

THE HKLB NEW DEMOCRAT

Don Martin offers his predictions for 2016



CTV journalist and host of TV show "Power Play" Don Martin closed the recently-departed year with a gaze into Canada's political future.

His predictions are not scientific and probably far from prophetic, but by mixing intuition with a survey of reasonably-informed sources for some semi-reliable speculation, he offers these predictions for 2016:

- In a political stunner, Conservative heir apparent MP Jason Kenney announces that he won't run for the party leadership, citing the need for fresh faces and contenders beyond Calgary.

- MPs Lisa Raitt, Kellie Leitch and Michael Chong join former MP Peter MacKay in declaring they'll seek the Conservative leadership, to be decided in March 2017.

- NDP leader Tom Mulcair garners 75% approval of his leadership at

the NDP convention in the spring. He declares that 75% is a satisfactory level of support and confirms his intention to lead the party through another election.

- Two NDP MPs defect – one to the Liberals, one to the Bloc Quebecois, citing the NDP leader's refusal to step aside as their reason.

- Sputtering revenue, unexpectedly high refugee resettlement costs and rising demand for infrastructure spending to prop up the soft economy force Finance Minister Bill Morneau to book a \$16-billion deficit in his spring budget.

- The loonie sinks below 70-cents US in February.

- The government admits it has to consider buying the F-35 jet fighters to be compatible in the air with its allies.

- Alberta unemployment, office va-

cancies and foreclosures skyrocket as the oil patch sheds another 40,000 jobs in the face of \$30 oil.

- The Northern Gateway pipeline project is mothballed.

- Former interim Liberal leader Bob Rae will be named Canada's ambassador to the UN and former deputy prime minister Anne McLellan gets a diplomatic appointment, possibly to Washington.

- Former aboriginal women's advocate Michele Audette and aboriginal lawyer Roberta Jamieson along with former PEI premier Robert Ghiz are among the 22 named to the Senate.

- Justin Trudeau's approval rating dips below 40 per cent for the first time in June. The honeymoon might be over, but prime minister still appears on the cover of GQ magazine.

- The First Ministers' Climate Change summit in March agrees to meet the Harper greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. Saskatchewan refuses to sign the accord.

- Manitoba Premier Greg Selinger loses to a sudden popularity surge by the Liberals, which will form a minority government under leader Rana Bokhari. Saskatchewan's Brad Wall cruises back to power with a slightly reduced majority.

- And, finally, saner minds prevail south of the border and Senator Marco Rubio wins the U.S. Republican nomination to take on Hillary Clinton for the presidency. Donald Trump bows out before the convention.

So that's Don Martin's political predictions for 2016. His accuracy will be determined only by time.

Dewar should be Canada's arms control ambassador



Former NDP MP Paul Dewar interviewed by Ottawa reporters

The mandate letter from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion instructs him to “re-energize Canadian diplomacy and leadership on key international issues,” including acceding to the Arms Trade Treaty.

This brings the new government back into the international political arena. The previous government’s refusal to sign the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty, which has set new international standards for regulating the \$70 billion annual business that fuels conflict, undermines peace and security, and causes widespread human suffering, was a shocking rejection of multilateral diplomacy.

Canada needs to quickly join the 130 states that have signed the treaty and show a new face to the international community on arms control and disarmament matters. And the right person for the job is former MP Paul Dewar. Dewar should be named Canada’s ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, a post which deals with arms control, human rights and peace and security issues. He commands the deep respect of the political and

civil society communities.

This post should not be confused with Canada’s Ambassador to the United Nations in New York. The latter covers the whole range of UN issues, from Security Council matters to the vast agenda opened up by the new Sustainable Development Goals. Rather, the Geneva post specializes in the work tackled by such bodies as the Conference on Disarmament and the Human Rights Council. This is the work that Dewar has specialized in during his parliamentary career, and there can hardly be a more important challenge than rallying opinion against the spread of weapons in the age of terrorism.

This is a highly sensitive job with a mandate to represent Canada at international meetings on arms control and disarmament, to be a special advisor to the government on these matters, and to be the point of contact between the government and civil society. The result enabled arms control and disarmament matters to achieve a high profile in Canada.

In the past years, the post of ambassador for disarmament has

been folded into the post of ambassador to the UN in Geneva with responsibilities for arms control and disarmament. The present incumbent is also a political appointment. Since it is customary for senior political appointees to resign when a new government takes office, there may be an opening soon.

It is wrong to assume that only career officers are best suited to represent Canada in crucial matters of peace and security.

Gary Doer’s service in the US, Stephen Lewis’s at the UN, and Gordon Campbell’s in the UK are just a few illustrations. In each case, they were public figures who had the skills to bring public attention to issues. This is not to lessen the importance of career officers, but ordinarily career officers are taught to work well under the headlines. That is the point here: arms control and disarmament and human rights issues are very much in the public eye and need constant exposure to inform and educate the public.

Prime Minister Trudeau has committed his government to “transparent, merit-based appointments.” Dewar fits the bill. He was a teacher, union leader and community organizer before jumping into politics. He was elected an NDP Member of Parliament in 2006 and became critic for Foreign Affairs. He was chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity.

His experience in conflict-torn Africa, where he saw the lethal effects of the notorious arms trade, made him an early supporter of the Arms Trade Treaty, and he persisted in pressing the Conservative government to crack down on the export of military equipment. Earlier this year, he said in Parliament: “The govern-

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Ontario to lose equalization payments as Alberta's economic fortunes fall

Ontario will shed its status as a poor cousin of Confederation in the coming years, not because its economic fortunes are rebounding, but because resource-rich Alberta is falling on hard times.

The equalization program redistributes national income to help poorer provinces provide services comparable to those of their richer counterparts. But equalization experts say the formula for calculating the payments is slow to respond to changes, including volatile commodity prices, which will leave Alberta carrying a disproportionate burden when the numbers are announced this weekend.

Ontario began receiving equalization for the first time in 2009, a dramatic reversal of fortune for the country's one-time economic powerhouse. It is now set to reclaim its status as a "have" province because the disparity between its economy and that of Alberta is shrinking.

What we're talking about is the bad way of coming out of equalization.

The "good way" to come out of the program, he said, is for a province's economy to rebound so that growth in its revenues offsets a loss of equalization payments.

Because the equalization funding is based on a three-year national average of gross domestic product, next year's calculation will still include times when oil prices were high and Alberta was booming. This means Ontario will not get "kicked out" of the program for another two or three years.

Alberta pulled up the overall standard of living in Canada when the country's wealth was shifting west to the resource-rich provinces. Now that Alberta's economy is faltering, the reverse is happening. Ontario will no longer be eligible to receive equalization once its standard of living is aligned with a lower national average.

Any province that falls below the national average is eligible for equalization. In fiscal 2015-16, Ottawa distributed \$17.3-billion in

equalization payments to six provinces. Ontario's share was \$2.4-billion.

Ontario Finance Minister Charles Sousa would not speculate on when the province will rejoin the "have" ranks, which included British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland as of the fiscal year of 2015-16.

Alberta's current troubles stem from a collapse in oil and natural-gas prices, which together have reduced provincial energy royalties to a fraction of what they were last year and have led to mass layoffs. Oil prices have plummeted from more than \$115 (U.S.) a barrel in June, 2014, to just under \$35.

The sudden decline in Alberta's economy highlights structural flaws with the equalization program, several experts say. With layoffs by the tens of thousands and the real estate market in trouble, they are still going to be paying major amounts for equalization over the next two or three years.

Paul Dewar is the right person for the job

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ment should immediately sign and ratify the Arms Trade Treaty, which it refuses to sign, to demonstrate commitment to ending the flow of weapons to illegal armed groups and human-rights abusers."

Dewar has also been a leader in complex nuclear disarmament issues and was elected co-president of the Parliamentary Network on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, a group of 800 legisla-

tors in 60 countries. For his work in this field, the organization, Canadians for a Nuclear Weapons Convention—which represents the 840 members of the Order of Canada who have asked the Canadian government to undertake a major initiative for nuclear disarmament—gave him their 2015 Achievement Award. Dewar would excellently represent Canada at UN discussions starting in 2016 on finding a legal path to the elimination of nuclear

weapons.

Canada needs an experienced political figure to champion the issues of peace and security, which beset us daily. As he strives to fulfil his mandate to bring "stakeholder engagement and co-operation with partners in Canada and abroad," Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion would be well served by Paul Dewar. In fact, Dewar's loss in the election in Ottawa Centre can be Canada's gain.



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Ontario government deserves the sting of the auditor's recent report



Auditor-General critical of Wynne government.

The Ontario Auditor-General's recent report was long, detailed and devastating. It analyzed schemes in policy area after policy area that were badly executed and poorly co-ordinated.

What produced such systemically bad results? Was it that the Ontario civil service has declined to the point where weak administration has become the norm? Is it, as is more likely, that the political leadership of Ontario has been flaccid, and that government attracts only mediocre-to-ordinary talents?

Is it that the centralized nature of contemporary government puts so much power in the hands of a few people around the premier (or prime minister) that they cannot possibly follow decisions to implementation? Is it that the ambitions to expand government into many areas of collective life make it likely that government will overreach and underperform?

Ontario has been sliding fiscally toward a weaker position for a decade under Liberal rule. Total debt, soon to be about \$340-billion, will be up from about \$212-billion nine years ago.

Net debt to GDP has reached almost 40 per cent, the second-highest in Canada after Quebec. Ontario's fiscal position has already resulted in downgrades from ratings agencies.

That's the overall fiscal picture. But the Auditor-General also delves into health,

energy, economic development and other areas of government activity. The picture is not pretty, to say the least.

For example, the Liberal government uses many programs to assist Ontario businesses, the approach also advocated now by the federal Liberals (and practised by the previous Conservatives). But the Auditor-General found the responsible Ontario ministry "has not attempted to measure whether the \$1.44-billion it provided to Ontario businesses since 2004 actually strengthened the economy or made recipients more competitive."

Projects received money without the ministry assessing whether public funds were really needed, which meant politicians just threw money at projects.

As for electricity, cover your eyes.

Ontario's two largest cities - Toronto and Ottawa - have among North America's most expensive electricity rates. In 10 years, from 2004 to 2014, electricity costs rose by 80 per cent. Wind and solar-power subsidies cost consumers \$9.2-billion more than had the status quo prevailed. (In fairness, polluting coal-fired plants were closed.) The McGuinty government's decision to close gas-fired plants near Toronto (a decision driven solely by politics) cost \$275-million.

These are just a few of the details studying the Auditor-General's chapter on energy. The entire chapter is long, complicated in spots, but over all quite damning. So are the chapters on important parts of the health-care system Such as Community Care Access Centres and Local Integrated Health Networks.

In theory, Ontario's economy should be thriving. Oil and natural gas prices are very low. The sagging Canadian dollar should make it easier to export anywhere, but especially to the United States. Public infrastructure should be providing a boost. Thriving, however, would not be the proper description for what's actually happening.