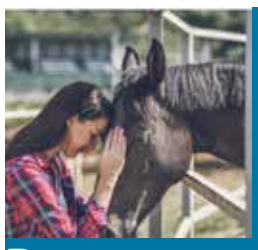


**PARENTS QUESTION VACCINE POLICY**
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ISSUE 17

- THE WESTWARD INDEPENDENT -

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# NORTH COWICHAN AND DUNCAN TAX HIKES: WHEN WILL ENOUGH BE ENOUGH?

**Let's talk about these relentless tax hikes in North Cowichan and Duncan.**

Both municipalities are gearing up for 2025 budgets, and the numbers being tossed around are unreal: North Cowichan is debating a potential 15 to 20 percent tax increase, while Duncan's got an 11.3 percent hike in the pipeline. And let's not sugarcoat this, we're normalizing massive tax hikes under the guise of necessity. It's time to pump the brakes.

CAO Ted Swabey of North Cowichan has painted a grim picture, calling this year "pivotal" and "dire." Sure, they've got $2 billion in aging assets and infrastructure to manage, and staffing shortages are compounding issues. But here's the kicker: we're being asked to swallow an 8.4 percent "status-quo" hike, just to maintain current services. Anything less than that, Swabey warns, means cuts. Oh, and if departments want anything extra? Tack on another 10 percent.

Across the way in Duncan, they've got their own problems. Their 11.3 percent hike is largely due to escalating policing costs after their population crossed the 5,000 mark. Congratulations on the census milestone, I guess? Now cough up more for policing, plus a chunk for that shiny new North Cowichan/Duncan RCMP detachment building.




Photo: Duncan City Hall - file photo

It's a crisis, we're told. But if everything's a crisis, shouldn't every cost and decision be scrutinized through what I'll call an "economic lens"? That's the same kind of lens both councils touted for climate-focused decision-making. You can't cherry-pick where the scrutiny goes.

Look, inflation is a real issue. North Cowichan's 4.26 percent "inflationary pressures" excuse for operational costs is a safe card to play. But inflation doesn't mean you get a blank check to raise taxes indefinitely. Regular folks are navigating the same inflation—on groceries, housing, and fuel—without a council to vote through a household income boost. Why can't municipalities show the same restraint?

Swabey himself admits North Cowichan kept taxes artificially low during the pandemic, with just a 1.4 percent hike in 2020. That's commendable, sure, but now it's being framed as a mistake because it left them with a "backlog" of asset management needs. How is that our fault? Taxpayers shouldn't have to pay extra now because of council's past under-planning.

Cuts will happen if increases don't. But that's the uncomfortable conversation councils keep dodging. Are all current services truly essential? When every department feels entitled to budget increases year after year, it's no wonder we end up here. At what point do we pause and reassess, what's just nice to have?

And it's not just a North Cowichan problem. Duncan is bracing for an eventual download of 911 dispatch costs, with municipalities expected to foot the entire bill by 2025. Mayor Michelle Staples assures us they'll "work with residents" to navigate this. Translation: "Prepare to pay more."

How about a radical idea? Instead of squeezing more out of residents, start working for them by trimming the fat. There's no sacred cow in municipal budgets that can't be put under the microscope.

Duncan's proposed 11.3 percent increase translates to $214 more per year for the average homeowner. North Cowichan's hike would likely be even steeper if they shoot for Swabey's 15 to 20 percent target. This might not sound like much to council members with steady paychecks, but for families already stretched thin, it's one more financial burden.

When councils normalize these massive hikes, they're essentially treating taxpayers like ATMs. Here's the thing about ATMs: they stop dispensing cash when the account runs dry.

North Cowichan and Duncan love their "climate lens," a decision-making framework designed to evaluate environmental impact. Fair enough. But if we're in such a dire financial crisis, shouldn't there be an equally rigorous "economic lens"? Every expense and proposal should be scrutinized with the question: "Is this the most cost-effective way to deliver value to taxpayers?" If you can justify every dollar, people might be more willing to accept increases. Until then, don't expect residents to keep shouldering the load without a fight.

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For nearly two years, we held the line—printing the stories no one else would, exposing the truth, and proving that independent voices matter. And guess what? We won.

The mainstream media is collapsing. People are tuning out the corporate spin and tuning in to real, independent journalism—the kind we've been delivering since day one. The Cowichan Valley is awake, informed, and stronger than ever. You know the truth. You know you're not alone.

Now, it's time to take this fight to the next level. We're expanding beyond print to focus on the platforms where we can reach more people, faster, with deeper, more hard-hitting coverage. That means:

✓ More digital articles – faster, unfiltered news.
More podcasts – long-form discussions that matter.
More video content – engaging, shareable, and direct.

The print edition is shifting fully online, but this isn't the end of our paper—it's an evolution. We're exploring a quarterly print edition packed with the biggest stories and deep dives into what matters most.
This isn't a retreat. This is expansion. The fight against censorship and government overreach isn't just local—it's national and global. And we're stepping up.

Stay with us. Spread the word. Let's build something even bigger—together.

# GET OUT AND VOTE in the North Cowichan bi-election

**Advanced voting is available on April 2 and April 8, from 8 AM to 8 PM at Municipal Hall.** If you miss those, the general voting day is Saturday, April 12, from 8 AM to 8 PM, with polling stations at:

- North Cowichan Municipal Hall
- Chemainus Fire Hall
- Crofton Fire Hall
- Maple Bay Fire Hall
- Cowichan Community Centre

In 2022, voter turnout for our municipal elections was shockingly low—only around 30%. We get it—municipal elections might not seem as exciting as federal or provincial ones. But here's the thing: local politicians make the decisions that directly impact your daily life.

- Frustrated with how your tax dollars are spent?
- Unhappy with your property taxes?
- Disagree with the council's priorities?

Then VOTE. This is your chance to make your voice heard.

For more details, visit: northcowichan.ca/election

# OTTAWA IS OVERLOADING B.C. WITH UNSUSTAINABLE IMMIGRATION

**At a news conference in July, Premier David Eby admitted that B.C.'s "unprecedented population inflows from immigration" are "completely overwhelming."**

He painted a dire picture of a province whose systems are buckling: "Our schools are full; we are unable to keep up with housing starts.".

Despite the Trudeau government's effort to curtail immigration, the issue refuses to go away. A recent Vancouver Sun article by Douglas Todd features a forceful critique of skyrocketing immigration levels by Port Coquitlam Mayor Brad West. As a mayor of a quickly growing municipality, West is well aware of the serious strain that out of control population growth is imposing on the lives of ordinary people.

West expresses frustration with Ottawa's perception of immigrants as abstract economic units rather than real people with human needs: "I guess the federal government had this misguided idea that you could invite all these people to Canada and they wouldn't have needs. They were never going to use the health-care system, they were never going to flush a toilet, they were never going to send their kids to school."

In West's view, this utter lack of planning is making the lives of British Columbians harder, and the tragic consequences include overwhelmed hospital emergency rooms: "Now you hear horror stories of people with serious issues who are waiting eight, 10 or 12 hours to be seen".

These concerns are reflected in the data. From July 2024 to October 2024, B.C. saw a net loss of -2,578 people from interprovincial migration – meaning people are fleeing in droves for greener pastures elsewhere in Canada (not a ringing endorsement of B.C.). In that same period, we saw an astonishing net gain of +22,785 people from international migration.

There is one additional figure to think about. During that time period, we saw a miniscule gain of +957 from what population statisticians call "natural change" (births over deaths). To sum up: in a four month period, B.C. saw a gain of +22,785 from immigration, +957 from births, and a loss from interprovincial movement.

The figures don't lie: immigration is the problem. For all of the many, many issues B.C. faces that are connected to population growth – astronomic housing costs, overwhelmed healthcare, overcrowded schools, rising road congestion, you name it – there is one clear culprit. Just imagine how much easier all of these challenges would be if all we had to deal with every four months was a paltry +957 gain from births.

It's true that, before his resignation as Liberal Party Leader, Prime Minister Trudeau did oversee something of a course correction on immigration. Caps have been imposed on the international student and foreign worker streams, and the annual permanent resident rate has been slashed from 500,000 to 395,000.

It's worth pointing out that 395,000 people is still the population equivalent of an entire city of Victoria, or four Nanaimos, being plopped down by the federal government every year. Is Canada building sufficient infrastructure to accommodate an annual inflow of that volume? Is building enough infrastructure for that many people even possible, or a desirable allocation of our society's time and energy?

All that mayors like Port Coquitlam's Brad West can do to combat B.C.'s population explosion is to publicly express frustration and try to put pressure on the feds. It remains to be seen whether more municipal politicians in B.C. will have the courage of their convictions - and the willingness to flout political correctness norms - to do so.

Meanwhile, the public's view is clear. One recent poll showed that no fewer than 78% of Canadians support immigration restriction measures, and another poll revealed that 82% of recent immigrants think that immigration levels are too high.

Riley Donovan is a freelance journalist and editor of Dominion Review.

# NEEDLES IN THE DARK: PARENTS QUESTION SECRETIVE SCHOOL VACCINATION POLICIES

**It seems that many parents of students in SD79 who have expressed concerns about being left out of the loop regarding what happens at school continue to have their suspicions confirmed.**

Last fall, we reported on a large school assembly that parents allegedly were not informed about. Now, we have been sent a letter purportedly circulated among staff at Kelsey High School. The letter reads:

"Please do not tell the students what day this is happening. FYI, the Grade 9 immunizations will happen on **Tuesday, February 11th, from 9 to 1 p.m.**

We will be calling down any Grade 10s who did not get their Grade 9 immunizations last year. We will call the students down by their last name (W to Z, T to V, etc.). This will be any missing vaccinations (such as HPV) and their Grade 9 vaccinations. This does NOT include flu or COVID vaccines. Please do not plan any field trips on this day."

Two reasons we've heard from nurses about the secrecy surrounding these events are that "kids get nervous about needles." and "When we used to let parents know the dates, we had low attendance at school those days."

While parents may be sent a form to sign—if their child remembers to bring it home—the nurses ensure students are educated about the Infants Act, letting them know they can make their own medical decisions without parental consent. What could go wrong? Plenty, it seems.

One parent shared a troubling incident involving their child, who suffers from medical issues that contraindicate the MMR vaccine. Despite the parent signing papers instructing nurses not to approach their child, the nurses did so anyway, claiming they had no paperwork for him. The child, thankfully, ran away and left the school. When the parent later raised the issue at Margaret Moss, they asked if the nurses had access to children's medical records. The response? They do not. This raises serious concerns: how can nurses ask a child to make a medical decision without knowledge of their medical history? Vaccines are not one-size-fits-all, and many children have contraindications or have experienced past adverse reactions that only a parent or their family doctor might know about.

In another district, a parent sent a letter stating her child should not receive multiple vaccinations. Despite this, the nurses allegedly convinced the child she could die from cervical cancer if she didn't receive the HPV vaccine. The child, second-guessing her mother, agreed to the vaccination and later suffered severe consequences.

Let's recall when children wore medical bracelets to indicate allergies, such as to penicillin. Yet, today, there seem to be no similar precautions for vaccines like MMR or DTaP. Even the CDC's simple, two-page vaccine information sheet outlines scenarios where vaccines should be avoided. It states:

"Talk with your health care provider. Tell your vaccination provider if the person getting the vaccine: Has had an allergic reaction after a previous dose of MMR or MMRV vaccine, or has any severe, life-threatening allergies. Is pregnant or thinks they might be pregnant—pregnant people should not get MMR vaccine. Has a weakened immune system, or has a parent, brother, or sister with a history of hereditary or congenital immune system problems. Has ever had a condition that makes him or her bruise or bleed easily. Has recently had a blood transfusion or received other blood products. Has tuberculosis. Has gotten any other vaccines in the past 4 weeks." These questions are not included on the forms sent home for parents to fill out.

This begs a larger question: why are these medical procedures being conducted in schools in the first place? Historically, such procedures were done in a doctor's office, where medical records could be consulted.

Additionally, what other medical procedures or talks might take place in the new Island Health building at the new high school? This facility, described during a school board meeting as being "slightly removed from the main building for privacy," has sparked concerns. However, when we reached out to Island Health for details, no one we spoke to had any knowledge of this building and what it will be used for.

Is it time parents pushed for more transparency within their districts? Many think so.

# REGARDLESS OF RELIGIOUS OR EVEN CIVILIZED BELIEFS, THE CONCEPT OF RECONCILIATION IS A 3-STEP PROCESS.

**First, the "responsible" party must sincerely be sorry and ask for forgiveness. This may include Reparations, whether they be financial or in kind;**

However, the second step is as vitally important as the first. The "victim" must truly forgive, not hold the responsible party to continue to perpetually account with further conditions and condemnations. Only then can "reconciliation" take place. It's the conscious act of putting the issue behind once and for all and allow true healing (on both sides) to occur.

So far, the journey concerning the oppression of Indigenous people is stuck in step number 1.

There appears to be no appetite to forgive; the only response this humble scribe observed is more and more and more reparations being sought. It's frankly extortive behaviour.

When can the responsible party(s) finally say, "Enough, there's no more reparations to give"?

And who are those responsible parties? Even assuming the genesis of unrest and unfairness started as late as Confederation (probably earlier), the overwhelming majority of us non-indigenous "colonizers" weren't born, or were born in a foreign country and immigrated to Canada without as much as an inkling that somehow their hard-earned tax dollars were going to be used for a cause that clearly preceded them?

I am not minimizing the plight but simply emphasizing that reconciliation is a two-way street, but for now and the foreseeable future, the "other lane" seems to be closed.

**D.N. Attorney at law**

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# GLORIA LEMAY - THE OTHER SIDE

**In an impassioned Substack written by Yolande Norris-Clark, who had the joy of birthing two healthy children with the help of Gloria Lemay (a local), we move past the sensational, rage-provoking headlines of our local news to a much deeper picture of the woman - who she is, and her long history of practicing the tradition of natural birthing.**


Source: Facebook

Yolande delves into the long history of government overreach and forced regulation: "The regulation of midwifery, and in particular, the slandering of independent traditional birth attendants, is a back-handed attempt to indirectly dominate birthing women, which, in the end, is in service to the long-term project of controlling population, sentience, and human life entirely. The objective of the state appropriation and medical usurpation of midwifery all over the world is totalitarian control, architected as part of the techno-feudalist movement to homogenize medicine, healthcare, and biology itself.

This isn't a new phenomenon—these cycles of institutional crackdowns on birth and birthwork have been playing out for ages. But during the 1980s and 1990s, a new and more subtle disciplinary strategy emerged. Instead of stamping out midwifery completely, the medical cartel would simply assimilate it. This was aided by harnessing the enthusiasm for midwifery and homebirth that had fomented within the counterculture movement, using the iconic Ina May Gaskin to great effect as an advocate for regulation. Thus, midwifery was rebranded.

The new, 'official' sanctioned midwifery was midwifery in name only. In reality, it resembled—wait for it—obstetrics! What a surprise! Many of the independent midwives who had been working in BC (and throughout Canada) prior to regulation acquiesced and entered into these re-education programs, eager to reap the promised benefits of the endorsement and protection of the system, but most of these women were filtered out, intimidated and dismayed by the hoops they were made to jump through, the humiliations they were made to endure, and the disorientation of having to completely revamp their practices and perspectives to align with a highly medicalized, bureaucratic, regimented approach to birth.

A few women, however, held out and politely declined to comply with the medical commandeering of a sacred vocation, which many view as antithetical to state control.

Gloria Lemay was one of them."

Yolande's love and respect for Gloria's work is easily felt throughout this Substack. Yolande birthed her first (and second) child with Gloria by her side after firing her "licensed" midwife, whom she quickly realized was far from 'alternative'. She notes, "The simple, inarguable truth—and a truth that Gloria saw clearly—is that it is not possible to serve two masters, let alone those whose interests may potentially be in conflict."

After firing her "official/sanctioned" midwife, Yolande was allegedly routinely harassed throughout her pregnancy by the BC College of Nurses and Midwives for not complying and opting for Gloria. It is evident throughout that Gloria was the inspiration behind Yolande's passion and advocacy for years to come around "free birthing" and midwifery. In one section of the Substack, she recalls loading her first child up in late July of 2002 and taking the long trip via ferry and bus to stand alongside many other supporters, parents, and grandparents outside the Vancouver courthouse in support of Gloria as she was sentenced to "five months in jail and twelve months' probation for supposedly violating a court injunction prohibiting her from practicing midwifery without a license."

Yolande recalls: "The atmosphere at Robson Square was celebratory and defiant. We knew exactly what this was. It was a witch hunt. And like most witch hunts, there was no witch—only a woman whose true power and courage represented an immense threat to the repressive, tyrannical cult of medicine. During the court proceedings, Gloria was referred to as 'incorrigible.' She responded by saying, 'I hope I am incorrigible. I hope that until the day I die, I fight for women's freedom to have who they want in their own bedroom to help them give birth to their baby.'"

Yolande expresses her deep compassion for all mothers who lose their babies as she recounts how she herself has lost four before 14 weeks. She points out how 300,000 people die from medical malpractice in the U.S. yearly but notes that, "When a baby dies at home, however, the automatic assumption is almost always that there was some element of recklessness, irresponsibility, or stupidity involved, and there will be an attempt, at least, to lay blame. In the context of freebirth, the mother herself will likely be held culpable. But in the case of an attended homebirth, the obvious scapegoat is the birth attendant—especially one who is unlicensed, unregistered, and operating outside the system." Yolande points out that Gloria has attended well over 2,500 births during her lifetime—numbers that rival any "registered" midwife or obstetrician.

Now, as Gloria sits in jail awaiting her judgment, we reflect on the knee-jerk reaction so many in our community had to the headlines posted on Facebook and the front page of our local newspaper—drawing outrage and a pitchfork-grabbing mob mentality. We can also reflect on the fact that when something traumatic happens in one's life, there is often a need to "make sense" of it or have a place to lay the blame.

Yolande ends the article with this:

"This impulse to condemn permeates the public social media post written by the father of the baby who died a year ago, during the birth that Gloria apparently attended. I won't share the text here (it's readily searchable), but it's full of rage, conspicuous contradictions, and, above all, a wholesale abdication of any personal responsibility as a parent. This man describes being 'victimized' by Gloria Lemay, and his post implies that Gloria maliciously convinced him and his wife to invite her to attend their child's birth. He also blatantly states that she is responsible for the fact that his child tragically died."

No parent should ever lose a child, whether in utero, at birth, or before the parent passes. The grief is inconsolable and long-lasting. However, we must walk lightly in the blame game, for sometimes nature is at play. Often the medical establishment is to blame, as the statistics show, and yes, there can be human error.

Let a woman devoted to the age-old practice of women helping women give birth have her day against the machine—the establishment that can run like a bulldozer over anyone who does not step in line. We have these examples even just from the past few years during COVID, many of the cases now being vindicated. Can we all slowly put down the oil-soaked rags and remove the pyres of wood, placed at the behest of bureaucrats that now make up the new College of Nurses and Midwives?

It is time to question not just the systems that suppress individuals like Gloria Lemay but also our own willingness to accept these narratives without deeper thought—because true justice demands more than

compliance; it demands courage, empathy, and a commitment to seek the truth.

{At the time of this writing, Gloria Lemay sits in Maple Ridge - Aluoette Correctional Centre for Women pending her bail hearing for manslaughter.}

The whole article can be searched via Substack: Bauhauswife, with the title "The (Attempted) Martyrdom of Gloria Lemay."

Just as we were going to print, we heard from another fan/friend of Gloria's who had this to say, "I met Gloria Lemay back in about 2014ish. We picked the Hilton Hotel at Metrotown in Burnaby, because there was a convention of companies producing canned milk for babies. A dozen people with signs, including a baby in arms, stood on the public sidewalk for a couple of hours. Nestle, the world's biggest producer of baby milk, fled the scene and bailed out of the conference. A few months ago, Gloria Lemay put on a seminar up there in Duncan: "How to catch a baby.". I really wanted to take it but couldn't manage to do so.

I went to the Victoria Courthouse yesterday and got a copy of the civil lawsuit. Court file no. VIC-S-248960. Tanner Ellingson Kristin Allan Plaintiffs/GLORIA LEMAY Defendant.

The claim is very well written with high-calibre lawyering. Originated by lawyer Rajinder Sahota in Victoria / Moe Sahota's law firm.

# WHEN DOES HUBRIS BECOME DANGEROUS?

**I am sure we can all think of numerous examples; let me illustrate with one that I experienced personally.**

In 2020, North Cowichan completed the Chemainus Road Corridor Upgrade project, implemented as part of the MTP (Master Transportation Plan). It was touted as an example of the "new way forward" to tackle the "Climate Crisis" most of us believed in. As a lifelong cyclist, I personally eagerly looked forward to the improvements.

The challenges of riding a bicycle on the narrow shoulder of most BC roads are not for the faint of heart and can be outright terrifying to the inexperienced cyclist. I considered myself more than equipped to handle the rigours of the challenge, having spent five years living in Japan, where I cycled an average of 40 km a day, often on far more treacherous roads. Having cycled Hwy 1 between Shizuoka and Shimizu on a regular basis in the 1990s, where there was no accommodation for bicycles and traffic thundered past mere inches from you, I felt confident that the bicycle commute in Chemainus would be a piece of cake.

It is now five years since this project was completed, and I can sadly report that this is not the case. In fact, I avoid using the bike lanes unless I have no alternative. Why? Because they are too dangerous, and twice now I have had incidents that were serious enough to not only dampen my enthusiasm but eventually to put me off completely.

I come from an environmental activist background; I was part of incorporating an Eco Village, and I attempted to build my own electric car 20 years ago (a story for the pub). I am a keen supporter of renewables (as a concept); I drive an electric car. I have always been passionate about saving the environment. As such, after a lifetime of challenges and saving (more stories for the pub), I was finally able to buy a house, which of course I looked for, and after three years of searching, I found one that I could commute to work in Chemainus from.

**What Changed Things for Me?**

The first incident was about two years ago. Keen to be "part of the solution," I was supportive of the concept of "Active Transportation." My experience as a young cyclist in Japan was pleasant, so I dutifully purchased a baby seat and a "Ride-Along" so I could go to the supermarket with my two young boys "the right way" and leave the car (albeit an electric one) at home.

For anyone unclear, a "Ride-Along" is like a bike with no front wheel, where the wheel would instead be an extension of the frame mounted to the back of another bicycle. (See page 78 of North Cowichan's 2024 North Cowichan Master Transportation Plan.) Kids who can't yet ride by themselves can pedal along and contribute to the propulsion effort. Needless to say, this rig altogether is not exactly light, and it can be difficult to stop rapidly.

So here I am heading north towards the supermarket in the bike lane. Now there is a small buffer that is designed to protect cyclists and car users alike from this particular hazard, but this buffer is merely painted "on the road," and people are fallible sometimes; more often than I am comfortable with, to be honest, they do not respect that one and park partially on it. Maybe because getting out of a car parked there is not easy and can itself be a harrowing experience.

Sure enough, as I was biking one day, an elderly gentleman did what Allan Greeves refers to as "dooring" and opened his truck door just as I was approaching. Now I was not going fast on this rig I was riding, but being essentially the bicycle version of a semi-trailer, it is hard to stop. I managed, with heart pounding, to do so without striking the gentleman in question, but only barely and literally by inches. I am not sure who was more frightened, me or him. The kids were delightfully oblivious, but for me, it was a sobering experience. I do not relish the idea of crashing with a 3- and 5-year-old on board. This made me more cautious, but I was still determined to be the example I wish to see and use Active Transport whenever possible. My next experience, however, was to change that commitment.

The second event happened on the next stretch of bike path, between River Rd. and Victoria St., where the Chemainus Theatre is. This time I was alone. Still wishing to be part of the solution, and in my 50s with a titanium hip and another one on the way, I broke down and found myself an E-Bike. Again, I was "doored," but this time the door was opened without time for me to stop. I was faced with a choice: bail or hit the lady who was exiting her car. I chose the former and crashed, narrowly missing her. To say she was shocked would be an understatement, but she was unharmed and very apologetic. Myself and my e-bike were unfortunately not so lucky. I hurt my ankle and wrist, and it was exacerbated by my already painful right hip. The E-Bike stopped working and, to this day, still does not work.

**Councillor Istace**

Councillor Istace, I assert that the design of the Chemainus Road Corridor Upgrade project is outright dangerous; there is potentially a simple, cost-effective solution, and your response to citizen concerns is nothing short of contemptuous. I call on you to make a formal statement on why even discussing a fix is "not going to happen."

With deep anger and resentment,

Paul from Chemainus



# LOCAL DOCUMENTARY HIGHLIGHTS YOUNG COMPOSER'S COVID SYMPHONY

**Camilo Aybar was still in high school when he set out to write his first orchestral symphony, inspired by his experiences in lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The incredible story – which crescendoed with a live performance in Hillsboro, Oregon – is the subject of a new documentary by Cowichan-based filmmaker, Joseph Boutilier. The Sound of a Pandemic was produced with the support of TELUS STORYHIVE through the All Access Documentary Edition and is free to view on TELUS Optik TV channel 9, Stream+, and STORYHIVE's YouTube channel starting Tuesday, January 14, 2025.

"Camilo Aybar is one of those incredible Vancouver Island characters whose story – and work – deserves more attention," says Boutilier. "It's always a win-win when you find a compelling story about a unique artist, who's work informs the style and soundtrack of the film itself."

The film is scored by Camilo's original Symphony No. 1 in D Minor, 'Pandemic,' which takes listeners through five stages of the crisis from 'Outbreak' to 'Vaccine.'. Camilo, who's also a classically trained clarinetist, was inspired to compose the work when the lockdown forced the closure of the Victoria Conservatory of Music, and with it the lessons, master classes and chamber groups that meant so much to him.

Born and raised in Victoria, Camilo Aybar has covered a lot of ground since writing the symphony. As a clarinetist, he performed Crussell's Second Concerto with three orchestras across Vancouver Island in 2022, won first-place at the BC and Canada West Performing Arts



Source: Sound Of A Pandemic

Festivals in 2023, and was invited to perform with the Emily Carr String Quartet. He is now a student at the Royal Conservatory's prestigious Glenn Gould School of Music in Toronto and is currently working on his second symphony.

The Sound of a Pandemic is co-produced through Empress Avenue Media. About Empress Avenue Media Inc. is a film production and post-services studio based in Cobble Hill, BC. Its VFX and postproduction work can be found in upcoming feature films like Sweet Summer Pow Wow with Graham Greene and Viper with Peter Facinelli and Jonathan Rhys Meyers. The company is also currently producing two independent documentaries.

You can watch now on YouTube by searching: The Sound of a Pandemic TELUS STORYHIVE

# THE DANGER OF CASUALLY THROWING AROUND THE "NAZI" LABEL

**If you spend any time online, you've probably seen it—the "Nazi" accusation. Whether it's individuals, organizations, or even media outlets, people throw around this label casually, often with no real basis.**

Some media companies even amplify these claims, giving credibility to unfounded attacks. But labeling someone a "Nazi" or associating them with Nazi ideology is not a harmless insult—it carries severe personal, social, and legal consequences.

**Why These Accusations Are So Damaging**

Falsely calling someone a Nazi does more than just spark online outrage. It can destroy reputations, divide communities, and incite real-world harm. Here's how:

**Defamation & Reputation Damage** – If the accusation is false, it can permanently damage a person's or organization's credibility, affecting social standing, personal relationships, and professional opportunities.

**Social Alienation** – People accused of Nazi beliefs often face ostracization, loss of friendships, and boycotts. Entire organizations can be blacklisted over unfounded claims.

**Incitement to Violence** – When people believe someone is a Nazi, they may feel morally justified in using harassment, threats, or even physical violence against them.

**Misinformation & Division** – Recklessly using extreme labels erodes meaningful discussion and replaces debate with hostility, creating an environment of fear and mistrust.

**Legal & Financial Consequences** – Accusations like these can cost businesses customers, advertisers, and partners. They may also lead to legal action for defamation.

**Devaluation of Serious Historical Context** – The term "Nazi" carries a heavy historical weight. Using it casually for political disagreements weakens its meaning and disrespects the reality of true historical atrocities.

Psychological Harm – Being falsely accused of such an extreme ideology can lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

**Dehumanization** – Labeling someone as a Nazi strips them of basic humanity, making it easier for others to justify hatred, harassment, or worse.

**The Real Danger: When Everything is "Nazi," Nothing Is**




Casually throwing around labels like "Nazi," "fascist," "homophobe," or "racist" doesn't just harm individuals—it weakens the impact of these words. If everyone is a Nazi, then the term loses meaning. If everyone is a racist, then real racism gets ignored.

This is how misuse of language distorts reality. When people rely on slander instead of debate, it shuts down discussion and prevents real understanding.

**The Solution: Think Before You Speak**

In a world where misinformation spreads in seconds, words matter. Instead of jumping to extreme labels, ask questions. Challenge ideas, debate fairly, and seek truth. The moment we stop doing that, we let fear, ignorance, and division win.

A free press, like any forum of open discussion, should not be attacked simply for presenting different viewpoints. If someone disagrees with a perspective, engage with facts, not insults.

Because once we start silencing voices through baseless accusations, we all lose.

# NORTH COWICHAN'S SPENDING SPREE: BECAUSE WHO NEEDS GROCERIES WHEN YOU CAN HAVE ELECTRIC CARS?

**In North Cowichan, a significant disconnect has emerged between municipal priorities and residents' concerns.**

From the last poll we could find (before the last election and with a very poor number of participants), the data indicated that only 7% of citizens consider climate change their top priority. Almost dead last in their poll options. Despite this, the municipal council and staff have placed climate initiatives at the forefront of budget discussions, leading to substantial financial implications for residents.

The municipality's ambitious plan to electrify its entire transit and municipal fleet by 2030 is part of their Climate Action Plan. Initially, in 2022, the council authorized $375,000 for the necessary electrical-charging infrastructure at key locations, including the municipal hall, public works, Fuller Lake Arena, and the Cowichan Aquatic Centre. However, recent assessments reveal that the infrastructure costs at just the municipal hall and public works have skyrocketed to over $1 million. This escalation has prompted the committee of the whole to recommend increasing the project's budget significantly.

Municipal leadership has justified these expenditures by citing an aggressive goal of meeting "net zero" emissions targets. However, this rationale appears disconnected from reality. The council's focus on achieving these goals through the electrification of fleet vehicles does not account for significant emissions stemming from ongoing large-scale development projects. These include the construction of a new hospital, a new high school, and numerous apartment buildings across the region—developments whose carbon footprints far outweigh the emissions offset by the use of their electric cars. They, with the exception of a couple, behave like a racehorse with blinders on, focused on a theoretical finish line, ignoring the crowd on the sidelines screaming, "We don't want this money spent now!".

Moreover, the council's belief that electric vehicles are inherently "green" is overly simplistic and ignores critical, ethical, and environmental concerns. The production of electric vehicles involves significant human and ecological costs, including the mining of cobalt and lithium. These activities have been linked to child labour, the poisoning of indigenous waterways, and other environmental violations—issues that contravene multiple clauses of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was placed in North Cowicihan's OCP (Official Community Plan). For example, lithium extraction processes have been shown to deplete and contaminate vital water sources in indigenous territories, while cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been criticized for its exploitative labour practices, including the use of children. The Citizen's Oversight and Accountability project asked two years ago to pause this program until the batteries and the components could be ethically sourced, citing this purchase as a virtue signalling NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) project.

Additionally, the assumption that British Columbia's electricity is entirely "green" due to its hydroelectric resources is misleading. While BC Hydro reports that over 98% of the power it generates comes from clean, renewable sources, primarily hydroelectric facilities, the province has increasingly relied on electricity imports to meet its energy demands. In fiscal year 2024, BC Hydro imported 13,600 gigawatt hours of electricity, accounting for approximately 25% of the province's power consumption. These imports, primarily sourced from the United States, often originate from fossil fuel-based generation, including coal-fired plants. This reliance on imported electricity undermines the perception of a wholly "green" energy supply and raises questions about the true environmental impact of initiatives like widespread electric vehicle adoption. So the "powered by water" charging stations are a bit misleading and will become more so as forced electrification continues without the 'made in BC' power availability.

Meanwhile, this financial strain coincides with a proposed property tax hike possibly exceeding 9%, a burden many residents find untenable, especially as they struggle to meet basic needs like feeding their families. The prioritization of costly climate initiatives, such as transitioning to an electric vehicle fleet, seems misaligned with the immediate concerns of the community. Danish statistician Bjørn Lomborg argues that extensive climate spending may, paradoxically, incur costs exceeding those of climate change itself. He suggests that the economic impact of a 3°C temperature rise by the century's end is estimated to be between 1.9% and 3.1% of global GDP. In contrast, the "net zero" green agenda, based on massive subsidies and expensive legislation, is projected to cost approximately $27 trillion annually throughout the century. Lomborg contends that such substantial expenditures could hinder economic growth without delivering proportional environmental benefits.

North Cowichan's leadership needs to reassess their budgetary priorities. "Climate change" goals, not attainable no matter how hard you tax us, should not overshadow the immediate economic realities faced by the community. Cllr. Manhas and Findlay opposed the motion to spend this extra money on these vehicles.

# GARBAGE GOVERNANCE: CVRD'S WASTE MANAGEMENT DEBACLE AND THE TAXPAYER FALLOUT

**We at Land Keepers have been closely following the waste disposal mess in the CVRD. Frankly, it's appalling. Do you genuinely believe the residents of this district are going to sit back and accept this?**

The way this has been handled screams incompetence. In any real-world setting, the people responsible would have been shown the door. You failed to do your homework, and now you're trying to make taxpayers cover the costs for services they aren't even receiving. On top of that, residents are still paying private contractors to fill the gap. This is not just insulting; it's absurd.

It's your problem to fix. Stop looking at taxpayers as your piggy bank and handle this internally. We suggest starting with: Reallocate funds. Cut unnecessary spending on non-essentials like park developments or other "nice-to-haves." Redirect those funds to address the shortfall caused by this debacle. Reduce bureaucracy.

Assess staff levels across the CVRD and make cuts where it makes sense.

Prioritize critical roles and tighten up operational efficiency. We've watched the recordings of the board meetings, and the response from Darcy Mooney was disappointing, to say the least. It's hard to believe that someone in her position could provide answers that were this out of touch.

We strongly urge every board member to take the time to watch those meetings, especially the parts where you discuss charging residents for garbage pickup starting January 2025. The service itself won't even begin until June at the earliest, possibly not until September. Meanwhile, residents are also stuck paying Pan Disposal to pick up the slack. How is this acceptable?

What's happening in the Cowichan Valley Regional District is a disgrace. This isn't just a local failure; it's a reflection of poor governance that should not be allowed to continue. We call on the BC government to intervene and stop this process immediately.

We're preparing a letter to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the opposition critic to bring this issue into the legislative assembly for a full discussion. This issue will not go away, and neither will we.

Sincerely,

Land Keepers

# B.C. NDP'S MASS DENSIFICATION PLAN HITTING ROADBLOCKS

**After narrowly returning to power in October, Premier David Eby's NDP government is proceeding full steam ahead with increasingly controversial province-wide densification plans.**

The BC NDP's Bill 44 is now in effect. This piece of legislation mandates that all municipalities with over 5,000 residents, allow four to six housing units on what were formerly single-family residential lots. In addition to abolishing single-family zoning, Bill 44 also prohibits public rezoning hearings.

In previous articles, I wondered what would happen if some local communities were simply unwilling to transfer control over zoning to Victoria. We are now starting to see examples of this.

Sooke's municipal council has voted 3-3 on implementing Bill 44 after the province denied the town's request for a five-year extension. A tie means the motion is defeated. Sooke Mayor

Maja Tait was one of those who voted against the motion, telling a Black Press reporter that she felt the province's denial of her community's extension request "comes across as, 'Do as we say. We know better than you do.'"

Will the NDP government seek to enforce compliance against the expressed desires of an elected local council? What form will this take? A provincial government stepping in to unilaterally rewrite bylaws would be a striking seizure of municipal authority.

An editorial in the Sooke News Mirror described the provincial government's approach to Bill 44 as "a glaring example of top-



Source: Grok

down governance gone wrong." The editorial pointed out that 21 other communities have been given extensions and wondered, "Why not Sooke?"

Meanwhile, in Burnaby's Brentwood Park neighbourhood, a group of neighbours calling itself

"Save Brentwood Park" is raising awareness of a little-known legal mechanism they hope will stall densification in much of the province.

The group's website (SaveBrentwoodPark.com) explains that homeowners are rallying to

defend their neighbourhood from overdevelopment: "Land assemblers and speculators have targeted our community with the intent to replace our homes to erect 8-story and 12-story towers."

They argue that Bill 44 does not supersede old property covenants from the 1950s, which designated certain properties as single-family lots: "Most homes in Brentwood Park are protected by Statutory Building Schemes registered on title that restrict the use of land in our neighbourhood to single family dwellings."

A piece in the Vancouver Sun reported that Save Brentwood Park intends to build a database of houses in the area with single-family covenants, enabling neighbours to take legal action if a developer starts building multiplexes.

As Bill 44 faces non-compliance from municipalities and creative resistance from local communities, new information is beginning to emerge about the forces which have influenced the BC NDP's aggressive development agenda.

In an article published on CRD Watch (crdwatch.ca) on November 22nd, BC activist Sasha Izard documented in detail the revelations that emerged from a Freedom of Information (FOI) request he submitted to the provincial government.

I encourage readers to check out Izard's exposé. In summary, the trove of documents he unearthed reveal that significant elements of several of the BC NDP's densification bills bear a striking similarity to recommendations submitted to the provincial government by the Urban Development Institute (UDI). The UDI is a registered organization on the B.C. lobbyist registry. and has numerous corporate members in the real estate and development industry.

Therein lies the rub. The limitless upzoning rampant in cities and towns across the province expands the profit of developers and speculators while degrading the quality of life of British Columbians who value peaceful, livable neighbourhoods with open spaces, woodlots, and backyards.

The movement to ramp up density enriches business interests with a vested interest in endless residential construction, and is granted a veneer of moral righteousness by YIMBY ("Yes In My Backyard") activists who portray their fight against zoning controls as a struggle for affordability while ignoring the real driver of the housing crisis: immigration-driven population growth.

Vancouver is the fourth-most dense region in North America—where's the affordability?

**Riley Donovan is a freelance journalist and editor of Dominion Review.**






# RESIDENTS VS. CELL TOWERS: HOW COMMUNITIES ARE PUSHING BACK AND WINNING

**As more and more residents push back against large cell towers in their neighbourhoods up and down the island, some local governments are starting to actually listen to the residents' concerns about the Health Aspects, even though the Federal Governments has told them to not engage in the health aspect when debating.**

"The Comox Valley Regional District meeting room on Monday at 10 am was filled to the point of standing room only! Thank you to each and every one of you who took the time to show up to the meeting and sit through until the tower topic came up. And thanks to every single person who took some time to write in about this tower, there were some excellent letters with really great questions and points!"

It was an interesting meeting. The last time that council met about the tower in July, the telecom consultant, Brian Gregg of SitePath, did not show up. This time, we didn't see him, but rather one of his support team members, Heather Oliver, was present. Three representatives from ISED (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada) were present. City Planner, Stephanie, read out each of their names but no last names were noted beside their names as meeting attendees on Zoom. Ken spoke for ISED but did not turn on his camera. No titles or role explanations were provided for the ISED representatives.

In the end, after much discussion, a motion to deny the application (at this point) was moved unanimously! It was confirmed that this application is specific to where the proposed tower was to be located on the property. Keep your eye on the local paper for any future cell tower proposals in this area.

Really great job to the residents of Williams Beach Road that went door to door talking to their neighbours, educating them and collecting petition signatures!!!! It's amazing what a community can do together—this is one of those wonderful moments and examples! The Williams Beach sensitive wetland and migratory bird habitat was saved from 24-7 radiation that would have been permanently emitting from this proposed 63-meter-tall cell tower!



Source: Stock Image

Once again, a big thank you again to everyone that showed up to the meeting, wore a button and looked at the directors and staff. They saw and heard us. It made all the difference having all of us there, as did all of the correspondence that was shared with the directors. Way to go everyone!!!!" - Williams Beach Resident

Here's a few quotes from the meeting: Director Arbour said, "Finally ISED is here, but we've been asking for about four years for them to come out but if they're just coming as a resource in the corner, not prepared to present any information on how they make decisions on the health aspects of cell towers and all of those key concerns that keep arising in community again and again, again and again."

Director Hardy said, "I'm just wondering about the required public consultation process. What kind of public consultation did Rogers have with the public regarding the tower other than the one zoom meeting that they had with the public. I guess I would put my question towards the public and I'm not sure how, when or how you go about doing that but would the public consider one zoom meeting with Rogers as wholesome and reasonable consultation with the community with regards to the proposed location of the tower."

Director Arbour said, "This almost must be like a national problem because with every one of these applications that we receive, we typically receive the, you know 90–95% negative responses from people that are nearby these towers or other constituents. So for ISED what is value if your going to go through these processes and receive all of this negative feedback and then say, well we approve the tower. Is it just because somewhere in Parliament, somewhere there is a legislated mandate that you need consultation because it seems that a lot of the consultation that happens results in a lot of negative response. So, it's a bit of a broken consultation process in my opinion." "So, what is ISED's view of the consultation process? Is there intent to reform the consultation process across Canada?"

Director Arbour said: "[I] may ask that at a subsequent meeting the regional district perhaps heads that way and be forward-thinking." (He said this in response to the idea of municipalities being forward thinking and having their own policy regarding zoned areas for siting cell towers.)

Director Hardy said: "one of the things I've seen over the past couple of years of being involved with the board and having these conversations revolving around telecommunication towers is again, quite often what I see is that the consulting firm that is working for one of these communication companies comes in and says, this will be the new location for the tower it can't be located anywhere else, it has to be on this exact spot. And what I have not seen over the years is an openness by the telecommunications companies to collaborate with our constituents and to collaborate with the CVRD staff regarding an appropriate place, location of the tower. And again, I go back to Director Arbour's comments or thoughts with regards to if there's going to be another six to eight that need to be put up in the Valley, let's sit down as a group, as a whole and say on a map here's the location that is going to work best for everyone. Instead of the telecommunication's company coming in and saying here's where the tower is going to be and that's it. What we've also heard over the last couple of years from our constituents is that there is a huge concern around health and safety." "And we've all heard of Health Canada and their Code 6 and you know, the communications companies saying that, hey you know we are adhering to conditions of Health Canada Health's Code 6 and consequently, we don't want to hear any other issues or concerns regarding the impacts of the tower. However, it's the local government here that is hearing from our constituents about the concerns about public health and safety from these towers going up."

We also understand that there may be environmental issues that aren't being delved into by ISED. And I guess the concern that I have here is again, from a public health and safety perspective with regards to placement of these towers and the impact upon our constituents and the environment, is that there doesn't seem to be any recognition from ISED on that process. And again, ISED, the primary authority with regards to these towers being put up, but we still haven't seen any consultation from Health Canada to our constituents with regards to addressing their concerns about this code 6 and the telecommunications towers. So, I'm just wondering again where ISED is with regards to how they go about addressing concerns our constituents share with placements of these towers in and around residential areas?"

Director Hardy also said: "if ISED cannot answer the health questions that our constituents have and the concerns that they have here. Then is it not the obligation of ISED to ensure that Health Canada come and have a presentation to our constituents, and allow our constituents to have that ability to ask questions with regards to health? And I haven't seen that within the public consultation process that the consultants have had with the constituents of the Comox Valley or with the area of concern here. So, again the question I ask, if ISED cannot answer the health questions and defers to Health Canada, does not ISED have the obligation to have Health Canada come and address the questions that are being put forward by our constituents and provide the information to our constituents about health code 6 and how that all works?"

Director Grieves said: "Personally, I don't support the tower where it is at all right now. It's grandiose, it's too much on everyone's lap."

If people want more info on pushing back, they can contact VISTA - Vancouver Island Safe Tech Alliance VISafeTechAlliance@proton.me They will share all the presentation materials created and collected (including petitions and flyers) and a ton of other info with people so they can use it as a starting ground to create their own materials for their area.

# FROM HORSES TO PEOPLE? THE MICROCHIP MANDATE OF BC BEGS SERIOUS ISSUES

**Not only in the equestrian community but also in more general debates on technology, privacy, and control, British Columbia's new horse microchipping program is generating waves.**

Advocates of animal welfare and disease control are touting it as a breakthrough. Critics call it a warning shot. Things start to feel less like a local policy and more like the setup for a dystopian book when you zoom out to the global scene when organizations like the UN and the World Economic Forum (WEF) are sketching big plans for tech-driven tracking systems.

The regulation calls for implanting RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) chips in every horse in British Columbia. These roughly grain-sized chips provide data about the horse's identification, medical history, and ownership. Sounds benign enough, right? Pet owners have been chipping their dogs and cats for years after all.

The twist is that this is a required rather than optional policy. And required technology always with strings attached. Although the government assures us this is all about safeguarding horses from theft, disease, and mistreatment, some are questioning what this type of program could entail going forward.

The Bigger View: UN, WEF, and the "Internet of Everything."

If you think this solely applies to farm animals, reconsider. Globally, groups like the UN and WEF have been building the foundation for what they refer to as "full traceability." Translation: a period when everything—yes, everything—may be followed in real-time.

Consider the WEF's "Internet of Bodies" idea, which links objects, animals, and people via implanted or worn technology. The pitch is shiny: transformed world security, sustainable farming, and modern medicine. As it stands? Critics contend it is a privacy and control disaster just waiting to happen.

This also comes through in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Their vision calls for a worldwide inventory of all resources, living entities, and products—a system run on tech akin to RFID chips, GPS tracking, and biometric data. Today,



Source: Stock Image

it's horses. Perhaps it will be cattle tomorrow. And someday? Well, who's to say it doesn't slink into our lives as well?

BC's microchipping program's detractors are not purchasing the "it's just horses" justification. According to history, technology hardly ever serves its initial intent. Social media began as a means of staying in touch with friends; today it serves as a surveillance tool covered by memes. Facial recognition was meant to identify criminals, yet each time you open your phone, it scans your face.

The worry is that RFID chips can do far more than just monitor horses. They can save and forward information on location, health, and even behaviour. One policy change away is widening their application.

Should this technology begin tracking other animals—or perhaps humans—what happens? Scaling back Which protections exist to guarantee the gathered data isn't misused? Who has this data? Who has power over it? And should it find the wrong hands, what happens?

The point of criticism is not that chipping horses is intrinsically bad. Accepting forced monitoring of living entities creates a barrier that is difficult to close.

Advocates of the program contend that this is more about pragmatism than some Orwellian scheme for the subjugation of us. In animals, disease control is vital, and microchips provide a clear, dependable means of monitoring epidemics and preventing their spread before they start. Another actual problem is horse theft; chips make it almost impossible to sell taken animals. Their message? Calm yourself. This is about making sure horses are cared for properly and tracked down, not about world monitoring.

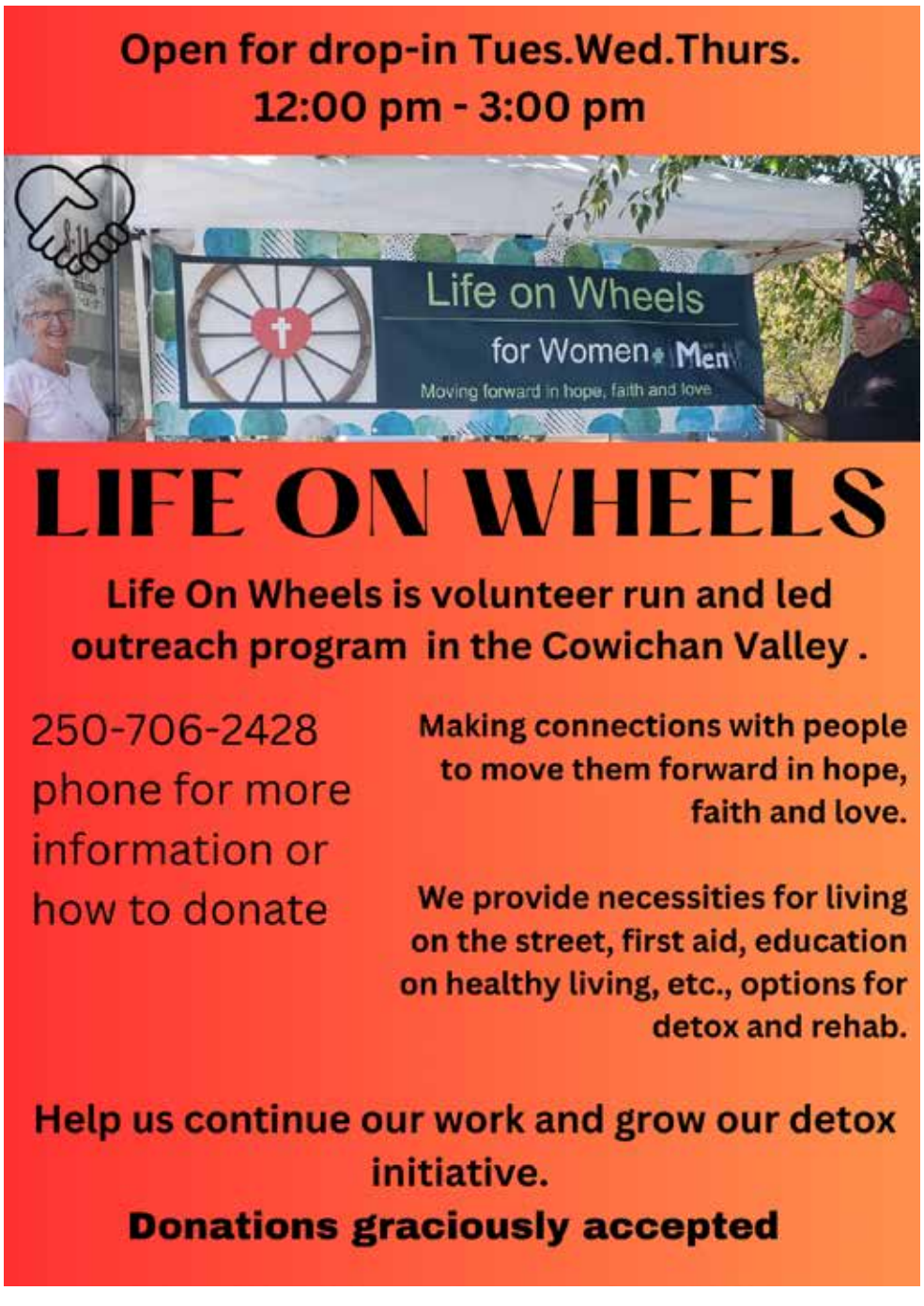
Even advocates must acknowledge that the technology itself poses a significant challenge. Once it's in place, it could be modified for uses much outside its initial intent.

The significant question then is: How far is too far? Although the horse microchipping program of British Columbia seems like a little sensible action, the ramifications are drawing criticism. This little measure feels like a test run for something far more, as worldwide groups like the UN and WEF advocate sweeping "track and trace" systems for all living entities.

Horses nowadays. Maybe all of it tomorrow is livestock. And at last? Well, let's just say history shows us that, when it comes to technology, what starts as "voluntary" or "practical" doesn't necessarily remain that way.

All things considered? Although these initiatives may be motivated by noble intentions, beneficial intentions by themselves may not ensure excellent results. This is a discussion worth listening to regardless of your level of horse ownership or simply the value of your freedom. The road to comprehensive surveillance is paved with microchips and assurances of protection, not with hatred most of the time.

**- A Cowichan Equestrian**



# THE SMOKE AND MIRRORS OF NOMINAL GDP: WHAT THEY'RE NOT TELLING YOU ABOUT INFLATION

**You've likely heard the assertion that Canada has the fastest-growing economy among the G7.**

Liberal supporters cite a rapidly increasing nominal GDP as evidence of Canada's impressive recovery. On the surface, it sounds great. But peel back the layers, and you'll see the reality. It's not as shiny as it seems.

**Nominal vs. Real GDP: The Key Difference**

Nominal GDP is the total value of all goods and services produced within the country, unadjusted for inflation. It's the "big number" politicians love to toss around because it's easier to make it look impressive. But here's the catch: when prices go up, nominal GDP goes up too, even if the economy isn't actually growing in any meaningful way.

Real GDP, on the other hand, adjusts for inflation. It tells you whether we're producing more stuff, not just paying more money for the same amount of stuff. Real GDP is the metric that matters if you're trying to figure out if life's actually improving for Canadians. Here's a simple example:

Imagine Canada's economy produces 10 million widgets a year. In Year 1, each widget costs $10, so nominal GDP is $100 million (10 million widgets x $10). But then inflation drives prices up by 20%. In Year 2, widgets now cost $12. Nominal GDP climbs to $120 million (10 million widgets x $12), but we're still producing the same 10 million widgets. The nominal GDP rise looks great on paper, but real GDP hasn't budged because the actual output hasn't increased. The economy didn't "grow" in any meaningful sense—you're just paying more for the same stuff.

**Inflation Isn't "Fixed," and It's Not Just COVID's Fault**

Let's talk inflation. Yes, the pace of inflation has slowed down, which means prices aren't rising as quickly as they were a year ago. But let's not kid ourselves. The damage is done. That $8 head of lettuce isn't dropping back to $3 anytime soon. Slowing inflation doesn't mean prices are going back to normal; it just means they're climbing less aggressively.

Here's an example to put it into perspective. Say your monthly grocery bill was $500 before inflation went wild. After inflation pushed prices up by 20%, that same cart of groceries now costs $600. Even if inflation slows to 2% next year, your bill will rise to $612. The worst part is that your bill will never drop to $500 again. Why? Because inflation compounds. Once prices rise, they stay at that level and build on it. There is no such thing as "negative inflation," where prices fall back to their old levels across the board. Instead, that 2% inflation means $600 gets an additional 2% tacked on top. Over time, the compounding effect ensures inflation, so living keeps creeping upward.

Politicians celebrating a "return to normal" are conveniently ignoring the new, higher baseline. It's like saying a wildfire is under control because the flames are smaller, while ignoring that half the forest has already burned down. The damage is done, and now we're living with the aftermath.

And before the Facebook "experts" jump in, yes, inflation has global factors, and yes, COVID disrupted supply chains. No, it's not that simple: countries with effective policies have bounced back more effectively. Blaming external factors is limited when other governments have taken stronger action to mitigate the impact for their citizens. The fact is, Canada's policy response has been underwhelming. While billions were funnelled into global climate initiatives and foreign aid, meaningful support for domestic issues like housing, food production, and supply chain resiliency was noticeably absent. It's hard to feel good about "saving the world" when Canadians are struggling to keep their fridges stocked.

**What Could Have Been Done?**

Here's where the frustration kicks in. The government had options to make life a little easier for regular folks, but instead, they leaned on surface-level optics. Here are a few things that could've helped:

**Cutting GST on Essentials:** groceries, for example, are a basic need. Removing taxes on necessities could've provided immediate relief for struggling families.

**Targeted Tax Breaks:** Instead of broad-stroke spending, targeted tax cuts for lower and middle-income earners could have helped people keep more of their money, counteracting some of the pain from rising prices.

**Improving Supply Chains:** A significant chunk of inflation came from supply chain disruptions. The government could have invested in infrastructure and streamlined processes to ensure goods moved faster and more efficiently.

**Support for Domestic Production:** Encouraging local production of food and essential goods could reduce reliance on imports and stabilize prices over time.

**The Bottom Line**

When politicians promote nominal GDP as proof of economic prosperity, they should be cautious, especially considering the current high cost of groceries. While nominal GDP may be increasing, it's primarily due to an increase in the cost of goods, not an increase in the value produced by Canada's economy.

And while inflation may no longer be spiralling out of control, don't mistake that for a victory lap. Indeed, the pandemic and global factors contributed significantly, but it's important not to oversimplify the situation. The government's inaction on meaningful measures to support Canadians during this adjustment period is glaringly obvious. Add to that misplaced spending priorities, like billions poured into international climate goals while basic domestic issues go unaddressed, and it's clear where the frustration comes from. So next time you hear about "booming" numbers, remember: **it's not growth. It's inflation, with a PR team.**






**Dear WWIND,**

On Friday, May 10, 2024, Northern Health effectively fired an employee, Amy Blanding, for wearing a t-shirt with a watermelon on it at the dress rehearsal of an event that was totally unrelated to her work and occurred outside of work hours. She has since filed a wrongful dismissal suit against Northern Health, alleging defamation and that her human rights and rights under the federal Charter of Rights and Freedoms were violated. The suit also claims constructive dismissal, a condition in which an employer makes changes to working conditions so that an employee then leaves. None of the allegations has been proven in court. If that sounds absurd to you, it's because it is: not only does it represent a terrifying new McCarthyism that seeks to control what we can and cannot say, but the process that led up to her firing, and the blowout resulting from it, is also a massive waste of resources for a health organization that can't even fully staff our brand new hospital here in Terrace.

Northern Health is in a chronic state of crisis, but instead of ensuring rural ERs can stay open all the time and fighting for the resources needed to hire new nurses and doctors, administrators are spending their time chasing spurious claims and firing employees on outrageous grounds that have nothing to do with their performance.

Let me explain what happened a little more clearly. On her own time, Blanding, the now-former executive director of Northern Health's inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility office, is a musician. She was asked to perform at an event, and during a dress rehearsal, she wore a t-shirt with a watermelon on it, a symbol that has come to be associated with solidarity with the Palestinian people and opposition to their ongoing genocide by Israel. At least 45,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October 2023, and a study in the journal The Lancet suggests the true death toll could be an order of magnitude higher. Roughly 70 percent of those dead, according to a UN report, are women and children. An image of Blanding wearing the shirt appeared on social media, and four people identifying themselves as a community group wrote a letter to Northern Health  suggesting that she was associated with a "Jihadist movement," and demanding her firing.

Rather than standing up for their employee or even initiating a genuine investigation into the group's claims as alleged, Northern Health executives responded by demanding that Blanding read a pre-written apology "to the Jewish community" and share it on her own personal social media, a wild request for an employer of any kind. Blanding was told she would be removed from her position if she refused. This is contained in her Supreme Court filing. She ultimately resigned. As a member of the Jewish community and as a resident of Terrace who has been unable to get a family doctor for years, I'm appalled by Northern Health's behaviour. I can't believe I have to say this, but a watermelon t-shirt is not anti-Semitic, nor is expressing horror at the scale of destruction being wrought against the people of Gaza. It's also absurd that Blanding was fired because of a letter written by those with no real interest in our regional health care or the safety of Jews in Canada.

The fact that all of this happened, and that Northern Health is now expending major resources dealing with the legal fallout of it, should be offensive to every one of us struggling to access health care and to every overworked nurse, doctor, and other care provider in the North. Blanding's legal case against Northern Health is ongoing. You can demand better from Northern Health by contacting Josie Osborne, the new Minister of Health. We should all be concerned about this attack by a public employer on workers' rights to express compassion.

**Nick Gottlieb, Terrace, B.C**

**Dear WWIND,**

I attended a meeting on Tuesday, November 5th, at the Cobble Hill Farmers Institute that was put on for farmers to hear about proposed changes to agriculture zoning throughout the CVRD. Lanark Consulting presented part of their plan to change life and autonomy forever for valley farmers, growers, and affiliated activities. The usual glossy presentation, complete with their round tables, take-home fridge magnets, and warm conversation groups, directed participants to address only issues of the consultants choosing. This time the spell was not cast and I assume they did not receive the anticipated response and outcome.

Many of the participants had come prepared, had done their homework, and questioned everything. Some brought copies of the long form of the zoning change by-law draft document and shared many concerns that may not have been expected to be addressed at the table.

Each group had been given a discussion guide meant to drive the conversation to narrow  questions of the consultants choosing that were meant to be answered and recorded. The discussions at all tables raised multiple issues and concerns that obviously had not been considered by the consultants. I question who advised the consultants to produce such a document and where the search for the ideas, opinions,, and data to justify their proposed policies originated.

The farmers and others spoke with a wealth of knowledge and experience that should be considered before moving forward on any changes. They spoke with passion.

Farming is not a one-stop, one-size-fits-all occupation and way of life. Farming is a living breathing organism that is responsive to multiple vast, variable and often not definable aspects. It is both a Science and an art. Experience and handed-down traditional knowledge along with education and ongoing improvements only create a possibility of success. Nothing is ever guaranteed or settled. Government regulations, policies, oversight and enforcement do not guarantee food security

Spokespeople representing each table stood up and boldly challenged the plan and sent a clear message to the CVRD.

Area C Director, Hillary Abbott, who adamantly opposed the preservation of 174 acres of ALR Class 1 farmland and fully supported its destruction only one year ago, spoke out on behalf of those who sat at his table. Hillary stated that Farmers do not need more government regulations. It was good to hear him supporting some of those who had voted him into office.

One speaker stated that there was still much work to be done. The room responded with loud applause and cheering. It's time that those who are affected by these decisions are consulted at the very beginning instead of the ongoing insulting message sent that expensive experts must develop plans affecting the most important aspect of our survival, food security.

No more board-selected experts or loyal supporters. These decisions need to be made by the experts, our local farmers.

**Ruth**

**Dear WWIND,**

To the North Cowichan Municipality- I have a question which demands strong consideration. In latest news, you state there will be a property tax increase of 11% in order that this may fund extra policing to our community. What I'd like to bring to your attention, if you haven't already noticed, is this is totally pointless. This will not accomplish anything at all and NOTHING is being done to address the focal point of the problem.

Like many other folk in North Cowichan (and all over), I have the privilege of being able to own my own home even though it's ONE person paying all the expenses—but I don't give a damn. I'd do it any day. But what I have an issue with is your latest decision of an erratic proportion to tax everyone in the vicinity MORE for more policing to take care of a problem that has NEVER BEEN ADDRESSED. I'm talking about the street people. I'm talking about the drugs. I'm talking about the ridiculous decision of the 'Overdose Prevention Site' which DOES NOT FIX THE PROBLEM—yet it creates a safe place for someone to indulge in their addiction—WHILE MAINTAINING THEIR ADDICTION. EXPLAIN HOW we, the residents, should bother to be responsible for the decisions of the government and consequently VIHA, who distributes free drugs on the taxpayer's dollar. Let's take away the drugs FIRST—and the problem of the 'policing' of which you request more money from the people of the community will take care of itself in short order. As says the proverb says, "Fire goes out for lack of fuel." Also, to those whom this decision concerns, I do not drive, nor have I ever. I work on computers, whether it be for Seaside Computers in Duncan, or myself doing both restoration of historical artifacts and photos or my own business, being Recapture Your Memories, a business I've had for 16 years now. To get away from the computer, I DELIBERATELY make the choice to get out and walk somewhere—whether it be out to the Tansor turn-off and back. Whether it be to Superstore DAILY. Whether it be up to the Cowichan Commons, Then to the TCH and Herd Rd intersection, then to the Tansor turn-off, then back into town. OR on other occasions—walking out to the Old Farm Market near Miller Rd. in Duncan. IN THIS TIME- and particularly in the evening times I see enough activity of smashed windows, homeless camps (which are in places time and time again which they have ALREADY been strictly forbidden from) and fires of INNUMERABLE proportions in only the Good Lord knows HOW MANY places- some of which end up taking out businesses. AND YET FURTHER—we have the increasing amount of theft of cars, trucks, tools, break & Enter's into people's houses, garage's and businesses by the same people and all too often- fuelled by drugs because they can't think straight. MEANWHILE—when we try to place a call to the police to report a crime or B & E in progress—have you ever noticed how bloody long it takes to speak to the dispatcher on the non-emergency line or for RCMP to show up to a crime scene? I have—and it has NOTHING to do with the relocation of the RCMP detachment.

So—I STRONGLY WISH YOU TO RECONSIDER raising taxes on account of extra funding for the policing aspect in our community. INSTEAD, please start dealing with the focal point of the problem instead. The drugs are not necessary. Yet YOU expect US, the residents and citizens of the community, to foot the bill for a problem that nobody wishes to bother addressing. I don't give a DAMN if I get chastised for this, but we both know very well that VIHA and the pharmaceutical industry are making great profits off the drugs (fentanyl and others) that are distributed in great quantities to many people at the corner of York and Lewis Street. And so technically, we, the residents are paying the penalty for the careless distribution of these drugs. I cannot walk to work ONE DAY and NOT see a needle anywhere- or not see a person who is reeling from 'shooting up' on the street corner, bent over and somewhat unresponsive. There is a much BIGGER problem to address here- and taxing the residents of the community MORE for dealing with a problem which is NOT being dealt with AT ALL makes no logical sense. If you keep doing this- more people will lose their homes due to the increasing cost of living and taxes, as the costs will progressively go up for everyone else. AS IT STANDS NOW- the residents of this community (and myself) are being forced without question into policing their own property due to the fact that the RCMP cannot show up fast enough with a progressive number of issues on any given night they have to deal with. The repercussions and bad choices of the free drug handouts to the street people in this community ARE NOT AND NEVER SHOULD HAVE BEEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE RESIDENTS WHO HAVE TO PAY THE TAXES TO THE MUNICIPALITY TO PAY FOR ADDED SECURITY AND POLICING FOR IRRESPONSIBLE CHOICES!!! VERY SINCERELY,

**Nigel R Robertson.**

**Dear WWIND,**

Once again, another letter writer, this time Wendy Wardle, shooting off from the hip and blowing off steam about the proposed 25% tariff on Canadian goods by incoming US President, Donald Trump. Her letter is fiction, and I am tired of reading fiction. If I want to read fiction, I can go to my local library.

Wendy has failed to mention that incoming US President has told our Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, that the US will put a 25% tariff on all goods from Canada unless illegal drugs and immigrants from Canada entering into the United States are stopped. The problem belongs to Justin Trudeau. Trump is telling Trudeau to clean up his act on illegal drugs and immigration in Canada, and the tariff will be history. Zero tariff. There is a lot of jealousy in this world and as Donald Trump is a millionaire, people are jealous of him and thus constant 24/7 comments about him are being made. These comments would not be made if he was not a millionaire.

The President of the US is paid a yearly salary of $400,000 per year. Our media never mentions that Donald Trump refuses to be paid this salary and donates this salary to a variety of different charities. Both former US President Barack Obama, also a millionaire, and soon-to-be-retired US President, Joe Biden, also a millionaire, did not give their yearly salary to charity but instead kept their yearly salary. Human greed on their part.

**Unbelievable! - Joe Sawchuk**

**Dear WWIND,**

Now that the Canadian USA border will be costing Canadians dearly, it's high time for politicians of all provinces to do something about it.

My suggestion is for each province to install a minefield 1/2 wide along their entire border, seeded with super high explosives, and drones equipped with electronic capability to sense any movement over the minefield. Any movement would automatically trigger rapid fire from the drone to "take out" the movement. Both sides of the border could be well marked with the dangers involved should anyone dare to enter such a minefield.

Don't suggest that such an idea would be too expensive! The minefield could be "seeded" using helicopters and aircraft, and could be therefore completed in short order.

The military and our armed forces could be then employed to the waterways and ports of entry to speed up searches of ships and cars at entry points. Anyone caught trying to import drugs or illegals could be required to return to the country they arrived from—on foot—using the minefield.

It certainly is a sad situation because of Trudeau and Biden's open border policy that started the endless flow of criminals fleeing Justice from various countries, illicit drugs that are killing our youth and others illegals that enjoy the comforts of this country that not even our homeless can enjoy.

Like it or not, Trump sure as hell got the attention of both Canada and Mexico in an effort to straighten out the ungodly mess Trudeau and Biden "deliberately" created.

**John Walker. Cobble Hill**

# THE ANNUAL SPRAYING DEBATE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

**We are once again entering the season when a government agency—most likely the Ministry of Forests—will be granted a permit to continue its annual aerial spraying of the bacterial-chemical pesticide Foray 48B over British Columbia communities and the surrounding environment.**

I am writing this as someone who has spent years researching Spongy moths (formerly called Gypsy moths) and the government's ongoing efforts to "eradicate" them. I was also part of a group of concerned citizens who successfully stopped the aerial spraying on Salt Spring Island in 1993. This letter is for those of you who are anticipating, with concern, yet another round of aerial pesticide spraying in your community—who feel it is your right and responsibility to respond.

The theory behind the spraying is simple: coat entire landscapes—people, animals, insects, plants, and microbial life included—with a pesticide to eliminate one single species. But this is dangerously naive thinking. There has been no rigorous, long-term study on how this type of widespread pesticide application affects the environment as a whole. It fails to consider the complexity of ecosystems, the long-term impact on non-target species, and what happens when you repeat this year after year.

And has the Spongy moth ever actually been eradicated? No. Despite decades of spraying, the moth still returns—because it is transported into the area by vehicles, ships, equipment, and wood products. The government's so-called "eradication" claims don't hold up when you look at the facts. B.C. has declared infestations based on finding as few as **one or two moths.** In Vancouver, aerial spraying was approved under an "emergency" designation based on the discovery of **four moths.** This emergency label meant there were no avenues for public appeal. The argument that B.C. has avoided an "invasion" because of continuous spraying is simply not factual.

These moths have been seen here since the early 1900s. They don't even thrive in B.C.'s forests—our trees are mostly conifers, and Spongy moth caterpillars prefer deciduous trees. Meanwhile, the eastern forests of Canada, where Spongy moths actually do establish themselves, have continued to stand despite their "voracious appetites." Research has shown that in areas where spraying was stopped, trees naturally defended themselves, and moth populations followed a natural cycle that forests could withstand.



Source: Stock Image

So if we can't actually eradicate them, and they aren't an immediate threat to our forests, why do we keep spraying? And why are we given so much misleading, pseudo-scientific "information" to convince us that this is necessary?

The truth is, there are **strong lobbying interests** behind this. Industrial forestry companies and the bio-chemical manufacturers who produce these pesticides have powerful voices in government. Then there are international trade concerns—Canada has to be able to prove to its trading partners (especially the U.S.) that it is actively controlling the spread of these moths. The problem is, we could do that in **other ways.** If we were made aware of any Spongy moth presence early, we could mitigate the issue with smaller, targeted approaches, document those efforts properly, and still meet trade requirements. There are smarter alternatives, but the government seems unwilling to break out of this pattern.

Then there's the issue of **safety**. We are constantly assured that Foray 48B is "safe" because it contains Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki (BTK), a bacteria that targets caterpillars in the Lepidoptera family. We are told that BTK is "naturally occurring" in soil and that there is nothing to worry about. But is this true?

Studies in the U.S. and Japan have found that **BTK is actually rare in natural soils.** One survey of untreated land found it in less than **one percent** of soil samples. The bacteria is closely related to Bacillus anthracis (which causes anthrax) and Bacillus cereus (which can cause food poisoning). These bacteria have the ability to produce toxic compounds under certain conditions. More importantly, **there have been no long-term studies on what BTK does when introduced into ecosystems year after year.**

And let's not forget—BTK is **only one** of the ingredients in Foray 48B. The other **97 percent of the formula is undisclosed due to "proprietary" protections.** We don't know what's in it. We don't know how those ingredients interact. We don't know what happens when people, animals, and water sources are repeatedly exposed.

What we do know is that Foray 48B has been found to persist in freshwater for up to 70 days. It can drift in the air for **kilometres** beyond the spray site. And people have reported health concerns following exposure.

In one spray campaign, a **government hotline** was set up to take public concerns. **Of the 26,000 calls received, 19,893 were related to health issues.** Nearly all of these reports were dismissed. Yet independent studies documented real cases of negative health effects, including respiratory issues and allergic reactions.

If you are concerned about this, there are ways to take action. Around Christmas, a public notice will appear in your local newspaper regarding an **Application for a Pesticide Use Permit.** This is not the final permit—it is the application for approval. The public can respond and submit concerns. The person evaluating the permit considers whether the treatment will be effective, whether the adverse effects will be unreasonable, and whether the pesticide will be applied safely.

When responding, it is best to focus on a specific area of concern. This could be waterways, soil health, loss of organic status, the impact on ecosystems, or public confidence in food safety. If you don't know much about the science, you can still express your personal concerns—whether it's the fear of pesticide exposure, the loss of enjoyment of your property, or distrust in the government's approach. These are all valid considerations.

If the permit is approved, there is still a brief window for appeal through the Environmental Appeal Board. In Salt Spring's case, we didn't have time to respond before the permit was granted, but when the final approval was published, we filed 24 appeals in two days. These appeals came from local organizations, government bodies, and individuals—including scientists. This created enough pressure that we were able to negotiate an alternative plan that eliminated aerial spraying altogether. Instead, we worked with Agriculture Canada to implement manual control methods, with community volunteers doing the work themselves.

It was a practical, hands-on solution that replaced government overreach with real community action. It was done again successfully in 2006.

If you're facing spraying in your area, know this—you have options. You have the right to question these decisions and the responsibility to protect your community. Even if you are unsuccessful at first, keep building support and pushing for change. There are a lot of issues out there competing for our attention, but this is one where community action can actually make a difference.

And when you can be part of the solution instead of just protesting the problem—that is something worth fighting for.

**An Island Grandmother**

# COWICHAN'S LEADERSHIP IS FAILING—AND TARIFFS JUST PROVED IT

**For years, we've been saying it. We've written the articles, we've laid out the facts, and we've practically drawn these people a roadmap to common sense.**

And yet, here we are. Feb 1, the United States imposed a 25 percent tariff on Canadian imports, and the federal government, with all its resources, is suddenly scrambling. The message is clear: Canada is weak, unprepared, and has been coasting on borrowed time.
If this is how a national government reacts to a little pressure from its closest ally, what do you think is happening at the small, local level? If Canada—a country of 40 million people with entire industries behind it—is sweating because the U.S. raised trade barriers, then what does that say about the governance of North Cowichan?
Here in our tiny municipality, we're being led by a group of people who still believe they are on the frontlines of the global climate battle, as if their resolutions and traffic redesigns are what's keeping the oceans from rising. Meanwhile, reality has come knocking, and our community is on the same trajectory as the federal government—which is to say, straight into the ground.

**The Disconnect is Astounding**

North Cowichan's financial situation has already been called "dire" by the CAO. This year alone, residents are being told to brace for at least an 8.4 percent tax hike—a number that doesn't even include utilities, which are also rising. But wait, that's not all! Some council members think 15 to 20 percent is more "realistic." Meanwhile, our roads crumble, our services weaken, and our infrastructure backlog grows.
Yet, somehow, the only priorities that seem to matter to our local elected officials are sustainability plans, park expansions, and "green" road projects that make traffic even worse. No one is saying that environmental considerations shouldn't exist—but should they be the main focus when people can't afford to live here?
While residents struggle to pay their bills, our council is busy patting themselves on the back for their "climate lens" policies. They are spending your tax dollars as if they're running a charity for progressive causes rather than governing a municipality. And what's the best response we've ever gotten from them? "Vote differently next time." What a joke.

**Told You So—But Now What?**

For two years, we at The Westward Independent have been saying this would happen. Not because we have some crystal ball, but because it was obvious to anyone with common sense. We're a group of professionals—tech entrepreneurs, business owners, natural health experts, tradespeople—normal people who actually think ahead. And yet, somehow, we saw the writing on the wall before our "elected experts" did.
The reality is, we don't need another council full of liberal arts degree holders who think governance is an extension of their activism. We need people who understand finance, business, infrastructure—people who actually know how to run something other than a social media campaign. And now, there's a chance to change that. With Debra Toporowski stepping down from council, a by-election is coming. It's a rare opportunity to shift the balance and bring some actual economic sense back to the table. If voters make the same mistake again, North Cowichan will continue its slow-motion decline. If they get it right, there's a chance to put a stop to this performative nonsense before it's too late.

**A Serious Reset is Needed**

The U.S. just sent Canada a reality check, and North Cowichan should take the hint. This municipality is bleeding money on performative policies while ignoring the fundamentals. Our leaders are making the same mistakes locally that the Liberals and NDP have made federally. The difference? We don't have a federal budget to absorb the consequences.
If this town is going to survive, we need a leadership overhaul. We need actual experts and innovators, not career politicians looking for their next ideological pet project.
The time for warnings is over. There's an election coming. You have a choice.
**Don't screw it up.**

---

**Living on the streets can be tough,**
**Not knowing who to truthfully trust.**
**Sureness in knowing yourself is rough,**
**When you are controlled by an outer lust.**

**There are reasons that must be known,**
**That will help strengthen the trust in yourself.**
**There are actions that can be shown,**
**To ensure understanding of what you ask of oneself.**

**When your assurance of the asking is woven,**
**Know there are others that will help you form.**
**They will build with sureness of strength given,**
**And help walk with you through the storm.**

**David W Armstrong**

## Anew in 2025

**It's a New Year: habits are best formed in practice–**
**so choose anew. walk forward with anew thought and before you know it, procrastination is no longer. Experts proclaim habits become routine after 21 days. Routine is balance unlike resolutions. Here in lies, homeostasis.**

**Anew**
**You cannot have all the answers before**
**You start.**
**The middle comes up as you go along . . .**
**And the end finishes as it does as a result**
**of what You do at the end . . .**

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***Citation: Twentieth Century Films, Hope Floats, Copr. 1998.**

**Happy New Year from : Threee Thumbs Up: Senior services. Personal Assistants I Supportive Companions dedicated to assisting seniors with day-to-day household tasks and running errands around town. We recognize People need People! Booking 7 days in advance.**

**NEW CONTACT (236) 979.1142 ThreeeThumbsUp@gmail.com @ ThreeeThumbsUp**

# DEI TRAVELS SIDEWAYS: HOW "ANTI-OPPRESSIVE" STORIES MIGHT BACKFIRE

## North Cowichan's 2025 Budget Includes DEI Training

Corporate America spends approximately $8 billion annually on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, according to research by consulting firm McKinsey. This reflects an ongoing financial commitment to advancing DEI in workplaces, but questions remain. Shareholders and board members often debate the effectiveness of these programs, especially as conservative pushback grows.

DEI programs have become the go-to solution for addressing prejudice and inequality in government offices, businesses, and colleges. The claim? These initiatives build bridges, increase empathy, and make spaces more welcoming. Sounds fantastic, right? But what if some of these programs are actually driving people further apart rather than bringing them together? With North Cowichan's 'People and Culture' division adding DEI training as part of its million-dollar budget for 2025, it's time to ask: Is this the best use of taxpayer dollars?

**A Study Raises Unexpected Concerns**

A recent study, Instructing Animosity: How DEI Pedagogy Creates the Hostile Attribution Bias, highlights some unintended consequences of anti-oppressive DEI narratives. Conducted by researchers from Narravance and the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI), the study suggests that some DEI strategies may actually aggravate prejudice, fuel animosity, and create division where none previously existed.

Researchers divided participants into two groups. One group studied materials from prominent DEI advocates such as Robin DiAngelo, Ibram X. Kendi, and Equality Labs. The second group? They read something completely neutral—like an essay on U.S. grain output (thrilling, I know). Afterward, participants were asked to assess hypothetical scenarios for bias—such as a university admissions process or job hiring decisions.

| | 2024 Budget | 2025 Budget | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| **EXPENSES** | | Source: NorthCowichan | |
| People & Culture | $1,058,043 | $ 1,067,408 | $ |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | $1,058,043 | $ 1,072,408 | $ |

**The results? Not what DEI advocates might have hoped for.**

Those who read anti-oppressive DEI materials were significantly more likely to perceive bias in neutral situations. This psychological effect—known as "hostile attribution bias"—causes people to assume bad intentions, even when evidence suggests otherwise.

For example, in one case, participants evaluated a fictional admissions officer. Those exposed to anti-racist literature were more likely to assume racial bias in the decision-making process—even when the process was clearly fair. And this didn't just apply to race. Participants who read anti-Islamophobia materials were more likely to perceive discrimination against Muslims, even when Muslims and non-Muslims were treated equally. A similar effect was found in caste-based narratives, reinforcing negative stereotypes about Hindu populations and heightening perceptions of caste-based persecution in otherwise neutral scenarios.

**The Problem with "Us vs. Them" Thinking**

Here's where it gets tricky. DEI programs often frame the world in binary terms: oppressors vs. victims, privileged vs. marginalized. While this might feel empowering for some, it has major drawbacks.

For one, it can alienate people who—despite never having done anything wrong—find themselves labeled as "oppressors." Instead of fostering understanding, this creates resentment and hostility. When DEI training is mandatory, forcing employees to sit through hours of ideological lectures, the risk of backlash only increases.

Many DEI narratives also contain a strong moral absolutism. If society is framed as a battle between "good" and "bad" actors, the response to perceived wrongdoing often becomes punitive. The same study found that participants exposed to anti-racist materials were more likely to support punishment or mandatory DEI training for a fictional admissions officer—even when their decision-making was objectively fair.

This "us vs. them" approach doesn't lead to reconciliation—it deepens division. The irony? A program designed to reduce bias may, in some cases, be making people more biased.

**The Real Issue: Poor Execution, Not the Concept Itself**

To be clear, the concept of DEI is not the problem. The intention behind these programs—to promote understanding and inclusion—is commendable. But when DEI efforts rely on ideological frameworks that focus too heavily on identity politics and historical grievances, they lose sight of their original purpose. Rather than creating environments where people find common ground, these programs often make people hyper-aware of their differences. This isn't just an issue in workplaces or universities—it's a broader social trend that fuels mistrust and ideological echo chambers.

If DEI programs are to be successful, they need a major rethink.

**What Needs to Change?**

**The study recommends a few key improvements.**

First, transparency is essential. DEI training materials should be publicly available so organizations can evaluate their impact before rolling them out. Blindly adopting these programs without review is a recipe for problems.

Second, DEI programs should focus on connection, not confrontation. Instead of reinforcing an "oppressor vs. oppressed" mindset, training should highlight shared values and mutual understanding. People are more receptive to these ideas when they don't feel attacked.

Third, DEI content should be independently reviewed. The study suggests creating independent review boards to assess whether DEI training produces real-world benefits or unintended harms.

Lastly, the focus should shift toward solutions rather than scapegoats. Instead of dwelling on blame and guilt, effective DEI programs should encourage constructive dialogue and teamwork. People work together better when they're encouraged to solve problems, not just listen to lectures about past injustices.

DEI should aim for a more inclusive, fair society where people genuinely respect and understand one another. But good intentions aren't enough. If these programs continue down a path that fuels division and resentment, they may do more harm than good.

Final Thought: The Charter vs. DEI

"DEI as a government policy initiative has been a blunt social engineering attempt—like performing heart surgery with a hammer. It trades one perceived tyranny for another, forcing communities and the country into a rearward-looking, conflict-based mindset. In practice, DEI is more about Disunity, Exclusion, and Inequality."

This argument, put forward by William A. Thomas, suggests that DEI strays from Canada's founding legal principles. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrines equality under the law—where race, religion, and identity should not dictate different treatment. Section 15 states:

"Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability."

**If DEI initiatives conflict with these principles, they need to be re-examined.**

The goal should not be to reframe society as a battle between identity groups. The goal should be a society where people are treated equally and fairly—without bias, without special treatment, and without division.

## Corporate Training

| Source: NorthCowichan | Actions/Projects |
|---|---|
| First Nations Reconciliation | |
| Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion | |