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expected to win p. 13



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Trudeau

bets on himself



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Trump,

the John Gotti of U.S. politics



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Exclusive news: inside



THE HILL TIMES

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CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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NEWS

There's 'no Plexiglass between our borders' protecting Canada from global authoritarian sentiment, ex-judge warns

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

Canada is not immune from growing anti-democratic sentiment around the world, according to a panel of justices and diplomats, and the greatest challenge will come from the United States as presidential candidate Donald Trump employs increasingly authoritarian rhetoric.

"The biggest threat facing democratic institutions comes from your giant neighbour to the south," said Vikas Swarup, the former high commissioner of India to Canada and author of the best-selling book, *Slumdog Millionaire*. "The United States is rightly regarded as the motherlode of democracy, and yet there is no advanced industrial democracy in the world today that is more ideologically divided and more politically dysfunctional than the United States today."

Swarup was speaking on April 8 at a McGill University in Montreal event titled, "The threat to civility and the fight for liberal democracy." He was joined by retired Supreme Court of Canada justice Rosalie Silberman Abella, and Luis Roberto Barroso, president of the Brazilian Federal Supreme Court, who

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NEWS

Freeland's budget seen as last hope to turn Trudeau's electoral fortunes around, say politicians

A key metric to gauge the budget's effectiveness will be whether it reverses Canadians' appetite for change in government, says David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data.

BY ABBAS RANA

The April 16 federal budget appears to be the last hope for turning Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's electoral fortunes around some pollsters say, for if it fails to deliver the expected political dividends, the only option left is a change in leadership.

"If the Liberal numbers go down out of the budget, that might be an indicator that this government is at its best-before date because the reality is that leading up to the budget, Justin Trudeau and the Liberals were, for all intents and purposes, on the campaign trail," said Nik Nanos, chief data scientist for Nanos Research, in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gives a shout-out to Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland at the Liberal caucus on April 17. Freeland tabled the government's penultimate budget on April 16. The budget includes \$53-billion in new spending over the next five years. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

More budget coverage inside:

- Conservatives have a stronger narrative on the budget, by Ian Campbell p. 23
- Sheila Copps: feds give CBC a budget boost, draw a line in the sand p. 9
- Elizabeth May: how green was this budget? p. 17
- Freeland's budget provides key themes for lobbyists, by Jesse Cnockaert p. 24
- David Crane: budget falls short in preparing Canada for difficult times p. 12
- Editorial: so far, budget debate falls short p. 8
- Photo feature, by Andrew Meade pp. 14-15

NEWS

Beef farmers seek exemption from federal carbon price in March dominated by environment lobbying

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Environment-focused lobbying took the lead for the third consecutive month in March, with advocacy highlights including discussions about the struggles of beef farmers under the federal carbon price, and a global treaty to address plastic pollution coming up this month.

"When we look at government programs, policies, legislation, we want to make sure that it's enabling cattle producers to produce more beef in Canada, and that we don't drive that to other markets," said Jennifer Babcock, senior director of government and public affairs for the Canadian Cattle Association (CCA). "We want to make sure that policies are not hurting producers unintentionally, and one of those is with the carbon pricing—carbon tax—and how we want to ensure that producers are fully exempt from that."

The environment featured as the most popularly-listed subject for discussion in communication reports on the federal lobbyists' registry in March, continuing a trend of environmental advocacy also leading the way in January and February.

The CCA filed the most communication reports—14—listing the environment as a subject for discussion in March. In terms of overall lobbying, the CCA filed 27 communication reports last

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Mike Lapointe

Heard On The Hill

Spring has sprung, so have lots of books



Extra, extra, read all about it: *Crosses in the Sky*, by Mark Bourrie; *The Peace*, by Roméo Dallaire, with Jessica Dee Humphreys; *Prison Born*, by Robin F. Hansen; and *The Notwithstanding Clause and the Canadian Charter: Rights, Reforms, and Controversies*, edited by Peter L. Biro. Book covers courtesy of Biblioasis, McGill-Queen's University Press, the University of Regina Press, and Penguin Random House Canada

Spring has sprung, and so, too, have a lot of books. Here are four new ones to read.

Roméo Dallaire's *The Peace: A Warrior's Journey*, which he wrote with **Jessica Dee Humphreys**, is described as a "crie de coeur of a warrior who has been to hell and back and hopes to help guide us to a better place." It's published by Penguin Random House Canada. Dallaire, the former force commander of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda during the genocide, also wrote the bestselling *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (Vintage Canada, 2004), and *Waiting for First Light: My Ongoing Battle with PTSD* (Vintage Canada, 2019). "In his final act, Dallaire has become a warrior working towards a better future in which those old paradigms are rejected and replaced. In *The Peace*, he calls out the elements that undermine true security because they reinforce the dangerous, self-interested belief that 'balance' of power and truces are the best we can do."

Mark Bourrie, a former Hill reporter and author of the bestselling *Bush Runner: The Adventures of Pierre Esprit Radisson*, has written another book, *Crosses in the Sky: Jean de Brébeuf and the Destruction of Huronia*, published by Biblioasis. "Riveting, clearly told, and deeply researched, *Crosses in the Sky* is an essential addition to—and expansion of—Canadian history," reads the blurb.

Prison Born: Incarceration and Motherhood in the Colonial Shadow, by **Robin F. Hansen**, and published by the University of Regina Press, "calls attention to the colonial and gendered assumptions that continue to underpin the legal system—assumptions that so frequently lead to the violation of the rights and denial of personhood for children and their mothers."

The Notwithstanding Clause and the Canadian Charter: Rights, Reforms, and Controversies, edited by **Peter L. Biro**, and published by McGill-Queen's University Press, is an impressive 470-page body of work that dissects the notwithstanding clause from every angle by leading scholars, jurists, and policy experts. "Comprehensive and compelling, these essays probe the intersection of history, law, policy, and politics, reflecting the dynamics of a constitutional democracy," writes **Irwin Cotler**, Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, on the back jacket.

Ottawa International Writers' Festival draws Dyer, Kaplan-Myrth, Grégoire Trudeau

The Ottawa International Writers' Festival is coming up in early May, and it has a fantastic lineup.

On May 4, syndicated foreign affairs columnist **Gwynne Dyer** will be on stage at the Library



Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, pictured with Seamus O'Regan, left, at an Ottawa Riverkeeper fundraiser. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

and Archives Canada with the University of Ottawa's **Jennifer Baker** to talk about his book, *Intervention Earth: Life-Saving Ideas from the World's Climate Engineers*. That evening, Ottawa's **Dr. Nili Kaplan-Myrth** will be on stage to talk about their new book, *Breaking Canadians: Health Care, Advocacy, and the Toll of COVID-19*, and Sunday, May 5, **Sophie Grégoire Trudeau** will discuss her book, *Close Together: Knowing Ourselves, Loving Each Other*.

Carney to explore Canada's economic outlook in evening conversation



Former Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney is set to host an event on April 22 taking stock of Canada's economic outlook. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

On April 22, former Bank of Canada governor **Mark Carney** is slated to host an evening conversation, "A Time to Build," exploring Canada's economic outlook, and "what governments, innovators, and economic leaders can do to build growth for all," according to the event description. Carney, who also served as the governor of the Bank of England from 2013

to 2020, is now the chairman and head of impact investing at Brookfield Asset Management. The event will be held at The Omni King Edward Hotel in Toronto on Monday, April 22, at 6:30 p.m. You can find more details at canada2020.ca.

Liberal MP Marc Serré highlights 'Be a Donor Month' in the House



Liberal MP Marc Serré told the House that 'one organ donor can save eight lives' in drawing attention to 'Be a Donor Month.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

On April 11, Liberal MP **Marc Serré** brought attention to "Be a Donor Month," where communities and advocates across Ontario are encouraging people to register for organ and tissue donation.

"There are more than four million people across the province who have already registered, starting in my riding of Nickel Belt," said Serré in the House on April 11. "One organ donor can save eight lives, enhancing the lives of up to 75 people through tissue donation. Currently, about 1,300 people in Ontario are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant."

April 7 was Green Shirt Day, which paid tribute to **Logan Boulet** who became an organ donor following the tragic Humboldt Broncos bus accident in 2018.

On April 6, 2018, the bus carrying the Humboldt Broncos hockey team was involved in a tragic collision, where of the 29 passengers, 16 lost their lives. The surviving 13 all bear physical and emotional scars for life.

On April 7, 2018, defenceman Boulet succumbed to his injuries. His parents, **Bernadine** and **Toby Boulet**, offered to donate his organs so that six lives could continue. They did so because Logan told his parents he was registering as an organ donor, and that he was inspired by his coach and mentor **Ric Suggitt**.

"I would like to thank Logan and all those who have given the gift of life. I would also like to thank the volunteers and staff at the Trillium Gift of Life Network for their work, as well as Canadian Blood Services of Greater Sudbury for its ongoing awareness activities," said Serré.

Macdonald-Laurier Institute to host webinar on innovation in health care



Aaron Wudrick, the Macdonald-Laurier Institute's director of domestic policy program, is set to moderate a panel on the state of Canadian health care. *Photograph courtesy of X*

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute will host a webinar on innovation in health care on Monday, April 22. Director of the domestic policy program at MLI, **Aaron Wudrick**, is slated to moderate the panel, which will include **Pamela Valentine**, president and CEO of MS Canada; **Tim Laudel**, director of sales, synergy and Skytron at Tribe Medical; and **Shawn Whatley**, author, policy fellow and physician at MLI.

'A wee dram': Conservative MP John Barlow celebrates Tartan Day



Conservative MP John Barlow says he is 'immensely proud' of his Scottish connections. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Conservative MP **John Barlow**, who represents Foothills, Alta., expressed his hope that Canadians would have a "wee dram" to celebrate this country's Canadian Scottish heritage on Tartan Day on April 6.

"It is a day to commemorate the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish declaration of Independence signed on April 6, 1320, signifying the independence of Scotland," said Barlow in the House. "It is a day to honour the strong bonds between Canada and Scotland, and the immense influence this relationship has had on our culture."

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The Hill Times

Navigating Responsible AI Development: Insights from the University of Montreal's Rector Daniel Jutras

Daniel Jutras OC is a Canadian lawyer and academic specializing in civil and comparative law and current rector of the Université de Montréal in Quebec, Canada.



What is the role of universities in promoting responsible AI development and deployment, and how can they work together with industry and government to achieve this goal?

The impact of AI on society is a highly complex issue, and universities are the best place to think about those issues and find solutions in collaboration with the industry and government. By collaborating with industry and government, universities can leverage their expertise to develop solutions that prioritize responsible AI deployment. Industry, government, and civil society should interact more with universities, keep the channels open, and communicate their needs around responsible AI. Universities can mobilize their expertise in the service of the common good and provide sound action-research on today's challenges. In my view, the best way to achieve this goal is to create and maintain a network of intermediaries, facilitators that serve as points of contact and a bridge between the industry, government, and universities. This collaboration requires open channels of communication and a network of intermediaries to facilitate cooperation between academia, industry, and government.

Can you explain how the University of Montreal's work in regulating AI has contributed to the development of policies and guidelines in this field, and what impact has it had?

The University of Montreal has played a significant role in promoting responsible AI development and deployment. Professor Yoshua Bengio, a researcher at the University of Montreal, has been a pioneer in the early boom of AI and has consistently set out to ensure that the technology is used to advance the common good. As a co-recipient of the Turing Award, known as the "Nobel of computing sciences", his voice on the responsible use of AI is greatly amplified by his strong scientific credentials in the field.

Under Professor Bengio's leadership, the University of Montreal has convened partners from businesses and society to co-create the Montreal Declaration on responsible use of AI, a fundamental guideline that has now been signed by more than 277 organizations partners in Canada and around the world and translated into ten languages. The Declaration has been used as a reference for leading international organizations and hailed as a major achievement by the Organisation for Economic and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the European Council.

In addition to his leadership on promoting responsible AI, Professor Bengio has been very active in the last few years on a number of platforms, nationally and internationally. For instance, he is a member of the UN's Scientific Advisory Board for Independent Advice on Breakthroughs in Science and Technology, a member of the AI Advisory Council of the Government of Canada,

and an External Advisory Board Member of the UK's Frontier AI Taskforce. Professor Bengio has also been invited to testify by the U.S. Senate Judiciary, Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law. Recently, Professor Bengio was featured in Time magazine's 100 most influential people list and has been applauded for his contribution and leadership to the world of AI.

Along with Professor Bengio, Catherine Régis, in the Faculty of Law at the University of Montreal, is co-president of the responsible AI working group of the Global partnership on AI (GPAI). She is also a member of the AI Advisory Group of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the director of the AI working group of the U7+, an alliance of 45 universities around the world, and has participated in the Aspen Minister Forum. She has also made contributions to various projects for UNESCO, UN-Habitat, and OECD and is co-president of the working group on the international governance for Conseil de l'innovation du Québec. These academic leaders are making significant contributions to promote responsible AI development and deployment, and their work is invaluable in shaping the future of AI.

What types of partnerships and collaborations does the University of Montreal engage in to advance its efforts in promoting ethical AI, and how have they been successful?

The University of Montreal engages in various partnerships and collaborations to advance its efforts in promoting ethical AI.

The R³AI project, an ambitious interdisciplinary project is one significant example that aims to develop robust, reasoning, and responsible AI. The project received CAD 124.5M from the Canada First Research Fund and is led by IVADO, an AI research, training, and knowledge mobilization consortium made up of UdeM, its affiliated schools Polytechnique Montréal and HEC Montréal, and partners Université Laval and McGill University.

The project has three main components. The first component, called "Science for AI," aims to make artificial intelligence work more like human intelligence. It aims to increase the predictive power of training situations, integrate causal reasoning, and develop more modular, evolved, and explainable systems. These systems will also be designed around human concerns, thereby preventing the potential dangers of AI systems due to built-in biases, for example.

The second component, entitled "AI for Science," focuses on the use of artificial intelligence to accelerate scientific discovery. It will start by targeting four key areas: discovering new drugs and other useful molecules, dealing with environmental emergencies, developing "learning health systems," and managing supply chains in a context of uncertainty.

The final component of the R³AI project is "AI for Society." Its goal is to promote widespread AI adoption and ensure these scientific and technological advances are used for the good of society. Much of this component will be conducted through collaborative research projects with many partner organizations and will be based on work carried out in the fields of responsible innovation and implementation science. The R³AI project has the potential to transform the field of AI by advancing responsible AI development and deployment, and the interdisciplinary collaboration will pave the way for future innovations in the field.

How does the University of Montreal train AI professionals to understand ethics and social responsibility, and what methods have been particularly effective?

The University of Montreal is committed to promoting responsible AI development and deployment through education and training. We have developed a number of courses, summer schools, and workshops, and we certainly plan to bring many more to life as we recognize the urgent need for a better and deeper knowledge of AI and its impacts on society. Our own research teams are also engaged in cutting-edge research on responsible AI development and deployment.

One of our international training courses, "Bias and discrimination in AI" (IVADO), focuses on the ethical and social implications of AI, including the challenges of bias and discrimination. The course aims to provide students with the skills and knowledge required to work with AI in a responsible and ethical manner.

In addition, MILA, a community of more than 1,200 researchers specializing in machine learning and dedicated to scientific excellence and innovation, offers responsible AI training in research. The training focuses on the ethical implications of AI research, including issues related to data privacy, transparency, and accountability.

Through these educational initiatives, the University of Montreal is working to ensure that the next generation of AI professionals is equipped with the skills and knowledge required to promote responsible AI development and deployment. We believe that education and training are key to ensuring that AI is developed and deployed in a way that benefits society as a whole.

What are the main challenges or obstacles that the University of Montreal faces in promoting the social responsibility of universities in AI development, and how does it overcome them?

There are three main issues that come to mind when considering the challenges of promoting responsible AI development and deployment. First, there is a need to keep working on breaking silos between different disciplines. We need and will continue to promote an environment where real interdisciplinary work is conducted because this is where we'll have the best chances of success in creating AI tools that are in sync with our values and needs. Second, the open science culture of AI is a double-edged sword. It promotes fast-paced adoption of new science, but it also brings a level of vulnerability in the risk assessment process. It is important to ensure that ethical considerations are taken into account and that the risks associated with AI are properly assessed and addressed.

Finally, there is still a low level of AI literacy in many sectors of civil society, small businesses, and government. We are addressing this by bringing more and more workshops, conferences, and summer schools so that all actors in the field will have a better understanding of the challenges and solutions that AI needs. We believe that education and training are critical to ensuring that AI is developed and deployed in a way that benefits society as a whole. By promoting greater AI literacy and interdisciplinary collaboration, we can work towards responsible AI development and deployment that prioritizes human values and ethics.



News

Cyber threat ‘continuously evolving,’ with autocratic states posing ‘greatest strategic cyber threat to Canada,’ Senate National Security Committee hears

Between malicious cyber activities and state-sponsored disinformation campaigns, Russia has long employed ‘a broader hybrid toolkit to achieve its geopolitical and military objectives globally,’ says Tara Denham with Global Affairs Canada.



Sami Khoury, head of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security at the Communications Security Establishment, left; Tara Denham, director general, Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion with Global Affairs Canada; and Marcus Kolga, director, DisinfoWatch and senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. Photographs courtesy of the Government of Canada, X

BY MIKE LAPOINTE

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine gave the world “a new understanding of how cyber activity is used in wartime operations,” Sami Khoury, head of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security at the Communications Security Establishment, told members of the Senate National Security, Defence, and Veterans Affairs Committee on the Hill last week.

Senators also heard that authoritarian regimes use “hybrid, grey-zone warfare” and disinformation to undermine rules-based democratic countries, “particularly with AI-enabled applications,” according to Anthony Seaboyer, director for the Royal Military College of Canada’s Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society.

The Senate National Security, Defence and Veterans Affairs Committee heard from three panels of experts working within intelligence and government departments, policy shops, and academia on April 15 on the Hill, more than two years after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

\$4.4-billion over 20 years allocated to beef up cyber security operations

Ransomware continues to be the cyber threat most likely to affect Canada and Canadian organizations, according to Khoury, but the “state-sponsored programs of Russia, China, Iran and North Korea continue to pose

the greatest strategic cyber threat to Canada.”

“As technology progresses with rapid speed, the cyber threat landscape in Canada is continuously evolving amidst destabilizing global events,” said Khoury in his opening remarks. “Cyber threat actors are adapting their activities and utilizing disruptive and emerging technologies, such as generative AI, to achieve their financial, geopolitical, or ideological goals.”

Reuters reported in late January that several Ukrainian state-run bodies, including but not limited to energy company Naftogaz and national post service Ukrposhta, as well as transport safety agency Ukrtransbezpeka, reported cyber attacks “in the latest wave that a source close to the government blamed on Russian intelligence.”

Khoury also told the committee that since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security has observed numerous Russian-backed disinformation campaigns designed to discredit and spread disinformation about both NATO allies and Canada’s involvement in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Controlled media outlets were directed to include doctored images of Canadian Forces members on the front line, and publish false claims about Canadian

Forces allegedly committing war crimes, Khoury said.

Foreign cyber threat actors, including Russia and those it backs, are also attempting to target Canadian critical infrastructure networks as well as their operational and information technology, said Khoury.

“While I can’t speak to CSE or Cyber Centre-specific operations, I can confirm that we have been tracking cyber threat activity, and have been working with Ukraine to monitor, detect, and investigate potential threats and to take active measures to address them,” said Khoury.

The 2024 federal budget, released on April 16, reiterated a \$4.4-billion commitment over 20 years to enhance Canada’s cybersecurity by expanding cyber operations capability, and shoring up critical infrastructure to fend off cyber attacks.

At the request of Latvia, the Cyber Centre has also deployed personnel to help defend against cyber threats on the country’s critical infrastructure and government network, said Khoury.

The Canadian-led NATO battlegroup in Latvia was inaugurated in June 2017—and in the years since, Latvia’s politicians and officials “couldn’t have been clearer about how much they and the country have appreciated Canada’s contribution to Latvia’s defence,” according to a Decem-

ber 2023 report from the Macdonald-Laurier Institute (MLI).

Seaboyer, who teaches political science and political philosophy at RMC, said “AI-enabled applications are significantly enhancing the effectiveness of information attacks on democracies.”

“Democratic societies urgently need to take substantive measures, beyond what we’re already doing, to defend against attempts to influence or undermine democracies and the weaponization of information,” said Seaboyer.

Marcus Kolga, director of DisinfoWatch and a MLI senior fellow, said he has been monitoring and trying to expose Russian information operations since about 2007, at first pointing to a “new phase of Russia’s information operations” targeting Estonia.

“Now, the broad primary objective of Russian information and influence operations is, of course, to distort our understanding of the world around us, and to ultimately manipulate and affect our democratic processes and policy decisions,” said Kolga.

Kolga alluded to Igor Gouzenko, an intelligence clerk serving in the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa who sent ciphers back to his government, and who defected to Canada in 1945, just weeks after the Second World War came to an end.

Upon his defection, Gouzenko brought with him “these reams of documents that exposed that, during the Second World War, while the Soviet Union was an ally with Canada and the United States and the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union was also establishing spy networks in these countries,” according to University of Toronto historian Tim Sayle, who spoke to *The Hill Times* back in 2022.

“And so already right at the end of the Second World War, there are real questions about whether the Soviet Union could be considered a friend and ally. And so the relationship is very rocky from the beginning,” said Sayle, author of *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order*.

Kremlin ‘continues its efforts to reduce Ukraine’s ability to defend itself’

Tara Denham, director general, Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion with Global Affairs Canada, said the Kremlin continued “efforts to reduce Ukraine’s ability to defend itself” using a multitude of measures.

“Moscow also continues to use all available means to try to reduce international support for Ukraine. These tools include cyber operations and disinformation,” Denham told the Senate committee.

Cyber has been a domain of conflict since before the 2022 invasion, and it will remain a contested domain when the hostilities end, she said, but in “both peacetime and war, there are rules that states are expected to follow for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace.”

Russia has repeatedly disregarded the United Nations framework for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, which makes clear that international law applies in cyberspace, and promotes the global body’s norms for state behaviour.

Denham noted that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s (Papineau, Que.) government announced further funding for cyber assistance in February 2024 as part of a \$3.02-billion package of critical financial and military support to Ukraine.

“Along with malicious cyber activities, Russia has long employed state-sponsored disinformation as part of a broader hybrid toolkit to achieve its geopolitical and military objectives globally,” said Denham. “In the case of Ukraine, Russia conceals, blurs, and fabricates information to gain military advantage, demoralize Ukrainians, divide allies and garner domestic and international support for its illegal invasion.”

The 2024 budget also notes over \$14-billion in total support for Ukraine, including \$7.4-billion for immediate financial support and \$4-billion for military assistance.

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Building more homes faster: Budget 2024 is a step in the right direction

Addressing Canada's housing shortage requires all levels of government, the private sector, and non-profit stakeholders to work in lockstep to increase the supply of all types of housing. Together, we must invest collectively in building healthy, thriving, and complete communities.

As one of Canada's most active developers and multi-family residential property owners, we at Starlight Investments are encouraged by the focus of Budget 2024 on increasing the housing supply and commitment to building more homes faster. The Budget puts forward incentives to increase supply, motivating stakeholders from across the housing sector to accelerate their plans to build more and help address the housing shortage across Canada.

By continuing to provide funding for the Housing Accelerator Fund and the Apartment Construction Loan Program, as well as a new Housing Acquisition Fund, the development sector is enabled and incentivized to continue to participate in Canada's rental housing landscape. These programs should reduce barriers to getting shovels in the ground.

With every level of government working to increase housing supply, Federal incentives can often have an impact on policy decisions from other levels of government. For example, in 2023 the federal government announced

the removal of GST from the construction of new rental apartment buildings with many provinces quickly following, reducing their share of tax for construction costs affiliated with purpose-built rentals. The cumulative elimination of provincial and federal sales tax allowed Starlight Investments, and developers across the country, to accelerate construction of more purpose-built residential rental suites, supporting all levels of government with their respective commitments to increasing the supply of quality housing across Canada.

Starlight Investments is positioned to commence construction on 1,200 new residential rental suites in 2024 and an additional 1,800 new rental suites in 2025. In total, Starlight Investments is on track to build up to 28,000 new residential rental suites in the next 10 years, with a goal to exceed this target in response to these announcements.

This example demonstrates collaboration is key. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) estimates 3.5 million homes must be built before 2030 to make housing affordable again. With all levels of government working in tandem, innovative approaches to development can be embraced to streamline permitting processes and encourage denser, mixed-use communities with strong transportation links.

At Starlight Investments, we are committed



Howard Paskowitz
Vice President
Development
Canadian Residential
Starlight Investments

to ensuring the longevity of purpose-built residential rental suites to increase the supply of quality attainable rental housing; Budget 2024 shares this ambition. As leaders in the housing industry, we are encouraged by the investment in the rental housing landscape. In particular, a \$15 billion top-up to the Apartment Construction Loan Program and the announcement of a new incentive, the Canada Builds Program providing low-cost loans to build more rental units. Changes to the Apartment Construction Loan Program application structure will allow partners to be approved for multiple projects at once and encourage greater density, affordability and accessibility, all imperative to accelerating development.

These investments in infrastructure create jobs and make it financially feasible to address the accelerated housing targets and anticipated continued population growth. This is particularly true in larger cities where increased multi-family housing stock is urgently needed. Investments in expanded infrastructure encourage the development of complete communities and allow homes to be provided closer to where people work.

Solving the ongoing housing shortage will require the collaboration of both private and public sectors, including all levels of government. Starlight Investments has the experience, scale, and ingenuity to work with all levels of government to help address the shortage of rental housing supply in Canada. When more policies support and reflect the needs of our housing sector, rental construction, which includes market and affordable housing, can be created at a faster rate.

As a leading provider of attainable rental housing across Canada, with one of this country's largest development pipelines of purpose-built rental suites, Starlight Investments is excited to see all levels of government prioritizing housing and development, and looks forward to continuing to be part of the solution.



Photo courtesy of Starlight Investments, Oakville, Ontario

News

Beef farmers seek exemption from federal carbon price in March dominated by environment lobbying

Bill C-234, sponsored by Conservative MP Ben Lobb, proposes an exemption to the federal carbon tax for farmers on propane and natural gas used for grain drying.

Continued from page 1

month, making the organization the third-most active advocacy group, behind Telesat Canada, which filed 38 communication reports for March, and the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada, which filed 31.

Representatives for the CCA communicated with public office holders in March to discuss the environmental benefits of beef production, according to Babcock.

“We’re conserving grasslands ... and our beef producers are actually helping to conserve that native prairie grassland by having cattle on those lands,” said Babcock. “Really, cattle in Canada are part of the solution when it comes to environment [and] when it comes to climate change, from carbon sequestration, to biodiversity, protecting species at risk, all of those elements.”

Part of CCA’s discussions in March focused on how the federal price on carbon is affecting cattle producers, according to Babcock.

The federal carbon tax, which increased on April 1, 2024, to \$80 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions, is set to rise by \$15 a tonne annually until 2030.

A private member’s bill by Conservative MP Ben Lobb (Huron-Bruce, Ont.), C-234, proposes an exemption to the tax for farmers on propane and natural gas used for grain drying and on-farm heating.

On Dec. 12, 2023, the Senate passed the bill with amendments that removed barns and greenhouses from the exemption clause, and shortened a sunset period on the exemption for propane and natural gas in grain drying from eight years to three. The amended bill is currently awaiting consideration in the House.

The Agriculture Carbon Alliance, with member organizations including the CCA



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said that carbon pollution pricing, when done right, effectively reduces emissions and makes life more affordable for Canadians by ensuring they receive more back than they pay, in a Finance press release on Feb. 14. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, expressed “strong disappointment” with the Senate amendments in a press release on Dec. 6, 2023, and argued that no viable alternatives exist for the use of propane and natural gas for on-farm activities.

Babcock told *The Hill Times* that producers across the agriculture sector are price takers, who must bear the burden of costs associated with the carbon tax with no way to pass on those costs.

“All along the way there is the cost of transportation for the animals, [and] for the feed that’s associated with the animals. In addition, any costs of the feed goes up as well when you’re talking about grain and then grain drying,” she said. “[Bill C-234] has gone through the House, to Senate, now back to House. It is something that we are flagging so that folks, whether they are on the Senate or House of Commons side ... have the information and can make an informed decision in their vote.”

In provinces subject to the carbon tax, individuals and families receive quarterly rebates that return fuel charge proceeds. In 2024-25, the quarterly rebate is \$225 for an adult in Alberta, \$188 in Saskatchewan, \$150 in Manitoba, \$149 in Newfoundland and Labrador, \$140 in Ontario, \$110 in Prince Edward Island (including the rural top-up), and \$95 in New Brunswick.

For a family of four, the base rebate is \$450 in Alberta, \$376 in Saskatchewan, \$300 in Manitoba, \$298 in Newfoundland and Labrador, \$280 in Ontario, \$220 in Prince Edward Island, and \$190 in New Brunswick.

“When carbon pollution pricing is done right—as we are doing here in Canada—it effectively

reduces emissions and makes life more affordable for Canadians by ensuring they receive more back than they pay. That’s why every three months, we are delivering hundreds of dollars back to families through the Canada Carbon Rebate—which gives eight out of 10 families more back than they pay—while ensuring big polluters pay their fair share,” said Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) in a Finance press release on Feb. 14.

Related to the environment, the CCA communicated with Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.) on March 20, and with Liberal MP Francis Drouin (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell, Ont.), parliamentary secretary to the minister of Agriculture, on March 19. The organization also communicated about the environment with Conservative MP John Barlow (Foothills, Alta.), his party’s agriculture critic, on March 18; and with NDP MP Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan-Malahat-Langford, B.C.), his party’s agriculture and food critic, on March 20.

The CCA is represented on the registry by Crestview Strategy consultants Nada Fahmy, Mira Ahmed and Frank Parker. The organization is also represented in-house by Nathan Phinney, CCA’s president; Dennis Laycraft, CCA’s executive vice-president; and consultant Leigh Rosengren, the CCA’s chief veterinary officer, who is also the owner of Rosengren Epidemiology Consulting, a consulting service for Canada’s livestock and poultry sectors in regards to animal health and food safety concerns.

Among the most active advocacy organizations in March discussing the environment was Environmental Defence, which

filed 11 communication reports on the subject.

Tim Gray, Environmental Defence’s executive director, told *The Hill Times* that those discussions last month partly focused on a call for the federal government to take ambitious action when Ottawa hosts the fourth round of negotiations this month for development of a legally-binding, global treaty to end plastic pollution.

The negotiations, organized by the United Nations Environment Programme, gathers representatives of UN member states to help develop an international agreement to address the entire life cycle of plastics, from design to production to disposal. The negotiations began in November 2022, with the most recent round taking place in Kenya in November 2023.

Gray said that Environmental Defence’s March advocacy included emphasizing the need to put production limits on plastics, as well as a push to phase out chemical contaminants in plastics.

“It’s really important that we put production limits on plastic at a worldwide level, and try and ramp those down if we don’t want to get buried in non-recyclable plastic,” said Gray. “Phasing out the dangerous chemical additives that are in plastic products [is important], because, as you can imagine, the toxic contaminants in plastic makes turning them into other products a lot harder or impossible.”

During March, Environmental Defence’s representatives also discussed Bill C-50, the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act, which passed third reading in the House on April 15, 2024. The bill, if passed, would commit the federal government to developing action plans every five years to help transition employment away from the fossil fuel industry and towards clean energy.

“This legislation is really needed to ensure that, as the transition to a cleaner economy occurs, that there’s an investment in retraining, in looking after workers and giving people the confidence that they can move from some of the employment that has been in place around fossil fuel industries to the green economy,” said Gray.

The controversial bill has met with heavy criticism, including from Alberta Premier Danielle Smith who called the government’s sustainable jobs plan a threat to the province’s energy

workers in June 2023. Conservative MP Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, Alta.), her party’s natural resources critic, said that Bill C-50 will “disproportionately threaten economic opportunities and kill jobs for Indigenous, rural, remote, and energy-based communities and regions — especially in Alberta,” in a statement posted on X on April 12, 2024.

Energy Minister Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver, B.C.) said the bill would ensure government accountability and engagement with the people who will be most affected as the world shifts away from fossil fuels toward renewable energy sources, as reported by CBC News on April 11.

Environmental Defence Canada is represented on the registry by Gray, as well as by Temple Scott Associates consultants Brian Klunder, Tamilore Awonusi, and Ujwal Ganguly.

Tying with Environmental Defence in terms of communication reports filed in March related to the environment is Heidelberg Materials Canada, a manufacturer and supplier of cement.

Heidelberg Materials’ March communications included discussing a carbon capture and storage project at the organization’s cement plant in Edmonton, Alta., according to an emailed statement to *The Hill Times* on April 16 from David Perkins, Heidelberg’s vice-president of government affairs and communications for North America.

“This engagement has been part of our outreach to the federal government which has been ongoing for the past several years as we seek to implement the world’s first full-scale application of carbon capture in the cement industry,” said Perkins in the statement.

The planned facility will have the capability to capture more than one million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, and is expected to be operational in late 2026, according to a Heidelberg press release on Aug. 14, 2023.

jcnockaert@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Top Organizations Lobbying about the Environment (March)

Organization	Communication reports
Canadian Cattle Association	14
Cenovus Energy Inc.	12
Environmental Defence Canada	11
Heidelberg Materials Canada Limited	11
Pathways Alliance Inc.	11
U.S. Grains Council	11
International Institute for Sustainable Development	9
Nature Canada	9

The above table shows the organizations that filed the most communication reports which listed the environment as a subject for discussion in March based on a search of the federal lobbyists’ registry on April 16, 2024.




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Editorial

Common people theatrics fall flat in House budget debate

Every Wednesday afternoon, MPs open proceedings in the House of Commons with a boisterous rendition of *O Canada*.

But reading the transcript of April 17's Question Period—the first after the 2024 budget was tabled—another song came to mind: Pulp's 1995 *Common People*.

We watched two men—one born into political royalty, the other collecting a six-figure MP's cheque since he was 25 years old, both living in taxpayer-funded manors—extolling the virtues of the common people, and desperately trying to present their bona fides and understanding of their needs.

After presenting yet another big-spending budget, the Liberals will rely on projected GDP growth and an increase to the tax paid on capital gains beyond \$250,000 to pay the bill. It is the latter measure that the government has calculated will result in the greatest fiscal gain for minimal political pain.

That measure is also a cudgel with which the government plans to beat the ascendant opposition—when the Conservatives inevitably vote against the budget bill, it will prove the party “stands with the ultrawealthy 0.1 per cent in this country, and that everyone else is on their own,” as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau put it.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre retorted that Trudeau is “the ultrawealthy. He hid his family fortune in a tax-sheltered trust fund so that he would not have to pay the same taxes as everyone else.” The “orgy” of spending, as Poilievre

put it, will be paid by taxpayers in the form of debt interest in the coming years.

And so the back and forth went—my opponent belongs to the top end of town, I'm with the common people. My ideas came from consultation with those doing it tough, theirs came from political donors and lobbyists. It's political theatre that treats those they ostensibly care about like mugs.

This week, the prime minister will go on a taxpayer-funded tour across the country to extol the virtues of the federal budget, re-announcing how the government will help people with declining disposable income, higher rents, and greater financial anxiety. Ministers and parliamentary secretaries will do the same, racking up the frequent-flyer points to ensure their constituents know who's fighting for them.

The opposition leader will head out on tour, too, partly funded by his party, partly by taxpayers. At well-attended rallies, he'll continue extolling the virtues of “the common sense of common people,” and how cutbacks to government spending and the removal of the carbon tax will ease the cost of living. He could also take in another party fundraiser at a private golf club or private manor, as he did last week in southern Ontario.

There's not necessarily anything wrong with that. But when the leaders return from their sojourns next week, it'd be nice if the “common people” cosplay was left behind.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor



Photograph courtesy of Pexels

Canadian Senators should not approve Bill C-282, advocates urge

As individuals who have devoted many years of public service and policy advocacy directed to negotiating beneficial international trade agreements and to assisting Canadian firms to develop international markets, we are profoundly concerned about how counterproductive Bill C-282, an Act to Amend the Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Act (supply management), stands to be to Canada's interests. We urge Senators not to approve the bill.

We do not comprehend how the bill would benefit Canada, nor the dairy sector, which it is apparently designed to favour. The bill includes serious and troubling provisions which we believe will be extremely damaging to Canada's vital international trade and business interests, including those of the dairy sector. Correcting the deficiencies of the proposed bill cannot be achieved through further amendment or redrafting. Rather, Senators should not approve the bill either as presented, or in any other formulation seeking to deliver similar intents.

If passed into law, Bill C-282 would seriously handicap Canadian governments and their trade negotiators to accommodate the give-and-take of future trade negotiations to open up new markets and secure valued access for Canadian products, services and investments. It should be added that, once negotiated, international trade agreements already require legislation to be fully implemented, thereby providing the House and Senate with a critical role in the implementation of each agreement.

Additionally, rather than supporting Canadian dairy farmers—as seems the bill's and its proponents' intent—any legislation that exempts the sector from all future trade negotiations and agreements could—counterproductively and detrimentally—end up making the dairy sector and supply management an explicit priority negotiating target for Canada's trading partners. The dairy sector and supply management could become an unwelcome target and stumbling block in critically important future negotiations, including, for example, when the renegotiated Canada-U.S.-Mexico Free Trade Agreement comes up for mandatory unanimous agreement to renew by all three parties before July 1, 2026, not to mention current negotiations with the United Kingdom, among others.

Previous trade negotiations have respected the importance of Canada's dairy sector and our supply management system, while also being able to gain access for a broad range of Canadian products, including agriculture and food products.

We count on Canadian Senators to understand how damaging Bill C-282 could be to the national interest and specifically as well to the dairy sector and therefore not to approve it.

Thomas d'Aquino, Stewart Beck, Ian Burney, Donald Campbell, Leonard Edwards, Peter Harder, Martha Hall Findlay, Jonathan Fried, Robert Hage, George Haynal, Lawrence L. Herman, Deanna Horton, John Manley, John Tennant, John Treleven, John M. Weekes, David Wright, and Robert Wright



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Feds give CBC a budget boost

Fasten your seatbelts. Canada is in for a long election run.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



OTTAWA—A small line item in last week's budget could be the line in the sand for the next election.

The government announced an increase of \$42-million for news and entertainment programming at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

CBC president Catherine Tait hailed the hike as "welcome news." For CBC watchers, it was a respite from the cuts and job losses that have plagued the Crown corporation in the past year as viewing habits change.

The question now begs: How many CBC supporters are there, and do they care enough to make it an election issue?

The government certainly hopes so. It is hard to see how a CBC on the verge of extinction would cover an election campaign without bias.

It is unlikely that journalists will exercise neutrality in news



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland inside the budget lockup in Ottawa on April 16, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

coverage when the outcome of the next election could leave them jobless.

Unlike Conservative predecessors, who grumbled about the CBC, but did not go further, Poilievre uses his hate-on for the broadcaster to fuel the base. At any rally, a call to defund the CBC is met with a rousing cheer.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has vowed to oppose the budget. And he has made his disdain for media, in general—and the CBC, in particular—widely known.

Poilievre is vowing to defund the CBC. His position on Radio-Canada is less clear as he has

intimated that the French-language public service could be kept while the English branch could be abolished.

That move is currently illegal, so a plan to defund in one language only would require a legislative change that might not pass muster.

It would also provide time for CBC's supporters to mobilize, and for the public to weigh in on whether the Mother Corp—as it is euphemistically known—is worth keeping.

So the budget line item sends a quiet message that, as far as the Liberals are concerned, the CBC is worth saving.

There may be many other items in the budget that could have an influence on the next election, but much depends on what cuts will be included in the Poilievre promise to vote down the document.

He characterized the spending as akin to a 'pyromaniac spraying gas on the inflationary fire he has lit.'

Poilievre claimed the budget caused \$2,400 of new inflation, but he has not actually said which programs he would axe. He is calling for a "carbon tax election."

But that "carbon tax" theme could be an intergenerational mistake. Young people are far more committed to sustainable development than their boomer elders.

The vote could pit the new generation against middle-aged Canadians, but it could also incite grandmothers to vote with their grandkids in an effort to save the planet.

After all, it is one thing to "axe the tax." What will be offered up in its place to actually tackle the climate change crisis that we are witnessing on a daily basis?

Poilievre may be called out on whether he is planning to trash any or all of the national child benefit, dental care, pharmacare, or daycare programs that Liberals have introduced.

If they are already too deeply embedded, and he decides not to cut those programs, just where will Poilievre get the \$40-billion

in savings to make up for the spending he opposes?

Defunding the CBC is just one small element of a debate that will unfold in the leadup to next year's election.

There are millions of English-speaking Canadians in all parts of the country who support the public broadcaster, and would not like to see it abolished.

The English television audience is not as robust as the French version, which can regularly attract the majority of Quebecers to a year-old special revue. But radio listeners are devoted and influential. Sunday's "Cross Country Checkup" can regularly poll listeners and motivate them to action on any political issue of the day.

Governments normally defeat themselves. But with the long rollout of Poilievre's "axe" campaign, questions are starting to dog him.

Last week's budget marked the start of the election campaign. CBC funding sent a clear signal that the government is not going down without a fight.

Any policy that drives a wedge between the parties is fair game in an election leadup.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland used her budget speech to underscore availability of free birth control, tying it directly to women's reproductive rights. That alone will touch a nerve with the Conservatives.

Fasten your seatbelts. Canada is in for a long election run.

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

The Hill Times

Trudeau's betting on himself

If the Liberals release an election TV ad highlighting Trudeau's beaming face, the public's reaction could be along the lines of 'Not that guy again. I'm so over him.' Trudeau-focused ads might end up reminding people why they don't want to vote Liberal.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit



OKAVILLE, ONT—Prime Minister Justin Trudeau might not

be a gambler, but when the next federal election rolls around, I'm certain he'll still risk everything by betting on himself.

That's to say, I believe his election strategy will almost surely focus on his personality, rather than on his record or his policies.

Indeed, I recently saw an election-style video on Trudeau's Facebook page which likely gives us a sneak preview of what we can expect from the Liberal communication strategy going forward.

The ad in question features a confident looking Trudeau, his sleeves rolled up, strolling through a modular house factory at a quick pace, as he cheerily explains how, by investing in cutting-edge technology, we can mass produce the homes we need to solve the housing crisis.

Of course, the true purpose of this ad isn't really to talk about building homes.

In fact, while Trudeau dazzles us with how the factory is "innovative" and how it employs "3D printers" and "standardized blueprints," we never actually see the process of house-building on the screen.

Heck, we don't even see a finished house.

All we see is a smiling and energetic Trudeau, with the house factory serving as nothing but a backdrop.

Clearly, then, the ad's real aim is to show off Trudeau's personal brand, to rekindle in the minds of voters why he was once so popular and exciting.

In other words, the message is basically, "Hey, remember how you once thought Trudeau was charismatic and progressive and attractive? Well, good news: he still is all those wonderful things!"

Essentially, the Liberals are hoping Canadians will contrast Trudeau's bubbly, sunny, can-do personality with Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's more austere, stodgy, and negative persona.

By the way, I strongly suspect the main target audience of such messaging are millennials, younger voters—once the backbone of Trudeau's support—who have been steadily defecting to the Conservative Party.

At any rate, this approach probably makes more sense for the Liberals than producing ads designed to address issues such as the carbon tax or the economy.

After all, everybody's distressed about the economy, and everybody hates the carbon tax. (All the hype regarding the recent federal budget likely won't change that.)

So, it's better for Trudeau to stick to his strength, which is to continually highlight his optimistic affability.

The equation is simple; if people like you, they're more likely to vote for you.

And there's no question, Trudeau's an excellent performer on TV.

You'd never know from watching him in that housing ad, for instance, that Trudeau is currently languishing in the polls as he looks and acts like he's on top of the world, ready and able to take on any challenge.

Yet, a Trudeau-focused strategy also entails a big risk, which can be summed up thusly: Canadians might simply be tired of the Liberal leader.

Maybe they just want change.

If that's the case, it could pose a challenge for the Liberals that even Trudeau's vaunted powers of personal charisma might not be able to overcome.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, pictured on the Hill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

My point is, if the Liberals release an election TV ad highlighting Trudeau's beaming face, the reaction of the public might be something along the lines of "Oh no. Not that guy again. I'm so over him."

In short, Trudeau-focused ads might end up reminding people why they don't want to vote Liberal.

On the other hand, however, maybe the Liberals simply don't have any other choice.

They'll just have to push Trudeau and hope for the best.

Oh, wait a minute. They actually do have another choice; they could pick a new leader.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Politics

Trump has become the John Gotti of U.S. politics

The infamous Mafia don of the Gambino crime family became an unlikely media star. He was so bad he was good.

Michael
Harris

Harris



HALIFAX—For someone already convicted of sexual assault, defamation, and massive business fraud, Donald Trump, criminal defendant, can still draw a crowd.

There is something about notorious criminal trials that attract humanity like moths to a flame.

In the case of the late O.J. Simpson's murder trial in the 1990s, it was the fascination of the abomination, amplified by the celebrity of the accused—an alleged double murder by a national hero.

Back in 1895, Irish poet Oscar Wilde was put on trial for gross indecency. Wilde's fame as the leading playwright and wit of his age created huge public interest.

But it was the details of his homosexual relationship with a son of the British aristocracy, Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas, that transformed public interest into a frenzied national obsession.

And so it is with Trump's hush-money case. For the next two months, the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president, will eclipse anything that comes out of Gaza, Ukraine, or Iran. What comes out of Trump's mouth will rule the airwaves.

That's because Trump has become the John Gotti of U.S. politics. The infamous Mafia don of the Gambino crime family became an unlikely media star. He was so bad he was good.

No matter how hard law enforcement tried to bring him to justice, the Teflon Don always managed to keep one step ahead of his pursuers; all the while flaunting his notoriety the way a body-builder flexes his biceps.

In an odd way, the more the law pursued Gotti, the more the public applauded him, a little like the people who cheered on O.J. Simpson during that famous ride in the white Bronco holding a pistol.



Donald Trump's hush-money trial started last week in New York City and is expected to last six weeks. If Trump can convince voters that the justice system is corrupt, the way he persuaded millions of America that he really won the 2020 election, they may give him a political pardon in November. Even if he is convicted in that New York courthouse. *Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

In Gotti's case, the public was in thrall to his Houdini-like escapes from authorities, and his \$2,000 suits. Despite being in the murder and mayhem business, his media star shone as brightly as his 1000-watt smile in TV scrums.

Ditto for the other Teflon Don, Donald Trump. Projecting an image of mega wealth and terminal irreverence, he has parlayed his celebrity from a popular TV show into political power.

Despite boasting on the now infamous *Access Hollywood* tape that he could grab women by their privates because he was famous, Trump not only won the GOP nomination for president, he won the White House in 2016. Blinded by his celebrity and bedazzled by his lies, voters let him away with his obnoxious sexism and misogyny.

A one-time fluke, an aberration? Not on your life.

Trump successfully retuned to politics after losing the 2020

election, winning his party's presidential nomination on a strategy of more lies and vicious personal attacks.

His approach was the same. A firehouse of low blows. Crooked Hillary became Sleepy Joe. America was totally broken and headed for Third World status. Criminal immigrants were "vermin" who were "poisoning" the blood of America. Only the Orange One could save the day. There were even hyperbolic comparisons to Jesus and Ronald Reagan, which in GOP circles is the same thing.

By the time Trump took over the Republican Party for the second time, he faced criminal charges for inciting an attempted coup, stealing classified documents, falsifying business records, obstructing justice, and paying off a porn star to keep their illicit affair secret. There were four criminal indictments in all, accounting for 88 felony charges.

Yet almost no senior Republicans, let alone the GOP's hard-right base, seemed to care. Trump fundraised off of every indictment, including making money from selling T-shirts featuring his mugshot.

Even after he was found guilty of sexually assaulting—and then defaming—E. Jean Carroll, and even after he was found guilty of business fraud and fined half a billion dollars, it didn't matter in the slightest to his supporters—or party brass.

Trump was still their man and they all wanted to be part of his celebrity wreck-em race. Many said they would vote for Trump even if he became a convicted felon. There is nothing in the U.S. Constitution preventing such a person from assuming the presidency.

Which brings me to the heart of the matter. Ostensibly, Trump is on trial in the so-called hush-money affair, not for paying Stormy Daniels \$130,000 to keep quiet about their dalliance. Paying hush-money is not a crime.

Trump faces 34 counts of falsifying business records to hide the payoff through a shell company. His purpose was to conceal the real Donald Trump from the public in the run-up to the 2016 election. Even the married Trump knew that bedding a porn star could get people thinking about their vote.

His personal lawyer of the day, Michael Cohen, did the dirty work. He paid off Daniels just 12 days before the presidential election in 2016.

Trump later repaid Cohen with 11 cheques, disguised as fees for legal services. All the cheques were sourced to Trump, who personally signed nine of them. Cohen subsequently went to jail after confessing to his part in this tawdry affair.

Trump has entered a not guilty plea. As his Class E felony case goes through a Manhattan court, the public will learn more about additional payments designed to silence others from making embarrassing disclosures about the man who couldn't keep his zipper up.

It is alleged that Trump used *National Inquirer* executive David Pecker to "catch and kill" unfavourable stories about the candidate that could affect the presidential elections.

One of those alleged payments, \$150,000, was made to a former Playboy playmate. Karen McDougal alleged an affair with Trump, and was trying to publish her story. Pecker bought her limit-

ed lifetime rights—and buried the piece deeper than pirate gold.

Pecker also made a payment to a doorman at the Trump Tower. The man was trying to sell a story alleging that Trump had an illegitimate child. Pecker wrote him a cheque for \$30,000.

According to District Attorney Alvin Bragg, Trump then instructed Cohen to repay AMI, the publisher of the *National Inquirer*, in cash. After consulting its lawyers, AMI did not accept the reimbursement.

Much is being made of the fact that Trump will finally be held accountable for his actions. A chorus of commentators have claimed that Trump's trial is a victory for the system, proof that everyone—even a former president—is not above the law.

That is naive and breathlessly premature. Even if Trump were to be convicted, that view is wildly optimistic. It also completely misunderstands Trump's methods, and his profound danger to American democracy.

Even though he lost the 2020 election, Trump has managed to persuade millions of Americans that Joe Biden stole the election. According to a *Washington Post*-University of Maryland poll, 36 per cent of Americans believe Biden's presidency is illegitimate. In other polls, that number skyrockets amongst Republicans who get their world view from Fox News.

How did Trump make his Big Lie work? By convincing millions of voters that America's electoral system is broken and corrupt.

And he is doing exactly the same thing in his multiple court cases. The justice system, Trump claims, has been unleashed against him by corrupt Democrats. Judges and prosecutors who pretend to be officers of the court are really Biden political operatives. They are not pursuing justice, but carrying out a witch-hunt against Trump to prevent him from re-taking the White House.

Bottom line?

Even if Trump is convicted in the hush-money case, it won't be the final word on whether or not the rule of law is still paramount in America. The real test of that reality will come in November, and Trump knows it. With Trump leading Biden in six of the seven swing states that could decide the election, it is a coin toss over who will win the presidency.

If Trump can convince voters that the justice system is corrupt, the way he persuaded millions of Americans that he really won the 2020 election, they may give him a political pardon in November. Even if he is convicted in that New York courthouse.

Should that happen, it will be Trump Rules, not the rule of law.

For now, it is Trump's character that is on trial. In a few months, it will be America's.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist.

The Hill Times

First they came for the carbon tax, are electric vehicles next?

Canadian politicians at all levels have a choice: continue supporting a still-lucrative but damaging fossil fuel industry, or summon the courage and foresight to boost funding for the clean, proven technologies they claim to favour.

Susan Riley

Impolitic



CHELSEA, QUE.—Perhaps slowing sales of electric vehicles in Canada, industry caution, and political wobbles are a temporary phenomenon, prompted by the affordability crisis (although car sales, overall, remain brisk). The rapidly evolving technology of EVs also gives some potential buyers pause; a lot of consumers are waiting.

If we are lucky, this is just an interruption en route to a necessary revolution in the way we fuel our lives.

However, this unsettling development also lends ballast to an indirect campaign by Big Oil and its enablers to undermine the transition away from gasoline, with torqued reports about the supposed unreliability of EVs in cold climates (although in frosty Norway, 82 per cent of new cars purchased recently were EVs, with strong uptake, also, in the tropical climes of Sweden, Iceland, and Denmark.)

Another specious complaint focuses on the environmental damage caused by mining the critical minerals needed for EV batteries. While those mining operations can be messy, nothing compares to the global devastation caused by burning fossil fuels. But, for the oil lobby, electric vehicles are an existential threat: a significant portion of every barrel of crude mined in Canada is refined into gasoline, mostly for passenger cars, so blunting that market—no matter by how much—would have a direct impact on the industry's multi-billion-dollar profits.

There are other worrying portents. These include recent com-



The slowing sale of EVs lends ballast to an indirect campaign by Big Oil and its enablers to undermine the transition away from gasoline, with torqued reports about the supposed unreliability of EVs in cold climates, writes Susan Riley. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

ments from General Motors CEO Mary Barra, an early adapter of electrification. Pointing to present “uncertainty” about future sales of EVs, she said: “If demand conditions change we’ll take advantage of our manufacturing flexibility ... to build more ICE [internal combustion engines] and fewer EVs.”

Earlier this month, Ford Canada announced a two-year delay, until 2027, in plans to produce electric cars at its Oakville, Ont., plant. The company cited softening sales and evolving technology, but the explanation did not sit well with Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who, along with the federal government, was blindsided by the announcement. (The auto-maker’s behaviour was doubly outrageous, given both levels of government contributed \$295-million each to the Oakville plant in 2020.)

Said the obviously displeased premier: “Ford has to retool as quickly as possible—three years seems like a very, very long time.” He insisted, too, on protections for the 3,200 workers at the auto plant.

The same premier, of course, was initially skeptical of EVs. One of his first acts when first elected in 2018 was to kill \$14,000 rebates for new EVs, and cancel planned EV chargers at GO train stations and other public places. However, when the auto industry embraced electrification a few years later, Ford had a conversion experience. The province, along with the feds, invested billions of dollars in retooled and new plants in southern Ontario’s auto belt. Overall, Ontario has attracted \$28-billion in foreign investment from Stellantis, Volkswagen, Ford, and others, for EV-related production.

But the old Premier Ford was back last month. His government removed a Kathleen Wynne-era

provision in the provincial building code, requiring EV chargers in new residential developments. The premier was responding to his developer friends who argued that mandatory chargers would add \$500 to the cost of a home.

Ford’s housing minister, Paul Calandra, said home-owners who want chargers can pay for it themselves—which sounds reasonable, but is actually imprudent and certainly undermines support for an electrified Ontario car sector. It costs individual home-owners anywhere from \$1,000 to \$3,000 to install a charger—more depending on the layout—and it is much cheaper to install the units during construction. So much for encouraging Ontario drivers to switch.

Unsurprisingly, Alberta Premier Danielle Smith is no fan of the federal plan to have 30 per cent of new cars sold here in 2030 be zero emissions, rising to 60 per cent by 2030 and 100 per cent by 2035. She called the notion “bananas.” These are ambitious goals and Ottawa isn’t doing enough to meet them, so Smith isn’t entirely wrong.

The premier claims not to oppose low-emissions vehicles, but her strong personal preference is hydrogen-powered cars, and—not coincidentally—Alberta’s natural gas industry produces a lot of hydrogen. But hydrogen technology is much less advanced and presents different logistical challenges from electric cars, notably, that hydrogen cars can’t be charged from home.

Meanwhile, as other provinces offer rebates to new EV owners, Alberta is introducing a \$200 annual tax on EVs in 2025 on the specious grounds that they are heavier, and cause more road damage. Also, Smith explains, EV owners have an unfair advantage

because they are spared the provincial fuel tax!

Lower Mainland, B.C., second only to California in the availability of hydrogen-filling stations, is also a leading adapter of electric vehicles. Indeed, British Columbia, along with Quebec, has the highest rates of new EV sales (from 14 to 21 per cent), partly because of generous rebates. (The Northwest Territories offers \$7,500 per new EV, easily the most generous of all programs.)

In British Columbia, rebates—up to \$4000 a vehicle—are income-tested. An estimated one in five B.C. drivers is now buying EVs, especially in the south-west, with its temperate climate and improving charging infrastructure. However, the province has also cancelled, or frozen, two other rebates—one for e-bikes and one for home-chargers—because they were too popular. The \$6-million fund allocated for new e-bike purchasers, for instance, was exhausted within 24 hours of the announcement.

The other EV leader is Quebec, where an estimated 21 per cent new car purchases were electric in 2023, thanks to longstanding rebates, relatively cheap electricity, and buy-in from the province’s corporate sector. However, in the March budget, Premier François Legault announced a phasing out of rebates for both new and used EVs from \$7,000 and \$3,500, respectively, to zero by 2027.

The rebates have done their job, he said, anticipating a saving of \$228-million in a province facing an \$11-billion deficit. Quebec will continue to offer a \$600 rebate for EV charging stations in private residences.

Fortunately, in last week’s federal budget, Ottawa replenished funding for its \$5,000 rebates for moderately priced new EVs—

originally scheduled to end in 2025—and added \$1-billion for more charging stations, a drop in the bucket given the challenge. The feds also introduced a 10 per cent tax credit for suppliers of parts and minerals in the EV supply chain. There is still no sign of once-promised rebates for used EVs, however, and the Canadian Automobile Manufacturers Association’s request for \$10,000 incentives to EV buyers and \$50-billion over 11 years for more chargers was ignored.

Despite all this—despite the still-elevated cost of larger EVs, especially, and an inadequate national charging network—there is still public interest in electrification, as seen in the oversubscribed B.C. programs. According to one survey, and supported by anecdotal evidence, 96 per cent of current EV owners would never go back.

The question is whether North America—and particularly Canada—will increase the push to electrification, or retrench, and let other countries take the lead. China already sells more electric cars than any other country by virtue of its huge population; some 25 per cent of new sales, domestically, are EVs. It is followed by the European Union at 15 per cent, Canada at eight per cent, and the United States at seven per cent overall.

China has a number of EV firms, led by BYD (Build Your Dream), and is turning out no-frills passenger cars that sell for less than \$20,000. BYD is currently looking to open a plant in Mexico, thereby avoiding a 25 per cent American tariff on Chinese imports, and to use as a launch pad to the North American market.

This has alarmed supporters of the North American car industry, including powerful auto-worker unions, who complain that Chinese factories benefit unfairly from heavy government support and a quiescent workforce. That may be, but consumer demand for an accessible, affordable, electric alternative could one day overwhelm trade barriers and even generalized mistrust of China.

Even if BYD’s bid fails, the fact that EVs, over time, cost less to fuel and maintain than conventional vehicles, are cleaner, quieter and non-polluting, is a powerful draw—especially as escalating climate catastrophes, stoked by tailpipe emissions, become harder to ignore.

Canadian politicians at all levels have a stark choice: continue supporting a still-lucrative, but inescapably damaging, fossil fuel industry, or summon the courage and foresight to significantly boost funding for the clean, proven technologies they claim to favour. Some have got their toes in the water, but too many are still huddled on the shore, waiting for someone else to go first.

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

The Hill Times

Opinion

Budget falls short in preparing Canada for difficult times



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's federal budget has failed to spell out to Canadians the reality of the challenges we face, and what is required to make things better, argues David Crane. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The government presented another transactional budget that seeks to send an 'all's well' kind of message when we need a frank and strategic budget that is open to Canadians about what we must do.

David Crane

Canada & the 21st Century



TORONTO—"The world economy faces a sobering reality," the International Monetary Fund

says in a strong and challenging wake-up message.

It's one that is not resonating in Canada in the way it needs to be, if Budget 2024 is any guide. On that score—how well the budget prepares Canada for a higher-productivity, stronger-growth economy—it deserves no more than a C+.

The world economy—and Canada is part of that economy—is not growing fast enough to avert difficult economic times ahead. We face the challenges of climate change and the need to transition to a green world; an aging society with lower growth in working-age Canadians, and rising health and other costs of an older population; weak innovation and underinvestment in new productive technology; and fiscal constraints that limit our capacity to meet new challenges or respond to future shocks. We need healthier economic growth based on innovation-led productivity to enable us to deal with these challenges and sustain decent lives for our population.

But politicians typically don't want to talk about what's need-

ed because what needs to be done will be highly disruptive to people's lives, and entail difficult changes if we are to get onto a better path. This applies both to those in power and those who seek it. Nor do we have private sector leadership that is credible.

Yet, it is our ability to drive innovation and change that will shape the lives of Canadians, and none more so than the youngest generations.

Short-term pain for long-term gain is a hard sell at the best of times, but even more difficult when a country—and Canada is a good example—lacks the leadership skills, the vision on what needs to be accomplished, a credible plan setting out the steps need to make progress, and continuing policy review to ensure we are on track to reach a targeted better place.

There are ways. Instead of a budget that sees young people primarily as victims—and there have been major failures, including access to housing—why not challenge them to be part of the solution? In her budget speech, Finance Minister Chrystia Free-

land said millennials and Gen-Z "need to see and believe that our country can work for them."

In his 1961 inauguration as U.S. President, John F. Kennedy invited Americans not to look to what the country could do for them, but what they could do for their country. Creating a new Canada should challenge and enable younger Canadians to be part of the solution.

In its April 2024 World Economic Outlook, the IMF warns that "the global growth rate—stripped of cyclical ups and downs—has slowed steadily since the 2008-09 global financial crisis," and "without policy intervention and leveraging emerging technologies, the stronger growth rates of the past are unlikely to return." The IMF expects global growth to run at 2.8 per cent a year by 2030, compared to the recent historical average of 3.8 per cent. Moreover, world population will continue to grow, so that per capita growth will be even lower.

Canadian per capita GDP growth averaged 0.6 per cent a year from 2006 to 2015, based on inflation-adjusted purchasing

power dollars, but from 2016 to 2023 averaged just 0.3 per cent a year, or just half the earlier rate. For the two years 2024-2025, the IMF expects an average annual decline of 0.5 per cent. This is the picture of a stagnating economy.

The evidence has been there for some time: weak business investment in innovation and poor productivity performance, inadequate public support for investment in fundamental research and higher education, an excessive dependence on foreign corporations so that Canada is becoming a branch-plant economy, a failure to scale up Canadian businesses and retain intellectual property ownership, a complacency over the foreign takeover of so many promising domestic firms, a lack of competition, a financial system that fails to meet the needs of a new economy, a failure to diversify export markets, and a growing shift to protectionism.

The IMF attributes more than half the decline in growth to the deceleration of what economists call total factor productivity (TFP), a proxy for innovation. This is the economy's speed limit, since it represents the level of growth an economy can have without triggering higher inflation.

In Canada, our speed limit has been shrinking. Moreover, the IMF fears, "the pace of TFP growth is likely to continue to decline," underlying the need for much greater attention to a growth agenda that enhances innovation and productivity. What we are really looking for is a higher potential growth rate for the economy driven by improved productivity.

According to a recent report from Statistics Canada, multifactor productivity (similar to TFP) increased 0.6 per cent in Canadian business sector in 2022, after a decline of 2.2 per cent in 2021. From 2000 to 2015 it declined at an average annual rate of 0.2 per cent, and averaged just 0.1 per cent in 2015-2022.

The global growth decline implies worsening prospects for future living standards, the IMF warns, and could become self-fulfilling since expectations of weaker growth could deter investment in innovations and new production capacity, in turn weakening prospects for improved productivity.

To be sure, Budget 2024 makes some useful ideas that could improve, largely at the margin, Canada's innovation performance and, hence, the potential for growth. Fairness was the principal theme: "fairness for every generation".

But it falls far short in spelling out to Canadians the reality of the challenges we face, and what is required to make things better. It is another transactional budget that seeks to send an "all's well" kind of message when what we need is a frank and strategic budget that is open to Canadians about what we must do.

For this reason, Budget 2024 falls far short in setting us on a course for a better future.

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

The Hill Times

Modi expected to win India's election

The idea that all Hindus share the same grievances and goals is just 'culture-war' lies, and caste is finally taking its rightful place on India's political agenda. It may be too late to turn back the BJP juggernaut, but fascism is not necessarily India's future.

Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—Extreme nationalism always looks foolish or even deranged to those who have not caught the virus, but in India it's now official.

In January, India's Ministry of Defence started setting up 822 'selfie points' at war memorials, railway stations, and tourist attractions where people can take photos with a cardboard cutout of their hero, Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The timing was no coincidence. The national election

begins on April 19 and runs until June 4, when the result will be declared. (With almost a billion voters, the country votes one region at a time.) The outcome is known in advance—Modi will win—but the Hindu fanatics who provide his core vote have the bit between their teeth.

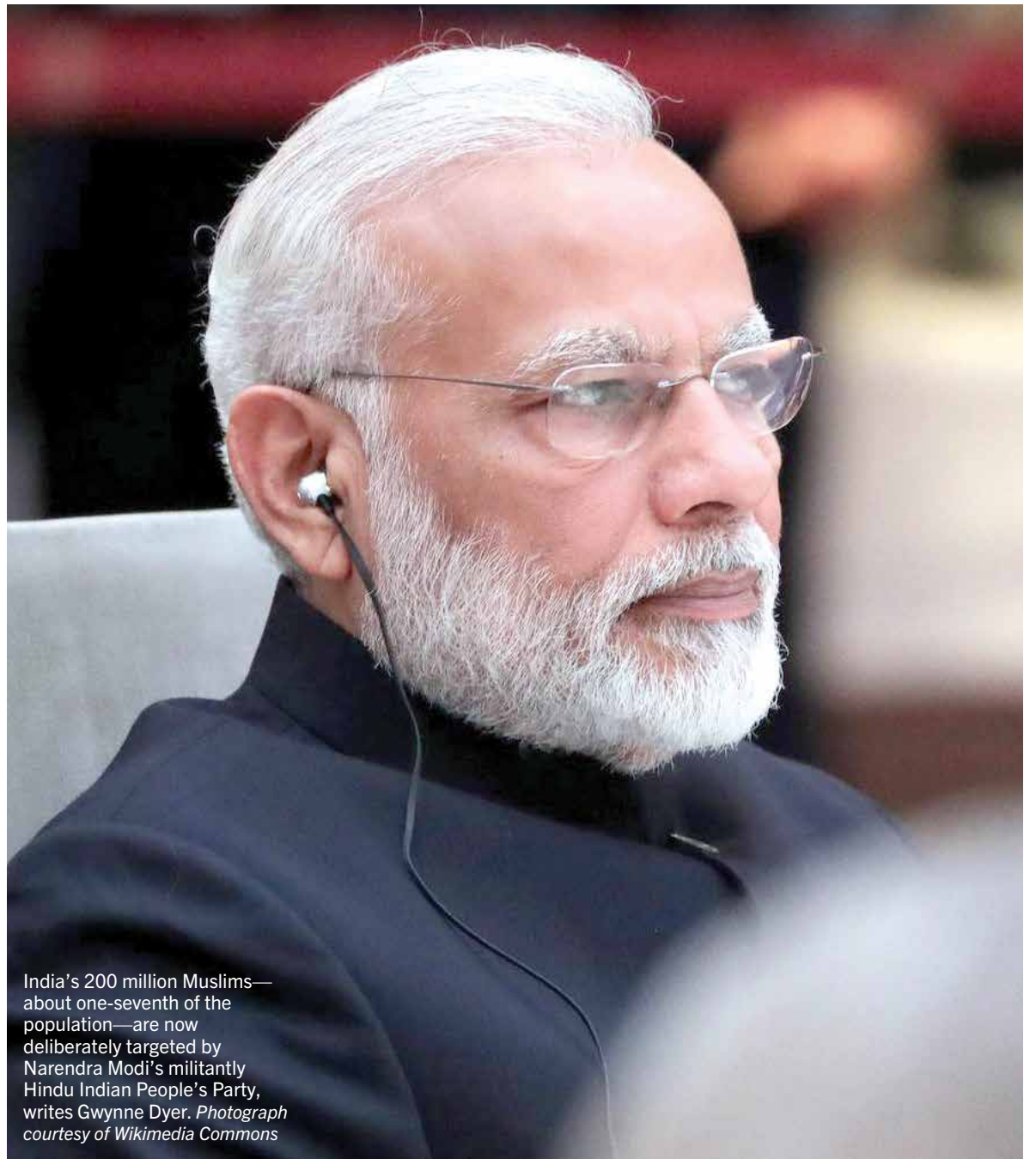
In West Bengal, for example, the World Council of Hindus recently petitioned a court to separate two lions in a zoo enclosure. The male lion is called Akbar, after a 16th-century Muslim emperor, while the female is named Sita after a Hindu goddess.

"Sita cannot stay with the Mughal emperor Akbar," the petitioners demanded. "Such an act amounts to blasphemy and is a direct assault on the religious belief of all Hindus." The pair have been duly separated and now reside in different cages. Ridiculous, of course, but also deadly serious.

India's 200 million Muslims, about one-seventh of the population, are now deliberately targeted by Narendra Modi's militantly Hindu Indian People's Party (BJP).

Some Hindus nurse a historical grievance because most of India was ruled for five centuries by Muslim conquerors originally from Central Asia, but that ended two centuries ago. Hindus were already in the ascendant under British rule because they were readier to collaborate with the new conquerors—and even that ended 77 years ago.

'Hindutva,' the aggressive modern version of Hindu nationalism, is largely a contemporary ideology created for political purposes, but it currently dominates



India's 200 million Muslims—about one-seventh of the population—are now deliberately targeted by Narendra Modi's militantly Hindu Indian People's Party, writes Gwynne Dyer. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

the Indian political scene. It has given Modi licence to transform an imperfect but functional democracy into a 'soft' fascist state.

This will be Modi's third consecutive term in office, and many Indians believe that it will complete his transformation of the country. What will emerge, they fear, is a BJP one-party theocracy, nastier than Viktor Orban's Hungary or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey although perhaps not as vicious as Ali Khamenei's Iran.

It may well come to that. Even now, opposition politicians are routinely jailed on false charges, almost all the media are cowed into obedience, and Muslims face intimidation or actual violence with almost no hope of protection from the police. Some of the courts are still independent, but the rule of law is definitely in retreat.

Yet, it's too soon to give up on India's democratic traditions. The BJP, for all its bombast and swagger, only got 37 per cent of the popular vote in the last national election five years ago. Its apparent 'landslide' victory was only due to the opposition being divided into many smaller parties.

Hindutva is all-powerful in the 'Hindi belt' of northern India, but first-language Hindi speakers are only 40 per cent of the population. Southern and eastern India speak other languages, and have different preoccupations. And there is one topic that could unite them against the BJP: caste.

The BJP is dominated by upper-caste Hindus who have convinced a great many other Hindus that they are all in the same boat, but they are not. Socially, economically, and educationally the lower castes trail far behind. The opposition—or at least the Congress Party part of it—has realized (better late than never) that these are the voters they need.

Rahul Gandhi, the scion of the family that has given India three prime ministers, has begun to demand a 'caste census' in every state because that would reveal how small a share of the national wealth the lower castes actually get.

No such census had been published in India since the 1930s. However Bihar, an opposition-governed state, finally did one, and revealed late last year

that more than two-thirds—73 per cent—of its 130 million people belong to 'backward' or marginalized castes.

That's much higher than people thought, and it's political dynamite. So now Gandhi's election speeches sound like this: "Are any of you Dalits ('untouchables') or other low castes in the judiciary? Are any of you in the media? Do any of you own even one of India's 200 top companies?"

"Why are you all asleep? You are 73 per cent of the population. What kind of society is this where you don't make any decisions?"

The idea that all Hindus share the same grievances and goals is just 'culture-war' lies, and caste is finally taking its rightful place on India's political agenda. It may be coming too late to turn back the BJP juggernaut this time, but fascism is not necessarily India's future.

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

Feature

Budget day and the

The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade



About 300 people were in the media budget lockup in the John G. Diefenbaker Building on Sussex Drive in Ottawa on Tuesday, April 16, 2024. The budget embargo ended at 4 p.m. when Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland tabled the budget in the House.



The budget document. Sealed and delivered.



Officials and reporters inside the lockup.



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland holds a press conference inside the media lockup for the 4 p.m. stories.



The New Brunswick *Telegraph-Journal's* Adam Huras hard at it.



Collin Lafrance, the illustrious chief of the Parliamentary Press Gallery, makes sure things run smoothly inside the media lockup.



Reporters putting their stories together to be published by 4 p.m.

day after in Ottawa

The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, centre, and Conservative MPs on the Hill on April 16.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gives Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland a hug at the Liberal caucus meeting the day after the budget.



Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet reacts to the budget on April 16.



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh also holds a presser on April 16 to react to the budget



Green Party Leader Elizabeth May holds one, too. May says she will vote against the budget.



Freeland, pictured on April 17, a day after releasing the budget.

Opinion



The Veritas (Truth) statue outside the Supreme Court of Canada building in Ottawa. Quebec's Bill 21 removes fundamental rights from its citizens. Now we will see what the Supreme Court has to say about this, writes Frank Baylis. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

Bill 21 should be quickly repealed

The Canadian government should stand firmly with those citizens who are working to reinstate their civil rights. Bill 21 is a discriminatory law that has moved Quebec away from its proud history as a human rights leader.

Frank Baylis

Opinion



MONTREAL—From the moment Bill 21 became law, it was inevitable that it would end up in front of the Supreme Court of Canada. The English Montreal School Board made this announcement recently. The

pushback from the Quebec's CAQ government—the authors of this controversial law—has been immediate. Quebec Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette stated “this is a Quebec issue,” and invited the federal government to “mind their own business.”

The federal government should do exactly as Jolin-Barrette has requested. It should mind its own business; and its business is ensuring the fundamental civil rights of all Canadian citizens, including those who reside in Quebec.

Undeniably, Bill 21 removes fundamental rights from the Quebec people. It has escaped two court challenges so far, simply because the CAQ government proactively used the notwithstanding clause to circumvent the Canadian Charter of Rights. Now we will see what the Supreme Court of Canada has to say about this.

The CAQ government presented Bill 21 as another step in Quebec's cultural move away from religion. Its stated goal was to create a secular society, safe from religious underpinnings and pressures. The law was presented as building upon the Quiet Revolution and further affirming Que-

bec's movement into modernity. However, Bill 21 does nothing of the sort. In fact, it does quite the opposite; it takes the Quebec society a step backward by removing citizens' basic rights. The Quebec government did not always act in this way.

In 1975, the provincial government implemented the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. It was conceived to protect the human rights of all Quebecers. The Quebec Charter was written by Quebecers for all Quebecers. The National Assembly adopted it unanimously. It is those fundamental rights and freedoms established in the Charter that helped Quebec move towards the modern, inclusive society it has become. The Charter protected the rights of all citizens in the territory of Quebec regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and practices, or lack thereof. It is worth noting that the Quebec Charter became law seven years before the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted. This is a heritage for which all Quebecers can be rightfully proud.

Sadly, this movement towards an open and inclusive society has

been stopped by Bill 21. The law has essentially overturned the progressive ideals of the Quebec Charter by enforcing employment discrimination against certain Quebecers based solely on their religious beliefs.

To implement this discriminatory secularism law, the CAQ government took four steps: it re-wrote the Quebec Charter to remove certain human rights, it invoked closure to stop any debate in the Quebec National Assembly on this issue, it used the notwithstanding clause to override the Canadian Charter, and it simply ignored the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Interestingly, the CAQ government's attempt to use the notwithstanding clause to block people who wear religious symbols from being elected was denied by the Appeal Court, just as it had been by the lower court. This means that politicians can wear their religious symbols everywhere, including at work. And therein lies the absurdity of Bill 21.

The democratically elected representatives to the highest office of Quebec nation can all wear religious symbols, they just can't work in sections of the public service that they oversee. For example, a Muslim woman who wears a hijab can become the Quebec minister of education, but she cannot work as a teacher. Take the case of Fatemeh Anvari, a Grade 3 teacher at Chelsea Elementary School. She was a good teacher, appreciated by her students. However, she was fired from her teaching position because she wears a

hijab. Amazingly, Fatemeh can run for elected office and can even become the minister of education, all while wearing the same hijab that got her fired as a teacher. That, on all levels, is both absurd and simply wrong.

What, then, should be the Quebec government's official position on religion? It should be agnostic. The government should put forth laws that create space for all citizens, whether or not they are religious. It should not be taking away people's rights based on their religious beliefs. The government should, most certainly, not be promoting non-believers over believers when it comes to employment. Simply put, the government of Quebec should let the people of Quebec be who they are, free to think and believe what they want, without fear of discrimination by the government.

In the end, the Canadian government should stand firmly with those citizens who are working tirelessly to reinstate their civil rights. Bill 21 is a discriminatory law that has moved Quebec away from its proud history as a leader in human rights. The Quebec Charter should have the rights that were removed put back, the not-withstanding clause used to circumnavigate the Canadian Charter should be cancelled, and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights should be respected. Finally, Bill 21 should be quickly repealed.

Frank Baylis is a former Liberal Member of Parliament who represented the riding of Pierrefonds-Dollard, Que., from 2015-2019.

The Hill Times

How green was this budget?



Grip and grin: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland pose with the 2024 budget. It's not possible to vote confidence in a government that never produced a cost-benefit analysis, much less a reliable environmental assessment before wasting \$34-billion on a pipeline and tanker project, writes Green Party Leader Elizabeth May. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Being better on climate policy than the official opposition is too low a bar for a confidence vote.

Green Party Leader Elizabeth May

Opinion



The decision about supporting a federal budget is less about whether any particular budgetary spending can be supported, and is more the ultimate expression of confidence in any government.

Greens have always said that we cannot vote confidence in any government that maintains billions of dollars in fossil fuel subsidies, and builds fossil fuel

infrastructure when we are on a “highway to climate hell—foot on the accelerator,” in the words of UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.

As the climate emergency worsens, threatening the lives of millions of people globally, the Green Party cannot vote confidence in a government that is half-hearted and conflicted about holding to a 1.5 C global average temperature increase as we pledged to do at COP21 in Paris. It was after Paris that the Trudeau administration first approved the Kinder Morgan pipeline, and then—even worse—bought it.

The political sniping about the Trans Mountain Expansion—whether from the Liberals, or from Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre—is rooted in fantasy. The budget says the pipeline is “anticipated to come online in May” of 2024. In reality, the construction is not complete, with a current 2.4 kilometre gap, and the

leak detection system won’t be operational for another year.

We have wasted \$34-billion on what was supposed to be a \$5.5-billion project. Further fantasy is found on the same page (page 10 of the budget) with the often repeated and disproved claim that diluted bitumen will get a better price once moving in tankers out of Vancouver.

The only thing on which Greens and Conservatives may agree is that buying the pipeline was a costly mistake. But in debating Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, Poilievre went on to claim that the private sector had been ready to build the pipeline. That is pretty choice revisionist history.

To refresh memories, Richard Kinder, CEO of Kinder Morgan, decided in early 2018 to abort the project. In 2017 National Energy Board (now Canada Energy Regulator) hearings, Kinder Morgan repeatedly claimed that the full weight and assets of the company

were backing the project. In early 2018, Kinder Morgan made two tell-tale decisions to prepare for a rapid exit. First Kinder Morgan restructured, creating a Canadian-only subdivision placing most Canadian assets in a segregated corporate unit. Secondly, Kinder told his shareholders that the \$1.6-billion it had raised for the Trans Mountain expansion were to be used to pay down debt of the parent company.

Exiting the project involved the risk of penalties under terms of long term contracts. To avoid penalties, contractual terms to give Kinder Morgan an out relied on being able to claim third parties prevented construction. At this point the federal government had approved the project, although the permits were being challenged in Federal Court by several First Nations and environmental groups.

Kinder Morgan announced a halt in construction, and issued an ultimatum that the Trudeau

administration commit to ensuring the pipeline would not face other obstacles, and that if such assurances were not received by the end of May, Kinder Morgan would walk.

As Andrew Nikiforuk explained in *The Tyee*, Kinder Morgan essentially kidnapped its own project. But continuing with Nikiforuk’s metaphor, it kidnapped the pipeline without any prospect of collecting ransom. The goal was to kill the hostage.

Incredibly, the Trudeau administration did not do the logical thing: explain that “the matter is before the courts.” The legality of the permits had already been disputed, and the case wrapped up. We were awaiting the decision of the Federal Court—a decision which was rendered in late summer that the permits were invalid for failure to consult First Nations.

Instead—and even more incredibly—then-finance minister Bill Morneau started the process of negotiating a price to buy the pipeline, and commit to having the federal government build it.

The hucksters from Houston, Texas, must have been laughing all the way to the bank. We bought it for more than Kinder Morgan paid when it initially bought the 1952-vintage original pipeline. Yet here is the leader of the Official Opposition pedalling the fantasy that Kinder Morgan would have built the new twinned pipeline if only the federal government had not “gotten in the way” by buying it.

Most days in Parliament I do not know whether to laugh or cry. So many people on both sides of the House are loudly proclaiming nonsense in which they appear to passionately believe. This is only possible by avoiding fact checks—Conservatives avoid facts on climate science, Liberals avoid facts on diluted bitumen (dilbit), and why it is of inherently lower value in the marketplace than conventional crude.

This pipeline will increase greenhouse gas emissions with an additional and unbearable risk of a tanker accident, and unprecedented damage to coastal ecosystems. Another inconvenient truth is that Kinder Morgan never produced evidence in the NEB hearings that dilbit can be cleaned in the event of a marine spill (see the 2010 Enbridge leak into the Kalamazoo River for a fresh water example. Damage from a dilbit spill will be far worse in the open ocean).

It is not possible to vote confidence in a government that never produced a cost-benefit analysis, much less a reliable environmental assessment before wasting \$34-billion on a dangerous pipeline and tanker project.

Being better on climate policy than the Official Opposition is too low a bar for a confidence vote.

Elizabeth May, O.C. is the leader of the Green Party of Canada, had intervenor status in the 2016-2017 NEB hearings, and was arrested in March 2018 protesting the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

The Hill Times

Opinion

How should we prepare for the unpredictable? Talk to Americans



When it comes to corporate Canada, the sad fact is too many of our CEOs don't spend enough time in Washington. Most either delegate the responsibility to lobbyists or, when they do go to D.C., they tend to do so as part of a delegation, write Paul Deegan and Kevin Lynch. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

It's time for more Canadian CEOs to talk to Americans, find out what's on their minds, see how we fit into that agenda, and work with them to build a more prosperous continent for all.

Kevin Lynch
& Paul
Deegan

Opinion



The recent passing of former prime minister Brian Mulroney is a reminder of the outsized influence that Canada had in Washington, D.C., during the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. By sheer force of Mulroney's personality and vision, Canada was able to conclude landmark free trade and environmental protection agreements with the Americans—the chemistry between those three individuals was unique.

Through the 1990s, Jean Chrétien and Bill Clinton had an effective working relationship, bringing NAFTA into being, and sharing similar middle-of-the-road views on many issues. Since then, relationships between Canadian prime ministers and American presidents have been more transactional and less personal, and that comes with risks and costs.

Diplomacy matters, especially when your neighbour is the world's largest economy and your main trading partner, and it is not solely the job of government. As we approach the November elections in the United States, Canadian business leaders should be concerned about how things may unfold during and after what is sure to be a wild ride of an election. Whoever wins the White House, the House of Representatives, and the Senate, Canadians should brace themselves for more protectionism and more dysfunction in Washington. The question is: how should we prepare for the unpredictable?

For the answer, we should borrow a little inspiration from comedian Rick Mercer. Mercer's *Talking to Americans* was a regular feature on the CBC's satirical *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* program. Mercer interviewed everyday Americans—and even

prominent ones—convincing them to agree to preposterous statements about their northern neighbours to highlight America's lack of awareness about Canada.

The skits were funny, but they were also a little uncomfortably telling about the real imbalance in cultural awareness and influence across the 49th parallel.

When it comes to corporate Canada, the sad fact is too many of our chief executive officers do not spend enough time in Washington. Most either delegate the responsibility to in-house or consultant lobbyists or, when they do go to Washington, they tend to do so as part of a delegation and spend too much time in their comfort zone with other Canadians. But there are some Canadian business leaders who get it right.

Related to the title of Mercer's skit, those who do it right spend their time Talking to Americans—

just like Mulroney did. Here's a recent case in point which is worth noting because of its rarity: a Canadian chief executive officer, CN's Tracy Robinson, posted a series of photos on LinkedIn. They weren't selfies with fellow Canadians on the roof of the Canadian embassy; they were photos of her with key U.S. legislators and regulators over a two-day visit to Washington, D.C.

That's excellent use of a CEO's time. If done regularly, that's an investment that will yield dividends down the road when it comes to regulatory and legislative affairs, and it will be money in the bank if reputational issues emerge.

In another example from 15 years ago, BMO's Bill Downe took on the role of chair of the U.S. Federal Reserve's Federal Advisory Council, which was remarkable for the CEO of a Canadian bank, even one with significant operations in the United States. The insights and relationships he built in Washington were helpful both to BMO's future growth strategy in the U.S., and to American understanding of the strengths of the Canadian banking system coming out of the 2008 financial crisis.

There are excellent supports for business leaders thinking of a foray into Washington's unknowns.

For companies without government relations boots-on-the-ground in the U.S. capital, the Canadian embassy is an untapped resource. Our trade commissioners are top notch, and have deep expertise in a wide variety of sectors, including aerospace, cleantech, consumer products, defence, financial institutions, infrastructure, IT, and life sciences. The embassy's congressional affairs team has the pulse of what's happening on Capitol Hill, and has strong relationships with elected officials and staff in both the House of Representatives and Senate—and on both sides of the aisle. While a high-powered lobbying firm may sometimes be warranted, the services the embassy offers are free, and better still, quite invaluable. In addition, Ontario and Alberta both have talented representatives housed at the embassy.

The upcoming U.S. elections present much uncertainty for Canada and Canadian business, but this uncertainty should be a catalyst for our business leaders. First and foremost, cross-border government relations is about building relationships, and that is best accomplished by listening and learning about a legislator or regulator's agenda and issues, rather than leading with your own parochial business agenda.

It's time for more Canadian CEOs to talk to Americans, to find out what is on their minds, see how we fit into that agenda, and work with them to build a more prosperous continent for all. That was the shared vision of NAFTA.

Kevin Lynch is a former clerk of the Privy Council and vice-chair of BMO Financial Group. Paul Deegan is a former public affairs executive at BMO and CN, and a former deputy executive director of the National Economic Council in the Clinton White House.

The Hill Times

To stop plastic pollution, stop producing it

At the 2023 Global Plastics Treaty negotiation session in Nairobi, the fossil fuel and chemical industry's lobbyists outnumbering the combined delegates from 70 of the smallest nations. The UN must disclose the number and nature of the industry lobbyists in Ottawa, and establish a conflict-of-interest policy.

Nicky Davies & Ame Trandem

Opinion



As negotiators from across the globe descend upon

Ottawa to negotiate the Global Plastics Treaty this week, the political currents are clear. People from the global north to the global south see the pollution from single-use plastic that ends up in our landfills, our waterways, and our bodies. They also increasingly understand the problem has a single source: the plastics and petrochemical industry that has massively expanded its production over the past 20 years.

A recent global poll about this treaty showed there is consistent support from people in countries ranging from Canada to Indonesia, with more than 80 per cent on average in favour of its goal of cutting plastic production, and 90 per cent supporting a transition away from single-use plastic packaging towards reusable alternatives.

There are hopeful signs this public concern will be heard. UN countries are discussing a lifecycle approach with real limits on plastics production, and highlighting the need for reuse systems, exceeding the expectations of many. The question is whether it will be torpedoed by industry and oil-producing nations, like so many treaties in the past. During the seven-day marathon on Parliament Hill, here are four potential points of conflict that observers should watch for:

1. Will the plastics treaty actually reduce plastic?

This is a historic opportunity for the Global Plastics Treaty to reduce plastic pollution by addressing everything from fossil fuel extraction to disposal. However, the petrochemical industry is trying to limit the treaty to recycling and harmful false solutions like incineration and chemical recycling, sidelining much more important strategies like production reduction and reuse systems. Turning off the tap is both more sensible and more possible than cleaning up the problem afterward. A strong treaty must include significant production limits, or it risks becoming greenwashing for a climate-busting industry.

2. Who will be in the room when it happens?

At the previous Global Plastics Treaty negotiation session in Nairobi, Kenya, in November 2023, the fossil fuel and chemical industry sent 143 lobbyists, outnumbering the combined delegates from 70 of the smallest countries. The UN must disclose the number and nature of the industry lobbyists in Ottawa, and establish a conflict-of-interest policy. It is worth noting that 60 per cent of the

global survey respondents said that industry lobbyists "should not be allowed to take part." Additionally, will the rights of Indigenous Peoples as rights holders also be respected and upheld, and will Indigenous and independent scientists be recognized as technical experts?

3. Which factions will get their demands met?

Two main factions developed at the previous negotiating rounds. The first is loosely named the "high ambition coalition" featuring 65-plus countries—with many nations from the Global South leading the push for a strong treaty. They need to be much more vocal if they are to achieve this objective. The second—and currently more vocal faction—is a small group of so-called "like-minded group" led by Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, who oppose any production limits and want the treaty to focus on waste management, a position supported by industry groups like the American Chemistry Council. If the like-minded group gets unfair representation, they may derail the negotiations as they did in Nairobi. The United States has yet to join either group but—since plastic is carbon—it must support the treaty in order to meet its cli-

mate and environmental justice commitments.

4. How will they get all the work done?

With only two negotiating rounds left, what happens if we don't make significant progress on a revised draft text? At 70 pages, with many unsettled policies, they will need intersessional work, and perhaps even an extra round. Are countries coming to the negotiations in good faith, or are they just trying to run out the clock?

Civil society groups and the high-ambition countries have clear and well-supported demands. The final treaty must prioritize reduction over recycling, and it must have plastic reduction targets, bans on chemicals of concern, and a just transition for workers. It also must exclude false and dangerous solutions like plastic credits and bioplastics, in favour of building up the reuse systems that we know can power local economies and protect people and our planet.

Nicky Davies is the executive director of the Plastic Solutions Fund, an international funder collaborative dedicated to tackling the crisis of plastic pollution and its impacts on the health of people and ecosystems across the planet. Ame Trandem is European program manager and Global Plastics Treaty lead for the Plastic Solutions Fund. She has worked with nonprofits on issues intersecting the environment and human rights over the past 20 years, and lives in The Hague, The Netherlands.

The Hill Times

First Nations and the right to say yes

The Trudeau government needs to start hearing 'yes' when First Nations say it.

Conservative Senator David Wells

Opinion



First Nations want to have a say in their economic future, and the government needs to get out of the way.

Instead, the Trudeau government has pushed an ideological narrative that aligns with its

extremist environmental agenda. One example is Bill C-48, which, in 2019, banned oil tankers off the north coast of British Columbia. Testifying before the Senate Transport Committee, then-transport minister Marc Garneau argued that those supporting Bill C-48 "is a coalition of all the remaining Indigenous communities along the coast, which incidentally represent a majority—the Haida, Heiltsuk, Haisla, Metlakatla, Gitga'at, Kitasoo, Gitxaala and even the hereditary leaders of the Lax Kw'alaams."

The problem with Garneau's argument was that the Metlakatla denied support for Bill C-48. When the minister was questioned about this at his next committee appearance, he said he couldn't recall his initial remarks.

We have repeatedly seen this battle of narratives:

- When conflict arose over the Coastal GasLink pipeline in B.C., it fell on deaf ears that the project had approval both from the province, but also the 20 First Nations band councils who signed agreements supporting the project, or that Indigenous communities purchased a 10 per cent stake in the project, and hoped to buy an even bigger share.

- In 2016, the government banned new offshore oil and gas licences in Canadian Arctic waters. The premiers of both the Northwest Territories and Nunavut called the decision patronizing, lacking in local consultation, and detrimental to the territories' devolution negotiations.

- Eleven First Nations leaders in B.C. have been explicit in their support for liquified natural gas projects, arguing "the difficult economic situation of Indigenous

communities and people must be considered on balance with overarching, but impersonal climate-related goals."

- On April 2, Reuters published an article highlighting the fact that Indigenous business groups are willing to purchase stakes in energy projects at an accelerating pace, including in the TransMountain Pipeline and Coastal Gas Link. First Nations have concluded recent deals with Enbridge, Suncor, and have established with Pembina, Cedar LNG, an export project majority-owned by the Haisla Nation. They want to do more.

Yet, the Trudeau government has habitually turned a deaf ear to "yes" from First Nations when it comes to resource development. The fact is, Indigenous workers represent 3.9 per cent of Canada's workforce, yet account for 6.9 per cent of the energy sector. The numbers are also high for the mining and aquaculture sectors.

According to the government's discussion paper, that proportion jumped 20 per cent since 2014, accounting for an estimated 10,400 jobs in 2020. That paper also noted that \$55-million in oil and gas-related revenue was collected on behalf of First Nations in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and B.C. by Indian Oil and Gas Canada

in 2018-2019. As stewards of the land, they want to be part of its responsible use.

In 2016, Chief Joseph Bevan, chair of the First Nations Major Projects Coalition, testifying on behalf of the 130-plus First Nations across Canada, asked Senate Banking Committee members a number of questions: "How can the business interests of First Nations impacted by major projects be accommodated in a meaningful way? Can it involve First Nations participating as equity owners in projects and involve us as part of the management decisions? Is there an approach to environmental stewardship and the mitigation of cumulative impacts caused by major project development that can be established in a manner that deals with the interests that are unique to First Nations?"

The Trudeau government needs to start hearing "yes" when First Nations say it.

Conservative Senator David Wells represents Newfoundland and Labrador. Before his appointment to the Senate, Wells served as deputy CEO and board member of the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board, the regulator for Canada's offshore petroleum industry.

The Hill Times

News

Sponsored travel climbed in 2023 as MPs accept trips

MPs accepted travel worth more than \$850,000 in 2023, including from lobby groups, foreign governments, and non-government organizations.

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

Federal politicians accepted sponsored travel in 2023 at a rate not seen since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, as 71 MPs disclosed trips worth more than \$850,000 in total, according to the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's registry for sponsored travel.

Almost two-fifths of that expenditure came from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), which paid for 21 MPs to participate in delegations to Israel last year. But 2023 marked the final year the organization would offer sponsored travel to parliamentarians owing to a change to lobbying rules that came into effect last July.

"As CIJA maintains strict compliance with the Lobbying Code, we have discontinued our decades-long mission program that offered parliamentarians unparalleled exposure that allowed them to better comprehend the complexities of the region," said Shimon Koffler Fogel, CIJA's president and CEO, in an emailed statement to *The Hill Times*.

The changes to the federal Lobbyists' Code of Conduct explicitly included sponsored travel in rules prohibiting registered



Liberal MPs Kody Blois, top left, George Chahal and Valerie Bradford, and Conservative MPs Scott Aitchison, top right, Kerry-Lynne Findlay, Shelby Kramp-Neuman, and Jasraj Singh Hallan are among those who received sponsored travel from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs last year. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and Sam Garcia

lobbyists from providing "any gift—directly or indirectly—to an official that you lobby or expect to lobby, other than a low-value gift that is a token of appreciation or promotional item." That low-value threshold was set at a one-off limit of \$40, or an annual limit of \$200.

Prior to the new code's coming into effect on July 1, 2023, lobbyists were only banned from providing gifts or favours that the public office holders were not allowed to accept. Ethics rules for MPs exempt sponsored travel

from regulations governing the gifts that elected representatives can accept, as long as the travel "arises from or relates to his or her position."

The updated lobbyists' code means that CIJA—which has been registered to lobby continuously since 2005—cannot offer sponsored travel to MPs. Fogel said the organization will, however, continue to host "missions for students, academics, journalists, businesspeople, and social leaders, among others, allowing them to witness the reality on

the ground, experience the strength of the Canada-Israel relationship and understand the Jewish perspective."

CIJA sponsored the travel of 21 MPs—eight Liberal, 10 Conservative, and three Bloc Québécois—to Israel, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem across three delegations in January, March, and July 2023. The latter delegation, which took place after the

July 1 enforcement of the updated code, took place after Lobbying Commissioner Nancy Bélanger granted the group an exemption.

"They did ask me if I could suspend the application of the code for the month of July in light of the fact they had two trips already organized," Bélanger told the House Ethics Committee on April 16. "I did not think it was fair to tell them not to pursue that trip since it had been organized for more than six months, I think."

That exemption meant CIJA was subject to a two-year cooling-off period in which they could not lobby the individuals who joined the July delegation. According to disclosures on the ethics commissioner's website, Liberal MPs Kody Blois (Kings-Hants, N.S.), Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South-Hespeler, Ont.), and George Chahal (Calgary Skyview, Alta.), Conservative MPs Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound-Muskoka, Ont.), Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey-White

Rock, B.C.), Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings-Lennox and Addington, Ont.), and Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, Alta.) received sponsored travel from CIJA that month.

Despite that cooling-off period, CIJA posted a communication with Aitchison on the federal lobbyists' registry on Jan. 30, 2024. Asked by NDP MP Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, Ont.) about that report, Bélanger told the committee that CIJA told her that Aitchison had been mistakenly invited to a presentation for MPs that had been invited on missions to Israel.

"They were forthright in letting me know that they had made a mistake, and would not do that again, and it was an oversight that the MP had been invited and I accepted that explanation," she said.

Asked by Green about the penalty for a lobbyist offering sponsored travel to an MP after the code's implementation, Bélanger said it would likely "be a breach of the code, and a report to Parliament, so it's reputational, really."

Israel most-visited destination in 2023

Israel was the most popular destination for sponsored travel in 2023, with 23 MPs travelling to



Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner Konrad von Finckenstein released the list of MPs who accepted sponsored travel in 2023 on April 8, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Most commonly visited countries in 2023

Israel	23
Taiwan	18
United Kingdom	9
Kenya	7
Iraq	5

back to pre-pandemic levels to Israel, Taiwan, U.K.

Continued from page 20

the country throughout the year, 21 of them through CIJA funding.

A January delegation program, included in supporting documents in Liberal MP Brenda Shanahan's (Châteauguay-La-colle, Que.) submission, included a tour of Jerusalem's Old City and Yad Vashem—Israel's official Holocaust memorial—meetings with members of the Knesset, and excursions to the West Bank and Golan Heights.

Fogel said the group and its predecessor, the Canada-Israel Committee, had organized the delegations for approximately 800 MPs and Senators since 1973.

"The itineraries were organized to provide up-close and intimate experiences showcasing the region's size, its character, the nature of the challenges—both in terms of Israel's development as a modern state and the ongoing conflicts since its establishment—and how these factors shape Canada's Jewish community," Fogel said. "The encounters were never filtered, nor was the program manipulated to favour a particular narrative. It is important to note that these missions were not treated as a 'lobbying opportunity,' with each invitation expressly indicating that there were no strings attached to their participation and no expectations that the participants would adopt specific positions on the issues following the trip."

The UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, which is not registered to lobby, sponsored trips by Liberal MP Anthony Housefather (Mount-Royal, Que.) and Conservative MP Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, Alta.) to Israel in November 2023.

Most frequent sponsors in 2023

Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs	21
Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada	18
Canadians for Affordable Energy, Iran Democratic Association, Kurdistan Regional Government, Results Canada, University of British Columbia School of Public Policy and Global Affairs	4
Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China	3
Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Canada, UJA Federation of Greater Toronto	2

CIJA president and CEO Shimon Koffler Fogel said the organization has discontinued its sponsored travel program in the wake of changes to lobbying rules. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



The declarations by Housefather and Rempel Garner stated that the UJA-sponsored travel included "showing solidarity with Israelis," visiting the sites of Hamas's Oct. 7, 2023, attacks on southern Israel, and meeting government officials and Canadian ambassador Lisa Stadelbauer.

Foreign government-funded travel continues

Taiwan was the second-most visited destination in 2023. Eighteen MPs—four Liberal, nine Conservative, three Bloc, and two NDP—visited the country with the funding of its *de facto* Canadian embassy, the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada.

Supporting documents provided to the ethics commissioner's office by Conservative deputy leader Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, Ont.) show that a delegation of MPs in July met with Canadian and provincial trade officials based in Taiwan, toured digital defence organization Doublethink Lab, and met with the country's foreign affairs and digital affairs ministers.

Harry Ho-jen Tseng, Taiwan's top diplomat in Canada, told *The Hill Times* earlier this year that his office would continue to organize trips for parliamentarians to Taiwan, and that the trips offered the "best way" for MPs to understand Taiwan and the diplomatic challenges it faces.

"Seeing is believing," he said at the time.

Taiwan spent the most of any foreign government on sponsored travel last year, accounting for \$177,970.20.

Other official sponsors included the Kurdistan Regional Government, which paid for four MPs to visit the autonomous region in northern Iraq; the German government, which invited Bloc Québécois foreign affairs critic Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, Que.) to a federalism conference in Munich; and Uzbekistan's central election commission, which hosted Conservative MP Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, Alta.) as an international observer for a constitutional referendum in the country.

Only one Canadian sub-national government—that of the Northwest Territories—provided sponsored travel. Liberal MP Michael McLeod, the province's sole federal representative, noted that the government supplied a chartered plan in which he accompanied ministers to communities affected by forest fires in September.

Highest spending sponsors in 2023

Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs	\$335,296.28
Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada	\$177,970.20
University of British Columbia School of Public Policy and Global Affairs	\$49,756.00
Canadians for Affordable Energy	\$31,225.55
Kurdistan Regional Government	\$29,566.56

McLeod was one of three MPs to accept intra-Canada travel: Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Ont.) accepted a trip from Indigenous Sport and Wellness and Ontario to attend the Indigenous Games in Halifax in July; and NDP Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, Man.) travelled to Toronto and Vancouver with the sponsorship of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and Canadian Union of Public Employees, respectively.

Future of sponsored travel an open question

While MPs continue to be allowed to claim sponsored travel under code of conduct rules, some politicians have called for the exemption to be scrapped.

As previously reported in *The Hill Times*, the House Ethics Committee unanimously moved an NDP motion in January calling for the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons to explicitly ban sponsored travel to be replaced by two international trips per year to be paid from office budgets.

The committee has neither jurisdiction over the code, nor office budgets, so the motion referred the matter to the Board of Internal Economy, and the Procedure and House Affairs Committee.

To date, neither committee has publicly examined the issue. Government House Leader Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.) and NDP House Leader Peter Julian (New Westminster-Burnaby, B.C.) raised the matter during a Commons Board of Internal Economy meeting on Feb. 15, and asked when it would be considered. Commons

Clerk Eric Janse, then-deputy clerk, procedure for the House of Commons, replied that staff were working on a briefing note, but that they would "follow the direction of the committee in terms of where it should fit in the order of priorities."

The issue returned briefly to the House Ethics Committee on April 16, when Liberal MP Parm Bains (Steveston-Richmond East, B.C.) asked Ethics Commissioner Konrad von Finckenstein whether he thought "the apparently limitless value of gifts receivable during travel" was a problem.

The commissioner responded that "these are the rules that you yourselves [MPs] passed."

"I administer them, I live with them. Could they be improved? That's up to you to decide, and the general public," he said. "My job in this case is not to suggest you change your code, but you decide the code you want to live by, and I apply it."

The only international trips MPs can currently expense to their office budgets are to New York, N.Y., or Washington, D.C. MPs are permitted 64 "travel points" within Canada each year, which are primarily used for travel between Ottawa and their riding, within their constituency, or from the federal capital or riding to their provincial or territorial capital. Twenty-five of those points can be used for other travel within Canada.

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MPs who reported more than one sponsored travel in 2023

Liberal	
Chandra Arya	5
Judy Sgro	3
Valerie Bradford	2
Shaun Chen	2
Arielle Kayabaga	2
Conservative	
Garnett Genuis	4
Ziad Aboultaif	2
Scott Aitchison	2
Michael Cooper	2
Rosemarie Falk	2
Cheryl Gallant	2
Mike Lake	2
Bloc Québécois	
Stéphane Bergeron	3
NDP	
Leah Gazan	2
Heather McPherson	2
Lindsay Mathysen	2

News

Freeland's budget seen as last hope to turn Trudeau's electoral fortunes around, say politicos



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks to the Liberal party caucus in West Block on April 17, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

A key metric to gauge the budget's effectiveness will be whether it reverses Canadians' appetite for change in government, says David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data.

Continued from page 1

"They were active, they were making announcements every day, and it sounded like an election. So think of it this way: [Trudeau] had weeks to sell the budget. He pre-announced a number of things, then he announced his budget with his big spending. If all of those things don't move the number, the Liberals have to start scratching their heads and wonder what will it take to change the current trend line," said Nanos.

In the April 16 federal budget, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) announced \$53-billion in new spending over five years on housing and affordability, defence, Indigenous communities, community health and safety, immigration, disability benefits, and pharmacare.

Nanos and other pollsters interviewed for this article described last week's budget as the "election budget" in which the government tried to address issues like housing and other affordability issues.

Ahead of the budget, Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and his cabinet ministers travelled across the country to announce big-ticket items to address issues that are top of mind for Canadians. Almost all the big item initiatives announced in the budget were already made public during the prime minister's national tour in an attempt to get Canadians' attention.

It remains to be seen if this will help the Liberals move the needle and regain some of their lost political ground. Since last summer, the Conservatives under party leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) have been ahead of the Liberals by as much as 20 points according to some polls.

Nanos said that, according to his recent research, the top four issues for Canadians that would influence their vote are the cost of living, healthcare, climate change, and affordability. The initiatives announced last week align with what Canadians are worried about, but he said the real test is how Canadians will react. A key challenge for the Trudeau Liberals is that Canadians appear to be fatigued with the government after nine years.

"The Liberals have an election shopping list where they're checking things off to try to connect with as many voters as possible," said Nanos. "Just because they're spending more money, Canadians will take the new products, programs and support that are offered, but that doesn't mean that their votes will go along with it."

Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, agreed, adding that Canadians have tuned Trudeau

out. Once that happens, it's hard for a leader to recapture peoples' attention.

"When things get entrenched, they're very hard to move," said Bricker. "Once people have made up their minds, getting them to change their minds is much harder."

Even though the Liberals will table one more budget before the October 2025 election, Bricker described last week's budget as the "election budget," while the next one would likely reinforce the same initiatives. He said that the government wants to bring back disaffected Liberal voters who were with the party in 2015, but who have since moved to other parties.

Bricker said that the Liberals are trying to regain the support of Gen Z and millennials, the latter

of whom the Liberals courted in 2015 by using a middle-class message. Based on the polling trends of last few months, these people are more attracted to the Conservative Party than the Liberals.

Bricker said that it's too early to say whether the budget would make people change their minds, and things will become clearer in the next couple of weeks as Canadians digest the highlights of the document.

He said the signals to look for in the coming few weeks will be whether the government's approval ratings and the prime minister's personal numbers go up or down. Even if people don't start to move from the Conservative into the Liberal column, it remains to be seen whether they will start to move to the undecided category, which would give

Trudeau an opportunity for a conversation.

"What they're trying to do is to focus on getting back the support of younger Canadians, and people who feel that they've been left out of finding their way into the middle class as was suggested by the government [when they] first started their term when they were running [in 2015], which was for the middle class and for those who want to join it, but particularly the younger middle class," said Bricker.

David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data, said that a key metric to gauge the federal budget's effectiveness is whether it is successful in shifting Canadians' appetite for change. He's also watching how much of an effort the government puts in selling it to Canadians.

Second, Coletto described the budget as a reassurance to the Liberal caucus that the prime minister still has a lot of tools in his toolkit to turn things around. He said that in the next 10 days it will be clear what kind of effect the budget has had in terms of regaining public support.

"They are fundamentally up against a strong headwind," said Coletto. "That means even if they're out there, putting policies that Canadians like, the length of time it's going to take for people to feel the effect of these ideas and policies is the real challenge. And they're not going to be able to build a million-and-a-half homes in a few weeks or months, or even by the time we get to the next election. And that, I think, is ultimately how people are going to vote. How do they feel at that moment, as opposed to some plans that are going to take four or five years to implement?"

Frank Graves, president of Ekos Research, said that the Liberals should sell this budget by drawing a contrast between themselves and the Conservatives. They need to highlight what they stand for, and ask the Conservatives how would they address issues like housing and affordability, he said.

As a starting point, Graves said the Liberals should be able to bring back disaffected Canadians under 35 years old. He said that if the budget fails to stop the hemorrhaging of public support, he's not sure what else is left that the Liberals can do.

"Bluntly, the Liberals have a lot of problems, but nothing more daunting—which would frustrate any chances of being successful—than their abysmal performance with young voters. For a government that in 2015, came in [with slogans like] 'sunny ways', they did very well with a number of segments, but young voters were particularly important," said Graves.

"They'll be looking for some signals that they have stopped the bleeding and perhaps show some improvements with key groups notably under 35. If they don't see any of that in the next few weeks, then have an even bigger problem because I don't know what else [they can do] at that point."

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The April 16 federal budget is a reassurance to the national Liberal caucus that Justin Trudeau, pictured, has a lot of tools in his toolkit to turn things around, says David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Conservatives 'riding the stronger horse' in competing narratives about budget: pollster Lyle

The Liberals made it 'eminently clear' the change to capital gains tax 'is a fight that they want,' says former Liberal staffer Carlene Variyan. But so far the Tories have 'batted it down pretty well,' says former Conservative staffer Laura Kurkimaki.



Pollster Greg Lyle of Innovative Research said it's easier to frame a ballot question around a tax on 'average people' than a tax on 'rich people.'
Photograph courtesy of Greg Lyle

BY IAN CAMPBELL

Two narratives about the 2024 federal budget set out by the finance minister and opposition leader both reflect positions the "middle ground of Canada believes," but "the Tories are riding the stronger horse" when it comes to these messages, says pollster Greg Lyle.

On April 16, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) tabled her fourth budget in the House of Commons, which proposed \$52.9-billion in new spending. The budget keeps the deficit below \$40-billion in the coming fiscal year, as projected in last fall's fiscal update, but proposes to grow the deficit in later fiscal years. One key measure of the new budget is an increase to the tax inclusion rate for capital gains. The amount of capital gains earnings subject to income tax will rise from one-half to two-thirds for businesses. The same increase will apply for individuals on capital gains earned over \$250,000 in a single year.

After Freeland tabled the budget document, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) rose in the House to condemn the increase in spending. He called the Liberal plan a "wasteful inflationary budget," and said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) was like "a pyromaniac spraying gas on the inflationary fire that he lit ...

and that's why we need a carbon tax election to replace him."

Freeland replied that her government had "presented a clear choice" by telling Canadians that Liberals believe "we need the power of government to get things built for young Canadians." She said the government "presented a clear, fiscally responsible way to finance those essential investments: increasing the inclusion rate on capital gains." She called on Poilievre to state whether a Conservative government would keep that change to the tax code or roll it back.

In response, Poilievre did not take a position on reversing that change, though he has stated the Conservatives would not support the budget.

Lyle said that when faced with a choice between focusing on social needs or balancing budgets, the Canadian public "is generally in favour of spending on social needs." But, when voters are asked whether the deficit is a result of mismanagement by the government, or forces outside of its control, they are "inclined to say it's due to mismanagement."

"They both have arguments on their side," said Lyle.

"So then the question is: how do you resolve the conflict?" he said. "What's important in that

exchange [between Poilievre and Freeland] is the ballot question that they're each trying to focus on."

Lyle said that's where the Conservatives currently hold the upper hand, because it is easier to frame a ballot question around a tax on "average people" than it is on a tax on "rich people."

"What [Freeland] was talking about is trying to get the Tories to argue for or against raising the capital gains tax on rich people," said Lyle. "Poilievre is saying, 'Are you for or against a carbon tax on average people?' And when you think of that, it would seem like Poilievre is in a stronger position."

Lyle said it's easy for a Conservative candidate on a voters' doorstep to stay focused on the carbon tax because home heating bills are a tangible item to talk about.

"The flip side is a Liberal candidate going to the door and saying, 'Do you know that we raised the tax on rich people, and do you know that Poilievre doesn't want to raise that tax?'" said Lyle. "It's not as immediate."

'Eminently clear' that Liberals want fight on capital gains tax: Variyan

Several former political staffers interviewed by *The Hill Times* agreed on how the parties were trying to frame the budget, but had different views on which parties these issues would advantage.

Former Liberal staffer Carlene Variyan said the Liberals had made it "eminently clear" that talking about the increase to the capital gains tax inclusion "is a fight that they want."

On budget day, the Liberals communicated in a way "that left little doubt" that over the coming weeks and months they would focus on messaging about increasing taxes on the wealthiest 0.1 per cent, said Variyan, who is now a vice-president at Summa Strategies.

"Because they want the Conservatives to have to respond to that and to be pushed to answer the question of whether they'll support that measure, or whether they'll commit to reverse it if they were elected," she said.

Variyan said that question puts Poilievre in "a very difficult position."

"I have little doubt that this is a policy that personally irks the Conservative leader from his ideological point of view," she said. "But it's a very difficult policy to come out and tell Canadians that you're against ... especially when it represents government revenue that is ostensibly going to be used to pay for things that Canadians have been very clear that they want—more investment in housing supply, pharmacare, dental care, health care transfers to provinces."

She said it was "notable" that the Conservatives and their leader have not spoken about the capital gains issue since budget day.

Former Conservative staffer Laura Kurkimaki also viewed the changes to the capital gains tax as "clearly a political play to try to wedge the Conservatives," but said "so far, the Conservatives have batted it down pretty well."

Kurkimaki, who is now a principal at Earncliffe Strategy, said the Liberals will find it challenging to get Poilievre to engage with that issue on their terms.

Poilievre has maintained disciplined messaging on the carbon tax and affordability, she said.

"I think the problem that the Liberals have is [the Conservative] messaging is working," said Kurkimaki. "So why would the Conservatives pivot [to talk about capital gains] when what they're saying is resonating with Canadians and they're 20 points up in the polls?"

Even if the Liberals generate some attention on capital gains, she said it may not be the winning issue they hope.

"It's obvious that they think it is good for them," said Kurkimaki. But with business leaders and innovators like the CEO of Shopify "coming out and saying that this is going to completely stifle innovation here in Canada," that creates a problem for the government, she said.

"There has been widespread criticism from sectors that normally, I think, have been either neutral or friendly with the government," said Kurkimaki.

As for the Liberal "power-of-government" framing on spending, she said that message may not resonate.

"I don't know that regular Canadians across the country are going to somehow agree with [the government's] continued spending when inflation and the cost of living are still skyrocketing, and people can't pay their bills," she said.

Variyan said the capital-gains commentary from wealthy business owners is a welcome development, and "the Liberals' smile just got wider and wider" with those remarks. On the issue of spending, she said it comes down to what role Canadians see for government.

"I think that what they want is to really bring this debate, this choice, down to its simplest terms, which is: do you believe that government has a positive role to play in the lives of its citizens, or not?" she said.

Less about communications, more about delivery: Holmstrom

For NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.)—who has not yet stated if he will support the budget, despite being in a supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberals—the budget politics come down to an attempt at "keeping enough distance from this government," said former NDP staffer Cam Holmstrom.

"As this government gets more and more unpopular, it gets harder and harder to walk that line," said Holmstrom, who is the founder at Niipaawi Strategies.

He said for the government to get any sort of boost from the budget, it will matter less about their communications strategy, and more about delivering on their promises.

"This government's problem isn't rhetoric, isn't messaging, it's delivery," he said. "This government has zero problem telling us what they're going to do. The problem is actually doing it."

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On April 16, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland tabled her fourth budget, which proposed \$52.9-billion in new spending.
The Hill Times
photograph by Andrew Meade

News

Budget 2024 provides key themes for advocacy strategies in advance of anticipated election budget, says lobbyists

Stakeholders unfulfilled by this year's budget are 'never going to get a more receptive time with an opposition [party], especially a potential government in waiting, than right now,' says Cam Holmstrom of Niipaawi Strategies.



Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland tabled the federal budget on April 16 with housing affordability as one of the major pillars. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

A focus on housing affordability and supporting millennials and Gen-Z Canadians in last week's federal budget shows the priority areas around which to align advocacy strategies, according to lobbyists who argue that stakeholders should already be anticipating the next federal budget.

"I think it's less about the budget we just saw, and more about the budget that will be forthcoming in that it's an election budget," said Kate Harrison, vice-chair at Summa Strategies and a Conservative strategist. "Stakeholders should look at this and think about the key themes and demographics that the government is looking to target [and] looking to support."

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) tabled the budget on April 16 with housing affordability as one of the major pillars. Lead-



Kate Harrison, vice-chair at Summa Strategies, says stakeholders 'should be coming to the table with, ideally, polling data that demonstrates public support for your request.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

ing up to the budget release, the Liberal government announced measures intended to address housing, including \$6-billion to launch a Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund, \$15-billion to top-up the Apartment Construction Loan Program, \$1.5-billion towards a Canada Rental Protection Fund, and a new Canada Housing Plan. Budget 2024 also proposed \$5-million over three years towards an overhaul of the Canada Lands Company to build more homes on public lands, such as by cutting approval times in half and by enabling housing development on actively used federal properties.

The budget also targeted millennials—anyone born between 1981 and 1996—and Generation Z—anyone born from 1997 to 2012—promising "to help restore generational fairness."

To support Canadians in these demographics, the budget announced an intention to extend, for an additional year, the increase in full-time Canada Student Grants from \$3,000 to \$4,200 per year, and interest-free Canada Student Loans from \$210 to \$300 per week. Other measures included a promised \$207.6-million to Employment and Social Development Canada for the Student Work Placement Program, and a pledge to create 90,000 youth job placements and employment support opportunities by providing \$351.2-million for the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy.

Harrison told *The Hill Times* that the themes of the 2024 budget should be used by stakeholders to figure out how to navigate a future budget. Another Liberal budget is possible before the next federal election, which will take place on Oct. 20, 2025 at the latest.

Advocacy groups seeking government action should "get very granular" in terms of recommendations, and focus on local politics, according to Harrison.

"You should be coming to the table with, ideally, polling data that demonstrates public support for your request, and even better if you have it specifically for certain regions of the country," she said. "What do voters for the Liberals or the Conservatives have to say about your policies in that part of the province? That will be what triggers MPs on both sides of the aisle."

Another important theme of the 2024 budget was artificial intelligence, according to Harrison. The budget promised \$2.4-billion towards AI development, as well as \$50-million over five years to create an AI Safety Institute of Canada to ensure the safe development and deployment of AI. The budget also proposed \$5.1-million to equip an AI and Data Commissioner Office with necessary resources to enforce the proposed Artificial Intelligence and Data Act.

Cam Holmstrom, founder of Niipaawi Strategies and a former NDP staffer, told *The Hill Times* that if there is a budget before the next election, it likely won't reflect big spending.

"If your issue is around a taxation issue, no government's going to try to push a tax increase right before an election," said Holmstrom. "You can be a bit more aggressive on certain things, but also, the opposition parties are much more willing to engage with you because they're all looking at an election coming up, too."

Holmstrom said that any advocacy groups who were left feeling unfulfilled by this year's budget

may find traction in reaching out to opposition parties who might be willing to do what the Liberals haven't.

"You're going to have parties like the NDP, and the Bloc [Québécois] who will be far more amenable to looking at that [issue] and saying, 'Okay, let's do it. Let's do more.' That's natural," he said. "But also, if you're the Conservatives, you can really wreak havoc if you came in and said, 'look, you guys said you're going to do 10 per cent, [so] I'm going to do 30 per cent.'"

Holmstrom said that advocacy groups are "never going to get a more receptive time with an opposition [party], especially a potential government in waiting, than you are right now."

"If you are trying to get your position across to someone, or you're trying to communicate, this is a great opportunity for that kind of leverage," he said.



Congress of Aboriginal Peoples National Chief Elmer St. Pierre says, 'the government seems to think, with the housing budget they put out, that [First Nations people] live on the reserves or you're in the northern remote areas, and that's far from being true.' *Photograph courtesy of Elmer St. Pierre*

Among the organizations disappointed in the 2024 budget was the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), which represents the interests of Métis, status and non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit Indigenous People living off-reserve in Canada. CAP argued the Liberal spending priorities showed "a total disregard of urban Indigenous issues," in an April 16 press release.

National Chief Elmer St. Pierre told *The Hill Times* that the spending priorities related to First Nations people in the budget tended to focus on reserves or isolated northern communities, with less focus on First Nations people in urban areas. Currently, more than 80 per cent of Indigenous people live off-reserve, according to CAP.

"A lot of our First Nation people and northern people, they have to come to the urban areas either for education, or jobs, or services because they don't have everything on the reserve or up in the northern areas," said St. Pierre. "The government seems to think, with the housing budget they put out, that they live on the reserves or you're in the northern remote areas, and that's far from being true."

To address housing issues, the budget proposed investments of \$918-million over five years to Indigenous Services Canada, and to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to accelerate work in narrowing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis housing and infrastructure gaps.

St. Pierre called the budget "a failure," arguing that greater investment to support First Nations people was needed.

"I think there should have been more money—a lot—into the housing, and not based over several years," he said. "They've got to look at what is needed right away, not over the next seven years. We need something today."

St. Pierre said that, in response to the budget, CAP's support for the Liberal government is "iffy," and will be discussed at a future board meeting.

In terms of advocacy, St. Pierre said CAP will be trying harder to push its advocacy priorities.

"We will look at everything. We'll look at everything that we submitted and what we talked about, and next time around, when we move forward, we will be changing things around, and we'll be pushing harder," he said.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak said the 2024 budget "falls short of addressing the urgent and long-term needs identified by First Nations," in an AFN press release on April 17.

Newfoundland and Labrador Regional Chief Brendan Mitchell argued that the budget allocations in Indigenous housing and infrastructure "are critically less" than the approximately \$350-billion required to close the housing and infrastructure gap among First Nations, according to an AFN report in infrastructure and housing released on April 9, 2024.

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News

There's 'no Plexiglass between our borders' protecting Canada from global authoritarian sentiment, ex-judge warns

Former Supreme Court justice Rosalie Silberman Abella told a McGill panel the global community had demonstrated few consequences for countries that departed from the principles of democracy established after the Second World War.

Continued from page 1

discussed “the threat to civility, the erosion of institutional trust, the rise of authoritarianism, and how Canada and other countries can promote respect and protect liberal democracy.” The inaugural event in the series “Conversations: sponsored by Charles Bronfman”, attracted more than 600 people, and was moderated by Nahlah Ayed, host of CBC Radio’s *Ideas*.

While the discussion focused on threats to democratic institutions across the world, the situation in the United States was frequently raised. Presumptive Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has repeatedly denied that he lost the 2020 election, and is facing four federal charges over what prosecutors allege were attempts to overturn that result.

Ahead of the apparent rematch of the 2020 election on Nov. 5 with incumbent U.S. President Joe Biden, Trump has promised to use the Department of Justice to attack his critics, send federal law enforcement into cities, and allow Russia to do “whatever the hell they want” to NATO allies if member states do not meet spending guidelines.

As of April 17, *The Hill’s* polling aggregate found both Trump and Biden at 45.1 per cent support. During the McGill event, Swarup said the United States is facing extreme political polarization in which the opposing sides cannot agree on basic facts, one side refusing to concede elections, and efforts are underway to restrict voting access in some jurisdictions. That problem could



Former U.S. president Donald Trump’s refusal to concede the 2020 election is an example of the ideological division and political dysfunction in the country ‘rightly regarded as the motherlode of democracy,’ said former Indian high commissioner to Canada Vikas Swarup. *Wikimedia Commons photograph*

extend beyond the country’s borders, he said.

“Because America is the most influential country in the world—it is not only the world’s largest economy and most powerful military, but it also sets the cultural benchmarks in technology and culture—if America succumbs to the erosion of its democratic values and norms, then I think that will have a very, very deleterious impact on liberal democracy,” he said.

Abella said Canada did not have “Plexiglass between our borders” that insulated the country from growing authoritarianism globally. She said the international community has failed to enforce the principles for democracy, civil, and political rights established after Second World War.

“One of the rhetorical tools that have been used by people in the United States and elsewhere ... is the perversion of the word ‘democracy’ from what we had originally understood it to be ... as a series of checks and balances,” she said. “That includes an independent judiciary, a strong and independent press, protection for minorities, religious rights, freedom of assembly and association. It’s a collection of those rights, with a legislature that’s responsible to the majority.”

When that breaks down, Abella said, it can lead to an erosion of confidence. “If we accede to those who want to say democracy

means majorities and elections, the way [former Brazilian president Jair] Bolsonaro did, the way [Turkish president Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan did, the way [Hungarian prime minister Viktor] Orbán does, then you are ignoring the fact that that has never been what liberal democracy is.”

“We have to take back the conversation from those who will not acknowledge the importance of those separate functions and rights because at the moment I think the public is confused; they also think democracy means votes,” she said. “Votes are the beginning of the democratic conversation. You’re putting in one of the players, but it’s really crucial to have those other protections through the media and the courts.”

A Pew Research Centre survey published in February 2024—but conducted in spring 2023—found that the number of Canadians satisfied with the way the country’s democracy worked had slid by 19 points in six years. While 70 per cent of those surveyed in 2017 were satisfied, that number dropped to just 51 per cent in 2023.

The survey was conducted in English and French with 1,007 adults between Feb. 21, 2023, and April 15, 2023. The margin of error was plus or minus 3.6 per cent.

Other G7 countries reported a similar slide during the same period: 57 per cent of Germans

were satisfied with their democracy (down from 73 in 2017); 40 per cent of Britons (down from 52 per cent); 35 per cent in Japan (down from 50 per cent); and just 27 per cent in France (down from 34 per cent). The United States, which has only been surveyed annually since 2021, dropped from 41 per cent to 33 per cent satisfaction in that period. Italy was the only country in the G7 to report an increase in satisfaction, from 31 per cent in 2017 to 36 per cent in 2023.

Despite the drop, representative democracy remained the most popular method of governance among those surveyed, with 83 per cent perceiving it as a “somewhat good” or “very good” idea. A majority—70 per cent—also saw direct democracy as a good way of governing, in which citizens vote directly on major national issues.

That was in contrast with only 14 per cent of Canadians backing military rule, though 49 per cent thought that technocracy—in which experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country—was a good idea. The latter figure increased from 41 per cent in 2017.

Barroso said that authoritarian populists in the 21st century tended to establish a direct line with their supporters, bypassing intermediaries, and “need an enemy.” In most countries—with the United States being a rare excep-

tion—that “enemy” is the country’s highest court due to its ability to curb the power of the majority.

Barroso did not blame polarization for that shift, but noted that the digital revolution made changes to the way we communicate, both positive and negative.

Barroso said while it democratized public access to information, it also “allowed for the unfiltered access to the public space, with misinformation, lies, slanders. It created tribes that only talked to themselves, and it brought a crisis to the business model of the traditional press, which was responsible for emphasizing a base of common facts, after which we could disagree, but we would agree on the facts.”

In the case of the far-right, Barroso said it allowed for character assassination of opponents, conspiracy theories, and hate speech. “They have the feeling that everything’s taken [from them], that the communists took over, the progressives took over, so anything I do is legitimate,” he said. “They feel that they could not win the game in a really decent way.”

As *The Hill Times* reported earlier this year, the number of threats and death threats against ministers had increased between 2020 and 2022.

The pressure has also extended to the municipal level. Gatineau, Que., mayor France Bélisle resigned on Feb. 22, with CBC News reporting it was due to a hostile political climate. Pierre Leroux, mayor of the Ontario township of Russell, east of Ottawa, resigned for similar reasons earlier this month. He told CBC News that “it just seems like civility has gone out the window,” and that he’d faced harassment and comments wishing for his death since the pandemic.

Swarup said the authoritarian populist model relied on grievance politics, but also on hope, using Trump’s “Make America Great Again” slogan as an example. That could be fuelled by a feeling that they were not being represented or cared about by elected officials.

A majority of Canadians surveyed in the Pew survey—64 per cent—did not think that elected officials cared what “people like them” thought. At the same time, 62 per cent believed at least one party represented their views well. That included 70 per cent of respondents on the political right, 66 per cent on the left, and 55 per cent in the centre.

At the same time, the world has been going through what Swarup described as “geopolitics on steroids” over the past decade, with factors such as the refugee crisis in Europe, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and global inflation.

“If an authoritarian leader comes in and he says, ‘I’m going to restore things as they were before, I’m going to bring order, I’m going to end this chaos,’ then, obviously, there’s a certain resonance with the kind of things they’re saying,” he said.

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Liberal MP Hepfner may have to duke it out with NDP MPP Monique Taylor in 'progressive bellwether' riding of Hamilton Mountain in 2025, say Liberal and NDP insiders

The southern Ontario riding could show whether the left-of-centre vote is coalescing behind the Liberals to stop the Conservatives, or is splitting, says Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs.

BY ABBAS RANA

Rookie Liberal MP Lisa Hepfner, who won her riding by one of the closest margins in the country in 2021, could face off against incumbent Ontario NDP MPP Monique Taylor in the next election.

For months, Hamilton, Ont.,-area politicians have been speculating about the four-term NDP MPP's potential federal run next time around. When reached for confirmation, in a brief telephone interview Taylor said: "I really haven't made any decision at this point," she told *The Hill Times*. Asked again, in a later follow-up, if it would be accurate to say that running federally in Hamilton Mountain is one of the options she is looking at, Taylor said: "That's not what I said. I said I haven't made any decisions."

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Hepfner said that she has also heard about Taylor's potential candidacy, but has not had any conversation with the MPP on the subject during the numerous interactions the two politicians have had in the riding.

"I've been hearing for a long time, too, but it's not something that we discuss when we're out at events," said Hepfner.

"I applaud any person who wants to run federally, I mean, it's absolutely her right. And particularly women. We need women in politics. So there's got to be someone who runs, or someone's going to run for the NDP. So I would just say that it's her rights, and I think everyone has the right to run, and I support particularly women who put their name forward to serve."

Hepfner said no matter who she's running against, her re-election



Lisa Hepfner, second from left, pictured with Conservative MP Glen Motz, Rural Economic Development Minister Gudie Hutchings, and NDP MP Alastair MacGregor. Hepfner could face off against four-term Ontario NDP MPP Monique Taylor in the next federal election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

strategy will not change. A former TV reporter in Hamilton for about two decades before she ran as a Liberal candidate in the last election, Hepfner said she knows the community well, and is optimistic that her constituents will elect her again. She said she's not worried about her party's tanking public support in the polls as the next election is about 18 months away, and things can change quickly in politics.

"When I talk to people in the riding, it feels like I have lots of support," she said. "I feel the same way as I did last time. It's such an honour to serve, and I'm just here to do my best and try my best. And if the people of Hamilton Mountain feel the same, then they'll put me back in the job."

Meanwhile, Ottawa Centre NDP MPP Joel Harden has also announced that he submitted the paper work with the federal NDP to run in the 2025 election. The two-term Ontario MPP has been representing the riding at Queen's Park since 2018. In both 2018 and 2022 elections, he won the provincial seat handily by double-digit margins. He won the seat in 2018 besting then-Ontario Liberal cabinet minister Yasir Naqvi who now is a federal MP from the same riding. They will likely be running against each other in the next election. The 2018 provincial election was the worst for Kathleen Wynne's Liberals where they failed to win

even the official party status. They ended up with only seven seats while the threshold for the official party status was eight at the time (it has since been boosted to 10). In 2022, under Steven Del Duca, the Ontario Liberals failed to make any gains and won the same number of seats they did in 2018. Even Del Duca failed to win his own seat.

In Ontario, the federal and provincial riding boundaries are identical. According to the Canada Election Act, if any member of a provincial legislature wants to run federally, they have to step down from their seat. This is a big risk for any MPP to consider running federally because there's no guarantee that they will win. At the same time, the reward is that if they do win, they would get an annual salary bump of \$86,600 compared to their Queen's Park paycheque. Also, after six years of parliamentary service, federal MPs become eligible for a pension. Ontario MPPs do not get any pension.

The annual salary of an Ontario MPP is \$116,500, while a federal backbencher earns \$203,100. In addition to their salary, MPs receive compensation for boarding and lodging when they're in Ottawa. The premier of Ontario makes \$208,974, \$5,874 more than the base salary of a federal MP.

Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, described the Hamilton Mountain, Ont., riding

as a bellwether one for progressive voters, and it could determine whether these voters will coalesce behind the Liberals to prevent a Conservative government led by Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.), or will split the vote of centre parties. Also, at the same time, this is a critical dynamic for the Conservatives as a fracture in the progressive vote could help them win a majority government for Poilievre.

"The one bad outcome of the current political situation for the federal Conservatives is if it becomes clear that NDP voters are motivated to keep together with the Liberals in order to stop the Conservatives," said Bricker. "That would be the interesting thing I'd be looking at [whether] the Liberals and NDP continue to split, or did they get behind one of the parties? Who's got the momentum? I would call it a progressive bellwether [riding]."

Sheila Copps, a former deputy prime minister in the Jean Chrétien government who represented Hamilton Centre provincially and later Hamilton East federally from 1984-2004, said it's too early to predict what will happen in 2025. But she said if the Conservatives have a similar level of support that they have right now in the next election, the progressive voters will likely vote for the Liberals.

"The challenge that they're going to have in the next election

is that depending upon what happens with the Tories, if the Tories are strong, it's going to be very difficult for the NDP because people are going to want to support the Liberals to stop the Tories," said Copps.

In the 2021 federal election, the Liberals picked up Hamilton Mountain by a razor-thin margin of 1.7 percentage points, or 835 votes. Before that, the NDP carried the riding between 2006 and 2021 with NDP MPs Chris Charlton and Scott Duvall, respectively. In the last election, Duvall did not re-offer. In his place, former Welland NDP MP Malcolm Allen ran unsuccessfully, and lost to Hepfner.

Between 1988 and 2006, Liberal MP Beth Phinney represented the riding.

The riding has been represented in the House since the 1968 federal election, and in its 56-year electoral history, the Liberals have won it for 30 years, the NDP 23 years, and the now defunct federal Progressive Conservatives for three years.

Taylor has been representing the riding provincially since 2011, and has won all four elections with comfortable double-digit margins ranging between 13 and 30 per cent.

The NDP is not the only party whose MPPs have expressed interest in running federally next time around.

On the Conservative side, Parm Gill, a former cabinet minister in the Doug Ford cabinet, stepped down in January to run federally in Milton, Ont. Last week, British Columbia MLA Mike De Jong announced his intention to seek the federal Conservative nomination in the riding of Abbotsford-South Langley, B.C. De Jong, a former provincial cabinet minister, has been a member of the legislature in Victoria, B.C., for about 30 years.

"I am joining Pierre Poilievre's common-sense movement, in support of the only leader who has the courage to discuss Canada's need for fiscal responsibility, I want to represent the people of Abbotsford-South Langley and bring responsible leadership to Ottawa," said de Jong, in a press release.

"In times of both challenge and prosperity, I have remained unwavering in my dedication to fiscal responsibility, ensuring that we live within our means while investing in the priorities that matter most to our community. My vision for Abbotsford-South Langley is one where economic strength and social well-being go hand in hand, guided by conservative principles that foster opportunity, security, and prosperity for all," stated de Jong.

So far, five NDP MPs have announced that they won't seek re-election. They include: Charlie Angus (Timmins-James Bay, Ont.), Carol Hughes (Algoa-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing, Ont.), Rachel Blaney (North Island-Powell River, B.C.), Randall Garrison (Esquimalt-Saanich-Sooke, B.C.) and Richard Cannings (South Okanagan-West Kootenay, B.C.).

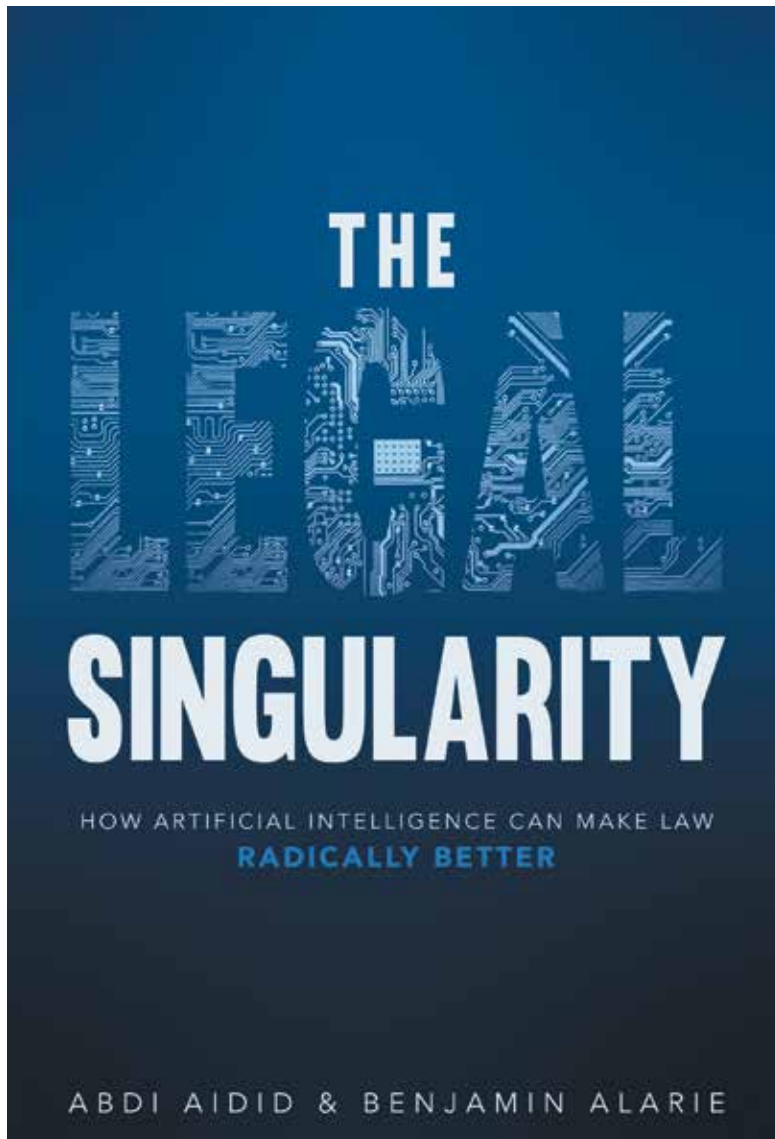
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Books & Big Ideas

We are on the path to legal singularity

The following is an excerpt from *The Legal Singularity: How Artificial Intelligence Can Make Law Radically Better*, one of the five books shortlisted for this year's \$60,000 Donner Prize.

BY ABDI AIDID & BENJAMIN ALARIE



The Legal Singularity is 'an important and timely book that will generate a meaningful conversation about AI and its role in the pursuit of justice,' writes the Donner Prize Foundation. *University of Toronto Press*

We are on the path to the legal singularity. Advances in technology, especially the improvement and widespread proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI), are driving us relentlessly down this path. By legal singularity, we mean a stable and complete legal order, capable of addressing and resolving practically all types of legal uncertainty in real time and on demand. Over the coming decades, the emergence of this legal singularity will fundamentally transform our existing legal systems and, with them, our societies.

The stakes are high. Navigating the path to the legal singularity safely is necessary for humanity to flourish during the rest of the 21st century and beyond. For society to evolve and leverage these new technologies effectively, we will need to develop an ever deeper and more responsive legal infrastructure.

Today's tools—our institutions and legal processes—are not up to the task. Courts are inaccessible. Laws are complicated. Legal procedures are baffling to the uninitiated. Lawyers are expensive. Incentives are misaligned. Legal doctrine can be outdated and outmoded. Most importantly, legal outcomes are too frequently unfair and unjust.

The good news is that the very technologies that are upending our existing practices will also enable us to construct the deeper and more responsive legal infrastructure that is sorely needed. The stability and resilience of the legal singularity will require more adaptability in our legal systems than they exhibit today. Fortunately, if we can get things right, the technology for a profoundly beneficial legal singularity will be in place just as we need it most.

This book is the first step towards articulating a vision of a legal singularity and motivating a discussion about its pathways and consequences. The legal singularity is the idea that law will reach functional completeness, in the sense that practically any legal

question will have an instantaneous and just resolution. In the legal singularity, the law will be knowable with a high degree of certainty—perhaps not perfect certainty, but practical certainty—for much of human activity.

The first serious step towards this technologized future is the widespread availability of legal prediction. Currently, many legal questions are not answerable with anything approaching certainty. Short of going to court and getting a definitive ruling from a judge, legal questions are answered through laborious research and learned intermediaries performing analysis that is, among other things, expensive. Today, new tools are emerging that allow much of this work to be computed. The legal material that lawyers and judges work with can be treated as training data for prediction algorithms. These prediction algorithms can effectively synthesize this information to produce accurate predictions of how the law would apply to a novel set of circumstances. In the hands of lawyers, this means the ability to

provide legal advice instantaneously at low cost with high accuracy. For judges, this means an improved ability to render decisions consistent with the law. For everyone else, this means the chance to have a real-time sense of one's legal rights and obligations.

The legal singularity will evolve and be able to absorb and accommodate changes to our social, economic, and technological contexts. If it is successful, it will not be dogmatic. Indeed, the nature of the legal singularity will be to provide quiet confidence that justice will prevail. Disputes will be resolved justly and in the best interests of society. Powerful actors will be held accountable to a greater extent than they are even in today's most advanced legal systems. Weaker parties will have their positions bolstered.

We contend that for the beneficial promise of the legal singularity to be realized, we will have to overcome foreseeable dangers. Some of these foreseeable dangers have already been well-identified. Scholars have explained that uncrit-

ical development and adoption of algorithmic technologies can reproduce—and indeed deepen—racial inequities. Our optimism about AI is not one that ignores these challenges. In fact, we are optimistic about AI precisely because we believe it makes us more capable of addressing these very issues than our current methods allow. Of course, there will also be dangers and hazards that—because of the limitations of our perspective—we cannot foresee. While we have striven to approach our task with humility and have done our level best to exercise our imaginations, we must necessarily leave the identification of the remaining dangers to others.

The legal singularity may strike many people as science fiction; it may be too "out there" for today's judges and lawyers who witness firsthand the messiness of the real world in their day-to-day interactions. Perhaps many judges and lawyers will dismiss the legal singularity as ivory tower dreaming. But, just like any long-term movement for greater social justice and improvement in the human condition, the understanding that the legal system and legal institutions are capable of significant improvement using new technologies and new institutional arrangements will become easier as improvements take hold and exhibit increasing positive momentum. Nothing motivates like a bold and difficult objective that appears to be just barely within reach. Even the articulated conviction that significant movement on the path towards legal singularity is happening is likely to be motivating for many.

The legal singularity will require deliberation, experimentation, wisdom, knowledge, and the cumulative efforts of governments, academia, and industry over the coming years. There will be problems. There will be dead ends. There will be experimentation, failures, and more experimentation. Ultimately, there will be significant progress. The good news is that many efforts are being undertaken even as we write. With this book, we aspire to echo and amplify those who seek to leverage technology as a means of improving law. To this, we add our own vision of how technology, ambitious problem-solving, and responsible stewardship will guide law towards the legal singularity.

Our goals with this book are threefold. The first is to firmly root the legal singularity in the popular imagination as an idea that we collectively must address to ensure that the world's legal systems undergo changes that are in alignment with humanity's interests as artificial intelligence and machine learning continue to improve. If managed deftly, these technological developments in artificial intelligence and machine learning can and will lead to astounding improvements in social justice and distributive justice, and will contribute to widespread human flourishing. This is, of course, an optimistic and ambitious vision. Others have pointed out less rosy possible scenarios; our view is that those scenarios are avoidable if efforts are undertaken now to help to navigate towards positive outcomes.

Our second aim is to press the point that technology-based changes to our legal systems are not simply a possibility to be discussed on a

theoretical level by the intellectually curious. It is tempting for many in the legal profession to want to assume that we could simply press "pause" on technological progress and the concomitant evolution of our legal systems until a sufficiently widespread level of practical confidence and psychological comfort is reached. Many would prefer to defer serious consideration of the uncomfortable topics that are explored in this book until they are first convinced that 1) the status quo is unsustainable; 2) the kinds of changes that are being driven by technological advances have been thoroughly tested and designed with normative and conceptual coherence; and 3) an implementation plan has been devised to accommodate these changes in a manner that will be minimally disruptive to the existing legal order. These instincts are understandable. Unfortunately, the context in which law functions and operates is changing too quickly. While we will not address in any depth the domain-specific technological changes that are transforming various industries, to ignore them when considering the future of law would be blinkered. Law does not exist in a vacuum.

Our third and final aim with this book is to join the emerging international movement in academia, government, the judiciary, and civil society, and among actors in the legal system more generally, to secure the safest, wisest, and most effective path to the legal singularity. The forces driving us towards legal singularity are persistent and powerful: there is no "off" switch to the internet; computing power looks to continue its exponential growth. We aim to help ameliorate two categories of risks. The most obvious are the risks associated with unforeseen consequences of the direct uses of the underlying technologies themselves. We contend that as technology continues to progress, the law must also increase in its sophistication to effectively meet this first category of potentially existential risk—the alignment or control problem associated with AI, as popularized by [American researcher] Brian Christian and [Swedish philosopher] Nick Bostrom. This first consideration gives rise to a second, less obvious, category of dangers: the potential risks associated with using new technologies within the legal system itself on the path to the legal singularity. The shape of an eventual legal singularity can undoubtedly be influenced for the better by careful monitoring, concerted action, and thoughtfulness (or, for the worse, by the abuse of technology to oppress or suppress populations). It is in our collective interest to work to forge and secure the best-possible path to legal singularity.

The Legal Singularity: How Artificial Intelligence Can Make Law Radically Better, by Abdi Aidid and Benjamin Alarie, *University of Toronto Press*, 226 pp., \$44.95. *The Legal Singularity is one of the five books nominated for this year's \$60,000 Donner Prize for the best book of public policy written by a Canadian. The prize will be awarded in Toronto on May 8.*

The Hill Times



Stuart Benson

Party Central

Politicians, press, and politicos pack The Mét for post-budget pints



City News' Cormac MacSweeney, left, and Glen McGregor; freelance reporter Teresa Wright; and Marco Vigliotti, editor-in-chief of *iPolitics*. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

iPolitics and Earncliffe hosted their annual post-budget day bash at the Métropolitain Brasserie on April 16.

Lobbyists, reporters, politicians, their staffers, and nearly every other denizen of the Ottawa Bubble who could squeeze into the Métropolitain Brasserie was at the after-budget reception on April 16 hosted by *iPolitics* and Earncliffe Strategies.

Arriving just before 6 p.m., having needed some time to do a sporadic “ctrl+f” search of the 2024 budget like everyone else who was spared the imprisonment of the pre-budget lock-up, the drinks were already flowing at the Mét. Nearly every booth, table, and inch of floor space was already crowded with attendees looking to celebrate the federal budget, as well as those seeking a stiff drink in response.

As a programming note, and with the seemingly indefatigable Mét staff in mind, **Party Central** needs to put something in print right at the top for all first-time and future attendees. There is a large dining room in the back of the bar with more booths; you don't all have to hang out within 20 feet of the front doors or stand in a circle between the bar and the bathrooms.

After navigating through the crowd to the rear cloakroom to squirrel away the work laptop and camera bag, **Party Central** touched base with one of the evening's hosts, **Marco Vigliotti**, *iPolitics Canada's* editor-in-chief, who confirmed that, with the exception of Immigration Minister **Marc Miller** and a few of his staffers, most of the current attendees were first-time attendees.

However, as the night went on and **Party Central** got some laps in swimming up and down the sea of people—which at some point spilled onto the outdoor patio, providing a little more room to breathe inside—there were more and more familiar faces.

Party Central spotted a large contingent from the Liberal caucus, clearly in a more

celebratory mood, including Justice Minister **Arif Virani**, Industry Minister **François-Philippe Champagne**, Housing Minister **Sean Fraser**, Treasury Board President **Anita Anand**, International Development Minister **Ahmed Hussen**, Environment Minister **Steven Guilbeault**, International Trade Minister **Mary Ng**; MPs **George Chal**, **Marco Mendicino**, **Francis Drouin**, and **Jaime Battiste**; as well as too many Liberal staffers to count.

Much of the chatter from the staffers revolved around excitedly surveying the various stakeholders, lobbyists, and journalists who were also in attendance to get their reaction to the newly released budget. **Party Central** has never seen such big smiles look so darn anxious.

Fielding those questions, **Party Central** spotted representatives from RBC, the Grain Growers Canada, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the David Suzuki Foundation, Nature United, the Forest Products Association of Canada; reporters from Global News, CTV News, *The Toronto Star*, CBC News, and City News; as well as crews from Earncliffe Strategies (of course), Summa Strategies, KAN Strategies, Maple Leaf Strategies, Crestview Strategy, Sussex Strategy, Vanguard Strategy, Bluesky Strategy Group, Pendulum Group, and Impact Public Affairs.

As another note to the latter group, have you all ever considered getting together and deciding on either “strategy” or “strategies”? Why do some of you have many strategies while others have only one?

The festivities continued well into the night, and the bar only began to clear out well after 11 p.m., but **Party Central** was able to find an open booth for a well-earned rum and coke, having survived #CSFN2024, the press gallery dinner, and budget day all in less than a week. Special shout out to **Katie Telford**, Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau's** chief of staff, for helping squash the rumours that swept through the bar at around 10 p.m. that her boss was en route so that **Party Central** could keep the camera holstered and actually enjoy that drink.

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Pendulum Group's Heather Bakken, left, Housing Minister Sean Fraser, and Earncliffe Strategies' Mary Anne Carter.



CPAC's Emily Haws, left, and CBC's Raffy Boudjikian



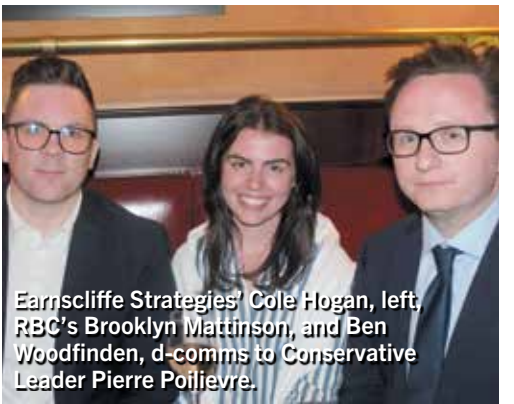
Youmy Han, left, deputy chief of staff to Immigration Minister Marc Miller; Matt Poirier, Retail Council of Canada; and Bahoz Dara Aziz, Miller's press sec.



CBC News' Benjamin Lopez Steven, left; Hartley Whitten, press sec to Labour Minister Seamus O'Regan; and Daniel Minden, d-comms to Defence Minister Bill Blair.



Chelios Vuong, left, policy adviser to Trade Minister Mary Ng; Charlie Skipworth, senior adviser to Justice Minister Arif Virani, pictured at right.



Earncliffe Strategies' Cole Hogan, left; RBC's Brooklyn Mattinson, and Ben Woodfinden, d-comms to Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre.



The David Suzuki Foundation's Lisa Gue, left; Nature United's Shaughn McArthur; Joanna Dafoe, deputy chief of staff; and Caroline Lee, senior policy adviser to Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault, right.



David Cochrane, left, host of CBC's Power & Politics; Earncliffe Strategies' Laura Kurkimaki; KAN Strategies' Greg MacEachern; and Jim Patrick, Montcalm Management Group.

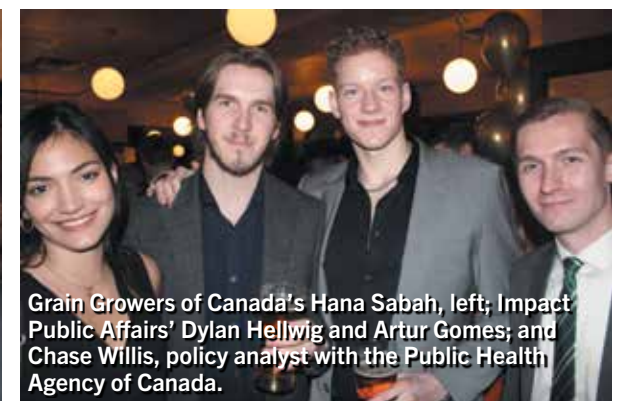


The Toronto Star's Mark Ramzy, left; Ronny Al-Nosir, press sec to Treasury Board President Anita Anand; and Annie Cullinan, d-comms to Agriculture Minister Lawrence MacAulay.

The Hill Times photographs by Stuart Benson



Global News' David Baxter, left, and Liberal MP Marco Mendicino.



Grain Growers of Canada's Hana Sabah, left; Impact Public Affairs' Dylan Hellwig and Artur Gomes; and Chase Willis, policy analyst with the Public Health Agency of Canada.



Laura Ryckewaert
Hill Climbers

Fresh hires in offices of PM Trudeau and ministers Wilkinson, Valdez



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson, and Small Business Minister Rechie Valdez have fresh faces in their respective offices. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

For her part, Small Business Minister Rechie Valdez has added a new Quebec regional affairs adviser to her team, Camille Leblanc.

Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** recently boosted his tour planning team by one. **Robert Heckbert** was hired as a new special assistant for tour in March.

Heckbert marked his first day in the Prime Minister's Office on March 11, and is a recently former infantry officer reservist with the Canadian Armed Forces.

Now in the PMO, he's working under director of tour and international visits **Kate VanGerven**, who also oversees a team of tour advances: **Emily Grant**, **Philip Kuligowski Chan**, **Marie-Pascale Des Rosier**, **Helena Kojo**, and **Victor Esposito**. There's also lead media advance **Terry Guillon**, senior media advance **Annabelle Archambault**, and media advance **Alexander Fernandes**.

Katie Telford is chief of staff to Trudeau. Energy and Natural Resources Minister **Jonathan Wilkinson** welcomed a new staffer of his own at the beginning of April, having recently hired **Madeleine Gomery** as a senior communications manager for this office.

Gomery previously worked on the Hill between April 2018 and September 2021, but since then has been busy as a public affairs adviser with the National Capital Commission—a role from which she's taken a leave of absence in order to work for Wilkinson.

Gomery—who is the granddaughter of the late Quebec justice **John Gomery**—spent her first almost two years on the Hill working as a legislative assistant and operations co-ordinator in then-Liberal MP



Madeleine Gomery has joined Minister Wilkinson's office. *Photograph courtesy of Minister Wilkinson's office*

Catherine McKenna's Ottawa Centre, Ont., constituency office.

At the start of 2020, she landed a job as an assistant for parliamentary relations and operations in McKenna's office as then-infrastructure minister, ultimately working in that role for about a year and a half before being hired as press secretary to then-public safety and emergency preparedness minister **Bill Blair** in June 2021—the same month McKenna announced she would not be running for re-election in that year's upcoming federal race.

Gomery holds a bachelor's degree in history from McGill University, and prior to working in federal politics, her past jobs include time spent as a project assistant at Reford Gardens (or Jardins de Métis), where she'd earlier worked as a guide and development assistant; as a guide at the Juno Beach Centre in Normandy, France, and at the Diefenbunker museum in Ottawa; and as a visitor services officer with the Bytown Museum, also in Ottawa, among other things.

In other office news, Atlantic regional affairs and communications adviser **Irawati Khedkar** left Wilkinson's office during

the latter half of March after almost a year on the job. A former 2022 summer intern in Trudeau's PMO, Khedkar has most recently been a server at The Keg prior to joining the minister's team in May 2023. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in public affairs and policy management, and security and intelligence policy last year.



Irawati Khedkar is no longer working for Minister Wilkinson. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Sabrina Kim remains director of communications to Wilkinson, working closely with press secretary **Carolyn Svonkin**, senior operations and communications adviser **Kieran Steede**, strategic communications and parliamentary affairs adviser **Maheep Sandhu**, and Ontario regional affairs and communications adviser **Shahenda Elwerdany**.

Kyle Harrietha is chief of staff to the energy and natural resources minister.

While Wilkinson is down a regional adviser, Small Business Minister **Rechie Valdez** recently added one to her team, hiring **Camille Leblanc** as a Quebec regional affairs adviser in early March.

Leblanc spent the last roughly four years working for the Regroupement des jeunes chambres de commerce du Québec, a non-profit that brings 42 young chambers of commerce and youth wings across

Quebec, starting as a project manager at the end of 2019, and ending as deputy director of operations and head of member services. She's also a former language services project co-ordinator with Deloitte Canada in Montreal, and a former linguistic co-ordinator and client content specialist with Cision Canada in the city. Leblanc has a bachelor's degree in public relations from the Université du Québec à Montréal, and a specialized graduate diploma in public and private sector management from HEC Montréal.



Camille Leblanc has joined Minister Valdez's office. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

In Valdez's office, she joins fellow regional advisers **Chris Zhou**, who covers the Atlantic; **Ajay Rakhra**, who covers Ontario as a senior adviser for stakeholder relations in the province; **Lisa Xie**, who's responsible for British Columbia along with serving as an executive assistant and operations assistant to the minister; and **Jibril Hussein**, who tackles the Prairies and North.

Zachary Nixon is director of operations to the small business minister, whose office is overall run by chief of staff **Angad Dhillon**.

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Ng to lead trade mission to South Korea

International Trade Minister Mary Ng is leading a Team Canada trade mission to South Korea from Sunday, April 21, to Thursday, April 25. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



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

House Sitting Schedule—The House is scheduled to sit for a total of 125 days in 2024. The House will take 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 Vandal to Deliver Remarks—Minister of Northern Affairs Dan Vandal will take part in “2024 Federal Budget Review” a special lunch event hosted by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. Monday, April 22, 11:30 a.m. CT at the Fairmont Winnipeg Hotel, 2 Lombard Pl., Winnipeg, Man. Details online: business.mbchamber.mb.ca.

Minister Boissonnault to Deliver Remarks—Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages Minister Randy Boissonnault will deliver remarks at the 2024 Federal Budget Luncheon hosted by the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce. Monday, April 22, at 12 p.m. MT the Fairmont Hotel Macdonald, 10065-100 St. N.W., Edmonton, Alta. Details online: business.edmontonchamber.com.

Cape Breton University MBA Info Session—Earn your MBA 100 per cent online on weekends with Cape Breton University’s Shannon School of Business. Program director Barrie Riome,

and instructors Barry McLoughlin and Laura Peck of TLC Transformational Leadership Consultants Inc. will hold an info session with an overview of the program’s unique features and to answer your questions. Monday, April 22, 4-6 p.m. at Métropolitain Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr. Register at mbaced.ca.

Economic Look-Ahead 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.

Webinar: ‘Innovation in Canadian Health Care’—The Macdonald-Laurier Institute hosts a webinar, “Exploring Innovation in Canadian Health Care”. A panel of experts will discuss innovations—past and prospective—in family medicine, medical technology, and the health charity sector, and discuss ways in which policy-makers can embrace innovation in health care to ensure Canadians are better served. Monday, April 22, at 3 p.m. happening online via Eventbrite.

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.

Webinar: ‘The Future of North American Cooperation’—The Canadian International Council host a virtual panel discussion: “The Future of North American Cooperation: A Trilateral Webinar.” With a trilateral North American Leaders’ Summit still uncertain, and with two critical elections in Mexico and the United States pending, what are the likely scenarios for the three countries in working together to advance security, prosperity, and quality of life? Tuesday, April 23, at 6 p.m. ET happening online: thecic.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.

Canada-Taiwan Economic Cooperation Event—Liberal MP Ken Hardie, chair of the House Special Committee on the Canada-China Relationship, will deliver remarks at the “Canada-Taiwan Economic Cooperation: Opportunities for Western Canada” event co-hosted by the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada. Other speakers include Harry Ho-jen Tseng, representative of Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Canada; and Carlo Dade, director of Trade and Trade Infrastructure, Canada West Foundation, among

others. Wednesday, April 24, at 8 a.m. MT at Calgary Petroleum Club, 319 5th Ave. SW., Calgary, Alta. Details online: cgai.ca.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24—THURSDAY, MAY 2

AFN Regional Engagement Sessions on Bill C-53—The Assembly of First Nations hosts a series of virtual regional engagement sessions for First Nations Chiefs on Bill C-53, An Act Respecting the Recognition of Certain Métis Governments in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, taking place between April 24-May 2. Details online: afn.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 on Saturday, April 27, 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 on Sunday, April 28, at the Horticulture Building, 1525 Princess Patricia Way, Lansdowne Park. Details online via Eventbrite.

MONDAY, APRIL 29

Panel: ‘Northern Strength is Canada’s Advantage’—Nunavut Premier P.J. Akeagok will deliver a keynote address on “Northern Strength is Canada’s Advantage” hosted by the Economic Club of Ottawa. This will be followed by a panel discussion featuring Minister of Northern Affairs Dan Vandal. Monday, April 29, 11:30 a.m. ET at the Chateau Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details online: canadianclubottawa.ca.

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 Jørnli Eskedal. Tuesday, April 30, at 7:30 a.m. ET at the Ottawa Conference and Event Centre, 200 Coventry Rd. Details online via Eventbrite.

Environment Commissioner to Table Five Reports—Environment and Sustainable Development Commissioner Jerry V. DeMarco will deliver five performance audit reports to the House of Commons. Afterwards, DeMarco will take part in a news conference Room 325, 180 Wellington St. Tuesday, April 30, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Contact infomed@oag-bvg.gc.ca.

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.

CCSPA Annual Government Breakfast Reception—The Canadian

Consumer Specialty Products Association is holding its annual Government Breakfast Reception at the Marriott Hotel on Kent Street in Ottawa from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. All Parliamentarians are welcome. RSVP to hughesc@ccspa.org

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 Mental 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: canadianclub.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.

Symposium: ‘NORAD Modernization’—The Canadian Global Affairs Institute hosts “NORAD Modernization: Enabling Connectivity for Interoperability,” examining the advanced capabilities and technology aspects of NORAD modernization, and how connectivity can help better defend the continent. Details to follow. Wednesday, May 1, at 8 a.m. ET at Westin TwentyTwo, 22nd Floor, 11 Colonel By Dr. Details online: cgai.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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YouTube Kids is a standalone video app designed for kids under 13. You can hand-pick the videos your kids can see, or choose content based on three age-based settings. Helping your kids explore and learn in a self-contained and age-appropriate place. And helping you feel a little more relaxed about what your kids are watching. To access YouTube Kids, and other online safety features for kids and teens, visit youtube.com/myfamily

Helping make the internet safe for kids and teens.



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