

Trudeau has a big hill to climb

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has a formidable job on his hands as he attempts to bring some accountability to Canada's most troublesome and intransigent institution: the Senate.

Trudeau's plan is to establish an independent advisory panel, which will consider potential nominees based on their history of leadership, achievement, ethical behaviour, and a perspective "that is clearly independent and non-partisan." Individuals could even nominate themselves. The panel selects a shortlist of suitable nominees. Then, the prime minister will choose from that shortlist his recommendations for the Governor General who actually makes the appointments.

Trudeau's plan is a praiseworthy attempt to navigate this rough terrain. But the Senate is still a big, heavy stone with a sword stuck in it, and our prime minister, as charismatic as he is, is still no King Arthur. His plan solves very few of the Senate's many problems. In fact, over time, it may become a problem all on its own.

Trudeau promised during the election campaign to reform the Senate. This promise played well with voters after the highly publicized scandals involving Conservative appointees. But the Senate, created in 1867 when Canada was born, cannot be reformed just because the prime minister of the day says so. It is weighed down by its own historical baggage. The rules for changing it are so exacting that true reform is nearly impossible. And so, in 2015, the upper chamber is still profoundly undemocratic.

For example, British Columbia has only six senators, as do Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. But New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have 10 each. Ontario and Quebec each have 24. This is because there weren't many people in Canada's West in the mid-19th century. Times have changed, but the rules haven't. And so New Brunswick has one senator per 75,000 people, while B.C. has one per 771,000.

With the big changes seemingly impossible to effect, Trudeau's "reform" plan could be mere window dressing, which he hopes will reduce the partisan nature of appointments. But unless the prime minister and his panel are very careful to avoid becoming a cosy club, he will fail in even this modest goal. The panel must make its search truly broad, and seek people with a variety of experiences. A dairy farmer, a homemaker or a tool-and-die maker must be on an equal footing with academics and CEOs.

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Letters to the editor

Cancer fighter grateful for support

To all who attended the fundraiser at the Acton Legion recently:

It has been a very long year of which I was thrown a curveball in September.

A broken back lead to a diagnosis of multiple myeloma that started the fight of my life.

My three children have given me strength while my supportive family has helped me on my road to recovery.

Two people, of whom I barely know, started a chain of events leading to a fantastic evening on Saturday, Nov. 21 at the Acton Legion.

Shelly Cox and Mandy Dixon arranged and organized a fundraiser for the benefit of myself and my children.

No words can describe the feeling of walking into a room full of 500 of my closest friends, family and acquaintances.

The extreme generosity of those who donated prizes in support of the event

was unbelievable. All involved should be proud to be a part of this loving and caring community.

Thank God for angels on earth... from the bottom of my heart, Shelly and Mandy, I thank you.

Ian Munday,
Halton Hills

Greenbelt is our future

The following letter was sent to Mayor Rick Bonnette and members of Halton Hills Council and sent to The IFP for publication.

I received an email from the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation asking for my support during the upcoming reviews of the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The email went on to state that "57 per cent of municipalities across the Greater Golden Horseshoe have formally requested that environmentally-sensitive and/or prime agricultural lands be removed from Greenbelt protection."

I trust that you have not been part of this formal request and I urge that if you have been, that you withdraw from this action. I further urge that you join the provincial commitment to grow the Greenbelt through the review process.

Quite apart from the essentials of protecting our watersheds, preserving wildlands and wildlife, and retaining the planet's green lungs; there is the developing economic proposition that global warming will make Canada's agricultural infrastructure of greater value than our fossil fuel resources. It is a compelling argument and one in which major financial interests are already investing.

Once the subject lands are paved over for development it is a matter of centuries, if not millennia before they can be restored to agricultural productivity or wildness and one has only to look at the Middle East to know how permanent desertification can become.

There is probably no more important issue you will ever face in your political careers and the one that will have the most lasting impact.

B.R. Cornwell,
Halton Hills