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West Quebec Post

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The Curious Case of the Disappearing Generals

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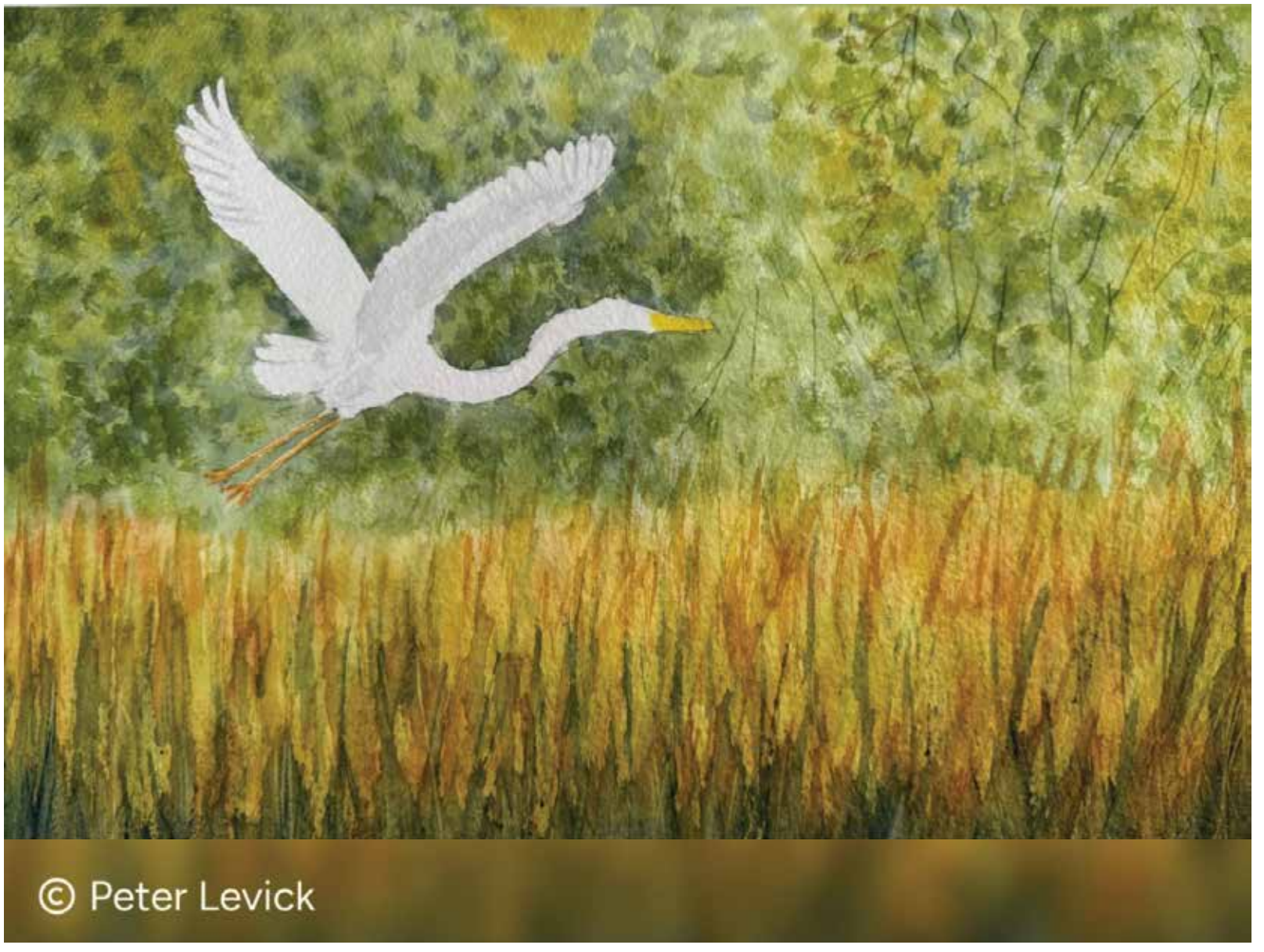
Art competition

The beauty of the Ottawa River in all its forms



Painting by Peter Levick, participant in the 1st edition of the 2025 Confluences competition. MG

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE OTTAWA RIVER ISSUE TABLE (TCO)

Mélissa Gélinas
LJI Reporter

An art competition is open. The Table de concertation de la rivière des Outaouais (TCO) is looking for creative and talented people who would like to participate in the 2nd edition of its art contest entitled "Confluences".

To do so, participants will be asked to create an artistic work of their choice inspired by the Ottawa River — Kichi Sibi. This can take various forms, such as a drawing, a photograph, a text, a poem, a graphic design, a painting, a sculpture and more. More than one creation may be presented, but only one prize may be won. Artwork must be submitted by June 1, 2026 at 11:59 p.m.

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George Singfield to retire after four decades in education *Page 9*

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Spring floods: Our teams at work

Our experts work year-round to limit the impact of changes in water levels and flow on neighboring communities. This is particularly true in the spring, when melting snow can lead to flooding.

Reservoirs always help reduce the impact of spring flooding

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Did you know?

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Run-of-river generating stations have no real impact on spring flooding

The majority of our facilities located in southern Québec are run-of-river generating stations. Since they have no reservoirs, they have no way of retaining water. During spring runoff, Hydro-Québec simply opens the gates to let the river flow through.

Our experts are hard at work

In both winter and spring, we measure the amount of snow on the ground to determine how much water it contains so that we can predict how the snowmelt will affect the rivers and lakes. Each day, our teams of meteorologists, engineers and hydrologists study weather forecasts and river behavior in order to plan what needs to be done.

How does climate change fit into all of this?

Climate change affects the scope, intensity and timing of spring runoff. We are therefore adapting our practices so that we can continue to do our utmost to limit the impact of spring flooding on communities.

Learn more about how we manage spring runoff on our website:

www.hydroquebec.com/generation/spring-runoff/

Routhier pushes to close lobbying loopholes

Tashi Farmilo
LJI Reporter

Quebec's Commissioner of Lobbying, Jean-François Routhier, is urging the provincial government to modernize the province's lobbying law, saying it is out of date and filled with loopholes that allow important lobbying activity to go unreported.

The law, which has been in place since 2002, only requires people to register as lobbyists if lobbying makes up a "significant part" of their work. According to Routhier, this leaves a large grey area. "Particularly in Quebec, we have an issue called the 'significant part', meaning a lobbyist must be doing lobbying as a significant part of their work to be required to declare it," he said. "It hasn't evolved since then. So now we're 20 years later, and we still have the same law."

He pointed out that this allows powerful people to influence elected officials without the public ever knowing. "The CEO of a multinational who doesn't lobby as a significant part of his duties can text the Premier and fly under the radar," Routhier said. "I think the public should know that."

Routhier has completed a proposal to fix the law, which he says is ready to be submitted if the government decides to move forward before the National Assembly breaks for the summer. One of the biggest changes would be shifting responsibility from individual lobbyists to the companies or organizations that benefit from lobbying. This would allow for penalties such as fines, required training, or making the company's name public, without needing to launch full legal cases.

"It costs a lot of money to make those investigations, and the results are not always there," he said. "That's why we want to change the law to make it more effective, cost-effective also, and so the public feels we are actually doing something about it."

Another proposed change would expand the law to include certain non-profit organizations like think tanks and foundations that are created to influence public policy. Groups that deliver direct community services would still be exempt.

Routhier also wants lobbying rules to be based on how relevant the issue is to the public. "Is a permit to change the colour of the brick on a factory or garage in a municipality, even if it's a business, relevant to the resident? Probably not," he said. "But if someone is trying to change laws and regulations outside the established legislative process, there's reason to disclose lobbying more than in other contexts."

He is also calling for a simple update: requiring lobbyists to say whether meetings with public officials actually happened. While the content of those meetings would not need to be shared, confirming that contact took place would help improve transparency.

In Gatineau and across the Outaouais, lobbying activity is steady and widespread. As of January 1, 2026, there were 430 active lobbying files in the region, including 214 in Gatineau. Most of these were filed by businesses or organizations trying to influence decisions at the municipal or regional level. The most common subjects in Gatineau were zoning, new developments, and technology projects. In the Outaouais more broadly, health care topped the list. "The biggest subject would be health," said Routhier. "Second is information technologies, and the third is urbanism and land development." The most frequently targeted public institutions included the City of Gatineau and the regional health authority, the CISSS de l'Outaouais.

The mayor and municipal councillors were the most commonly contacted public officials in Gatineau. Routhier said his office also provides training for public servants, journalists, and members of the public to help people understand how lobbying works and how it is regulated. More information, including the public registry of lobbying activity, is available at www.lobbyisme.quebec.

"Let's just hope that we have a better law in a few months so that we can actually do our job better," he said.

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Historic Gatineau Park estate gets second chance as boutique hotel

PHOTO: TASHI FARMILO

Historic Gatineau Park O'Brien House, built in 1930 for Montreal Canadiens founder John Ambrose O'Brien, will reopen as a boutique hotel this spring under a new NCC lease with Square Old Chelsea, the second attempt to revive the federally designated heritage property. (TF)

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Tashi **Farmilo**
LJI Reporter

The National Capital Commission (NCC) has signed a lease with Square Old Chelsea to reopen the long-vacant O'Brien House this spring as a boutique hotel and event venue on the shore of Meech Lake, marking the second attempt to bring paying guests to the storied heritage property.

The federal agency announced Tuesday that the Outaouais-based business will operate the property under the name Maison O'Brien, offering 11 guest rooms, event spaces for weddings, meetings and private gatherings, and food and beverage services open to the public.

The NCC spent $3.9 million renovating the property in 2018 and leased it to Wakefield hoteliers Robert Milling and Lynn Berthiaume, who opened it as a boutique hotel that March. However, the venture lasted less than two years. Milling said in a 2019 social media post that high operating costs exceeded revenues, and the house has since sat largely empty.

Built in 1930, the house was a summer retreat for Renfrew, Ontario industrialist John Ambrose O'Brien. Also known as Kincora Lodge, it sits on a promontory above Meech Lake in Chelsea. O'Brien was a founder of the National Hockey Association in 1909, the league that directly preceded the NHL, and was the founding owner of the Montreal Canadiens, though he held the franchise for only one season before selling it. He was inducted as a builder into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1962.

Designed by Ottawa architect Werner Noffke in the Queen Anne Revival style, the two-and-a-half storey structure features a steeply pitched cedar-shingled roof, wood siding milled to resemble logs, and a foundation, terraces and chimney of local granite. The NCC acquired the property in 1964, at a point when, the organization later described, the building was on the verge of ruin. It was designated a federal heritage building in 1984.

"O'Brien House is truly one of the gems among the 1,664 properties entrusted to the National Capital Commission," said Tobi Nussbaum, chief executive officer of the NCC. "We are delighted to see its doors reopen and to witness renewed vitality at a site that holds such a meaningful place in Gatineau Park. This agreement with Square Old Chelsea strengthens our commitment to showcasing and protecting an important part of the National Capital Region's heritage."

"The relaunch of Maison O'Brien reflects our vision of celebrating heritage and showcasing our region by creating authentic and welcoming gathering spaces," said Manuela Teixeira, chief executive officer of Square Old Chelsea. "Through our collaboration with the NCC and local partners, we aim to highlight the richness of our territory and offer a vibrant space open to all."

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How did Canadians consume news in 2025?

Since 2012, News Media Canada has partnered with Totum Research to unveil findings on the state of Canadians' news appetite and consumption across the country.

Earlier last year, the 2025 research results were released and there were some interesting findings that are relevant for stakeholders across the sector.

This year's research found, for example, that 86 per cent of Canadians are reading newspapers in traditional format, meaning print and e-edition, with the search for local information remaining the main driver for readership.

Each week, moreover, nearly 24 million printed newspapers are distributed across the country. Of that batch, nearly nine million are free community newspapers.

This year's research found that more than two-thirds of Gen Z, among the youngest of those surveyed, still continue to read newspapers in a traditional format. In addition to newspapers, Gen Z's and Gen X's gravitate toward news podcasts for their news consumption, while Gen Y/Millennials are keener to read email newsletters.

Social media holds the least trust among polled respondents, aged 18+, and advertising and editorial content found in printed newspapers/e-editions capture the most trust among respondents. 81 per cent of printed newspaper readers remain steadfast in support of advertising in local newspapers, and over half of Canadians read newspapers for advertising content (ROP advertising/flyers).

Media literacy has encouraged more well-informed citizens, with 41 per cent of Gen Z's choosing multiple sources (reading on all four platforms – print, computer, tablet and phone), regularly. Over a quarter of all Canadians (26 per cent) surveyed read their news across ALL four measured platforms.

Readership remains the strongest in Western Canada, but overall, Canada's younger generations are plugged in the most.

In 2025, close to 15 million copies of daily newspapers were distributed across Canada, with over 70 per cent of those newspapers published six to seven times a week. 750 community newspaper titles and 766 editions were circulated.

Since 2012, readership of weekly newspapers and online news remains at 80 per cent or higher among Canadians, proving that trust and loyalty remains strong for informed, consistent, traditional news.

-News Media Canada Community Newspaper association
Special to the West Quebec Post

LETTERS to the Editor

Opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the paper

Social services failed me, how about you?

I'm a single mother. The system failed me as a child. I'm not a mom on social assistance, I work hard to care for my own kids, plus other family members.

DPJ (child services) traumatized my siblings and I repeatedly because they refused to listen when we needed help under the care of an unfit mother.

There is a long story and the details are important, but not likely fit to print. Between child sexual abuse, un-caring health system and family services that can't seem to actually ever help, I'm at a loss. I work every moment I can to pay all our bills, yet am always behind.

In Aylmer, there is a system that failed me. Social workers apologized to me for not listening to me, that they could have helped make my childhood safe. They had told me they feel bad and that calling the police was my best option. I did that, and everyone there too listened to my story and just feel bad. Keep in mind, I'm not the only one. Now I'm struggling to do the same for my kids among people bent on harming youngsters. And I'm not the only one.

I am sharing this because I don't qualify for legal aid but feel if more of us who were victimized by inaction and neglect by social services got together, we could somehow sue them. We all struggle as a result of the harm they knowingly let us go through. So as parents, we are not equipped. And as I and others do our best, we are faced with similar types of professionals in social services that ignore their responsibilities to make life safe for kids.

Sincerely

A burnt-out mom who's tired of the system being against her

Editor's Note: This is an abridged letter. Over the years, many stories like this have been reported to the newsroom. At the Post, we understand the importance of this problem. The letter-writer's name is withheld. However, if anyone wishes to respond, email the newsroom and we will forward the email to this writer. (editor@westquebecpost.com)

www.westquebecpost.com

Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations presents position on Bill 1 to Quebec Government

Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA) board members Ginette Sauvé-Frankel, Natasha Drysdale, and Nick Giannakoulis of the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHSA) presented the organization's formal position on Bill 1 before the National Assembly Committee on Institutions, February 17,2026.

We would also like to acknowledge the work of Director Michael Canuel who was instrumental in preparing the presentation, and to Director Natasha Drysdale who researched and wrote the original brief.

In their presentation, QFHSA outlined substantive concerns regarding Bill 1, particularly its implications for democratic legitimacy, minority protections, institutional balance of power, and the potential impact on education governance in Quebec.

QFHSA emphasized the following key points:

- Lack of broad democratic consultation in the drafting of a bill presented as constitutional in scope
- Insufficient constitutional protections for linguistic minorities, including Quebec's English-speaking community
- Concentration of legislative power and reduced judicial oversight
- Potential risks to minority education institutions, including exposure to political and financial pressures
- Absence of explicit protections for fundamental social rights, including education

"Parents across Quebec want stability, fairness, and meaningful participation in decisions that affect their children," said Ginette Sauvé-Frankel, QFHSA Director. "A constitutional initiative of this magnitude must be built through broad consultation and must explicitly safeguard minority rights, including the autonomy and integrity of our education institutions."

Representing 80 school communities across Quebec and approximately 2,000 member families, QFHSA underscored that its intervention reflects the lived realities of parents and students within Quebec's English-language education sector.

QFHSA called for the withdrawal of Bill 1 and the establishment of a transparent, inclusive, and consultative constitutional process that meaningfully engages minority communities and civil society, while respecting existing constitutional and Charter protections.

QFHSA remains committed to constructive dialogue and to safeguarding the democratic rights, educational stability, and well-being of children and families across Quebec.

Rosemary Murphy, President
Chair, Constitution, Bylaws and Standing Rules Committee
Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations

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Who we are now ... who will we be then?

In recalling the Ottawa Savoy, Gilbert and Sullivan productions, I relate this anecdote about Sir Walter Sullivan, who composed the music for the comic operas. Our director at the time told us this little story:

Sir Walter Sullivan's home was one of several identical duplexes. In front of each were several wooden steps leading to the entrance. One evening, while returning from a gentleman's night out, he staggered home to his dwelling. Uncertain of which was his duplex, he began kicking the wooden steps near each entrance. "E-flat," he uttered as the unmistakable sound resounded when he kicked the steps where he lived. Sullivan's ear was acutely tuned to the sounds that surrounded him.

The other half of the Victorian-era partnership was the witty W.S. Gilbert who composed the lyrics for the songs. From *Anecdotes for All Occasions* is this one about Gilbert.

"At the Garrick Club in London, the librettist, W.S. Gilbert, was once making light of Shakespeare to the horror of those surrounding him. 'All right then,' said Gilbert in answering their protests. 'Let us take this passage for example': "I would a lief be thrust through a thicket hedge, / As cry Plosh to a callow throstle."

"Why that's perfectly clear," insisted one of the hearers, rising to the defense of the bard. "It just means that this bird lover would rather get himself all scratched up in the thorny bush than disturb the bird's song. What play is the passage from?"

"No play," said Gilbert, "I made it up—and jolly good Shakespeare, too."

In Shakespeare's pastoral comedy, *As You Like It*, Shakespeare referred to the seven ages of man. These ages were: infancy, schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, pantaloon (old man) and second childhood. The poem begins: "All the world's a stage / and all the men and women merely players...."

You and I can recognize ourselves in one of these stages. In theatrical parlance, we each wear our masks. The following exercise will help you understand this more clearly. You may do this alone with a mirror, or preferably with another person.

Sit facing the other (or your mirror image). Play peek-a-boo. Note your expression. Does it remind you of the toddler stage of your life?

Stand tall with a firm expression. Are you not that soldier?

Assume the posture, with an even sterner face. Justice? Mais oui!

Drop your jaw, half-close your eyes, are you now at an older stage of your life?

Maintain that same expression but with a feeble smile. With all respect and apologies, to whom the bard referenced as 'second childhood,' might you be tempted to play peek-a-boo again?

Here's a little poem that I wrote to conclude this piece. Be assured that is total fiction,

"Who are you?" a fellow inquired.
I replied, "It is no mystery,
I'm the one who stands here before you
Now, sir, may I ask who you be?"

"I am, who I am," he responded
Then these other words the man said,
"There are times I'm the King of the Castle,
There are times that I wish I was dead."

He gave a thumbs up as we parted
As we each went our own separate way.
We are who we are there is no doubt
But who were we both yesterday?

When our final chapter is written
All of our deeds will be told
For then there will be no redactions
As the scroll of our lives will unfold.

The Curious Case of the Disappearing Generals

by Gwynne DYER
AUTHOR, HISTORIAN & INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

Armies can be used against both against foreigners abroad and against citizens at home, but the two roles require quite different equipment and tactics. The same applies to their commanders: you need a different kind of general if you think that the primary task of their troops will be controlling dissent at home.

With that in mind, what has been happening in China is quite interesting. Slowly at first, but now in a rush, the senior command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been purged of its highest-ranking generals.

It's not like Stalin's great purge of Soviet generals in 1937-38, just before the Second World War, when at least 780 generals were shot. The Chinese generals are not being executed, although many are ending up in jail. Nobody outside the intelligence services knows what is happening to lower-ranking generals, but at the highest level, it is almost a clean sweep.

China's highest military body, the Central Military Commission, normally has seven members, with President Xi Jinping himself in the chair in his parallel role as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. (It is the Party, not the State, that controls the armed forces.)

These six men should be loyal to Xi, because he appointed every one of them after the 20th Party Congress four years ago. Yet all six have been dismissed on suspicion of corruption, including last month the CMC's vice-chair, Zhang Youxia, one of Xi's oldest friends.

Xi and Zhang were childhood friends whose fathers had served together under Mao in the Liberation War and they regarded each other as Honorary Brothers. Moreover, Zhang was the last serving officer in the PLA to have seen actual combat (in border clashes with Vietnam in 1979 and 1984).

Now they have all been accused of "serious violations of discipline and law" (the standard phrase for corruption) and removed from the CMC. Why?

The accusation of corruption is probably true for some of them, as it is for many or most PLA officers, but that would have been true already when they were appointed to the jobs. Something else must have changed.

In most dictatorships the first suspects will always be those who control troops and might try to make a military coup. However, that really seems unlikely in a country where the Communist Party has been in power for 77 years and almost every military officer is also a Party member.

It's not that the Party can never be overthrown. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Russia) was removed from power by a non-violent popular revolt after 74 years, in 1991, so you could speculate that China is the same zone now. But that's probably much too simplistic: history may rhyme, but it rarely repeats quite that accurately.

However, this is precisely the historical analogy lurking at the bottom of the psyche of most true-believing Communists (a rare breed) whom I have known in China. This rarely admitted spectre even drives a good deal of state policy in China – including, perhaps, this stunning reshuffle.

We know that the Chinese economy is in big long-term trouble and that many young people are disaffected with the state ("lie flat"). Maybe China's rulers know more than we do about growing dissent, or maybe they are just imagining it – but if domestic repression is going to be necessary, then they need different people on the CMC.

It's only an hypothesis, but it is one possible explanation for why the real military people have been removed from the existing CMC. The Chinese Communist Party could do as thorough a job of suppressing dissent in the streets as Iran's Revolutionary Guard, no doubt but it would probably require a change in China's current military leadership.

Speaking of which, have you noticed how many senior American generals have been removed from office in the past year? President Trump has fired or otherwise relieved at least fifteen very senior officers, most of them 3-stars and 4-stars and replaced them with men (all men) he considers more aligned with his values.

This happens a little bit in most administrations, but never on the scale seen in the last year. Moreover, Trump has said that in future he will personally interview all prospective four-star nominees in every service.

It doesn't necessarily mean he's putting in the right people in case he needs to use the army to suppress large-scale domestic dissent at home in future, but an unfriendly observer could certainly construe it that way. There are definitely people around him who think that far ahead, although at this stage it would be just one contingency among many in their forward planning.

Stéphanie Fecteau spotlighted in Quebec professor documentary

Tashi Farmilo
LJI Reporter

Stéphanie Fecteau, a professor at the University of Quebec in Outaouais, is featured in a documentary series released February 16 that examines the daily work of university professors across Quebec and the pressures shaping the profession. The 15-part series, A Day in the Life of a Teacher (Journée de prof), was produced by Savoir média in partnership with the Quebec Federation of University Professors and is available online and on television at https://savoir.media/details/387249-journee-de-prof.

The series follows faculty members through teaching, research, student supervision and committee work. It also addresses structural pressures in Quebec universities, including heavy workloads, administrative demands and competition for research funding.

Fecteau said she was drawn to the project because of its stated aim to clarify what professors actually do. "The intention to demystify the profession of professor sparked my interest," she said. "I wanted to show the reality behind publications and funding applications."

She described the role as extending well beyond research output. "The academic career goes far beyond research," she said, noting that her work includes student supervision, project management and service on committees, including one focused on women's status. "The professoriate is, at its core, relational and engaged work."

Stéphanie Fecteau of the University of Quebec in Outaouais is featured in a new documentary series, A Day in the Life of a Teacher (Journée de prof), examining the daily work and systemic pressures facing university professors across Quebec. (TF) PHOTO: COURTESY

At the University of Quebec in Outaouais, Fecteau leads a research program on stress and well-being, with a focus on improving the quality of life of autistic people. Her work examines chronic stress and social camouflaging and explores interventions such as therapeutic horseback riding, developed in collaboration with participants.

"My role is at once scientific, pedagogical and social," she said. "It is scientific, through the development of a research program on stress and well-being; pedagogical, through supervising students and training future professionals in psychoeducation and psychology; social, through engagement in bodies that promote equity."

The series also highlights the impact of institutional pressures. "It is true that our working conditions influence our capacity to innovate," Fecteau said. "However, funding applications are opportunities to innovate and to connect knowledge in order to fill a gap."

Despite performance expectations, expanding responsibilities and what she described as a fragile balance between work and personal life, she said the university remains a place of intellectual freedom.

"Despite the issues related to funding, performance requirements and the multiplication of responsibilities, the university environment offers us opportunities for great freedom and creativity," she said.

Art competition

The beauty of the Ottawa River in all its forms

Continued from page 1

OVER $1,300 IN PRIZES TO BE WON

The winner will have the chance to win one of three prizes worth a total of $1,360 in prizes and cash thanks to the following partners: Parc National de Plaisance, Parc National d'Opémican, Fairmont Château Montebello, Parc Oméga and the Fondation des Amis du parc Oméga.

Whether it's a brunch for two at the Château Montebello or an annual pass to visit Omega Park, there is something for everyone.

In early summer 2026, the public will have the chance to select the winners of the competition at the Water Stakeholders' Assembly. Details of the event are to come.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible, participants must reside in one of the following regions: Outaouais, Laurentides or Témiscamingue.

For more information or to enter the contest: tcriviereoutaouais.ca in the news/news section.

ABOUT TCO

The TCO was born out of a project mandated by the Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec (ROBVQ), which is part of the 2018-2030 Quebec Water Strategy.

Painting by Luc Charbonneau, participant in the 1st edition of the 2025 Confluences competition. MG PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE OTTAWA RIVER ISSUE TABLE (TCO)

Photograph by Sophie Michaud, participant in the 1st edition of the 2025 Confluences competition. MG PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE OTTAWA RIVER ISSUE TABLE (TCO)

The goal is to create a governance structure to implement water management in the Ottawa River. To do this, a diagnosis of four problems was prioritized: alteration of water quality, flooding, degradation of wetlands, as well as degradation of wildlife and plant environments. These are part of the implementation of the integrated management plan.

Qlub petition calls on Quebec government to leave global social networks

Tashi Farmilo
LJI Reporter

Qlub, a Quebec-developed platform focused on local information and communities, has launched a public petition asking the government to withdraw from international platforms such as X, Facebook and Instagram.

The petition calls on the Quebec government to move its official communications away from foreign-owned social media services and instead prioritize digital platforms developed in the province. Organizers say the shift would help strengthen Quebec's media ecosystem and support locally built technology.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X are widely used by governments, public agencies and municipalities to share announcements, public notices and emergency information. The petition argues that relying on those platforms directs advertising revenue and audience attention toward large international technology companies rather than local media organizations.

Qlub describes itself as a Quebec-based social network designed to connect citizens, organizations and media around local news and community information. The platform says it displays posts in chronological order rather than using algorithm-driven feeds.

The company says the initiative is part of a broader effort to promote what it calls digital sovereignty, encouraging governments and public institutions to maintain greater control over digital communications and data within Quebec.

"The government continues to feed the ogre that impoverishes our culture and our local information by capturing the advertising revenues necessary for the survival of our local media," said Philippe Larose Cadieux, chief executive and co-founder of Qlub.

Quebec social network Qlub has launched a petition urging the provincial government to leave foreign social media platforms and shift its communications to locally developed services, with co-founder and CEO Philippe Larose Cadieux arguing the move would help protect Quebec's media ecosystem and keep advertising revenue within the province. (TF)
PHOTO: QLUB

"Public institutions should set an example by favouring local and sovereign communication platforms that support the long-term viability of Quebec's media ecosystem," he added, saying those revenues are essential for news organizations to continue informing citizens.

The petition is available online at https://site.qlub.social/petition-gouvernement-du-quebec/

Proposed cuts threaten Quebec cultural access

Tashi Farmilo
LJI Reporter

Quebec's cultural sector is urging the provincial government to reverse proposed cuts to the Culture in Schools program, warning the reductions would significantly limit student access to arts and cultural activities across the province. Réseau Culture 360°, which represents Quebec's regional culture councils, called on Education Minister Sonia LeBel to abandon the planned reductions.

The Auditor General of Quebec's November 2025 report to the National Assembly stated that the Education Department intended to reduce the program's budget by $13 million beginning in the 2026-2027 school year, followed by further reductions the next year that would bring total cuts to roughly half of the current funding envelope. The changes would also affect school trips to cultural venues.

The province recorded a $5.2 billion deficit for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, placing the proposed reductions within a broader context of budgetary pressures.

The plan has drawn criticism from a coalition of cultural organizations, including the Front commun pour les arts and RIDEAU, the professional association of performing arts presenters. RIDEAU said research shows a direct link between exposure to cultural works during schooling and attendance at live performances in adulthood.

A petition launched by the Front commun pour les arts calls on the government to maintain current funding levels and ensure the program's sustainability. As of February 19, more than 18,000 people had signed the petition, which remains open until March 23. The petition is available on the National Assembly website: https://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/exprimez-votre-opinion/petition/Petition-11971/index.html?

The petition states that the proposed reductions, estimated at nearly 60 per cent of the current budget, would affect students, teachers and cultural workers and undermine efforts to promote Quebec's French language culture.

During question period at the National Assembly on February 18, former Québec solidaire spokesperson Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois criticized the Education Department's plan, asking whether the minister intended to be remembered for weakening children's access to culture.

LeBel said the budget process is ongoing and that final allocations will be known when the next provincial budget is tabled. She added that the government has invested more than $112 million in culture since 2019 and reiterated the importance of connecting children with Quebec culture at an early age.

The Union of Artists also raised concerns. Its president Tania Kontoyanni said that for many students, particularly those outside major urban centres, school activities are their primary contact with the cultural sector. She questioned the scale of the proposed reductions and called for the culture budget to reach three per cent of Quebec's overall spending within four years. Cultural groups added that the impact would extend beyond institutions to individual creators, noting that many artists depend on the program as a key source of income and community engagement. Sector data indicate that 95 per cent of visual artists deliver projects in their own region or neighbouring areas through the Culture in Schools program.

Data from the Quebec Institute of Statistics show that school group attendance at museums has not returned to pre-pandemic levels. Before 2020, museums received close to one million student visitors annually. That number fell to about 589,000 in 2022 and has increased only slightly since.

"In the Outaouais region, where cultural outings and the Culture in Schools program are essential drivers of access to culture for our youth, the announced cuts would have a direct and devastating impact on our students and on the vitality of our cultural community. Given that 75 per cent of youth theatre performances in Quebec take place in the regions, it is our tours, our presenters, and our artists who would be hit hardest," said Julie Martineau, executive director of Culture Outaouais.

QCNA AJRQ

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QCNA provides advocacy, government representation, marketing and promotion for Quebec community newspapers and, among other things, highlights newspaper challenges in official language markets and provides possible solutions and establishes partnerships that will benefit members and the association.

We are seeking a Marketing and Outreach Coordinator for a full-time position through the 2026 Internship Program in Official Languages Minority Community Media. The duration of the position is 6 months, from April to September 2026. Pay is $24/hr for 35 hours / week. The position is located in Gatineau, but the candidate can work mostly from home.

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- Provide an up-to-date resume.
- Provide photo identification issued by a provincial or federal government authority.

Email submissions to: info@qcna.qc.ca

Planifier l'avenir du bassin versant des rivières Noire et Coulonge

Cathy Fox

FORT-COULONGE — Plus de 20 participants – des membres de la communauté et des représentants d'organismes régionaux – se sont réunis au Pontiac Conference Centre le 4 février pour une consultation organisée par la Société pour la nature et les parcs du Canada – Vallée de l'Outaouais (SNAP-VO) afin de recueillir des commentaires sur le développement futur d'une réserve de biodiversité proposée dans le bassin versant des rivières Noire et Coulonge. Cette rencontre s'inscrivait dans le cadre des travaux en cours visant à élaborer un plan pour cette aire protégée récemment annoncée.

Les efforts pour protéger ce bassin versant remontent à près d'une décennie. En 2016, peu après avoir contribué à la protection de la rivière Dumoine, la SNAP-VO a entrepris des démarches pour recueillir de l'information sur les rivières Noire et Coulonge dans le but de créer un réseau interconnecté d'aires protégées.

Des participants marquent des zones d'intérêt sur des cartes lors d'une consultation tenue le 4 février à Fort-Coulonge concernant la réserve de biodiversité proposée du bassin versant des rivières Noire et Coulonge. (CF)

Une première proposition a été rejetée, mais le projet a été relancé en 2022 lorsque la SNAP-VO et le Conseil régional de l'environnement et du développement durable de l'Outaouais (CREDDO) ont reçu le mandat de préparer une deuxième proposition. Le 30 août 2023, le gouvernement du Québec a officiellement annoncé la désignation de 852,6 kilomètres carrés du bassin versant des rivières Noire et Coulonge comme réserve, avec l'objectif éventuel de lui accorder le statut complet de réserve de biodiversité.

Lors de l'atelier, les participants ont assisté à une présentation du vice-président de la SNAP-VO, John McDonnell, qui a expliqué les étapes entreprises par le groupe de citoyens bénévoles Friends of the Dumoine River. Leur travail visant à protéger et à promouvoir la rivière Dumoine a été présenté comme un modèle potentiel pour lancer le nouveau projet.

Les participants se sont ensuite divisés en petits groupes autour de tables recouvertes de cartes de la zone de réserve proposée. À l'aide d'autocollants de différentes couleurs, ils ont identifié des lieux d'intérêt, des préoccupations ou des zones à éviter, en ajoutant des notes pour expliquer leurs choix.

Un deuxième exercice invitait les participants à dresser la liste des « trésors », des préoccupations et d'une vision pour le bassin versant en 2050. Ces idées ont été regroupées sous trois thèmes : les atouts naturels, les atouts historiques et les facteurs de gouvernance. Chaque table a ensuite déterminé ses principales priorités et choisi un porte-parole pour présenter ses idées au reste du groupe.

Malgré le caractère informel de la rencontre, plusieurs thèmes communs ont émergé. Les participants ont souligné l'importance de consulter les communautés locales afin de s'assurer que les infrastructures et les services d'urgence pourront soutenir l'augmentation du tourisme générée par la nouvelle réserve. Ils ont également insisté sur la nécessité d'un financement stable, de lignes directrices opérationnelles claires et bien documentées, de l'embauche locale et de la préservation des connaissances historiques détenues par les aînés.

À partir des commentaires recueillis lors de la rencontre, la SNAP-VO prévoit de cerner les principaux défis et occasions avant d'élaborer un plan d'action et de suivi. L'organisme espère que ce plan pourra être mis en œuvre d'ici la fin de 2027.

Les participants ont aussi suggéré que la prochaine rencontre ait lieu directement dans le bassin versant, avec des canots et des kayaks, afin de permettre aux intervenants de découvrir le territoire sur le terrain.

Cette initiative fait partie de quatre sites choisis par le ministère du Tourisme du Québec et le ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs dans le cadre d'un « projet pilote pour le développement de réserves de biodiversité visant à promouvoir un tourisme responsable et durable », financé par le Plan d'action 2020-2025 pour un tourisme responsable et durable.

Singfield to retire after four decades in education

Sophie Demers
Local Journalism Initiative

WEST QUEBEC - After 40 years in education, George Singfield, Western Quebec School Board (WQSB) director general, has announced his retirement, effective July 25 this year. Singfield began his career in education as a supply teacher at Darcy McGee high school in 1989.

"The principal at the time, Michael Donlan was a mentor to me. He found me work every year," said Singfield. "I worked as a special education technician, an office agent one summer doing clerical work, and as a supply teacher, eventually becoming a teacher full-time."

In his youth, Singfield attended St. Michael's High School in Low before transferring to D'Arcy McGee high school after his father, who also worked in education, took a job there. Before starting his teaching career, he attended St. Francis Xavier University.

As an educator, Singfield taught many subjects like history, english, economics, physical education, as well as moral and religious studies at D'Arcy McGee. In 1998, he started his first position as principal at Onslow (Quyon) and Poltimore (Val-des-Monts) elementary schools.

In 2000, Singfield returned to D'Arcy McGee as vice-principal. Two years later, he became principal of Symmes Junior High School. While holding this position, he completed a masters of Education at Bishops University.

A few years later in 2006, he became the principal of both Symmes Junior High School and D'Arcy McGee high school, a position he held for 13 years before moving on to work for the WQSB in 2019. Before leaving, the students and staff of the school renamed the gym after him, highlighting his contributions to the school.

One of the biggest highlights during his career, said Singfield, was learning and working with so many different people including support staff, teachers, caretakers, counselors, and principals.

Looking to the future of the English school board, he hopes they continue in the direction they have been going, which is to continue providing support and opportunities for all employees and educators. "The commitment to providing optimum conditions for learning for students and focusing on how what we do impacts students must be at the forefront and it has been. The board is so fortunate to have outstanding principals and senior directors. They're incredible people who really are in this for the right reasons," said Singfield.

George Singfield, WQSB director general, announced his retirement after four decades of dedication to education. PHOTO COURTESY

As a long-time educator who has overcome many obstacles within the education system, Singfield says the education system will always be hit with challenges. "We've really made an effort to receive those challenges and look at them as opportunities, not obstacles. I'm proud the people I work with think that way, and I'm confident they'll continue to do so."

During retirement, Singfield hopes to travel a bit more with his wife, and get back into cycling. As a grandfather of two, he looks forward to spending more time with his grandkids. However, he says he can't see himself walking away completely from the education world and would be open to staying connected and maybe helping to coach a sports team.

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REGIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WEST QUEBECERS QUIZ NIGHT AT THE BRITISH PUB. March 21, 2026, at 6 p.m. Tickets: $15 in advance or $20 at the door. $80 for a group of 6. Silent auction. Information: 819-682-9602, info@westquebecers.ca, www.westquebecers.ca

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