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THE HILL TIMES

THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR, NO. 2084

CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2023 \$5.00

NEWS

‘Take chances’: expect parties to experiment, refine marketing messages in 2024, say political players

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

After 2023 was spent experimenting with both the medium and the message, voters can expect the major political parties to refine their pitches for the 2025 election over the next 12 months, according to former partisan strategists.

“The Liberals are currently experimenting on different messages to see what works. Conservatives have got a message they feel pretty comfortable with, and they’re experimenting with different tactics to see how they can best deliver that message,” said Dan Arnold, chief strategy officer at Pollara Strategic Insights and a former director of research, advertising, and correspondence in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s (Papineau, Que.) office. “That’s what I think all the parties will be doing next year: trying to refine both their message, and their mediums and tactics in terms of getting that message out there to get ready for an election campaign.”

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NEWS

It could be a ‘bloodbath for the Liberals’ if polls hold up until next election, say political strategists and insiders

- With recent polling highs, the Conservatives could go after safe Liberal and NDP ridings, says Dan Robertson, a former senior Tory strategist.
- The party could start their target riding list with the 34 swing ridings that it held in the 2011 election, but which became Liberal in 2015, and largely stayed red in 2019 and 2021.

BY ABBAS RANA

If the Conservatives maintain a double-digit margin lead until the next election, they will target safe Liberal and NDP seats instead of just marginal ridings, say senior political strategists.

“It’s going to be a bloodbath. It’d be worse than 2011 [that year’s federal election] for the Liberals,” said Dan Robertson, a former senior Conservative strategist in the 2021 and 2011 election campaigns who now works as a senior adviser of Focalldata. “We’re looking at 1984 seat counts, not 2011.”

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. If the Conservatives are able to maintain the current support momentum until the next election, they can be ambitious and target safe Liberal and NDP ridings, say political strategists. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade. Illustration by Neena Singhal

NEWS

Poilievre ‘does not need to rely on mainstream media’ as much as previous leaders, say veteran journos, as sparring with reporters continues

BY MIKE LAPOINTE

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has sparred with a number of reporters so far during his tenure in the party’s top job, but such interactions are a core part of messaging to his base and the media better get used to it, say veteran Hill journalists.

“Any journalist asking Pierre Poilievre a challenging question risks being used by Poilievre [to say] how terrible journalists are,” said seasoned Hill journalist Paul Wells, an author and former columnist for *Maclean’s* as well as for *The Toronto Star*.

“For Poilievre, the conversation isn’t taking place between himself and the journalist. The conversation has been taking place between himself and people who will watch later on social media,” said Wells.

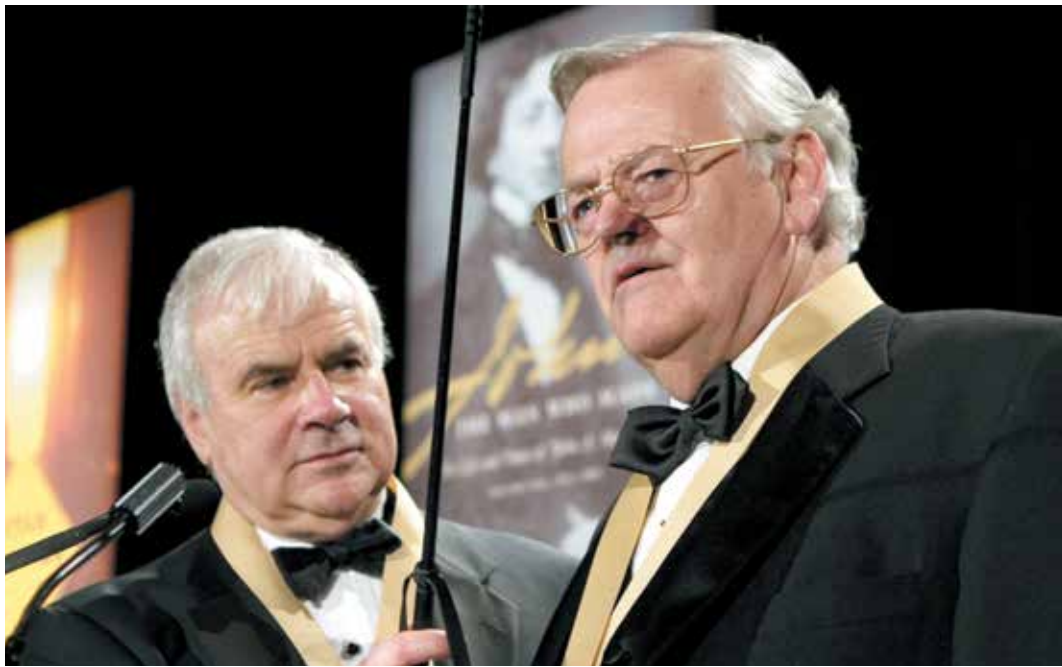
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Mike Lapointe

Heard On The Hill

Noël Kinsella, who died last week, was a ‘loyal servant to Canada,’ says Poilievre



Then-House Speaker Peter Milliken, left, and Senate Speaker Noël Kinsella, pictured in 2008 at the Politics and the Pen event at the Chateau Laurier Hotel in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

Former Senate Speaker **Noël Kinsella** has died. He was 84. The former New Brunswick Senator, who retired from the Red Chamber in 2014, died on Dec. 6. Prior to his Senate career, he served as chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, and president of the Canadian Human Rights Foundation.

He was first appointed to the Senate by Progressive Conservative prime minister **Brian Mulroney** in 1990, and served as the party's opposition whip from 1994 to 1999, and then as deputy leader of the opposition from 1999 to 2004.

Kinsella became leader of the opposition in the Senate as part of the newly formed Conservative Party in 2004, and was named Senate Speaker on the advice of prime minister **Stephen Harper** in 2006. He held that role until 2014, shortly before his mandatory retirement date from the Senate at the age of 75.

The Senate held a minute of silence in tribute to Kinsella at the start of proceedings on Dec. 6. Opposition Leader in the Senate, Senator **Don Plett**, wrote on X (formerly Twitter) that “Canada has lost a great man.”

“The Hon. Noël A. Kinsella dedicated his life to public service. I have fond memories & appreciation of him as Speaker of the Senate of Canada,” Plett wrote.

New Brunswick Premier **Blaine Higgs** described Kinsella on X as “well-spoken and serious, he had a dry sense of humour and was always kind and eager to help up-and-coming individuals. He gave much to New Brunswick,

to Canada, and to the world, and will be missed by the many people whose lives he touched.”

Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre** described him on Facebook as a “loyal servant to Canada, was renowned for his brilliance, decency and fairness.”

Carleton University creates political management scholarship program for grad students

Carleton University has established a scholarship program named in honour of the late political staffer **Jaimie Anderson**.

The university's School of Political Management announced on Dec. 7 that the Jaimie Anderson Scholarships will provide \$5,000 scholarships to eight graduate students “who embrace politics with a spirit of civility” each year.

“We want to help the program and its students play a constructive and thoughtful role in politics,” said **Bruce Anderson**, on behalf of Jaimie's family, in the press release. “While partisanship will always be a part of a healthy, competitive democratic system, so too is a spirit of mutual respect, and appreciation of conversing about politics in ways that reduce, rather than increase conflict.”

Anderson's death at the age of 23 inspired the creation of the Jaimie Anderson Parliamentary Internship in 2010, which provides paid summer Parliamentary internships.

Like, share, subscribe: Poilievre urges PM to watch ‘my groundbreaking and much-acclaimed documentary’

Much was made of Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre's** 15-minute “documentary” on the housing crisis last week, with plenty of column inches dedicated to his data- and graphic-filled *Housing hell: how we got here and how we get out*.

Not content with the impressive number of views the video had already received, Poilievre spent much of his time in Question Period last week asking the prime minister and cabinet ministers to watch “my groundbreaking and much-acclaimed documentary.”

Poilievre spent most of his questions to Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** on an appeal to watch the video, with the added offer of “a private screening” for the Liberal caucus.

For his part, Trudeau responded to Poilievre in the House that “I did not think Canadians were going to be hearing an infomercial for the leader of the opposition's YouTube page.” Housing Minister **Sean Fraser**, meanwhile, quipped: “I am curious how many of those views are actually the opposition leader.”

New Parliament Hill reporter Irem Koca joins *The Hill Times*’ newsroom

Irem Koca has joined *The Hill Times* to cover government contracting and procurement after a brief stint working as a producer at CPAC. Koca has previously spent a year reporting national stories, including federal politics, for *The Toronto Star*. Born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey, Koca worked for CNN Turkey for several years and has also freelanced for the Turkey bureaus of *The New York Times* and Reuters as a side hustle.

“I am thrilled to join *The Hill Times*’ talented team of reporters. I look forward to exploring and explaining the intricacies of government contracting and tracking



New *Hill Times* reporter Irem Koca. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

what the federal government spends taxpayer dollars on, how, when, and why,” said Koca.

Chrétien and Harper handshake shakes social media, and Lawrence Martin writes about it

Former Conservative prime minister **Stephen Harper**, who sat on opposite sides of the House with the Liberals for many years, was able to come together recently with another former prime minister, **Jean Chrétien**, who posed for a picture together.

“Always wonderful to catch up with a true gentleman and my friend, the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien,” wrote Harper on X (the social media platform formally known as Twitter).

Chrétien served as Canada's prime minister from 1993 to 2003. Harper served from 2005 until 2015.

The image of the Conservative and Liberal icons in a friendly pose drew many comparisons to their successors, who spent last week engaged in debate over the partisanship of the Speaker and in a number of procedural tactics as the holiday season approached.

For *Globe and Mail* columnist **Lawrence Martin**, the photo



Buddies: Two former prime ministers who sat on opposite sides of the House were able to come together recently, with prime minister Stephen Harper, left, posing for a picture with prime minister Jean Chrétien.

was “such a departure from the temper of our times, which sees polarization at a brutal level and many complaining that the country has never been so divided.”

While describing the “perennial gripe” about disunity as “tiresome”—referencing the 1990s, when a separatist party sat as the official opposition, the Reform Party and Progressive Conservatives duelled in Western Canada, and the Quebec independence referendum almost succeeded—Lawrence said the former leaders' photo “sets a good bridging-the-divide example: They're Canadian, and they can get along, despite their differences.”

Gould proposes appointment of Eric Janse as House of Commons Clerk

Government House Leader **Karina Gould** called last week for the nomination of **Eric Janse** as Clerk of the House of Commons.

“Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a certificate of nomination and biographical notes for the proposed appointment of Eric Janse to the position of Clerk of the House of Commons,” said Gould in the House on Dec. 5, adding that the nomination will be referred to the Procedure and House Affairs Committee.

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Eric Janse appears before the Procedure and House Affairs Committee as part of its hybrid Parliament study on Oct. 4, 2022. Screenshot courtesy of *ParlVu*



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News

Elections Canada reaching out to potential landlords for suitable voting locations in case election called next year



Chief Electoral Officer Stéphane Perrault, pictured in this file photo. Elections Canada is currently looking for suitable voting locations just in case one is called in the new year, confirmed Matthew McKenna, a spokesman for Elections Canada. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

All federal parties are quietly getting ready for the next election if one is called in the new year.

BY ABBAS RANA

Canada's federal election agency is preparing for the possibility of a 2024 election by reaching out to potential landlords for polling locations.

"Our mandate is to be ready to deliver an election at any time," Matthew McKenna, a spokesman for Elections Canada, told *The Hill Times* last week. "We're in a minority Parliament now and an election could actually happen at any time."

McKenna said that "it's not out of the ordinary for returning officers to start doing that kind of work to identify locations so that if and when an election is called," and noted that those officers will look for locations that "are as accessible as possible, familiar sites for electors, and within a reasonable distance to where electors live."

According to Canada's fixed election date law, the next election is scheduled for Oct. 20, 2025, but in a minority Parliament, one

could be triggered at any time. In a minority government, the opposition parties outnumber the governing party and can topple the government at any time. At the same time, the incumbent prime minister could also advise the governor general to dissolve Parliament and call an election the way Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) did in 2021.

Since last year, the governing Liberals have had a supply-and-confidence agreement with the NDP, in which the latter's MPs vote with the government on all confidence motions. But, given the Liberals and the NDP are almost tied in the polls, and the governing party's public support has dropped, the NDP could decide not to prop up the government any longer.

In the new year, the first major opportunity for the opposition to defeat the government would be the next budget, which would likely be brought down in February or March. The vote on the budget will be a confidence vote.

The Trudeau government completed the first two years of its third mandate in September. The average age of a minority government in Canada is between 18 and 24 months.

Considering the uncertainty in the timing of an election, all federal parties are also getting themselves ready for an election.

Early last month, the Liberals appointed Tourism Minister Soraya-Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Que.) and three-term Liberal MP Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Man.) as campaign co-chairs. At the September national caucus retreat in London, Ont., Jeremy Broadhurst was officially introduced as the national campaign director for the Liberal Party for the next election. Broadhurst, who most recently served in the Prime Minister's Office, held senior positions in the 2021, 2019 and 2015 elections.

The national Liberal caucus was told in the fall of 2022 that if they want to run in the next election unopposed as Liberal candidates, they would have to fulfil certain conditions, including fundraising and doorknocking requirements.

According to these new rules, each MP had to have at least 65 per cent of the anticipated expense limit in their respective electoral district association bank account by March 1; at least 40 more Victory Fund members compared to the number they had on July 1, 2022; and, attempted to knock on at least 3,500 doors or make 7,500 phone calls along with their team of volunteers. At the same time, in unheld ridings, the Liberal Party had started to accept requests for nomination packages from potential candidates.

The deadline for MPs to meet the party's conditions was March of this year, meaning that the Liberals will have a good gauge on who are their candidates in 158 of the 338 held ridings across the country. These are the ridings where the Liberals have the best chance of winning. If the next election happens after April 2024, the total number of seats will go up to 343 due to an electoral redistribution. Of the five new seats in the House of Commons, Alberta will get three, and Ontario and British Columbia one each.

With the addition of new seats, Alberta will have 37 seats, Ontario 122, and British Columbia 43.

Because of the redistribution of electoral boundaries process, all but 46 of the current 338 riding boundaries have changed. Of the ridings where there's no boundary change, 25 are in Quebec, 15 in Ontario, three in British Columbia, and one each in Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Alberta.

On the Conservative side, Jenni Byrne is expected to be the national campaign director. She held the same role in the 2015 election campaign when Stephen Harper's Conservatives lost power to the Trudeau Liberals, and was the national campaign manager in the 2011 election in which they won a majority government.

Since the election of their new leader in September last year, the Conservatives have been raising record amounts of money and are far ahead of the second-place Liberals in fundraising and public support. According to recent projections, if the current polling trends continued until the next election, the Conservatives could win more than 200 seats.

A Dec. 1 poll by Nanos Research suggested that the Conservatives were leading the pack with the support of 40.4 per cent of Canadians, followed by the Liberals who were at 23.4 per cent, the NDP at 21.2 per cent, the Bloc Québécois at 6.2 per cent, the Greens 5.1 per cent, and the People's Party of Canada at 1.8 per cent.

A Dec. 3 Abacus Data poll suggested that the Conservatives had a 19-point lead over the Liberals. According to that poll, the Conservative support was at 42 per cent, the Liberals 23 per cent, the NDP 19 per cent, the Bloc seven per cent, the Greens four per cent and People's Party of Canada at three per cent.

When it comes to fundraising, so far this year, the Conservatives have raised \$23.3-million, which is \$13.5-million more than the Trudeau Liberals.

According to numbers released by Elections Canada for the first three quarters, the Conservatives have raised \$23.3-million, the Liberals \$9.7-million, the NDP \$4-million, the Greens \$2.3-million, the Bloc Québécois \$1.9-million, and the People's Party \$3.8-million.

Last year, the federal Conservatives raised a total of \$57.4-million, including \$23-million in party donations, \$18.7-million in leadership contributions, and \$9.6-million from memberships. In comparison, the Liberals raised \$15.3-million in revenue, followed by the NDP with \$6.5-million. At the end of last year, the Conservatives had \$11-million in the bank.

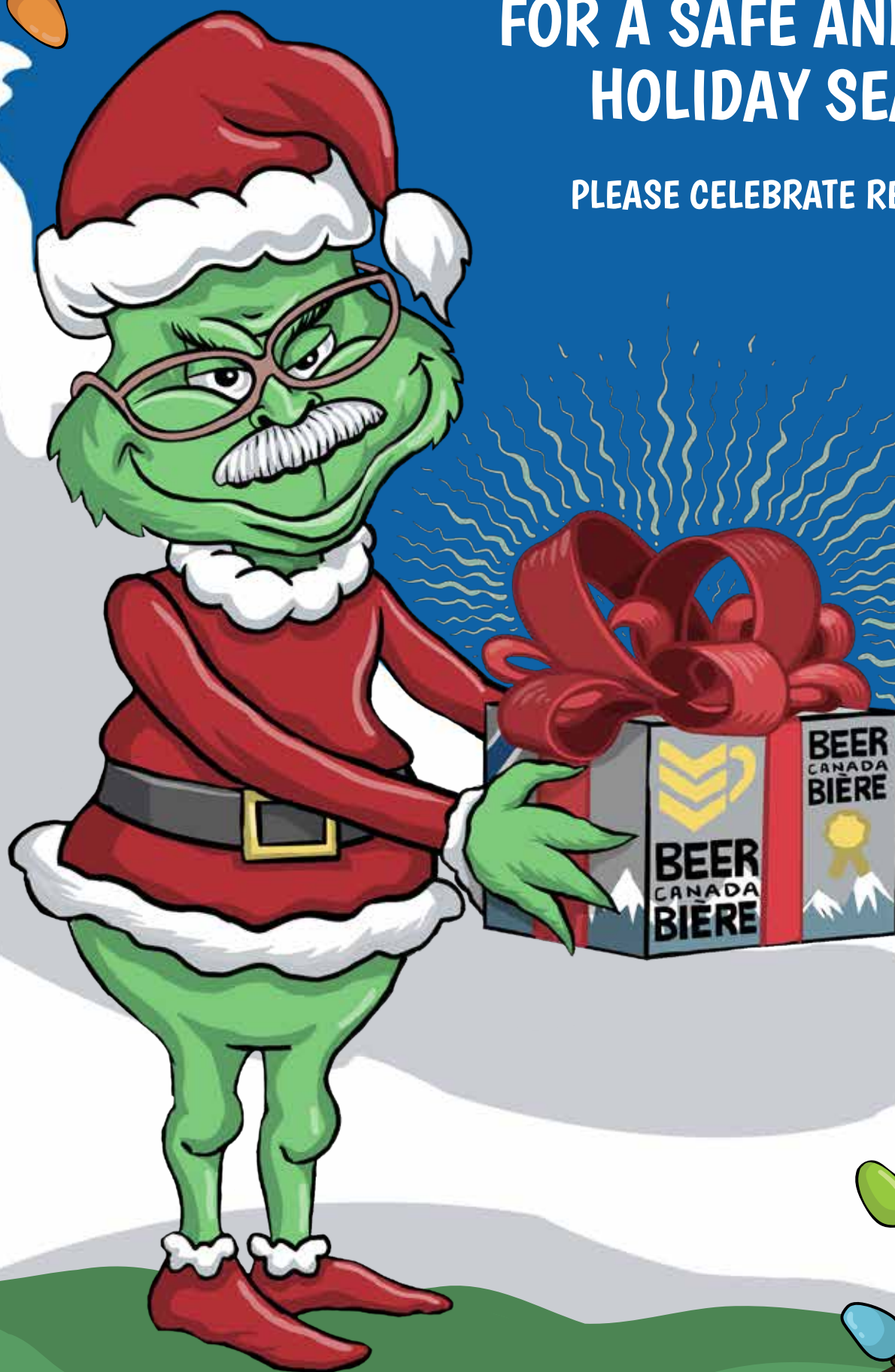
In the fourth of quarter of last year, which was the first after Poilievre became the party leader, the Conservatives raised \$9.6-million. This was a record for any party in a non-election year. In the month of December alone, the party raised \$6.05-million. In contrast, the Liberals raised \$5.7-million, and the NDP \$2.05-million. This means the Conservatives raised \$1.47-million more than the combined total of the Liberals and the NDP in the last quarter of 2022. In the first quarter of this year, the Conservatives raised \$8.3-million, the Liberals \$3.6-million and the NDP \$1.26-million. This time the Conservatives raised \$3.44-million more than the combined total of the Liberals and the NDP. In the second quarter of this year, the Conservatives raised \$7.9-million, the Liberals \$3.19-million, the NDP \$1.375-million. Again, the Conservatives out-raised the Liberals and the NDP by \$3.3-million.

The Conservatives have also started to nominate candidates in ridings where there's little or no change in riding boundaries.

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News

Public Safety hears support for foreign influence registry as government looks to allies for inspiration

A second round of consultations has been launched into Canada's response to foreign interference, and cited recent changes to laws in Britain and Australia.

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

The creation of a foreign influence registration scheme could help provide the public with some sense of the extent of activities in Canada, according to an expert in cybersecurity, after government consultations found overwhelming support for the creation of such a plan.

"The advantage of setting up such a registry is that it can disclose some of the links between agents in Canada and a foreign state's government," said Benjamin Fung, Canada Research Chair in Data Mining for Cybersecurity and professor at McGill University. "[Under a registry], they are supposed to disclose where they get their money from, and by disclosing this piece of information the general public can better understand the potential risks."

The federal government published some of the feedback received from consultations about the creation of a foreign influence transparency registry on Nov. 24. The "what we heard" report on the plan said the respondents were overall in favour of a registry, as well as financial and criminal penalties for noncompliance, but stressed that the rules for registration be clear, and that it not be overly burdensome on registrants.

At the same time, stakeholders said it was "only one tool of many to counter foreign interference," and urged that the government "continue its outreach program with communities at risk from foreign interference, and to allocate additional resources towards the enforcement of existing counter-foreign interference legislation."

The government received more than 1,000 online submissions and heard from about 80 interested groups, according to the report. Just over half of the respondents were members of the public, while 17 per cent were categorized as business, and eight

per cent each as academia or Canadian government.

At the same time, stakeholders said it was "only one tool of many to counter foreign interference," and urged that the government "continue its outreach program with communities at risk from foreign interference, and to allocate additional resources towards the enforcement of existing counter-foreign interference legislation."

Fung said that transparency was the key to creating some form of registration rather than punitive measures.

"I think this is more important than setting up rules, or even punishment," Fung said. "Raising awareness sometimes is more important."

There were already research security measures in place for foreign influence in academia, for example, Fung said. In February, the government announced that Canada's federal funding research granting councils would not fund research in sensitive areas if any researchers are "affiliated with a university, research institute or laboratory connected to military, national defence or state security entities of foreign state actors that pose a risk to our national security."

Universities, meanwhile, have established research security units to review sponsored research agreements with foreign partners. However, Fung said these measures do not prevent a "grey area" in which professors can be recruited as consultants by foreign entities.

"Previously, there was a company who tried to approach me several times and tried to recruit me as a consultant," he said. "This is a really common way for a Chinese company to approach a professor. Basically, that is directly putting money into the pocket of the professor, then asking the professor to maybe later on contribute intellectual property from their research team, or to say something that would benefit the company."

Professors are usually required to report such an arrangement with their university, but Fung said it was usually only a reporting mechanism, and the university generally would not be able to disallow it. That would be an instance in which a federal registry would help, he said.

"If the professor is collaborating with a company that is on that list, then maybe their research director could suggest that the professor register this information," he said.

Public Safety Canada and Justice Canada also announced additional consultations on potential changes to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, the Criminal Code, the Security of Information Act and the Canada Evidence Act on Nov. 24.

Residents of Canada and Canadians overseas have been asked to provide feedback by Feb. 2, 2024, on whether to create new criminal offences for foreign interference, whether the offence of sabotage should be modernized in the Criminal Code, and whether to reform the way national security information is protected and used in criminal cases.

"Foreign interference is a threat to our democracy and national security in Canada, and it is something we do not take lightly," said Justice Minister Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Ont.) in an accompanying press release on Nov. 24.

The press release said the consultations were based in part on the earlier round of consultations about the creation of a foreign influence transparency registry. Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.) said the proposed changes would "give the Government of Canada another set of tools to detect and disrupt foreign state and non-state actors that attempt to act against our national interest."

Working with allies

Similar legislation in two other countries is referenced in the latest round of consultation: the United Kingdom's National Security Act, which received royal assent on July 11, and Australia's National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act, which became law in 2018.

Then-public safety minister Marco Mendicino (Eglinton—Lawrence, Ont.) attended a meeting of ministers from Five Eyes countries in Wellington, New Zealand, in June, during which a communiqué stated that the allies "committed to further collaborate on policy, regulatory, intelligence, operational and enforcement responses, to build our collective resilience against the hostile actions of state actors."

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported in August that Australia's federal Attorney-General, Mark Dreyfus, said that officials from his department had been speaking with Canadian counterparts about his country's five-year-old foreign influence transparency scheme.

"The interests that Canada has shown our laws is because they don't have laws of the same kind," Dreyfus said, according to the Aug. 2 report. "We're very happy to assist."

A spokesperson for Australia's Attorney-General's Department told *The Hill Times* in an emailed statement that "the department engages with like-minded countries and international bodies, including Canadian counterpart agencies at officials level, to share best practice and lessons learned administering the scheme."

"The Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme... established by the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018, forms part of a broader framework of measures designed to promote transparency and protect the integrity of Australia's political and governmental processes," the statement said.

The Hill Times asked Public Safety Canada whether such discussions were continuing during the latest round of consultations, and whether there had also been discussions with officials from the U.K., which is also implementing counter-foreign interference reforms, as well as whether a timeline had been set for the development of proposed foreign interference laws once this round of consultations ends. A response had not been received by press time.

The Australian laws are currently being reviewed by a joint House of Representatives and Senate committee to determine both the legislative and administrative effectiveness of the scheme over the past five years.

Under Australia's scheme, people must register if they plan to engage in political or governmental influence (such as traditional lobbying or communications) on behalf of a foreign government, political organization, government-related individual, or company that is controlled either in part or in full by a foreign government.

The scheme is "country agnostic," meaning that activities associated with any foreign government must be included, regardless of its relationship to Australia.

For example, there are eight active entries related to Canada as of last week: four lobbyists for Flying Whales, which has received funding from the Quebec government; one lobbyist for the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan; two lobbyists for the Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS), and an electricity operator in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory part-owned by OMERS;

and a lobbyist for the Port of Brisbane Pty Ltd, which is part-owned by a Quebec pension fund investor.

The Canadian consultation asked respondents whether a scheme should be country agnostic or country specific, to which "there was debate," but the majority backed the former. The feedback report said that some respondents wanted nations involved in foreign interference to be targeted, while Canada's allies should be exempt.

Others, however, noted that "Canadian national interests are not always aligned with that of Canada's allies, thereby making it prudent to be aware of allied activity in Canada... further, a country-specific registry could unnecessarily stoke racial and ethnic exclusion, and result in a 'blacklist,' rather than a means of transparency."

Respondents also recommended that the rules for registration be as clear as possible, which is another area in which the Australian legislation is being reviewed.

Kevin Rudd, a former prime minister and foreign affairs minister who currently serves as Australia's ambassador to the United States, said in a 2020 letter that he supported the legislation, but described the department's "sweeping interpretation" of arrangements with foreign principals to be "absurd." As such, he included registry files of news interviews with Canadian public broadcasters CBC and TVO, as well as publicly funded broadcasters in the U.K., New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Under the scheme, former federal cabinet ministers must register activities for life, and other designated position holders such as senior government officials, MPs and senators must do so for 15 years after leaving public office.

Malcolm Turnbull, who was prime minister when the law was introduced, has two registry files for speeches given to forums in South Korea and Taiwan.

He told the parliamentary committee reviewing the scheme this past February that "it would seem to me the problems that have arisen are not so much in the legislation, although that no doubt could be improved and fine-tuned in the manner I've described, but in the manner in which it has been administered."

"It is noteworthy that there is apparently, according to the transparency register, no organization in Australia that has any association with the United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China," he told the committee. "I would love to think that was true, but regrettably I can say absolutely that it is not true. If in fact it were true there would be terrible repercussions in Beijing for those responsible for the United Front Work Department."

"If the register simply contains reports of associations that are innocuous, and many of which are already in the public domain, then it may be that officials can congratulate themselves on faithfully implementing the law, but they're essentially doing a work-to-rule and not fulfilling the object of the legislation," Turnbull added.

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Editorial

House Speaker made an error in judgment, but he should not resign

The nonpartisan referee of the House’s video appearance at a partisan event has raised the ire of all opposition parties, and doubtless some in the government who are navigating yet another unforced error. The Conservatives and Bloc Québécois have even called for the Speaker’s resignation over the incident. It doesn’t matter that Fergus, according to his apology to the House, thought the taped video tribute to John Fraser was to be played at an “intimate gathering for a long-standing friend.” It doesn’t matter that Fergus, a Quebec MP, was not a member of the provincial party that played the video. It’s all about optics, and the House Speaker’s chair is going to be under an even more intense spotlight when it is being occupied by an ex-Young Liberals president and former Liberal national director, as is Fergus. The official opposition has already made clear exactly how much respect they had for Fergus before this incident with their carry-on not long ago as he outlined his vision for decorum in the House. With the donning of robes and the pressing of a record button, any moral high ground he may have held from that embarrassing display has evaporated. Operation Black Vote Canada, which encourages more Black Canadians to run for office, also said that the Speaker must be impartial, but said that “there is a wide

chasm” between the first Black Speaker’s “conduct and unhealthy partisan behaviour.” “This type of caustic hyperpartisanship demonstrated by members of the opposition has the real potential of discouraging people from seeking public office, particularly those who come from underrepresented communities,” it said. The video appearance does not appear at face value to be a sackable offence—especially given the circumstances in which his predecessor departed the role—but it does raise questions about the judgment of the Speaker, and the advice he is receiving. Former House of Commons clerk Audrey O’Brien told *The Hill Times* the decision was “mind-boggling” and said the incident “should be a real wake-up call for him that he needs to be more cautious in his approach.” The Speaker has access to a bevy of knowledgeable, intelligent staff in both his own office and in that of the clerk who are available to make sure this kind of thing doesn’t happen. Use them. At a time when trust in public institutions has been shattered by a pandemic, economic turmoil, and extremism, the last thing Canada needs is a Speaker who is seen to show favouritism. Get your act together, Mr. Speaker. For now, the nonpartisan’s future is in the hands of the partisans. *The Hill Times*

Letters to the Editor

Ridding the world of Hamas is a necessary first step: Alan Williams

Re: “Western media have contributed to the loss of truth in Gaza,” (*The Hill Times*, Nov. 15, by Lama Alsafi). Ms. Alsafi and I agree on many issues. I, too, am aghast at the horrific living conditions of the people in Gaza. I, too, deplore the tragic loss of life in Gaza since Oct. 7, and I, too, acknowledge that by failing to provide appropriate context, mainstream media often fail their audiences. Where we disagree, however, is in the timing and substance of this context. To me, we need to go back 76 years in history. In 1947, when the United Nations voted to partition the land, Israel accepted the decision and proceeded to build a society based on democratic principles, committed to a free society, supporting human rights and justice for all. The Arab countries immediately waged war. Israel integrated hundreds of thousands of refugees displaced from Arab lands into their society. The Arabs decided to leave their refugees in tents as pawns for the world to see. After 75 years of missed opportunities and self-serving decisions by its leaders, Gazans live in appalling conditions with a GDP per capita one-tenth that of Israel. Nonetheless, their leaders worth a staggering \$11-billion, revelling in luxury in Qatar. Gazans should be angry. But their anger should be directed at their own leaders, not at Israel. Their quality of life could have mirrored that of Israel. Whom you elect and what values you embrace make a difference. Another contextual oversight by Ms. Alsafi are the events of Oct. 7. On that day, Hamas terrorists invaded Israel and barbarically massacred 1,200 civilians. These were non-combatants, grandparents, parents and children, some attending a music festival, others spending

a peaceful Saturday morning in their homes—brutally and sadistically murdered with great glee. Hamas knew that their pogrom on Oct. 7 would trigger a military response. They knew that many citizens in Gaza would pay the price with their lives. They didn’t care. Ms. Alsafi claims that this is a genocidal war. She is right. Hamas has never hidden its genocidal ideology. It advocates for the elimination of the Jewish State of Israel. Ghazi Hamad, a senior member of Hamas, has hailed the systematic slaughter of civilians in Israel on Oct. 7, vowing, in an interview, that if given the chance the Palestinian terror group would repeat similar assaults many times in the future until Israel is exterminated. In contrast to Hamas, Israel is operating in war consistent with its values as a nation that treasures life. To minimize civilian deaths, Israel phones and drops thousands of leaflets into Gaza, informing the residents as to when and where bombings will occur so that they can get out of harm’s way. Israel has provided incubators for newborns, baby food and medical supplies to the Al-Shira hospital. As for Ms. Alsafi’s desire for a ceasefire, that will result in more—not fewer—deaths. A ceasefire simply provides Hamas with more time to retrench and rearm, thereby extending the war and risking the lives of more civilians. If Ms. Alsafi sincerely wants to help the people in Gaza, she should hope that Israel completes its mission as quickly as possible. Both the people living in Israel and those living in Gaza are entitled to live in peace. Ridding the world of Hamas is a necessary first step.

Alan Williams
Ottawa, Ont.

Poillievre’s threat to delay House break is ‘grandstanding’: North Vancouver letter writer

The current grandstanding by the Conservative Party, where MPs may be forced to stay in Ottawa and lose the Holiday break, is as anti-Democratic as it gets. I for one had already had a meeting with my MP postponed, as he had to stay

in Ottawa to deal with this mischievous tactic—now our new date for meeting with him is again in jeopardy if Pierre Poillievre and his radical way of politicizing even Christmas holds sway. Anne Birthistle
North Vancouver, B.C.



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DELIVERY INQUIRIES
circulation@hilltimes.com
613-688-8821

THE HILL TIMES
Published every Monday and Wednesday by Hill Times Publishing Inc.
246 Queen Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E4
(613) 232-5952
Fax (613) 232-9055
Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40068926
www.hilltimes.com

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Liberals have to fight back, hard

The Conservatives have already started their pre-election communications strategy and are well-funded to keep it going. If the government wants to remain in the game, it needs to get in the game.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



OTTAWA—P.T. Barnum once said that there is no such thing as bad publicity.

Oscar Wilde followed suit with this zinger: "There is only one thing worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre followed Barnum's advice by vowing to bring in thousands of amendments to legislation until the Liberals change some elements of their pollution pricing strategy.

Poilievre didn't call it "pollution pricing," but rather "carbon tax," which is how most Canadians seem to be viewing the issue. Government House Leader Karina Gould was quick to repudiate Poilievre's tactic, accusing him of being a bully, and "not a serious politician."

She also pointed out that Canadians earning less than \$50,000 are actually receiving more in their pockets because carbon pricing includes personal rebates.

Poilievre seems to be winning the ground war, and has not been damaged by his bully tactics on parliamentary bills.

Most Canadians are not watching the machinations of Parliament on a daily basis, but

they are feeling the pinch of inflation, and a hike in cost for basics like food and housing.

On the housing front, Poilievre dominated the headlines again, for good or for bad.

He released a 15-minute docudrama on housing which was widely quoted by pundits in both positive and negative news columns.

Globe and Mail columnist Gary Mason called the video "a dime-store analysis of our housing crisis."

Globe columnist Andrew Coyne, on the contrary, called it, "extremely impressive. Simplistic, tendentious, conspiratorial in places, but by the standards of most political discourse, it is a PhD thesis."

The video had legs. Within days of its posting, the docudrama had received more than three million views.

That compares with a prime ministerial upload the same day that received fewer than 100,000 views.

Liberal Housing Minister Sean Fraser joked that the Poilievre video got multiple views because of the opposition leader dialling in to watch himself perform.

Anyone can manipulate social media to inflate the number of views.

But the fact that the video occupied so much ink in mainstream media means that Poilievre was getting out his message.

The media and positive polling numbers have emboldened the Conservatives in the House of Commons.

Last week, one member was bounced out of the place for accusing the prime minister of lying on the carbon tax issue.

Alberta MP Damien Kurek ignored repeated invitations from the Speaker to withdraw his comments and was drummed out. Kurek almost immediately posted his exchange from the House on Twitter.

Meanwhile, a journalist for social media Insight has used the incident as a fundraising measure, inviting people who support Kurek to assist by sending money to a media PayPal account.

But this is no ordinary media strategy. Instead, Poilievre and the Conservatives plan to use every social media platform to promote their positions.

On these platforms there is no real rebuttal, so it doesn't matter much that a number of statements in Poilievre's housing video were simply false.

To follow the Barnum school of promotion, simply getting out the message on multiple platforms helps reinforce Poilievre's status.

Screaming matches in the House of Commons are intended to reinforce the Conservative message that the carbon tax needs to be axed.

Liberals have some great talking points to deflate the video, but talking points will not carry this day.

Instead, they need to get serious on social media, attacking the falsehoods that are being perpetrated by Poilievre.

Fraser issued his own video in rebuttal to Poilievre's housing claims.

But he is a single actor in the parliamentary story. Instead, the government needs to spend as much effort on rebuttals as it does on its own positive announcements.

As long as Canadians are talking about carbon tax and not a price on pollution, it is pretty simple to see who is winning this public relations battle.

But that doesn't necessarily equate to winning the war.

A hard-hitting rebuttal to the "dime-store" housing analysis needs to come from the Liberals, and it needs to involve social media saturation and paid media messaging.

The Conservatives have already started their pre-election communications strategy, and by all accounts, are well-funded to keep it going.

If the government wants to remain in the game, it needs to get in the game.

Any winning team needs a defensive and an offensive strategy.

By leaving the offence to Poilievre, Liberals look defensive. Only by going into attack mode will they win.

Sheila Copps is a former Jean Chrétien-era cabinet minister and a former deputy prime minister.

The Hill Times

Poilievre's miscues won't save Trudeau

Now I'm not arguing Justin Trudeau can't make a comeback. It'd be difficult, but doable. But for him to succeed, he can't just rely on Pierre Poilievre to fail.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit



OKVILLE, ONT.—According to some political observers, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's secret weapon is Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre.

That's to say, even though Poilievre is currently leading in polls, some believe he'll crash and burn before the next election, either because he'll commit political errors or because he'll be deemed too aggressive.

Now, I can certainly understand why some would hold this



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. According to some political observers, Trudeau's secret weapon is Conservative Poilievre, writes Gerry Nicholls. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade



view, but, in my opinion, it's a misreading of political reality.

But before I get into my own thoughts on this matter, let's review the "Poilievre is going to blow it" criticisms which have recently been leveled against the Conservative leader.

First off, Max Fawcett, a columnist for *The National Observer*, noted a few weeks ago that "If Justin Trudeau finds himself celebrating a political comeback for the ages at some point in 2025, he'll probably look back to this past week as the point where it began."

And apparently, it'll begin with Poilievre's decision to vote

against a free trade deal between Ukraine and Canada, since it includes a provision on carbon pricing.

Fawcett thinks such a stance will make it difficult for Poilievre to win over "moderate Central Canadian voters he needs to actually win an election."

Then Fawcett pointed out how during that same week, Poilievre refused to apologize for misrepresenting the recent fatal car crash at Buffalo's Rainbow Bridge as a terrorist attack; instead, says Fawcett, he "went on a meandering and mean-spirited tirade against a Canadian Press reporter who asked him about his comments."

"This" says Fawcett "was the Poilievre id on full display, stripped of the image makeover gurus and slick advertising campaigns."

Meanwhile, *National Post* reporter John Ivison also took aim at Poilievre for his tirade against that CP reporter, writing, "Poilievre's derisive and misleading response last week offered an opening for the Liberals to put doubt in the minds of the jury."

Nor were Fawcett and Ivison alone in making these observations, as I saw few other news stories headlined "Poilievre's bad week," which seemed to suggest Poilievre's empire was beginning to totter.

So why am I skeptical about these takes?

Well, to begin with, and this is something journalists sometimes have a hard time understanding, most people don't really pay much attention to political news, meaning Poilievre's stance on a Ukrainian-Canadian free trade deal is likely not on anybody's radar.

Indeed, foreign affairs is usually the last thing on people's priority list.

At the same time, I'm willing to bet not many Canadians will ever even realize Poilievre was allegedly mean to a CP reporter.

In other words, Poilievre's actions during his "bad week" didn't put doubt in the minds of the jury, because the jury wasn't listening, it was too busy worrying about the price of groceries.

Also keep in mind, Poilievre is currently high in the polls not because people necessarily like him or because they think he's a saint; he's high in the polls basically because he isn't Prime Minister Trudeau.

He's the "other guy."

My point is, Trudeau's problem is that people are simply getting tired of him (this is not surprising, as all politicians have a limited shelf-life) and because, rightly or wrongly, they blame him for Canada's souring economy.

Also, the more he hangs on, the more Canadians will grow weary of him. And if there's a recession, that'll only increase economic anxiety and thus further damage Trudeau's brand.

All of this will only make Poilievre look better.

Now I'm not arguing Trudeau can't make a comeback.

It'd be difficult, but doable.

But for him to succeed, he can't just rely on Poilievre to fail.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Opinion

Anger, apathy and despair drives democracy to the brink



U.S. President Joe Biden, left, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau are facing electorates that are not overly enamoured of either of their respective leadership choices at the next election, writes Michael Harris. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Voters are prepared to punish incumbents without liking the alternative. The candidate that voters dislike the least is the one they will likely be voting for—hardly what you can call robust democracy in action.

Michael Harris

Harris



HALIFAX—Is democracy becoming a form of hope in which people no longer believe?

A hint of that has surfaced in a number of ways that could be described as declining citizen interest: apathy toward elections, political events, public meetings, and voting itself. Ontario offers a disquieting insight into the depth of that apathy.

Just 43.53 per cent of eligible voters turned out for the last provincial election. Premier Doug

Ford won a majority government with a mere 18 per cent of Ontario voters. The number was even lower in Ontario's municipal elections, where only 36 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot.

Judging from the public's view of politicians, especially incumbents, there is more than a little evidence that democracy is more than just running a fever.

The most unpopular provincial leaders in Canada are the premiers of the country's two biggest provinces. Ontario's Ford has an approval rating of 34 per cent. His counterpart in Quebec, François Legault, sits at just 31 per cent.

At the federal level, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has an approval rating of 25 per cent, while a whopping 58 per cent disapprove of his performance. That adds up to a net -33 rating for the prime minister—a political death warrant in most circumstances.

But federal Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre isn't exactly setting records for personal popularity. Although the Conservative Party is a cab-ride ahead of the Liberals in popularity, just 37 per cent of Canadians had a favourable view of the leader of the opposition, against 33 per cent who held a negative view, according to recent polling.

So that means a modest plus-four favourability rating for Poilievre, but with a large block of Canadians still undecided. In other words, a lot could change between now and election day.

But at this moment, it appears as though voters are prepared to punish incumbents, particularly the ones in power during the COVID-19 pandemic, without being crazy about the alternative. The candidate they dislike the least is the one they will apparently be voting for. It is hardly what could be called robust democracy in action.

It is actually anger bordering on rage with a touch of despair. Canadians are angry and despairing about the cost of groceries, heating their homes, getting a house, and running their cars. Poll after poll shows Poilievre with a huge lead over Trudeau in all but two files: climate change and affordable childcare.

With very little policy detail, Poilievre is the resounding choice to lead the way on bringing down the cost of living and reducing the tax burden. Poilievre is betting the farm that Canadians are willing to give up the fight against climate change in exchange for cancelling the Trudeau government's carbon tax.

What will prove to be the thing that motivates voters when they take their next trip to the polls: saving the planet, or a few bucks on their taxes?

Poilievre can take heart that his bet, and his TikTok tactics, might just pay off if events playing out south of the border portend what could happen here.

As in Canada, Americans are not overly enamoured with either

of their presumptive presidential candidates in 2024. They are showing every sign of being tired of democracy, angry, and electorally vengeful.

U.S. President Joe Biden is caught between the same rock and hard place that is squeezing Trudeau towards the exit.

Faced with widespread anger over inflation, interest rates, immigration, and the sense that his country is somehow headed in the wrong direction, Biden faces a disapproval number even worse than Trudeau's—a crushing 63 per cent. A mere 37 per cent approve of his performance as president. The only number that is going up for Biden is his age—and at 81 years old, that is a problem for his campaign.

But here is the burning issue. The question that will be answered next November is how much are Americans prepared to give up to have their grievances dealt with and their prayers answered?

And this is where the conversation gets scary. The answer appears to be a reconsideration of democracy itself by taking a flier on Biden's likely adversary, Donald Trump. Astonishingly, Americans are flirting with a would-be dictator.

Unlike your run-of-the-mill sneaky rat, Trump has made no secret of exactly what he would do if elected president for a second time. It is a long, authoritarian, and ultimately dictatorial list. It is about as American as was Guantanamo Bay.

For starters, Trump wants to suspend the U.S. Constitution, which, ironically, he would have to swear an oath to at his own inauguration. Trump wants to ditch the Constitution in order to do away with all constraints on his other plan to "Make America Hate Again."

One of those plans is to do away with the separation of powers that is the foundation of U.S. governance, in order to exert executive control over the Department of Justice. Trump has talked about using the department to go after his enemies, people he recently referred to as "vermin."

Another of his plans is to round up, arrest, detain, and deport millions of undocumented migrants. That would require building detention centres to hold them until they could be processed and deported.

If Congress refuses to fund the plan, Trump could simply redirect funds from the Pentagon as he did in his first term to pay for building portions of his wall on the southern border with Mexico.

Trump has promised to immediately reinstate and expand his first-term travel ban on Muslims. He would also ban all refugees from Gaza, and subject others wanting to come to America to "ideological screening."

As for climate change, Trump has pledged to expand oil and gas exploration and drilling in remote areas of Alaska.

Coming from your garden-variety fascist, this would be risible stuff in the world's self-described greatest democracy. But Trump is also a convicted fraudster, sexual abuser, and epic liar currently facing four indictments and 91 criminal charges. And the public knows it.

The political cycle in America is so surrealistic that U.S. Senator Mitt Romney says he now just laughs when Trump makes another of his dictatorial, defamatory and dumbfounding declarations.

No one should be laughing. Without bothering to participate in any of the televised debates with other candidates seeking the GOP presidential nomination, Trump has maintained his death-grip on the Republican Party and its leadership.

Trump will also benefit from third party candidates because they will more likely peel off votes from Biden than from the former president.

More ominously, while Biden's numbers are dropping, Trump's are spiking. A recent NBC poll showed Trump with a four-point lead over Biden with young voters: 46 per cent to 42 per cent. Polls also show Trump leading nationally, and besting Biden in five of the six battleground states that will likely decide who goes to the White House in 2024.

"I am willing to go to jail if that what it takes to become a democracy again," Trump recently said.

How dire is the state of democracy in these angry times? A guy in an orange jumpsuit could end up as the leader of the Western World.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist. *The Hill Times*



Newly elected AFN National Chief Cindy Woodhouse addresses the Special Chiefs' Assembly in Ottawa on Dec. 7, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Is it better to talk about unity and not practise it, or not talk about it at all?

Somehow the AFN always ends up in this place when selecting leaders: culture fighting against progress. Decolonized leadership is about the capacity to grow. I'll vote for that.

Rose LeMay

Stories, Myths, and Truths



OTTAWA—The Assembly of First Nations gathered last week in Ottawa to elect a national chief. It was a marathon vote between a culture-is-comfort approach by Cindy Woodhouse, and the competence-for-change position of David Pratt. Somehow the AFN always ends up in this place when selecting leaders: culture fighting against progress.

Indigenous leadership is holistic, one cannot leave one's culture and values behind. Drumming, regalia, sometimes

religious-like prayer (let's leave the residential school impacts to a later conversation) are central to national chief platforms to varying degrees. The confounding issue about electioneering on culture is that there is no room at all for critique on a platform that is mostly on culture. The push-pull of culture and progress are visible at the AFN, and at many Indigenous groups around the world. For what would be the point of an AFN if there wasn't culture? So how do leaders lead with integrity including one's own culture, while leading a diverse bunch?

There is unspoken risk when culture is a plank in an election. How much culture is enough? Who gets to say how much is enough? Who is left out when some judge it to be enough? And then the next question: what is left off a platform when the majority of the planks are about culture?

Unity is always left out when culture leads. Hear me out.

Culture is about defining the lines of who is "us." Those lines sometimes exclude. To be honest, those lines always exclude. There are numerous cultures and they are each unique, so the lines between cultures are meant to define difference. So when one leads with one's own culture, unity is not a foundational value to the platform.

Leadership is about including those who are not included. Leadership success is measured about the success of all, leaving nobody behind. Right? And yet we

continue to allow leaders to lead only for people who look like them, and to exclude the others.

AFN delegates were speaking about the urgent need for unity in the days leading up to the chief's election. One wonders if the talk will lead to policies and funding decisions within the AFN that uphold the principle of unity? Or will First Nations regions continue to go their own ways and pursue their own priorities, leaving some communities behind. Is it worse to talk about unity, but not do it?

This is not a uniquely Indigenous issue. When culture or subgroup is central to a party or a candidate, the risks are raised for those who are not like them. This is a challenge facing the world today: parties, candidates, and countries which are about protecting one culture over another. It's called colonialism, and it might take us all down.

The national parties haven't really talked about unity in years. The politic today is all about how my group is losing more than your group, the worst of "tribalism". It's a fake dichotomy. And it's colonialism. It's certainly not unity, but maybe it's just too difficult to talk about unity these days? Unity doesn't sell to party insiders looking for power through wedge issues. So, is it worse to not talk about unity at all?

If we don't talk about unity, my guess is that we surely won't practice it. How do leaders lead with integrity, including one's own culture, while leading a diverse bunch? I say we talk about unity, and try again to practice it. This is what we need to do to decolonize. We need leaders who are willing to learn from other cultures, who are willing to deeply understand their own culture, and perhaps even grow in it.

Decolonized leadership is about the capacity to grow. I'll vote for that.

Rose LeMay is Tlingit from the West Coast and the CEO of the Indigenous Reconciliation Group. She writes twice a month about Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation. In Tlingit worldview, the stories are the knowledge system, sometimes told through myth and sometimes contradicting the myths told by others. But always with at least some truth.

The Hill Times



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A video of the event will be available after the meeting at idrc.ca.



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Canada

Opinion

Oil and gas industry's fancy foot-dragging wins the day, again



Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault, left, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, and Energy Minister Jonathan Wilkinson. The Trudeau government has abased itself to the fossil fuel industry leaders: buying a \$30-billion money-losing pipeline, sending millions of dollars to the province to clean up abandoned wells, writes Susan Riley. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

While the Conservative leader is busy trying to ‘ruin’ Trudeau’s holiday with procedural hi-jinks aimed at fighting the carbon tax, oil executives and their well-paid lobbyists can take comfort in their well-earned Christmas bonuses.

Susan Riley

Impolitic



CHELSEA, QUE.—It has been a splendid couple of weeks for the oil and gas industry.

Over the decades, it has gone from being the scourge of international climate conferences to running the show in Dubai at this month’s COP28. The conference president this year, Sultan Al Jaber, is also CEO of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, and has been credibly accused of using his contacts at the global gathering to promote LNG projects. Also, a record 2,456 oil company representatives from around the world are accredited delegates.

Al Jaber insists he accepts an eventual phase-out of fossil fuels, but—as always with these events—solemn commitments are larded with convenient bolt-

holes, vague language, extended deadlines, and a lack of serious enforcement measures.

So whether delegates at COP28 (which ends on Dec. 12) ultimately endorse a phase-out, a phase-down, or an end to “unabated” oil and gas production—that is, production facilities that don’t employ carbon capture utilization and storage (CCUS) to trap and defuse emissions—hardly matters. There will always be another conference, new targets, new strategies, no immediate threat to fossil fuel production, and no end to the damaging emissions destroying the planet.

More than a decade ago, Big Oil began casting itself as a partner in addressing climate change rather than an obstacle. It did this by promoting expensive, small-scale remedies like CCUS, and insisting that governments contribute significantly to larger, more dubious projects. It wasn’t hard in Canada. Chrystia Freeland’s latest federal economic update, for instance, reaffirmed billion-dollar federal loan guarantees for a massive CCUS pipeline in northern Alberta intended to collect and bury emissions from some 20 sites—although construction isn’t expected to start for some years, if ever. CCUS has not yet been proven to work on a large scale, and, where it is working, it is often used to extract *more* oil from nearly depleted wells.

The International Energy Agency recently warned that carbon capture will not be enough to mitigate emissions-causing climate change, but it remains a shiny, billion-dollar decoy that enables the industry to continue—and even expand—fossil fuel production.

The fossil fuel industry has also flooded Canada—and the world—with advertising in print and television featuring green

landscapes, ruddy-faced welders, Indigenous partners, smart women engineers—all puzzling over how to limit emissions while a dulcet-voiced narrator croons about the economic and environmental potential of “clean energy.”

That’s another thing it did: changed the words “oil and gas” to the more neutral “energy.” Years ago it erased “tar sands” from the vocabulary and replaced it with the less graphic “oil sands.” As for “natural gas,” that is an early marketing coup. “Natural” gas is composed mostly of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas that is a byproduct of oil production. Environmentalists have properly labelled it “fossil gas,” but you don’t find that daring phrase on the lips of many Canadian politicians.

This green-washing has been noted and widely deplored in environmental circles, including at the United Nations, but in the meantime it has bought the industry time. That, along with a veritable army of well-paid, event-toned, industry lobbyists who insist that the health of the planet is never far from their thoughts—as long as it doesn’t interfere with spiralling corporate profits, expanded production, and their own handsome paycheques.

In Canada, of course, the capture of our political class is complete. Alberta Premier Danielle Smith turns every timid attempt by the federal government to mitigate an obvious crisis into a personal insult and assault on her province’s “sovereignty” as she did again last week. She lives in an alternate universe in which she is an “equal” partner to the federal government, beholden, apparently, to no one except a sub-set of Alberta voters. And the oil industry.

The Trudeau government has abased itself, trying to woo her and other fossil fuel industry

spear-carriers: buying a \$30-billion money-losing pipeline, sending millions of dollar to the province to clean up abandoned wells and to cap methane emissions, insisting that somehow, magically, the oil industry can continue to expand while lowering emissions.

That fruitless campaign continues with two key announcements last week. After decades of consultations and years of delay, the Liberal government finally released its long-promised “cap” on emissions from oil and gas production—the leading single source of greenhouse gas emissions, nationally.

Only it isn’t a hard cap, but rather a cap-and-trade system that is less ambitious than originally proposed—aimed at emissions reductions of 35-38 per cent below 2019 levels, instead of the original 42 per cent—and it relies on an absurdly ambitious role for CCUS, on gradually tightening targets over time, and on contributions to a sort of technological swear jar, the so-called Decarbonization Fund, for polluters who keep on polluting.

The policy is incredibly complicated and can mean whatever people want it to mean. Will it significantly reduce emissions? Doubtful. The global market will do that eventually and Canada will be playing catch-up.

Above all—as federal ministers Jonathan Wilkinson and Steven Guilbeault were at pains to explain—the new measure is aimed at reducing pollution, not production. This neatly avoids constitutional (if not political) conflict since the feds are responsible for containing greenhouse gas emissions while provinces oversee natural resources—but a world of expanded fossil fuel production is not a climate-friendly world.

And it did not mollify Premier Smith, who denounced the federal moves as a “de facto” production cut, an attack on Alberta jobs and prosperity, and blatant unilateralism. This passionate outburst, including her recitation of a list of climate measures mostly taken by the previous provincial NDP government, is undermined by Alberta’s continually increasing emissions—higher than any other province or even G7 member.

Earlier last week, Guilbeault also pledged to reduce methane emissions, largely a byproduct of oil and gas production, by 75 per cent by 2030. If this sounds familiar, it is because in 2016, newly-elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau agreed to urgent action on methane with then-U.S. President Barack Obama.

Methane, a more powerful greenhouse gas than carbon, is relatively easy to capture but, even though it is often described as “low-hanging fruit” in the battle to contain emissions, governments have been slow to harvest, and oil companies unenthusiastic about plugging leaks. Some progress has been made thanks to “incentives,” but haltingly.

Guilbeault’s new policy isn’t likely to change that—at least not quickly enough. First, inspectors have to find the emissions which are massively under-counted. Then we wait until mid-2024 for draft regulations, and another year at least for publication of the final rules to kick in in 2030. The “cap” fossil fuel emissions has a similarly leisurely timeline, with yet more consultation and the final regulations not due until 2025.

But Wilkinson insists his flexible—even forgiving—regime will work, and notes that Pathways Alliance, a lobby group for Canada’s largest fossil fuel producers, “has been part of this”—i.e. part of developing the regulations for their own industry. Someone should tell Premier Smith.

Meanwhile, the five largest oil companies operating here amassed \$38-billion in profits in 2022. And Canada is expected to hit an all-time high in oil production in 2024 as the Trans Mountain pipeline starts pumping more crude from Alberta. This train is definitely going in the wrong direction, despite all the confounding programs, warring rhetoric, and fanciful claims. You only need to open your windows during wildfire season to realize that.

But, perhaps the greatest victory for oil and gas, is the knowledge that Pierre Poilievre could be prime minister by 2025, rendering all the Trudeau government’s blandishments futile, all the proposed new regulations moot, and—for the rest of us—worsening climate change a certainty.

While the Conservative leader is busy trying to “ruin” Trudeau’s end-of-year holiday with procedural hi-jinks aimed at fighting the carbon tax some more, fossil fuel executives and their well-compensated lobbyists can take comfort in a job well-done.

They’ve earned their Christmas bonuses this year.

Susan Riley is a veteran political columnist who writes regularly for *The Hill Times*.

The Hill Times

Indigenous human rights are not second-class rights



Without concerted leadership and ambition by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured on the Hill recently, and central agencies within the federal system, the UN Declaration Act risks becoming little more than symbolic legislation, writes Natan Obed. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The health and well-being of our communities depends on the success of this work which would usher in a new era in Canada as well as a gold standard internationally for the implementation of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Natan Obed

Opinion



Canada remains the first and only state to adopt national legislation to implement the rights affirmed by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, without concerted leadership and ambition by the prime minister and central agencies within the federal system, the UNDRIP risks becoming little more than symbolic legislation.

UNDRIP, which received royal assent in 2021, is intended to end and prevent systemic discrimination against Indigenous Peoples. It is not a list of principles or aspirational policy goals. Sec. 5 of the act obligates the federal government, in consultation and co-operation with Indigenous Peoples, to take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the UN Declaration.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami identified a number of measures to achieve this obligation,

including legislative amendments enabling Inuit cross-border mobility and immigration (Article 36); new federal legislation enabling the systematic repatriation of Indigenous human remains and belongings (Article 12); and legislative amendments that would make federal transfers to provincial and territorial governments contingent on meeting service delivery standards (Article 2).

Despite their obligations under Sec. 5, many federal departments declined to include clear legislative commitments in the action plan developed under the act,

making it unclear if and how Sec. 5 will be implemented. Following the release of the action plan in August 2023, some departments continue to lack the mandates needed to implement their own action plan commitments.

Canada has an opportunity to set a new standard internationally for the recognition and implementation of Indigenous human rights. Passage of the UNDRIP is a historic first step that can help close the legislative and policy gaps that harm Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples.

Stronger ambition is needed within government to ensure that Canada's laws are actively being aligned with the rights affirmed by the UNDRIP, and that this work is happening in a coordinated way. This requires the prime minister to direct his cabinet ministers to pursue transformative legislative and policy changes.

One promising area of work that could be advanced immediately is in relation to immigration and Article 36 of the UNDRIP. Inuit and other Indigenous Peoples are divided by Canada's international borders. Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada pledged in the action plan to pursue amendments to Canada's immigration legislation, and to address other barriers to mobility and immigration.

First Nations are already eligible to enter the United States and to apply for permanent residency there on the basis of their Indigenous status. The federal government in Canada currently discriminates against Inuit by declining to recognize Inuit treaty organizations in the list of Indigenous Peoples it provides to the United States government for the purposes of determining eligibility for permanent residency.

Inuit in Alaska, Canada, and Greenland are divided by artificial borders that serve as barriers to co-operation, trade, and economic development and mobility. Amending Canada's immigration legislation to affirm a reciprocal right for Greenland Inuit and Alaska Inuit, and other U.S. Indigenous Peoples to enter Canada and apply for permanent residency here would help eliminate longstanding legal barriers that divide and isolate Indigenous Peoples from each other.

The rights affirmed by the UNDRIP can only be implemented if they are interpreted as legal rights and implemented and enforced accordingly. Our human rights are not second-class rights and deserve the same protection as the rights of other Canadians.

The health and well-being of our communities depends in large part on the success of this work, which would serve to usher in a new era in Canada as well as a gold standard internationally for the implementation of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Natan Obed is president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national organization for protecting and advancing the rights and interests of Inuit in Canada.

The Hill Times

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Opinion

Language matters: it's time to retire the old-fashioned notion of 'not-for-profit'

Let's adopt a more accurate perception of the sector, one that acknowledges its economic contributions and the profound impact of its work.

Farah
Mohamed

Opinion



In Canada, the charitable sector alone comprises over 170,000 organizations, employing 2.5 million people, many of whom are among the brightest minds in the country, writes Farah Mohamed. *Photograph courtesy of Pexels*

Organizations operating within the charitable sector, or civil society at large, are commonly labelled as "not-for-profit." While this term intends to emphasize the altruistic mission of these entities, it inadvertently diminishes the significant role charities play in our economy and society. Beyond being a misnomer, this language is out of touch as individuals seldom identify themselves or others by what they are not. For example, I do not label myself as "not white" because of my brown skin, or "not male" because I am a woman. Likewise, I don't categorize myself as "not a fan of soccer" just because I am a tennis enthusiast. I define myself by what I am, especially if the negation refers to something I am, as is the case with not-for-profit organizations.

The common perception of not-for-profit (NFP) organizations often conjures images of well-meaning underdogs operating out of ramshackle offices, harried and adorned in tweed. However, this is far from the reality. In Canada, the charitable sector alone comprises over 170,000 organizations, employing 2.5 million people, many of whom are among the brightest minds in the country. From lawyers advocating for equality to doctors providing care in underserved communities, to former politicians running campaigns for food banks or climate change, or top fundraisers supporting cancer research or animal welfare. Collectively, it contributes a staggering \$198-billion to Canada's GDP, surpassing our mining or manufacturing sectors, respectively. This economic impact underscores the profitability of the NFP sector.

NFP groups do aim for profit, it's just that that profit is social. Instead of counting dollars and cents, we count lives impacted. Our shareholders are the communities we serve. We measure our profit in the number of refugees helped, the effectiveness of our advocacy on important issues like bail reform, how many breakfasts

we served for kids who otherwise would have gone hungry, the number of people we helped break life-threatening addictions, the houses we built for the homeless, the miles of nature we conserved, the ground-breaking research we funded, and the list goes on and on. All of that impact has follow-on benefits for society, because unlike monetary profit, social profit is exponential.

In a democracy, not-for-profit organizations also take on important advocacy roles, championing the rights of communities, and acting as a counterforce to any potential abuses of power. And in a capitalist system, where market forces can sometimes neglect human needs, the NFP sector steps in to fill the gaps, offering support where it is most urgently required. This safety net is not just a comforting concept, but is also a lifeline for countless Canadians facing hardship. Recognizing this multifaceted role underscores the importance of re-evaluating our perception of NFPs, appreciating them not just as do-gooders, but also as essential partners in creating a more just and compassionate society and strong economy.

It's time to retire the old-fashioned notion of "not-for-profit," and adopt a more accurate perception of the sector, one that acknowledges its economic contributions and the profound impact of its work.

Farah Mohamed is the founder of several charities including the Malala Fund, and is the current CEO of His Majesty King Charles III's charity in Canada.

The Hill Times

ENVIRONMENT

The Hill Times
Policy Briefing
December 11, 2023

STEVEN GUILBEAULT:

A GREAT, BIG

LOOK, BY

JESSE

CNOCKAERT

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tape and
roll out the
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Environment Policy Briefing

Guilbeault ‘can’t do it on his own’: progress on greenhouse emissions reductions should not rest solely with the minister, say environment experts, advocates

Canada is set to miss its target to reduce carbon emissions by at least 40 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, according to the latest report from the office of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault is “doing the best he can” to help Canada achieve its emissions reduction targets, but real progress on climate change will require consolidating responsibility across multiple federal departments, say environmental experts and advocates.

“[Guilbeault] can’t do it on his own. He has to have the support of other members around the table. He has to have the support of the prime minister and the support of the finance minister, and he needs support from Canadians as well,” said Robert O’Brien, a professor of political science at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. “I think if we’re falling short in our climate change goals, it’s not the fault of the environment minister.”



Robert O’Brien, a professor of political science at McMaster University, says that Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault ‘can’t do it on his own. He has to have the support of other members around the table.’ Photograph courtesy of Robert O’Brien



Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault said that ‘all sectors of our economy need to reduce their emissions, and that includes oil and gas companies,’ in an Environment Canada press release on Dec. 7, which announced the regulatory framework to cap oil and gas emissions. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canada is on track to miss its target to reduce carbon emissions by at least 40 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, according to an audit report from the office of Environment and Sustainable Development Commissioner Jerry DeMarco, released on Nov. 7.

That target of reducing emissions was outlined in Canada’s 2030 emissions reduction plan, which was released in March 2022. In its most recent projections, Environment Canada revised the emission reductions it expected to achieve from the measures in the plan to 34 per cent below the 2005 level, which would fall short of the 40 per cent minimum, according to the report.

The audit credited the 2030 emissions reduction plan

for including “strong measures for reducing emissions” such as carbon pricing, but argued that progress has been held back because of factors such as some of the measures lacking timetables for implementation. The audit also criticized the plan for a lack of reliability and transparency in economic and emission modelling, which led the government to make “overly optimistic assumptions about emission reductions.”

Since 1990, the federal government has developed more than 10 plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but Canada’s emissions were still higher in 2021 than they were more than three decades earlier, according to the audit.

O’Brien told *The Hill Times* this trend is “of considerable concern.” He said that achieving Canada’s climate targets will require focusing on the oil and gas and transportation industries, as the two biggest sectors contributing to emissions.

“Between those two sectors, that’s half of our emissions. If we could make progress on those two sectors, then that would be a considerable accomplishment,” he said. “The concern in the oil and gas sector is not simply that they’re not reducing, but they’re continuing to increase their emissions, and they’re continuing to increase their share of Canada’s total emissions. What that means is, if we want to make our targets, and the oil and gas sector doesn’t

participate, everybody else has to engage in even more cutting of emitting carbon.”

The audit report also argued that another barrier to reaching Canada’s targets is a fragmentation of responsibility among multiple federal entities when it comes to emissions reduction. Although the environment minister can collaborate with other ministers to meet emissions targets, they have no way of compelling other ministers to do more, according to the audit.

O’Brien argued this could be addressed through development of a “climate co-ordinator” role within the government who would be responsible for coordinating climate policy across different departments.

“I would say the first thing would be to prioritize the climate change emissions reduction across the government, and make different departments accountable for whether these things are implemented or not,” said O’Brien. “Secondly, I would say a renewed emphasis on the most important sectors—so, the oil and gas sector [and] the transportation sector—in highlighting which policies that the government are proposing are most likely to be most effective and in leading to emission reduction.”

Julie Gelfand, a distinguished fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Policy at the University of Toronto and a former federal environment commissioner, told *The Hill Times* that she considers Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.) to be “doing the best that he can inside the system.”

“[Guilbeault’s] position is exceedingly difficult, and it would be for any environment minister ... because they are literally the only person sort of speaking on behalf of things that cannot speak,” she said. “It’s a very tough job—that they have to try to figure out how to reduce the emissions with a huge industry that’s pushing to continue to operate, and whose economic ramifications are huge for our country.”

To help Canada reach its climate targets, Gelfand emphasized the need for a strong oil and gas emissions cap, and added that the federal government could more closely examine “nature-based solutions” to climate change.

“The one thing that they could continue and do more of is look at how restoring and protecting nature can become one of the tools to absorb carbon, from an adaptation perspective and even from a mitigation perspective” she said. “These [natural ecosystems] can help with both storing carbon, absorbing carbon, and helping us deal with the changes that we’re going to see in our climate like floods, etc.”

Alex Cool-Fergus, national policy manager for Climate Action Network Canada, told *The Hill Times* that Guilbeault has definitely shown a lot of leadership, but leadership must also be shown by other federal ministers on the climate file.

“It doesn’t make sense for all of the accountability of the emissions reduction plan to



Julie Gelfand, a Distinguished Fellow at the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy and a former federal environment commissioner, says the role of environment minister is ‘a very tough job’ because ‘they have to try to figure out how to reduce the emissions with a huge industry that’s pushing to continue to operate, and whose economic ramifications are huge for our country.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Alex Cool-Fergus, the national policy manager for Climate Action Network Canada, says ‘it doesn’t make sense for all of the accountability of the emissions reduction plan to really rely on the minister of the environment.’ Photograph courtesy of Alex Cool-Fergus

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Environment Policy Briefing

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland released the federal government's 2023 Fall Economic Statement on Nov. 21, which stated 'Canada will develop options for making climate disclosures mandatory for private companies.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Rapid and clear interventions needed in the financial sector if we are to move the needle on emissions reduction

Canada needs credible and consistent policy to provide clarity and guidance to the financial sector for the biggest economic transformation we have seen since the industrial revolution.

Independent
Senator
Rosa Galvez

Opinion



Last month's fall economic statement mentioned "Canada will develop options for making climate disclosures mandatory for private companies." The content of those disclosures is fundamental for what will follow concerning

the stability of our climate and financial systems. As a former Bank of England economist postulated: "Just discussing risks, and assessing risks, does not mean we are actually transitioning to net zero. Many firms may discuss risks—and do exactly nothing to advance the transition."

As discussed in my recently updated white paper on aligning Canadian finance with climate commitments, many studies show that the uptake for voluntary standards based on risks and opportunities has been limited in scope and depth, and has not resulted in meaningful change. The current focus of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions on disclosing risks and opportunities falls "short of incentivizing the transition to a net-zero emissions economy" according to a report by the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

What we need is a focus on real-world impacts and planning for a transition, like the United Kingdom and Europe are doing. Bill S-243, the Climate-Aligned Finance Act (CAFA) requires the consideration and planning of

the only scenario that matters: the one set to avoid dangerous climate change. It is about disclosing action, including the plans and the progress towards achieving decarbonization and climate safety. It is about ensuring we use science-based criteria, and focus on information useful for decision making to guide our economy's transformation. It is our national equivalent to what the U.K. Transition Plan Taskforce is putting forward, as I had the pleasure to learn by sharing a stage with Professor Ben Caldecott, the co-head of its secretariat, while discussing CAFA at COP28 along with Catherine McKenna.

The Climate-Aligned Finance Act is widely seen as the missing piece of policy the financial sector needs to align its activities with a climate-safe future that fosters a multi-decade clean investment boom from which the government could draw inspiration. While we cannot alter the biological, physical, or chemical laws governing our planet, we can undoubtedly amend our economic and financial system to be future proof because they no longer address

humanity's needs in the context of a warming planet.

Recent polling conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights shows that about two-thirds (65 per cent) of Canadians want "new sustainable finance regulations in the financial sector," and the "majority of Canadians support both banks and pension funds practicing sustainable finance." Additionally, "over three-in-four (78 per cent) support the government passing new greenwashing regulations in the financial sector, with more than four times more preferring mandatory rather than voluntary regulations." In general, respondents to the poll said they want the long-term good of society to be prioritized over short-term profits.

The government could also be inspired by the process used to develop CAFA when it decides who gets to weigh in on 'the options' to be developed. The Act was created in collaboration with dozens of national and international experts, and is grounded in climate science, financial expertise, and the best international regulatory and voluntary practices. In short, the process we adopted modeled the best prac-

tices of open parliaments, which favour a holistic understanding of the interdependence of complex problems such as climate change and finance, and the development of evidence-based policies.

Since its introduction, CAFA has received the backing of more than 120 civil society endorsers including Vancity, Caisse d'économie solidaire Desjardins and impact investment firms. It was also endorsed by MPs from four of the five parties in the House of Commons who also put forward a motion in the House of Commons calling on the government to use all its legislative and regulatory tools to align the financial sector with the Paris Agreement. It has been presented and discussed with hundreds of experts at more than a hundred national and international events.

We need credible and consistent policy to provide clarity and guidance to the financial sector for the biggest economic transformation we have seen since the industrial revolution. The Climate-Aligned Finance Act comprehensively provides investors with the certainty and security they need to invest in Canadian capital markets, helping to ensure Canada's investment-readiness well into the future while maintaining the competitiveness of our economy in a global market which increasingly values sustainable investment opportunities.

We have to future-proof the economy; aligning the financial system with our climate commitments is the way to do it.

Rosa Galvez is an environmental engineer, a professor at Laval University, and has served as an Independent Senator in Canada for the province of Quebec since 2016. She is a member of the Senate's National Finance Committee.

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Guilbeault ‘can’t do it on his own’: progress on greenhouse emissions reductions should not rest solely with the minister, say environment experts, advocates

Continued from page 16

really rely on the minister of the environment. That doesn’t make sense, given that he doesn’t have any more power over his other colleague ministers than anyone else,” said Cool-Fergus. “We need to see finance step up, we need to see housing step up, we need to see the Treasury Board step up. These are all ministers that have important roles in sectors that are meaningful if we’re talking about reducing Canada’s emissions, and we need to see them be more accountable and take more of a leadership role.”

To help address emissions, Cool-Fergus argued the federal government should consider a re-capitalization of the Greener Homes Grant in the federal budget. The Greener Homes Grant program, launched by the federal government in 2021, provides homeowners with up to \$5,600 dollars to retrofit their homes to make them more energy efficient.

“It’s been a really successful program. It’s something that has really tangible impact on people’s daily lives, and it must not be forgotten as the government moves forward,” she said.

Anna Kanduth, director of the Canadian Climate Institute, told *The Hill Times* that the findings of DeMarco’s audit are not surprising, but the report also shows that progress is being made in terms of emissions reductions.

“What the emissions reduction plan shows is that, in Canada, for the first time, we have a comprehensive plan for how policies can bend the curve to reduce emissions,” she said. “Yes, it’s not enough currently to get to that 40 per cent target, but I think too often we think of climate targets and policy progress as a pass/fail test, when in reality we need to be looking at where progress is being made.”

Kanduth argued that the first priority should be to finalize the policies from the emissions reduction plan that account for the 34 per cent reduction by 2030.

“I think before we start looking to the other six per cent, we need to focus on that 34 per cent, and make sure that all of those policies are delivering the emissions reductions that the government’s modelling suggests,” she said. “Then at the same time, I think the government can start to look for other ways to close the gap to 2030. That might include strengthening existing policies,

whether that be tightening up the output-based pricing system. Or it might include introducing new or stronger policies, whether that be going even deeper on methane reductions.”

Keith Brooks, programs director at Environmental Defence, told *The Hill Times* that Guilbeault is “doing the best that he can in the circumstances that he is in,” adding that his power to deliver on his agenda is limited.

“You really do need this all-of-government approach, and we certainly need the Prime Minister’s Office as well to be really ... committed to and contributing to driving this change in delivering on the emissions reductions plan,” said Brooks. “We really do need the prime minister to get involved here. If he says he is a climate champion, he’s got to really show it.”

Oil and gas emission cap framework announced

Ottawa’s long-awaited framework plan to cap oil and gas emissions was released on Dec. 7 by Guilbeault, revealing that the fossil fuels industry will need to cut emissions by more than one-third within the next seven years. The regulatory framework proposes to cap 2030 emissions at 35 to 38 per cent below 2019 levels. To offer some flexibility, the plan also allows facilities to buy a limited amount of “carbon offset credits,” or to contribute to a decarbonization fund, which would permit them to emit up to a level about 20 to 23 per cent below 2019 levels.

Guilbeault called the emissions cap plan ambitious but practical in an Environment Canada press release on Dec. 7.

“Every sector of Canada’s economy must do its part to combat climate change and build a safe, prosperous, and healthy future for Canadians. All sectors of our economy need to reduce their emissions, and that includes oil and gas companies,” said Guilbeault in the press release. “[The emissions cap plan] considers the global demand for oil and gas—and the importance of the sector in Canada’s economy—and sets a limit that is strict, but achievable.”

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), an international public policy research think tank that advances policy recommendations on issues including international trade and investment, economic

policy, and climate change, called Ottawa’s regulatory cap on oil and gas sector emissions “ground-breaking,” and “a welcome step forward,” but also criticized the inclusion of measures allowing flexibility for firms that exceed the reduction targets.

In a Dec. 7 press release, the IISD argued that carbon offsets are often ineffective for reducing overall emissions, and that payments to a decarbonization fund “do not equate to emissions reductions at all as any future

emissions reductions from clean technology would already be accounted for under the cap.”

The regulatory framework drew strong criticism from the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP), an organization with member companies that produce about 80 per cent of Canada’s natural gas and oil. Lisa Baiton, president and CEO of CAPP, argued that Ottawa’s cap on emissions could result in “significant curtailments” on fossil fuel production, despite assuranc-

Canada’s Emissions Reduction Plan:

- In 2021, the Government of Canada committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions to between 40 to 45 per cent below the 2005 level by 2030.
- The federal government is not on track to meet the 2030 target. Since 1990, the federal government has developed more than 10 plans to reduce emissions. It has spent billions of dollars on developing and implementing plans. Despite these efforts, Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions were higher in 2021 than they were in 1990.
- From 2005 to 2021, emissions decreased by eight per cent. This means that the bulk of reductions need to occur in the years ahead to meet the 2030 target. Canada has been the worst performer of all Group of Seven countries since 1990 and since 2005 in reducing emissions.
- Environment and Climate Change Canada estimated that the measures in the 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan (published in March, 2022) were not expected to reduce emissions to the extent needed to meet the target. Environment Canada projected that the 2030 plan would decrease Canada’s total emissions to about 470 megatonnes of carbon

dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂ eq) in 2030, but to meet the target from the 2030 plan, emissions should be reduced to no more than 443 Mt CO₂ eq. As a percentage, the plan projected 2030 emissions to be reduced to 36.4 per cent below the 2005 level. Although this would be a significant achievement and change in trajectory for Canada’s emissions, it falls short of Canada’s commitment to reducing emissions to 40 to 45 per cent below the 2005 level by 2030.



The oilsands in Fort McMurray, Alta. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

Source: 2023 reports of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, released on Nov. 7, 2023

Canada’s Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions:

- Canada’s total GHG emissions in 2021 were 670 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO₂ eq), a 1.8 per cent increase from 659 Mt CO₂ eq in 2020.
- From 2005 to 2021, Canada’s GHG emissions decreased by 8.4 per cent (62 Mt CO₂ eq).
- Between 1990 and 2021, Canada’s GHG emissions increased by 13.9 per cent (82 Mt CO₂ eq).
- While the overall trend between 1990 and 2021 was an increase in GHG emissions, some sectors saw a decrease. Canada’s overall emissions growth over the 1990 to 2021 period was driven primarily by increased emissions from the oil and gas as well as the transport sectors. The 8.4 per cent decrease in GHG emissions between 2005 and 2021 was mainly a result of emission reductions from the electricity and heavy industry sectors.
- In 2021, the oil and gas sector and transport sector were the largest GHG emitters in Canada, accounting for 28 per cent and 22 per cent of total emissions, respectively
- In 2021, the top five emitters (Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and British Columbia) together released 91 per cent of Canada’s national total GHG emissions.

Source: Greenhouse gas emissions (updated April 2023), Canada.ca

es from the Liberal government that the proposed emissions cap only sets a limit on pollution, and not on production.

“At a time when the country’s citizens are experiencing a substantial affordability crisis, coincident with record budget deficits, the federal government risks curtailing the energy Canadians rely on, along with jobs and government revenues the energy sector contributes to Canada,” said Baiton in the press release. “An emissions cap on the upstream oil and natural gas industry is unnecessary, given the longstanding carbon policies which already have Canada well on its way to meet or exceed emission targets.”

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith also condemned the proposed cap, arguing that singling out the oil and gas industry, which is predominantly focused in her province, is “a clear violation of the Constitution,” as reported in CBC News on Dec. 7. She called Guilbeault an “eco-extremist” minister, and vowed to establish a “constitutional shield” to keep Ottawa out of Alberta’s affairs, as reported by CTV News on Dec. 7 jcnockaert@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Let's cut the red tape and roll out a green carpet for clean-tech solutions in Canada

Apoorv Sinha

Opinion



There's a lot to disagree about when it comes to fighting climate change. Reasonable people can advocate for very different policies and approaches. What no one can dispute, however, is the need to move faster—and specifically for governments to do their part by clearing a path to deploy new technologies and solutions as soon as they become available.

Right now, this isn't happening, and it's hampering the ability of Canada's cleantech industry to scale and put a real dent in emissions.

Ironically, some of the regulations that were meant to protect the environment are now endangering it. This is because some mandatory review processes needlessly add years and millions of dollars to the deployment of new clean technologies.

The bottom line is this: the planet can't wait, and the government of Canada shouldn't either. Instead, we need to follow the example of other jurisdictions, like the European Union, where cleantech fast-track programs are poised to slash approval processes and help rush new technologies forward.

To compete, Canada needs to do these three things fast:

Trust and verify climate-relevant projects:

Projects that are proven by independent assessments to reduce pollution, save water, or capture greenhouse gases should not have to go through long approval processes which can currently take up to two years.

This means carbon emission reduction projects like the use of alternative fuels, material substitution or improved water efficiency projects get fast-tracked with pre-approvals or significantly reduced compliance measures.

Robust monitoring schemes should be mandated during the project operations

to ensure their impacts are legitimate, but these shouldn't stall progress in getting shovels in the ground.

Mandate faster approvals for green industrial projects:

Projects that are designed to help the environment should not be held up by the process of getting environmental permits. The government should mandate approvals of large industrial projects faster: within six months for projects costing up to C\$10-million, and within a year for those over C\$100-million.

On average, environmental permits require two to four rounds of feedback between the applicant and the local agency before final approval, each costing between one to three months of precious time. This could be sped up by limiting the process to just one round of clarifications.

Boldly use Canada's world-class expertise in carbon capture, utilization and storage:

Canada already punches above its weight in carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS), and is responsible for 10 per cent of industrial CCUS projects in the world. Canada also boasts more than a dozen world-class carbontech companies producing marketable products and scaling globally.

Instead of running a hamster wheel of information-gathering forums and RFIs to collect best practices from around the world, Canada should use its in-house expertise on large-scale CCUS projects like the Quest, and the Alberta Trunk Line Carbon Capture and Storage Projects to fast-track similar initiatives across the country.

It's time Canada shifted the onus from permissions to start a project to enabling rapid project deployments with robust and continuous monitoring during operation.

At Carbon Upcycling Technologies, we have two projects that alone could reduce emissions by over 30,000 tonnes of CO₂ per year. The current regulatory burden risks delaying each by up to six months at a likely cost of \$2-million to \$3-million. And this is just one Canadian company.

If we want Canada to be a country of choice for cleantech entrepreneurs, then we need to create the right conditions where innovators can succeed. Canada is projected to capture over 40 million tonnes of CO₂ by 2030. Today, it captures less than five million tonnes. Yet right now, there are no new projects slated to definitively come online for the next six years.

It took decades to understand the full lifecycle benefits of various biofuel production methods and similarly, it'll take time to identify the best pathways to storing or utilizing carbon, producing green hydrogen or lower emissions at major industrial plants.

We need to do better and the best way to develop these pioneering technologies is to build, test and improve. We need more rapid iteration and less regulation stopping climate entrepreneurs right at the starting line.

This is why it's time for Canada to cut the red tape and roll out a green carpet. We have world-beating technologies and the sooner they make it into the marketplace, the sooner we will see the carbon reduction results we need and the clean jobs that go with them.

Apoorv Sinha is the co-founder and CEO of Carbon Upcycling Technologies, based in Calgary, Alta.

The Hill Times

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Environment Policy Briefing

A Youth Climate Corps would put workers and the climate first. Why won't Trudeau make it happen?

We owe it to young people to do everything in our power to provide real hope and to fight the climate crisis like we want to win.

NDP MP Laurel Collins

Opinion



A few weeks ago, U.S. President Joe Biden announced the American Climate Corps, a massive green jobs program to help tackle the climate crisis, and to get young people good paying jobs. But on this side of the border, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been silent.

In Canada, this past summer was the worst forest fire season on record, forcing over 100,000 people to flee their homes. Record-breaking heatwaves and extreme weather events are endangering our health, and putting vulnerable people more at risk than ever before. We need



On Sept. 20, U.S. President Joe Biden announced the American Climate Corps, a massive green jobs program to help tackle the climate crisis and get young people good paying jobs, writes NDP MP Laurel Collins. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

to see more change to tackle the climate crisis.

Biden's Climate Corps will mobilize young people in the United States, create new jobs, support conservation efforts, and address the climate crisis. It is a public program designed to train and employ young people in industries that fight climate change, and to develop the skills necessary for the clean energy sector, developing climate resilient infrastructure and conservation efforts.

In its first year, the American Climate Corps will employ more than 20,000 young Americans, and set them on a path of good-paying unionized jobs.

The Climate Corps is an idea that originated in 2017 from the

Sunrise Movement, a youth-led organization dedicated to fighting the climate crisis. It was a key component of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Green New Deal, and Bernie Sanders' platform in his 2020 presidential bid. Here in Canada, I was proud to push for a Civilian Climate Corps during the 2021 election as part of Jagmeet Singh and the NDP's platform commitments. But disappointingly, we have yet to hear the Liberal government talk about a Climate Corps. This is a disservice to all Canadians, but especially youth.

Trudeau likes to talk about the climate, but he's repeatedly failed to respond to the scale and urgency of the climate emergency. When the NDP forced the Lib-

erals to end fossil fuel subsidies, Trudeau still found a way to create loopholes to continue funding big oil companies.

The Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault claims Canada is a climate leader, but the truth is that our country is a climate laggard with the worst performance in the G7 on climate action. Canada's emissions are still going up, in no small part because the oil and gas industry here is increasing their emissions every year.

The Liberals talk about wanting to support young people and fight the climate crisis, but if they were serious about these promises, they would follow in Biden's footsteps and implement a Youth Climate Corps in Canada.

Since the Liberals have refused, I have tabled a motion calling on the government to create a Youth Climate Corps.

This motion would be a large-scale national program aimed at young people that would provide paid opportunities to work on projects that protect the environment, restore ecosystems, respond to extreme weather events, reduce our emissions, make communities more resilient, and build the new climate infrastructure we need. And, when they complete their service, they would be able to access free post-secondary education, or training in the sustainable jobs of the future.

This will allow the next generation of young people to receive on-the-job training, participate in projects to fight climate change and natural disasters, and build a better future for both Canada and the planet. This program would not only employ thousands of young people, but it would also reduce our carbon emissions, incorporate environmental justice, and set our youth on a path of success.

Young Canadians don't need to be told there is a climate crisis: they're aware that the climate emergency is here now. This summer was a glimpse into their future. Young people across the country are no longer looking to the prime minister for hope. His "sunny ways" are over.

Young people are ready for change. That is why on Nov. 30, over 600 youth submitted mock-cover letters to the Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland and the Minister of Youth Marcia Ien letting them know that if a Youth Climate Corps existed, they would apply to work.

We owe it to young people to do everything in our power to provide real hope, and to fight the climate crisis like we want to win. Today's youth will live with the effects of climate change for their entire lives, and they want to be part of the solution. The prime minister must start putting people and the planet first, and he can take an important first step by supporting New Democrats plan to create a national Youth Climate Corps.

NDP MP Laurel Collins, who represents Victoria, B.C., is her party's environment and climate change critic, as well as the deputy critic for families, children, and social development.

The Hill Times

Adopting clean technology is a skills issue

Among the solutions like renewables and tax levers, Canada should be all-in on clean technology adoption which offers immediate-term benefits critical to achieving climate wins.

Alyssa Buttineau

Opinion



The urgency of climate change action is no longer theoretical. Fires, floods, and extreme heat worldwide have made it clear that

we have a major global challenge on our hands.

Among the solutions, Canada should be all-in on clean technology adoption. While renewables are increasingly viable, and tax levers have proven to influence company and consumer behaviour, clean-tech offers immediate-term benefits that are critical to achieving climate wins.

This is where educational institutions offer an important bridge.

As part of its net-zero ambitions, the Canadian government has committed to reducing emissions to 40 per cent of 2005 levels by 2030. A key element was the introduction of an \$8-billion Net-Zero Accelerator Fund, which requires companies to take the lead.

That can be a lot to ask, particularly when the vast majority of Canadian businesses are small. Without the internal resources to test new equipment, build a skilled workforce, and integrate new technologies into their operations, investing in new

technology can seem an unsurmountable challenge.

Distinguished by their emphasis on industry collaboration, practical skills development and responsiveness to real-world needs, polytechnic institutions have an important part of play in Canada's sustainable future.

With state-of-the-art facilities and the expertise to help companies navigate cutting-edge technology adoption, polytechnic applied research helps firms explore the solutions to reduce their environmental footprint.

For instance, Ethey Foods partnered with Fanshawe with the goal of finding a way to make the company's meal containers more eco-friendly. Their applied research partnership has pioneered a new plastic recycling technology that reduces used plastic into either a liquid or powder form which is, in turn, used to create new plastic packaging.

At another polytechnic—the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology—their Green Building Technologies Tech-Access

Centre partnered with the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association on a multi-year retrofitting project designed to enhance energy efficiency at friendship centres across the province.

But helping businesses adopt green technologies and reduce emissions is only half the battle. As sustainability becomes a nationwide objective over the next decade, experts expect 3.1 million Canadian jobs will be impacted.

In addition to training new workforce entrants, polytechnic institutions are playing a crucial role in preparing mid-career professionals for the green economy shift.

Humber College's tailored micro-credential programs provide specialized courses to upskill mid-career workers in green and digital technologies, enabling people to stay relevant and effective in their fields.

The Northern Alberta Institute of Technology has also launched a national clean fuels online program. The program consists

of self-paced training modules and webinars to increase awareness of clean fuels and technologies for academic, industry and government stakeholders, with accessible tools available to the public.

Simply put, having people ready to lead the implementation of clean technology solutions is as important as the technology itself.

As governments around the world grapple with the competing realities of today's urgencies—food security, housing shortages, war and inflation—along with the long-term best interests of the planet, partners who can help carry the load are critical. Canada's polytechnics are ready for the challenge, introducing clean technology to their business partners and ensuring the workforce is ready to maximize their impact.

Alyssa Buttineau is a policy analyst at Polytechnics Canada, a national association of the country's leading polytechnic institutions.

The Hill Times

Canada needs to up its game on climate finance



Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault is leading the Canadian delegation to the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from Nov. 30 to Dec. 12, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Group. Abu Dhabi will host the Global Climate Finance Centre (GCFC) to accelerate the development of climate finance frameworks and skills, and champion best practices both in the UAE and globally. The GCFC aims to address key barriers linked to financial frameworks that hinder investment flows, to help make climate finance available, affordable, and accessible as a COP28 legacy for action.

But even these new institutions are not close to the kind of reshaping of global financial flows advocated by a growing list of countries. Barbados' Prime Minister

Mia Mottley, herself a graduate from the London School of Economics, backed by no less than Lord Nicholas Stern, former World Bank chief economist, is calling for systems of global governance over new revenue flows. A small levy on travel, a carbon price on global shipping, and the transaction tax known as the Tobin tax could provide the sustainable funding at scale that will be required, both in addressing economic losses due to climate events and funding the rapid and massive investment needed for the shift to renewable energy. At COP28, the call for reforming the multilateral development banks such that they be fit for purpose in a polycrises world is frequently heard.

All of this suggests we urgently need a new Bretton Woods to put in place rules and institutions to ensure human society can navigate and survive the coming storms.

Elizabeth May is the Green leader and MP for Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.
The Hill Times

Measures for greater transparency and development of a new taxonomy for climate finance made up a small and unambitious section of the Fall Economic Statement.

Green Party
Leader
Elizabeth May

Opinion



DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES—Here at COP28, one of the hot topics is climate finance.

The innovations under discussion remind me of the kind of globally re-organizational changes at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference than of the changes inked at Conferences of the Parties (COPs).

In our Parliament, the most forward-looking work on climate finance is ISG Senator Rosa Galvez's Bill S-243, the Climate-Aligned Finance Act. Bill S-243 is the gold standard for the rules and regulations one would want to align actions of banks, insurance companies, pension plans, and other financial institutions with climate goals. One would wish the government to not only adopt and support S-243, but also to reintroduce it as government legislation in the House, and advance it to royal assent.

We are seeing snail's-pace progress in Canada with such things as the adoption of Guideline B-15 on Climate Risk Management by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions. Measures for greater

transparency and development of a new taxonomy for climate finance made up a small and unambitious section of the fall economic statement.

Meanwhile, "climate finance" at COPs tend to be one-off announcements of financial commitments to the various funds opened in connection to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We already have an "Adaptation Fund," and Global Environmental Facility, the Global Climate Fund, and the dwindling funds of the Kyoto's now-mothballed Clean Development Mechanism. At COP27 last year, the long-debated Fund for Loss and Damage was finally put in place. COP28 opened with funding pledges to start implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund with real dollars. But even with \$100-million from the United Arab Emirates, \$100-million from the United States, and a similar amount from the European Union, the amount in the fund hovers at around \$400-million. As one World Bank representative put it in a gathering of parliamentarians: two major storms will wipe out all the commitments made at COP28.

Other big amounts that move the needle on financing were announced at COP28. ALTERRA, a US\$30-billion catalytic climate vehicle, has been trumpeted as promoting international efforts to create a fairer climate finance system with an emphasis on improving access to funding for the Global South. This program has Mark Carney's fingerprints all over it. Carney has been designated the UN special envoy for Climate Action and Finance, and co-chair for the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero. ALTERRA will aim to mobilize US\$250-billion globally by 2030, steering private markets towards climate investments with a focus on transforming emerging markets and developing economies.

Also announced here in Dubai is a collaboration involving the UAE government with members forming a who's who of global capital: ADQ, Blackrock, HSBC, Masdar, Ninety One, and the World Bank

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Environment Policy Briefing

Canada must stay the course on its push to tackle plastic pollution

The Liberal government is considering an appeal of a Federal Court's Nov. 16 decision which overturned Canada's ban on single-use plastic.

Elaine MacDonald & Lindsay Beck

Opinion



A decision from the Federal Court last month upended Canada's agenda on plastics.

As governments from around the world gathered in Nairobi to negotiate a UN treaty to end plastic pollution, the court challenge

brought by the plastics industry upset Canada's domestic plans to do its part.

The judgment in Responsible Plastic Use Coalition *et al v. Canada* quashed the order listing plastic manufactured items on Schedule 1 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. That order was the legal foundation for national efforts to curb plastic pollution, including a regulation banning six of the most harmful single-use plastics.

The judgment could change everything

Canada's bid to work industry-wide with retailers to reduce plastic packaging on grocery shelves, set recycled plastic resin content and recyclability labelling rules, and its regulation banning unnecessary single-use plastics are now all in limbo thanks to the legal challenge brought by a coalition of the country's biggest plastic producers.

What hasn't changed? The scourge of plastic pollution

Plastic production has increased faster than any other material, and with that so has the rate of increase of plastic pollution. Plastic remains one of the most persistent and pervasive pollutants on earth. Plastic from a straw or take-out container tossed away today remains in the environment for hundreds of years. Canadians throw out more than three million tonnes of it each year. Less than 10 per cent of that is recycled. Too much of it ends up as plastic pollution where it harms human health and the environment.

Plastic pollution in the marine environment strangles animals, smothers coral reefs, and accumulates on shorelines. Seabirds are ingesting so much plastic a new illness has been coined: "plasticosis", the inflammation of birds' digestive tracts from eating

plastic as it breaks down in the environment.

The plastic pollution and climate crises are intertwined

More than 99 per cent of plastics are made from fossil fuels. In fact, the climate crisis and the plastics crisis are intimately linked through the fossil-fuel based petrochemical industry. Plastics contribute to global warming across their lifecycle—they are predicted to reach 15 per cent of the global carbon budget by 2050 if current plastic production trends continue unabated.

There is growing evidence of threats to human health too. Studies have detected microplastics—the tiny fibres shed from synthetic fabrics and particles that plastic items break down into as they degrade—in the blood of 80 per cent of people tested. Thousands of the chemicals associated with plastics are linked to cancer, damage nervous systems, and alter the actions of hormones.

That's why, despite this setback from the court, the federal government must stay the course

We welcome the Attorney General's announcement that Canada will appeal the court's ruling. Also welcome are Canada's efforts to push for strong and ambitious global commitments to tackle the plastics pollution crisis

at the UN Global Plastics Treaty negotiations.

At the Nairobi round, which ended in deadlock, the fossil fuel and chemical industries registered more lobbyists to attend than the representatives of 70 countries combined. The next round of negotiations will come to Ottawa in April. Industry lobbyists bent on avoiding caps or curbs on production are expected again to be out in force.

We need continued strong national leadership to tackle the plastic pollution crisis

Better waste management, however, is not going to fix this crisis. Provincial and municipal actions are welcome, but they too aren't enough to address an environmental crisis of this scale.

Plastic pollution is ubiquitous, persistent, and increasing exponentially. Canada will not achieve its goal of zero plastic waste by 2030 without a national effort. And industry won't act without being pushed.

Polling consistently shows that the overwhelming majority of Canadians are concerned about the impact of plastic pollution.

The costs of inaction are too great for Canada to let a setback in the courts win out.

Dr. Elaine MacDonald is the healthy communities program director at Ecojustice. Lindsay Beck is a lawyer with Ecojustice.

The Hill Times

Health-care sector needs to reduce environmental harm as it heals

Environmental pollution caused by the health sector can lead to a chain reaction of public health consequences.

Kendra Frey

Opinion



Canada is fortunate to have one of the most highly regarded healthcare systems in the world when it comes to access to patient care, but it also has a lesser-known dark side.

We are unintentionally harming the planet while we are trying to heal patients. Hospitals and the supply chain that makes up our overall health-care system cause significant pollution that has serious health impacts for many patients.

Our health sector is among the worst performers across the globe in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, coming in as the world's third-highest polluter per capita, according to recent research.

The research found that healthcare is responsible for nearly five per cent of Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions, as well as more than 200,000 tons of other pollutants, resulting in 23,000 years of life lost every year from disability or early death. Emissions tied to our health sector have roughly the equivalent carbon footprint of 514 coal-fired power plants.

The environmental pollution caused by our health sector leads to a chain reaction of public health consequences. As more people become ill because of climate change and environmental pollution, they require more treatment and put more pressure on an already-strained system, which also contributes to more pollution.

We need leadership, urgent policy action, and innovative thinking from all levels of government and all stakeholders in the healthcare supply chain to

reduce our environmental impact on the planet and the toll it takes on patients.

It can be daunting to try to tackle a problem as broad and pervasive as the pollution created by our healthcare system. But doing too little to fix it is no longer an option. The key is for all players in healthcare to start somewhere—to learn about the problem and begin taking action to reduce our impact. Every small step taken by an individual hospital or organization in the supply chain to go greener has a cumulative effect that will deliver greater collective benefits.

For example, consider the growing movement by many hospitals across the country to reduce usage of a common anesthetic gas—desflurane—that packs a powerful punch on climate change. A potent greenhouse gas, desflurane has a global warming potential 2,500 times higher than carbon dioxide, and 40 to 50 times greater than that of sevoflurane, another common anesthetic gas.

Fortunately, more hospitals in all provinces and territories are shifting away from using the

more harmful desflurane during surgical procedures in favour of sevoflurane. Leading the charge in decreased usage are Northwest Territories which has eliminated its use entirely, followed by Newfoundland and Labrador with a decrease of 39 per cent, Ontario at 27 per cent, and British Columbia at 23 per cent.

Individual hospitals are also making important changes to improve their environmental sustainability.

Vancouver Coastal Health in B.C. is shrinking its environmental footprint by reducing waste nitrous oxide, commonly known as laughing gas, that escapes into the atmosphere. The greenhouse gas has a global warming impact 265 times higher than carbon dioxide when comparing the same volumes.

Vancouver Coastal Health recently shut down the central supply system for nitrous dioxide at Vancouver General Hospital, the largest hospital in its network. By replacing the leaky pipes with a small local supply system that is used only when required, Vancouver General has been able decrease greenhouse

gas emissions by the equivalent of removing 57 cars from the road annually.

As Canada's leader in health-care procurement, HealthPRO Canada is committed to raising awareness about the health sector's environmental impact among a network of more than 1,300 hospitals and healthcare facilities. We work with members and suppliers in our network to come up with innovative ways to reduce their individual impact on the environment and shrink our health system's overall carbon footprint.

We have created a Sustainability Toolkit with a scorecard that allows members to measure supplier performance in three categories—environmental, economic and social—to help make more informed decisions that improve environmental sustainability.

Across the health sector, we must all do more and increase the level of urgency to become greener and fight climate change. The health of our planet and our patients depend on it.

Kendra Frey, CSCMP, is vice-president of materials management at HealthPRO Canada and is responsible for the strategic oversight of several business units including clinical, support services, nutrition and food services, capital equipment and signature services.

The Hill Times

Canada can get its banks out of fossil fuels before it's too late, and here's how

Climate change puts Canada's financial system at risk. By acting now, the government can send a clear signal to banks and investors about the future of finance in a changing climate.

Bernard Soubry

Opinion



When it comes to investing in the green economy, Canada's banks and pension funds are lagging behind global trends. In

2022, this country's banks provided over US\$100-billion to fossil fuel companies, making them the world's top contributors. This needs to change, and the government already has the tools to help.

This level of investment in fossil fuels isn't just bad for the planet, it also jeopardizes the stability of our financial system. First, climate change puts infrastructure at risk—real-world assets that banks rely on to guarantee loans. Insurers are struggling to keep pace with the scale of increasingly frequent extreme weather events, resulting in huge losses—such as the \$570-million loss incurred by Intact Financial during last summer's wildfires. As climate change gets worse, these costs could escalate to catastrophic outcomes for the financial system.

Second, investing in fossil fuels means investors risk being left behind by the green energy transition. Projections from the International Energy Agency are clear: fossil fuel markets are volatile,

and headed for decline. Keeping pensions and savings locked in fossil fuels leaves them exposed to tipping points in the green transition when markets could reprice quickly and leave fossil fuel assets stranded. The Bank of Canada has warned that, in some scenarios, a rapid market repricing with current investments could bring the GDP down 10 per cent below baseline by 2050. That would have a catastrophic impact on affordability and jobs in Canada.

Whether in banks or pensions, investing in fossil fuels creates an unacceptable level of risk. The Canadian government needs to step up and align private finance with the realities of climate change. Here are three key steps forward:

Crack down on greenwashing with a green taxonomy. Greenwashing—passing off fossil fuel investments as sustainable through false advertising—is an endemic problem in this country. In November's fall economic statement, the government com-

mitted to a green and transition taxonomy for investments—a set of criteria that would outline what kinds of investments will push forward a green transition. This will help combat greenwashing and ensure that investors know their investments are helping fund a green economy. The next step is to ensure that the taxonomy is based on science and impartial advice. It should exclude investments that keep Canadians' money in fossil fuels—such as coal, oil, gas, and carbon capture and storage.

Move from disclosing to managing risk. Until now, private institutions in Canada have operated on a disclosure basis: they report on the risks in their own investments. But that's not enough.

The government can support this transition by asking regulators to require banks, pension plans, and Crown corporations to publish and enforce clear, scientifically credible transition plans. These should lay out clear timelines for how those institutions

will move their investments from emissions-heavy sectors towards growing sectors in the clean energy economy such as renewables.

Set a new standard for fiduciary duties. Regulators must help banks align their investments with Canada's climate commitments, but Finance Canada can set the tone for a greener financial system. Every year, it should outline current climate risks and opportunities—a scientifically credible assessment of what investments are risky, and where money could go instead. This will set the gold standard for private investment, sending the signal that financial institutions' fiduciary duties include taking positive action towards managing risk.

The government already has the tools in hand to act now. And policymakers are paying attention. The Climate-Aligned Finance Act, currently under consideration by the Senate's Banking Committee, would be a powerful step forward—it would set the standard for banks, pensions, and Crown corporations to align their financial goals with Canada's climate commitments.

Climate change puts Canada's financial system at risk. By acting now, the government can send a clear signal to banks and investors about the future of finance in a changing climate—ensuring a stable, prosperous financial system for all Canadians.

Dr. Bernard Soubry is a policy adviser at the International Institute for Sustainable Development. He works on sustainable public and private finance in Canada.

The Hill Times

The Toronto-Quebec City railway corridor project: a green ticket to sustainable travel

We need to develop a transportation service that empowers millions of Canadians to swap cars for a greener mode of travel, thereby instantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Martin Imbleau

Opinion



As we look ahead to the coming decades, our society will face challenges in productivity, housing, the environment, energy, and population movement and growth. Because these challenges are so interconnect-

ed, the solutions are yet to be fully grasped.

Reflecting on my experience, I've noticed a recurring pattern. Every large infrastructure project I've been part of faced initial skepticism. Whether it was wind farms, renewable natural gas, solar power, or large transmission lines, people initially questioned their necessity. However, over time, these projects not only proved necessary, but also became indispensable. Conversely, the projects that were shelved in the past too often prompt the question: "Why didn't we pursue them?" The evidence often makes it clear—they were indeed necessary. It's a cycle where skepticism transforms into acknowledgment of necessity and, eventually, satisfaction that the projects were undertaken.

As we navigate these challenges, it's important to recognize that we're not here to claim a unique solution, but rather to offer one of the many paths toward addressing these complex issues. Our initiative of a fast, frequent, reliable, and electric railway train service is part of a collective effort toward finding viable solutions for a better future. We can't help but

regret the missed opportunities of the past. If this service had been established earlier, both past and present generations could have enjoyed its benefits. This time, we must do it; otherwise, we may once again be left with regrets.

Today, I'll focus on the environmental benefits of the Toronto-Quebec City railway corridor project, leaving room for future discussions on its broader spectrum of impacts and advantages.

In the next 20 years, the population in Ontario and Quebec will grow from 24 million to close to 29 million people, with most of these new residents living in the Toronto-Quebec City corridor.

The most densely populated corridor in the country represents 61 per cent of the total population. The transportation sector is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in both Quebec and Ontario. The way we move across our bustling economic corridor demands a shift toward a more sustainable approach. Currently, the lack of a reliable and sustainable choices forces people to opt for much less eco-friendly and more convenient modes of travel such as the car. Passenger rail represents only two per cent of trips

in the region, while cars account for 94 per cent. We are reliant on cars despite the pressing need for greener alternatives.

It already takes two hours to drive 75 km from Bowmanville to Toronto in rush hour traffic on a Thursday afternoon. The same applies to traffic in Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City. What will it be like in 20 years? Even more congestion on highways, less productivity and opportunity, and more pollution?

When I imagine what the future will be for our children in 2045, I just can't imagine millions more cars on congested, costly, and polluting new roads and highways. It's clear that we need to act now.

We need to develop a transportation service that empowers 15 million Canadians to swap cars for a greener mode of travel, thereby instantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Our new train service will slash millions of tons of CO₂. It's a tangible step toward a cleaner environment and more sustainable transportation options for our children.

This project addresses Canada's productivity challenges by providing sustainable transpor-

tation solutions. When passenger trains have their own tracks and freight companies can contribute to a seamless supply chain, you get the best of both worlds. Goods get to market sooner. Travelers get where they're going faster, more flexibly, and more reliably. And that's good for the entire economy and our environment. We're creating a blueprint for responsible and sustainable development and to a greener, more productive tomorrow.

And for people who wonder if this project is necessary: the news headlines are a constant reminder of the need for sustainable transportation to combat climate change. Giving the opportunity to Canadians to get onboard a faster, more frequent, and reliable electric train will enable passengers to do their part to make our country and our planet a better place to live.

Martin Imbleau is the CEO of VIA HFR-VIA TGF. He specializes in international human rights law, and has held key roles in the energy sector, contributing to the development of important infrastructure and public services projects.

The Hill Times

Environment Policy Briefing

Canada needs to step up to deliver

Sustained leadership, and a spirit of innovation and partnership today, can help forge the models of Crown-Indigenous relations that can carry Indigenous communities, sustainable natural resource management, healthy ecosystems, and vibrant local economies into the future.

Christine Smith-Martin & Dallas Smith

Opinion



One year ago, we stood with Prime Minister Justin

Trudeau as he announced a historic commitment to support four Indigenous-led conservation initiatives: in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, northern Ontario, and in our marine territories on British Columbia's north Pacific Coast, also known as the Great Bear Sea. Taking place at COP15, the announcement set an ambitious tone for the global gathering, which culminated in an agreement among 196 countries to reverse biodiversity loss. The announcement also uplifted an innovative conservation finance approach called Project Finance for Permanence (PFP), which was born in Canada more than two decades ago in our traditional territories, as part of an initiative that weaves together nature, economy, and community in the Great Bear Rainforest.

Canada must now show real leadership and policy innovation to realize the full environmental and economic potential of these ambitious models. The prime minister's signature commitments to reconciliation, nature, and sustainable prosperity hang in the balance.

True partnerships in policy innovation are challenging, but the payoffs are worth it. The Great Bear Rainforest Agreements advanced large-scale conservation and transformed forest management, shifting away from industrial extraction to place the

health of ecosystems and communities at the heart of forest management. The results speak for themselves: we protected vast tracts of coastal temperate rainforest and, at the same time, created 1,250 jobs, launched more than 120 new businesses, supported hundreds of community and cultural programs, and driving expansion and diversification of the regional economy.

First Nations have now taken the same innovative approach into the ocean. We have worked for over a decade with federal and provincial governments to develop Canada's first bioregional marine spatial plans and science-based marine conservation plans for one of the richest and most productive cold-water marine ecosystems on Earth.

Designed by First Nations in partnership with both levels of government, and in consultation with stakeholders—including the fishing, tourism, aquaculture and shipping sectors—the marine protected area network at the heart of the Great Bear Sea PFP is poised to become the world's largest and most ecologically robust Indigenous-led marine-protected-area network. It can be a major stride in Canada's commitment to protect 25 per cent of lands and waters by 2025, and 30 per cent by 2030.

The Great Bear Sea PFP will also help ensure healthy fisheries

today and for future generations, while bringing economic benefits to the wider region. Marine protected areas are proven and effective superchargers for reversing declines in fish stocks and rebuilding fisheries across the region. With investors poised to contribute more than \$275-million into First Nations stewardship and community development, the Great Bear Sea PFP will create over 3,000 new, permanent jobs and hundreds of businesses, increase household incomes, improve food security and boost the regional economy.

First Nations of the Great Bear region understand that the health, vitality and prosperity of all coastal communities is inseparable from the ecosystems that nourish us, fortify our language and culture, and ensure sustainable livelihoods for our communities.

One year ago, Prime Minister Trudeau's announcement set a high bar. By committing to the PFP model, he embraced a level of ambition that will change the trajectory of conservation in Canada. These are the models that Canada—and the world—needs now. The federal government needs to step up to deliver them.

We know that taking up this challenge is worth it: already, we are seeing how implementing the Great Bear Sea PFP is challenging governments to find

new and more equitable ways of managing diverse interests and resources, and of upholding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The policy innovations and lessons that come from the Great Bear Sea can inform new models of co-governance and collaborative resource management which can sustain the ways of life of all communities—both Indigenous and non-Indigenous—in regions across Canada for generations to come.

Sustained leadership, and a spirit of innovation and partnership today, can help forge the models of Crown-Indigenous relations that can carry Indigenous communities, sustainable natural resource management, healthy ecosystems, and vibrant local economies into the future.

Christine Smith-Martin is a member of the Haida Nation and Lax Kw'alaams communities. She serves as the executive director of Coastal First Nations-Great Bear Initiative, an alliance of nine First Nations on British Columbia's north Pacific Coast. Dallas Smith has roots from all four corners of the Kwakwaka'wakw speaking peoples. He is the founder and president of N'nanwakolas Council, which represents six First Nations on North Vancouver Island and the mainland coast of British Columbia.

The Hill Times

Without mandatory green procurement standards, the cheap choice will always top the green choice

Commercial and public buildings are among Canada's most significant greenhouse gas emitters.

Emma Schindler & Bryan N. Detchou

Opinion



Despite 10 different plans since 1990, Canada has yet to meet an emissions-reduction target. Unsurprisingly, we won't be hitting our 2030 goal either, and if we're to have any hope of meeting our 2050 goal, it's time we tackle one of Canada's most significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters: buildings.

Commercial and public buildings account for 13 per cent of Canada's total GHG emissions. Part of that is due to their construction. Two of the most ubiquitous building materials, concrete and steel, are carbon intensive, each accounting for approximately seven per cent of global GHG emissions.

But we can't build our future—even a green one—without concrete and steel. Which is why it's imperative we choose the most sustainable options from producers who are committed to being part of the net-zero solution. Canada's steel and cement (a required ingredient of concrete) companies are leaders in this space. Domestic cement companies like Ash Grove are developing and streamlining technology to reduce the carbon toll of traditional limestone binding, and produce low-carbon binder options. They're also looking at partnerships with emerging startups for carbon reduction strategies, and cutting carbon

emissions along their own supply chains through fossil fuel reductions and increased plant efficiencies. Meanwhile, Canadian steel has long been the greenest choice, and is among the lowest carbon emitters for steel in the world.

So why are these firms losing out to less sustainable producers in other countries?

Concrete and steel producers represent only one step in the building supply chain. Without specific government policies that enforce green procurement there is no incentive for the decision-makers downstream to choose green—or choose Canadian—when there's a less sustainable product with a lower price tag.

Until government (across all three levels) establishes mandatory green procurement standards, the cheap choice will always top the green choice. Except that it's not cheap in the long run as it will result in an overall increase in emissions.

If we've learned anything from our inability to meet a carbon emissions target, it's that what we've been doing hasn't been working. Which is why, when it comes to tackling building emissions, we can't wait to address the issue after it's already become an issue. One of the goals of the Canada Green Buildings Strategy is to build in a way that is net-zero carbon and climate resilient *from the start*. For a green building to be green, it must be constructed using low-carbon inputs from sustainable and responsible producers.

Currently, it's not possible to significantly reduce carbon emissions in new buildings while also having the lowest price on the project. Eventually, as innovation and competition drive companies to produce cheaper low-carbon options, it might be. But for now, we face a trade off. And despite the science surrounding the urgency of climate change, the availability of a greener product, and our obligations to future gen-

erations, we all know which scenario will keep getting picked—unless government steps in.

Mandatory green procurement will matter little if the system by which carbon emissions are calculated remains broken. Government policy plays a big factor in the way carbon calculations happen. And right now, there are a lot of discrepancies across building materials. Truly green products are being unfairly matched against the “green washed” products of their competitors. A standard accounting system needs to be prioritized to ensure a 1:1 comparison.

Green procurement and a standardized accounting system will require broad industry adoption of new norms and standards. Budgets and timelines will have to be adjusted to accommodate the extra cost of Canadian green steel or the extra 12-24 hours low-carbon concrete takes to reach full strength. But if our real objective is creating a truly green building and doing the right thing by our future, then industry, government and Canadians will be willing to pay the cost.

Emma Schindler is vice-president of sales and marketing at Ash Grove, Canada, and Great Lakes at CRH Canada. Bryan N. Detchou is the senior director of natural resources, environment and sustainability for the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

The Hill Times



Taiwan Working With The World Toward A Net-Zero Future

Taiwan is a key player in the next-generation technologies crucial to combatting climate change.

We call on all parties to support Taiwan's professional, pragmatic, and constructive participation in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).



News

Poilievre ‘does not need to rely on mainstream media’ as much as previous leaders, say veteran journos, as sparring with reporters continues

Continued from page 1

“We, as professional journalists, who are supposed to notice stuff, should be the last people on earth to be amazed when our workplace is more like Twitter,” said Wells. “More polarized, less nuanced, more confrontational. How can you be alive in the 21st century and be amazed that something like that is going on?”

Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) recently dressed down a reporter for The Canadian Press after the reporter asked him why he described an explosion on the American side of Niagara Falls at the border crossing between Ontario and New York on Nov. 22 as a possible “terrorist attack” in the House. The FBI and New York Governor Kathy Hochul later said there was no sign of terrorism in the explosion.

When Poilievre was asked about it by the reporter, the Conservative leader said CP had recently made three mistakes in one story and subsequently accused the journalist of being guilty of “another falsehood,” and said there “were media reports of a terror-related event.”

“Do you think it was responsible for you to call yesterday’s explosion by the checkpoint by the Rainbow Bridge terrorism when no U.S. or Canadian authorities said that was the case, and when the New York governor said there was no evidence to suggest terrorism activity?” asked the reporter.

“Actually you’re wrong,” replied Poilievre. “You’re with [Canadian Press]?”

“I’m actually thinking about checking with the Guinness Book of World Records to see if there’s ever been a news agency that has had to issue three corrections for patent falsehoods that they admit they had made in one single article, and you have made one more falsehood in your question,” said Poilievre.

“What I said, and I was right, that there were media reports of a terror-related event,” said Poilievre. “By your admission, there were media reports of a terror-related event. And that media report, according to CTV, unless you’re questioning their integrity now, came from security officials in the Trudeau government.”

The CTV article in question was timestamped at 2:39 p.m.,

about 14 minutes after Poilievre asked his question in the House.

Stephen Maher, a veteran journalist and author, told *The Hill Times* that the rise of social media allows politicians to reach increasingly large numbers of people without the mediation of traditional mainstream media outlets.

“We’ve seen a massive increase in fragmentation and people’s media consumption habits and the electorate is fragmenting,” said Maher. “So he does not need to rely on the mainstream media as much as earlier generations of politicians.”

“He has the opportunity to both ignore the media and also attack it using the cultural war techniques that look to me to be familiar from the United States and in particular, from [former U.S. president Donald] Trump,” said Maher.

Glen McGregor, who has worked as a journalist for CTV National News as well as the *Ottawa Citizen*, and has spent many years on the Hill.

Poilievre’s approach to the media “resonates with a certain constituency who distrust the media,” he said in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

“And some of that is imported from the Trump era in the United States, this idea that the media somehow has an agenda against some industry small-c conservatives, or big-C Conservatives,” he said.

“It’s not true,” said McGregor of the media agenda. “I’ve seen this come and go. This has been a recurring theme for the entire time I’ve been covering politics,” said McGregor. “It’s a way that people try and deflect coverage they don’t like by claiming that it’s biased against you.”

McGregor said it was an “old trope,” but that Poilievre is “doing it more than anybody else has done, that’s for sure.”

“The central fallacy behind all this stuff is that people who are very partisan in politics and want to engage in politics those are going to be the people commenting on Twitter,” said McGregor.

“I feel badly for the reporters in that position, because you’re there trying to do your job and ask a question, but an issue that’s worrying, issues that are important, and they’re trying to get responses for themselves like this,” said McGregor. “The other

thing that people misunderstand about journalists is we’re not doing it for our own personal amusement. We’re doing it to get answers on behalf of the Canadian people, the readers, listeners, viewers of those news organizations, about the politicians that they elect [to] parliament.”

“Poilievre might just well say, ‘you want to cover me, you can show up at my events. I’m going to fly around on a rented LearJet,’” said McGregor. “And local reporters can cover it as they see fit. That, I suspect, is being considered by Poilievre, because of his demonstrated animus towards what he considers to be legacy media or conventional media.”

Freelance journalist Justin Ling told *The Hill Times* that “from a political calculus point of view it kind of makes sense for him to pick fights with the media.”

But looking back to Stephen Harper, who had a prickly relationship with the media at the best of times, Ling said the former prime minister “found people in the gallery who he thought were thoughtful and business-minded, and maybe not partisan,” and would engage with them.

“And I think if Poilievre wanted to do that—pick fights over process stories, but engage thoughtfully with the media over real, substantive issues—I’d feel differently,” said Ling.

“The reality is he just plays to his worst instincts, and makes everything a bare-knuckle boxing match instead of a constructive, thoughtful thing,” said Ling.

Les Perreux, editor in chief at *Policy Options*, wrote on social media that he “had the privilege of jousting with dozens of prime ministers, premiers and opposition leaders from all parties over 25 years, and I don’t remember one of them acting like this, and certainly not on repeated occasions,” on X on Nov. 23.

“Part of leadership is rising above us, journalists, who have a list of faults as long as the people you know in the rest of your life,” wrote Perreux. “If seeking a personal confrontation with every person who grinds your gears is leadership, I guess this is going to be the way now.”

National Post columnist John Ivison also made note of the video

clip showing Poilievre’s rebuking of the Canadian Press journalist.

“He could lose this thing yet if he keeps behaving like this,” wrote Ivison on social media on Nov. 23.

Such observations have been made since Poilievre won the Conservative leadership last year. Columnist Chantal Hébert, in writing about December 2022’s Mississauga-Lakeshore, Ont., byelection, wrote that the voters Poilievre will “need to lead his party into government in the next federal election will not be reached via the mainstream media.”

“He also boasted about holding a rare news conference in Toronto. But if that’s the first you’ve heard of it, that’s because the city’s major media outlets, be they print, radio or TV, were not invited. True to his belief about the mainstream media, Poilievre is campaigning off its radar,” wrote Hébert in a Dec. 4 column.

“Where his predecessors mostly found the parliamentary press to be an asset to amplify their critique of the government of the day and keep them in the public eye, this Conservative leader wears his disdain for its daily coverage on his sleeve,” wrote Hébert.

In response to a message from Poilievre noting that CBC “says it’s broke again and laying off staff, this after they paid \$99-million in bonuses to incompetent executives and talking heads,” adding that “I’ll bet none of Trudeau’s favourite mouthpieces will be let go—they’ll get more bonuses,” freelance journalist Rachel Gilmore wrote that “this dude sees layoffs happening and further mocks and attacks the staff.”

“Meanwhile he’s been a politician making six figures his whole adult life. A real ‘man of the people, here, folks!,” wrote Gilmore.

In response to a social media message from Jenni Byrne, a former adviser to Harper and former principal secretary to Doug Ford, who wrote “any wonder why the press gallery has been in full on attack mode against Pierre since Trudeau’s [fall update]? He’s giving out another \$30,000 per journalist in tax-funded media bailouts. Expect them to do whatever the PMO says,” the *Toronto Star*’s columnist Althia Raj wrote

“this is complete B.S. and Jenni knows it.”

“They are looking for some to blame for a bad week. The [government] is providing a labour tax credit to employers. It’s indirect and applies broadly. One of the organizations who has lobbied the most for this, is the National Post/PostMedia,” said Raj on X on Nov. 24.

Poilievre first sparred with longtime Hill journalist David Akin during a September 2022 press conference to ask why he wouldn’t be taking questions. Akin would later apologize, but it was a harbinger of things to come.

As Bruce Arthur noted in his *Toronto Star* column, Akin barked at Poilievre as he spoke, asking if he would take questions afterwards.

“Poilievre, rattled enough to revert to his instincts, called Akin a Liberal heckler, even after Akin identified himself. Akin kept on, and Poilievre agreed to take two questions in midstream. Nobody came off particularly well,” according to the column.

Political strategist Fred DeLorey served as the national campaign manager for the Conservative Party during the 2021 election, as well as director of field operations for Ford, director of political operations for former prime minister Harper, and national spokesperson for the party.

DeLorey told *The Hill Times* that outside of an election, people aren’t paying as much attention. But once the campaign starts, people can start looking to sources of information, including the news.

He also said that he believes there is a media bias towards the Liberal Party which he’s seen throughout his career in politics.

“So people really enjoy seeing leaders push back and other leaders push back in the way that [Poilievre] has,” said DeLorey. “Maybe his way is the way that we should have been doing it all along, if you look at the numbers and how things are going.”

“Poilievre has really turned himself into a message machine,” said DeLorey.

Ten years ago, politicians would have to spend millions of dollars to get the reach that they can get today, said DeLorey.

When asked what the prime minister can do to counter the Conservatives’ approach, DeLorey said “he’s a politician, he’s got to start politicking.”

“Poilievre has been campaigning full-tilt—it’s been the year of Poilievre, and he’s the only politician campaigning,” said DeLorey. “Trudeau has no story, he has no narrative.”

“He’s basically disappeared for the year on the political side—he’s obviously governing,” said DeLorey. “But if he wants to get re-elected, he’s got to become a campaigner.”

“It sounds simple, it’s hard to do to pull it together—you’ve got to do it,” said DeLorey. “You’ve got to do it, you’ve got to do the research to see what words work,” noting that he believed the Liberals had “no story” in the 2021 election campaign.

Bloc Québécois MPs describe CBC cuts as ‘a catastrophe,’ while some media experts say CBC should stick to news, investigative stories



CBC president Catherine Tait announced that approximately 600 positions will be cut from the organization over the next year, as well as another 200 vacant positions. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Former CBC News Hill bureau chief Chris Waddell says the CBC isn't immune from cuts, but says the government should decide what role it wants the public broadcaster to play in the current media environment.

BY MIKE LAPOINTE

Media experts and some MPs say they are worried after CBC/Radio-Canada announced plans to cut 10 per cent of its workforce, with the Bloc Québécois describing the situation as a “catastrophe.” Some who have worked at the corporation, meanwhile, say the national public broadcaster needs to re-examine its mandate.

“It is a catastrophe for news and regional information. It is a catastrophe for Quebec culture and democracy, and of course it is a catastrophe for Radio-Canada creatives,” Bloc MP Martin Champoux (Drummond, Que.) told the House on Dec. 7.

The broadcaster announced on Dec. 4 that it plans to cut about

600 positions across the organization, while another 200 vacant positions will be eliminated. Those cuts are expected to take place over the coming year. The CBC received an estimated \$1.3-billion in public funding from the federal government in the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

“[CBC/Radio Canada president] Catherine Tait’s chosen approach is like water torture: Waves of layoffs stretching out over months, leaving everyone feeling like they could get the boot at any second,” Champoux said of the cuts. “It is disgusting, yet the executives have the gall to give themselves holiday bonuses. Shame on them.”

Bloc Leader Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil-Chambly, Que.), who also criticized the announced cuts last week, said in the House that “more people in Canada tune in to Radio-Canada than the CBC.”

“Radio-Canada generates more advertising revenue in Canada than the CBC. In fact, French-language Radio-Canada subsidizes CBC’s English-language services,” said Blanchet. “Nevertheless, Tait is calling on French-language Radio-Canada to absorb half the cuts she is demanding at the expense of French, and at the expense of the regions,” said the party leader. “Should the prime minister not personally summon Tait to come and explain herself to francophone parliamentarians in the House of Commons?”

Chris Waddell, a former Hill bureau chief for CBC News and now the program director for the bachelor of media production and design program at Carleton University, said “everybody else has been cutting back for obvious reasons.”

“CBC isn’t immune from that. But I think what it says is that what really needs to happen is the government needs to decide what role it wants the public broadcaster to play in the current media environment, and so far has refused to do that,” said Waddell.

Waddell noted that the argument made in his 2020 book, *The End of the CBC?*, is that there needs to be more of a focus on news and current affairs.

“But more than that we would also argue that CBC needs to get out of advertising,” said Waddell. “And change its whole mentality away from competing with private media.”

The corporation can’t continue in its current condition with declining audiences, Waddell said.

“Their audience is going away,” he said. “They can’t compete with streaming services because streaming services have programming budgets that are maybe five to 10 times what the overall CBC budget is.”

Chris Dornan, a professor at Carleton University who has worked as a reporter for the *Edmonton Journal*, an editor and editorial writer for the *Ottawa Citizen*, and a columnist for *The Globe and Mail* and CBC Radio,

told *The Hill Times* that “the CBC is not alone” on that issue.

“The entire broadcasting world has been upended by the both the arrival of the Internet and the streaming services,” said Dornan.

Dornan said there’s a great deal more competition for people’s time and attention now compared to the 1960s and ‘70s when there were just a handful of broadcasters.

“You’d get CBC, CTV Global English, CTV global, and the American channels like ABC, NBC, CBS, PBS,” said Dornan. “Now, NBC is facing the same problem that CBC is facing in that they’re competing for the attention of a viewing audience that’s so blinkered amongst scores of viewing options from YouTube, to Netflix, to Amazon Prime, to Apple Plus TV, to Paramount.”

“There’s a glut of supply and very high-quality programming as well,” said Dornan, who also noted that the broadcaster is not supposed to be driven by a profit motive.

“It’s supposed to provide an alternative to the commercially oriented private sector broadcasters,” he said. “The sole reason for the CBC was to provide programming that is for the social good—it’s beneficial for us to have this programming, but left to themselves, the private sector would not produce this type of programming,” said Dornan.

As an example, Dornan noted that there wasn’t a lot of commer-

cial money available for science documentaries.

“So it fell to the CBC to make that program. It was the CBC that made [radio program] *Tapestry* and talked about faith and spirituality. It was the CBC that made *Quirks and Quarks*, and *The Nature of Things*,” he said. “That worked, and they made entertainment programs in programming as well that weren’t commercial in its sensibilities.”

In response to a question from Champoux about whether the government still had confidence in Tait, Heritage Minister Pascale St. Onge (Brome—Missisquoi, Que.) said that “the public broadcaster, which is supported by public money, is accountable to Canadians for its decisions.”

“I encourage the CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada to answer the questions people are asking about the compensation policy,” said St. Onge. “What I can say is that our government will always be there to support a public broadcaster that is strong from coast to coast to coast. We understand how important it is, especially in Quebec and in all francophone communities, so we will always stand up for it.”

St. Onge told the House that “since we took office in 2015, our government has shown that we have always been there to support the public broadcaster.”

“We gave back the \$115-million that the Conservatives cut, despite the fact that the Bloc Québécois, which was the official opposition at the time, failed to prevent the Conservatives from making those budget cuts,” said St. Onge in the House.

“Mr. Speaker, as a government, we have always supported CBC/Radio-Canada and the services it provides to local communities across the country,” said the minister.

“Supporting local news and journalists during these difficult times for the industry is exactly why we introduced Bill C18,” said St. Onge.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) said in the House that “while the Leader of the Opposition celebrates Canadian families being laid off, we will continue to support local journalists and local news in Canada. We are very open to working with the Bloc Québécois on this, as always.”

When asked what changes Canadians will notice to programming in an interview on CBC News, Tait said “I hope they do not notice too much,” because the corporation is “not just taking a razor cut across the board.”

Tait also said in the interview that she was hopeful that local news delivery would not take a hit.

“Where the public may in fact see some difference is in the area of prime-time television in particular, where we have also announced a cut of \$40-million in programming,” which Tait explained would be \$25-million for CBC and \$15-million for Radio-Canada.

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The Hill Times

Opinion

For an entire generation of Canadians, a future without the legacy news industry is already here

The current government has been grappling with how to assist the responsible news industry as adjusts to a transformed economy. But the legacy media have a political problem, one that the current government can't help with. In fact, the more it tries to help, economically, the more it inflames the news media's political problem: the government-in-waiting is out to get them.

Christopher Dornan

Opinion



Now that the deal with Google is all but done, what does the future hold for the Canadian news media? The newspaper chains and the local broadcast newsrooms: have their prospects brightened? Is this an industry newly buoyant, a hot ticket among investors?

Alas, no. As we close out 2023, here's how things stand. A few venerable properties with national scope and an emphasis on business coverage, such as Thomson-Reuters and *The Globe and Mail*, still prosper. But most of what remains of the 20th century newspaper industry continues its agonizing, shrieking, slow-motion death scene. Will the Google settlement be enough to bring that to a halt? Probably not. If the reaction from Torstar owner Jor-

dan Bitove is anything to go by, it won't even stop the shrieking.

Meanwhile, the telcos that own the commercial broadcasters see local TV newsrooms as money-losing encumbrances they would very much like to be rid of. The leader of the opposition contemptuously rejects the impartiality of The Canadian Press, the private-sector news service, and vows to take a meat cleaver to the CBC as soon as he becomes prime minister. For the companies that own *The Toronto Star*, Postmedia, CTV, Global, and TVA, there is still money to be wrung from news journalism, but they also know they are in the business of managing demise, and the government knows this too.

That's the policy problem, surely. Not keeping the legacy media alive, but easing their passing. Was Bill C-18, the Online News Act, realistically imagined as the salvation of the news industry? Or was it a palliative pat on the back, a procedure to buy the patient more time so that the doctors could show they'd done all they could?

Imagine what our news media landscape is going to look like two years from now, by which time the next federal election must be held. Or a year after that when who knows who might be in power? The Conservatives are revving their engines to put the mainstream media in their place. It's right up front in their campaign rhetoric. It gets cheers every time they mention it. Expect no favours for the news industry from a Poilievre government.

The Liberals tried to help the industry because they genuinely believe that sources of trustworthy news are essential to social well-being, and we'll all be worse off once no one is covering city hall. How well the government has gone about it is up for debate, but that was the motivation. For the Conservatives, the "trustworthy news" the Liberals insist is so important is just a running account of things told from a liberal point of view. The fact that the Liberals tried to help this industry at all is evidence that the news cannot be trusted.

Yes, there are promising news journalism start-ups and we'll get to them shortly, but to appreciate the policy issue and the political problem the news media have become, we have to recognize

what's dying commercially, and why it can't be stopped.

First, it's only a specific type of media content that's dying. Everything else is proliferating at the gallop. From porn to podcasts, sports to fanfic, scandalous gossip to helpful home repair videos, every other genre of information has made the transition from the 20th century to the 21st in order to either make money or command attention. Except local news reporting. Why should that be?

Consider *The Belleville Intelligencer*, exactly the sort of newsroom the Online News Act was designed to help keep alive. A hard fact about the *Intelligencer* is that it cannot generate any revenue that does not come from the city of Belleville (population 50,000), no matter how good its journalism. There are only so many local car dealerships, and even they don't need the *Intelligencer* as an advertising vehicle anymore.

The second hard fact about the *Belleville Intelligencer* is that it is an omnibus publication, and it can't be anything else. Other newsrooms can focus on a single subject and cultivate readerships across the country: *The Hockey News* (the NHL), *The Logic* (the tech industry), *The Hill Times* (politics and parliamentary affairs). The *Intelligencer* has to cover politics, business, sports, crime, the courts, and the cultural scene. It has to be all things to all

people who live in Belleville, or it doesn't have a product to sell. As cutback after buyout after layoff whittles the staff down to the point that the newsroom simply can't cover the city comprehensively, its hold on the city's attention slips away. It becomes irrelevant.

How could a newsroom like that be in any way profitable?

The third hard fact about the *Belleville Intelligencer* is that it is part of a chain. Small town newspapers never made much money even before the internet, but they did make money. If a company owned scores of them, those marginal, steady profits added up to millions of dollars. Plus, the local papers benefited from the efficiencies of chain ownership. Centralized payroll and insurance. Popular syndicated material such as the crossword, the bridge column, *Calvin and Hobbes*. Corporate purchasing and delivery of newsprint. Tech support to keep their printing presses well-oiled and humming. Tax breaks aplenty!

There used to be advantages for city dailies and community weeklies in being owned by chains. Now they are roped together like doomed alpine mountaineers. If the corporation that issues the paycheques plunges to its death, they all get dragged into the crevasse along with it.

When Metroland, *The Toronto Star* subsidiary, decided this



summer it could no longer sustain its local papers in 70 towns and communities, it didn't try to sell the properties even at rock-bottom prices. There was nothing left to sell. Just employees to terminate, rental agreements to wrap up, and 13 cents on the dollar for the creditors.

It's not just that news conglomerates are no longer wanted. News as a species of information—the industrial output of waning corporations—that has fallen out of favour. News journalism promised reliable accounts of what matters in the world and where you live, something we could all agree on. It aimed to fix the facts of things.

That sort of arrogance no longer sells. If every fact is contestable, what matters is not the facts, but the contest. Something we can all disagree on.

One of the gifts of the Internet has been the all-consuming firestorm of everyone announcing their opinions to one another—seeking approval, picking fights, writing Amazon reviews, rating Uber drivers. And the one thing everyone feels absolute freedom



Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre holds a press conference outside West Block on Aug. 1, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Opinion



Justice Minister Arif Virani speaks with reporters after the Liberal cabinet meeting in West Block on Sept. 19, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

to mouth off about is politics. Because how political power is exercised is important in a way that other important things are not. And because that's democracy, citizens. In a free society, everyone gets to speak up about how they are governed. Everyone is entitled to try to persuade everyone else.

So, hats off to political journalism start-ups such as *The Hub* and *The Line* and the various *Substacks* who are betting they can carve out a paying clientele for topical commentary on political news. You'd think that would be an over-saturated market, but apparently not.

Even as their newsrooms wither, the legacy media show no sign of growing short of polemicists. If anything, they're top-heavy with marquee names who have plenty of opinions, but don't do much in the way of original reporting. They riff on events as they unfold. The point of their work is to take the facts of things and try to persuade us of something.

They may be very smart people with insights and analysis that deserve our attention, but the

facts they comment on have to come from somewhere. Spouting off is easy and cheap. Responsible inquiry and accurate reporting require professional standards and a budget.

Consider two Canadian journalism start-ups, launched around the same time. **The Post Millennial debuted in 2017, its focus on Canadian political news, right from the start a right-wing indignation machine.** *The Logic* debuted in 2018, its focus on the policy, politics, and business dealings of the tech industries.

The Logic delivers interesting information you didn't know until they told you (i.e., news) written with snap. *The Post Millennial* is nothing but snap. *The Logic* has exacting standards in its reporting and analysis. *The Post Millennial* has nothing of the kind.

Why? Because when the subject matter is money, the reporting has to be deep and dependable, and the analysis has to be genuinely useful to knowledgeable readers, or you don't have a product to sell. When the subject matter is politics, and if the only priority is crying for attention, all

you need is a smart mouth. *The Post Millennial* is just a bunch of partisan warriors having a good time being outraged. It's not expected to make money. It's expected to make trouble.

Now imagine trying to devise a policy instrument that will materially support a 189-year-old title like the *Belleville Intelligencer* right along with a start-up newsroom like *The Logic*, but exclude a start-up like the *Post Millennial*, a publication that is nothing if not current, politically attentive and engaged. Why exactly do we want to help the *Belleville Intelligencer*, but not *The Post Millennial*?

That's the policy problem the current government has been grappling with. How to assist the responsible news industry as it tries to adjust to a transformed economy. But on top of their economic woes, the legacy media companies also have a political problem, one that the current government can't help them with. In fact, the more the current government tries to help the news media economically, the more it inflames the political problem the news media face, which is that

the government-in-waiting is out to get them.

In the fall economic statement, the Liberal government bumped the Journalism Tax Credit from 25 per cent to 35 per cent. (Quick reminder: a tax credit is not a tax. It is a means to pay less tax. Nor is it a cash subsidy from the government. I repeat: it is a means to keep more of one's own money by paying the government less. It is a tax cut.)

The idea—and it's a very good idea—is to coax the news companies to hire journalists rather than, say, accountants or insolvency lawyers, and otherwise keep government out of it. The Journalism Tax Credit does not cover executive compensation, and cannot be used to service corporate debt. It is a tool to help local newsrooms like the *Belleville Intelligencer* without padding the bank accounts of the parent company. And a tax credit is ideologically blind. It applies to the newsroom of *The Toronto Star* just as it does to the newsroom of the *Toronto Sun*. Ultra-woke liberals and reactionary conservatives can benefit equally. All they need are accountants to file for the exemption.

Good idea or not, the Conservatives attacked it as a bribe, yet another sly Liberal measure to make the media beholden to the government agenda. To conservatives, it's this sort of ongoing bribery that accounts for the pervasive liberal tone of the mainstream media, and corrupts the whole lot of them. If you are of that cast of mind, the CBC is the biggest bribe of all.

And if you are in the corporate suites of the private-sector news companies, you are now cold in the realization that an ascendant right-wing party would rather campaign against a tax break than lift a finger to help you. They're not anti-business, they're just anti-your business. They see you the way environmentalists see the petroleum companies, as polluters.

Nor will the private-sector news firms find many allies. When the election is called, the threat to the CBC will draw protests and placards, but no one will be marching in the streets in support of Postmedia.

Here's my prediction: if the Postmedia chain still exists three years from now, it will be an even more shrunken thing than it is today, its newsrooms so diminished it will hardly matter whether they hang on or cease to exist. The CBC will either be the last remaining national news source with local newsrooms across the country—in which case it will be vilified by its enraged political enemies as a government Thought Ministry—or it will be a gutted ruin, like a city sacked after a siege.

The CBC was created expressly to provide a public service alternative to private-sector broadcasting, to backstop where the profit market in radio and TV fails. So, to lose the CBC just when the for-profit news companies are so obviously failing would be twice the catastrophe. But that's what we're looking at.

Me, I will lament the passing of the network and newspaper newsrooms, but I'm getting on in years. It's hard for folks of my vintage to conceive of a city like Edmonton without a big city daily like *The Edmonton Journal*. How can a city know itself without a common source of municipal information to which everyone subscribes?

But this is not something that worries or even occurs to anyone who is 23 years old. The storied news titles the old guard is so concerned about—*The Montreal Gazette*, *The Fredericton Daily Gleaner*, *Maclean's* magazine—young adults have barely heard of. They are certainly not where people born after the year 2000 turn to be informed about what matters in the world and where they live.

For an entire generation of Canadians, a future without the legacy news industry is already here.

Plan for that, strategists. Christopher Dornan taught at Carleton University for 33 years, where he served as director of the school of journalism and communication, and director of the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs. He is a co-author of the *Public Policy Forum's* 2017 study of the Canadian news media, *The Shattered Mirror*, and its 2022 follow-up, *The Shattered Mirror: Five Years On*.

The Hill Times



Journalists scour embargoed copies of the fall economic statement in the lock-up before the government's fall economic statement is tabled on Nov. 21, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh takes questions from reporters in the House of Commons foyer before Question Period on June 14, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

News

‘Take chances’: expect parties to experiment, refine marketing messages in 2024, say political players

The Liberals are trialling new messages against Pierre Poilievre following the Conservative leader’s 15-minute housing video, but so far have brought a ‘knife to a gunfight,’ says digital strategist Cole Hogan.

Continued from page 1

With the Conservatives out-fundraising all other parties over the last seven consecutive quarters—most recently making more than \$7.1-million



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh. Poilievre’s team’s willingness to take chances in political advertising is a ‘good sign’ for the Conservatives, according to Pollara’s Dan Arnold. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

in the third quarter of 2023—the party has been spending on advertising campaigns on

television and across social media to introduce Canadians to leader Pierre Poilievre (Car-

leton, Ont.) and his agenda, and to criticize Liberal government policies.

The party has also been experimenting with new formats. On Dec. 2, Poilievre published a 15-minute video about housing, styled as a “documentary,” on his YouTube channel, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) accounts. The video included data and news reports about the country’s housing crisis before presenting both Poilievre’s theories for how it was caused, as well as how it can be fixed.

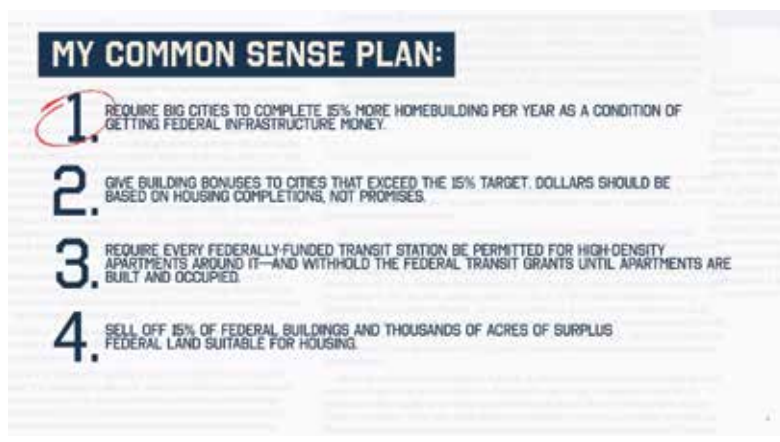
Arnold said Poilievre has been experimenting with different forms of communication since he launched his run for the Conservative Party leadership in early 2022. He said it is good practice for parties—especially those in opposition—to experiment with different formats, noting that the Liberals tried new techniques with Facebook in 2014.

“We are in an era where the leaders have pretty good reach on social media. They have millions of followers,” he said. “If you can give people content that they find interesting, those people will share it with their followers, and that’s a lot more effective than buying TV ads where you’ve got 30 seconds. If you can get a critical number of people to watch 15 minutes of content, that is phenomenal value for you.”

Cole Hogan, principal at Earncliffe Strategies and a former digital campaigner for conservative provincial campaigns in Ontario and Alberta, said the federal Conservatives would have looked at data that showed higher engagement with long-form content. According to YouTube’s internal data from December 2022, approximately 17 million Canadians watched videos on the platform from a connected television, and more than 60 per cent of the content watched on a connected TV was 21 minutes or longer.

“We’re looking for this content as Canadians, and we’re ready to engage with it, so [Conservatives] know that,” Hogan said. “The normal strategic advice would be to keep it short, but here is an academic-style lecture that’s delivering solid numbers.”

The video could also serve as a defence against accusations of a



Screenshots from Pierre Poilievre’s 15-minute video, ‘Housing hell: How we got here and how we get out.’ Screenshots via YouTube/Conservative Party of Canada

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lack of policy detail from the Conservatives, Hogan said.

"It demonstrates that the party appears serious about this [issue], and ultimately serious about governing," he said, noting that the video would have taken at least a month to produce. "It's something that Conservatives can point to and be like, 'Look here's the description of the problem and a detailed solution.' That's the difference, especially in a non-election year."

Arnold said there was a novelty factor to the video, which attracted media attention and public curiosity.

"It's hard to say if this is the future or not," he said. "But I think it's a good sign for the Conservatives that they've got a team that's willing to experiment and take chances, try out different things, and see what works and doesn't work."

Arnold also pointed to Poilievre's walk-and-talk, piece-to-camera style videos run during the leadership campaign as an example of effective communications that helped the then-candidate make a name for himself. Such videos have since been adopted by members of his shadow cabinet.

Another area in which the Conservatives have benefited, according to Hogan, is through the sheer number of public rallies that Poilievre held throughout the year. Not only do those rallies energize those who attend, but they also offer plenty of images and videos to run in advertising, Hogan said.

"From a visual perspective, it's given them so much content, day-in and day-out, for them to post and run ads behind," Hogan said. "If I'm editing political ads, I'm looking for people coming up to the candidates, smiling, giving them a hug, embracing them, just to demonstrate visually that this is when you should be doing, as well: voting for the person we have on offer here."

The Liberal Party, meanwhile, has been running a less expensive digital campaign throughout the year experimenting with messages that best appeal to the public, Arnold said. Those ads have fallen into the broad categories of fundraising and email signups, promoting the government's record and policies, and attacking the Conservatives.

"I do think the products that have been put out are a bit more polished than maybe a year ago," he said. "There have been a few videos that the party released on social media that feel more like commercials. They're obviously not airing on TV, but they're in that 30-second range. They're very produced and [focus on] Poilievre talking about cryptocurrency, and some of his past statements around the retirement age and repealing pensions."

Arnold said there was now a greater emphasis on issues such as the cost of living and housing affordability in the ads, instead of the environment or gender equality. In terms of attacks on Poilievre, he noted that the party was experimenting with comparisons



Attendees applaud Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre at the party's 2023 convention. Rallies with hundreds of supporters provide plenty of visuals for ad campaigns, according to Earncliffe Strategies' Cole Hogan. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

to former U.S. president Donald Trump, and the use of the Conservative leader's past statements.

"That feels a bit more like it's exploratory—you're trying different things, seeing what sticks," he said. "When you get to the next election, the only way the government will get re-elected is if people are concerned about the alternatives, so there will have to be a strong negative message that gets carried at some point in the game."

The Liberals are also operating in an environment in which Canadians are either angrier, annoyed, or more negative than in the past 15 months, according to the latest version of Pollara's "rage index" for November. The index, which measures the mood of Canadians regarding governments, the economy, and prevailing issues, found approximately 70 per cent of those surveyed were angry or annoyed with the latest stories in the news, 63 per cent with the Canadian economy, and 54 per cent with the federal government.

"It's a difficult environment for any incumbent government, especially a government that's been

around for a long time," Arnold said. "I think that's the biggest challenge right now that the Liberals are facing—this public frustration with the economy—and it's somewhat inevitable that the people in charge are going to wear that."

Hogan noted that the Liberals have run some small videos against Poilievre on housing since the release of the Conservative video, but described it as "bringing a knife to a gunfight."

"It's all text-based with some very basic animations ... they've been kind of stuck to what they've been doing all year," he said. "I don't think I've seen anything that's very innovative, but I'll be really interested to see where it goes in 2024, and I expect some form of response to the housing documentary."

Hogan said while incumbents tended to avoid experimenting or taking risks with their messages compared to the opposition, the Liberals "desperately need to put something" beyond their current advertising.

"They might be in a position where it's time to go, the public's fed up, and there's nothing you

can really do, but this is the time where they've got to start trying something," he said. "It has to be visually interesting, and it has to be an issue on which they're winning, because they can't talk about housing now. They need to tick off Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, and be really focused on those places."

The drop in the Liberals' political fortunes also presents an opportunity for the NDP to refine its messaging and present itself as a progressive frontrunner against the Conservatives, according to Niipaawi Strategies principal Cam Holmstrom. The ex-New Democrat staffer said the Liberals' strategy of presenting themselves as the only viable alternative to stop the Conservatives would not work if the party slipped into third place, and with Trudeau's personal popularity dropping.

"People are looking for an alternative right now, which is very clear, and are by default parking their vote with Conservatives, but even the polling shows that the Conservatives aren't polling high because of any great love for Pierre Poilievre," he said. "It's literally, 'You're the least of two evils,'

at this point. Once you're closer to an election, people pay attention, they actually are watching and listening, and Mr. Poilievre has got more than enough baggage in his past to cause him problems."

Polling showing the Liberals close to the NDP could worsen over the holiday period, Holmstrom said.

"People get together over the holiday period, and for better or for worse, they talk politics and we see where that has accelerated trends," he said, pointing to the drop in support for Paul Martin's Liberals after Christmas in 2005, the boost to Jack Layton's NDP after Easter in 2011, and the Trudeau Liberals' rise to first place after Thanksgiving in 2015.

Hogan suggested that the NDP's advertising would be best spent in its existing ridings and previously held ridings, and that its approach be more regional than national.

"I would want digital ad dollars to do an awareness campaign to say, 'if you didn't like the Liberals, now's not the time to vote Conservative. It's time to come over to the orange team, and here's why,'" Hogan said. "The problem is, I can't think of an issue on which they can do that."

Holmstrom said, however, that the NDP could continue running on its achievements through the party's supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberals, such as dental care. He said the party is used to doing more with less in terms of fundraising dollars, and so it would be important to achieve earned media as well as meeting voters on the platforms they frequented.

"Because they're using the levers of minority government to full effect, the media has to pay attention," he said. "As for the NDP, not only can you talk about delivering, they can be the ones to say, 'lend me your votes,' as Jack Layton said. 'The only way to stop these guys is to vote for us.'"

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Two of the Liberal Party ads that have run on Meta (Facebook) in the last month. Screenshots via Meta/Liberal Party of Canada

News

PROC study should address ‘politicization of the speakership,’ says former parliamentary counsel

Former House of Commons Clerk Audrey O’Brien called Greg Fergus’ decision to appear in a partisan video ‘mind-boggling.’ The Procedure and House Affairs Committee will now examine the issue.

BY IAN CAMPBELL



House Speaker Greg Fergus has been under fire since appearing in a video in which he wore his full Speaker’s attire in the Speaker’s office. The video was screened at the Dec. 2 Ontario Liberal Party leadership convention. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The House of Commons’ unanimous decision to send the issue of House Speaker Greg Fergus’ conduct to the Procedure and House Affairs Committee presents an opportunity to explore the “politicization of the speakership,” says a former parliamentary official.

Fergus (Hull-Aylmer, Que.) has been under fire since appearing in a video message screened at the Ontario Liberal Party leadership convention on Dec. 2, in which he gave what he has since described as a “personal” farewell message to that party’s outgoing interim leader, John Fraser. Fergus wore his full Speaker’s attire and appeared in the Speaker’s Office as he delivered the message.

This has prompted strong criticism from the opposition Conservatives and Bloc Québécois, who said the events bring Fergus’ impartiality into question, and have called for his resignation.

Conservative House Leader Andrew Scheer (Regina-Qu’Appelle, Sask.), himself a former House Speaker, raised a question of privilege about the matter.

“At this point, I don’t see how the Speaker can stay on,” Scheer said. “Until he makes his own decision, we have to use the existing tools that are there for us.”

Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil-Chambly, Que.) said that Fergus “cannot stay,” and the matter should be “fixed as soon as possible for it not to become a distraction in Parliament.”

NDP House Leader Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, B.C.) has said his party was “dismayed” by Fergus’ conduct, but has not called on Fergus to resign. Instead, Julian said his party supports sending the matter to the Procedure and House Affairs Committee (PROC) to determine “any appropriate remedies so that this never happens again.”

Government House Leader Karina Gould (Burlington, Ont.)

has said she supports Fergus staying in the role, but that her party also supports sending the matter to PROC.

Fergus has indicated he has no intention to resign.

“There’s a process that’s been set out by the House, and we’ll follow that process,” he told CBC News on Dec. 5 in an interview from Washington, D.C.

Fergus said he would seek to put the matter behind him by demonstrating “fairness and impartiality.” However, he also courted further controversy while on his trip to the American capital when a video emerged of him speaking about his time as a Young Liberal at a Dec. 5 event. Those events were shared by Conservative MPs on X—formerly Twitter—and featured in the debate in the House of Commons about how to proceed.

Deputy Speaker weighs in

In response to the controversy, Deputy Speaker Christ d’Entremont (West Nova, N.S.) was asked on Dec. 4 to assess the matter. In his ruling on Dec. 5, d’Entremont said, “The role of Speaker is central to our parliamentary institutions. It cannot be seen to be diminished or drawn into partisan debates.”

Noting that it was “exceedingly rare that actions involving the Speaker are questioned in the chamber,” d’Entremont said it would be best for MPs to introduce a motion to address the matter rather than as a question of privilege as had first been raised by Scheer. d’Entremont said he would allow such a motion introduced by Scheer to be given priority for a Dec. 6 vote.

That debate culminated on the evening of Dec. 6 with Liberal MP Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg

North, Man.), parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, advising the Speaker that there was support for the motion to pass unanimously without a vote.

With the matter now headed to PROC for further review, former House officials and experts in parliamentary institutions say there are larger issues at play about the politicization of the role of the Speaker, as well as how some Speakers may be interacting with their staff, and making use of the expertise they have at their disposal.

Committee should explore speakership as ‘capstone of a career’

Steven Chaplin, a former senior parliamentary counsel for the House of Commons, who is now a University of Ottawa law professor, said Fergus’ actions were “ill considered” and said, had he been giving advice on the matter, he would have told any Speaker: “Absolutely not. Do not do this.”

However, he said, now that the events have occurred and the matter is heading to PROC, there is an opportunity to explore larger issues regarding the “politicization of the speakership.”

The events involving Fergus come only months after the previous House Speaker, Anthony Rota (Nipissing-Timiskaming, Ont.) was forced to resign after unwittingly getting the entire House of Commons to honour a Second World War veteran from his ridding, who—it was revealed after the fact—had fought on the side of the Nazis.

“In both cases, it appears on its surface to be Speakers making some form of independent

decision without recognizing that they are, in fact, doing so as Speaker,” said Chaplin.

At the time of the incident involving Rota, former Liberal staffer Greg MacEarchern told *The Hill Times* that Rota may have been motivated by shoring up support in his own constituency when he invited Yaroslav Hunka to the House of Commons without thoroughly vetting him.

Jonathan Malloy, a political science professor at Carleton University who studies parliamentary institutions, also noted how political pressures still exist for the MP who is Speaker who plans to seek re-election, despite the Speaker’s non-partisan role.

“Mr. Rota’s mistake, I think, is just ultimately that he was just thinking of this constituency. It’s natural for politicians to want to do things for constituents and honour them,” said Malloy. “He was thinking as a politician—he wasn’t thinking it’s a partisan politician. He’s a politician. He wanted to highlight his constituency like that. In the same way, Mr. Fergus wanted to pay tribute to a political friend in Mr. Fraser. In a both cases, it went badly.”

Both Chaplin and Malloy pointed to a practice that exists in the United Kingdom where a Speaker resigns from their party and runs as an Independent, unopposed by other major parties in the following federal election. They said this would be a good practice for PROC to explore in its coming study.

During debate on the motion, Conservative MP Scott Reid (Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston, Ont.) also raised this practice.

The role of Speaker being seen as the “capstone of a career” is “an interesting convention and one that may have many merits,” said Reid in the House of Commons.

Chaplin said the issue of politicization of the Speaker role increased following Scheer’s decision to pursue partisan roles—as a party leader and now opposition House leader—following his tenure as speaker from 2011-2015.

“If my ambition is to lead a political party—no matter how hard I try, [it’s] in the back of my head I want to lead these guys—how many of their buttons am I prepared to push? And do I push that button that explodes my future career? This is the crux of the issue,” said Chaplin.

Scheer’s return from the role of Speaker to that of a partisan MP also figured into the debate in the lead-up to the vote on his motion.

NDP MP Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, Que.) said this “broke a long tradition of impartiality,” calling it a “monumental error and a lack of judgment.”

“When you become Speaker of the House, you no longer go back to partisan activities,” said Boulerice.

However, Malloy said it is unlikely that PROC would ultimately make such a recommendation.

He added that having a set of written rules that could anticipate every controversial situation a Speaker could find themselves in would be challenging, and that politicians who occupy the Speaker’s chair need to also be guided by the staff structures that are in place to help them navigate the choices they make.

“Staff generally know their role very well,” said Malloy. “I think most people would say that MPs shouldn’t necessarily do what their staff says, but they should always consult their staff.”

Former House of Commons clerk Audrey O’Brien also said the events involving Fergus may indicate a need for the Speaker to listen more to the advice he has as a ready resource. She pointed to the Clerk’s Office, which is the rough equivalent of the bureaucratic arm at the Speaker’s disposal, with the clerk functioning like a deputy minister. The Speaker also has a chief of staff who heads up the equivalent to the political arm of an MP’s office.

She said the Speaker is “extremely well supported” by the entire staff working under the clerk. She called Fergus’ decision to appear in the video “mind boggling” and said it indicated to her that he must not have consulted with the Clerk’s Office because it was difficult to imagine any clerk not warning against such an undertaking.

O’Brien said that for any new Speaker, one of the items they need to learn on the job is that some of the biggest challenges they will face come not from the opposition, but from the risk of stumbling into pitfalls from their own party which expects more favourable treatment when it has one of its own in the chair.

“I think this should be a real wake-up call for him that he needs to be more cautious in his approach,” said O’Brien.

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It could be a ‘bloodbath for the Liberals’ if polls hold up until next election, say political strategists and insiders

With recent polling highs, the Conservatives could go after safe Liberal and NDP ridings, says Dan Robertson, a former senior Tory strategist. The party could start their target riding list with the 34 swing ridings that it held in the 2011 election, but which became Liberal in 2015, and largely stayed red in 2019 and 2021.

Continued from page 1

In the 1984 election, Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservatives won 211 of the 280 seats in the House of Commons. In the 2011 election, the Conservatives under Stephen Harper won a majority government by carrying 166 of the 307 seats.

With the Conservative Party under current leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) enjoying a lead as high as 19 points over the Liberals, the official opposition could win 204 seats, according to recent seat projections by Abacus Data. If this were to happen, it would be the third time in Canadian history that a federal party would carry more than 200 seats, after Mulroney in 1984, and the Progressive Conservatives' 1958 election win under John Diefenbaker when the party secured 208 of the 265 seats.

It remains to be seen if the Conservatives will be able to maintain such a lead until the election.

Robertson and other political strategists interviewed for this article said that the target riding lists that any political party is working on right now will most likely be very different from the one at election time. They explained that the targets depend on the timing of the next election as the popularity of a political



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. If the Conservatives are able to maintain the current support momentum until the next election, they can be ambitious and target safe Liberal and NDP ridings, say political strategists. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

party and relevant issues can change at voting time.

The next election is scheduled for October 2025, but one could be called earlier because Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) leads a minority government. The incumbent could also request the governor general to dissolve Parliament and ask for an election.

Political strategists use a variety of methods to put together their target riding list. In most cases, the starting point is to look at the most recent general election results and find the ridings their party lost by the closest margins, which could be between five and 10 per cent. They also look at the riding's voting history and candidate profiles. The most important part of the process is to get detailed data using the best available polling models, and combine it with census and consumer data.

This data provides strategists with a detailed and precise input on how different parts of a specific riding are likely to vote in an election. In addition to identifying their target ridings, political parties also identify their target voters. For this, the most modern polling models also provide guidance to strategists about what kind of messages will work in different areas of the ridings.

"Theoretically, you could profile each and every voter according to their political preferences, what issues motivate them, how

they're motivated, their likeliness to vote [for a particular political party]," said Robertson, who served as director of strategic communication and director of advertising in Harper's Prime Minister's Office between 2009 and 2011. "We know how every demographic category is going to vote with a high degree of accuracy. Then all you have to do is match it up with the demo-



Northern Ontario NDP MP Charlie Angus says he's not worried that the Conservatives are targeting his riding for the next election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

graphic profile of the riding, and voilà, you have a very accurate picture of how that riding is going to vote."

All sources interviewed for this article predicted that the Conservatives would likely start their target riding list with the 34 swing ridings that the party held in the 2011 election, but which moved to the Liberal column in 2015, and largely remained there in 2019 and 2021. There were two exceptions: in the 2021 election, two-term Kitchener Centre Liberal MP Raj Saini withdrew his candidacy in the middle of the campaign after facing sexual harassment allegations, and the Green Party's Mike Morrice won the seat. The other is the Nova Scotia riding of South Shore-St. Margarets, where Conservative Rick Perkins defeated two-term Liberal MP and cabinet minister Bernadette Jordan by a razor-thin margin of 3.8 per cent of the votes that same year.

According to an October survey by Innovative Research, in these 34 Conservative-Liberal defector ridings, the Conservatives were leading by 10 points. So, if an election were to happen now, the Conservatives could carry a majority of these ridings.

Of these 34 ridings, 25 are in Ontario, six are in Atlantic Canada, two are in Manitoba, and one is in British Columbia.

Political insiders said that the second set of ridings that the Conservatives would likely go

after are the Conservative-Liberal swing ridings. There are 30 of these in Ontario, and 31 outside the province: 12 are in British Columbia, 10 in Atlantic Canada, four each in Alberta and Manitoba, and Yukon's lone riding. These ridings were won by the Conservatives or Liberals in the last three elections. In those elections, each party won the riding at least once, or the average margin did not exceed 10 per cent, and the non-winning party has come within 10 points of winning at least once.

According to Innovative Research, the Liberals were 10 points behind the Conservatives in the Ontario swing ridings, and 18 points behind in ridings outside Ontario.

"It makes a lot of sense to focus on the ground game in those seats, so that you can build your list and build relationships with those voters," said Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research, in an interview with *The Hill Times* last week. "Take advantage of this moment to re-establish the dynamic from before 2015, which was a dynamic that kept the Liberals really struggling."

Lyle said that on top of these ridings, the Conservatives would also likely go after the NDP's Ontario seats in the Windsor, St. Catharines, London, Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie regions.

David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data, agreed, adding that the Conservative Party's superior fundraising efforts will enable them to go after ridings aggressively, and will also help them to recruit quality candidates.

"These are perfect conditions [for the Conservatives] to go after far more seats than they might traditionally or normally be able to because of how weak the Liberals are, and therefore how strong they [Conservatives] find themselves," said Coletto. "When you're on the offensive, like the Conservatives are right now—assuming that this kind of lead and the momentum that they have holds to whenever the next election is—they can put way more seats on their map to try to contest. They also have a ton more money which is going to enable them to be [on the] offensive in more seats, and it may also help them recruit better candidates to run in those seats."

According to media reports, Conservatives are already targeting ridings held by the Liberals and the New Democratic Party in the Northern Ontario ridings. Currently, there are 10 ridings in Northern Ontario. Of these, the Liberals hold six, and the NDP and the Conservatives represent two each. After the completion of the redistribution of electoral boundaries process, Northern Ontario will have nine ridings.

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, NDP MP Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay, Ont.) said that he knows the Conservatives are going after his riding, but said they won't be successful.

"I've survived seven elections, I'm not worried," said Angus.

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Laura Ryckewaert
Hill Climbers

A deep-dive into

Dominic LeBlanc's office includes three directors of policy—one for each of his cabinet portfolios—and one deputy director for public safety.

Juggling three portfolios, Public Safety, Intergovernmental Affairs, and Democratic Institutions Minister **Dominic LeBlanc** has a large ministerial team supporting him, with 28 staff in all, including **Brandan Rowe**, who is now deputy chief of staff to the minister.



Brandan Rowe is deputy chief of staff to Minister LeBlanc. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Rowe was previously director of policy to LeBlanc when he was minister for both intergovernmental affairs and infrastructure. An aide to LeBlanc since 2018, Rowe started out as a policy adviser in LeBlanc's office as then-minister for intergovernmental affairs, northern affairs, and internal trade. LeBlanc was shuffled into the role of intergovernmental affairs minister and Privy Council president after the 2019 election and Rowe followed, later getting promoted to senior policy adviser, then to senior adviser for policy and communications, and finally director of strategic planning in 2021. After LeBlanc was made minister for infrastructure and intergovernmental affairs following that year's election, Rowe was named director of policy for the latter portfolio; he took charge of policy for the infrastructure file, as well, earlier this year.

Rowe is also a former assistant to now-Justice Minister **Arif Virani** in his role as the MP for Parkdale-High Park, Ont., and from 2016 to 2018 worked for the federal immigration minister, starting as assistant to the parliamentary secretary (Virani, at the time) under then-minister **John McCallum**, and ending as special assistant for Atlantic regional affairs to then-minister **Ahmed Hussen**.

As previously reported, **Jamie Innes** is chief of staff to LeBlanc as minister for democratic institutions and intergovernmental affairs, while **Cory Pike** is chief of staff for public safety.

Innes is supported by executive assistant **Shawna Dittburner**, while **Shannon**



Public Safety, Intergovernmental Affairs, and Democratic Institutions Minister **Dominic LeBlanc** speaks with reporters in the House of Commons foyer in the West Block. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Ablett does the same for Pike. Dittburner is a former aide to **Ralph Goodale** as both a Liberal MP and later as then-public safety minister, and is an ex-assistant to Liberal MP **Ryan Turnbull**; she was previously executive assistant to Innes, and office manager for LeBlanc as infrastructure and intergovernmental affairs minister. Ablett was previously office manager and executive assistant to Pike as then-chief of staff to then-public services and procurement minister **Helena Jaczek**, and is also a former aide to Turnbull.

LeBlanc has three directors of policy in his office, and one deputy director. **Chris Rodgers** continues to oversee policy work related to the democratic institutions file, while **Rebecca Parkinson** now runs the intergovernmental affairs policy shop, and **Maja Kostic** has been named director of policy for the public safety file, supported by **Mary-Liz Power** as deputy director.

A former policy adviser with Public Safety Canada, Rodgers began working for LeBlanc after the 2019 federal election, starting as director of policy in his office as then-intergovernmental affairs minister and Privy Council president. He's been



Chris Rodgers is director of policy for democratic institutions. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Rebecca Parkinson is director of policy for intergovernmental affairs. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

running policy for the democratic institutions file specifically since 2022. Rodgers is a former two-time Liberal candidate, having run against now-Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre** in Carleton, Ont., in both the 2015 and 2019 federal elections.

Parkinson has been working for LeBlanc through his various portfolios since the end of 2020, starting as a senior adviser for the Prairies and North in his office as then-intergovernmental affairs minister and Privy Council president. She most recently held the title of deputy director of regional affairs to LeBlanc. A former executive assistant to then-Manitoba Liberal MP **Jim Carr**, Parkinson worked in the ministers' regional office in Winnipeg between 2017 and 2020.

Kostic has previously worked for the Treasury Board Secretariat, and for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Up until last month, Power had been busy as a senior policy adviser to Foreign Affairs Minister **Mélanie Joly**. A former Ontario Liberal staffer at Queen's Park, Power landed on the Hill at the start of 2020 as press secretary to then-public safety and emergency preparedness minister **Bill Blair**. From 2021 until the start of this year—when she joined Joly's office—

Power worked in Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau**'s office, starting as an issues adviser, and ending as issues management and parliamentary affairs adviser.

Working under these directors are: senior policy adviser **Kristina Slodki**, who's focused on the democratic institutions file; senior policy advisers **Jessica Fullerton** and **Nathan Bessner**, who both tackle intergovernmental affairs; and **Miro Froehlich**, senior regional adviser for Quebec, and policy adviser for public safety and intergovernmental affairs.



Kristina Slodki with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Slodki joined LeBlanc's office in September straight from the PMO, where she'd been a policy co-ordinator since 2022. She previously spent two years working for then-employment minister **Carla Qualtrough**, starting in March 2020 as an executive assistant and scheduler.

A former special assistant for research in the Liberal research bureau, Fullerton has been working for LeBlanc since the end of 2021, starting as a policy adviser for intergovernmental affairs in his office as infrastructure and intergovernmental affairs minister. She was promoted to "senior" status this past June.



Jessica Fullerton is a senior policy adviser for intergovernmental affairs. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Bessner returned to LeBlanc's employ (under his current title) this past winter, after exiting as a policy and Ontario regional affairs adviser to LeBlanc as then-infrastructure and intergovernmental minister in September 2022 to start studying for a master's degree at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He's also a former parliamentary and policy adviser to then-infrastructure

LeBlanc's office

minister **Catherine McKenna**, an ex-special assistant to then-innovation minister **Navdeep Bains**, a past senior special assistant for operations to then-immigration minister **Marco Mendicino**, and a former assistant to Mendicino as the MP for Eglinton-Lawrence, Ont.

Froehlich worked as a Quebec regional affairs adviser to Mendicino as public safety minister prior to the July 26 cabinet shuffle. He joined Mendicino's office in 2022, and previously did the same for then-health minister **Patty Hajdu**. Froehlich is also a former assistant to Quebec Liberal MP **Angelo Iacono**.

Rob Jamieson is a senior adviser to LeBlanc as public safety minister. He previously did the same for Mendicino as then-public safety minister starting in February 2022 after two years as a senior adviser to the government House leader (starting under now-Transport Minister **Pablo Rodriguez** and continuing under now-Health Minister **Mark Holland**). Jamieson was previously chief of staff to now-government House leader **Karina Gould** and **Maryam Monsef** during their turns as minister for democratic institutions.



Rob Jamieson is a senior adviser for the public safety file. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Wallace McLean is a senior adviser for research to LeBlanc. A former legislative assistant and policy adviser to **Lawrence MacAulay** during his first turn as agriculture minister, and an ex-issues manager to Gould as then-democratic institutions minister, McLean has been working for LeBlanc since the start of the 43rd Parliament, most recently under the title of senior adviser for issues management.

Alex Axiotis-Perez is director of operations to LeBlanc, a role she's held since



Alex Axiotis-Perez is director of operations. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

January of this year after roughly three years working in Trudeau's PMO. She started in the PMO as executive assistant to chief of staff **Katie Telford** in 2020, and ended as an advance staffer—in between, she spent roughly a year as a PMO policy adviser. Axiotis-Perez previously worked for LeBlanc in 2019 as a scheduling assistant in his office as then-intergovernmental affairs, northern affairs, and internal trade minister.

Monica Stella Jaillet is a special assistant for operations; she's been a special assistant to LeBlanc since 2020, starting during his time as then-intergovernmental affairs minister and Privy Council president.

Annina Plummer is a regional affairs adviser for the Prairies and North. She was hired to cover the Ontario and Prairies regional desks for Mendicino as then-public safety minister shortly before the July shuffle after a little over a year as executive assistant to the chief of staff to Foreign Affairs Minister **Mélanie Joly**. Prior to being hired to Joly's office in the spring of 2022, Plummer had been an English-language assistant with the Fleuve-et-des-Lacs School Board in Quebec, among other past roles.



Nina Plummer covers the Prairies and North regional desks. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Gabriel Broderick covers the Ontario regional desk for LeBlanc, as he has done since 2022 for then-public safety minister Mendicino prior to this summer's shuffle. Broderick is also a former special assistant for Ontario regional affairs to Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister **Chrystia Freeland**; an ex-constituency assistant to Scarborough-Guildwood, Ont.,



Gabriel Broderick covers the Ontario desk. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Liberal MP **John McKay**; and a former program assistant with the Royal Ontario Museum, among other things.

Ayesha Khaira is a regional affairs adviser for British Columbia. Khaira has been working for LeBlanc since the start of 2022, originally hired as a policy and Western and Northern regional affairs adviser in his office as then-infrastructure and intergovernmental affairs minister. She previously covered the West and North regional desks for then-employment minister **Carla Qualtrough**, and is an ex-constituency assistant to now-Citizens' Services Minister **Terry Beech** as the MP for Burnaby North-Seymour, B.C.

Émilie Simard continues as director of parliamentary affairs to LeBlanc. She joined LeBlanc's office this past May as both head of parliamentary affairs and of issues management, having previously done the same for the federal immigration minister. Simard joined the immigration office as an issues manager under then-minister Mendicino after the 2019 election, and was promoted to director under then-minister **Sean Fraser**. She's also a former press secretary to then-rural economic development minister **Bernadette Jordan**, and an ex-special assistant for Ontario and Quebec regional affairs and assistant to the parliamentary secretary to then-veterans affairs minister **Kent Hehr**.

Working under Simard are parliamentary affairs adviser **Conor Lewis** and legislative assistant **Ashton Ross**. Lewis is a former aide to Mendicino as public safety minister, having been hired as assistant to the minister's parliamentary secretary—at the time, Liberal MP **Pam Damoff** in 2022; before then, he'd been an assistant to Damoff as the MP for Oakville North-Burlington, Ont. Ross is a former aide to Liberal MP **Jennifer O'Connell**, and has been working for LeBlanc since early 2022, previously as Ontario regional affairs adviser and assistant to O'Connell as then-parliamentary secretary to LeBlanc.



Ashton Ross is a legislative assistant. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Caroline Williams is now director of issues management to LeBlanc. A former parliamentary assistant at the Scottish Parliament, Williams first landed on the Hill in 2018 as assistant to Liberal MP **Ruby Sahota**. In October 2020, she was hired as a special assistant for parliamentary affairs to Joly as then-economic



Caroline Williams is director of issues management. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

development and official languages minister, and less than a year later, Williams joined Blair's office as then-public safety and emergency preparedness minister, starting as an issues and parliamentary affairs adviser. After the 2021 post-election cabinet shuffle that saw Blair made Privy Council president and emergency preparedness minister, Williams was promoted to director of parliamentary affairs—her most recent role.

Kelly Ouimet remains director of communications to LeBlanc, as she's been since late 2020, starting during LeBlanc's time as minister for intergovernmental affairs and president of the Privy Council, after more than a decade working in the private sector. Ouimet was previously communications director to then-Liberal social development minister **Tony Ianno**, and is a former special assistant to communications to then-finance minister **Paul Martin**. She's also a past director of government relations for the Forest Products Association of Canada, and an ex-senior media relations specialist for the Canadian Council on Learning.

Jean-Sébastien Comeau continues as press secretary and senior communications adviser. He's been working for LeBlanc since May 2021, starting as press secretary and communications adviser to LeBlanc as intergovernmental affairs minister and Privy Council president. Before then, Comeau was working for the federal agriculture minister, starting under MacAulay (who now once again holds the portfolio) as a special assistant and ending as press secretary to then-minister **Marie-Claude Bibeau**. He's also a former media monitor with Global Affairs Canada.

Ève Loignon-Giroux is now a communications adviser to LeBlanc. She previously interned in his office as then-intergovernmental affairs minister and Privy Council president.

Finally, **Ariane Mallet** is now a communications assistant to LeBlanc. A part-time aide to LeBlanc as then-infrastructure and intergovernmental affairs minister since the summer of 2022, she was hired as a full-time intern this past summer, shortly before the July cabinet shuffle.

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Stuart Benson

Party Central

Country's top general talks *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice* at Juneau and Lagassé's book launch

While an academic treatise on Canadian defence policy may not be the sexiest topic in Parliament Hill's social circles, if the more than 100 people in Ottawa who do care manage to cram themselves into the Château Laurier's MacDonald Room with the promise of free liquor and a Q&A with the nation's top general, it turns out those policy wonks can throw quite the party.

Luckily, **Party Central** was able to arrive early to the Dec. 6 event as both rows of chairs and the space on the two coatracks were filled by just after 6 p.m. for the official launch of *Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice*, Vol. 2, co-edited by experts **Thomas Juneau**, an associate professor at the University of Ottawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA), and **Philippe Lagassé**, an associate professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs (NPSIA) at Carleton University.

Thanks to this reporter's journalistic-punctuality, **Party Central** managed to stake out a front-row seat and an excellent vantage point for people watching, as well as one free drink ticket. As the guests filed in and attempted to find a corner of the reception hall not already overflowing with jackets and coats, **Party Central** spotted plenty of the well-dressed, heavily-medaled uniforms of members of Canada's senior military leadership dotting the crowd which was composed mostly of fresh-faced students from Carleton University and from the University of Ottawa. There were also several of Juneau's and Lagassé's colleagues in attendance, including **Artur Wilczynski**, a senior fellow at GSPIA, as well as **Stephen Saideman**, Paterson Chair, and **Stephanie Carvin**, associate professor with NPSIA.

While Lagassé and Juneau jokingly attributed the better-than-expected attendance to the promise of free drinks and a keynote speech followed by a Q&A with General **Wayne Eyre**, Canada's chief of the defence staff, considering how much of a genuine fan Gen. Eyre seems to be of their book, the pair will at least be able to take comfort that their "labour of love" is being appreciated where it probably matters most.

Party Central can report that Gen. Eyre's claim of having a copy of the book's first volume "about a foot and a half" from his office desk keyboard isn't just because he likes the cover. Eyre has clearly "done the reading," which he said, as he took on the role of CDS in 2021, helped him wrap his mind around the interplay between military and government leadership he would need to understand.

"I didn't have much of a handover," Gen. Eyre joked, adding that the first volume has helped "a lot" as he continues to "learn every day about political-military relations."

"I sometimes find where the line is after stepping over it, but nevertheless, it's a learning experience," said Eyre.

As for the newest volume, the general said it gave him something to read during

his flight back from NORAD headquarters the week prior, and clearly plenty to think about since then, adding that it was "on point" with many of the issues Canada's military has been grappling with for the past few months and years, including evolving military culture and combatting sexual misconduct in the military, the urgency of modernizing NORAD, reconstitution, and—an especially relevant topic as the governing Liberals signal a tightening of belts heading into the holidays—budgeting and procurement.

On that topic, Eyre said the military is often asked the "weak bureaucratic question" of why it should be given more money when it can't spend what it already has, which the general said is the wrong question. What the government should be asking instead, he said, is, "How can we help you spend that money to produce operational capability?"

During the evening's Q&A portion, the general also demonstrated the breadth of his appetite for academic writing on the military, referencing military strategist **Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr.'s** *The Origins of Victory: How Disruptive Military Innovation Determines the Fates of Great Powers* when asked about lessons he has learned from the war in Ukraine, and the "precision warfare revolution" the world is currently experiencing.

Eyre detailed that the "revolution" centred around changes to the capability of a military's capacity for "persistent surveillance" to see everything on the battlefield, long-range precision strikes, and rapid command control systems to tie them together. In combination—and in layman's terms—the general explained that would mean "if you can be seen, you can be targeted, and if you can be targeted, you can be killed," which he said would drive operational deployment for generations.

When asked for his thoughts on the situation in the Middle East, however, the general looked backward to the end of First World War to explain the current complexities of the region, referencing David Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*, noting that "part of the problem could go back to the lines on the map drawn in the right[or wrong] places."

Eyre also touched on the "wicked problem" of the current conflict in the Middle East between Israel and Hamas, and the lack of clarity of what "the day after" Israel's military operation looks like.

"No one has been able to wrestle [with] that or present a palatable solution...because there are so many competing national interests and unwillingness to get involved decisively in an intractable conflict."

The general also said it is in Canada's "vital national interest" to be prepared for what he said appears to be a new era of



Thomas Juneau.



Steve Saideman.



Philippe Lagassé.



Juneau, left, Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Wayne Eyre, Philippe Lagassé, and Srdjan Vucetic.

Eyre, left, Stephanie Carvin, and *Le Devoir's* Marie Vastel.

Camila Gutierrez, left, Evelyn Burgess, Alimata Ouedraogo, Yasmine Teofilo, Tomasz Glod, Marie-Perla Mukwaka and Coralyne Santi.

The Hill Times photographs by Stuart Benson



Wayne Eyre.



It was standing-room only for many of the attendees.

"great power competition and confrontation, but hopefully not conflict." He added that keeping up with the accelerating changes to the character of how wars will be fought, as well as remaining relevant to allies and "more importantly" to potential adversaries, will pose a real challenge to the country, especially when the military is "burdened with the procurement system we have."

While he said that the era of great power competition would require Canada to recognize that it is dealing with a "globally integrated security environment," Eyre said there would need to be some "really hard decisions" about which parts of the world Canada would need to focus on.

"Let's face it, we've got a bigger appetite than what we've got capacity; we have global aspirations, but the force for maybe one region," Eyre explained while noting that any potential conflict between, say, Russia and NATO, would undoubtedly involve Canada's "northern flank" in the Arctic.

Once the Q&A had wrapped up, with the piles of the book's two volumes being snatched up like hotcakes by the attending grad students, **Party Central** and *The Hill Times's* own international man of foreign affairs **Neil Moss** conducted a successful exfil-op to D'Arcy McGee's for a pint of beer that didn't cost \$11.

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Parliamentary Calendar

House Speaker Fergus to be special guest at Ottawa mayor's breakfast on Dec. 14



House of Commons Speaker Greg Fergus, whose impartiality is being questioned after he sent a video tribute to former interim Ontario Liberal leader John Fraser which was shown at the Ontario Liberal Party convention on Dec. 2, will be the special guest at the Ottawa Mayor's Breakfast event, hosted by the Ottawa Board of Trade and the Ottawa Business Journal, on Thursday, Dec. 14, at 7 a.m. ET at Ottawa City Hall. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

MONDAY, DEC. 11

House Sitting—The House is scheduled to sit until Friday, Dec. 15, and it's scheduled to return again on Monday, Jan. 29, 2024.

TUESDAY, DEC. 12

Chief Nursing Officer to Deliver Remarks—Longwoods hosts a virtual breakfast event, "You Can't Recruit Your Way Out of a Crisis: Why Retention is Critical to Today's Health Workforce Challenges in the Context of a Global Nursing Shortage," featuring Canada's chief nursing officer Leigh Chapman, and Canadian Nurses Association CEO Tim Guest. Tuesday, Dec. 12, at 8:30 a.m., ET, taking place online: longwoods.com/events.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 13

Launch of Ian Garner's New Book—The Pendulum Group and the Macdonald-Laurier Institute host the launch of Ian Garner's new book, *Generation Z: Into the Heart of Russia's Fascist Youth*. Garner will share his insights and take questions from guests. Wednesday, Dec. 13 at 5:30 p.m. ET at 449 Sussex Dr. Contact heather@pendulumgroup.ca.

THURSDAY, DEC. 14

Speaker Fergus at the Mayor's Breakfast—House of Commons Speaker Greg Fergus will be the special guest at the Mayor's Breakfast event, hosted by the Ottawa Board of Trade and the *Ottawa Business Journal*. Thursday, Dec. 14, at 7 a.m. ET at Ottawa City Hall, 110 Laurier Ave. W. Details online: business.ottawabot.ca.

Stephen Poloz to Deliver Remarks—Former Bank of Canada governor Stephen Poloz will take part in a webinar entitled, "Why is economic forecasting getting so hard?" hosted by the Canadian Association of Business Economics. Thursday, Dec. 14, at 1 p.m. ET taking place online: cabe.ca.

OEA Holiday Cocktail Event—The Ottawa Economics Association hosts a cocktail evening and a brief discussion on the federal government's Fall Economic Statement with Robert Asselin, senior vice president, policy, Business Council of Canada. Thursday, Dec. 14 at 6:30 p.m. at the Rideau Club, 99 Bank St. Details online

FRIDAY, DEC. 15

Bank of Canada Governor to Deliver Remarks—The Canadian Club of Toronto

hosts Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem, who will give his final public address of the year. Friday, Dec. 15, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York, Toronto. Details online: canadianclub.org.

Webinar: 'Assessing the Impact Ruling'—The Macdonald-Laurier Institute hosts a webinar, "Assessing the Impact of the Impact Assessment Act ruling." The Supreme Court ruled Oct. 13 that the majority of the Impact Assessment Act was outside Parliament's law-making authority, thus unconstitutional. A panel of experts will discuss what this decision means for future assessments of major projects, and for those in the IAA process today. What must the federal government change to make the IAA constitutional? How will this impact other proposed federal environmental laws? Friday, Dec. 15 at 1 p.m. ET taking place online. Register via Eventbrite.

TUESDAY, JAN. 16, 2024

Peter Stursberg Foreign Correspondents Lecture—Carleton University hosts the 2023 Peter Stursberg Foreign Correspondents Lecture. Ukrainian journalist Veronika Melkozerova from Politico Europe will deliver remarks entitled

"Conflicted: a Ukrainian journalist covers her country at war." Tuesday, Jan. 16, 7 p.m. ET., Canadian War Museum, 1 Vimy Pl. Register via Eventbrite.

SUNDAY, JAN. 21, 2024

Camp Parliament for Girls Ottawa—The Girls in Politics Initiative hosts "Camp Parliament for Girls Ottawa 2024," introducing girls aged six to 17 to the Canada's parliamentary system of government. Students will form political parties, create a campaign platform, vote in an election and form a government to pass a law. Each student will serve as an MP. Sunday, Jan. 21, at 8 a.m. ET at the Marriott Hotel, 350 Dalhousie St. Details online via Eventbrite.

THURSDAY, JAN. 26, 2024

Health Care Town Hall—*The Globe and Mail* hosts the fourth in a series of hybrid town hall events taking place across Canada on 'Public-Private Health Care'. Moderated by health columnist André Picard, these town halls will focus on approaches to improving patient access, experience, equity and outcomes across public and private systems in Canada. Thursday, Jan. 25 at 12 p.m. AT at the Halifax Convention Centre, 1650 Argyle St., Halifax. Details online: globeandmailevents.com.

TUESDAY, FEB. 6—THURSDAY, FEB. 8, 2024

Arctic360 Annual Conference—Themed "Prosperity, Community, Security: It's Time to Meet the Challenge," this conference will bring together Arctic state leaders, northern and Indigenous governments, institutions, and corporations; financial institutions, critical minerals, innovation, and other industry leaders; and Arctic experts from Canada and around the circumpolar North to discuss and foster action for building a sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous Arctic region Feb. 6-8, 2024, at The Faculty Club, 41 Willcocks St., Toronto. To register and for sponsorship opportunities go to: arctic360.org.

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2024

Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner—The Parliamentary Press Gallery hosts its annual gala dinner. Journalists, together with political leaders, diplomats, and other distinguished guests will gather for an evening of high spirits and satire that puts the spotlight on media's crucial role in our democratic ecosystem. Saturday, April 13, at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building.

The Parliamentary Calendar is a free events listing. Send in your political, cultural, diplomatic, or governmental event in a paragraph with all the relevant details under the subject line 'Parliamentary Calendar' to news@hilltimes.com by Wednesday at noon before the Monday paper or by Friday at noon for the Wednesday paper.





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