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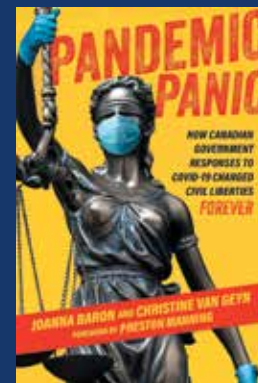


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THE HILL TIMES

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CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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NEWS

'Insufficient for the scale of need': foreign service reform gets initial 'down payment,' but follow-up needed, say Parliamentarians

BY NEIL MOSS

With modest initial investments in Canada's foreign service reform included in the recent federal budget, one Senator is calling the spending plan "a down payment," while an opposition critic says more funding is needed on the foreign file as the budget downplays diplomacy in favour of defence.

The Liberal government's most recent budget, tabled in the House of Commons on April 16, has heeded calls for billions of dollars in defence funding, but only pledges \$664.4-million exclusively for Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

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Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly's calls for more investment in her department were met with a modest response in the recent budget. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS

'Overtaxed and overburdened': cannabis industry suffocating under regulatory regime as feds take puff past excise relief in budget

BY STUART BENSON

With thousands of job losses since marijuana's legaliza-

tion in 2018, cannabis companies large and small closing their doors due to an increasingly burdensome tax regime, and growing

levels of unpaid federal debt, cannabis stakeholders say without urgent action, there may soon no longer be an industry to tax.

Leading up to the tabling of the 2024 federal budget on April 16, cannabis industry stakeholders were lobbying the federal government to adjust the excise tax, which they say has hampered the industry from turning a profit more than half a decade since legalization, causing more than 4,000 job losses and leading hundreds of companies to owe

Continued on page 4

NEWS

Canada going ahead with Ecuador trade talks despite Mexican embassy raid rebuke

BY NEIL MOSS

After castigating Ecuador for flouting its commitment to an international pact, Canada still plans to move forward with trade negotiations with Quito, maintaining that talks are a forum to spotlight the need to adhere to a country's legal pledges.

Earlier this month, Ecuadorian authorities raided the Mexican Embassy in Quito to arrest Jorge Glas, who served as vice president of Ecuador from 2013 to 2017. Glas was seeking political asylum in the embassy.

In an April 11 statement, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) called the "unauthorized entry" into the Mexican Embassy "a clear violation" of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

Article 22 of the convention lays out that the "premises of the mission shall be inviolable," and that officials from a host country cannot enter an embassy without the approval of the head of mission.

"Canada condemns all violations of the Vienna Convention and of international law, and reaffirms its strong disappointment that Ecuador has done so in this case," GAC's statement reads. Mexico and Nicaragua cut off diplomatic relations with Ecuador following the raid.

Asked whether Canada would still pursue trade negotiations

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Christina Leadlay

Heard On The Hill

Red Passport: Trio of ex-diplomats launch a podcast



Louise Blais, left, Jeremy Kinsman, and Peter Donolo co-host *The Red Passport*, a new podcast produced by the Canadian International Council. Photographs courtesy of the Canadian International Council

Two former Canadian ambassadors and one former Liberal staffer-turned-diplomat have recently launched a podcast.

Produced by the Canadian International Council, *The Red Passport* is co-hosted by Louise Blais, Jeremy Kinsman, and Peter Donolo.

Blais served as Canada's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations from 2017-2021. Kinsman capped a 40-year career in the foreign service with top postings to Moscow, Rome, London, and Brussels. Donolo served as Jean Chrétien's director of communications and was chief of staff to then-Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff before being appointed as Canada's Consul General in Milan, Italy, in 1999.

Drawing on their shared experience as former red passport holders—a reference to the special passport used by Canadian diplomats accredited abroad or travelling from Ottawa on high-level business—the podcast will explore timely foreign policy issues.

"Kinsman came up with the idea in the fall," Donolo told *Heard on the Hill* by email last week. "He thought that there was very little available to Canadians from an 'insiders' point of view about foreign policy: how what goes on around the world affects Canada; the types of choices and tradeoffs our government—regardless of its political stripe—faces; how and where we can make a difference."

The first episode launched in February. New ones are slated for release every three weeks.

Blais notes that having three hosts in different cities is an advantage. "Regional perspectives matter," she told *HOH*. "I am in Quebec, Jeremy is on the West Coast, and Peter is in

Toronto. And while the podcast is in English, we make a point to incorporate the francophone and Quebec's take on issues."

Blais and Donolo note that while the trio are not journalists, their unique perspectives from having been in the room with world leaders and decision-makers is worth sharing, providing a "missing lens" in a media landscape in which Canadian views are often missing due to many foreign news bureaus having closed over the past decade.

"*The Red Passport* is not just another take on headline international news stories," Kinsman told *HOH*. "It is a Canadian take by practitioners who have lived and worked the issues abroad, and interpreted conditions and events to Canadian leaders."

There's "nothing like [*The Red Passport*] on offer in Canada," said Blais. "We will not have all the answers—and the three of us often disagree—but that is what we hope to present to our audience; a thought-provoking and engaging dialogue that can help shed some light on major issues that they cannot get elsewhere."

Look for *The Red Passport* wherever you download your podcasts.

Search is on for the next Parliamentary Poet Laureate

The time has come, the Speakers said, to search for someone new.

A poet to serve Parliament, no matter what they do.

Starting now, until mid-June, add your name to the slate. For a chance to be Parliament's next Poet Laureate.



Parliamentary Poet Laureate Marie-Célie Agnant's two-year term is coming to an end. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Parliament

The two-year term begins next year when the current scribe Marie-Célie Agnant bids adieu and steps aside.

The Haitian-born Quebec-based bard has won many a trophy. For works in French on themes like exile, race, and memory.

The search is on for her successor, this time an anglophone. For someone who, despite background, calls this country home.

Who's made a splash in Canada's literary community. Who can travel, and take part in parliamentary duties.

Late this year, or early next, the House and Senate Speakers will choose their favourite, and offer them \$40,000 for two years.

Worth of time and effort to write poems and hold readings. Advise Parliament's librarian, and craft verses for proceedings.

So, if you think this could be you, then grab your pens and paper. And send your submission to the LoP by June 17, no later.

Minister Vandal and Nunavut Premier at April 29 event in Ottawa



Nunavut Premier PJ Akeagok will speak in Ottawa on April 29. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Nunavut Premier **P.J. Akeagok** is expected to be in Ottawa on April 29 to deliver remarks at the "Northern Strength is Canada's Advantage" event hosted by the Economic Club of Ottawa.

Northern Affairs Minister **Dan Vandal** is also scheduled to take part in a post-address panel discussion. Other participants include **Anne-Raphaëlle Audouin**, CEO of Nukik Corporation; and **Sean Boyd**, chair of the board at Agnico Eagle Mines Ltd.

The 39-year-old Akeagok was first elected to the Nunavut legislature on Oct. 25, 2021, and became the territory's sixth premier one month later, defeating incumbent premier **Joe Savikataaq**.

This event will take place at the Château Laurier at 1 Rideau St.

Brian Goodman lays early groundwork for CPC nomination in Pontiac

While the date for the Conservative nomination in the eastern Quebec riding of Pontiac has yet to be called, that hasn't stopped **Brian Goodman** from starting his campaign to become the party's candidate.



Ex-Tory staffer Brian Goodman is campaigning to be the Conservative candidate in Pontiac, Que. Photograph courtesy of Brian Goodman

Originally from Manitoba, the 44-year-old submitted his application to the party on April 18 after announcing his candidacy back in February.

"As I talk to members around the riding and dig further into local issues, I become more and more convinced that Pontiac is going to turn blue in the next election," he said in an April 18 press release.

Currently held by Liberal MP **Sophie Chatel** since 2021, the Pontiac riding hasn't been Conservative since **Lawrence Cannon** was the area's MP from 2006-2011. **Mathieu Ravignat** took it for the NDP from 2011-2015. The riding has been Liberal since 2015 with former MP **Will Amos** having represented it from 2015-2021.

Since arriving in the National Capital Region in 2008, the bilingual Goodman has been an active Conservative member and donor. He and his family have lived in Chelsea, Que., since 2018.

Goodman has worked both on and off the Hill. He confirmed to *HOH* that he was staff to Saskatchewan's then-justice minister **Don Morgan**. After arriving in Ottawa, he worked for then-Conservative MP **Ray Boughen** from Saskatchewan, and later worked for Hill & Knowlton, and Deloitte.

"Since leaving Parliament Hill, I've worked in just about every job that touches on the federal government, including government relations consultant, director for a national association, management consultant, public servant, and now with a Crown corporation," Goodman said in the press release.

Goodman will keep reaching out to members and selling party memberships until the Tories announce the nomination date in that riding.

Marie Wilson shares her experience as a TRC commissioner

Former Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner **Marie Wilson** has written a book about her experience, which is set to be published on June 11, the 16th anniversary of the federal government's apology to residential school survivors.

North of Nowhere, Song of a Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner, is Wilson's first-hand account of witnessing residential school survivor testimony across the country during the commission's mandate from 2009-2015.

A former CBC journalist, Wilson was one of three commissioners, and the only one of non-Indigenous heritage. Her husband **Stephen Kakfwi**, a former premier of the Northwest Territories, is a residential school survivor.

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News

‘Overtaxed and overburdened’: cannabis industry suffocating under regulatory regime as feds take puff past excise relief in budget

Cannabis Council of Canada’s Paul McCarthy says he’s ‘bewildered’ at the feds’ lack of action despite growing calls from industry, experts, and a House committee.

Continued from page 1

millions of dollars in tax debt to the federal government.

But post budget, with little relief on offer, Paul McCarthy, president of the Cannabis Council of Canada, said disappointment in the lack of action from the federal government is shared across the industry “writ-large,” pointing to statements from the CEOs of Tilray Brands and Canopy Growth.

McCarthy said that disappointment is coupled with a growing sense of frustration as the government seems to be ignoring not only the industry’s calls, but also the collective recommendations from the House of Commons Finance Committee, the federal Competition Bureau, and the final report of Health Canada’s expert Cannabis Act review panel.

All three have recommended changes to the federal excise tax, suggesting that the rate be adjusted to a flat 10 per cent per gram sold.

Canada’s current federal excise tax amounts to \$1 per gram of cannabis sold, or 10 per cent of the per-gram price, whichever is more. The government determined the rate based on an expectation of an average wholesale price of \$10 per gram. The majority of that tax—75 per cent—is shared with provinces and territories, except for Manitoba, which opted out of the federal cannabis excise tax. The remaining 25 per cent goes to the federal government.

However, McCarthy explained that dried flower is sold on the legal market for as little as \$1.80 per gram to compete with the illicit market, meaning the \$1 per gram excise amounts to a more than 30 per cent tax on most products.

Despite that price compression, prices on the illicit market remain 20 per cent lower, according to a Deloitte study.

McCarthy said it’s understandable that neither industry nor the

Between 2020 and 2023, the number of companies owing excise debt increased from 68 to 213, accounting for a threefold increase in outstanding debt from \$52.4-million to \$192.7-million. Without swift action from the federal government, there soon may not be a legal market left to tax, says Organigram CEO Beena Goldenberg. *The Hill Times* file photograph



government would have gotten things perfect “right out of the gate.” But he said the industry has adapted, and is still waiting for the government to do the same.

“We know so much more now, and this [excise tax] issue isn’t new,” McCarthy said. “[The government] has to ask itself why the vast majority of licensed producers at this stage of the game are still unprofitable.”

McCarthy said that since 2019, the cannabis industry has been in a constant state of retrenchment with regular layoffs and offloading of assets, but the issue is no longer one of supply versus demand. While “a lot of people clamouring to get involved” post-legalization in 2018 had led to an overbuilt sector with supply far exceeding demand, the industry recognized and dealt with that issue fairly quickly, he said.

“The issue now is that this sector is overtaxed and overburdened by the current regulatory regime, and it’s killing the industry,” McCarthy said, explaining that he is referring to both the current excise tax and regulatory burdens imposed on the industry.

“The industry isn’t just hurting, it’s being suffocated,” McCarthy said, adding that despite the mounting evidence, he believes a combination of ignorance of the industry and an overabundance of caution is leading to inaction by the federal government.

“I think there’s still a negative stigma attached to it because it’s cannabis,” McCarthy said, adding that he believes the government hasn’t sufficiently shifted from viewing it as an illicit substance to a legal consumer product.

“From a purely economic standpoint, if there were another

sector of the economy in this kind of position, the government would be tripping over itself to take action,” McCarthy explained. “It just leaves us kind of bewildered as to why, and I can only make the assumption it’s because it’s cannabis; who else needs to say what before somebody takes action?”

Beena Goldenberg, CEO of Organigram Holdings, said changing the excise tax to a 10 per cent ad valorem rate—a fixed percentage based on the value of the good being sold—would have a “night and day” impact on an industry still struggling to turn a profit five years post legalization.

In the 2022 budget, the federal government introduced a measure to allow smaller licensed producers to pay their excise duties quarterly. Budget 2023 extended that measure to all producers; however, even then, most companies were already behind on paying those duties beyond a financial quarter.



Paul McCarthy, president of the Cannabis Council of Canada, says the federal government’s lack of excise relief in the 2024 budget has left the industry ‘bewildered.’ Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

In 2022, 41 per cent of companies that filed for protection with the Creditors Arrangement Act (CCAA) were from the cannabis industry, and cannabis companies also made up 12 per cent of those granted CCAA protection in 2023. The CCAA is available only to Canadian firms with debts exceeding \$5-million.

Between 2020 and 2023, the number of companies owing excise debt increased from 68 to 213, accounting for a threefold jump in outstanding debt from \$52.4-million to \$192.7-million.

Over the last year, Alberta-based cannabis producer Ogen and British Columbia’s Tantalus Labs have closed due to the unhealthy state of the industry, Goldenberg said, noting that the burdensome excise tax regime is making it challenging for small, medium, and even larger companies like hers to turn a profit.

As reported by MJBizDaily on April 8, according to data provided by the Canada Revenue Agency, at least 123 federal cannabis business licenses were either cancelled or pending cancellation in 2023, accounting for 58 per cent of all cancellations since 2018.

Goldenberg explained that many companies are choosing to withhold paying excise duties in order to continue paying employees and keep their doors open, and while the CRA has begun garnishing payments from licensed producers that are behind on those duties, she warned that, without relief, there may no longer be an industry to collect taxes from.

“We’re an industry struggling to be profitable, and we really need to see some changes to help the industry survive,” Golden-

berg said, noting that a healthier, profitable industry would mean companies could not only begin repaying those debts, but also begin paying income tax on profits.

On the other hand, Goldenberg said that without relief, she fears the pendulum will swing back toward an illicit market that doesn’t have to pay any taxes, or abide by any health regulations and restrictions to keep their products out of the reach of children.

“Consumers are seeing lower prices fill the illicit market, and [the legal market] can’t compete anymore; we can’t just keep burning cash,” Goldenberg said, explaining that to safeguard the public health objectives of legalization and the move away from the illicit market, the legal market needs to become profitable.

To do that, Goldenberg said the federal government should treat the industry similar to how it taxes and regulates alcohol and tobacco. In comparison, per unit of consumption, the tax on cannabis is six times higher than the tax on beer, and nine times higher than wine.

However, adjusting how much excise tax the industry pays isn’t the only change that Goldenberg said could have a significant impact, also pointing to the difference in when those duties are paid.

Producers have to pay the excise tax when they package the product to receive the legally required excise stamps that must be affixed to the packaging, explained Goldenberg. However, those producers must then wait up to 60 days for payment from wholesalers. Instead, she said the CRA should renegotiate those terms to align with the alcohol industry, wherein provincial boards collect duties from the wholesalers’ payments.

To do so, Goldenberg said excise stamps should also be made digital as is done with alcohol products. She said this would significantly improve companies’ cash flow, and reduce and simplify supply-chain costs.

Finally, Goldenberg said that, unlike alcohol and tobacco, cannabis producers are charged an annual 2.3 per cent tax (or regulatory fee) on gross revenue over \$1-million by Health Canada—a rate she said is also based on an early assumption post-legalization that the industry would be highly profitable.

McCarthy told *The Hill Times* that while the industry doesn’t expect to see any new relief on the excise tax before at least the fall federal economic statement, many of the other suggestions—including Health Canada payments and changes to the excise stamp—could be made through legislation before then.

“We’re certainly not holding our breath, but we’re trying to be optimistic,” McCarthy said.

In response to a request for comment, a Finance Department official told *The Hill Times* the federal government would continue to “monitor the sector” and that it recognizes the need to “ensure that the existing excise duty framework is as fair and as current as possible.”

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News

‘Insufficient for the scale of need’: foreign service reform gets initial ‘down payment,’ but follow-up needed, say Parliamentarians

‘We needed the Liberals to come forward with some leadership, and I don’t see that in this budget,’ says NDP foreign affairs critic Heather McPherson.

Continued from page 1

The new funds include \$159.1-million over five years for the foreign service’s reform, which includes \$61-million for training and recruitment, \$47-million for better pay for local staff at Canada’s embassies around the world, \$32-million for the department’s IT systems, and \$18-million to strengthen Canada’s mission at the United Nations in New York.

The budget proposes a backloaded spending plan with \$19-million set out for 2024-25 and \$28-million in 2025-26, which will rise to \$33-million in 2026-27 and \$40-million for both 2027-28 and 2028-29.

Independent Senator Peter Boehm (Ontario), chair of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, said he sees the funding for the reform as a “down payment.”

“I would characterize it as a perceptive and intelligent and good beginning. The challenge will be to stick to it, and, as other crises come, that these funds are not somehow diverted for other purposes,” said Boehm, a former career diplomat who served as Canada’s ambassador to Germany from 2008 to 2012.

For a department as large as GAC—which was granted \$8.4-billion in the 2024-25 Main Estimates alone—the new funding announced for the foreign service reform doesn’t add up to much, Boehm said.

“The challenge will be to set up a few consistent things over the course over those years,” he said.

Boehm said he anticipates more announcements on the foreign service reform will be coming “very soon.”

The Senate Foreign Affairs Committee is still awaiting the government’s response to its comprehensive report that includes 29 recommendations for modernizing the foreign service, which it released last December.

As the Senate committee was undertaking its 20-month-long



Independent Senator Peter Boehm says he expects more announcements on Canada’s foreign service reform ‘very soon.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

study, GAC was also undertaking its own internal review of the foreign service.

A discussion paper on the department’s transformation, which was released last year, shows that Canada trails some of its closest allies on foreign ministry spending on a per capita basis. It found that Canada spent \$223 per capita on its foreign ministry in 2021-22 compared to Germany’s \$334, the United Kingdom’s \$297, and Australia’s \$233 over the same fiscal year.

The recent budget also proposes \$350-million over two years for international humanitarian assistance to respond to emerging crises for GAC, as well as nearly \$150-million over five years (starting in 2027-28) for sustainable growth in Latin America. It also retroactively committed \$9-million for crisis evacuations for 2023-24.

The spending plan has additionally earmarked \$917-million for both the Communications Security Establishment and GAC to conduct cyber operations. As well, \$87-million will go to “multiple departments” to prepare for Canada’s G7 presidency in 2025.

NDP MP Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.), her party’s foreign affairs critic, said the planned spending towards GAC’s transformation is “insufficient for the scale of need.”

“This is conceivably the last budget this government will put forward [and] it didn’t build back our diplomatic resources, and conceivably we’re looking down the pipes of a much harsher Conservative government that

does not recognize the value of diplomacy and peacekeeping, and they want to disengage from the world,” she said. “We needed the Liberals to come forward with some leadership, and I don’t see that in this budget.”

She said the Trudeau government did “just the bare minimum” whereby they “couldn’t be accused of completely abandoning Canada’s foreign policy.”

McPherson said the budget is not only short on funds for foreign policy, but also on a direction.

“Some of the places I’ve seen the investment don’t seem to be

on the right track if what Canada wants to do is to continue its legacy of being a peace-building country,” she said. “Fundamentally, this illustrates for me that Canada doesn’t have a cohesive, cognitively smart foreign policy. We just don’t. It feels like we just throw things at the wall, and hope they stick.”

She said as the world is increasingly seeing more and more conflicts, it won’t be military solutions that will lead to resolution, but diplomatic ones.

“If we want Canada to be part of a real solution, none of these conflicts that we’re seeing can be

solved with the military alone,” she said. “There needs to be diplomacy. There needs to be development. The failure to recognize that is really dangerous.”

Former diplomat Colin Roberson, now a vice-president of Canadian Global Affairs Institute, said Canada is investing billions of dollars in defence because of international pressure to do so.

“We’re dealing with defence because our closest allies are pushing us to do so,” he said, “but there’s no one pushing us to put money into diplomacy.”

“To me, it’s a package [with] defence, development, and diplomacy,” he said. “I see just incremental gains.”

Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers (PAFSO) president Pamela Isfeld said defence is “clearly” a higher priority for the government.

“That’s quite short-sighted, since an effective foreign service can help prevent and manage conflict at a lower level, and effective diplomacy can make military intervention unnecessary,” she said in an email.

Isfeld said she was happy to see investment in Canada’s UN mission in New York, but also wanted to see “the same attention” on other multilateral forums, and to Canada’s missions abroad in key capitals and conflict zones.

On training and recruitment, Isfeld said PAFSO was happy to see such funding included in the budget as it’s “been such a long time since we saw any investment of this kind at all.”

“However, there is always more that can be done, and it remains to be seen how effective these measures will be if other elements of the department are cut,” she added.

While the latest federal budget proposed a modest injection of new funds for GAC, the department will continue to face spending reductions of \$118-million in 2024-25, \$179-million in 2025-26, and \$243-million in 2026-27 as part of the government-wide spending cuts that were announced in the 2023 budget.

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The Hill Times



NDP MP Heather McPherson says the Liberal government did the ‘bare minimum’ for foreign policy funding in the recent budget. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The CAQ's language shell game fooled everyone

A report last week from the Office québécois de la langue française indicates the status of the French language since 2017 has been 'stable.'

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



KAMOURASKA, QUE.—Take a moment to think of Emmanuella Lambropoulos today.

In 2020, the Liberal MP for the Montreal riding of Saint-Laurent, Que., asked the Commissioner of Official Languages Raymond Thériault what was causing the decline in French in Quebec. However, she had the temerity to suggest reports of the decline might be a “myth,” and she doubled down by using air quotes in using the word “decline.”

For her apostasy, she was given a public scolding by Bloc Québécois committee member Stéphane Bergeron and members of her own party, including now-Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly. Lambropoulos walked back her comments, apologized for her “insensitivity,” and was forced off the House Official Languages Committee.

The reason I mention this unfortunate chapter in the language wars in Quebec is a report last week from the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF) indicating the status of the French language since 2017 has been “stable.” According to the report, in 2022, 90 per cent of francophone Quebecers spoke French in public spaces. Among all Quebecers, 79 per cent spoke French, eight per cent used English most often, and 13 per cent used French and English.

In a nutshell: no decline.

So think back to the passage of Bill 96, “An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Quebec,” which has engendered almost a dozen lawsuits from a variety of sources, including the volunteer organization I lead, the Task Force on Linguistic Policy. Because it is protected by the “notwithstanding clause” in the Canadian Charter, its hallmark is its outright abuses of individual protections against illegal search and seizure, and the reduction of access to English in the courts and in contracts.

It also heralded the creation of a new class of English-speakers, “historic anglophones”—those educated in English in Canada—thus excluding half-a-million anglophone Quebecers from government services in their mother tongue. And it created a constitutional acknowledgement of a “French-speaking Nation” in Quebec, despite its 1.25 million English-speaking citizens.

The so-called “decline” also transformed Bill C-13, the changes to the Official Languages Act. Thanks to the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives, with acquiescence from the Trudeau Liberals, the Quebec Charter of the French Language is incorporated into federal law, and recognizes French as the sole official language of Quebec when the Canadian Constitution ensures English as the language of the

legislature and the courts. It also creates a distinction between the rights and recourses afforded to French minority communities, and those for the English minority in Quebec.

How did this happen? Like the con men I once watched in Times Square working “marks” in a shell game, Quebec Premier François Legault brought in nationalist demographers and extremist columnists as shills to set up the con. Extremists like Richard Martineau and Mathieu Bock-Coté railed in the *Journal de Montreal* about the “threat” anglophone institutions pose to Quebec’s francophone culture.

However, demographer Jean-Pierre Corbeil has led a counteroffensive, with the recent publication of his book *Le Français en déclin? Repenser la francophonie québécoise* (French in Decline?)

Rethinking Quebec’s French Character). In a recent column in *La Presse*, he critiqued what he called “the narrative created around the language issue,” pointing out that between 2020 and 2022, articles in the French media mentioning “decline in French” increased from 419 to 2,868. In other words, repeat a lie enough times, and it becomes the truth.

Over the last five years, anglophone Quebecers have borne the brunt of the scapegoating for the “decline” of French. Our organization has received dozens of complaints about government officials refusing to serve anglophones, and Quebec government website and phone lines go out of their way to ensure services are provided only to “historic anglophones.” This is the whirlwind Legault has created. Combine this with Parti Québécois Leader Paul St-Pierre

Plamondon piling on recently about the federal government’s plans to “erase [francophones] who won’t assimilate,” and this phoney narrative continues to escalate.

This narrative of blame has to stop now that we know it has been just one massive con job. It is time to look the so-called leaders of Quebec in the eye and say: “You should be ashamed of yourselves.” If only some had the courage of Lambropoulos to question the “popular wisdom” of the time.

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

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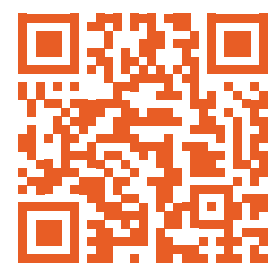


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Editorial

Feds should act fast on potential judge residency rule repeal

Among the 2024 federal budget's 416-pages are a handful of commitments aimed at tackling the federal judicial appointment backlog.

There are currently 65 federal judicial vacancies across Canada, representing roughly 6.5 per cent of the 995 full-time positions. While that's an improvement from one year ago, when, as of May 2023, there were 88 vacancies, the chronic dearth in appointments continues to have consequential impacts for Canadians awaiting justice.

In February, a Federal Court ruling ordered the government to act swiftly to "materially" reduce the backlog, calling the number of vacancies "significant and unacceptably large," and the situation "untenable and appalling." That ruling followed a May 2023 letter from Chief Justice Richard Wagner to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in which Wagner expressed similar concern that the ongoing shortage "will create a crisis in our justice system."

Last month, the federal government filed an appeal challenging the Federal Court ruling and arguing the court had overstepped its jurisdiction.

But the feds at least had few offerings aimed at the backlog in the budget tabled by Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland on April 16—one in particular that stands out as likely to be more definitively helpful in tackling the

judicial crisis should it make it past the announced consultation phase.

Along with pledges to reallocate \$50.2-million over five years starting in 2024-25—and \$10.9-million ongoing—for the Office of the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs to "redistribute 17 judicial positions to provincial superior courts currently experiencing capacity issues," and to amend the Judges Act "to move 17 superior court judicial positions from Unified Family Courts to provincial superior courts," the budget announced plans to "launch consultations" on repealing residency requirements for Federal Court and Tax Court judges.

Despite the fact that these courts sit in municipalities across the country, the 1980s-era Federal Courts Act and Tax Court of Canada Act currently require such judges to live within 40 kilometres of the National Capital Region.

In this day and age, the logic behind scrapping this rule seems obvious, and the Canadian Bar Association agrees, having passed a resolution in February urging the feds to repeal the requirement in both acts.

The government must be swift in launching and concluding its planned consultations on this proposal. Further delays are the last thing the justice system needs.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

Correcting the record on Bell's restructuring: BCE exec



The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

Re: "Should telecommunications be nationalized?" (*The Hill Times*, April 17, opinion piece, p. 3).

Last week's opinion piece in *The Hill Times* authored by Mark Hancock, national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, contained inaccuracies concerning the recent restructuring at Bell, which need to be corrected.

To be clear, none of the recently eliminated positions at Bell have been moved offshore as Mr. Hancock claimed.

Bell's recent restructuring included reductions at all levels of the company. Wherever possible, we used vacancies and natural attrition to minimize the impact on our team. Those who left the company were offered fair severance packages along with career transition services, and continued access to health benefits.

Bell remains one of Canada's largest private sector employers with more than 40,000 employees. We continue to invest and hire in growth areas.

Bell has invested billions of dollars in Canada's communications networks

and technology, including the deployment of pure fibre internet to more than 7.4 million locations from Manitoba to Newfoundland, and reaching 86 per cent of Canadians across the country with our 5G and 51 per cent of Canadians with our 5G+ wireless networks.

Canadian telecommunications companies contribute significantly to the Canadian economy, provide thousands of well-paying jobs in Canada, keep Canadians connected, and support communities all across the country, helping them to thrive and succeed. Over one year, \$1-billion invested in broadband and 5G networks generates an estimated \$2-billion in economic activity, and supports more than 6,000 jobs at Bell and throughout this country's supply chain. A strong Canadian telecommunications industry benefits all Canadians.

Please visit BCE's website for more facts concerning the restructuring at Bell.

Robert Malcolmson
 EVP, Chief Legal and Regulatory Officer,
 BCE Inc. and Bell Canada

We need to bring back extensive urban, inter-urban rail and buses: letter writer

Re: "EV battery fires are a global problem that we need to address in Canada," (*The Hill Times*, April 15, opinion piece). I agree with the opinion expressed by Josipa Petrunic that some planning for eventual fires needs to be done. The author points out stricter controls on battery design and sourcing.

However, I think the opinion misses an important point: we should not solve the fire problem only by finding solutions to combating EV battery fires, safeguarding infrastructure against them, or instituting new quality controls. We should also minimize the opportunities for fire to occur, and that means minimizing the number of vehicles with batteries. No, this is not an argument in support of the internal combustion

engine. This is in support of public transit, whether or not it's electrified. We need to bring back extensive urban and inter-urban rail and buses. Models exist in Toronto and widely elsewhere in the world.

Next to that, we have to divest ourselves of the idea that we can replace internal combustion-engine cars with electric-engine cars on a one-to-one basis. Only mass transit and personal transport—that is, by bicycle and by foot—are sustainable in the long run, and it would be good for sustainability if we started to consider the long run in this country again and maximized infrastructure designed for it.

Martin Damus
 Greely, Ont.



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The personal transformation of Pierre Poilievre

From an enemy of organized labour, Poilievre now depicts himself as something akin to the saviour of Canada's workers.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—One of the main determinants of middle-class well-being in the post-war era was the strength of labour unions. Any economist will tell you that the golden years of middle-class economic advancement in North America in the three decades after the Second World War owed a lot to the union movement, and the sharing of

corporate earnings with workers during that period's economic boom.

Ever since, the economic prospects of employees have deteriorated relative to that of corporate executives and investors. A key factor in this shift toward inequality has been the decline of organized labour and its ability to compel better returns for employees' economic output.

In the United States, where union membership has been chopped back to 10 per cent of the workforce, an essential anti-union tool has been so-called "right-to-work" laws. These misnamed rules originated in the U.S. south as a means of blocking racial integration in the workplace. A direct attack on working people and unions' financial strength, the laws allow workers in unionized companies to opt out of paying union dues. Former president Barack Obama famously defined them as giving employees "the right to work for less money." States with these laws have lower wages and incomes,

higher poverty rates, and more problems with health and safety compliance.

In Canada, where the law protects the rights of unions to receive dues from all in unionized shops, there is only one federal politician of significant stature who has overtly declared himself in favour of this type of blatant anti-union law: Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre.

"I am the first federal politician to make a dedicated push toward this goal," Poilievre told *The Toronto Star's* Tim Harper back in 2012. "I believe in free choice for workers and I am going to do my part to see that happens at the federal level, and I would encourage provincial governments to do likewise."

"I am going to work with cabinet and caucus colleagues to build support [for right-to-work legislation]," the then-four-term Conservative MP said. "Over time, I believe I can convince people of its merits."

Poilievre's personal campaign ran counter to the stated

intentions of then-prime minister Stephen Harper's government. But that didn't stop the Conservative lobbyists—from passing two laws that were meant to seriously hamstring Canada's labour movement. (The measures were rescinded by the Liberals in 2017.)

In recent years, the now-Conservative leader appears to have undergone a personal transformation. From an enemy of organized labour, he now depicts himself as something akin to the saviour of Canada's workers. "When I'm prime minister, my ... daily obsession will be about what is good for the working-class people of this country," he declared recently. This kind of anti-elitist talk has become standard populist strategy over the last decade. And the new Poilievre has also no doubt been heavily influenced through his close ties to the election brain trust around Ontario Premier Doug Ford, a pro-business leader who has thoroughly hoodwinked his province's voters with his "little-guy" song-and-dance.

Besides anti-elitism, the populist brand tends to be an amalgam of magical economic promises, conspiracy mongering, rage incitement against institutions, anti-progressive culture war themes, and (sometimes veiled) racism in the form of nativism. As Poilievre's use of such themes in varying degrees has resonated with Canada's working class during a period of high inflation and housing shortages, union leaders have responded with alarm. Canadian Labour Congress President Bea Bruske,

for example, says "we must do everything in our power to expose Mr. Pierre Poilievre for the fraud that he is."

Beyond anti-union legislation, the Harper Conservatives undercut the prospects for workers and average people by eroding unemployment insurance, repeatedly bringing in back-to-work legislation, cutting social assistance, sharply reducing Ottawa's much-needed corporate revenues, scrapping child care, moving to raise the age of eligibility for Old Age Security, and letting an excess of temporary foreign workers drive down Canadian wages and take jobs away from residents.

A Poilievre government could be expected to renew the diminishing of the federal government's role—by, among other things, cutting business taxes, and hacking away at social and pro-economic-growth programs. Reducing Ottawa's regulatory oversight on the environment, energy, business, and perhaps other areas would also be a priority.

In the meantime, labour leaders and the NDP are wearing themselves out trying to remind workers that Poilievre and the Harper government were no friends of working people. Asked about the Conservative leader's shop floor appeals, NDP MP Charlie Angus told a reporter: "What would Pierre Poilievre know about the working class? He has never had a job outside political attack dog ... who is he kidding?"

Les Whittington is a regular columnist for *The Hill Times*.
The Hill Times

Canada's military procurement: a laundry list of broken promises

Only a foolish military analyst would hail the recent defence policy update as a solid building block upon which to rebuild our badly depleted CAF.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—When the Trudeau Liberals announced their long awaited defence policy update on April 8, it did not take the skeptics long to take to social media to criticize the policy paper.



Close followers of the Canadian Armed Forces have good reason to believe that little of what is promised in the defence policy update released by Defence Minister Bill Blair on April 8 will ever see the light of day, writes Scott Taylor. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

While the announced spending hike is enormous—the Canadian defence budget is set to nearly double from the current \$30-billion to roughly \$59-billion by the end of this decade—the problem is that close followers of the Canadian Armed Forces have good reason to believe that little of what is promised in the defence policy update (DPU) will ever see the light of day.

Comic strip aficionados will recall the *Peanuts* character Lucy perpetually convincing Charlie Brown that, this time, she would hold the football in place so that he might "kick it to the moon." Inevitably, at the last minute, Lucy snatches the ball away, and Charlie Brown ends up flat on his back swearing to never again trust Lucy's word.

Only a foolish military analyst—and there have been a few out there—would hail this current DPU as a solid building block upon which to rebuild our badly depleted CAF.

For those who remain unconvinced that when it comes to the Canadian military, government promises are meant to be broken, here is a short peek back down memory lane.

Back in 2003, the Canadian Army had a battle group deployed to Afghanistan, and as insurgent resistance was stiffening, Canadian commanders realized that they would need better protection and more firepower. Thus, it was announced that Canada would spend \$600-million to purchase 66 mobile gun systems (MGS) from General Dynamics Land Systems (GDLS).

This was controversial among senior Army commanders who were hoping to acquire a new main battle tank (MBT) instead. The MGS are based upon

a light-armoured vehicle (LAV) wheeled chassis with the addition of a 105 mm gun for fire support.

Doubters of this purchase were put in their place by then-chief of the defence staff General Rick Hillier. A former armoured officer, Hillier was of the opinion that main battle tanks were at that juncture "Cold War relics." Fortunately, the MGS purchase never went ahead, and Canada ended up borrowing Leopard 2 MBT's from Germany to support our troops in Kandahar.

In 2005, there was a lot of fanfare when the government announced it was investing \$750-million to produce 30 multi-mission effects vehicles (MMEV). The MMEVs were to become the nucleus of our ground forces combat fire support.

The concept was in fact a marriage of the Air-Defence Anti-Tank System—known by the acronym ADATS—mounted on an LAV 3 chassis. The ADATS had been built in Canada immediately after the Cold War ended, and had been mothballed almost immediately. Alas, as events unfolded, they have remained in mothballs as the MMEV project was quietly cancelled.

Continued on page 15

Opinion

Buried in the budget: a potential breakthrough in meeting Canada's net-zero goals

Budget 2024's support of carbon removal procurement as a climate solution is a welcome breath of fresh air.

Na'im Merchant

Opinion



Blink and you might miss it, but buried deep in Budget 2024 is potentially groundbreaking progress for climate action in Canada.

The Low-Carbon Fuel Procurement Program, a \$135-million fund meant to help reduce hard-to-abate emissions associated with the government's transportation fleets, has been expanded to include carbon removal solutions. Second only to the United States, which announced a \$35-million carbon removal procurement fund last year, the Government of Canada's program cannot come at a more critical time.

Global greenhouse gas emissions went up worldwide again last year, and they are projected to continue rising before an anticipated peak around 2030. We cannot afford to delay fighting climate change any longer. We must continue to drive down emissions across our economy, but we must expand the toolbox, and start deploying carbon removal solutions to deal with historical and current carbon pollution. We applaud the Government of Canada for recognizing this reality.

Carbon removal is not carbon capture, which reduces the release of carbon dioxide from a polluting facility. Carbon removal solutions permanently clean up the CO₂ already in the atmosphere, and UN climate experts agree that carbon removal is an essential solution needed to meet global climate goals. Given our vast natural resources, skilled workforce, and track record of innovation, Canada could be the best place in the world to do it.

In addition to environmental benefits, the independent think tank I run commissioned research that discovered the carbon removal activity needed to meet our climate goals could create 90,000 new jobs. Carbon Removal Canada also found that this sector would add more than \$100-billion to our GDP. Investing in this industry would position Canadian companies to develop world-leading IP and sell carbon removal credits into global carbon compliance markets worth more than \$800-billion.

More than 70 Canadian companies have already formed across the carbon removal supply chain to begin removing carbon from the atmosphere. These environmental entrepreneurs are turning mining waste into carbon sponges, injecting CO₂ into concrete while making it stronger, restoring river and ocean health so they can naturally absorb CO₂, and partnering with



farmers to spread carbon-attracting minerals on agricultural lands. The innovations that these Canadians are pioneering are the future of climate action—but they need more support, now. The Low-Carbon Fuel Procurement Program can create an essential demand signal for their carbon removal services in the short-term, but we need to continue to match the ambitions of our global partners. For example, the U.S. has invested billions of dollars in carbon removal research and development—as well as tax incentives—through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act. Similarly, the European Union is leading the world in establishing the quality standards necessary for lucrative global carbon markets to operate with integrity.

Canada must continue to innovate and strategically invest in technology development, market creation, and regulatory improvements to pull more carbon out of the atmosphere as fast as possible. While we determine the best ways to procure carbon removal, ensuring only high-quality carbon removal is used, we must also have strategic conversations about what comes next. For instance, in 2024, Canada has an opportunity to raise its ambitions for its 2035 climate targets, and match the lead of the EU and the United Kingdom, which are setting specific carbon removal targets; doing so will help stoke both public and private investment in the sector while focusing government priorities about how we can continue to scale this climate solution.

The heated debate over the carbon tax has obscured the generational challenge in front of us. And that is actually fighting climate change. That's why the Budget 2024's support of carbon removal procurement as a climate solution is a welcome breath of fresh air.

Na'im Merchant is the executive director of Carbon Removal Canada, an independent policy initiative focused on the rapid and responsible scale-up of carbon removal solutions needed to meet Canada's climate goals and help catalyze a net-negative emissions world this century.

The Hill Times

The Hill Times

Canada's sordid approach to transparency needs to change



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau appeared before the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference on April 10. The prime minister told the inquiry he did not look at most of those written briefings on interference, and relied more on oral briefings from officials, notes Ken Rubin. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Data on everyday contracting is too often hidden, and only minimally posted on the open government portal or sufficiently posted in official public accounts.

Ken Rubin

Opinion



Transparency is reaching new lows with four instances of this dominating much of the air time recently.

One such instance has been the lack of adequate disclosures on the ballooning contracting in the ArriveCan case. Even the Auditor General of Canada, with special access to data, was not provided with adequate records or explanations. The findings to date show poor record keeping that could be a means of avoidance, concealing what transpired.

The degree of questionable and secretive bureaucratic and corporate contracting actions is not limited to the Canada Border Services Agency's handling of the ArriveCan contracting. Data on everyday contracting is too often hidden, and only minimally posted on the open government portal or sufficiently posted in official public accounts.

The House of Commons' Government Operations and Public Accounts committees have their work cut out for anyone to believe government procurement can operate in an accountable and credible manner free from corruption.

Another matter taking up much of Parliament's time is the issue of—and allegations about—foreign interference in recent Canadian elections.

It has led to the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference being called, with that inquiry hearing testimonies and being presented with some redacted data on formerly secret briefings concerning potential foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 elections.

What stands out is that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told the inquiry he did not look at most of those written briefings on interference, and relied more on oral briefings from officials.

What the prime minister is encouraging and saying is that officials need not write down operational matters, or be more accountable on matters of national security. If his government wants those matters not to be recorded or known, so be it. If leaks happen because there is not an adequate recording and accountability system in place, so be it. But that approach isn't good enough when it comes to government accountability.

The CSIS director had to be called twice before the Foreign Interference Inquiry to clarify his agency's input. The impression left is that information isn't always accurate, or conveyed.

One reason the Access to Information Act was put in place was to manage leaks. But by keeping so much information on foreign interference secret and verbal, Canadians are not being provided with sufficient answers.

This Parliament has also had to further deal with what was behind the firing of two scientists who had been working at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. Again, data was leaked to the media, but much remains unknown.

Parliamentary committees had to go to extraordinary efforts to get at what was behind the firings. That included passing a motion finding the head of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) to be

Continued on page 14

Feds' groceries bill is worth less than the paper on which it's printed

Relief requires a short-term solution because an election is coming, and Bill C-56 ain't it. In fact, I would go as far as calling it useless.

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



It is so Canadian to amend a bill to give Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne the power to demand an inquiry and to compel answers, writes Erica Ifill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

OTTAWA—So I'm minding my business—as I always do—while shopping at Loblaws, and saw that the company must have started adding gold dust to their food considering the prices they're charging. Galen Weston Jr. has become the patrician face of excess at the expense of the average Canadian; he is painted as a rapacious economic predator. With Loblaws' prices, he seems to be just that.

The City of Ottawa defines food security as, "having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food." In Canada—studied by Statistics Canada—food insecurity hit about 18 per cent of families in 2022, up from 16 per cent the previous year. Single mothers are the most likely to experience a lack of access to nutritious food: "More than four in 10 [41 per cent] of these families reported being food insecure. While food insecurity was also higher than average among male lone parents, the proportion was much lower at 24 [per cent]." Consistent access to affordable food is higher, of course, for the usual suspects: "Food insecurity was higher among Indigenous families, racialized communities, and immigrant families." And renters were more food insecure than homeowners.

Food banks are looking towards an increase in demand for their services in 2024. But have no fear, our Liberal landed gentry are on the case.

Let's return to Bill C-56, the Affordable Housing and Groceries Act. In my last column, I wrote about the housing portion of this piece of legislation, but there is also a directive for grocers. The bill amends the Competition Act to "establish a framework for the Minister of Industry to direct the Commissioner of Competition to conduct an inquiry into the state of competition in a market or industry." It is so Canadian to amend a bill to give Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne the power to ...*checks notes*...demand an inquiry and to compel answers. OK.

Funny thing is, the Competition Bureau produced its own study on rising grocery prices, which called for the government to increase competition in the industry instead of allowing it to congeal. However,

this is a long-term structural solution that doesn't do anything to alleviate grocery prices in the short term. And it is not in this bill because that is its main problem: relief requires a short-term solution because an election is coming, and this legislation ain't it. In fact, I would go as far as calling it useless.

Last fall, Champagne met with the CEOs of Loblaw, Metro, Sobeys, and Walmart. In the meeting, as CBC reports, Champagne told the heads of these big chains "the government wanted to see their plans to stabilize prices by Thanksgiving." Coming out of this meeting, we were promised by the grocery stores discounts we haven't seen, price freezes they took away in the first place, and price-matching campaigns with their equally-expensive peers.

Always trust Champagne's promises, which inevitably expose his inability to deliver anything but higher bills. Isn't that what happened to cellphone prices he swore to protect? When facing opposition to the Rogers-Shaw merger, we already foresaw higher prices but Champagne—facing opposition—told BNN: "All of that was driven with one objective and one objective alone, to bring down prices in Canada." Weeks later, Rogers raised its cellphone prices. Empty threats and empty promises are two sides of the same coin.

Thankfully, no one is waiting for this government to figure it out. A subreddit, *r/loblawisoutofcontrol*, which boasts 54,000 followers has become the heart of the resistance. In May, they are organizing a boycott of Loblaw and all its affiliates. It has two guidelines, described by blogTO: "Don't shop at Loblaw and Loblaw-owned stores for the entire month of May 2024," and, "If shopping is taking place at Loblaw stores, focus on purchasing loss leaders." I will add my own: if you see someone stealing from the grocery store, no you didn't.

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

The Hill Times

Funding for Manitoba landfill search welcome, but First Nations-led response still needed

My office is still waiting to hear whether the First Nations-led response noted in our reports will be given the utmost consideration.

Grand Chief Cathy Merrick

Opinion



Two short months after I was elected as the first female grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) in 35 years, I found myself standing with the families of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran, calling for the resignation of Winnipeg Police Chief Danny Smythe as he had just informed the country that his department would not search the Prairie Green Landfill for women who had been left like trash. I have always known that the AMC has advocated for a comprehensive regional approach to address both the systemic causes, and the immediate consequences of the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S+) crisis. It was one of the files that I wanted to ensure was addressed within our political organization.

As the former chief of the Pimichikamak Cree Nation, I was more than aware of the fact that there was no on-reserve funding to address this heartbreaking issue. Every chief I have spoken to over the last several years noted how they wanted to be more proactive and have resources to better equip themselves to deal with the genocidal crisis that is taking place off-reserve, where our First Nations citizens have no supports or connections.

My goal was to seek the mandate from our AMC Women's Council and our Chiefs in Assemblies to direct my office to secure all the monies earmarked for the MMIWG2S+ crisis in Manitoba to ensure that each First Nation in the province could hire a co-ordinator that would assist in the development of Community Safety Plans, and to link individuals and families to supports if they had to leave their home community. A proposal was submitted, dozens of meetings took place, ministers changed, and very few recommendations from the National Inquiry on MMIWG2S+ were implemented. But yet, to my surprise, no money flowed. To say that the AMC and I are deeply disappointed by the lack of meaningful action from all levels of government to implement the recommendations of various federal reports—going back to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action—goes without saying.

It took two reports, several letters, copious amounts of meetings, and a lot of advocacy work to reach the recent commitment of \$20-million from both the federal and provincial governments toward searching the Prairie Green Landfill for the remains of three First Nations women. This was heartbreaking work, and the antics of government often induced frustration and anger, particularly when #SearchTheLandfill became a provincial election issue in Manitoba, and the Progressive Conservatives took out ads and billboards that highlighted their insensitivity. People all over Canada knew this, too, and there was backlash and solidarity rallies held across the country supporting the families and the AMC on this humanitarian call for action. While this recent funding announcement is welcome, my office is still waiting to hear whether the First Nations-led response noted in our reports will be given the utmost consideration because, as of now, we are not privy to the details of these funding commitments and next steps. It is almost as if we have been "ghosted," as the kids would say.

The chiefs of the AMC have always known that the MMIWG2S+ crisis demands our urgent attention and action. It is a tragedy that has been perpetuated by generations of systemic discrimination and violence against First Nations women, girls, and Two-Spirit people. To bring healing and closure to the families and communities affected by these losses, we must work together to search for the missing, to hold those responsible accountable, and to implement the recommendations of the numerous reports that First Nations have identified over these last four decades to address the underlying causes of this crisis.

As the grand chief of the AMC, I stand with our AMC member Nations, ready to work with all levels of government and with all people of goodwill to bring an end to this crisis—that starts with ensuring funding is directed to Manitoba First Nations for a First Nations-led solution. As the grand chief who has stood by the Harris and Myran families, and all of those who have lost loved ones, I will continue to advocate for this search to start, and for monies not to sit on the government's books.

I believe as a daughter, sister, mother, auntie, and grandmother, that together, we can create a future where First Nations women, girls, men, boys and 2S+ relatives can live safely and freely.

Grand Chief Cathy Merrick is a proud Cree woman from the Cross Lake Band of Indians in Northern Manitoba. Her leadership journey began as a councillor in Pimicikamak, where she served for 12 years. After 44 years of male leadership, Merrick was the second woman to be elected as Chief of Pimicikamak in 2013. In October 2022, she made history by becoming the first female Grand Chief elected to the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

The Hill Times

News

Tenants' advocates warn of landlords 'double dipping' into green retrofit fund without greater transparency or strings attached

A recent survey by ACORN Canada found more than half of Alberta-based Avenue Living property tenants saw rent increases of between \$300 to \$600 following its June 2022 financing agreement with the Canada Infrastructure Bank for energy-efficient retrofits.

BY STUART BENSON

The latest federal budget offered potential relief for many low- to moderate-income Canadians concerned with rising rents and potential evictions, but tenant advocates say that without significant conditions attached to the billions of dollars on offer for energy-efficient renovations, corporate property managers and landlords will continue to act with impunity, increasing rents, and pitting climate and housing justice against each other.

In its post-budget reaction on April 16, ACORN Canada said the document included “promising moves” toward housing affordability for low- to moderate-income tenants as part of the federal housing plan, including the proposed Renters’ Bill of Rights, the \$1.5-billion rental protection and acquisition fund, and the proposed use of federal land to build affordable housing.

But, like many announced budget items promising large quantities of federal money for programs, Nichola Taylor, ACORN’s New Brunswick chair, said the details of those programs, and what restrictions—if any—are placed on property owners and developers would be key in determining how effective they will be.

In particular, Taylor pointed to the announced \$458-million for the Greener Affordable Housing stream as part of the federal Canada Greener Homes Loan program to provide low-interest loans and grants for energy-efficient affordable housing retrofits, and the \$800-million over five years—beginning in 2025-26—for

The 2024 budget announced \$458-million to provide low-interest loans and grants for energy-efficient affordable housing retrofits, and \$800-million over five years to launch a new Canada Greener Homes Affordability Program to support the direct installation of energy efficiency retrofits for Canadian households with low- to median-incomes. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Natural Resources Canada to launch a new Canada Greener Homes Affordability Program that will support the direct installation of energy efficiency retrofits for Canadian households with low- to median-incomes. The latter program is the next phase of the Canada Greener Homes initiative. It will be co-delivered with provincial and territorial partners, and complemented by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation’s Greener Homes Loan program, which provides interest-free loans of up to \$40,000 for energy-efficiency home retrofits.

Taylor told *The Hill Times* it will be vital for the federal government to ensure that landlords and property management companies receiving these funds are restricted from using those retrofits as a rationale for raising rents excessively, leading to increased evictions.

While the Renters’ Bill of Rights promises to protect tenants from those concerns, Taylor argued that before any money is handed over to landlords for retrofits, there need to be greater strings attached and more transparency for tenants regarding any financing or loan agreements under the Greener Homes initiative. She said those assurances are currently not present for similar funding agreements already made with landlords and property managers in Alberta and her province, neither of which have restrictions on rent increases.

“There are no strings attached; then the landlord can do whatever he or she wants to do, and that’s what’s happening now,” Taylor said.

Taylor said one of the biggest examples is the Alberta-based Avenue Living, which signed a

financing agreement with the Canadian Infrastructure Bank’s (CIB) Building Retrofits Initiative in June 2022 for \$130-million toward sustainable retrofit projects in its low-density residential buildings across Western Canada.

A recent report based on a survey of 111 past and current Avenue Living tenants conducted by ACORN Alberta indicates that since that financing agreement was announced, half of respondents reported rent increases averaging \$420, with most ranging from \$300-\$600, and some increases as high as \$800.

Given those rent increases, Taylor said tenants had at least expected an improvement in those buildings’ maintenance and quality of life. Yet respondents said the opposite was true, with basic maintenance and repair work being ignored, and tenants reporting that aging and faulty appliances and services like recycling bins, garbage, and snow removal were being neglected.

Sandra McCrone, a tenant in a Calgary, Alta., Avenue Living property and ACORN tenant union organizer, told *The Hill Times* that when she first moved into her apartment in January 2021, the complex was “rather dingy but nice,” considering the price of rent at the time.

Back then, the unit was owned by Alberta-based real estate management company Morguard, which she said charged her \$1,330 a month for a three-bedroom apartment, with only water included in those payments, plus a one-time pet fee of \$190.

McCrone’s rent increased by a little more than \$100 in the first two years she lived in the building, but after it was sold to Avenue Living in 2023, the pet fee was changed to a monthly pay-

ment of \$25—or \$300 a year—and then in January of this year, her rent was increased by more than \$500 to \$1,985 per month.

McCrone said she doesn’t believe she’ll be able to afford next year’s rent increase, considering that a two-bedroom apartment in her building now rents for \$2,200 a month.

Since Avenue Living took over managing the property, McCrone said security and administrative staff are now working reduced hours, from five days a week to two, previously nightly security patrols of the complex have ended, and the security buzzer that allows guests to enter has been broken since last Christmas.

“They’ve wrung every nickel out of the place,” Taylor said, adding that Avenue Living has also been cutting landscaping and cleaning costs. The property’s previously regularly maintained garden is now overgrown with weeds and littered with dog poop, and even the building’s garbage bins are smaller.

“COVID showed them what they could get away with, and now they’re just acting with impunity,” McCrone said, noting that she and many other tenants like herself are already making plans for what will happen when the next rent increase makes their homes unaffordable.

“When you see rents just going up and up, all you can think about is when you’re going to be next,” McCrone told *The Hill Times*. “I’ve lived and worked in Calgary since 1977, and I’ve done nothing but contribute ... but now, I’m going to be next.”

McCrone and many other respondents to ACORN’s survey also said there’s been a lack of transparency regarding the renovations and Avenue Living’s agreement with the CIB, as more than half of respondents were unaware of the agreement, or why the renovations were occurring.

In a response to ACORN Canada from the CIB regarding a letter ACORN President Marva Burnett sent in August 2023 detailing the group’s concerns over the agreement—a letter ACORN said it had not received until it was shared with them by *City News Calgary* in the course of its reporting—the CIB noted that Avenue Living has “not yet used any funding from the CIB to upgrade their properties tied to our investment.”

However, to address ACORN’s concerns, the CIB agreed that more could be done to maximize co-benefits from building upgrades, and that “going forward,” [the CIB] will require assurances that upgrades it finances are not

used to rationalize rent increases “beyond provincial guidelines in provinces where caps exist or at all in provinces where no regulator caps exist.”

While Taylor said she appreciates the CIB’s commitment, those assurances won’t be enough without sufficient enforcement and follow-through from both the federal government and the provinces.

As it stands, without greater enforcement and the closing of “loopholes” in existing restrictions, Taylor said there would continue to be instances of “double dipping,” with landlords and property management companies collecting federal funds for retrofits while using those renovations to justify increasing rents.

As one example, ACORN has observed an increasing number of retrofit-related expenses listed as capital expenditures by Ontario landlords to increase rents beyond what is permitted under the provincial Residential Tenancies Act.

“We need to see stronger covenants on rent control and eviction protections [from the provinces], and we hope that will also be addressed in the new Renters’ Bill of Rights,” Taylor said, adding that ACORN is also calling for a ban on fixed-term leases, and for federal resources for tenant unions to facilitate greater resident participation and awareness of federally funded housing and renovation projects.

Taylor said simply getting assurances that the financed renovations wouldn’t be used as a rationale for increasing rent is insufficient, pointing back to the example of Avenue Living, which she said is using a loophole by front-loading the rent increases before accessing the money.

“If they’re already jacking up rents by that much, maybe they don’t need the money,” Taylor said, suggesting that due to the rent increases, she believes the agreement already violates the Canadian Infrastructure Bank Act, which requires that deals are made in the public interest.

In an emailed response to *The Hill Times*, Avenue Living attributed the rent increases to increases in operating costs, including utilities, taxes, insurance, labour materials, and interest payments.

“We empathize with the challenges that this places on our residents and ensure our renewal rates continue to be aligned with the markets in the prairie provinces where we operate,” wrote Tammy Cho, Avenue Living’s chief communications officer. “We regularly conduct quality assurance assessments at each building to identify upgrade requirements that prioritize resident safety and comfort. The costs of these improvements, like most things, are increasing, and these costs are also factored into rental fees.”

Energy and Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson’s (North Vancouver, B.C.) office declined to comment, noting that further details on the Canada Green Building Strategy will be announced “in the coming weeks.”

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The Hill Times

Canada going ahead with Ecuador trade talks despite Mexican embassy raid rebuke

The first round of trade talks are planned to begin on April 29, according to Canada and Ecuador.

Continued from page 1

with Ecuador after the breach, a GAC spokesperson confirmed that the first round of trade negotiations is set to start on April 29.

"FTA [free trade agreement] negotiations are an occasion to strengthen the rule of law and underscore the importance of honouring legal commitments," GAC spokesperson Pierre Cuguen said in a statement to *The Hill Times*.

"We maintain that an FTA with Ecuador, supporting good governance and economic opportunity, will benefit Canadian companies, in line with the outcome of Canada's public consultations process on the FTA," he added.

Ecuadorian Ambassador to Canada Carlos Játiva also confirmed to *The Hill Times* that the first round of negotiations will begin on April 29.

Liberal MP Judy Sgro (Humber River-Black Creek, Ont.), chair of the House Committee for International Trade, said trade talks can be an opportunity for Canada to reinforce its expectations that Ecuador meet its international commitments.

"Negotiations are an opportunity to put some added emphasis on the fact that we don't take these things lightly, and we're not going to have trade agreements unless we're having them in an understanding that human rights are important to Canada, and we're going to insist that agreements be followed and be respected," she said.

Sgro said Ecuador understands the importance of a potential trade deal, so she expects that Canada can get "firm commitments" that it will follow what is agreed in an eventual pact.

She added that it would've been much more preferable if Ecuador's raid on Mexico's Embassy had not happened.

"That just raises another kind of road-block that could be potentially problematic," she said.

Amnesty International Canada has called for the trade talks to be put off until Ecuador makes firm commitments to human rights.

Kathy Price, Amnesty International Canada's Latin Americas campaigns co-or-

dinator, said Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa has shown his "true colours" with the raid on Mexico's Embassy.

"This incident shows what the Ecuadorian government is willing to do," she said. "And they are thumbing their nose to long-standing international obligations."

Price said the raid calls into question Ecuador's commitment to human rights and the rules-based international order, remarking that there are added concerns that are ongoing—far from the eyes of the Mexican Embassy's security cameras—in isolated parts of the country where there have increasingly been allegations of Ecuador failing to safeguard Indigenous rights.

"In this context, and considering Ecuador's very obvious conduct during the Mexico Embassy raid, the crucial question we have to ask is whether it is appropriate to move full steam ahead with Canada-Ecuador trade negotiations," she said.

Before the raid, Price had told the House Committee for International Trade in February that negotiations shouldn't proceed without meaningful consultations with affected Indigenous peoples in Ecuador.

"The question that we are delivering, and we have been delivering, is: where are the guarantees that human rights will be more than just an empty statement of shared values that are too easily sacrificed when whatever the agenda is requires?" Price told *The Hill Times*.

Political opposition to trade negotiations with Ecuador had been building—as the NDP and Bloc Québécois have raised concerns over the inclusion of an investment protection dispute settlement (ISDS) regime in a potential deal—but a recent referendum vote has alleviated some of the dissent, as around 60 per cent of Ecuadorians recently voted against allowing international arbitrators settling trade disputes.

ISDS systems allow private corporations to sue governments through an independent arbitrator when they feel changes in domestic laws have injured their investments.

Both Canada and Ecuador had indicated they would support ISDS provisions being included in a final trade pact. But Canada's negotiating objectives for talks with Ecuador, which were tabled in the House of Commons on March 19, indicated that investment and services "may be set aside" in negotiations "in light of ongoing consideration in Ecuador of the legal compatibility between investment agreements and its domestic legal framework."



International Trade Minister Mary Ng tabled negotiating objectives for trade talks with Ecuador on March 19, which included an investor-state dispute settlement regime, but a recent Ecuadorian referendum vote has reinforced the mechanism as unconstitutional. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NDP MP Richard Cannings (South Okanagan-West Kootenay, B.C.), his party's international trade critic, said the referendum vote against allowing international arbitration "goes a long way" to allay his concerns about a potential agreement.

"My real concern was around investor-state dispute mechanisms that would really only be there to protect Canadian companies' interests," he said.

Cannings said he would be "very surprised" if Canada continues to insist on moving ahead with an ISDS clause and investment chapter.

He called Ecuador's raid on the Mexican Embassy a "serious issue" that needs to be addressed by the international community.

Conservative MPs have also spotlighted concerns with a carbon tax being included in a negotiated deal. It was that concern that led the Tories to vote against Canada's modernized trade deal with Ukraine, despite there being no provisions within the pact that would have enacted a carbon tax, which both countries already have.

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Books & Big Ideas

Exploring the legacy of COVID pandemic panic

The following is an excerpt from *Pandemic Panic: How Canadian Government Responses to COVID-19 Changed Civil Liberties Forever*, one of the five books shortlisted for this year's \$60,000 Donner Prize.

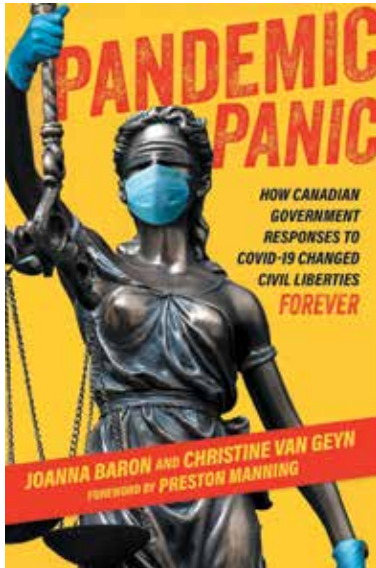
JOANNA BARON & CHRISTINE VAN GEYN

In October 2022, economist Emily Oster wrote a plea for a “pandemic amnesty.” After detailing various ill-conceived public health policies cobbled together throughout the pandemic, Oster concluded that “The standard saying is that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. But dwelling on the mistakes of history can lead to a repetitive doom loop as well.” She reasoned that many admittedly poor public health decisions were made in an information vacuum and that the salubrious thing to do going forward would be to forgive and forget.

Oster was concerned about the social fabric fraying as a result of polarizing online discourse and urged the need to move forward. However, our anecdotal experience has shown a second common response to pandemic mishaps—going blank entirely on what occurred during that time.

We have observed a phenomenon whereby the surreal, sometimes inane, often unprecedented and unusual public health measures taken over the roughly three-year pandemic period were “memory holed,” i.e., the mind completely fogged over. Many times in the course of writing this book we messaged one another after unearthing yet another public policy absurdity: the City of Toronto taping off cherry blossoms or Quebec requiring unvaccinated people to be chaperoned in plexiglass carts through the essential aisles of big-box stores.

We are not psychologists, but we can see that there must be an evolutionary benefit to allowing a collective trauma to dissolve into the slipstream: it's unproductive to dwell on how we got by and how our government coped in real time. Our memories are warped, first, by the “primacy effect”—our tendency to remember “firsts,” exemplified by people universally naming George



Pandemic Panic will be very relevant to policymakers in that it provides a critical analysis of past actions and their implications, offering lessons that can inform future crisis response and policy development, writes the Donner Prize Foundation. Book cover image courtesy of Optimum Publishing International

Washington when asked to recall former U.S. presidents.

Most people have a crystal-clear memory of the moment their plague year started in earnest. For us and for many others, it was March 11, 2020, the day the National Basketball Association suspended games for the rest of the season. Joanna was in bed eating takeout in a hotel in Montreal, watching the feed of escalating bad news roll in with increasing unease, knowing she had to get on a plane back to Toronto the next day. She got home and more or less barricaded herself in her condo. Within a few days, the entire world had changed. Christine was visiting her family in northern Ontario with her husband and kids. They would remain up north for weeks. Such an extraordinary and immediate change to virtually every aspect of daily life is indelibly etched in our memories.

As the pandemic dragged on, however, most of the various lockdowns, reopenings, stay-at-home orders, regulations, and ordinances melted into a grey area that has less significance for our individual recollections. To take just one of infinite examples, you probably don't remember: an incident in December 2020. At this point it was well established that COVID-19 very rarely spread outdoors. Two Calgary police officers arrested a twenty-one-year-old man for skating outdoors. When the man asked why he was being grabbed, one officer warned him “Get on the ground before I f**cking taser you.” To watch the video is to be reminded of the grotesque occurrences

that, for a period of time, became normalized. This book aims to serve as something of a corrective to the frailties of our collective memories. *The British Medical Journal* recently called for a national inquiry into Canada's public health response to COVID-19, declaring that “the world expected more of Canada.” We respectfully claim the same is merited with regards to Canada's treatment of constitutional rights.

When liberty doesn't emerge from the laws of nature but instead must be mediated through the people's representatives, groupthink and political exigencies can do a lot of damage. From the outset of the pandemic, Canadians witnessed an extraordinary—and mainly uncontested—outgrowth of governmental powers and assaults on individual liberties. The Macdonald-Laurier Institute, in its COVID Misery Index, ranked Canada's pandemic misery in unemployment and excess inflation as among the worst in the world.

Any way you calculate it, there was plenty of misery to go around. Canada's most populous provinces, Ontario and Quebec, endured some of the world's longest lockdowns. Restaurants in Toronto were shut down for more than 360 days over the course of the pandemic, the longest period of any city in the world. Schools in Ontario were shut for more than seven months between March 2020 and January 2022. As for the economic and social consequences, the worst may still be to come.

Our book, *Pandemic Panic*, moves sequentially through the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Canadian Constitution, primarily its *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, but also the rights guaranteed by the *Constitution Act, 1867*. We consider the rights to freedom of assembly and protest, the epoch-defining Freedom Convoy and subsequent invocation of the federal *Emergencies Act*, which saw the Trudeau government, for the first time in history, invoke an extraordinary portfolio of draconian state powers. We discuss movement restrictions, going back to the early days of the first wave of the pandemic, when the Maritime provinces put in place a flurry of interprovincial travel restrictions. We also have a lengthy deep dive into the ultimately misconstrued federal quarantine hotels program and the challenge the CCF led against it.

Pandemic Panic looks at the various privacy implications of the pandemic measures, including the notoriously expensive COVID alert app, vaccine passports, snitch lines, and cellphone data tracking. We highlight the asymmetrical effects public health

measures had on Canadians, including disabled Ontarians who were barred from accessing mobility therapy due to gym lockdowns and individuals who suffered known medical complications from a COVID-19 vaccine and were left unaccommodated by British Columbia's vaccine passport program.

One of the areas most ravaged by pandemic policies was freedom of expression, with staggering restrictions placed on individuals' abilities to share information and engage in debate—including a case where a judge imposed one of the most extreme compelled-speech orders of any country in the world during the pandemic.

We also cover the devastating effects lockdowns had on the ability of religious congregations to gather in worship, and discusses why religious freedom attracts unique constitutional protections, looking at various court challenges to lockdown orders. And we review one of the most intensely polarizing issues of the pandemic: vaccine mandates, passports, and the differential treatment of unvaccinated individuals which, at times, even raised the spectre of imposing a special “unvax tax.”

Finally, public emergencies often go hand in hand with politicians skirting ordinary legislative procedures with the goal of defending public safety, and Canada's experience during the COVID-19 pandemic was no different. In Chapter 11, “COVID-19, Democracy and the Rule of Law,” we look at extended states of emergency, legislative power grabs, and other worrying irregularities that occurred at various levels of government.

We ask that you read with an open mind. Over the course of the pandemic, we saw the world views of many thoughtful, intelligent friends ossify into uniform narratives. The underlying reality of how the pandemic affected our rights is uneven and complex. So whether you fall into the camp that believes the pandemic constituted a generational health threat and most public health measures intended to blunt its impact were justified, or you think that governments lurched towards unjustified power grabs, prepare to have your narrative challenged.

Pandemic Panic: How Canadian Government Responses to COVID-19 Changed Civil Liberties Forever, by Joanna Baron and Christine Van Geyn, Optimum Publishing International, \$27.95. *Pandemic Panic* 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

Opinion

Canada's sordid approach to transparency needs to change

Continued from page 10

in contempt of Parliament, and bringing in three retired judges to vet the denied data.

In the end, a special committee of MPs noted the majority of PHAC records released appeared to be withheld to protect the agency from embarrassment over its poor security actions resulting in the sharing of—and funding of—pathogen data with Chinese authorities. That release of more information took more than three years to come about.

Whether lax security compromised the treatment and transfer of deadly infectious disease pathogens at any time that could have impacted Canadians' well-being is still not known, nor is whether there were more breaches and unauthorized transmission of confidential infectious disease data and pathogens to the Chinese. Simply indicating that security has been beefed up at the Winnipeg lab leaves much to be explained. More investigation and answers are needed.

While less prominent, the House of Commons National Defence Committee has been hearing how the Department of National Defence (DND)—recently awarded with an increase in its budget—is simply ignoring the basic ground rules of the Access to Information Act. That includes in many instances not acknowledging applications on a timely basis, not taking or honouring time extensions, and being caught out on falsely claiming records do not exist.

Having figures on the costs incurred on the controversial multi-billion-dollar Canadian Surface Combatant program—Canada's most expensive contracting program—be totally exempt remains beyond the pale.

The defence committee heard from Information Commissioner Caroline Maynard that DND has been ignoring her orders for better processing and release of departmental data, forcing her to go back to Federal Court.

Yet federal bureaucrats and the Prime Minister's Office expect their belated handling of these issues and release of associated documentation under pressure to be considered fair-minded.

This sordid state of affairs of avoiding transparency, adequate and timely record keeping, and accountability practices needs to change.

Ken Rubin is an Ottawa-based investigative researcher and public interest advocate reachable at kenrubin.ca

The Hill Times

Canada's military procurement: a laundry list of broken promises

Continued from page 9

By 2009, the Army realized that it needed something heavier than an LAV 3 in Afghanistan, and they needed it on an urgent basis. The Army wanted to buy the Swedish Combat Vehicle 90 off the shelf, but bureaucracy prevailed. A competition was then launched to ascertain which close-combat vehicle (CCV) would be best suited for Canada's future Army. The project called for the purchase of 108 CCVs at a cost of \$2.1-billion, and they were to be the backbone of our combat forces for the foreseeable future. After two rounds of what was called "testing to destruction," the three remaining bidders—BAE Systems, Nexter, and GDLS—were informed that the whole deal was off. Given that our combat mission in Afghanistan was concluded, the Harper Conservatives killed the procurement to save money.

It was the Harper Conservatives who had also originally announced in 2010 that they would buy 65 Lockheed Martin F-35 Joint Strike Fighters to replace the RCAF's 80 CF-18s at a purchase cost of \$9-billion. The first delivery of these CF-35s was to be in late 2016. However, in 2015, the Trudeau Liberals ran on the promise that, if elected, they would scrap the Conservatives' plans to purchase the controversial CF-35 Joint Strike Fighters. Once elected, Trudeau did scrap the initiative to buy the F-35s, and the Liberals subsequently ordered the RCAF to hold a competition to determine the CF-18s best possible replacement. Lo and behold, the F-35 won the competition, and the price tag is now \$19-billion for 88 aircraft—the first of which will not be delivered until 2026.

For the long suffering Royal Canadian Navy, nothing exemplifies their dangling carrot of procurement promises better than the saga to replace the now long-retired HMCS Protecteur class supply ships. First announced in 2004, the original timeline called for a contract to be signed by 2009 with the first of three ships delivered and in service by 2012. There are now only two such ships on the order book, and the first will not be delivered until 2025, with the second due in 2027. The cost has continued to climb.

So, when the Liberals table a DPU in 2024 promising \$73-billion in additional defence spending over the next 20 years, forgive me if I do not believe that, this time, Trudeau is going to "kick it to the moon."

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

The Hill Times

Parliamentary Calendar

The Parliamentary Calendar is a free events listing. Send in your political, cultural, diplomatic, or governmental event in a paragraph with all the relevant details under the subject line 'Parliamentary Calendar' to news@hilltimes.com by Wednesday at noon before the Monday paper or by Friday at noon for the Wednesday paper.

Senator Pate, PPC Leader Bernier to talk social injustice April 27



ISG Senator Kim Pate, left, and People's Party of Canada Leader Maxime Bernier are taking part in a panel discussion, 'Elusiveness of a Just Society in Canada: Causes and Solutions,' in Ottawa on April 27. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

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 at the 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 in Ottawa 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 in Ottawa 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 Château 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 in Room 325, 180 Wellington St., on Tuesday, April 30, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Contact infomedia@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., Ottawa. 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 7:30-9 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. 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., Ottawa. 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. Mental Health and Addictions Minister 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., Ottawa, 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., Ottawa. 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., Ottawa. 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.

SATURDAY, MAY 4

Gwynne Dyer to Discuss His New Book—Author, journalist, *Hill Times* columnist, and historian Gwynne Dyer will discuss his latest book, *Intervention Earth: Life-Saving Ideas from the World's Climate Engineers*, as part of the Ottawa International Writers' Festival. Saturday, May 4, at 12 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details online: writersfestival.org.

SUNDAY, MAY 5

Sally Armstrong to Discuss Her New Book—Author, journalist, and human rights activist Sally Armstrong will discuss her new book, *Outspoken: My Fight for Freedom and Human Rights in Afghanistan*, co-authored with Sima Samar, a medical doctor, public official, founder of schools and hospitals, and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, as part of the Ottawa International Writers' Festival. Sunday, May 5 at 1:30 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details online: writersfestival.org.

Sophie Grégoire Trudeau to Discuss Her New Book—Sophie Grégoire Trudeau will discuss her new book, *Closer Together*, as part of the Ottawa International Writers' Festival. Sunday, May 5, at 7:30 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details online: writersfestival.org.

MONDAY, MAY 6

AFN Dialogue on Transport and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel—The Assembly of First Nations hosts the third 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. Monday, May 6, at 8 a.m. ET at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel, 123 Queen St. W., Toronto. Details online: afn.ca/events.

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