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#2 IN A SERIES

FROM A MANDATE FOR CHANGE TO A PLAN TO GOVERN

Getting Refugee Policy Right

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INTRODUCTION

The tragic image of three-year old Alan Kurdi who died along with his mother and brother when their boat capsized trying to flee Syria in September 2015 galvanized Canadians. It was a poignant reminder of the humanitarian crisis that has been ravaging the Middle East as a result of the Syrian civil war and the murderous expansion of Daesh, the self-styled Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

At the same time, it laid bare just how unprepared Canada's refugee policy is: the premise of this policy paper is that Canada can do better than having the telegenic images of the tragic death of a toddler stimulate reactionary policy responses that have politicians make up policy and targets on the fly.

Refugee policy thus emerged unexpectedly as a major issue during the 2015 federal election campaign, which spawned a national conversation about refugee resettlement and the economic, social, national security, and foreign policy implications. The debate endures as the new Liberal government begins to welcome as many as 50,000 refugees over the next 12 months, when one combines the Liberals' election promise to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees immediately with other commitments, plus Canada's usual intake

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of refugees from other countries (Chase and Leblanc 2015a). Not since the “boat people” from Indochina has refugee policy featured as prominently on the national and global stage. To the extent that there is a silver lining here – it is an opportunity to atone for past sins – such as the contemptible treatment of Jewish refugees in the lead up to the Second World War – by forging a coherent, sustainable approach to refugee policy in Canada.

The Prime Minister has professed that his government is determined to “get it right” on its current resettlement plan in particular and refugee policy in general (CBC News 2015). This policy objective is as critical as it is controversial. With some 19.5 million refugees in the world (UNHCR 2015) and the political, economic, demographic, social, and cultural dislocation that will plague the arc of countries from the Maghreb through Pakistan, as well as significant part of Africa, the refugee issue is bound to be with us and quite possibly become even more pressing for years to come.

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute’s mission is to help to inform sound public policy at the federal level. Our goal in this essay series is to help the new government best achieve its top policy objectives.

This second essay in the series will help Canadians better understand the source of the refugee crisis, the reasons that it is likely to persist, and how the new government can “get it right” with a coherent, systematic long-term plan. The purpose is to ensure that refugee policy strikes an appropriate balance between compassion and security and sets the conditions for incoming refugees to integrate and find opportunity here in Canada.

The current resettlement efforts should thus not be seen as a one-off solution. Rather, Canada needs a coherent strategy going forward so that refugee policy does not become politicized on an ad hoc basis. We propose that the government harness this opportunity to (1) put in place a process of consulting with provinces and municipalities to generate an annual number of government-sponsored refugees to be resettled; (2) likewise with civil society organizations to gauge the number of private sponsorships the government can count on when admitting refugees; and (3) use the humanitarian refugee-assistance envelope to assist those refugee host countries that follow best practices as an incentive to encourage countries to adopt best practices.

SOURCE OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The Syrian civil war and the expansion of ISIS have made large swaths of the region uninhabitable. These twin forces have produced a humanitarian and refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Balkan wars in the 1990s.

Almost half of all Syrians – an estimated 9 million people – have fled their homes since the outbreak of civil war in March 2011. The majority are internally displaced persons within Syria. Over 4 million, however, have fled Syria to seek refuge in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt. Most of these jurisdictions already face their own economic and social challenges. Lebanon, for example, now hosts about 1.2 million refugees from Syria. That amounts to an astonishing one in five people in the country (Amnesty International 2015a). By way of analogy, imagine about 7 million Americans flooding into Canada with little more than the clothes on their backs.

In fact, most of the world’s refugees are found not in the West, but in the developing world. Developing countries host about 85 percent of the world’s refugees. The top three host countries alone – Turkey, Pakistan, and Lebanon – account for 30 percent of the refugees registered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (see table 1).

TABLE 1: Top 10 host refugee countries (as of October 12, 2015)

Ranking	Country
1	Turkey (1.59 million in 2014 and now more than 2 million)
2	Pakistan (1.5 million)
3	Lebanon (1.15 million)
4	Iran (950,000)
5	Ethiopia
6	Jordan
7	Kenya
8	Chad
9	Uganda
10	China

Source: Amnesty International 2015b.

Most of these countries are struggling to provide essentials to their own populations, let alone having to cope with an influx of refugees. Water and food scarcity are critical issues and the refugee influx is straining already-overstretched public resources. Both Jordan and Lebanon, for example, will run large budgetary deficits in 2015 as a result of refugee expenditures and other Syria-related revenue losses, such as in trade and tourism. Even if Jordan receives all of the international refugee assistance that has been pledged, it will still overspend by \$660 million, or by five percent of its \$11.4 billion budget (Schenker 2015).

Across the Mediterranean, more than 750,000 migrants have arrived in Europe so far this year. Using asylum applications as a benchmark shows that already, to date, 700,000 have applied, but many more are thought to have slipped into Europe undetected and undocumented (UNDP 2015).

Germany continues to be the most popular destination for migrants arriving in Europe. It has received the highest number of new asylum applications, with more than 331,000 by the end of October (Jimenez 2015). Up to 10,000 refugees per day continue to enter Germany (*Spiegel* Staff 2015). Smaller countries such as Hungary and Slovenia have carried a disproportionate burden. The Slovenian government recently established a limit of 2500 migrants per day in order to stabilize its refugee flows. The little country accepted more than 180,000 migrants this fall after Hungary closed its borders to stem its own influx: a country of 2 million people was confronted with up to 13,000 migrants a day (Surk 2015). Even progressive countries, such as Sweden, have imposed stringent border controls to limit the inflow of asylum seekers (Kingsley, Weaver, and Kassam 2015). By comparison, Canada's 2 x 25,000 is a drop in the bucket. But what approach should Canada take?

AN ONGOING CRISIS

This humanitarian crisis is unlikely to abate, at least in the short term. To the contrary, it may actually worsen. ISIS seems to have an unbridled ability to destabilize the region. Its reach now extends to Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen. And the broader ISIS's expanse, the greater the refugee crisis. Egypt's roughly five million

Copts, the Middle East's last remaining major Christian sect, for instance, were already deeply worried about their future long before ISIS showed up. Incessant internecine violence in Syria presents further risk for displacement. Foreign policy observer Fareed Zakaria (2015) notes, "the strength of the Islamic State does not appear to be much diminished" and there is a case that Syria's conflict may be intensifying.

At the same time, conditions in the region's refugee camps are deteriorating: crowded and unsanitary; malnutrition and diarrheal diseases such as cholera are widely prevalent. Education is largely non-existent and even where it is, children are preoccupied with begging to get by. UNICEF estimates that 13 million children are deprived of education as a result of conflict in the region. As one policy expert puts it, "Destabilization will come when you have a generation of children growing up in an environment where there is no education and social support" (Kullab 2015). That is, the seeds for further instability are well on their way to germinating. Australia's immigration minister recently returned from the region to conclude: "it will get worse before it gets better" (quoted in Wroe 2015).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CANADIAN REFUGEE POLICY

The recent preoccupation with refugee policy suggests that Canadians want to help and the new government has rightly prioritized the issue.

By way of background, major steps in Canada's modern experience with refugee policy have a familial connection to the current prime minister. During his father's prime ministership Canada signed the United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees in June 1969 and enacted legislation in 1976 to designate refugees as an admissible class for resettlement.

But our general openness to migrants – particularly those fleeing poor circumstances and seeking new opportunities – dates back to the era of the first great Liberal Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Immigration was a core part of Laurier's ambitious vision for Canada, as he sought populate the country. Western territory was sparsely populated and disconnected from the rest of the country. Laurier was determined to open Canada's borders to newcomers in pursuit of economic opportunity. A liberal criteria with respect to ethnicity, language, and religion, and a generous homestead policy made Canada an attractive destination for immigrants – from Ukraine, Russia, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States.

Yet racial prejudice and intolerance long marred Canada's immigration and refugee policy. The Chinese "head tax" (and its successor the *Chinese Exclusion Act*), the poor treatment of migrants from India, and the shameful record of Jewish immigration in the lead up to, and during the Second World War, are dark spots on our history. Current circumstances offer another opportunity to atone for our past improprieties.

Canada learned from these painful lessons and came to have an immigration policy that drew from the best of Laurier's vision. While refugee policy was not codified until Pierre Trudeau's prime ministership, Canadians pride themselves on helping those fleeing unsafe circumstances. The admission of close to 38,000 Hungarian refugees in 1957/58 who were in flight from Soviet occupation was a major national undertaking – the largest of any country in proportion to its population (Parks Canada 2015). The subsequent admission of nearly 60,000 Vietnamese refugees ("boat people" as they were often called), following the fall of Saigon, in the late 1970s, is another example of Canadian compassion. Roughly half the Vietnamese refugees in Canada were settled by private sponsorship, and this successful experience caused the government to make the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program permanent (CIC 2015a). It has since become a fundamental part of Canada's refugee resettlement policy.

Along the way, then-Prime Minister Trudeau codified the UN convention on refugees and passed legislation recognizing refugee policy as a core part of Canada's immigration system. These steps helped to bring

greater coherence and transparency to the process. As his immigration minister proclaimed at the time: “Greater attention will be given to the acceptance of refugees for settlement in Canada from other parts of the world” (quoted in Knowles 2000).

Since Laurier, Canada has showed a general propensity for compassion for those fleeing persecution and seeking opportunity. And ordinary Canadians were a major part of the effort. In 1986, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) awarded the UNHCR’s Nansen Award to “the people of Canada” to recognize the work of Canada in helping the cause of refugees around the world. It remains the only instance the award was given to an entire country (UNHCR).

CURRENT REFUGEE POLICY

Canada offers refugee protection to people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution, and who are, therefore, unable to return home. The refugee system has two main parts: Canada, and the In-Canada Asylum Program, for those making refugee protection claims from within Canada, and the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, for people seeking protection from outside of Canada. These programs are the key pillars of our refugee policy, though there are other components such as the Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program and the new Blended Visa Office-Referred Program.

Prospective refugees who are able to make their way to Canada can make a settlement claim upon arrival. The number of people who do so varies year-over-year. In 2014, more than 13,500 came to Canada and made an asylum claim. The In-Canada Asylum Program considers refugee protection for these individuals.

The Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program is the main part of the refugee system and the subject of greater interest given the Syrian refugee crisis. As part of this program, the Canadian government works with international organizations, such as the UNHCR, to identify and refer refugees for resettlement in Canada. A number of considerations go into determining eligibility, including a legitimate threat of persecution and the absence of alternative options for resettlement.

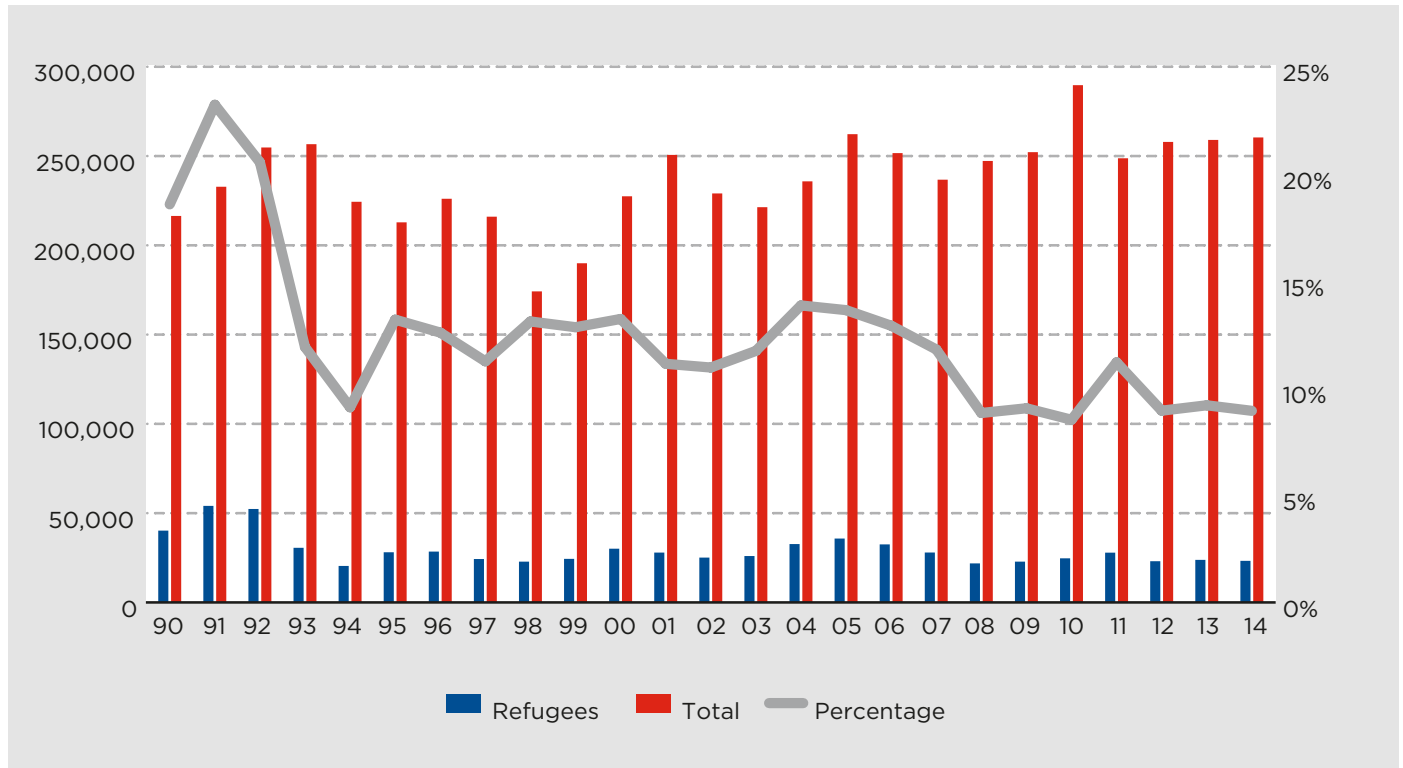
Resettlement cases are carefully screened to ensure that there are no undue concerns about security, crime, or health. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration (now the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship) works with the Canada Border Services Agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and the Department of Health to carry out the screening process. However, the screening is only as good as the information available, which is often quite incomplete.

Private sponsors also play an important role in Canada’s resettlement efforts. Some are organized to do so on an ongoing basis and have signed sponsorship agreements with the government to help support refugees when they resettle in Canada. These organizations are called Sponsorship Agreement Holders. Other sponsors, known as Groups of Five and Community Sponsors, are not involved on an ongoing basis but sponsor refugees in a particular case.

Government-assisted refugees receive financial support to help them get established and integrated into Canada. The Resettlement Assistance Program provides financial support for accommodations, basic household items, and income support for up to one year. The program’s annual budget has been roughly \$58.7 million over the past three years (CIC 2015b). This financial support excludes health benefits, which are provided through the Interim Federal Health Program, at an annual cost of approximately \$52 million per year (CIC 2015b).

These programs are the foundation of Canada’s refugee resettlement program. Canada resettled an annual average of 25,325 refugees per year over the period between 2006 and 2014. But the number of refugees has actually fallen as a share of total immigration as shown in chart 1.

CHART 1: Refugees as a percentage of total immigration – Canada, 1990 to 2014



Source: CIC 2012a.

Canada has already resettled more than 25,000 Iraqi and Syrian refugees since 2009 (CIC Media Relations 2015), prior to the new government’s policy announcement. It is likely that we will face continued pressure to help resettle a greater number of refugees in the coming years.

Canada is a wealthy, generous country with a reputation as a safe haven for those facing persecution and requiring resettlement. Our historical experience provides some insight into what we can accomplish in terms of refugee resettlement. But there are limits on what we can learn from the past. Security concerns and challenges arising from civil war and failed states present new difficulties for host countries to carry out proper security screening and ensure successful integration for resettled refugees. And the magnitude of the crisis also makes it unique. The key now is to devise a refugee policy that meets the new government’s policy objectives in the short-term and provides for a coherent, systematic framework for the longer-term.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT’S PLAN

The new government’s immediate plan is to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees over 2015/2016: 15,000 will be government-assisted refugees and the remaining 10,000 will be privately sponsored. The first 10,000 are expected to arrive in Canada by the end of the month.

The decision to give sufficient time for proper security screening and to secure settlement arrangements here in Canada will help to sustain public support for the refugee system’s integrity and create the conditions for better eventual integration. One major US newspaper judges: “Canada is showing the way [on Syrian refugees], with compassion and sound judgment” (*Washington Post* Editorial Board 2015). The ultimate test of whether the government has found the right balance between compassion and judgment will not be whether it meets its refugee target and its timeline (both of which were devised more with politics than

policy in mind), but rather whether the refugees are resettled without security issues and in a way that supports integration and economic opportunity, and these questions will be determined over the long term.

But this experience ought to provide a powerful lesson for the new government. The global refugee crisis is not going away. It has the potential to be an animating policy issue throughout the government's four-year term. This means that a longer-term solution is needed to put refugee policy on a coherent and systematic footing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LONG-TERM REFUGEE POLICY

Canada's priority needs to be a sustained (and sustainable) commitment to refugee resettlement (Leuprecht 2015). What does a coherent, systematic policy that balances compassion and security, and creates the conditions for incoming refugees to integrate and find opportunity here in Canada look like? We propose that such a plan has three key components.

The current target of 25,000 Syrian refugees is arbitrary. Canada's resettlement target – which is approved by the federal Cabinet and publicly released each year – ought to be a bottom-up exercise developed in consultation with provinces and municipalities on a regular basis. First, then, a coherent, systematic refugee policy means consulting with provincial and local governments to ascertain capacity and resources: The federal target should be a function of local capacity. Communities should determine how many refugees they are able to resettle, each province should then establish its commitment, and adding those commitments up generates the federal target. The obligation, then, is on communities to step up, not on the federal government to float an arbitrary target which it proceeds to impose on the country. In return, the federal government might fully or partially compensate provinces (and municipalities by way of provinces) for associated social service costs, such as education, for a certain number of years.

Second, the federal government should consult non-governmental agencies and civil society groups that sponsor refugees privately. Their aggregate commitment might amount to the rough annual target of privately-sponsored refugees; but provinces should have a say since they end up shouldering many of the costs associated with privately-sponsored refugees. Research by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration shows that privately-sponsored refugees tend to integrate better, more quickly, and ultimately more successfully than refugees with no prior links or social capital (CIC 2007 and 2012b). The goal, then, should be to consider what policy steps can be taken to enable sponsored refugees. This could include encouraging and supporting more private sponsorship, by reduced wait times, providing greater financial support to Sponsorship Agreement Holders, and cost-sharing assistance to individuals and families (often known as "Group of Five" sponsors) who wish to sponsor refugees. A preoccupation with government-assisted refugees over privately-sponsored ones is more of an ideological pose than it is an evidence-based position. Going forward, the federal government should aim to shore up the generosity and ingenuity of Canada's civil society to help resettle refugees.

Third, Canada should support those states that are bearing the brunt of the refugee crisis. Canada's geographic distance from the heart of the crisis has its advantages. Asylum seekers cannot easily migrate to Canada: 95 percent of migrants who arrive in Canada have been pre-selected. In Europe, by contrast, the number are reversed: 95 percent of migrants just "show up." Canada has the luxury of "cherry-picking" from UN-sanctioned refugee camps. But other jurisdictions – particularly the neighbouring states – do not, and compassion should not be a function of geography.

Indeed, Canada has a moral obligation to support countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq that are on the front line of the crisis. The new government has pledged an additional \$100 million to help the UNHCR cover its costs of managing Syrian refugee camps (Blanchfield 2015). Yet, the UNHCR has only raised 50 percent of what it sought for 2015 to assist Syrian refugees and there is considerable evidence

that the predominant host countries require major financial support. Canada might leverage its prosperity to encourage best practices: do our part in taking in refugees, and reward those countries who are meeting their obligations under international law while adhering to best practices. This is especially critical in light of evidence that most Syrian refugees do not want to leave their homeland and come to Canada and Europe (Chase and Leblanc 2015b). Canadian policy should not force them to migrate or presume that refugees want to come here. Instead an evidence-based policy would focus its effort and resources to reflect the preferences of those affected. Neither the transnational refugee flows we have witnessed, nor the discord they sow among allies, are in Canada's interest.

These three key principles – working in concert with provinces and municipalities, mobilizing civil society, and leveraging our resources internationally to support a comprehensive response to the humanitarian crisis – will be need to be present in a long-term plan for dealing with the ongoing refugee situation in the Middle East and elsewhere. A long-term policy will also be guided by the experience and lessons from the immediate resettlement plan. It will not be easy but the government will be aided by the lesson of Laurier's vision and the generosity and compassion of the Canadian public.

CONCLUSION

The new government has prioritized a resettlement plan for 25,000 Syrian refugees in the short-term. It is a laudable objective. Canada has a rich tradition of opening its doors to those fleeing persecution for new opportunities.

But Canada's approach to refugees has the potential to be less myopic and reactionary. The underlying causes of the Middle Eastern refugee crisis persist. And the government will want to forge a plan for the long-term.

The current experience ought to serve as a catalyst for bigger thinking about refugee policy. The government has said that its determination is to "get it right" and it has shown a willingness to adjust its policy accordingly. This is a positive sign.

The goal should be to develop a refugee policy that is coherent, systematic, and sets the foundation for refugees to integrate and pursue opportunity here in Canada.

This paper highlights lessons from Canada's history of refugee policy and sets out three recommendations – bottom-up coordination with provinces and municipalities, encouraging more private sponsorship, and leveraging humanitarian aid to encourage best practices – to improve our current refugee system over the long-term.

During the recent federal election the Liberal Party promised "real change" for Canadians. With the right mix of policies, such as the ones set out above, the new government has a great opportunity to deliver real change for the better.

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What Is in a Name?

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute exists not merely to burnish the splendid legacy of two towering figures in Canadian history – Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir Wilfrid Laurier – but to renew that legacy. A Tory and a Grit, an English speaker and a French speaker – these two men represent the very best of Canada’s fine political tradition. As prime minister, each championed the values that led to Canada assuming her place as one of the world’s leading democracies. We will continue to vigorously uphold these values, the cornerstones of our nation.



Working for a Better Canada

Good policy doesn’t just happen; it requires good ideas, hard work, and being in the right place at the right time. In other words, it requires MLI. We pride ourselves on independence, and accept no funding from the government for our research. If you value our work and if you believe in the possibility of a better Canada, consider making a tax-deductible donation. The Macdonald-Laurier Institute is a registered charity.

Our Issues

The Institute undertakes an impressive programme of thought leadership on public policy. Some of the issues we have tackled recently include:

- Getting the most out of our petroleum resources;
- Ensuring students have the skills employers need;
- Aboriginal people and the management of our natural resources;
- Controlling government debt at all levels;
- The vulnerability of Canada’s critical infrastructure;
- Ottawa’s regulation of foreign investment; and
- How to fix Canadian health care.

CELEBRATING



5 Years of True North in Canadian Public Policy

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What people are saying about the Macdonald-Laurier Institute

In five short years, the institute has established itself as a steady source of high-quality research and thoughtful policy analysis here in our nation's capital. Inspired by Canada's deep-rooted intellectual tradition of ordered liberty – as exemplified by Macdonald and Laurier – the institute is making unique contributions to federal public policy and discourse. Please accept my best wishes for a memorable anniversary celebration and continued success.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute is an important source of fact and opinion for so many, including me. Everything they tackle is accomplished in great depth and furthers the public policy debate in Canada. Happy Anniversary, this is but the beginning.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE PAUL MARTIN

In its mere five years of existence, the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, under the erudite Brian Lee Crowley's vibrant leadership, has, through its various publications and public events, forged a reputation for brilliance and originality in areas of vital concern to Canadians: from all aspects of the economy to health care reform, aboriginal affairs, justice, and national security.

BARBARA KAY, NATIONAL POST COLUMNIST

Intelligent and informed debate contributes to a stronger, healthier and more competitive Canadian society. In five short years the Macdonald-Laurier Institute has emerged as a significant and respected voice in the shaping of public policy. On a wide range of issues important to our country's future, Brian Lee Crowley and his team are making a difference.

JOHN MANLEY, CEO COUNCIL