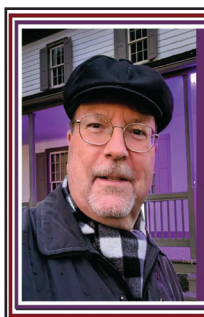

A Weekly Column by Dean Hickey

# THE FINAL TAKE

AN UNVARNISHED LOOK AT THE MANY SOCIAL & POLITICAL ISSUES OF OUR TIME...

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## A POLITICAL CONVENTION AND A HOST OF NATIONAL ISSUES

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA NATIONAL CONVENTION in Calgary from January 29 to 31 is primarily focused on a leadership review of Pierre Poilievre following the party's 2025 election performance. However, beyond the leadership vote, delegates received over 60 policy and constitutional proposals for debate.

This comes at a time in our nation's history when the sheer number of issues we face appears overwhelming to even the most casual observer. As one might expect in today's political and economic climate, conversations are taking place on matters of resource development, public safety, bail reform, immigration, and of course, freedom of speech. At the same time, there are a few fundamentals we as Canadians need to face, and this week I will highlight just a few.

First, let's talk about jobs. It's no secret that Canada's economy has languished over the past couple of years, with feeble increases in gross domestic product (GDP), outright declines in per-person GDP (an indicator of living standards), sluggish exports, and alarmingly low levels of business investment. Needless to say, this pattern of economic weakness is showing up in the job market.

The number of unemployed Canadians averaged 1.5 million in 2025, up from 1.4 million in 2024 and 1.1 million in 2022. The unemployment rate averaged 6.8 per cent in 2025, compared to 6.3 per cent in 2024 and 5.4 per cent the year before.

Part of the problem is the continuing post-pandemic trend of 'outsized' government-sector job gains versus more muted growth in private-sector employment. Government administration, education, and health care all reported job growth in 2025. Across the entire Canadian public sector, payroll jobs expanded by 1.9 per cent versus a 1.3 per cent increase in the private sector. With Ottawa and many provinces now facing sky-high deficits, it's doubtful that government-funded employment can keep rising at the brisk pace seen in recent years.

If last year was a mediocre one for job creation, 2026 is expected to bring more of the same. Most forecasters see the Canadian economy struggling this year, after a lackluster 2025. This suggests that annual employment growth in 2026 is unlikely to surpass 1 per cent, and that's anything but positive news.

Now let's turn our attention to one of the most pathetic issues to have surfaced in generations, being that of Ottawa's mandate for electric vehicle (EV) imports.

The new trade deal between Canada and China, which reduces the tariff rate on Chinese EV imports into Canada, recently made headlines. Reality check: Federal EV mandates require more vehicles to plug in, but our electricity grids are not equipped to handle the related surge in electricity demand. Expanding power infrastructure takes decades, and there's growing doubt among the more astute in this country about the feasibility of meeting EV adoption targets.

Since 2023, the federal government has introduced policies to force a shift towards EVs as one element of its "net-zero" emissions by 2050 plan. Looking ahead, according to the Canada Energy Regulator, a federal agency, by 2050 national electricity demand will grow by a projected 135 per cent. This means that in the span of about 25 years, Canada's electricity demand would more than double to meet EV mandates. Successfully delivering such a massive increase in electricity would require a monumental expansion in our infrastructure for electricity generation, transmission and storage, and points to increased reliance on energy imports from the United States if demand for power grows faster than domestic supply.

There's a self-evident and fundamental challenge - the federal EV mandate strives for rapid acceleration of EV adoption and will lead to a significant increase in electricity, but expanding the supply of electricity has historically proven slow and expensive. Any changes to Ottawa's EV mandate must confront this disconnect and its consequences for electricity demand. That is something the 'EV-Cult' among us simply refuse to acknowledge.

The third issue I would like to touch on concerns healthcare wait times here in Ontario – an issue that unquestionably spans the entire country. In a recent news story about the Ford government's plan to increase the number of private clinics and reduce wait times in Ontario, one Toronto-based doctor told CTV News that Ontario's health-care system is in "remarkably good shape" however, the data reveal a different story.

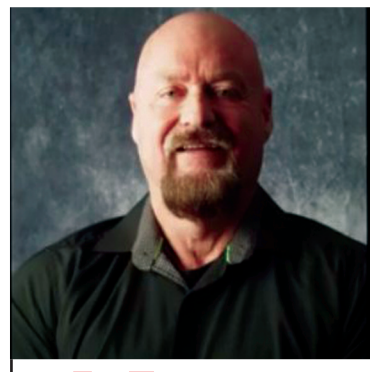
According to government statistics, nearly one-quarter of children in Ontario wait "too long" for general pediatric care, and all children wait four months on average for "non-urgent" treatment. Keep in mind the fact that this is after they first wait weeks or even months to see a specialist for diagnostics in the first place.

The situation isn't any better for adults, where in many cases between one-fifth and one-quarter of patients in Ontario are not treated within the government's own target times. The official maximum wait-time target for joint replacement and a broad range of other surgeries is now six months, during which it's apparently fine for patients to endure pain and potential deterioration. For those in need of non-urgent cataract removal, for example, the government seems to be okay with people stumbling around with limited vision for up to four months. Again, these wait-time targets don't include the weeks or months of waiting for a specialist appointment or for an MRI or CT scan.

In light of these facts, how can anyone say that Ontario's health-care system is in "remarkably good shape"? The government's self-ascribed targets are generous while patients languish and deteriorate. Health care in Ontario is only in "good shape" if someone (hopefully, someone else) will wait longer than the government's idea of how long patients should wait. The Ford government's plan to increase access through private surgical clinics is a positive step towards solving a very real wait-time problem.

Increasing unemployment rates, EV fantasies that border on complete lunacy, and a failing Soviet-style healthcare system are but a few of the issues Canadians need to face up to. There are many more of course, such as weak productivity, high household debt, and massive trade vulnerabilities. If these are left unresolved, you can bet on a continuing decline in our living standards due to preventable economic erosion.

Never forget that our economy – that of our ancestors right on up to the present day – will always be heavily reliant on natural resources and trade. Since 2015, the prevailing ideology in Ottawa has been to wage war on the one, while letting the other slip away due to incompetence at the highest level. Things need to change, and perhaps someday soon the average Canadian voter will begin to see the light.



THE Mr. X Files

By John Mutton

CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

# Karmageddon

By Mr. 'X' ~ John Mutton

CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

## People are watching

As Ontario prepares for the next round of Skills Development Fund (SDF) allocations—this time including capital funding—you would think the government would be eager to clean up its act. So far, there is little evidence that it has.

The SDF program has already been engulfed in controversy. Applicants that scored poorly on their submissions were nevertheless greenlit for millions of dollars, while legitimate trade schools, unions, and skilled-training institutions were left watching from the sidelines.

When a disproportionate share of public funding flows repeatedly to the same politically connected actors, it stops looking like coincidence and starts looking like collusion.

Among the names repeatedly tied to these grants are Kory Teneycke, the Premier's former campaign manager; Nico Fidani Dyker, a former senior staffer in the Premier's office; and Michael Diamond, the President of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party. Oversight ultimately rests with the Ministry of Labour, under Minister David Piccini, whose proximity to lobbyists and grant recipients has raised persistent concerns.

There are documented reports of front-row Maple Leafs tickets, luxury travel, and privileged access enjoyed by principals of companies that received SDF funding. At the same time, credible training organizations—those actually preparing electricians, welders, millwrights, and heavy-equipment operators—were passed over.

This week, a brief investigation revealed that multiple steel companies have independently retained Nico Fidani Dyker's lobbying firm ahead of the next SDF intake. This mirrors prior behaviour observed during the Greenbelt scandal, where access appeared to matter more than merit.

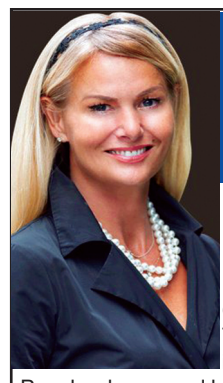
At the same time, the Ontario Provincial Police investigation into irregularities surrounding Keel Digital Solutions remains unresolved, and the RCMP's Greenbelt investigation continues. Despite this, the same players appear confident that public money will continue to flow. Within government, many Members of Provincial Parliament are privately unhappy with what is unfolding. Fear of political retaliation, withdrawn support, or stalled funding has kept most silent.

Meanwhile, Ontario's skilled trades continue to struggle. Apprenticeships go unfunded.

Training facilities age. Labour shortages worsen.

If the next round of Skills Development Funds proceeds without reform, transparency, and accountability, it will confirm what many already believe: the program has become less about skills and more about access.

People are watching.



# Lisa Robinson

PICKERING CITY COUNCILLOR

## Punishing the Law-Abiding Won't Make Canada Safer

Let's talk about the federal government's so-called gun "buyback," because Canadians deserve honesty — and this policy is anything but honest.

This program does not target criminals. It targets the most law-abiding citizens in the country. People who followed the rules. People who took safety courses. People who passed background checks. People who registered their firearms. People who did everything the government asked of them.

And now they're being punished for it.

Meanwhile, the people actually committing gun crimes are untouched by this policy. They don't have licenses. They don't register firearms. They don't take safety courses. And they certainly aren't lining up to hand anything over to the government. They are criminals — and this policy does absolutely nothing to stop them. That's why this so-called gun grab is a complete waste of time, a complete waste of money, and a complete distraction from what actually keeps communities safe. If someone commits a violent crime with a firearm, there should be real consequences — not catch-and-release bail, not revolving-door justice, not political theatre. That is where public safety lives. That is where bail reform matters. That is where government should be focused. And this isn't just opinion — it's been stated plainly by police leadership.

Even here in Durham Region, our own police have acknowledged that gun crime entering our community is not being committed by legal gun owners. That fact alone destroys the justification for this policy. So when politicians claim this is about safety, Canadians should understand what they're really being sold: optics, control, and the targeting of the easiest group — not the most dangerous one.

Several police services across Ontario have already made their position clear. The Toronto Police Service and the Barrie Police Service have publicly stated that they will not participate in the collection of legally owned firearms, citing resource constraints and the need to focus on real crime, not political programs. That reality makes it even more important for residents to know where their own police services stand.

That is why I have formally written to Durham Regional Police Chief Peter Moreira requesting confirmation on whether DRPS will participate in the federal program, whether police resources will be diverted away from real crime, and whether DRPS has communicated any position to Ottawa. I am currently awaiting a response, and I will share that response publicly when it is received — because transparency matters.

Across Canada, Premiers including Doug Ford and others are now pushing back against this policy, recognizing what Canadians already know: this will not stop crime, and it will not make communities safer.

History also tells us what happens when governments disarm the law-abiding while ignoring criminals. Across countries and across generations, the pattern is the same. Governments disarm those who obey the law first. They promise safety. They promise order. They promise the power will never be abused.

And then power is centralized — and when things go wrong, the people have no protection left.

We've seen this story before: in 1930s Germany, the Soviet Union, Mao's China, Cambodia, Venezuela. Different nations. Different leaders. Same outcome.

Canadians should be especially alarmed because we have already seen our own government turn state power on peaceful citizens. During the convoy protests, police were used against ordinary Canadians under the Emergencies Act — and a court later ruled that action unlawful.

So don't tell Canadians this could never happen here. It already did.

And once a government crosses a line, it becomes easier to cross the next one — and the next — and the next. History doesn't repeat because people are blind.

It repeats because they're told, "This time is different." It never is.