

# Politics was about the long game for Mulroney

DONALD E. ABELSON

Since his passing on Feb. 29, dozens of op-eds, commentaries and tributes have appeared in a host of Canadian media outlets offering assessments of former prime minister Brian Mulroney, and how he transformed Canada in the nine years he served as the country's 18th prime minister.

Not surprisingly, people remain divided over whether the historic initiatives he spearheaded in the areas of trade, the environment, foreign and defence policy, and taxation benefited or harmed Canada. Contributors also remain divided over who Mulroney was as a person, and if he should be admired or demonized.

There is no doubt that while in office, and in the decades that he worked in the private sector, Mulroney was a polarizing figure, and no one understood that more than Mulroney himself. But what is often lost in discussions about his legacy is why he felt so strongly about the importance of leadership, and why he believed it was critical for new generations of Canadians to step up and contribute to making Canada a better, safer and more prosperous country.

In the hundreds of conversations I had with Mulroney over a five-year period when I served as the inaugural director of the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government at St. Francis Xavier University, where he graduated in 1959, he often shared with me the lessons he learned as party leader and prime minister.

He would often say that no one should seek leadership roles to be popular; rather they should do it to make a difference. On that note, he would add, instead of toiling in the weeds, true leaders should tackle big issues, even if it means losing the support of half the country in the process. And if it meant taking issues such as free trade with the United States and the GST to Canadians and letting them decide what direction the government should move in, so much the better.

For Mulroney, politics was about the long game; he cared little about what was said about him in the morning newspapers, preferring instead to focus on how economic, political and social issues could be advanced over time. "In the fullness of time," he often opined, "history will judge what my government has done." He was comfortable with that position, and rarely wavered from it.

Mulroney was also known to quote former U.S. president Bill Clinton, who observed that the best leaders are those who are capable of peeking around the corner, even just a little bit, to anticipate what was coming their way. These and other attributes helped inform and shape Mulroney's style and how he approached the key issues of the day.

On March 23, a state funeral will be held in Montreal where Mulroney will be laid to rest. He lived an extraordinary life during which he experienced the heights of success and the loneliness and despair of failure. While his record will be examined and re-examined for decades, let's not lose sight of the lessons he has left behind, lessons that, if followed and implemented properly, could inspire young people to make a positive impact in government, industry, the not-for-profit sector, and in community-based organizations.

While his efforts to establish closer ties to the U.S. broker a free-trade agreement and overhaul the tax system in Canada will continue to elicit a broad range of reactions, I would be hard-pressed to think of why the lessons he has passed down on leadership would ruffle many feathers.

Encouraging citizens to become more engaged politically, urging them to pursue leadership roles to make a positive impact, instilling in them the confidence to embrace big issues that could move our country forward, and helping them to anticipate and respond to challenges that might be lurking around the corner seem practical to me.

Mulroney will be remembered for many things, and of course, like most leaders, scholars will have to consider both his strengths and weaknesses. Still, one thing is certain; he had the courage to take his swings in the political arena, and although he often emerged

bloodied and shaken, his voice on so many important issues continued to resonate across the country and the globe.

In the fullness of time, the Mulroney record will be subjected to even more intense scrutiny, but for now, I prefer to focus on how the lessons he offered on leadership can help those aspiring to high-level positions in government and in other sectors.

His unmistakable voice was silenced on Feb. 29, but his advice to young Canadians intent on leaving a positive impact on Canada should resonate well after he is laid to rest.

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Hannah, below, and Liz Froese, daughters of columnist Thomas Froese, in 2020. Writing about International Day of Happiness and youth mental health, Froese notes, "If something will strengthen your child, do it. If not, then don't."

THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

## Are we hurting our kids by overprotecting them?



THOMAS FROESE OPINION

Here's a story to get us thinking about health and happiness.

Boy has serious stomach pain. Mom brings him to a clinic. Boy checks out fine, but a routine mental-health screening asks him these questions.

"In the last few weeks, have you wished you were dead? Have you thought you or your family would be better off with you dead? Have you thought of killing yourself? If so, how or when? Do you have thoughts of killing yourself now? If so, describe."

The boy is 12. Gosh.

Here's another story, this of an old woman. She was happiness personified to those who knew her. It's interesting because her mom died birthing her. Then she lived poor, mistreated and stunted. At 16, she contracted polio, spending a year in an iron lung without human touch.

In time, she recovered. Then college. Then marriage, three kids and night school. Then she became a lawyer, then a judge, among Maryland's first female judges. She had foster kids. Finally, old and with joy, she watched her children's children get on their own journey.

I'm imagining her old face, lined with life's crevices but still reflecting a girl's innocence. My deep hope is that the faces of my own children — two are girls — reflect something like this in their own old age.

But what if that woman, while still a girl, was asked about killing herself? Would that have made her happier? And therapy? "You've experienced so much trauma, you know?"

It's good to think about it with International Day of Happiness on Wednesday. Yes, the United Nations has deemed that humankind has a fundamental right to happiness, an interesting story in itself.

It's especially interesting considering youth in western nations, the world's more privileged nations, are, we're told, strikingly unhappy. About 40 per cent of North American Gen-Zers have had therapy. Many are medicated and convinced they have a limiting mental disorder. Why?

One reason is because intervention itself has risks. Labels are harmful. And studies — one involved 8,000 British teens, two involved 3,500 Australian teens — show such school-based therapy programs get youth more anxious and depressed than otherwise. Why so?

Because ruminating on your problems makes them grow. That's why a coach doesn't unify his team by asking Mikey how he's feeling about his parents' divorce. Instead, he gives Mikey a great task to make him a stronger person.

The mother of that 12-year-old boy, by the way, is Wall Street Journal writer Abigail Shrier. And that Maryland judge? She's Shrier's grandmother. Shrier, who's also a lawyer, recently wrote "Bad Therapy: Why the kids aren't growing up." It's a well-researched read that

asks fair questions about how culture's climate change that overprotects kids, hurts them.

Not that intervention is always harmful. Good therapy exists. Get cancer and get chemotherapy. It can save your life. Like a skilled therapist can save someone in crisis.

But the rule of thumb is this: If something will strengthen your child, do it. If not, then don't. Because a strong child is a happy child. And what parent doesn't want a happy child?

The paradox is that you never arrive at full happiness. It's an ongoing journey. An outgrowth of myriad choices. Also, it involves four pillars: faith, family, friends and work. This, according to Arthur Brooks, a Harvard University happiness guru who studies both the neuroscience and social science of these matters. His most recent happiness book is co-authored with Oprah.

Everything else, including addictive social media or well-meaning but meddling adults, is too much. What kids everywhere want is trusting, supportive connections with loved ones, especially Mom and Dad. If extended loved ones join their journey, even better.

With warm weather near, it's a good time to let the children discover more of this: that life, even when it knocks you around (especially when it knocks you around), is meant to be lived in a spirit of adventure and thanksgiving.

Teach anything less and the kids get ripped off. Or worse.

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## Peterborough housing project on track to reap myriad benefits

DR. THOMAS PIGGOTT

Through the Wolfe Street Modular Bridge Housing Project, the City of Peterborough, along with key partner Elizabeth Fry Society of Peterborough, are on a path to improving health by reducing homelessness.

It's a message worth repeating — housing is a key determinant of health and a strong predictor of well-being. With a safe and affordable roof over your head, your chances of experiencing a range of health issues — such as toxic stress, addictions, mental-health issues, and chronic illness — are dramatically reduced. Your chances of recovery from illness and adversity are also more likely to increase.

The project consists of 50 individual modular units, a washroom/shower facility and a service hub for support agencies for people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

A recent city staff report shows it is on track to deliver a range of potential benefits. If these early results can be sustained and scaled, the entire community will reap the social, health and economic rewards that only ongoing investment in safe and accessible housing can provide.

There is no doubt that addressing the growing problem of homelessness will require significant and ongoing investment by all levels of government. It is therefore not sur-

prising that recent public discussion surrounding the project has focused largely on the cost, which in its first year totals around \$4.6 million. By next year, Peterborough city staff estimate operating costs will drop to around \$1.9 million, after cost savings from contributions made by cabin residents are included as revenue.

To some, these figures sound like a lot, especially at a time when the rising cost of living feels beyond the means of many. Yet, this pales in comparison to the high cost of virtually every other institutional response to homelessness that exists in Canada, from ERs, hospitals and prisons to shelters and sleeping rough.

Take, for example, a 2005 study comparing the cost of a bed in jail, a hospital, and an emergency shelter in four Canadian cities. Among these options, jails and hospitals were by far the most expensive, at \$66,000 to \$120,000 per year.

Emergency shelters of all types, though less costly, remain high, ranging between \$13,000 to \$42,000 annually.

Only with supportive and affordable housing options do we see an annualized cost-reduction be-

tween \$5,000 to \$18,000. More recent research has arrived at similar findings.

Along the housing continuum, the Wolfe Street project most resembles supportive or transitional housing. This type of housing recognizes that many people often require a stable environment with essential supports before moving on to more permanent options. With many of these more permanent options in short supply across the province, the Modular Bridge Housing Community is providing an important stopgap.

We should not underestimate the power of housing to affect our health. With stability and support, many other issues begin to fall into place. This is a core element underpinning the philosophy and evidence behind Housing First, a strategy that continues to guide Peterborough's current and ongoing efforts to eliminate homelessness in our community.

Having seen the health-related of impacts of homelessness in this community with my own eyes, as medical officer of health, as a doctor working clinically at our local hospital and as a resident of our community, I commend the City of Peterborough and partners for this important contribution to housing and health.

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