

# north shore news

## CAROLAN: Governments face test in Horse year ahead

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*The public realm is irredeemable and the only thing a sensible person can do is ignore it and live as decently as one can in spite of it.*

- W.H. Auden

The impulsive Chinese new year of the Horse upon us this week, so it's timely to take stock of where we're headed politically.

Federally, with the Conservatives' bully-boy decision a week ago to open up B.C.'s coastline to more commercial fish-farms, there's further evidence that they're willing to throw themselves right over the cliff on environmental issues. But as the furor over rocker Neil Young's trashing of the Tories for their role in the tar sands eco-nightmare shows, even Canadian voters in the political centre are growing quietly alarmed about their environmental health.

Is this a golden opportunity for Justin Trudeau and the Liberals to establish another beachhead in filching away middle-of-the-road support that had been willing to give the Harper gang a chance in power?

Canadians don't much like bullies, even in hockey. With their decisions on scrapping home postal delivery service, the softening of fish-farm environmental regulations, and their muzzling of federal scientists about their environmental research findings, the Conservatives look heavy-handed and clueless. Thomas Mulcair and the NDP have beaten them silly over the senate corruption scandal, and now with Justin Trudeau ready to defend issues of personal choice regarding legalization of pot and the sex trade, we've got an opposition that's shaping up as a real alternative in terms of ideas. Mulcair is still the most popular politician in Quebec; with Trudeau making significant inroads in Ontario, the makings of a tenable Liberal-NDP government look interesting right now. The minority government Pierre Trudeau shared with Ed Broadbent of the NDP in the early 1970s is still remembered as a progressive period in Canadian history. Certainly more imaginative than the out of touch, total oil-slick future that the Conservatives dinosnores are wedded to.

Can we hope to see a leader emerge who'll champion right-to-die legislation that so many Canadians silently endorse in private? It's time we sorted out these things as a society.

Locally, the screams over commuter traffic woes are getting louder than the routine twohour traffic jams trying to get home across the Ironworkers Memorial

Bridge at Second Narrows. Despite the two-tier transportation system now separating motorists between those who can or can't afford the \$6 return toll on the Port Mann and Golden Ears bridges, there's still no help in sight for North Shore commuters. The former south-of-Port Mann gridlock has leapfrogged across the Fraser River making the Brunette Ave. to Cassiar Tunnel section of the Trans-Canada an exercise in self-flagellation five days a week. Even weekends feature major snarls.

Meanwhile, all three North Shore mayors and councils have continued to support more residential growth while traffic gridlock nightmares are the number one local civic issue. Is it any wonder that citizens give up on bothering to vote? Have you noticed the District's advertisements inviting citizen input on solutions for the traffic problem? Well, here's an idea: Stop greenlighting big housing projects that bring more people and cars to the North Shore.

If there's another critical Lower Mainland issue, it's surely the call made this past fall for the reopening of Riverview Hospital. That's a provincial responsibility. Mayor Ernie Daykin of Maple Ridge has led the municipal charge, reiterating The Union of B.C. Municipalities AGM call on Premier Christy Clark to reopen the Coquitlam facility for mentally ill patients. The first step should be to junk any lingering plan to sell off Riverview's almost 250-acre lands for residential housing. Many of the site's imposing old buildings can be quickly revived to bring in patients from downtown streets throughout Metro Vancouver.

The fateful decision to decommission Riverview was initiated by Joy MacPhail and the NDP during their tenure in the 1990s. We've all been shamed by it. Sadly, the provincial Liberals have passed on the chance to improve things: mental health care additions to local area hospitals won't fix the larger problem. Here's an opportunity for a historic step by Premier Clark's government. The real issue is that the alternative resources needed to care for the mentally ill we too often see living on the streets haven't been able to cope with the task. Instead, our public hospital emergency rooms are forced to deal with mental health and related drug addiction issues, and police officers end up being forced to serve as first-contact responders. That's not their mandate and we've seen what can happen when things go sideways. Vancouver Police Chief Jim Chu confirms that arrests under the Mental Health Act there have grown four-fold in the past 10 years.

The return to a centralized institutional system is a no-brainer. Health professionals say we need at least 300 long-term mental health treatment beds. Will some Liberal MLA please take up the reins on this issue soon? What we could all use is more access this year to good information about pressing issues that's unmediated by government or interest group spin. A chance to listen to well-informed speakers engaging in community debate in a safe, non-volatile way would help toward redeeming the current state of our civic life.

One prospect is the next Cool North Shore. They're a non-profit citizens' group covering Lions Bay to Deep Cove that organizes focused coffeehouse-style talks on sustainability and climate change action.

Tonight's event is scheduled to take place at Café for Contemporary Art on East Esplanade, from 6:30 to 9 p.m. The topic is: "Oil Pipelines, Jobs, Risks and the Canadian Vision." Speakers are Dr. Jonn Axsen of SFU School of Resource and Environmental Management; Liz McDowell, responsible economic development consultant; and feisty Robyn Allan, economist, former CE O of IC BC (and speeding ticket collector, if memory serves), who'll offer a video presentation. Ten dollars includes appetizers, beverage and thoughtful dialogue. I'm looking forward to this one. See you there.

It's the Chinese New Year of the Horse on the 31st. Bringing in the upbeat vibes for this notoriously stubborn animal sign will be easier, though, if you look in at T&T's Osaka Supermarket at Park Royal South.

The new year's displays are fabulous and tasty - the cheapest ticket to Asian festive fun right now. Check it out! And a collegial farewell to Tim Jones, old civic friend and sparring partner.

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