

Facing Canada's Future: MISC Annual Conference
Envisageons l'avenir du Canada: Conférence annuelle de l'IECM

October 28 - 29, 2021
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Report prepared by:
Josh Medicoff
MA Candidate, Department of Political Science, McGill University

About the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada - l'Institute d'études canadiennes de McGill

Established in 1994 thanks to an innovative agreement between the Bronfman family and McGill University, the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (MISC) runs an academic program at McGill University, supports an active research environment, and organizes a variety of large-scale, public events on matters of interest to Canadians, including MISC's Annual Conferences, which attract a great deal of attention from policy-makers, media, and the general public. While the Institute itself is non-partisan, MISC is no stranger to debate and controversy.

About the *Facing Canada's Future*, MISC's 25th anniversary annual conference

Facing Canada's Future, MISC's 25th annual conference, reflected on the state of Canada when MISC was created to see how far it has come since that time, and more importantly, to look at the coming years and Canada's future. The conference addressed national identity, reconciliation, Canada in the world, the impact of COVID-19, technological change, climate change, and more.

Key takeaways from *Facing Canada's Future*

- **National unity remains an important issue in Canada.** Though today's situation is different than it was in 1994, Western alienation and resource development remain core issues, as do provincial-federal tensions. The place of Indigenous Peoples in modern Canada has become an essential question as well.
- **Progress has been made on reconciliation, but not enough.** Public awareness of reconciliation is higher, but Indigenous Peoples continue to face resistance on issue like clean water, sovereignty, and society-wide recognition. Additionally, settler Canadians should consider who has to do the work of reconciliation.
- **Racism is a global issue that requires diverse voices to fight.** In Canada, the role of the electoral system in including or excluding fringe movements like the People's Party of Canada (PPC) is important, as is understanding how racism against Indigenous Peoples is at the foundation of Canada's political and bureaucratic institutions.
- **Canada's foreign policy needs a rethink.** Canada has lots to bring to the table internationally, but we need to critically assess our position in the world and renew our vision after the Two Michaels, Donald Trump, and COVID-19.
- **Federalism is a challenge for environment and climate change policy in Canada, but opportunities exist.** Intergovernmental disagreements around natural resources and the economies of resource-dependent provinces are core issues. Community management and political engagement are key ingredients in a Canada focused on climate solutions.
- **The knowledge economy presents an interesting path forward for Canada's economy.** Canada's data policy is anachronistic, but reveals interesting things about the relationships between the private sector, universities, and government. Climate will also play a key role in the future of Canada's knowledge economy.
- **COVID-19 has illuminated lessons on our resilience, our future, and intergovernmental relationships.** At its heart, we can learn a lot from municipalities, provinces and territories, and the federal governments' responses to COVID-19, and what it tells us about justice, equity, and resiliency our country.

Keynote: Canada and China

Speaker: Dominic Barton, Canadian Ambassador to the People's Republic of China

Speaking from Beijing, Dominic Barton, Canada's Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, highlighted the immense period of change Canada and the world is experiencing. From this Mr. Barton discussed the role Canada can play in a time of unstable global politics.

First, Mr. Barton outlined 4 forces driving global change. These forces are the economic power shift from east to west, technological change, demographic shift, and societal change. On shifting economic power, Mr. Barton discussed issues like population growth and urbanization, highlighting that Asia has the biggest middle class in the world. Due to urbanization, this middle class will continue growing. Technological innovation like AI, quantum computing, and bioscience are also driving change and propelling investment in Asia, particularly in China. Demographically, east Asia is also similar to Western countries, as fertility rates are decreasing across China, South Korea, and particularly Japan. However, Africa in particular is experiencing rapid population growth with southeast Asia also primed to see its population increase. These challenges are capped by societal changes, particularly in inequality. Mr. Barton noted that inequality is bad across the world but is growing especially unequal in China, prompting a shift towards a policy of "common prosperity." Additional pressures, including climate change and COVID-19, demonstrate how global responses require collaboration internationally.

What role can Canada play in addressing these challenges? Canada is a wealthy, highly educated country with a large talent pool. This makes it innovative, as demonstrated by industries like AI, clean technology, and healthcare. Furthermore, it's a multicultural and inclusive society, which attracts people across the world for education and work and strengthens ties between Canada and its resident's countries of origin. Mr. Barton further outlined how Canada's consistent support for a fair and multilateral international order has allowed to do develop substantive relationships with other countries.

In his closing remarks, Mr. Barton discussed Canada and China's challenged bilateral relationship. Mr. Barton noted that Canada and China have sought to find areas of collaboration, notably in the environment. In this, the countries can share technical know-how, leadership, and environmental standards. Mr. Barton ended his discussion wishing for Canada's mission in China to have the most substantive understanding of any country in the G7.

Keynote: **Immigration and Race: Transatlantic Connections**

Speaker: **Terri Givens, Professor of Political Science, McGill University**

Recently welcomed to McGill as Professor of Political Science and the Provost's Academic Lead and Advisor on McGill's Action Plan to Address Anti-Black Racism, Dr. Terry Givens' keynote speech discussed the historic ties between immigration and race. Later, she engaged in a conversation with MISC director Daniel Béland on the way forward.

Dr. Givens highlighted the historic marriage of immigration and race began as countries in North America were developing and diversifying. In Canada, this was exhibited by the 1923 China Immigration Act, which banned most forms of immigration from China. In the US, this often manifested against emigration to the US from Asia and Eastern Europe. There has been, therefore, a longstanding connection between immigration policy and race.

Dr. Givens further explained that civil rights legislation in the 1960s opened opportunities for the growth of Latinx, Africa, and Indian settlement in both the US and Canada. This initiated shifting discourses in the politics of left and right in both countries and across Europe. Though the 1980's were marked by the rise of the far right, it also witnessed equality being legislated across Europe in particular. These tensions between different factions can equally be seen today with broad actions on racial equality by the Black Lives Matter movement contrasted with the institutionalization of the far-right by Donald Trump. These shifting discourses can be observed on discussions of multiculturalism and immigration in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom as well.

Interestingly, Dr. Givens also pointed to the structuring role played by Political Science in normalizing and promulgating race and racism. Dr. Givens observed that the field of Political Science has not broadly grappled with issues of race. To that end, Dr. Givens argued that structural racism (from governing institutions to immigration to disciplines like Political Science) is essential to understanding politics and policy. A marginalized class is central to the way that policy and politics are made, and race is at the center of that strategy. Therefore, Dr. Givens suggests that race is embedded in the structure of society. Those who pursue policies that perpetuate racism, inequality, and white supremacy are not bound by national borders. Similarly, racism extends to those who share different national origins and religions.

Radical empathy, diverse voices, and electoral systems

In conversation with Dr. Béland, Dr. Givens noted that part of the ways to remedy these institutional problems is to hire diverse voices that ask the right questions and advocate for marginalized people. She noted that her presence at McGill is an example of this, as part of her mandate is to advise the Provost on anti-Black racism. The two additionally discussed the interesting role that party systems play in giving a voice and/or marginalizing the far right. Proportional Representation (PR) systems, she notes, often give seats to fringe parties, whereas First Past the Post (FPTP) systems tend not to reward these parties. This was evidenced in Canada's September 2021 election, where the People's Party of Canada (PPC) won 6% of national votes but no parliamentary seats.

Before concluding the keynote, Dr. Givens gave her perspective on how Canada's self-understanding and elite consensus on immigration contrasts with that of the United States and other Western countries. Dr. Givens suggested that modern discourses may not have been so harsh on immigration in the United States had 9/11 not occurred, and may have been closer to Canada's consensus on immigration. Dr. Givens concluded discussing how the path forward is deeply intertwined with the principles she put forward in her book *Radical Empathy*. *Radical Empathy* focused on vulnerability, action, and creating trust to finding a way forward in contemporary racial politics.

Discussion: **In Conversation With...**

Speakers: **Charles Bronfman** and **David Johnston**, moderated by **Althia Raj**

In a brief conversation between Charles Bronfman and David Johnston, the founders of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (MISC), the two discussed MISC's creation, what it's been able to accomplish, and what the future holds.

Mr. Bronfman, whose endowment helped fund MISC, reminisced on his desire to begin a Canada-focused institute and campaigning to house it at McGill. Mr. Bronfman wanted Canadians to see their own opportunities and promote national unity at a time of division. (MISC was founded between Quebec's 1980 and 1995 referendums.) As recounted by Mr. Johnston, Canada's former Governor General, the two encountered pushback for a variety of reasons. This included housing a Canada-focused institute in Quebec, hosting it at McGill, a primarily Anglophone institution, and whether McGill's traditionalism was a good fit for the Institute.

After successively deciding to house MISC at McGill, they decided that the Institute would have a tripartite mandate on teaching, research, and outreach. Part of the research mandate was holding a yearly conference in addition to Lunch and Learns on McGill's campus. The two attribute part of MISC's success to this mandate, which has engaged Canadians across the political spectrum and help develop a more cohesive Canadian identity. For example, the institute has helped Canadians understand themselves beyond the simple French-English divide and focus on international relationships, Indigenous issues, Canada's relationship with the United States, and much more.

The two attributed much of the success of the past 25 years to good governance and a clear idea of MISC's identity. Having a clear understanding of its own mandate has helped MISC choose energetic, inspired directors like Des Morton (first) and Daniel Béland (current). These leaders have helped MISC's research be widely disseminated, inclusive, and focused on teaching Canadians of all walks of life about themselves.

In looking to the future, Mr. Bronfman noted that MISC should provide clarity to young students on what their experience as Canadians means for their future. Mr. Johnston, more broadly, discussed how MISC has and can help us understand who we are and what we want to be. This is particularly useful in avoiding being provincial or tribal, and focusing on how our diversity and inclusivity can be leveraged to better the world. More broadly, Mr. Johnston discussed that Canada has a role to play in the world and believes MISC can help us understand what it is.

Discussion: **The Knowledge Economy in Canada**

Speakers: **Vass Bednar, Taylor Owen, Maxime St-Pierre, John Stackhouse**, moderated by **April Fong**

The knowledge economy is growing in Canada, but ensuring it grows in the right direction is the central task of policymakers today. Defined as “an economy in which growth is dependent on the quantity, quality, and accessibility of the information available, rather than the means of production,” the knowledge economy will continue to play a key aspect of a postindustrial Canada, especially in the wake of COVID-19. To deepen our understanding of Canada’s knowledge economy and what issues and opportunities it presents, MISC convened a panel of experts that included:

- **Vass Bednar**, Executive Director of McMaster’s Digital Society Program
- **Taylor Owen**, Beaverbrook Chair of Media, Ethics & Communication at McGill’s Max Bell School of Public Policy
- **Maxime St-Pierre**, Executive Director and Head of Digital, at CBC /Radio-Canada (French medias)
- **John Stackhouse**, Senior Vice-President, Office of the CEO, RBC

In their opening remarks, the speakers highlighted issues including public-private relationships, regulation, data transparency, what’s changed in data and information policy, and what’s to look for. On public-private relationships, Canada can be characterized as playing a catch-up role on the policy and regulatory side. This means that on data policy, Canada has an opportunity to redefine how policymakers are in dialogue with industry. In fact, policymakers and innovators have much in common as “problem solvers.” But as noted by Ms. Bednar, policymakers need to have a forward-looking vision and understand that industry needs “accountability to make good decisions.”

Dr. Owen discussed how there are essentially two sides to how policymakers we engage with industry. **First, we incentive some industries through industrial policy -- and we pick and choose depending on our societal desires and norms.** Second, we regulate business to minimize risk. Owens noted that this understanding needs to be applied again to the knowledge economy in order to create infrastructure for the future instead of being reactive.

With respect to data and transparency, Mr. St. Pierre discussed how at its base, the knowledge economy is about confidence from users. While user data has helped Radio-Canada better understand its audience, utilizing their data comes with caveats. Those caveats are that **users must know what organizations are doing with their information and treat them like “digital citizens”** whose rights should be respected and not be manipulated.

Finally, Mr. Stackhouse discussed three core issues, including 1) what’s changed since the founding of MISC in 1994, 2) what’s changed in Canada’s favor, and 3) the role of climate change in the knowledge economy’s future. Mr. Stackhouse noted that most of what’s changed since 1994 hasn’t been in Canada’s favor -- the economy has become data driven (but Canada is too small to have relevant data), data is transnational (innovation doesn’t respect borders), and innovation has become privately and machine driven (for better and for worse). However, innovation is now more

principle driven, people-oriented, and pluralistic -- and Canada is good at attracting top-talent across the world into an inclusive society. On climate, Mr. Stackhouse also noted that climate is a knowledge issue for everything from firms to governments to individuals -- and this transformation will benefit Canada as it barrels toward net-zero by 2050.

Accelerating innovation, digitization, and post-industrialism in Canada

After their opening remarks, the speakers focused what factors accelerating Canada's shift to a knowledge economy. **COVID-19 has played an essential role.** Governments that had previously seemed slow were able to act fast.

One key area highlighted by Mr. Stackhouse is the remarkable increase in biometric data use -- a reality exacerbated by COVID-19 but which predates the pandemic. Mr. Stackhouse noted that **biometric data is an opportunity for Canada to develop consumer-protected data regulation,** especially considering that many biotech innovations fall outside the scope of existing regulations.

Surveillance and education technology were the most profitable during the pandemic, which demonstrates that the knowledge economy can infringe on individual privacy without adequate regulation. While firms have found it easy to transition working online, decreases in social interaction have impacted worker happiness and satisfaction. Ultimately, the winners and losers of an increasingly digitized work and educational space are partly the result of Canada's industrial policy. Knowing this reality should help policymakers choose the right path forward.

Returning to the subject of data, the panelists agreed that **transparency and consent are essential to good policy, but that Canada seems paralyzed and out-of-step in its approach.** Mr. St-Pierre speculated about the possibility of considering "**data as a public good,**" as Canadians are not aware of all the information they share. Elsewhere, the panelists described how Canada is severely out of step with regulating tech and data transparency; though the Liberal government made an attempt in 2020 to re-make data laws, that effort failed.

On the subject of workers, Mr. Stackhouse highlighted that the climate knowledge economy is and will be about data, but that Canada will also need a new generation of trade workers that can maintain things like electric vehicles and energy efficient buildings. Essentially, **Canada's economy will need to be retrofitted** -- and cultivating an economy that can handle this is a key task for Canadian regulators.

The panelists ended by talking about how Canada is often unable to have courageous conversations on data policy. This is because Canada generally follows other countries/regions strides and does not follow the advice of experts. Mr. St-Pierre pointed to California, France, and Australia's regulation of tech giants as inspiration.

Discussion: COVID-19 and Canada's Resilient Future

Speakers: **Charles Breton, David Kaiser, Danielle Martin**, moderated by **Amélie Quesnel-Barrée**

COVID-19 has reshaped Canada's political, economic, and social policy landscape. While the *The Knowledge Economy* panel touched on the impacts of COVID-19 and Canada's knowledge economy, MISC invited three speakers to discuss how COVID-19 is contributing to making Canada a more resilient country. The panel included:

- **Charles Breton**, Executive Director of the Institute for Research on Public Policy's Centre of Excellence on the Canadian Federation
- **Danielle Martin**, Chair of the Department of Family & Community Medicine at the University of Toronto
- **David Kaiser**, Head of Environmental Health at Montreal Public Health

In their opening remarks, the speakers discussed their own definitions of resiliency with a mixture of sobriety and optimism. Dr. Breton established that Canada needs to work to create the conditions necessary for resiliency. As a specialist on the Canadian federation, Dr. Breton highlighted that different **levels of government need to sort out who does what to improve how the federation operates**. This includes questions and issues about equalization, health transfers, and adapting municipal infrastructure to climate change. Ultimately, reforming Canada's institutions is essential to its resiliency.

Dr. Kaiser used prisons to illustrate his perspectives on resiliency. While helping manage an outbreak at a Montreal prison in 2020, Dr. Kaiser observed inmates deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms. He noted that when talking about resiliency, we're talking about the humans at the center of our policymaking. Dr. Kaiser found it morally unjust for individuals to be locked in cells for weeks at a time and noted that feelings of indignance can help provoke actions for change.

Dr. Martin suggested using resiliency not only as a noun, but also a verb. Noting that resiliency must be actively pursued by citizens and policymakers alike, she outlined 3 lessons in resiliency for health care. First, **all policy is health policy**. Policy decisions on privatization and workers' rights, for example, have impacts across the spectrum. These decisions particularly impact and exploit racial, income, and gender inequity. Second, digitization is not a health improvement. Despite the benefits of shifting to digital care over COVID-19, solely focusing on telehealth can exploit inequities in internet access. Thus, digitization is an improvement, but not a means to an end. Third, a focus on hospitals and doctors will not lead to the best outcomes. High quality, equitable, community-oriented care routinely provided the best outcomes for communities over the pandemic.

Challenges, vulnerabilities, root causes, and the low-hanging fruit to Canada's resilient future

From there, the panelists discussed the challenges, vulnerabilities, root causes, and opportunities in resiliency that COVID-19 has initiated. While health care burnout is worrying, Dr. Martin noted

that workers and policymakers have been able to act with agility few had expected. For example, Dr. Martin highlighted that her unit was surprised that only high-income postal codes were reserving vaccine appointments. Through engagement with community ambassadors, organizers, and partnerships, physicians achieved spectacularly high rates of vaccination in the Toronto region. One key takeaway is that the agility and rapid response capacities of Canada's pandemic response won't simply go away -- people at all levels know the speed that we can act with now.

COVID-19 also exposed vulnerabilities in Canada's federal health system. Noting that Canadians experienced federalism in their daily lives more than they ever have through the pandemic, Dr. Breton observed that federalism enabled tailored responses to citizens. It also demonstrated that in national crises', **there is a need for institutionalized, shared, and coordinated approaches to health care**. Different jurisdictions had remarkably different guidance on everything from isolation to vaccination throughout the pandemic. However, centralizing health care at the federal level isn't necessarily the solution as the federal government doesn't know how to administrate health care.

What are the root causes of Canada's vulnerabilities? There are many, but Dr. Kaiser highlighted that **Canada has long had an "out of sight, out of mind approach" to health care**. This includes sectioning elderly people in long term care, incarcerating people for social issues, and outsourcing the lowest paying health care jobs to private agencies. This is, broadly, a symptom of runaway capitalism and wealth inequality. **Rethinking our economic system is essential for better health outcomes**.

In their conclusions, the panelists discussed the low-hanging fruits that could render Canada more resilient. For Dr. Kaiser, that includes **decentralized decision-making and giving people public goods like high-quality public transit, social housing, and participatory urban planning**. More specifically, Dr. Martin noted that Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a no-brainer in a post-Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) world. Dr. Breton agreed and noted, crucially, that once you do something once, it becomes a lot easier and more efficient to do it again.

Discussion: **The Next Steps of Reconciliation**

Speakers: **Janice Hill, Ghislain Picard, and Val Napoleon**, moderated by **Emille Gilpin**

Similar to *COVID-19 and Canada's Resilient Future*, much of *The Next Steps of Reconciliation*, was focused on discussing what reconciliation means. To unpack this question, MISC invited three panelists to discuss what the next steps of “reconciliation” may be. The panelists included:

- **Kanonhysonne - Janice Hill**, Associate Vice-Principal (Indigenous Initiatives and Reconciliation), Queens University
- **Val Napoleon**, Interim Dean, Professor, Law Foundation Chair of Indigenous Justice and Governance at the University of Victoria
- **Ghislain Picard**, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador

In their opening remarks, the panelists unpacked what the term reconciliation means to them. Kanonhysonne noted her belief that every person in Canada is responsible for enacting reconciliation. In that same breadth, she also noted that **there is a long road ahead in convincing the Canadian population that reconciliation is important, as many still struggle with understanding and accepting how we've gotten to this point**. She explained that many Indigenous Peoples struggle with reconciliation as a concept because it suggests that there was ever a period when Indigenous Peoples were at parity with settlers.

Canada's history of forcefully displacing Indigenous Peoples, language loss, residential schools, and distance to kinship has led many Indigenous Peoples means that, ultimately, **reconciliation is the work of Canadians, and resurgence is the work of Indigenous peoples**. Ultimately, Kanonhysonne established that the time for talk is done -- now is the time for action.

In her remarks, Dr. Napoleon noted that reconciliation is defined by the experiences of the people speaking it. Coming from the perspective of someone working to articulate Indigenous Peoples understanding of their own laws, Dr. Napoleon highlighted the importance of understanding the legal orders that exist in Canada. That includes the multitude of existing Indigenous legal orders and Canadian common and civil law. **Without recognizing Indigenous laws, Canadian law is the only kind of law, an outcome that only seeks to serve the settler state**. Dr. Napoleon concluded her opening remarks by noting that while reconciliation is a broad act, it is also one of small issues. Those issues include equity and assertion around land, education, human rights, fishing, and much more.

Concurring with Kanonhysonne and Dr. Napoleon, Mr. Picard noted that everyone has different definitions of reconciliation and mentioned that his own Inuk community has been working on reconciliation before the term was coined. This has involved a particular focus on educating people on the issues that Indigenous communities face.

Mr. Picard noted that the context of Quebec creates hesitation in engaging with reconciliation because many Quebecers feel accused of doing something wrong. Dr. Picard noted that this is more pronounced in Quebec than elsewhere, and illustrated that in meetings with the current Minister of Indigenous Affairs of Quebec there seem to be two diverging visions of Quebec-Indigenous engagement. However, polling conducted by several nations also noted that 9/10 of

Quebecers believe First Nations are victims of racism -- and that the real area of stalling is when it's time to engage with high-level governing bodies. **While Mr. Picard has had success with municipalities like the City of Montreal, he noted the Government of Quebec's is unwilling to "go there" on these subjects.**

Unpacking the Land Back movement and economic reconciliation

In a question on the Land Back movement, Kanonhysonne discussed the difficulty that **many Indigenous Peoples have in understanding what exactly Land Back can mean.** She noted that it doesn't feel like Indigenous Peoples will come back to control their homelands, but that the idea of collaboration, where Indigenous Peoples have their own way, and settlers have theirs, could be a possibility.

Dr. Napoleon, however, noted that reconciliation is often conceptualized as laws between people. But there are laws in international (meaning First Nation to First Nation) Indigenous legal orders to teach and learn the laws of other First Nations. The concept, therefore, of teaching others about how to use the land is not a new concept between Nations. However, to assert Indigenous legal principles of the land, the law has to be applicable and understandable -- and that includes rebuilding Indigenous communities around their own laws.

Discussing the idea of economic reconciliation and what it may look like, Mr. Picard discussed how territory is at the heart of reconciliation and that Quebec is similar geopolitically to British Columbia, in that many of its territories are unceded and have Indigenous title, particularly in the North. However, he noted **that too often, gestures towards First Nations are verbal, and not legal** -- meaning that more lip service is paid than action is enacted. He noted that it is especially difficult to engage the Government of Quebec. For example, the Inuk Nation has been negotiating with the government for 50 years on some issues.

Many Nations in Quebec have chosen to develop themselves economically so it can have access to services and growth. Nations have taken advantage of the term reconciliation and engaged with state corporations that are often more open to meaningful engagement than the Government of Quebec. For example, Mr. Picard cited an agreement between an Anishinaabe Nation and a state-owned mining company in which latter acknowledged territorial ownership of the First Nation. In the scope of economic reconciliation, Mr. Picard established that Nations are trying to find ways to divest from state dependency at the same time as they steward their lands in a sustainable manner.

Dr. Napoleon further highlighted that **economic reconciliation is an opportunity to redefine what wealth and economies are.** Communities have obligations to look at what their relationships are with new parties and determine whether they're harmful with the land. She further noted that not all jobs are created equal, particularly in the resource world, as many end and leave harmful impacts.

In their final remarks, the panelists talked about the signs of progress they've observed. Kanonhysonne noted Queens reputation as a sign of progress, in that the university has been significantly invested in reconciliation and has witnessed "allies become accomplices." Dr.

Napolean noted that pessimism needs to be avoided -- and that nations need to be rebuilt as engaged Peoples who take up challenges. Finally, Mr. Picard discussed how challenges need to be looked at as opportunities to ensure a transition in perspectives happens -- and that needs to happen in collaboration.

Discussion: National Unity

Speakers: **Jean Charest, Christy Clark, André Lecours**, moderated by **Jonathan Montpetit**

When MISC was founded in 1994, Canada was preparing for Quebec's 2nd independence referendum. Returning to the question of national unity, MISC convened two former premiers and an expert to discuss where Canada's national unity is today. The panelists included:

- **Christy Clark**, former Premier of British Columbia, 2011-2017
- **Jean Charest**, former Premier of Quebec, 2003-2012
- **André Lecours**, Professor of Political Science, University of Ottawa

In their opening remarks, the former premiers discussed their respective tenures as Premiers of Canada's 2nd and 3rd biggest provinces, respectively, and Dr. Lecours discussed the features aggravating national unity today.

Mr. Charest revisited how seminal Quebec's 1998 election outcome was for the province and country. Though the Parti Québécois (PQ) won, the Parti libéral du Québec (PLQ) won the most votes, cementing the fact that a 3rd referendum would not occur. That election's legacy is a more administrative style of federalism, an annual Premier's conference, and the creation of asymmetrical federalism. **Mr. Charest finished his remarks by noting that unity is among the biggest challenges we face, especially in western Canada.**

Ms. Clark noted that British Columbia is an interesting mix of Prairie and Pacific Northwest. The north and east resemble Alberta and Saskatchewan, but the Lower Mainland resembles Ontario. However, **Ms. Clark has never seen so much agnosticism about the idea of Canada.** She noted that part of the reason is that there are no actors fighting for national unity anymore.

Dr. Lecours began by saying that **Quebec nationalism is here to stay**, and will likely always be a force that needs to be managed. However, support for independence has decreased in the decades since MISC's creation. However, he also noted that a new wave of Western alienation isn't a threat in the short term, but does exploit the solidarity between Canadian jurisdictions.

Indigenous relations, equalization, climate action, and the notwithstanding clause

Launching into a discussion, the panelists were prompted to consider how reckoning with Canada's history has changed the way we think about national unity. **Dr. Lecour suggested that the concept of unity has been transformed into considerations of justice.** Ms. Clark purported that the core issue involving Indigenous Peoples in Canada today is poverty. She backed this up by saying that, beyond apologies, when resources are developed, First Nations should be included economically. As an example, she discussed how her government consulted with over 60 First Nations in BC to provide a piece of the pie of a Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) pipeline, and that **many Indigenous people don't consider themselves Canadian and never have. This surprised the former premier.**

Mr. Charest concluded this brief segment by noting that Canada was founded by 2 nations (French and English), though many nations were here before settlers arrived. He also discussed how Canada has an apartheid system of reserves, but nobody knows how to change this as it is difficult to imagine another solution. The challenge in Canada, therefore, is trying multiple nations together, Mr. Charest suggested.

On equalization, Dr. Lecours cited research showing that **support for equalization is guided by individuals' views of Quebec**. Those that believe Quebec is favored in the federation are more likely to oppose equalization. However, **support for equalization is high across the country, even if there are ways to improve the formula**. Ms. Clark noted that people like the idea that we support each other, but that the problem for western Canadians is that opposition to resource projects in western Canada seem strongest when the economies are not strong. On this, Ms. Clark purported that the West could not understand why central Canadians preferred resources imported from countries with bad human rights records over resources from Canada.

Mr. Charest agreed that the **debate on equalization was a pretext for other issues**, but that there is also little understanding of equalization and what it does. He also noted that almost all federated countries, and even unitary ones, have equalization formulas, to ensure that services are equal across regions.

On the question of how to respond to the climate crisis without damaging national unity, **Ms. Clark suggested that the solution in Canada is to let the provinces regulate themselves**. She noted that in the development of Canada's Pan-Canadian Climate Change Framework (PCCCF), it was "abundantly clear that the federal government's agenda was to have a fight with the provinces." She suggested Canada needs a federal government that is 1) able to accept climate change as real, 2) accept that carbon taxes are essential, and 3) that provinces have their own jurisdictions. But that hasn't occurred yet, from her perspective.

Mr. Charest also noted that fiscal conservatives believe that the solution to the climate crisis is in market-based instruments. Concurring with Ms. Clark, Mr. Charest suggested that solutions to the climate crisis must be provincially led. However, Dr. Lecours speculated that it is **unlikely that Canada can find a way to address climate change in a way that doesn't create tension**. In any federation, intergovernmental conflict is a fact of political life.

Finally, on the subject of the notwithstanding clause, the panelists discussed Quebec's Bill C21, which bans displays of religion in the public sector. Mr. Charest suggested that Bill C21 would have been popular in any jurisdiction outside of Quebec. Ms. Clark agreed. Even so, the former premier suggested that any bill that limits individual rights must be able to empirically demonstrate it, which the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) has been unable to do.

Ms. Clark noted that the notwithstanding clause is meant to protect the provinces from the federal governments legislating, and that is why she supports it. Mr. Lecours agreed with Ms. Clark and had no issue with its use. However, part of the reason Bill C21 is popular in Quebec, Mr. Lecours suggested, is that Francophones have a philosophically different approach to liberalism than the other provinces. The perception of Bill C21 in other provinces was of concern to all three speakers.

Discussion: **Canada in the World**

Speakers: **Roland Paris, Bruce Heyman, and Vicki Heyman**, moderated by **Lori Turnbull**

Canada's place in an increasingly multipolar world was the focus of *Canada in the World*. MISC convened a panel of former diplomats and experts to discuss how Canada can manage the global shifts taking place. The panel included:

- **Bruce Heyman**, co-author of *The Art of Diplomacy* and former U.S. Ambassador to Canada
- **Vicki Heyman**, co-author of *The Art of Diplomacy*
- **Roland Paris**, Professor of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa

Opening the floor, Mr. Heyman described some of Canada's most noteworthy characteristics, including the fact that its population is highly educated and wealthy. The former ambassador outlined that for a long time, U.S.-Canada relations embraced a "we" as opposed to "you and me" approach. However, he outlined that Canada's future is also dependent on the path that American democracy follows -- the threats to U.S. democracy are significant, and may threaten Canada's place in North America and beyond.

On another note, Mrs. Heyman discussed the importance of cultural diplomacy. She described how she met many people who used **culture and art as a primary dialogue and get to the heart of issues that "went beyond diplomacy,"** like racial politics, justice, equity, and beyond. She ultimately highlighted that art and culture are primary languages that can be used to build bridges -- using, for example, Hillary Clinton's focus on culinary diplomacy to make progress between leaders.

For his part, Dr. Paris offered a lucid treatment of the international realities Canada needs to face. This includes managing a global pandemic in the short-term, but also the structural power shifts taking place across the world with China's rise and increased capacity to be a military power. The U.S. is also in a period of economic protectionism and decreased reliability, meaning that **we are living in a "world with an asterisk, where our principal partner is less predictable, less reliable, and major power rivalry has returned."**

Global shifts, foreign ministers, priorities, and China

Thankfully, Canada is a collaborative power focused on protecting liberal democracy. Internally, it's also a welcoming country able to assimilate immigrants, where education costs are low, healthcare doesn't decide where people work, noted Mrs. Heyman. However, as per Dr. Paris, that's a blessing and a curse. **Canada's foreign policy hasn't shifted in the last 25 years, even though global politics have.** The new Liberal governments' platform on an Indo-Pacific strategy is welcome, but Canada needs to modernize its foreign policy.

Adding to this, Mr. Heyman noted that governments are often stuck thinking about tactics, and less about strategy. In a world where things have grown unpredictable, Mr. Heyman underscored

the value of developing comprehensive strategies to manage these shifts. This is particularly key if Canada is to remain stable with an increasingly *less* stable partner south of the border.

On the subject of Canada's "revolving door" of foreign ministers, Mr. Paris noted that while the newly appointed Mélanie Joly is up to the task, **developing institutional memory on a file as important as foreign affair is essential.** They are especially key for alliance's like the newly minted North American Battery Alliance, which is meant to secure the key minerals and manufacturing of electric vehicles. However, Mrs. Heyman underscored Ms. Joly's remarkable aptitude for cultural diplomacy.

Thinking to priorities files, Mrs. Heyman discussed the U.S.-Canada relationship as one that should be at the top. She highlighted that **Canada has demonstrated an ability to engage in substate diplomacy with governors in the U.S.** More broadly, Mr. Heyman noted that one of Canada's priorities must be about being willing to be agile and change. Dr. Paris additionally emphasized the perennial challenge of ensuring Canada avoids becoming collateral economic damage from the U.S. It can do so by diversifying its supply chains and engaging in more substate diplomacy.

Finally, the trio discussed how Canada's position has been affected by its increasingly strained relationship with China due to the Two Michaels. With 1.4 billion citizens and centuries of history, Mr. Heyman underscored that China isn't going anywhere and that the U.S. strategy of cooperate, compete, and, in some areas, confront, is simply not available to all countries. That's especially true for middle power countries like Canada. In a tie to Mr. Barton's keynote speech, **Mr. Heyman emphasized the need for Canada and China to find areas of cooperation.**

However, the goodwill many Canadians felt toward China was sure to be erased by the situation with the Two Michaels, Dr. Paris noted. Ultimately, he concurred with Mr. Heyman that China is here to stay, and that sustained cooperation will be key. At the same time, **developing economic ties with Indo-Pacific countries other than China is critical.**

Discussion: **Environment and Climate Change**

Speakers: **Susanna Fuller, Thomas Mulcair, Suzanne Simard**, moderated by **Mike de Souza**

Many comparisons have been made between COVID-19 and climate change. These comparisons have especially implicated ideas about action what it takes to mobilize in the face of a crisis. While such comparisons were not the focus on *Environment and Climate Change*, parallels can be made to panels from *COVID-19 and Canada's Resilient Future*, *National Unity*, and *The Next Steps of Reconciliation* on what it means to act. The panelists for this event included:

- **Suzanne Simard**, Professor of Forest Ecology at the University of British Columbia and the author of *Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest*
- **Thomas Mulcair**, former leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada and visiting professor at l'Université de Montréal
- **Susanna Fuller**, Vice President, Operations and Projects, Oceans North

In their opening remarks, the panelists discussed their involvement in the climate world and the issues and opportunities facing Canada today. Ms. Fuller opened with a personal anecdote of how the collapse of Maritimes cod fisheries galvanized her interest in ocean ecology and protection. **Growing up in rural coastal Nova Scotia enabled her to observe the vital importance of ocean protection for Indigenous and settler communities.**

Mr. Mulcair highlighted how Canada's environmental policy has, for decades, not been results oriented. While that may be changing, he noted Canada must be ready to act rather than promise. He alluded to the fact that coal production increased 20% during President Joe Biden's first year as President of the United States.

Referencing her recently published book *Finding the Mother Tree*, Dr. Simard discussed how forests are essential in the fight against climate change. Forests occupy one third of land in the world, store 80% of terrestrial carbon, and house 80% of the world's biodiversity. However, **Canada's rate of forest disturbance is worse than Brazil's due to logging, wildfires, land-use conversion, mining, and oil and gas.** Today, 67 million cubic meters of forest are clear-cut in BC a year. In addition to increased flood and wildfire risk, Dr. Simard noted that this is damaging ecologically, culturally, and socially for the communities that depend on these forests.

The good news, however, is that there are solutions. Dr. Simard highlighted that there is old-growth left -- and that these forests and their highly biodiverse ecosystems **must** be protected. A **shift from old-growth harvesting to nature-based solutions will also be key**, along with avoiding over-planting trees that could convert forests from carbon sinks to carbon sources.

Promoting nature-based solutions and engaging civil society

One key takeaway from this panel is that governments have much to do to promote nature-based solutions (NBS). Dr. Simard discussed **that forest management is a complex, multi-boundary issue that Canada's federalist system makes challenging.** For example, municipalities may want to fire-proof their borders, but sustainable forest management is a provincial issue. Mr.

Mulcair furthered this by saying that resource management is a vexing issue for federated countries like Canada. On a positive note, Ms. Fuller noted that oceans protection is a federal issue, and Canada has now protected 30% of marine ecosystems. Other issues, like ecologically bottom-trolling by the fishing industry, need to be prioritized.

On engaging civil society, Ms. Fuller discussed that elections help push these issues into the national conversation, and severe weather events also help galvanize people. But many of these issues are beyond individual action and must implicate government and regional bodies.

Dr. Simard underscored the need for policy excellence at every level, but focused on engagement is made difficult by community disconnect from the land encouraged by increasingly monopolistic resource companies. 5 corporations do most forest harvesting in Canada. However, **neither the fiscal windfall nor the jobs come back to logging communities**. To remedy this, **forest management needs to be devolved to local communities**. In practice, that would look like government intervention, economic transition, and removing subsidies.

On a practical scale, Dr. Simard noted that **cutting down forests is intrinsically a moral issue** -- and a morally wrong one, at that. But forests can be a huge source of income, including tourism, teaching, fishing, and carbon conservation.

The Just Transition and the future

Discussing the Just Transition movement and the delayed climate efforts of Canada's Liberal government, Mr. Mulcair noted that the goal of net zero emissions by 2050 can mask inaction. He also noted that partisanship is making action difficult. However, he also discussed the idea of **subsidiarity**, which is that **Canada's multilevel governance enables multiple governing levels to take action**. He exemplified this by discussing the remarkable work being done by Canada's municipalities on climate change.

The three panelists also agreed that the conversation on climate has shifted since MISC's founding in 1994. There's now political consensus that climate change exists and that equity is a fundamental issue -- but action is still needed. Dr. Simard noted, however, that Canada's forests have been transformed from carbon sinks to carbon sources, and that forestry is unaccounted for in nation carbon counting. Finally, Mr. Mulcair has observed a substantial change in his own students, who he says are leading the way on climate activism.

The last question asked to Dr. Simard, Mr. Mulcair, and Ms. Fuller was what lessons should be taught to students about the climate crisis. Dr. Simard underscored the **vital importance of teaching climate solutions rather than climate change**. This perspective was supported by the other two panelists. Mr. Mulcair and Ms. Fuller additionally discussed the importance of understanding the political process in order to change it from both the inside and outside.

Keynote and Closing Remarks: **Facing Canada's Future**

Speaker: **Daniel Béland**

In the last session of MISC's 25th anniversary conference, Dr. Daniel Béland, MISC's director, outlined key issues in Canada's fiscal policy.

Dr. Béland began with discussing how COVID-19 has resurfaced complex questions about fiscal policy including how to raise money, how to spend money, and what the debt-to-GDP ratio means for Canada. While Canada's debt-to-GDP ratio is among the best in the OECD, there is no current date by which the budget will be balanced. **Though interest rates are currently low (making debt cheap), that may change, and Canada's fiscal situation could change.** Provincial debt is also a cause for concern as provinces have higher debt than the federal government.

Underscoring this issue is Canada's fear of discussing taxation. As Dr. Béland noted, "we need to have a conversation on taxes in this country." No one gets to eat lunch for free -- and if the aim, especially by the federal government, is to expand programs and create new ones, taxation will be essential. Ultimately, Dr. Béland underscored that Canada needs to think about how it taxes people more generally if it wants durable and long-term social programs.

Another key issue brought to the table by Dr. Béland was fiscal federalism. Because the federal government has more funding sources than the provinces, its long-term fiscal outlook is sunnier than its substate counterparts. To amend this, the federal government needs to work collaboratively to bring more money to the table.

In concluding on his remarks on fiscal policy, Dr. Béland highlighted the increasingly contentious issue of equalization. The equalization payment (around CAD \$20 billion a year) is smaller than that of the federal health transfer, but is nonetheless a core issue between the provinces and Ottawa. This is particularly true in resource-rich provinces like Alberta and Saskatchewan, the former of which held a referendum on the equalization formula in October 2021. Dr. Béland noted that **equalization is poorly understood by most Canadians, making it vulnerable to political exploitation.** To that end, Dr. Béland is advocating for an independent expert body that can advise and potentially change the formula if needed.

Dr. Béland ended MISC's 2021 conference ended by highlighting that **policymakers need to take regional grievances seriously, and that intergovernmental diplomacy could be part of the solution.** He added that he has been working on an Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations Commission with the Canada West Foundation and the Institute for Research on Public Policy. This commission deals with funding for territories, provinces, and municipalities. Municipalities are key as they have constricted revenue-raising possibilities despite their significant expansion in their responsibilities during COVID-19.