

VANCOUVER



Choosing Canada, Again

From “I owe much to my time in the US, but I came home to Canada for a reason,” by David Suzuki, an op-ed in the Toronto Star, Jan 12, 2025. Suzuki is a scientist, broadcaster, author and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation, based in Vancouver.

Thank you, president-elect Donald Trump. Canadians are already tightly bound to the United States of America physically, economically and culturally, so your threat to absorb us as a 51st state forces us to ponder our values and reasons for remaining a sovereign nation that claims to be independent.

I am a third-generation Canadian of Japanese ancestry. My parents and I were born and raised in Canada. Although we never visited Japan, we were incarcerated during the Second World War as “enemy aliens.” At war’s end, a \$1,500 scholarship—more than my father earned in a year—made it possible for me to attend Amherst College in Massachusetts.

I am forever indebted to the US, where I moved in 1954 for eight years. I received a superb university education because foreign students were valued as contributors to the education of American students.

In my senior year, on October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union shocked the world when it launched the Sputnik satellite. As the Soviets achieved a series of space firsts (first dog, man, team and woman in space) over the following years, the US lagged behind, but the response was amazing. The US government began to invest massively in science and scientists. As a foreign student, I simply showed an interest in science to get offers of scholarships and jobs.

In 1962, when president John F. Kennedy announced the goal of reaching the moon in a decade, the “space race” was on. At the time, it wasn’t clear how this would be achieved or how much it might cost. But the commitment was made, and money, resources, infrastructure and human power were thrown into the challenge. America succeeded, and more than 60 years later, Nobel prizes continue to be disproportionately won by American scientists. Hundreds of unpredicted spinoffs, such as laptop computers, GPS and ear thermometers resulted from the space race. It was an impressive expression of the kind of American resolve that could serve well as a model to meet the challenges of climate and ecosystem breakdown.

By the time I was doing post-doctoral work in 1961, employment opportunities were enormous in US universities, government and the private sector. It was a glorious time to be a scientist. Nevertheless I chose to return to a Canada lagging far behind in support of scientists, especially in my chosen area of genetics. To my scientific colleagues it seemed like academic suicide.

I chose to return because Canada was different, not better, than the US and those differences reflected values that mattered to me. Canada had a healthcare system available to all regardless of economic status. Politician Tommy Douglas,

who served as Saskatchewan premier and later leader of the federal New Democratic Party, was a hero to me, a champion for the poor and disadvantaged. But his party (the CCF, which later became the NDP), respected and legitimate in Canada, would have been branded communist by Americans.

I was also proud of the equalization policy whereby provinces that are better off economically share their wealth with those that are not doing as well.

As a biologist, I know that diversity of genes, species and ecosystems has enabled life to survive and flourish in an ever-changing environment. Humans have occupied many different parts of the planet because of an added level of diversity: culture. That’s why Quebec and its culture are an important part of the fabric of Canada. (To my great regret I never learned to speak Japanese, because my father always said, “We are Canadians. If you learn a second language, it must be French.”)

The enormous diversity created by including Indigenous nations and immigrants from all parts of the world in the fabric of Canadian society provides adaptability and resilience few other countries have as we confront ecological and economic limits. That’s also why I value the National Film Board and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which enable us to see ourselves and the world through a Canadian perspective, coloured by our ever-evolving values.

I have never regretted my decision to return home to Canada, and I thank you, Mr. Trump, for reminding me why. I hope all Canadians reflect on this country and why we will fight to preserve our differences with your great nation.

CANADA



Poilievre and the News Deserts

From “Canadian journalism is dying, and Poilievre may kill it,” by Marc Edge, The Maple, readthemaple.com, Jan 8, 2025. Edge is the author of Tomorrow’s News: How to Fix Canada’s Media (2024) and The Postmedia Effect: How Vulture Capitalism is Wrecking Our News (2023), both published by New Star Books.

Journalism in Canada is at its lowest ebb in decades, as evidenced by the cancellation or pausing of several post-secondary programs in the subject due to the dismal job market.

Postmedia Network, Canada’s largest newspaper chain by far, is 98 per cent owned by US hedge funds and has had to sell assets and lay off workers to make payments on the hundreds of millions in company debt the vulture capitalists also hold. The corporation has steadily tightened its grip on Canadian newspapers since its creation in 2010, buying: Sun Media, Canada’s second-largest chain at the time, in 2015; Brunswick News, the chain that monopolizes New Brunswick, in 2022; and SaltWire, the chain that dominates the rest of the Maritimes, in early 2024.

Canada’s current second-largest chain, Torstar, was taken over in 2020 by private equity firm NordStar Capital, which has been stripping its assets and eviscerating its workforce.



FACADE, CALGARY HERALD BUILDING BY STEVE SPEER
 2011. Ink and varnish on vellum over 23k gold leaf. Christine Klassen Gallery.

Last year, it converted 71 Ontario community newspapers published by its Metroland subsidiary to online-only publications, laying off more than 600 workers in the process. It then cheated them out of the severance pay they were owed by taking advantage of our bankruptcy laws.

Our broadcasting industry isn't in much better shape, with radio and TV ownership dominated by Canada's highly profitable telecom companies. Bell owns the CTV network, along with dozens of radio stations and cable channels, while Rogers owns Citytv. Global, meanwhile, is owned by the Shaw family through Corus Entertainment, which in 2021 sold Shaw Communications Inc., its western Canada cable empire, to Rogers. The CBC, meanwhile, made 141 layoffs in early 2024 to cope with a projected \$125-million budget shortfall, but an injection of \$42-million in funding from the 2024–25 federal budget in April 2024 helped it avoid further job losses.

Advertising revenues have fallen for broadcasters in the past decade, as they have for all legacy media, because Google and Meta now dominate ad sales by tracking our online behaviour. Broadcasters have also faced competition from foreign digital streamers such as Netflix and Spotify.

Independent media outlets have also suffered from the flight of ad dollars online, with alt-weeklies from coast to coast folding in the past two decades. The lower cost of publication online, however, has enabled a spate of digital replacements funded largely by readers, with some enduring success stories including

Canada's National Observer, *The Tyee* and *The Narwhal*.

Prime minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals were admittedly faced with a daunting task in cleaning up the media mess left by the outgoing Harper Conservatives.

Such massive foreign ownership of news media should never have been allowed under our 25 per cent cap in this culturally sensitive industry, and yet a legal loophole permitted it. Postmedia's takeover of Sun Media should also not have been allowed, as it gave the chain eight of the nine largest newspapers in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, including both dailies in Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. Postmedia promised to keep separate newsrooms in cities where it owned both dailies, but soon after the purchase was rubber-stamped by the federal Competition Bureau in 2015, it merged them to cut costs.

In February 2016 the Liberals convened Heritage Committee hearings into Media and Local Communities. In 2017 it urged a 5 per cent levy on the revenues of internet service providers to subsidize news provision, similar to what our telecoms pay from their cable revenues to subsidize broadcast content.

An ISP levy proved a non-starter with Trudeau, who quickly promised "no Netflix tax" (though the industry eventually persuaded Ottawa to pass the Online Streaming Act in 2023 to make streamers subsidize Canadian content). A report issued early in 2017 by the Public Policy Forum think tank, which painted an exaggerated portrait of newspaper industry woes,

was instead adopted as the dominant industry narrative. At first reluctant to subsidize news, Ottawa introduced a five-year, \$50-million Local Journalism Initiative in 2018 to boost news coverage in underserved communities. The newspaper industry dismissed it as a “Band-Aid solution,” and in 2019, newspaper owners prevailed on Ottawa to pass a five-year, \$595-million bailout package. This bailout came after News Media Canada hired a heavyweight Liberal insider to lead a lobbying blitz that has since resulted in a reported 102 meetings with senior officials, including in the Prime Minister’s Office.

When one bailout wasn’t enough, Postmedia and Torstar doubled down, adopting the strategy pioneered in Australia by Rupert Murdoch of pressing the government to force digital giants such as Meta and Google to share their revenues with news media for running links to their stories. The result of this lobbying was the Online News Act (ONA) in 2023.

The campaign in Canada for the ONA saw blank front pages appear one day in 2021 across many of the country’s newspapers, which ironically asked, “Imagine if the news wasn’t there when we needed it?” Management at some of our largest dailies reportedly suppressed criticism of the Act by “spiking” opinion columns that had been accepted for publication, which resulted in a very one-sided debate.

While Google eventually agreed to pay \$100-million a year to a group representing Canadian media, Meta has instead blocked links to news in Canada on Facebook and Instagram, which has had a disastrous effect on our emerging online-only news media.

In their 2021 election platform, the Conservatives promised to cancel the 2019 news media bailout, which in 2023 was extended until 2029. “While we support Canadian media outlets, they should not be directly receiving tax dollars,” the platform stated. “Government funding of ‘approved’ media undermines press freedom, a vital part of a free society.”

Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre has been a harsh critic of the government’s recent internet regulation. In August 2024 he said, “I am going to repeal the censorship laws, make it possible for Canadian news to be visible again on Facebook, Instagram and all other social media platforms.”

Poilievre has also called for the CBC to be defunded, and the Conservatives have launched an online petition to that effect. It claims the CBC “undercuts private sector and independent media and competes for advertising space while receiving more than \$1-billion in direct taxpayer subsidies” and that it “mostly provides opinions and coverage that are widely available in a free and competitive media marketplace.” Given the precarious state of Canada’s news media, the defunding of the CBC could be a death sentence for journalism, with so-called “news deserts” spreading rapidly from coast to coast.

Before fulfilling its promises, a new Conservative government, should one be elected, would be well advised to at least convene hearings on a long-term media strategy and consult with all stakeholders—not just media owners. That would be a refreshing change from the Liberal approach of making up media policy on the fly based on lobbying, which has resulted in a patchwork quilt of bailouts and forced subsidies.

CALGARY



Death by “Churnalism”

From “The Hollowing of the Calgary Herald,” by Jeremy Klaszus, a podcast by The Sprawl, sprawlcalgary.com, Feb 18, 2023. The podcast—an oral history of the decline of the Calgary Herald—was published in 2024 as a book by Hingston & Olsen.

Jeremy Klaszus (host): It was once likened to a castle on a hill. For more than 40 years, the *Calgary Herald’s* big brick newspaper plant has loomed over Deerfoot Trail north of Memorial Drive, a bold expression of the newspaper’s former power. But in January, Calgarians got some news about... well, the news.

CityNews (Taylor Braat): The iconic *Calgary Herald* building will soon be no more. Postmedia has sold the building that has overlooked Deerfoot Trail for decades to U-Haul for more than \$17-million.

Klaszus: In 2020 U-Haul bought the former *Calgary Sun* building, a little farther north on Deerfoot Trail. And now U-Haul is going to convert its newly purchased *Herald* building into more than 700 storage lockers. Calgarians have less local news, but more space to stow their stuff.

And for the first time in its history, the *Calgary Herald* has no fixed address. Today there are about 10 cityside reporters working for the *Herald* and the *Sun*, covering the goings-on of the city. That’s way down from what it used to be. In the 1980s there were about 35 *Herald* reporters covering the city—and that was just the *Herald*. The *Sun* had another newsroom of reporters doing the same thing. Now it’s down to just 10 between the two papers.

Gwendolyn Richards: Smaller staff equals more “churnalism.”

Klaszus: This is former *Herald* reporter Gwendolyn Richards.

Richards: More just trying to feed the goat, as we would always say, and less investigation. Less deep diving.

Klaszus: What’s happening in Calgary is not at all unique to this city. Journalism everywhere is in trouble, particularly newspaper journalism. The industry faces an economic crisis—and on top of that, a crisis of public trust.

But the decline of a city’s major newspaper has specific local implications.

Over Calgary’s history, there have been many publications that have popped up and served the city for a time. *The Eye Opener* (1902–1921). *The North Hill News* (1954–1981). *Fast Forward Weekly* (1995–2015). *Metro* (2007–2018). *The Sprawl* (2017–????). Each of these publications has shaped the city’s sense of itself in some way.

But no local publication has had the power, influence and longevity of the *Calgary Herald*. Day in and day out, the *Herald* has reflected the mores and values of the city—and reinforced them. And smaller newsrooms, including TV and radio, usually followed the *Herald’s* lead. The *Herald* set the news agenda for the city.

It’s hard to overstate what the newspaper meant to city life

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