

OPINION
& EDITORIALS



The CENTRAL NEWSPAPER

Founder & Publisher: Joe Ingino

136 Simcoe St. N., Unit 4. Oshawa ON L1G 4S7

Tel: 905-432-2657

Email: newspaper@ocentral.com

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The integrity of our electoral system must be maintained...

The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Stéphane Perrault, was appointed in 2018 for a 10-year term, leading Elections Canada in administering federal elections and ensuring a fair process - all the while acting independently for both Parliament and the Canadian public. Earlier this year at a meeting of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties, Mr. Perrault informed members that Elections Canada had definitely received complaints regarding potential disinformation from influencers in the United States.

We all know this modern-day fact of political life spans the entire globe, and there are undoubtedly a host of countries attempting to cause electoral confusion through the use of social media.

Mr. Perrault reminded the committee that if they see anything that could contravene the Act or raise any doubt, they should contact the Commissioner of Canada Elections. That's all well and good on a larger scale, however there are also issues here on the home front that need to be examined.

Candidates from various parties, as well as official agents and volunteers, have shared a range of observations regarding the administration of our federal elections. One of the more pressing issues being faced is the growing gap between the use of special ballots and the public's confidence in them.

Despite increased uptake, voters everywhere are expressing an element of distrust as to the transparency and security of the mail-in ballot process.

To that end, steps must be taken that would help rebuild confidence without limiting accessibility. Special ballots are undoubtedly a necessity in certain situations, however Canada should never fall victim to the scandalous mess experienced by political candidates south of the border. Another issue for debate is the mandatory bank-account requirement, even for candidates who don't intend to raise or spend funds.

This is seen by some as an unnecessary administrative barrier, and despite Elections Canada's engagement with the Canadian Bankers Association, financial institutions continue to apply requirements inconsistently.

These challenges appear to fall heaviest on first-time candidates and smaller parties lacking full-time administrative support. There have certainly been a few welcome improvements such as an ongoing modernization of the electronic financial return system, and updated rules that clarify social media accountability, however much more needs to be done.

For many years the process of having to attend a voting station, present proper identification, and mark a paper ballot has held this country in good stead. Be careful to avoid being influenced by those who seek to encourage all manner of alternatives that would undoubtedly open the door to fraud and manipulation. Remember, elections can be 'stolen' as we've witnessed south of the border, and that is something no Canadian should have to worry about.

Mark Carney needs to start knocking on wood...

In nine months, Mark Carney, the self-proclaimed 'master negotiator' has failed to lower U.S. tariffs on Canadian softwood. His failure to get a deal is perpetuating the struggle many Canadians are having with the Liberals' cost of living crisis. When asked about the state of trade talks with the Americans, our Prime Minister actually said who cares and that he had "nothing burning" to talk to the Americans about. Tell that to the thousands of lumber workers and their families who are suffering because of his failures as a leader. Countries around the globe have been able to land trade deals with the Americans, so why can't we? Very recently, the Liberals had yet another chance to provide a substantive update on softwood lumber trade talks with the Americans. Instead, Minister of Natural Resources Tim Hodgson's ground-breaking announcement was on the building of a website and a 'Transformation Task Force' to provide recommendations in 90 days. Lovely... a website and some suggestions to come a year after Mark Carney took office.

This is despite dozens of lumber mills shutting down across the country, leaving thousands of Canadian lumberjacks and mill workers without jobs and costing billions of dollars in damage to each region that loses these cornerstone industries. In contrast, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, we managed to land a trade deal on softwood lumber within his first 79 days in office. But after 10 disastrous Liberal years, there has been no deal, no jobs, and tariffs have in fact tripled to 45 per cent.

Canada has the best lumber workers in the world but they don't want handouts, they want their jobs back and a deal that will provide them with some stability. It's time to actually start negotiating a deal with the Americans from a position of strength - and to do what is best for our country.

Why Christmas is so important for us all...

Christmas, that sacred day of faith and eternal hope, remains an essential element for many millions of people worldwide. It is a celebration built on religious devotion, cultural heritage, and universal human values. In this season of fellowship and reflection, as we come together to remember the birth of Jesus Christ, we stand in awe at the miracle of God entering human history in a humble form – a baby in a manger - to offer salvation and grace for all mankind. Even for those who are not religious, Christmas holds deep importance due to the "Christmas Spirit," which emphasizes virtues that most of us still strive for year-round.

The tradition of gift-giving, inspired by the Magi, or Saint Nicholas, fosters a culture of thinking of others and supporting those in need. Occurring near the winter solstice, Christmas serves as a "festival of light" during the year's darkest days, symbolizing hope for a brighter future and a fresh start. It offers a chance to pause from the hustle of daily life, allowing families and friends to reunite and strengthen bonds over shared meals and traditions.

As 2026 draws near, we have every reason to celebrate and to be grateful for all the good that exists in our world of today – even in the face of so much ongoing human conflict. The strength and conviction that are at the very heart of Christmas cannot be broken by futile attempts to seek its removal from society, or at the very least its diminution year after year. It remains the best and brightest message on earth.

All of us at The Central newspaper wish our readers a very Merry Christmas.

The CENTRAL NEWSPAPER welcomes your submissions and letters

As The CENTRAL works to provide an interesting and accurate reflection of the communities that make up Durham Region through our weekly news pages, we invite local citizens to participate in the conversation through submissions and letters to the editor.

We truly appreciate and support your efforts to make The CENTRAL your own.

Letters and submissions are welcome at newspaper@ocentral.com

Letters To The Editor:

WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND? Send letters to newspaper@ocentral.com

Dear Editor:

When did people begin to host New Year parties?

Ancient Egyptians celebrated New Year when the Nile River overflowed, usually in June. Then someone suggested, "If we change New Year to January, we won't drown coming home from the party."

Early Romans named their celebration for Janus, a deity with two faces. One face looked backward, the other forward.

Today, we also reflect on the past, and plan for the future. But we no longer have two faces, because the one in back is too hard to shave.

Another New Year's custom was chimney cleaning. This meant participants planned to "clean up" their faults, and strive to do better the next year.

Sadly, a few zealous cleaners toppled down the chute into the fireplace below. This was called "coming down with the flue."

The Druids celebrated the New Year on March 1. Unfortunately, that was two months late for bowl games.

But remember, these were ancient civilizations, and they did not yet worship football.

By Rix Quinn'

Dear Editor:

Early attempts at artificial intelligence (AI) were ridiculed for giving answers that were confident, wrong and often surreal – the intellectual equivalent of asking a drunken parrot to explain Kant. But modern AIs based on large language models (LLMs) are so polished, articulate and eerily competent at generating answers that many people assume they can know and, even better, can independently reason their way to knowing.

This confidence is misplaced. LLMs like ChatGPT or Grok don't think. They are supercharged autocomplete engines. You type a prompt; they predict the next word, then the next, based only on patterns in the trillions of words they were trained on. No rules, no logic – just statistical guessing dressed up in conversation. As a result, LLMs have no idea whether a sentence is true or false or even sane; they only "know" whether it sounds like sentences they've seen before. That's why they often confidently make things up: court cases, historical events, or physics explanations that are pure fiction. The AI world calls such outputs "hallucinations".

But because the LLM's speech is fluent, users instinctively project self-understanding onto the model, triggered by the same human "trust circuits" we use for spotting intelligence. But it is fallacious reasoning, a bit like hearing someone speak perfect French and assuming they must also be an excellent judge of wine, fashion and philosophy. We confuse style for substance and we anthropomorphize the speaker. That in turn tempts us into two mythical narratives:

Myth 1: "If we just scale up the models and give them more 'juice' then true reasoning will eventually emerge."

Bigger LLMs do get smoother and more impressive. But their core trick – word prediction – never changes. It's still mimicry, not understanding. One assumes intelligence will magically emerge from quantity, as though making tires bigger and spinning them faster will eventually make a car fly. But the obstacle is architectural, not scalar: you can make the mimicry more convincing (make a car jump off a ramp), but you don't convert a pattern predictor into a truth-seeker by scaling it up. You merely get better camouflage and, studies have shown, even less fidelity to fact.

Myth 2: "Who cares how AI does it? If it yields truth, that's all that matters. The ultimate arbiter of truth is reality – so cope!"

This one is especially dangerous as it stomps on epistemology wearing concrete boots. It effectively claims that the seeming reliability of LLM's mundane knowledge should be extended to trusting the opaque methods through which it is obtained. But truth has rules. For example, a conclusion only becomes epistemically trustworthy when reached through either: 1) deductive reasoning (conclusions that must be true if the premises are true); or 2) empirical verification (observations of the real world that confirm or disconfirm claims).

LLMs do neither of these. They cannot deduce because their architecture doesn't implement logical inference. They don't manipulate premises and reach conclusions, and they are clueless about causality. They also cannot empirically verify anything because they have no access to reality: they can't check weather or observe social interactions.

Attempting to overcome these structural obstacles, AI developers bolt external tools like calculators, databases and retrieval systems onto an LLM system. Such ostensible truth-seeking mechanisms improve outputs but do not fix the underlying architecture.

The "flying car" salesmen, peddling various accomplishments like IQ test scores, claim that today's LLMs show superhuman intelligence. In reality, LLM IQ tests violate every rule for conducting intelligence tests, making them a human-prompt engineering skills competition rather than a valid assessment of machine smartness.

Efforts to make LLMs "truth-seeking" by brainwashing them to align with their trainer's preferences through mechanisms like RLHF miss the point. Those attempts to fix bias only make waves in a structure that cannot support genuine reasoning. This regularly reveals itself through flops like xAI Grok's MechaHitler bravado or Google Gemini's representing America's Founding Fathers as a lineup of "racialized" gentlemen.

Other approaches exist, though, that strive to create an AI architecture enabling authentic thinking:

- Symbolic AI: uses explicit logical rules; strong on defined problems, weak on ambiguity;
- Causal AI: learns cause-and-effect relationships and can answer "what if" questions;
- Neuro-symbolic AI: combines neural prediction with logical reasoning; and
- Agentic AI: acts with the goal in mind, receives feedback and improves through trial- and-error.

Unfortunately, the current progress in AI relies almost entirely on scaling LLMs. And the alternative approaches receive far less funding and attention – the good old "follow the money" principle. Meanwhile, the loudest "AI" in the room is just a very expensive parrot.

LLMs, nevertheless, are astonishing achievements of engineering and wonderful tools useful for many tasks. I will have far more on their uses in my next column. The crucial thing for users to remember, though, is that all LLMs are and will always remain linguistic pattern engines, not epistemic agents.

The hype that LLMs are on the brink of "true intelligence" mistakes fluency for thought. Real thinking requires understanding the physical world, persistent memory, reasoning and planning that LLMs handle only primitively or not all – a design fact that is non-controversial among AI insiders. Treat LLMs as useful thought-provoking tools, never as trustworthy sources.

And stop waiting for the parrot to start doing philosophy.

It never will.

Gleb Lisikh