

Let's celebrate our champions and protect our freedoms

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Joe Oliver was federal minister of natural resources and minister of finance 2011- 2015.

At FP Comment, we do our share of complaining. For the festive season, six wise Canadians tell us what not to complain about. What's going well and shouldn't be changed? Today, Joe Oliver on celebrating champions and protecting freedoms.

Canadians often remind each other how incredibly fortunate we are to live in this wonderful country, especially considering the tyranny and persecution endured by people elsewhere in the world. There is indeed a great deal to be joyful about and many champions and accomplishments to celebrate. So let's start with a few of our proudest moments.

Canadian James Naismith invented basketball (as a dual citizen and while in the U. S., but why quibble?) so it was only fair that the Raptors finally won the NBA championship. What an exciting victory for the entire country and wouldn't it be great if the Raptors kept the Larry O'Brien Championship Trophy for a long time? Also this year, Bianca Andreescu became the first Canadian to win a Grand Slam U. S. Open singles tennis title. Astronaut David Saint- Jacques returned to Earth after 204 days in space. And Winnipeg- born astrophysicist Jim Peebles was awarded the Nobel Prize for physics.

Several amazing Canadian companies were leaders in innovation and entrepreneurship. Shopify, an Ottawa based e- commerce business, grew to a market capitalization of \$59 billion.

Lightspeed, a point- of- sale and e- commerce software provider based in Montreal, went public and now has a market value of about \$ 2.8 billion. Verafin, a St. John's financial crime detection and investigation company, completed a \$ 515- million private placement. Coveo, a Quebec City provider of intelligent and predictive search technologies, raised \$227 million privately.

In the retail space, Canada Goose, headquartered in Toronto, continues its remarkable growth, proving that high quality winter apparel manufactured here can be sold even in China.

Since innovation is critical to productivity and competitiveness, these are good news stories for the country (counterbalancing somewhat the 20 per cent decline in plant and equipment investment over the past five years). Also encouraging was the signing of the free trade agreement with the U. S. and Mexico, warts and all.

Still on a high note, Canada was the second country to legalize pot. Mind you, governments managed what few could accomplish: lose money selling weed. Their secret was to limit supply of a lower- quality product sold at a higher price than the black market. That experience should serve as a reminder: governments are usually hopeless at running a business. Meanwhile, Canada led the world in financing cannabis companies.

But Canada is more than its towering athletic, scientific and entrepreneurial successes and public sector bungling. It is a place and an idea. The place Canada is endowed with magnificent scenery and vast natural resources, which we manage with great care. Our 348 million hectares of forest lands constitute nine per cent of the world's forest canopy, but account for only 0.3 per cent of global deforestation. The lands we protect are the size of France and Spain combined.

Our electricity is 82 per cent non- GHG emitting, compared with about 36 per cent in the U. S. and 54 per cent in Europe. Canada is a world leader in energy innovation and technology. In the past 20 years the oilsands, which generate a minuscule one- thousandth of global emissions, dropped emissions per barrel by a third. We can be proud of our environmental accomplishments, driven mainly by the private sector.

To Canadians who still harboured naive delusions, the Chinese government made clear this year it will not be constrained by international norms.

When Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor are finally freed from a harsh and retaliatory imprisonment, we can resume a normal trading relationship — but with eyes wide open.

In Canada, political power is transferred according to parliamentary conventions and laws, without violence or social upheaval. Canadians cherish liberty, democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, religion and the press, protection of minorities and care for the disadvantaged. We insist on equality, irrespective of gender, race, sexual orientation, faith or country of origin. One positive result of the otherwise dispiriting federal election is that it confirmed large majority support for LGBTQ rights. A political leader who considers gay families less worthy of respect or is visibly uncomfortable with marriage equality is now an electoral liability no party can afford.

Immigrants and refugees flock to Canada because of the freedom and economic opportunity our prosperous land offers. We welcome them and they contribute to the public good by building a better life for their families and contributing to their communities. Other countries can only marvel at how successfully Canada manages its diversity.

Canada's brave men and women in uniform who serve in harm's way deserve our enduring gratitude. Our duty is to combat domestic attempts to engender hatred, subvert justice and debase our values, especially free speech. As a tribute to our ancestors and an obligation to our children, we should protect what is most precious and never take our blessings for granted.

This year offered a lot worth preserving and repeating in 2020. Bravo, Canada!

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