

Looking forward to the possibilities in 2026

Heather Anne Wakeling Lister - February 2026

At 6:30 am, before brewing a cup of tea, I listened to a particularly cringing political mud-slinging, which for me, offered no value at all -- another politician complaining about what is wrong.

It would be refreshing to listen to researched conversations about what is working, with politicians sharing realistic, goal focused support of optimistic opportunity, for 2026 is going to be a year when the need for optimistic opportunity will prove paramount.

With the political situation south of our border being at best a wake-up call for democracy, and at its least, the designed beginning of an authoritarian war-state, I draw hope for 2026 from the past year's federal government's dignified, outward reach toward allied and Commonwealth countries, and for the most part, staying out of the fray below the 49th parallel.

Most people learn the hard way that it's a far better use of their life energy to avoid wasting time fighting those creating intentional discord. By the federal government focusing attention on increasing inter-provincial trade, while actively strengthening international alliances within the commonwealth association and allied countries, I feel they are making smart moves, not rhetorical ones.

Just as one wouldn't walk over to a neighbour to ask about trading some milk for a cup of sugar when they're just about to close their door to muffle those screaming during a soul-splintering family argument, any reasonable person, would choose to walk further down, around the corner, to the more peaceful home, where their presence and request to trade are welcome.

According to recently published financial statistics, it appears that Canadians are doing that very same thing. Having taken some financial shock, especially in steel, aluminum and car manufacturing sectors, Canadians, neighbour to neighbour, are buying local, their wages saving neighbourhood economies, and so, we're doing better than expected.

Looking forward to 2026 I take pleasure seeing an investment allotted in the latest federal budget, which aligns with the unique opportunity presented from the dismantling of research and universities south of our border. This investment of \$1.7 billion, to support the recruitment of world-renowned researchers to our universities could place Canada among the world leaders in research and intellectual retention.

Right now, AI is a rapid-ticking opportunity. We are entering a technological revolution with consequences similar, but more far reaching than what print-industry skilled tradespeople went through in the 1980s when introduction of the apple computer revolutionized production. Literally overnight, I, like thousands of others, became redundant, obsolete.

Technological advancements are inevitable, therefore this investment, combined with our stable legal system, and reliable banking institutions, will offer the opportunity to create 100 new Impact + Research Chairs. Inventing technologies that will clean our environmental manufacturing processes, assist with climate resilience, study the Arctic, our health, food and water security, defence, medical breakthroughs -- the list is extensive.

While not a particular fan of the implementation of AI chatbots in children's stuffed toys as conversations and the bonding that takes place at young ages should be with humans, not digital playmates -- wondering too just where does all that 'private therapy' conversation end up? AI, if used for public good, offers tremendous potential in expanding access to knowledge and therefore intellectual growth.

When I was younger, access to education was at the library. Index cards in a large cabinet. Books aligned on shelves. I loved the high school library and spent a great deal of time there. When I worked in hospitals, medical libraries were an amazing resource, the librarians themselves sleuths, expert at ferreting out medical studies, factual, reliable information.

AI, when fed with truthful, factual, and reliable information is, like access to a library, an equalizer. Meaning that self-education throughout all economic classes and geographic locations should be open to all.

In fact, anything a person wishes to educate themselves about can be sourced through AI. And with the increase usage of digital learning platforms, it is interesting to see if or how universities and colleges will continue the practice of student registration for on-campus residency or classroom attendance.

Returning to why I applaud this \$1.7 billion-dollar investment: by investing in intelligence, 2026 could prove a pivot point when Canada transforms herself from a primary trading partner with the United States, towards a global market supplier of goods, food, and agricultural supports including potash. And building the energy infrastructure, rail and ships necessary to do this.

And with the added bonus of supporting a vibrant research and intellectual hub, we might just well prove to ourselves, that once again, we're plenty smart too.

As for my 2026 resolution--I am taking advantage of AI to learn another language, French, maybe Spanish--on my phone.