# CBC POWER & POLITICS

23 May 2025

## CONSERVATIVE ECONOMIC GROWTH COUNCIL

Participants: Greg McLean

**Peter**: Canada's new energy Minister is laying out his vision to retool our economy by fast tracking resource projects. In a speech today, Tim Hodgson tried to convince business leaders in Calgary that this government will be different.

**Tim Hodgson**: I want to be very clear: in the new economy we are building, Canada will no longer be defined by delay. We will be defined by delivery. We have the people. We have the ideas. And we now have a government determined to lead and help unlock the potential of Canadian workers and businesses.

**Peter**: but the Liberals aren't the only party trying to chart a new path for the economy this week. On Tuesday, the Conservatives announced a new Leader's Economic Growth Council to identify the root causes of canada's economic stagnation and propose practical solutions. Conservative MP Greg McLean is the chair of the council and he spoke with him yesterday just after the G7 Summit wrapped up in alberta. nice to see you.

**Greg**: Thank you for having me.

**Peter**: The tricky part of the opposition, you have to oppose, and don't get to propose anything. What does this council propose to get the economy moving again?

**Greg**: You think of what opposition parties do, they are responsible to hold the government accountable. So our role in the House of Commons, of course, is to make sure we try to improve Government's legislation every step of the way. It's a new Parliament. We have to make sure we're working with the other parliamentarians in advancing what we think are better solutions for the Canadian people here. Because at the end, it's about good government for all Canadians that we're trying to achieve. We've been working on that a long time. I've been here five and a half years trying to advance the interests of the country that we think are better economic outcomes, and Pierre Poilievre recognized this and asked me to head up a council here. Prior to an election, parties always go through the process, at least opposition parties, of presenting what we're going to put forward as economic priorities in the election. Now we did so. We did so in the past election. You take a look at some of the key things we put on the table, including getting rid of the carbon tax, including getting rid of the capital gains tax increase that the liberals already had on the books before the election were immediately wiped off the table because of the effectiveness of what we brought to the table in actually assessing these economic outcomes that the government was leading the country down the path towards. So these are effective outcomes at the end of the day for the whole country. And i think people have to look at that. We want to continue that process obviously and make sure that even though there's not an election on the horizon, that we're looking at the economic growth options for Canada going forward here and making sure that we have the ability to move them forward. Now you heard my Leader Pierre Poilievre talk to the new Prime Minister and he says take our ideas and implement them for the better of the country. Fine. We come up with the ideas and you get to use them while you're in government for the next four years potentially. Use some of the good ideas to make sure we get some advancement in the economy in Canada.

**Peter**: You're a business guy. Your background is in finance, oil, gas back in Alberta. This council that you're heading up says, according to the official announcement, it's going to consult widely to gather data, feedback and insight from businesses, labour organizations that, you know, identify the root causes canada's economic stagnation, propose practicallal solutions. Do we need more study? I mean, it feels like we all know what the answers are. How do we actually get them going and how do you do that as the opposition? How do you sort of try to goose that long?

**Greg**: Well, if we knew exactly what the answers were, we wouldn't have to ask the questions. If everybody knew what the answers were, perhaps the government would be moving in the direction towards those solutions. Now we're the opposition party. We want to make sure that we get this full input from all of the players across the country. This is going to be multi-province all the way across the province. Making sure we get input on what is better from the whole country from every perspective. We're going to speak with, you know, policy groups all across the country, industries all across the country, making sure they get to put on the table what they see is holding back their growth in the economy right now and make sure we have some actual options about how we make some government changes at the federal level so we can advance those interests of the whole country in that respect. Whenever it comes from an opposition party -- I mean the Liberals are famous for this, they say the Conservatives don't have policy. The Conservatives have policy but it is terrible policy, and then they say okay, we'll take the policies now, thank you very much. The issue is to identify those policies even in this next four-year period -- potential four-year period where we do need to advance the Canadian economy before an election. Before we have to put out our own election ideas going into the next election, we want to make sure that Canadians benefit from a stronger economy going forward.

**Peter**: In the moment, you say, they took the carbon tax idea. That's good. You say they took the capital gains idea. That's great too. What is next? What is the top of the list of things that you want them to move on this week?

**Greg**: Well, if you had to ask me that -- first of all, let's address that and they came to the conclusion and look at the whole front bench --

**Peter**: I get that.

**Greg**: No, I'm going to say this very clearly because they spent -- I can give you hundreds of speeches in the House of Commons where they argued exactly the opposite of what they came out with in the election.

**Peter**: I hear you.

**Greg**: It's the flip-flop that happened here. And recognize the effectiveness of the opposition, and the things that need to happen quickly and we identify them, what we thought were the initial ones, and the repeal of the *Impact Assessment Act*. The Supreme Court of Canada has come out with its position saying that the impact assessment act, Bill C-69 is somewhat ultravirus, and it's a year and a half and the government has not come back with any changes to that at this point in time. One of the things that has to happen and we want that to come not the opposition party, but making sure we have the full feedback of the people that are affected by the impediments of the Canadian economy advancing. Let's recognize we're the second worst performing economy OECD.

**Peter**: Per capita. Anyways, the biggest impediment to the economy of canada is tariffs.

**Greg**: Tariffs is the recent thing.

**Peter**: The thing in front of us.

**Greg**: The tariffs in front of of us. And tariffs is hard on everybody, and tariffs a tax on the producer and the consumer at the end of the day.

**Peter**: For sure.

**Greg**: You need to address these going forward and you need to look at the other impediments and why Canada performed less well than its peers as a result of the policies in the last ten years. And those things have to be identified. Making sure that all of the -- all of the interest in the economy, bring that forward rather clearly as part of the job here. It's not just the opposition parties trying to score points here frankly. We want to ensure we're echoing what people across the country are saying as far as how we make the economy better.

**Peter**: I don't disagree with you on that. I only asked about tariffs because I want to get the Finance Minister communique, and policy uncertainty declined from its peak and doesn't mention the word tariff at all, and there's a lot of question whether it was a concession to Scott Bessent in the United States. Is this a strong enough outcome at a summit with the United States in this moment with tariffs looming so largely?

**Greg**: We looked at -- we listened to Minister Champagne, Canada's new Finance Minister, and it sounded like a whole bunch of platitudes, if you will. We would like to see specifics about what is going to be solved going forward here. We do need to land on something. It's not whole bunch of this, that, and the next thing. A word salad of potential solutions here. Let's look at the outcomes we need to come to. If there is one or two that say this is the main focus, if one of those is saying we need to find a way to get past the tariff situation and get back to business as usual between countries that trade around the world, well, then find a way to do that. You're saying that tariffs is the number 1 problem.

**Peter**: i'm asking. i think it's probably is. but --

**Greg**: If tariffs are the one problem, and this is a G7 meeting in Banff, why isn't there tariffs in the communique?

**Peter**: Fair. Very fair question. We won't get a budget until the fall. I think we're going to get a budget in the fall. What are your concerns about not getting a proper look at the government books?

**Greg**: It's an absolute lack of accountability. and Minister Champagne has to own this at the end of the day. We have a new government coming in here, and they put forward their policy proposes. They put forward effectively a budget going into the election campaign about where they would see the deficit over the next four years, and they costed that out. With a whole bunch of proposals, and of course, 60 billion plus in deficits over the next years. Now they have to put the proof in the pudding here. This is a legacy government. It's not a new government where they have to figure out where the spending is and where it needs to go. It's a legacy government. You know where you're spending. You know what the programs are on the horizon here. So come to the table here and present something to Canadians. Waiting until the fall when we haven't seen Parliament since December is a bit of an embarrassment. So accountability has to be there. Think of our role again, we're the Loyal Opposition. So we need to hold them to account to what they are putting on the table here. Giving a blank cheque and saying look, go ahead, spend what you want, do what you want as opposed to here's the plan to spend, and the accountability for Canadians is a bit of a free ride and I'm surprised that the new Prime Minister is starting off his government this way.

**Peter**: I usually report on the economy. So i don't dig deep on the politics stuff. I have a couple rapid fire ones for you. Radio-Canada's Christian Noël, my colleague reported today there is increasing pressure inside your party for Poilievre to fire his campaign manager Jenni Byrne. Do you support her staying on?

**Greg**: I don't know Jenni Byrne at all. Thank you very much. Those are decisions that are made at a level that is not my parliament --

**Peter**: You don't care one way or the other?

**Greg**: I don't have any input on the decision and nobody has asked my opinion on it and frankly I think there needs to be accountability and mechanisms in over organization. I think a review of who is responsible for what is something that should happen in any organization. And I think that that should happen with the proper personnel in my party and like i say, I'm a Parliamentarian, as opposed to working in the Conservative Party of Canada.

**Peter**: Do you support Pierre Poilievre staying on as leader?

**Greg**: Yes, I do.

**Peter**: Finally, the MP for Calgary Centre, do you oppose alberta holding a referendum on separating from Canada?

**Greg**: Look, a referendum -- if you think about protests, what protests are is a way to re-- a release valve in a democratic society. The government can see what is on the horizon here. You look at the support -- supposed support that some sort of separation or sovereignty would have in Alberta, it is way below the threshold of actually accomplishing what the people that are supporting that want. Nevertheless, there are irritants in confederation right now -- particularly with the Western Canadian provinces. Saskatchewan and Alberta primarily -- on the way our resource sector has been held back by the previous ten years of this government. So we've got to make sure we address those and not make sure we continue to have what many people in Alberta see as taxation without representation and actually move forward with something that is better for the whole country. A strong Alberta leads to a strong canada. The two go hand in hand. We want to make sure we continue with that equation going forward.

**Peter**: I began my reporting career in Quebec. Reporting on the long -- decades' long economic impact of questions like this looming over that province. Do you worry about the impact this kind of thing could have on investment, growth, hiring?

**Greg**: Of course I do. You think of any type of uncertainty as terms of investment holds back economic development and you think of the leader's economic growth council that has been put together, and one of the things that holds that back in canada is the cost of capital here because risk is considered higher in Canada because of the government policies. So if you actually throw in some more potential referendums into that equation, risk goes higher. So the risk premium for finance goes higher again. This is something we want to make sure we get investment back into Canada. So get our cost of capital back down. Some economic peace would come from some political peace, if you will. And I would encourage the government to actually come to the table and address the concerns that Albertans have. The Alberta businesses have, the Alberta government has about how they've been treated for the past ten years in this Liberal government.

**Peter**: We got to leave it there. Appreciate you coming in.

**Greg**: Thank you for having me.