

PARKLAND INSTITUTE'S 29th ANNUAL FALL CONFERENCE



DEMOCRACY
UNDER **SIEGE**

NOVEMBER
21-23, 2025

STRENGTHENING THE SAFEGUARDS



UALBERTA CAMPUS & LIVESTREAM

Parklandconference.ca

DEMOCRACY UNDER SIEGE

STRENGTHENING THE SAFEGUARDS

We are living through extraordinary times — times that would have seemed unthinkable just a few years ago. Around the world, autocracy is on the rise. The new U.S. regime threatens the sovereignty of these lands currently called Canada. Here at home, misinformation and corruption have taken hold in Alberta's government. The pillars of liberal democracy are crumbling under the strain of growing authoritarianism.

This year's Parkland Institute conference confronts these urgent threats head-on. We'll take a hard look at the political institutions meant to act as guardrails against autocracy and ask how well they are faring in this role. More importantly, we'll start a conversation about how we can strengthen those institutions, defend our struggling democracy, repel the current threat, and create a future that is built on the foundations of equality, justice, and solidarity.

We would like to thank the generous support of the following sponsors for helping to make this conference possible:



Greetings from Parkland Institute Director

Jason Foster



Dear conference participants,

Welcome to Parkland Institute's 29th Annual Fall Conference. The conference is always a highlight of our calendar, and I hope you enjoy the weekend, either by joining us in person on campus or via livestream.

We hold this year's conference during what may be the darkest time we have seen in decades. Unspeakable violence is being waged on innocent people in many places around the world, including Gaza and Ukraine. Our southern neighbour seems to be quickly descending into civil war or a kleptocracy. Irrational tariffs threaten Canada's economic security, and the federal government is embarking on an austerity program not seen in thirty years.

Here at home, our provincial government is watching what's happening in the U.S. — and likes what it sees — attempting to replicate a small-scale version in Alberta. It's taking a sledgehammer to workers' rights with the notwithstanding clause while actively breaking our public health and education systems in

an effort to create more space for privatization that will enrich its corporate friends.

That is why we need this conference now. We need to have frank conversations about what is happening and what we, collectively, can do in response. We all have a role and a responsibility to act in defence of democracy, while holding on to the belief that we can build a more just world. My hope for this weekend is that you not only learn about how democracy is under siege but, more importantly, come away with ideas about how to protect it and the conviction that, together, we can do it.

Gathering as we do at this conference is good for our collective spirit. We are reminded we are not alone and that others share our commitment to justice. Plus it is always uplifting to see old friends, discover new allies, and share in a common experience. And, hopefully, the program we have assembled for you leaves you hopeful, inspired, and energized to continue the fight for a better society.

I also want to remind you that Parkland relies on the support of people like you. So take a moment over the weekend to consider offering a donation to our work, signing up as an ongoing supporter, or even just letting our hardworking staff know how much you appreciate what they do.

Warm regards to all,

Jason Foster

Director

Parkland Institute

Welcome to Parkland Institute's 29th Annual Conference

Your full conference registration includes:

- Friday and Sunday Keynotes
- All plenary and concurrent sessions
- Saturday Lunch

Food and Beverages

Coffee, tea, and water will be available during breaks. Pastries will be available Saturday and Sunday mornings.

We encourage you to use your own travel mug for coffee and tea. Lunch on Saturday is provided to all full-conference registrants, including volunteers and representatives of tabling organizations with badges. Lunch will include vegetarian options. Show your badge to gain entrance to the lunch room.

You are also welcome to bring your own lunch, and there are food vendors available a short walk away at the Students' Union Building (SUB).

If You're Late

If you arrive late for keynotes or plenaries, please enter through the south side rear door so as not to interrupt the speaker.

Parking

We recommend you park in the Windsor Car Park located at 116 Street and 92 Avenue. Parking is available for a flat fee after 6 pm on Friday, as well as on Saturday and Sunday. Hourly parking is available on 116 Street.

Volunteers

The Parkland Conference would not be possible without the support of the volunteers who perform many hours of work on our behalf. Please help us thank them.

Special Thanks

Flavio Rojas, our graphic designer

Rob Butz, our webmaster

The A-Team Volunteers (you know who you are)

We All Have a Story to Tell

We all have a story to tell, but the precious few minutes afforded us at the end of each session for dialogue is not the time to tell it.

We all have a story to tell, but the precious few minutes afforded us at the end of each session for dialogue is not the time to tell it.

Parkland people are remarkably diverse, and our conferences bring together a special blend of academics, activists, students, and community members — every one of whom has an incredible story to tell. That's why we've ensured multiple ways for attendees to converse with each other and our guests.

Please help ensure that the question-and-answer time at the end of each session is enjoyed by everyone by following these simple rules:

- Keep your remarks short and to the point. Questions or comments that require lengthy background information are not well suited to this format. If you cannot adequately ask a question within 30 seconds, consider saving it for another opportunity.
- Don't hog the microphone. People who have not yet had the opportunity to speak will be given priority.
- Participant speaking lists may be altered to balance representation by age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, or other identities. Just because you put your hand up first doesn't mean it's your turn.
- Value dialogue. Everyone has something to contribute.
- Please do not interrupt speakers, facilitators, or other conference-goers.
- Do not campaign at the mic. It is inappropriate to ask your fellow conference-goers to support your cause, no matter how important it is.
- Be conscious of how your behaviour impacts others. Practice stepping up/stepping back so we can ensure that everyone is able to contribute.

FRIDAY

NOVEMBER 21, 2025

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Room 1-001, ETLC

Opening Keynote



PEGGY NASH

The Fate of Democracy in the Face of Growing Authoritarianism

What is democracy? Is it voting or something more? What underpins democracy? Which institutions create safeguards? Are they strong enough to face the current challenges?

Global threats to democracy can seem overwhelming and disempowering. From elected leaders behaving like kings to tech bros flaunting their riches and power. Polarizing social media and social isolation can lead to passivity or radicalism. What breeds cynicism or apathy? Are we edging towards fascism or widespread war?

Inaction is not an option. How can Canadians push back? How can we both defend democracy and make it more meaningful to more Canadians?

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Peggy Nash's career bridges labour negotiations, partisan politics, academic leadership, and public policy advocacy — all grounded in a deep commitment to social justice and democratic inclusion. She is the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a leading public policy think tank.

Nash began her union career working at Air Canada and was a member of a small Canadian union that later merged with the newly independent Canadian Auto Workers (CAW). Working in communications, education, and equity, she was appointed assistant to national presidents Bob White and later Buzz Hargrove. As a senior negotiator in the airline and service sectors, she became the first woman to lead major auto negotiations in Canada. A long-time executive member of the Canadian Labour Congress, she also chaired its Women's Committee and pioneered CAW equity initiatives on leadership, gender-based violence, and human rights—work that earned her appointment to the Order of Canada.

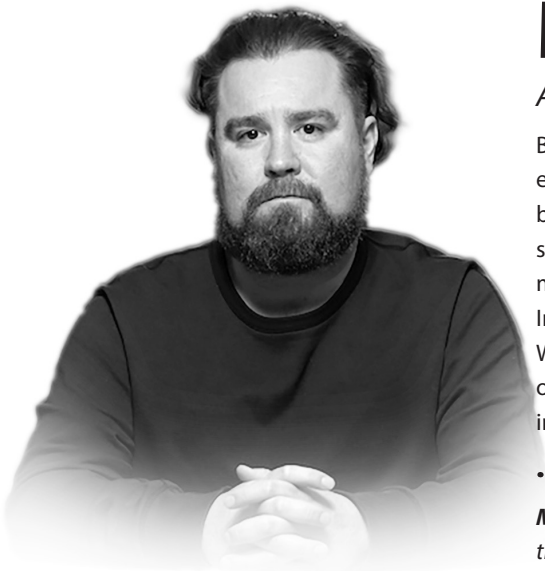
Recruited by NDP leader Jack Layton, Nash entered federal politics in 2004. She was elected in 2006 as the first New Democrat MP in her Toronto riding and re-elected in 2011, serving as Official Opposition Finance Critic and later Industry Critic.

After leaving politics in 2015, Nash continued her education and advocacy on gender and politics internationally and at Toronto Metropolitan University, where she co-founded the Women in the House program.

SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

8:00 am ETLC Lobby	Doors Open
9:00 am – 10:15 am Room 1-001, ETLC	Plenary



MATTHEW WILDCAT

An Indigenous Realist Analysis of the Alberta Separatist Movement

Bill 54, the Election Statutes Amendment Act, has been widely interpreted as entertaining the possibility of Alberta separation. First Nation leaders have said the bill undermines treaty rights and is illegal. I argue a focus on the legality of Alberta's separation distracts from the real danger posed by an emboldened Alberta separatist movement. The danger of the separatist movement is their latent policy position that Indigenous peoples should not have a distinct political status, reminiscent of the 1969 White Paper. Rather than separation being the focus of our attention, we should focus on the dangers posed by a separatist movement that is hostile to Indigenous Peoples in Alberta.

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Matthew Wildcat is a member of Ermineskin Cree Nation. He is an Assistant Professor and the Director of Indigenous Governance in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta. Wildcat leads the Relational Governance Project – an Indigenous policy concept that explores the practice of how First Nations co-govern service delivery organizations. This emerges from his experience with the Maskwacis Education Schools Commission that led to the creation of a unified school system for the four Nations of Maskwacis. Wildcat is also the co-director of the partnership grant Critical Approaches to Indigenous Relationality and is an associate editor of the Canadian Journal of Political Science.

10:15 am – 10:45 am ETLC Lobby	Break Coffee and pastries will be available.
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SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

10:45 am – 12:00 pm
Room 1-013, ETLC

Concurrent Session

A. *University Encampments and Freedom of Speech*



MUHANNAD AYYASH

The Persistence of the Palestine Exception in Canadian Policy and Academic Discourse: What Does It Tell Us About Canadian Institutions?

After 19 months of genocide in Gaza, massive demonstrations, student encampments, and a shift in public opinion towards support for Palestinian rights, Canadian institutions continue to render the Palestinian aspiration for decolonial liberation as unintelligible – as something that cannot enter valid and legitimate policy discourse. Ironically, the more Canadian institutions seek to conceal the settler colonization of Palestine, the more the colonial nature of reality is revealed— not just in Palestine, but in Canada as well. In that sense, the “Palestine Exception” reveals that Canadian institutions are not simply refusing to apply to Palestine what they apply to other cases of injustice (prioritizing human rights, anti-racism, decolonization, etc.), but rather that these institutions are structured in a way that is antithetical to the ideals of substantive anti-racism and decolonization.

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Dr. Muhannad Ayyash was born and raised in Silwan, Al-Quds, before immigrating to Canada where he is a Professor of Sociology at Mount Royal University. He is also a policy analyst at Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network. He is the author of *Lordship and Liberation in Palestine-Israel* (Columbia University Press, 2025) and *A Hermeneutics of Violence* (University of Toronto Press, 2019). He has published over twenty journal articles and book chapters on topics such as political violence, Zionism and colonial modernity, settler colonial sovereignty, anti-Palestinian racism, BDS and Palestinian decolonial movements in journals such as the *European Journal of Social Theory*, *Critical Sociology*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, and *Middle East Critique*. He has co-edited two books, the most recent with Jeremy Wildeman is titled, *Canada as a Settler Colony on the Question of Palestine* (University of Alberta Press, 2023). He has written over fifty commentaries, policy analyses, and opinion pieces for *Al-Jazeera*, *The Baffler*, *Middle East Eye*, *Mondoweiss*, *Arab Center*, and *Al-Shabaka*, among others.

SATURDAY
NOVEMBER 22, 2025



COREY SNELGROVE

Alienated Labour and the Question of Palestine

The Palestinian solidarity movement has made implication and complicity keywords of our time. While these efforts draw attention to what we might call the bounds of freedom, they also illustrate how “Palestine has the potential to set us free” (Erakat 2024). In this talk, I offer some reflections on the connections between implication and alienated labor and what this might mean for the academic sector.

More specifically, I argue that implication requires a move beyond the limitations of non-interference vis-à-vis the discourse of ‘academic freedom’ to a more expansive concept of democratic control. To end our implication in the colonization of Palestine would then necessitate the expansion of democratic control. This is just one instance of what I take Erakat to mean when she states “Palestine has the potential to set us free”.

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Corey Snelgrove is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. He teaches and writes on questions of settler colonialism and decolonization in Canada. His writing is published or forthcoming in journals such as Theory & Event, Philosophy & Social Criticism, Legal Form, Polity, and Native American and Indigenous Studies, where he addresses questions such as: How might non-Indigenous political theorists inherit treaty today? What explains the emergence of reconciliation? What political lessons does this history offer for the critique of reconciliation? How do Indigenous treaty visions challenge the premise of capitalist social relations? What might communism mean on stolen land? His book manuscript aspires to change the framing question of Indigenous-state/settler relations in Canada away from the “political form” of co-existence to the “social form” of co-existence.

10:45 am – 12:00 pm
Room 1-003, ETLC

Concurrent Session

B. Is it Fascism Yet?



LORI THORLAKSON

Democracies Under Threat: Fascism and Authoritarianism in the 21st Century

How are democracies today withstanding the threats against them? Is Canadian democracy vulnerable? This talk examines how terms such as ‘fascism’ and ‘authoritarianism’ are used – and sometimes abused – and how we can assess the state of our democratic health. What does creeping authoritarianism look like and how does it affect our democracies?

SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

Lori Thorlakson is Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta where she was also the founding director of the European Union Centre for Excellence. Her research has examined party competition and representation, political incivility and the politics of energy transition. She is the author of Multi-level Democracy (Oxford University Press, 2020). Dr. Thorlakson holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and held a Jean Monnet Postdoctoral Fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. Prior to joining the University of Alberta, she was a lecturer in the School of Politics at the University of Nottingham, in the UK. Her research has been funded by the British Council, the UK Economic and Social Research Council, the European Union and the Killam Foundation.



DR. FEO SNAGOVSKY

Democracy Requires Democrats: Support for Democratic Values in Canada and Beyond

Democracy appears to be in retreat around the world. Scholars and civil society organizations have raised the alarm as political elites have eroded democratic institutions in countries like the United States, South Korea and India. Elites are not solely responsible for this problem, however: as the famous saying goes, “democracy requires democrats”. This presentation examines how people in Canada and other countries see democracy, as well as the evidence that support for democratic values has eroded around the world.

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Dr. Feo Snagovsky is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. His research focuses on the comparative analysis of elections and political behaviour – particularly in the role that political elites play in shaping identity and public opinion. He is the project lead for Viewpoint Alberta, the largest, publicly available survey project of Albertans’ political attitudes and behaviours. His forthcoming book – Who Cares About Representation? Race, Ethnicity, and Legitimacy in Westminster Democracies (UBC Press, May 2026) – examines how the diffuse support which underlies the legitimacy of those three countries relates to the ethnic identities of voters and their representatives. His research examines support for democratic values and authoritarian alternatives to democracy, why people believe in conspiracy theories, and the role that political elites play in shaping political attitudes. His work has been published in journals such as Party Politics, Parliamentary Affairs, Government and Opposition, Electoral Studies, the Canadian Journal of Political Science and the Australian Journal of Political Science

12:00 pm – 1:00 pm
ETLC, Second Floor

Lunch – Catered by Upper Crust

SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

1:00 pm – 2:15 am
Room 1-001, ETLC

Plenary



CHARLES SMITH

Workers, Unions and the Fight for Democracy: Why Workers Freedom of Association is Essential for Democracy

Historians of democracy often point to the extension the franchise as a key moment when societies become “democratic.” And yet, even if the franchise is an essential barometer for the health of a democracy, such a narrow understanding tells us little about the health of a democracy in a capitalist economic system. When looking at authoritarian power in a capitalist workplace, our understanding of democracy has to include the freedom of workers to freely associate against employers unilateral authority to dictate the conditions of work. In this sense, attacks on workers freedom of association to unionize, bargain, and strike—by governments and employers—need to be understood as more than simply addressing an economic emergency. Rather these attacks need to be understood as attacks on democracy itself.

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Charles Smith (Ph.D York) is a Professor in the Department of Political Studies at St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan. His research interests include Canadian political economy, provincial politics, public law, workers freedoms to collectively bargaining and strike, and American politics. He is the author of *Transforming Provincial Politics* (2015), *Unions in Court: Organized Labour and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (2017), and *The New Politics of Western Canada: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures* (2025). He has also authored numerous articles and book chapters on provincial politics, Canadian labour history, and the politics of labour unions in Canada. Charles is also co-editor of Canada’s foremost labour studies journal *Labour/Le Travail*. He is also the husband to Allison and proud father of twin boys, Dylan and Jonah.

2:15 pm – 2:30 pm
ETLC Lobby

Break

SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

2:30 pm – 3:45 pm
Room 1-013, ETLC

Concurrent Session
A. *Constitution 101: Could They Do it Here?*



MARGOT YOUNG

The Relevance of Rights: Democracy in Neoliberal Times

The promise of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to usher in a new era of human rights observance and progress towards social justice was touted. In some respects, the *Charter* has made a significant difference. In other ways and in relation to, say, the harms of poverty, homelessness, and social exclusion, *Charter* rights have been a disappointment. Now, with an increase in resort to the override provision, the *Charter's* role as, at least, a minimal guarantee of key features of participatory norms is further eroded. Indeed, ironically, the override provision threatens to position the *Charter* as a device legitimating compounding exclusions.

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Margot Young is Professor at the Allard Law School, University of British Columbia, where she is Director of the Social Justice Concentration. She teaches and researches in the areas of public law, constitutional law, equality law and theory, and social justice issues such as income security and housing. She is on the boards of Justice for Girls, the David Suzuki Institute, and the Community Legal Assistance Society. Professor Young is a fellow at the Broadbent Institute and a research associate with the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice (at the University of British Columbia).



Heather McPHERSON

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FOLLOW ON HeatherMcPhersonNDP HMcPhersonMP Heathermacnow

SATURDAY
NOVEMBER 22, 2025



REBECA MACIAS GIMENEZ

Sovereignty and Honour: Examining UNDRIP's Role in Crown Accountability and Overlapping Sovereignties

The *Haida Nation* decision (2004) marked a significant step forward in clarifying the Crown's responsibilities toward Indigenous peoples, particularly the duty to consult and accommodate when there is a risk of infringing Aboriginal rights or title. The Court refers to reconciliation as arising from "honourable dealings," which in turn stems from the Crown's assertion of sovereignty over Indigenous peoples. In Canadian law, Sovereignty and Honour are vested exclusively in the Crown, raising concerns about whether the settler government can objectively determine if its Honour has been met during each consultation and accommodation process. *Haida* exposed a lingering paradox: the Honour of the Crown originates in Crown Sovereignty, yet its aim is reconciliation. Legal scholars argue that this paradox results from a "thick" conception of sovereignty, which restricts overlap between Indigenous and Canadian state sovereignties. This presentation examines how courts are interpreting and applying the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and whether it may lead to stronger legal pluralism.

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Rebeca is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta Faculty of Law, where she teaches Constitutional Law, Indigenous Peoples and Canadian State Law, a seminar on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a seminar on Indigenous Jurisdiction and Constitutional Pluralism. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Victoria Faculty of Law, an LLM from the University of Calgary, and a Bachelor of Law from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (Brazil). She specializes in environmental law, Indigenous peoples and the law, and trans-systemic and comparative law. Rebeca also completed a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Alberta, exploring and articulating legal principles of the Dunne-za and Cree legal orders of Treaty 8 British Columbia regarding land and natural resources decision-making. She continues to conduct community-engaged research with First Nations in Treaty 8. Her current research, supported by a SSHRC Insight Grant, examines the cumulative effects of industrial development and Aboriginal Treaty rights as the trigger for a renewed interpretation of historic treaties in Alberta and BC, with a view towards Indigenous self-government initiatives.

SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

2:30 pm – 3:45 pm
Room 1-003, ETLC

Concurrent Session

B. *The Media Versus Autocracy*



JEANETTE AGESON

How Independent Publishers are Keeping Journalism Alive

What happens when a cornerstone of democracy loses its funding? This is the position that the Canadian journalism industry is in, at a time when the need for trustworthy, fact-based reporting is higher than ever. After decades of consolidation, tech platform disruption, and challenges adapting to the new digital landscape, many of Canada's largest news organizations are shadows of their former selves. But the digital disruption has also created opportunities for new entrants who are rewriting the way that journalism is delivered and paid for. In this session, Jeanette Ageson, publisher of The Tyee, will share the non-profit newsroom's lessons learned from 20+ years of growing a news organization in the digital age.

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Jeanette is the Publisher of The Tyee, an independent, non-profit, reader-supported journalism organization based in B.C. For over a decade Jeanette has worked on creating a sustainable business model for journalism, and has helped to grow The Tyee's staff team, publishing output, and revenue streams.

As Chair of Press Forward Canada, Jeanette works with other independent publishers to have a voice in matters of public policy that affect the news industry.



RACHEL GILMORE

Is Mainstream Media Failing to Protect Us from the Rise of Autocracy?

They say that when the United States sneezes, Canada catches a cold. Well, the United States is coming down with a bad case of autocracy – so Canada's immune system needs to be strong. The media is an integral part of that. Unfortunately, due to its focus on profits, its refusal to reject bad-faith backlash, and its addiction to both-sidesism, the media risks becoming a tool in our democratic decline. Fortunately, it's not too late. Through rethinking the profit model, teaching newsroom leaders to recognize bad-faith outrage online, and rejecting both-sidesism in favour of transparency, we can avoid the mistakes our U.S. counterparts have made. Our democracy depends on it.

SATURDAY

NOVEMBER 22, 2025

Gilmore is an award-winning journalist with extensive experience reporting on federal politics, human rights, disinformation, and extremism. She recently launched her own media company, Bubble Pop Media, which publishes daily short-form news videos and a weekly podcast. She also shares her independent reporting across social media platforms, where she's accumulated a collective audience of more than half-a-million followers.

3:45 pm – 4:00 pm ETLC Lobby	Break
4:00 pm – 5:15 am Room 1-001, ETLC	Plenary



HARSHA WALIA

Against Canadian Nationalism: Solidarities Against Border Imperialism and Racial Capitalism

In a time of tariffs and trade wars and Trump, Canada's response has been doubling down resource extraction on Indigenous lands, anti-migrant racism, neoliberal austerity, and liberal nationalism. What kind of leftist progressive response is needed to counter both right-wing fascism and neoliberalism? This talk will situate the current moment within the global context of growing fascism and border imperialism, while emphasizing the urgent necessity of transnational solidarities.

.....

Harsha Walia (she/her) is a Punjabi Sikh writer and organizer based in Vancouver, unceded Indigenous Coast Salish territories. She has been a grassroots organizer in migrant justice, anti-capitalist, feminist, abolitionist, and anti-colonial movements for the past two decades, including through collectives and coalitions such as No One Is Illegal, Defenders of the Land, and Anti-Capitalist Convergence. Her day gig is in an anti-violence service provider organization supporting survivors of gender-based violence. She is the award-winning author of *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism* (2021) and *Undoing Border Imperialism* (2013), and co-author of *Never Home: Legislating Discrimination in Canadian Immigration*; *Red Women Rising: Indigenous Women Survivors in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside*; and *Colour of Violence: Race, Gender, and Anti-Violence Services in BC*. Harsha is formally trained in the law.

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SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 23, 2025

8:00 am ETLC Lobby	Doors Open
9:00 am – 10:15 am Room 1-001, ETLC	Plenary



FLORENCE ASHLEY

(Trans)gender in Fascist Context

We live in a time of turmoil. The United States is facing growing fascist threats as the Trump government targets all those deemed undesirable with little concern for such pithy notions as due process or human rights. One of the first amongst these assaults has been against trans communities and so-called “gender ideology,” mirroring the creep of anti-trans politics northward to Canada. This presentation will explore the close conceptual and strategic overlap between anti-trans movements, anti-abortion, and white supremacist movements, emphasizing the intertwined nature of anti-fascist struggles and the need to organize in solidarity across differences.

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Florence Ashley is an Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta Faculty of Law and John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre. Florence holds BCL/JD and LLM degrees from McGill University and an SJD from the University of Toronto. They served as the first openly transfeminine clerk at the Supreme Court of Canada in 2019–20. Florence is a recipient of the King Charles III Coronation Medal, Canadian Bar Association’s SOGIC (LGBTQ2+) Hero Award, and CAFA Distinguished Academic Early Career Award.

10:15 am – 10:30 am ETLC Lobby	Break Coffee and pastries will be available
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SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 23, 2025

10:30 am – 11:45 am
Room 1-013, ETLC

Concurrent Session

A. Healthcare and Well-Being



REBECCA GRAFF-McRAE

Malady or Remedy? Two Futures for Healthcare in Alberta

Canada's universal, single-payer, public health system has long been held as one of the defining pillars of our national identity – one that binds provinces and territories together and which offers a stark contrast to our American neighbours. In this time of geopolitical and economic turbulence, when Canada's sovereignty is challenged both from without and within, the future of healthcare is also a deeply uncertain one.

Public healthcare as a form of nationbuilding, as an essential pillar in our economy, and as a guardrail of our social democracy could provide the remedy to social, economic, and political inequity. Or it could be eroded and transformed by political and corporate interests into a tool of further division.

Alberta is on the frontlines of this tug-of-war and has been for much of our recent history. This presentation will outline the current healthcare crisis in Alberta and map out the two future possibilities before us. What does healthcare mean in Alberta today? Who is it for? And what price are we willing to pay to preserve and expand it?

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Rebecca Graff-McRae is a Research Manager for the Parkland Institute at the University of Alberta, where her areas of research include public healthcare, seniors' care, and public services. She holds a doctorate in Irish Politics at Queens, Memorial University Newfoundland, University College Cork, and a SSHRC Post-doctoral Fellowship in Political Science at the University of Alberta. Rebecca is author of *Remember & Forgetting 1916: Commemoration and Conflict in Post-Peace Process Ireland* (Irish Academic Press, 2010), and her scholarly work has appeared in *Éire-Ireland*, *Nordic Irish Studies*, and *Ethnopolitics* among other publications. She has also contributed to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives forthcoming 2023 Alternative Federal Budget, as well as *Alberta Views* magazine. She has previously worked for Edmonton City Council, the Centre for Advancement of Women into Politics at Queen's (now the Centre for Gender in Politics), and the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland through a competitive internship program. Her recent reports for Parkland include: *Misdiagnosis: privatization and disruption in Alberta's medical laboratory services* (2022); *Time to Care: staffing and workloads in Alberta's long-term care facilities* (2021); and *Blurred Lines: private membership clinics and public healthcare* (2017). When not researching or writing, Rebecca can be found practicing her Irish dancing and raising a quartet of critical thinkers.

SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 23, 2025



SALIMAH VALIANI

Sumak Kawsay and Wellbeing Economy – Challenging Authoritarianism by Reframing Democracy from the Ground Up

Sumak kawsay is 'life in harmony' in Kichwa, an indigenous language of the Andes. Shared by other indigenous groups of the Andes and Amazon rainforest, sumak kawsay is the principle by which these communities strive for collective wellbeing: through harmony with all other life forms. Wellbeing economy, a concept of the global North, is an economy organized in the service of people and the planet. Though different in many ways, both of these notions, and their accompanying practices, present challenges to the authoritarianism, inequality and division so pervasive today. This presentation will explore these challenges, and propose they are antecedents to a future democracy in which the collective and the ecological are as important as the individual and the political.

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Salimah Valiani is a Research Manager at the Parkland Institute and a researcher of world historical political economy. She is the author of the research monographs, *The Africa Care Economy Index (FEMNET and UNDP, 2023)*, and *Rethinking Unequal Exchange: the global integration of nursing labour markets (University of Toronto Press, 2012)*. Valiani has also published policy papers, journal articles, and popular pieces on the political economy of healthcare, temporary labour migration, and various aspects of socio-economic development. She has served as a researcher and political economist in unions, nongovernmental organisations and think tanks in Canada and South Africa since 2001. In 2012 she received the Feminist Economics Rhonda Williams Prize – an award recognising feminist scholarship and activism in the spirit of the African American economist and advocate, Rhonda Williams. Valiani is also a published poet. Her poetry collection, *29 leads to love (Inanna, 2021)* won the 2022 International Book Award for Contemporary Poetry.

SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 23, 2025

10:30 am – 11:45 am
Room 1-003, ETLC

Concurrent Session

B. *Education for Democracy and Democratic Education*



HEATHER GANSHORN

Making the Connection between “Parental Rights”, Privatization and the State of Alberta’s Democracy

In Alberta, the concept of “parental rights” is being deployed to encroach on the autonomy of schools and school boards to set policy on matters such as library collections, sex education, and supports for gender and sexual minority students. Many of those pushing for restrictive policies and greater government control are also proponents of education privatization. “Parental rights” organizations wish to reframe education as a private good rather than a public one. This results in an erosion of funding to public education, even as subsidies to private schools increase. Culture-war issues are being used to promote privatization and reshape public education governance in the lead-up to this fall’s trustee elections.

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Heather Ganshorn is the Research Director for Support Our Students Alberta, a non-partisan, non-profit public education advocacy group fighting for the rights of all children to an equitable and accessible public education system. SOS Alberta believes that when we meet the needs of the most vulnerable children, we elevate the quality of life for all children. We are a grassroots organization working with community organizers, activists, parents, students, educators, and general community members to protect the promise of public education as a public good and as a human right. We promote and advocate for public education through an equity lens.

Heather is also the parent of two children attending Calgary public schools. Her interest in education policy began when she registered her oldest child for kindergarten and started questioning why her excellent local elementary school ranked near the bottom of the Fraser Institute’s list. Digging deeper generated more questions about many elements of Alberta’s education system. A desire to connect with others who shared her concerns motivated Heather to join SOS Alberta as an advocate for public education. Heather believes that public education is essential to a functioning democracy.

In her professional capacity, Heather is a research and instruction librarian at the University of Calgary.

SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 23, 2025



CARLA PECK

Shredding Democracy: How Alberta's Curriculum War Mirrors Authoritarian Tactics

In this presentation, I will examine how Alberta's K–6 curriculum redevelopment under the United Conservative Party represents a profound shift away from democratic educational tradition. I argue that curriculum has become a political weapon used to delegitimize experts, suppress diverse histories, and replace inquiry with rote memorization. These changes mirror broader authoritarian and populist movements across North America that target public education as a site of “culture war,” centralize state power, and produce compliant rather than critical citizens. I conclude by outlining how educators and communities can resist democratic backsliding and defend public schools as institutions essential to pluralism, evidence-based reasoning, and civic democracy.

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*Dr. Carla Peck is Professor of Social Studies Education in the Faculty of Education, and Adjunct Professor in the Department of History, Classics & Religion, at the University of Alberta, and Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick. She is the Director of Thinking Historically for Canada's Future, a national SSHRC-funded Partnership Grant focused on K-12 history education in Canada (www.thinking-historically.ca). Dr. Peck researches teachers' and students' understandings of democratic concepts, teachers' and students' historical understandings, and is particularly interested in the relationship between students' ethnic identities and their understandings of history. She has authored and co-authored numerous journal articles and book chapters and has co-edited several books including *Teaching and Learning Difficult Histories in International Contexts: A Critical Sociocultural Approach*, *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Citizenship and Education*, and *Contemplating Historical Consciousness: Notes from the Field*. Her latest book, with Dr. Alan Sears, is *Rescuing Reason: How History Education Can Help Save Democracy* (University of Toronto Press, forthcoming Spring 2026). Dr. Peck has provided professional development workshops for K-12 teachers in Alberta, across Canada, and internationally and serves as a consultant on numerous boards and advisory groups for provincial, national, and international history and civic organizations. She has been involved in various aspects of curriculum development in Alberta, Canada, and internationally and is actively engaged in political advocacy to support public education in Alberta. Dr. Peck received the Alberta Teachers' Association Public Education Award (2022), the Province of Alberta's Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal (2023), and a Killam Annual Professorship (2025) in recognition of this work.*

11:45 am – 12:00 pm
ETLC Lobby

Break
Coffee and pastries will be available

SUNDAY

NOVEMBER 23, 2025

12:00 pm – 1:30 pm
Room 1-001, ETLC

Closing Keynote



GEORGE ELLIOT CLARKE

Illiteracy Versus Democracy

Do artists have a responsibility to undertake public education, not to propagandize, but to edify, especially in regard to historical events? Indeed, one sign of political decadence and/or civilizational decline is the loss of public memory of the import of historical events pertinent to the existence of the nation or to broader enterprises such as “The West” or “BRICS,” etc. One may expect artists in all disciplines to remind audiences of events and personalities erased from historical consciousness precisely because they challenged lineages of unmerited privilege and/or tyrannical oppression. The chief threat to democracy is (historical) illiteracy. I will give examples and read pertinent poems.

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*The 4th Poet Laureate of Toronto (2012-15) and the 7th Parliamentary/Canadian Poet Laureate (2016-17), **George Elliott Clarke** was born in Windsor, Nova Scotia, in 1960. An English prof at the University of Toronto, Clarke has taught at Duke, McGill, UBC, and Harvard. Laurels? Pierre Elliott Trudeau Fellows Prize, Governor-General’s Award for Poetry, National Magazine Gold Award for Poetry, Premiul Poesis (Romania), Dartmouth Book Award for Fiction, Eric Hoffer Book Award for Poetry (US).*

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February 26, 2026

Faculty Club, UofA

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