



ADVERTISEMENT:

HOST:

Canadians represent 0.48% of the global population, and we're on track to get even smaller on the world's stage. In her talk, Shari Austin proposes that Canada's population needs to triple in less than 100 years. If it doesn't the country could be facing an onslaught of economic problems. So, what do we do? Welcome to The Conversation Piece. This is Shari Austin, CEO of Century Initiative.

SHARI AUSTIN: Here's another disruptive idea for you. We need a hundred million people in Canada by 2100. Yes. I said it.

In other words, we need to be roughly three times our current size 82 years from now, that may sound a bit shocking, but let me share a few facts today. We have 37 million Canadians. If we stay on our current course, we'll have 55 million in 2100. Not nearly enough to ensure a thriving economy or to afford a compact, our compassionate social programmes, or build the infrastructure we need for livable communities, or to maintain our level of influence in the world as a trade partner and a champion of human rights and peace. The key issue is that our society is changing is ageing. We're both living longer and having fewer children, not a great combination. You can see for yourselves, the trajectory of the past 56 years, longevity is in blue and fertility's in purple. The gap will continue to widen. Of course, Canada is not alone in this challenge. Japan is an extreme example of an ageing society. About 15 years ahead of us in the us and quite possibly at a point of no return Here, you can see their dilemma expressed in sales of baby diapers versus adult diapers.

2015 was a turning point in Canada for the first time ever. We had more people over 65 than under 15, and the trend is accelerating. Today's seniors are 17% of the population in 2031. There'll be 25%. The people are living longer is of course good news. But on the flip side, older people are typically not working and are costly in terms of healthcare, home care and income security programmes. Combine that with the fact that we have a very low fertility rate Canadian women now have an average of just 1.5 children each much lower than the replacement level of 2.1. AMA is not likely to rise anytime soon. Definitely not in my household. Anyway, the point is that fewer and fewer working people are supporting more older people in the seventies. There were six working people for every older person today it's four and in 2036, the ratio will be two to one. That means a smaller tax base, just when costs are increasing. We simply won't have the people to run the economic engine that supports us all. So, size does matter.

50 million people in 2100, our annual GDP will be less than 1.6% with a hundred million people. It will be a healthier 2.6. So, if we don't set our sights on serious growth taxes are going to have to rise or programmes will have to be cut or both, but before we all throw up our hands in despair, there is a fairly obvious solution. We need more immigration. Yes, there are some other things that might help we could double down on fertility, but even if that works, it will take at least 20 years for those kids to reach the workforce or many, many more. In the case of my kids,

We could try that

Harder to learn some of the 3 million Canadians home who are living abroad. We could re increase the retirement age, but these options won't get us where we need to go immigration well. And, but believe it or not, we've grown at this pace before in less time between 1945 and



now 73 years, we went from a population of 12 to 37 million. So maybe aiming at a hundred million and 2100. Isn't that disruptive to be clear, we're not talking about bringing millions of people a year, raising the annual immigration target to 450,000 from today's 310,000 may. Well do the trick. If we start soon, we are already among the best in the world at sourcing immigrants, using the point system to target economic immigrants with the skills we need, but we can be bolder on the numbers. International students, for example, are some of the most ideal new Canadians and with the U S and Britain now, uh, clamping down on students wanting to stay.

We have a great opportunity, and let's remember that our immigrant stories are really positive. One: immigrants to this country are better educated. Start more businesses, commit fewer crimes that are healthier than a Canadian born resonance. That said there will be real challenges ahead. We'll need to get better at supporting settlement, encouraging immigrants to go where they're most needed, qualifying their skills more quickly and removing barriers to success. Governments will need to make smart policy decisions and investment choices in areas like infrastructure, education, employment, and early childhood support, and will need to protect and strengthen our culture of pluralism. At the same time, we must ensure that indigenous people take their rightful place in our growing economy and that our growth is environmentally sustainable. But these are challenges we need to face up to whether we're 55 or a hundred million, all of this will take government commitment and community level work. But maybe the place to start is with personal reflection. My family story has shaped my view of the country as I'm sure yours has my grandparents, poor Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe found place for themselves here in Calgary. They did what many did then, and now they opened a small business. In this case, the North star grocery on second Avenue Northwest, you may know it today as the Vendome cafe.

The family built a life here, although not without difficulty. My father and two sisters grew up in the back of the store. Their mother died of breast cancer. Their father had an industrial accident and was in the hospital for more than a year. But my father grew up to be a lawyer and ultimately a Senator and the most optimistic person. I know his sisters went into nursing and civil service. The next generation became business owners, lawyers, teachers, journalists, healthcare workers, and architects. That's my family. Give her a few give or take a few details that may also be your family. Hard work. Optimism brings rewards. If not for you, at least for your children or theirs. What if our relatives had stayed where they were and not bet on the future, how much more difficult would our lives be and how much less would Canada be?

I'm proud to be part of an organisation. The century initiative, that's focused on a bigger and bolder future for Canada. We're committed to building out the fact base, encouraging the conversation and coming up with concrete ideas for action. We're hoping that others will join in taking the long view in steering Canada to a prosperous 2100, but we don't by any means, have all the answers. But we do know we need to get started in closing. I'd like to leave you with a quote from Margaret Atwood, a great friend of the walrus. There is an infinite number of possible futures, which one will actually become the future will depend on how we behave right now.

Thank you.

HOST: Shari Austin spoke at The Walrus Talks Disruption in 2018, and she's just one of the over 800 fantastic Canadians who have walked, wheeled and web-cammed onto the stage at The Walrus Talks.

The Conversation Piece Podcast: **Shari Austin** from The Walrus Talks



If you enjoyed this podcast, consider donating. Any donation from now until the end of December will be matched! That's double the impact on creating fact-based, Canadian journalism. Learn more at the walrus DOT ca SLASH donate.