



A Weekly Column by Dean Hickey

THE FINAL TAKE

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



MARK CARNEY IS PLACING CANADA'S HEAD SQUARELY IN THE MOUTH OF A CHINESE TIGER

CANADA'S VERY OWN PRIME MINISTER is playing a very dangerous game of high international politics with one of the world's most aggressive totalitarian regimes. In recent weeks, Prime Minister Mark Carney has decided to launch a significant and highly controversial shift in Canadian foreign policy by establishing what the Liberals are now trying to package as "a strategic partnership" with the Chinese Communist Party. This is a significant change, which Carney tries to justify as "taking the world as it is" rather than as we wish it to be – a statement that has drawn intense criticism for potentially compromising Canada's national security. This is happening despite concerns over China's human rights record and nearly a year after he called China "the biggest security threat" facing Canada.

Carney went on to tell members of the press that "the world has changed" in recent years, and that these new arrangements will somehow set Canada up well for "the new world order". Our more intimate relationship with the Chinese Communist Party, he added, has become "more predictable" than our relationship with U.S. president Donald Trump. He even went so far as to write, in a social media post, that Canada was "recalibrating" its relationship with China's totalitarian regime, "strategically, pragmatically, and decisively". Make no mistake, this is really happening, however frightening it may sound to those who do not support Liberal party ideology in this country.

As to the economic circumstances that surround all of this, we can – in part – look to the United States. Since taking office for a second time last year, president Trump has imposed tariffs on various sectors, such as metals and automotives, which has led to increased uncertainty for counties like ours that have for so long decided to piggyback on America's capitalist culture. The North American free trade agreement between Canada, the US and Mexico (USMCA) is now under a mandatory review, with Canada and Mexico having both made clear they want it to remain in place. But the decision to carve out a major new deal with China is a declaration by the Liberals that the future of North American free trade is increasingly irrelevant within the realm of socialist Canadian politics.

Our Prime Minister made some very questionable choices in both Beijing and Davos that may come back to bite him – and all Canadians – by alienating moderate Americans while unwittingly arming authoritarian propagandists. The Liberals have been seen as overly conciliatory towards their new masters, and Mark Carney's glowing endorsement of Chinese Communist Party propaganda is a steep price to pay in a desperate move to cozy up to Xi Jinping.

The federal Liberals are making no attempts at hiding their moral bankruptcy, and Mark Carney's latest performances have revealed his government's willingness to appease an authoritarian power. Over the past two decades, China has perpetrated an array of hostile acts against Canadians by sanctioning, threatening and harassing politicians and members of various communities. They have interfered in Canadian politics, weaponized trade for geopolitical purposes, and perpetrated historic levels of espionage and theft of intellectual property. Canada's security agencies continue to identify China as the most capable and persistent strategic threat we face.

With regard to the deal-making on tariffs that came about due to lingering frustration with the United States, our federal government secured a deal where China dropped its own tariffs on Canadian canola seed (from 84% to 15%), lobsters, and crabs. In exchange, we cut our 100% tariff on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) to 6.1% for up to 49,000 vehicles annually. A new memorandum of understanding aims to increase Canadian exports to China, and to explore Chinese investment in Canada's energy sector (as if that prospect can be seen as somehow helpful to our country). The proposed partnership even includes "pragmatic engagement" on public safety, such as law enforcement cooperation on narcotics trafficking and cybercrime. Don't hold your breath.

The whole thing offers a dangerous new precedent, because economically, Canada matters very little to most Chinese firms. The real prize for the Chinese Communist Party is not access to Canadian markets, but the spectacle of America's neighbour kowtowing to Beijing. It sets an embarrassing benchmark for future negotiations by enhancing totalitarian propaganda that the free world is now entirely vulnerable.

Worst of all, the EV component of these deals is positively frightening. The deal will see Canada ease tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles that it imposed in tandem with the U.S. in 2024. As one might expect, the reaction was swift, with some, like Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe hailing it as "very good news". Farmers in his province have been hard hit by China's retaliatory tariffs on Canadian canola oil, and the deal, he said, would bring much needed relief.

But here in Ontario – home to Canada's auto sector – Premier Doug Ford was sharply critical of the deal. He said removing EV tariffs on China "would hurt our economy and lead to job losses". In a post on X, Ford said Carney's government was "inviting a flood of cheap made-in-China electric vehicles without any real guarantees of equal or immediate investment in Canada's economy". He's right about that, and you can rest assured the electric vehicle provisions in the trade deal will ultimately help China make considerable inroads into our domestic automobile market.

With the lower EV tariffs, approximately 10 per cent of Canada's electric vehicle sales are now expected to go to Chinese automakers. The Liberals under Mark Carney have signaled to the rest of the world that they're now warming up to China, and the fallout has only just begun. All signs point to the end of Canada's domestic automotive industries, and there's no denying that reality.

To put it simply, if countries like ours continue to treat negotiations with the Chinese Communist Party as being an intelligent and strategic move – one that buys us time to restructure a weakening economy – our future sovereignty will be compromised. The Liberals are poorly placed to resist being coerced by the Chinese, and Mark Carney's rhetoric in Davos will ultimately be seen as a not-so-sophisticated moral compromise for accommodating totalitarianism.

At the end of the day, words alone do not confer moral authority or defend sovereignty. It's up to every concerned Canadian to ensure our Prime Minister doesn't let Canada's collective head get bitten off, because – as Winston Churchill used to say – you can't negotiate with a tiger when your head is in its mouth.



Lisa Robinson

PICKERING CITY COUNCILLOR

Pickering Must Reclaim Transparency and Democratic Access Before It's Too Late

Recently, the Town of Whitby did the right thing. After being warned by the Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms (JCCF) that its ban on members of the public recording council meetings raised serious Charter concerns, Whitby's council voted to reverse that policy and reinstate recording rights for the public. This isn't just a local policy adjustment – it is a reaffirmation of fundamental democratic norms that should never have been in doubt.

In contrast, the City of Pickering has taken a series of steps that, collectively, narrow resident participation in local government and erect barriers to transparency just when openness is most needed.

I have formally asked the City Clerk, the Mayor, and members of Council to review and revise Pickering's policies and procedures so that residents can genuinely engage with their local government. This request is rooted not in partisanship but in principle: open meetings and open government are foundational to a functioning democracy.

What Changed in Pickering?

Over the past term, Pickering adopted a number of measures that, intentionally or not, restrict community access to council: Public recording of council and committee meetings is prohibited. If the public wants to record what is happening in an open meeting, they cannot unless the policy changes. This goes against the basic idea that a public meeting should be publicly accessible and documentable without restriction. Whitby acknowledged this and corrected their policy. Delegation times were cut from 10 minutes to 5 minutes. This might seem small, but for everyday residents, community advocates, and experts without a megaphone, five minutes is barely time to begin explaining a concern, let alone have their voice heard.

Public Question Period before Council meetings was removed. Residents can no longer stand up and ask questions of their Mayor and Council before meetings when they have concerns about what is happening in their city. The removal of this basic question-and-answer opportunity cuts off a direct line of accountability between elected officials and the people they serve, and sends the message that resident concerns are an inconvenience rather than a priority. Only Pickering residents are routinely allowed to speak. Residents from elsewhere in Durham Region are barred from addressing council unless special permission is granted, even though many Durham residents work in Pickering, pay regional taxes that fund services impacting Pickering, and are directly affected by decisions made in our council chambers. Three members of Pickering Council plus the Mayor sit at Durham Region Council, where decisions made regionally impact every municipality. Residents should not lose their voice at the local level simply because they live one municipal boundary away.

Residents cannot speak to matters not on the agenda without a two-thirds vote. Previously, Pickering residents could speak to any matter of concern as long as they provided notice in advance of a council meeting. Now, even residents who follow the rules and give notice can be denied the opportunity to speak if two-thirds of Council does not approve the topic. In practical terms, this means if Council does not like what you want to speak about, you may not be allowed to speak at all. This shifts public participation from a right to a permission-based privilege.

Media access is limited. The media cannot record meetings without a two-thirds vote of council. On more than one occasion, members of the media were escorted out of meetings, and when the matter came to a vote, council refused to allow media to remain and record. Public meetings should be accessible to journalists without hurdles. This undermines the open government principles protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Communication avenues are unnecessarily restricted. Councillors are not permitted to use their own ward budgets to advertise or inform residents in local newspapers unless those newspapers are approved by the CAO. If a paper is not approved – including community outlets such as The Central – councillors are prohibited from using their budget to communicate with residents through that outlet. The stated concern is that some papers contain opinion pieces, yet the City advertises in major outlets that also carry opinion content. This uneven standard restricts how councillors can reach residents and limits access to local, community-based media.

Why This Matters

A council meeting isn't a secret club. It's a public forum where decisions about taxes, services, infrastructure, and community life are made. When policies limit who can speak, shorten speaking times, block recordings, remove public question periods, restrict media access, and turn resident participation into something that requires Council's approval, the result is less accountability and less trust.

Transparency isn't optional. It isn't something that communities should have to fight for legally. It should be the default. Whitby's recent policy reversal should be a wake-up call for Pickering: restricting public access and scrutiny is both unnecessary and legally vulnerable. Rather than waiting for external legal pressure, our City should proactively correct course.

What Needs to Happen

Pickering must: Amend policies to clearly allow members of the public to record open meetings – audio and video – with only reasonable, content-neutral restrictions related to safety and non-disruption.

Restore meaningful delegation time and reinstate a public question period so residents can directly ask their Mayor and Council questions. Ensure that voices from across Durham Region can be heard when decisions affect them, without unnecessary procedural barriers. Allow the media to record open meetings without requiring a supermajority vote. Permit residents to speak to issues they care about, even if Council has not placed those issues on the agenda. Remove unnecessary restrictions on how councillors can use their ward communication budgets to inform residents through local media outlets.

Democracy Doesn't Work in a Vacuum

I did not raise these concerns lightly. When Pickering passed each of these restrictive policies by 6–1 votes, I cautioned that they raised serious concerns about Charter-protected freedoms and democratic access. Whitby's reversal confirms that those concerns were valid. Local government should be closer to the people, not further from them. It should empower residents, not silence them. I remain hopeful that Pickering's leadership will choose transparency, openness, and democratic engagement – before legal action becomes necessary.

Despite me putting the City of Pickering on notice that this policy violates Charter-protected freedoms, The Mayor is choosing to delay any changes until 2027 – leaving residents' rights infringed in the meantime. "Strength Does Not Lie In The Absence Of Fear, But In The Courage To Face It Head On And Rise Above It" - Lisa Robinson 2023



THE X Files

By John Mutton

CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

Karmageddon

By Mr. 'X' ~ John Mutton

CENTRAL EXCLUSIVE

Who Really Runs Your City Hall?

Community Planning vs. Development Services – Explained Without the Spin

One of the biggest misunderstandings in municipal politics is the belief that City Hall is one big machine making decisions behind closed doors. It isn't. There are two very different branches inside every municipality that shape your community – and confusing them is exactly how bad decisions slip through without accountability.

COMMUNITY PLANNING – The Rule-Makers

Community Planning decides what is allowed and where – long before a shovel ever hits the ground.

They deal with Official Plans, Secondary Plans, zoning bylaws, land-use policy, and long-term growth vision. Their job isn't approving buildings – it's deciding what kind of city or town you'll live in 10, 20, or 30 years from now.

Mr. X translation: Community Planning designs the city before anyone applies for permission.

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES – The Rule-Enforcers

Development Services steps in after the rules are already written. They don't decide what should go there – they decide whether a specific project follows the rules already in place. They handle site plans, subdivisions, engineering, servicing, permits, and inspections.

Mr. X translation: Development Services makes sure developers follow the rules – not invent new ones.

The Simple Analogy

Community Planning is the legislature. Development Services is the permit office. Community Planning decides what can be built. Development Services decides how it's built.

Why This Matters - When residents show up angry about a development, they're often told it complies with policy and council's hands are tied. That's usually because the real decision was made years earlier in a planning document most people never saw. If the public doesn't like what's being built, the issue is almost always bad policy – not permits.

Final Mr. X Line: Cities aren't changed by cranes and concrete. They're changed quietly – by planners writing rules nobody's reading