

# The Chronicle-Journal

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## Women in the military let down by Liberals

ONE of the minor mysteries of Ottawa in the spring of 2021 is why on earth Harjit Sajjan is still Canada's minister of national defence. Sajjan's credibility has been so thoroughly shredded by the sexual misconduct scandals paralyzing the Canadian Forces that calling for his resignation seems rather beside the point.

Even in the normal course of events one would expect Sajjan to be out of the defence portfolio. He's been in the job since the Trudeau government took office in October, 2015, making him one of Canada's longest-serving defence ministers.

The Liberals would have done themselves a favour by rotating Sajjan into another position some time ago. But it's too late for that now.

His failure to deal properly and effectively with allegations of misconduct involving the former chief of the defence staff, Gen. Jonathan Vance, has been thoroughly exposed at hearings of the House of Commons defence committee.

His explanation of why he refused to look at a complaint against Vance brought to him in 2018 by the military ombudsman, Gary Walbourne, won't wash. He says he didn't want to politicize any possible investigation, but the net effect of his actions was that the complaint went nowhere and Vance served another three years at the very top of the military with no consequences.

All this has been aired at the committee, though there remain serious questions about exactly who knew what and when in this affair — specifically how much the prime minister himself knew at the time (he says he wasn't aware the allegations about Vance were of the "Me Too" variety).

The Liberals are using their power on the committee to shut down further questions. They may well succeed; in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic the public's capacity for outrage over that kind of procedural wrangling is limited, and the government knows it.

But what a failure. Through Sajjan, the government abandoned the woman who brought forward the allegation against Vance three years ago. The government extended his term, and then appointed as his successor another officer, Adm. Art McDonald, who almost immediately had to vacate the position because of allegations of sexual misconduct against him.

It just doesn't stop. Another top officer, Maj. Gen. Peter Dawe, was recently removed as commander of special forces because he wrote a letter in support of a soldier found guilty of sexual assault. In this case it wasn't for personal misbehaviour, just for terrible judgment on precisely the issue that is turning the forces inside-out.

Sajjan's big move to get out from under all this was to name a former justice of the Supreme Court, Louise Arbour, to lead yet another review of sexual misconduct in the military and what to do about it. This, six full years after a major review by another former Supreme Court judge, Marie Deschamps, a review whose recommendations were essentially ignored by the government and the military.

We've written before that the government should long ago have implemented Justice Deschamps' key recommendation for an independent centre for accountability for sexual assault and harassment.

Even the government now belatedly agrees with that. Justice Arbour's mandate is not to second-guess the Deschamps report but to recommend exactly how to turn it into action.

The pandemic is the government's only friend in this fiasco. Voters will no doubt judge the government in the next election on how well it fought COVID and its plans for recovery. Everything else, including rooting out abuse in the military, will pale beside that.

But that's just a political calculation. Whether or not the government pays an electoral price for its failures on this front, the fact remains that it betrayed its own feminist principles. Most of all, it let down the women who serve in Canada's military.

— An editorial from the Toronto Star

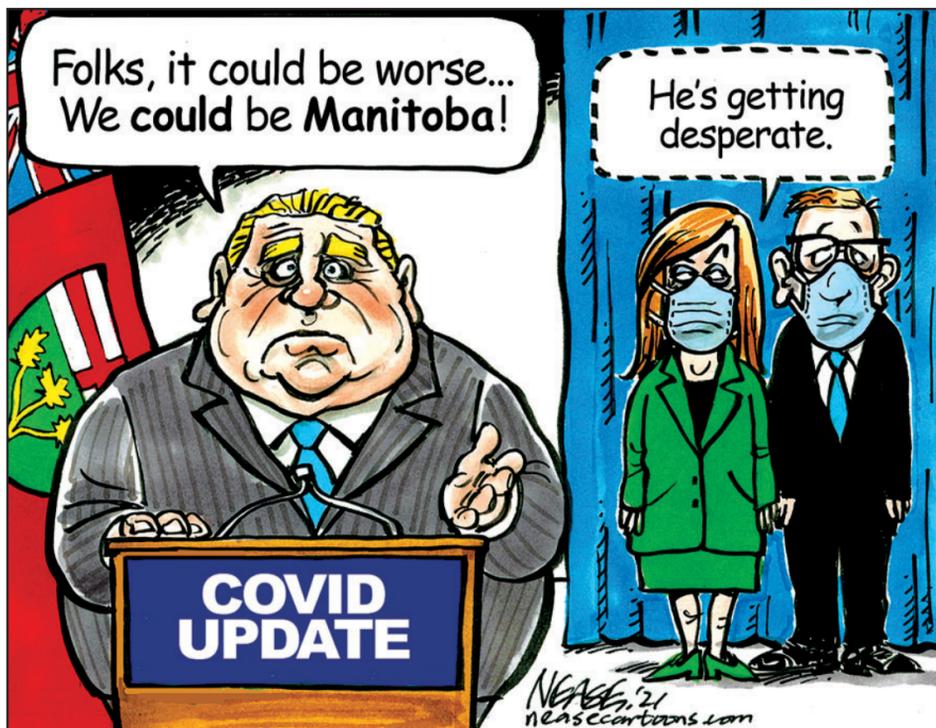
### Diversity of views

We take pride in our letters section as a forum for sharing diverse views. We know there are a wide range of opinions on a variety of topics and believe strongly that our community is best served when all opinions are exposed, considered and discussed.

Letters kept to 300 words have priority and may be edited for space, style, accuracy and clarity. Letters must be the original work of the author and be exclusive to The Chronicle-Journal. Please cite page and date for articles mentioned. Letters may appear on our website. There is no restriction on the frequency of letters.

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## Environmental justice tackles systems built on inequities

BY SEMIE SAMA

I INVITE you to deliberate about environmental justice, which speaks for fair treatment and meaningful involvement of everyone regardless of colour, race, national origin or income, with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

Our city of about 121,000 people is distinguished by its diverse community inhabiting the city irrespective of its ethnic backgrounds or affluence. However, there are pockets of areas with low-income dwellings and marginalized communities. This contrasts with many urban settlements where local neighborhoods are characterized by cultural identities or countries of origin, such as China Town or Little Italy, irrespective of the affluence factor.

The more affluent parts of a city tend to have, among other things, more schools, clinics, hospitals, green spaces, community centres, soccer fields, seasonal ice rinks, golf courses, as well as many grocery stores to meet the basic wants and needs of its residents. Examples of inadequate, unequal, or substandard amenities and services will be inadequate distribution and access to healthy food, transportation, air and water pollution, and unsafe homes, more prevalent in less affluent parts of a city.

Thunder Bay and the region have small to medium-sized businesses and industries in transportation, manufacturing, mining, and forestry, as well as facilities such as solid waste and recycling sites, mines, agri-farms, power generation stations, and pulp and paper mills, some of which have the potential to pollute the air, soil, and water. This is more pronounced when it impacts Indigenous peoples living in rural and re-



ONE CITY, MANY VOICES

**The Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

mote areas and who are at a disadvantage with minimal access to resources, infrastructure, amenities, and civic services. This disproportionation hurts communities.

This social stratification can be traced back to different factors: colonization, industrialization, race-based zoning and housing policies, poor land-use planning, of affected communities, their lifestyle and well-being. The visible segregation has residents of the same city living very different lives.

Environmental justice is a sustainable approach to living. Acknowledging the stratification could lead to developing zoning laws, advocacy, and policy solutions to address issues, such as improving how vulnerable communities are represented in government, negotiating deals when developing industrial infrastructures or opening doors to resource sectors, such as mining to dig deeper into the gold, copper, lithium, palladium, graphite, and nickel deposits in the area. Another active and ongoing discussion in the region pertains to identifying sites to dispose of highly radioactive nuclear waste. This calls for conscious and collective decision-making to improve and maintain a healthy environment, espe-

cially for those who have traditional dwellings close to the impact sites.

While we diligently design and plan our urban spaces to minimize socioeconomic and environmental disparities, natural resources exploration projects continue against the interest of the less-privileged communities. This can lead to encroachment of their rights to water, quality environment, environmental information, participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice.

Environmental justice is about how we can take steps to break down a system that was built upon these inequities and reimagine something better. It's about replacing a system where those who are already disadvantaged because of their race and economic status are made poorer because they are unable to profit from the air, water, soil, and other resources that they depend on and are made sick or worse by the environmental contamination.

Fruitful outcomes of environmental justice are achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work. But as environmental governance and zoning laws and policies are continuously deployed against the interest of the less privileged, including Indigenous communities, many will continue to be left behind on the journey of environmental justice and equality.

*Semie Sama is an assistant professor in Bora Laskin Faculty of Law. Semie specializes in international environmental law, international sustainable development law, natural resources law, and climate change law. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.*

## Canada sinks under debt load

BY FRANCO TERRAZZANO

I F YOU think the federal government's so-called historic spending on a national child-care scheme is big, wait until you hear how much the government is spending to cover its debt interest costs.

In its 2021 budget, the Justin Trudeau government is promising to spend \$30 billion over five years on a national child-care program. That's a tonne of money considering we couldn't afford it pre-pandemic.

But it's still five times less than what the feds will have to pay in debt interest charges over that period, which will total \$153 billion by 2026. That's nearly \$4,000 per Canadian. And instead of that money going towards health care or lower taxes, it's going into the pockets of bond fund managers.

Assuming the feds can hold the line on budgeted spending — a generous assumption given the government's track record — the deficit by the end of 2025 will still be \$30 billion. The interest charges that year will be \$39 billion. That means the borrowing to make up the budget gap couldn't even cover the interest payments.

On top of this interest, taxpayers will have to eventually pay back the \$1,000,000,000,000 — one trillion — debt tab.

It's no wonder economists' spidey senses are tingling from this debt-fueled spending spree.

The University of Calgary's Jack Mintz noted that Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland "is rolling the dice that never-ending deficits will be manageable."

Mintz added that "just a one-point



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increase in interest rates would then increase the annual deficit by close to \$5 billion."

In the few months since the fall economic statement was released, the private sector has revised its 10-year government bond rate forecast up about half a percentage point. What happens if low interest rates inch up?

Mintz isn't the only expert raising concerns.

"Are we really going to make this assumption that interest rates are going to stay static for the next 10 or 20 years?" said David Rosenberg, chief economist and strategist at Rosenberg Research, on BNN Bloomberg. "I just find so many people have short memories against what happened in the 1970s into the 1980s, and then all the tough choices and the hardship to get our fiscal situation back into some mode of stability."

Former finance minister Paul Martin knows a thing or two about tough choices. After all, he cut government spending by about 10 per cent during his mission to erase the federal deficit in the 1990s. He also knows a thing or two about the dangers of debt binges.

"The debt and deficit are not inventions of ideology," said Martin during his budget speech in 1995.

"They are facts of arithmetic. The quicksand of compound interest is real."

The provinces also learned their lesson the hard way.

"When (Ralph) Klein became premier, government debt daily snatched money away from patients and students due to escalating interest costs," said government finance expert Mark Milke in his book *Ralph vs. Rachel*. "Between 1985 and 1993 in Alberta, the cost of interest on Alberta's growing debt was \$7.2 billion, equivalent to two full years of what the province spent on health care just a few years previous."

Saskatchewan had to come to terms with its deficit addiction by enduring "a lot of pain," according to former finance minister Janice MacKinnon who closed 52 hospitals across the prairie province.

"We left a fiscal situation in Saskatchewan until it was a crisis and so we had to make dramatic cuts to fundamental programs and raise taxes to get out of the situation," said MacKinnon.

The moral of the story is that the best time to put out a fire is before it spreads. But by betting the house that interest rates will stay low forever and nearly doubling Canada's debt in a few short years, Budget 2021 is adding fuel to the fire.

*Franco Terrazano is the federal director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, an independent citizens' advocacy group fighting for lower taxes, less waste and more accountable government. Column courtesy of Troy Media.*