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## Beyond the Duck: Investing in Parliament's infrastructure

*The McGrath Committee was a moment of mature and comprehensive conversation about Canada's democratic infrastructure. But it's not a piece of history we can afford to leave as part of the past*



Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press



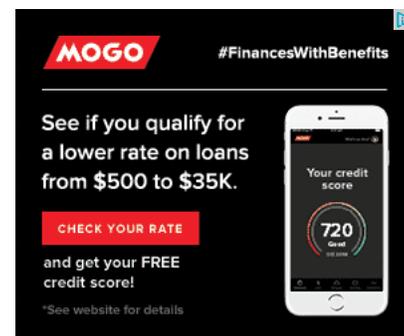
SPECIAL TO NATIONAL  
POST

***There's a lot more to celebrate on Canada's 150th birthday than gargantuan rubber ducks. That's why the National Post asked some of Canada's most interesting personalities and writers to tell us what they would rather celebrate about Canada on the sesquicentennial — that is, if the government actually gave a duck what they thought.***

JANE HILDERMAN —

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9:36 AM EDT

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9:39 AM EDT



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across the country. And 2017 will likely mark the creation of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, as per the vision of the current Trudeau government.

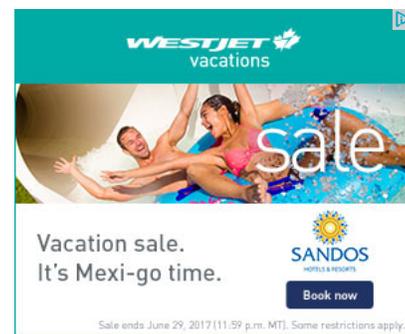
While steel and cement may literally bring us together, we're also bound by democratic infrastructure. Of course, this type of infrastructure is less visible, less concrete. But it's no less important. The norms, rules and institutions of democracy shape public decision-making. Unlike other infrastructure projects, though, there is no chief planner for democracy. Instead, responsibility for its form and upkeep rests with all of us, but particularly our elected MPs.



Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

In 1984, a committee of the House of Commons was struck to consider how to "restore the House of Commons to its rightful place in the Canadian political process," particularly by decentralizing power from the Prime Minister's Office and giving more responsibility to individual MPs. Six MPs drawn from the Progressive Conservative, Liberal and NDP parties formed the Special Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons, which came to be called the McGrath Committee.

The committee members studied, travelled and listened. And naturally, they produced thick reports. Ultimately, the House adopted a number of the committee's recommendations, including requiring the House speaker to be elected by secret ballot, ensuring more private members' bills would reach voting stage, and giving standing committees more independence to conduct studies. The committee's success was owed in part to the fact that their recommendations



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**Beyond the Duck:** Investing in Parliament's infrastructure

CANADA 150.  
BEYOND THE DUCK

To this day, the McGrath Committee remains a substantive benchmark in Canadian history. It was a moment of mature and comprehensive conversation about Canada's democratic infrastructure. But it's not a piece of history we can afford to leave as part of the past. Samara Canada's research tells us that my generation needs a McGrath Committee of its own. Samara has conducted more than one hundred interviews with former MPs from many previous governments, and they're in agreement that power has become even more centralized in leaders' offices, and MPs' voices even more marginalized.

Notably, the McGrath Committee was struck shortly after a large majority government was elected. The Progressive Conservative government of that day included many rookie MPs who were seeking to find ways to play a greater role in the legislative process. Sound familiar? The parallels to today's 42nd Parliament—which includes a large and talented group of new MPs—cannot be missed. Stubborn partisanship, however, has thus far prevented a meaningful conversation about parliamentary reform from getting off the ground.

On July 1, many of us will tune into the Canada Day celebrations broadcast live from Parliament Hill. While we're watching the fanfare, we might spare a few moments to reflect on the place behind the familiar gothic facade of Centre Block. Renovations of Parliament's physical structure may be nearly complete, but that doesn't mean our work is done. We must invest in renovating our democracy to make it more relevant, more inclusive, and more effective for the next 150 years.

*Jane Hilderman is the Executive Director of Samara Canada, a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canadian democracy*

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Saturday	26°C

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