reality, the so-called "free market" has always required big government to set the rules, enforce, subsidize and clean-up corporate capitalism's many externalities, inequities and market failures. As Jim Balsillie noted recently, all economics begins with values, and economies, and even neoliberal economies are sanctioned and shaped by government, referencing the great Karl Polanyi's observation that "laissez faire was planned".¹¹⁰ As an analysis by McKinsey of the global

stimulus response concludes, "countries with coordinated-market economies (e.g. Germany, South Korea, and the Nordic nations) have leveraged strong balance sheets and existing measures to respond rapidly and at scale to protect businesses and jobs." Conversely, "countries with liberal-market economies (including Canada, Australia, the US and UK) face greater short-term risks" Their economies skew more heavily toward big corporations than do those with coordinated market economies, with a comparatively smaller role for SMEs, and flexible labor policies are dominant."¹¹¹

The devil may well be in the details. Ill-considered stimulus may inflate or unnaturally keep afloat sectors that no longer serve prosperity or that undermine public goals like decent work or climate change action. One important such detail is Canada's tax system, which the IMF has noted is not productivity-focused. We have managed to grow tax-evading cohorts (as revealed in the Panama Papers) and tax-avoiding commercial activity (think Netflix and Amazon), while comparatively failing to grow a strong tax-paying middle class. As well, attempts at aligning the tax code with green objectives have been met with fierce political opposition. And there are gaps in how effectively the tax code incentivizes capital investment, employment growth and R&D. Canada is one of only three OECD countries where business currently spends less on R&D than it did in 2007. This is one

"Our actions in the next decade will determine the future of civilization."

Indy Johar, Dark Matter Labs

"...there is not a single key technology behind the iPhone that has not been State-funded."

Mariana Mazzucato, *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths* (2013)

area where Mazzucato focuses most of her attention, noting that virtually every significant technological breakthrough is the result of publicly-funded R&D. Government must not only invest in the new economy, but it must take risks in doing so. Does a given investment help to build a bridge to the future or does it result in a dead end? As Mazzucato notes, governments that subsidize old models and shy away from new ventures and new forms of risk-taking doom their jurisdictions to irrelevance.¹¹² Responding to this challenge, matching grants for investment in machinery, equipment and intellectual property development will likely be on the horizon, as may new direct investments in post-secondary research-industry partnerships, as well as research-community partners.¹¹³

But perhaps above all else, there is growing consensus that government has a vital role – indeed THE role – in wealth redistribution, in order to not only ensure as little poverty as possible (ideally eliminating it all together), but also to maintain social stability and social mobility that is otherwise eroded when extreme inequality is present. The Edelman Trust Barometer has tracked a far greater awareness of, and concern for, social inequalities among the public, with 60% of Canadians feeling strongly that something must be done to redistribute Canada's wealth and prosperity more fairly.¹¹⁴ This is even more strongly felt among the "mass population", who feel disproportionately affected by the pandemic. A review of the academic literature on inequality in Canada conducted by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) revealed "a growing body of research indicates there is a relationship – if perhaps indirect and complex – between income inequality and inequality of opportunity or of life chances, not only among members of society at a given point in time but also across generations."¹¹⁵ It further concludes

that "from the perspective of the past three decades or more, inequality has increased substantially, particularly in terms of market income" and "the evidence suggests that in coming years battling inequality will require real leadership on the part of the federal government." Roger Martin notes that Canada's income distribution has gradually warped over the last four decades from a healthy bell-shaped "Gaussian" curve, to a hockey stick-like "Pareto" curve, where those at the upper income levels have a disproportionate amount of wealth.¹¹⁶ Other economists, such as Thomas Piketty, have measured the change in different income fractiles' wealth growth since 1982, in real (inflation-adjusted) dollars. In their analysis, the top 0.01% of Canadian income earners (i.e. the 1% of the 1%) saw their incomes grow by nearly 160%, while the bottom 90% of income earners saw just a 2% increase over the same nearly 30-year period.¹¹⁷ Martin echoes the IRPP findings that "significant and frankly unprecedented government intervention will be necessary to maintain a decent middle class" (and hence, community-wide prosperity).¹¹⁸

In addition to income supports and income redistribution, R&D investment, and greening of the economy, major investments in universal child care, reform of long-term care, and likely a pharmacare program are in the offing. Additional investments in affordable housing and health care are also likely. Whether the government can actually grow the productive middle class while shrinking poverty and the moderating the wealth of the uber wealthy remains to be seen.



TOWARD UNIVERSAL CHILD CARE:

The Key to a She-recovery

The pandemic has dealt a disproportionately severe blow to female participation in the labour force, which is at its lowest level in three decades. According to RBC deputy chief economist Dawn Desjardins, women are bearing the brunt of the COVID-19 labour displacement, “as they tend to work in industries – hospitality and food services, retail trade, educational services, health care and social assistance – most affected by closures, earnings losses and layoffs.”¹¹⁹ While a net 68,000 jobs for men have been added to the economy since February, over 20,000 jobs for women have disappeared.¹²⁰ 80% of the tens of thousands of workers laid off in the retail, hospitality and food services industries are women.¹²¹ Pre-pandemic, about 64 per cent (1.4 million) of Canadian children aged 0-5 regularly used paid non-parental childcare. In Ontario and Alberta, only about 50% of child care centres remained open during the pandemic, and most of those are operating far from full capacity.¹²²

A recent report by social policy researchers noted that “economists, activists and parents alike” are in unison in understanding the social and economic price of this “she-session”, warning that without a national child care program, Canada’s recover will be “dragged down”.¹²³ Canadian economist Armine Yalnizyan, who coined the term “she-session”, has urged governments to focus on this, in addition to traditional ‘stimulus’ packages

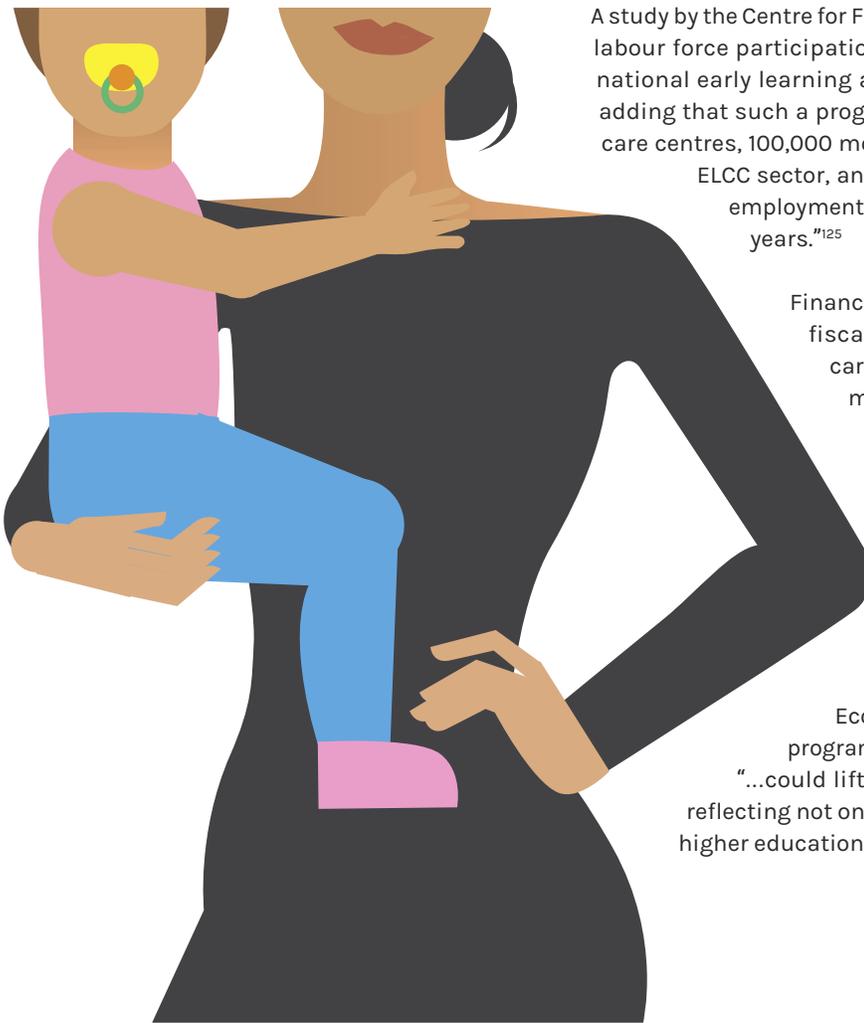
which tend to disproportionately support male labourforce participation (refer to Alberta’s \$10 billion stimulus package as a prime example of stimulus to male-dominated sectors). Rebekah Young of Scotiabank Economics has similarly urged governments to embed universal child care into a recovery plan, noting that Quebec’s universal daycare model has shown much stronger female labour participation.¹²⁴ For over a decade now, the Early Childhood Development Funders Working Group (led by the Margaret and Wallace McCain Foundation, Muttart Foundation, Lawson Foundation and others) have laid out the policy case in Canada for both universal child care and early childhood education (including early Kindergarten).

"We expect women to work like they don't have children, and raise children as if they don't work."

Amy Westervelt, *Forget Having It All: How America Messed Up Motherhood--and How to Fix It* (2018)

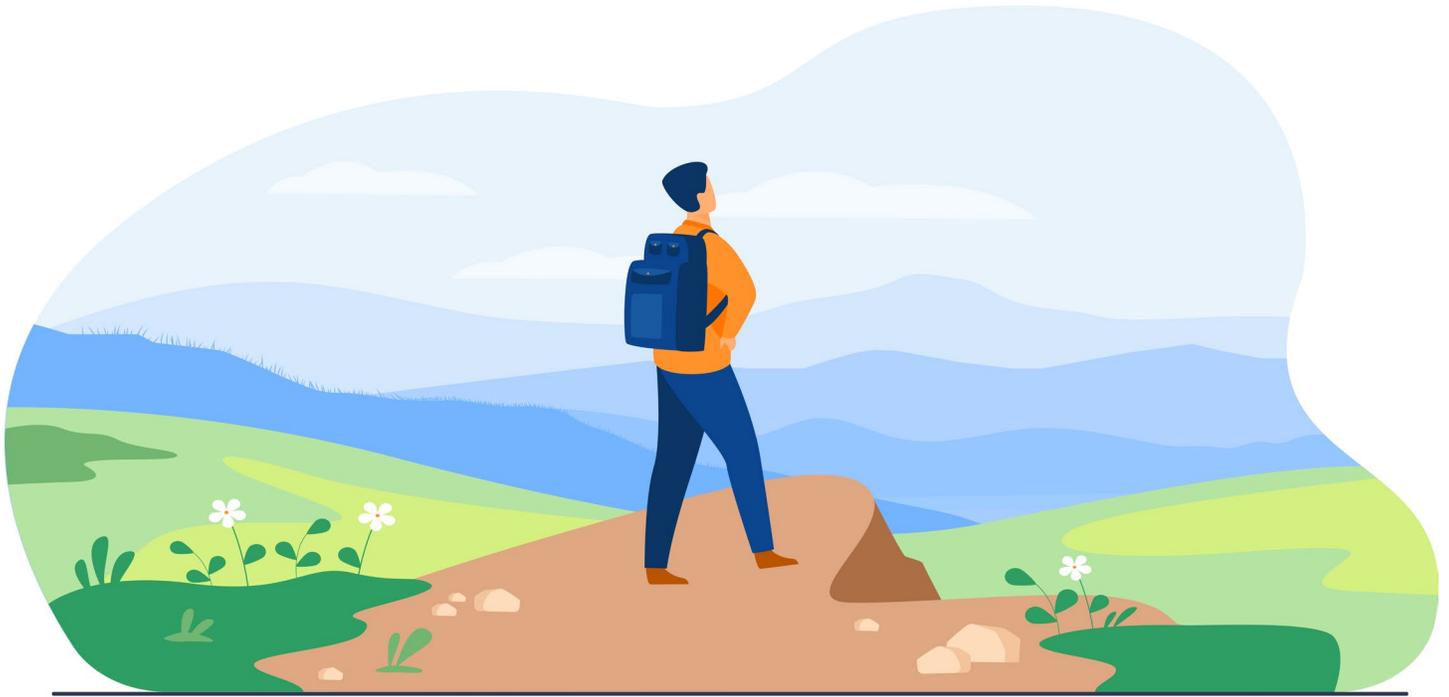
"I say this both as a working mother and as a minister of finance — Canada will not be truly competitive until all Canadian women have access to the affordable child care we need to support our participation in our country's workforce."

Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finance, November 2020 Fiscal Update¹²⁶



A study by the Centre for Future Work argues that an expanded GDP from female labour force participation would enlarge tax revenue such that a universal national early learning and child care (ELCC) program would pay for itself, adding that such a program "would create over 200,000 direct jobs in child care centres, 100,000 more jobs in industries which support and supply the ELCC sector, and facilitate increased labour force participation and employment by up to 725,000 Canadian women in prime parenting years."¹²⁵

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, in her November, 2020 fiscal update, signalled that a national, universal child care program is indeed on the horizon. Earmarking \$20 million to embark on a national consultation and design process, and in the short term topping up the Canada Child Benefit. Freeland noted the success of the Quebec model, and how essential child care is to a full recovery. A Liberal election platform promise, we can expect such a program to be tabled as early as the spring budget, but more likely will form the centrepiece of a Liberal re-election strategy. Universal child care also has broad support from the private sector. In a Scotiabank Economics primer on the topic, they argue that such a program is critical to closing the workforce gap, which in turn, "...could lift Canada's GDP levels by 4% over the medium term, reflecting not only greater supply, but also a productivity boost given higher educational attainment levels of Canadian women.



FLATTENING THE CARBON CURVE, Flattening the Rockies

The oil and gas industry burns up a lot of oxygen in the public conversation about the economy and the environment in Alberta. Conversely, the recent story of coal in the province has been far too under-profiled. It is a fascinating, double-edged story, of remarkable climate action success, on the one hand, and, on the other, vast planned exploitation of the eastern slopes of the Rockies.

Much as we've had to tackle the COVID curve, we also have a global, regional, and local challenge of flattening a carbon curve. With travel restrictions, closed borders and physical distancing in effect through much of 2020, the world experienced an estimated 8% reduction in carbon use. Soberingly, in order for the world to maintain levels of mean global temperature increase at 2 degrees Celsius, we must eliminate carbon emissions entirely by 2070. To achieve this, in turn, means 2020-scale decreases

in carbon use in every subsequent year from this point forward.¹²⁷ We are sitting at 411 parts per million carbon in the atmosphere now, up from 280 as an historic mean, vs. 350 deemed to be the safest maximum level.¹²⁸ Decarbonization is now an urgent global imperative. Climate change is even being felt (and measured) in Alberta. According to University of Lethbridge Professor Stefan Kienzle, average temperatures in Northern Alberta during the winter have risen 6 C since 1951, and 4 C in southern Alberta.¹²⁹ The number of days below -20 C has fallen by half, and the frequency of both heatwaves and cold spells have more than doubled.

As such, governments around the world are announcing aggressive net-zero pledges. China's unilateral commitment to carbon neutrality by 2060 means we can no longer rag the puck by using China (a larger emitter than the US, Europe and Japan combined) to justify North American inaction.¹³⁰ The Biden administration is bringing the US back into the Paris Accord. Under the "Next Generation EU" banner, 750 Billion Euros are earmarked for climate action.¹³¹ The upcoming German election, set for autumn 2021, will likely see the centrist (but climate action committed) Green party as king-maker in a coalition government, regardless of which other party wins. Meanwhile, the courts are increasingly becoming a battlefield for enforcing climate action. French PM Emmanuel Macron lost a domestic court decision drawing attention to France's lax performance reaching the Paris targets. There is a growing movement of lawyers pushing to criminalize destruction of the world's ecosystems – a crime that would be called "ecocide".¹³² Former Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney, now the UN Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance, is pushing for governments and market regulators to make climate disclosure mandatory.

“Alberta’s shift away from coal power should be the most talked-about climate policy story in Canada today. That it’s happened without the large increases in prices or concerns regarding reliability that were so loudly predicted five years ago is all the more remarkable.”

Dr. Andrew Leach, University of Alberta and Dr. Blake Shaffer, University of Calgary (CBC online, Oct 15, 2020)¹⁴¹

“Adults keep saying we owe it to the young people, to give them hope, but I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is.”

Greta Thunberg

Corporations have also turned a corner on climate change action, with many leading the way, or even pushing governments into action, such as *Uniting Business and Government to Recover Better*, a global compact of over 150 transnational companies (of which only two are Canadian). Astonishingly, corporate reporting on climate risk exposure, as part of Environmental and Social Governance (or ESG) reporting has increased nearly four-fold from 2019 to 2020.¹³³ Enbridge, for example, in addition to net zero targets, has also set new employment and governance targets for equity seeking groups.

One might conclude that Alberta’s trajectory is fundamentally at odds with all of this. That we are set to move from climate action laggard to outright climate menace. It is true that Alberta’s percentage contribution to Canada’s total greenhouse gas emissions is not only by far the highest in the country (37%), but it is in sharp contrast to Alberta’s contribution to GDP (15%).¹³⁴ Moreover, while all provinces east of Saskatchewan have either stabilized or lowered their emissions over the last decade, Alberta keeps trending upward unabated (save for COVID and recessionary effects). And oil production, this last year excepted, has increased in every preceding year going back to 2010 (remaining the crown jewel of the Canadian export market). Moreover, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers forecasts production growth reaching 4.25 million b/d by 2035 from 2.9 million b/d in 2018, which is actually a much revised, constrained forecast.¹³⁵ But alongside this petroleum growth trajectory are also some encouraging trendlines for climate action.

TransAlta is poised to convert the last of its coal-fired power plants next year to natural gas, four years ahead of schedule.¹³⁶ As a result, as CEO Dawn Farrell has pointed out, “TransAlta has more than met its fair share of the Paris Agreement. To date, we alone have delivered 10% of Canada’s goal of a 220 million tonne reduction for Canadians by 2030.”¹³⁷ In the last 20 years, coal has fallen from over 80% of Alberta’s energy supply to 27% in 2020. The steepest drop has been in the last 5 years. Since the Notley government announced the coal phase-out in 2015, coal-fired power use has dropped 50%. The 2015 phase-out built on the 2007 carbon pricing

scheme on large emitters brought in by the Stelmach government, adding both a “stick” and a “carrot”. The former through an indexed pricing scheme, the latter through compensation to producers. The net result is that there is very little appetite by industry to reverse the trend, and it shows that industry can respond quickly when there are clear price signals combined with new technology.¹³⁸

While this is encouraging news for climate action, there is a parallel coal story just starting to be written, and with a very different trajectory. This past May, the Alberta government rescinded a 44-year ban on coal mining on the Eastern Slopes of the Rockies, put in place by the then Lougheed government. One month later, the federal/provincial Joint Review Panel established to review the proposed Grassy Mountain Coal Project, proposed by Australian company Benga Mining Limited, determining that it has sufficient information to proceed to a public hearing, happening right now.¹³⁹ This will be the first of at least seven, and likely eventually more, proposed open pit metallurgical (non-thermal) coal mining projects proposed for the Alberta Rockies, from the Crownsnest in the south to the Nordegg/Hinton region in the north. This first project has raised serious questions about water quality, the nature and depth of support from surrounding communities, protection of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, community economic benefits, social impacts, remediation and clean-up and sufficiency of royalty rates on coal (1% in Alberta vs. 7% in BC).

Beyond this first proposal, there are deeper questions about cumulative effects, land use planning (there are no regional land use plans for most of the eastern slopes region), as well as “free entry” mining, which is the dominant means of granting mineral tenures in Canada. “Free entry” gives the prospector (typically a mining company) exclusive right to Crown-owned mineral substances.¹⁴⁰ As Alberta is one of six provinces pushing back on legislation to enact the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and as it has passed legislation expressly forbidding protests that encumber transportation or energy corridors, the table is set for an even more acrimonious relationship between the province and Indigenous Peoples over questions of land use and resource extraction.



EXORCISING THE **RESOURCE CURSE**:

The Emerging Post-Carbon Alberta Powerhouse

The pandemic is just the latest in a wave of cataclysms that have shaken Alberta to its core. It is as if the province has been going through a lengthy exorcism. And the demon has a name: The resource curse, or the ‘paradox of plenty’, which tends to visit economies with abundant natural resources in the form of stunted growth of non-resource sectors, challenges with innovation, entrepreneurship and diversification, and challenges with social capital and cohesion.

The psychologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, who worked with terminally ill patients, famously came up with the “Five Stages of Grief”: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Taking each

of these in turn, we’ve seen an early epoch of *denial* – denial of climate change, or our collective culpability in it (think of Ralph Klein’s dismissive knee-slapper about “dinosaur farts”). Then, *anger*, expressed for example in the vilification of celebrities (Neil Young, James Cameron, Leonardo DiCaprio). Then, *bargaining*, for example in the Notley-Trudeau attempt at a “grand bargain” (or, more cynically, the “we can have our cake and eat it too” scenario), also in the unprecedented scale of public pipeline and refinery subsidies, equity partnerships with Indigenous stakeholders and threats-as-bargaining chips lobbed at the rest of Confederation. The early phase of COVID then brought on the penultimate phase: *Depression*. Indeed, agonizingly so: Alberta currently has the highest rate of suicide among all provinces.¹⁴² We have 2 fewer Canadian energy giants (following EnCana’s decampment to Denver and the Husky-Cenovus merger). And a glum Premier Kenny told us to brace for levels of unemployment that would echo, if not eclipse, the Great Depression.

But now, Alberta is reaching the last phase: *Acceptance*. Perhaps best symbolized by the damning indictment of both the federal and provincial government’s inaction on climate change that came not from an environmental group, but from the industry itself – the now infamous February 23 Letter from the CEO of Teck.¹⁴³ The mining giant’s abandonment of a multi-billion dollar oilsands investment is due to insufficient investor interest

“We’ve shown the world things like this can happen, even in the smallest of communities.”

Blue Eyes Simpson, Vice-President, Fort Chipewyan Metis Association¹⁵²

“The future rewards those who press on. I don’t have time to feel sorry for myself. I don’t have time to complain. I’m going to press on.”

Barack Obama

...tied, in turn, to Canada’s lack of a compelling or coherent climate strategy, leading to uncertainty for investors and an elevated risk of “stranded assets.” Indeed, as one economic analyst noted recently “we have switched our approach to emissions reductions so many times, federally and provincially, that long-term investors don’t know what to think.”¹⁴⁴

But now, the good news: Slowly and painfully, as acceptance sets in, there is a new imagined future emerging. More and more people are beginning to get excited about the 21st century possibilities in new industries, some far flung from oil and gas, and others perfectly suited to take advantage of Alberta’s unique *in situ* natural and human assets: The most plentiful wind and solar potential in Canada, decent geothermal potential, alongside sedimentary basins capable of sequestering vast amounts of carbon; a highly educated population schooled in required, or adjacent, STEM-fields necessary to take leadership in an energy transition; and a thriving civil society, a necessary corollary to a high-innovation economy. Despite the challenges of COVID and declining revenue, there remains no shortage of grit, tenacity and a sense of possibility among Albertans. Industry analysts Peter Tertzakian and Jackie Forrest of ARC Energy Research Institute are particularly bullish about hydrogen, geothermal, and carbon capture and storage.¹⁴⁵ Each of these are explored in this section.

Ironically, with sufficient political will and investment, Alberta innovation could prove to be pivotal in achieving a levelling off, or eventually even a reduction, of atmospheric greenhouse gases. As a recent report by the International Energy Agency pointed out, carbon capture “is the only group of technologies that contributes both to reducing emissions in key sectors directly and to removing CO₂ to balance emissions that cannot be avoided.” Alberta was an early a global leader in point-source carbon capture and storage (CCS), and UCalgary’s Containment and Monitoring Institute (CaMI), led by Dr. Don Lawton, is among the world’s leading CCS research projects. The \$1.2 billion Alberta Carbon Trunk Line System (ACTL) went online in June, 2020. Alongside Shell’s Quest project and Calgary-based Whitecap Resources’ Weyburn project, initially developed by Cenovus, these are three of the largest geologic sequestration sites in the world.



However, such projects, still very much in the proof-of-concept phase, require significant public subsidy, including tax credits, and their commercial potential in the short term remains tied to “tight” hydrocarbon production. But longer term, global carbon neutral and carbon negative markets suggest there is a much larger market in offsets and carbon trading, partially reliant, of course, on more robust carbon pricing schemes and/or more stringent clean energy standards. Currently, the United States remains - by far - the global leader in the development in particular of large-scale CCS facilities, with 25 facilities with commercial potential having been announced in just the past 3 years. Even during COVID, the CCS market has increased nearly 50%, and with Biden’s stated commitment to decarbonization, CCS will become a vital part of the mix of solutions, which Alberta could be well-positioned to help address. The re-deployment of Alberta oil and gas science and engineering knowledge, and employment should be a relatively straightforward shift. In fact, the employment potential in Alberta for CCS may well be massive. Predicted to be an \$800 billion global market by 2030, CCS is even expanding to non point-source, “direct air capture” (or DAC) technology (i.e. capturing carbon directly out of the atmosphere), which will be a critical biosphere-sustaining solution. This breakthrough technology was pioneered by former UCalgary Professor Dr. David Keith (now at Harvard). While many companies already claim carbon neutrality, and many others are moving to more robust net zero targets, Microsoft vows to be carbon negative by 2030, which requires heavy investment in DAC.

Another interesting petroleum-adjacent industry that has huge potential for Alberta is hydrogen. Global demand for hydrogen is projected to increase at least tenfold in the coming decades, with a \$2.5 trillion industry potentially meeting a quarter of the world's energy demand by 2050.¹⁴⁶ Over 25 countries already have a hydrogen strategy, with Canada in the process of developing one. Alberta has the start of a strategy, but at 3 pages embedded within the natural gas strategy, it will need fleshing out.¹⁴⁷ Like fossil fuels, though much safer, hydrogen's portability enables a wide range of uses, including heavy industrial uses, from shipping to aerospace to rail to steel smelting. Currently, 95% of the world's hydrogen is produced from fossil fuels, so the key will be moving to so-called "blue" (zero net carbon) and "green" (hydrogen from renewables) production. The trick will be to simultaneously expand hydrogen supply and demand. The Canada Energy Systems Analysis Research (or CESAR) lab, led by Dr. David Layzell at UCalgary, is doing some cutting-edge research on hydrogen in the heavy trucking industry, which is where Burnaby-based Ballard Power Systems could be poised to make a comeback. It is also worth considering that Central Canadian opposition to a national energy corridor would likely evaporate if it the payload was hydrogen.

Geothermal energy is poised to be a significant part of the worldwide energy mix in 2021. The exciting news for Alberta is that the engineering know-how required to bring geothermal to the forefront of world energy solutions comes largely from the oil and gas sector (horizontal drilling and fracturing substrata, for example). As one energy writer put it recently, "there's no realistic way geothermal can promise to absorb all the jobs currently being lost in oil and gas. Nonetheless, geothermal offers oil and gas something it badly needs: a port in a storm. It's a growing clean energy industry that needs a smart workforce trained in exploration and drilling"¹⁴⁸ The coming decade will see more investment in geothermal than the four previous decades

combined. Saskatoon-based company DEEP Earth Energy Production, female-led no less, just announced a "geothermal gusher" using directional drilling technology.¹⁴⁹ The well will provide energy sufficient to power 3,000 homes. In fact, geothermal's potential is so tantalizing as both a flexible and inexhaustible resource, the potential long-term for Alberta companies who are early innovators is hard to overstate.

Oil giants Shell, BP and Total are all moving heavily into renewables, with BP pledging to cut its oil and gas production by 40% while shifting about one third (so far) of its new investments in low-carbon energy.¹⁵⁰ But, notwithstanding Suncor's heavy investment in cogeneration, in general, Canadian companies are not pursuing renewables with nearly the same vigour. Some large companies are distancing themselves from the more rabid industry associations that work to undermine climate and renewables policies. Shell left the American Fuel and Petrochemical Manufacturers over its lobbying work undermining climate action policy. Total and Teck have both left the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) due to their "misalignment" with CAPP's stance on climate change.¹⁵¹ Andrew Grant, the head of Oil, Gas and Mining at Carbon Tracker, a London-based think tank that researches the impact of climate change on financial markets summarizes the shifting sands well:

"I think it's become very clear that the world is different now these are not normal times, and that's especially true for large oil and gas companies like BP. Case in point: on August 4, the date that BP announced it was fundamentally altering its business strategy to adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, its shares rose by about 7% – on a day when the broader index of energy producers saw much more modest gains. If that doesn't tell you a story about how the math has changed, nothing will."¹⁵⁷

New wind and solar projects are coming online faster than predicted, particularly as the cost of solar plummets. The Taber solar plant will generate 500 megawatts of power, as will the Travers Project in Vulcan County (which will utilize a whopping 1.5 million photovoltaic panels). The solar project in off-grid, diesel-reliant Fort Chipewyan will provide up to 25% of the community's energy needs.¹⁵³ In fact, Alberta could well lead Canada in wind and solar development by 2025.¹⁵⁴ Worldwide solar use has jumped 20-fold in the last decade alone, providing 724 Gigawatts (or 3% of the world's energy) in 2019.¹⁵⁵ Over the same period, wind increased 3-fold, from 346 to 1,430 Gigawatts. Renewables are already lower cost in most of the world's markets, compared to fossil fuels, and the International Energy Agency in its *World Outlook 2020* declares solar to be the "cheapest electricity source in history", revising its 2018 forecasts for solar, which assumed cost levels 20-50% higher than the technology has proven to be.¹⁵⁶ By the end of 2020, total investments in renewables will exceed investments in fossil fuels for the first time ever, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). A revolution in battery storage will be a huge part of a renewable energy future, so it is also encouraging to see TD Asset Management's Greystone Infrastructure Fund investing in the country's largest battery storage development in Alberta. At least ten other major battery projects are underway in Alberta.

Canadian initiatives that bring industry, government and civil society together to work on future scenario planning, and shared innovation strategies will be important investments in the next few years. The Energy Futures Lab and Transitions Accelerator are two such initiatives, supported through philanthropic, industry government partners, the latter with seven foundations among the mix of funders.



CLOCKING IN TO THE 21ST CENTURY: A Workplace Revolution

In past scans, we have prognosticated about the future of work - the skills and competencies needed, the role of robots, and so on. We have also mused about placemaking, in Calgary in particular. But we have not brought the two together: What might the workplace of tomorrow look and feel like?

Working remotely in the pandemic, the workplace of most people's *literal* tomorrow holds many clues for what the *figurative* tomorrow looks like. We are all now both joyfully and painfully aware of the liberating and shackling paradox of working remotely. Liberating, insofar as we can blissfully keep our pajama bottoms on, playing fetch with

the dog in between conference calls. We can engage people in real-time conversation from nearly anywhere in the world. We can live rurally and interact urbanely. We can even live abroad and act Canadian when required. But this arrangement is also constricting because we have lost a face-to-face connection. We can't read body language, our eyes are strained, and in less fortunate institutional environments, our employers are monitoring our every keystroke and search term.¹⁵⁸ For students, it's even more anxiety-inducing: Proctoring software designed to prevent cheating on exams taken remotely monitors eye movements, prohibits bio-breaks and racially profiles.¹⁵⁹ As the pandemic drags on, people's sense of a healthy work-life balance is being challenged. The other paradox about working from home is that, while productivity is up, innovation is down.¹⁶⁰ Innovation requires collaboration and co-creation, which is very difficult to do working remotely. And there are other shadow sides to the remote working trend: 32% of companies are replacing full-time permanent workers with "contingent workers", and employees are begging for more resources to be put into mental and physical health supports.¹⁶¹ A 2018 Gallup poll found 67% of North American employees had experienced burnout in the previous year, which further suggests that Canada's ascetic culture of sick-day policies will have to change.¹⁶²

The truth is, no one really knows what the future of work looks like. But the literature seems to centre on three recurring concepts: The future of work is FLEXIBLE (e.g. remote working, decentralized co-working options), ADAPTIVE (e.g. far more collaboration) and RESPONSIVE (e.g. to employee mental health, work-life balance). At least two of these characteristics may prove challenging to Canadians, who are more wedded than most countries to an outdated (and empirically invalid) notion that productivity is connected to hours worked. As J. Percival, the founder of Basecamp, points out, we have known since Henry Ford that productivity declines past a certain number of hours.¹⁶³ Flexible remote working policies, four-day summer weekends, a four-day work week (as Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin is pursuing), longer vacation allocations (and/or mini-sabbaticals), all have potential to optimize 21st century worker productivity and loyalty.¹⁶⁴ As Percival succinctly puts it “the 9-5 is over. Just get your work done.” A 2018 analysis of 50,000 knowledge workers showed that between chat apps, e-mail and other distractions, there was only 1.2 hours on average of uninterrupted productive time (flow). But at least e-mail is asynchronous – it doesn’t encourage artificial urgency.

On the employee adaptability front, as the Future Skills Centre and Janet Lane from the Canada West Foundation have noted, we are moving from competency-based careers to occupational careers. Micro-credentials, skills and capacities are increasingly more important than professional accreditations (which tend to be more frozen in time).¹⁶⁵ Community-focused work-integrated learning (which includes co-ops, internships, apprenticeships, practicums, applied research projects or fellowships, and other employment-related experiential learning opportunities) is dominating the discourse on higher education these days, also among many in the business community. RBC, Telus, the Business-Higher Education Roundtable of the Conference Board of Canada, and the current review of Alberta’s higher education funding and policies (if leaks are to be believed) all emphasize work-integrated learning.¹⁶⁶ There is also an increased emphasis on social, human, and emotional skills (e.g. working in a team, negotiations, problem-solving, communications), all of which are also tied to adaptability. One of the more systemic reasons Alberta is struggling right now may simply be that a high proportion of the workforce is STEM-schooled talent, who may be more challenged with respect to adaptability.

Overall, the future of the workplace is heterogeneous. But one cornerstone will be a principle called “anywhere operations”, where the mantra is “remote first, digital first”, an operating model that allows “business to be accessed, delivered and enabled anywhere regardless of where customers, employers and business partners” are located.¹⁶⁷ There will be shifts in insurance, risk assessment, employee benefits, and other policies as borderless, geographically-agnostic working becomes more and more commonplace. According to a recent Gartner poll, 30% of North

“So much of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to work.”

Peter Drucker

“Many European countries have higher labor productivity than [North America]. Yet citizens there choose to work fewer hours and take longer vacations, decreasing their output—because ...they prioritize contentment or happiness over economic output.”

Fareed Zakaria, *The End of Economics* (2019)

American office employees, pre-pandemic, worked at least partly from home. The number is now at 50%, and far higher in certain sectors like tech and academia. We are also moving from location-based production to globalized off-shore production, to now more decentralized (and in many cases re-localized) production. This is sometimes referred to as “glocalization”. And “resiliency” is replacing “efficiency” as the new watchword in business.

Companies will have to radically adjust their policies on working remotely, as well as how to facilitate collaboration. We are seeing a trend toward nearly 100% remote working in tech. Microsoft, for example, recently announced that all of its North American staff can choose to work from home. Shopify is also moving to a permanent work-at-home model. But, if your company doesn’t trust employees to work in a decentralized setting, you are ill-prepared for the 21st century.¹⁶⁸ In this light, the Calgary downtown culture is an increasingly anachronistic manifestation of Max Weber’s “Protestant work ethic.” Such low-trust environments will cling to the office model for awhile, but will eventually be out-competed on talent. There will be pressure on companies to enable digital nomadism, including working in other provinces and countries (all the more reason to consider quality of life metrics in Calgary – how do you incentivize your talent to stick around when they can work from the Sunshine Coast?). That said, not all employees actually want to work from home. Many crave community, and thrive in a collaborative setting. For that reason, co-working spaces (currently in suspended hiatus during COVID-19) still have a viable future.

Longer term, but certainly within the coming decade, work-life balance will change even more, as automation replaces more mundane or hazardous tasks. As one blogpost on workplace experience adds, “toss in blockchain, IoT sensors, wearables, platform models, quantum computing, robotic exoskeletons, and eggs, and you’ve got a frittata served fresh for a workforce revolution” The future of work isn’t a binary between having a job or your job being automated, it’s a nuanced reimagining of every assumption we have about workplace experience.¹⁶⁹

Pandemics have always led to urban innovations. Municipal sanitation, parks and open spaces, public washrooms, and minimum housing setbacks (a more absurd relic of this era in the modern context) were all in response to diseases like cholera and typhoid afflicting cities in the earlier industrial era. Expansive suburbs, which we now deride as “sprawl”, have their roots in social innovation. COVID-19 will be no different – it will lead to new urban designs, planning regulations, land use and transportation configurations driven by public health imperatives. Some of these measures will help save lives and some will likely harm urban vitality. Some will reduce our carbon footprint, and others may exacerbate it.

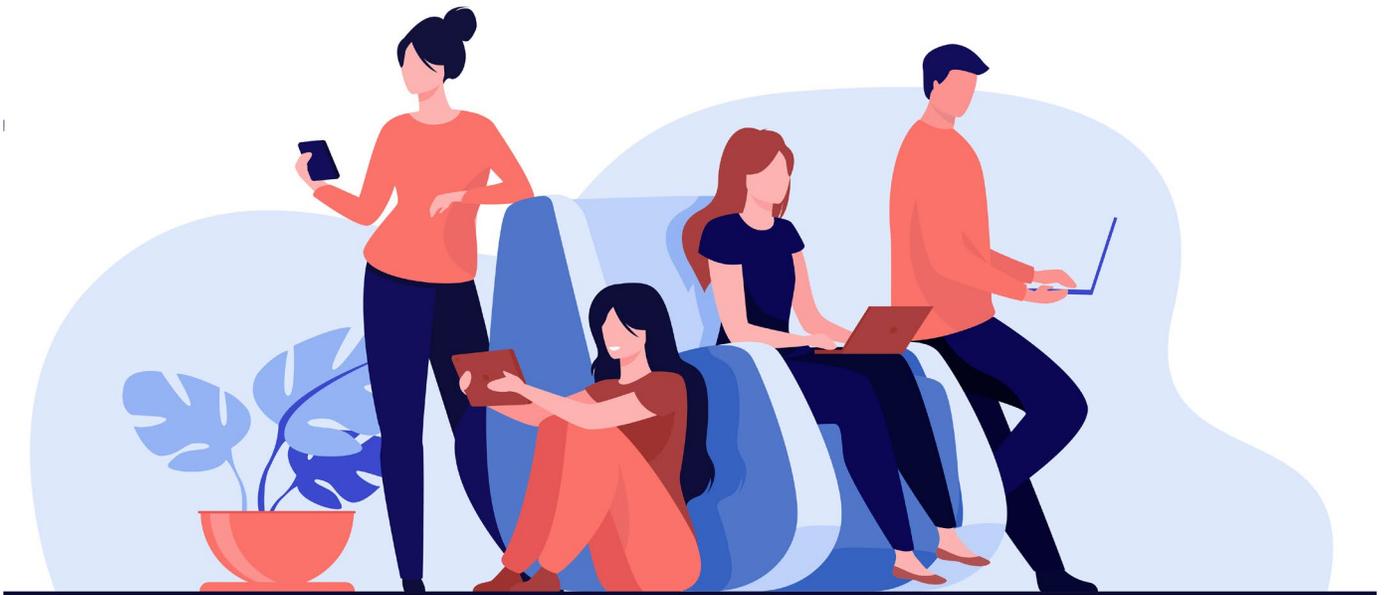


While it may be tempting to see the equation of remote working + electric autonomous vehicles as leading inexorably to a new era of sprawl, or even worse (from a sustainability standpoint) exurban acreage expansion, real estate prices and the natural human longing for community may keep such a trend in check. What may be more likely is the rise of medium density housing options, which is the most optimal scale to promote transit use and urban vitality (Barcelona, Berlin and the central parts of London, Paris and San Francisco are excellent examples of medium density). It is also the requisite density for the “15-minute” city, an idea getting a lot of play lately. Medium density is currently less attractive to developers because of minimum parking requirements – the buildings are too small to warrant the cost of underground parking, but too large to have minimum parking requirements waived. But with mobility-as-service (described in the previous section of this scan), the need for personal parking spaces all but evaporates.¹⁷⁰ High rise apartments, in contrast, tend toward mono-cultures, and are far from pandemic-friendly settings, while low suburbs don’t usually have the densities or sufficient heterogeneity of land uses to promote a vibrant pedestrian culture.¹⁷¹

Also, we may see the rise of mid-sized cities in the 100,000 to 500,000 range. Large enough to contain a full array of activities and services but small enough not to overwhelm (think, places like Kelowna, Kingston, and Moncton). Incidentally, Calgary’s status as a second-tier metropolis, with much more affordable housing than Vancouver, yet also having cosmopolitan cultural and recreational assets, by its very nature helps future-proof the city somewhat.

Downtown office high-rises, of which Calgary has many splendid examples for its size, may be the trickiest properties to reconfigure. Downtown Calgary is currently challenged by over 12 million square feet of empty office space (that’s over three Pentagons worth of empty space). Four office buildings in the core are entirely unoccupied, and five others are more than 75% empty.¹⁷² Urbanist Richard Florida predicts that we won’t see the same “packing and stacking” of office workers, but downtown business districts will still play a role.¹⁷³ Offices will still have a use as places of creation, training and, especially, collaboration, perhaps also for hotdesking or other ephemeral work activities. It will remain crucial for innovation to have places for co-creation in physical proximity and for ‘spontaneous workplace collisions’. But the divided solitary office or cubical, designed for routine independent work, will be a thing of the past.¹⁷⁴ Workplaces will also be more heterogenous in design, particularly with regard to attending to employee wellness (e.g. building in spaces for yoga, meditation, prayer and ablution, etc.). City cores that thrive will also have heterogenous blocks and precincts – residential, commercial and public in close proximity (Beltline and the East Village do this well, but the downtown core does not). Partial or complete conversions of downtown Calgary buildings into condominium or hotel spaces will intensify.

We will still have a need – and a craving, post-pandemic – to congregate, to gather in communion (for civic voice and solidarity, faith, celebration, live music and theatre, sports, and other shared experiences). Parking lots, particularly as the mobility-as-service model takes hold, will also be more creatively utilized or re-purposed entirely, for example as farmers markets, for live music or festivals, or as pop-up outdoor cinemas.



A NEW (DIGITAL) DEAL:

Toward Equitable Lifelines to Civilization

As IBM Canada's new President Claude Guay recently observed, the pandemic has led to an unprecedented digital acceleration, and yet he notes that there is a big disconnect between executives and employees in the perceived level of support they need to stay connected.¹⁷⁵ Social distancing requirements have forced millions of Canadians to not only work from home, but to attend school or post-secondary classes online, and to use the internet as our main conduit of for social gatherings. The internet has become our lifeline to civilization. Not only is it an indispensable tool in the vast majority of workplaces, but it is vital for education, for democratic engagement, for data collection and measurement, and increasingly for health and medicine. And yet, it is not a public utility, and the quality of access among different Canadian communities is grossly unequal.

In fact, this unequal access has been the norm since the dawn of the internet, and the gap has only widened. Canadians in rural and remote communities experience speeds on average twelve times slower than urban Canadians, a problem made more serious by the need for tele-health solutions in northern and remote regions. As of November, \$1.75 billion is being committed by the federal government to bringing rural Canadians in line with urban residents - this includes a new partnership with SpaceX to bring low-Earth-orbit satellite-based based internet to remote locations, currently in the pilot testing phase.¹⁷⁶ However, some commentators say this is far too little, too late. As Fiona McKean of the Thistle Foundation states, the current set of initiatives are "like rolling out VHS to communities".¹⁷⁷ They will help with equitable access, but will do little to build the competitiveness of communities. Instead, she advocates for a national-scale fibre optic roll-out to thousands of Canadian communities, as well as more community ownership of internet service providers (ISPs). The ambition and scale of this can draw inspiration from Roosevelt's New Deal, which brought electrification to small US communities. O-NET, a nonprofit ISP owned by the Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development, is a brilliant Alberta example of a community-owned ISP.¹⁷⁸ In the US, 500 communities operate internet as a public utility, many having been pushed into this solution by Congress' removal of net neutrality. Chattanooga, the most famous of these, is the #1 consumer-rated ISP in the country.¹⁷⁹

Although mobile internet in Canada is cheaper than the US, it is twice as expensive as the UK or Germany, and many times more expensive than France, Australia, or most other OECD countries. Although prices have dropped somewhat over the past 3 years, Canada still “has the highest or second highest PPP-adjusted prices in all five [product] baskets”, according to Industry Canada.¹⁸⁰

As the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) has observed in a recent study, “digital development in Canada is underfunded, piecemeal, ad hoc and unorganized despite stakeholders sharing many of the same goals.”¹⁸¹ The combined effort of governments and “digital philanthropy” from foundations, companies, and donors for digital literacy programs, cybersecurity projects, digital infrastructure or even public conversations on digital tech and civil society is wholly inadequate.¹⁸² The report also notes the imbalance in how the federal government engages stakeholders, with a policy advocacy environment strongly skewed to industry participation over local communities and civil society groups. As Cassie Robinson of the UK National Lottery Fund observes, there is still a huge lack of knowledge of the importance of funding technology. Any funders who are genuinely concerned with social impact need to realize how important it is for organizations to be digitally savvy. Moreover, digital transformation is not simply digital adoption (e.g. going remote, going paperless). It involves completely rethinking why they exist and how they can meet people’s expectations in a digital society – it is a fundamental re-design, it is a mindset, and much more than the tech, per se.

Post-COVID in particular, the push to recognize the internet as a public utility is intensifying. Universal broadband service obligations are underway in Switzerland and Taiwan (the first two countries in the world to provide universal broadband, over a decade ago), and more recently in Finland, Spain, the UK and a number of other smaller nations. Canada itself declared a universal broadband commitment of 50mbps, but it is important to note that it has the status of a “basic service”.¹⁸³ A very useful step may to define broadband internet access as an “essential service”, which would mean no Canadian community can be denied access (much like electricity and water). As telecommunications is squarely within federal jurisdiction, this could be relatively straightforward. The First Nations Technology Council (unfortunately soon to be folding) had pushed for increased recognition not only of the digital divide, but also for “broadband spectrum as a Treaty right” (much as the Maori in New Zealand and Indigenous peoples in Mexico have pushed for).¹⁸⁴ Although Rural Development Minister Maryam Monsef has signalled an openness to making the internet a public utility¹⁸⁵, the most likely scenario in the short term is an Obamacare-style compromise with the big telecoms, where the private option remains alongside the guarantee of universal access.

As a previous section of this scan has highlighted, social impact organizations are challenged to address a host of pressing issues just when they’ve been forced to move their operations online.

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This shift has revealed yet another important digital divide in Canada. As a 2019 Senate report on the Charitable Sector highlighted, there is a technology gap, a data capacity and literacy gap, and a gap in how data and technology play into organization’s strategic priorities and their ability to innovate.¹⁸⁶ Most nonprofits do not have IT departments or data specialists, and funding for such priorities is in short supply.

We can also expect more discussion of who owns and regulates the platforms on which the social sector undertakes their activity, stores their data and communicates with citizens. There is a connection between the social impact sector’s need for next-level digital capacity and the broader goal of digital equity. As Laura Tribe from Openmedia maintains, “if the sector keeps up the fight for digital rights, everyone will have access to the internet.”¹⁸⁷ Moreover, to the extent the sector pushes relentless inclusion, tech design, whether in the sector itself, or on public (or even commercial) platforms will be better. Indeed, inclusive tech is arguably the most important priority society could be working on. As we have stated elsewhere,

“AI may well be the most important disruption to human social organization since the Agricultural Revolution. And yet, the very sector charged with monitoring, advocating for, and improving social impact and civil discourse, is barely talking about it” The vigilant, cautious, and creative amalgamation of machine super-intelligence with human learning has enormous potential to help us solve “wicked problems.” But is civil society sufficiently future-proof (or future-ready), when the stakes are so stratospheric, and the rewards and risks challenge the very bounds of our imagination?”¹⁸⁸

Last, there will be much more vigorous debate about whether Canada has struck the optimal balance between the public interest and privacy rights. Both Canada's and Alberta's contact tracing apps are examples of where striking this balance ends in failure: They are designed to so carefully safeguard privacy rights that they are essentially useless as public health tools. Public services that work well online through so-called "frictionless design" can run the risk of undermining privacy rights in the interest of efficiency, and consolidation and access of information (think, for example, of detailed medical records that are attached to you all your life – the benefits are obvious, but there are also clear privacy risks). Blockchain, discussed in depth in a previous scan, will help with this, but we could look at what other countries have done to thread this needle. Estonia is one promising jurisdiction worth looking at. "Named 'the most advanced digital society in the world' by *Wired*, Estonia has built an efficient, secure and transparent ecosystem where 99% of governmental services are online. It is no surprise then that Estonians have designed numerous digital solutions to help tackle the COVID-19 pandemic crisis."¹⁹⁰

"The Internet is not a luxury, it is a necessity."

Barack Obama¹⁸⁹

"We have to stop thinking of the internet as a commodity... It isn't a car."

Fiona McKean, Thistledown Foundation. (Future of Good Summit, Nov. 25, 2020)

"The pandemic has forced us into a virtual existence, on top of which everything sits... Without the internet, you can't participate. You're relegated to second class."

Kamau Bobb, global head of diversity strategy and research at Google



FROM PITY TO PARITY:

Revisiting Income and Social Supports

The effects of the pandemic on poverty and economic precarity are difficult to understate. *The Economist* notes that COVID-19 has undone years of poverty reduction efforts across the developing world.¹⁹¹ A survey conducted by Prosper Canada reveals that Canadians earning under \$40,000 report that almost all aspects of their finances have worsened since the onset of the pandemic.¹⁹² Opioid deaths rates have more than doubled since the pandemic began.¹⁹³ COVID-19 has also revealed to Canadians how inadequate the existing array of social support programs are. Employment insurance (EI) for example, only covers a portion of the population: 75% of minimum wage earners do not qualify for EI. And its formula of 55%

income replacement doesn't work for most families. Millions of Canadians are also more enlightened on the demeaning and humiliating aspects of the current social welfare system.

As the Canada Recovery Benefit (CERB/CRB) rolled out, which almost functioned like a grand experiment in universal basic income (UCB), we've seen more and more discussion of basic income, outlined for example in Evelyn Forget's new book.¹⁹⁴ But, not only is UCB expensive, public sector unions have been lukewarm (if not outright opposed) to the idea, and some critics note that it could remove people's connection to the labour market, especially at the margins.¹⁹⁵ As such, in the near term, we are more likely to see incremental reforms like an EI revamp, top-ups to existing programs (as we have seen with the Canada Child Benefit), and new programs that don't have quite the same pricetag (universal daycare and pharmacare, for example).¹⁹⁶ It will also be critical to get everyone who can work back to work: Because of an aging population, we will soon have the smallest working age cohort supporting the largest senior cohort in Canadian history.

“This pandemic has kicked open the factory doors of our culture and allowed us to see how the sausage is made: on the backs of the people whose labour, time and bodies we deem to be worth at or around minimum wage, but without which we absolutely could not – cannot – make it through this crisis.”

Lori Fox, Yukon-based writer and journalist²⁰³

At the same time there is growing impatience with the embedded paternalism of charity-driven approaches to poverty alleviation. Early in the pandemic, we witnessed a cleavage in Calgary where hoteliers were offering up hotel suites to homeless citizens, with the Mayor urging agencies to take up the offer. But some agencies declined, preferring instead to bus the homeless off to remote shelters each night (with questionable social distancing measures in place), only to be brought back downtown at the crack of dawn to be released to the streets. Fewer and fewer Calgarians are convinced that preserving this neo-Victorian approach is preferable to addressing either the actual welfare and social mobility of either homeless citizens directly or the safety of the broader community. With 189,000 Calgarians living in poverty, such lingering paternalism is not merely boutique and specious in its impact. It is tied up with unhelpful (and often unspoken) psycho-social notions like “deservingness” and “pity”, concepts which also undermine reconciliation and right relations. Calgary’s Enough for All strategy highlights the Blackfoot concept of *kimatapsini*. The essence of the concept is “to have pity on no one”, but rather genuine empathy and compassion.¹⁹⁷ The Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka studies a phenomena he labels the “deservingness ladder”, which asks a random sampling of respondents who they think are entitled to the benefits of the welfare state. Immigrants and racialized minorities tend to be at the bottom of the ladder, despite being labelled as “hard working” and “law-abiding”.¹⁹⁸ Additionally, these ratings are often subconsciously coloured by de-humanizing stereotypes, that allow us to look the other way when, for example, selective state-sanctioned violence is in play.

Connected to this, expect intensifying calls to embrace social innovation. It is a time to, on the one hand, pilot new approaches (such as the New Leaf project, conducted by Canada Research Chair and UBC researcher Jiaying Zhao with the Foundation for Social Change, which has tested – with early success – the use of cash payments to recently homeless people, alongside financial literacy supports). On the other hand, there will be pressure to scale up other approaches that have been well-researched and show efficacy. But social innovation itself will need to avoid replicating the systemic exclusion of Indigenous Peoples, racialized Canadians, people with disabilities, and other community members with ‘lived experience’ that could inform, drive and design an innovation. Dr. Kwame McKenzie, CEO of the Wellesley Institute, noting how a “poverty” mindset is disabling vis-à-vis a “prosperity” mindset, urges us to go back to basics – what are the REAL foundations of Canada, the REAL foundations of our prosperity?¹⁹⁹

So many social equity issues are not just tinged by racism, they are infused with it. Very, very few of the boards of the most influential and visible public agencies and high-profile nonprofits in Calgary, as one signpost, do not reflect the diversity of Calgary in 2021. Encouragingly, the federal government is allocating \$542 million for Indigenous groups to establish their own approaches to child welfare services (or whatever the more appropriate Indigenous proxy will be).²⁰⁰ But there is so much work yet to be done. Black and Indigenous people’s health outcomes are poorer, educational outcomes are poorer, and they do not have the same return on educational investment as white Canadians. It is estimated that wage discrimination costs the Black community in Canada as much as \$1.5 billion.²⁰¹ As the Canadian Poverty Institute has pointed out, “in 2016, the last year complete data is available, the prevalence of low income among racialized populations was 13%, compared to 9% for the total population in Calgary, 20% of the Black population live with [a] low-income, whilst 18% of the Indigenous population do the same.”²⁰² Additionally, people living in Calgary’s poorer communities are much more likely to be racialized than in more affluent communities. As a recent op-ed by a group of MRU researchers pointed out, COVID-19 in Calgary is affecting racialized communities much more profoundly:

“Many individuals in northeast Calgary, similar to those in Brampton, Ont., are essential workers in jobs where physical distancing isn’t possible (e.g., warehouses). This results in higher levels of exposure to COVID-19. Such employment usually does not provide sick days or other benefits so that sick workers can stay home. In addition, individuals in northeast Calgary are more likely to live in larger, multi-generational homes, partially due to lack of affordable housing. This population density is another factor that makes it difficult to prevent COVID-19 transmission. Finally, many individuals in northeast Calgary have faced extensive discrimination via the very systems designed to protect Canadians (e.g., health-care system) and thus, may be less likely to seek medical assistance until conditions become dire.”²⁰⁴



OLD CANADA:

Do We Stand on Guard for Thee?

COVID-19 has revealed much about our attitudes toward, and public policy choices regarding, the eldest members of our community. It was clear early on, that the pandemic was ravaging the elderly: For those who contract the virus, mortality rates are 1.3% at age 65, 4.2% at age 75, and 14% at age 85.²⁰⁵ Even at age 55, one's chances of dying from the coronavirus are 50 times greater than dying in a car accident. Even more important than chronological age is having multiple chronic diseases and/or general frailty.

The residential context in which elder members of the community are living is also an important factor. Among the heightened risk factors, according to a study just published in *The Lancet* looking

a country-wide data in Sweden, "living in a care home was associated with an increased risk of COVID-19 mortality compared with living in independent housing." Living in close proximity to younger relatives, or in high density situations, was also associated with higher mortality.

Arguably more than any other social issue, the pandemic has shined a light on the state of long-term care in Canada. What it has revealed is not pretty: Over 80% of all COVID deaths in Canada have been in long-term care facilities, the highest rate of any country in the OECD.²⁰⁶ As health writer Andre Picard notes, "those living in these group settings were 77 times more likely to die than their counterparts still living in homes and apartments."²⁰⁷ Starting in late March, news stories abounded at the numbers of dead emerging in single facilities where outbreaks had occurred: The Langley outbreak in Vancouver (24 lives lost) and The Pinecrest outbreak in Bobcaygeon (29 deaths) were the first to shock Canadians. But they were surpassed by so many others in the ensuing weeks and months. Among them, Northwood in Halifax (41 of Nova Scotia's 47 deaths); Sainte-Dorothée in Laval (95 deaths); Notre-Dame-de-la Merci in Montreal (93 deaths); Altamont in Toronto (59 deaths), and Orchard Villa Pickering (78).²⁰⁸ While Alberta has not had mortality counts this high in individual facilities, it has spread through a greater number of facilities, with over one hundred continuing care facilities experiencing active outbreaks in December



“This is a strategy that may protect business but the cost of doing business is a bunch of dead seniors. If that’s a formula that works for people in Alberta, well, then there you go. But... these are human beings that basically need our support and protection.”

Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Geriatrics at the Sinai Health System²²⁵

“Unfortunately, I don’t think it’s explicit; it’s implicit systemic ageism. I find that to be very unfortunate... We know who the most vulnerable in our society are, based on the learning from the first wave of the pandemic and I think we could’ve done more to prevent the vulnerability of those in continuing care centers.”

Mike Conroy, CEO, Brenda Strafford Foundation²²⁶

alone. Alberta also has the highest percentage of seniors living in long-term care of any province other than Quebec.²⁰⁹ Among the many shocking revelations that have accompanied this crisis is a failure of governments to track (or make public) COVID-19 cases in care facilities: What we know of the numbers is largely the work of activists, researchers, clinical workers and other citizens connected to the system.²¹⁰

The impact of COVID-19’s spread through seniors’ residences in Canada has been nothing short of horrific, and has revealed what Picard describes as “shocking systemic neglect towards our elders.”²¹¹ When the military were called in to provide emergency care in Ontario and Quebec, they reported on appalling conditions – overmedication, abuse, unattended hygiene, undernourishment – and yet these have been reported on in previous investigations going back many years.²¹² The ripple effects on the 425,000 Canadians living in continuing care are vast (loneliness and isolation at the top of the list), not to mention their families or the backlog of seniors waiting to get into these residences. Wait times for admission to Alberta’s 355 long-term care and supportive living facilities now stands at 79 days, up 61% from 2019.²¹³

So why is this almost uniquely Canadian epidemic-within-a-pandemic happening? And what are the prospects for change? Certainly, there have been differences in preparedness, with well-staffed facilities with plenty of personal protective equipment (PPE), able to nimbly implement protocols and isolation measures to avoid serious outbreaks.²¹⁴ PPE was also prioritized for hospitals, often at the expense of care facilities.²¹⁵ But there are financial and public policy factors at play too: While \$1 billion in emergency funding pledged from the federal government will help in the short term, Canada spends less than 30% than OECD average for long-term care, resulting in little capacity or resilience in the system for responding effectively to outbreaks.

The system is a mix of private for-profit, nonprofit and public providers, a patchwork of provincial regulatory regimes, with lax oversight and spotty inspection, and chronic issues with overcrowded residents, understaffed facilities, and over-worked, poorly-paid employees.²¹⁶ While more research needs to be done on private vs. public vs. nonprofit facilities, there is an emerging pattern of the public sector stepping in to support the safe operation of private facilities. Some private facilities in Ontario lost up to 80% of their staff, relying on emergency redeployment from the military and the public health care system.

A deeper analysis reveals that implicit ageism may well play a part, all the more so with respect to seniors experiencing dementia.²¹⁷ On the face of it, our collective choices to permit community circulation as a consequence of keeping the economy running, means that we’ve tacitly made the choice to jeopardize seniors’ health, as community circulation inevitably spreads into care settings. A meta-analysis of ageing and cultural factors, conducted by researchers at Princeton and NYU, revealed that ageism globally is less a function of Eastern vs. Western cultures, but rather is associated more with highly industrialized societies.²¹⁸ However, a 2018 paper in the *Journal Nature* reporting on a multi-year experiment conducted by MIT’s Media Lab involving millions of participants from 233 countries making ethical judgements for autonomous vehicles in fictionalized crash scenarios, revealed that participants in collectivist cultures, “which emphasize the respect that is due to older members of the community” – Taiwan, Japan, China and South Korea in particular – were less likely to make decisions that would harm elders.²¹⁹ Participants from Canada were near the opposite end of the spectrum, with participants from France being the least likely to make ethical decisions that favoured saving elders. Gerontologist Dr. Samir Sinha adds that there is intersectionality at play as well, between marginalized seniors and racialized, immigrant workers: “If we

don't really value the old, we aren't going to fund their care adequately, and won't pay the people who care for them properly. The entire long-term care system exists in the shadows, largely built on the backs of racialized immigrant women."²²⁰ Relatedly, structural violence in long-term care is well-documented (it is 6 times higher in Canada than in Scandinavia), and is directly connected to low-quality working conditions.²²¹

As the influential baby boom generation reaches the age at which long-term care may be necessary, the political prioritization of this issue will change dramatically. Will we continue to embrace mass institutionalization? Can we learn from de-institutionalization in other settings, such as mental health?

How can this system be fundamentally reformed, even revolutionized? What role is there for a universal home care program, or for age-friendly communities, or for housing and supported living innovations from elsewhere (co-housing, dementia villages, and naturally occurring retirement communities, or NORCs, for example). How can we build for unprecedented plurality and diversity of cultures, preferences and lifestyles? And most of all, how can we listen - really listen - to the needs and desires of seniors themselves?

We will also require better ways of valuing family and kinship care in Canada, which we tend to undervalue, both culturally and through Canada's tax and benefit regimes. According to one recent study, 93% of seniors preferred to stay at home if given the choice, and none envision long-term care in their future housing plans.²²² On November 19, 2020, Petro-Canada announced the creation of the *CareMakers Foundation*, noting in its media release that 1 in 4 Canadians are caregivers. Shirley Sharkey, CEO of SE Health, notes that only 10% of health care resources are dedicated to the 90% of seniors living in their homes.²²³ Dianne Roussin of the Winnipeg Boldness project, urges those in elder care to incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems and methodologies. As she frames it, "we have to stop placing 'independence' over 'interdependence'" as well as "thriving over surviving", noting as well that Indigenous cultures are more likely to value seniors living with extended family for as long as feasible.²²⁴



THE EXPERIENCE(D) CITY:

From a Place to Work to a Place to Live

While 2020 is epochal in many Canadians' lives, it has impacted Calgary in particularly profound and permanent ways. For much of the past 20 years, indeed 50 years, significant economic growth, population growth, and material prosperity has defined the city. It grew fast, far and wide, and seemed forever young, with a swagger and a chutzpah that other mid-sized cities could only envy. With an influx of young workers, especially during boom times, it maintained one of the most youthful demographics in all of urban Canada.

Then, like a series of biblical plagues befalling the city – the flood, the recession, the rejection of a half-hearted Olympic bid, the seeming death spiral of the petroleum industry – Calgary seemed to be getting stuck in a serious civic funk. And then a real plague hit. These days, downtown streets are hollowed-out canyons, floors of empty commercial space like geologic strata marking the fossilized remnants of fossil-fueled prosperity. Unemployment is at epically high double-digit levels, home prices are stagnant or falling, and many local businesses and community groups are beginning to disappear.

But another troubling trend has been quietly unfolding for a while. Shortly before the full brunt of the pandemic hit Canada, an article appeared on CBC News observing that, despite Calgary's population having grown by over 20% over the past decade, there was one demographic that actually shrunk during the same period: The age group 20- to 24-year-olds declined by 4,400, a decline of 5.5 per cent.²²⁷ Over the past three years, there has been an even sharper drop in the 25-30 year range. It is not clear why this happening, or whether it's connected primarily to economic hardship or to other factors.²²⁸

At the Institute for Community Prosperity, we interviewed twenty twenty-somethings (current and recently former students) to dig into this. Albeit anecdotal, these conversations uncovered almost no mention of jobs or the economy, but rather questions of artistic and cultural vitality, accessibility (especially transit and food accessibility), inclusivity, disconnection from the corporate downtown culture, and a perceived reactionary political climate that caters to an older generation.²²⁹

"I feel like Calgary is still a young city; it is still going through a lot of growing pains. I attribute Calgary to someone between the age of 25-30 trying to figure out who they are. They know they are grown and know what they are capable of but haven't figured out how to get there."

Anonymous citizen respondent, Calgary on Purpose (2020)²⁴⁰

"...humanity is no longer moving towards a future anymore that will allow our communities locally, nationally, and globally to flourish together. If we're moving anywhere at all, we seem to be sliding down a slippery slope towards a treacherous place, with unreason, self-righteous anger, and racism greasing our shared descent."

Thomas Homer-Dixon, *Commanding Hope: The Power We have to Renew a World in Peril* (2020)

So why is this happening? Calgary has long been a net exporter of post-secondary students, and certainly the job picture is not nearly what it was a decade ago, but is there a connection between the broader malaise that the city finds itself in, and this particular trend? Are young Calgarians, more globally networked through social media and more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations, having difficulty reconciling Calgary's narratives with the dynamics sweeping the globe and defining the near future? How might the city adapt and evolve to become a place that 20-somethings can see themselves living and thriving in, well into the future?

Paradoxically, a recent poll by ThinkHQ showed a sharp generational divide in Calgarian's levels of optimism about the city.²³⁰ And when you look at the city centre, it's almost like there are two sides of the track: North of the CPR, the downtown nine-to-fivers tend to be older, and more likely to be homeowners. They are pessimistic about the direction the city is headed. South of the railroad, in the beltline, the population is younger, more likely to rent, and to work in other sectors. This is the demographic that is positive about the future of the city, and yet many of them are leaving.

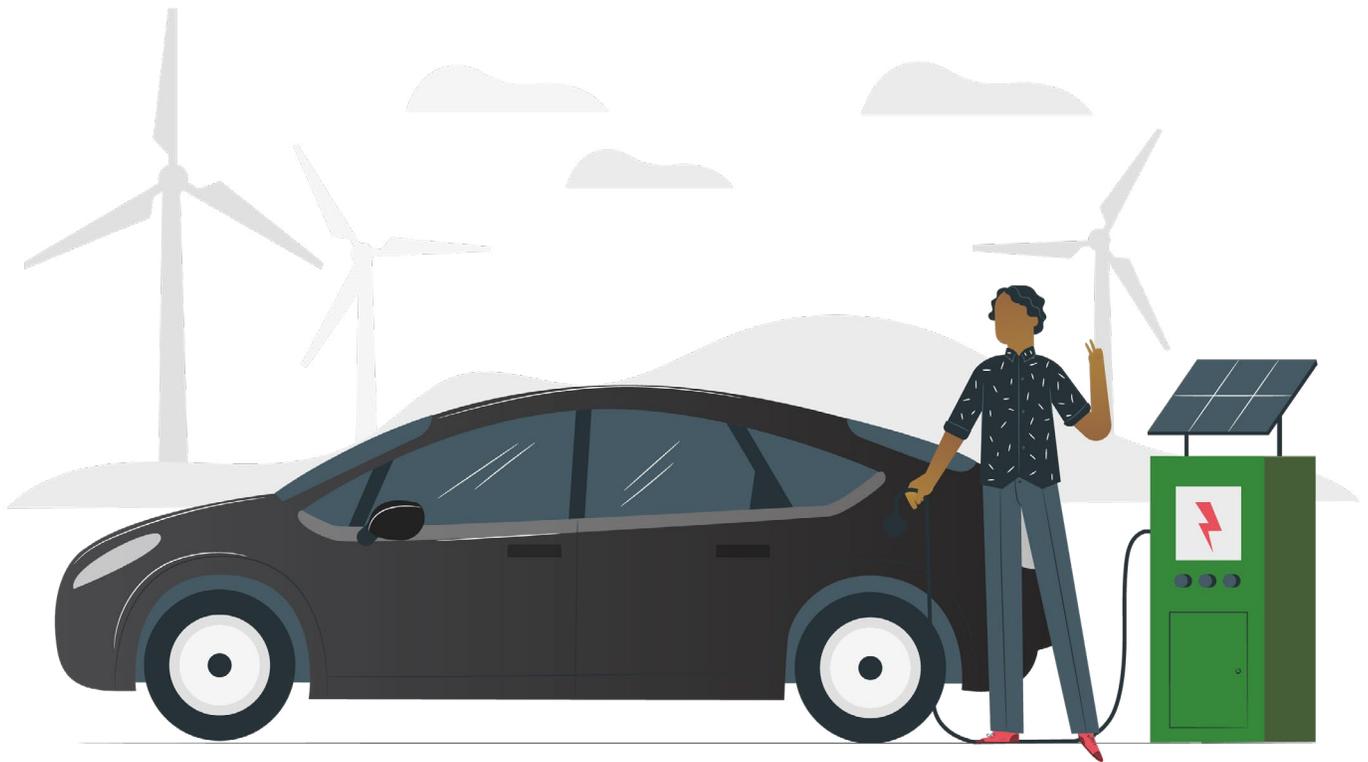
Fundamentally, this is a community prosperity challenge – how can Calgary create the conditions (cultural, economic, social and ecological) to attract and retain talent, and for human potential to flourish? There are many entities, municipal, civic, and grassroots that are digging into aspects of this question – working to spark, steward, connect, understand, or measure. It is why Calgary's anti-poverty coalition is called "vibrant communities", and why Calgary's municipal arts development authority speaks not of "funding arts organizations", but of "living a creative life". Calgary Economic Development's mission statement centres on "embracing shared prosperity and building a strong community for Calgary". The Calgary Foundation is interested in this challenge itself through its *Vital City*, *Jane's Walks* and *Neighbourhood Grants* initiatives. Grassroots entities like CivicTechYYC, Imagine Cities, and the UCalgary student-powered NextCalgary have sprung up in the past couple of years, as have initiatives to create new vehicles for local investing and venture promotion (e.g. Platform Calgary, LocalInvestingYYC, BeLocal, BestofCalgaryFoods). *Calgary on Purpose* is a new platform for Calgarians to share with each other what it means to be a Calgarian and what they want their city to be in the future – What is our new narrative?

The new CityxLab, created under the auspices of the Institute for Community Prosperity, will study the relationship between a city's experiences and its capacity to attract, retain, and develop human capital. Under the leadership of Dr. David Finch, CityxLab brings together aspects of the "experience economy" – Arts and culture (CreativeCity)²³¹, sport and recreation (ActiveCity)²³², learning (LearningCity)²³³, and hospitality and tourism²³⁴ – alongside an effort to profile and strengthen collective efforts to measure community prosperity and indicators of well-being, sustainability, quality of life and civic vitality.

It is not as if Calgary has not gone through major transitions in the past, and our narrative continues to shift and evolve based on who lives here, gathers here, and the stories they imprint on the landscape.

Four dominant epochs, in particular, stand-out: Framed by Indigenous stories, then British colonial stories, then American, then cosmopolitan. Version one – "Calgary 1.0" – was *Mohkinstsis*, "the Elbow". "Calgary 2.0" began with Fort Brisbois (later Fort Calgary), the era beginning with the BNA Act, the signing of Treaty 7 and permanent settlement of British (especially Scottish), French, Irish and other European settlers. "Calgary 3.0" was the era of cowboys, oilmen (yes, "men" is deliberate), and even academics (as the first university was established), with the dominant cultural influence coming from the US, with the iconography of American impresario Guy Weadick's Stampede at the centre. "Calgary 4.0" is now upon us, and while we'll continue to honour these other "Calgaries", the 21st century will be as different as each of these previous eras were from each other. But we're not quite there, and the birthing pains of this new epoch are still all around us. Consider just one small piece, but also a symbolic piece – the transition required for governance: The energy services and mining sectors are at the bottom of all sectors in Canada in terms of women on boards or in executive positions. On the other hand, pipeline and utilities companies are doing better than other industries. Still, as the vast majority of companies with defined diversity targets are in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, it's hard not to conclude that Calgary's corporate culture remains male, pale and stale.²³⁵

An important piece of the puzzle will be a much stronger connection between the municipal government, post-secondaries and other learning organizations (library, science centre and so on). For this, we can draw inspiration from Singapore's NUS Resilience and Growth Initiative²³⁶, Vancouver-based CityStudio²³⁷, now franchised to many other cities in Canada and beyond, or from CivicLabTO, "an opportunity to address civic challenges and opportunities by leveraging the resources, expertise and skills of Toronto's post-secondary institutions" The City-Academic partnerships aim to develop human capital, promote the exchange of research and develop new approaches to City services and programs."²³⁸ We can also expect to see, as Jeb Brugmann from the Resilient Cities initiative has pointed out, much closer alignment between municipal government and community economic development tools and approaches, especially at the neighbourhood level.²³⁹ The City's sustainable and ethical procurement strategy is a good example of this, but it might also include new local venture or loan funds, or efforts to build on and add to business improvement areas. The kind of opportunities that Sunalta or Crescent Heights Community Associations, for example, have been pursuing are in this vein. Some cities in the UK are also starting to identify and protect community assets that are too important (for community vitality) to fail – think indie cinemas and live music venues, for example.



FULL SPEED **AHEAD:**

The Electric, Eclectic Future of Transportation

The age of the internal combustion engine (ICE) is coming to a close. In fact, we are very close to reaching “peak ICE”, and oil demand from passenger vehicles may have already peaked.²⁴¹ Over 62% of global warming is from carbon dioxide specifically from burning fossil fuels, 80% of which is from the consumption (not production) of fossil fuels. Over three-quarters of Alberta-produced oil and gas is for transport fuels (70% of every barrel of oil). Our gas-guzzling lifestyle is the largest single driver of oil demand AND climate change, and it’s about to come to a crashing halt. We are at the early stages of the biggest revolution in transportation since the horse and buggy were replaced.

Both demand for and production of Electric vehicles (EVs) is soaring, and EV costs are dropping. EV annual maintenance costs or less than half of gas-powered cars, and fuel costs in most jurisdictions will be orders of magnitude cheaper. EV will revolutionize automobile design, due to its modularity.²⁴² This is the first part of the revolution.

GM’s recent pledge to manufacture 40% of its U.S. models as battery electric vehicles by the end of 2025, under 20 different models, is only the latest in a string of pledges and commitments by big automakers. Pioneering EV manufacturer Tesla is currently considered the world’s most valuable car company.²⁴³ Volkswagen Group, the world’s largest automaker, still recovering from the diesel fuel efficiency cover-up that seriously damaged public trust in their green *bona fides*, has committed \$66 billion US to an ambitious program of e-mobility and digitalization. Their all-electric retro VW Microbus, set for export to North America starting in 2022, seems already destined for the Museum of Modern Art.²⁴⁴ Even Canada is getting in on the manufacturing act – there are currently four manufacturers of electric buses in the country.²⁴⁵

“Climate change is real, and we want to be part of the solution by putting everyone in an electric vehicle,”

Mary Barra, CEO, General Motors²⁵²

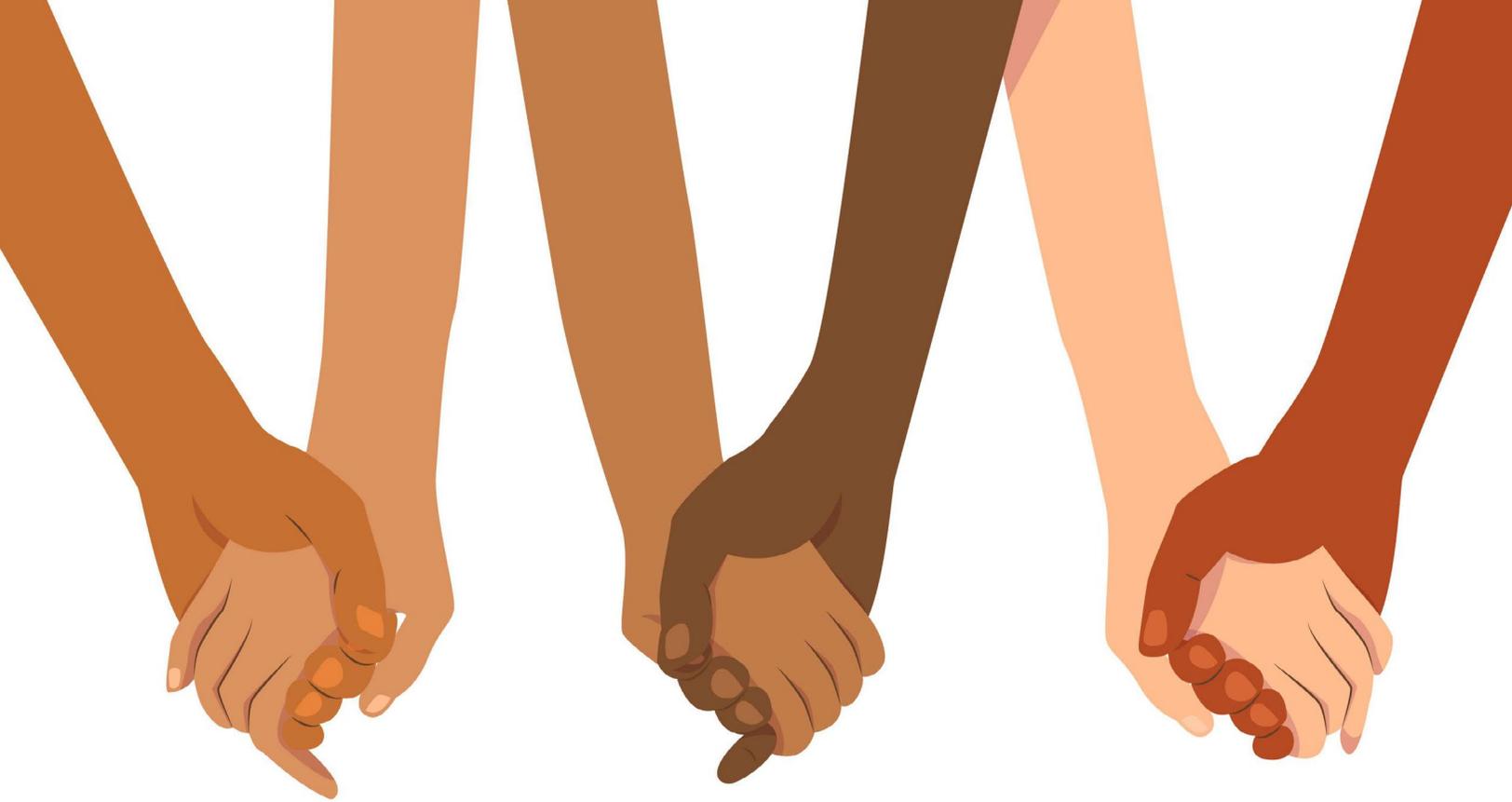
“It took 20 years to sell the first million electric cars. It took 18 months to sell the next million. It took 4 months to sell the fifth million. That is the pace of this change.”

Ramez Naam, technologist and author of *The Infinite Resource: The Power of Ideas on a Finite Planet*

This phenomenon has obvious consequences for the oil and gas sector. EVs already displace the need for 1 million barrels of oil per day, and by 2040 they are projected to displace 17 million barrels per day. EVs sales are just starting to round the corner of a ‘hockey stick’ shaped curve, at 10 million, having grown 2,000% since 2014.²⁴⁶ Sitting at less than 3% global market share, EVs are projected to comprise 10% of global sales in five years, and over 25% by 2030. Canada is currently 8th overall in global EV sales, at 2.7% of all car sales.²⁴⁷ And recent government pledges and incentive programs have catalyzed the transition further. China and Quebec, for example, plan to phase out internal combustion powered cars by 2035, and the UK by 2030.²⁴⁸ Canada’s zero emission targets are softer, but the fall Fiscal Update hinted that zero-emission electric vehicle charging stations will be a likely component of the federal stimulus package. Alberta’s EV sales, though climbing, remain microscopic compared with the other three large provinces, partly because there are no provincial tax rebates or incentives.²⁴⁹ However, there is a Tesla dealership in Calgary as well as Go Electric, a company selling used EVs and hybrids, and there are currently 22 EV charging stations within Calgary and another 17 throughout the Bow Valley corridor, between Calgary and Lake Louise.

The second part of the revolution is autonomous vehicles, and in particular autonomous ride-sharing, which will transform profoundly how we utilize transportation. We might call up a two-tonne truck for Tuesday morning’s move, and a two-person luxury vehicle, champagne included, for the evening celebration. The notion that you would have your own vehicle, alongside the insurance, maintenance, storage and other headaches of ownership, will seem bizarre (enthusiasts excepted). While fully autonomous vehicles are likely as much as a decade from being a mainstream option, the technology is proceeding apace: Alphabet subsidiary Waymo, one of the earlier autonomous vehicle companies, is up to an impressive manual intervention rate of once every (roughly) 15,000 kilometres.²⁵⁰

The implications for work-life patterns, urban form, and industry will be profound. Energy writer Amory Lovins describes the transition as moving from PIGS to SEALS: **P**ersonal **I**nternal-combustion **G**asoline **S**teel to **S**hareable **E**lectric **A**utonomous **L**ightweight, where mobility is less an owned asset than it is a service. We already see a trend among younger populations away from car ownership toward heterogenous mobility options (Uber, car-sharing, public transit, etc.), so this will only intensify. And while public transit is down more than 75% in most Canadian cities, ridership is expected to recover, though not to pre-pandemic levels for some time. Even more important may be capitalizing on the popularity of cycling and active transportation, as an op-ed from the Conference Board of Canada recommends, alongside a national active transportation strategy.²⁵¹



THERE AND **BACK AGAIN:**

Rediscovering the Community Policing Paradigm

Policing in Canada has gone through many transitions, always pulled in two directions: One toward hard-nosed militarization, the other toward responsive, sensitive, community integration. There is a somewhat related tension between self-policing and community oversight. Since the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in the spring of 2020, a galvanizing moment that otherwise was one of countless incidents of mortal racism at the hands of North American police forces, the very institution of policing has been put under the microscope. Between the extremes of a literal interpretation of “defund the police” (an unhelpful phrase)

and the defensive posturing that many police unions have taken, lies ample opportunity for positive reform of 21st Century policing. There are opportunities to reform both the RCMP and local policing.

The Northwest Mounted Police, which later became the RCMP, was established as a quasi-military front-line of colonial rule, modeled after the Royal Irish (later Royal Ulster) Constabulary, which kept Ireland firmly under the boot of British rule.²⁵³ There’s a reason, after all, that so many communities were originally called “forts”. The RCMP had a central role in spying on dissident Canadians, enforcing Indigenous parents’ compliance with the residential school system, and in committing many acts of harassment, brutality and more subtle forms of racism vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples and black Canadians in particular, many of which have come to light in the wake of the #BLM and #defundthepolice movements. There was even a Royal Commission investigating illegal RCMP activities in the late 1970s.²⁵⁴ But Hollywood and Canada’s own mythology has also portrayed the RCMP as benign guardians of *Peace, Order and Good Government*, the frontline against the lawless, murderous American manifest destiny, and quintessentially politely

“You’re getting stopped and harassed all the time, for no other reason than, quite frankly, driving while Black, walking while Black, or just being Black.”

Kingsley Massiah, Calgarian and victim of racial profiling²⁵⁹

“We will never have true civilization until we have learned to recognize the rights of others.”

Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America* (2012)

Canadian (with all the warm fuzzy thoughts that phrase evokes). The gallant musical ride is the symbol we prefer to remember, compared with, say, that of Mona Wang, a 20-year-old nursing student who earlier this year was dragged by an RCMP officer by her hair down a student apartment complex in Kelowna. More recently, we have seen tepid admissions of systemic racism and sexual harassment in the force, a Public Inquiry into the Nova Scotia mass murder investigation, and incidents of RCMP failing to intervene or lay charges amid assaults in the Mi’kmaq fisheries dispute and white-supremacist clashes with anti-racist protestors in Alberta. As the bad news for the force piles up, expect to see either a more comprehensive federal Public Inquiry or a Royal Commission into the RCMP. Meanwhile, Alberta’s Fair Deal panel convened by the UCP government is looking into the potential of a provincial police force to replace the RCMP. Without guessing what the panel’s recommendations will be, this may be perhaps the least controversial, particularly because Quebec and Ontario already have their own province-wide police forces.

Calgary’s municipal police force is a good example of an organization navigating the tension between community imperatives and thuggish militia-aping aesthetics and tactics, a tension perhaps best captured by the logos on police cruisers; the newer “Vigilance, Courage, Pride” (read, “it’s all about us”) vs. the former “To Serve and Protect” (“it’s about serving and protecting the community”). The 2020 documentary film *No Visible Trauma* shines the light on one particular incident of excessive force, accompanied by an alleged cover-up. But the same force has also come out with one of the most vocal and honest statements on

systemic racism, with Police Chief Mark Neufeld acknowledging that a new “paradigm” of policing is needed, one that is more community-focused and embedded, alongside reforms to use of force policy and procedures.²⁵⁵ In late November, the Community Safety Investment Framework was presented to City Council. The framework will create an \$8 million annual alternative call response, expanding the Policy and Crisis Teams (PACT) as well as supporting community partners like the Alpha House DOAP team, as well as \$2 million to address anti-racism work, including for the Indigenous Liaison Officer Program.²⁵⁶ Weirdly, although the Police Service recommended that the \$8 million come from within their own budget, the supposedly cash-strapped City Council chose to instead pay for this from the City’s own reserve fund.²⁵⁷ The Police Service also announced that they would eliminate the practice of “carding”, a key racial profiling practice.

One cornerstone of the paradigm shift that many North American cities, from Los Angeles to New York are adopting, is the dispatch of mental health crisis workers (in lieu of, or as need dictates, alongside) police officers.²⁵⁸ The pilot for this was a program called CAHOOTS which has been running in Eugene, Oregon since 1989. Last year, 20% of the city’s dispatches were handled by mental health workers, with only 150 of 24,000 calls requiring police back-up. What is striking about CAHOOTS is that it is yet another social innovation that has a decades-long lag time from proof-of-concept to scaled adoption, a phenomenon previous scans have touched upon. innovation that has a decades-long lag time from proof-of-concept to scaled adoption, a phenomenon previous scans have touched upon.



NOT OK, **BOOMER**:

Polarization or an Epidemic of Gullibility?

“Americans need to call on Boomers, in their next act onstage, to behave like grown-ups. And there is no better way for them to do this than to guide young people to lives of greater meaning, effectiveness, and purpose.”

Eric Liu

“Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it.”

Jonathon Swift

The admittedly ageist meme “OK, Boomer” rose to prominence in late 2019, first on TikTok, then in the UK parliament to mock attitudes presumed to be associated with people born in the two decades following World War II. The phrase knowingly exploits the irony of baby boomers critiquing younger generations for being idealist and utopian, but also expresses an exhaustion with having to “inherit ever-amplifying problems in an ever-diminishing window of time”, according to one British parliamentarian who used the term in the House of Commons.

It turns out that the baby boom generation is shaping up to be the most reactionary, conspiracy-loving, civically disruptive generation since the days when national socialism and Bolshevism were mainstream. And this is directly tied to uncritical dependence on social media. The internet-fueled “outrage-ification” of Americans and an increasing number of Canadians, skews disproportionately to an older demographic. During the 2016 election, users over 65 shared more fake news than any other age group and seven times more than users between 18 and 29.²⁶⁰ According to Briony Swire-Thompson, a

senior research scientist at Northeastern University who specializes in social media networks, “older adults consume more misinformation and are more likely to share misinformation.”²⁶¹

But one might reasonably ask “Doesn’t millennials’ and Gen Zers’ dependence on social media suggest that THEY would be the most duped and susceptible to conspiracy theories?” Certainly, there are pernicious affects on young brains, and the rising incidence of youth mental health issues are increasingly tied to social media, in particular its “vainification” pressures. But it also turns out these younger generations also have more digital literacy and skills that bring a critical, skeptical eye to what they digest. Their media ecosystem has always been heterogeneous and littered with garbage, so they can sift better and are less likely to take social media posts at face value. The boomer generation, in contrast, grew up with curated, reliable news feeds generated by professional journalists. They didn’t need to be as critical in their media digestion habits, and that lack of a skeptical muscle has ported over to social media. Although older adults have more knowledge about history and politics, they are less able to discern news from sponsored content, to detect altered images (including deep fakes) or to distinguish fact from polemic opinion.²⁶² More worrying, a recent study found that the boomer generation was displaying signs of cognitive decline earlier than previous generations.²⁶³

Confirmation bias is also rampant in the human-social media interface, which exposes society to irrational levels of risk-taking. As philosopher Mark Kingwell cautions “the person who would not dream of running a red light at a lonely intersection in the middle of the night will refuse to wear a mask out of some half-baked theory of epidemiology that they [read] yesterday on Twitter.”²⁶⁴ Facebook has been a particularly pernicious force in amplifying ‘fake news’ and conspiracy theories (including the Trumped-up blizzard of fabrications about

“Each generation has inspected the world around us, declared what wasn’t good enough, employed cultural change through media, education, collective action and a few hard-hitting jokes in order to move the goalposts on what is politically possible.”

Chlöe Swarbrick²⁷¹

US election fraud). Leveraging this, the Trump campaign spent more than 50% of its campaign budget on Facebook ads. While 7 of 10 adults use the platform, its use has been declining among teens.²⁶⁵

With Facebook catching up to Twitter and Youtube in flagging or banning fake news stories conspiracy traffickers (think, Alex Jones or Steve Bannon), new censorship-free platforms are emerging. We might applaud the measures of the tech giants to stamp out such civically mendacious voices, but, like ill-weeds, such voices manage to find fertile ground in new platforms: Parler, launched in 2018, was the first of these platforms to blow past a million users. Co-founder, hedge fund manager, former principal investor in the now-defunct Cambridge Analytica, and – yes, boomer – Robert Mercer has largely financed the development of the platform. Parler doubled its subscriber base to 10 million in November alone, and is helping coningle and unite mainstream conservatives with white supremacists, QAnon supporters, Boogalooers, and other extremist odds and sods.²⁶⁶ As a result, older right-of-centre Americans (and many Canadians) are moved less by debates over public policy, or even ideology, and more taken by fantastical storytelling. Democracy is so dull and boring by comparison. So is science, as we see spikes in “vaccine-hesitancy”, which used to be present more commonly on the left, but of late has been much more attached to the political right²⁶⁷ (as we’re now seeing in Alberta).²⁶⁸ And while Democrats may have won the 2020 battle, they may be losing the war.

The answers to the pernicious effects of social media are not simple. Perhaps most disturbing is the notion that older adults are simply more trusting, a pro-social human trait, yet social media has preyed on this as a vulnerability. Certainly, we can take steps to promote empathy and civic dialogue, especially at a hyperlocal level. But polarization not just of political opinion but of entire language spheres makes this a tall order. On the other side of the spectrum, many contemporary social justice activists give no quarter to nuance, to language they deem old fashioned, or to discomfort in general. As Loretta Ross, a self-described radical Black feminist, urges in an article calling out “call out culture” and “doom scrolling”, also noting that some of that online activity is actually bot-generated, “I think we actually sabotage our own happiness with this unrestrained anger. And I have to honestly ask: Why are you making choices to make the world crueller than it needs to be and calling that being ‘woke’?”²⁶⁹ Like a 21st century version of the echo chambers described in Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*, where the many factions in the Spanish Civil War each preferred ideological purity over discourse on the common good, the proving of one’s commitment to social justice, as Ross describes it, “has become something of a varsity sport.” Ross’s timely remedy? It’s time for a *call-in* culture to flourish:

“You can’t be responsible for someone else’s inability to grow. So take comfort in the fact that you offered a new perspective of information and you did so with love and respect, and then you walk away. We have a saying in the movement: Some people you can work with and some people you can work around. But the thing that I want to emphasize is that the calling-in practice means you always keep a seat at the table for them if they come back.”²⁷⁰

Endnotes

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- ² John Mecklin (Ed.). "Closer than ever: It is 100 seconds to midnight" (blogpost), Science and Security Board Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. January 23, 2020. <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time>
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- ⁴ Samuel Stebbins and Grant Suneson, "Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk among US billionaires getting richer during coronavirus pandemic", *USA Today*, December 1, 2020.
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- ⁶ Paul Nuki, "Bill Gates warns of 'mutually exacerbating catastrophes' and calls for collaboration to defeat virus", *The Telegraph*, September 14, 2020.
- ⁷ Theresa Tam, *From Risk to Resilience: An Equity Approach to COVID-19*. Public Health Agency of Canada. August, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/from-risk-resilience-equity-approach-covid-19.html>
- ⁸ As social R&D leader Sarah Schulman notes in an interview with Brennan Doherty at *Future of Good*, (November 16, 2020). "We put older people together, we put homeless people together, we put disabled people together, and we create a lot of stigma and shame. The supervised, residential congregate care environments of homeless shelters, nursing homes, and long-term care facilities are all commonplace in Canada's social welfare system. Sarah [Let's hope that] by 2030, they are on their way to obsolescence."
- ⁹ A recent podcast convened by the CCVO, for example, had panelists warning that with the current UCP government, many of these catch phrases are associated with progressive, left-of-centre movements. #BuildBackBetter being tagged to the Biden campaign and frequently used by the Trudeau government.
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- ¹¹ Acemoglu, D and Robinson, J. A. *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*. Penguin, 2019.
- ¹² Henry Mintzberg. *Rebalancing Society: Radical Renewal Beyond Left, Right and Centre*. Berrett-Koehler, 2015.
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- ¹⁴ "Relative blindspots" because many commentators have recently drawn attention to this. For example, Oscar Villanueva and Kris Archie with respect to Indigenous peoples, or Environment Funders Canada's biennial tracking of environmental granting in Canada, in which climate change action philanthropy is nowhere near the level of support for biodiversity and conservation, for example.
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- ²³ Yascha Mounk, "Prepare for the Roaring Twenties", *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2020.

- ²⁴ Pierre Cleroux, *2021 Economic Outlook*, Business Development Bank of Canada (blogpost) Retrieved from <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/blog/2021-economic-outlook-canada>
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- ²⁶ Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. 2020. *The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19. Sustainable Development Report 2020*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The top 15 countries are all in Europe, the top 3 being Nordic nations.
- ²⁷ Remitly, "Where the World Wants to Work: the most popular countries for moving abroad" www.remitly.com
- ²⁸ See <https://www.centuryinitiative.ca/> as well as Doug Saunders. *Maximum Canada: Why 35 Million Canadians Are Not Enough*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2017.
- ²⁹ This is a cause Senator Ratna Omidvar, for example, has spoken about recently.
- ³⁰ Jason Kirby, "Canada Leads the World in Pandemic Spending: Is that a Good Thing?", *G&M Report on Business* December, 2020.
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- ³² Kathleen Harris. "Liberals to spend \$100B to jolt post-pandemic economy after posting record \$381B deficit", *CBC* (online), November 30, 2020.
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“Either way, change will come. It could be bloody,
or it could be beautiful. It depends on us.”

Arundhati Roy

