Hate and paranoia abound in political social media, as federal Liberals prepare to intervene

BY PETER MAZERINGE

Expressions of hate and paranoia, and conspiracy theories with roots in the United States have become a staple of Canadian political Facebook pages, as the Liberal government prepares legislation to crack down on social media platforms that don’t remove hate speech quickly enough.

The Liberal Party of Canada Facebook page is no exception. It doesn’t take long to find comments to posts on the page that espouse conspiracy theories, attack immigrants, compare Conservative politicians to Nazis, or Liberals to pedophiles.

“The pandemic, which was once a slam-dunk political win for incumbent governments, is now becoming a potential liability with the vaccine, because Canadians are becoming increasingly impatient about interruptions in the vaccine rollout, say some political insiders.”

“The pandemic is shifting from a platform for governments to look good to a platform for governments to be politically vulnerable, and the vaccinations are symbolic of that risk,” he said.

Canadians started to receive COVID-19 vaccinations in mid-December. This is the country’s largest mass inoculation program in history. The Public Health Agency of Canada has said that all Canadians who want to be

Continued on page 36

‘Canadians have grown impatient’: regulation of social media in the works, but Parliamentarians wary

BY MIKE LAPONTA

As the federal government looks to set down rules around hate and harmful speech online, MPs and experts are still unclear as to what the legislation is going to look like, but all say there’s work to be done to temper some of the unsavoury elements of social media in Canada’s political discourse.

Liberal MP Arif Virani (Parkdale-High Park, Ont.), the parliamentary secretary to Justice Minister David Lametti, left, Minister of Infrastructure Catherine McKenna, Green Party MP Paul Manly, NDP MP Charlie Angus, and Arif Virani, parliamentary secretary to the justice minister all have opinions about further regulating hate and harmful speech online. The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade, courtesy of Twitter

Continued on page 22

Pandemic response slips from ‘slam dunk’ to ‘potential liability’ for Liberals, say some political insiders

BY ABBAS RANA

The government’s handling of COVID-19 was until recently seen as a critical factor in drumming up voter support that could have put the Liberals into a position to convert their minority government into a majority in the next election, but it could now become a “liability” as Canadians are growing increasingly impatient about interruptions in the vaccine rollout, say some political insiders.

“The pandemic, which was once a slam-dunk political win for incumbent governments, is now becoming a potential liability with the vaccine, because Canadians are becoming increasingly impatient,” said Nik Nanos, founder and chief data scientist for Nanos Research, in an interview with The Hill Times.

“The pandemic is shifting from a platform for governments to look good to a platform for governments to be politically vulnerable, and the vaccinations are symbolic of that risk,” he said.

Canadians started to receive COVID-19 vaccinations in mid-December. This is the country’s largest mass inoculation program in history. The Public Health Agency of Canada has said that all Canadians who want to be

Continued on page 35
Seen in an effort to band together and help hard-hit shelters amid the pandemic, long-time public affairs commentator, pollster, and Ottawa resident Bruce Anderson has pulled together a volunteer initiative with local restaurateurs.

"There are people in the community who are frustrated with life in the pandemic, but otherwise are healthy and financially okay. I’m in that category," he told The Hill Times last week. "I’m somebody who’s travelled a lot all my life, but I’ve been in the community non-stop for 12 months now, and, like a lot of people, I’m more aware of the value of people in the community looking out for each other."  

Mr. Anderson, head of Abacus Data polling firm, has been helping raise funds for food and labour so "generous-minded folks" from local restaurants can cook and deliver meals to shelters. The plan was about five days in the making, after he learned Ottawa homeless shelters were going to stop accepting new people because of outbreaks at their sites.

In his chats with community members, including Infrastructure Minister Catherine McKenna, who represents Ottawa Centre, Mr. Anderson said the reaction to the idea immediately looked promising.

"People want to support local small businesses and they want to do it because they understand the connectedness that we have with each other, in a way that maybe we didn’t completely understand before the pandemic," he said.

Mr. Anderson, a former Globe and Mail columnist and for years a pundit on CBC’s The National’s “At Issue” Panel, is also the founding partner of Spark Advocacy, which will help get the word out and encourage people to donate. Over the years, Mr. Anderson has been a strategic adviser to both the federal Liberals and Progressive Conservatives, and is a partner in two of the restaurants taking part: North and Jake Wright.

A website will be launched soon to accept donations from the public, which will go through the Shepherds of Good Hope webpage. People will be able to claim tax credits for their contributions.

Other businesses helping are Whales Bone, Wild Oak Bakery, Farinella, and Luciano Foods, who will help push out pizza lunches, sandwich meals, and breakfast muffins to the shelters. Mr. Anderson said he hopes to begin flowing out meals this week and into March. His "one-end date" has not yet been set, as it will depend on community need and fundraising. By the by, The Hill Times is also supporting this initiative.

Ex-NPD hopeful now a Conservative member

A former federal NPD candidate in the 2019 election shared last week he has become a member of the Conservative Party. Jigar Patel, who won 28 per cent of the vote in Regina-Lewvan, Sask., for the NDP in 2019, second to the Conservatives’ Warren Steinly, who won 52 per cent, made the announcement in a Facebook post.

"Unfortunately the NDP of [late former leader] Jack Layton does not exist any more. For the last few years, I continued to toil as a dedicated and loyal BUT an UNHAPPY soldier," he wrote.

Mr. Patel said the change was precipitated by "ill treatment of [the party’s] long-term local leadership, loyal local workers, and local volunteers," and a "total disrespect for Saskatchewan’s short and long-term overall interests."

He also cited the federal NDP’s support of the minority government Liberals as another reason for the switch. The party has helped Canadians stave off election threats posed by the Liberals in the past, most recently last fall, and often finds itself holding the balance of power in the minority Parliament.

"Mr. Patel said he is also a member of the provincial Saskatchewan Party now, which is currently headed by Premier Scott Moe.

The news comes as Conservative Leader Erin O’Toole looks to frame his party as one that sits “squarely in the centre” of the political spectrum.

As reported here last week, the Conservative Party green-lit a former Liberal health minister from Prince Edward Island who had served under two Liberal premiers, to run under the party’s banner in the next election.

At the time of his 2019 defeat, Mr. Patel told local media he planned to run again.

Archaeologists dig up remnants of yesteryear’s Centre Block

Last week marked 105 years since Centre Block, including the Library of Parliament, burned down in February 1916.

According to a Senate webpage, more than a century later, archeologists with the Centrus last summer discovered artifacts of a bygone era during excavation work on the limestone foundation of the Victoria Tower.

Workers found old ventilation shafts and the limestone foundation of the Victoria Tower, which date back to the 1916 fire, on the excavation site, pictured in December 2020, on Centre Block last summer. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Found near the old tower’s foundation by where the pillars propped it up, workers also came across ventilation shafts.

After burning down in the 1916 fire, engineers were forced to tear down Centre Block a few months later. Four years after the Centre Block reopened after reconstruction, with new limestone interior walls to replace the old fireplaces.

Derek Mes, a structural project manager for the modern rehabilitation efforts, said all the ruins will need to be cleaned up this time because they stand in the way of reaching the bedrock, which “will need to be accessed to build the Visitor Welcome Centre.”

The Centre Block’s Visitor Welcome Centre will also provide an underground link between the West Block and the East Block.

Delacourt fends off expected Trudeau trash talkers

Veteran, Toronto Star columnist Susan Delacourt offered a glimpse into her writing process (and fallout) last month, sharing in a Facebook post that a 40-minute phone chat with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau helped her produce three separate stories.

Citing an “experience-based prediction,” Ms. Delacourt said she expected to be “inundated with mail from angry old white men” over the next two days.

“It’s inevitable and kind of sad. They see the word ‘Trudeau’ in a story and immediately run to their computers to hammer out (with their fists, I picture it) some vicious message,” she wrote. “The basic formula is the same: the PM is an idiot (or gay or a communist or all of the above) and I am a moron (or a swooning school girl or a communist) for reporting what he says.”

Ms. Delacourt added she takes such comments in stride. “It is interesting/disturbing to observe who gets so whipped up to write these letters to strangers. I don’t get such letters from women or people of colour or folks with non-[White Anglo-Saxon Protestant] names (perhaps because they’ve been told they won’t be taken seriously if they get emotional about politics?),” she added.
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O'Toole’s pivot to centre, Sloan’s expulsion, and Kenney’s tanking popularity could help Maverick Party win out West, say Conservative political insiders

‘Getting closer to the centre’ is the only path to victory for the Conservatives, says pollster Nik Nanos.

BY ABBAS RANA

Erin O’Toole’s pivot to the political centre, Derek Sloan’s expulsion from the PC Party and Jason Kenney’s falling polling figures are all going to contribute to a significant bump up for Western Canada’s upstart Maverick Party, which could win a few seats in the Western provinces in the next election, say Conservative political insiders and the Maverick interim leader.

“If he [Mr. O’Toole] continues to do what he has been doing since August, which is clearly attempting to appease central Canadian voters to the detriment of the West, then has a huge impact on our future success as Maverick,” said Jay Hill, interim leader of the Maverick Party, in an interview with The Hill Times.

Up until now, the Maverick Party has focused on winning seats in 49 strong Conservative ridings in Western Canada where the Conservatives won with very wide margins.

Of the 49 strong Conservative ridings in Western Canada where the Conservatives won with very wide margins.

The Maverick Party is using this strategy to avoid a vote split between the two right of centre parties that would give an opening to the left of centre parties to win more seats. But last week, following political developments in favour of the Maverick Party, Mr. Hill was not as committed to this strategy, leaving open the possibility of running candidates in other ridings, as well.

“Nothing’s final, we’re talking about politics,” said Mr. Hill with a chuckle. “There’s nothing final, that’s why you keep calling me every few months … Currently, we’re not in a position to say what our position is, so we’re still proceeding with the same strategy of only running where Conservatives are an upstart party, constrained by limited resources and still in the building process, lacking the proper infrastructure required for an established party. As the next federal election will be the first one in which they will be fielding candidates, Mr. Hill said he would be happy if the Mavericks can win a handful of seats.

Since becoming party leader in August, Mr. O’Toole (Durham, Ont.) has been trying to expand his party’s base by reaching out to ethnic communities, union members, the LGBTQ community, and has identified himself as pro-choice. He has also committed to reducing Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions to 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 as laid out in the Paris climate accord.

All these policy adjustments have led some long-time party members and caucus members to question why Mr. O’Toole ran on the slogan of “true blue Conservative” but now is trying to recreate a “new PC Party.” Some are even going as far as to assuming that the party will lose the next election, and are already looking at potential supporters for the next leadership election, according to some veteran Conservatives.

Mr. O’Toole recently expelled controversial Conservative MP Derek Sloan (Hastings-Lennox and Addington, Ont.) from the caucus, arguing his former leadership rival was engaged in a “pattern of destructive behaviour” which had become a distraction for the party.

Mr. Sloan has a significant following among right-of-centre and pro-life party members, many of whom will likely either vote for a party other than the Conservatives, or will not show up to vote on election day at all.

“I can tell you like my Facebook page has over 70,000 followers on it,” Mr. Sloan, now an Independent MP, told The Hill Times last week. “My email list of Conservative supporters is maybe, you know, it’s tens of thousands. It might be 40, or 50,000. I haven’t checked lately. So I don’t have everybody’s email address that’s on my Facebook page, necessarily. But I would say there’s over 100,000 people that at least follow me fairly closely based on my social media platform.

Some senior Conservatives interviewed for this article said that Mr. Sloan’s expulsion from the caucus will hurt the party in rural ridings, but may have the opposite effect won by a very thin margin of five per cent or less. Of these, nine were decided by a margin of 50 votes or less.

“They could stay home and just be uninterested,” said the source. “If you’ve got blue collar populist-type voters figuring they don’t have a party to vote for, they’re just going to sit it out. … There are a lot of seats where a few hundred votes here and a few hundred votes there could make a difference. Those voters provide a lot of the volunteers and when you are in a close seat that gap is very, very small. You’re a third, four hundred votes. It’s your volunteers that can bring people home to personal connections.

Alberta Premier Jason Kenney’s unpopularity is also a cause of concern for the Conservatives, as Alberta is the bedrock of the Conservative base, home to 34 federal ridings. The Conservatives won 33 of the 34 seats in the last election. Before getting elected as the Alberta premier in April 2015, Mr. Kenney represented the federal riding of Calgary Midnapore—and its predecessor Calgary Southeast—as an MP for about two decades between 1997 and 2016, including eight years as a cabinet minister under Stephen Harper. A Mainstreet poll, released last month, suggested that if an election were to happen now, the opposition New Democrats would handily defeat the UCP that won a landslide majority in 2019.

Mr. Kenney’s government’s popularity would plunge further if ever the RCMP filed any charges in relation to his ongoing fraud investigation which is called “kamikaze” campaign allegedly waged against Mr. Kenney’s UCP leadership elections in 2017.

On one hand, the Conservatives are an upstart party, constrained by limited resources and still in the building process, lacking the benefits of being a potential government, as opposed to splitting the vote, and ensuring that Justin Trudeau remains prime minister.

The Conservative Party won most ridings in Alberta with very comfortable margins, which led many to ask whether they would prefer to have Justin Trudeau as prime minister or Erin O’Toole. So, the reality is that all the federal party leaders are imperfect. There are Liberals that think that Justin Trudeau is too progressive. So, for those Conservatives, they have to weigh the benefits of a potential government, as opposed to splitting the vote, and ensuring that Justin Trudeau remains prime minister.

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Once vaccines get rolling, that’s the moment to trigger an election

Voters are always happier in the spring and the economic fallout won’t yet be felt.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has to keep saying that he does not want an election. Forcing the country into a vote in the middle of a pandemic may be seen as an impolitic move.

However, the three provinces that have gone to the polls during this pandemic have all been rewarded with majority governments.

So those who say the calling of a COVID election would cost votes are wrong. Sure, there would be a couple of days of grumbling at the beginning of the campaign. But very quickly, pundits and politicians would start debating the big issues facing Canadians at the moment.

Economic and health uncertainty are the obvious themes that need to be addressed. Thus far, these are both issues where the opposition parties have not been able to secure much traction.

The Conservatives have been hitting hard at pandemic mismanagement. With Pfizer delaying their promised deliveries, and provinces adding their criticism to the rollout, the government has suffered some political damage. However, that will be forgotten as soon as the rollout returns at the end of February.

These hiccups are happening around the world, and Canadians are not alone in the challenge of securing and delivering vaccines to needy citizens.

But most Canadians will not hold that against the government once the election is called. Instead, they may attack the opposition for being offside in a world pandemic situation.

Last week Green Party Leader Annamie Paul tried to carve out her own COVID space, accusing the government of being a bad global citizen because it tapped into a previously contracted number of vaccines from Covax. Paul said the Canadian government should not have access to a vaccine that was developed primarily to assist poorer countries.

But the Green Party leader won’t get much support on that one. If she had read the fine print of the Canadian Covax funding announcement last fall, she would know that one-half of the $440-million invested in the Covax vaccine was intended for Canadian vaccine use.

And when Canadian lives are at risk, it seems strange for a Canadian politician to deny the vaccine to her own country. Similar criticism was reflected in some international media reports, which accused Canada of being greedy as one of the few developed countries tapping into the Covax vaccine.

While the world needs a global strategy, all politics is still local. And Paul will not get a lot of support for attacking the Liberals’ desire to protect Canadians.

The government is also facing a long-term economic meltdown as province by province, businesses are forced to shutter, and citizens are required to stay home in lockdown.

Liberals delivered a death blow to the airline industry by asking them to shut down flights to the Caribbean and Mexico in a popular, but misguided effort to stop the spread of the virus.

By all accounts, air travel was responsible for little more than one per cent of the COVID transmission, but that did not stop the government from introducing a punitive hotel quarantine for any citizen returning from abroad after next week. This requirement has zero pandemic value, as it supplements a COVID PCR test before anyone gets on a plane and after they get off. It also requires those who have been vaccinated to quarantine.

And even though the viral mutations came from the United Kingdom, Brazil, and South Africa, none of these destinations have been shut down.

The move was largely intended to keep people from travelling during spring break and it worked. But the airlines have also laid off thousands and Air Canada shut down Rouge last week. Professor Fred Lazar, of the Schulich School of Business at York University, said travel is being unfairly targeted in the pandemic fight. “They are doing it to cater to the vast majority of Canadians that have a holier than thou attitude toward travel.”

Full disclosure, I am one of those shameful snowbirds who left Canada for southern climes, despite the best advice of my government.

But even if the move did not make health sense, it was very popular, and managed to distract attention from vaccine rollout problems.

Some Canadian routes, cancelled during COVID, will never return, exacerbating regional isolation.

Meanwhile, once the vaccine gets rolling, there will be a collective sigh of relief. That is the moment to trigger an election. Voters are always happier in the spring and the economic fallout won’t yet be felt.

Most Canadians will reward the Liberals for taming the COVID beast. Sheila Copps is a former Jean Chrétien-era cabinet minister and a former deputy prime minister.

The Hill Times
As pandemic brings federal government’s role into focus, parties rally in donors

That parties had to change tack in their efforts may have actually ended up boosting their year-end bottom line, because it forced them to double down on more cost-effective fundraising appeals.

BY BEATRICE PAEZ

The pandemic appears to have created an unlikely opening for parties to reel in donors, with homebound Canadians lured by political stripes more willing to hear from parties and to engage politically, say politicos.

“There’s a general phenomenon that is lifting all boats, in a way. Voters are generally a more captive audience this year because of the pandemic. They’re collectively spending more money in front of screens, not doing as many social things. That makes them more likely to pay attention to what parties are doing,” said Sébastien Dallaire, senior vice-president at Ipsos Quebec.

“They’re more likely to see messaging from political parties on various organizations talking about political parties.”

Mr. Dallaire added that the pandemic, with the massive amounts of money that’s been pumped into the economy to stave off mass unemployment and keep businesses liquid, has also brought into the focus the role of government, for better or for worse. That’s giving parties grist for engaging with their voters.

“[People] actually see and feel the impact government interventions have in their lives every day, whether it’s through programs they received money, but also just because of public health directives and guidelines,” he said. “You can’t go shop, you can’t go watch a movie. You have to behave in different ways. And this is all mandated by the government, so the government becomes inseparable to the people.”

By various measures, most parties posted relatively strong finishes, with the Conservatives, Liberals, and the Bloc Québécois ending the year breaking their fourth-quarter fundraising records. The NDP ended the year in the black, paying off its $7.7-million campaign debt, with the Greens overall raised more than they had before outside of an election year, according to CIC.

The Conservatives had the biggest haul, raising $7.7-million in the last quarter, with the Liberals at $6.5-million, the NDP at $2.5-million, the Greens at $1.4-million, and the Bloc at $619,386.

The parties had to change tack in their efforts may have actually ended up boosting their year-end fundraising appeals. With a ticket, in-person fundraisers and rallies off the table, many parties doubled down on the use of more cost-effective fundraising drives, such as email appeals, phone banks, virtual town halls, and teleconferences.

Virtual events and other pandemic-friendly fundraising drives can not only be run on shoestring budgets, which means more money in the bank for the parties, but they also don’t impose significant costs—both in time and money—on people to participate.

Braeden Caley, senior director of communications with the Liberal party, said the party temporarily paused all fundraising appeals for 40 days early on in the pandemic and ramped up efforts in the last months of the year. The party “sensitized and reintroduced those approaches when it was appropriate to do so,” he told The Hill Times.

“I think it’s honestly the most successful appeals in December.”

Mr. Caley pointed to two virtual events, including one on Dec. 2 with both Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and his second-in-command, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.), which, he said, was the largest web-based event in the party’s history. He was unable to share specific figures on attendance, but noted that there were more than 6,000 questions submitted from every corner of the country.

There was a repeat winning in from every single province or territory, which shows you that it’s possible to reach large numbers of Canadians from every corner of the country in a low-barrier way,” he added. “That event had no cost whatsoever.”

Jesse Calvert, deputy national director of the NDP said the party made a conscious decision to continue to engage with donors at the onset of the pandemic. “We made a decision at the very beginning of the pandemic that it was not the time to pull away from our donors, and that we were going to continue to engage them through the phone program,” he said.

“I think that has really proved to be the consequence. A phone-fundraising program isn’t just about donations. It’s about connecting with our members and donors; it’s about talking to them, engaging them, hearing their thoughts on what’s going on, what they want to see.”

He said the party registered a dip in donations in the first few months of the pandemic, but the effort that went into speaking with supporters appears to have paid off, giving the party its best fourth quarter outside of an election year in half a decade. (The NDP steadily drew in more dollars as the year progressed, posting $963,923 in the first quarter and ending it with $2.5-million.)

“People were happy to hear from us. They wanted to talk about the issues,” he said. “So when we went to speak to them, they were more open to having us. That event had the foundation for future success. People were happy to hear from us.”

People were happy to hear from us. They wanted to talk about the issues, he said.

“I think the phone platform was radical and it was something new that we had to a party mandate to do in order to get connected to the voters.”

The other upside of having virtual events and phone drives be the default mode of fundraising amid the pandemic is political leaders and their staff don’t have to stretch themselves by trying to pop into different parts of the country to raise funds and build their party’s profile, said Cameron Holmstrom of Blundes Strategy Group.

“Do proper fundraising. I can do a lot online. We’re now seeing people running full events on Zoom. They can sit in their bedrooms in Ottawa or they can be anywhere in the country.

“You’re starting to see how this can build itself out and allow for greater outreach,” he said.

It’s now more possible for parties to pencil in multiple events with the leader in a day or over a week to speak with people from different parts of the country, he added, without expending the same amount of effort it would’ve taken to travel there and back and to organize an event in person.

Conservative Party Leader Erin O’Toole (Durham, Ont.) has done just that. For example, he held two ticketed virtual fundraisers on Jan. 18, one in the morning and another in the evening, and did the same on Dec. 21, 2020, when he hosted two teleconferences, according to Elections Canada’s registry for regulated fundraising events. One of the Jan. 18 fundraisers involved supporters from Ontario, while the guests in the other one were all from British Columbia. (Parties have to disclose event details, including a list of guests, for fundraisers with an entry cost of more than $200.)

A request for comment from the Conservative Party was not returned by deadline.

Spectre of an election, issue-based appeals, fear driven donations

Last year, approximately the last stretch, was also punctuated by election speculation. An election anytime time being a possibility under a minority, but more so as this Parliament approaches the two-year mark when governments typically fall.

“Parties are using that narrative to reach out to members to ensure the party is in a good place to fight,” said Elliot Hughes, senior consultant at Summa Strategies and former senior Liberal aide. “A lot of it is actually driven by the idea of driving support to us, so we can fund an election, so we can achieve all of these things and continue to go towards these goals.”

Mike Van Soelen, managing principal at Navigator and Conservative strategist, agreed that the election was likely a motivator among donors, even in a pandemic. “It’s much easier to go to supporters with talk of a pending election to motivate them, to send money to the parties to bolster their war chest,” he said.

“It’s one of the prime motivators of fundraising that has resonated across all political lines.”

For Conservatives, in particular he noted, 2020 gave the party a leadership race and eventually a new leader to rally behind.

Fear of the alternative can also serve to motivate people to donate, said Kevin Bosch, vice-president of public affairs at Hill and Knowlton Strategies and former Liberal communications director. He pointed to how Liberals have been able to tap into supporters’ concerns about the influence of social conserva- tives within the Conservative Party and Mr. O’Toole’s political history. To many Liberal supporters, given that Mr. O’Toole was a cabinet minister under then-prime minister Stephen Harper, he still embodies a return to the Harper years, said Mr. Bosch.

“I think a lot of Liberals would say, ‘Well, no, I don’t want that. So I’m going to put my money where my mouth is, and give money to my party,’” he said.

For the Liberals, one of the most successful appeals in December was an email blast that said Kevin O’Toole was following the lead of his predecessor Andrew Scheer (Regina-Qu’Appelle, Sask.) in engaging in divisive politics because of his leadership campaign slogan “take back Canada.”

That appeal, a right-wing website that some saw had an anti-immigrant bent, according to Mr. Caley. The particular week had seen grassroots fundraising support increase by more than 100 per cent. A significant driver of that, said Mr. Caley, was that note how Erin O’Toole’s Conservatives have all too frequently been catering to the far-right, he said.

“Canadians have no appetite for extreme far-right politics. And when Erin O’Toole Conservatives have catered to it, there’s been a very strong response from Cana- dians who want politics and leadership that bring people together, not extreme politics.”

Last month, Mr. O’Toole issued a statement that responded to Liberals’ accusations that he’s pandered to the far-right. He denounced that faction and said the party has no place for them. “The Conservatives are a moderate, pragmatic, mainstream party—as old as Confederation—that sits squarely in the centre of Canadi- an politics,” his Jan. 18 statement read.

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The Hill Times
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Editorial

MPs shouldn’t feel unsafe doing their jobs

Parliament Hill has seen a number of security breaches over the years. In April 1989, an armed man hijacked a Greyhound bus, drove it to Parliament Hill, and sat there on the front lawn with hostages inside the bus for six hours before the incident ended without any casualties. In November 1995, an intruder armed with a jackknife slipped into 24 Sussex Drive while the prime minister and his wife slept. Aline Chrétien woke up, locked the bedroom, woke up Jean Chrétien, who grabbed an Imut carving for protection and called the police. No one was hurt. In 1997, a man tried to smash his Jeep into the doors of Centre Block after driving it up the steps of the Parliament Buildings. In 2002, a grenade was delivered to the Prime Minister’s Office. After 9/11 and the 2014 shooting on Parliament Hill, everything changed. Security is much tighter on Parliament Hill today and MPs now want tighter security off the Hill. NDP MP Charlie Angus told The Hill Times last week that he was the victim of a two-month online stalking campaign last summer. “It actually undermines our ability to represent people democratically, that’s what I realized,” he said.

Female and racialized politicians, in particular, are more frequently subjected to threats, harassment, and insults. When Wanda Thomas Bernard was appointed to the Senate in 2016, she upgraded security at her Nova Scotia home because of racist and hateful threats. Infrastructure Minister Catherine McKenna’s constituency office was vandalized in August 2020. Liberal MP Anne Marie Creasy said she spent $6,000 on moving her home more secure after facing rape and death threats for publicly supporting gun control legislation. A Toronto man was convicted in 2015 of threatening and harassing Conservative MP Michelle Rempel Garner, then a cabinet minister, over social media. Conservative MP Marilyn Gladu has said she was shocked at the level of harassment, threats and trolling when she was first elected the same year.

According to The Toronto Star, in the first half of 2020, the RCMP recorded 1,390 threats filed against the prime minister and his cabinet, 30 per cent more than the same time frame in 2019. In July, a man tried to smash through the gates of Rideau Hall with four loaded firearms and faces 21 charges, including threatening the prime minister. More recently, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh was harassed on Wellington Street by a man trying to make a citizen’s arrest.

Last fall, the House’s Board of Internal Economy strengthened security measures for MPs while they’re outside of the Parliament Precinct. It will boost residential security with home assessments and recommendations for MPs, costing nearly $4.3 million in one-time expenses and $778,524 annually. It also decided to provide MPs with a mobile device capable of triggering an alert to a third-party monitoring centre when activated—at a one-time cost of $203,220, and $133,021 annually. It will also implement a new records management system to improve communications with security partners—a $1 million one-time cost, and then $130,000 ongoing per year, according to The Hill Times’ report.

It’s unfortunate these security measures are needed, but the security of our MPs should be taken very seriously on and off the Hill, and MPs shouldn’t be afraid to speak up about it. We cannot allow our elected officials to feel intimidated by threats of violence.

Letters to the Editor

Civil society calls on political leaders to protect and strengthen Canada’s democracy

W e are shocked and saddened by the recent political violence in Washington, D.C., and unnerved by the prospect of similar events occurring in Canada. What happened in the United States was not a spontaneous, isolated act; rather, it was the result of a culture of political discourse that has become unmoored from reality and detached from decency. Now former U.S. President Donald Trump may have incited a riot, but enablers of ignorance and excusers of hate created the conditions for this to happen. This is a lesson Canada must heed.

Our country is not immune to such dark forces. Canadians are familiar with acts of terror inspired by conspiracy theories and hateful words. The 2017 van attack in Toronto is another last summer’s armed intrusion onto the grounds of Rideau Hall could have been one too. Nor have we evaded the ecosystem of far-right media websites, gun lobbies, and anti-government think tanks that have proven effective at sowing distrust in public institutions and between citizens in America.

What recent studies underscore the urgency of the moment: Canada is among the global leaders in online-wing extremism and hate-related incidents. Canada’s possibility too great not to act.

Bernie Farber, chair of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network

Lorraine Whitmim, president of the Native Women’s Association of Canada

Michael Byers, professor and Canada Research Chair in Political Economy

International Law, UBC

Anne Lagacé Dawson, journalist

Mohamad Fakih, founder and CEO of the Fakih Foundation

(See the full list of signatories at www.civilidialogue.ca)

Coverage of decision to cancel Keystone XL pipeline doesn’t tell climate change story, says reader

Watching the Canadian media, particularly the CBC, cover U.S. President Joe Biden’s decision to cancel the Keystone XL pipeline has been deeply disappointing.

First, few reporters clearly state that Mr. Biden’s decision was not one of his own making. The experts in his administration determined the project was out of step with the Paris Climate Agreement’s goal of limiting global temperature rise to a safe level. Instead, the decision has been framed as political, driven by following up the Keystone rejection by suspending oil and gas leasing on federal lands and promising sweeping climate action. Mr. Biden has demonstrated that this is more than just a political gesture.

Second, the media in Canada continue to frame Keystone XL as a pipeline with broad public support. There is no current evidence for that. Nor is there evidence that Keystone is in Canada’s national interest. In fact, a recent report from the Canada Energy Regulator showed that the Keystone XL and Trans Mountain pipelines don’t fit within Canada’s climate promises and don’t make economic sense.

Last, almost no attention has been paid to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau or Alberta Premier Jason Kenney’s failure to deliver real support for workers. In 2019, Mr. Trudeau promised a Just Transition Act to support workers, but now, nearly two years later, the bill hasn’t been passed. Mr. Kenney and Mr. Trudeau are spending billions of public dollars on pipelines and reject and hold accountable individuals. The Canadian media should hold them to account.

Hubert Mmeault

Ditaaw, Ont.
Inequitable health outcomes for Indigenous peoples is the measure of racism in the system

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond and Harmony Johnson recently led a team to review complaints of racism in health care in British Columbia, and the resulting report should be mandatory reading for all Canadians. But racism against Indigenous people happens across Canada, not just in B.C.

Racism is a disease. But unlike other diseases it does not reside in the body of the Indigenous patient trying to find care in a hospital today. }

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"Racism is a disease. But unlike other diseases it does not reside in the body of the Indigenous patient trying to find care in a hospital today." — Joyce Echaquan, the 37-year-old Atikamekw woman who died on Sept. 28, 2020, while in the hospital in Joliette, Que., is now the subject of two investigations. Before she died, Echaquan recorded a Facebook Live video in which she was heard screaming in pain and health-care workers insulting her. Photograph courtesy of Facebook.

In Plain Sight, Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in B.C. Health Care, the 228-page report commissioned by the B.C. government, and led by Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond and Harmony Johnson, was released on Nov. 30, 2020. Rose LeMay says all Canadians should read the report. Image handout.
O’Toole shouldn’t worry about third-party sound and fury

Whenever you hear a ‘third-party’ advocacy group grandly and dramatically claim it’s launching a media campaign to either elect or defeat a particular political party or candidate, take it with a mountain-sized grain of salt.

Okay, that’s just my Shakespearean-style way of saying, whenever you hear a “third-party” advocacy group grandly and dramatically claim it’s launching a media campaign to either elect or defeat a particular political party or candidate, take it with a mountain-sized grain of salt.

True, such third-party ad campaigns can sometimes seem impressive on paper, but the reality is, thanks to Canada’s strict political financing laws, it’s virtually impossible for non-political parties to have any real influence on electoral results.

I’m bringing this up because a newly emerged third-party group with the clunky name, “The Protecting Canada Project,” recently made headlines when it launched a well-funded ad campaign aimed at removing Conservative party leader Erin O’Toole never becomes prime minister of Canada. Certainly, the group’s TV ads have some real bite.

Indeed, the ads scarcely claim that if the Conservatives form the next government, they will recklessly and callously slash health care spending, even as the COVID pandemic rages on.

Just in case anyone misses the point, the ad’s tagline chillingly and bluntly declares, “O’Toole and the Conservatives are hazardous to your health — at the worst possible time.”

The group’s spokesman, Ian Wayne, told the media, “This launch is just the beginning, we will continue to grow our campaign and get our messages to more and more everyday Canadians.

So, sound and fury abound.

Yet, what Wayne and his group must surely realize is that once a federal election is officially underway, their message will be all but stifled.

That’s because Canada has an “election gag law” on the books which imposes extremely strict limits on how much money third-party advocacy groups, like The Protecting Canada Project, can spend on electoral ads.

In fact, this probably explains why The Protecting Canada Project is airing its TV ads right now, even though a federal election might still be months, or even years, down the road.

And yes, this means the group can avoid the gag law’s restrictions, but it also means their ad campaign won’t be effective when it comes to damaging O’Toole’s electoral chances.

After all, its highly doubtful “everyday Canadians” will actually retain any memory of the group’s anti-O’Toole propaganda when they eventually go to cast their ballots months or years from now.

Keep in mind, when it comes to electoral advertising most voters have extremely short memories, which is why political parties typically bombard the air waves with their most effective ads only a week before Election Day, a time when advocacy groups will be silenced.

So, my point is, O’Toole shouldn’t be losing any sleep over The Protecting Canada Project’s ad campaign.

Yet, this is not to say, third-party political ad campaigns aimed at influencing the electorate are necessarily a total waste of time and money.

A matter of fact, it’s quite possible third parties run such media campaigns for ideological goals that go beyond electoral politics.

For example, even though they’d never admit it, perhaps The Protecting Canada Project ad campaign is actually less about deferring O’Toole and more about mobilizing and energizing Canada’s progressive voting base.

Certainly, its strictly anti-O’Toole messaging could have the effect of riling up left-wing activists and partisans, who, thus agitated, might be more likely to make donations to progressive causes.

Heck, they might even make donations to The Protecting Canada Project.

So perhaps, all things considered, third-party ad campaigns emanating from third parties actually does sometimes signify something.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Canada’s broadcasters need a fair deal to compete in new reality

Creating a more equitable system means uniting Canadian broadcasters’ hands, and freeing them to adapt and compete. If we fail to do so, there will inevitably be fewer domestic voices and choices for Canadians.

While the competitive landscape shifted dramatically and broadcasters worked to evolve, their substantial regulatory burden did not adjust. This is why the sector welcomed Bill C-10, An Act to Amend the Broadcasting Act.

The Broadcasting Act is 30 years old, and it shows. The regulatory system presumed there were limitless ways for content to reach Canadians, and created obligations for those granted that right.

Clearly, those limitations are gone. A multitude of video and audio streaming services are now readily available, and Canadians have eagerly taken up their offerings as they have launched.

At the same time, the advertising sector has fundamentally shifted. Foreign online advertising platforms scoop up 80 per cent of those dollars and shift revenues out of the country, with very little net benefit to Canada’s economy.

The combined effect of these forces is a genuine existential threat entry into our system has created an existential crisis for the broadcasting sector. A study published last summer estimates that local TV and radio broadcasters stood to lose more than $1 billion in revenues between 2020 and 2022.

These changes are structural, not cyclical. The trends have been clear for some time, and the economic viability of local broadcasters won’t improve if we simply wait to weather the storm.

Structural challenges require structural solutions.

Broadcasters do not want to turn back the clock. We want to continue to evolve and compete in this new media marketplace, but we cannot do it with one hand tied behind our backs.

This is why legislative and regulatory changes that Bill C-10 can enact are critical. The current system has been rendered inequitable and unsustainable for our domestic broadcasters, and delays in creating a modern regulatory framework will only serve foreign players.

When resources become scarce and obligations remain the same, the squeeze gets placed on an area that should be of greatest importance at this moment in history: local news.

In an era of disinformation—often distributed by these same foreign tech platforms—it is critical that we identify ways to continue to support local news voices that reflect the reality of the communities in which they live, and reflect a fair and accurate vision of Canada back to Canadians.

The need for local information has never been more pertinent than over the past year. While COVID-19 is a global pandemic, the disease had localized impacts. The 700 broadcasters in more than 300 local markets were essential in communicating the latest public health knowledge that citizens needed to know.

News programming has traditionally been given short shrift by the regulatory regime when measuring expenditures. Priority is given to transferring resources from broadcasters to external producers, to “tell Canadian stories.”

If we are to preserve Canada’s cultural sovereignty, it is critical to recognize broadcasters’ own news and information producers are creating vital cultural content, and telling Canadian stories. Arguably, the most important stories are at the greatest risk of disappearing. It is hard to imagine foreign streaming services delivering the news at 6 p.m. with a local touch from Lethbridge, Regina, Quebec City, and Moncton.

“Leveling the playing field” for Canadian broadcasters does not simply mean applying antiquated broadcasting rules to digital players. It should be seen as creating an additional funding for certain classes of creators beyond the required expenditures from which they already benefit.

We must ensure streamers who shake up Canadian audiences also share equitably in Canadian programming, and that private broadcasters’ share of these obligations are reduced to reflect the new reality.

And we need to ensure that the public broadcaster’s mandate is distinct, and complementary to the role of private broadcasters.

Creating a more equitable system means untying Canadian broadcasters’ hands, and freeing them to adapt and compete. If we fail to do so, there will inevitably be fewer domestic voices and choices for Canadians.

Kevin Desjardins is president of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

The Hill Times
China creates a world miracle in poverty reduction

Before I came to Canada for my posting in 2019, many friends recommended Arxan to me, which is a small city in the foothills of Greater Khingan Range in north China. They told me that the scenery there was as beautiful as that of Banff in the Canadian Rockies and was quite worth a visit. It is a pity that I was unable to make a trip due to a tight schedule.

After I arrived in Canada, I looked up some materials about Arxan out of curiosity and found this small city was indeed unusual with beautiful lakes, forests and snowcapped mountains, as well as vast grasslands and the largest group of hot springs in the world. Unlike Banff, Arxan had remained a trail full of hope featuring “tourism plus poverty alleviation”. The tourism revenue of Arxan reached 5.27 billion yuan (about $813.16 million) in 2018, increasing by 280 percent compared to 2013. In 2019, Arxan was officially removed from the list of national-level poverty-stricken counties.

Arxan is merely an epitome of the miraculous poverty alleviation of China. Over the past 70 years, the Chinese government has lifted 850 million people out of poverty. During the four decades of reform and opening-up alone, 750 million people have been lifted out of poverty. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese government has given top priority to the battle against poverty in its governance and organized the world’s biggest and toughest poverty-relief battle in human history. Since 2012, an average of more than ten million people, equivalent to the population of a medium-sized European country, had been lifted out of poverty each year. In November 2020, China accomplished its poverty alleviation target of the new era on schedule, with all 832 poor counties removed from poverty, eradicating absolute poverty and overall regional poverty, and achieving the poverty reduction target of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 10 years ahead of schedule.

China takes “targeted poverty alleviation” as a basic strategy, which is also a key feature of its poverty alleviation effort. The poverty alleviation plans are tailored to different groups of people, which include increasing production, relocating the poor, ecological compensation, strengthening education and improving social security. China has also introduced a list of top 10 poverty alleviation projects such as poverty alleviation through e-commerce, tourism, and photovoltaic power generation projects. With such policies, China’s poverty elimination actions have benefited a wide range of Chinese people including minorities. By the end of 2019, over 2.92 million people in northwest China’s Xinjiang autonomous region have shaken off poverty. In Xizang autonomous region in southwest China, all 74 poor counties have been removed from the poverty list, and the net income per year per capita increased from 1,499 yuan at the end of 2015 to 9,328 yuan in 2019, which means eliminating absolute poverty in history for the first time. In Guangxi autonomous region in southwest China, a provincial-level region with the largest population of minorities in China, all the 54 poor counties have been removed from the poverty list, and all the people of the Zhuang ethnic group have been lifted from poverty.

China has made great contributions to the world poverty alleviation process. China has the highest number of people moving out of poverty worldwide, accounting for over 70 percent of the global poverty alleviation effort. It established the China-UN Peace and Development Fund, South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund, and made solid progress in cooperation projects under such frameworks as the Pilot Project of Poverty Reduction Cooperation in East Asia and the China-Africa Poverty Reduction and People’s Welfare Plan. China has helped establish 24 agricultural technology demonstration centers in Africa, benefiting more than 500,000 local people.

Poverty eradication is a challenge for all and the top priority of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the world population living in extreme poverty will exceed 1 billion by 2030 due to COVID-19. Thus, realizing global poverty eradication is still an ongoing battle. China and Canada have a lot to share in eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality and tackling climate change. It is our common aspiration to pursue a better life. Let’s join hands to make greater contributions to world poverty alleviation and strive for a better future for mankind.

Cong Peiwu, Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Canada

For more information please visit http://ca.china-embassy.org/eng/
Trump claims another victim: the Republican Party

The gutless wonders at the helm of the GOP continue to support Donald Trump. Even though his last atrocity, turning the Capitol Building into a crime scene, made clear to the world in explicit video after video that something truly noxious had crawled out of the Washington swamp—the president himself.

GOP bought it. It was a Hans Christian Andersen/Stephen King moment. U.S. politics had become part horror story and part fairy tale, spun by the biggest liar in America. Just a week after the president’s Capitol Crime, House Republicans voted 211 to 10 not to impeach the president. In a later vote, it was the same story in the Senate. Only five Republicans out of 50 voted to try the president for inciting a mob to attack the Capitol Building at the very moment that Congress was trying to fulfill its constitutional obligation to certify the presidential election. In fact, the mob brought the work of the lawmakers to a halt.

One of those lawmakers was Mitch McConnell, GOP minority leader in the Senate. McConnell had earlier said that he believed Trump had committed impeachable offences. He declared that the president had “provoked” the mob. But when it came time to vote, this two-faced career politician voted against holding a Senate trial for Trump, bore responsibility. Then the qualifications started to appear. Trump was partially responsible. Finally, the ethical retreat was complete; everyone was responsible. When the rubber hit the road in the House vote, McCarthy too voted against impeachment.

Then came the moment when Kevin McCarthy became Charlie McCarthy, Donald Trump’s ventriloquist doll. The Republican minority House leader arrived as a suppliant at Mar-a-Lago to “kiss the ring.” Or kiss something. He emerged with a photo standing beside Trump, claiming that the ex-president had agreed to help the loser-insurrectionist to help them not lose again in 2022, is the strategy the GOP is going for? Could McCarthy’s rubber spine get more flexible than when he genuflected to Trump in Florida? It actually disappeared altogether in his handling of Marjorie Taylor Greene, the Miss QAnon of the new Republican Party.

Consider what this purveyor of batshit conspiracy theories has as credentials for a spot on the Education, Labour and Budget committees of the House of Representatives. Greene has repeatedly supported executing Democratic members, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Democrats echoed that view: “I see, begging forgiveness and finding the courage to account, don’t expect the GQP, will declare moral bankruptcy. Given all the previous votes where Republicans have massively rejected holding Donald Trump, or his dipstick accolades, to account, don’t expect them to find the courage to convict an ex-president.

The whole thing will descend into a brouhaha of hypocrites, with nothing more for the Republicans to celebrate at the end of the day than that they have once again smothered the truth in the oily rags of misplaced partisanship.

As for the Creature from Mar-a-Lago, he will slip back into the swamp, where he will digest the party he has swallowed whole and America will finally know what the Republicans stand for, writes Michael Harris.
What happens now? Probably a new president and commander-in-chief to replace Min Aung Hlaing within weeks, and then another prolonged period of military rule. Foreign sanctions? Definitely. Popular protests? Almost certainly. Massive bloodshed and repression? Quite possibly; the army has done that before. And Aung San Suu Kyi gets another crack at sainthood.

In fact, it was worse than that. When the army started massacring the Rohingya, a Muslim minority in the state of Rakhine, in 2017, Suu Kyi had to go along with that as well. The Burmese army’s main business has always been keeping restive minority populations down, and it would not brook civilian interference in that key role. ‘Had to go along with it’ may be a bit too generous. Suu Kyi didn’t just keep quiet about the genocide that drove most of the Rohingya population (700,000 people) across the border into Bangladesh. She actually went to the International Court of Justice last year and defended the army’s actions in person. (That was when her foreign admirers finally cancelled her honorary sainthood.) As a Burmese politician hoping to be re-elected, Suu Kyi probably felt obliged to cater to the ferocious anti-Muslim prejudice of Burma’s Buddhist majority. The genocide is the one really popular thing the army has done in decades. But there have also been hints in her private conversations that she shares the majority’s paranoia about Islam.

No matter. She did it, she still stands by it—and the NLD got 80 per cent of the votes in the November election, so it worked. She kept her side of the rotten deal. Why did the generals not keep their side? After all, they still really held the final control, and all their investments were safe.

Part of the reason seems to be that the soldiers expected the army’s proxy civilian party to do much better in the election because of popular support among the Bamar ethnic majority (86 per cent of the population) for its actions in Rakhine. And at this point it goes very Trumpish.

If you believe you should have won the election, it’s a short step to thinking that the vote was rigged, and a longer but still possible step to believing you should use force to reverse this injustice. There was no evidence of fraud and the national election commission said so, but the army started claiming there had been “massive voting irregularities.”

There has long been dissatisfaction among junior generals and colonels about the army’s collaboration with the NLD, profitable though it has been. However, the commander-in-chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, was distinctly less enthusiastic in his claims of fraud in the run-up to the coup.

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Gwynne Dyer’s new book is ‘Growing Pains: The Future of Democracy (and Work)’.

The Hill Times
The prime minister has to know that any detailed, well-funded federal ‘intrusion’ on provincial turf, aimed at improving long-term care, could be wildly applauded by the public, if not the prickly prima-donnas aligned against him. He, too, is heading into a possible spring election and needs a win.

The provinces have tried to make improvements, but slowly and unevenly. A desperate Legault has repeatedly begged retired Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured Jan. 29, 2021, holding a media briefing outside the Rideau Cottage in Ottawa. Even those who find Justin Trudeau annoying, mannered, insufficiently serious, or arrogant, also know this: we are one people when it comes to how we treat our elders. We have already lost more people in long-term care than any other wealthy nation. And we don’t want to carry the national shame of more unnecessary deaths. Do what you have to, prime minister, and let them howl, writes Susan Riley. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

It will take deep reform and more money to fix the system, most critics agree. But that seems to be as far as agreement goes. Like so many important issues in this country, progress is hobbled by federal-provincial turf wars. Provinces are responsible for long-term care, with the federal government throwing cash (never enough) their way.

This has created uneven quality in long-term care both between provinces—where British Columbia’s homes are considered the best, with Quebec’s ranking among the worst—but also within provinces. In Ontario, for instance, 58 per cent of homes are privately owned, with 24 per cent run by non-profits and the rest by municipalities.

The privatization wave in Ontario started in the Mike Harris years and continued as subsequent governments tried to offload some of the costs of caring for its most frail citizens. While there are some good privately owned homes, most experts agree they are generally inferior to public, or non-profit, residences—an argument borne out by respective death tolls during the pandemic.

York University sociologist and senior care expert Pat Armstrong, who has been studying the sector for years, notes that private homes are largely funded and regulated (almost weakly) by the province, so they cut corners to secure profits by skimming on “discretionary” items like laundry, food, and cleaning. They also usually pay staff significantly less than public and non-profit homes. This has led some—most recently federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh—to call for an end to private long-term care. If he knows the Countless reports have exposed the many short-comings in the sector, but a primary problem remains: the unglamorous, unglamorous work at near-poverty wages which has driven many personal support workers, nurses, and administrators from the sector, a flight exacerbated by the pandemic. Changes that will require a large investment, but one many Canadians may be willing to pay. And the cost can be mitigated somewhat by increased resources for at-home care, the best outcome for seniors who are mentally sound but physically frail.

The provinces have tried to make improvements, but slowly and unevenly. A desperate Legault has repeatedly begged retired Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently. To which the obvious rejoinder is: what do you, actually, know about them?

Trudeau says he will “happly partner” with provinces and territories to co-operate on improving long-term care. Those who will not agree to federal standards, he implies, won’t get the money, and will be answerable to their electorates. This is a disappointingly timid stance, although it may still be all he can do given the constitutional reality. Trudeau has been urged to invoke the federal Emergencies Act to supersede provincial objections and impose national standards to fill a desperate leadership void at this time. But, however, requires the approval of both the Commons and the Senate, and, particularly with a minority government, could provoke a lengthy, angry distraction, with an uncertain outcome, while the pandemic is still claiming victims and vaccine deliveries are disrupted.

Rivaling from un-cooperative provinces is probably the only lever Trudeau has (which is unfortunate for those Canadians whose premiers are too blinded by ego, or ideology, to collaborate). Still, the prime minister has to know that any detailed, well-funded federal “intrusion” on provincial turf, aimed at improving long-term care, could be wildly applauded by the public, if not the prickly prima-donnas aligned against him. He, too, is heading into a possible spring election and needs a win.

Even those who find Justin Trudeau annoying, mannered, insufficiently serious, or arrogant, also know this: we are one people when it comes to how we treat our elders. We have already lost more people in long-term care than any other wealthy nation. And we don’t want to carry the national shame of more unnecessary deaths. Do what you have to, prime minister, and let them howl, writes Susan Riley. The Hill Times

It is unlikely that provinces, left to their own devices, will direct the huge federal pandemic funds in the most effective manner, or provide quality assurance and location for most Canadians.

Of course, any talk of “strings” sets off angry denunciations from premiers who find federal meddling or micro-managing, a performative stubbornness that is particularly ironic in a national emergency. The provinces want $28-billion more in annual health transfers as they see it fit: “I don’t see what the federal government knows about nursing homes,” blustered Premier Legault recently. To which the obvious rejoinder is: what do you, actually, know about them?

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Dreams are fine but results are much better

What we need now is less talk of Canada as a global champion in electric vehicle and batteries and a much clearer analysis of how we might best participate in the new electric age.

A good example of this dream is the near-euphoria in Ottawa after Ford and FCA (Chrysler) committed to keeping open assembly plants—to produce electric vehicles—that would have been closed without Canadian taxpayers paying well over $1-billion to keep these two plants open and sustain existing employment. The companies may get tax breaks as well. Staying in the game is expensive. Nor do we know whether there will be much Canadian technology used in these plants.

Yet this didn’t stop the Prime Minister’s Office after these announcements to quickly declare that “electrification will allow us to position the innovative Canadian automotive industry as a global leader in battery-electric manufacturing.” And his Industry Minister at the time, Navdeep Bains, proclaimed Canada had a competitive advantage in batteries because of what he said were “our natural resources and the scientific excellence and manufacturing skills to maximize them.” Since then GM has announced it will keep an assembly plant open in Ontario for electric vans, though this will also depend on taxpayer support.

This aspirational language is continued in the Trudeau government’s climate “strategy”—“A Healthy Environment and a Healthy Economy. It boasts that the government is “working with its partners to make Canada a leader in the design, development and manufacturing of zero-emission vehicles.” Under its plans, it would “support the development of the entire battery supply chain to ensure Canada can build the batteries that will power the vehicles and the electricity grids of the future.”

The Trudeau government argues we have a big advantage because of our minerals such as nickel, cobalt and lithium. Yet our nickel is not in a form that can be used for battery production without costly upgrading and further processing; Indonesia has a better nickel ore for batteries and the Asian battery producers are already there. And South American countries, notably Chile and Argentina, have a big cost competitiveness in lithium production. Our mineral base today is much less than an advantage than our government claims.

Moreover, recycling will become a competitive source of raw materials as existing batteries age. Here, Canada is in the game. A Kingston, Ontario company, Li-Cycle, has proprietary technology that it says allows it to recycle 95 per cent of the materials in discarded lithium-ion batteries, including nickel, cobalt and lithium, for re-use. It is investing $175-million to build North America’s largest battery recycling facility, in Rochester, New York, which will become a major source of nickel and lithium and cobalt.

But designing and producing batteries is an even bigger challenge. Today the industry is dominated by Asian producers, with China’s Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. and Korea’s LG Chem the world’s two largest manufacturers. They accounted for almost half the world’s production last year. There is now a race underway, in the European Union, the United States, and Britain to develop domestic battery producers. Currently the Europeans and Americans rely heavily on plants owned by Asian manufacturers, such as CATL’s plant in Germany or LG Chem’s joint venture with General Motors in Ohio. Tesla is the main U.S. manufacturer with plants in Nevada and China and construction underway in Germany.

But as the transition to electric vehicles accelerates, there will be a need for more battery plants—which, because of the heavy weight of batteries, need to be built close to assembly plants. Ontario’s electric vehicle plants could be supplied by battery production in Ontario or by plants in nearby Michigan or Ohio, for example.

Two projects, one in Sweden and the other in Britain show the challenges. Plants have to be big—they are not surprisingly called Gigafactories—so they require significant capital and expertise. But they also must be led by companies, not governments. Sweden and Britain benefit because of business-led initiatives. In one example, a Swedish company established in 2016, Northvolt, is building a major production facility and research centre in Sweden, a plant in Poland for assembly of battery modules, and is in a joint venture with Volkswagen for a massive project in Germany. It has raised more than US$1.6 billion in equity investments, accessed close to $1-billion in European Union loans, and has an order from Volkswagen for 8-billion of batteries. It is also building a recycling plant in Sweden.

In Britain, a group of investors from Abu Dhabi and Scandinavia have formed Britishvolt, which is planning $4-billion Gigafactory in Britain on a 95-hectare site where it expects suppliers will also locate. Negotiations are underway for financial support from the British government under its battery strategy and the company is expected to go public to raise additional funds this year.

Canada has allocated $3-billion over five years under its Strategic Innovation Fund and its mandate includes support and development of “a Canadian battery innovation and industry ecosystem” that would “cover support for everything from mining and processing, and research and development to manufacturing and recycling.” But without a business-led battery enterprise with the technology that meets industry needs, Canada may end up being a niche player, and some times a potentially considerable one, as Li-cycle suggests.

What we need now, though, is less talk of Canada as a global champion in electric vehicle and batteries and a much clearer analysis of how we might best participate in the new electric age. Dreams are fine but results are much better.

David Crane can be reached at crane@interlog.com.

The Hill Times
Opinion

COVID-19 recession: why traditional economic tools will not restore job losses

The neoliberal notion of handing out money, free land and tax exemptions to start-up, small and medium sized businesses is now completely discredited. Instead, a focused industrial strategy based on advanced manufacturing is the future.

Ken McFarlane & Ian Waddell

At every Canadian election, federal provincial politicians promise to create more jobs. Easier said than done at the best of times. The current COVID-19 recession adds unique elements to the challenge. Instinctively, governments will use expansionary monetary policies (interest rates and money supplies) or expansionary fiscal policies (taxation and government expenditures) or both to stimulate job growth. Unfortunately, these policies can take up to six months or more to prompt economic gains if, in fact, they will work at all during the current atypical recession. The exception may be government funding for necessary infrastructure programs.

The Bank of Canada has lowered interest rates with the hope that this will cause consumers to borrow and spend more resulting in businesses expanding and hiring additional workers to satisfy increased demand. However, once a major recession is underway most people are too poor to spend or borrow no matter how low interest rates are. Banks can lend against personal credit scores tumble and personal savings are depleted.

Lower interest rates might help some in the middle class to renegotiate mortgages or consider new house purchases. As for the upper middle class and the rich, it has been shown that interest rates rarely effect their spending habits and that includes the expansion of their businesses.

The intent is also utilizing quantitative easing (QE) to increase the supply of money and liquidity in the economy. The intent is to give a boost to product and service demand by making credit more readily available from banks. This policy is often referred to as “printing money.” In short, the government creates financial instruments to purchase bonds and securities resulting in the money being released into the economy.

As with lowering interest rates, there is no concrete evidence that utilizing quantitative QE will lead to increased consumer spending or business investment and therefore job creation during the current severe recession. It may assist the rich to acquire more possessions and stock markets might spike, but it will do little for those who have lost their jobs or are already unemployed.

The Canadian government and provinces have taken extraordinary and invaluable efforts to get cash straight to individuals and small businesses in need. This puts money directly into the economy without the banks and other institutions acting as gate keepers. However, as would be expected at this time, these singular allocations have been modest and temporary. At this writing, the federal government is attempting to re-establish the Employment Insurance program as the focus for ongoing funding. A compelling argument can be made for establishing a guaranteed annual income even as the current crisis continues. This would assist ordinary Canadians to better weather the ups and downs of the economy, now and in the future, with one simple, reliable and well-funded program.

Infrastructure programs can create many jobs and robust economic spin-offs. However, the fact remains that most of these jobs are temporary and only available to certain trades and professions. Governments could institute focused and expedited training programs to allow a broader spectrum of the unemployed and underemployed to participate in these projects.

If the quantity and size of infrastructure programs were maximized, then the number of jobs created as we ease out of this recession might well be sufficient to allow small and medium sized businesses to reopen. Reducing payroll taxes for new-hires would provide a further incentive.

In short, policies like infrastructure projects, efficient re-training, reduced payroll taxes and limited personal income tax offsets are crucial to stimulate a guaranteed annual income system are some of the tools we can rely on to help economic growth during and after the pandemic crisis.

In the long term, governments in Canada need to come to terms with the fact that our future must include a robust industrial strategy utilizing skilled workers trained in all the proven tools for clean-tech and advanced manufacturing. As the European industrial heartland has shown, an advanced sector is capable of weathering heavy economic storms.

Given the sorry state of Canadian entrepreneurialism, this shift will likely require Crown corporations to lead the way and perhaps privatization is created to the private sector. The neoliberal notion of handing out money, free land and tax exemptions to start-up, small and medium sized businesses is now completely discredited. Instead, a focused industrial strategy based on advanced manufacturing.

Ken McFarlane assisted in developing and commercializing novel advanced materials technologies in Europe and North America. He chairs the Zhang Research Group at U of G which undertakes economic development projects on four continents. Ian Waddell is founder of NZMP and a former British Columbia minister of small business.

The Hill Times

It’s time feds give us straight talk on the vaccine rollout

It is time for the government to get real with Canadians, go beyond the approved talking points and illustrate that they understand our concerns when faced with unrealistic answers.

Amanda Shore

It’s time the Canadian government gets serious.

The past 10 months have been hard on everyone. No matter your age, or stage of life, COVID has halted everybody in their tracks. We, as Canadians, have hunkered down, figured out how best to communicate with others virtually, made Zoom dinners a thing, joked, cried, felt hopeless, rose up, stayed home, masked up, and waited patiently. We were amazed by the speed of the vaccine trials and vowed by the tireless work of the scientists to get a vaccine into trials like never before. All the while, we continued to socially distance, limiting any social interactions with trusted friends outside and two metres apart to help stop the spread of this terrible, scary virus. News broke that these vaccines were just about ready. We were ecstatic. Some 97 per cent efficacy? Mind blowing. It needs sub-freezing temperatures to store? No worries, we knew it was only a matter of time, any day now, that we would soon have a feeling of relief in our hands and we could let out the communal breath we had been holding to gain some sort of release. We understand this was not the magic pill, but it would, in short order, be a light at the end of the tunnel.

While we Canadians were doing our utmost to work from home, teach our kids in the next room over, miss our siblings’ weddings, keep loved ones in our arms, and find love, we believed—we assumed—the Canadian government was doing its utmost to secure vaccinations and come up with a suitable and realistic rollout plan to help dig its citizens out of this rut which we are all collectively living in. When the government said it had secured enough doses to vaccinate our population three times over, we rejoiced, we started to see that little speck of light. While we played our part, we trusted that these deals the government brokered were solid and competitive, that the rollout of these vaccines would be well considered, organized, and ready once the vaccine arrived at our doorstep.

Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the reality. Though we have kept our smiles hitched, our outlook resolute, a crack is starting to form. The vaccine rollout, it seems, is not so organized, and transparency and information are lacking. Vaccine shipments are being withheld for this reason or that, and millions of Canadians are still not vaccinated. The Canadian government continues to repeat that these hiccups will not result in delays to the overall vaccine rollout schedule, though it is hardly a stretch to see why this may be far-fetched. While this comes from good intentions, this does a disservice to us Canadians. It is clear the government does not understand that qualified experts are undoubtedly working tirelessly to address missing gaps and growing, issues that the plebeian commentators are not even aware of the get it. But it is time to get real with us. We Canadians have proved to be resilient, resourceful, helpful, kind, and strong. We need realistic answers and even more realistic solutions. Another virus strain is threatening our already tenuous, uncertain future and we want to know that the Canadian government is going to fight for our right to get vaccinated before a new one will be necessary.

It is time for the government to get real with Canadians, go beyond the approved talking points and illustrate that they understand our concerns when faced with unrealistic answers. And it is also time to show the world that while Canadians may be a bit too nice, we will also not back down; we will have a seat at the table and we will fight and defend our country. This is what is necessary for us Canadians who continue to persevere, to innovate in the face of adversity, and who will want to be proud to call ourselves Canadians.

Amanda Shore is an architectural designer who lives in Ottawa.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured Feb. 2, 2021, holds a presser in front of his home at the Rideau Cottage in Ottawa where he announced updated travel restrictions in response to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and unveiled a plan to domestically manufacture Novax COVID-19 vaccines at a National Research Council bio-manufacturing facility in Montreal. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade
Lynn Beyak case reveals systemic racism in Senate ethics procedures, full stop

It is systemic racism to allow a non-Indigenous person to decide what is anti-Indigenous racism without any consultation with Indigenous persons.

BY LILLIAN EVA QUAN DYCK

Lynn Beyak retired from the Senate on Jan. 25, four years after she began a campaign which claim that Indian residential schools (IRS) were really not that harmful to the thousands of Indigenous children who attended them, but were instead characterized by an abundance of good. A year later, she posted numerous letters supporting her position some of which contained anti-Indigenous racist comments.

Several Senators, including myself, wrote to the Senate asking for the letters containing racist comments about Indigenous people to be removed from Beyak’s website. She refused to take them down, although she claimed steadfast in her viewpoint about IRS. On June 16, 2020, Beyak apologized for the gross content and for causing hurt by posting some letters with hurtful comments. It’s important to note, however, that she did not apologize for posting letters with racist comments or for causing hurt by posting residential school letters.

Now, after two reports from the Senate ethics officer (SEO), three reports from the Senate’s Ethics and Conflict of Interest Committee of the Senate, two suspensions without pay, two training courses on racism and Indigenous history, an official apology, a human consultation with Indigenous peoples, they would not be able to recommend that Beyak be reinstated. This shows how vital consultation with Indigenous Senators can be; the recommendation of the Senate Ethics Committee would have been different had we been consulted.

Beyak’s comments about IRS were not part of the ethics investigation. But her repetitive claim over a period of several years, in which not only denied the harms done to Indigenous people by residential schools, but also made race-baiting comments, would have been grounds for a complaint of racism.

Thirdly, it was systemic racism by the Senate Ethics Committee to reinstate former senator Lynn Beyak after suspension were wrong because they underestimated the racial content of the letters she posted, and they underestimated both the adequacy of her official apology and of what she learned after her retraining.

The recommendation of the Senate ethics officer and the Senate Ethics Committee to reinstate former senator Lynn Beyak after suspension were wrong because they underestimated the racial content of the letters she posted, and they underestimated both the adequacy of her official apology and of what she learned after her retraining, writes former senator Lillian Dyck.

The recommendation of the Senate ethics officer and the Senate Ethics Committee to reinstate former senator Lynn Beyak after suspension were wrong because they underestimated the racial content of the letters she posted, and they underestimated both the adequacy of her official apology and of what she learned after her retraining.
Canada should be speaking up against Moïse’s authoritarian measures in Haiti

Rather than just words acknowledging structural racism, Ottawa must take action that improves the lives of long-marginalized Black people. At the international level, a good place to begin would be ending Canada’s support for the revival of Duvalierism in Haiti.

Ottawa is supporting a government that is reviving the spectre of the infamous Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier dictatorship. More than two centuries ago, Africans in Saint-Domingue rose up against the most barbaric of all the slave economies to become a beacon for Black liberation. Over 13 years, they freed themselves, defeating multiple colonial powers including a British force led by Toronto icon John Graves Simcoe. The Haitian Revolution represents what may be the greatest example of liberation in the history of humanity, abolishing slavery three decades before Canada and six decades before the U.S.

There is a different kind of resilience emerging in Haiti today. Unfortunately, this time, it is the fortitude of a reactionary elite—that should have long been discredited—when supported by Washington and Ottawa.

Neo-Duvalierist President Jovenel Moïse, who should have left office on Feb. 7, looks set to extend his term in defiance of the constitution and popular will. After surviving 18 months of massive protests and strikes spurred by a huge corruption scandal, Moïse began to rewrite the constitution in violation of the law. Over the past few months, he has released presidential decrees criminalizing protest blockades as “terrorism” and establishing a new intelligence agency empowered to infiltrate and arrest anyone engaged in “subversive” acts or threatening “state security.”

To commemorate Black History Month, the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute has launched a letter writing campaign to new Foreign Minister Marc Garneau, pictured, asking him to reset Canadian policy towards a country that did so much to make Black lives matter. The Hill Times

Has released presidential decrees criminalizing protest blockades as “terrorism” and establishing a new intelligence agency empowered to infiltrate and arrest anyone engaged in “subversive” acts or threatening “state security.” The new agency may become analogous to the Duvalier dictatorship’s infamous Ton Ton Macoutes. Canadian officials have barely criticized any of Moïse’s authoritarian measures. On the contrary, Ottawa has backed Moïse at almost every turn. During a week-long general strike in February 2019 and an even longer one in October, Canadian officials publicly backed the president. Canada funds and trains a police force that has violently repressed anti-Moise protests with the Canadian ambassador repeatedly attending police functions and refusing to criticize their repression.

Alongside the U.S., France, Germany, Brazil, Organization of American States (OAS), UN and Spain, Canada is part of the “Core Group” of foreign ambassadors in Port-au-Prince generally believed to be the real power behind Moïse. Last year, Radio Canada’s flagship investigative program Enquête pointed out that the Core Group was spawned at the “Ottawa Initiative on Haiti.” On Jan. 31, 2003, the Canadian government convened top U.S., French, and OAS officials to discuss Haiti’s future. No Haitian officials were invited to the secret two-day meeting where they discussed the removal of the elected president and putting the country under UN trusteeship.

On the final day of Black History Month not long after the country celebrated the 200-year anniversary of the Haitian Revolution, U.S. Marines forces president Jean-Bertrand Aristide out of the country in the middle of the night. Canadian JTF2 special forces “secured” the airport from which Aristide said he was “kidnapped.” A 15-year UN occupation of the country began.

Last year, Bloc Québécois MP Mario Beaulieu sponsored a parliamentary petition calling on the federal government to “publish all documents relating to the Ottawa Initiative on Haiti” and to “hold a hearing of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to learn everything there is to know about the Ottawa Initiative on Haiti,” including its link to the “Core Group.” The petition gathered the signatures required to be presented in Parliament but was sidewise by the global pandemic. Opposition parties should press the matter.

Last week, protests and a general strike are planned in Haiti to oppose Moïse’s bid to extend his mandate. The opposition has largely united behind a proposal for a caretaker government to oversee elections.

To commemorate Black History Month, the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute has launched a letter writing campaign to new Foreign Minister Marc Garneau asking him to reset Canadian policy towards a country that did so much to make Black lives matter. Rather than just words acknowledging structural racism, Ottawa must take action that improves the lives of long-marginalized Black people. At the international level, a good place to begin would be ending Canada’s support for the revival of Duvalierism in Haiti.

Bianca Mugyenyi is the director of the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute. The Hill Times

A meaningful way to honour Black History Month is by questioning Canada’s role in a country born in struggle to make Black Lives Matter. In Haiti today, Canada funds and trains a police force that has violently repressed anti-Moise protests with the Canadian ambassador repeatedly attending police functions and refusing to criticize their repression.

To commemorate Black History Month, the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute has launched a letter writing campaign to new Foreign Minister Marc Garneau, pictured, asking him to reset Canadian policy towards a country that did so much to make Black lives matter. The Hill Times
Naysayers who claim to be speaking up for the disabled on assisted dying bill are missing the point

MAiD and C-7 are not measures of personal failure. They are final choices for people who suffer intolerably and have had enough of life and its difficulties. They want their right to choose and access a death with purpose and dignity. MAiD is not perfect and nor is C-7, but C-7 should be passed now.

Ron Posno

Opinion

LONDON, ONT.—There is a heated debate going on here in Canada about medical assistance in dying (MAiD) because of the changes proposed in Bill C-7, that currently sits with the Senate for review. Several articles have been published in the past few weeks on the wishes and the failures for the disabled but have failed to countenance the reality. I would like to present another position on the issue.

MAiD and Bill C-7 both have deficiencies, some being addressed in Bill C-7, but nonetheless, MAiD is the current reality of a law directive from the Supreme Court of Canada in February 2015 (Carter decision).

The Supreme Court was speaking for all Canadians, including the disabled, when it ruled: the existing Canadian Criminal Code’s prohibitions on voluntary euthanasia (Sec. 14) and assisted suicide (Sec. 241(b)) violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; the new law should permit physician assisted death for a competent adult person who (1) clearly consents to the termination of life; and (2) has a grievous medical condition (including an illness, disease, or disability) that is irremediable (cannot be alleviated by means acceptable to the individual) and causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition.

That’s the basis of the reality under review in the House of Commons and the Senate. The review became necessary because MAID failed to meet the directive from the Supreme Court. Jean Truchon and Nicole Glaud appeared to the Quebec Superior Court for help, just like two others in Canada, because MAID failed. They argued that the clause that “death must be reasonably foreseeable” failed to protect the rights to equality as well as life, liberty, and security for all Canadians. The Quebec Court ruled in their favour and ordered the federal lawmakers to make the requisite changes to MAID.

With respect to the Truchon decision Justice Baudouin explained, “The vulnerability of a person requesting medical assistance in dying must be assessed exclusively on a case-by-case basis, according to the characteristics of the person and not based on a reference group of so-called ‘vulnerable persons.’” The justice also added, “The patient’s ability to understand and to consent is ultimately the decisive factor, in addition to the other legal criteria.”

Now, we’re going around the same circle. We had the moralists (conscientious objectors) and the naysayers crowing the floor and crying for exemptions, precautions, and safeguards. We had them for Sue Rodriguez in 1993. They tried Justice Carter in 2015, and for MAID in 2016. They took the floor then and they’re taking it now.

I won’t write of the moralists. I am very concerned with the nay-sayers who claim to be speaking for the disabled. They’re taking the time and the attention of the decision-makers now—just like before, and they’re missing the entire point. The Supreme Court (in reference to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms) is saying that disabled persons are entitled to all the rights of all Canadians.

I know of no disabled person who wants his/her rights removed or lessened.

In fact, the irony of it all, is that many of these naysayers have pretended for years to speak and represent the disabled population. In denying disabled persons access to MAID, they have become “ableist” the very kind of people they’ve been speaking against for years. Note: ableism is defined as discrimination against disabled persons. Every argument they put forth to limit access to MAID is ableism.

I can say this because I am classified as disabled. I have dementia, I am one-eyed and losing vision in the remaining eye, my left knee is crippled; and I am 81 years old.

I hate saying all this because I don’t speak to them about removing their rights. And don’t talk to me about that either.

The featured, institutionalized ableists may be correct when they speak of systemic inadequacies to support people with disabilities. But that’s the unfortunate reality of societal and program failures. These failures should not become the basis for denying the disabled their rights as Canadians nor access to choose MAID. These failures are much better addressed by the programs and services offered by these same ableists.

MAID and C-7 are not measures of personal failure. They are final choices for people who suffer intolerably and have had enough of life and its difficulties. They want their right to choose and access a death with purpose and dignity. MAID is not perfect and nor is C-7, but C-7 should be passed now.

There are far too many hurting people, suffering in their respective agencies for better access to MAID. Don’t need more prolonged and tiring arguments. MAID needs improvement. Better it come in the later, anticipated full review in June.

Ron Posno received his formal schooling from College Militaire Royale, University of Western Ontario, Wayne State University, and the University of Toronto. Nationally recognized for curricul- um innovation in special education, he was a teacher, consultant and school superintendent. As an advocate for people with exceptional needs, he has lectured in 13 universities and colleges in Canada and the United States. Before retir- ing, he was a motivational speaker who talked about ‘change’ in busi- ness and public institutions.

The Hill Times
new decade of the 20th century has just opened. A decade of uncertainty brought forth by the global pandemic and its consequences, but also a decade of hope. A decade of opportunities for the collaboration and economy’s recovery, a chance to create a world that is better, more just, more green, and one that respects the principle of sustained development. As we look towards the future, we are toasting for areas which will be the centers of dynamic and positive changes. I am certain that Central Europe will be one of them on the European and global scale.

Central Europe or Central and Eastern Europe (the terms are used interchangeably) is a significant regional entity, a community of shared fate in terms of geography, politics, and economy as well as in terms of ideas and cultures. As for a location on a map, it is perceived as an area between the Baltic, Adriatic, and the Black sea or (even though it is oversimplification) between Germany and Russia. But above all, we constitute a circle of common memory. We have had our share of similar historical experiences, in the dramatic 20th century in particular. We have suffered from two totalitarianisms, the brown and red ones, that suppressed and oppressed us. But we also have great, glorious experiences from centuries ago. The 15th-17th centuries, the era called “the Europe of Princes”, accompanies the progress of freedom. The three decades that have passed since the fall of communism, the regional breakthrough freedom, entrepreneurship, self-government, open up the space for fulfillment of bold ambitions and aspirations. Development and reconciliations ensure a sound diversification of benefits and mutual interdependence.

Central Europe constitutes a perfect example of how powerful and creative power freedom is. Freedom and its siblings – economic development, entrepreneurship, self-government – will do unstoppable work. It is a chance to create a world that is better, more just, more green, and one that respects the principle of sustained development. As we look towards the future, we are toasting for areas which will be the centers of dynamic and positive changes. I am certain that Central Europe will be one of them on the European and global scale.

Central Europe as a Community of Shared Aspirations

A description of Central Europe in terms of values is important as well. Being part of Western civilization for more than a thousand years, we share its ideological foundations. Milan-Kundera, a Czech writer, suggested Central Europe is “a kidnaped West,” the part of Western civilization that found itself against the Soviet domination – imperial, authoritarian, and unable to manage nationally. It must be emphasized, though, that our commitment to values that have built the European culture is not without reflection. We know perhaps better than others the high price one must pay for defending them. We are aware that one must cultivate and reconcile freedom and responsibility, rights and duties, individualism and solidarity, the attitude of criticism, innovation, and modernization with one that cherishes heritage and traditions that describe our identity.

On the threshold of the historic breakthrough of 1989, Timothy Garton Ash wrote that the concept of Central Europe had hourly since the Western world from thinking in Cold War terms, has challenged the common notions and priorities but also had something new to offer. The concept seems to be validated as well when the participation of Central European countries in the EU and NATO is a crucial and salient part of the European and Atlantic order, and as our region with its solid economic growth has made a significant contribution and is today part of the European Union and NATO, a part of which is the EU and NATO as the biggest country in the region. I would say at this time that is the community of shared success and the community of shared aspirations of the same time.

Central Europe constitutes a perfect example of how powerful and creative power freedom is. Freedom and its siblings – economic freedom, entrepreneurship, self-government – open up the space for fulfillment of bold ambitions and aspirations. Development and reconciliations ensure a sound diversification of benefits and mutual interdependence.

Central Europe as a Community of Shared Aspirations

We can also serve as an inspiring example of how cooperation, joint initiatives and undertakings bring positive results. It was thanks to them that Central Europe ceased to be, as it was to advance, a peripheral area between the West and East, between imperial powers, and instead became a structure connected by multiple ties, one that is aware of its interests and has an influence on the course of European affairs. The emancipation of Central and Eastern Europe was a success, we are the crucial part of political and civilization processes.

Let me draw your attention to three important planes of Central European cooperation, which are not only of regional significance, but are also crucial to the EU, Atlantic, and even global dimension. The first of them is the Visegrad Group, an entity of the longest existence which gathers Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. Initiated in 1991 as a platform for political dialogue and coordination of efforts to gain membership in NATO and the EU, the Visegrad Group has also proven useful once it has achieved these strategic goals. Today it is one of the most important agents in activating regional cooperation in Central Europe and seeking understanding on European issues.

The second of the planes is the Bucharest Nine, a structure that groups countries of NATO’s eastern flank: Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria. It was established in 2015 in Bucharest, where we signed a joint statement which said the Bucharest Nine countries are determined to secure, where it is necessary, a “robust, credible and sustainable Allied military presence” in the region. To a large degree, the B9 is a response to Russia’s aggressive policy, to the violations of borders and territorial integrity of the neighboring Ukraine, which threaten a regional and Atlantic security. We are not going to watch it idly.

The third plane of cooperation is the Three Seas Initiative, which was initiated by the President of Croatia Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and myself in 2015. The group comprises countries located between the Baltic, Adriatic, and Black sea: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary. The goal is to make joint investments in infrastructure, transport, energy, and new technologies that will boost the development in our countries and contribute to the cohesion of Europe as a whole.

President of the Republic of Poland

Andrzej Duda
Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault, left, Green Party MP Paul Manly, NDP MP Charlie Angus, and Afif Virani, parliamentary secretary to the justice minister all have opinions about further regulating hateful speech online. The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade and courtesy Twitter

‘Canadians have grown impatient’: regulation of social media in the works, but Parliamentarians wary

‘We want to be careful that we don’t censor people and we want to be careful that the media giants are not censoring people,’ says Green Party Paul Manly.

Continued from page 1
grown impatient’ around regulating hate speech online. NDP MP Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay, Ont.), his party’s ethics critic, said, ‘there have to be rules set down.’

There’s a distinction between regulation of hate and regulation of harmful speech, something lawmakers will be grappling with when they turn their attention to social media giants like Google, Facebook, and Twitter, among others.

Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte Marie, Que.) has said that ‘it is up to elected officials to lead the development of public policy, and our government has been very clear on how we’re going tackle social media platforms and web giants, and the Canadian heritage team is providing excellent, evidence-based support in this regard.’

“Our government is committed to regulating digital platforms and putting them to work for Canadians,” said Mr. Guilbeault in front of a heritage committee meeting last week.

“The government has been in consultations with Canadians on this issue since the spring of 2020,” said Mr. Virani. “People’s patience was wearing thin” with the notion of voluntary moderation, said the MP.

The legislation is still being worked out.

‘There’s certain hurdles that still need to be crossed with cabinet and cabinet decisions,” said Mr. Virani.

These moves by the government are not intended to inhibit political speech,” said Mr. Virani, who was a constitutional lawyer prior to his time in politics. “We want to empower people to participate in our political discourse, even at the highest level of running for office, so that’s an important consideration in terms of what we’re trying to achieve.”

Social media a ‘real toxic cesspool’, says Green Party MP Paul Manly

“I think social media has become a real toxic cesspool, and the problem is the way that algorithms take,” said Green MP Paul Manly (Nanaimo-Ladysmith, B.C.).

“People think that it’s OK to say a lot of things on social media that are laced with hate, that are patently false and misleading.

But Mr. Manly said creating legislation around this issue is ‘fraught with peril.’

“We want to be careful that we don’t censor people and we want to be careful that the media giants are not censoring people,” said Mr. Manly.

Catherine McKenna (Ottawa Centre, Ont.), said she ‘got into politics because I did not like where our country was heading.”

“I wanted to make a difference, a goal that I have in common with many other women and girls. My experience in politics has showed me the best and some of the worst. Take five minutes to scroll through my social media comments—I don’t recommend—and you will see some of the most alarming, hateful rhetoric,” Ms. McKenna said in an emailed statement to The Hill Times. “But I am not a shrinking violet and I am fortunate to have a platform and a social media presence that allows me to connect with my community and to speak out when necessary. At the same time, the social media companies themselves need to step up, and we should be holding them responsible for the continued spread of hate and violence.”

According to Mr. Angus, “there’s been a steady poisoning of public conversation that can be traced to the power of algorithms to steer people to increasingly dissonant and extremist content.”

“That’s certainly Facebook and it’s definitely YouTube, and that I think has had profound implications for social discourse, and nowhere more so than the United States.”

“I think this is a huge issue. And certainly the abuse that women and young racialized women take compared to a politician like me, is it is so exponentially more weaponized against women that it’s hard to even comprehend what that can do to your, your willingness to participate publicly. And that too, is a threat to democracy, because one of the rights that we are given as Parliamentarians is the ability to do our work without intimidation.”

There has to be “rules that are set down,” said Mr. Angus.

‘The right to free speech is non-negotiable’

According to Conservative MP Alain Rayes (Richmond-Arthabaska, Que.), his party’s heritage critic, “we believe that it is urgent to do more to combat hate groups and groups that incite violence online.”

In this section of this article, there has to strike an appropriate balance between dealing with social media content that is illegal and protecting the fundamental rights of Canadians to free speech, freedom of expression, a free press and due process under the law,” said Mr. Rayes in an email to The Hill Times. “Canada already has criminal law protections in place against hate speech, incitement to violence and sexually abusive material.”

These laws should be strongly enforced, and can best be enforced by the criminal justice system. We believe that the right to free speech is non-negotiable, and oppose censorship of material that is not criminal in nature merely because some may find it to be offensive or politically incorrect,” he said.

Edward Greenspon, president and CEO of the Public Policy Forum, said the ‘forces of regulation are gathering in Europe and in California and in Australia and now in Canada, and they are open to certain forms of regulation—tell us what the rules are, tell us what is hate and is not hate. So they are trying to find some co-responsibility on liabilities.”

Facebook declined to provide a comment for this story. Spokesperson Meg Sullivan directed The Hill Times to information around the organization’s algorithmic transparency office, as it’s oversight board, an independent body that judges Facebook’s content decisions and issues binding rulings on whether it made the right decision in allowing or removing a specific piece of content or account.

“As Mark Zuckerberg put it when he first outlined his blueprint for a new system for content governance and enforcement, Facebook should not make so many important decisions about free expression and safety on our own.”

With our size comes a great deal of responsibility and while we have always taken advice from experts on how to best keep our platform safe, until now we have not had the final decisions about what should be allowed on our platforms and what should be removed. And these decisions are often not easy to make—most judgments do not have obvious, or uncontroversial, outcomes, and yet many of them have significant implications for free expression.”

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The Hill Times
With Canada's supply of COVID-19 vaccines dropping below initially expected numbers in the coming weeks, experts argue this period presents an opportunity to ensure the mass-vaccination campaign runs smoothly.

BY AIDAN CHAMANDY

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The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

supply delay offers opportunity to get mass vaccination campaign right, experts say

Health Policy

The Hill Times

With Canada’s supply of COVID-19 vaccines dropping below initially expected numbers in the coming weeks, experts argue this period presents an opportunity to ensure the mass-vaccination campaign runs smoothly.

BY AIDAN CHAMANDY

issues with COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing in Europe has affected, but the company cannot confirm to what extent. The document prepared by the company began retooling its manufacturing plant in Belgium to produce more vaccines. The company also said it will cut Canadian shipments by around 80 per cent, but that the reduction will allow them to produce around two billion total vaccines in 2021, up from the initial promise of 1.3 billion. Mr. Trudeau said he discussed the situation with Dr. Stephen Hébert, who is in charge of the vaccine procurement program. The company also said it will receive far fewer doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine after the company began retooling its manufacturing plant in Belgium to produce more vaccines.

“Given that they have failed to deliver and actually managed to slightly exceed what they’ve stated so far, and, frankly, the fact that they’ve misled Canadians and actually been wrong so many times, that can’t give anybody confidence,” he said.

“There’s a serious credibility problem,” he added.

The lack of vaccine supply is making it difficult to judge how effective Canada’s actual vaccine rollout has been, Dr. Wilson said.

Canada’s limited vaccine supply “is making it really hard to judge right now how we’re doing. It’s apparent that the systems need to be further developed. It’s a bit of a double-edged sword, that the delay getting vaccines is an opportunity to be better prepared,” Dr. Wilson said.

“With vaccines, there’s no way that we can have the same data in real time and shareable. The individual has to be part of the solution, they have to have access to their vaccine records. And health-care providers need to know exactly which vaccine this individual is given, that individual needs to be able to report adverse events as they would occur,” he said.

Dr. Wilson said one of the key things he learned in running trials using his CANImmunize platform and from other jurisdictions is that effective “scheduling” is one of the most important aspects. The scheduling “successes really sped up the clinic management.”

It helps from two perspectives.Booking is easier and you can also start to auto-populate the data needed at the time of vaccination, he said. But the most important thing is that the data fills in that data. So the vaccination is much quicker—there’s no waiting for the data of vaccination, because already most of the information is auto populated,” Dr. Wilson said.

Prof. Ray said that winter temperatures will act as a constraint. “Until May, indoor is perhaps better for a few more weeks. May there be more of an opportunity for going outdoors,” he said.

Another key constraint, Prof. Nagarajan said, “is making it really hard to judge how effective Canada’s actual vaccine rollout has been, Dr. Wilson said.

Canada is expected to receive around 180,000 doses a week throughout the summer. Canada has received around 210,000 doses of federal vaccine logistics. Moderna was originally set to send 249,000 doses a week. A table on Health Canada’s website now longer provides information on Moderna shipments past the week of Feb. 1 to Feb. 7. Prof. Ray pointed to sites like the Palais des Congres in Montreal as prime targets for mass vaccination campaigns. Quebec Health Minister Christian Dubé said the convention centre is ready to administer more than 1,000 doses per day. Prof. Ray said in the coming months, when winter is still keeping temperatures low, indoor sites that haven’t had much traffic because of the pandemic, like convention centres, malls, and universities, will become more of an opportunity for going outdoors.”
LEADING THE WAY

Canadian solutions for a global crisis

Based at McMaster University, Canada’s Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats is focused on shared goals: beating COVID–19 and preparing for future pandemics.

Building on a world-leading track record of infectious disease research, Canada’s Global Nexus is bringing together researchers, government, industry, health care and global partners to help make Canada a leader in solving the existing health crisis while preparing for the next.

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No time to waste on health-care reforms

It is not too late for Canada to convene an intergovernmental COVID-19 task force, led by health experts, to develop and deliver a coordinated national response to the pandemic

BY GREEN PARTY LEADER ANNAMIE PAUL

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us painful lessons about the weaknesses in Canada’s health-care system. Low-income and racialized communities have been disproportionately impacted, as have seniors and the disabled.

More than ever, the current crisis demonstrates why preventive health-care plans are best made in ordinary times, rather than in the middle of a crisis with all the additional pressures it brings. Health promotion and disease prevention in times of stability are the best preparation for times of crisis or outbreak. While we will be reckoning with this pandemic and its accompanying health-care failures for some time, we must still begin planning for the future. Modernizing our health-care systems should be high on the agenda, and the federal government can and should lead the way.

As we continue to grapple with Canada’s greatest health crisis in over a century, there is no time to waste. The Green Party has asked the prime minister to convene an intergovernmental COVID-19 task force, led by health experts, to develop and deliver a coordinated national response to the pandemic. Countries that have been more successful in protecting their populations have adopted such an approach, including the new president of the United States, who appointed a national COVID-19 coordination team on his first day in office. It is not too late for Canada to do the same.

When we search for answers on why the pandemic’s death toll in Canada continues to rise, one answer stands out: conditions in long-term care facilities. More than 80 per cent of Canada’s COVID-19 deaths have been in long-term care, and Canada ranks second amongst wealthy countries for the proportion of COVID-19 deaths in long-term care facilities. This crisis affects both long-term care residents, staff, and the loved ones who provide essential care. This is a humanitarian crisis, and there is overwhelming consensus among experts on what needs to be done.

The short-term solutions to our LTC crisis are clear, implementable, and would have an immediate positive effect on reducing deaths: accelerated vaccination, rapid testing, increased staffing, improved training and pay for workers, and four hours of regulated daily care for each resident. We need an urgent first ministers’ meeting to agree on a plan to end the mounting deaths in long-term care that includes the immediate implementation of these recommendations. There should not be one more death in long-term care facilities caused by inaction and lack of political leadership.

Throughout the past year, we have been reminded of the importance of evidence in guiding public health decisions—a standard that should be adopted well beyond this pandemic. Science and data have been critical to understanding how different communities are impacted by the pandemic. We must collect socio-demographic data in government-funded research moving forward in order to make evidence-based decisions on how to provide the right support where it is most needed.

If we are serious about addressing health-care shortcomings in Canada more broadly, we cannot overlook the skyrocketing costs of pharmaceuticals. Canada is the only country with a universal medicare system that does not include doctor-prescribed medication, and one in three Canadians is forced to pay for their prescriptions. To achieve lifesaving goals, and economies of scale, we must establish a national universal pharmacare program, a bulk drug purchasing agency, and shorter patent protection times for new drugs. The drug assessment process must be free of conflicts of interest, and bulk purchases of prescription drugs must be evidence-based.

The opioid crisis is a national tragedy that has skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2016-2020, nearly 18,000 Canadians died from opioid overdose, many of which were due to fentanyl contamination. We need to declare a national health emergency to address the opioid crisis as a health-care issue, not a criminal issue. Drug possession should be decriminalized, and users should have access to a screened supply and the medical support they need to combat their addictions. We must also prioritize the expansion of rehabilitation services. A harm-reduction approach is the only way to address this emergency and save lives.

A through-line of the conversation about health in Canada is mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted many Canadians’ mental health, straining an already overburdened mental healthcare network. Establishing a national mental health strategy is common sense—we need to address the very real stressors plaguing Canadians such as inequality and affordability, the precariousness of work and housing, the climate crisis, social isolation, and the trauma and anxiety the pandemic has caused. A suicide prevention plan and immediate investments in both community-based service organizations and provincial and municipal mental health services are a critical first step.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted health issues, but they are unfortunately not new. Addressing the structural weaknesses in health care, rather than merely reacting to each crisis as it arises, is the best strategy. The Green Party of Canada

Green Party leader Annamie Paul, pictured, says addressing the structural weaknesses in health care, rather than merely reacting to each crisis as it arises, is the best strategy. Photograph courtesy of the Green Party of Canada
Why healthy aging must be the upshot of the COVID-19 pandemic

It would be in everyone’s best interest to focus now on ways to prevent frailty by investing in policies that ensure healthy aging for all Canadians.

In contrast to a common misperception, aging alone isn’t what sidelines older people—frailty is. While aging is inevitable, frailty is not. Frailty is defined as a medical condition of reduced function and health; it becomes more common as we age. Frailty increases vulnerability to disease, resulting in the need for intensive and costly health-care interventions. Today, 1.6 million Canadians live with some form of frailty. In 10 years, it will be 2.5 million.

Living within the guardrails of a pandemic has aged everyone. And we are getting a glimpse into how the seeds of frailty are sown—through loneliness and isolation, loss of structure and routine, mental and emotional stress, physical exhaustion, loss of freedom and a sense of control, disruptions in eating and sleeping habits, weight gain, muscle loss and deferring routine medical appointments to avoid the virus.

Our response to the global pandemic now, and in the coming years, should include robust policies for healthy aging which in large part are composed of strategies to address these contributors to frailty.

Most COVID-related deaths in Canada to date have occurred in people over the age of 70. It’s a glaring statistic—one that, left unfiltered, might prejudice people’s understanding of this age group and its capacity.

Persistent news coverage about the vulnerability of older people in the early days of the pandemic inadvertently fuelled ageist attitudes. In its most extreme form, some people wrongly concluded that the economy should not have to shut down just to prevent the virus from killing the eldest members of society. After all, this demographic contributes the least, right?

From both a moral and economic standpoint, this is a deeply flawed viewpoint.

More and more, out of choice or necessity, healthy older Canadians are remaining engaged in paid labour beyond conventional retirement age. In 2010, 14 per cent of people 55 and over were active in the labour force. By 2031, this number is expected to rise to almost double.

More recently, we also saw experienced health-care workers risking their lives by coming out of retirement to work on the front lines of the pandemic.

The unpaid labour of this age group often goes unrecognized. A life of accumulated skills and knowledge is poured freely into raising funds for community projects and organizations, coordinating events, caring for children in the absence of childcare options, coaching sports and passing knowledge and skills on to young people. Or even worse, we sideline these skills by not putting in place ways that we can better harness this experience.

Statistics Canada reported that, in 2013-14, 36 per cent of seniors performed volunteer work. Those aged 65 and up volunteered 233 hours a year, well above the national average of 156 hours. In 2012, baby boomers and senior adults clocked one billion volunteer hours.

This informal support is a gift to communities and is especially true in rural Canada where the loss of a community-minded elder often leaves an unrepairable social gap.

In strictly fiscal terms, Canadians aged 65 and older also have money to spend. Many continue to benefit from earnings-based retirement plans and other progressive senior-focused social and financial policies launched in the late 20th century.

Older Canadians are an economic pillar, one that will crumble in the absence of supports for healthy aging that enable people to remain active and engaged in their communities.

The past year has been a valuable lesson on the importance of nurturing our functional ability, especially in older people. Let’s turn insight into action. It would be in everyone’s best interest to focus now on ways to prevent frailty by investing in policies that ensure healthy aging for all Canadians.

John Muscedere is the scientific director and CEO of the Canadian Frailty Network (CFN) and a professor in the School of Medicine at Queen’s University and an intensivist at Kingston Health Sciences Centre.

In December 2018, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance acknowledged this oversight and recommended that the government address it by amending the Income Tax Act.

Budget 2021 offers an opportunity to close this gap and streamline access for eligible patients.

WHY NOT CHIROPRACTORS?

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians rely on chiropractors to assess, diagnose, and treat spine, muscle and nervous system conditions. This includes back, neck, and knee pain, as well as osteoarthritis. But unlike other primary care providers, chiropractors are not authorized to assess and certify the Disability Tax Credit.

That needs to change.

John Muscedere
Opinion

Last month, while the world was distracted by political turmoil and the pandemic’s roaring second wave, a very significant proclamation came and went with little fanfare. The United Nations General Assembly launched 2020-2030 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing, calling for a second wave, a very significant proclamation in policies that ensure healthy aging for all Canadians.

In December 2018, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance acknowledged this oversight and recommended that the government address it by amending the Income Tax Act.

Budget 2021 offers an opportunity to close this gap and streamline access for eligible patients.

_The Hill Times_
Health Policy Briefing

Vaccination, trust in science and patience is the only way out of this pandemic

We will need Canadians to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated. But we will also need to be patient. Immunizing the country won’t happen overnight. It will be an incremental process informed by science and one that seeks to immediately stem the loss of life.

As Canada’s nurses, we want to encourage all those living in Canada to receive the vaccine as soon as they are able. Together, we can contain this virus, end the pandemic and take part in Canada’s post-pandemic recovery, writes Linda Silas.

Vaccination, trust in science and patience are the only way out of this pandemic. We also urged governments across Canada to speed up the rollout of the vaccine, especially to those most likely to experience severe illness, such as seniors, Indigenous people and racialized people—all of whom have been shown to be most at risk of infection.

Nurses have also signalled that they are ready and willing to step up and help the government with the vaccine rollout by joining health care teams at vaccination clinics across Canada. While the news of some delays in delivery of the Pfizer vaccine may give us pause, governments must strive to speed up the immunization and rapidly increase the number of clinics where the vaccine is available. This is how we will contain this virus and counter its spread.

What’s also been lacking in Canada’s vaccine delivery program is evidence-based information. Within this vacuum, misinformation, vaccine myths and mistrust have thrived. Sadly, many Canadians are hesitant to get vaccinated, particularly among marginalized communities who, we recognize, have all too often experienced negative interactions with the medical community.

As nurses, we believe that any risk posed by the vaccine is far outweighed by the benefits in being protected from COVID-19.

As with any other medical treatment, informed consent is required. It’s our job, as health professionals, to provide facts—and yes, empathy—when patients express concerns about being vaccinated. Everyone who gets the vaccine must understand the benefits of immunization, as well as any potential risks. All Canadians should be empowered to make an informed decision.

Some individuals have expressed concerns about the record turnaround time for these vaccines. Producing multiple vaccines in less than a year was the result of a momentous global effort, harnessing the ingenuity of a scientific community united in a common objective. Large-scale trials on the efficacy of vaccines involved tens of thousands of participants, including many from diverse backgrounds. The trials resulted in high rates of protection against the continued spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus but this will only happen if sufficient numbers choose to be vaccinated.

The COVID-19 vaccines approved thus far have the potential to provide much-needed protection against the continued spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus but this will only happen if sufficient numbers choose to be vaccinated.

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The research Canada’s life sciences companies are doing is laying the groundwork for novel diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics. Canada has built an extraordinary knowledge infrastructure, and we must not lose momentum in making our country a global life sciences leader.

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Linda Silas

Opinion

A COVID-free future is within our reach, a future where it’s safe to hug again and where our smiles no longer need to be hidden behind a mask. To get there, we will need a robust vaccination drive. We will need Canadians to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated. But we will also need to be patient. Immunizing the country won’t happen overnight. It will be an incremental process informed by science and one that seeks to immediately stem the loss of life.

Earlier this month, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions encouraged all health-care workers, all essential workers and the general public to receive the vaccine when they become eligible. We also urged governments across Canada to speed up the rollout of the vaccine, especially to those most likely to experience severe illness, such as seniors, Indigenous people and racialized people—all of whom have been shown to be most at risk of infection.

Canada’s nurses, we want to encourage all those living in Canada to receive the vaccine as soon as they are able. Together, we can contain this virus, end the pandemic and take part in Canada’s post-pandemic recovery.

Linda Silas is a nurse and president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, representing nearly 200,000 nurses and student nurses across the country.

The Hill Times
What’s up (or down) with drug shortages?

Our chronic shortages and the current vaccine situation remind us to ask why must we be buffeted about by unpredictable shortages, originating elsewhere and often impacting well established yet critical products, the recipes for which are neither secret nor protected.

BY JACALYN DUFFIN & JON PIPITONE

With complaints and fears swirling around COVID-19 vaccine supply, we take up our devices once again to report on drug shortages in Canada. When we last communicated in Hill Times back in April 2020, Canada had already spent a decade facing severe shortages of prescription drugs. We argued that COVID-19 might exacerbate those shortages and, at the same time, serve as a wake-up call to get to the bottom of the problem.

Alas, nothing much has happened. Today, Canada reports more than 1,500 actual drug shortages. The good news is that this number is 400 fewer than last April. The bad news is that no matter how you look at it, it is still a shocking number, and worse, it is misleading. Our national shortage database is woefully thin, as it doesn’t account for provincial, regional or hospital-level shortages. We also wonder if the decline since April is more apparent than real. After all, in that same time, 197 drugs were reported to be discontinued, and 330 drugs were cancelled post-market. If a drug is no longer on the market, it is not in shortage— it remains utterly unavailable. Additionally, over the last two years, nearly a third of our shortages involve medications that we would deem critical or “essential”, priority medicines needed for effective function of a basic health-care system: items such as antibiotics (cefalexin, amoxicillin), common heart medications (amlodipine, ramipril, candesartan). These individual shortages are numerous and long-lasting.

Early in the pandemic, Canada did experience temporary shortages of drugs for managing COVID-19 symptoms and ICU patients needing intubation—epinephrine, midazolam, propofol, phenytoin, etc. And like the hydroxychloroquine example of last spring (when Donald Trump’s evidence-free claims spawned panic buying and shortages for those who relied on it), shortages have emerged in Canada (and elsewhere) for every remedy, old or new, thought to be helpful in the pandemic: remdesivir, dexamethasone, ivermectin and oseltamivir. Possibly we’ll soon see the same for the ancient gout treatment, colchicine, recently reported effective by researchers at the University of Colorado.

Numerous American and European studies have documented the negative impact of shortages on patients’ outcomes and health-care budgets. But the reasons for shortages, according to manufacturers, reveal a pattern dominated by manufacturing disruptions, that has gone basically unchanged during the pandemic.

In March 2020, the minister of health signed an interin order to monitor potential and actual shortages and allow importation of drugs that may not fully meet regulatory requirements in order to protect supplies of threatened medications. Why is the Canadian medication supply chain so fragile that we needed this stop gap measure? Another interim order came in late November 2020 to protect vulnerable stocks from American poaching.

Without a national strategy for responding to shortages, pharmacists initially resort- ed to invoking the tried-and-true mechanism of restricting dispensed quantities to 30 days. But they encountered outrage and political interference. Citizens, especially those out of work, objected to paying extra for drugs and to the inconvenience and risk of more frequent trips to the pharmacy. Some provinces opted to cover the extra fees, but pharmacists were shocked when various provincial governments intervened, ordering an end to the practice or canceling extra fees, effectively legislating a rollback in income. The policy eventually melted away.

Unlike more than 100 other countries, Canada still does not have an essential medicines list (EML)—critical medications for which the government is mandated to protect supply, much in the same way as the recent interim orders aspire to do. At least one Canadian team is working on developing an EML, but the effort is not yet recognized by our government. Nor does Canada do much to understand the extent and impact of shortages. It does not analyze the shortages, year-by-year, month-by-month, or by type, to uncover whether or not its feeble policy gestures are making any difference. And, as the public has become painfully aware, Canada lost its own, once robust drug- and vaccine-making capacity long ago. Even the Ontario Medical Association has exceptionally released a statement recommending several actions, including more domestic production.

Our chronic shortages and the current vaccine situation remind us to ask why must we be buffeted about by unpredict- able shortages, originating elsewhere and often impacting well-established yet critical products, the recipes for which are neither secret nor protected. In the face of pandemic threats to our medication supply, Canada has shown it can take temporary steps to protect our most critical medicines. Shouldn’t we now move to properly and permanently secure our supply with a na- tional essential medicines list and revival of our own industry?

Jacyln Duffin, MD PhD, is professor emerita at Queen’s University, and Jon Pipitone, MD, MSc, is a resident in psychiatry at Queen’s University.

The Hill Times
Maybe artificial intelligence will drastically change health care, but who will benefit?

Our federal and provincial governments have proven they can unite around issues of national importance in health care and they must do so again if we are going to have any chance of AI playing the role many believe it can in helping us move toward personalized health care.

Governments across Canada have signalled that they believe artificial intelligence will play an important role in the country’s economic future. Major investments have attracted more computer scientists to our post-secondary institutions and have benefitted the private sector by opening up a growing pool of AI talent. If we want to build this data-driven economy in a responsible manner, however, then we also need to protect Canadians by modernizing our information and privacy laws.

But as we move to strengthen our privacy laws, we must also pay close attention to the impact those strengthened laws have on AI innovation. We should not prioritize unbridled innovation over privacy, but if governments want taxpayers to buy in to the great hope of an advanced AI economy, then they also need to be clear about what that economy might look like and how Canadians stand to benefit. The content of our modernized privacy laws will send clear signals about where our governments think AI has the most potential to benefit society.

At present, the idea that AI has the potential to improve our everyday lives is perhaps most widely acknowledged within the health-care space. We have long heard from people affected by rare diseases, for example, that we need a more personalized approach to health care because one size does not in fact fit all. By using AI in health care we will be better able to predict and prevent disease, to make quicker diagnoses, to understand disease progression and even to discover new therapies that could improve patient outcomes. It may also be possible for AI to operate in conjunction with other new and emerging technologies like DNA sequencing, gene therapy, bio-printing, and genome editing. The question should no longer be if, but how can we use AI to help us effectively and equitably personalize our health-care systems?

To build a personalized health-care system we will need to collect, store, and analyze more data than we ever have. Not just patients’ personal health information, but also data about how socio-economic factors can have a meaningful impact on patient experiences and health trajectories. We will also need to make deeper investments into building and sustaining the infrastructure, the talent, the tools, the policies, the regulatory oversight, etc., needed for a personalized, learning health-care system.

But did you know that artificial intelligence is already being used in some Canadian hospitals? Many computer scientists who were inspired to pursue an education in the School of Public Policy and Administration at York University. He also serves on York University’s Artificial Intelligence & Society Task Force and sits as a legal member of the Children’s Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

Ian Stedman is an assistant professor of Canadian public law & governance at the School of Public Policy and Administration at York University. He also serves on York University’s Artificial Intelligence & Society Task Force and sits as a legal member of the Research Ethics Board at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto.

The Hill Times
Aging? What’s to be done?

The pandemic is exposing many cracks in Canada’s already porous seniors’ care system. We don’t have much time to fix the problem, so we better get started.

Much less expensive health-support services needed to meet the needs of most seniors.

That Canadians are living longer is good news. What’s not to like about living to a ripe old age provided you can age well—happily settled in housing appropriate to your needs, with a stimulating social life with old friends and new, where you can pursue an active, lifestyle, and have available the reliable support and care needed to maintain the activities of daily living and robust good health?

The problem is that it is not easy to meet those provisions in Canada. Relative to many other countries, notably Japan, Denmark, and others noted for enabling seniors to age happily and well, Canada and its provinces and territories do not score well. We spend far less on long-term care overall and disproportionately much more on institutional ($60) than on home and community ($3) care, the reverse of comparable ratios in Denmark and other leading nations. There, the predominant policy thrust is not to institutionalize or, crudely, “warehouse” seniors, but to facilitate their “aging in place.” Canadian seniors, like others, strongly prefer to retain their independence and to age in place for as long as possible in their own homes and communities with the support of an expanded range of home care and community support services with which they are familiar and comfortable. Ironically, meeting their preferences would be much cheaper for both the affected seniors and for the public purse; exceeds by far what it would cost to provide an extended range of seniors’ needs through bedfed-up home and community support services. That will be expensive too, but it’s an approach that would both help seniors age well, certainly better than at present, and one that our country could afford.

What do we need to do to get to it? Governments have to work together, federal, provincial and territorial, and municipalities, with the latter’s funding of so many community services out of the property tax base and the charitable giving of the residents.

Solutions and their implementation are primarily under provincial and territorial ownership, apart from our Indigenous communities where the feds are on the hook. The federal government must decide what role it wants to carve out in facilitating a coordinated response to a problem that is both bigger and will extend well beyond what was foreseen in the 2015 election platform and its promise of $3-billion over four years, and

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The problem is real, here right now, and time is short.

Don Drummond is a Senior Fellow at Queen's University. He is a former senior official at Finance Canada and the chief economist at TD Bank. Duncan Sinclair is an adjunct professor and distinguished fellow at Queen's University and a member of the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame.

Policy Briefing Health
Burnout was far too common in the healthcare workforce before the pandemic. COVID-19 has made it much worse. Poor health workforce planning is to blame.

**Health Policy**

**Pandemic exposing critical gaps in health workforce planning**

Janice Keefe

**Opinion**

Vaccines give long-term care crisis a brief reprieve, but cannot stand as the solution

Janice Keefe

**Opinion**

This time last year, I had the great privilege of authoring another editorial for *The Hill Times* in an effort to amplify the job; but it is just that, a reprieve.

Dr. Ivy Lynn Bourgeault is a professor of sociological and anthropological studies at the University of Ottawa and the lead of the Canadian Health Workforce Network.

**The Hill Times**
COVID-19 is not gender-blind

The pandemic has affected men and women differently, which is why deliberate focus on the gendered experience of the pandemic could help in reducing these inequalities.

Opinion

Women at greater risk

Will Canadians ever have the universal national pharmacare program that repeated investigations show will support fair, appropriate health care and that 86 per cent of Canadians say they want? The long-simmering question is once again on the minds of voters. In its supplementary mandate letter, the prime minister called on Health Minister Patty Hajdu to “accelerate steps to establish a Canada Drug Agency, implementing a national formulary, and a rare-disease strategy.

As Peter Cleary of Santis Health told Hill Times Research, failure to enact this legislation could “push away progressive voters.” On Feb. 24, the NDP will up the pressure, with a private member’s bill. Other commentators cite political barriers, including the ongoing pressures of COVID-19, lack of provincial ministers’ support, and the pharmaceutical industry’s vociferous but unsurprising opposition to a policy they feel would be inimical, in part, to rein in drug prices.

Less obviously, an army of vociferous industry-funded groups stand against key aspects of a plan meant to make health care less costly. And, without dismissing other political headwinds, I believe these organisations are the greatest potential to derail the national pharmacare plan we need. Challenging Big Pharma is one thing; taking on sick people is no one’s idea of heroism.

Patients should listen to patients, but—unlike many prominent patient advocates—I believe Big Pharma has systematically co-opted much of the patient advocacy movement, through strategic partnerships. Canadian health policies, even encourage, public-private partnerships. I agree with ethicist and lawyer Jonathan Marks who says society needs public health actors to actively defend the public interest. A collaborative agreement with the private sector makes this impossible.

I don’t know how much the industry spends on this activity, but because no laws require disclosure (a transparency law passed by the Ontario government in 2018 that makes it public what Big Biotech pays Ontarians lays dormant under Doug Ford’s leadership), Best Medicines Coalition, a group I co-founded in Montreal passed a motion calling for greater transparency about drug companies and the department of epidemiology and the department of sociology. However, there is no data to document this phenomenon. How can the impact of the pandemic and gender-related health inequalities be measured? Action must be mobilised on several fronts. Rigorous documentation of the gender experience of the pandemic is needed. Facilitating access to flexible work arrangements, including the 10-day leave proposed by the federal government, would also have a strong impact.

Employers are also proving to be essential levers for equality. The pandemic has exposed the need for flexibility and a culture of trust for them to participate in this transformation by promoting, for example, flexible hours, time banking, family leave or reduced work weeks. Women who have access to such measures report less psychological distress than those who do not. The pandemic could prove to be an opportunity for more gender equality during the recovery if these flexible work arrangements are put in place.

Even during a pandemic, the increase in health inequalities between men and women should not be inevitable. A deliberate focus on the gendered experience of the pandemic could help in reducing these inequalities.

Opinion

Sharon Batt

Pharmacare, patient groups, and the need for open discourse

The pandemic in the United States is like a wake-up call for women. We're not alone: even in an egalitarian society like Finland, women spend up to 2.5 times more time on regular household chores and twice as much time on childcare than men.

Gender is also constructed through the meaning and importance given to everyday situations, resulting in differential vulnerability to stressful situations. Some women may thus be more concerned than their spouse about the difficulties experienced by a child or a parent, a situation common to the pandemic (Conseil du statut de la femme 2015). This, in turn, can exacerbate stressors and their opportunistic health consequences. The recognition that the structural nature of gender results in differential exposure and vulnerability to stressors explains, in part, why women have faced more of the burden than men. And we are not alone: even in an egalitarian society like Finland, women spend up to 2.5 times more time on regular household chores and twice as much time on childcare than men.

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Express entry economic immigration timelines a ‘joke,’ say lawyers as processing times increase

Canada promises the express entry pathway for skilled foreign workers will take six months, but lawyers say it’s ‘not working’ as none of the programs met that standard last fiscal year.

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

Canada’s “express entry” approach to key economic immigration programs isn’t working, immigration lawyers say, following a recent report showing that none of them are meeting the six-month service standard.

That failed grade was among 17 missed performance targets the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) reported for the 2019-20 fiscal year, or 31 per cent of the 54 total targets. It said none of the government’s business lines for permanent residents met service standards during a time period that had yet to feel the pandemic’s full impact.

Launched in 2015, the express entry process is described by Canada as its “flagship” system for various federal skilled worker programs, and a portion of the provincial nominee program, as a pathway to permanent residence for skilled workers in Canada and overseas.

IRCC has said it plans to increase permanent-resident admissions, setting a target of 341,000 for 2020 and 350,000 for 2021, with most of the uptick expected from economic immigration streams.

Evelyn Ackah, founder of Ackah Business Immigration Law in Calgary, laughed when she repeated the program’s name. “Express entry, that’s a joke. When they first launched that program a few years ago, it was ambitious. I. It was three months, four months,” she said, but now she warns clients it can take more than a year.

She said it’s disappointing the government hasn’t been able to keep up with the high volume of applications. To her, it’s a clear resourcing and staffing problem that doesn’t line up with Canada’s stated goals to increase immigration levels.

“It’s not working as an express process, absolutely not. It’s the same as the old process, as far as I’m concerned, and it’s lost its credibility with people,” she said. “The trend is getting slower and slower.”

Over the last three years, before COVID-19 interruptions, processing times have increased, and in some cases, doubled the time it takes to deal with 80 per cent of applicants. The federal skills trade stream jumped from six months in 2017 to one year for the majority of applicants, while the federal-skilled worker and provincial nominee programs increased from six to nine months in that same time frame. The Canadian Experience Class increased from four to seven months. Across all programs, only 60 per cent of the applications met the standard by the end of 2018.

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According to the department’s latest plan, its overall spending is set to increase from $1.92-billion in 2017-18 to the peak last fiscal year at $3.46-billion, before going back down this fiscal year to $2.54-billion, $2.6-billion in 2021-22, and $2.56-billion in 2022-23.

The stretching timelines reflect an increase in applications for express entry, with the 332,361 submissions in 2019 amounting to a 20 per cent jump from 2018. Among the profiles submitted in 2019, 72 per cent were eligible for at least one of the business programs, according to the program’s year-end report.

Still, the government promised to those searching for information online about the express entry system that it “will result in fast processing times of six months or less.”

“I can’t even bring up that number [to clients],” said B.C.-based immigration lawyer Will Tao of Heron Law, saying more transparency is needed.

It’s “misleading” and can “give the wrong impression” to applicants, he said, especially now with the pandemic posing even more of a challenge to processing times.

“They think they pretty much internally abandoned it, so from my perspective, if you’ve done that, then you probably should…let clients know,” he said, calling for better transparency so that people can get more certainty about their situations.

Even though it’s supposed to be an automated system, based on points, both lawyers said the process gets bogged down during the authentication stage, as officials check over and verify the many documents submitted. Eligible candidates in the pool are given a score based on their skills and experience, with top-ranking candidates invited to submit an application for permanent residence. As of June 2017, IRCC added extra points to candidates with strong French-speaking skills.

Processing times, in months, for Express Entry applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian Experience Class</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Skilled Worker</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provincial/Territorial Nominee</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federal Skilled Trades</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Programs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada

 Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, overseen by Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino, missed a third of its performance targets in 2019-20, prompting some to question whether its goals are too aspirational. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Both Mr. Tao and Ms. Ackah acknowledged it is a complicated process, but Ms. Ackah said that’s all the more reason to provide more resources.

In IRCC’s report on performance targets, the department said “substantial efforts” have been made to reduce express entry applications that took longer than six months to process.

“While service standards are being met for a higher number of applications compared to previous years, this was offset by an increase in applications and the processing of older applications,” the report said.

The department noted early results show that changes towards higher admission targets and that efforts to increase the intake are having an impact on service standards, in this case, the promise to have the majority completed with six months. The department doesn’t control intake for provincial nominee program’s paper applications and Quebec-selected skilled workers.

By email, IRCC spokesperson Lauren Sankey said the government remains committed to reducing application processing times and improving the department’s service delivery.

IRCC misses a third of 2019-20 targets

Among the third of IRCC’s performance targets missed in 2019-20, the largest delay was the worst among 17 the department didn’t reach. Canada’s backlog was 54 per cent in 2019, compared to 4.5 per cent in 2018.

Mr. Griffith questioned why the government reports on aspirational or unrealistic goals.

“Personally, I favour realistic standards for public departmental reports, with aspirational more appropriate for internal use,” he said.

IRCC’s targets are based on factors like historic trends, program objectives, resourcing levels, client service goals, and evolving indicators such as the impact of increasing temporary resident and permanent resident immigration levels, said Ms. Sankey.

Those are reviewed regularly, and in some cases, the department establishes ambitious targets that serve to stretch program vision and encourage innovation. In other cases, they are based on historic and historic trends where achievement is more certain,” said Ms. Sankey, noting how IRCC tracks performance will change following a 2020 departmental review.

“Service and performance delayed in two tracks—one for permanent residents and one for temporary residents—is not a true representation of the department’s performance, she said, given the disparate programs under the two umbrellas. Instead, IRCC will report on the service standard for each individual program, which Mr. Griffith called a “significant change” given the “very complex” approach before.

“This change will capture more accurate service standard performance for the many lines of business which make up the temporary and permanent resident programs,” Ms. Sankey said.

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The Hill Times
Pandemic response slips from ‘slam dunk’ to potential liability for Liberals, say some political insiders

Ekos Research president Frank Graves says the vaccine rollout is a problem for the Liberals, but also says it’s not over yet.

Continued from page 1

Inoculated should be able to get their vaccine shots by September. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) has also promised that a “majority” of Canadians will be able to get their vaccine shots by that time.

Recently, however, there have been some signs of slippage in the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccines from their suppliers, including Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna. The government has said the supply will start to return to normal in the coming weeks.

Last week, the federal government announced that it had signed an agreement with Novavax to produce millions of COVID-19 vaccine shots in Montreal. However, the production of this vaccine will start at the end of the year, which means it won’t help the government reach its goal of vaccinating Canadians by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, the recent hiccup in the vaccine availability has started to take its toll on the Liberals’ popularity, according to Nanos Research. As of last week, the Liberals were leading the pack with the support of 34.9 per cent of Canadians, followed closely by the Conservatives with 30.3 per cent. The NDP had 15.5 per cent support, and the Green Party had 7.4 per cent.

On Jan. 8, according to Nanos Research, Liberal support was at 40.2 per cent, Conservative support was at 36.5 per cent of Canadians, followed by the Liberals at 32 per cent, the NDP at 18 per cent, the Greens at 11.9 per cent of Canadians, followed by the Bloc at 10.9 per cent, and the Liberals held a margin of error of 2.4 per cent.

The online poll of 1,559 Canadians was conducted last week also suggested that the delay to vaccine shipments.

According to last week’s Ekos poll, Prime Minister Trudeau, said the Liberal support in his polls. “There’s no consolation to Canadians who are worried about their own health, and the health of their loved ones, to be told the cheque is in the mail when it comes to the vaccinations. And, so, I think it’s a much more serious time right now than it was at another time in the pandemic.”

The Hill Times file photograph

But Mr. Graves warned that if the government fails to deliver on its promises, there would be dire political consequences for the Liberals.

“The public are very concerned, [but] the idea that this will all turn out badly and that we’re in huge problems, the government’s incompetent and has screwed it all up... the public aren’t buying it,” said Mr. Graves. “My data suggests that the public are wary, they’re very concerned, and the government will be punished severely if their claims turned out to be without foundation.”

Mr. Graves did not rule out the possibility of a spring election if the government is able to fix the vaccine rollout issue by that time.

“The next election will be basically a referendum on how you handle the pandemic,” he said. “That will be No. 1. No. 2, closely aligned, will be, did you get the vaccines in time? And depending how long it goes on, No. 3 is what do you plan to do with Canada coming out of this pandemic? Those will be the three biggest questions. None of them are entirely clear right now. The government’s done okay on the first one, but will it go to the second if they screw up the vaccine rollout.”

Ekos Research president Frank Graves says his polling is showing that the Liberals are maintaining a stable lead over the Conservatives, despite the delay to vaccine shipments. The Hill Times file photograph

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Ekos Research president Frank Graves says his polling is showing that the Liberals are maintaining a stable lead over the Conservatives, despite the delay to vaccine shipments. The Hill Times file photograph

According to last week’s Ekos poll, Prime Minister Trudeau still leads the Liberals were the choice of 36.5 per cent of Canadians, the Conservatives were at 29.8, the NDP at 14.5 per cent, and the Green Party at 9.3 per cent. The poll of 548 Canadians was conducted between Jan. 29 and Feb. 3 and had a margin of error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

A Leger poll released last week also suggested that the Trudeau Liberals were leading all parties with the support of 37 per cent of Canadians, followed by the Conservatives with 28 per cent. The NDP was at 22 per cent and the Green Party at five per cent. The poll also suggested the government’s support in managing the pandemic has slipped from 60 per cent to 54 per cent. The poll of 1,559 Canadians was released on Feb. 1 and had a margin of error of 2.4 percentage points, plus or minus 4.1, 19 times out of 20.

An Abacus Data poll of 3,830 Canadians released last week put the Liberals at 32 per cent, the Conservatives at 31 per cent, and the NDP at 18 per cent.

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The Hill Times

Pollster Nik Nanos of Nanos Research says that the interruption in the vaccine rollout is causing a Liberal support to drop across the country. The Hill Times file photograph
Hate and paranoia abound in political social media, as federal Liberals prepare to intervene

The German online hate speech law which the government may view as a model could lead to social media platforms over-suppressing online speech, says law professor Karen Eltis.

Continued from page 1 for conservative political parties,” wrote one visitor to the Liberal Party Facebook page under a post honouring Holocaust vic-
tims and survivors. Other com-
ments viewed by The Hill Times after a short search espoused a conspiracy theory about “a plan for total world-wide control,” and repeated racist stereotypes in response to a post about Black History Month.

The Liberal Party monitors its social media pages for discrimi-
nation, hateful, and threatening content as well as misinformation and removes it, said spokes-
man for the party, Eric Fawcett.

Similar comments are harder to find, but present, on Facebook pages for the Conservative Party, the NDP: political think tanks including the Broadbent Institute and the Fraser Institute; and news organizations that cover federal politics, including The Hill Times.

The federal Liberals promised in their 2019 election platform to bring in new rules for social media companies to curtail hate speech.

“We will move forward with new regulations for social media platforms, starting with a require-
ment that all platforms remove illegal content, including hate speech, within 24 hours or face significant financial penalties,” the platform said.

The government is planning to introduce legislation in February or March to make good on that pledge, according to a report from The Globe and Mail. That report said the government’s own legis-
lration would likely be influenced by German law, which requires social media platforms to remove illegal content under a tight deadline, or face significant pen-
alties. Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.) and Justice Minister David Lametti (LaSalle-Emard-Verdun, Que.) are responsible for taking on the lead on that legislation.

Using the German law as a model could have consequences, however, said Karen Eltis, a pro-
fessor who specializes in digital and constitutional law at the University of Ottawa.

The punitive German law ef-
teffectively pushes digital platforms to “over-suppress” online speech to avoid incurring monetary pen-
alties, she said.

Prof. Eltis said she was the “de-
lighted” that the government was taking action to curb online hate speech. She said that democratic governments have for too long neglected their role set-
ing rules online, instead forcing private companies that run digital media platforms to fill that void.

Prof. Eltis said the govern-
ment’s legislation could establish an ombudsman or a set of high-
level principles to help digital media platforms decide how to deal with hate speech online.

Few pages attract as many extreme comments as Canada Proud, the right-wing political discussion forum founded by digi-
tal media strategist Jeff Ballingall in 2018, following the establish-
ment of a similar page, Ontario Proud. Both pages have hundreds of thousands of followers.

A single post on the Canada Proud page on Jan. 30 prompted one visitor to the page to liken the Liberal Party to Nazis, and another to reply that the Lib-
eral government was “creating concentration camps.” A third wrote that “next they will be drag-
ging people out of their homes in the middle of the night.” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Pap-
ineau, Que.) is “heading closer to being arrested for treason,” wrote another.

That Jan. 30 post had warned that “Justin Trudeau is taking his next step into authoritarianism,” and linked to a post on The Post Millennial, a right-wing political website, about the government’s decision to hire “security contrac-
tors” to knock on doors to confirm that people ordered into quaran-
tine are complying.

“Either his tenure ends or his life….I’m fine with both!” wrote an-
other user under another post about the government’s vaccine rollout.

A July 3, 2020, Canada Proud post about Corey Hurren, the heavily-armed man who randed down the gates of the Rideau Hall grounds last July and threatened Prime Minister Trudeau, prompt-
ed a barrage of comments, nearly all of which applauded Mr. Hur-
ren, called for violence against the prime minister, or dismissed the episode as a hoax designed to generate support for Liberal gun-
control policies.

“[Too] bad Trudeau wasn’t there and this guy didn’t get to

It’s past time for democratic governments to step in to combat online hate, says University of Ottawa law professor Karen Eltis. Photographt courtesy of the University of Ottawa
Senators preparing ‘sunset clause’ amendment to scrap mental health exclusion from assisted dying law

Senators aren’t happy that the promised parliamentary review to deal with the issue never materialized.

BY PETER MAZEREEUW

Senators aren’t happy with the government’s assisted dying bill, C-7, and will likely present numerous amendments to the legislation, says Independent Senator Mobina Jaffer, who chairs the Senate’s Legal Affairs Committee studying the bill.

Senators who object to the mental health exclusion in Canada’s current assisted dying law will likely get behind a “comprehensive” amendment that would put a “sunset clause” on that exclusion, which prevents people who are suffering solely from a mental illness from accessing assisted-death, said Sen. Jaffer.

The idea was proposed by Independent Sen. Stan Kutcher (Nova Scotia) during his speech on the bill at second reading in the Senate on Dec. 15. Sen. Kutcher worked as a psychiatrist before he joined the Senate in 2018.

“During the sunset period, the government could put into place all the reviews of this issue that it wishes,” he said in the Chamber.

“Furthermore, a sunset period would allow national medical and nursing professional organizations time to create an accredited interdisciplinary education and training program in MAID assessment and delivery. This would help ensure that every Canadian, regardless of their place of residence, could have access to a similar quality of MAID assessment and delivery.”

Conservative Senator Claude Carignan (Mile Is., Que.) told The Hill Times that he believes the exclusion of mentally ill people from the assisted dying regime is unconstitutional. Sen. Carignan is his party’s critic for the bill in the Senate, and a lawyer. He suggested a sunset clause lasting one year.

The government introduced Bill C-7 in February 2020 after the Quebec Superior Court ruled that part of the 2016 assisted dying law was unconstitutional. The court singled out language that limits access to an assisted death to only those who will die “naturally from the condition causing them to suffer—technically, to those for whom death is reasonably foreseeable.”

The Senate amended the original assisted dying law to remove that condition when it was passing through Parliament, but the government rejected its amendment. The Senate did not insist, and the bill passed.

Conservative Senator Claude Carignan, left, and Independent Senator Stan Kutcher have both spoken in support of amending Bill C-7 with a ‘sunset clause’ for the mental health exclusion in Canada’s assisted dying law. Independent Senator Mobina Jaffer, the Legal Affairs Committee chair, said she believes that such an amendment would have support in the Senate. The Hill Times file photograph, photographs courtesy of the Senate

The government had also inserted language into the 2016 bill requiring a parliamentary review of the law after five years. Justice Minister David Lametti (LaSalle-Emard, Ver., Que.) said later, when he introduced Bill C-7, that the review would explore the subject of extending assisted dying to people suffering from a mental illness, as well as advanced requests for assisted death, and assisted death for mature minors.

However, the review, which was due to begin last summer, has not yet taken place, and Mr. Lametti has denied responsibility for initiating it.

Numerous Senators pointed to the missing parliamentary study as a source of frustration, both in the Chamber and in interviews with The Hill Times.

“I take this very personally” says Sen. Wallin

Sen. Wallin told The Hill Times that she will press for an amendment that would allow the way for people suffering from dementia to access assisted dying. Under the current law, a documented wish for an assisted death under certain conditions in the future, which can be honoured even if a person later loses the ability to consent—known as an advance request—is not legal.

A diagnosis of Alzheimer’s or other cause of dementia typically renders a person legally unable to give consent to an assisted death, said Sen. Wallin.

“I take this very personally. My grandmother died of Alzheimer’s, and my mother did,” she said.

“They’ve seen every variation on the mindset of a person as they descend into hell.”

She said she is currently healthy, but is already speaking with a doctor who provides assisted death to see what options are available to her for the future.

“When I grow up I’ll take it to the Supreme Court, I don’t know. Just think that it needs to be clarified,” she said.

Sen. Carignan said that he believed amending C-7 to legalize advanced requests would be going too far, and that the federal and provincial governments should be given time to discuss that issue first.

“We have to clarify MAID access for [mental health] first,” he said.

Several Senators and adovacry groups for disabled Canadians have made the case that Bill C-7 would make the assisted dying law discriminatory against people with disabilities. If Bill C-7 is passed and the requirement to reasonably foreseeable death is removed, the assisted dying law would allow people with an incurable disability to seek an assisted death if that disability is causing suffering that is intolerable to them.

“One doesn’t know, at the end, how people with this thinking will have enough support to defeat the bill,” he said.

“Hard to feel the place” without in-person sittings, says Sen. Carignan

Independent Senator Peter Harder (Ottawa) argued in the Chamber in December that Senators should not treat Bill C-7 as a referendum on the existing assisted dying law, but rather as the government’s response to the 2019 order from the Quebec Superior Court.

“Bill C-7 is not new government policy or priority. It is a response to a judicial decision and must be respected as such,” he said in the Chamber on Dec. 14.

Sen. Jaffer said she agreed with Sen. Harder on that point.

“Hard to feel the place” without in-person sittings, says Sen. Carignan

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Sen. Jaffer said she agreed with Sen. Harder on that point.

“I feel the same way....we had that fight in 2016,” she said.

Sen. Jaffer also said, however, that Senators on introducing her own amendment to Bill C-7 to mandate a government analysis of what different ethnic communities need in order to properly access and evaluate assistance.

Sen. Jaffer is also one of several Senators who have expressed concerns that the federal government in Canada were not adequately consulted by the government as it put Bill C-7 forward.

Mary Jane McCallum (Manitoba) told The Hill Times that she was seriously considering voting against the bill for that reason.

“It’s too easy to say” if Senators will be willing to push back harder on their amendments this time if the government rejects them, said Sen. Jaffer.

Independent Senators, most of them appointed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), form the largest group in the Senate. Collectively, they most often vote in favour of government legislation, but have proven eager to amend it.

“Because it is a non-partisan issue, by and large, there will be people on both sides of the floor for and against. So I think it’s kind of a case where you have to fight a little bit,” she said.

With many Senators participating virtually amid the pandemic, “You’ll have these back room discussions with members so you know where they stand, so I think it’s kind of a feel the place,” said Sen. Carignan.

Several Senators have called on the government to refer the assisted dying law to the Supreme Court of Canada, and have it determine which parts of the law, if any, violate the Constitution.

“It’s very difficult for a government to know where the puck is going to go. That’s why we are dealing with this incrementally,” Independent Senator Howard Wetston (Ontario) said in the Chamber.

“My view is that if we do not act decisively now, this ping-pong will continue for the next decade.”

…”unless we can affect significant amendments to this legislation or we should be urging the government of Canada to refer this immediately to the Supreme Court of Canada,” he said.

“In that reference, there would be an instruction to the court to consider the issues we’re dealing with now and will deal with over the next decade: advance directives, mature minors, this issue around folks with mental challenges and those with disabilities, as we should be doing on a new set of guidelines,”

Sen. Wallin and Sen. Jaffer both said they supported a Supreme Court review of the law. Mr. Lametti told the Senate’s Legal Affairs Committee on Feb. 1 that “it always remains an option but we don’t think we’ve demonstrated that it’s our best option.”

Mr. Lametti has framed Bill C-7 as a “sunset clause” solution to the Quebec Superior Court’s decision that the faster it is passed, the fewer people will suffer as they wait for legal access to assisted dying.

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The Hill Times
Faizel Gulamhussein has taken over as chief of staff to the national revenue minister, with Bernard Bottin moving over to Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland’s team.

National Revenue Minister Diane Lebouthillier has a new chief of staff in charge of her team, after bidding farewell to Bernard Bottin, who’s exited to become director of stakeholder relations and a senior Quebec adviser to Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland as of Feb. 8.

Faizel Gulamhussein, who’s spent the last year (plus two months) as director of policy to Ms. Lebouthillier, has now been promoted to chief of staff.

A former tax lawyer with Baker & McKenzie in Toronto, Mr. Gulamhussein has been working on the Hill since the end of 2017, starting as a senior policy adviser to then-heritage minister Mélanie Joly (and continuing under her successor, Pablo Rodriguez). He joined Ms. Lebouthillier’s office in December 2019, shortly after the shuffle as executive assistant to the minister.

With the office since February 2020, he was previously serving as an issues manager and assistant to the minister’s regional affairs adviser for Quebec and the Atlantic. He spent six months doing administrative work for the city of Percé, Que. In 2018, he spent three months as a project coordinator for the Percé Rock Tourist Office, among other past experience. Mr. Bourget graduated from Université Laval with a bachelor of law degree in 2019.

In turn, Chloé Rioux, who’s been busy as Ms. Lebouthillier’s executive assistant since March 2020, has been given the added responsibility of replacing Mr. Bourget as the minister’s Quebec and Atlantic regional affairs adviser. Before joining the minister’s office, Ms. Rioux spent almost half a year as an economic development minister’s office, Ms. Rioux spent almost half a year as an economic development assistant to Ms. Lebouthillier, has now been promoted to chief of staff.

PricewaterhouseCoopers in Toronto. He studied law at McGill University, going on to article with McCarthy Tétrault, and also has both a master’s degree and a bachelor’s degree in political science and criminology, in the case of his undergraduate degree from Simon Fraser University.

As of Feb. 8.

National Revenue Minister Lebouthillier hires a new chief of staff, Faizel Gulamhussein

Three other names were on the list: Faizel Nathoo, who previously advised ministers on international affairs; Adam Grech, senior executive assistant; and Shannon Zimmerman, director of operations and senior Ottawa adviser. Mr. Nathoo is a former press secretary to then-treasury board president Joyce Murray, and prior to the August 2020 shuffle as executive assistant to the minister.

Similarly, Ms. Zimmerman was a senior adviser for Ontario to Ms. Freeland before August 2020. A former director of issues management and to intergovernmental affairs minister Dominic LeBlanc, Ms. Zimmerman has now been promoted to Ms. Freeland’s office since December 2019, after she took over the portfolio from Mr. LeBlanc. (The August 2020 shuffle saw the intergovernmental affairs portfolio switch back to Mr. LeBlanc’s oversight.)

Hill Climbers has also previously reported, based on other sources (including the federal conflict of interest and ethics commissioner’s public registry), that Bud Sambasivam, Michael Ingoldsbly, and Ansel Jauwlack are tackling policy for Ms. Freeland. As well, that Tyler Meredith, who previously served as deputy director to then-finance minister Bill Morneau, has remained in the office as a senior adviser. Mr. Morneau’s LinkedIn profile and the public registry both indicate that his title is now director of economic strategy and planning to the minister.

As reporting public office held under the Conflict of Interest Act, when ministerial staff and their immediate family members’ financial information must be be transmitted to the conflict of interest and ethics commissioner’s office as part of a larger public disclosure process, which includes disclosures of any outside activities and assets, to ensure they are in compliance with the act.

A public registry of this information can be accessed through the office’s website.

Mr. Sambasivam, Mr. Ingoldsbly, Mr. Jauwlack and Mr. Meredith are all listed on the commissioner’s registry as current staff to Ms. Freeland.

Based on the information on this registry, Hill Climbers identified 16 other staff who appear to be currently working in the minister’s office.

They are: Vincent Garneau, executive director of the DPMO; Josh Arless, senior manager of executive operations; Amitpal Singh, policy adviser; Michael Den Tandt, senior communications adviser; Sassen Ross, special assistant; Alexandre Kropman, special assistant for legislative affairs; Vasken Vosguian, legal assistant; Stephen Bateman, special assistant for issues management and operations; Bronwen Jervis, writer; Jean-Yves Mathieu, senior adviser for the Prairies; Jillian White, senior adviser for the Prairies and the North; Hannah Wilson, regional desk for the Prairies and North; Malcolm McEachern, Atlantic desk and assistant to the minister’s parliamentary secretary; and Jessica Eritou, special assistant for digital communications and social media.

Additional names are listed under the deputy prime minister’s office on the registry, which appear to Hill Climbers to be staff listing through various ministers’ regional offices, which serve all of cabinet and organizationally fall under the DPMO’s oversight (but are not part of the actual DPMO team).

Hill Climbers has separately confirmed that Ms. Eritou, who previously press secretary to Families, Children, and Social Development Minister Ahmed Hussen, is now working for Ms. Freeland. A former executive assistant to then- veterans affairs minister Steven O’Regan, Ms. Eritou has worked on the minister’s team since December 2019. Similarly, Ms. Zimmerman took over the portfolio in November 2019, and Ms. Eritou was promoted to press secretary shortly after.

Hill Climbers
THURSDAY, FEB. 11
Black History Month—February is Black History Month in Canada and there are virtual festivities and events honouring the legacy of Black Canadians and their communities across Canada. This year’s theme is: “The Future is Now.”

House Sitting—The audience is sitting in a hybrid format during the pandemic, with most MPs connecting remotely. It’s scheduled to sit until Feb. 5. It will take a one-week break and return on Tuesday, Feb. 16, and sit every weekday until Friday, Feb. 26. It will take a one-week break, March 1-March 5, and will sit every weekday until March 8-12, before taking another break, March 15-19. It’s scheduled to sit March 22-26, will take a two-week break, March 29-April 9. It’s then scheduled to sit every weekday for the next five weeks, April 12-May 14. It will take one-week break after that, from May 17-May 24. It will sit May 25 every weekday until Wednesday, June 23, and will take another break for three months, until Monday Sept. 20. In the fall and winter, the House is scheduled to sit for 11 weeks over September, October, November, and December. It will sit Sept. 20-Oct. 8; Oct. 18-Nov. 5; Nov. 15-Dec. 3; Dec. 15-Jan. 13; Jan. 18-Feb. 15.

The Pandemic of Racism—A Facebook live series exploring the sociological impacts of racism. Join Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard (East Preston, N.S.) and Senator Stanley Kutcher (Nova Scotia) on Feb. 8 at 1 p.m. ET/7 p.m. PT who will talk about Asian racism.

Diversifying Power—Carleton University hosts a webinar on “Diversifying Power: Why We Need Antiracism, Feminist Leadership on Climate and Energy.” Dr. Jennie Stephens, author of the new book, Diversifying Power, which examines climate and energy leadership related to job creation and economic justice, health and nutrition, and housing and transportation. She explains why we need to reclaim and restructure climate and energy systems so policies are explicitly linked to social, economic, and racial justice. Monday, Feb. 8, at 5:30 p.m. To register, visit: carleton.ca/sustainable-energy/?p=522.

TUESDAY, FEB. 9
National Security, Economic Prosperity and Canada’s Future—The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) will host a webinar on ’National Security, Economic Prosperity and Canada’s Future’ featuring David Vigneault, director of the Canadian Network for International Intelligence Service. A question-and-answer period will follow. The event happens on Tuesday, Feb. 9, at 1:30 p.m. The event will be free for all CIGI members. To register, visit: cigionline.org.

Energy, the Environment, and Canada-U.S. Relations in the Biden Era—The Macdonald-Laurier Institute hosts a webinar on “Energy, the Environment, and Canada-U.S. Relations in the Biden Era,” exploring the challenges and opportunities for Canada as it engages on these issues with the new administration. Speakers include former Conservative cabinet minister Lisa Raitt, now vice-chair for global investment banking, CIBC; former Canadian ambassador to the United States Gary Doer; JP Gladu, president and CEO of the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters; Bob Leduc, president and CEO, Réseau Environnement; and Rosemary Westwood, PhD, expert on the environment.

SUNDAY, FEB. 14
The Pandemic of Racism—A Facebook live series exploring the sociological impacts of racism. Join Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard (East Preston, N.S.) at 3 p.m. ET/7 p.m. PT. The event will be free for all CIGI members. To register, visit: cigionline.org.

MONDAY, FEB. 15
Environment Minister Gives Remarks on ‘National Security, Economic Prosperity, and Canada’s Future’—The As-sembly of First Nations hosts the second in a series of webinars focusing on national security, economic prosperity, and Canada’s future. The event is free for all CIGI members. To register, visit: cigionline.org.

MONDAY, FEB. 15
The Pandemic of Racism—A Facebook live series exploring the sociological impacts of racism. Join Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard (East Preston, N.S.) and Senator Stanley Kutcher (Nova Scotia) on Feb. 22 at 1 p.m. ET/7 p.m. PT. To register, visit: stanleykutcher.com.

THURSDAY, FEB. 18
Racon and Eggshe—Join Dr. Volkert Gutter, director and CEO of the University of Saskatchewan’s Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization-International Vaccine Centre, for a discussion on “Better Pandemic Preparedness: How Canadian science can be ready for future threats.” This presentation will provide an overview of some of the lessons learned from the current pandemic and provide possible solutions of how Canada can be better prepared for emerging diseases. Thursday, Feb. 18, from 12:15-1:15 p.m. To register for this free online presentation, contact: Emma Brown, PRGSE Manager at ebrown@nature.ca or 613-232-5952.

MONDAY, FEB. 22
The Pandemic of Racism—A Facebook live series exploring the sociological impacts of racism. Join Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard (East Preston, N.S.) and Senator Stanley Kutcher (Nova Scotia) on Feb. 22 at 1 p.m. ET/7 p.m. PT. The event will be free for all CIGI members. To register, visit: cigionline.org.

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