
MARTHA HALL FINDLAY
President and CEO

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Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to speak today.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the members of the Board of the Canada West Foundation who are here this morning – Edward Kennedy, Diane Gray and Paul Vogt – as well as a long time and dear member of the Canada West Foundation family, Jim Eldridge.

As head of a public policy think tank, one that prides itself on doing truly evidence-based, non-partisan, objective research, analysis and recommendations, I normally talk about specific policy issues, such as trade and investment – NAFTA, TPP (of which there is no shortage these days); or the responsible harnessing of our natural resources – whether it be energy, minerals, agriculture, forestry; or the challenges of matching people with jobs and jobs with people.

But today I want to talk about something that transcends all of those things.

I wrote part of this about a year and a half ago in an op-ed for the Globe and Mail. It’s worth repeating now, because I think things have gotten worse in this country. It’s time for a serious reckoning of what we are, and what we need to succeed – as a country.

If we started today, there’s a good chance Canada would never get off the ground.

Roy MacGregor, that superb observer and reporter on all things Canadian, once compared Canada to a bumblebee. By all rights the creature, given its outsized body and tiny wings, shouldn’t be able to fly – but it does. Canada is big, and spread out, and in the early years the idea of all of the parts being one country seemed, if not impossible, awfully unlikely.

But it flew.

It did so because people of courage were willing to compromise and invest – both politically and financially – for the greater good. They created our Constitution, which unites us politically, and built the railways that transported goods, products and people from one part of the country to other parts of the country, often to go on to global markets.

The original four provinces in fact made the completion of the Intercolonial Railway by the federal government a condition – a requirement – of signing the deal. Grain, wood, fish, minerals, livestock – without the ability to transport the fruits of our natural resources across the country, we wouldn't be the successful country we are today.

That understanding of Canadian history and of the Constitution (or the political courage needed to uphold it) seems to be evaporating.

We are forgetting not just how the Constitution works, but a fundamental ingredient of Canada's success: The need, sometimes, for compromise on local or special interests for the greater national good. Rather than building our nation, we are in the process of, dangerously, dividing it – and in doing so, losing altitude and hitting ground.

It's time we all put on our Canada pants.

Imagine trying to build a railway today – it wouldn't stand a chance.

If municipal mayors feel that they can prevent a pipeline being built because it is “too risky” or somehow not pristine enough, imagine what they would do, now, about a railway. Imagine if politicians in Ontario refused to allow track to be laid crossing Ontario, because transporting grain from the Prairies to Montreal or St. John for export was of “no benefit” to Ontario.

What about the Trans-Canada Highway? Imagine if the building of that national link – or any road for that matter – were contingent on proving that it did not contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Given that 20% of all of Canada's GHGs come from driving cars and trucks, it wouldn't stand a chance either.

All is not well in the land, including:

- Our inability to get *any* major infrastructure built – not just pipelines
- More barriers to trade *between provinces* than with other countries
- Doing more to turn away investment than to attract it
- Politically-motivated support for selected industries, not national economic interests. This is contributing to our failings with respect to international trade (NAFTA, TPP11, China, etc.) Dairy? Really?
- B.C. v. Alberta, and now potentially Alberta v. BC on pipelines
- Quebec v. Alberta and New Brunswick on pipelines
- Saskatchewan v Federal Government on carbon tax
(Kudos to Manitoba on this – more below)

- Indigenous communities v. Federal Government (on many issues)
- Pro-development Indigenous communities v. anti-development Indigenous communities
- Municipalities v. national interest

So what, exactly, do I mean by putting on our Canada pants?

To start, federal politicians must show more “national” leadership – they must better recognize and understand the different regions and concerns, and better understand how interdependent we all are. Domestically, our federal politicians must not be so politically-motivated. Internationally, they must not be so naïve

Provincial politicians must show “national” leadership – and not just with respect to provincial interests. An excellent example of a positive effort is what Manitoba is doing on the carbon tax issue in the newly announced climate plan.

Business leaders must also show “national” leadership – and not just when it comes to their specific business interests.

NGOs must show “national” leadership – not just special interests

Frankly, the Supreme Court should show “national” leadership in the current Comeau beer case. Section 121 of the Constitution Act states products from any province «shall... be admitted free into each of the other provinces.» Upholding that section the way it was intended could be transformative in this country in terms of getting back to being a country, rather than going further down the hole of provincial protectionism.

The founding fathers drafted the Constitution the way they did because they understood the local pressures faced by politicians – and the temptation to succumb to them. Section 91 sets out all of the federal Parliament’s powers; Section 92 sets out all of the provincial powers – but specifically reserves to the federal Parliament key jurisdiction over shipping lines, railways, canals, telegraphs and other works or undertakings (including, today, pipelines) that connect one province with any other province(s), or beyond. It also gives the federal Parliament the right to declare any work, even though “wholly situate within” a province, to be for the general advantage of Canada or of two or more provinces – and thus under federal jurisdiction.

This “declaratory power” has been invoked more than 400 times since 1867. The system has worked well for Canada – but only because we have upheld it.

Unfortunately, we haven’t seen that in quite some time now.

Despite declarations by some politicians, and headlines provided by various polls, municipal and provincial governments do not, under the Constitution, have the power to block pipelines. Of course they have the right to raise local concerns – and other provinces, as well as the federal government, need to listen, understand and yes, sometimes everyone needs to compromise.

But no development is risk free.

Whether it is a railway, a highway, a pipeline, a windfarm, a transmission grid – or a school or a hospital – one must analyse and balance the costs and the benefits (including probabilities of any risk). Collectively, we need to ensure best practices in terms of safety and the environment, including prevention, mitigation and the like.

But in the end, the federal government must decide on federal undertakings. The provinces must decide on provincial issues.

But we must look beyond our own self-interests, our own neighborhood interests, our own municipal, or provincial, or regional interests. We must recognize that we are all, indeed, greater than the sum of our parts.

Understanding that is what keeps those bumblebee wings firm and open and working.

That compact we made 150 years ago is what keeps us in the air – but we're losing altitude. We all need to pitch in to find the leadership to find it again.

As Jim Bell, CEO of Siloam Mission, said in his introduction – thank you, Jim – “If one wants to go fast, go alone. But if we want to go far, we must go together.”

Thank you very much.