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**The Current**

# The Current for March 17, 2021

CBC Radio · Posted: Mar 17, 2021 11:09 AM ET | Last Updated: March 17



Matt Galloway is the host of CBC Radio's The Current. (CBC)

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**The Current** 1:14:26 What's at stake for Erin O'Toole ahead of this week's Conservative convention; Black civil servants allege years of discrimination; André Picard on the AstraZeneca vaccine; and how changing sea ice is impacting life in the North

## [Episode Transcript](#)

Today on *The Current*:

The Conservatives are [lagging in the polls](#) as they head into a policy convention this week. Jenni Byrne, a former adviser to Stephen Harper joins us to talk about what Erin O'Toole needs to do to turn things around. And our national affairs panel weighs in on what we can expect, and what's at stake, as the Conservative convention kicks off Thursday.

And Ottawa has hired a Bay Street law firm to fight [a class-action lawsuit by Black civil servants](#), who allege years of discrimination. Many say it shows the government's duplicitous behaviour. We speak with some of the plaintiffs in the case, and hear from Courtney Betty, lead counsel on the lawsuit and a former Crown attorney.

Then, from questions about the AstraZeneca vaccine to a potential third wave — Globe and Mail health columnist André Picard brings us the latest update on COVID-19.

Plus, sea ice is melting at a rapid pace in northern parts of Labrador, changing the way of life for many people in the region. We speak with Derrick Pottle, a hunter and sculptor in Rigolet, Labrador, about the impact on his community. And Rex Holwell, the northern production lead with SmartICE in Nain, Labrador, tells us about research being done on the issue.

## TRANSCRIPT changing sea ice

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Andre Picard, The Globe and Mail health columnist for. I might ask you the same question. Where are you finding optimism in this? You can let us know through email: [thecurrent@cbc.ca](mailto:thecurrent@cbc.ca). This is "The Current". My name is Matt Galloway. Climate change has, in many parts of the world, forever changed not just environments but the lives of people who live there. This reality is now being felt dramatically in parts of Newfoundland and Labrador. Communities there rely on the winter freeze of sea ice. And this year, that freeze hasn't come. Derrick Pottle is a hunter and sculptor in Rigolet, Labrador. Derrick, good morning.

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Hey, good morning.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** What's happening with the sea ice this winter?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** The lack of sea ice in many places, it's... it's not a lot of ice. Between the warm temperatures for long extended periods into the pluses, the ice haven't formed at all. And when they do get a chance to form, we get very, very severe wind. And it breaks up the ice, and it doesn't have time to catch up to reform again.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Describe what that looks like?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Well, it looks like open water in many areas where it should be ice. Last week, myself and my wife travelled to one of our hunting cabins about 100, 130 kilometres east northeast of here. And we had to go over... over to land instead of on the sea ice because there was no ice. And what little bit of ice was there was just like you could see water through it.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** For people who aren't familiar with how important the ice is, I mean, what... what does good sea ice mean for your community?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** It means accessibility to the areas that we utilize in our home territory. We don't have road access this time of the year. We have

access by snowmobile or by a Twin Otter service, which is a daily service, a very expensive daily service into the communities. So in many, many situations, people use the sea ice. It's our highway. It's our connection to community. It gives us access to be out on the land. And we have one northern store here that's very, very sparsely-stocked and very expensive. So, yeah, the sea ice, it gives us means to move around in our homeland.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Given the fact that the ice is so unpredictable right now, what's it like to go out... when... when there actually is some layer of ice there, what's it like to go out on that ice that's not... that's not as solid as perhaps it should be?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Well, it's dangerous. It's very dangerous. You know, people... people have lost their lives. People have lost equipment. And, you know, we were taught from a very young age to respect the ice and to understand it. But when... when the ice doesn't form proper, you get a lot of snow on it, even for the most experienced people, it becomes a challenge because you have a layer of snow onto it, it could be just open water underneath it. So it's very difficult to predict what's underneath your... underneath your feet or underneath your snowmobile.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Have you ever gone through the ice?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Several times, yes.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** What's that like?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Cold and wet and scary. Snowmobiles today, Matt, are these machines are probably upwards of between 500 to 1,000 pounds each machine. And if you imagine taking of 800-pound rock and throwing it in the water, there's no buoyancy to it. And that's the same thing as, what, a snowmobile. And it sinks very fast. And if you became entangled or hooked onto any part of that snowmobile or equipment, you're going to go down with it.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** And is that what you say when you talk about I mean, understanding the ice is that you need to in some ways, from that point of respect, be able to read the ice and see what's going on with it?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Yes. Yes, sir. That's exactly what it is. You know, as ice ages, it has different colour formations to it. Where the pressure ridges the ice is solidier, different colours. Like new ice that's probably a day or two old is very dark, very black. You can almost see the water through it. And as saltwater ice ages, it becomes... it becomes greyer or whiter. And that's the ice that we look for. And this year, 2020 and 2021 is probably about the worst year that I've seen for... for sea ice. As I described to you earlier, last week when my wife and I were travelling, we're on the Atlantic coast, right on the ocean. And you go up on the land and get up on a high point. And as far as your eyes can see to the ocean is ocean water. There's... there's no ice in the... in the ocean. And, you know, that should be, as far as your eye could see, should be land fast ice extending off into the horizons, but it's not there. Not this year.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** For hunting, what is the role of the ice and how important would that be in terms of your culture?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** As Inuit, the sea ice it's part of our identity. We still harvest a lot of cases of marine mammals. Seals is a big part of my diet. We have a small quota of polar bears that we harvest that's governed and restricted by the government. And, you know, for the most part, that's where polar bears and seals live to is on the ice or on the sea edge. There's also the rivers and ponds. I mean, this year, the rivers haven't even frozen over. As we speak, you can go to a river and just dip a water bottle down and get fresh water. You don't even need to chop ice anymore.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** What happens if this continues? I mean, what do you think is... is at risk of being lost if this year turns out to be what's happening next year and the year after and that ice doesn't form in the way that it should?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Well, it's... it's twofold. You know, it's going to impact, you know, the animals and the mammals after a while. I mean, seals, for example, there are some species of seals that we harvest. They have to have an ice platform and a good snow depth to have their young. They give birth on the ice, on the sea ice, and they live in a snow house. Without that, they wouldn't survive. So if this is going to continue on, like down the road, if this is the way that things are going to be, it's very concerning as to, you know, right now, as I said earlier, snowmobiles are the only easiest access that we have to be in on on the land. ATVs and Hondas and all-terrain vehicles, the land is so rough. And in order for us to travel comfortably over that, we have to have a snow base. And a snowmobile is by far the best modes of transportation. So it's very, very concerning as to, you know, what... what the future's going to hold for us if this trend keeps up.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** What do you tell your children and grandchildren about this?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Well, you know, we reminisce about when I started to... when after I got married on my own in the late 70s and started my family, we were living on the land for the most part, trapping and hunting and making a living from the land. And I could cross over the inlets. This would be, you know, late 70s, early 80s. I could cross over the inlets on at least two-foot of sea ice in mid-November. Now this year, well, after the new year, in probably the second week, third week into January, before we could cross over into that same area to get to where our traditional hunting and trapping zones are, too. So I reminisce with my children and my grandchildren. These are the changes that I've seen in a very short period of time. So we're all concerned about if this trend is a part of our future. I think our future, our way of life is going to come, if not to an end, is going to come to a very different way that we're used to in a very short period of time.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** And it's almost like they wouldn't be able to have that same way of life or that... that... that same experience that you've had?

**DERRICK POTTLE:** We taught our children, both myself and my wife, we taught our children the values of living on the land, how to live on land. They both know what it takes to survive on the land and how to survive on the land. But, you know, my grandchildren, all four of them live in southern Ontario. We bring them back. Unfortunately, we haven't seen them for a year now because of COVID. But we bring them back, and we teach them. We teach the values of of our lifestyle, of their lifestyle, of their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, you know, go back, you know, several thousand generations. And, you know, this is... this is our homeland.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** And it's changing right in front of your very eyes.

**DERRICK POTTLE:** It's changing right before our eyes. And it's very scary and very concerning. And I don't know if it's false expectations, but I'm really hoping that things are going to slow down and things are going to revert to back to what they were. But I've been very blessed and fortunate that I've travelled in all four Inuit regions in Canada, right across the north. I've travelled to Greenland on several occasions, many occasions over the years. And I talk, I connect with the people who live in the communities and all across the north, right across the north it's the same trend as what what we're seeing/

**MATT GALLOWAY:** But I wish you the best. And I really appreciate speaking with you. It's important to hear what you're seeing firsthand. Derrick, thanks so much.

**DERRICK POTTLE:** Well, I appreciate that. And, you know, like, you know, to us, it's our life. It's who we are. And we really want to continue on that path of... of what we know and how to utilize and stay connected to the land. So thank you very much, Matt.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Derrick Pottle spoke to us from his home in Rigolet, Labrador. He and his community aren't the only ones seeing these changes in real-time. A team of researchers is working with communities in the north on a project called SmartICE. Rex Holwell is the northern



production lead with Smart Ice in Nain, Labrador. Rex, good morning to you.

**REX HOLWELL:** Hey, good morning.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Does what Derrik is describing sounds familiar in terms of what you've seen with the ice this year?

**REX HOLWELL:** Very much so. I mean, Rigolet is only, you know, 300 kilometres, less than that, away from where I am in Nain. And this year, it's actually colder now than what it was in January and February. So, you know, we did have a cold snap where the sea ice did freeze for a bit. But then, you know, again, in January, it was it was the temperature was normally around minus 10. So whatever sea ice we did have, it was very thin. It wasn't really thick sea ice. So I go out and do these smart comedy runs. And when I was calibrating my equipment, you know, I manually drilled through it sea ice and what should be, you know, three feet of ice, hard ice. You know, it was a foot-and-a-half. And it was it was really soft, not really soft, but it was soft saltwater ice.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Tell me more about the work that you're doing. How do you go about mapping and measuring the ice?

**REX HOLWELL:** So with Smart Ice, we... we have two sensors that measure ice thickness. One is a stationary we call it a SmartBOUY. Essentially, it's a nine foot long thermometer that we stick in ice. It'll freeze in the ice. And then on a daily basis, it'll send... it'll send the... the information and it'll be red. And then we'll display it on a website. It'll tell us every day how thick ice is, you know, how how thick the snow is. And it'll tell us the sea water temperature and it'll tell us the air temperature. But it measures the sea ice thickness, which is what we really want. And the other one that we have is called the SmartQAMUTIK. And it's a mobile sensor that, you know, I tie onto a quamutik that tows behind my snowmobile. And as I'm travelling on the sea ice, it'll tell me in real-time how thick the ice is on a like iPad on the handlebars of the snowmobile. And when I get back to my



home base, it'll upload my... my whole run up to the platform that we use to get our information out.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** And are you finding that the ice is getting thinner?

**REX HOLWELL:** Yeah. Well, I mean, I've only been doing this for the last two years in Nain, but going through last year's runs, compared to this year runs. And, you know, I've I've done the same.... I've done the run that I did last year, I did the same as I did last week. And the runs that I've been doing, you know, I can consistently see the difference between this year and last year. It's almost perfectly a foot difference.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** To you, is this the visual effects of climate change? Like are you seeing, you know, the... the effect of climate change right in front of your very eyes when you're looking at that ice?

**REX HOLWELL:** Yeah, well, I mean, looking at the data, I mean, it tells me, you know, the hard cold data is telling me the sea ice is thinner. But I mean, much like Derrick said, last year was an anomaly where... where we had sea ice come in, but then the wind came and blew it all away. And then it wasn't cold enough for the longest time. So the ice didn't set properly. And this year, this year was even worse in that sense that, you know, beginning January and February was you know, it was minus-10. I was going around all winter, if you can call it winter, with a spring jacket. And like I mentioned, it's colder now than it was in all of January and February.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Derrick talked a little bit about this. But just briefly, I mean, what support do you think people in the community need if they're cut off, for example, from their usual travel routes and they can't get to where they need to go because the ice isn't there or isn't thick enough to be safely out?

**REX HOLWELL:** Well, a lot of people just won't go out to take that chance. You know, Derrick said people go through the ice. And people here have gone through the ice as well. So a lot of the people won't take the chances

of travelling on the sea ice. So they won't be able to go off to their traditional fishing grounds to get fish or partridges that would help offset the high cost of living in Nain or, you know, here in Labrador. A lot of the people here go get wood to help heat their house. And if they don't feel it's safe enough, you know, they won't get the wood to help, again, offset the high cost of living to heat their house here in Nain.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** So what needs to be done to ensure that they can make ends meet?

**REX HOLWELL:** You know, with climate change happening the way it is, unfortunately, the trend that I'm seeing even in my lifetime, you know, it's not going to improve, it's just going to get progressively worse. So I... I honestly, for climate change, I unless everybody stops burning, you know, diesel fuel and fuel and, you know, it's not going to stop. But I mean, really, the only thing that I can think that we can really do is much like how SmartICE responded, we... we use new technologies to help keep people travelling on the ice if they're able to.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** So allow them to in some ways adapt to those changing conditions?

**REX HOLWELL:** Yeah, and that's the whole part of why SmartIce was founded, you know? Back in 2009, 2010, you know, we had in those two years, you know, we had rain in Nain in January, and you know? [scoffs] That led to the founding of SmartIce through the two technologies that we have now. But I mean, you know, we're doing what we can now. Maybe there's a new type of technology that can be utilized to help keep people safe. But until then, you know, people just have to exercise caution when they're travelling on the sea ice.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** We just have a few seconds left. What would you say to people who are around the country listening to this about what's happening right now and how urgent the situation is?

**REX HOLWELL:** Well, here in Labrador, we are at the forefront of climate change. You know, we're like... Derrick when he said himself, when he was a young person, he was on the sea ice in November, and so was I. But now, like, we... people here in Nain haven't been able to travel on the sea ice in late January. So it's getting later and later in the year. So I just urge people who do travel on the sea ice, you know, exercise caution. You know, take... take the steps to prepare yourself. Make sure you know the sea ice. Make sure you are aware of, you know, any holes or anything that, you know, people... people just have to take their time and be prepared to look for the worst if they do go through the ice.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Rex, It's good to speak with you about the work that you're doing. Thank you very much.

**REX HOLWELL:** Yes. Thank you, too.

**MATT GALLOWAY:** Rex Holwell is the northern production lead with SmartICE. He was in Nain Labrador. That's "The Current" for today. Coming up next on CBC Radio One, it's "q". Want to give you a heads up about what you'll hear tomorrow on this program, a special documentary by our producer, Samira Mohyeddin. More than a year has gone by since the downing of Flight 752, which killed dozens of Canadians. We'll meet a group of fathers who lost wives and children on that flight. They've bonded together and they're fighting for answers. "The Fathers of Flight 752". That's coming up tomorrow on "The Current". I'm Matt Galloway. Thanks for listening. Take care. And we will talk to you tomorrow.

[Music: Theme]