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THE HILL TIMES

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NEWS

Liberal continue 'big budget' spending trend, increasing capital gains tax to maintain deficit

The government could be overestimating its projected new revenues from tax policy changes, says one finance expert.

BY CHELSEA NASH

The Liberals are not backing down from spending in the new budget, but instead of increasing the deficit, the government is relying on GDP growth and introducing new tax measures to increase revenue.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) tabled Budget 2024 in the House of Commons on April 16, with a host of spending promises to increase housing supply and make life easier for young Canadians—and increasing taxes on the wealthy to do so.

Titled *Fairness for Every Generation*, the budget lays out \$57.6-billion in new spending over six years, \$4.6-billion of

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland pose in the West Block foyer to showcase the 2024 budget before its tabling in the House of Commons on April 16. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS

Budget projects savings through 'natural attrition' of public service jobs

BY MIKE LAPOINTE

The federal budget avoids deep cuts to the federal public service, but promises to shrink its population by 5,000 jobs due to "natural attrition" over the next four years as part of an expected savings of \$15.8-billion.

Although the government has recently demonstrated some willingness to rein in the growth of the federal public service follow-

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NEWS

Defence over diplomacy spotlighted in Liberal budget, with modest initial spending on foreign service reform

BY NEIL MOSS

Amid mounting calls to invest in Canada's foreign ministry, the government is pledging nearly \$160-million in the next five years to reform Canada's foreign service, but that commitment is

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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill

Compass Rose's recovering journalists nurture ink-stained roots with newsletter launch



Recovering reporters Kathleen Harris, left, Theo Argitis, and Bea Vongdouangchanh, all now at Compass Rose Group, have launched an economics and policy news platform, *Means and Ways*. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson and *Hill Times* file photographs

What happens when a bunch of Hill journalists quit the news industry for the government relations world, but find themselves still itching to cover the world of policy and politics? They start a newsletter.

That's what three members of Compass Rose Group have done. April 17 is the official launch of *Means and Ways*, a website and newsletter featuring the news, analysis, and original content that Ottawa nerds love. It's run by three recovering political journalists: **Theo Argitis**, ex-Ottawa bureau chief for *Bloomberg News*; *The Hill Times*' alumna **Bea Vongdouangchanh**; and **Kathleen Harris**, formerly of the CBC.

Argitis confirmed to **Heard on the Hill** recently that he, Harris, and Vongdouangchanh conceived and developed the project over the past year or so, with beta testing having taken place these past few months.

"The name—*Means and Ways*—is a play on the commonly known 'Ways and Means' of parliamentary procedure," Argitis explained. "We'll focus on how the means (finance, economy, money) intersects with the ways (policy, solutions, and explanatory ways forward) with a little levity along the way."

"There's already a lot of great economic and business policy reporting out there. We feel we can add to the ongoing debate and dialogue," he said of the free platform.

But *Means and Ways* won't just be a source for news and analysis. According to the website, it will also be a forum for

exchanging ideas with events and discussions to be hosted on a regular basis. Its inaugural event, on the topic of rural Canada, took place in the Parliamentary Precinct on April 10. Argitis said it was "very successful," with an audience of "about 60 people" tuning in both in person and virtually to hear from participants including Rural Economic Development Minister **Gudie Hutchings**; parliamentary secretary to the agriculture minister **Francis Drouin**; Conservative rural economic development critic **Dan Mazier**; Conservative MP **Lianne Rood**; NDP MP **Taylor Bachrach**; Canadian Telecommunications Association CEO **Rob Ghiz**; **Cathy Jo Noble** of the National Cattle Feeders' Association; and Forest Products Association of Canada CEO **Derek Nighbor**.

"Our next event will be held on June 6, where we will dig into AI and what it means for the future of creative industries," Argitis confirmed.

Percy Mockler retires from the Senate

After 15 years in the Red Chamber, Conservative Senator **Percy Mockler** reached the mandatory retirement age of 75 on April 14.

The former New Brunswick MLA—who was only 32 years old when he was first elected as a provincial Progressive Conservative—served two nonconsecutive terms from 1982-1987, and again from 1993-2008. He held a variety of cabinet roles including trans-



First appointed in 2009, Conservative Senator Percy Mockler retired from the Senate on April 14. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

port, solicitor general, and human resources and housing.

"I had lived that portfolio," he said of housing and human resources in a farewell interview published on the Senate's website. "We were all living on welfare in a small house my grandfather built. People called it 'Mockler's Welfare Alley,'" he said of his childhood growing up in the francophone community of Saint-Léonard, N.B.

Mockler first got involved in politics as a high-school student. Following his first stint as MLA, he became an organizer for then-New Brunswick premier **Bernard Lord** and then-Progressive Conservative prime minister **Brian Mulroney**. Then-Conservative prime minister **Stephen Harper** appointed Mockler to the Senate in 2009.

"I've been inspired by former premier Lord, as well as former

prime ministers Stephen Harper and the late Brian Mulroney," said Mockler in his exit interview. "Collectively, these three leaders motivated me throughout my Senate career."

Mockler has chaired the Senate's national finance committee for seven years, and counts the committee's reports on the Phoenix pay system, the federal government's response to the pandemic, and the committee's calls to adopt a national seniors strategy among the highlights of his work on the Red Chamber.

"Some people in Saint-Léonard still think I'm their elected official, especially the older generations who have been seeing me in the community for more than 40 years," he said in the online interview. "I'll continue working for them if God permits me."

Retirement... what's that?

Just don't go saying the word "retire" to Bloc Québécois MP **Louis Plamondon**. As of April 3, the 12-term MP reached the milestone of longest-serving MP in Canadian history, taking the record from the late former Liberal MP **Herb Gray**.

And he's planning to run again in the next federal election, he confirmed to **HOH** last week.

"Yes, it's already done!" Plamondon wrote in French in response to the question of whether he plans to reoffer at the next election.

Plamondon was first elected in 1984 as a Progressive Conservative in Quebec during **Brian Mulroney's** first majority government. He became a founding member of the Bloc Québécois in 1990. He told **HOH** that the highlight of his 40 years in Ottawa was in 1993, when the Bloc became the official opposition to **Jean Chrétien's** new Liberal government.

On April 10, the House's business included a motion to "recognize that the member for Bécancour-Nicolet-Sauvel became, on April 3, 2024, the longest-serving and undefeated elected representative in the history of the Canadian Parliament on his 14,457th day in office, for a total of 39 years, six months, and 29 days."

Bloc leader **Yves-François Blanchet** led the tributes to



Bloc MP Louis Plamondon became the longest-serving MP in Canadian history last week. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

the dean of the House, calling Plamondon a generous and endearing "rascal." Government House Leader **Steven McKinnon**, a fellow Quebec MP, said Plamondon's "constituents have placed their trust in him since 1984, making him the envy of us all," while Quebec Conservative MP **Dominique Viens** acknowledged the work and sacrifices that Plamondon and his family have made over the last 40 years.

When asked what he'd like to see change in politics, the 80-year-old politician told **HOH** he wishes people—particularly journalists—would put less importance on Question Period, and instead give more attention to private members' bills.

Plamondon said he was very touched by the tributes he received from all parties in the House last week. "It's a lovely proof that beyond party politics, there are human beings," he said.

Annie Boudreau named first woman comptroller general



The prime minister announced Annie Boudreau's new gig as comptroller general in an April 12 press release. *Photograph courtesy of the Treasury Board Secretariat*

Professional accountant and longtime civil servant **Annie Boudreau** took over from **Roch Huppé** as Canada's comptroller general on April 15, the prime minister announced last week.

Judging from a historical list of Canada's comptrollers general, it appears Boudreau is the first woman to hold the role.

Boudreau has worked in various roles at the Canada Revenue Agency from 2006 to 2019, and has held senior financial roles at Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, and most recently at Treasury Board.

Huppé recently retired from a 32-year career in the public service. He had held the role of comptroller general since 2017.

The prime minister also announced that starting this week, **Paul Halucha**, the current deputy secretary to the cabinet (clean growth) in the Privy Council Office, will serve concurrently as deputy minister of Public Lands and Housing. Halucha has worked in the public service since 2007, and was appointed to his PCO role last August.

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Should telecommunications be nationalized?

The federal government must not accept that the telecommunications companies under its jurisdiction and regulated at its initiative are exporting our jobs and damaging our economy.

Mark Hancock

Opinion



There were recently 4,800 workers laid off at Bell, 360 jobs cut in Quebec by Telus, and 214 families who have been

affected by a lockout at Videotron in Gatineau, Que., for almost six months now.

These recent events show how, despite record revenues, Canada's multi-billion-dollar telecom companies couldn't care less for workers. They are also striking examples of the inability of existing legislative tools to curb excessive corporate greed when it comes to protecting jobs in the telecommunications sector. Our elected representatives need to show greater political courage to ensure that the success of these companies benefits workers, too, instead of constantly leaving them behind.

The jobs axed by Bell and Telus in February have not disappeared, nor has the work of the people locked out by Videotron. The jobs still exist, they've just been shipped overseas. Canadian telcos are firing workers in Canada in order to hire others abroad—at lower cost—despite the substantial subsidies they have received to roll out broadband across the country.

To make matters worse, Canadian telcos are paying their overseas subcontractors poverty wages

by Canadian standards. They pay no tax in Canada, but also work in conditions that are far from Canadian labour standards.

But that's not all. Canada's big telecom companies are taking these odious practices a step further by taking advantage of authoritarian or complacent political regimes to exploit hundreds—even thousands—of people.

Take Videotron as one example. The subcontractor Videotron is using (while locking out 214 workers back home in Canada) is owned by the Egyptian government, and employs migrants from sub-Saharan Africa to work in call centres. The regime uses fear to control this workforce, in many cases confiscating passports on recruitment. According to reporting by *La Presse*, demonstrations by these workers were suppressed at the beginning of 2023, and their organizers were hunted down and treated as terrorists. Their crime? Demonstrating publicly for better wages in the face of inflation and the devaluation of the local currency.

How can the Canadian government turn a blind eye to these good telecom jobs being shipped

abroad? How can it allow our economy to lose quality, well-paid jobs that benefit communities big and small, and help fund our social safety net and public services? How can our government ratify Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment of the International Labour Organization on one hand, and tolerate these regulated Canadian companies' complacency with the violence being perpetrated against workers on the other? Does the government not recognize that moving telecommunications call centres abroad puts our personal data and national security at risk?

Telecommunications networks have become the backbone of the Canadian economy and society. It's impossible to do without them. They are necessary for a multitude of transactions and services, keeping families together, and providing entertainment. Without them, our standard of living and psychological health would have plummeted during the pandemic. For precisely that reason, the federal government must not accept that the telecommunications companies under its

jurisdiction and regulated at its initiative are exporting our jobs and damaging our economy. This has to stop.

Telecommunications companies cannot continue to enrich themselves with no regard for their workers or the communities where they operate.

The federal government can and must act now. It must amend the Telecommunications Act to prioritize keeping jobs in Canada, and to prohibit the movement of telecommunications work outside the country. Regulations requiring Canadian ownership of telecommunications companies are no longer sufficient to ensure positive economic spinoffs for Canadians.

If this approach is unsuccessful, the nationalization of the entire telecommunications sector should be considered. This would allow for a public service approach whereby data security, privacy, and local employment would be under direct public control, for the benefit of all Canadians.

Mark Hancock is the national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The Hill Times

ArriveCan shows government consultants should prove ethical business foundations before getting contracts

Acknowledging the role of external consultants in conducting the business of government is important for politicians of all stripes and federal decision-makers. There should be a new focus on optimizing the return on investment.

Donna Ringrose

Opinion



The ArriveCan saga has created a reputational challenge for every consultant who works with the federal government. The worst actors have created an atmosphere of distrust and derision of external consultants. The government needs to do a better job of knowing who they are hiring. Qualifications and certifications for consultants and contractors need to be reviewed in response to this latest story.

Thousands of hardworking, ethical, and professional consultants are being lumped in with the bad apples.

For better or worse, the federal government could not deliver its programs, policies, and even funding without the help of management consultants. This reality has developed over time, and has proven beneficial for both consultants and federal departments.

Departments go through phases of ramping up and ramping down operations to fulfill the mandates given to ministers. If departments were constantly staffed up to maximum capacity, taxpayers would be on the hook for salaries and benefits that do not respond directly to urgent needs. At the same

time, management consultants who work on both public and private sector projects would lack opportunities to bring knowledge gained in one sector to the other.

Thousands of management consultants bring expertise and years of experience to federal government projects daily. Often, they possess skills and knowledge that are simply not available on the project teams housed in federal departments. For the federal government, "contracting in" talent has become a mainstay of delivering the services upon which Canadians rely.

The ongoing investigation will show the true scope of failures that led to a failed procurement with ballooning costs. At the same time, many lessons can be learned from what we know already. The recent scandal appears to stem first not from consultants, but rather civil servants who allowed their relationships to get too comfortable with the vendors they were engaging. The contractors clearly could not deliver on the scope of work on their own, and relied heavily on contracting out work, which created a new set of risks for taxpayers.

The 2023 budget introduced a goal of reducing departmental expenditures by three per cent by 2026-27. Management consulting and departmental travel were singled out as areas of focus for the departments tasked with implementing these cuts. The number of scandals focused on international firms and mismanaged procurement processes was casting a long shadow over the profession when these decisions were made.

The government is clearly pushing to find efficiencies. Beyond broad directives to reduce spending, there should also be a new focus on optimizing the return on investment of working with consultants.

Knowledge about the value of management consultants is low. That is true in the public at large, and also within federal departments. By extension, despite the long-term interdependency between consultants and federal departments, the profession is an easy political target. Acknowledging the role of external advisers and extra capacity in conducting the business of government is important for politicians of all stripes and decision-makers throughout federal departments.



Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc, left, and Procurement Minister Jean-Yves Duclos respond to the auditor general's report on ArriveCan in the House of Commons foyer on Feb. 12. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Ultimately, it is important that the government validates the competencies that consultants claim when responding to government requests for proposals. To avoid a similar—yet reoccurring—situation in the future, new policies should also require that consultants adhere to a recognized and enforceable ethical code. When procuring other professional services like engineering or accounting, the federal government requires a professional designation as part of any application. The same opportunity exists for consulting and the certified management consultant designation is a good place to start.

Donna Ringrose is the executive director of CMC-Canada, the Canadian Association of Management Consultants.

The Hill Times

News

Canada's 'win-win' EU pact met with mounting concerns amid drawn-out confirmation

A vote against ratification of the Canada-EU trade pact in the French Senate is the latest threat holding up full implementation of the deal with nine other countries also still needing to pass it.

BY NEIL MOSS

With the French Senate's vote against ratification of Canada's trade pact with the European Union, the deal is increasingly under the microscope in the 10 countries who have yet to fully implement it.

The Upper Chamber in Paris overwhelmingly voted against—by a tally of 211-44—ratifying the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which has been provisionally applied for more than six years. A ratification vote previously passed in the National Assembly in 2019, 266-213.

Despite the vote, French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal defended the trade pact during his visit to Ottawa last week.

"CETA is a win-win agreement between Canada and France, and Canada and Europe," Attal said in French on April 11. "The figures show this to be the case."

CETA has been provisionally applied since September 2017, which means 95 per cent of the deal is in place with only the investment protections and other minor provisions needed to be fully enacted. That can only happen after all EU countries ratify the agreement.

Trade between Canada and the EU grew by 33.7 per cent from 2016 to 2022. Trade reached \$110-billion in 2023, up from \$74-billion in 2016. Merchandise trade between Canada and France went from \$9.9-billion in 2016 to \$12.9-billion in 2023.

"There would be a good deal to lose for our two economies if this [deal] were not fully applied," Attal said.

He said the deal was negotiated by the right and ratified by the left in the National Assembly, remarking that "both now seem to be turning their backs on it at the Senate."

"I regret this and wish to continue to explain to all [that] this is a beneficial agreement," he said. "I



French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, pictured left alongside Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa on April 11, says that a 'good deal' would be lost if CETA isn't fully implemented. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

have faith that this will continue to move forward in the future."

At the same press conference, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) told reporters in French that Canada will continue to highlight the "positive impacts" of trade between countries with shared values.

"I have a great deal of confidence in the French political class. I know that they will see the interest in more trade, especially with a country like Canada," he said. "If a country doesn't want free trade with a progressive, open, and responsible country like Canada, then what country would they want to sign a free trade agreement with?"

After CETA's defeat in the French Senate, Canadian Ambassador to France Stéphane Dion posted on X, formerly Twitter, that Canada "regrets the outcome of the vote."

Leading the implementation of CETA was highlighted in then-international trade minister Jim Carr's 2018 mandate letter, but was dropped in subsequent cabinet instructions.

The context of the agreement has shifted markedly since negotiations for CETA were concluded. The United Kingdom, which was Canada's largest trading partner in the bloc, left the EU in 2020, and populist trends have brought forward a cynicism towards free trade. Canada has subsequently signed a transitional deal with London to have many of the same CETA provisions cover Canada-U.K. trade. Both sides had agreed to work towards a more comprehensive trade pact,

but those negotiations were put on hold in January by the U.K. over complaints around dairy access and auto rules-of-origin.

As the path towards ratification remains uncertain in France, it also has yet to occur in Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia. Canada's Parliament passed an implementation bill in May 2017. Cyprus is the only country that has categorically voted against ratification when its Parliament voted it down in 2020.

Cypriot High Commissioner Giorgos Ioannides told *The Hill Times* in February that his country's objective is to fully implement CETA.

"That's the goal at some point, to ratify," he said. At dispute is Nicosia wanting halloumi cheese to be designated as a Cypriot-originating product.

"Canada considers that halloumi can be prepared by Canadian cheesemakers, or it can import halloumi-like products from other countries," he added. "I hope that well before the assumption of the presidency of the EU by Cyprus [in 2026] the issue will be resolved and will already have been ratified."

In an interview with CTV during his visit to Canada last month, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis said he hopes to ratify the pact "soon," but noted there are outstanding issues, including declaring feta cheese as a Greek-originating commodity.

"Once these issues are going to be sorted out, we're going to be

very happy to ratify the agreement," he said. "In principle, I am very much in favour of these types of free trade agreements. Although, I understand there are some difficulties with other countries. But, we'll sort out our differences."

A spokesperson for the Delegation of the European Union to Canada said it is up to each EU member state to "decide the procedures and timelines of its ratification process," and noted that the EU does not comment on the internal ratification processes of its members.

"We will continue to promote the understanding of CETA, its benefits, and success stories," the spokesperson said.

The increasing trade numbers that CETA has provoked, along with having the pact almost fully in place, has some observers downplaying concerns over the continued European trouble in ratifying the agreement, but some are looking to Canada to be more forceful in pressuring the outstanding EU member states to implement the deal.

"We should be much more persistent and much louder about our expectation that European countries ratify the agreement," said Carleton University professor Meredith Lilly, Simon Reisman chair in international economic policy. "I think we have been far too accepting of an extremely slow ratification process. ... We should demonstrate that we would like this to be moving faster."

Lilly, a former foreign affairs and international trade adviser

to then-prime minister Stephen Harper when CETA was being negotiated, said Canada should employ its diplomatic toolkit "more actively and more boldly."

She added that as a result of CETA's continued non-ratification, Canadian companies may start to question if the EU is as attractive an exporting market.

"Canadian firms, in order to export, they need to align with various regulatory standards of whatever country they're exporting to," she said. "They need to know that that's going to be a longtime prospective market for them, and if countries don't ratify, then that reduces the certainty for those markets for our Canadian exporters."

While the provisional application remains in place after the vote in the French Senate, Lilly said there are broader signals placed on the Canada-France relationship and the Canada-EU relationship.

She said that Canada knew what its expectations were when it signed the deal, ratifying it months later.

"It's for European countries to explain to Canada why they aren't ratifying the agreement that their 27-body union determined was in their best interest," she said.

Lilly said she expects the ratification process in France to enter a state of purgatory in lieu of another vote in a National Assembly—which has fewer loyalists to President Emmanuel Macron now than when CETA ratification passed in 2019—as a loss could imperil the pact.

Jason Langrish, executive director of the Canada Europe Roundtable for Business, said there is no one who will want to be forceful to push for the pact's ratification.

He said that since CETA has provisionally applied since 2017 and economic gains have been realized, it isn't going to be unwound.

Langrish added that the components of CETA that aren't included in the provisional application aren't themselves without critics.

"Some people think it's better that [the deal] sits in provisional applications because the investor rules are actually not that great for investors. They give a lot of leeway to the right to regulate," he said. "That can very quickly turn into the right to prejudice your own domestic industry over a foreign industry."

He said concern over the outstanding EU countries to ratify is "much ado about nothing."

"It's going to be the same seven years from now. We're still going to be sitting in provisional application," he said.

CETA hasn't achieved its potential, but it has still been beneficial, Langrish said, remarking that both sides have constrained it becoming a better deal.

"There's some blame to go around. It's been good, but it could be better," he said. "In aggregate, it's been a success."

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Centre Block project contracting ramps up as focus shifts from demolition to rebuild

Trompe l'oeil tarps cover scaffolding along the west façade of the Centre Block building where exterior masonry restoration work is now roughly 16 per cent complete. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Roughly 1,600 windows in Centre Block are set to be replaced with replicas or upgraded as part of renovations, and the process to award a contract for that work will get underway this spring.

for Centre Block, including the addition of new elevators banks and stairwells, construction of a three-storey infill above the Hall of Honour, expansion of the House of Commons' government and opposition lobbies down one floor level, and plans to raise the building's roof by roughly five metres to help accommodate new mechanical systems.

"There are a series of subcontracts to be issued by PCL/ED for the structural demolition and rebuild of the existing [Centre Block] building. The first of these contracts is expected to be award-

ed this spring, with the remainder continuing throughout the year," said Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) media relations in an email.

PSPC is the federal department responsible for overseeing the estimated \$4.5-billion to \$5-billion Centre Block Rehabilitation project, which includes both renovation of the existing 100-year-old building and construction of the underground welcome centre complex that will ultimately connect the West Block, Centre Block, and East Block buildings, as well as Block

2 on the south side of Wellington Street, construction of which is set to get underway in the fall.

This spring, PCL and EllisDon will start contracting processes for construction of the four-storey underground Parliament Welcome Centre and the provision of replica windows for Centre Block—two of four "milestones" for the spring identified in the department's latest quarterly progress report for the project published at the beginning of April.

Roughly 1,600 windows throughout Centre Block are set to be upgraded or replaced with replicas resembling the "existing window design," according to PSPC.

"The window milestone referenced in the spring quarterly report, for the replica windows, will include primarily windows in stone openings on the exterior façades and the mansard roof (excluding the Peace Tower)," explained the department by email.

"The new windows will improve the energy efficiency and user comfort of the building while also preserving the Gothic architecture. More specifically, the windows on the exterior façades and mansard roof will be replaced with a replica that has a second, interior performance window."

Pre-renovations, Centre Block had single-paned windows, which are less energy efficient than the double-paned windows that will be installed.

Also on the department's to-do list for this spring: completing 25 per cent of concrete slab replacement on level 1 of Centre Block, and completing construction of the temporary concrete shear walls that will form a key part of the support network that will hold up the building during excavation work underneath that's required both to connect Centre Block to the underground welcome centre, and to install a base-isolation seismic upgrade.

Excavation work underneath Centre Block won't begin until the building's load has been transferred onto the support system being built—which will be made up of a network of steel piles, concrete sandwich beams, and five temporary concrete shear walls—and that load transfer won't happen until the support

network is built and at least 55 per cent of the total building slab has been replaced.

Slab replacement work started roughly one year ago, and, as of the end of March, is now roughly 15 per cent complete, with 400 of the 800 piles (or support posts) drilled in place, according to the latest progress report.

By comparison, in February, it was estimated that 12 per cent of the total building slab had been replaced, and roughly 370 steel piles had been drilled. At that time, it was estimated that load transfer would be in April or May of 2025, with excavation underneath Centre Block projected to get underway by June 2025.

Along with this work and excavation of the final section of the 23-metre-deep pit in which the welcome centre will be built—which is set to finish this spring—the restoration of Centre Block's exterior masonry is currently underway.

As of the end of March, roughly 16 per cent of the building's exterior masonry had been restored overall, with work on the north façade fully complete, while the east façade is 31 per cent done, and restoration of masonry on the west façade is 16 per cent complete. Work has yet to begin on the front, south façade of the building.

The Centre Block project's health tracker remains unchanged from the last progress report, with "overall project health" still in the green—meaning it's "progressing in line" with approved costs, scope, and schedule—but toeing the line of being deemed to be "progressing but experiencing challenges that may impact the cost, scope, and schedule" (marked as yellow). Of those three elements, it's the schedule that's firmly in the yellow as PSPC planners await final approval of design plans.

As of March, a total of roughly \$814-million has been spent on the project of its estimated \$4.5-billion to \$5-billion budget, according to the progress report. In the previous quarterly report covering Oct. 1 to Dec. 31, 2023, the department indicated that about \$748-million had been spent on the project to date.

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BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

As construction inside Centre Block begins to shift gears following the completion of demolition work last December, so, too, are contracting processes, with bids to replace Centre Block's windows and build the new underground Parliament Welcome Centre next in line.

Over the winter, PCL and EllisDon—which together were awarded an almost \$2.9-billion contract to serve as construction manager for the Centre Block project—started the process to find bidders to tackle structural demolition and rebuild work inside the historic building. As has been described by *The Hill Times*, there are a number of structural changes on the books



Old windows from Centre Block are lined up for removal on the fifth floor on Feb. 7. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Freshly poured concrete as part of slab replacement work in the southwest corridor of the first floor of Centre Block. *Photograph courtesy of PSPC*

News

House to pilot pay-per-use electric vehicle charging for MPs, staff

The House has 21 electric vehicle charging stations on the Hill that MPs and staff currently use free of charge, with costs covered by Public Services and Procurement Canada.

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

MPs and staff may soon have to start paying for the cost of charging their electric vehicles on the Hill, with a new pay-per-use model set to be piloted for certain users starting this May.

The House of Commons currently has 21 electric vehicle (EV) charging points on the Hill that are available for use for holders of special passes issued by the Chamber's parking services. Since the first charging stations were installed on the Hill in 2017, costs associated with using them have been covered by Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), the federal department that serves as custodian for government property including the Parliamentary Precinct.

But that may soon change after the House Board of Internal Economy (BOIE) unanimously agreed to launch a pilot project with a small group of special pass holders this May to test a new pay-per-use system whereby users will cover the cost of charging their vehicles themselves via a third-party app.

The model pitched and agreed to by the BOIE on April 11 is also aimed at incentivizing users to unplug and move their vehicles once they've been charged.

An electric vehicle is plugged in to a charging station west of the West Block on May 1, 2019. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Along with paying a still-to-be determined fee to charge their vehicles, once charging is complete, users will get a notification via the app that their vehicle is ready, at which point an "idling period" starts and users will be subject to a time-based idling fee until they unplug—a feature that acting House chief information officer Benoit Dicaire said is "common in the industry."

"It aims at incentivizing users to move their vehicle once the charging portion is complete, and its purpose is ensuring fair and equitable use of the charging station shared between all permit holders," explained Dicaire.

Currently, 46 MPs, eight MP staffers, and 15 House administration staff members hold special passes to use the charging stations, according to Mathieu Gravel, director of outreach and media relations in the House Speaker's Office.

"Minimal internal resources" are needed to implement a pay-

per-use model for the charging stations, and the House will work with PSPC "to make the necessary configuration changes," said Gravel in an email.

Users will pay through a third-party app that will be managed by PSPC and will require MPs and staff to each create an individual account that will be tied to their personal credit card or "other payment options on their mobile device," explained Dicaire. House parking services would continue to be responsible for managing the charging stations and issuing cards required for their use, he added.

Which app will be used is still to be determined. Gravel said the House and PSPC are currently exploring potential use of two existing apps: FLO (not to be confused with a menstrual tracking app of the same name), or ChargePoint.

The trial set to launch in May will test the new system with "a small group of existing permit holders from all parties and a limited amount of electric charging stations," said Dicaire, later noting that the pilot will be volunteer based. "Feedback and adjustments would be made to ensure readiness for a proposed general launch of the pay-per-use model in June 2024."

The rate that users will pay has yet to be finalized, and will be brought to the BOIE for approval when the group makes a final decision on whether to agree to a general launch in June, confirmed Gravel.

PSPC said in an email that during a parliamentary session,

rate is used for expenses related to personal vehicles, set at 57.1 cents per kilometre as of April 1. Gerretsen also suggested the board should consider "whether or not there should be a different calculation per kilometre based on electric vehicles."

During the board's brief deliberations on April 11, Bloc Québécois Whip Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry-Suroît, Que.) flagged potential logistical issues if an MP gets a notification that their vehicle is ready while in the middle of a speech or other House business and is unable to move it, confirming that additional idling charges would be levied against them.

DeBellefeuille also asked whether more powerful charging stations are in the cards, with Dicaire confirming in French that the House is "in discussion" with PSPC "to determine what electrical capacity is available for type 3 charging."

"We're assessing that capability in the future," he said.

Currently, all 21 of the House's charging stations are level 2 stations, which Dicaire estimated can take between four hours and 10 hours to fully charge a vehicle depending on environmental conditions (cold weather can affect times), and the vehicle make and model. By comparison, level 3 charging stations can take between 26 and 60 minutes, he said.

"As of today, there [are a] sufficient number of charging stations in relation to permit holders, but we anticipate the demand to consistently grow in the coming years. Working in partnership with Public Services and Procurement Canada, we continuously monitor the utilization and evaluate the need to add additional charging stations in due time when required," Dicaire told the BOIE.

The Senate has nine of its own level 2 EV charging stations, the costs for which are currently covered by PSPC, confirmed Alison Korn, an issues management and media relations adviser with the Senate who serves as spokesperson for the Senate Internal Economy, Budgets, and Administration Committee.

While there are no special passes issued for use of the Senate's charging stations, Korn said the stations "within the Senate's portfolio are intended for the use of specific parking lot occupants" and "are available on a first-come, first-served basis."

lryckewaert@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Benoit Dicaire became acting House chief information officer in October 2023. *Screenshot courtesy of ParVu*



Ontario Liberal MP Mark Gerretsen has also suggested the BOIE reconsider mileage claim calculations for EVs. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

HEALTH

POLICY BRIEFING

Publication date: **Monday, April 29**
Advertising deadline: **Tuesday, April 23**

Health Minister Mark Holland introduced Bill C-64, the Pharmacare Act, on Feb. 29, outlining a proposed first phase towards implementation of national pharmacare. What are the challenges as Canada begins this transition towards a universal, single-payer pharmacare model?

What are the workforce challenges facing Canada's health-care sector?

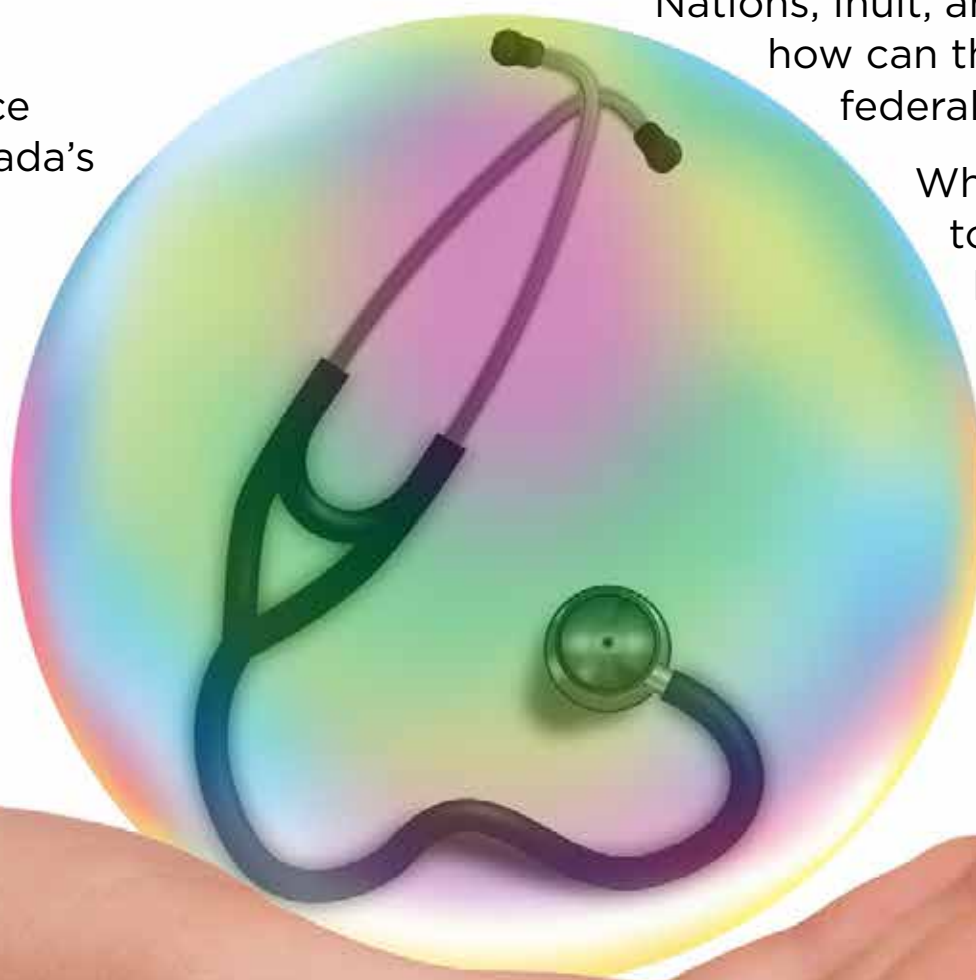
What can be done to increase the number of available doctors, nurses, and other needed workers?

What can be done to address mobility of health-care providers across Canada?

How well is the federal government supporting health research? Are there sufficient resources devoted to health research in Canada?

What is the health gap in Canada facing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and how can this be addressed by the federal government?

What innovations are poised to change Canada's health-care system, and what can the federal government do to support them? What is the potential for artificial intelligence in health care?



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Editorial

Political parties shouldn't get to set all of their own rules

The fight between federal political parties and voters' right to know what happens with their personal information that's playing out in the British Columbia court system is an interesting case study in how differently political and non-political players view the democratic process.

As *The Hill Times'* Ian Campbell has been reporting, the federal Liberal, Conservative, and New Democrat parties are fighting a case against a group of private citizens who want to know what of their personal information these political organizations possess.

After years of delay, the case is finally going to trial on April 22 after a B.C. Supreme Court judge denied the political parties' latest application for an adjournment.

The case first kicked off in 2019 when three private citizens used B.C.'s Personal Information Protection Act to make a request to several federal political parties regarding what personal information about them the parties possess. Unsatisfied with the parties' response, these citizens filed a complaint with the Office of the B.C. Privacy Commissioner. When the commissioner's office looked into the complaint, several of the federal parties objected, asserting the office did not have jurisdiction over them.

The political parties have successfully delayed the case thus far, with the Liberals pointing to a pair of bills they've introduced as dealing with the matter at hand—namely, that they're masters of their own domains when it comes to privacy.

Despite all of the sensitive personal information parties collect, the only requirement they face is to develop their own privacy policies, submit them to Elections Canada, and publish them online.

"Different provinces are moving forward with privacy regimes that do vary from one region to the next," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in April 2023. "It's going to be important that we make sure that our federal electoral system and our federal rules around political parties are homogenous and cohesive."

But experts say those so-called cohesive federal rules—which were introduced in last year's Bill C-47 and this year's electoral reform bill, C-65—are rife with flaws and loopholes.

This is just one more area in which political parties are essentially allowed to be free agents in the democratic process. But, as was demonstrated during the most recent round of public hearings for the Foreign Interference Commission, the rules that parties set for themselves can sometimes wilt under closer scrutiny by reasonable observers.

Sure, for political partisans, busing in groups of people who can't legally vote in Canada to participate in a candidate nomination contest may seem totally normal and legit. Just as it must make complete sense to federal political parties that they only have to adhere to privacy rules they set themselves.

But it definitely raises some eyebrows from those who haven't drunk the same partisan Kool-Aid.

Letters to the Editor

Correcting the record on education and copyright

Re: "Canadian writers, visual artists, and publishers need copyright reform now," (*The Hill Times*, April 10, p. 14).

This recent opinion piece misrepresents the Canadian education sector and universities with respect to copyright and the use of course materials. The piece fails to recognize more than a decade of digital transformation in both the publishing and education sectors.

How course materials are delivered and used by educators and students has changed dramatically in the past few decades. Universities currently license electronic access to ebooks, newspapers, and journal articles, and pay transactional licences for small excerpts of materials that are beyond their conservative institutional fair-dealing guidelines. Students buy textbooks, including novels and poetry collections, in digital formats.

The inflated figure that the authors assert as lost revenue is questionable at best. It assumes the continuation of an antiquated course pack model where systematic, inappropriate double payment for materials was taking place. It was double-dipping, not "earned income." Universities have since shifted to licensed digital content.

The authors further assert that "copying across the education sector has continued at the same pace of hundreds of millions of pages per year. It's likely even increasing." In fact, universities have seen a significant decline in copying and many libraries have removed photocopiers entirely.

In 2020-2021 Canadian university libraries reported spending \$388-million on licensed resources, and those licences

enable a wide range of copyright-compliant uses. This digital content represents more than 90 per cent of materials acquired through these libraries, giving our university communities access to billions of pages of legally acquired and paid for electronic content.

Universities represent and support both creators and users of copyrighted materials and are committed to working within the framework for copyright provided by Canadian legislation and our highest court. There has been a succession of Supreme Court decisions that provided clarity around user rights and affirmed that collective licensing is not the only way to manage copyright commitments.

Any regulatory change that supports the independent publishing sector should be based on evidence that bears up under scrutiny, respects Canadian jurisprudence, and demonstrably assists authors. Copyright law is not intended and should not be used to address the twentieth-century shift to digital product lines in the publishing sector.

In short, market issues cannot be resolved by copyright reform.

Brett Waytuck
 President, Canadian Association of
 Research Libraries (CARL)
 Dean, University Libraries and Archives,
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 Regina, Sask.

Susan Haigh
 Executive director, CARL
 Ottawa, Ont.

Netanyahu not alone in his motives, says Calgary reader

Re: "Who can stop Benjamin Netanyahu?" (*The Hill Times*, April 8, p. 10). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not the only politician more concerned about his political survival than the national interest. The same can be said about Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau whose every act is calibrated against the size of the voting blocs likely to agree or disagree with his policies. Every statement and proposed legislation by American President Joe Biden is measured against the influence they will have on his re-election. I would suggest that every single political leader is primarily concerned with their re-election.

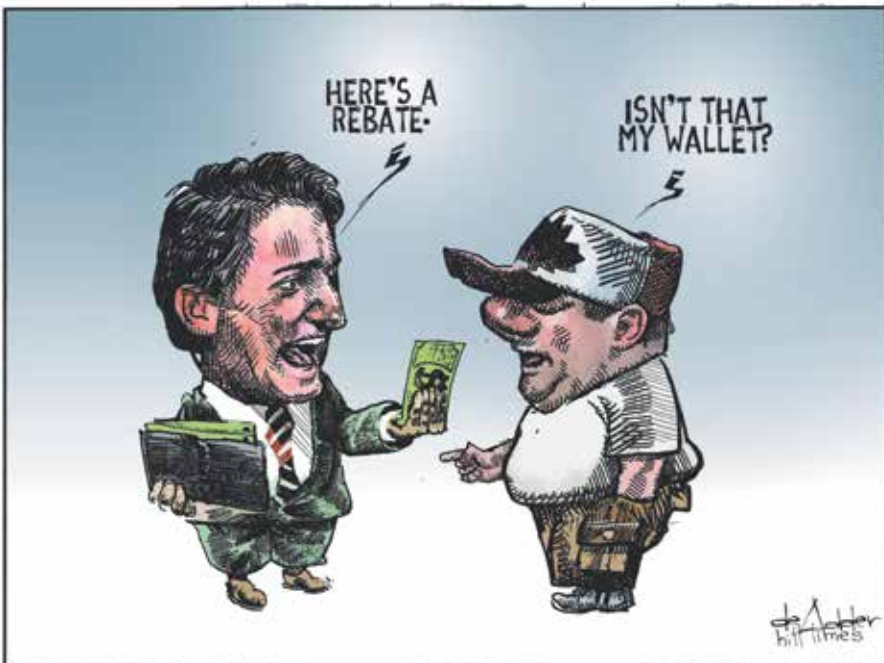
Israelis want to get rid of Netanyahu not because they doubt his motives for

his prosecution of the war—they know that he is totally devoted to protecting the Israeli people—but because the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023, was on his watch. Netanyahu will go, as will the heads of intelligence and the military, who all bear responsibility for the calamity that befell the Israeli people.

Another point of contention is that many Israelis want the hostages back, even if it means abandoning the war, a position not universally shared.

Pro-Palestinians loathe Netanyahu because of his dogged effort to rid Gaza of Hamas. They are mistaken if they think a successor will do anything different.

Larry Shapiro
 Calgary, Alta.



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Time for some Liberal soul searching

The Liberals are getting to a place where they need to decide if they are going to stumble into an election walloping, or do something about it.

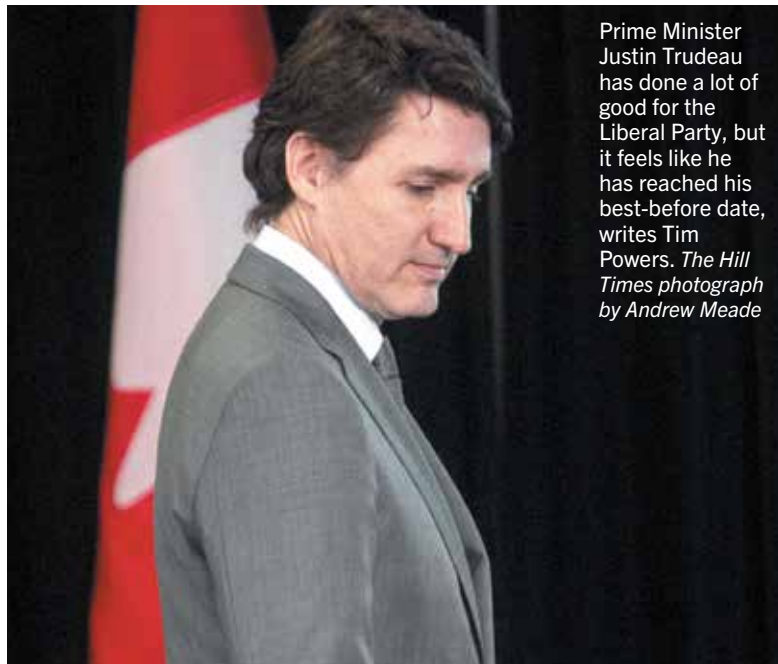
Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—The Liberal Party of Canada is in trouble. I am not burying them, as that would be foolish and fly in the face of history. They have historically been Canada's perpetual Stanley Cup winner, but even great organizations need to shake it up from time to time to stay competitive.

Right now, according to our most recent Abacus poll, the Liberals sit 20 points behind the Conservatives in the overall national standings. The Conser-



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has done a lot of good for the Liberal Party, but it feels like he has reached his best-before date, writes Tim Powers. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

vative Party of Canada sits at 44 per cent, the Liberals at 24 per cent. They are behind in every region of the country, and, with one exception—Quebec—trail the Conservatives in all of them.

The Liberals are also trailing the Conservatives among both male and female voters. They are behind in every age cohort. And

there is a big spread favouring the Conservatives over the Liberals in accessible voters.

It has been more than two weeks since Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the government made \$38-billion in announcements, \$21-million of which is new money. While Liberal partisans may feel emboldened

and have a pep in their steps right now, the PM's "big buy" is not landing him any added support in public opinion polls.

And last week, more crumbling started to happen for him after federal NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh began to back away from the government's individual carbon pricing system. While the prime minister was right to assert that Singh was feeling the pressure from the Conservatives, premiers, and other advocates to abandon that policy, Trudeau sits on a lonely island in support of the initiative.

The well-regarded former governor of the Bank of Canada and England, Mark Carney, a potential future political party leader, has also offered some new thought about our approach to carbon pricing. It was not in lock-step with the prime minister.

Perhaps there is some magical spell that will take hold of Canadians following this week's budget that will transform Liberal fortunes and put them back on track. Failing that, they are getting to a place where both the party and its leader—for the good of the organization—need to decide if they are going to stumble into an election walloping, or do something about it.

Trudeau has done a lot of good for the Liberal Party and has earned the opportunity to write his own ticket. He has won three general elections, and is a formidable campaigner. But for him and the Liberals, it feels like he has reached his best-before date. Maybe he will prove people wrong again, but even the greats come to the end of the line.

Stepping away from anything you love and are passionate about is hard. Giving up the opportunity to go toe to toe against an opponent you are fond of—Pierre Poilievre—isn't easy, either. But even political winners should not be bigger and more important than the party they represent.

Former prime minister Stephen Harper likely should have walked away before the 2015 election, but he relished the fight then with Trudeau. The Conservatives still would have lost the election, but the dynamic and path to rebuilding might have been different. Is there a lesson from Harper hanging around that Trudeau ought to now be reflecting on?

Changing a leader doesn't mean the Liberals would suddenly be back in serious contention, but it is hard not to conclude that their main messenger—the prime minister—is not the asset he once was for them. Despite his pride, the PM must see this, too.

If there's no sudden post-budget bump, this spring will determine if the Liberals will be whistling past the graveyard or actually searching for new life.

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

Business investment key to addressing Canada's productivity crisis

Governments across Canada can enact policies to help stimulate business investment, productivity gains, and stronger economic growth.

Tegan Hill

Opinion



The Bank of Canada's senior deputy governor Carolyn Rogers recently raised the alarm on Canada's productivity crisis, saying "it's an emergency—it's

time to break the glass." But to address Canada's productivity problem, which is contributing to our stagnant living standards, we must first address Canada's weak business investment.

For perspective, Canada's economic growth in the fourth quarter of 2023, as measured by per-person GDP—a common indicator of living standards—was \$58,111, which is slightly less than it was at the end of 2014 at \$58,162 (after adjusting for inflation). That means that over roughly the last decade, Canadian living standards have not increased. Indeed, our economic problems span well beyond the pandemic. In the five years prior to 2019 (the last pre-COVID year), Canada's per-person GDP (inflation-adjusted) was the fourth weakest out of 38 advanced countries.

Unfortunately, prospects for the future are dim. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Canada will record the

lowest rate of per-person GDP growth among 32 advanced economies over roughly the next 40 years. Countries such as Estonia, South Korea, and New Zealand are expected to pass Canada and achieve higher living standards by 2060.

Given that growth in productivity—essentially, the value of economic output per hour of work—is key to higher living standards, it's no surprise that Rogers and other analysts are raising alarms. But what's at the heart of our productivity crisis?

Put simply: weak business investment. While the federal and many provincial governments have prioritized immigration and bigger government in an effort to stimulate productivity growth and grow our economy, they've ignored business investment, which has significantly declined in recent years.

From 2014 to 2022, inflation-adjusted total business investment—in plants, machinery,

equipment, and new technologies, but excluding residential construction—in Canada declined by \$34-billion. During the same time period, after adjusting for inflation, business investment per worker declined (on average) by 2.3 per cent annually. In contrast, business investment per worker grew (on average) by 2.8 per cent annually from 2000 to 2014.

While business investment has generally declined in Canada since 2014, in other countries, including the United States, it's continued to grow. As a result, Canada's GDP per hour worked—a key measure of productivity growth—is among the lowest in the OECD.

Think of it this way: when businesses invest in physical and intellectual capital, they equip workers with the tools and technology (e.g. machinery, computer programs, artificial intelligence) to produce more and provide higher quality goods and services, which fuels innovation and higher

productivity. Because Canada has lower levels of investment in tools and technology, our workers are less productive.

But here's the good news. Governments across Canada can enact policies to help stimulate business investment, productivity gains, and ultimately, stronger economic growth. The key is to reduce onerous regulations, rein in high government spending, and create a pro-growth tax environment that makes Canada a more attractive place for business to locate and invest. These policies have a proven track record of improving business investment in Canada.

Clearly, without a change in the investment climate and stronger productivity growth, the economic outlook looks grim. Fortunately, Canadian governments can respond to this emergency with pro-growth policy reform.

Tegan Hill is a senior policy analyst at the *Fraser Institute*.

The Hill Times

Comment

Seeing will be believing with Canada's defence policy update

Perhaps the most important detail to remember is that this is a projected 20-year plan, which is unlikely to survive any change in government.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



Defence Minister Bill Blair took two years to unveil the defence policy update, which is not an 'urgent' response in any universe, writes Scott Taylor. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

over the next 20 years in our national defence," Blair stated in the DPU.

In terms of equipment acquisitions, the DPU shopping list includes: early-warning aircraft, tactical helicopters, and new long range missiles for the Army.

The government plans to buy specialized maritime sensors to improve ocean surveillance as well as build a new satellite ground station in the Arctic. The DPU blueprint includes plans to establish additional support facilities in the Arctic for military operations. Also referenced—albeit without detail—is a new

fleet of submarines for the Royal Canadian Navy.

There will be a major investment in domestic ammunition production to replace those stocks of artillery shells that Canada donated to Ukraine. Having learned their lesson from that war, Canada also plans to significantly increase the Army's strategic reserve of ammunition.

Due to the numerous delays to the Canadian Surface Combatant program, a large sum of money has been set aside to keep the RCN's aging Halifax-class frigates operational until the new Type 26 destroyers eventually enter service.

With a nod to the fact that the modern battlefield is evolving into new domains, the DPU focused on improving the CAF's ability to conduct cyber operations. The government plans to establish a Canadian Armed Forces Cyber Command. Also to be pursued is a joint cyber operations capability with the Communications Security Establishment, Canada's secretive, Ottawa-based, electronic intelligence-gathering organization.

While not as sexy as the wish list of futuristic weaponry and spy gizmos, the DPU also set aside increased funding to address the construction of affordable housing for military personnel. That was about the only item to address the most-pressing issue that is currently crippling the CAF: the combined retention failure/recruiting shortfalls, which have resulted in woefully depleted ranks.

You can buy all the weaponry in the world, but it will be useless if there is no one left in uniform to use it.

As for what all this will mean for the actual future of the CAF, a few polite reminders might help put things in perspective. First of all, this DPU was initially

announced by the Liberal government back on April 7, 2022, as an "urgent" necessity in the immediate aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That was nearly two years to the day before they actually tabled this DPU. That is not an "urgent" response in any universe.

At the DPU technical briefing last week, it was confirmed that prior to making the details public in Canada, Blair had first briefed NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to get his blessing. Apparently, Blair also pre-briefed United States Ambassador to Canada David Cohen. Those who follow Canadian military affairs closely will be well aware that both NATO and the U.S. have been pressuring Canada to increase defence spending to the NATO alliance target of two per cent of gross domestic product.

This new DPU projects a massive increase from Canada's current annual defence budget of \$30-billion to a staggering \$50-billion by the end of this decade. However, thanks to Canada's robust economy, that will only put us at the 1.76 per cent of GDP mark. In other words, closer but still no cigar from Stoltenberg.

Perhaps the most important detail to remember is that this is a projected 20-year plan, which is unlikely to survive any change in government. To coin the old phrase, "I'll believe it when I see it."

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

The Hill Times

Is there another Charest in the Quebec Liberals' future?

The son of a former Quebec premier, Antoine Dionne Charest says he isn't eyeing party leadership, but is looking to make a mark on the province's political scene.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



per cent among francophones. In the last provincial election, the Liberals offered a more nationalist platform, ignoring their traditional Anglo Montreal base. The devastating defeat in October of 2022 was the party's worst showing since its founding in the mid-19th century.

Paradoxically, thanks to the support of non-francophones, the party became the official opposition in the National Assembly with 19 seats, compared to Premier François Legault's Coalition Avenir du Québec (CAQ) with 89 seats.

I have argued here previously the reason for the defeat was the popularity of the avuncular Legault during the pandemic, and the fact Quebec was not ready for a brilliant, Black woman premier in then-Liberal leader Dominique Anglade.

Nonetheless, the Liberals chose to amend their policies. In a process begun last May, former senator André Pratte led a group of 14 people, including Antoine Dionne Charest, the son of former premier Jean Charest. In October, the Reflection and Consultation Committee released its 97-page

report, calling for a written Quebec Constitution, a comprehensive reform of French-language education, a basic income, economic initiatives, and Senate reform.

The party is now asking members to focus on four topics: economic development, improving public services, education, and the "affirmation of Quebec within the Canadian federation and the world." The Liberals will put the finishing touches on the discussion at a convention in the fall.

While Pratte won't return to the political arena, Dionne Charest is approaching it with enthusiasm. He attracted attention in Quebec's media in June when he challenged right-wing nationalist Mathieu Bock-Côté to a debate about Quebec's place in Canada on the TVA network. While it didn't change any minds, the polite Dionne Charest was a contrast to the bloviating Bock-Côté. In December, *La Presse* offered up a three-part profile on him, titled "The New Charest." His star was on the rise.

I spent an hour talking with him last week. The fluently bilingual Dionne Charest is a lecturer

at Université de Montréal, where he is finishing a doctoral thesis. While he has no interest in the vacant leadership post, he makes no bones about his intent to run for a seat in the National Assembly.

Dionne Charest was keen to talk about the policy tour. He said members heard a great deal about bread-and-butter issues, but also about constitutional questions, and from anglophones who were "frustrated" about the language issue. He said, "A serious party starts with ideas." Quoting former prime minister Jean Chrétien, he said "you need to put some water in the pool before you dive in."

The discussion turned from policy to politics. He slammed the current CAQ government as "neither competent nor effective." He calls Parti Québécois Leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon "one of the most radical leaders of the PQ, ever," in calling for a sovereignty referendum and making a connection between immigration and the alleged decline of French in Quebec.

Dionne Charest said Quebecers will come back to the Liberal Party when "we reclaim our brand," and compared its record

of budget surpluses to the CAQ's \$11-billion deficit. He said the Liberals should focus on wealth creation, making federalism work, and combatting illiteracy. He said he wants to see the notwithstanding clause taken off the controversial secularism law—Bill 21—so it can be challenged effectively in court.

Finally, I asked him about the "elephant in the room," his father. "I am proud to be Jean Charest's son, but I am also proud Michelle Dionne is my mother." Although his father made his name as "Captain Canada," Dionne Charest describes himself as a nationalist, which to him means "having a sense of belonging to Quebec." He describes as a "false dilemma" those who demand Quebecers choose Quebec or Canada.

He was inspired to become involved in politics "as a way of contributing to society." He ended our conversation saying: "I was raised with strong values. People should judge me by what I do." While I have never been a fan of the *dau-phins* (designated heirs) phenomena in politics, Dionne Charest may be an exception. He is a smart man, who clearly bears watching.

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



Facing possible political devastation, Housing Minister Sean Fraser and the Trudeau government have decided to take on the national housing crisis in a full-bore, government-wide fashion, writes Les Whittington. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

sistance can make a major difference in economic well-being. While no one expects the new housing strategy to solve the crisis in the short term, it has to be seen as a meaningful start with potential to address the housing shortage and improve accessibility and affordability for younger people in the years ahead.

Trudeau rightly called it a matter of generational fairness. But beyond the effectiveness of Ottawa's new approach—something that won't be known for some time—there is the overarching question of whether Canadians will view the federal government's commitment in this area as genuine and worth supporting. Opposition is already intense, with critics calling Trudeau's housing spending inflationary and irresponsible, and provinces raising jurisdictional objections.

The Conservatives, who have blamed Trudeau for the housing mess and relied on the issue in part to gain a commanding lead in the polls, derided the Liberals' pre-budget announcements as meaningless, multi-billion-dollar photo ops.

On this and other social issues, what it comes down to is whether Canadians will stick with an activist, progressive government, or are ready to embrace a return to so-called "zombie neoliberalism" that prioritized the interests of business and the wealthy at the expense of everyone else from the 1980s to 2015. Today's wealth inequality—including with housing—took shape during those years, and is only likely to get worse under a right-wing party that wants to reduce the role of the federal government in every aspect of Canada's socio-economic life.

Les Whittington is a regular columnist for The Hill Times.

The Hill Times

Housing the latest skirmish pitting progressive government against zombie neoliberalism

The growing disparity in wealth between homeowners and those who cannot afford to buy into the residential lottery has become a pressing matter of inequality.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—From the explosion of the munitions ship that destroyed part of Halifax in 1917 until the election of former prime minister Brian Mulroney in 1984, the federal government had been heavily involved in Canada's housing policy.

Under periodic pressure from the Depression to the return of Second World War veterans to Canada's postwar urbanization—the most rapid in the industrialized world—and the 21 per cent interest rates of the 1980s, the federal government has tried out every program, tax initiative, funding incentive, loan guarantee, and subsidy imaginable in relation to this subject. Better living conditions, severe housing shortages, lack of affordability, urban renewal, economic stimulation, poverty reduction, and other issues motivated federal ministers on this file for more than 60 years.

This was the case despite the fact that, as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently pointed out, housing was not primarily a federal responsibility.

Now, facing possible political devastation, the Trudeau government has decided to take on the national housing crisis in a full-bore, government-wide fashion. Except for Ottawa's gargantuan effort to protect Canadians and their livelihoods from COVID, it's the most extensive, multi-faceted set of pro-growth programs brought in by any federal government in recent memory.

The measures anchor the 2024 budget. As part of its novel pre-budget rollout, the federal government has announced billions of dollars in spending commitments intended to make it easier in the long run to own a home as well as helping renters.

"We are releasing the most comprehensive and ambitious housing plan ever seen in Canada," Trudeau said, previewing the budget. "It builds on the sizeable investments we've made over the years and it goes a lot further." The plan envisions building 3.9 million homes by 2031.

The size of Ottawa's latest comprehensive foray into housing is commensurate with the current shortage-affordability mess, which has grown over recent decades as a result of a mix of political, demographic, and financial factors. These include the attractiveness of Canada to speculators, failed provincial and municipal housing policies, the fact that 80 per cent of Canadians live in cities, tax favouritism, historically low interest rates, household debt tolerance, and declining middle-class real incomes.

By 2023, average Canadian house prices were 80 per cent higher than a decade earlier, and the price bubble, which had previously been mainly seen in major cities, had spread across the country because of the remote work trend during COVID. The growing disparity in wealth between homeowners and those who cannot afford to buy into the residential lottery has become a pressing matter of inequality, not to say rights.

"Wealth inequality in Canada is not just a story of rich versus poor, it is one of homeowners versus non-homeowners," TD Bank economists state in their study, *Digging Beneath The Surface: Is Housing Perpetuating A Wealth Divide in Canada?*

"Even up to the mid-2010s, the benefits of rising home valuations were accruing to a much broader range of households on the wealth and income spectrums [in Canada] under better accessibility," the economists write. "That thread of the narrative is now fraying, as rapid home price gains have limited accessibility to either high-income households, investors, repeat buyers, or those who benefit from pre-existing family wealth." The resulting imbalance in outcomes, the TD study concludes, highlights "the importance of housing accessibility,

not just as a basic necessity-of-life, but also as a natural lean against inequality."

Importantly, the Liberal government proved during COVID that increasing financial transfers to those needing as-



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News

Liberals continue ‘big budget’ spending trend, increasing capital gains tax to maintain deficit

The government could be overestimating its projected new revenues from tax policy changes, says one finance expert.

Continued from page 1

which includes policy measures announced since the fall economic statement, meaning the budget itself contains \$53-billion in new spending. That figure includes the nearly \$38-billion in new spending the government announced in the weeks leading up to the budget's release.

The Liberals are starting slow in the rollout of those new funds, with only \$10.9-billion—or 20 per cent of the budget—earmarked by March 2025. This will be the government's second-to-last budget before the next scheduled election on Oct. 25, 2025.

“It's a relatively big budget,” said Mostafa Askari, chief economist of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy at the University of Ottawa, noting there is a significant increase in planned spending between the fall economic statement and this budget.

But there is also a significant increase in the government's projected revenues: the economy has shown more growth than was projected in the fall economic statement, Askari noted, leading to an increase in projected revenues for the government, in addition to the new revenues it is generating through new tax measures.



Mostafa Askari is the chief economist of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy at the University of Ottawa. Photograph courtesy of Policy Options



The cover of Budget 2024. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

“One thing for this government ... from the time they got elected, they were very clear that they wanted to raise the size of this state, the role of the government, and they've done it. And they continue to do that,” Askari said.

The government also has to be ready to pay for its larger role, Askari said. Overall, Budget 2024 sees the government maintaining its deficit and offsetting new spending with changes to its taxation.

“Whether this is the right time [to raise taxes], that's a different issue,” Askari said.

“Perhaps at the time where there are uncertainties about the economy, there are uncertainties about investment in Canada—we haven't had a huge increase in investment. Maybe that's not the best time to do it.”

The federal debt is projected to slightly increase between now and the 2028-29 fiscal year, but debt as a percentage of GDP is projected to decrease slightly, from \$41.9-billion in 2024-25 to \$39-billion in 2028-29.

ing \$1.7-billion in tax breaks for entrepreneurs.

Capital gains are the profits an individual or business earns when selling an asset, such as stocks or a secondary residence or investment property. Currently, the government taxes 50 per cent of all capital gains—known as the “capital gains tax advantage.”

As of June 25, 2024, the government intends to start taxing two thirds of all capital gains beyond \$250,000. It estimates that in 2025, 40,000 people—or 0.13 per cent of the population—will earn capital gains more than \$250,000.

It's through this measure that the government hopes to get the wealthiest in Canada to “pay their fair share,” given that a larger percentage of the wealthiest Canadians' income comes from capital gains, while the majority of Canadians' income is from their wage.

However, there is an important footnote to the government's prediction of how many Canadians will have capital gains exceeding \$250,000 in 2025: namely, that it “does not account for behavioural responses to increase in capital gains inclusion rate.”

“When there is a tax increase, those who are subject to the tax can change the way they manage their affairs,” Askari noted, “especially people with more means. [They] have more opportunities to move money around, to do different ways of avoiding that tax.”

Askari said for that reason, he thinks the government is overestimating its projected revenue from the capital gains tax.

He also thinks the increase to that tax sends an anti-business message.

“Some investors that were planning to invest may think twice and may reduce their exposure to this,” he said.

In the budget document, the government appears to anticipate

this criticism, pointing out that Canada has the “lowest marginal effective tax rate in the G7.”

In a press conference in advance of tabling the budget, Freeland said the increased capital gains tax would not harm Canada's business climate.

“I am confident that the measure that we are putting forward today will not have a negative effect on business certainty, on business investment.”

“In thinking about raising revenue, we thought very, very carefully about the investment climate. That is one of the principal considerations in my mind, one of the main things that the government is focused on and thinking about,” said Freeland.

She stressed the principle of fairness, and that all income should be taxed equally. She also said the new revenue “will help make life cost less for millions of Canadians, particularly for millennials and Gen Z.”

What defines the ‘middle class’?

In the preamble to announcing tax increases, which the government refers to as “tax fairness,” it attempts to appeal to the generosity of those who will be subject to the tax, asking them to think of the younger generation. It also frames its tax decisions as a rebuttal to a common criticism of this government's budgets over the years: that increases to the deficit harm future generations by leaving them on the hook for paying down the debt.

“Financing the investment we need through more debt would be unfair to young Canadians—we want them to inherit prosperity, not our unpaid bills,” the budget reads. “We have a better, fairer option. We are making the responsible choice. The government is asking the wealthiest Canadians to pay their fair share.”

Defining Canada's middle class versus the wealthiest “has always been an issue,” Askari said.

It won't only be the wealthiest Canadians who are subject to the increased capital gains tax, however. Those whose incomes would place them firmly in the “middle class,” but who might inherit an

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Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre attacked the budget before it was tabled in the House of Commons on April 16. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Budget projects savings through ‘natural attrition’ of public service jobs

The 5,000 public servants projected to leave in the next four years are expected to make up the bulk of previously announced savings targets.

Continued from page 1

ing years of steady growth—particularly during and following the pandemic—the government has opted to look for savings without direct cuts to staffing.

With some economist concerns over the size of the bureaucracy, the budget makes no new direct announcements on that front. It simply puts a number on a previous plan.

That “natural attrition” of employees leaving the bureaucracy but not being replaced makes up the bulk of the second phase of cost-saving measures first announced in the 2023 budget and subsequent fall economic statement. It outlined government plans to find \$15.8-billion in savings over five years, as well as \$4.8-billion ongoing, at the department and agency level. During the first phase, the government said it targeted duplication, programs that didn’t align with government priorities, and “a particular focus on travel and consulting.”

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) said the Liberal government is careful with spending decisions and tied the expected drop in public servants to highlight anticipated savings.

“It’s not our money, it is the money of Canadians and they quite rightly expect us to be really thoughtful about what we spend it on,” said Freeland during a press conference at the budget lockup before pointing to the expected decline in the public service.

“That’s why it was really important for me, in this budget, to announce that over four years, you’re going to see a decline in the public service by 5,000 people,” she said. “That is really significant. And it was important, particularly right now, to say that to Canadians.”

Based on historical rates of natural attrition, the government predicts the public service population will decline by approximately 5,000 full-time equivalent positions, a fraction of the



The budget presents no direct cuts for the federal public service, overseen by Treasury Board President Anita Anand, and instead savings from 5,000 employees expected to leave over the next four years by ‘natural attrition.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

estimated population of roughly 368,000 workers as of March 31.

“Care was taken to ensure that departments and agencies could meet their reallocation targets without impacting direct benefits and service delivery to Canadians,” the budget said.

The government said these efforts help ensure the “operations of government are cost effective” while “restoring fairness for every generation”—invoking the language of equity through the political document. It also noted millennials have recently overtaken baby boomers as the largest age group in the country.

“That’s why the government is continuously evaluating demand for services and programs, and adjusting investments accordingly—ensuring Canadians have the support they need, when they need it,” reads the budget.

As previously reported by *The Hill Times*, the Public Service Commission’s 2022-23 annual report found that the federal public service increased by 6.5 per cent between the beginning of April 2022 and the end of March 2023. The report also found that more than 423,000 people applied to externally-advertised public service positions during that time.

But although the federal public service has grown considerably since the Liberals came to power in 2015, a recent CBC analysis notes that the country’s population has also grown significantly during that time. The CBC found that under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), the federal public service has grown to represent 0.90 per cent of the Canadian popula-

tion, up from 0.72 per cent in 2015. But, Treasury Board Secretariat data shows that the population sat at or above 0.90 per cent in every year from 1980 to 1992.

Operating expenses tied to direct program expenses, which include employee salaries, totalled \$129.6-billion in 2022-23, increased to \$130.9-billion the following year, and are expected to come in at \$127.1-billion in 2028-29—slightly higher than the \$126.1-billion projected in the 2023 fall economic statement.

But, department-level transfer payments for program expenses are now projected to cost more when compared to fall economic statement forecasts. The 2024 budget puts these payments at \$112.8-billion in 2028-29, up \$10-billion from the \$102.6-billion projected just a few months prior.

And, in about a year, beginning April 1, 2025, the second phase of cost savings will include an expectation for organizations in the federal public service to cover part of increased operating costs through existing resources.

Measures announced to improve procurement practices, conflict of interest regimes

This year’s budget also addresses government procurement practices, pointing to recent implementation of “additional robust standards to strengthen oversight and hold public servants to the highest of ethical standards.” The budget adds a new risk and compliance process to the mix.

Last month, Public Services and Procurement Minister Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec, Que.) and Treasury Board President Anita Anand (Oakville, Ont.) announced a number of new actions to strengthen the government’s procurement and conflict of interest regimes.

Updated procurement guidance for managers were released last month, including examining human resources and staffing strategies before looking to procure professional services, strict evaluation criteria when a supplier is selected, due diligence procedures to ensure there is no conflict of interest, and ensuring all contractual obligations are upheld by third-party vendors.

Government-wide audits were also launched earlier this month, according to the budget, with results expected to be released by December 2024.

The budget also includes mention of the launch of a new risk and compliance process in the coming months “to ensure government-wide trends, risks, and departmental performance meet the highest standards, and take corrective action wherever necessary, as soon as possible.”

When managers look to procure professional services moving forward, “robust validation” that a potential contractor is the optimal approach to meeting operational requirements will be expected, as well as a commitment to publishing more detailed contracting information on the government’s open data portal.

The budget states that these actions will ensure transparency

in contracting and help “identify and immediately take action to resolve any potential anomalies in billing,” and will also help ensure that public servants “clearly understand and abide by their responsibilities with respect to engaging in outside employment.”

In February, *The Globe and Mail* reported that a public servant who worked in the Department of National Defence also worked as president of a private business that was hired to work on the controversial ArriveCan app launched during the pandemic and which ballooned in costs.

At the time, Anand told reporters on Parliament Hill that she was “extremely surprised” to hear that David Yeo, president and founder of Dalian, was also employed by the government. Yeo was suspended by the department following the discovery.

And on March 20, Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) announced it had detected “several fraudulent billing schemes” undertaken by subcontractors working on federal contracts awarded to suppliers.

Half of government office space underused or entirely vacant: budget

Of the more than six million square metres of office space under PSPC’s umbrella, an estimated 50 per cent is underused or entirely vacant, according to the budget.

The federal government says it is moving forward with a “significant disposal effort” to reduce its office footprint, which would enable more office buildings, particularly in urban areas, to be converted into homes.

As with most workplaces, the pandemic upended the traditional model of office work, with many public servants now working in a hybrid format.

Then-Treasury Board president Mona Fortier (Ottawa-Vanier, Ont.) hinted at early government plans to convert some federal office buildings into residential spaces in downtown Ottawa back in 2022 during an interview with CTV News.

This year’s budget includes a proposal to provide Public Services and Procurement Canada with \$1.1-billion over 10 years, beginning in 2024-25, to reduce its office portfolio by half.

“This funding, which is expected to be fully recovered through substantial short- and long-term cost savings, will help to accelerate the ending of leases and disposal of underused federal properties, and address deferred maintenance,” according to the budget. “Where applicable, the government will prioritize student and non-market housing in the unlocking of federal office properties.”

The budget also outlines how reducing the federal office footprint will generate an expected \$3.9-billion in savings over the next 10 years, and \$0.9-billion per year ongoing.

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News

Defence over diplomacy spotlighted in Liberal budget, with modest initial spending on foreign service reform

The government's spending plan will add \$664.4-million exclusively to GAC, while billions more have been allocated for the Canadian Forces over the next 20 years.

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eclipsed by billions of dollars earmarked for the country's military.

A Senate committee report last December called for new investment to modernize Canada's dated foreign service. Canada's top diplomat, Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.), has also emphasized the need for more investment. At the same time, the Liberal government has faced domestic and international pressure to boost its defence budget amid calls for restrained spending.

While the defence calls were largely met with \$73-billion pledged over the next 20 years in the long-awaited defence policy update, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's (University-Rosedale, Ont.) new budget has meager new funding to offer Global Affairs Canada (GAC). Freeland tabled the budget in the House of Commons on April 16.

Promised is \$159.1-million over five years for the foreign service's "transformation," including \$61.4-million for recruitment and training, \$47.6-million for better pay for local staff at Canada's missions abroad, \$32.1-million to improve GAC's IT systems, and \$18-million to "bolster Canada's presence" at its United Nations mission in New York.

The foreign ministry has faced calls to build subject-matter expertise and increased foreign language competency. A 2022 report by Canadian diplomat Ulric Shannon found that foreign language compliance was 23 per cent, which dropped to 18 per cent for executive-level posts.

The Senate Foreign Affairs Committee report recommended that the government "increase its investment" for foreign-language training. The report also found that of the nearly 2,500 rotational posts at GAC, 17 per cent were unfulfilled.

Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly has called for increased investment for her department. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



According to an internal discussion paper prepared for GAC's foreign service review, in 2022, Canada had 25 diplomats posted to its UN mission in New York, compared to the United States' 150, the United Kingdom's 108, Japan's 102, France's 73, Italy's 60, and Australia's 30.

The planned contribution to the foreign service review is backloaded, seeking only \$19-million in 2024-25 and \$28-million in 2025-26, with most of the funding coming after the next election: \$33-million in 2026-27, and \$40-million each in 2027-28 and 2028-29.

Other spending pledges heading GAC's way are \$350-million over two years for international humanitarian assistance so Canada can respond to worsening crises, as well as \$146.3-million over five years (starting in 2027-28) to foster sustainable growth in Latin America, and retroactively pledging \$9-million for crisis evacuations in 2023-24.

The budget also seeks \$87-million over five years for early preparations for Canada's upcoming G7 presidency in 2025. The spending plan is for "multiple departments," but it isn't defined which specific ministries will receive the funding.

Total planned spending committed exclusively to GAC in the budget is \$664.4-million.

France's foreign service review in 2023 led to a boost of 20 per

cent to its foreign ministry's budget and the creation of 700 jobs, according to GAC's internal discussion paper.

But in Canada, GAC's \$8.4-billion budget faced the spectre of \$118-million in spending reductions for 2024-25 set out in the main estimates, with the budget outlining only \$169-million to be added in the same year. In 2025-26, the budget pledges \$228-million in new spending for GAC, while spending reductions total \$179-million. The following year,

in 2026-27, the budget forecasts \$33-million of new spending, while spending reductions jump to \$243-million.

In its 2024-25 departmental plan, released before the budget, spending for GAC slightly increases to \$8.8-billion for 2024-25, before dropping to \$8.1-billion in 2025-26 and \$7.4-billion in 2026-27.

Additional funding for GAC is set out in a defence policy update commitment that the budget points to for both the Communi-

cations Security Establishment and Canada's foreign ministry. That line item is for \$917-million over five years, and nearly \$11-billion in later years, for conducting cyber operations. It is unclear how much of the spending plan would go to GAC.

Over at the Department of National Defence, the defence policy update pledged \$8.1-billion over the next five fiscal years.

Following the release of the update, Independent Senator Peter Boehm (Ontario), chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, raised the topic of money being earmarked for Canada's military while the foreign ministry's coffers are being targeted.

"I think we all know that what was announced today was very important today and is much needed," the former Canadian diplomat told Defence Minister Bill Blair (Scarborough Southwest, Ont.) at the Senate Defence and National Security Committee on April 8. "In my experience and to misquote a former U.S. general: diplomacy comes before bullets."

"There is a symbiotic relationship between what our Forces do, and what our defence planners and what our diplomats do abroad in crisis areas," he said, referencing Joly's statement in the update in which she said that "defence and diplomacy go hand-in-hand in pursuing our national interest."

"Yet," Boehm said, "Global Affairs Canada is being slashed."

Blair responded that he was hopeful that Canada would do the "whole job," including "significant investment on foreign affairs and that diplomatic effort."

Canada's defence commitment includes plans for a new fleet tactical helicopter, long-range missile capabilities, and a new airborne warning aircraft, as well as funding to maintain its fleet of aging naval warships and its military equipment.

The budget also pledges \$1.6-billion over five years in lethal and non-lethal military aid for Ukraine, as well as \$2.4-billion in loans in 2024.

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In the government's latest budget tabled on April 16, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland has limited new commitments for Canada's foreign ministry. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Liberals continue ‘big budget’ spending trend, increasing capital gains tax to maintain deficit

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asset such as a cottage, would also be subjected to the increase in the year they sell that asset.

Budget 2024 cites a 2019 Parliamentary Budget Office analysis that 24.9 per cent of Canada’s household wealth is held by the top one per cent. The average family net worth of the top one per cent in 2019 is pegged at \$5-million. (It notes 2019—since which there has been a pandemic, global inflation, and a worsening housing and affordability crisis—is the last year that official statistics on average family net worth are available.)

In 2021, a Statistics Canada analysis identified an annual increase in salaries of 9.4 per cent for the country’s top one per cent, while the bottom half of tax filers saw their income decrease by an average of \$1,400.

Government leverages federal coffers to push other jurisdictions on housing

In terms of spending, the government’s main focus of Budget 2024—featured prominently in Chapter 1—is addressing the housing crisis. The government’s recent focus on housing represents a shift since Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s (Papineau Que.) August 2023 declaration that housing was not “a primary federal responsibility.”

Most of the budget’s new housing funds were laid out prior to tabling the budget, including a \$6-billion Canada Housing



Green Party Deputy Leader Jonathan Pedneault, centre, speaks to reporters about his party’s response to the budget, alongside Green MP Mike Morrice, left, and Green Leader Elizabeth May on April 16. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Infrastructure Fund, a \$15-billion top-up to the Apartment Construction Loan Program, a \$1.5-billion Canada Rental Protection Fund, and a new Canada Housing Plan.

While the government is offering funding via grants and loans to provincial and municipal partners, it is imposing terms and conditions to which they must agree in order to access the funding.

One example of this is that in order to access federal funding for public transit, Budget 2024 states municipalities must

allow for high-density housing to be built within 800 metres of high-frequency transit lines, eliminate parking requirements near those lines, and also allow for high-density housing within 800 metres of post-secondary institutions.

The government is pushing its jurisdiction in taking these measures, Askari said, while also recognizing that the provinces and municipalities were not adequately addressing the housing crisis, and the feds were feeling the political pressure to act.

Economist Jim Stanford told *The Hill Times* on April 15 that there are lots of examples where the federal government creates national policy in areas that are governed on a more detailed level by other jurisdictions.

He said critiques of the government for overstepping its jurisdictional bounds are “opportunistic.”

“Look at Canada’s whole social safety net. You could say the same thing about the entire employment insurance system,” he said.

Stanford also called back to Trudeau’s 2023 comment about housing not being primarily federal jurisdiction, saying “he got ripped to shreds by it, including by Conservatives who are supposedly defenders of provincial autonomy.”

However, Askari said the government’s plans could increase tensions with provinces, some of which are reluctant to allow the government any say in how they spend their money—even if it’s coming from the federal purse.

Pharmacare gets a budget

The government plans to allocate \$1.5-billion over five years, starting in this fiscal year, to support the launch of its National Pharmacare Plan, which includes providing free access to contraceptives and insulin. The budget also mentioned it would work to make essential menstrual products accessible, further details of which would be announced in the fall economic statement.

Conservatives will ‘attack this from all sides’

Askari said the government has to be ready to defend its budget against predictable attacks from the Conservative Party and its leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.)

“They’re going to attack this from all sides,” Askari said.

The morning before the budget was tabled, Poilievre spoke to the press from behind a “fix the budget” sign, saying “everything” is worse under Trudeau, panning the Liberals and NDP as a “costly coalition” that hurts Canadian pocketbooks.

“Over the last several weeks, he has been pouring fuel—and not water—on the inflationary fire that he lit. With tens of billions of dollars of new spending for the same old programs that caused the misery in the first place,” he said.

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NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh reacts to the 2024 budget in the West Block on April 16. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Reporters work during the budget lockup inside the John G. Diefenbaker Building in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The Canadian Conservative movement is tired of apologizing for their ideas

‘Conservatism no longer a dirty word’: Canada Strong and Free Conference shows confidence and conviction in Conservative ideas, and a rejection of ‘centrist orthodoxy’ as right-wingers make their power play, say politicians.

BY STUART BENSON

Bolstered by the Conservative Party’s record leads in the polls against the governing Liberals, attendees at the Canada Strong and Free conference last week say they’ve experienced confidence and energy unseen since the 2010s, which has given the movement a certainty in their values to unapologetically “say what they mean” and reject the “centrist orthodoxy” demanding moderation to win an election.

From April 10-13, more than 1,000 conservatives from across the country and the spectrum of political thought gathered at the Westin Hotel in Ottawa for a policy and networking conference featuring keynote speeches from former prime ministers from the United Kingdom, Australia, and Israel, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.); as well

as panel discussions on topics such as parental rights, childcare and family policy, immigration, natural resources, First Nations and reconciliation, and foreign policy. The conference wrapped up on April 13 with a “Best Practices Forum,” featuring training sessions on the use of social media and artificial intelligence in political campaigns, engaging First Nations, communications strategy, and a final keynote on “integrating data with ballot box questions,” from Hamish Marshall, a longtime Conservative data guru and founder of ONE Persuades.

While not an official Conservative Party event, the Canada Strong and Free Conference—formerly known as the Manning Conference—was a “friendly space” to test drive potential messaging on some of the more controversial issues from which Poilievre has attempted to steer clear, said Conservative strategist Daniel Perry, who spoke with *The Hill Times* as a conference attendee.

However, rather than tempering those ideas, Perry said that this year he saw an emboldening of the

conservative movement’s pride and conviction.

“Especially this year, Conservatives are very proud to be Conservative, and that hasn’t always been the case,” Perry explained, adding that the conference had been an opportunity to remind the movement that they are more than a “fringe minority.”

While Perry said it was energizing not to feel like “the only Conservative in the room”—a sentiment many other attendees had shared with him—he recognized that the challenge would be

reaching all of the voters outside of the convention room.

“Growing the big blue tent is going to be one of Poilievre’s biggest challenges, but there’s definitely a lot of momentum right now,” Perry added. “Conservatism isn’t as dirty of a word as it was a decade ago.”

Cole Hogan, a principal with Earncliffe Strategies, told *The Hill Times* that the conference offers an opportunity for “peripheral conversations beyond the slogans.”

“We’re getting a wide range of opinions from one side of the conservative political spectrum to the other,” Hogan said. “This is where we can bandy about those ideas and decide what’s best, even if the main agenda and messages for the election are already set.”

Hogan explained that much of the energy and confidence he saw at the conference, as well as at the Conservative Party policy conference in Quebec City, was due to Poilievre’s decision to reject the “centrist orthodoxy” demanding that a new Conservative leader pivot to the centre to be successful in a general election.

Unlike his two predecessors, Erin O’Toole and Andrew Scheer

(Regina-Qu’Appelle, Sask.), Hogan said that Poilievre has so far resisted that pressure.

“All the things that he talked about during his leadership race are the same as what he’s talking about now and will continue into the election,” Hogan said, adding that Conservatives across the country had resonated with a leader who finally “says the same thing all the time.”

“That’s probably why the convention slogan is ‘leading with conviction,’” Hogan said. “We’re saying what we mean.”

Hogan also suggested that Poilievre may not believe he needs to pivot to the centre, pointing to his speech framing himself as the “common-sense Canadian consensus” in the tradition of both Conservative and Liberal prime

ministers, and casting Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) as the “illiberal” outlier.

“If you look at the way Trudeau has governed further leftward and leftward, there’s a wide gap between [him] and what you would have seen out of Jean Chrétien or Paul Martin,” Hogan explained. That gap, Hogan added, is where Poilievre sees his opportunity to build that consensus.

Quebec Conservative Party Leader Éric Duhaime, who participated in the immigration panel discussion on April 11, told *The Hill Times* that the federal Conservatives have a huge opportunity to grow their support in Quebec, the one province where the party doesn’t currently enjoy a strong polling lead.



While addressing more than 1,000 attendees at the Canada Strong and Free Networking Conference on April 11, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, pictured, framed Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as a ‘radical departure’ from the ‘common-sense, Canadian consensus.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Duhaime said Poilievre’s French will be a significant asset, noting that he has not seen a conservative leader with the same level of “mastery” since former prime minister Brian Mulroney.

“I think his French will be a huge asset during the election, and the debates in particular,” he said, adding that remaining focused on the same conservative values Poilievre has championed since becoming leader would resonate with the province’s electorate.

“I think it’s important that he keeps to his strong Conservative values because Quebecers are looking for alternatives,” Duhaime said, adding that, like all other Canadians, Quebecers are equally concerned with affordability, crime, the housing crisis, and immigration.

Duhaime added that he believes Quebecers’ displeasure with the federal Liberals and the Bloc Québécois—whom they may view as supporting the governing party—will only increase after the 2024 federal budget is released on April 16.

Duhaime said that from what had already been previewed leading up to the budget, he expects it to be “the worst in our lifetime” from the perspective of both Conservatives and Quebecers.

“They are invading provincial jurisdiction, and Quebecers will be unanimous in condemning it,” Duhaime said, adding that rather than a direct conflict with federalism like another referendum, Quebecers are looking for a party that respects the rights of the provinces and the constitutional separation of powers.

“Only a Conservative government is offering us that right now,” Duhaime said, adding that the message of provincial autonomy would effectively grow Poilievre’s support in the province.

Rather than focusing on what a potential Conservative government would do, Poilievre’s keynote and the panel discussions were far more focused on what the federal government would do less of, from

deregulating industry and denationalizing Crown corporations, to having an overall smaller impact on Canadians’ day-to-day lives, to repealing legislation like the Online Streaming Act; the solitary confinement and bail reform bills, C-83 and C-75; the Liberals’ gun bill, C-21; and the Impact Assessment Act, C-69.

The Conservative ethos of limited government interference and local autonomy has also garnered greater success among First Nations communities, particularly Poilievre’s focus on resource development rights.



Kyla Canzanes, legislative assistant for MP Adam Chambers, left; Hill and Knowlton’s Daniel Perry; and Bruce Power’s Candace Johnston attend the Canada Strong and Free Conference and opening reception on April 10. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

Warshield Strategy’s Jennifer Laewetz, who participated in the conference’s “First Nations First Principles” panel, said the Liberal government has only belatedly realized that a “ballooning bureaucracy” and doubling the federal departments that Indigenous people have to deal with has not improved their communities.

In contrast, Laewetz said that Poilievre and the Conservatives’ approach—focused on resource revenue-sharing agreements—is resonating far more.

“That means getting communities working on projects and creating wealth for themselves,” Laewetz explained. “That’s a huge opportunity because we know that more government isn’t going to solve our issues.”

Laewetz said that she isn’t particularly “pro-resource development,” but rather an advocate for self-determination, and that there is a need “to go back to the drawing table” on how best to approach reconciliation while allowing First Nations to prosper independently.

“I’m open to the idea of resource development, but I also believe that whether or not our nations want to participate and see a way to create wealth for themselves is a decision

for our communities,” Laewetz said. “Our leaders need to make that choice and take responsibility for leading that process, but we need to make sure the federal government isn’t standing in our way.”

“It might not be oil and gas; it could be a casino or catering company in the North; the leadership of our communities should be equipped to make those decisions, and the [federal] government should get out of the way,” Laewetz continued.

Conference attendee Blaine Badiuk said that the message offered by the event was the “pragmatic approach” that differentiates Canadian conservatives from right-wing parties worldwide, particularly the Republicans south of the border.

Badiuk, who describes herself as falling closer to the libertarian side of the political spectrum, said that the conservative movement in Canada is now “laser-focused” on its core values from “smaller, limiting governments, lower taxes, and more control of your life and less of the government telling you how to live your life.”

As both a Conservative and a transgender woman, Badiuk said

Continued on page 18



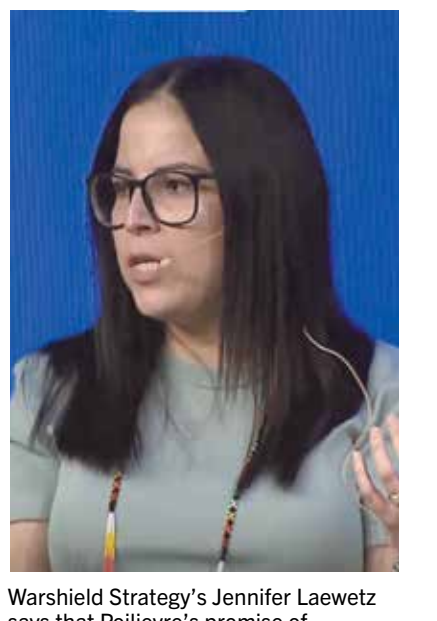
Former Australian prime minister Tony Abbott, left, former U.K. prime minister Boris Johnson, and British political commentator John O’Sullivan open the Canada Strong and Free Conference on April 10 at the Westin Hotel in Ottawa. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson



Earncliffe Strategies ‘blue team’ at the CSFN2024, including Sean Murphy, left, Laura Kurkimaki, Dan Bernier, Shakir Chambers, Cole Hogan, Liam O’Brien, and Nicko Vavassari. *Photograph courtesy of Cole Hogan*



Quebec Conservative Party Leader Éric Duhaime says he believes federal Conservatives’ French ‘mastery’ will be a major asset in Quebec in the next election. *Screenshot courtesy of CPAC*



Warshield Strategy’s Jennifer Laewetz says that Poilievre’s promise of increased First Nations autonomy through resource revenue-sharing agreements resonates more with her community than the Liberals’ ‘ballooning bureaucracy.’ *Screenshot courtesy of CPAC*

News

The Canadian Conservative movement is tired of apologizing for their ideas

Continued from page 17

that contrary to the “left-wing narratives” that such a conference wouldn’t have been a safe place for someone like her, she said the message over the past three days had been one of compassion.

“I was welcomed here more than I’ve ever been in any space on the left,” Badiuk said.

Badiuk said she agrees that the majority of the Canadian electorate sits closer to the centre of the political spectrum. Still, after eight years of the Liberals governing further and further to the left alongside the NDP under the leadership of Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.), the Conservatives already represent that centrist majority, she said.

“The left has abandoned that common-sense consensus, and Conservatives are presenting real solutions to try and solve these issues,” Badiuk said, noting that she believes the Conservatives could find those same solutions to the debate over parental rights and gender identity.

On April 11, New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs spoke about his parental rights policy, which requires transgender and non-binary students under the age of 16 to get their parents’ permission to use their preferred names or pronouns at school.

While the policy has garnered large amounts of criticism from transgender advocates over its potential to endanger children who feel unsafe disclosing their gender



Progressive Conservative New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs, left, sits down with *True North*'s Andrew Lawton at the Canada Strong and Free Network conference on April 11, discussing his surprise at how controversial his gender policy had become and his willingness to lose the next election over it. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

identity to their parents, Badiuk said Higgs’ policy is one of the better ones she has seen so far because it offers avenues of support for those minority of cases.

During his discussion with moderator Andrew Lawton, editor and chief of *True North Wire*, Higgs said he was surprised that the policy had become such a controversial issue.

“Isn’t it amazing that in today’s world, the ‘far right’ is having parents who are involved?” Higgs said, adding that instead, he and other conservatives are more interested in solutions that are “really right.”

Badiuk told *The Hill Times* that as both a transgender woman and future mom, she finds it “really sad” that there was even a need to

defend the inclusion of parents in their children’s education.

“I want to be involved in every part of my child’s education,” Badiuk said. “It’s common sense, which used to be common sense for everyone.”

Badiuk also echoed Alberta Premier Danielle Smith’s comments during her fireside chat on April 12, stating that “you cannot be out

to your entire school community, and the only people who are not allowed to know are your parents.”

During the discussion, also moderated by Lawton, Smith was pressed on her gender policies, which, similar to New Brunswick’s, would prevent children from transitioning medically or socially at school without their parents’ knowledge, as well as potentially limiting some sports leagues to cisgender women.

However, on the topic of women’s-only spaces like public bathrooms and changing rooms, Smith offered a more empathetic and nuanced answer than Poilievre’s earlier this year when he said, “female spaces should be exclusively for females, not for biological males.”

In her answer, Smith shared the discussions she has had with transgender individuals, including one shared by a friend of Badiuk, about her desire to enjoy a spa day with her girlfriends without being forced into the men’s changing room.

Smith said the “issue is modesty,” referring to those individuals who had not yet fully transitioned.

“If you have not fully transitioned, you should not be exposing yourself in female spaces because no one should know,” Smith said. “You should either be behind a washroom stall or show modesty.”

Badiuk said that Smith’s response was the answer she wanted to see from more conservatives on the issue, and that it was a more productive discussion than focusing on isolated “worst cases” that make the news. The vast majority are women like herself who simply want to live their lives, she said.

“I think Conservatives can find a common-sense way to approach this issue, too,” Badiuk said, adding that Smith’s answer has made her optimistic about a change in tone from Poilievre. “There is a way to push back on the broken left-wing narrative while still showing that Conservatives are the compassionate ones.”

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New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs, left, and conference attendee Blaine Badiuk following Higgs’ ‘fireside chat’ on April 11. *Photograph courtesy of Twitter*



Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, right, participates in a ‘fireside chat’ alongside *True North*'s Andrew Lawton at the Canada Strong and Free Network conference in Ottawa on April 12. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

AVIATION

**Better working conditions
can make air travel a
smoother ride**

**Now is the
time to invest
in sustainable
aviation**

**Canada's commercial
aviation in crisis:
fact or fiction?**

**Aviation sustainability
is more than just cleaner
jet fuel**

Aviation Policy Briefing

Struggling low-cost air carriers require feds' intervention on price competition, says aviation expert

Lynx Air, which closed its doors in February, was the latest in a string of low-cost carriers to shutter in recent years, including CanJet Airlines and Swoop.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

A pattern of low-cost airlines in Canada folding in recent years shows that attracting investment is a struggle, and requires a regulatory regime that ensures the long-term survival of these carriers, according to an aviation sector expert.

"I think that we've seen over 20 carriers over the last couple of decades come and go, and those have been basically funded by third parties, by entrepreneurs, ... and they've all failed miserably," said John Gradek, a lecturer at McGill University in Quebec and co-ordinator of its aviation management program. "Canadian investors are gun-shy about



Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez and the federal government should recognize that air travel in Canada shouldn't be seen as a 'cash cow,' says National Airlines Council of Canada CEO Jeff Morrison. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

investing in aviation. Rightly so, because the survivability of those carriers into which they invest is called into question."

Lynx Air, a low-cost airline with service destinations throughout Canada, the United States, and Mexico, ceased operations on Feb. 26 after filing for creditor protection. The airline was the latest in a string of low-cost carriers to close in recent years, including CanJet Airlines, which folded in 2015, and Swoop, an airline owned by WestJet that closed in October 2023.

In a press release, Lynx stated that challenges facing the business had become too significant to overcome, despite doubling its volume of passengers in the two years since the company's inaugural flight.

"Over the past year, Lynx Air has faced a number of significant headwinds, including rising operating costs, high fuel prices, exchange rates, increasing airport charges, and a difficult economic and regulatory environment," said the Lynx press release.

Gradek argued that the biggest challenge facing Canada's aviation sector is price competition. He referred to Air Canada and WestJet—the two largest domestic airlines in Canada—as forming

a "duopoly" that dominates the marketplace, allowing them to take on ultra low-cost carriers (ULCCs) with price matching.

Gradek told *The Hill Times* that the price competition in Canada is led by the two largest carriers, and the closure of ULCCs is "wreaking havoc" on the choices of Canadians for air travel.

"I've had people complain to me that they were shopping for a price the day before Lynx went bankrupt, and they went back then two days later to book it, and they couldn't find anything even close to that price anymore because the adjustment was done that quickly," said Gradek. "They disappear, prices will go back up, and in about a year you'll have another set of entrepreneurs. They'll come in and say, 'Oh, I've got a better mouse-trap, and let me start a ULCC and see how will I do,' and away we go again."

Gradek said the federal government needs to create a more level playing field in the area of consumer pricing for airfares to help nurture ULCCs.

"There has to be a way in which we can, once and for all, create ... an oversight practice that basically keeps these ULCCs whole and gives them a chance to survive," he said. "It's really to create a regime where we create a floor price for the established carriers below which they can't go because it would then be infringing on the pricing of our ULCCs."

Anthony Norejko, president and CEO of the Canadian Business Aviation Association, told *The Hill Times* that attracting investment to the aviation sector in Canada is challenging.

"Costs are high. This translates to customers who are unable to make those purchases, which drives down ticket sales," said Norejko. "When making an investment in that Canadian space, I think the thing that's holding people back is looking at their expected returns, and with the economic conditions as they are, that's likely what's making these folks think about making the investments elsewhere."

He said that the federal government should undertake a strategic review of aviation, which examines the fundamental

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McGill lecturer John Gradek says 'there has to be a way in which we can, once and for all, create ... an oversight practice' that gives ultra low-cost carriers 'a chance to survive.' *Photograph courtesy of John Gradek*



Anthony Norejko, president and CEO of the Canadian Business Aviation Association, says some low-cost air carriers in Canada are attempting to employ a business model that works in the U.S., but not so well in Canada. *Photograph courtesy of Anthony Norejko*



Energy and Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson announced a new investment of \$6.2-million to support a planned processing facility for sustainable aviation fuels in Manitoba in January. *photograph by Andrew Meade*

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Aviation Policy Briefing

Struggling low-cost air carriers require feds' intervention on price competition, says aviation expert

Continued from page 20

differences between the way the aviation sector works in Canada, compared to air carriers in the U.S.

"Some of the low-cost carriers ... the problem is that they're trying to take a model that has worked elsewhere. The problem is that the cost-basis in Canada makes it such that that model really doesn't work. It's very difficult to make work, actually," he said. "Airports in the [U.S.] are funded through tax dollars. That is not the case in Canada. There needs to be an appreciation of the costs that are passed on to the customers, the traveling public."

Norejko said that without a review, Canadians close to the U.S. border will continue to go south to catch flights from American carriers such as Southwest Airlines or JetBlue.

Prices for airfares in Canada fell more than 14 per cent in January, compared with the same month in 2023, according to a consumer price index report released by Statistics Canada on Feb. 20. The report also indicated that plane fares also dropped nearly 24 per cent between December 2023 and January 2024, as the heightened holiday demand subsided.

To compare, airfares in the U.S. in January reached a 15-year low, excluding peak pandemic fares, as reported by CTV News on March 11. American prices in January were three per cent lower than pre-pandemic airfares in January 2020, and also down 15 per cent compared to a decade ago, according to consumer price index data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics published in February.

Aviation and aerospace challenges include need for industrial strategy and 'proactive' support, say industry representatives

Jeff Morrison, the president and CEO of the National Airlines Council of Canada (NACC), told *The Hill Times* that one of the biggest challenges facing Canadian air travel is a lack of competitiveness, especially in comparison to the U.S. and other countries.

The council represents four of Canada's biggest carriers, including Air Canada and WestJet.

Each year, the federal government collects more than \$400-million in airport rent, according to an NACC press release. Morrison said the federal government should reinvest those funds into airport infrastructure.

"The Canadian travel system—by its nature—is lacking competitiveness, which means

A WestJet aircraft sits on the apron at the Ottawa Macdonald-Cartier International Airport on Nov. 28, 2022. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



we're paying more with less opportunity to grow," he said. "What do I mean by that? In Canada, airports are paying \$400-million more in rent to the federal government than they're getting back in things like infrastructure. We're seeing a whole plethora of fees and charges that the federal government charges vis-à-vis air travel, and many of those charges are going up."

Morrison said he would like to see the federal government recognize that air travel in Canada shouldn't be seen as a "cash cow."

"Let's take a step back, review all the fees and charges that the federal government imposes on air travel, and see where we can find some efficiency so that we're actually in a more competitive environment, both domestically and in relation to our partners in the U.S. and elsewhere," he said.

As one way to boost competitiveness, Morrison said that Ottawa could be more proactive in supporting production of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) in Canada.

SAF is a low-carbon alternative to conventional jet fuel, which represents a viable path for the aviation sector to meet net-zero commitments by 2050, as stated in a Feb. 6 NACC press release. The NACC is a part of a coalition of airlines, airports, and equipment manufacturers that urged the federal government to incentivize domestic SAF production in a letter presented to the House on April 16. The coalition is seeking

federal action through measures such as the introduction of refundable investment tax credits for SAF-production facilities.

"Canada has all the raw materials to produce SAF. We have all the human resource expertise. But what's missing is that it's more expensive to produce at this early stage in its development," said Morrison. "Unfortunately, what we're starting to see is more and more energy companies are choosing to locate in the U.S. to produce domestic SAF there, and because airlines are buying up every drop of this stuff that they can

get, Canadian airlines—again—are being put in a position of not being able to compete ... because no domestic SAF production is currently in the works in Canada."

On Jan. 17, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver, B.C.) joined Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew to announce a new combined investment of \$6.2-million to support a planned processing facility in the province for sustainable aviation fuels.

The Azure Sustainable Fuels Corp. facility is expected to create

more than 1,500 jobs during and after construction, and produce around one billion litres of SAF annually, primarily from Canadian feedstock such as canola and soybean oils, according to a Natural Resources Canada press release.

"These clean fuel projects will help create good jobs and grow the economy, all while reducing pollution on the path to net zero," said Wilkinson in the press release.

In terms of support for the aerospace industry, Mike Mueller, president and CEO of the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada (AIAC), argued that attracting international investors requires "clarity, consistency, and predictability," which could be achieved through a national aerospace strategy to co-ordinate actions from different government departments.

In 2022, the Canadian aerospace industry contributed more than \$27-billion in GDP, according to Mueller.

The *State of Canada's Aerospace Industry Report*, released on June 12, 2023, through a partnership between AIAC and Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada, indicated that the country's aerospace industry was in a state of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, with an increase in revenues, jobs, and GDP in 2022 for the first time since 2019. However, the report also showed a trend of declining spending on innovation.

Mueller said that "business investments rise on predictability, certainty and clarity."

"Right now ... everything seems to be on a case-by-case or transactional basis, whether that be defence procurement, whether that be innovation, research, and development. And so better alignment through a strategy—taking into account those things—would definitely help to increase both domestic investment and also a foreign investment," said Mueller. "We need to bring that to a whole-of-government approach through an aerospace strategy. That's really what's required, and that's what's lacking right now."

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Civil aviation 2023 stats

- In 2023, Canadian airlines continued their recovery from the pandemic. The pace of recovery slowed from 2022, as levels in 2023 approached pre-pandemic levels.
- Throughout the year, Canadian Level 1 air carriers flew 79.6 million passengers, a 27 per cent increase over 2022 and 6.8 per cent below the 2019 level. Year-over-year increases in passenger numbers exceeded 100 per cent at the start of 2023 as a result of low

volumes in early 2022 when air travel was affected by the Omicron variant.

- Year-over-year increases then moderated, with the smallest gain recorded in November 2023 (+7.9 per cent). Passenger numbers were closest to pre-pandemic levels in October (-1.3 per cent compared with October 2019).
- The number of passenger-kilometres reached pre-pandemic levels in October and November 2023, before dipping below the 2019 level again in December. Capacity, measured by available seat-kilometres, was closest to 2019

levels in November (-0.5 per cent) and December (-0.9 per cent).

- In 2023, the passenger load factor was above pre-pandemic levels every month except December. The overall load factor for 2023 was 86 per cent, higher than the 84.3 per cent recorded in 2019.
- The average distance travelled per passenger in 2023 was 2,722 kilometres, up 1.9 per cent from 2019.
- In 2023, operating revenue exceeded pre-pandemic levels in every month and totalled \$28.3-billion, 11.8 per cent higher than in 2019.



Aerospace Industries Association of Canada head Mike Mueller says a whole-of-government approach via an aerospace strategy is required. Photograph courtesy of Mike Mueller

—Source: *Monthly civil aviation statistics, December 2023, released by Statistics Canada on Feb. 28, 2024*

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Aviation Policy Briefing

Better working conditions can make air travel a smoother ride

By failing to improve working conditions, airlines, airports, and government are guaranteeing that the industry cannot meet the needs of passengers.

Lana Payne

Opinion



Working conditions and travel conditions are intricately linked. Given the current state of job quality in the industry, it should be no surprise that travellers are facing subpar conditions, writes Lana Payne. *Unsplash photograph by Marco López*

and flight-services personnel, and we have a perfect storm for a poor travel experience.

And let's be clear: it is not the fault of the workers who are left to pick up the pieces of a tangled system of airport authorities, airlines, and regulators who seem to have forgotten that air travel is an important service for Canadians and there are remedies.

The federal government introduced some solutions such as the Air Passenger Protection Regulations (APPR), which became law in 2019 and was beefed up last year.

But the key to smoother air travel is to improve the work-

ing conditions of those in the air-transportation industry to ensure airlines and airports can meet the expectations set by these regulations.

Unifor has already cleared the runway for how that can be done through our Air Transportation Workers' Charter of Rights. The government would do well to implement these standards instead of focusing on Band-Aid solutions.

Workers and travelling Canadians lose out because of contract flipping within the industry and airports. This is a practice the government can easily avoid

by implementing full successor rights for workers, and by limiting the number of ground-handling companies that can operate at an airport. Companies may be trying to reduce costs, but the costs of leaving passengers without their luggage contribute to negative air-travel experiences. It can also result in delayed flights costing the industry, too.

Our union's charter—informed by the voices of workers in many facets of air travel—recommends airport authorities implement a living wage throughout the airport.

In the middle of an affordability crisis, lifting the floor for workers through fair pay across all job categories is essential.

Companies need to prioritize fair scheduling and high-quality training. They must hire and schedule enough workers to perform the work that is required, and recognize that technology is often not the miracle fix that developers suggest it is.

Airlines need to create the conditions to reduce and eliminate harassment by easing the tension and frustration for passengers instead of creating a pressure cooker.

To address some of these issues, the federal government has so far opted for fines and refunds. A rebate is not the answer, nor is

it much of a consolation prize for cancelled flights, long wait times, and missed meetings or family events.

The challenges are across the board, including in air traffic control, flight scheduling, and aircraft maintenance. The challenges show up in baggage handling, catering, and airport services. They are in the chatbot that promises quick and easy experiences, but always leaves you unsatisfied.

By September 2023, the Canada Transport Agency was still facing a backlog of 57,000 complaints through the APPR complaint process.

Working conditions and travel conditions are intricately linked. Given the current state of job quality in the industry, it should be no surprise that travellers are facing subpar conditions. When workers don't have the tools or resources needed to do the work effectively, everyone suffers.

By failing to improve working conditions, airlines, airports, and government are guaranteeing that the industry cannot meet the needs of passengers.

Let's not forget the working conditions of aviation workers are your travel conditions.

It's time to get our aviation industry working for everyone—workers and travellers.

Lana Payne was elected Unifor national president in 2022, becoming the first woman to hold this leadership office. Before her election, Payne served the union as secretary-treasurer from 2019-2022. Payne brings three decades of inspired leadership fighting for workers.

The Hill Times

Airports and the Canadian government can work together to supercharge the benefits of air connectivity

Prioritizing connecting transportation projects, investing in tech that streamlines the passenger experience, and cutting red tape would give industry the lift it needs to set a course for a bright future.

Neil Pakey

Opinion



Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez makes an announcement at the Canadian North airlines hanger in Ottawa on Aug. 9, 2023. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

It's fair to say that most people have an intuitive understanding of the importance that Canada's airports play in driving the country's economy, even if they don't have the hard statistics at hand to back up their assertions. If you

were to ask anyone on the street, you'd probably get a nebulous answer that mentions people flying for business, holidays, medical, and family reasons; tourism spending; and maybe even job creation.

But what, exactly, do Canada's airports do for the country's economy?

Pre-pandemic research from the Canadian Airports Council indicates that Canada's airports contribute \$19-billion in GDP and support a whopping 355,000 jobs while contributing \$6.9-billion in taxes to federal, provincial, and municipal governments, all the while maintaining a stellar safety record. In the case of Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport, we contribute \$2.1-billion in GDP and support some 4,450 jobs.

So, that's what airports do, but a far more interesting thought to ponder is what more they *could* do if nurtured in the right way. I believe there is vast unrealized potential for Canada's airports to amplify their already significant contribution to the country if industry and government can work together to help inject more private capital into the system.

Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport is unique among Cana-

da's top 10 airports by passenger volume: PortsToronto—a self-financing, federal government business enterprise—owns and operates the airport, and Nieuport Aviation, owned by an institutional investor, the International Infrastructure Fund, owns and operates the passenger terminal.

Under this public-private partnership (P3) model, I believe the airport has thrived, receiving accolades from industry bodies for its focus on customer service and having been recognized with the Most Outstanding Business Recovery award post-pandemic by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport has emerged as an industry leader in environmental sustainability, running on 100 per cent renewable energy, and featuring a 100 per cent electric ferry and a forthcoming fleet of electric shuttle buses. Further, it has developed a comprehensive community investment program that helps local community and charity organizations deliver a wide variety of much-needed programming. Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport has created robust art and music programs in-terminal, embracing diversity and cultivating a true sense of place. The airport has also received consistently high polling results from our community by virtue of

Continued on page 27

Now is the time to invest in sustainable aviation

Government funding currently places far too little emphasis on the societal benefits of aviation, and too much on its perceived economic benefits.

David Zingg

Opinion



Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne. The best way to attract foreign investment is to create a fertile environment for research and a vibrant post-secondary education sector such that companies investing in Canada can be confident that they will be able to find highly qualified employees, writes David Zingg. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Some influential books published over the past 20 years planted the idea that it is impossible to substantially reduce the impact of aviation on climate change, whereas it is not too difficult to eliminate other anthropogenic sources of carbon dioxide. As a result, it is often argued that the only way to reduce aviation's impact is to stop or at least greatly reduce the amount of flying we do.

Since these books were written, it has become increasingly clear that those authors overestimated the difficulty of reducing aviation's climate change impact, and underestimated the challenge of reducing other sources of

carbon dioxide emissions. In fact, there is a path to greatly reduce the carbon emissions from aviation that involves new fuels, such as sustainable aviation fuels and hydrogen, in combination with step improvements in aircraft energy efficiency to mitigate the increased cost and limited supply of these new fuels. Whether the sector can get all the way to net zero depends primarily on an abundant supply of green ground-based energy, an issue that is common to virtually all sectors that require energy.

Unfortunately, despite the societal benefits of aviation, the Government of Canada is not

making the investments required to address the urgent need to reduce aviation's impact on climate change. Investments in artificial intelligence, for example, vastly exceed those in sustainable aviation. Government investments of this type must address both economic and overall societal benefits; we currently have far too little emphasis on societal benefits and too much on perceived economic benefits.

Presumably, the AI investments are justified based on expected future job creation from that sector. However, investments in sustainable aviation will prevent the loss of good jobs

for Canadians that already exist. Moreover, the private sector is quite happy to invest in AI because of huge potential profits, whereas an investment in sustainable aviation is less about getting rich and more about preserving a critical sector.

The government should not be investing like a venture capitalist in areas where there is already plenty of investment. Rather, it should be investing in areas of benefit to society where other investment may be scarce. When we invest in cures for cancer, we do so not with an eye on future profits or even job creation, but because such cures would benefit many Canadians and fellow inhabitants of Earth. The same is true of sustainable aviation. The government surely has a huge stake in helping to ensure that people can continue to fly without causing climate change, as well as maintaining the many excellent Canadian jobs associated with the aerospace and aviation sectors.

In addition to investing directly in Canadian aerospace companies—rather than giving tax breaks to wealthy foreign corporations—it is critical that the government support sustainable aviation research at NRC Aerospace, Transport Canada, and Canadian universities. Current government support for research is—in many cases—also investing in areas where there is already plenty of private-sector investment. Rather than trying to pick winners, the government should support a broad range of basic research so that Canada is well prepared for the next generation of challenges.

The best way to attract foreign investment is to create a fertile environment for research and a vibrant post-secondary edu-

cation sector such that companies investing in Canada can be confident that they will be able to find highly qualified employees. Instead, support for post-secondary education badly lags both inflation and population growth in most provinces. Moreover, Canada regularly loses talent due to inadequate opportunities for recent PhD graduates. This trend can be reversed through increased support for government research labs such as the National Research Council, and for postdoctoral fellowships at Canadian universities. It is particularly troubling that the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Discovery Grants program is increasingly supporting research in perceived hot areas where there is plenty of private sector support at the expense of other topics of great importance, such as sustainable aviation, for which other sources of funding are not plentiful.

Fortunately, it is not too late. If the government can place more emphasis on supporting goals such as sustainable aviation where there is little likelihood of major private sector investment, as opposed to investing in areas that are already popular with private-sector investors, we can create an aerospace sector that leads the world in reducing aviation's impact on climate change. The time to act is now.

David Zingg is a distinguished professor of computational aerodynamics and sustainable aviation at the University of Toronto Institute for Aerospace Studies, where he leads the Centre for Research in Sustainable Aviation. He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for research in the design of environmentally friendly aircraft in 2004.

The Hill Times

Navigating Canada's aerospace future: a call to action for an industrial aerospace strategy



Canada's aerospace industry can be our ticket to greater economic stability, but we need a strategy to better align policies, investments, and opportunities, writes Mike Mueller. *Unsplash* photograph by John McArthur

Already contributing \$27-billion to GDP in 2022, Canada's aerospace industry has the potential to be a major engine of the economy.

Mike Mueller

Opinion



The global aerospace industry is undergoing significant and transformative changes, with disruptive, innovative, and world-class ideas shaping the trajectory of aerospace practices and technologies for decades to come.

Recent forecasts also indicate a 28 per cent increase in the global fleet over the next 10 years, from 28,400 aircraft to 36,400 by 2034, and this projected demand—coupled with aging fleets around the world that will require maintenance, repair, and overhaul services—presents tremendous economic opportunity for Canada, as one of the only countries around the world capable of manufacturing aircraft from nose to tail, and certifying it.

As Canada continues to recover from the global pandemic, ensuring we are positioned to capitalize on this projected demand over the next decade will be critical to fortifying our leadership position in the global aerospace value chain, while providing economic stability at a time when our country needs it most.

Already contributing \$27-billion to GDP in 2022, Canada's aerospace industry has the potential to be a major engine of

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Aviation Policy Briefing

Canada's commercial aviation in crisis: fact or fiction?

Aggressive plans to meet the post-pandemic moment put aviation's partners in difficult situations, attempting on many occasions to handle volumes beyond the capacity of available resources.

John
Gradek

Opinion



As I wrote in this publication in the midst of COVID lockdowns in April 2020, Canadian commercial aviation would change. Today, commercial aviation in Canada is in a state of shock.

This shock can be felt by Canadian air travellers, by Canadian airline operators, by Canadian airports, and by the administrators of the Canadian aviation systems. While Canadians are once again travelling in numbers eclipsing pre-pandemic levels, the consequences of the actions taken by the aviation communities to survive the COVID-19 pandemic remain very evident. And action might be required to redress the failings we see daily.

Perhaps the public face of commercial aviation is a place to start this dialogue. Canadian airlines undertook a variety of corporate strategies at the start of the pandemic when pleas were made to the various levels of government to provide financial assistance upon the suspension of air travel. To the surprise of many, no aid was forthcoming, notwithstanding the billions of dollars being offered by western countries to provide support to maintain the resource levels of the industry. Airlines in Canada, and subsequently others in our aviation ecosystem, achieved a lower cash burn rate by undertaking

resource reductions, be it by withdrawing aircraft from service or by reducing staffing levels across an experienced workforce. Flight attendants, flight crew, mechanics, ground staff, and air traffic controllers were all affected by early retirements, buyouts, and layoffs.

Fast-forward two years and the inevitable return of air travel demand. Airlines offered services designed to meet this sudden return of passengers by maximizing their flight offerings with limited available resources at their disposal. These aggressive plans put aviation's partners in difficult situations, attempting on many occasions to handle volumes beyond the capacity of available resources.

The resourcing of aviation to meet burgeoning demand had mixed results. While staff levels, per se, have returned—and even exceeded—pre-COVID levels, the experience lost in those early days of COVID downsizing is haunting Canadian aviation. Whether it is flight crew or flight attendants, mechanics, or air traffic controllers, all these roles require years of training and experience in their specialized roles for optimal performance. And the timeline to acquire this experience is affecting the service that Canadians are receiving—and can expect to receive—from commercial aviation. And let's not forget the need for additional technical resources to be able to operate the industry's growth plans.

Before moving to my take on how best to address these shortcomings, I believe there is a need to concurrently address the unhealthy competitive structure of Canadian commercial aviation. While COVID pushed the aviation community to reduce its resources, the pandemic also created opportunities for entrepreneurs to acquire resources to operate new air services at a very discounted cost structure. Such availability led to the launch and expansion of ultra-low-fare carriers such as Flair and Lynx, and the growth of established carriers such as Porter. While market conditions have since caused Lynx to withdraw its services, there remains a significant increase in airline capacity, a growth that remains poised to increase even further. In my opinion, it appears inevitable that Canadian air travellers will

experience further carrier consolidation as the industry rights itself to a viable and sustainable service offering.

So, we seem to have a human resource sizing issue as well as a competitive behaviour paradigm that need to be addressed with government support.

There is a need to accelerate the recruitment and training of the aviation workforce. Pilots, mechanics, and other operational trades all need to have financial assistance such as student loans, bursaries, and other financial incentives put in place to fast-track the professionals needed in Canadian aviation.

While such trades are very portable in a global aviation marketplace, such financial incentives should have specific minimum residency requirements for Canadian applicants, assuring ourselves of urgently needed skills and competencies in Canada's skies. Canadian regional and local air operators are currently at risk as they look to recruit the professionals they need.

The competitive dilemma requires a much more nuanced approach. When Canadian aviation's commercial practices were deregulated in the 1980s, the rationale was to permit carriers to compete in an open market, unconstrained from regulatory pricing and service oversight. The result of this "experiment" has been extreme consolidation, with any number of smaller carriers either disappearing or being absorbed by larger carriers. Whether it is Canada, the United States, the European Union, or Asia, the results of this consolidation phenomena are consistent: wide-scale pricing and market freedom leads to fewer competitors. Is it time to consider a "new and improved" price and service oversight regime to address current failings, or are we happy to leave things as they are?

We need this conversation as competition in our commercial aviation scene continues to sputter.

Is Canada's commercial aviation industry in crisis? You be the judge.

John Gradek is a professional engineer and academic program co-ordinator of the supply networks programs at McGill's School of Continuing Studies in Montreal.

The Hill Times

Navigating Canada's aerospace future: a call to action for an industrial aerospace strategy

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the economy, and manufacturer of choice for countries around the world, with more than 80 per cent of manufacturing revenues (approximately \$18.7-billion to 196 countries) stemming from exports in 2022.

While Canada's aerospace industry can be our ticket to greater economic stability, we need a strategy to better align policies, investments, and opportunities for civil aviation, defence, and space so that investments and opportunities are realized in Canada, ultimately creating more jobs, modernizing our defence capabilities, and strengthening our industrial base.

As Canada's aerospace industry navigates the demand for next-generation aerospace products and services, we have an opportunity to not only achieve our economic goals for Canada, but also our environmental goals.

Sustainability has made a significant and lasting impression on aerospace over the past several years, with industries and governments around the world publicly committing to reducing emissions from aviation with the goal of net zero by 2050. Examples of these commitments can be found in both the International Civil Aviation Organization's long-term global aspirational goal for international aviation of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and Transport Canada's Aviation Climate Action Plan.

While 2050 is years away, industry is already working towards net-zero objectives by investing in research and development to enable adoption of more sustainable aviation fuels and enhance aircraft efficiency, as well as implementing operational changes to reduce emissions. But as industry works towards more sustainable aviation technologies to achieve net-zero emissions goals by 2050, we cannot take this journey alone. The targets laid out in Canada's climate action plan are ambitious, and the increased production and access to sustainable aviation fuel will be critical. We need the full aviation ecosystem—including the government—engaged to ensure long-term planning and predictability to meet these targets and enhance our competitiveness.

Adopting more sustainable fuels, practices, and technologies is just one of the many challenges and opportunities industry is faced with today. Skill shortages and an aging workforce is another area of concern presenting significant challenges for industry, with a looming labour crisis adding

to the complexities and urgency for strategic action. The federal government must play a role in addressing these labour challenges by establishing a supportive regulatory environment with the right incentives and training programs to promote Canada as an attractive destination for aerospace talent and investments.

Rather than incentivising investments in aerospace manufacturing and helping establish a robust and resilient workforce, current government initiatives like the select items luxury tax—a tax on aerospace manufacturing—is killing jobs and hampering the industry's ability to reach its full potential. An updated study conducted by professor Jacques Roy of HEC Montréal revealed that more than 3,800 jobs are at risk across Canada's aerospace sector, totalling more than \$1.5-billion in lost revenue and prompting the cancellation of aircraft orders.

With more than 600 diverse aerospace companies spanning every corner of the country and more than 200,000 workers who rely on the industry to support their families, an industrial aerospace strategy for Canada is essential. It is our flight plan for growth and economic prosperity that will enable our world-class industry to enhance competitiveness and solidify our position as a global leader in aerospace.

In the absence of a supportive regulatory environment and clear commitment from government on an industrial aerospace strategy for Canada, we're merely scratching the surface of our potential while allowing other nations to seize the opportunities in front of us. The United States, the European Union, and Australia, for example, have long recognized the strategic importance of their respective aerospace industries and are currently implementing their own strategies to enhance industrial capabilities and capitalize on economic opportunities.

Through collaboration and an industrial aerospace strategy, we can provide predictability and certainty for industry; leverage our competitive advantage to unlock disruptive, innovative, and world-class ideas that lead to growth and technological advancements; and reposition Canada as a leading aerospace nation of the 21st century to the benefit of our economy and the environment. With the stakes having never been higher for Canada, the time to act is now.

Mike Mueller is the president and CEO of the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada.

The Hill Times

Aviation sustainability is more than just cleaner jet fuel

The future of Canada's aviation industry hinges on integrating sustainability into every facet of our operations.

Suzanne Kearns

Opinion



Aviation's commitment to sustainability reflects the larger global imperative to fight climate change and prioritize sustainable development, writes Suzanne Kearns. *Unsplash photograph by David Kovalenko*

What is aviation sustainability?

Is it cleaner jet fuel to reduce the carbon emissions from flights? Is it about making sure airlines adopt a "carbon-neutral" framework? Is it frequent fliers paying a little bit extra on their plane tickets to offset their carbon footprint?

The reality is that aviation sustainability is all those things, but it's also so much more.

Real sustainability in this sector is about fostering a steady, thoughtful environmental focus in every aspect of aviation. Not only do we want to ensure our actions today do not negatively affect future generations, we want to ensure that this industry is efficient and resilient.

Reflecting on the history of the aviation industry, a parallel between today's focus on sustainability can be made with aviation safety. About two decades ago, the aviation industry embraced

a cultural shift towards organizational safety management, recognizing that safety can't be achieved by any individual in isolation but requires a collective approach where every job is inextricably connected to and must prioritize safety, every day. Today, we stand at a similar point with sustainability as the future of aviation will require every job to become a "sustainability job."

Codifying sustainability into future aviation jobs must navigate the delicate balance between social and environmental responsibilities with economic viability. The future of Canada's aviation industry hinges on integrating sustainability into every facet of our operations, from policy-making to on-the-ground practices.

For example, if hours of flight training are shifted from fuel-burning aircraft into an electric flight simulator, it reduces emissions and cost to students, while producing higher profit margins for flight schools. This balance

can be difficult as sustainable aviation fuels dramatically cut emissions, but cost many times more than traditional fuels, benefiting the environment but harming economic sustainability.

The truth is sustainability is not confined to a single role, but is a collective responsibility. From airport operations to air traffic management, each segment of the aviation network will need to contribute to this overarching goal.

Coming back to jet fuel, flying with sustainable aviation fuels is one of the linchpins for achieving the aviation industry's global 2050 net-zero emissions target. However, the high costs of developing and implementing them could challenge airlines' balance sheets. Plus, it is expected to take at least a decade for these carbon-friendly fuels to become commonplace and accessible at most airports.

The industry will eventually get there, but in the meantime, work still needs to be done to

drive momentum to encourage more sustainable practices in aviation.

Policies like carbon taxes, though well-intentioned, are not a silver bullet to solving our sustainability issue. Taxes, paid largely by air passengers, can have unintended socio-economic repercussions, particularly in regions heavily reliant on tourism.

Meanwhile, corporate social responsibility and environmental, social, and governance terms are becoming integral to aviation businesses, driving them to consider broader environmental and social challenges while linking sustainability to financial performance.

We've begun to see these practices in action, but they can fall short of meeting sustainability goals. For example, some air operators have deceived customers and investors with vague environmental claims, or announcing they have achieved "carbon-neutral" status without

disclosing they did so by purchasing carbon offsets that yielded no climate benefit. Airlines have even decorated their planes with sustainability-focused imagery even if it just means putting on a fresh layer of green paint on their fleet.

Our industry will need to actively combat greenwashing—the deceptive claim of environmental responsibility without substantive action. We must strive for authenticity in our sustainability efforts, ensuring transparent and accountable practices.

The education sector is committed to supporting the aviation industry in this transformation through fostering a new generation of aviation professionals equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate the sustainability landscape.

That includes professional development courses to support upskilling challenges and peer-reviewed research that can shed new light on optimized air traffic management. From pilot training to aircraft design, sustainability principles are being embedded into the aviation curriculum to enable the industry's future workforce to adopt "green" principles as early as possible.

Aviation's commitment to sustainability reflects the larger global imperative to fight climate change and prioritize sustainable development. Nations and industries that prioritize sustainable practices today will be in the best position to lead the sector tomorrow.

By embracing sustainability, we can ensure our collective flight path leads to a destination where economic viability, environmental integrity, and social well-being are harmonized, securing a more resilient and prosperous future.

Dr. Suzanne Kearns is an associate professor of aviation at the University of Waterloo, and the founding director of the Waterloo Institute for Sustainable Aeronautics.

The Hill Times

Airports and the Canadian government can work together to supercharge the benefits of air connectivity

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the quick, convenient, comfortable, and safe service we offer to more than 20 destinations in the United States and Canada.

The results we've seen here in downtown Toronto have been replicated in many parts of the globe. The International Civil Aviation Organization compiled case studies of P3 airport success stories, noting that the P3 model can "increase the quality, the efficiency and the competitiveness" of the services offered; "supplement limited public sector capacities and raise additional

finance in an environment of budgetary restrictions"; and "speed up infrastructure development."

The question becomes, then: how can Canada's airports and the federal government work together to attract private-sector investors—distinct from full privatization—and thereby supercharge our competitiveness? The answer, to my mind, is threefold:

1. The airport is never a traveller's final destination. Prioritizing transportation projects that enhance airports' connectivity to intermodal hubs represents a valuable strategic investment; it improves the passenger experience,

and increases the attractiveness of airport assets to private-sector investors.

2. Whether through investments or pilot projects, government agencies such as the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority and Canada Border Services Agency must be enabled to implement technologies to streamline the passenger experience as much as possible while still prioritizing safety and security. Two examples would be biometrics and self service.

3. Red tape must be removed and a permissive environment should be established to allow for

more creative financing options for airports to support their capital and operations needs while catching up to many other countries where competitiveness is concerned. Closely related, government must understand that airports plan on 20-, 30-, 40-, and even 60-year timelines to meet projected demand. Given this, the proper policy, regulatory, and governance frameworks need to be in place to facilitate and foster growth and competitiveness in the industry.

The importance of Canada's airports to the economic, social, and cultural fabric of our nation are clear. Moreover, continued

growth in passenger traffic since the pandemic suggests that airports' significant contributions will only increase in the years to come. Industry and government have a golden opportunity to work more closely together to further amplify these benefits by attracting private-sector investment and giving industry the lift it needs to set a course for a bright future.

Neil Pakey is the president and CEO of Nieuport Aviation, owner and operator of the passenger terminal at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport. He has served as CEO of the Shannon Airport Group in Ireland, CEO of Peel Airports Group in the U.K., managing director of Liverpool John Lennon Airport, and the senior VP Network Marketing at the Vantage Airports Group. Pakey was a national expert to the European Commission, working on air transport policy, and currently chairs the U.K.'s Regional and Business Airports Group.

The Hill Times

Canada's updated defence policy muted on UN peacekeeping as historic low contributions persist

Observers are expressing growing doubt over whether Canada will ever deploy the quick reaction force pledged in 2017.

BY NEIL MOSS

More than six years after Canada pledged a 200-member quick reaction force, the rollout remains unfulfilled as questions mount over the Liberal government's commitment to United Nations peacekeeping with an ever-decreasing deployment and scant mention in an updated defence policy.

During a 2017 peacekeeping ministerial in Vancouver, Canada promised the quick reaction force as one of the Liberals' key contributions towards UN peace operations, which they had pledged to "recommit" to in their 2015 election platform. When previous Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper left office, Canada was contributing 116 personnel to UN peacekeeping, including 89 police and 27 military members.

The latest publicly released figures show that since then, Canada's contributions have been more than halved, with Ottawa only deploying 44 personnel across six peacekeeping missions, as of the end of January, according to UN figures.

In 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) had



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau came to power championing a recommitment to peacekeeping that has yet to be realized. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

promised the UN up to 600 Canadian personnel.

Canada's deployment, as of the end of January, included 18 staff officers and four experts on mission, as well as 22 police personnel. The largest contingent—19 police personnel and eight staff officers—is deployed to the UN's peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, nine staff officers are in South Sudan, four experts are with the Truce Supervision Organization in Jerusalem, two police personnel are in Haiti, and a staff officer and a police official are in Cyprus and Kosovo, respectively, according to the UN statistics.

Department of National Defence spokesperson André-Anne Poulin said the Armed Forces has 22 people currently deployed on peacekeeping missions

across four UN missions, which include nine in South Sudan, eight in the Democratic Republic of Congo, four in the Middle East, and one in Cyprus.

Forty-four other Canadian military peacekeepers are also deployed to non-UN peace operations in the Sinai Peninsula and Kosovo. There was an uptick when Canada deployed a medical evacuation capability to the UN's peacekeeping mission in Mali for 13 months in 2018-19, which included up to 250 troops and three Chinook and five Griffon helicopters, but since then Canada's peacekeeping commitment has returned to historic lows.

The delay in rolling out the 2017 pledge for a quick reaction force has some suggesting that the government has abandoned the promise. The government's recently released defence policy update, titled *Our North, Strong and Free*, features a handful of references to peacekeeping missions, including to "lead and/or contribute to international peace operations and stabilization missions with the United Nations, NATO, and other multilateral partners," but no firm commitments to what contributions it would provide the UN.

Canadian Forces College professor Walter Dorn, an expert on peacekeeping, said he considers the quick reaction force pledge to have lapsed.

"The Canadian government has never registered that promise with the UN, so it's either questionable whether it was made to be an effective promise, or not, because if you don't register it with the UN, then the UN cannot rely on it," he said.

During the House Defence Committee's study on international peacekeeping in 2019, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) told MPs that it had registered a quick reaction

force with the UN. But in 2020, *The Hill Times* confirmed that was not the case as there was no registration made. After publication, the government said, "an error was made by Global Affairs Canada's officials in this matter."

University of Calgary instructor Chris W.J. Roberts, an expert on Canada's engagement in Africa (where most of the UN's peacekeeping missions are located), said he doesn't expect the quick reaction force to be delivered anytime soon.

"I would be shocked within the next two to three years that there's even the capability, let alone the political will, to meet the QRF [quick reaction force] commitment," he said.

Royal Military College professor Jane Boulden, an expert in UN peace operations, said she also doesn't see the government fulfilling the promise.

"I think it's a lapsed promise. I'd be happy to be wrong, but the broader situation for the Canadian Forces is that there's so much need and there's so much going on that everything else is going to be prioritized over that," she said. "They don't want to not continue the idea that they might do it, but I don't see it happening."

Poulin said the commitment remains on the government's docket. "Opportunities for a Canadian contribution in this regard are still being considered. Any deployment of a QRF would be following a decision by the Government of Canada to deploy in support of a specific UN mission within clearly defined parameters," she said.

Last December, deputy minister for national defence Bill Matthews indicated that there were no current plans to fulfill the quick reaction force pledge when asked by Bloc Québécois MP Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, Que.), her party's defence critic.

"I would say no, not at this time," he told the House Defence Committee, remarking that vice chief of the defence staff Lt-Gen. Frances J. Allen may know more.

"I don't have anything else to add to that," Allen said.

The Canadian Press reported in April 2023 that the government had extended the timeline for the promise to be fulfilled for an additional three years into 2026. The pledge was supposed to be fulfilled within five years of the commitment being made in 2017, and an additional one-year extension was later added, but neither timeline was met.

While the wait grows for Canada to meet its quick reaction force pledge, it has provided a tactical airlift capability to UN peacekeeping missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan from 2019 to 2023. It has also



The Canadian Armed Forces is currently contributing 22 personnel to UN peace operations as Canada's focus remains on NATO endeavours. *Department of National Defence photograph by MCpl Jennifer Kusche*

deployed training units "on an episodic basis" to assist with mapping out vulnerable population areas.

Retired lieutenant-general Roméo Dallaire, who garnered international acclaim for leading a UN peacekeeping mission during the Rwanda genocide, said he doesn't think UN peacekeeping missions are a priority for the Canadian government.

He said the government has shifted to a semi-Cold War view of Eurocentrism away from fostering peace and stability in Africa.

"When NATO [and] when Europe become a problem, it shifts all the efforts to more of the classic use of military forces, although modernized and very complex," he said. "The whole realm of peacekeeping [and] conflict prevention, and engagement in countries that are not in our self-interest, and that may bring risks, well that just doesn't carry the need."

Dallaire, who has recently authored *The Peace: A Warrior's Journey*, said Canada should be meeting its past pledges to commit upwards of 600 personnel to peacekeeping.

"That's what these countries are yelling for," the former senator said. "They are looking for the competency, for the professionalism, for the depth of capacity of military training, and ethos in the military that can be embedded and adapted to the cultures of those nations so they can in fact create their own doctrine from this."

He said one helpful role Canada can play in UN peacekeeping is capacity building as a trainer, similar to the work the Armed Forces is doing with its training of Ukrainian soldiers.

"We should be concentrating on building capacity in nations," Dallaire said. "If you want to do that, you still have to deploy a number of NCOs [non-commissioned officers], you have to provide some

equipment, but you have to have people deployed in countries and embed them into those nations' forces and look at long-term commitments to those countries."

"What we hear is Canada is a big talker and little doer, so it doesn't take on those long-term missions. In fact, it tries to get in and out as fast as it can," he said, remarking that the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security has more people in volatile regions in Congo, South Sudan, and Mozambique than the Canadian Forces does.

According to the latest UN numbers available, Canada ranks fifth in the G7 in its peacekeeping contribution, with Italy deploying 962 people, France sending 727, the United Kingdom allocating 270 personnel, and Germany contributing 190. The United States and Japan trail Canada's contribution with 27 and four personnel deployed with UN peace operations, respectively. In the G20, Canada's contribution ranks 14th out of 19 countries. Among NATO, it is 13th out of 32 members.

As part of GAC's \$541-million spending reduction over the next three fiscal years, a "smaller reduction" is being highlighted through "scaling back" spending for the Peace and Stabilization Operations Program (PSOP) and police deployments. PSOP leads the foreign policy engagement in peacekeeping, which includes a "focus on enhanced engagement with the UN."

Lack of capacity and political will compounding with declining peacekeeping commitments

Alongside a lack of political will to commit to peacekeeping efforts,

the lacklustre state of Canada's military means that the government has to pick and choose what it can and cannot do, observers told *The Hill Times*.

"We have capacity problems now, so what little capacity we have—at least on the Army side—is being invested in Latvia in shoring up the eastern flank of NATO," said retired major-general Denis Thompson, a former director of peacekeeping policy.

The April 8 defence policy update noted that the military won't be restored to its authorized size of 71,500 people for its regular forces until 2032. DND's most recent departmental results for 2022-23 showed it cannot "conduct multiple operations concurrently per the requirement laid out in" the 2017 defence policy "based on overall readiness levels," as well as 61 per cent of the Armed Forces that are prepared for operations.

The results also found that the state of the military's land, air, and sea fleets is dire, with 56 per cent of the land fleet serviceable to meet training and readiness requirements, dipping to 51 per cent for the sea fleet, and 43 per cent for the air fleet.

At the same time, Canada has committed to increase deployment in Latvia to 2,200 people by 2026, an increase from 1,000 personnel. Dorn said despite the dire straits of the military, it can still increase its peacekeeping presence, suggesting that the government can double or triple the number of peacekeepers it deploys.

"But we've seen this low number of peacekeepers now for over a decade," he said. "The government's commitments and level of rhetoric is much higher than its willingness to deliver."

Dorn said that having more peacekeeping deployments will in

turn help the military's recruitment crisis.

"Lots of Canadian military personnel want to go on peace operations, [but] just don't get the opportunity because we have so few posts," he said.

Dallaire echoed that more peacekeeping deployments would encourage others to join the Armed Forces.

"Apart from the European context, apart from Special Forces work, what do you do with this Army to give it a sense ... of purpose that it is actually doing something for the betterment [and] value added to Canada in the world," he said.

What's the future for UN peacekeeping?

As Canada's peacekeeping totals continue to reach historic lows, some countries dealing with instability and volatility are increasingly questioning the merits of having a UN peace force within their borders.

The UN's 10-year mission in Mali concluded at the end of 2023. The mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has been ongoing since 1999, will cease at the end of this year.

Boulden said there has been a rethinking of the role of peacekeeping, and a recognition of the importance of consent in peace operations for the receiving states.

"Very rarely until recently have government actors withdrawn their consent in the way that's happened in Mali and seems to be happening in the DR Congo [Democratic Republic of the Congo]," she said.

She said countries wanting peacekeepers out isn't necessarily an indictment of the work they are doing, but an overall reassertion of control for receiving states over the parameters in which peace operations are conducted.

Roberts said UN peace operations are at a standstill due to the dysfunction within the UN Security Council. Since the Mali deployment, a new mission hasn't been approved under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which gives the body power to consider measures to "maintain or restore international peace and security."

"There's going to be more and more [missions] constrained,

or kicked out, or mandates not renewed than there is going to be any new ones," Roberts said. "There is no appetite for it, but I also can't imagine a situation where you get the Security Council and the African Union all on the same page."

He said that situation gives the Canadian military the ability to buck its commitment to peacekeeping.

Roberts said dissatisfaction has grown with international peace operations due to not only their inability—at times—to achieve results, but also due to the countries with major capabilities not sufficiently engaging.

"Unfortunately, UN missions can only work when there's really critical mass behind it, and real political will, and real resources, and enough domestic and regional and international agreement on outcomes," he said. "Right now, we just don't have it."

MacEwan University professor Michael Carroll, who has studied Canada's historic contribution to peacekeeping, said the practice has "changed dramatically" since the time Ottawa was more committed to UN peace operations.

"The rhetoric of peacekeeping resonates strongly with Canadians and so people always wanted to look [at] it through those rose-coloured glasses without realizing that the realities of the situation on the ground had changed," he said.

Carroll said African countries are increasingly looking towards the African Union for peace stabilization.

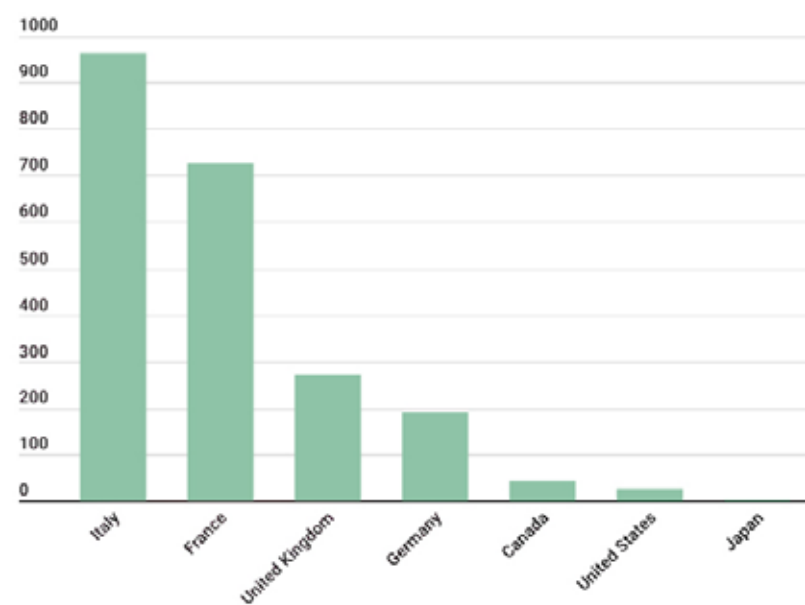
"That's a reality that Canada and the United Nations has to respect—that's one of the basic tenets of peacekeeping," he said.

He said the shift away from peacekeeping isn't a sign of a lack of support for peace operations by Canadians, as the values at play in the Canadian military's other stabilization efforts are the same ones that underpinned its peacekeeping involvement in the 1950s and 1960s.

"The underlying mission of the Canadian Forces is the same, it's just the venue that has changed."

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The Hill Times

UN peacekeeping contribution by G7 country



Source: UN statistics as of Jan. 31, 2024/Infogram



Two Griffon helicopters are pictured during Canada's 13-month-long deployment to Mali. *DND photograph by Ken Beliwicz*

Opinion

Internet freedom can co-exist with child protection

Necessary debate over the Online Harms Act cannot delay efforts to tackle the growing global problem of online sexual exploitation of children.

Anu George
Canjanathoppil
& John
Tanagho

Opinion



Social and mainstream media outlets across the country have been abuzz in recent weeks with discussion of the Government of Canada's proposed Online Harms

Act. The governing Liberals say the legislation will hold online platforms accountable if they distribute content that includes child sexual abuse, promotes hatred, or incites violence. Critics argue that the legislation goes too far, particularly in creating a Digital Safety Commission, and could violate Canadians' constitutional rights to freedom of expression.

Serious discussions are a vital part of the legislative process in Canada, and the Online Harms Act is no exception. With the internet increasingly dominating many aspects of our daily lives, potential changes to policies governing online services need to be robustly debated. At the same time, we cannot allow debates to delay efforts to tackle a growing global problem: online sexual exploitation of children.

The International Justice Mission's *Scale of Harm* report reveals disturbing findings of the cross-border, global crime of livestreamed child sexual abuse: namely, that nearly *half a million*

children in the Philippines were sexually abused to produce child sexual exploitation material for sale to offenders around the world, especially via livestream.

- Philippine authorities have identified Canada, along with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia as the largest sources of payments flagged by financial institutions as "suspicious transactions" for online child exploitation. In 2022, Canadians reportedly paid more than \$900,000 to finance this abuse.
- Statistics Canada reported that police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation, including "child pornography," rose by more than 200 per cent between 2014 and 2022.

The risk facing Canadian children is clear given that studies by the Australian Institute of Criminology, as well as organizations such as Protect Children and Childlight, have shown that predators who view child sexual abuse material have a higher propensity to abuse children in person.

Canada has already undertaken relevant initiatives, including toughening penalties for child sexual abuse material offences, and providing educational resources to parents, educators, and young people. Still, much more can be done.

Based on the *Scale of Harm* report, IJM Canada puts forward five recommendations that the Government of Canada can undertake to combat online child exploitation perpetrated by Canadian offenders:

- Develop and pass online harms legislation in consultation with survivors, law enforcement, and child-protection organizations;
- Strengthen law enforcement's ability to access digital evidence of online sexual exploitation of children;
- Work with law enforcement to identify gaps in existing legislation governing financial transactions related to online sexual exploitation of children;
- Increase Canadian resourcing for the Philippine Internet

Crimes Against Children Center to identify and hold accountable Canadian and Filipino offenders; and

- Conduct internal research to improve understanding of opportunities for strengthening legislation, including auditing the Canadian sex offender registry against border exit/entry stamps to assess the level of contact offending by registered offenders.

Freedom of expression is a cherished right enshrined in our Constitution, and deserves to be protected against unwarranted restrictions. But no one has the freedom to sexually exploit children online, and we cannot ignore the desperate plight of children in the Philippines, Canada, and elsewhere in the world abused by Canadian offenders. Fellow democracies such as Australia and the U.K. have passed online safety bills, balancing the urgent need to protect children from sexual abuse while preserving civil liberties. In any debate in Canada regarding the regulation and prevention of harmful content online, protecting children must be at the forefront of our concerns.

Anu George Canjanathoppil is the chief executive officer of IJM Canada. John Tanagho is the executive director of IJM's Center to End Online Sexual Exploitation of Children.

The Hill Times

EV battery fires are a global problem that we need to address in Canada

Ignoring the issue may not only come at the expense of public safety, but also that of the public perception to act on climate change through fuel switching.

Josipa
Petricic

Opinion



The electrification of transportation has brought increased attention to the robustness of batteries, particularly as millions of cars and hundreds of electric buses hit the roads. The launch of the Zero Emissions Transit Fund in Canada in 2020 has spurred investment in zero-emissions bat-

tery and hydrogen electric buses, but has also brought battery safety concerns to the forefront.

With diverse manufacturers entering global supply chains, the production, supply, and delivery of energy-storage systems are facing heightened safety risks. To get ahead of the issue now, there is a pressing need for rigorous manufacturing standards for batteries integrated into vehicles—especially large fleet vehicles. The potential catastrophic consequences of battery fires underscore the urgency of pre-emptive action to mitigate safety risks, and prevent what could be significant financial losses in damage in a matter of minutes from a chemical failure.

Torontonians are hyper aware. Just last month, Metrolinx announced a crackdown on e-bikes following a lithium ion battery fire on a Toronto subway train. That Dec. 31, 2023, fire damaged a subway car before being suppressed by firefighters, caused a yet-to-be-reported total cost to the taxpayer, and could have caused harm to riders. Just six months prior, four people died in a fire

at an e-bike store in New York, caused by lithium ion batteries

These fires occur across the mobility spectrum of e-scooters, cars, and all electric transit. Thankfully, they have been few and far between so far. In 2023, a study citing United States government data revealed electric vehicles (EVs) were involved in only 25 fires per 100,000 sold.

But like airplane disasters, when catastrophe strikes, it strikes big. Chemical fires are difficult to contain because they set off something called "thermal runaway"—meaning, once it starts, it runs away and doesn't stop running until it burns itself out. Firefighters have learned new techniques to suppress these fires, but the risk of major damage still exists.

An EV owner might be worried about a fire taking down their house. A public transit agency needs to worry about it taking out a whole depot. In April 2023, an electric bus caught fire after a battery failure in a Parisian transit fleet. It took mere seconds for the entire bus to engulf in flames.

The growing demand for EVs and battery electric buses has put

immense pressure on the global battery supply chain leading to concerns over a potential bottleneck in the supply of lithium batteries by 2025 that could outstrip the available supply. In 2022, a high-profile EV CEO warned that 90 to 95 per cent of the battery supply chain "does not exist," highlighting the need for significant improvements in infrastructure and capacity to sustain the EV market.

In all of this melee, new entrant manufacturers and suppliers may not be taking battery fires as seriously as they ought to. As demand grows exponentially, quality may drop and corners may be cut—with serious consequences. It may not only come at the expense of public safety, but also that of the public perception to act on climate change through fuel switching.

Stricter manufacturing, supplier, and integration standards for batteries purchased by vehicle manufacturers—across all platforms—are needed. The cost will be passed onto consumers and public transit fleets (i.e., the taxpayer), and that means we should prepare for manufactured and

delivered—but safe—batteries to get more expensive, not less, in the future.

The good news is that Canada is emerging as an international leader in electric vehicle battery manufacturing, bolstered by its commitment to quality control and stringent regulatory oversight. Battery plants in Canada should be investing heavily in ensuring consistent overall quality throughout the manufacturing process. These measures may lead to higher battery prices due to increased production costs, but they should ultimately result in a superior product that is safer and more reliable.

Other measures, like allocating more land and storage for Canada's electric buses and prioritizing "transit first" in zoning considerations by government, may also help to mitigate the unknown by allowing for more spacing between buses and batteries, rather than squishing them into transit depots.

To decarbonize successfully, we can't avoid the hard discussions around battery fires, battery waste, and increased battery prices with global supply constraints.

Opposition to decarbonization does nothing for anyone. Creative solution-building based on Canada's safe(r) and (more) regulated manufacturing landscape is a great place to start. Taxpayers, riders, and voters won't care who started the fire. But we will care about who has a safe solution to fossil fuels going forward.

Dr. Josipa Petricic is president and CEO of the Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium.

The Hill Times

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Opinion



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, does want a bigger war than either Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei, centre, or American President Joe Biden are willing to give him.

Photographs courtesy of Wikimedia Commons and The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia

in Damascus. The matter can be deemed concluded."

"However, should the Israeli regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be considerably more severe. It is a conflict between Iran and the rogue Israeli regime, from which the U.S. MUST STAY AWAY!"

With Washington's tacit co-operation, that outcome has been achieved. There will be no bigger war—at least, not for now—although Netanyahu still has some cards to play. Well done, everybody. But there is one unforeseen consequence of this elaborate charade: Iran now looks like a paper tiger, at least to the general public at home and elsewhere.

Military professionals would not necessarily agree. Drones are particularly vulnerable to interception (as Ukraine was demonstrating every day before the U.S. Congress cut off its arms supplies), and Israel's David's Sling and Arrow systems are very efficient at stopping ballistic missiles. Besides, Iran was probably not trying very hard.

Nevertheless, just one seven-year-old girl injured for a 300-weapon attack is a surprisingly low hit rate, and the Iranians may feel the need to restore the credibility of their weapons through a successful operation somewhere else—but not Israel—in the near future.

A pantomime crisis, not a real war

“

There is one unforeseen consequence of this elaborate charade: Iran now looks like a paper tiger, at least to the general public at home and elsewhere.

The main cost of this operation is that it lets Netanyahu claim a great success, and divert public attention away from the appalling situation in the Gaza Strip. Even the artificial famine now devastating the territory will be ignored for a while. However, a real war between the U.S. and Iran would have been far worse. Sufficient unto the day.

Gwynne Dyer's new book is *Intervention Earth: Life-Saving Ideas from the World's Climate Engineers*. Last year's book, *The Shortest History of War*, is also still available.

The Hill Times

The obvious way for Israel's prime minister to escape from the dilemma in the Gaza Strip was to make the war bigger by dragging in Iran.

Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—Ayatollah Khamenei, Iran's "Supreme Leader," is embarrassed and humiliated by the complete failure of his drone and missile attack on Israel, but does United States President Joe Biden have the

empathy to feel sorry for his old adversary in his time of trouble?

Maybe he does, because it was almost certainly Biden's people, working through back channels, who persuaded the Iranians that this was a safe way of retaliating for Israel's unprovoked attack on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus two weeks ago. Just fire a few drones at Israel, one or two will get through, Iran's honour will be satisfied, and we can all avoid the big war we don't want.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu does want a bigger war, of course. He let Hamas carry out a horrific attack on Israel, and he's now trapped in a "forever war" with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The horrendous civilian casualties Israel is inflicting on the Palestinians are alienating U.S. public opinion, and the pressure from Biden for a ceasefire is getting hard to resist.

Netanyahu would lose power almost instantly if he accepted a ceasefire because his hard-right

coalition government would collapse. The obvious way for him to escape from this dilemma was to make the war bigger by dragging in Iran. Then the U.S. would feel obliged to save Israel from the evil Iranians, and all that ugly stuff in Gaza would just fade into the background.

That was the purpose of Israel's unprovoked missile attack on the Iranian embassy in Syria on April 1, which killed seven officers of Iran's Revolutionary Guard including two generals (plus six Syrian civilians).

Israel had never attacked an Iranian embassy before because embassies are regarded as sovereign territory of the country that owns them. The Iranians would treat an attack on their embassy as an attack on Iran itself, and who needs a war with Iran? Well, Netanyahu does, actually.

The Israelis knew that Iran's leaders would feel obliged to respond with a precisely similar attack from Iranian territory

on Israeli territory—no substitutes, no proxies—because of the rigorously precise moral accountability of Twelver (Shia) Islamic jurisprudence. Interpreting that law is what the ayatollahs do for a living, so you can be sure they will respond the right way.

Neither the U.S. nor Iran wants that bigger war Netanyahu was aiming at, so between them, they cobbled together an (unwritten) plan to avoid it. Iran would launch its counterattack and satisfy its honour, but superior American and Israeli technology would keep the number of Israeli casualties low enough that Washington could stop Netanyahu from further retaliation.

You doubt this analysis? Too clever by half? Consider this: just as the Iranian counterstrike was launched, Iran's mission to the United Nations released the following statement: "Iran's military action was in response to the Zionist regime's aggression against our diplomatic premises



Stuart Benson
Party Central

It could be the end of the world, but the journos looked fine at the 2024 Press Gallery Dinner

Independent journalist Paul Wells received the 2024 Charles Lynch Award, and the giant novelty cheque was awarded to La Fondation Donatien-Frémont.

After a long week of competing political conferences, inquiry hearings, and marathon votes in the House of Commons, journalists, politicians, diplomats, and a smattering of “who’s who” in the Ottawa bubble donned their best suits and gowns at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on April 13 for the annual Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner.

Per tradition, a good chunk of *The Hill Times*’ newsroom and their dates gathered at the office for a few pre-gala drinks before heading over to SJAM. **Party Central**’s date this year was **Bahoz Dara Aziz**, press secretary for Immigration Minister **Marc Miller**. Also joining the HT crew this year were NDP press secretary **Ella Klein**; **Chris Evelyn**, chief of staff to Families Minister **Jenna Sudds**; Independent Senator **Peter Boehm**; Heritage Canada’s **Shane Mackenzie**; **Alexandre Gravel**, lead speechwriter in the PMO; **Peter Farrell**, legislative assistant to NDP MP **Don Davies**; **Marie-France Proulx**, director of communications for Procurement and Public Services Minister **Jean-Yves Duclos**; **Michel Bédard**, parliamentary law clerk; and **Amélie Crosson**, communications director to the House Speaker.

This year’s gala made a change of venue from its usual home at the Canadian Museum of History, meaning most attendees were able to walk from their various offices in downtown Ottawa, or bike, as NDP Leader **Jagmeet Singh** was spotted arriving to the gala, peddling forward for a change of pace.

As attendees began to gather just after 5:30 p.m. for the pre-dinner reception, fittingly held in the former COVID-era press theatre on the second floor, the news of Iran’s missile launches against Israel that had broken just a few hours before cast a cloud of anxiety over the chatter, but for many, it was simply one more reason to make the most of the open bar before dinner started.

To save page space, **Party Central** won’t attempt to name all of the politicians, diplomats, and press gallery reporters in attendance. There were strong showings from the Liberal, NDP, Bloc Québécois, and Green Party caucuses, and all of the parliamentary bureau’s from the CBC, *National Post*, Bloomberg, CTV News, CPAC, and *Politico*.

While the majority of the Conservative caucus were busy that night—possibly celebrating MP **Melissa Lantsman**’s birthday—**Party Central** did spot MPs **Shannon**

Stubbs, **Karen Vecchio**, and **Michael Chong**, as well as **Sebastian Skamski**, Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre**’s director of media relations, the latter of whom was attending as the date of **Kate McKenna**, CBC’s senior parliamentary bureau reporter.

As attendees headed down to the main hall for dinner at 7 p.m., *Politico*’s **Nick Taylor-Vaisey** and *The National Post*’s **Catherine Lévesque** had the unenviable duty of attempting to corral the crowd’s attention and get them to take their seats, as well as the even more difficult task of trying to be funny while rockets were in the air to Tel Aviv.

Usually, the gala dinner is an opportunity for some light-hearted roasting between the press gallery and the politicians and political public figures they cover. But with the likelihood of the Third World War once again looming over the festivities, Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** had to scrap his planned, more humorous speech. Instead, Trudeau made more sombre comments, “unequivocally condemning” Iran’s attack, as well as offering a message about the importance of journalism in a democratic country.

Following Trudeau’s brief comments, he quickly left the function, leaving Taylor-Vaisey and Lévesque to attempt a nearly impossibly segue and pivot to the funny part of the show. That being said, the pair made a valiant effort with many genuinely funny parts, including some prop humour as Taylor-Vaisey poked fun at the apple bite heard from coast to coast to coast.

Furthermore, while Poilievre was once again a no-show, most likely having used most of his best material at the Canada Strong and Free Conference on April 11, NDP Leader **Jagmeet Singh** and Bloc Québécois Leader **Yves-François Blanchet** both delivered rather entertaining speeches, with Blanchet even gracing the Anglos in the audience by delivering part of his speech *en anglais*. Green Party Leader **Elizabeth May** made her first return to the gallery dinner stage since 2015, though former Conservative cabinet minister **Lisa Raitt** was on standby if things ran long.

This year’s Charles Lynch Award, recognizing outstanding coverage of national affairs, was awarded to **Paul Wells**, which will help give him an edge against Conservative MP **Michelle Rempel Garner** in their presumably upcoming Substack articles exonerating how embarrassing the whole event has become. The giant novelty cheque for \$5,000 raised from the night’s proceeds was awarded to La Fondation Donatien-Frémont.

While **Party Central** called it a relatively early night, leaving just after 2 a.m. after carb-loading at the late-night poutine bar to forestall the worst of the coming hangover, sources have reported that the party continued well into the night and morning.

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The Hill Times



StrategyCorp’s Ljisa Samson, left, Charles Lynch awardee Paul Wells, and Treasury Board President Anita Anand at the 2024 Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on April 13.



RBL’s Lisa Mayor, left, CBC’s Kate McKenna, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, NDP press secretary Alana Cahill, and CBC’s Stephen Hoff and Marina von Stackelberg.



The Hill Times’ gala crew: Chris Evelyn, left, Bahoz Dara Aziz, Katie Schultz, Irem Koca, Mike Lapointe, Christina Leadlay, Samantha Wright Allen, Shane Mackenzie, Charelle Evelyn, Tessie Sanci, Stuart Benson, Andrew Meade, Senator Peter Boehm, and Neil Moss. Photograph courtesy of the Press Gallery



Shannon Day-Newman, left, Hannah Trubedeau, Don Newman, CBC’s Kate McKenna and Sarah Brunetti.



Politico’s Nick Taylor-Vaisey, pictured left with co-host Catherine Lévesque, takes a bite out of Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre’s now-famous spite bite.



Green Party Leader Elizabeth May.



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh.



Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made brief remarks at the 2024 Parliamentary Press Gallery dinner condemning Iran’s missile attack on Israel.



Bloc MP Christine Normandin, left, NDP MP Lindsay Mathyssen, CPAC’s Mathieu Cordeau, Liberal MP Mona Fortier, NDP MP Heather McPherson, CPAC’s Noah Richardson and Andrew Thomson.

The Hill Times photographs by Stuart Benson & Samantha Wright Allen



Senator Andrew Cardozo, left, Don Newman, and Liberal MP Charles Sousa.



Labour Minister Seamus O’Regan, left, CTV’s Vassy Kapelos, Michael Serapio, and Rubicon Strategy’s Kory Teneycke.



Laura Ryckewaert Hill Climbers

One staffer in, one out for ministers Freeland, Joly

Plus, Fisheries and Oceans Minister Diane Lebovillier is in the market for a new regional affairs adviser following Dwayne Cull's exit.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister **Chrystia Freeland** has an opening in her office following the recent exit of director of parliamentary affairs and issues management **Farees Nathoo**.

Nathoo left Freeland's team—and the Hill—in late March, and noted his decision to leave in a LinkedIn post marking his last day on the job.

"I could not imagine a better boss or a better team to have been able to serve alongside," wrote Nathoo. "I leave filled with gratitude for the elected officials, public servants, and colleagues that have become lifelong friends over the past nine years."



Farees Nathoo recently bade farewell to Parliament Hill. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Nathoo had been working for Freeland since the start of 2020; originally joining her team as an issues manager, he was promoted to director that fall. An ex-communications officer with the Aga Khan Foundation Egypt, Nathoo began working for the Trudeau government at the end of 2015, starting soon after the Liberals took power as a special assistant to then-innovation minister **Navdeep Bains**.

From 2018 until joining the DPMO in January 2020, Nathoo worked for the Treasury Board president, starting as a special assistant for communications under then-minister **Scott Brison**, who later promoted Nathoo to press secretary. Nathoo stuck with the office through former minister **Jane Philpott's** brief time in the Treasury Board portfolio, becoming a senior communications adviser, a role he continued in through both now-Sport Minister **Carla Qualtrough's** short run as acting minister, and Liberal MP **Joyce Murray's** turn as Treasury Board president.

Hill Climbers understands a new director of parliamentary affairs and issues management has yet to be named in Freeland's office, but stay tuned for a future update.



Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, left, and Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly have both seen ministerial staff exits and additions in recent weeks. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

In other office news, earlier this month **Samuel Saint-Vincent** bade farewell to Public Services and Procurement Minister **Jean-Yves Duclos's** office to join Freeland's team as a senior policy adviser.



Sam Saint-Vincent is now a senior policy adviser to Freeland. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Saint-Vincent had been working for the minister for public services and procurement for almost three-and-a-half years in all, starting as a Quebec regional affairs adviser under then-minister **Anita Anand**. He was given the added title of policy adviser in early 2022 after now-Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario Minister **Filomena Tassi** took over the public services portfolio. After Duclos was shuffled into the portfolio in July 2023, Saint-Vincent dropped his regional duties and became a senior policy adviser.

Bud Sambasivam is director of policy to Freeland, whose office is run by chief of staff **Andrew Bevan**.

Foreign Affairs Minister **Mélanie Joly** has a new digital communications adviser on her team, having hired **Mehak Minhas** in March.

Prior to joining Joly's shop, Minhas had been working for Liberal MP **Ruby Sahota**



since the summer of 2022. She's also been involved part time with **Achève**, a "charitable organization that delivers employment, newcomer, language, youth, women, and inclusion services," as described on its website, and is a former marketing communications associate with **BridgePoint Financial**, and an ex-marketing co-ordinator with **Acosta** in Toronto.

Minhas' past campaign experience includes working on then-Ontario Liberal candidate **Rimmy Jhaji's** ultimately unsuccessful 2022 campaign in Brampton West, and Ottawa Liberal MP **Yasir Naqvi's** 2023 Ontario Liberal leadership campaign.

Emily Williams is director of communications to Joly, and also currently oversees deputy director of communications **Marie-Christine Demers** and press secretary **Isabella Orozco-Madison**.

Headed in the other direction is senior operations adviser **Nicolas Bouchard**, who took his leave from Joly's office earlier this month.



Nicolas Bouchard is no longer working for Minister Joly. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

A former assistant to Joly as the MP for Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que., Bouchard joined her office as minister of foreign affairs at the start of 2022, originally as an operations adviser. He was promoted to add "senior" to his title last fall. Bouchard previously also worked on Joly's successful 2019 and 2021 re-election campaigns.

Elizabeth Anderson remains director of operations to Joly, whose office is run by chief of staff **Peter Wilkinson**.

Meanwhile, Fisheries, Oceans, and Canadian Coast Guard Minister **Diane Lebovillier** is down a regional adviser following **Dwayne Cull's** exit as of Feb. 20.

Cull had been a senior regional affairs adviser for Newfoundland and Labrador to Lebovillier since last September.

Hill Climbers understands that no one has yet been hired to replace Cull. Left covering regional desks for the fisheries minister are: **Ty Bradley**, Atlantic regional affairs adviser; **Evan Sambasivam**, adviser for Ontario, the Prairies, and North regional affairs, and Indigenous outreach; **Alex Gagné**, Quebec regional affairs adviser; and **Josh Lindner**, senior regional affairs adviser for British Columbia.

Faizel Gulamhussein is chief of staff to Lebovillier, whose office currently also includes: **Jessica Morrison**, director of policy; **Dylan Bissonnette**, senior policy adviser; **Paul Carrigan**, special adviser; **Andrew Richardson**, director of parliamentary affairs and issues management; **Daniel Jennings**, special assistant and assistant to the minister's parliamentary secretary; **Gabriel Bourget**, director of communications; **Jérémy Collard**, press secretary; **Benjamin Sparkes**, director of operations; **Kevin McHarg**, senior operations adviser; and **Vinciane Museru**, executive assistant to the minister and chief of staff.

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The Hill Times



Fisheries and Oceans Minister Diane Lebovillier speaks with reporters during a press conference at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on April 19, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Immigration Minister Miller joins cabinet's post-budget campaign with April 19 talk in Montreal



Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Minister Marc Miller will deliver remarks on the 2024 budget and international relations to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations on April 19. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

MONDAY, APRIL 15—THURSDAY, APRIL 18

AFN's Water Symposium and Trade Show—The Assembly of First Nations hosts its annual Water Symposium and Trade Show on the theme "Bridging the Gap: First Nations Water and Wastewater Equity" featuring panel discussions, plenaries and exhibits on addressing important water-related issues facing First Nations. Monday, April 15, to Thursday, April 18, at the Hilton Lac-Leamy in Gatineau, Que. Details online: afn.ca

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

House Sitting Schedule—The House is scheduled to sit for a total of 125 days in 2024. The House will sit 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.

Minister Sudds to Take Part in Post-Budget Breakfast—Families, Children, and Social Development Minister Jenna Sudds will take part in the Post-Budget Breakfast hosted by the Ottawa Board of Trade and the *Ottawa Business Journal*. Other participants include Heather Scofield, senior vice-president of strategy, Business Council of Canada; Gavin Miranda, regional tax leader, MNP; and Huw Williams, president, Impact Public Affairs. Wednesday, April 17, at 7 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details online.

Lecture: 'Canadian Studies in Turbulent Times'—Carleton University's School of Canadian Studies will hold its annual Vickers-Verduyn Lecture, featuring four notable Canadians:

Adrian Harewood, associate professor, Carleton University School of Journalism and Communication; Dr. Jane Philpott, director of the school of medicine, Queen's University; ISG Senator Yuen Pau Woo; and Frank Graves, founder and president, EKOS Research Associates Inc. Wednesday, April 17, 6:30-8:30 p.m., Teraanga (Residence Commons), Rooms 272-274. Register by April 12 online at carleton.ca.

THURSDAY, APRIL 18

Denise Chong Book Launch—Library and Archives Canada, the Ottawa International Writers Festival, and the Ottawa Public Library host the launch of Denise Chong's new book: *Out of Darkness: Rumana Monzur's Journey through Betrayal, Tyranny and Abuse*, a tale of power and political influence, and of the Bangladeshi woman whose irrepressible spirit found light in sudden darkness. Thursday, April 18, at 7 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St. Details online: library-archives.canada.ca.

Post-Budget briefing with Finance Canada DM—Deputy Finance Minister Chris Forbes will take part in a post-budget briefing hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Thursday, April 18, at 7 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details online: cdhowe.org.

FRIDAY, APRIL 19

Seminar: 'Legislatures as a Workplace'—The Canadian Study of Parliament Group hosts a bilingual seminar, "Legislatures as a Workplace," exploring the often-difficult realities of the parliamentary workplace, considering issues such as harassment and violence, unionization of legislative employees, and the legal context in which parliamentary work occurs. Friday, April 19, at 9 a.m. ET in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, 144 Wellington St. Details online via Eventbrite.

Minister Miller to Deliver Remarks—Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Minister Marc Miller will deliver remarks in French to the Montre-

al Council on Foreign Relations. Friday, April 19, at 11:30 a.m. ET in Montreal. Details online: corim.qc.ca.

Digital Empires: The Global Battle to Regulate Technology—The University of Ottawa hosts a public lecture by Columbia Law School professor Anu Bradford on her most recent book, *Digital Empires*. Bradford will discuss regulatory approaches governing the digital economy and how governments and technology companies navigate inevitable conflicts. Friday, April 19, at 12 p.m. at uOttawa's Social Sciences Building, 120 University Pvt., Room 4007. Details online: cips-cepi.ca.

SUNDAY, APRIL 21—THURSDAY, APRIL 25

Minister Ng to Lead Trade Mission to South Korea—Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion and Economic Development Mary Ng will lead Team Canada trade mission to South Korea from Sunday, April 21, to Thursday, April 25.

MONDAY, APRIL 22

Economic Lookahead Dinner with Mark Carney—Canada 2020 hosts an evening conversation, "A Time to Build," with former Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney who will explore our country's economic outlook and what governments, innovators, and economic leaders can do to build growth for all. Monday, April 22, at 6:30 p.m. ET at the The Omni King Edward Hotel, 37 King St. E., Toronto. Details online: canada2020.ca.

TUESDAY, APRIL 23

AFN Dialogue on Transport and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel—The Assembly of First Nations hosts the second in a four-part series, "Regional Dialogues on the Transportation and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel," from April 9-May 22, to advocate for First Nations' active involvement in decisions about used nuclear fuel, management, and transportation across Turtle

Island. Tuesday, April 23, at 8 a.m. AT at the Crowne Plaza Fredericton, 659 Queen St., Fredericton, N.B. Details online: afn.ca/events.

Canada Infrastructure Bank CEO to Deliver Remarks—Ehren Cory, CEO of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, and Brian J. Porter, chair of the board of the Ontario Infrastructure Bank, will take part in a discussion on "Accelerating Growth with Infrastructure Banks" hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Tuesday, April 23, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details online: cdhowe.org.

TUESDAY, APRIL 23—MONDAY, APRIL 29

UNEP's International Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution—The UN Environment Program's International Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution will take place from Tuesday, April 23 to Monday, April 29, at the Shaw Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr. Details online: unep.org.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24

Minister St-Onge to Deliver Remarks—Canadian Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge will deliver remarks in French at a lunch event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Wednesday, April 24, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Le Reine-Elizabeth, 900 Blvd René-Levesque W., Montreal. Details online: corim.qc.ca.

SATURDAY, APRIL 27

Senator Pate in Panel Discussion—ISG Senator Kim Pate will take part in a panel discussion on "Elusiveness of a Just Society in Canada: Causes and Solutions." Other participants include People's Party of Canada Leader Maxime Bernier, Carleton University journalism professor Adrian Harewood, CUPE economist Angella MacEwen, Iman Syed Soharwardy, Rev. Alexa Gilmour, and Youth Ottawa's Ryan Banfield. This event will take place in the Horticulture Building, 1525 Princess Patricia Way, Lansdowne Park. Details online via Eventbrite.

SUNDAY, APRIL 28

Panel: 'Free Speech, Ethics, and Democracy in Canada'—The Ottawa International Food and Book Expo hosts a panel discussion on "Free Speech, Ethics, and Democracy in Canada." Participants include author and broadcaster Andrew Lawton, managing editor of *True North*; Dr. Julie Ponesse, author of *My Choice: The Ethical Case Against Covid-19 Vaccine Mandates*; Thomas Quiggin, author of *Eyewitness to Deceit* following his intelligence role in Freedom Convoy 2022; and former Ontario MPP Randy Hillier. This event will take place at the Horticulture Building, 1525 Princess Patricia Way, Lansdowne Park. Details online via Eventbrite.

TUESDAY, APRIL 30

Canadian Intelligence Conference 2024—Liberal MP John McKay and Conservative MP James Bezan, respective chair and co-chair of the House Defence Committee, will take part in the 2024 Canadian Intelligence

Conference hosted by the Canadian Military Intelligence Association. Other participants include Daniel Rogers, deputy national security adviser to the prime minister; and Norway's Ambassador to Canada Trine Jeranli Eskedal. Tuesday, April 30, at 7:30 a.m. ET at the Ottawa Conference and Event Centre, 200 Coventry Rd. Details online via Eventbrite.

NDP Leader Singh to Deliver the Bell Lecture—NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh will deliver the Bell Lecture hosted by Carleton University. Tuesday, April 30, at 7 p.m. ET at the Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre, 355 Cooper St. Details online: carleton.ca.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1

Economic Club's Health Care Summit—The Economic Club of Canada hosts its annual health-care summit, "Healthcare Horizons: Navigating the Future of Canadian Wellness." Industry executives, policy-makers, and key government officials will provide an in-depth look at the health-care landscape in Canada as it pertains to the economy, innovation, and the health and well-being of our labour force. Wednesday, May 1, at 8:45 a.m. ET at the Hilton Toronto, 145 Richmond St. W., Toronto, Ont. Details online: events.economicclub.ca.

Panel: 'Pillars of Arctic Resilience'—PSG Senator Dawn Anderson, ISG Senator Pat Duncan, NDP MP Lori Idlout, and Jackie Jacobson with the Arctic Research Foundation will take part in a panel discussion, "Pillars of Arctic Resilience," exploring the Arctic National Strategy and Canada's path to prosperity in the North. Wednesday, May 1, at 5:30 p.m. ET at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, 144 Wellington St. Details online via Eventbrite.

Flora's Walk for Perinatal Mental Health—The Canadian Perinatal Health Collaborative hosts Flora's Walk on Wednesday, May 1. Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Ya'ara Saks will be speaking, along with Liberal MP and parliamentary secretary to the minister of foreign affairs Pam Damoff, Conservative MP Karen Vecchio, NDP MPs Don Davies and Heather McPherson, and Green Leader Elizabeth May. Opening ceremonies begin at 9 a.m. ET, in Room 228, Valour Building, Parliament Hill. Details via Eventbrite.

Rogers CEO to Deliver Remarks—The Canadian Club of Toronto hosts a lunch event with Tony Staffieri, president and CEO of Rogers Communications, who will deliver remarks on "Investing in Canada and Canadians." Wednesday, May 1, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York, 100 Front St. W., Toronto. Details online: canadian-club.org.

Public Forum: Canada's Nuclear Future—Renaissance or Relic?—Hosted by Seniors for Climate Action Now (SCAN! Ottawa), this hybrid event will take place on Wednesday, May 1, at 6:30 p.m. with a reception, followed by the forum at 7-9 p.m., St. James United Church, 650 Lyon St. S., and online: not-the-nuclear-lobby.ca.

THURSDAY, MAY 2

World Press Freedom Day Luncheon—American journalist Margaret Sullivan will deliver a keynote speech at the World Press Freedom Canada Luncheon. Thursday, May 2 at 11:30 a.m. ET at the National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St. Details online.

FRIDAY, MAY 3

Foreign Interference Inquiry Interim Report—Marie-Josée Hogue, commissioner of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions, is expected to deliver her interim report today. The final report is expected by December 2024. Call 343-574-8116.

Minister Blair to Deliver Remarks—National Defence Minister Bill Blair will deliver a special keynote address at a lunch event hosted by the Economic Club of Canada. Friday, May 3, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Hilton Toronto, 145 Richmond St. W., Toronto. Details online: economicclub.ca.

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