

OPINION
& EDITORIALS

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The CENTRAL NEWSPAPER

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We look back at 2025 and consider the challenges ahead...

In this week's edition of The Central, our columnists take a look at the year 2025 and consider some of what the New Year may have in store for us as Canadians. Dean Hickey looks back at some of the people and events that made their way into his column, while Maj. (Ret'd) Corneliu Chisu provides a detailed analysis of the year that was, and how we as Canadians have faced significant changes during that time. Nick Kossovan offers advice for those who may be searching for employment in 2026, and John Mutton (Mr 'X') looks to the coming year as a time for exposing political corruption in all its forms. Our publisher, Joe Ingino, writes about the need for a fresh start in local politics.

The issues we face as a community and a nation are many, and the year 2026 will provide us with more than our usual share of challenges – on economic issues, cultural heritage, and how best to manage our vast natural resources in an age of 'climate change' hysteria.

On the matter of our economy, 2025 was defined by a struggle to maintain growth amidst severe trade disruption and long-term structural weakness. While inflation eventually stabilized, we still faces a daunting new era that will be marked by further trade conflicts, chronic productivity issues, and record household debt. As everyone knows, our economic path in 2025 was a rough road – one that was and still is heavily dictated by constantly shifting U.S. trade policies. Consider this... The average U.S. tariff rate on Canadian exports rose from 0.1 per cent at the start of 2025, to approximately 5.9 per cent by October. This served to paralyze business investment and forced a massive reconfiguration of global supply chains. In addition, the upcoming 2026 review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) continues to create high levels of uncertainty, curbing long-term capital planning. As a result, growth remains tepid, with Canada's real GDP projected to expand by only 1.2 to 1.7 per cent for the full year 2025.

To make matters even more complicated, economists have warned that Canada's decades-long productivity problem has reached an emergency level. Weak business investment in technology and training has created a vicious circle of low wages and sluggish demand. While aggregate GDP grew slightly, GDP per capita remains under pressure as population growth significantly outpaces economic output, and while inflation has reached the Bank of Canada's 2% target, Canadians are still facing severe financial pressure. The unemployment rate peaked at 7.1% in September 2025 - its highest level since 2016 (excluding the pandemic) - before softening to 6.5% in November. As to consumer debt in this country, the stress level reached a breaking point this year, with consumer insolvencies hitting their highest levels since 2009. After a series of cuts throughout 2025, the Bank of Canada ended the year with a policy rate of 2.25%, signaling a long pause to assess trade impacts. As well, our housing sector remains a core economic drag, with weak productivity in residential construction accounting for up to 20% of the increase in new home prices since the pandemic. Despite federal initiatives like the One Canadian Economy Act, construction starts have been slowed by zoning restrictions and a lack of skilled workers. Although Canada's national home price averages declined nearly 4% year-over-year by November, high borrowing costs continue to keep many potential buyers on the sidelines. All of this will require some hard decisions by governments at all levels in this country.

With regard to our cultural heritage, our society is navigating significant challenges marked by a sharp demographic pivot and deepening partisan divides. Despite record immigration levels brought about by the Trudeau Liberals, Canada's population growth took a significant pause, ticking up only 0.1 per cent in the first two quarters of 2025, due largely to federal policy shifts that sharply reduced the number of non-permanent residents, particularly international students. As the influx of younger newcomers slowed, Canada's median age rose to 40.6 years. Newfoundland and Labrador became the first province where more than 1 in 4 residents are aged 65 or older. Regardless of this, a majority of Canadians (58 per cent) now believe immigration levels are too high, which represents a major shift in public opinion. Concerns are increasingly linked to housing affordability and perceptions of poor government management. 2025 saw the widest partisan divide on immigration in nearly 50 years, with federal Conservative supporters becoming increasingly critical of current policies compared to Liberal or NDP supporters. Public and political debate regarding Canada's immigration system reached a critical inflection point in 2025, with many critics and citizens describing the system as "broken" due to two years of intense population growth and perceived management failures.

Between 2022 and 2024, Canada experienced a historic population increase, adding roughly 3.1 million people - a rate significantly higher than other G7 nations. This growth was primarily driven by temporary residents, including international students and foreign workers. The rapid influx of newcomers has been linked to a worsening housing affordability crisis and increased pressure on healthcare and transit systems. As a result, long-standing public consensus on immigration has cratered. By late 2024, roughly 58% to 72% of Canadians believed immigration levels were too high, up from 27% in 2022. Reports have highlighted weaknesses in vetting, including cases where individuals with criminal records were granted residency. There are also concerns over a spike in asylum claims and an estimated 500,000 undocumented migrants. A 2025 report found that highly skilled immigrants are leaving Canada at near-record rates, with those holding doctorates being twice as likely to leave within five years as those with bachelor's degrees. In response to these challenges, the federal government was forced to implement certain policy changes. For the first time in decades, Canada significantly lowered its targets for new permanent and temporary residents to pause population growth. Under new leadership directions, the government is seeking to cut temporary resident targets from over 670,000 to 385,000 in 2026, with further reductions planned for 2027 and 2028. The Trudeau-era immigration madness was entirely unsustainable.

Finally, on the issue of Canada's natural resource sector, the fact remains that this component of our economy is still a major cornerstone, though it now faces long-term investment risks. As of the second quarter of 2025, natural resources accounted for 11.3 per cent of our nominal GDP, reaching an annualized rate of \$335.7 billion. The sector supports approximately 670,000 jobs directly, with total resource-related industries contributing to nearly 17 per cent of GDP and 70 per cent of goods exports. In July 2025, crude oil production rose 7.2 per cent year-over-year to 27.1 million cubic metres, driven by new highs in the oil sands. Marketable natural gas production also reached record levels earlier in the year. As a nation, we achieved major milestones in diversifying our energy exports beyond the United States, which is an absolute necessity.

In July 2025, we delivered our first-ever overseas shipments of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Kitimat terminal in British Columbia to global markets. We also have an expanded pipeline network for crude oil, which began operating in May 2024, allowing exports to non-U.S. countries to surge, reaching a series high of 1.9 million cubic metres in March 2025, primarily destined for Asia. However, despite current growth, the industry faces structural and environmental headwinds. Reports in mid-2025 warned that up to 66% of future capital investments in Canadian oil and gas (2025–2040) could become "stranded" assets if global demand declines in line with what many see as totally unrealistic Paris Agreement climate targets. Industry advocates point to regulatory layers and emission caps as factors that have led to an estimated \$670 billion in cancelled energy, forestry, and mining projects over the past decade. The current proposal to extend further pipelines to the B.C. coast must come to fruition if we truly hope to once again become a solvent country – one not burdened by a national debt which shows no signs of abating.

So as we take stock of the old year and consider the new, we've certainly learned a few lessons along the way. The first is that, as a nation, we cannot go on borrowing money to simply keep the lights on. To that end, the utopian dream of a carbon-free economy appears to be coming to an end. The fact that a country built on its natural resource capacity could, for a time, be hijacked by radical environmental ideology is almost unfathomable – certainly regrettable. Secondly, our cultural fabric has been frayed beyond belief by a Liberal government that was bent on importing likely supporters without regard to the disastrous effects on the capacity of Canadian society to absorb such a massive influx. The Trudeau-era attempts towards a population explosion will hopefully never be repeated. We are stronger now due to our increased awareness of bad management on the part of our federal government, and we must continue to hold elected officials at all levels to account.

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