
MARTHA HALL FINDLAY
President and CEO

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Hello, and thank you for inviting me to speak today.

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.

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 or provincial politicians 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.

But this is true also of provincial politicians who claim the federal government doesn't have the right to implement its carbon pricing effort. Manitoba already obtained a legal opinion on this, and took the more collaborative – the more CANADIAN approach – in working on how a made-in-Manitoba solution could work with the federal plan.

All is not well in the land:

- Our inability to get *any* major infrastructure built – not just pipelines. And despite many people blaming specific things like a burdensome regulatory system, an awful lot has to do with political flip-flopping – the increasing propensity of newly elected politicians to simply throw out prior decisions. We respect democracy, but Canada has a long history of maintaining some stability in this regard. Flip-flopping on serious decisions is what the so-called banana republics used to do. It's a key disincentive for investment of any kind.
- 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 – don't get me started how protecting dairy is hurting our negotiation leverage on NAFTA.
- B.C. v. Alberta; Alberta v. Saskatchewan on licence plates; Quebec v. Alberta and New Brunswick on pipelines
- Saskatchewan and Ontario v Federal Government on carbon tax
- Indigenous communities v. Federal Government (on many issues), both pro and con
- Pro-development Indigenous communities v. anti-development Indigenous communities

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.

But provincial politicians must also 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.

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, but not for a long time now. The system has worked well for Canada – **but only because we have upheld it.**

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

Despite declarations by some politicians, municipal and provincial governments do not, under the Constitution, have the power to block pipelines, or refuse various other federal initiatives – like carbon pricing. 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, and no fiscal program will suit everyone or make everyone happy.

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 neighbourhood 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.

Thank you very much.