

# OPINION & EDITORIALS



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## It's time to stop sending money to Ukraine...

Last month, Prime Minister Mark Carney welcomed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Halifax where the two men discussed the ongoing war in Ukraine as well as Canada's latest commitment of \$2.5-billion in financial support. Since Russia's full-scale invasion, Canada has provided nearly \$22 billion in aid to Ukraine, making us one of the largest contributors for what Zelenskyy has described as "recovery and reconstruction". The new funding includes support for an International Monetary Fund loan, participation in debt service suspension and certain loan guarantees. The funding is also intended to go toward ensuring energy security in the war-torn country. "When I stood with President Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Ukraine's Independence Day, I made clear that Canada will stand with Ukraine throughout this horrific war and when peace finally comes," said Carney in a statement. That's all well and good, however, at this stage in the conflict there are plenty of solid arguments against our federal government even considering a further \$2.5-billion in aid. We have significant domestic fiscal pressures right here at home, and the structure of the financial commitment being offered is itself questionable. The money being sent abroad should instead be prioritized for Canadians facing a high cost of living, housing shortages, and a healthcare crisis which extends right across this country. It's interesting to note that, while Canadians die in understaffed emergency rooms, billions are sent overseas. As well, many of our fellow citizens continue to struggle in their efforts to afford even the basic necessities. That \$2.5-billion commitment will unquestionably add to an already deteriorating fiscal outlook for this country. Consider, the federal deficit was forecast to reach \$78.3-billion in 2025, with projections of more than \$50-billion annually through 2030. Continued deficit spending of that magnitude will only lead to higher taxes, inflation, and unsustainable debt servicing costs - which are projected to exceed 13 per cent of our federal revenues by 2029-30. While the government emphasizes most of the \$2.5 billion consists of loan guarantees rather than direct cash grants, this remains a point of contention. Any loan guarantee means Canada is liable if Ukraine defaults on its debts, which are already double its pre-war GDP, making the risk of non-payment substantial. Canada is in over its head in terms how much we can afford to help fight wars in far-off countries. To make matters worse, there are ongoing concerns regarding how aid is managed within Ukraine, a country with a history of political corruption and recent scandals. Our leaders should consider the fact that overall public resolve for "as long as it takes" support has certainly declined over time. The sentiment that Canada is doing "too much" for Ukraine is in fact growing, and with good reason. As the war nears its fourth year, our federal government should focus more on brokering a diplomatic peace rather than providing indefinite financial support that may only serve to prolong the conflict.

## Regional council just keeps on spending...

Prior to the Christmas holidays, councillors at the Region of Durham decided to reject a proposed 3 per cent property tax rate increase brought forward by Oshawa's Brian Nicholson and Tito-Dante Marimpietri, instead voting to send it back to staff. Why? So they can prepare a report on a proposed 4.8 per cent increase for 2026 - and to have that report brought back to Regional Council on January 28th for further consideration. That means, in essence, that no budget has yet been approved, and no tax rate increase has been set in stone. When the report is finally brought back to Council, they can approve the higher tax rate increase or simply reject it. Oshawa's Ward 5 Regional councillor Brian Nicholson has stated publicly that, in his words "the fight for a lower tax rate is not over" and that when the report is back before councillors, he and his colleague Tito-Dante Marimpietri will again try to gather enough support for a more modest 3 per cent increase. This newspaper has long-since suggested that Durham Region has a definite spending problem, one that has significantly outpaced reliable, non-taxpayer revenue streams. Regional expenses have risen significantly in recent years, with a reported 29.6 per cent increase (\$386 million) between 2020 and 2023 alone. Such rapid growth in spending is unsustainable when compared to population increases and other financial metrics. Key non-tax revenues, such as Development Charges have fallen, with the projected revenue for 2026 coming in around \$29-Million, a significant decrease from the \$79-Million seen in 2023. Spending wasn't reined in as these non-tax revenues declined, forcing an increased reliance on property taxes to fill the infrastructure gap. As well, certain expenditures, such as the controversial headquarters 'revolving door' renovation project, have rightly drawn public criticism due to the high costs involved. As to the total financial liabilities now being faced by the Region, these have increased substantially, rising by 40.6 per cent (\$687 million) over a recent three-year period, representing a worsening financial situation. All the while, you will hear some councillors describe the taxation issue as a revenue problem, specifically the downloading of certain responsibilities from provincial and federal governments without corresponding permanent funding. There's no denying the Region now faces increasing costs for social services and healthcare programs, with the required tax levy funding for these having increased by \$101-million (60.8 per cent) between 2019 and 2025. However, at the end of the day, the problem remains the decision by Regional councillors to keep increasing expenditures and staffing levels at rates that are unsupported by long-term revenue sources. At some point, the political will to actually cut back on 'big government' must somehow be brought to the fore if we are ever to bring a degree of sanity to the issue of taxation.

## New Year's resolutions are important...

How many New Year's resolutions have you made, and how many did you keep? These commitments made at the start of every new year are vastly important because they leverage the 'fresh start effect', a psychological phenomenon where calendar landmarks act as a mental reset, helping people distance themselves from past imperfections while increasing our motivation for change. Key reasons for their significance include the promotion of self-reflection - a process that forces an honest evaluation of the previous year, identifying successes, failures, and areas needing improvement. Research suggests that people who explicitly make resolutions are 10 times more likely to successfully change their behavior compared to those who desire change but don't set a formal resolution. Setting that resolution is inherently an act of hope, signaling a belief that the future can be better, and that's a positive outlook that can help to improve your overall mental health. Publicly declaring or writing down a resolution creates a sense of responsibility to oneself and others. Pursuing a goal triggers the release of dopamine, a "feel-good" chemical that manages pleasure and reward-centers in the brain, making the journey toward a goal rewarding, regardless of the final outcome. Many resolutions, such as improving health or volunteering, positively affect family, colleagues, and the wider community. In fact, the tradition of resolutions is over 4,000 years old, starting with the ancient Babylonians who made promises to their gods to repay debts at the start of the year. Romans later associated the practice with Janus, the two-faced god of beginnings and endings who looked both into the past and the future. Here's to a great New Year for all of us!

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](mailto:newspaper@ocentral.com)

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## Letters To The Editor:

WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND? Send letters to [newspaper@ocentral.com](mailto: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 at 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