

OPINION

At the G7, Canada's globalist ambitions put our domestic problems in stark contrast

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SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED JUNE 17, 2025

[At the G7, Canada's globalist ambitions put our domestic problems in stark contrast - The Globe and Mail](#)

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Prime Minister Mark Carney speaks with world leaders at the G7 summit in Kananaskis, Alta., on Tuesday.

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The recent visit of King Charles III to deliver the Speech from the Throne arrived at a moment of major consequence for our country. We find ourselves in simultaneous technological, geopolitical and energy races where our degraded place in the world demands urgent restoration.

If, as Niall Ferguson argues, the United States is in its Late Republic phase, Canada has drifted into its own Late Dominion period – resource-rich yet rudderless, with constrained autonomy, flat growth and a faint strategic voice. Neither massive

government intervention nor forfeiting our autonomy to the United States will suffice; we require a grand collaboration between public and private, East and West, capital and labour – a re-energized covenant as our main engine of renewal.

As Canada hosts the G7 summit in Kananaskis, Alta., our moment of international prominence throws our domestic drift into sharper relief. With the world's leading democracies convening to address global challenges, the fundamental question for Canada remains: Can we summon the collaborative will that built this country's reputation? The irony of a country projecting leadership abroad while struggling with institutional "brownout" at home is stark.

This confluence of royal constitutional moment and G7 responsibility comes after Canada has endured what Livy would call *duo lustra perdita* – two whole civic cycles (five years each) in which national self-correction never occurred. We have, furthermore, achieved what Herodotus might term the Borealis Paradox – a country perpetually lamenting its declining condition while refusing to change anything for which those laments might be necessary. If anything, this underlines the importance of functioning elites. The question is not whether we need them, but whether they seize this moment with the vision to meet our challenges, leading where public policy lags.

If the past decade is any indication, our national drift manifests not as spectacular collapse but as "brownout" – diminishing capacity, efficiency and legitimacy. The No. 1 job of leadership now is to catalyze our extraordinary advantages in energy, AI, human capital and expertise. The spirit seems to be willing.

What is required of our leadership for Canada's exceptional moment? We could enumerate qualities, virtues, competencies and strategies, but leadership can best be understood in this moment as an encounter with lives that make purpose tangible – models and examples of this grand collaboration that illuminate our path forward. Let us look to three such exemplars, all now passed from this world but whose legacies offer instruction for our present dilemma.

Just over a century ago, Captain Guy Percy Drummond, son of Sir George Drummond, president of Bank of Montreal (1905-10), was cut down at St. Julien in 1915, dying for King Charles's predecessor and for Canada. Within weeks, his mother, Lady Julia Drummond, transformed personal grief into institutional action, establishing the King

George and Queen Mary Maple Leaf Club in London for thousands of Canadian soldiers. The personal mirrored the institutional response: Sir Vincent Meredith placed the bank's full capabilities at Ottawa's disposal – a fusion of private loss, institutional capacity and public purpose. These acts embodied the essence of grand collaboration.

During the Second World War, C.D. Howe summoned his regiment of “dollar-a-year men” to Ottawa – industrial titans who drew token salaries, left comfortable boardrooms for windowless offices and placed supply chains, capital and managerial science at the Crown's disposal. H.J. Carmichael of General Motors directed aircraft production, E.P. Taylor converted his breweries to munitions factories, and H.R. MacMillan controlled timber resources for the war effort. Within 18 months, their improvised War Supply Board had transformed into a production machine that rolled 16,000 aircraft off the line and launched 800 ships.

In our own time, Jacques Ménard earned Canada's rarest distinction: a double first – Companion of the Order of Canada and Grand Officier de l'Ordre du Québec. At the top of Québec Inc. via capital markets, banking and utilities, his business acumen was legendary, and he stitched civic virtue to economic edge. From classrooms to boardrooms, he launched a “tsunami of volunteers” to drive down Quebec's dropout rate. On the Prairies, his seat on WestJet's board grafted Bay Street discipline to Calgary daring, proving East and West prosper together – or not at all. When Montreal drifted, he convened the 2014 Je vois MTL summit, extracting 180 concrete commitments in a single day.

A functioning, productive and accountable elite is not a luxury; it is the load-bearing beam of a middle-power economy. We shouldn't begrudge their fortunes, provided the prosperity within our reach – yet far from our grasp – becomes broadly shared. Like Lady Drummond, the dollar-a-year men and Jacques Ménard, today's leaders must embrace self-sacrifice, converting comfortable preservation into purposeful renewal.

In each historical example, these figures prevailed against some of the toughest challenges in their own time, transforming crisis into renewal through grand collaboration. But there is no guarantee that our outcome will mirror theirs. The Maple Leaf Forever is a charge, an imperative, not a guarantee of perpetual existence. The Speech from the Throne may outline the government's blueprint, and our G7 presidency may project confidence to allies, but the Canadian establishment requires its own warrant

– not from international expectations, but from the precarious situation in which we find ourselves.

Consider the scale of the opportunity in one arresting statistic: Analysts forecast that Canada’s AI-hungry data-centre fleet will expand by roughly 55 per cent in just four years, jumping from about 750 megawatts today to 1.16 gigawatts by 2029. And every extra megawatt will tap a grid that is already 82-per-cent powered by non-emitting sources. Few peer economies can match that combination of digital appetite and clean-energy muscle. The ingredients for a 21st-century grand collaboration are literally humming in our substations. While media attention fixes on government, executive committees and boardrooms often drive the real action – co-ordinated capital deployment for Canada remains essential.

Whatever path the U.S. chooses – renewed republic or declining empire – our country travels a narrower road with less margin for error. While our southern neighbour debates its future, we face a quieter but more fundamental question: Will Canada, as we understand it, persist at all? This convergence of royal constitutional moment and G7 leadership pulls back the veil on our last, best chance for renewal. Our history shows we have raised up women and men who answered the call, but precedent provides no certainty.

The covenant between privilege and duty must be rebuilt now, with urgency that matches our peril. Every actor in our elite constellation must rediscover what their predecessors knew instinctively: Privilege endures only when it serves purpose beyond itself, and Canada’s purpose hangs in the balance.

But that takes courage – to speak, to act, to advocate. The most prescient warning came from Queen Elizabeth II. During the last Speech from the Throne she delivered in person, in 1977, she observed: “It is apparent to thoughtful Canadians everywhere that this is a time of great decisions for Canada, a time for rediscovering the strength and potential of a marvellously free and caring society.” Her words echo from that moment to ours; the rediscovery she urged now calls for our leaders to be bold.