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NEWS

Overemphasis on security concerns undermines 'humanitarian intent' of Gaza visa program: refugee advocate

BY STUART BENSON

More than two weeks after the special visa program for people fleeing Gaza opened for applications on Jan. 9, the

federal government has begun processing a fraction of the stated 1,000-person cap, and has offered no timeline for when they will be finalized and approved for travel to Canada. And while hundreds

more people wait in limbo, constantly refreshing their emails in hopes they will receive a code to begin the application process, refugee advocate Gauri Sreenivasan says the unprecedented

level of information required of applications is "costing days and lives."

Initially announced on Dec. 21 by Immigration Minister Marc Miller (Ville-Marie-Le Sud-Ouest-

île-des-Soeurs, Que.), the program offers temporary-resident visas for three years to extended family members—including spouses and common-law partners, children and grandchildren regardless of age, parents, grandparents, or siblings—of Canadians and permanent residents. Seven days

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NEWS

Trudeau nears record high for political diplomatic appointments as Bennett goes to Denmark

BY NEIL MOSS

With the appointment of Carolyn Bennett as Canada's newest ambassador to Denmark, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has now selected four of his former cabinet ministers for diplomatic posts—a count that sits among the highest in Canadian history, and has some past ambassadors worried about eschewing career diplomats.

A former Crown-Indigenous relations minister and later minister of mental health and addictions, Bennett was tapped to become only the third political appointee to head Canada's Embassy in Copenhagen in more than 70 years. Bennett resigned her Toronto-area seat on Jan. 16, after more than 26 years as a

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NEWS

Quebec Liberals want Champagne for the provincial leadership—and he's not ruling it out

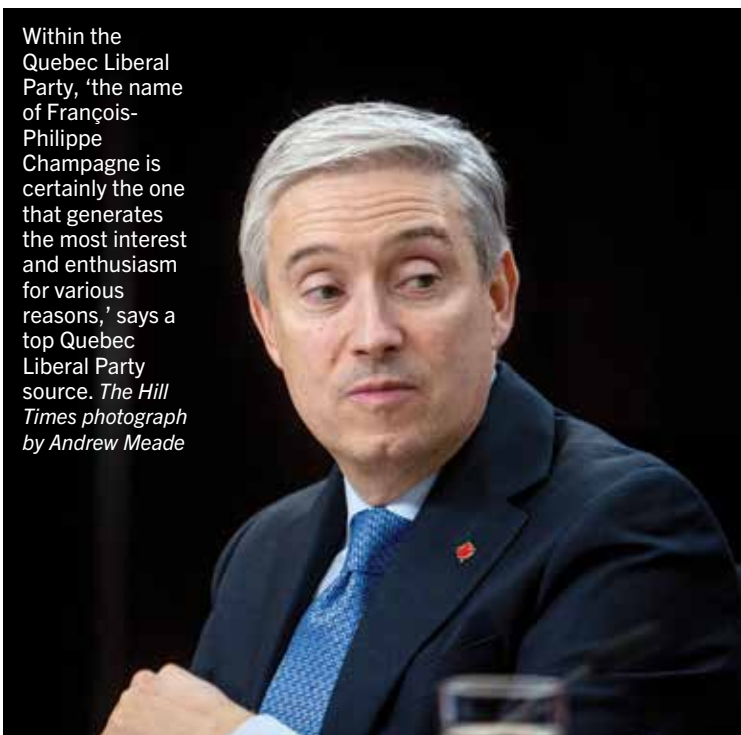
Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne's name generates the 'most interest and enthusiasm' amongst Quebec Liberals for the provincial party's top job, says a top Quebec Liberal Party source.

BY ABBAS RANA

MONTREAL—François-Philippe Champagne is one of a few Liberal ministers seen as a potential successor to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as leader of the federal Liberals, but some Quebec Liberals

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Within the Quebec Liberal Party, 'the name of François-Philippe Champagne is certainly the one that generates the most interest and enthusiasm for various reasons,' says a top Quebec Liberal Party source. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



NEWS

Parliament construction work chugs ahead, as new acting LTVP point person steps in

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Roughly \$748-million has now been spent on the multi-year, multi-billion dollar project to renovate Centre Block and build the new underground welcome centre, according to the latest departmental progress report, with new contracts expected to be awarded in the near future.

That means another \$68-million of the \$4.5-billion to \$5-billion budgeted for the Centre Block Rehabilitation project has been spent since Public Services and Procurement Canada's (PSPC) third-quarter report, which had pegged total spending to date at \$680-million.

That number is expected to grow soon, as indicated by the most recent report released at

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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill

Liberals decamp to Ottawa for caucus retreat



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addresses the Liberal caucus at its winter retreat in the West Block on Jan. 27, 2023. This year's meeting runs from Jan. 24-26 in the same location. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

Hot on the heels of the three-day cabinet retreat in Montreal which ended on Jan. 23, the National Liberal Caucus is holding its winter retreat in the exotic location of—checks notes—Ottawa Jan. 24 and continuing until Jan. 26.

But what the location lacks in glamour it makes up for in familiarity for Liberal MPs. According to a press release, the retreat will be held in the West Block and in the Wellington Building. Judging by *The Hill Times*' photo archive, that's where they gathered this time last year, too, ahead of the winter parliamentary session.

Luckily, Ottawa's forecast for the rest of this week looks to be on the milder side, making the quick shimmy across Wellington coat-optional. The NDP caucus gathered for their pre-sitting retreat earlier in the week in Edmonton, while the Bloc Québécois will be huddled in Chicoutimi, Que., from Jan. 24-25.

Hello to you, Senator Robinson

Past president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) **Mary Robinson** was appointed on Jan. 22 as a brand-new Senator, filling a vacancy in the Senate for Prince Edward Island.



Mary Robinson was appointed to the Senate on Jan. 22. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Robinson is a sixth-generation family farmer, and is current vice-president of the World Farmers' Organisation.

Her appointment fills the last vacant seat in the Upper Chamber for Canada's smallest province, which holds four seats. That leaves nine more vacancies as of Jan. 22, though expect another seat to come free on Feb. 12 when Conservative Senator **Pierre-Hughes Boisvenu's** 75th birthday—and mandatory retirement—comes around.

Canadian Senators Group member and fellow Islander **Percy Downe** congratulated Robinson on her appointment on social media, saying she "will be a strong voice for our province on agriculture and many other issues."

Current CFA president **Keith Currie** also extended his well wishes, saying in a press release that Robinson "has consistently been a stalwart leader and advocate for Canadian agriculture. We are thrilled to see someone of her calibre, with extensive knowledge, expertise, and a profound understanding of agriculture, join the Senate."

Irish Embassy to celebrate women on Feb. 1

Algonquin elder and University of Ottawa chancellor **Claudette Commanda** will be taking part in a celebration of women hosted by the Embassy of Ireland on Feb. 1 at St. Brigid's Centre for the Arts (310 St. Patrick St.).

Titled "Sung and Unsung: A St. Brigid's Celebration of Women," the evening will feature a discussion with Commanda and **Bridget Brownlow**, professor of peace and conflict studies at Saint Mary's University in Halifax.



Algonquin elder and uOttawa chancellor Claudette Commanda will take part in the Irish Embassy's 'Sung and Unsung' event on Feb. 1. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Irish Ambassador to Canada **Eamonn McKee** told *Heard on the Hill* on Jan. 22 that Feb. 1, St. Brigid's Day, "is a new public holiday in Ireland celebrating women, their role, achievements, and leadership." He said Commanda and Brownlow are "remarkable leaders with stories to tell and insights to impart. Claudette Commanda is the first female and first Indigenous chancellor of uOttawa. She is an outstanding spokesperson for and elder of the Anishinaabe in the region. Prof. Bridget Brownlow was the first individual female recipient of Ireland's Presidential Distinguished Service Award. She is currently engaged in peace-building in Northern Ireland," explained McKee.

The timing and location of the event are not by accident, as Feb. 1 is the feast day of **Saint Brigid**, one Ireland's three patron saints along with **Patrick** and **Columba**. "St. Brigid's Day is the beginning of spring in Ireland. This day has long symbolized hope, renewal, fertility, and the feminine, originating in the pre-Christian Irish festival of Imbolc," reads a blurb on the Eventbrite page where tickets for the event are available.

Huda Mukbil to talk security and candidacy on Feb. 9



National security expert and author Huda Mukbil will deliver the 'Canada Talks' lecture at Carleton University on Feb. 9. *photograph courtesy of Huda Mukbil*

National security expert and author **Huda Mukbil** will be giving the "Canada Talks" lecture on Feb. 9 at Carleton University.

The title of her lecture is "From National Security to Political Candidacy: My Journey and 10 Key Lessons from Running with the New Democratic Party in Ottawa South." Mukbil was an intelligence officer at CSIS for 15 years until 2017. In the 2021 federal election, she ran for the NDP in the riding of Ottawa-South, Ont.—a Liberal stronghold that's been held continuously since 2004 by MP **David McGuinty**—where she placed third.

Published last year, Mukbil's book, *Agent of Change: My Life Fighting Terrorists, Spies, and Institutional Racism*, was on *The Hill Times*' Top 100 Books of 2023 list in December.

The "Canada Talks" lecture will start at 12:30 p.m. at Carleton University, 1717 Dunton Tower, 1125 Colonel By Dr.

Wells tapped as 2024 Hyman Soloman laureate

Veteran political journalist **Paul Wells** will be receiving the 2024 Hyman Solomon Award for Excellence in Public Policy Journalism at a gala event in Toronto this spring. Hosted by the Public Policy Forum, the annual award "celebrates the journalistic standards and intellectual integrity of the late **Hyman Solomon** who [was] Ottawa bureau chief of the *Financial Post*," according to the forum's website.

This is just one of a handful of awards to be presented at the forum's Annual Testimonial Dinner Honour Roll 2024 on April 11, which will cap off the day-long Canada Growth Summit 2024. Other impressive folks to be honoured at the April 11 dinner include recently retired privy council clerk **Janice Charette**; former president and CEO of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business **JP Gladu**; Olympian

Jayna Hefford; **Murad Al-Katib**, president and CEO of AGT Foods; and former Liberal cabinet minister and astronaut **Marc Garneau**.

Liberal MP Erskine-Smith won't seek re-election

Toronto-area Liberal MP **Nathaniel Erskine-Smith** announced last week that he won't be reoffering when the next federal election comes.

"I plan to stay closer to home after this current parliamentary session. It will be time for someone else to step up and serve Beaches-East York after the next federal election," he wrote on Substack on Jan. 18.

The former lawyer, who was first elected to the House in 2015, said "I'm not sure what the future holds for me beyond that, and I'll be looking for new opportunities to make a difference," though he confirmed he will continue to produce his four-year-old *Uncommons* podcast, the latest edition of which features him speaking with Bellingcat's founder and creative director **Eliot Higgins** about pursuing truth and challenging disinformation.

Erskine-Smith ran for the leadership of the Ontario Liberal Party this past fall, coming in second to **Bonnie Crombie**, herself a former MP, who was crowned on Dec. 2.

Dance to beat ovarian cancer on Jan. 25

There's only a few tickets left for "The Dance For Her," a fundraiser for ovarian cancer research at Metropolitan Brasserie on Jan. 25.

"When my sister **Andrea** passed [from ovarian cancer] in 2019, she wanted to remind her friends and family to make sure you enjoy the good times, too," the event's co-organizer, **Greg MacEachern** of KAN Strategies, told HOH on Jan. 23. He and friends **Bobby Sutherland** and **George Wamala**, who'd also lost loved ones to ovarian cancer, started the fundraiser just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"When we brought it back last year, we—although recognizing it's a very serious subject—wanted to add to it to make it a celebration," he explained. "This year we've added a chance to get your song played next for a \$100 contribution to Ovarian Cancer Canada."

In addition to a DJ and cocktails, there will be some items up for auction, including two PWWL tickets, a Le Nordik gift card, a "Premier Bourbon Tasting Experience," and a George Springer Toronto Blue Jays jersey and signed baseball. Last year's event raised more than \$25,000 for Ovarian Cancer Canada. Tickets are available through Eventbrite.

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The Hill Times

The jig is up on western imperialism



U.S. President Joe Biden, left, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. The United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are giving the impression they have lost the plot, making up their plan for Gaza as they go along, writes Erica Ifill. *The Hill Times* photographs by Sam Garcia and Andrew Meade, and No. 10 Downing Street photograph by Simon Dawson

The western messaging on this war has fallen flat, sowing more distrust in our institutions, politics, and media.

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



CALGARY—Is western imperialism drowning in a sea of its own arrogance?

The United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are giving the impression they have lost the plot, making up their plan for Gaza as they go along. As the humanitarian catastrophe unfolds, and as more Palestinians are killed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the West seems like it's crossing its fingers and hoping for the best. Their delusion that this war is going to end with Hamas being defeated and hostages rescued is looking more like a pipe dream. "The dual objectives of freeing the hostages and destroying Hamas are now mutually incompatible," as reported by

the *New York Times*. War expert Andreas Krieg has concluded that the IDF and Hamas are at a stalemate, even calling it "an unwinnable war."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has become a loose cannon who contradicts public statements made by western allies. These countries have insisted that the way forward is a two-state solution, where Palestinians and Israelis live side-by-side. Instead, Netanyahu has rejected the idea of that approach saying, "I clarify that in any other arrangement, in the future, the state of Israel has to control the entire area from the river to the sea." (*The New Republic* notes that in other translations, Netanyahu said that Israel "must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River.") Well, isn't that ironic? I was told, especially by legacy media, that phrase was a call to eliminate Israel and kill Jews, so its use by Netanyahu is curious to say the least. U.S. Representative Rashida Tlaib was censured in the U.S. Congress for using that phrase and clarified it on Twitter: "From the river to the sea is an aspirational call for freedom, human rights, and peaceful coexistence, not death, destruction, or hate."

Day by day, Israel and its allies are losing face with muddled explanations and tired messaging that hasn't changed since Oct. 7, 2023. Israeli paper *Haaretz*

asserted, "Netanyahu's greatest concern is not [U.S. President Joe] Biden, the Egyptian regime, or the hostages' families." And the families of the hostages have come to that conclusion. Around 20 family members of the hostages stormed an Israeli parliamentary session demanding more be done, and expressing anger over Netanyahu's refusal to accept a deal with Hamas to release the hostages.

As the anger grows in Israel, its western allies have become more isolated in their support. And their indifference to the humanitarian crisis and the more than 24,000 Palestinian lives lost has put the liberalism of western values in question. The value of equality comes to mind as Palestinian lives are shown to be expendable. A United Nations committee scrutinized Israel's dehumanizing language that is applied to the Palestinians, which the Canadian media has picked up. The CBC specifically has "portrayed Israelis in more humanizing ways," according to *The Breach*. Support of press freedom, another western liberal value, has been destroyed when it comes to the silence on the extreme number of journalists killed by the IDF in Gaza. The outcry was visceral when it was the Ukraine war and *Charlie Hebdo*, however the silence when it comes to Palestinian journalists is palpable. Shree Paradkar asks in her

Toronto Star column: "But where is the solidarity with Palestinian journalists working in impossibly hostile environments?" Good question. The blatant rejection of international law and human rights demonstrates the hypocrisy of these values and the emptiness of their meaning. The West has lost the moral high ground it used to invade countries like Iraq, as everyone can see the charade of western values historically used to promote imperialism. The jig is up.

Meanwhile the Global South is fast becoming the world's moral compass. It was South Africa that brought the case of Israeli genocide to the International Court of Justice, supported by other countries in the Global South. It is China that proposed a diplomatic plan to end hostilities in Gaza that ensures the protection of Palestinians. This was a power move designed to quietly flex its muscles in an area besieged by western principles of domination in the region. The Global South consists of countries that were colonized by the western standards of violence, subjugation, corruption, and contempt for the native populations. The bombing of the Houthis in retaliation for their aggression against commercial ships in the Red Sea has also shown Biden's proclivity to solve every problem with military might, despite insisting he doesn't want to escalate the fighting in the region, and has no idea when the campaign will end. Biden even circumvented the accountability of Congress—twice—to send weapons to Israel to continue their massacre against Palestinians in Gaza.

And it's not only the Global South that sees the deceitfulness of the West, but western populations have also seen the same through their diet of educational resources that sprung out of Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and land theft that continues on Indigenous territories for commercial interests. Hence why they are out in the streets protesting for a ceasefire and Palestinian liberation. They view social media posts more than legacy news media, and as I've written before, the rise of TikTok has been instrumental in providing a range of viewpoints that are skewed or ignored by western media. *The Guardian* found, "Younger generations in countries such as the U.S. and Britain have grown up taking racism far more seriously than those before them, and polling shows they are far more sympathetic to Palestinians than older citizens are."

The western messaging on this war has fallen flat, sowing more distrust in our institutions, politics, and media. They are now rendered by many as untrustworthy. The fantasy of righteousness is gone forever, as the stain of alleged ethnic cleansing cannot be washed off by a change in tone. What the world is witnessing is that the emperor has no clothes, and the West's dominance is withering away.

Erica Ifill is a co-host of the *Bad+Bitchy* podcast.

The Hill Times

Readying the spring-sitting scorecard

The prime minister's resilience, the opposition's strategy, the U.S. election, and the Canadian economy make for interesting watching between now and June.

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—Parliament returns next week after the holiday break. While the prime minister was apparently crashing on the most expensive friend's couch in the world, others were also getting recharged for the stretch running between now and June. There will be lots of things to watch for that could shape the fate of the next election.

With February just around the corner and the 40th anniversary of Pierre Trudeau's "walk in the snow," will Justin Trudeau do the same? He continues to give an emphatic "No" when asked if he is going. But what the hell else is he supposed to say? However, he is known to love symbolism, and if polls continue to be deadly bad for his party, you have to imagine leaving becomes a real option. Without a doubt, that would be the single biggest development on Canadian political terraferma.

Following a close second in things to watch is the Liberal-NDP affair, or as it's more properly known, the supply-and-confidence agreement. While neither party wants to go to the electorate now, and both still need to raise money to compete with the Conservatives, this thing has to be close to the end. Yes, they have an established break-up date of June 2025, but break ups just tend to happen on no particular date when one party has had enough. The NDP, while, yes, achieving things like dental care and potentially pharmacare, have to be worrying about the right time to leave to push brand differentiation, systemic election calculations aside. They know the wily Liberal Party is not beyond chewing them up and spitting

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Opinion

Indigenous midwives are the key to addressing sexual and reproductive health inequities

With Indigenous-led midwifery care, we spend less for better health outcomes. So why aren't we properly funding it?

Ellen Blais

Opinion



When birth takes place in-community, it improves the mother's experience, allowing her to be surrounded by her own language, culture, and family, writes Ellen Blais. *Unsplash photograph by Aditya Romansa*

It's 2024 and Indigenous people in remote communities still don't have access to basic sexual and reproductive health care. Meanwhile, Indigenous infant mortality and morbidity rates are higher than any population in Canada.

Such gross inequities are a direct result of colonization, anti-Indigenous racism, and systemic underfunding of community-based Indigenous-led health services. To address these injustices, the government must take accountability by reinvesting in services like Indigenous midwifery. As *Hill Times* columnist Rose LeMay wrote on Jan. 8, "To paraphrase Cindy Blackstock: do the real work so you don't have to apologize or pay out the settlements again."

Beginning in the 1950s, the federal government systemically removed Indigenous-led health care—including midwifery care—from Indigenous communities. As a result, many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people must travel vast distances to access basic services like contraception and prenatal care. As a matter of policy, Indigenous women with low-risk pregnancies are routinely forced to leave their communities for birth, a practice colloquially known as "birth evacuations."

Forced birth evacuations lead to poor physical health outcomes and emotional, cultural, and social harms for Indigenous families and communities. Still, each year thousands of Indigenous people leave their loved ones to give birth, travelling up to thousands of kilometres away, often alone, to distant hospitals.

According to federal occupational guidelines for nurses, pregnant people leave up to a month before their due date. They are placed in substandard housing, with little access to a support network, birth education, or adequate nutrition.

These long-standing federal policies deepen the already profound health inequities faced by Indigenous people in Canada. Forced birth evacuations cause increased stress for expectant mothers, as well as increased risk of C-section, forced and coerced sterilization, and forced removal of newborns from their mothers by child welfare.

The antidote to forced birth evacuations is having Indigenous midwives in every Indigenous community. When birth takes place in-community, it improves the mother's experience, allowing her to be surrounded by her own

language and culture. Family is present, and significant others have an opportunity to participate in the birth of their child. The risk of exposure to anti-Indigenous racism is reduced or eliminated when qualified Indigenous midwives provide care.

With Indigenous-led midwifery care, we also spend less for better health outcomes. In 2022, the federal government spent \$602.2-million on medical evacuations, including evacuations for birth. Indigenous midwifery is a sustainable, culturally rooted, community-based alternative. Indigenous midwifery is proven to result in positive health outcomes, and provides a balance of life and death within communities.

We already have examples of this model's success. Today, 92.2 per cent of deliveries in Nunavik, Que., are done in the community, through the work of Inuit midwives. The C-section rate in Nunavik has been documented at 6.5 per cent, far below the current 30 per cent Canadian average.

Despite the proven benefits, Indigenous midwifery's growth has stalled because of barriers including systemic underfunding. In 2017, the federal government made a commitment and took small steps to grow investments in Indigenous midwifery. But it is not enough to address the vast inequities in sexual and reproductive health.

The government needs to honour its 2017 commitment and

continue to expand investments for Indigenous midwifery to help close health gaps for Indigenous communities (especially women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people). To do so would be a key step towards reconciliation.

There is already strong support for this investment from the general public, Indigenous communities, and health-care providers. In a national survey conducted in 2022 and 2023 by the National Council of Indigenous Midwives, a whopping 93.1 per cent of Canadians agreed: Indigenous pregnant people should have access to care from qualified Indigenous midwives in their communities. The fact that Indigenous people in remote communities do not have access to basic sexual health services was described as "deplorable," "disgusting," "racist," and "wrong."

We urge the federal government, and in particular Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, to honour initial commitments to grow Indigenous midwifery and address the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People Calls to Justice; Article 24 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action 22 and 23.

Indigenous lifegivers deserve to give birth in safety, surrounded by loved ones. It's time for the federal government to commit to reproductive justice for all.

Ellen Blais, an Onkwehonwe midwife from the Oneida Nation of the Thames, is executive director of the National Council of Indigenous Midwives (NCIM). Megan Davies, NCIM advocacy and policy adviser, and Cassie Smith, Canadian Association of Midwives social media co-ordinator, contributed to this article.

The Hill Times

Comment

French media bias hurts Quebec's democracy

By not reporting fairly on the preoccupations of the anglophone community, the French media do a disservice to the cause of democracy in Quebec.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



MONTREAL—On the night of Oct. 2, 2022, a victorious Quebec Premier François Legault stood before an adoring crowd of Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) supporters at his headquarters in Quebec City. In French and then in English, he said, "When I say Quebecers form a great nation, I mean all Quebecers, from all regions, of all ages, of all origins. I am going to be the premier of all Quebecers."

Of course, his CAQ government had already passed the mean-spirited changes to the Charter of the French Language, Bill 96, in June of that year. The bill had sailed through the National Assembly with limited opposition: two of the opposition parties, Québec Solidaire and the Parti Québécois, are just as na-

tionalist as the CAQ. The Quebec Liberal Party, while ostensibly opposing the bill in first and second readings. Their committee performance was hapless, and motivated by a desire not to offend nationalist voters.

While these machinations might have been expected, in other legislatures where groupthink has dominated, it was the media that held the government's feet to the fire. I think of virtual one-party states such as Peter Lougheed's Alberta of the late 1970s, Frank McKenna's control in New Brunswick in 1987, or Gordon Campbell's 77 of 79 seats in the 2001 British Columbia election.

In Quebec, the French media does find fault with the premier. But it's a selective critique:

rarely, if ever, does it focus on the concerns of the province's 1.25 million English-speakers. One reason is ownership: *le Journal de Montreal* and the TVA network are owned by Québecor, run by one-time Parti Québécois leader Pierre-Karl Péladeau.

In Quebecor media, there has been a virtual cacophony of columnists and commentators opposing any defence of the English-speaking community. Just recently, columnist Sophie Durocher wrote: "My resolutions are ... to regularly remind the whining columnists of the *Montreal Gazette* to stop playing the victim."

The other main French papers, *Le Devoir* and *La Presse*, are not much better. *Le Devoir* was founded as a nationalist

paper by Henri Bourassa in 1910. *La Presse* is no longer a newspaper, publishing online only. Both will frequently take shots at the anglophone community. Radio-Canada, which was a hotbed of separatists like René Lévesque in the past, is often hostile to Anglo concerns.

Indeed, when the new federal Official Languages Act was tabled incorporating the Charter of the French Language, there were sneers from such established columnists as Michel C. Auger and Chantal Hébert. Responding to former Liberal MP Marlene Jennings' assessment of the legitimate threats of Bill 96, Auger wrote, "This is the kind of talk that is totally exaggerated and

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Research safeguards a good first step, but more needed to avoid foreign influence traps, says Montreal professor

NDP MP Richard Cannings says the absence of private companies operating in Canada, like Huawei, still leaves room to circumvent federal funding restrictions.

BY STUART BENSON

The federal government has taken a long-awaited “first step” to protect Canadian research and technology with a new set of measures to clamp down on Canadian universities and research institutions partnering with organizations affiliated with adversarial foreign governments and militaries. But Benjamin Fung, a Canadian academic and target of repeated Chinese government recruitment attempts, says the new measures are incomplete until they address all avenues of foreign infiltration into Canadian institutions.

On Jan. 16, Innovation, Science, and Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Que.) announced a set of national security measures to protect homegrown research and technology from falling into the hands of organizations affiliated with foreign state security, military, or national security institutions for countries like Russia, Iran, and China.

The measures apply to several research areas related to sensitive and cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence, advanced weaponry, robotics, and quantum computing. The feds have listed 88 Chinese organizations, like the National University of Defense Technology and the Academy of Military Science; 11 Iranian institutions, including the Iranian Revolutionary Guard-run Imam Hossein University; and six Russian institutes that Canadian researchers will now need to avoid in order to be eligible for funding from federal granting agencies.

Champagne also announced the creation of a Research Security Centre, and an additional \$50-million for the \$450-million Research Support Fund.

In a statement accompanying the announcement, Champagne said the new measures wouldn’t take effect until later this spring, but the government could “immediately take research affiliation into account as part of research funding decision-making, should risks be identified,” and encouraged researchers and institutions to continue exercising “due diligence in all of their partnerships.”

Fung, the Canada Research Chair in Data Mining for Cybersecurity at McGill University, told *The Hill Times* that while the measures are a welcome “first step,” it’s one he has been waiting for the government to take for several years.

“I don’t think this will make a big change because, in the past two to three



Beginning this spring, Canadian universities will be prohibited from receiving federal funding for sensitive technology research if they collaborate with any of the more than 100 military, national defence, or state security organizations associated with adversarial foreign governments. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

years, most professors have already come to recognize the risk of collaboration, especially with universities in China,” Fung explained, adding that he doesn’t expect there to be many planned or future funding applications that will now be disqualified. Additionally, he said he doesn’t expect many of the research projects currently partnering with a listed agency to have sought funding from a federal agency to begin with.

However, Fung said the list is still “better than nothing,” as even the researchers and institutions that had learned to practice greater caution in deciding who to partner with had, for the most part, traditionally underestimated the breadth of the issue in the case of China in particular.

Fung explained that, traditionally, it was thought that the main concern when it came to partnering with Chinese universities was the so-called “Seven Sons of the People’s Liberation Army” (PLA), a grouping of seven public universities affiliated with China’s Ministry of Industry and Information Technology believed to be in close partnership with the PLA on scientific research projects.

According to the United States’ Hoover Institution, the Seven Sons serve as “pathways for harvesting U.S. research and diverting it to military applications.” In 2020, the U.S. government banned Seven Sons students from enrolling in American graduate programs.

Fung said that while expanding the list to 88 institutions is an improvement, he also hopes it won’t give the illusion that any Chinese university not on the list is without risk.

“Universities on the list have a higher risk, but that doesn’t mean they’re safe if they’re not,” Fung said, adding that another missing piece is not including organizations and companies operating in Canada that have ties to China’s government.

Fung said the inclusion of those organizations would be especially useful in the instances when researchers and institutions are approached with funding by private interests, as while they may be more cautious about saying yes to a university

or corporation based in China, they are more likely to collaborate when a company operates in Canada.

Fung has firsthand experience with the recruitment tactics of the Chinese Communist Party and state-affiliated companies. Beginning in 2018, Fung was repeatedly approached by a large Chinese 5G company with offers to collaborate, offering him triple his salary to, as he says he was told, “simply answer their emails.”

Fung explained that the lucrative offer is the first step in the CCP’s “feed, trap, kill” recruitment strategy. If the target accepts the offer and begins to rely on the funding to continue their research, Fung said that’s when the trap is ready to be sprung. He clarified that the third step of the strategy isn’t a suggestion of possible physical harm, but rather a demand of the target to say or do something that may damage their reputation, or even land them in legal jeopardy.

After rejecting the offer himself, Fung said the company has repeatedly contacted him since with new offers of collaboration. When that didn’t work, they began to approach his graduate students. While none accepted the offers either, he explained that students, particularly Chinese international students, are especially vulnerable to pressure tactics.

Fung said that many Chinese students receive full scholarships to study and research in Canada through the China Scholarship Council (CSC), and due to the strict agreements they sign with the government, the students can be pressured with threats of their families being forced to pay back their scholarships.

“It can be very dynamic because since the CSC is approving all of the scholarships, they know exactly which projects each student is working on,” Fung explained. “So if they are interested in a specific project, they can put pressure on a particular student. It doesn’t have to be many students, and it doesn’t require lots of energy.”

While Fung said he isn’t suggesting that Canadian institutions should completely stop collaborating with any Chinese universities or stop accepting international students, he said he believes universities and academics should be more responsible with whom they partner and which projects they allow students to work on.

NDP MP Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, B.C.), his party’s deputy innovation, science, and technology critic and a member of the House Science and Research Committee, told *The Hill Times* that while he welcomes the announcement, he had been expecting it “any day now” for the past six months.

However, while he’s happy to see the measures finally announced, he described the list of research organizations as a “work in progress,” and said the first thing he asked upon reading it was: “Where’s Huawei?”

Canning said given the concerns over Huawei’s own affiliation with Beijing and funding of Canadian research, he was surprised to see the company absent from the list.

“I’m not saying that everything Huawei does is a security concern, but there are certainly a lot of security issues that have been raised around it,” Cannings explained, adding that Huawei was only one example of how he could see the measures being subverted.

“Overall, I’m glad it’s there and hope it will be updated regularly, but there are various ways to circumvent this list,” Cannings said, noting that there is a lack of clarity on what the auditing process for the funding would be to ensure compliance.

One effective way to reduce the temptation to find a loophole is to feed Canadian universities’ and research institutions’ hunger for increased funding, Cannings said.

“When Canadian research funding is not up to the level that it is in other countries, there’s a lot of pressure on researchers to take funding from other sources,” Cannings explained. “We have good researchers, so there’s very strong competition for funding, but the ones who don’t end up getting it have to find other ways. If they can’t get it from the Canadian private sector, they obviously turn to the private sector outside Canada.”

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News

Quebec Liberals want Champagne for the provincial leadership—and he's not ruling it out

Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne's name generates the 'most interest and enthusiasm' amongst Quebec Liberals for the provincial party's top job, says a top Quebec Liberal Party source.

Continued from page 1

have another idea in mind for the current industry minister.

They want him to run for the open provincial leadership position in that province, and Champagne didn't rule it out.

"Listen, a lot of people call me, offering me all sorts of jobs. I think I have a pretty busy one," said Champagne (Saint Maurice-Champlain, Que.) in an interview with *The Hill Times* on the sides of the Liberal cabinet retreat in Montreal.

When asked if it would be accurate to say he's not ruling out the possibility, he said:

"Listen, I have a job. I'm always amazed at people, people always ask me if I want another job. I have a job, and I'm pretty happy with that, and I'm pretty busy."

The Quebec Liberals won't elect a new leader until the spring of 2025, and the next provincial election isn't scheduled for until more than a year later, on Oct. 5, 2026. The party has been without a permanent leader since late 2022 after Dominique Anglade stepped down following the provincial party's failure to unseat the François Legault and the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) in the provincial election.

First elected in the 2015 federal election, Champagne—a well respected Quebec MP—has served in senior cabinet portfolios including international trade, infrastructure, and foreign affairs.

Former Liberal MP and mayor of Montreal Denis Coderre and incumbent Liberal MP Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hebert, Que.) are other po-



Quebec Liberals are wooing Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne for the provincial party's top job. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

tential candidates for the provincial Liberal leadership contest.

A top Quebec Liberal Party source who spoke to *The Hill Times* on a not-for-attribution basis so as to speak candidly said that numerous grassroots party members as well as those in official party positions want Champagne to run, but he has not yet been officially approached. The source said party members have had informal conversations with the industry minister, who has not committed one way or another.

"So, within members of the party and officials within the party that have official positions, the name of François-Philippe Champagne is certainly the one that generates the most interest and enthusiasm for various reasons," said the top Quebec Liberal. "Many people see him as having a very good profile for the job, and he's been an excellent federal minister [who has] held important positions, and he's been successful in his role. He already has a good profile in Quebec, [is] very visible in the media in Quebec, [and] is elected in a region [outside of Montreal]."

The source acknowledged that Champagne is seen as a potential candidate for the federal Liberal leadership whenever that does take place, but pointed out that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) wants to lead the party in the October 2025 election. For months now, national polling numbers have shown the Conser-

vatives ahead of the Liberals by a double-digit margin. The source said that if Trudeau were to lose the next election and step down, Champagne would be running to become leader of an opposition party. If Trudeau were to win the election, then the prime minister could stay on for years more. As well, the source noted that whenever the prime minister does leave the Liberal leadership, Champagne would also have to overcome the informal federal Liberal tradition of alternating leaders from English and French Canada.

The potential path to power for the next leader of the Quebec Liberals sits in contrast. The source noted the CAQ has already won two elections, and, according to recent levels of public support, are unlikely to win another. The

source suggested that odds are much better for Champagne to become the Quebec premier as the provincial Liberal leader than to become the next Liberal prime minister. In the 2022 Quebec provincial election, the Quebec Liberals came a distant second to Legault's CAQ, electing 21 members to the legislature with 14.4 per cent of the vote.

In addition to Champagne, a number of other prominent Liberals are seen to be potential candidates to lead the party federally, including Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.); Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.); and Treasury Board President Anita Anand (Oakville, Ont.). Former Bank of Canada and Bank of

England governor Mark Carney is also seen as a potential candidate to succeed Trudeau. When the position opens up officially, other potential candidates might also decide to seek this position.

Since the 2021 election, a significant number of MPs and party insiders had been expecting Trudeau to step down and let someone else lead the party before the 2025 election, but so far the prime minister has been adamant that he has no plans to leave. The Liberal Party's consistently bad polling numbers have been another reason for people to think that Trudeau might move on. The Liberals have been trailing the Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) Conservatives by as many as 18 points, and according to some seat projections, if public support for the governing party does not change before the next election, the Poilievre Conservatives could win a landslide majority.

In interviews with *The Hill Times* at the retreat in Montreal, senior cabinet ministers—including Champagne—said they are focused on governing the country, and are not looking at the polls.

"I've always been wanting to focus on getting the job done," said Champagne. "Canadians want us to focus on what matters to them, and what matters to them is not the polls. It's affordability; it's housing; it's getting groceries; the cost of living."

Newly minted Government House Leader Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.) echoed the same view:

"Good policy is good politics, and we're gonna keep looking at [the] good policy part," he said.

The 40-member Trudeau cabinet met in Montreal for their pre-winter House sitting retreat. At this three-day get together, cabinet ministers, senior ministerial and PMO aides plotted their new year's parliamentary and legislative strategy and heard from experts on how to address issues like affordability, housing, middle-class prosperity, and Canada-U.S. relations.

On housing, experts briefing the cabinet included Tim Richter, president and CEO of Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness; and Mike Moffatt, associate professor in business, economics, and public policy at Ivey Business School at Western University.

On the middle class, the cabinet heard from Kevin Milligan, a professor of economics at the University of British Columbia; Frances Donald, chief economist at Manulife Financial; and Armine Yalnizyan, an economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers.

Canada's ambassador to the U.S. Kirsten Hillman; Flavio Volpe, president of the Auto Parts Manufacturers Association; Laura Dawson, executive director at Future Borders Coalition; and Marc-André Blanchard, executive vice-president, global head of sustainability, and head of CDPQ Global also shared their views on Canada-U.S. relations with top government officials.

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The Hill Times



Newly minted Government House Leader Steven MacKinnon says the government is not worried about low popularity in the polls, and is keeping its focus on coming up with good policies for Canada. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Trudeau nears record high for political diplomatic appointments as Bennett goes to Denmark

Only Jean Chrétien and Pierre Trudeau appointed more of their cabinet ministers as ambassadors and high commissioners than Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has to date.

Continued from page 1

Liberal MP. Her ambassadorial appointment was officially announced the following day.

Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) had previously appointed his former public safety minister Ralph Goodale as Canada's high commissioner to the United Kingdom in 2021, as well as past immigration minister John McCallum and former foreign affairs minister Stéphane Dion to lead Canada's embassies in China and Germany, respectively, in 2017 (Dion was later appointed as Canada's ambassador to France in 2022).

The appointment of four past cabinet ministers to ambassadorial posts only trails that of prime ministers Jean Chrétien and Pierre Trudeau, who both appointed five each. The two former Liberal leaders served in office for nearly two and more than seven years longer, respectively, than Trudeau's current tenure. Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper appointed three former cabinet colleagues, and prime ministers William Lyon Mackenzie King and John A. Macdonald each appointed two. Four other prime ministers appointed a lone cabinet minister to a head of mission posting.

Following his ouster from cabinet, former foreign affairs minister Marc Garneau told *The Globe and Mail* in 2022 that Trudeau offered him the post of Canada's ambassador to France, which he turned down. Garneau resigned as an MP last March.

Former Canadian ambassador Guy Saint-Jacques, who served as Canada's ambassador to China from 2012-2016, said the appointments represent "an unfortunate trend."

"It's clear that it is a process used by the prime minister to free up ridings for people that he likes," he said.

When McCallum, who served as Saint-Jacques' successor in China, departed his cabinet post and resigned as an MP, it was former Prime Minister's Office staffer and now International Trade Minister Mary Ng (Markham-



New ambassador Carolyn Bennett became the fourth cabinet minister Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has named as a foreign envoy when she was appointed Canada's top diplomat in Denmark on Jan. 17. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Thornhill, Que.) who ran in the subsequent byelection.

McCallum later resigned as a diplomat in 2019 after public comments he made about Meng Wanzhou's extradition during the Two Michaels' affair that differed from the government's positioning.

Saint-Jacques said the political appointments largely separate Canada's foreign ministry from other allies, with the exception of the United States, which employs a large number of political appointees to lead its missions abroad.

"The French, the British, the Japanese have [virtually] no political appointees—it's very rare," said Saint-Jacques, who was responsible for the heads of mission nomination process for career diplomats during his time in the foreign service.

"This means their understanding of foreign policy and appointing ambassadors, they know you have to appoint people with competencies and experience," he said.

Trudeau hasn't shied away from naming other political appointees as ambassadors and high commissioners.

He appointed former interim Liberal leader Bob Rae as ambassador to the United Nations, and former Liberal MP and now Progressive Senator Rodger Cuzner (Nova Scotia) as consul general in Boston, as well as David MacNaughton in the U.S., Isabelle Hudon in France, Dominic Barton in China, Janice Charette in the United Kingdom, Marc-André Blanchard at the UN, and Ian McKay in Japan, among others.

Harper previously came under fire for appointing what

some thought were unsuitable candidates as envoys, including Toronto lawyer Vivian Bercovici to Israel, and former head of his RCMP detail Bruno Saccomani to Jordan. He also tapped his former foreign affairs minister Lawrence Cannon as ambassador to France after the Quebec MP's defeat in the 2011 election. Past veterans affairs minister Jean-Pierre Blackburn was appointed as ambassador to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization after he was also defeated in the 2011 election. Harper's former fisheries and oceans minister Loyola Hearn was named ambassador to Ireland following his decision not to run for re-election in 2008.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has surpassed predecessor Stephen Harper in appointing more of his cabinet ministers to ambassadorial posts. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Saint-Jacques said political appointments show a lack of understanding of foreign policy which affects how Canada is perceived abroad.

"We are taken less seriously (due to insufficient foreign affairs funding), and by appointing political people, it just reinforces the perception among recipient countries that we don't really understand the importance of foreign policy," he said.

He added that the political appointments hurt the morale of the foreign service when there is a situation where four of Canada's six G7 embassies are led by political appointees.

Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers president Pamela Isfeld said the best preparation for a high-level diplomatic appointment is a career in the foreign service.

"I get kind of concerned when I see people coming from outside that don't have the background or the networks, and don't understand the management systems," she said, remarking that it is disappointing for members of the foreign service when a posting is taken from a career diplomat and given to a political appointee.

Isfeld said there are legitimate reasons to appoint a cabinet minister to a post, noting that some have done fantastic work.

But she added that it's a tougher role for a political appointee to be named to a smaller mission like in Denmark. Whereas there are more personnel to help with running and managing the larger missions, in smaller- and medium-sized missions there often isn't.

"From my point of view, if they are going to appoint people, they should be looking at the

infrastructure that needs to be there to support that person so they can be effective," she said. "It's that kind of systemic thing that concerns me when you see a lot of political appointments, especially if they're going to be at these smaller missions."

According to data presented to the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee in September 2022, Canada's Embassy in Denmark had four Canadian diplomats, including the ambassador, as well as 10 local staff at the time.

Canadian Ambassadors Alumni Association president Michael Small said the government should be selective in how it uses political appointments, ensuring they add value to the posting.

"The basic approach that I would recommend is that [political] appointments should be selective, strategic, and scarce," said Small, a former head of mission to Australia and Cuba.

He said appointing people who have worked in the public service to ambassadorial posts is apt, as ambassadors and high commissioners are tasked with bureaucratic responsibility, including how to manage the personnel and assets, while also having a domestic and international network.

He said there are a number of political appointees who have relevant experience and have performed well, noting Harper's appointment of Mulroney-era cabinet minister Michael Wilson as ambassador to the U.S. as an example.

Small said Bennett's experience as a former Crown-Indigenous relations minister links with major interests Canada shares with Denmark, specifically the Arctic through Canada's relationship with Greenland.

Past Canadian diplomat Anne Leahy said there is a necessary balance to be struck between having political appointments, and also ensuring the foreign service is respected.

"It's very important that diplomacy be valued by the prime minister, and not just in policy statement, but in measures taken and that includes having the top positions available to professionals ... and how our advice is taken and how valued we are at headquarters as well," said Leahy, who has served as Canada's top diplomat in Russia, Poland, and Cameroon, among others.

She noted that a career diplomat, Kirsten Hillman, currently leads Canada's most important mission in the U.S., when in recent history it largely has been reserved for political appointees.

Leahy added that it is not a given that just because someone had the ear of the prime minister as a cabinet minister, that will continue as an ambassador.

"Once someone's out of Ottawa or out of that political position, they are onto a different island and may not retain the same access as they had before," she said. "On the other hand, someone like our ambassador to the U.S., who is a career diplomat, because of her position and strength will have the ear of the prime minister."

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Editorial

Stay clear of scapegoating in student cap

In a move signalled a week prior, the Liberal cabinet retreat in Montreal kicked off on Jan. 22 with an announcement from Immigration Minister Marc Miller that the feds are going to start capping the number of international student permit applications.

The two-year initiative is “expected to result in approximately 360,000 approved study permits, a decrease of 35 per cent from 2023” this year, according to the press release from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

“In recent years, the integrity of the international student system has been threatened. Some institutions have significantly increased their intakes to drive revenues, and more students have been arriving in Canada without the proper supports they need to succeed. Rapid increases in the number of international students arriving in Canada also puts pressure on housing, health care, and other services,” the IRCC release said.

The federal government is also switching up how it deals with work permits for those who have graduated, and which international students’ spouses are eligible.

These are all measures “to protect a system that has become so lucrative that it has opened a path for its abuse. Enough is enough,” Miller said in the release.

The conversation around international students has become more vigorous

in recent years in conjunction with the ongoing housing crisis. While this move could be objectively beneficial to help avoid international students being taken advantage of, it is equally—if not more so—aimed at a domestic audience looking for some action on the availability of homes across the country.

And that’s where things can get dicey.

In a recent interview with the *Toronto Star’s* Susan Delacourt, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau indicated that the overarching sentiment in this country regarding immigration is something he’s thinking about.

“I’ve long said that one of the most important responsibilities of any Canadian prime minister of government is to protect that consensus,” he said.

But that consensus has seemingly been slipping for a while as people look for reasons and rationale as to why their lot in life has apparently deteriorated.

As politicians forge deeper into these kinds of actions ostensibly aimed at helping all involved, they must be cognizant of the potential to open the door to what could be a form of state-sponsored xenophobia.

Once a category of people have been cast as “the problem,” that’s toothpaste that can’t be put back in the tube, regardless of how benevolent one’s intentions are.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

Liberals failing to prevent genocide: St. John’s reader

Re: “Tactical neutrality may avoid inflaming Liberal caucus divisions, but Canada can’t escape ICJ ruling consequences with silence: international law experts.” (*The Hill Times*, Jan. 17, p. 12).

The division in the Liberal caucus is displayed and the depth of emotion within the individuals on opposite sides of the issue of genocide in Gaza is captured clearly in this story. The position of the NDP is less obvious, but discernible by the visit to the occupied West Bank by three members of that party to listen to Palestinians. The repellent, reptilian position of the Conservative Party is wholly missing, thereby not allowing readers to fully understand the breadth of the issue and the potential embarrassment for Canada on the world stage.

Much of the applicable international law is presented clearly by experts. With regret, the onus on Canada, as a signatory to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, is overlooked. Article 1 of the Convention requires all parties to “prevent” genocide. With the International Court of Justice having before it the complaint by the Republic of South Africa that the actions of the State of Israel in Gaza constitute

genocide, a prudent action by the federal government would be to stop both the export of military materiel directly to Israel and through conduits in the United States.

This failure by the Liberals could well come back to haunt the chain of command personally, from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly, and the myriad of the federal bureaucracy, including the director of export control, who should be especially aware of the responsibility conferred by the Genocide Convention.

Either the wing of the Liberal Party blind to genocide has the upper hand, or the Liberals are woefully inept. While there is considerable evidence of the latter situation blemishing the Liberal record as Government of Canada, a handful of powerful lobby groups are equally blind to genocide, and continue to sway the prime minister and his honourable colleagues. This was apparent when they made Trudeau back away from requiring an investigation into the Israeli forces’ 2018 shooting of Canadian medical doctor Tarek Loubani in both knees in Gaza.

Walter Thomas Beckett
St. John’s, N.L.

Hamas can stop the Gazans’ suffering, says Williams

Re: “The Islamophobic silence is deafening,” (*The Hill Times*, Jan. 17, p. 9).

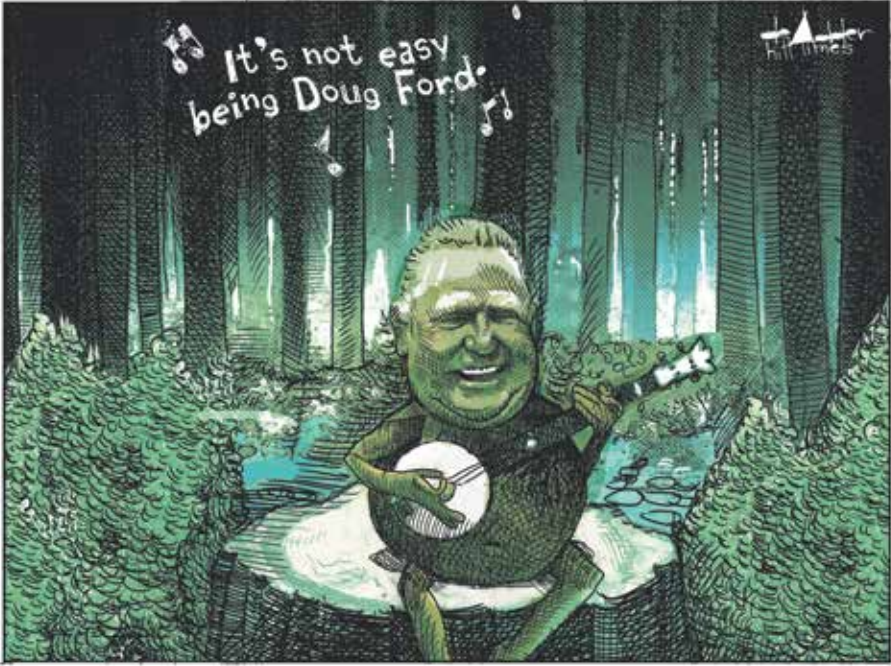
In her column, Erica Ifill cannot comprehend why there appears to be so much more empathy for Israelis than for Palestinians in Canada. While I’m not sure that is the case, I do believe it ought to be true.

I hope and expect that Canadians understand that Hamas, not Israel, is accountable for the devastation to Gazans. Hamas broke the ceasefire on Oct. 7, 2023. Hamas gleefully gang-raped women, killed babies, playfully mutilated people at will, and took hundreds of hostages from the ages of younger than one-year-old to older than 80 years old. Hamas also knew full well that it was a war it could not win, and one that would inflict immense suffering on its own people. It didn’t care. In fact, Moussa Abu Marzouk, a prominent member of Hamas’ political bureau, has declared that the terror group ruling Gaza is not responsible for protecting the Strip’s civilians, and said that the vast tunnel network under-

neath the enclave is only for the protection of Hamas.

Hamas correctly anticipated that much of the world would soon forget the atrocities and, like Ms. Ifill, clamour against the disproportionality of the response and demand a ceasefire. But people possessing moral clarity do understand the difference between Hamas’ war crimes (which I am pleased Ms. Ifill acknowledges) and a legal and morally justifiable Israeli military response. If Ms. Ifill is truly concerned about the loss of life of Gazans and the dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza, she should demand that Hamas immediately surrender and release all the hostages. That is what governments do when their citizenry is imperiled. It is what Japan did on Sept. 2, 1945, to signal the end of the Second World War, and it is what Germany did on Nov. 11, 1918, to end the First World War. It is what Hamas should do now if it truly cares about its people.

Alan Williams
Ottawa, Ont.



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Jamaican a baby

The rather grey, and yet allegedly specific, set of rules that govern a life abroad indicate that your offspring will not be granted foreign citizenship.

Andrew Elliott

Opinion



OTTAWA—Having kids is expensive. The first time my wife and I found out we were pregnant I was tagging along on her work trip to Bangkok, Thailand. She was on a United Nations stipend and I spent the last of the money I'd made landscaping in Vancouver on the flight. Anybody who has had either of these two jobs knows this leaves you in a state of abject poverty. So, when my better half told me she felt something and wanted to get a pregnancy test, we opted for the \$1 offering at the convenience store across the street from the hostel. We went through five tests trying to confirm which line was which. That confirmation was

solidified after we purchased a \$5 test. A doctor confirmed that test when we returned to our then home in Mongolia.

Eight years later, we had learned our lesson. Some things you can buy generic, like ketchup or Tadalafil. With home pregnancy tests, buy brand name. Despite the fact that First Response sounds like a firefighter is going to kick down your bathroom door after you've done a pee, they work. That's how, in the suburbs of Kingston, Jamaica, we found out we were having our second kid.

Like in Canada, if you're born on Jamaican soil, you have a right to Jamaican citizenship and all the privileges that go with it. That is, unless you happen to be born to a diplomat. The rather grey, and yet allegedly specific, set of rules that govern a life abroad indicate that your offspring will not be granted foreign citizenship. With that incentive off the table, we made the decision to come back to Canada to deliver. Other factors, most prominently my wife being designated a high-risk pregnancy, played a larger role in that decision, but I'm willing to lean into being deflated because my youngest daughter won't be able to represent Jamaica in the amateur sport of her choosing in the 2042 Commonwealth Games.

We got pregnant with each of our kids while living abroad, but delivered both in Ontario. The first time we had been out of the

country too long for our OHIP to kick back in by the time our daughter was ready to come out. She was born on private insurance linked to my wife's job with the United Nations. We saw the bill (a rarity for Canadians). It was around \$16,000 in Sudbury for an uncomplicated natural birth. The second time around was the same, but like everything else, the price has gone up.

Because of our status as diplomats, my wife is covered by private health insurers. One for medical claims in Canada, and another for medical claims on posting in Jamaica. All medical claims. Consider all the joy one gets when figuring out the co-pay with regards to any prescriptions you have, and then add that to every medical encounter you go through while pregnant. I know prices have gone up because most of these costs are paid up front, and I now have enough Scene points to see all the upcoming Phase 6 movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, whether I want to or not.

We settled into a birthing room at the Civic Hospital on the evening of Dec. 29. I bought more Tim Hortons products that weekend than I have in my entire life, including the time I had a job at one. If ever there was a place that needed a pub, it's the maternity ward in a hospital. It would only be accessible to the non-birthing partners who could sit and commiserate and pay hospital—rival-



With Jamaican citizenship off the table, Andrew Elliott and his wife welcomed their second daughter on Dec. 31, 2023, in Ottawa. Photograph courtesy of Andrew Elliott

ling airport or stadium—prices for beer.

There is next to nothing to do while waiting for your significant other to go into labour. The chairs provided for anyone not squeezing out a kid seem to be designed to make you feel as if you have, too. I think we can kill two birds with one stone when the new Ottawa Hospital Civic Campus is built: high-back leather chairs in a maternity-ward pub. We can call it the Stork and Swaddle, and charge \$15.50 a pint.

We spent four days in the hospital, our daughter was born on the third. While kids are expensive, my second is already saving us money. She was born at 5:20 a.m. on Dec. 31, meaning we won't have to pay for another full year of daycare.

Andrew Elliott has spent two decades hosting radio shows around the world, most recently in Ottawa, and now writes stuff from his home in Kingston, Jamaica.

The Hill Times

Comment

Readying the spring-sitting scorecard

Continued from page 3

them out while taking the credit for significant social policy.

Does Conservative Pierre Poilievre's game plan alter in the months ahead? He has been, like opposition leaders before him, chief critic-in-residence of the Trudeau government. The Liberals have made his life pretty easy, giving up oodles of material for him to use. Poilievre has been living the Napoleon maxim of "never interrupt your enemy while making a mistake," and that has been wise. But he may soon find himself in a place where with double-digit leads in polls, and the expiration of the current government appearing more real, he needs to show a bit more of his hand on policy. In the past, he'd have been given the advice that this was the smart thing to do. But so far, Poilievre has mostly eschewed advice about



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, and former U.S. president Donald Trump will draw plenty of eyes over the next few months, writes Tim Powers. The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade and photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

what Conservatives on the edge of government should do, and just plowed forward doing things his way. It is uncertain whether that will change.

Gazes southward will be a pretty common occurrence over

the next six months. With the United States in full presidential-primary mode and Donald Trump court-appearance season, it will be hard to turn away for a moment. As the American drama plays out, how will it influence

our domestic politics, particularly the back and forth between the Liberals and the Conservatives? American elections and their proponents have been weaponized in Canada. This time will be no different. But will it be blanks

or clean shots landed? How many times and in how many ways will the Liberals play out a comparison between Poilievre and Trump? I am sure one of those online gambling sites can come up with some quality odds.

What happens with the Canadian and global economies over the next six months will be a crucial barometer. If interest rates go down, and affordability challenges around housing and food slightly improve, does that affect the public mood? It could make people less angry and potentially diminish the throw-the-bums-out mood that is now almost a national mantra.

Get your scorecards out. Let us see what things look like in June.

Tim Powers is chairman of Summa Strategies and managing director of Abacus Data. He is a former adviser to Conservative political leaders.

The Hill Times

Comment

Russian disinformation claims not a shield for Canada's military woes



Canadian Armed Forces members participate in a tree-planting exercise as part of Operation Reassurance at Camp Adazi Training Area in Latvia on May 5, 2023. The orderly conduct of the Canadian contingent in Latvia made Russian misinformation fizzle on impact, writes Scott Taylor. *DND photograph by Corporal Darren McDonald*

Now that the Canadian military has realized how little impact the Russian disinformation campaign had in Latvia, perhaps they can stop using that red herring to deflect any negative news story here in Canada.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—For years now, the Canadian Armed Forces has been telling anyone who will listen to be afraid of Russian disinformation.

According to our own military officers and a few self-appointed “misinformation experts,” the Russian propaganda machine is out to undermine the efforts of the NATO alliance, of which Canada is a founding member.

In 2014, Canada agreed to provide troops to be forward deployed in Latvia as part of NATO's Operation Reassurance, as a deterrent to potential Russian aggression.

The fear was that Russia would disseminate misinformation among the Latvian population, particularly the 25 per cent ethnic-Russian Latvians, in order to sow discord and discontent between the NATO battlegroup

and local civilians. To counter this potential threat, Canada spent a boatload of money to create something called the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

Interestingly, this title is somewhat misleading as their website runs an up-front disclaimer that they are not actually part of the NATO command structure and that they do not represent the military alliance. This in turn makes me question the validity of the use of the word “Excellence” in their title.

However, it is now being reported that any Russian propaganda campaigns in Latvia have been largely unsuccessful, and have failed to gain traction with that country's population. Now, before some zealot accuses me of spreading Russian disinformation, this latest report comes courtesy of the Royal Military College of Canada, via an internal assessment obtained by the *Ottawa Citizen*.

It is not that Russia did not attempt to sow discord in Latvia; it is instead the fact that the tactics used were so lame as to be immediately dismissed by a Latvian public long accustomed to clumsy government propaganda from their Soviet era.

For instance, one Russian ploy was to depict NATO soldiers flagrantly littering the streets of Latvia.

If the streets were indeed clogged with garbage, such images may have indeed incensed the Latvian population. But they were not, so the issue gained no traction.

Another Russian ruse was to portray Canadian soldiers as being fixated on the acquisition of beer.

For anyone familiar with soldiers of almost any nationality the question begs: where is the

insult? If NATO soldiers were drunkenly staggering en masse through the streets of Riga like extras from the *Walking Dead* TV series, Latvians might have indeed been displeased with having a NATO brigade deployed on their soil.

The orderly conduct of the Canadian, and indeed all NATO contingents in Latvia, made that Russian misinformation fizzle on impact.

Perhaps the most outlandish Russian falsehood was to link former Royal Canadian Air Force colonel and convicted serial killer Russ Williams to the Canadian mission in Latvia.

The kicker was to attach a photo which had been entered into evidence at Williams' murder trial, wherein the colonel was wearing the bra and panties of one of his victims.

This, I am sure, was dismissed out of hand by any Latvian civilian exposed to this hoax as being too bizarre to even contemplate it being real.

Only those Canadian service members familiar with the Williams saga would have been slighted by the fact a senior RCAF officer had indeed committed rape and murder. But I digress.

Now that the Canadian military has realized how little impact the Russian disinformation campaign had in Latvia, perhaps they can stop using that red herring to deflect any negative news story here in Canada.

Whether or not Canada's procurement woes, personnel shortages, or sexual misconduct scandals would be “music to the Kremlin's ears” is irrelevant. The answer is to fix the problems, not blame the Russians.

Scott Taylor is the editor and publisher of *Esprit de Corps* magazine.

The Hill Times

French media bias hurts Quebec's democracy



The French media's selective critique of Quebec Premier François Legault rarely, if ever, focuses on the concerns of the province's 1.25 million English-speakers, writes Andrew Caddell. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Continued from page 4

does nothing to contribute to an intelligent debate on these issues.”

By the time the Legault government was in full nationalist mode, Auger had changed his tune, writing in December, “For the English-speaking community, [the possibility of losing health services] is confirmation that their institutions are not immune to a threat that could arrive from who knows where.”

Just last week, I had a disturbing encounter with the bias of the francophone media. The organization I lead, the Task Force on Linguistic Policy, applied for an interlocutory injunction against the entirety of Bill 96, citing 30 English Quebecers whose lives have been harmed by the legislation. As we have done since our founding in 2021, we issued news releases in both languages, and I was available for interviews.

There were several in English, none in French. One would think a high-powered legal challenge to the Charter of the French Language might make news in

French. Instead, we were ignored. This was par for the course. And it was disgraceful: these taxpaying citizens are no less Quebecers than anyone else.

When the anglophone community was powerful in years past, the French media listened. Now, the average anglophone Quebecer earns less than their French neighbours, and while most are bilingual, those who are not are the elderly, Indigenous, visible minorities, rural poor, new arrivals, and people with physical and mental challenges.

It is these marginalized citizens who most need government services in English and are denied them. By not reporting fairly on the preoccupations of the anglophone community, the French media do a disservice to the cause of democracy in Quebec.

Andrew Caddell is retired from *Global Affairs Canada*, where he was a senior policy adviser. He previously worked as an adviser to Liberal governments. He is a town councillor in Kamouraska, Que. He can be reached at pipson52@hotmail.com.

The Hill Times

Overemphasis on security concerns undermines 'humanitarian intent' of Gaza visa program: refugee advocate

Lack of clarity and timelines leaves Palestinian Canadians in maddening limbo waiting for responses to their applications.

Continued from page 1

before the program launched, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) published the text of the policy, revealing the program would be limited to the first 1,000 accepted applications, and would close after a year if that quota was not met.

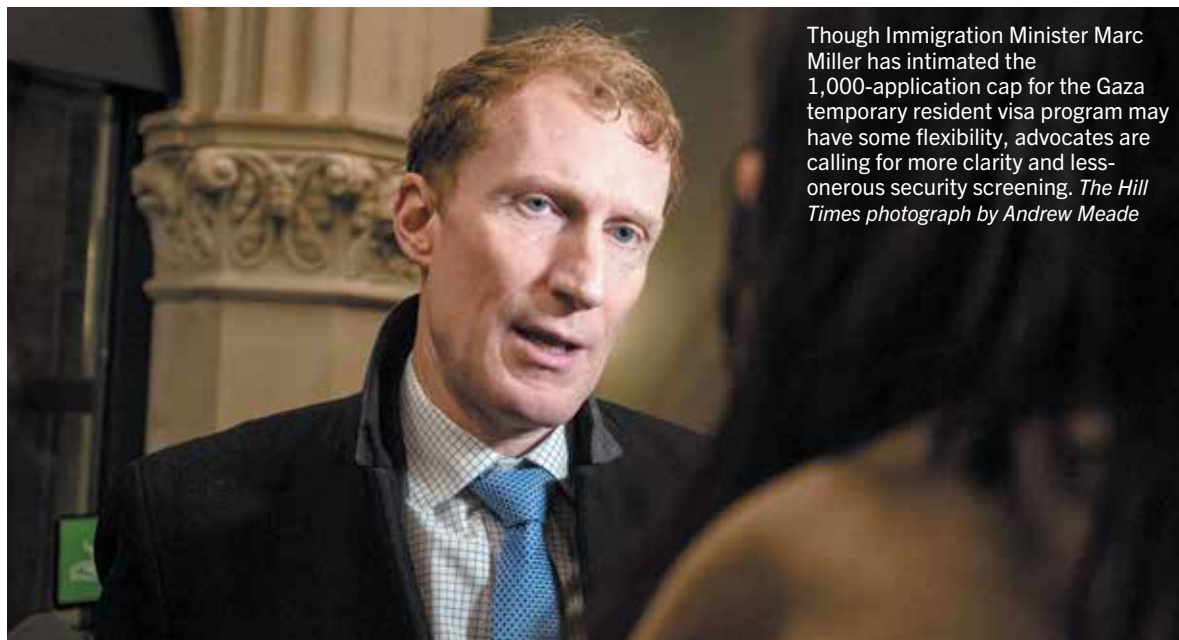
While condemnation of the quota from Muslim and refugee advocates as an unnecessary hurdle pitting desperate Canadians against one another for a spot was swift, once the program opened, concerns were immediately raised over the intensive process and unprecedented level of personal information required of applicants.

Sreenivasan, co-executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), told *The Hill Times* that she welcomed the visa program, but said the 1,000-application cap "undermined the generosity" of such a significant announcement. She said the government's reasoning for the cap—Canada's lack of control over who is allowed to cross the border into Egypt—"made no sense," as it undermined the need for a cap in the first place.

While the cap remains a primary concern, she said there is also significant concern about



Gauri Sreenivasan, co-executive director, Canadian Council for Refugees, says the inequitable and unwarranted level of scrutiny towards Palestinians threatens to undermine public support for similar humanitarian programs in the future. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Though Immigration Minister Marc Miller has intimated the 1,000-application cap for the Gaza temporary resident visa program may have some flexibility, advocates are calling for more clarity and less-onerous security screening. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

the government's "mixed messaging" on the subject, as well as the program's initial rollout.

Sreenivasan said that while the 1,000-visa limit is written in "black and white" on the IRCC website, Miller has hinted to the media that it may not be a "hard cap." She added that the CCR calls for Miller and IRCC to "be clear, and if the cap is not hard, remove it from the paperwork."

However, that would only solve one issue with the paperwork applicants are expected to fill out, which she said constitutes an "unbelievably in-depth and unprecedented level of personal information."

Once applicants have completed a sworn and notarized statement that they can support their relatives financially, they will be given a code to begin submitting the documents for the visa application. As part of that process, applicants are required to submit a biographic information document instead of biometric data that can only be gathered across the border in Egypt.

Alongside the usual passport information and travel history, the new form asks applicants to provide all of their past email addresses, usernames for all social media accounts, detailed employment history—including description and details on roles and responsibilities, names of supervisors, the reason for leaving, and any disciplinary issues—since the age of 16, and a "description of any scars or injuries" they have and how they sustained them.

According to a statement from IRCC, once the application is

complete, it is reviewed to determine each applicant's eligibility, which includes a "multi-stage security screening" assessment that will begin while individuals are still in Gaza using the biographic information provided. Once an individual has been cleared to cross into Egypt, the security assessment would then be completed there or in another third country that can collect biometric data.

As of Jan. 16, 144 applications were "in process," according to IRCC, with none having been finalized. The department did not respond by publication deadline when asked for more up-to-date information.

Sreenivasan said the overly burdensome combination of the nature and volume of details requested is causing the application process to take hours and sometimes days to complete, even with the help of a lawyer.

She also said it was concerning to see Canada hand over a level of security and information control to the Egyptian and Israeli governments that she believes is unrelated to the goal of enabling refugees to flee a war quickly, and has far more to do with those countries' own political and security considerations.

"Canada is bowing to a level of concern around security risks that undermines the central humanitarian intent of the program," Sreenivasan said, noting Miller's own emphasis on security concerns over humanitarian ones in his media interviews on the subject.

Sreenivasan said it's important to see more positive messaging

from the government on the issue, not only because it encourages Canadians to "rise to the occasion" to welcome newcomers to their communities, but also because the inconsistent messaging compared to other cohorts of refugees undermines public support for them all.

"Welcoming refugees is an important and historic value in Canada, and this inequitable level of scrutiny in the Palestinian case is unwarranted and dangerous," Sreenivasan said, noting the differing treatment in the program for Palestinians and the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel (CUAET) following Russia's invasion, including the waiving of fees for the application and biometric scans.

The average family in Gaza will be required to pay \$500-700 to process their application.

Since the federal government launched the CUAET in March 2022, more than 1.1-million applications have been received, and 936,293 have been approved. As of Nov. 28, 2023, 210,178 Ukrainians have arrived in Canada.

"These security requirements are costing days and lives, and we've already created all of these other obstacles with processing fees and an unreasonable cap," Sreenivasan said. "Canada knows better than this, and we can do better."

In a 'first-come, first-serve' race, Palestinian Canadians say time is running out to bring their families to safety

Jihan Qunoo—who previously spoke with *The Hill Times* before the program opened on Jan. 9—counts herself as one of the lucky ones, having received codes to submit an application for one sibling and their family. However, more than two weeks after applying for her remaining three siblings, their families, and her mother, she has yet to receive a response.

In a Jan. 18 interview, Qunoo said that she submitted the first- and second-stage documentation for three of her siblings' families and her mother the day the program opened—completing the submission for the first family within two hours of the program opening—and the fourth the following morning.

She said she received the first of seven codes to begin the visa application process for her brother Ahmed, his wife, and their five children on Jan. 11. She said the application took her more than 15 hours to complete as she took extra care and time to ensure she completed and submitted each document correctly, and did not lose time with a rejected application.

"At the same time, it feels like a competition ... first come, first serve ... so you want to submit everything quickly," Qunoo added.

However, Qunoo estimates that, even if she were to receive

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Jihan Qunoo's brother Ahmed, centre, and his three daughters pictured in their home in Gaza City before the war began. Photograph courtesy of Jihan Qunoo

News

Parliament construction work chugs ahead, as new acting LTVP point person steps in

Jennifer Garrett has been tapped to replace Rob Wright as the assistant deputy minister responsible for overseeing Hill renovations on an interim basis.

Continued from page 1

the end of December, with the department's stated plans to start contracting processes related to structural demolition and rebuild work inside Centre Block, and for the Parliament Welcome Centre's structural build, in the winter and spring, respectively. The construction manager for the project is a joint venture of PCL and EllisDon.

The 23-metre-deep pit where the main structure of the underground welcome centre will be built has been fully excavated, and last year, work began to install a network of geothermal wells at the bottom of that pit which will form a geothermal exchange system to store excess heat from the future building for reuse. Each well goes down some 260 metres, and as of Dec. 15, 73 out of 92 wells had been drilled.

With the main pit complete, excavation work related to the welcome centre is now taking place on the east side of Centre Block. Work is also gearing up to begin excavating underneath the historic building to install a new seismic base isolation system and connect Centre Block with the underground Parliament Welcome Centre. Future visitors to the Hill will enter through the welcome centre—doors to which will be set into the staircase leading up from the lawns to Centre Block's front entrance—and make their way into Centre Block through its previously unused west and east courtyards.

A network of temporary posts and support beams has to be installed under Centre Block to support the building during this excavation work. Workers began drilling to install the steel cylindrical posts, or piles, that will form much of this network last January, and during an Oct. 26 appearance before the House Board of Internal Economy (BOIE), then-PSPC assistant deputy minister (ADM) Rob Wright told MPs that 250 out of an anticipated 800 steel piles had so far been installed. In its latest quarterly report, the department



The Centre Block building on Parliament Hill, as seen on Jan. 17. As of last December, \$748-million out of a projected \$4.5-billion to \$5-billion has been spent to revamp the historic building. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

has a stated goal to have 50 per cent of the temporary posts needed to support Centre Block during excavations installed by this winter.

Much of the building slab also needs to be replaced or reinforced as part of this work, and PSPC is aiming to have 25 per cent of that rebuilt by the spring, and to have completed construction of the "temporary concrete shear walls" that will be part of the network supporting Centre Block during excavation.

Inside the building, interior demolition and abatement work is now "substantially complete," according to the latest quarterly report, with roughly 26 million pounds of hazardous materials (largely asbestos) having been removed. In October, Wright had indicated that work was "well over 95 per cent complete."

"We're into the challenging part of the project," Wright told MPs in reference to the excavations set to happen underneath Centre Block.

Masonry restoration on Centre Block's exterior has also been chugging along, and is now completed on the north façade, and roughly 27 per cent complete on the east façade. Since starting on the west façade in October, work there is roughly eight per cent complete.

Markers tracking the project's overall health, scope, cost, and schedule remain as they were in the previous third-quarter report for 2022-23, with both scope and cost marked as "progressing in line" with approved plans, and the project schedule marked as an aspect that is "experiencing challenges that have a high likelihood of impacting" project health overall.

A notable part of that challenge is slower-than-hoped-for

decision making by Parliamentarians, as was emphasized to both MPs and Senators last fall and was highlighted as a "significant risk" by Auditor General Karen Hogan in a March 2023 report.

A number of Centre Block design decisions still need to be finalized by both Chambers, and are expected to be high on the agenda for the respective bodies—an MP working group that reports to the BOIE, and a subcommittee of the Senate Internal Economy, Budgets, and Administration Committee—once Parliament returns (Jan. 29 for the House, and Feb. 6 for the Senate).

Wright move takes key players by surprise

In a move that took some by surprise, a late afternoon press release from the Prime Minister's Office on Friday, Jan. 12, announced that Wright was being shuffled out to become associate deputy minister for Crown-Indigenous Relations Canada as of Jan. 22—one of 10 senior public servant changes announced.

Wright had been assistant deputy minister for PSPC's science and parliamentary infrastructure branch (referred to internally as SPIN) since 2015, and as such, was the senior-most person responsible for overseeing all of the moving parts involved in the department's "Long-Term Vision and Plan" for renovating the Parliamentary Precinct for the last nine years—from the revamping of Centre Block to construction of the new underground Parliament Welcome Centre to the redesign of Block 2 on the south side of Wellington Street. As ADM, he also oversaw the department's 25-year plan aimed at revitalizing

federal science and tech laboratories across Canada (a \$2.8-billion project dubbed "Laboratories Canada"), managed all federal buildings north of Sparks Street including the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office (at 80 Wellington St.), and was responsible for nine sectors, each led by a director general.

Among those nine was Jennifer Garrett, director general for the Centre Block Program since 2016. As of Jan. 22, she has now stepped in to replace Wright as acting ADM, *The Hill Times* has learned.

Speaking to news of Wright's shuffle out of PSPC, Canadian Senators Group Leader Scott Tannas (Alberta), chair of the Senate's Subcommittee on the Long Term Vision and Plan, said he was surprised by the announcement, adding "I think a lot of people were."

Wright was a lead public face for the LTVP and the Centre Block renovation project, often speaking to media and appearing before House and Senate committees, and subcommittees, to brief Parliamentarians and answer questions—frequently alongside Garrett and other officials.

"To be honest, I don't know his background, I just always assumed he was a construction guy," said Tannas. "He's a real professional, he's a good communicator."

Asked his thoughts on the change in assistant deputy minister mid-way through the massive Centre Block project, Tannas said "there's always a risk, I think, but whoever's making decisions around this hopefully has thought that part through as well."

Though speaking before news of Garrett's acting appointment was known, Tannas noted she was among the "pretty substantial

team" of senior bureaucrats working with Wright, whom he said he'd noticed "taking more of the load of presentations, responses to questions, and so on" over the past year during meetings of the subcommittee.

"I don't think it'll interrupt the good working relationship we have with the PSPC folks," he said.

While the massive, multi-billion dollar project to renovate Parliament Hill's centrepiece building has been a main focus in recent years, attention will soon be well and truly split with work set to get underway on the similarly substantive effort to overhaul Block 2 later this year.

Block 2 sits on the south side of Wellington Street, bounded by Metcalfe and O'Connor streets to the west and east, and Sparks Street to the south. The project will require demolition work (and relocation of the Terry Fox statue currently at the corner of Wellington and Metcalfe streets) and construction of a new complex that will support an estimated 150 MP and Senator offices, as well as administration offices and committee rooms. It's also set to be connected to the main Parliament buildings—Centre Block, East Block, and West Block, which themselves are connected underground—by tunnel.

A competition to choose the design for Block 2's overhaul wrapped up in May 2022, with a concept drafted by Zeidler Architecture in association with David Chipperfield Architects selected as the winner. The architectural and engineering services contract, currently valued at \$28.25-million, was subsequently awarded to Zeidler Architecture a year later in May 2023.

In July, an environmental consulting services contract for the Block 2 project, valued at \$489,742, was awarded to Englobe Corp.

The main construction management contract for Block 2 work is expected to be announced in a matter of days, and as soon as this week, *The Hill Times* understands.

Once announced, things will need to progress quickly.

PSPC confirmed by email that its previously stated timelines for the project remain "on track."

"Specifically, construction activities will commence in fall 2024, as planned," said the department. The project is estimated to be completed by the early 2030s, around the same time as—or shortly after—the Centre Block project, which is expected to wind down by 2031.

Tannas said while the Senate subcommittee's focus remains "primarily around Centre Block," he noted the group is looking to get an update soon on how work is progressing on Block 2.

"We're watching very closely ... what's going on there, we want to know where that project is because there's some, I think, aggressive timelines there, and we very much want to see them held to," he said.

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Neil Moss

Diplomatic Circles

U.K. opens new three-storey commission steps from Canada's foreign ministry

After more than 60 years in downtown Ottawa, the U.K. High Commission has moved its offices to 140 Sussex Dr.

Just mere steps from the headquarters of Canada's foreign ministry, the United Kingdom has opened the newest chancery in Ottawa, trumpeting its green infrastructure.

Located on the same Earncliffe property that has housed the residence for the U.K. high commissioner to Canada for more than 90 years, the new three-storey chancery sits in place of the property's old carriage house.

Entering the building, visitors are greeted by a foyer adorned with the Union Jack and the Canadian flag, where Algonquin Anishinaabe Elder **Claudette Commanda** performed a blessing ceremony on Jan. 12. The foyer features a staircase with a special connection to Ottawa's past.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, timber intended for making ships or other projects was floated down the Gatineau and Ottawa rivers towards a lumber mill located near Parliament Hill, but sometimes logs would sink to the bottom. Now, those forgotten logs have been reclaimed and were used for the staircase leading from the foyer to the high commission's second-floor communal area.

On the second floor, a large gathering space flows from a bar area, and is accompanied by a balcony that wraps around the building, offering a panoramic view



The new U.K. High Commission is being touted as Britain's greenest mission throughout the globe. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

of Parliament Hill, the Ottawa River, and Gatineau, which U.K. High Commissioner **Susannah Goshko** said she foresees as being a prime viewing spot for the annual Canada Day fireworks festivities.

The bar, which will have both British and local offerings, will be opened for "thirsty Thursdays" to allow people from the government and diplomatic communities join.

The third—and top—floor of the high commission is work space, with rows of desks and computers set up in an open-concept office design. Goshko said that compared to the high commission's old 80 Elgin St. high-rise, the new premise brings diplomats and staff together, instead of splitting them across many floors, as the mission has reduced in size on account of no longer having to process passports and visas (which are now largely handled in the U.K.). Also on the third floor is Goshko's office, which looks out over the river and back to her residence.

Speaking to *The Hill Times* from her office, Goshko said the new building is better suited to how diplomacy operates in the 21st century.

"[The old high commission] was designed for when diplomacy was done completely differently," she said. "That building was long and thin. It was not a great building to work in because it didn't force collaboration."

The building that previously housed the U.K.'s diplomatic headquarters in Canada was sold to the National Capital Commission in 2021 for \$25-million, which the U.K. High Commission said has offset the construction of the new one.

"This building has been designed, really, to encourage interaction, to put everyone on the same floor, to create commons spaces, and to think about how do we encourage through architecture to deliver brilliant diplomacy?" Goshko added.

She said she's "loving" her commute, now working just steps from her residence, but noted that won't last too much longer,

as Earncliffe is now set to undergo renovations for at least the next two years.

The chancery is set to be the greenest mission in the U.K.'s catalogue of more than 260 overseas posts. Much of that is built within the infrastructure of the building, including washrooms that have minimal water output, but the mission is also encouraging its staff to think about how they can contribute—for example, individual garbage cans have been replaced with a central one.

"[Climate change] has been really an important part of our foreign policy for some time. Successive governments have been really committed to being at the forefront on taking action on climate change. We talk about it a lot here in Canada, we work a lot with Canada internationally on taking action on climate change," Goshko said. "It's really fitting that this building here will be a visual representation of that; it's about living our values."

She said the mission is on track to get Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design gold status.

With blank walls, the building—which is in its final stages of construction, and is set to be finished in a matter of weeks—will soon be getting a mixture of artwork shipped from the U.K., as well as locally commissioned work.

Being located just a stone's throw from the Pearson Building, Goshko said she foresees more face-to-face interaction with Canadian counterparts, especially as the closest dining option is Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) cafeteria.

She said she also wants to bring people into the building to speak in person rather than over the phone.

While there hasn't been an official opening of the high commission, a handful of GAC staff from its protocol office and MPs from the Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association were on hand for Commanda's blessing.

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The Hill Times



The ground floor staircase of the new U.K. High Commission uses repurposed timber from the bottom of the Ottawa River. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*



The U.K.'s new chancery is located steps from the Pearson Building, the headquarters of Canada's foreign ministry in Ottawa. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

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Laura Ryckewaert
Hill Climbers

Quartet of recent hires in offices of ministers Saks, Duclos

Changes in Public Services and Procurement Minister Jean-Yves Duclos' office include the addition of three new regional affairs advisers.

Mental Health and Addictions Minister **Ya'ara Saks** has added four staff to her office since **Hill Climbers'** last update, including new heads for her policy and communications shops.

Fara Shah joined Saks' office as director of policy in mid-October. A former program manager on the health sector response to gender-based violence for the United Nations Population Fund in Kabul, Afghanistan, Shah has been working for the Trudeau government since July 2021, starting as a policy adviser to then-international development minister **Karina Gould**.



Fara Shah is now director of policy to Minister Saks. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

She stayed on after now-Emergency Preparedness Minister **Harjit Sajjan** took over the international development portfolio in October of that year, but left in 2022 to become a policy adviser to then-employment minister **Carla Qualtrough**—her most recent role.

Shah is also a former policy adviser with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission in Kabul, and has done public affairs and communications work for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, amongst other past experience.

Now in Saks' office, Shah oversees senior policy adviser **Julia Duncan**.

Director of communications **Zachary Caldwell** left the mental health and addictions minister's office at the beginning of November, and by month's end, **Emily Kanter** had joined Saks' team to replace him.

Caldwell had been communications director in the office since the end of 2021, starting under then-minister **Carolyn Bennett**, who was shuffled into the newly

created cabinet post after that year's federal election. A former Ontario Liberal staffer at Queen's Park, he'd previously been director of parliamentary affairs to Sajjan as then-defence minister, and has also previously tackled parliamentary affairs work for Bennett as then-Crown-Indigenous relations minister, and for then-science and sport minister **Kirsty Duncan**.



New director of communications Emily Kanter. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Kanter recently returned from maternity leave and was last working as lead strategic communications adviser in Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau's** office. Kanter first joined the PMO as a communications planner in early 2019 after a little more than three years working in the Liberal research bureau on the Hill, starting at the end of 2015 as a special assistant for caucus services and ending as manager of communications. She's also a former assistant to then-Ontario Liberal MPs **Ted Hsu** and **Peter Milliken**.

Also (relatively) new to the communications team in Saks' ministerial office is **Ghada Abid**, who started as a communications adviser at the end of October. Abid was previously an assistant to Saks as the MP for York Centre, Ont. As she noted in a LinkedIn post last year, Abid moved from Tunisia to Canada in 2019 to study at the University of Ottawa. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in development economics and international development in 2022, and during her studies, she did co-op placements as a research assistant with the Centre for the Study of Living Standards; a media analyst with Environment and



Ghada Abid is a communications adviser. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Climate Change Canada; a policy analyst with Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada; and as a research assistant with the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study, amongst other past experience. Abid is also a former 2021 Equal Voice Daughters of the Vote delegate.

Alexander Fernandes continues as press secretary and senior communications adviser to Saks.

In more belated news, **Courtney White** joined Saks' team after last summer's shuffle, stepping into the role of senior operations and outreach adviser in September.

White spent the last year as a special assistant for tour and operations in Trudeau's PMO and before then was executive assistant to Labour Minister **Seamus O'Regan** (who added on responsibility for seniors in the July 2023 shuffle) and his chief of staff, **Paul Moen**. White was an aide to O'Regan and Moen for almost two years in all, starting in 2021 during O'Regan's time as then-natural resources minister (Moen was chief of staff for that office, too). She's also an ex-Daughters of the Vote delegate, and is additionally a former fellow with the Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee.

Hillary Morgan is director of operations to Saks, whose office is run by chief of staff **Sarah Welch** and also currently includes director of parliamentary affairs **Jeremy Proulx**, and parliamentary affairs adviser **Yuval Daniel**.

Jumping to Public Services and Procurement Minister **Jean-Yves Duclos'** office, there's another quartet of new additions—and one departure—to note.

James Rourke is now the West and North regional affairs adviser to Duclos, having started working in the minister's office in mid-October.

Rourke is a former assistant to British Columbia Liberal MP **Ron McKinnon**. Originally hired as a constituency assistant to McKinnon in Coquitlam-Port Coquitlam in early 2020, he came to Ottawa to work for the MP on the Hill roughly two years ago. Rourke is also a former constituency assistant to then-B.C. Liberal MP **Gordie Hogg**.



James Rourke is a West and North regional affairs adviser. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Dillon McGuire has been hired as a senior regional affairs adviser for Ontario.

Another October addition to Duclos' team, McGuire was previously busy as an operations and tour assistant to then-housing, diversity, and inclusion minister **Ahmed Hussen**. An ex-constituency assistant to Waterloo, Ont., Liberal MP **Bardish Chagger**, McGuire also previously worked for Qualtrough during her time as employment minister, starting as a special assistant for communications in early 2020, and ending as a regional affairs adviser for Ontario focused on the Greater Toronto Area.

McGuire has been an active Liberal organizer in Ontario; he worked as a field organizer for the federal party between 2016 and 2017, and worked on the campaigns



Dillon McGuire covers the Ontario desk for Minister Duclos. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

of Liberal MPs **Adam van Koeverden** and **Paul Chiang** in 2019 and 2021, respectively.

Rounding out the list of new regional desks in Duclos' shop is **Pavan Sapra**, who's joined as a senior policy and Atlantic regional affairs adviser.

Sapra previously did the same for **Bill Blair** as then-emergency preparedness minister and Privy Council president, and is also a former Atlantic regional adviser to then-economic development and official languages minister **Mélanie Joly**. A former youth director with the Dufferin-Caledon federal Liberal riding association in Ontario, Sapra was a political operations intern in then-interim Liberal leader **Bob Rae's** office, and between 2013 and 2016, worked in Trudeau's office as the MP for Papineau, Que. He's also a former assistant to then-Liberal MP **Alaina Lockhart** and to Liberal MP **Joyce Murray**.



Pavan Sapra is a senior policy and Atlantic regional adviser. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Élisabeth d'Amours remains director of operations to Duclos.

Another addition to Duclos' office is **Simone Racanelli**, who's been hired as assistant to the minister's parliamentary secretary, Liberal MP **Charles Sousa**. Racanelli was previously working in Sousa's office as the MP for Mississauga-Lakeshore, Ont.

On the flip side, policy adviser **Lawrence Zhang** left the public services and procurement minister's office as of Nov. 3. He'd been working there since February 2023, starting under then-minister **Helena Jaczek**, whom Zhang had previously worked for as then-minister for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (he stayed on as a policy adviser for a time after current minister **Filomena Tassi** swapped portfolios with Jaczek in August 2022).

Mary-Brown is director of policy to Duclos and continues to also oversee senior policy adviser **Samuel Saint-Vincent** and policy adviser **Victor Kandasamy**.

Anthony Laporte is chief of staff to Duclos, whose office also currently includes **James Fitz-Morris**, deputy chief of staff and director of parliamentary affairs; **Shiraz Keushgerian**, senior adviser for parliamentary affairs and issues management; **Marie-France Proulx**, director of communications; **Olivier Pilon**, press secretary; **Rachel Desjardins**, adviser and executive assistant to the minister; and driver **Marc Charbonneau**.

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Overemphasis on security concerns undermines ‘humanitarian intent’ of Gaza visa program: refugee advocate

Continued from page 11

codes for the remaining three families, she would have to spend much more time on those applications as Ahmed’s children are all under the age of 16. Furthermore, many of the documents needed to complete those applications may prove extremely difficult to obtain, as, in her siblings’ rush to evacuate on Oct. 13, they had only thought to bring passports and essential identification documents.

Adding to the stress of gathering so much detailed information is the unreliable means of communication available to Qunoo and her family in Gaza. Qunoo said that since an hour before submitting the completed appli-

cation for her brother Ahmed’s family on Jan. 12, she had been unable to regain contact with her family until Jan. 21, when she received a spotty international phone call from him.

“It’s getting worse,” Qunoo said, explaining that in her latest call with her brother, he told her that both of her sisters, Sofia and Sherin, are now sick from the dropping winter temperatures and increasingly unhygienic conditions due to an ever-dwindling supply of clean water and access to adequate washroom facilities or hygiene products.

While that news has only made Qunoo more desperate to get her loved ones out of Gaza and bring them to safety in Canada, she said she doesn’t sense the

same urgency from the Canadian government.

“The design of this program doesn’t fit the situation in Gaza right now; they’re in a crisis,” Qunoo explained. “It’s getting very bad in Gaza day by day, and we don’t know what will happen tomorrow. We’re still unsure if or when they will get out; it’s a matter of luck.”

However, there are far more people who have had less luck than Qunoo, including Israa Alsaafin, who has yet to receive any response on the Stage 1 applications she submitted for her parents, her remaining three siblings and their spouses. Alsaafin’s fourth sibling, her brother Ahmed, was killed in an airstrike on Oct. 13 as he was evacuating

the city with his sick father-in-law ahead of the official order from the Israel Defense Forces to evacuate Gaza City.

More frustrating than the quota or the process is the lack of clarity on the timeline for when she will receive a code, or at least confirmation that she won’t, Alsaafin said.

While Alsaafin waits to receive the codes and, hopefully, begin the visa applications, she has already begun collecting the necessary documents. She told *The Hill Times* she finds the level of information and detail required “ridiculous,” questioning whether she would need to include her mother’s C-section scar or how to get details on the past 50 years of work history for each of her parents.

Alsaafin said she understands that Canada needs to make sure they know exactly who is being welcomed into the country, but doesn’t understand the disproportionate level of suspicion being directed toward Palestinian refugees compared to others fleeing war zones.

Alsaafin added that her late brother had previously been approved for a foreign student visa in 2020 to attend Carleton University for a master’s in environmental engineering, but had lost his chance when the international borders closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, her sister Arwa had also begun the application process for a skilled worker visa as an architect and graphic designer.

“Most of [my family] are engineers, so we’re not a family of slackers; they’re going to be able to adapt,” Alsaafin said, noting that before that can happen, the government’s priority should be to bring hers and any other loved ones fleeing the war to safety.

“Everyone deserves to be in a safe place, but it feels like [Palestinians] aren’t looked at the same way,” Alsaafin said. “We’re not allowed to stay in the place we were born in, but we’re not trusted to leave because we were born there.”

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Parliamentary Calendar

Ed Broadbent’s life to be celebrated at state funeral in Ottawa on Jan. 28

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 24

House Not Sitting—The House is adjourned and is scheduled to return on Monday, Jan. 29. It’s scheduled to sit for a total of 125 days in 2024. It will sit Jan. 29-Feb. 16, and will break for one week (Feb. 19-23). It returns for one week (Feb. 26-March 1) and breaks for two weeks (March 4-15). The House comes back again on March 18 and sits for a week until March 22. It breaks on for two weeks on March 25, and returns again on Monday, April 8, and sits until April 19. It takes a one-week break (April 22-26), returns on April 29, and will sit for two weeks (April 29-May 10). The House returns on Tuesday, May 21 after the Victoria Day holiday, and will sit for five straight weeks until June 21. The House resumes sitting on Sept. 16, and will sit for four weeks from Sept. 16-Oct. 11, but take Monday, Sept. 30 off. It breaks Oct. 14-18, and resumes sitting on Oct. 21. It sits Oct. 21-Nov. 9, and breaks on Nov. 11 for Remembrance Day Week until Nov. 15. It resumes again on Nov. 18, and is scheduled to sit from Nov. 18-Dec. 17, and that will be it for 2024.

Panel: ‘Palliative Care in Our Society’—Former president of the Canadian Medical Association Dr. Sandy Buchman will take part in a panel on “Palliative Care in Our Society: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go,” hosted by the Economic Club of Canada. He will join other experts to discuss this country’s lack of adequate number of hospice beds, and how governments need to more to enable the caring, compassionate health care system our society expects. Wednesday, Jan. 24,

at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel. Details online: economic-club.ca.

Senator Dasko at ‘Balance the Power’ Launch—ISG Senator Donna Dasko will take part in the virtual launch of “Balance the Power,” an initiative from Informed Opinions to increase diversity and representation of women and equity-deserving communities in our elected bodies now. Wednesday, Jan. 24, at 12 p.m. ET happening online: balancethepower.ca.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 24—FRIDAY, JAN. 26

Liberal Caucus Retreat—The National Liberal Caucus will hold its winter retreat in Ottawa from Jan. 24-26 in the West Block and Wellington Buildings of the House of Commons. The retreat will begin at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 24 and wrap up at 4 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 26.

THURSDAY, JAN. 25

Webinar: ‘Americans’ Mood During the 2024 Primary Elections’—The Canadian Global Affairs Institute hosts a webinar: “The Mood of Americans during the 2024 Primary Elections,” looking toward the 2024 United States Presidential Election and its implications for Canada. Moderated by Colin Robertson, participants include The German Marshall Fund’s Bruce Stokes, former Canadian ambassadors to the U.S. David MacNaughton and Gary Doer, as well as former Canadian ambassador and deputy permanent representative to the UN Louise Blais. Thursday, Jan. 25 at 11 a.m. ET taking place online: cgai.ca/events.

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.

Google Canada Announcement—Google Canada will be announcing a new grant and programming to support and collaborate with Québec’s cybersecurity ecosystem. The event, hosted at Google Montréal Viger, will be followed by networking and interview opportunities with representatives from Google Canada and other organizations in the industry. Thursday, Jan. 25, 425 Viger Ave. W., Montreal. By invitation only.

SUNDAY, JAN. 28

State Funeral for Ed Broadbent—The life of former NDP leader Ed Broadbent, who died on Jan. 11, will be celebrated with a state funeral on Jan. 28 at the Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre, 355 Cooper St., Ottawa.

MONDAY, JAN. 29

House Resumes—Parliamentarians return to Ottawa following six weeks in their constituencies. The House will sit until Friday, Feb. 16.

Foreign Interference Commission Hearings Begin—The Foreign Interference Commission’s first set of public hearings will begin today and extend over five days. Monday, Jan. 29, at 395

Wellington St. Contact michael.tansey@pifi-epie.gc.ca.

Minister Boissonnault to Discuss ‘The Future of Work’—Employment Minister Randy Boissonnault will take part in a panel discussion titled, “Innovation, Sustainability, and the Future of Work” hosted by the Canadian Club of Ottawa. This event will explore the intersection of environmental responsibility, cutting-edge innovation, and the evolving landscape of work in the 21st century. Monday, Jan. 29, 11:30 a.m. ET, Canada Room, National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St. Tickets: canadian-clubottawa.ca.

Future Proofing Policy: The Role of Foresight in Shaping Policy—The Institute of Public Administration of Canada, National Capital Region, presents a discussion on the use of foresight to inform and shape public policy to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Panellists include Kristel Van der Elst (director general, Policy Horizons Canada), Martin Roy (head, foreign policy research and foresight, Global Affairs Canada), and Joel Martin (chief digital research officer, National Research Council). Tuesday, Jan. 29, from 5-7:30 p.m. ET. Complimentary for IPAC members; \$15 for non-members. Register at future-proofingpolicy.eventbrite.ca.

TUESDAY, JAN. 30

Panel: ‘Unlocking Development Finance’—The Aga Khan Foundation Canada and ONE Campaign in Canada host a hybrid discussion on “Unlocking Development Finance: Canada’s Role in African and Emerging Economies.” A panel of experts will discuss how Canada can play a bigger role in shaping an

inclusive global financial ecosystem to address climate change and development, as well as deepen investments and engagement with African countries. Tuesday, Jan. 30, at 1:30 p.m. ET the Delegation of the Ismaili Imamat, 199 Sussex Dr. Details online via Eventbrite.

Webinar on Canadian Health Care and the Media—The Public Policy Forum hosts a webinar, “How seismic changes in mainstream media are impacting access to health care information, and what Canadians can do about it,” examining the complex issues of trust that underpin the dissemination of health care information in Canada. Participants include Canadian Medical Association president Dr. Kathleen Ross, and Abacus Data’s chair and CEO David Coletto. Tuesday, Jan. 30, at 12 p.m. ET taking place online: ppforum.ca.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 31

Webinar: ‘Affordable Housing as Human Rights Failure’—The Group of 78 hosts a webinar, “Affordable Housing: Human Rights Encounter Market Failure” The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ political economist and senior researcher Ricardo Tranjan, and senior economist David MacDonald will discuss how the current housing market fails so many. Wednesday, Jan. 31, at 1 p.m. ET happening online: group78.org.

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.

INNOVATION

POLICY BRIEFING

Publication date: **February 5, 2024**
Advertising deadline: **January 31, 2024**

Finance Canada announced on Dec. 19, 2023, that consultations are to be held this month on a cost-neutral modernization of the Scientific Research and Experimental Development tax incentive program. What is the role of tax credits and incentives in innovation, and how can Canada be better positioned as a leader in research and development?

Finance Canada also announced on Dec. 19 that the Canada Innovation Corporation, a funding agency originally intended to launch before the end of 2023 to help Canadian businesses be more innovative, would be delayed until “no later than 2026-27.” What does the delay in implementation of the CIC mean for innovation in Canada?

What are the opportunities for innovation in artificial intelligence in Canada, and what can the federal government do to help?

Possible challenges facing biotechnology innovation in Canada include a lack of wet-lab infrastructure and trained personnel. How can the federal government support biotechnology innovation in Canada?

Canada launched an Intellectual Property Strategy in 2018 to help Canadian innovators protect their ideas and reach commercial success. What is the role of IP in innovation, and how well is Canada’s IP strategy doing in achieving its goals?

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