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THE HILL TIMES

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CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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NEWS

Conservative Facebook ads reach out to Chinese-Canadians as Liberals take local approach to big budget sales pitch

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

Following the tabling of the 2024 budget on April 16, the Conservative Party is running Chinese-language advertisements on Facebook and Instagram to promote the party's law-and-order policies.

"There's no better way to reach specific communities than by communicating to them in the language they speak," said Cole Hogan, a principal at Earncliffe Strategies and past digital campaigner for conservative parties in Ontario and Alberta. "I think we can expect to see this from all parties. If you have additional translators at your disposal and you're creating ads featuring your leader in the language of the demographic you're targeting, you're giving yourself a big advantage."

The Conservatives' advertisements, targeting Ontario and British Columbia, state that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) and the New Democratic Party are seeking to "legalize hard drugs," leading to safe supply facilities across the country.

"To curb crime, support the Conservative Party which is based on common sense," the ad reads. It is accompanied by a video, which contrasts a black-and-

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NEWS

Trudeau tells Grit MPs not to expect any dramatic boost in public opinion until next year

The Conservatives' double-digit lead is not so much an endorsement of Pierre Poilievre as leader, but because Canadians want a change in government, says Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs.

BY ABBAS RANA

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told Liberal MPs at their most recent national caucus meeting in Ottawa not to expect any significant change in public opinion polls until next year, according to some politicians who attended.

"Don't expect us to be neck and neck in two months' time or six months' time, even," said a Liberal MP when describing the gist of Trudeau's (Papineau, Que.) message to MPs at the April 17

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NEWS

Public service unions sound alarm over feds' plan to trim bureaucracy by 5,000 jobs through 'natural attrition'

BY MIKE LAPOINTE

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's federal budget, released on April 16, promised to shrink the federal public service by 5,000 jobs via to "natural attrition" over the next four years, projecting \$15.8-billion in savings down the line.

But the three largest federal public service unions are wary that federal employees will be asked to do more with less, noting that some departments already struggling to deliver services to Canadians could be in for a rough ride.

In a scrum with reporters on April 16, Treasury Board President Anita Anand (Oakville, Ont.) said Canada has seen a significant growth in the public service following the COVID-19 pandemic, "when it was natural for us to have additional public servants in order to dispense with massive programs that we were putting in place."

"We are simply looking at ways in which we can save money, cut red tape, and ensure that our taxpayer dollars are allocated towards our government's priorities," said Anand. "So that's just the process of the refocused spending initiative. We are on track to save \$15.8-billion over five years, and this second phase will examine the size of the public

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addresses his Liberal caucus on the Hill on April 17. The April 16 federal budget failed to provide any bump in support to the Liberals last week. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

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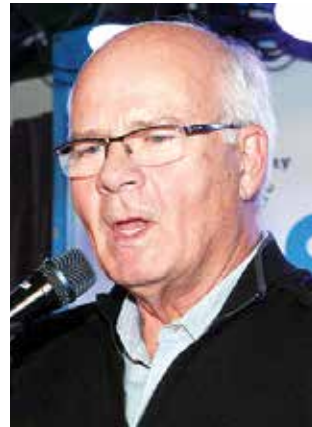
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Mike Lapointe

Heard On The Hill

The Bridge's take: LeBlanc, among others, discussing 'Plan B' scenario if Prime Minister Trudeau steps down



Abacus Data's CEO Bruce Anderson, left, columnist Chantal Hébert, and former CBC journalist Peter Mansbridge discussed recent revelations that Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc has eyes on succeeding the prime minister should he step down. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

A stalwart supporter and friend of the prime minister, cabinet minister **Dominic LeBlanc** recently sparked chatter amongst politicians following an opinion piece by veteran journalist and author **Lawrence Martin** in *The Globe and Mail* entitled "Dominic LeBlanc wants his close friend **Justin Trudeau**'s job."

LeBlanc, minister of public safety, democratic institutions and intergovernmental affairs, is a long-standing New Brunswick Liberal whose late father, **Roméo LeBlanc**, served as the governor general from 1995 to 1999, and also in prime minister **Pierre Trudeau**'s cabinet.

LeBlanc was recently reported as having met with a former Liberal cabinet minister who discussed plans "for Mr. LeBlanc to run to succeed Mr. Trudeau as party leader and become prime minister, should he step down," according to Martin's column. "Mr. LeBlanc was eager. Over whisky and cigars—the New Brunswicker has always enjoyed a good stogie—the former minister agreed to be part of a ginger group to lay the groundwork for a campaign," reads the column.

The article prompted LeBlanc to answer questions from reporters, wherein he said he plans to be a candidate in the next election under Trudeau's leadership.

"I'm very happy. I'm excited about that. I'm focused on the responsibilities he gave me. It's a big job. I'm enjoying it and I'm optimistic that our team and the prime minister will make the case to Canadians as to why we should be re-elected," said LeBlanc.

Following the column and LeBlanc's remarks to reporters, the story was dissected in former CBC's *The National* anchor **Peter Mansbridge**'s podcast *The Bridge* with *Peter Mansbridge* by *L'Actualité* columnist **Chantal Hébert** and Abacus Data chair **Bruce Anderson**.

When asked what she thought about the story, Hébert said "there are a number of people, including Dominic LeBlanc, who are thinking about the 'Plan B' scenario' where the Liberals have thrown everything they have at improving in the polls without seeing a rebound."

Hébert said she thought most of the people in the conversation—former Bank of Canada governor **Mark Carney** and LeBlanc, for example—do not assume the prime minister will leave, but are thinking that if he does, the Liberal Party is not going to give itself a year to choose, and that it will give itself a matter of months.

"So if you do nothing—because you should do nothing—you will be totally disadvantaged should this happen," said Hébert, noting that former Progressive Conservative cabinet minister and Quebec premier **Jean Charest** had expected former prime minister **Brian Mulroney** to stay on in 1993.

"And [Charest] didn't organize at all before Brian Mulroney quit, and that may have cost him the leadership," said Hébert, who also noted former prime minister **Kim Campbell**'s name "kept surfacing more and more" despite the fact that she didn't spend a lot of time organizing.

"No one wants to be the Liberal **Jean Charest** if Justin Trudeau quits, so those conversations have been happening," said Hébert.

Anderson said "we know Lawrence Martin," and that he "would not have written that piece had that dinner not happened and been pretty much as he described it," said Anderson.

Anderson said when that point comes—whether it's in June or mid-July—Trudeau may feel that it's only up to him to make that decision.

"But in my experience it doesn't usually feel that way in the moment," said Anderson. "It feels like, then, a whole lot of

other people have opinions, and those opinions are starting to be spoken and are starting to be translated into unpleasant stories every day or two, and a sense of tension, and that's not a situation he would want."

Conservative MP Mike Lake recognizes World Autism Month in House

On April 17, Conservative MP **Mike Lake** stood up during member's statements to recognize World Autism Month, and said it's "now 26 years since my son **Jaden** was diagnosed."

"Since then, I have embarked on an unanticipated lifetime of learning experiences. For example, I have learned at home to always check for finger lines in the butter, cupcakes, or just food generally. I have learned that an urgent 'bababababa' in the car often means an iPhone left behind or a missed Google Maps turn. More importantly, I have learned that we tend to wrongly divide the world into people who give help and people who need help," said Lake.



Conservative MP Mike Lake says "in reality, as human beings, we are helpers or those helped at various times; sometimes, we are both at once." *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

"In reality, as human beings, we are helpers or those helped at various times; sometimes, we are both at once," said the Conservative MP, who represents Edmonton-Wetaskiwin, Alta.

Lake said that deciphering what Jaden needs or wants "is incredibly hard," but that he learns much in the process of waiting on him, paying attention to his non-verbal communication, and assuming he has something to say.

"These lessons help me in every human interaction I have," said Lake. "Right now, finding ways to better understand one another is something our world needs more than anything else."

Erica Rayment's new book on the impact of women in Parliament hits shelves

Erica Rayment, an assistant professor in the department of political science at the University of Calgary, has released a new book: *What Women Represent: The Impact of Women in Parliament*.

"Great way to start the week: [Eric Rayment's] excellent new [McGill-Queens University Press] book arrived," wrote **Jonathan Malloy**, a political scientist at Carleton University and scholar of Canadian political institutions, on X on April 15. "Drawing from a feminist perspective and deep knowledge of the workings of Parliament, this is an excellent study of what it actually means on an everyday basis to have women in Parliament."

CAJ announces investigative journalism awards finalists

The Canadian Association of Journalists has announced the finalists for this year's top investigative journalism awards competition.

The Canadian Press' **Mickey Djuric**, the *Globe and Mail*'s **Steven Chase** and **Bob Fife**—in addition to the *Globe*'s **Grant Robertson**—*La Presse*'s **Isabelle Dubé**, and the *Toronto Star*'s **Wendy Gillis** all made the finalist list for the Canadian Association of Journalists' scoop category.

Finalists in the written news category include the Canadian Press's **Darryl Greer**, *Winnipeg Free Press*'s **Marsha McLeod**, **Aaron Derfel** from the *Montreal Gazette*, freelance/*Globe and Mail* reporter **Jenn Thornhill Verma**, and *The Narwhal/Toronto Star*'s **Emma McIntosh**, **Noor Javed**, **Sheila Wang**, and **Charlie Pinkerton**.

"In a time when journalism is so frequently brought under assault by those who seek to undermine the public's right to know, this year's CAJ Awards



Canadian Association of Journalists president **Brent Jolly** says "this year's CAJ Awards finalists showcase the dynamic power of storytelling and the vital public service journalists serve in holding the powerful to account." *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

finalists showcase the dynamic power of storytelling and the vital public service journalists serve in holding the powerful to account," said CAJ president **Brent Jolly** in a statement.

There were a total 474 entries submitted for consideration in the 2023 awards program. Recipients in each category will be announced at the awards gala scheduled for June 1 at the Toronto Public Library. The gala is the CAJ's signature event that concludes the CAJ's 2024 national conference: *Journalism and How To Survive It*

Some 130 Quebec and Ontario students will be working in the Red Chamber on April 29

Teenagers, an ambassador, and Senators are set to come together in a conference on April 29 at the Senate of Canada.

Some students will participate online from the Toronto area, with student leaders spending the day working with politicians on legislative issues that are before the government and the United Nations.

Political participants include United Nations Ambassador **Bob Rae**, Senators **Tony Loffreda**, **Marc Gold**, **Donna Dasko**, and **Andrew Cardozo**, as well as Quebec Liberal MLA **Jennifer Maccarone**.

The student leaders will have three hours to learn about their legislative issue from their politician in the morning, and report back to them with solutions at the end of the day.

The purpose of NextGEN is to give emerging leaders the experience and tools to influence meaningful change in their communities by understanding the democratic system and the how the mechanics work, identify complex problems and work collaboratively to meet those challenges, and to enable students to work with the highest levels of our government—in French and English—from different regions of Canada, "on topics that affect all of us in our daily lives" according to the release.

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Minister Holland

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News

Former ministerial staffer Church and Global Affairs official Richardson seek coveted Liberal nomination of Toronto-St. Paul's, Ont.

The May 1 Liberal nomination contest will elect the party's candidate for the yet-to-be-scheduled byelection.

BY ABBAS RANA

The Toronto-St. Paul's, Ont., Liberal riding association members will choose their candidate on May 1 for the yet-to-be scheduled byelection to succeed former Liberal MP and cabinet minister Carolyn Bennett. Leslie Church, former chief of staff to Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) and Emma Richardson, a senior official at Global Affairs Canada who in the past has worked for the United Nations, are competing to carry the party's banner in the byelection expected to be called by July.

"With a strong focus on important new engagement with Canadians, the Team Trudeau nominations process helps ensure we're ready to re-elect our dedicated Liberal team in Parliament and continue to elect even more talented, diverse, and hardworking community leaders as Liberal MPs across Canada, whenever the next campaign eventually



After representing the riding of Toronto-St. Paul's for about 27 years, Carolyn Bennett resigned her seat in mid-January. She is now Canada's ambassador to Denmark. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



arrives," read the email sent by the party to riding association members, last week. "As we look forward to the important work ahead of us, the hope and hard work of Liberals across Canada will ensure our candidates and teams are ready to run competitive campaigns and earn another mandate from Canadians—including right here in Toronto-St. Paul's."

For about three decades, Toronto-St. Paul's has been traditionally seen as a safe Liberal riding. The last time this riding elected anyone but a Liberal was 1984 when then-Progressive Conservative cabinet minister Barbara McDougall represented the area for nine years between 1984-1993. McDougall did not seek re-election in the 1993 election in which her party was reduced to only two seats across the country, and the Liberals won a majority government under Jean Chretien. In that election, Liberal Barry Campbell defeated PC candidate Isabel Bassett. Campbell did not re-offer in 1997, leaving an opening for Bennett.

The downtown Toronto riding officially opened up this past January following Bennett's resignation. She served as the MP for the riding for about 27 years starting in 1997. With the exception of the 2011 federal election, the nine-term incumbent Liberal MP won all elections by double the number of votes of second-place candidates.



Former cabinet staffer Leslie Church, left, and senior government official Emma Richardson are running for the Liberal nomination in Toronto-St. Paul's. The nomination contest is scheduled for May 1. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade and courtesy of voteemma.ca

In advance of last summer's cabinet shuffle, Bennett had announced that she would not be running in 2025, and consequently was shuffled out. Since Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's (Papineau, Que.) Liberals came to power in 2015, Bennett had served in a number of portfolios, including Indigenous and northern affairs, Crown-Indigenous relations, and mental health and addictions. Prior to that, she served as the public health minister from 2003-2006 in then-prime minister Paul Martin's cabinet.

After Bennett officially tendered her resignation in mid-January, Trudeau appointed her as Canada's ambassador to Denmark.

After a riding opens up, the government has six months to call the byelection. The minimum writ period is 36 days and the maximum is 50 days.

Considering the tanking Liberal polling numbers nationally, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict that caused a sharp divide amongst the Liberal voter base, and Bennett's name not on the ballot after about three decades, political insiders and pollsters expect the coming byelection in the riding to be a close one, but the Liberals are still likely to win. This riding has the fifth-highest number of Jewish Canadians in the country. Political observers are watching closely how the progressive voters who are part

of the Liberal Party base will vote in this byelection.

According to an Innovative Research national poll released last week, if an election were to happen now, 41 per cent of Canadians would vote for the Conservatives, 26 per cent for the Liberals, 17 per cent for the New Democrats, eight per cent for the Bloc Québécois, and five per cent for the Greens.

Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research, said the Toronto-St. Paul's riding is part of the Liberal Party base, and even though the current political landscape appears to be unfavourable for the government, still, the Liberals will most likely win. He said that he will be looking at the margin by which the Grits win this riding.

"The real question is: how close is the margin?" said Lyle. "This is a base Liberal seat and is the sort of the seat you would expect the Liberals to win [even] if they're winning 50 seats [nationally]. If they come close to losing it, that's a message that they can't count on their base. If they actually lose it, that's a pretty clear message to Trudeau: it's time to pack up and go home."

David Colletto, CEO of Abacus Data, told *The Hill Times* earlier this month that, based on his January seat projections, this was a Liberal-leaning riding, but that the governing party had only a four-point lead over the Conservatives. He said the model does not

take into account the candidate profile, how a campaign is run, and current-affairs issues like the Hamas-Israel conflict, which has ripped apart the Liberal voting coalition. By adding these three factors into the mix, the safe Liberal riding is in play, and any of the three major parties could win, said Colletto.

According to polling aggregator 338canada.com, the riding of Toronto-St. Paul's is a Liberal leaning hold riding.

The federal Conservatives have nominated Don Stewart, director marketing surveillance at the Canadian Marketing Investment Organization, as their candidate.

The New Democrats has named Amrit Parhar, director of programs at the Institute for Change Leaders in Toronto, as their candidate.

Emma Richardson, a senior Indigenous Services official who is currently on secondment with Global Affairs Canada, told *The Hill Times* that she received a very welcoming response from people living in the riding. She said that, due to Bennett's "incredible legacy," the constituents of Toronto-St. Paul's are receptive to the Liberal Party's message.

"It's been very easy to meet with constituents because a lot of them knew her [Bennett] so well," said Richardson, who holds a PhD in Public Health and Behavioural Science, and is also an adjunct assistant professor at the McMaster University. "So that is a major advantage that the Liberal Party will have in the election, and I'm very optimistic about the result for the Liberals."

Church, a former senior cabinet ministerial staffer, said that if she were to win the nomination on Wednesday, she wouldn't take anything for granted. She has been campaigning in the riding since October.

"The stakes here are very high, and that there's a really clear choice ahead [in the byelection]," said Church, a lawyer by training, who served as a senior ministerial staffer to several cabinet ministers in the Trudeau government, and who previously worked in the private sector. "And I have to say that I've been out in the community, I've knocked on thousands of doors, and made thousands of calls. The one thing that I feel really strongly about is that St. Paul's is a riding of community-builders. And I think that that choice is something that I really want to fight for. It's about someone who's going to fight to grow and build this community while caring for our neighbours and investing in the things that people depend on, or an approach that wants to tear down the things that make Canada great."

In addition to Toronto-St. Paul's, the ridings of LaSalle-Émard-Verdun, Que., and Elmwood-Transcona, Man., are also now vacant. The Quebec riding opened up following the resignation of Liberal MP and former justice minister David Lametti, and the Manitoba one after the resignation of NDP MP Daniel Blaikie. Trudeau could call byelections in all three ridings at the same time.

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The Hill Times

Military mutiny or political collapse: Ukraine is running out of options

Gwynne
Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—“I’ve said before, you do the right thing and you let the chips fall where they may,” said Mike Johnson, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. The chips being the 10,000 or 20,000 extra Ukrainians who died needlessly during the six months when the Republican Party blocked the sending of any more American military aid to Ukraine.

To be fair, that’s a fuzzy number. Neither side issues regular updates on military casualties, and Ukrainian civilian deaths from Russian bombs, shells, and rockets are only about 11,000 in the past 26 months. However, Ukrainian military deaths have at least doubled since the U.S. Congress stopped sending artillery shells and other weapons six months ago.

To be even fairer, a significant number of Republican members of the House support Ukraine, and only a small number are actively pro-Russian. (The rest are simply isolationists or are cowed by Donald Trump, who does favour the Russians.) Johnson may lose his job for defying the hard-liners in his own party, but they cannot reverse the April 20 vote.

The Senate has come back from recess to approve the amended House vote, which authorizes US\$61-billion in military aid to Ukraine. The U.S. Armed Forces claim that fresh supplies of 155 mm shells and other urgently needed kit will start reaching exhausted Ukrainian troops by next week.

Is that soon enough to avert collapse? Probably, but it has been a very near-run thing. As the U.S.-supplied munitions ran out, the Russians have been able to fire 10 shells for every one expended by the Ukrainians—and since the fighting increasingly resembles First World War-style artillery duels with added electronics, has given the Russians the upper hand.

The Russians have been building up for a big June offensive, but they might launch it early in the hope of breaking through before the U.S. arms arrive. That would probably be a mistake, however, because the rasputitsa (‘mud season’) that makes off-road movement by vehicles almost impossible is now often lasting into early May due to global warming.

So if the renewed American military aid prevents a Russian victory at least until the end of 2024—and if Trump does not return as president next January—what are Ukraine’s chances of surviving over the longer term as an independent country?

If the analogy of the First World War is relevant, then the next step, for one side or the other, is military mutiny and/or political collapse.

So far the analogy has held up quite well. A first few months of rapid movement (August 1914/March 2022) is rapidly followed by a surprise shift into trench warfare and stalemate. This lasts for three years, punctuated by occasional big offensives that cause high casualties but gain little or no ground.

And then, by mid-to-late 1917, the sheer futility of the war had undermined morale

so badly that the armies started to mutiny or just collapse. The Russians leave the war entirely and have a revolution instead. The French and Italian armies mutiny, and their officers dare not order any more offensives.

The equivalent point on our 21st-century Ukraine war timeline would be early next year. True, the analogy is far from perfect,

but that’s a problem with all historical analogies. This war directly involves only two countries, not all the great powers, but the experience of the soldiers is very similar—and it was the soldiers who mutinied in 1917, not the generals.

Which side will collapse first this time around? Hard to say. There has already been one mutiny in the Russian forces. (Prigo-

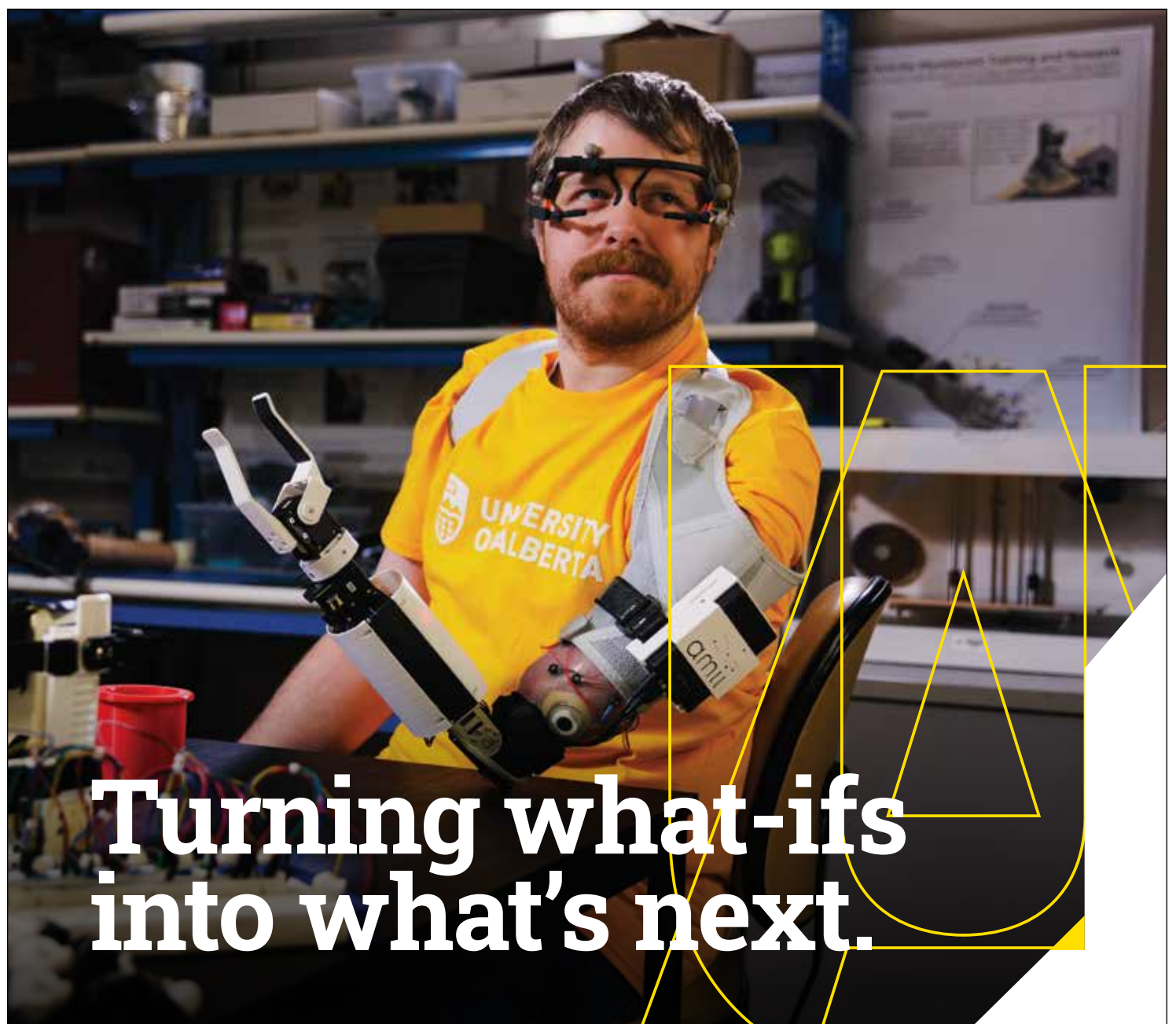
zhin’s aborted putsch last June). He was duly killed for his presumption, but he came close enough to success to inspire others.

Ukrainian morale has already taken a battering because of the capricious stop-and-start character of U.S. military and financial aid, and Ukrainian soldiers will always face three-to-one odds or worse because of their country’s smaller population. ‘Gallant little Ukraine’ is a great slogan, but God (as Voltaire remarked) “is on the side of the Big Battalions.”

All that this analogy can tell us, therefore, is that the war is unlikely to be decided by a military victory for either side. It will probably be settled by which side’s soldiers get sick of it first—and if you are not actually living amongst them, you cannot know how close either side is to that point.

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

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News

Broad support for Senate modernization motion, says Sen. Gold as Tories accuse government of ‘ramming’ through rule changes



Marc Gold, the government's representative in the Senate, introduced a motion on April 18 to change the Upper Chamber's rules after other initiatives failed to bring the matter to a vote. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Some Senators questioned the timing of the motion amid talk of Liberals being ‘wiped out’ in the next election, as Conservative Leader Donald Plett put it.

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

The government's representative in the Senate says it's time for the Red Chamber to properly recognize new groups of Senators and grant their leaders “equity and fairness” in the rules so it matches legislation updated in 2022. But the Conservatives say Senator Marc Gold is taking the wrong approach and is effectively “ramming” through changes that will hinder the opposition's ability to hold the government to account.

“[T]he time has come for this Chamber, as a whole, to act,” said Gold (Stadacona, Que.) during his April 18 speech introducing Motion No. 165.

Gold said despite amendments passed in 2022 to the Parliament of Canada Act, repeated studies on Senate modernization, and the creation of three official groups of Senators in the Upper Chamber, the Senate remains “incoherently defined by a two-party system” that “excludes an absolute majority of the Senators.” The 41-person Independent Senators Group (ISG) is the largest by far, followed by the 17-member Canadian Senators Group (CSG), 14-member Progressive Senate Group (PSG), and 13-member Conservative Senate caucus. There are seven non-affiliated Senators, as well as the Speaker and three government representatives. There haven't been Liberal Senators since 2014 when Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) removed all Senators from the party's caucus.

Gold said the Senate rules unfairly favour the government and opposition when the majority of Senators—more than 80 per cent of the 96 Senators—are not associated with either group, and doesn't reflect major changes to

the Senate's evolving model since 2015. The Conservatives take issue with this framing, given 70 of the current Senators have been appointed by now Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and his selection suggests a certain political alignment in perspectives if not outright party allegiance when it comes to passing government legislation.

While the substantive changes that focus on expanding two-party powers to other recognized groups drew the bulk of Tory ire during debate recently, there were plenty of other reforms suggested in the more than 3,700-word motion. It also proposes Senators reduce their dinner break to one hour from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m., and implement a 60-calendar day requirement for the government to provide responses to Senate delayed answers and written questions where no such obligation to respond currently exists.

It also codifies a November 2021 sessional order extending the time for Senators' statements up to 18 minutes, brings in language changes to align the rules with the Parliament of Canada Act, and expands deferral of standing votes to include the three largest groups in the Senate (other than the government and opposition).

One section focuses on time allocation, formally granting the government representative the ability to set limits on debate length before a vote is called—“even if they do not lead a political party caucus.”

After the Senate Rules Committee chose not to bring any recommended changes to the floor following its study, Gold said his office was forced to address the disconnect.

“[O]ur rules remain at a standstill, reflecting a bygone era,” said Gold, who took questions for two-and-a-half hours on April 18. “While coming to a unanimous agreement of all interested parties is obviously an ideal and the best way forward, it's also obvious that unanimity is not in the cards.”

“Do you know why you get a standing ovation?” Conservative Senator Leo Housakos (Wellington, Que.) asked Gold following the motion's introduction. “You are changing the fundamental procedural rules of this independent House, with support and applause raining down in this place by Trudeau-appointed Senators.”

Gold offered his view of independence, as “independent from

the control of the Prime Minister's Office,” later stating the government motion before Senators is an initiative of his office and not of the PMO, “period.”

If the motion passes, unlimited speaking time for debate would be granted to the leader of the largest group other than the government or opposition leaders who already have that power. Currently, they have up to 45 minutes, the amount proposed to remain for the leaders of the next two largest groups. The proposal also makes sure each recognized group has a designated Senator to speak 45 minutes on a bill, a privilege currently only granted to bill sponsors and critics at second and third reading.

‘Draconian motion’ greatly reduces opposition powers: Batters

Gold said he consulted with all official groups for many weeks, with all but the Conservatives responding, which he called consistent with their “longstanding opposition to reforms of this kind.” The Conservatives objected to Gold's framing of that approach as consultation, with Conservative Senate Leader Donald Plett (Landmark, Man.) accusing the government of pushing “unilateral changes to the rules clearly with the goal to silence the opposition.”

Plett said more negotiation was the better path, and with that approach the parties could have “maybe reached something somewhere along the line.”

“Instead, you're ramming it through,” he said, with his caucus colleagues Densie Batters (Saskatchewan) and Housakos also offering vigorous objections to the fundamental shift it would bring to Canada's Westminster parliamentary system.

The opposition's powers are “so significantly diluted,” because the same powers have been granted to other groups, Batters said, noting they are specifically opposition powers for a reason.

“With that comes a certain dilution of government powers, too,” Gold countered during debate, but said “the government is prepared to do that because it believes in equity and fairness for all groups.”

Gold said the Senate needs to move from the “framework legisla-

tion” in the Parliament of Canada Act and codify the rules into practice so the act doesn't “remain a paper tiger and an empty promise.”

ISG Senator Raymonde Saint-Germain (De la Vallière, Que.), who sits on the Senate Rules Committee and is her group's facilitator, spoke of the “considerable effort” over the past few years “to prevent there being two classes of Senators,” and questioned whether Gold would have brought forward the motion “if not for the opposition's filibustering of any changes to the rules.”

Deliberations have gone on long enough, Gold told Senators, citing the 13 reports produced by the Special Senate Committee on Senate Modernization, work at the Senate Rules Committee, and individual efforts as initiatives that never “bore fruit, largely because there was a strong opposition... and at times obstruction from the Conservative caucus.”

Gold told *The Hill Times* his office made tweaks to the motion after feedback from the groups. Asked if he would be open to amendments following debate, he said he believes the “motion captures the consensus,” and it represents “the right package of changes at this moment in the Senate's evolution.”

He acknowledged the “pragmatic, focused” proposal goes too far for some and not far enough for others, but said he's “very confident” it has the broad support needed to pass.

Time allocation an available tool, but Gold prefers finding ‘common ground’

CSG Senator Jean-Guy Dagenais (Victoria, Que.), who was appointed as a Conservative in 2012, questioned the timing.

Oddly, nine years later, perhaps sensing the defeat of the current government, it seems to be in a rush to make absolutely sure we carry out this modernization because obviously something is going to happen in a few months,” said Dagenais. The next election has to be held by Oct. 20, 2025, though the minority government could fall on a confidence motion should the New Democrats stop

backing the Liberals. Plett also mused whether the timing comes now with fears of Liberals being “wiped out” next election.

Before the 2025 fixed election date, 14 Senators will reach mandatory retirement, including six appointed by former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper and eight Liberal picks (six of whom were named by Trudeau). Between then and October 2029, during the next government's mandate should it last four years, a further 24 will reach mandatory retirement. Five of them were Harper appointees, and all but two of the 19 Liberal appointees were named by Trudeau.

In *The Hill Times* interview, Gold said he can't change how people see things, and those focused on electoral politics are going to “view everything through that very partisan, political prism.”

Had the Senate Rules Committee put any recommendations before the Senate, “we could have been debating this a year ago.”

“This is not about the calendar. This is about the fact that there's been serious work and serious recommendations on the table for years,” he said.

As for when he hopes to see it passed, Gold told *The Hill Times* his office doesn't have a timeline, and there's nothing in the motion that puts parameters on the length of debate.

“The debate has barely begun,” he said, and “we fully expect and want to have a proper debate on the floor.”

“It's important to us that this not be dragged out interminably... that's been the problem,” he said, referencing time allocation as an option used to “ensure government business doesn't get obstructed.”

As for whether he would use time allocation for this motion, Gold said the focus is on trying to find common ground.

“We hope to find agreement on how to best move forward on this proposal,” he said. “We have tools at our disposal if we're not able to do that... but our preference is always to see if we can find a way forward that meets everybody's objectives.”

The debate will likely continue when the Red Chamber resumes sitting on April 30.

swallen@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Patrice Dagenais
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Editorial

Poilievre should steer clear of far-right extremists

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre continues to ride high in public opinion polls, and could be Canada's next prime minister.

But the judgment of the country's leader-in-waiting was seriously called into question when he chose to stop and visit a group of anti-carbon tax protesters and far-right extremists camped out at the Nova Scotia-New Brunswick border last week and told them, "everyone's happy with what you're doing," according to a story by *Press Progress*' Luke LeBrun.

He told the protesters he will "axe the tax," and mentions Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, saying "everything he said was bullshit," and "people believed his lies." He said he was driving from Prince Edward Island to Nova Scotia when he saw the group, and asked his driver to pull over. "We were just going down the highway, and we heard about you guys on the news," Poilievre said, according to the report. "We saw you, so I told the team to pull over to say hello." Poilievre posed for selfies, went inside one trailer with his security detail, and offered encouraging words to the protesters in a livestream video. He spoke to one man who sleeps in the trunk of his car, "Fuck Trudeau" flags flying on the back of the vehicle. Then Poilievre left.

Poilievre's visit became a national story because the group—according to the *Press Progress* news report—is protesting

against the carbon tax, but also subscribes to fringe conspiracies and extreme views. The group of protesters has been camped out at the border for the last three years, originally to protest public health orders, and more recently to protest the carbon tax. Sebastian Skamski, Poilievre's communications director, told *The Canadian Press* that Poilievre visited the group because he saw it was an "anti-carbon tax protest." Poilievre did tell the group of protesters to "keep it up," and described their protest as "a good old-fashioned Canadian tax revolt."

But Trudeau had a different take on Poilievre's visit. "Are they a kind of leader that is going to exacerbate divisions, fears, and polarization in our country, make personal attacks, and welcome the support of conspiracy theorists and extremists? Because that's exactly what Pierre Poilievre continues to do."

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh had a similar opinion and said leaders are supposed to bring people together; however, Poilievre "is irresponsible with language" and "stokes division," he told reporters in Edmonton last week.

The Conservative leader should steer clear of far-right extremists, especially if he wants to be prime minister of Canada. The last thing Canada needs is a more polarized country, and Poilievre is playing with fire if he continues to court the far right.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

CBC, Radio-Canada journalists are fiercely independent in their reporting: CBC's Poulter

Sheila Copps is wrong about CBC journalism.

In her opinion piece, "Feds give CBC a budget boost," (*The Hill Times*, April 22), Copps makes an outrageous suggestion about CBC journalism. She writes: "It is hard to see how a CBC on the verge of extinction would cover an election campaign without bias. It is unlikely that journalists will exercise neutrality in news coverage when the outcome of the next election could leave them jobless."

This is absurd. CBC and Radio-Canada journalists are fiercely independent in their reporting. Their commitment is to the facts. Their work adheres to specif-

ic journalistic standards, and is scrutinized by two independent ombudsmen. It's part of the reason Canadians continue to trust the work that they do, especially during elections. The next election will be no different.

CBC and Radio-Canada journalists across the country will continue to give Canadians the information they need to make decisions about the future of their country. That's their job.

Shaun Poulter
 Executive director
 Strategy, Public Affairs and
 Government Relations
 CBC/Radio-Canada

Dyer's take on Gaza-Israel war is unsupportable speculation, writes Shapiro

Re: "A pantomime crisis, not a real war," (*The Hill Times*, April 16, by Gwynne Dyer). Thousands of rockets have been launched and are continuing to be launched at Israel from Gaza and Lebanon by Iranian proxy armies driving close to 200,000 Israelis from their homes, and Gwynne Dyer doesn't think that this is a war. Iranian proxy Hamas, thanks to the training its operatives received in Iran invaded Israel to rape and burn, but Dyer doesn't think that it's a war. It would certainly be a war if all this was inflicted on Canada, but the Jewish state, well, to Dyer, those oppressive Israelis had it coming.

In 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took over Iran, he instituted

a policy of wiping Israel from the map. To do this, he has attempted to encircle Israel with proxy armies, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Houthis, and Hezbollah who have been attacking Israel ever since. Israel's action to take out the Iranian generals conducting the war was legitimate.

If Dyer thinks that attacking an embassy is a war crime, what did he think of Iran's 1992 attack on the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires killing 87 and injuring more than 300? To suggest that Israel's action was undertaken by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to save his job is unsupportable speculation.

Larry Shapiro
 Calgary, Alta.

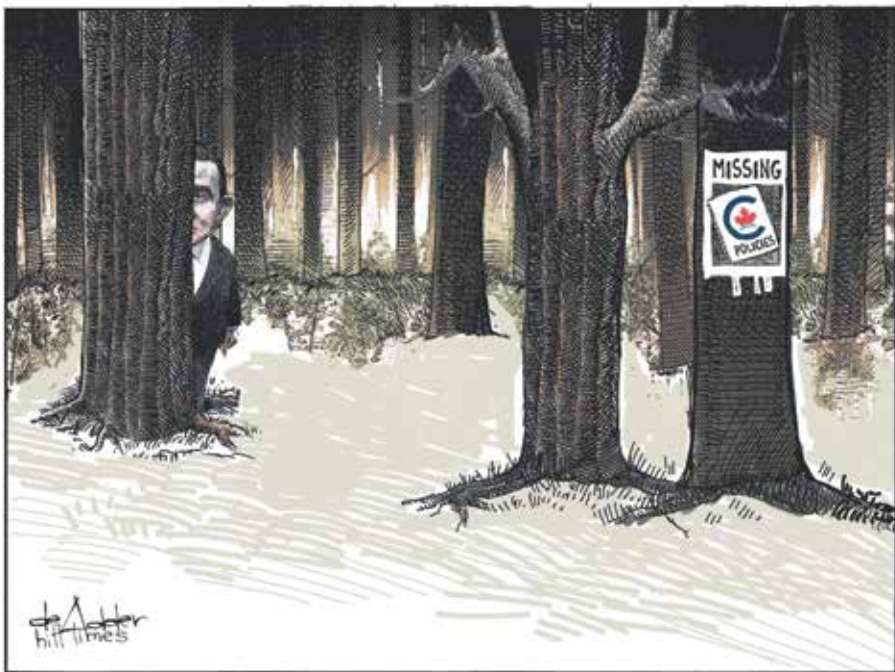
We need more than three-word slogans from Poilievre: reader

For more than a year, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has been hammering home a three-word slogan, "Axe the tax." He recently added another: "Spike the hike." Since the carbon tax was increased April 1, this slogan did not work as he intended. However, consider this: to quote from the *Merriam-Webster* online dictionary, one of the definitions for "spike" is: "intransitive verb: to increase sharply." Apparently, the

government took his three-word slogan seriously and increased the tax, although not "sharply."

While three-word slogans are great for successful marketing, like all simple slogans they provide little-to-no information about the actual item being sold and, in some cases, they are explicitly misleading.

William Turner
 Deep River, Ont.



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Accountability needed after Zameer acquittal

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, then-Toronto mayor John Tory and Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown attacked the decision to grant bail to Umar Zameer back in 2021. Three years later, he's been found not guilty.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



OTTAWA—Toronto Police Chief Myron Demkiw should be fired.

There is no way anyone can have confidence in his impartiality after he told the world last week that he had hoped for a different outcome when Umar Zameer was found not guilty of all charges in a high-profile case involving the death of a Toronto police officer in 2021.



Ontario Premier Doug Ford, pictured, was among those in 2021 who criticized the decision to grant bail to Umar Zameer. Without an external review of the judicial process in this case, too many questions remain unanswered, writes Sheila Copps. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

In her instructions to the jury before the not-guilty decision, Justice Anne Molloy said “the defence theory of what happened is consistent with the testimony of Umar Zameer, Aaida Shaikh, the Crown’s reconstruction expert, the defence reconstruction expert and the video. There is no evidence that fully supports the Crown’s theory.”

With such overwhelming unanimity on the reconstruction of the incident, one wonders how the case ever made it to trial?

Some are asking whether there was political pressure brought to bear, as three key politicians—including Ontario Premier Doug Ford, and then-Toronto mayor John Tory and Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown—weighed in to attack the

decision to grant bail to Zameer back in 2021.

Ford minced no words in his tweet: “This is beyond comprehension. It’s completely unacceptable that the person charged for this heinous crime is now out on bail. Our justice system needs to get its act together and start putting victims and their families ahead of criminals.”

Demkiw refused to condemn comments by his predecessor who placed the “cop killer” label on Zameer, claiming it was not his job to criticize a former chief. However, the chief quickly walked back his own attack on the verdict after it prompted a firestorm of criticism from members of the legal profession.

Daniel Brown, past president of the Criminal Lawyers Asso-

ciation, told *The Toronto Star* that “the one thing that a chief of police isn’t supposed to say is that you were hoping for a verdict that didn’t conform with the evidence.”

Demkiw told the media at a mid-week press conference on an unrelated matter that he respected the decision of the jury. But Brown challenged that assertion. “You can’t say that you respect that jury’s decision, but that they also got it wrong.”

The judge also said that the jury should consider whether there had been collusion in the matching testimony of three police officers, though also noted that the officers had denied it. She also offered her “deepest sympathies” to Zameer following his acquittal, an apology seldom seen from the bench.

As for Zameer, he stuck to his story that he and his family were returning from a Canada Day celebration when four people starting banging on his car doors, ordering him to disembark. Zameer thought they were criminals trying to rob him, and he tried to drive away, resulting in the death of one officer who was allegedly holding on to the vehicle.

The accountant spent almost three years waiting for the outcome, and racked up legal bills in excess of \$200,000, forcing his family to sell properties to pay for his defence.

Such was the public support for the defendant that within a few days, a GoFundMe page set up for his legal expenses had received \$267,347 from more than 3,400 donors.

The police have already announced an external review of their actions by the Ontario Provincial Police. That review is automatic when any judicial

decision involves criticism of police sworn testimony. But no review of the Crown’s decision to take this case to court, based on what we now know was flimsy or non-existent evidence, has been initiated.

Thousands of police officers attended the funeral of Constable Jeffrey Northrup, who was tragically killed in the incident. And with the public comments by high-profile politicians attacking the bail decision, one wonders whether there was political pressure exerted on the Crown to prosecute.

Demkiw has clearly shown that his interest is in protecting the actions of his police officers. That may work with the police, but it certainly undermines public confidence in the force. His statements reinforce the viewpoint of opponents who have been regularly lobbying to defund the police.

Without an external review of the judicial process in this case, too many questions remain unanswered.

Why did this case ever go to trial in the first place? Was there political pressure to lay charges, and why was the first-degree murder charge introduced, based on what did not appear to be a premeditated incident?

When a police officer dies, a first-degree murder charge is automatic. Maybe that rule also needs to be revisited.

The good news—in spite of all the questions surrounding the validity of the charges—is that justice was done.

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

The Hill Times

Polls have Singh worried and it shows

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh’s polls have spooked him, and his change of tone on the carbon tax is him admitting it.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit



OKAVILLE, ONT.—Rosalynn Carter once said, “Don’t worry about polls, but if you do, don’t admit it.”

On the surface, this might sound like good advice, but believe me, no politician in the real world could ever actually follow it.

Indeed, all politicians worry about polls, and all politicians will admit it one way or another.

For instance, I’d argue that NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh is



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, pictured on the Hill, isn’t doing well in the polls right now. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

worried about his polls, and I’d also argue that he’s admitting it through his rhetoric.

Now before I go on, let me say the NDP would never buy into my argument.

Heck, if anything, NDP officials have been downright contemptuous when it comes to

all those polls which show their party languishing in last place.

Anne McGrath, for example, who serves as principal secretary to Singh, recently forthrightly declared to *The Hill Times*’ Chelsea Nash: “Polls are bullshit. Nobody can say what’s going to happen in an election campaign a year away, or even a week away, based on polls.”

And, yes, in fairness to McGrath, it’s easy to point out glaring instances of when pollsters have seemingly gotten it all wrong.

Consider how in 2016 just about every major pollster was predicting that Hillary Clinton would clobber Donald Trump.

Talk about missing the mark.

Mind you, we also must keep in mind the difference between public opinion polls—the ones which get splashed about in the media—and private opinion polls which political parties routinely commission.

The latter, which can cost a lot of money, tend to be much more accurate than public polls, while also offering political parties key bits of data that can be used to create a communication strat-

egy that will resonate with the public.

In other words, unlike public polls which usually only give a superficial snapshot of who’s winning the “horse race,” the more rigorous internal polls, which dig much deeper into public attitudes, provide political parties with research that can be used to create a path to victory.

This is why all political parties employ pollsters.

Even the NDP has a pollster, which suggests McGrath’s anti-polling comment must be taken with just a pinch of salt.

At any rate, I’ve got to believe the NDP’s pollster is crunching out numbers which are making the party’s top brass nervous.

More specifically, I believe said pollster is presenting evidence showing how the NDP’s stance supporting the controversial carbon tax is killing the party.

He or she is probably saying something like, “according to our data, your base hates the carbon tax and unless you distance yourself from it, you’ll get crushed.”

Why do I think that’s happening?

Well, just consider how the NDP’s position on the carbon tax has shifted as of late.

Not too long ago, remember, the party was all gung-ho on the tax, seeing it as an effective method to combat emissions.

But that was then, and this is now, and now Singh is apparently cooling to the idea of carbon taxes, saying he doesn’t want the burden of fighting climate change to fall on working people.

As he put it in a recent speech, the fight against pollution “can’t be done by letting working families bear the cost of climate change while big polluters make bigger and bigger profits. We all lose if we make Canadians choose between an affordable life and fighting the climate crisis.”

It sure looks like the NDP leader is signaling his willingness to perhaps flip-flop on the carbon tax, sacrificing it on the altar of political expediency.

So, yes, Singh’s polls have spooked him, and his change of tone on the carbon tax is how he’s admitting he’s spooked.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Politics



Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe, left, has reached the limit to how far conservative politicians can carry the demonization of Justin Trudeau, writes Michael Harris. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

But there is so much more on the line than mere politics. Poilievre, Moe, and other opportunists in the populist movement are on the wrong side of history. While they amplify aggrievement rather than offer solutions, the planet is careening toward an environmental Armageddon.

Case in point. Natural Resources Minister Jonathan Wilkinson recently said that Canada is “preparing for the worst” after a warm, dry winter has created perfect conditions for a terrible wildfire season in 2024.

With 70 wildfires already burning in Canada, and the month of May expected to bring higher than normal temperatures accompanied by persistent drought, the summer doesn’t look good. Although the minister advised caution in assessing wildfire forecasts, there is a risk that the situation could be “catastrophic.”

While politicians like Moe and Poilievre practise myopia on an industrial scale by niggling about the price of gasoline as the planet chokes, wiser minds have grasped the big picture.

The International Monetary Fund’s environmental fiscal policy expert recently wrote that now is the time to impose carbon taxes across the global economy.

“As energy prices recede from peak levels, it is an opportune time to scale up carbon taxation without an increase in energy prices relative to their recent highs. Policy makers should seize the moment,” Ian Parry wrote in *The Economist*.

Rebuffing the distorted claims of Conservative politicians looking to play politics with climate change, 100 economists from across Canada backed up Parry’s advice in an open letter. They wanted the issue to be aired with “sound evidence and facts,” not political jive talk.

“We encourage governments to use economically sensible policies to reduce emissions at a low cost, address Canadians’ affordability concerns, maintain business competitiveness and support Canada’s transition to a low-carbon economy. Canada’s carbon pricing policies do all those things.”

That is a far cry from the shrill Conservative mantra that, starting with the carbon tax, everything in Canada is broken.

Beware of the “everything-is-broken” crowd. In a recent speech, former Bank of England and Bank of Canada governor Mark Carney reminded everyone that the slogan “Britain is broken” led to that country’s exit from the European Union. The Brexiteers promised what Carney called “Singapore on the Thames.” Instead, they produced “Argentina on the Channel.”

One wonders what the Poilievres and Moes of the world will produce having so successfully bamboozled Canadians on the carbon tax.

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

Beware of the ‘everything-is-broken’ crowd

Mark Carney recently reminded us that the slogan ‘Britain is broken’ led to that country’s exit from the European Union. Brexiteers promised what he called ‘Singapore on the Thames.’ Instead, they made ‘Argentina on the Channel.’

Moe’s stand on the “carbon tax,” a fawning imitation of his party’s national leader, is indefensible. He says not collecting or remitting federal carbon pricing for natural gas and electricity is about “fairness.”

Wrong. It is about a senior, elected leader breaking the law for partisan reasons, thumbing his nose at both the federal government—which initiated the tax—and the Supreme Court that confirmed its constitutionality in March 2021.

The premier’s decision to break the law of the land came on the heels of Ottawa’s decision to extend a three-year exemption on home heating oil in Atlantic Canada, where that expensive fuel is most used.

It is arguable whether that exemption was politically wise. Who wouldn’t push back on a supposedly national program that was applied unequally across the country?

But pushing back means rational criticism and advocacy for alternatives, taking your opponent on at the polls. It doesn’t include deciding you don’t have to comply with the law. And that is exactly what Moe is doing by refusing to remit taxes he owes to Ottawa.

That is especially true when you consider that at the same time as Ottawa announced the carbon pricing exemption for Atlantic Canada, it also doubled the rural rebate top-off across the country.

Moe conveniently ignores that fact, the better to spread disinformation about carbon pricing. For better or worse, Ottawa has decided to keep writing rebate cheques to residents of Saskatchewan, and leave it to Revenue Canada to deal with Moe’s law-breaking.

Meanwhile, Moe and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre will continue to cast the appropriate lights and shadows over the facts to their advantage. That is the old, sad song of all politics. But they can’t change the fact that the majority of Canadians get more money back in the government’s rebate program that they pay in carbon pricing.

A case in point, where Conservative hyperbole overwhelms the plain facts to create a false impression. Moe claims that carbon pricing is a major contributor to inflation. It depends on what you call “major.”

According to the governor of the Bank of Canada, carbon pricing accounts for 0.15 per cent of inflation. That means that when inflation hit its peak at eight per

cent, carbon pricing accounted for one/54th of that number.

It is true that Tiff Macklem’s number is based solely on the direct impact of carbon pricing. Opponents of this policy point out that Macklem’s math doesn’t take into account the so-called “knock on” effects of putting a price on pollution.

Poilievre, who has bet the farm that the road to government runs through “axing the tax,” says that the real cost of Trudeau’s unpopular policy is much higher. It depends on what “much” means.

According to the CBC, quoting University of Toronto economist Trevor Tombe, the direct and indirect inflationary costs of carbon pricing amounts to 0.207 per cent in Ontario, and 0.1875 in Alberta.

More than that, the government’s national carbon policy is getting results on the most important file on the planet: climate change and global warming.

The Canadian Climate Institute recently reported that the federal government’s national climate policy—a combination of consumer and industrial carbon pricing—means that Canada is on target to meet at least 90 per cent of its 2030 emission reduction target of 400 megatonnes.

Most of the cuts in emissions come from industrial carbon pricing, but the institute found that consumer carbon pricing was essential if Canada is to hit our overall targets.

There is no doubt that Poilievre’s T-shirt sloganeering, his bumper-sticker blarney, and his potty-mouthed politics have been a hit at the box office. Prisoners of Poilievre’s short-term thinking, most Canadians hate the carbon tax.

Just as Donald Trump mobilized the mob element in American politics by vulgar assaults on his opponents, Poilievre has fattened up his political base with a steady diet of Trudeauphobia. He recently got so carried away with gutter politics that his remarks to followers could not be reported on the CBC.

Michael Harris

Harris



HALIFAX—There is a limit to how far Conservative politicians can carry the demonization of Justin Trudeau. Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe has reached it.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's \$2.4-billion commitment for local computer access and AI development was devoid of anything earmarked for international advocacy toward a broader global AI policy, or working with other states to develop similar legislation that would work in tandem with each other. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canada's investment in AI should inform a global 'rights-based' approach

Canada has a role to play in pushing its influence on the world stage. Right now, we are currently fifth in terms of AI capacity on the Tortoise Global Index, yet is 23rd in actual AI infrastructure.

Ann Fitz-Gerald, Jatin Nathwani & Maral Niazi

Opinion



The Government of Canada's recent investment of \$2.4-billion into developing its artificial intelligence (AI) sector must come with efforts to inform an ethically-grounded global governance framework to harness the potential benefits of AI for the betterment of humanity. In the shadow of rapid technological advancements, deep concerns over potential harms—described as an existential threat—contrast with those advocating AI's benefits. Some have argued for a case to be made for establishing a United Nations Universal Declaration of AI for Humanity (UDAIH). Existing universal human rights frameworks provide the key to making the use and the development of AI ethical.

The UN Advisory Body's interim report on AI governance is an initial step that can be regarded as the preliminary groundwork for shaping future AI developments to help deliver widespread benefits for social good. The UN Summit of the Future happening this September in New York is an opportunity that could be used to develop strategies to navigate the complexities of AI development and deployment consistent with the principles of universal human rights. A UN declaration is a non-binding

formal treaty that outlines agreed-upon principles, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Forming a UN declaration would provide a foundational base for ensuring that the global governance of AI remains linked to a human rights framework—as opposed to statements of philosophical platitudes—and would serve as the moral compass for the burgeoning field of AI. This could incorporate fundamental principles to ensure that AI development aligns with human rights, dignity, and sustainable development goals (SDGs). Such a declaration could leverage the benefits of AI for humanity, and help accelerate progress on every SDG, from enhancing health care and education, to combating climate change. However, to unlock AI to our full advantage, only a globally acceptable framework can become the cornerstone for its responsible use.

A UN UDAIH could serve as an important first and necessary step towards an international governance framework for AI. It would provide ethical and governance benchmarks against which all AI development and deployment can be measured. This is crucial for preventing misuse, such as invasive surveillance, biased decision-making, or widening inequalities. A declaration would also promote AI in ways that could profoundly benefit society, like faster, more accurate AI-driven health diagnostics, AI-directed precision agriculture, and AI real-time environmental monitoring to protect endangered species. By establishing clear norms and expectations for AI governance rooted in respect for human rights and a commitment to the common good, the declaration would encourage AI innovations that are technologically advanced, socially responsible, and beneficial to vulnerable communities. It would encourage transparency, accountability, and public engagement in AI systems, ensuring that AI serves the public interest, and contributes to a more just, sustainable, and prosperous world.

Canada has a potential role to play in pushing its influence on the international stage. Right now, Canada is currently

considered fifth in terms of AI capacity by the Tortoise Global Index, yet is 23rd in actual AI infrastructure. This gap

shows how little this country has been willing to create actual policies that would protect Canadians from the risks of future AI developments. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's \$2.4-billion commitment for local computer access and AI development was devoid of anything earmarked for international advocacy toward a broader global AI policy, or working with other states to develop similar legislation that would work in tandem with each other. Without working with other countries to come up with solutions to potential AI threats, the gap between Canada's needs and our AI infrastructure will continue to grow. The next step that would benefit our country would be to use some of this funding to advocate for more international measures and frameworks, such as exerting pressure on the UN to develop a UDAIH.

By developing a UDAIH, the UN must use this pivotal leadership moment in shaping AI's future—a future where technology is harnessed not just for economic gain, but also for the betterment of all humanity. Such a declaration is not only desirable, but it is also imperative to ensure that, as we step boldly into the future, we do so with a commitment to the values that define us as human beings, and to the global goals that unite us in pursuit of a better world. This initiative should appear at the top of the agenda for the September 2024 UN Summit of the Future—and Canada should help in getting it there.

Ann Fitz-Gerald is the director of the Balsillie School in Waterloo, Ont. Jatin Nathwani is a professor at the University of Waterloo. Maral Niazi is a fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation's Digital Policy Hub.

The Hill Times

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Opinion



Commissioner of Justice Marie-Josée Hogue presides over the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference at Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa on Jan. 29, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Redefining the frontlines: the battle for democracy in an era of transnational interference

The foreign interference inquiry focuses mainly on election meddling, whereas foreign interference extends to surveillance, threats, physical violence, extortion, and deception through disinformation. Individuals in Canada and their relatives abroad are targeted.

Philip Leech-Ngo,
Nadia Abu-Zahra
& John Packer

Opinion



One year ago, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a prominent think tank in the United States that the “old way of doing things isn’t going to work anymore,” identifying the ongoing

struggle between democratic societies and resurgent anti-democratic regimes. This followed Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland’s address at Washington’s Brookings Institute where she speculated about co-existence in a world divided among democracies, autocracies, and ‘the in-betweens’. Neither the PM nor Deputy PM were wrong, but they were not entirely correct, either.

Many states defy such clear categorization while human interactions criss-cross frontiers. Trudeau and Freeland’s oversimplifications obscure forms of repression that operate within and across borders, threatening the safety and security of Canadians, especially activists in exile who are unable to return to their countries of origin. The challenge isn’t just “over there,” but also here and now. The ongoing Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions exposed nefarious and unlawful conduct affecting individuals and communities, not just the integrity of our core political institutions.

The inquiry focuses primarily on election interference, whereas—far more disturbingly—foreign interference extends to surveillance, threats, physical violence, forms of extortion, and deception through disinformation. Individuals in Canada and their relatives abroad are targeted. As well, for individuals in Canada without Canadian citizenship, some foreign countries have de-

nied them consular services, putting them at risk of deportation. The threat of “transnational repression” has been well-documented, but has yet to receive the possibly lifesaving attention it deserves from our government.

Contrary to the perceptions and claims of some Canadian officials at the inquiry, acts of transnational repression are not so fuzzy legally. Protecting people in Canada from assaults is both an evident matter of criminal law and national security—each is a bedrock responsibility of Canadian government. Yet ministers of public safety hardly seem moved.

The concerns are not limited to China and Iran, but spreading to include countries like Saudi Arabia, with which Canada has more than \$5-billion in trade; and India, touted as the world’s biggest democracy. This brings into question the assumption underlying Canada’s approach: that this is a battle only between authoritarian and democratic states.

Indeed, according to Freedom House, a non-governmental organization that systematically tracks the most pressing threats to democracy and freedom, transnational repression and the shrinking spaces for civil societies are burgeoning trends with democratic states not only being targets, but also arenas for such conflicts. These reports underscore the increasing sophistication and reach of authoritarian measures, which are systematically curtailing freedoms across

borders. Consider the extraterritorial security laws of China and Russia, which purport to curb ‘terrorism’ but, in effect, stifle dissent worldwide. China’s National Security Law, for instance, claims jurisdiction over all Chinese nationals abroad, putting anyone critical of Beijing at risk of being labelled a security threat, irrespective of their location. Similarly, Russia’s recent expansions of anti-terrorism laws have intensified since its operations in Ukraine, targeting not just domestic critics, but also those who have fled and are now outside Russia (including in Canada).

Along with some other states, Canada has taken some steps in the right direction, such as adoption of guidelines to help advocate and protect human rights defenders abroad, and creation of a program to resettle some of the most vulnerable in Canada. But while these steps are laudable, they are quite limited. This is not only because their scale is too small, but also because the definition of ‘human rights defender’ is too narrow to include many activists working from exile here in Canada such as journalists, anti-corruption advocates, environmentalists, and peace-builders.

Canada’s approach is also problematic because it is almost exclusively outward-looking, neglecting the fact that the domestic environment is a site of ongoing struggle, and because it sees the activists it assists essentially as victims and overlooks their agen-

cy as actors—often important ones. Moreover, Canadian institutions and society are frequently suspicious of activists in exile, mislabelling them, and jeopardizing their safety here.

Consider the irony: Canada extends its hand to activists when they are abroad, navigating through a thicket of diplomatic and logistical constraints, yet when these defenders are within easy reach—even in walking distance from Parliament Hill—the readiness and resources to assist them inexplicably wane. We either lack dedicated programs or—more perplexingly—ignore the remarkable engagements and potential of these ready activists for social change and justice. Such a policy gap not only undermines the effectiveness of Canada’s global human rights and democracy agendas, but also squanders the opportunity to fortify these activists who could make impactful contributions if duly recognized and adequately supported. We must bolster them, protect them, support them, and make it easier for them to share their experiences and ideas. And—as the foreign interference inquiry has shown the urgency of the issue—we must do it now.

Philip Leech-Ngo, PhD, is a former Gordon F. Henderson Post-doctoral Fellow (2016-2017) at the Human Rights Research and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa. He is the author of *The State of Palestine: A Critical Analysis* (Routledge, 2016) and the co-editor of *Popular Uprisings in the Middle East* (Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016). Nadia Abu-Zahra is an assistant professor of globalization and development at the University of Ottawa. John Packer is an associate professor of law, and director of the Human Rights Research and Education Centre at the University of Ottawa.

The Hill Times



A woman performs at the National Indigenous Peoples' Day ceremony at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Que., on June 21, 2018. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The result of the oppressive synergy of sexism and racism

The families of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran have been involved in a long battle to search a Winnipeg landfill for their loved ones' remains. These families warn that women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals find themselves in precarious situations, seeking shelter and safety in a province that historically offers little refuge.

Cambria Harris, Melissa Robinson, Jordan Myran, Donna Bartlett, Senator Mary Jane McCallum & Grand Chief Cathy Merrick

Opinion

“Economic and racial inequality are not abstract concepts, (they) hospitalize and kill even more people than cigarettes,” said Larry Adelman, executive producer of the 2008 documentary *Unnatural Causes*. “The wages and benefits we’re paid, the neighbourhoods we live in, the schools we attend, our access to resources and even our tax policies are health issues, every bit as critical as diet, smoking and exercise. The unequal distribution of these social conditions, and their health consequences are not natural and inevitable,” said Adelman. “They are the result of choices that we, as a community, as states, and a nation have made, can make differently. Other nations already have, and they live longer, healthier lives as a result.”

Although there is ample evidence of the centuries-long brutal treatment and genocide of innocent Indigenous Peoples, Canadians are immersed in biased information

that leads to stereotyping. The continued perpetration of stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples—especially women—leads to prejudicial thinking. When we fail to correct a wrong—like searching for the women in the Winnipeg landfill—then we are practising discrimination. When our discriminatory actions and inactions are supported and condoned by governments, police, and other institutional structures, this process constitutes oppression. Racism of this type remains deeply and systematically rooted, as the power to make decisions, to take collective action, and to allocate resources resides at this level.

Oppression does not operate in isolation. In our country, white women won the right to vote in elections in 1918, but they were not recognized as persons until 1929. Canadian women of Asian and Indo-Canadian heritage were not enfranchised until 1947. And women of this country, Indigenous women, could not vote until 1960. As the disenfranchisement of Indigenous, Asian, and Indo-Canadian women demonstrates, the oppression of sexism and racism form a powerful synergy in disadvantaging women of colour in Canada, particularly Indigenous women.

First Nations women were revered as the backbone of their communities in pre-colonial times, but that has since been diluted or erased by the institutions of government and church. These women were symbols of strength and resiliency, same as they are today, for how else could we have survived years of genocide?

The families of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran have been involved in a lengthy battle to search the Prairie Green Landfill in Manitoba for their loved ones' remains. These families warn that women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals find themselves in precarious situations, seeking shelter and safety in a province that historically offers little refuge. The ripple effect of this vulnerability increases the risk of addiction and mental health conditions disproportionately for those marginalized citizens.

Many find themselves at risk on the streets, and the path to recovery through rehabilitation facilities is laden with obstacles, including lengthy, agonizing wait times. The lack of housing and safe spaces remains a critical issue, pushing many to be homeless with belongings reduced to a size that vulnerable citizens can carry

on their backs. The stark reality emphasizes the gravity of the situation: shelters, ostensibly places of refuge, are no longer secure havens. Instead, they have been transformed into predatory grounds, as seen in tragic cases like that involving accused serial killer Jeremy Skibicki, who

has claimed the lives of four vulnerable First Nations women.

The racism that we live with is inscribed on our bodies and minds including high rates of heart disease, breast and cervical cancer, diabetes, and so on. Yet, race has absolutely no scientific meaning. Race is merely a social construction and is defined as “an ideology of inferiority that is used to justify unequal treatment (discrimination) of members of groups defined as inferior by both individuals and societal institutions.” Why, then, is race allowed to keep our women in the landfill?

What and who are creating these risks for “at-risk people?” What are the social pathogens that threaten their lives? This modern-day social murder causes certain groups—homeless, Indigenous Peoples—to persistently suffer more, and to die earlier. Women meet too early and unnatural deaths at the hands of various institutions that also impact other women by depriving them of the necessities of life across this country. As a result, they, too, are placed under threat of untimely death.

These women have been disowned by their country, and they continue to be disowned—even in death. First Nations women have to fight to find their place in this world. Are we, as First Nations women, not viewed as human beings deserving respect, including proper burials?

Cambria Harris, Melissa Robinson, Jordan Myran, and Donna Bartlett are family members of Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran. Non-affiliated Senator Mary Jane McCallum is a citizen of the Barren Lands First Nation in Brochet, Man., and Cathy Merrick is the grand chief of Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

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Opinion

Spirit of Anzac looms large 109 years on

In Canada, the heavy toll of Parliament's decisions is most often contemplated in November when red poppies are pinned to lapels. But last week Ottawa hosted a smaller ceremony to commemorate the most solemn event on Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand's calendar: Anzac Day.

Stephen
Jeffery

Opinion



OTTAWA—One of the most sobering decisions a national leader must make is whether to send their country's youngest adults to war.

In the devastating aftermath of the First World War, memorials sprung up in cities and towns across the world like poppies from the abandoned battlefields of the Western Front. Alongside the modest cenotaphs in small towns were the more grandiose memorials set up in larger cities; places of national and local mourning and remembrance.

In Ottawa, as in so many other capital cities, the National War Memorial is both a place of reflection and a reminder to those who work up the street: these are the heavy consequences of the decisions you make.

In Canada, the heavy toll of those decisions is most often contemplated in November when red poppies are pinned to the lapels of heavy coats as the looming winter makes its presence known. But last week Ottawa played host to a smaller ceremony at the Canadian War Museum, this time to commemorate the most solemn event on Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand's calendar.

In my homeland, and for our neighbours across the Tasman, Remembrance Day takes second place in the national consciousness to Anzac Day on April 25. It means the southern winter is bookended by two periods of



Anzac Cove, Turkey, in 1915. The Gallipoli campaign remains the focus of Australia and New Zealand's commemorations on April 25 each year. Photograph courtesy of State Library of South Australia



Canberra, Australia, as seen from Mount Ainslie. There is a direct line of sight from Parliament House (the white building with a massive flagpole, centre) to the Australian War Memorial (the domed building at bottom centre). Photograph by Stephen Jeffery

solemnity: in our autumn, we stop on the anniversary of the day that both countries' illusions of war as an adventure were shattered under heavy gunfire; in our spring, we pause on the anniversary of those guns falling silent.

Like Canada, Australia's First World War experience has been recast as a coming-of-age tale for a young nation: a baptism of fire forging together a newly federated people. If it were a person, Australia would need to have lied about its age if it had wished to enlist: while Canada approached its half-century of Confederation when hostilities broke out, the Commonwealth of Australia was just 13 years old. The Dominion of New Zealand was only seven.

Central to the mythos is the Gallipoli campaign, a disastrous attempt to knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war by cap-

turing the Gallipoli peninsula in present-day Turkey. From the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landing on April 25, 1915, to its evacuation from the peninsula on Dec. 20 that same year, little was gained, and plenty was lost.

The idealistic vision of adventure and fighting "for King and Country" meeting the horrific reality of modern warfare has inspired the imagination of both countries' populations ever since: though the Ottomans, British, and French suffered greater casualties, both Australia and New Zealand saw the sacrifice as baptisms of fire.

By the end of the First World War, more than 60,000 Australians were dead, 155,000 were wounded, and more were psychologically scarred in ways that those back home would never

understand. For a nation of just 4.9 million people at the time it was a national trauma, and one that dwelt on that first significant scar at Gallipoli.

What does it say about a country that its most sacred day commemorates a defeat rather than choosing from any number of victories on the battlefield? Though it has in recent years taken on more nationalistic and jingoistic overtones, one thing that struck me growing up in Australia was the emphasis on the cost of war to the individual, to those left behind, and to a lesser extent to a country.

In high school, our history classes on the First World War spent more time covering Gallipoli than the Western Front, where approximately five times more Australians were killed. Even then, there's a good chance most

schoolchildren could name only one Australian involved in the campaign: John Simpson Kirkpatrick, who carried wounded men from the front lines with the aid of a donkey.

The lessons weren't about military maneuvers, but rather conditions in the trenches—the lice, the psychological impact of constant shelling, the letters home, the tins of bully beef and Anzac biscuits—a staple to this day—sent in care packages.

In researching this column, I looked up the war record of my great-grandfather, Lincoln "Joe" Sjöberg. He was wounded at Gallipoli in May 1915, and returned to the peninsula after a period of convalescence later that year.

He survived the war, both in Gallipoli and in France, and returned to become one of his Sydney suburb's "most popular figures," according to a death notice in a 1954 newspaper. But it is part of a poem, posted by his family to the "In Memoriam" section of a newspaper two years later, that is more poignant:

*No-one knows how he suffered,
Because he never told.*

To this day, Anzac Day begins with a dawn service, symbolically representing the first amphibious landings on that morning 109 years ago. There are marches later in the day, but it's the dawn service that holds the greatest significance—as the personal memory of those lost has slipped away, attending the services cannot help but make you imagine yourself in those rowboats in the pre-dawn chill, and the horrors about to unfold.

Perhaps the most pointed memorial to the fallen is in Australia's capital of Canberra. Nestled at the base of Mount Ainslie, this secular temple to the fallen has a direct line of sight to Parliament House three kilometres away.

It means that any politician who decides to commit their country to war—and there have been plenty in the intervening century—cannot help but set eyes on the gravity of their choices. If they want that point driven further home, they can attend a ceremony at the Australian War Memorial every afternoon at 4:30 p.m. when the story of one of approximately 103,000 armed forces personnel who have died in (post-colonial) conflict is told. Provided no more names are added to the list, it will take the memorial nearly 300 years to read every single story.

It's not intended as a shrine to pacifism, nor to militarism. But—effective or not—the memorial's unavoidable position in a city deliberately designed from scratch, constructed in the aftermath of a devastating war, is a message from modern leaders' predecessors: this is the human toll of the decisions you make. Do not make them lightly.

In an increasingly unstable world, it's a call more leaders would do well to heed.

Lest we forget.
Stephen Jeffery is a deputy editor of The Hill Times.

The Hill Times

HEALTH

The Hill Times
Policy Briefing
April 29, 2024

**NEXT STEP IN UNIVERSAL DRUG
COVERAGE SHOULD PRIORITIZE
'ESSENTIAL MEDICINES,'**
BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

JANE PHILPOTT
talks about her new
book, by Peter
Mazereeuw

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Health Policy Briefing

Next step in universal drug coverage should prioritize ‘essential medicines,’ says pharmacare expert

Focusing on a list of the most commonly prescribed clinically-important drugs could save billions of dollars, both directly in terms of drug budget, and indirectly in terms of improvements in health care, says Steve Morgan, a professor of health policy at the University of British Columbia.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

A next step in phasing in a national pharmacare program should begin with a list of “essential medicines,” according to Steve Morgan, a professor of health policy at the University of British Columbia, who described the choice of covering contraception and diabetes treatments in the first phase as practical, but also political.

“What are the essential treatments for the widest possible categories of needs that we can fund as a country? And that’s the idea behind essential medicines,” said Morgan. “If you’re going to ask what the next stage is, it’s [to] focus on essential medicines as a human rights issue.”

Canada’s federal Health Minister Mark Holland (Ajax, Ont.) introduced Bill C-64, the Pharmacare Act, on Feb. 29, which proposes the foundational principles for the first phase of national universal pharmacare in Canada to help manage the costs of prescription drugs. If the bill is



Health Minister Mark Holland introduced Bill C-64, the Pharmacare Act, on Feb. 29, which proposes the foundational principles for the first phase of national universal pharmacare in Canada. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*



Steve Morgan, a professor of health policy at the University of British Columbia, says ‘What we should be saying is: what are the essential treatments for the widest possible categories of needs that we can fund as a country? And that’s the idea behind essential medicines.’ *Photograph courtesy of Steve Morgan*

passed, Holland will begin negotiations with the provinces and territories for a funding commitment to provide universal, single-payer coverage for some diabetes medications and contraception.

Morgan told *The Hill Times* that he regards the choice of covering diabetes treatments and birth control as pragmatic,



Steven Staples, national director of policy advocacy for the Canadian Health Coalition, says ‘We want to make sure that there’s enough money there so that when Minister Holland goes out and begins to negotiate with provinces, the provinces know that there’s sufficient funding.’ *Photograph courtesy of Steven Staples*

but also containing important symbolism.

“Birth control in particular is framing Canada’s approach to pharmacare, in part at least, as a women’s issue and a human rights issue, which is extremely powerful stuff,” he said. “It does speak to just how important it is to ensure that people have access



Joelle Walker, vice-president of public affairs for the Canadian Pharmacists Association, says some of the provinces have signaled that ‘they have some systems that they feel currently work and they want help supplementing that for people who don’t have coverage or not enough coverage.’ *Photograph courtesy of Joelle Walker*

to the treatments that they need, including treatments to control their reproductive lives, and that is going into a 2025 federal election.”

The selection of diabetes treatments may be seen as symbolic, because insulin is a Canadian invention, according to Morgan. Insulin was discovered by Fred-

erick Banting, Charles Best, and John J.R. Macleod at the University of Toronto in 1921, and it was purified by James Collip. In 1923, Banting and Macleod received a Nobel Prize in medicine.

“The Canadian inventors of that invention dedicated the patents to the public good. They didn’t actually choose that they and the University of Toronto would become uber-billionaires by having exclusive rights to the technology. They felt that the innovation was to be made available to everyone to save as many lives as possible,” said Morgan. “The irony of that being [insulin is] a Canadian invention, and yet Canadians cannot universally afford ... insulins or other diabetes treatments.”

When considering the next possible phase towards universal pharmacare, Morgan argued the federal government should begin with a list of “essential medicines,” or the most commonly prescribed clinically-important drugs.

“What we should be saying is: what are the essential treatments for the widest possible categories of needs that we can fund as a country? And that’s the idea behind essential medicines,” he said. “It says, ‘Look, we’re not going to fund 11 different treatments for high cholesterol and high blood pressure. We’re going to fund six treatments in those categories because that will cover the vast majority of our needs. And the reason for focusing in that way is that means we can address more different needs.’”

In February 2017, Morgan, along with Nav Persaud, assistant professor at the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto, and medical residents Winny Li of the University of Toronto, and Brandon Yau of the University of British Columbia released a study on the cost and benefits of covering essential medicines. The study focused on 117 drugs available and sold as prescription-only medicines in Canada, which were part of the CLEAN Meds list, an adaptation of the World Health Organization (WHO) model list of essential medicines for primary health care in Canada.

The study concluded that the 117 essential medicines spanned more than 40 different therapeutic categories, and could be used for 77 per cent of all prescriptions written in Canada, including the majority of prescriptions for insulins, antibiotics, antidepressants, dementia treatments, and thyroid treatments.

Morgan argued there is a perception that it would be hard somehow for Canada implement a national pharmacare program, but that doesn’t have to be the case.

“What a program needs to do—particularly just starting with those essential medicines—is develop a clear and transparent and publicly accountable means of arriving at that list of medicines that is going to be covered, and then apply global best practices with iron-clad supply contracts with manufacturers of the medicines that are chosen,” he said. “And in so doing, as our research

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Health Policy Briefing

All hands on deck for the future of health care

One major gap that health providers have identified in testimony before the Standing Committee on Health has been the lack of high-quality, comparable data across provinces and territories.

Liberal MP
Sean Casey

Opinion



In my view, there is no better example of the disconnect between the Ottawa bubble and the electorate than the dearth of thoughtful urgent debate on the state of health care in Canada. It is consistently the No. 1 concern at doorsteps in my home province of Prince Edward Island, as it is across Canada, and rightfully so. Voters are acutely aware of the challenges facing the health workforce, and don't really care which level of government meets them.

As I write this opinion piece, one of the unions representing health-care workers on Prince Edward Island is moving to conciliate to negotiate a new collective agreement with the province. Prince Edward Island

currently ranks last in access to health care among the provinces, largely due to workforce shortages to meet the need of Islanders. Health workers play a vital role in our communities, and we have an obligation to lean in and understand the challenges they face as they support us with care and compassion.

This workforce, which includes everyone from physicians and nurses to orderlies and pharmacists is currently facing a high volume of demands on care. This, alongside the doubling of the number of vacancies from the start of the pandemic to 120,140 in 2022-23, has dramatically increased the workload and burnout in the sector. To further exacerbate matters, many have reported feeling unsafe as they carry out their duties.

As decision-makers, it is our responsibility to listen to the concerns of these workers, and to develop solutions with them, not for them.

One major gap that health providers have identified in testimony before the House Health Committee has been the lack of high-quality, comparable data across provinces and territories. The lack of information means that we do not have a pan-Canadian snapshot of the situation on the ground, and are thus unable to develop solutions that work in every jurisdiction.

Last year, the federal government launched its *Working Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians* plan, committing \$200-billion over 10 years in federal funding. The goal is to expand access to family health

services, support health workers, reduce backlogs, improve access to mental health and addictions supports, and modernize the health-care system with standardized tools. As part of this plan, we signed bilateral agreements with every single province and territory, which include provisions for data collection and sharing between provincial, territorial, and federal governments.

This is essential to the development of the Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy, which aims to modernize public health data, expand access to health services, and support health workers.

This strategy will, in turn, inform the work of Health Workforce Canada, an independent organization set up by Health Canada bringing health workforce experts and other health workers to strengthen health workforce data and planning in this country.

The work being done by these three initiatives is essential in both addressing the most pressing health workforce challenges and long-term planning.

While the federal government is uniquely situated for large-scale, sustainable planning and strategizing for health care, provinces and territories have an essential role to play, which is reflected in the bilateral agreements.

Indeed, as the governments with the jurisdiction over health-care delivery and workforce management, provincial and territorial governments must identify opportunities for improvements within their regions. From optimizing the education and training of future health workers,



In February 2023, during a meeting with Canada's premiers, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced an approximately \$200-billion health-care plan, the *Working Together to Improve Health Care for Canadians* plan. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

to streamlining the recognition of foreign credentials of health workers and revamping administrative processes, they can—and must—alleviate the pressures on the health-care delivery system.

Legislative frameworks and policies can be amended to reduce bottlenecks, and ensure that the health-care system is evolving to meet the challenges and opportunities of a changing society. This includes optimizing scopes of work, providing digital and administrative tools, and supporting a holistic model of care delivery.

An example of such good practice can be found in Atlantic Canada. In 2023, the four Atlantic provinces created an Atlantic physician registry, allowing doctors to work anywhere in the region without additional licens-

ing requirements. This increased the mobility of physicians in the region with minimal paperwork, enhancing residents' access to care. Such innovation must be encouraged and expanded.

In my previous op-ed, I stressed the importance of a comprehensive, collaborative, and thoughtful approach to resolve the complex challenges within healthcare. This has been our government's approach so far, and we will continue to favour solutions over slogans to meet the needs of Canadians.

Liberal MP Sean Casey, who represents Charlottetown, P.E.I., is chair of the House Health Committee, and a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

The Hill Times

Protecting public health care has never been more important

National pharmacare will be extended to 3.7 million Canadians with diabetes and nine million Canadians of reproductive age.

Liberal MP
Yasir Naqvi

Opinion



We are at a turning point in Canadian health care—a time of both challenges and opportunities. We need bold solutions to meet today's challenges and to harness tomorrow's opportunities. It is time for all parliamentarians to support our government's ambitious efforts to ensure that Canada's public health-care system moves into the 21st century, and remains a source of pride and a reflection of who we are as Canadians.

Access to quality health care is of paramount importance. However, with the difficulties facing the health sector, the industry's workforce has been significantly impacted, and access to health practitioners has become

more challenging. As an MP and parliamentary secretary to the minister of health, I have spoken with many health professionals, and they have told me the same thing: "We need more staff."

Our government is taking action on this front. We have provided funding to provinces and territories to invest in key shared health priorities, including the health workforce, through the *Working Together* agreements, and have partnered with the provinces and territories on commitments to streamline the foreign credential recognition process. Budget 2024 includes \$77.1-million over four years to help effectively integrate internationally educated health-

care professionals into this country's health workforce. It also commits to an expansion of the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to encourage new graduates to set up practices in rural Canada. This has the potential to have an enormous impact on our rural communities.

Another significant obstacle that we have seen is the cost of essential medication. We have an important opportunity to make a real difference by passing Bill C-64, An Act Respecting Pharmacare. The bill proposes the foundational principles for the first phase of national universal pharmacare in Canada, and outlines collaboration with provinces, territories, Indig-

enous Peoples, and stakeholders to develop universal, single-payer coverage for a range of contraception and diabetes medications.

The cost of birth control is a significant barrier for women and gender-diverse Canadians. Passing Bill C-64 will mean that nine million Canadians of reproductive age will have greater access to reproductive autonomy. At a time when our neighbours to the south are seeing a political effort to remove their right to bodily autonomy, we must remain firm in our support of the right to choose. Eliminating barriers to accessing contraceptives is a necessary step forward.

Similarly, I believe that improving access to diabetes medications should be common sense as it will help improve the health of 3.7 million Canadians. One in four Canadians with diabetes have reported not following their treatment plan because it is too expensive. This is dangerous, and can lead to

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Health Policy Briefing

Feds must expand pharmacare to include essential drugs for our deadliest diseases: cancer, heart conditions, and stroke

An expanded pharmacare framework offers a lifeline for millions of people in Canada. It is time for federal, provincial, and territorial governments to deliver it.

Andrea Seale & Doug Roth

Opinion



The federal government's new pharmacare legislation is a historic step forward on the path to national, universal drug coverage. Through important collaboration between the NDP and the

federal government, we've finally received a legislative framework intended to give everyone in Canada with a health card access to prescription drugs for diabetes and contraception.

Additionally, the infusion of \$1.5-billion over five years in the recent federal budget is a welcome first step in terms of funding.

But it is not time to celebrate yet. Not only must the legislative framework win the support of Parliament and the provinces and territories, but the federal government must also act quickly to close the gaps in the framework that leave out essential medicines to treat our deadliest diseases: cancer, heart conditions, and stroke.

Millions of people in Canada live with cancer and heart disease, and rely on prescription medicines to help keep them alive. Many cannot afford them.

A 2024 Leger poll commissioned by the Canadian Cancer Society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation revealed that one in four people in this country either do not have prescription drug insurance, or do not have enough insurance to cover their prescrip-

tion medicines, leading many people to skip doses or split pills, or decide not to renew or fill their prescriptions due to cost.

This is not acceptable. We live in the only country in the world with a medicare system that does not include prescription medications. Without a national program to help reduce the cost of prescription medications, too many Canadians end up taking on this financial burden on their own. These costs are getting harder to manage as the cost of living crisis continues across the country.

This policy gap places a heavier burden on those struggling with complex diseases like cancer and heart disease—people like Robin McGee and Heather Evans.

McGee, from Nova Scotia, has late-stage colorectal cancer. While seeking treatment, she learned there were promising drugs that could help prolong her life. But the province's public health plan did not cover them. Neither did her private insurance.

To access the treatment she needed in Canada, McGee had to pay thousands of dollars out of her own pocket. She ended up buying

the prescription medicine from a pharmacy in Bangladesh where it was more affordable, but still costly.

Evans, from Alberta, lives with heart disease and other health conditions. At times, her life-saving prescription medicines cost her up to \$1,000 a month. She is currently taking a medication that would cost \$46,000 a year if she had to pay for it out of pocket.

Fortunately, Evans has a job with health insurance coverage. But she wasn't always so lucky. Before she had coverage, she was forced to skimp on groceries for her family to afford her medication, and had to rely on free drug samples from her local medical clinic.

McGee's and Evans' stories are not unique. The Leger poll showed that more than one-quarter of respondents have had to cut back on groceries; delay rent, mortgage, or utility bills; or incur debt to pay for their prescription medicines.

A cancer or heart disease diagnosis is daunting enough without also having to face financial hardships to pay for necessary medications.

Beyond affordability for patients, an expanded pharmacare framework that includes prescriptions for cancer and heart disease can also reduce pressure on and save costs to the health-care system.

When we polled people about their prescriptions, one in 10 said they have gone to a hospital because they could not afford prescription drugs for their chronic condition. Universal coverage of essential drugs can prevent these unexpected and costly visits, saving the health-care system an average of \$1,488 per patient per year.

Time is of the essence, and we have four critical asks.

Our first is that Parliament makes it a priority to pass the pharmacare legislation before it adjourns for the summer.

Second, we ask all provincial and territorial governments to sign on to new bilateral agreements with Ottawa before the end of the year. The pharmacare legislation enables the creation of these new agreements through which federal funding would flow to expand prescription coverage.

Third, the federal government must immediately appoint a committee of experts—including those from the cancer and cardiovascular diseases communities—to build the pharmacare program.

Fourth, we need the expansion of pharmacare to cover prescriptions for cardiovascular and cancer drugs.

An expanded pharmacare framework offers a lifeline for millions of people in Canada. It is time for federal, provincial, and territorial governments to deliver it.

Andrea Seale is CEO of the Canadian Cancer Society. Doug Roth is CEO at Heart & Stroke. *The Hill Times*

Past time for health minister to hit reset button on Natural Health Product over-regulation

Health Canada's changes reflect neither the reality of the industry, nor the values around freedom of choice for the over 80 per cent of Canadians who choose natural to maintain their health and wellness.

Aaron Skelton

Opinion



In the spring of 2023, the Canadian Health Food Association officially

launched the Save Our Supplements campaign. This campaign, which began as a response to Health Canada's many regulatory changes to the natural health products industry, remains one of the most active grassroots campaigns with the highest number of engaged Canadians in recent history.

But, despite public outcry and concern raised by many MPs from across the country, the federal government has remained perplexingly and stubbornly headstrong in pushing its agenda.

One of these changes is the new proposed fees for natural health products (cost recovery). As the minister of health stays silent on an exaggerated proposal under his authority, Health Canada keeps changing its stance on the justification and reasoning behind the changes. Cited initially as a response to its failed auditor general report, the department has now cancelled most of the program's modernizations and efficiencies. During an illuminating House Health Committee

testimony last fall, the Natural and Non-prescription Health Products Directorate stated the need to increase regulation to protect Canadian health and safety. However, a 2023 Deloitte study analyzing Health Canada's databases, amongst other relevant sources, affirmed the safety of natural health products. These products have been a trusted choice for Canadians seeking alternative health solutions for decades. Yet, Health Canada has failed to adequately analyze the many impacts on Canadians.

Unfortunately, lack of analysis remains a running theme. The original cost recovery proposal (published in *Canada Gazette I*, May 2023) aimed to recoup \$100-million a year from the sector. Industry response was overwhelming, as a lack of cost-benefit analysis left businesses to do the math on whether they could afford to stay afloat—which many small to medium-sized companies realized would be near impossible.

The current proposal (updated March 2023) has attempted to reduce the rates charged to industry. Still, it threatens to bleed Canadian businesses dry, demanding hundreds to hundreds-of-thousands of dollars to be compliant while foreign, unregulated competitors do not have to pay as they operate beyond Health Canada's regulatory oversight. Health Canada is worsening the already uneven playing field by increasing the regulatory burden on compliant Canadian companies, and essentially taxing domestic brands out of the market. The onslaught of costly changes being forced on Canadian small and medium-sized businesses appears conflicting to the message of protecting health and safety, as they will only result in Canadians losing access to safe, compliant products in local stores, driving consumers to online, international marketplaces.

The domestic market cannot afford to shoulder this financial burden: Canada's natural health

products industry—a \$5.5-billion industry that generates \$2.8-billion in taxable revenue, and supports more than 54,000 jobs—will be left behind from what is a global, thriving industry set to see unprecedented growth in the next few years. The sector's innovation, research, and science will fall to shameful levels where this country was once a global leader.

Health Canada's changes reflect neither the reality of the industry, nor the values around freedom of choice for the more than 80 per cent of Canadians who choose natural to maintain their health and wellness.

We've said it before, and we're repeating it now: it is time for Health Canada to hit reset and do something about the uneven playing field it has created for Canadian businesses.

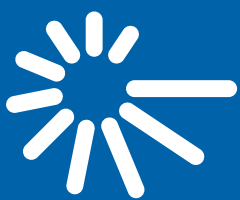
When we all do well, Canadians live well.

Aaron Skelton is president and CEO of the Canadian Health Food Association. *The Hill Times*



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Health Policy Briefing

Mental health and illnesses are a population health issue

The government has heeded the call for pharmacare and dental care, which fall outside the Canada Health Act. Mental health care is the obvious third leg of the stool.

Louise Bradley

Opinion



The first iteration of Wellness Together Canada, funded through emergency federal dollars, ceased on April 3, 2024, yet the urgent need it filled remains, writes Louise Bradley, board chair of Stopped Care Solutions. Photograph courtesy of Pixabay.com

leaders woke up to the reality that mental health problems and illnesses are a population health issue—full stop.

The federal government has heeded the call for pharmacare and dental care, which fall outside the Canada Health Act. Mental health care is the obvious third leg of the stool.

Our need for these services may ebb and flow, but it never recedes. If one in five Canadians experiences a mental health problem in any given year, and one in two by the age of 40, then the demand will grow as Canada's population ages.

We can meet the rising tide by building on the foundation laid by Wellness Together Canada, which was so much greater than the sum of its parts.

By uniting 15 expert providers—ranging from self-guided programs

and peer support, to counselling and crisis intervention—the access and reach of each was expanded. People who might have otherwise fallen outside certain service areas were able to access timely help. Add to this lesser-known applications, such as an overdose prevention tool, and you have a comprehensive suite of services for a broad range of mental health and substance use concerns.

The program, designed to serve the needs of every individual—from new Canadians, to overwhelmed working moms, to trans kids in isolated communities, to residential school survivors—ushered in an era of unprecedented equity. Twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, Wellness Together Canada was there—and more than half the time, people sought help outside business hours.

From overtaxed nurses in the Northwest Territories, to once-skeptical psychologists in the heart of downtown Toronto, health-care providers of all stripes became ambassadors, safe in the knowledge those in need would find quality care at the tips of their fingers. The high level of satisfaction reported by visitors bore that out.

The first iteration of Wellness Together Canada, funded through emergency federal dollars, ceased to be available on April 3, 2024.

Yet the urgent need it filled remains.

It was founded on the pioneering Stopped Care 2.0 model, which eases system log-jams, slashes wait-times, and offers people choice. Among my proudest achievements as then-president and CEO of the Mental Health Commission of Canada was our work to scale up Stopped Care 2.0, initially at select sites across the country, and ultimately, as the bedrock of Wellness Together Canada.

As the name suggests, Stopped Care 2.0, a refined version of an earlier approach, recognizes that people move along a mental health continuum, from healthy and well to injured or ill, with few of us requiring the specialized care at the most intensive level, or “top step.” In fact, evidence supports the extraordinary findings that a self-guided online program, or a single counselling session with a social worker, is often enough to help someone who may be struggling to course correct.

Wellness Together Canada has been lauded internationally for subtracting stumbling blocks from the help-seeking equation. Unlocking accessibility required nothing more than an internet connection or a telephone—a game-changer when six million Canadians are without a family doctor, and referrals are prohibitive. ‘Convenience’ and ‘choice’ were watchwords of Wellness Together Canada, offering people a selection of reputable resources from the comfort of their own homes with the added security of privacy safeguards.

Since its launch four years ago, there were over four million visitors to the service, averaging 100,000 people each month. This redirected patients from emergency rooms and freed up physician visits, while providing services to many who would have otherwise been left out in the cold. If an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, then a re-upped Wellness Together Canada would be a bang-for-your-buck investment.

With increased advertising, greater public awareness, and continued health care provider referrals, a similar offering could become an even greater, more efficient resource, costing each Canadian taxpayer less than a cup of coffee—per year.

Wellness Together Canada was truly a port in a storm. If there was a silver lining to COVID, it is the invaluable lessons learned through Wellness Together Canada. Imagine the possibilities waiting for us in version 2.0.

Louise Bradley is board chair of Stopped Care Solutions, and is former president and CEO of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

The Hill Times

The health-care system's hidden backbone: workplace supports for economic sustainability

Whether it be providing long- or short-term care, unpaid carers reduce strain on the healthcare system by taking care of their loved ones either in the home or the community.

Allison Williams

Opinion



The sustainability of our healthcare system and workforce depends on the readiness of our workplaces to support and accommodate carer-employees to better manage their dual role, writes McMaster University professor Dr. Allison Williams. Photograph by Matthias Zomer, Pexels.com

contributing to sustainable health-care infrastructure. In Canada, 75 per cent of care is provided by unpaid carers, saving our health-care systems billions of dollars, averaging about \$24-billion to \$31-billion in unpaid care work each year. Whether it be providing long- or short-term care, unpaid carers reduce strain on the health-care system by taking care of their loved one(s) either in the home or the community.

The impacts of COVID-19 are still being realized across health-care systems today, ranging from nursing shortages to the realities of underfunded long-term care; these weaknesses are placing additional strain on unpaid carers.

Some carers are simultaneously balancing their unpaid care work with paid employment; these folks are known as

As Canada approaches National Caregiving Month in May, people across the country recognize the difficult and important work of unpaid carers in supporting health-care systems.

Unpaid care work is the backbone of the health-care system in Canada. Unpaid carers are individuals of all ages—youth, older adults, and those in the prime of their careers—pro-

viding care to loved ones that could include spouses, parents, in-laws, family members, friends, or neighbours. Carers directly impact our country's economic health, specifically

Continued on page 31



CANADIAN
PARTNERSHIP
AGAINST CANCER

Transforming cancer care through the Pan-Canadian Cancer Data Strategy

Imagine a world in which a cancer patient's health data follows them across the whole healthcare system, from their first appointment with their family doctor, through radiation and surgery, to post-treatment care. Every step of the way, high-quality and up-to-date information about their health would be available to them and all the professionals involved in their case, allowing for better, more timely and more equitable decision-making and care. This would also provide decision-makers with a more complete picture of the processes and outcomes of care to inform policy.

This kind of approach to data is on the horizon in Canada: in May 2022, the [Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy](#) laid out high-level requirements for improving point-of-care data access throughout the healthcare system. In July 2023, the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (the Partnership) and the Canadian Cancer Society (CCS), working with partners throughout the Canadian health and data systems, launched the [Pan-Canadian Cancer Data Strategy](#).

Building on strong foundations

The Cancer Data Strategy complements the Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy which aims to modernize the health system by improving how health information is collected, shared, used and reported to people in Canada.

The Cancer Data Strategy also aligns with the goals of the Shared Pan-Canadian Interoperability Roadmap to help ensure different digital health systems can interact with one another so a patient's health information can move with them throughout the system. This is paramount for cancer patients who interact with different parts of the healthcare system throughout their journey, from screening to treatment to follow-up and beyond.

Investing in a cancer-specific data strategy is critical, not just because of the prevalence of the disease – two out of every five people in Canada will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime – but also because there are unique data systems such as cancer registries and radiation treatment files in the cancer data ecosystem. Additionally, the relatively good organization of cancer data makes cancer an ideal test case for initiatives under the broader health data strategy. The Cancer Data Strategy will help tackle the urgent need to close gaps in cancer data in Canada, leading to improvements in cancer prevention and care while also helping to address the needs of those who survive it. Additionally, the strategy will support better planning, evaluation and research to ensure that Canada's cancer system remains strong and effective.

The strategy includes three priorities for action and investment:

- Improve the efficiency, timeliness and quality of data capture and access.
- Enhance interoperability and linkages to current data.
- Fill gaps in current data collection and availability.

Achieving these priorities while centring the needs of equity-deserving groups, and supporting and upholding First Nations, Inuit and Métis data sovereignty, will ensure that all people in Canada have access to patient-centric, innovative and high-quality cancer care.

Collaborating to achieve the goals of the cancer data strategy

The work underway at the federal level toward the Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy has created the supportive environment needed to achieve the priorities of the Cancer Data Strategy. In turn, the Cancer Data Strategy operationalizes many of the goals of the Health Data Strategy.

To achieve the goals of the Cancer Data Strategy, it is crucial that health administrators, researchers and academic institutions, First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners, as well as federal, provincial and territorial policymakers continue to invest in building a more cohesive cancer data ecosystem.

Together with provincial and territorial partners, the Partnership and CCS are pushing ahead with innovations in cancer data. We urge everyone with a stake in the healthcare system – and particularly government and healthcare leaders – to lend their support so we can move quickly to establish a comprehensive cancer data system that benefits all people in Canada, today and in the future.

Learn more at partnershipagainstcancer.ca

As the steward of the Canadian Strategy for Cancer Control, the Partnership works with Canada's cancer community to take action to ensure fewer people get cancer, more people survive cancer, and those living with the disease have a better quality of life and all people in Canada have equitable access to quality cancer care. The Partnership is funded by Health Canada.

This article was produced through a financial contribution from Health Canada through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. The views expressed represent those of the Partnership.



Health Policy Briefing



Close to 20 per cent of Canadians have inadequate or no drug coverage at all, forcing some to skip or cut doses of medicine, or forgo other necessities, such as food or heat, to be able to afford those medicines. *Image courtesy of Pexels*

Patient involvement in pharmacare is critical to its success

Pharmacare is the most innovative and important health policy legislation in decades. To get it right, the federal government must directly engage with patients.

Louise Binder
& Filomena
Servidio-Italiano

Opinion



Canada is on the verge of a new era in access to affordable prescription drugs. The federal government's long-awaited pharmacare bill promises to lay the foundation for a national, universal pharmacare plan.

It could be a game changer for the one in five Canadians who struggle to afford the cost of prescription drugs. The federal government and the NDP deserve praise for developing a framework for the most ground-breaking health policy initiative in decades.

Yet, an essential element for success is missing from the legislation: input from patients who rely on prescription medications to treat their illness or disease. Their experience is vital in ensuring that pharmacare makes prescription drugs more affordable while not limiting access to essential medicines.

The federal government must avoid a mistake that governments too often make when implementing health policy. It must directly involve patients in building pharmacare.

Governments often tout the importance of patient-centred care in decision-making, only to leave patients out of the loop when it comes to developing policies that affect them. This cannot happen with pharmacare. The stakes are too high.

Close to 20 per cent of Canadians have inadequate or no

drug coverage at all, forcing some to skip or cut doses of medicine—leading to potentially catastrophic outcomes—or forgo other necessities, such as food or heat, to be able to afford those medicines.

So, how can the federal government directly engage patients in developing pharmacare?

First, it must include the patient voice on the expert committee that will make recommendations on operating and financing pharmacare. The legislation requires the government to set up the committee within 30 days after the bill passes.

However, the legislation makes no reference to patient representatives being among those experts. This is a mistake. Who knows better than patients—especially those with no or insufficient drug insurance—where the real gaps are in current public drug plans and how to fill them?

Second, the government must give patients a seat at the table when it comes to determining which prescription drugs to cover.

The government's commitment to provide first-dollar coverage for contraceptives and diabe-

tes drugs and devices through provincial agreements is a good first start, but the list cannot end there.

Currently, it is up to each province to decide which prescription drugs to cover under their public health plan and under what conditions—including deductibles and co-payments. This results in unequal, inequitable coverage for and access to timely prescription drugs.

Drugs not covered publicly are only available to those fortunate enough to have a private drug plan covering them. Otherwise, people must pay for drugs out of their own pockets. This can be unaffordable for many, especially those in marginalized communities.

The federal government must work with the provinces, and consult with patients to expand the list of pharmacare-covered drugs to include prescribed treatments for life-threatening illnesses including cancer.

Governments must also include patients in discussions about how innovative drugs fit into pharmacare. Research advances have led to an explosion

of new treatments in recent years, particularly for cancer.

These innovations can help patients live longer with a better quality of life. Yet, many innovative drugs are not covered under provincial public health plans, and are costly out of pocket expenses, limiting access for those who need them. Patients' insights can give governments a more comprehensive picture when determining how these treatments fit into pharmacare.

Third, the government must give patients a voice in the recently created Canadian Drug Agency. The legislation provides details on the agency's role—including in the areas of developing a list of essential prescription drugs, creating a national prescription drug purchasing strategy, and developing recommendations for doctors and patients about the appropriate use of drugs—yet it is silent on patient involvement.

Patients should be part of decision making not only about which essential medicines to cover, but also around an issue as important as the appropriate use of prescription drugs and related products. Patients' lived experience with medications is an invaluable asset in making evidence-informed decisions about their care.

Pharmacare is the most innovative and important health policy legislation in decades. To get it right, the federal government must directly engage with patients. Their expertise is crucial to pharmacare's success.

Louise Binder is the health policy consultant for Save Your Skin Foundation. Filomena Servidio-Italiano is the president and CEO of the Colorectal Cancer Resource and Action Network.

The Hill Times

Embracing regulatory ambition to shape Canada's future in health-care innovation

At this pivotal moment, Canada has the ability not only to redefine its healthcare landscape, but also to lead globally in the sector.

Andrew
Casey

Opinion



As a result of game-changing innovations emerging from the biotechnology sector globally, health care is undergoing a truly transformational phase. With its long history of science, research, and health-related biotech innovation, Canada is well-positioned to be a leading force in this transformation which will benefit Canadian patients and millions of others globally.

The origins of this country's diverse and national biotech ecosystem can be traced back to the discovery of insulin and the development of the polio vaccine.

Since that time, Canadian scientists have played central roles in developing remarkable breakthroughs in stem cell research, regenerative medicine, and vaccines. This legacy is augmented by a dynamic ecosystem characterized by collaboration across academia, industry, and government, which establishes the foundation for the next frontier of health-care advancements including next-generation vaccines to prevent cancer, gene-editing tools such as CRISPR, and advances in tissue engineering which all hold the potential to address previously untreatable diseases and genetic disorders.

Importantly, the rapid application of artificial intelligence (AI), another field in which Canada is developing recognized expertise, is now transforming the biotech industry by enhancing R&D, accelerating and streamlining new drug discovery and development. AI's capacity to swiftly analyze complex data sets enables companies to push the pace of innovation, promising rapid development of novel therapies. As a result, there are remarkable new technologies available now, with many others on the not-so-distant horizon. Accordingly, Canada needs to be ready to adopt and drive the development of health-care innovation and technology.

Building on the history and success of the established biotech ecosystem and

the imperative of preparing for future pandemic-like challenges, the government has identified the biotech sector as a strategic priority. Importantly, just as Canada has, other countries are also moving aggressively to invest in and drive their domestic biotech sectors. In this context, the global arena is now a highly competitive space as countries compete for limited companies, investment, and talent. To remain competitive, Canada must establish a globally ambitious public policy and regulatory environment which supports and drives innovation forward. At a minimum, our nation must be on par with other like jurisdictions around the world if it aspires to attract innovation and grow its domestic life sciences sector. Following the pandemic, Canada has taken some meaningful steps to modernize and improve its regulatory capacity. Continuing to build on these initial steps will enhance domestic competitiveness and attract innovation. Embracing AI, developing technical expertise in emerging fields, regulatory cooperation, and alignment with other similar regulatory jurisdictions are some of the potential steps Canada should take to advance its regulatory capacity.

An efficient and agile regulatory framework is crucial for the success of our biotech sector and for the attraction of new technologies and therapeutics for

Canadians. Canada has traditionally been viewed as a strong, science-based regulator for new drugs and technologies. An aspirational approach to modernizing this country's regulatory capacity will ensure it is ready to adopt the remarkable emerging technologies. Moreover, an ambitious approach to regulatory modernization sends a strong signal that Canada is serious about playing a leadership role in adopting and developing the new technologies. This will support the creation and scaling up of businesses, and will attract global pharma and biotech companies who will bring innovation, clinical trials, and investment to Canada.

At this pivotal moment, this country has the ability not only to redefine its healthcare landscape, but also to lead globally in the sector. By drawing on our strong tradition of innovation and fully embracing AI and biotechnology, we are well-equipped to navigate the complexities ahead and maintain our position as a leader in global healthcare.

Andrew Casey became president and CEO of BIOTEC Canada in August 2012. As the head of BIOTEC Canada, he is the lead spokesperson for Canada's biotechnology industry communicating on the industry's behalf with government, regulators, international bodies, media, and the Canadian public.

The Hill Times

Together, building healthier tomorrows for all children.



UCalgary is driving the pace of discovery and impact sparking meaningful change in the lives of children.

onechildeverychild.ca

The One Child Every Child initiative at the University of Calgary is a groundbreaking research partnership aimed at improving the health and well-being of children across Canada and beyond.

With over 250 unique health delivery organizations from hospitals and rehabilitation centers and 132 organizations from over 25 different countries, the One Child Every Child initiative aims to level the playing field among children and identify and remove the barriers that make growing up so difficult for so many.

Through partnerships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, community partners, and equity-deserving communities, One Child Every Child will focus on **Better Beginnings, Precision Health and Wellness and Vulnerable to Thriving**. The initiative incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing, comprehensive data analysis, transdisciplinary training and technological solutions that find ways to evaluate and mobilize knowledge to ensure the greatest impact is felt by every child. Learn more about how you can support this initiative to create a better future for every child in Canada and beyond.

Health Policy Briefing

Moving beyond Band-Aid solutions to deliver health care fit for kids

The Conference Board of Canada estimates the annual costs to treat anxiety and depression in young people to be \$4-billion, which balloons to nearly \$1-trillion over a lifetime without timely interventions.

Emily Gruenwolddt

Opinion



The vibrancy and wellbeing of children and youth serve as an important barometer of a nation's commitment to its future. In the Canadian context, we find ourselves at a critical crossroads,

facing a crisis in child and youth health that demands our collective attention, and compels transformative action.

From coast to coast to coast, children and youth are struggling. From long waitlists for essential health-care interventions to a shortage of primary care providers, cracks in our health-care systems threaten to undermine the potential of our youngest generations, and indeed the future of our country.

Delays in access to care come at both a human and financial cost. The Conference Board of Canada estimates the annual costs to treat anxiety and depression amongst children and youth to be \$4-billion; a figure that balloons to nearly one-trillion dollars over a lifetime without timely interventions for these common mental health diagnoses. Delayed pediatric scoliosis surgeries—based on children currently waiting beyond the recommended time frame—are estimated to cost our healthcare systems \$44.6-million, and lead to caregiver productivity loss of \$1.4-million. While children wait for services, they may experience physical or emotional pain, fall

behind in school, miss out on social activities, and often their conditions worsen—in some cases, irreversibly. As a society, we cannot afford to ignore the mounting evidence of the profound impacts of inaction.

Canada has an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine its future by setting up children, youth, and families for success. The path forward requires a fundamental shift in how we conceptualize and prioritize investments and policies to support children and youth. A path that speaks both to a moral imperative and an economic one. We must recognize that investing in the health and wellbeing of our youngest citizens is an investment in the future prosperity and resilience of our nation as a whole. If we improve the health of children, we improve the health of Canada.

At the heart of this commitment must be the opportunity to “right-size” health-care systems tailored specifically to the unique needs of children and youth. Children are not tiny adults. They require specialized physical and mental healthcare services that span the continuum of care. From primary care to community

settings, acute care, and rehabilitation, our health-care systems must be accessible, equitable, and purpose-built to meet the diverse needs of our youngest population.

Central to this vision is the concept of integration—of seamlessly connecting physical and mental healthcare services, of fostering partnerships between healthcare providers and families, and of ensuring continuity of care across the lifespan. Only through a holistic and interconnected approach can we hope to address the multifaceted needs of children and youth effectively.

Achieving this vision will require more than just lofty rhetoric. It demands concrete actions and unwavering commitments from all levels of government, advocacy groups, healthcare delivery organizations, and beyond. It requires dedicated funding envelopes for children's health systems, publicly accessible child health data, and a highly specialized health workforce trained to meet the unique needs of our youngest patients.

Fortunately, the groundwork has already been laid. Through extensive consultation and

collaboration, organizations like Children's Healthcare Canada have developed a shared vision for high-functioning children's health-care systems. The report, *Beyond Band-aids: Delivering Healthcare Fit for Kids*, recommends collective and coordinated action to immediately begin maximizing results for children and youth. Now, it is incumbent upon us all to turn this vision into reality.

As we look to the future, let us not forget the profound impact that our actions—or inaction—will have on the lives of our children and youth. Every day matters in the life of a child, and it is incumbent upon us all to ensure that every child has access to the quality health care they deserve. Together, we can move beyond Band-Aid solutions, and build health-care systems truly fit for kids to deliver a brighter, healthier future for all Canadians.

Emily Gruenwolddt is a trusted voice and passionate champion for Canada's eight million kids, and advances a vision for vibrant, healthy children and youth in her role as president and CEO of Children's Healthcare Canada, a national, non-profit association representing more than 40 health-care delivery organizations serving children, youth and families. She is also executive director of the Pediatric Chairs of Canada.

The Hill Times

Answering a call for help can save a life, but what comes next is just as critical

With 12 Canadians dying by suicide every day, the government has set up a national three-digit helpline. But a compassionate response can't end there. It demands the availability of real help for Canadians in mental distress, before and after they hang up the phone.

Margaret Eaton

Opinion



For Canadians experiencing suicidal thoughts, dialling 988 could be the hardest call they'll

ever make. For others experiencing distress, they wonder if their symptoms are “serious enough.”

Some will reach out to the new 24/7 helpline for suicide crisis, made available nationwide last fall, during their own mental health crises. Others will make the call because a friend or family member needs help. For those who take this leap—and for the people who love them, their communities, and the responders on the other end of the phone—it's essential that the right help be available, when they need it, to alleviate the suffering that prompted the outreach in the first place. But right now, that's far from guaranteed.

The theme for the Canadian Mental Health Association's 73rd Mental Health Week (May 6-12) is “healing through compassion”. Compassion goes beyond empathy in that it includes an authentic desire to alleviate suffering and is followed by genuine effort to do so. Providing adequate care in response to a mental health crisis is the compassionate thing to do.

Canadians are struggling. So much so that 12 people die by suicide each day in this country, on average, and 60 are hospital-

ized for self-harm. It was concern about this suffering, and compassion across party lines, that led to the establishment of a dedicated national helpline to provide immediate support to those thinking about suicide, and to de-escalate situations of acute emotional distress. It is an important first step, but additional federal leadership is essential to both prevent these crises in the first place, and to ensure that those reaching out for help actually get the support they need.

If connecting with a helpline responder isn't enough—and for many of those who call 988, it won't be—we know that too often, people in mental health crisis have nowhere to turn for care but a police car or emergency room. Where appropriate mental health care is available in the community, services are delivered by non-profits and charities whose current resources can't always meet demand. Otherwise, people with the ability to pay can use private providers.

The bilateral health agreements signed in 2023 with provinces, as well as the April 16 federal budget, fail to adequately invest in crisis services delivered

by community-based organizations outside of hospitals and doctors' offices. This is a missed opportunity. According to polling commissioned by CMHA for Mental Health Week, 78 per cent of Canadians think this country could be more compassionate by doing more to help those in need, through social support programs and better laws/policies.

For Canada to be considered a truly compassionate nation we need to see dedicated investments in community resources to reduce instances of mental health distress and prevalence of suicide, and make sure that a call for help is the beginning of someone's journey towards mental wellness.

What would a compassionate response look like? Imagine hearing from a crisis line responder that a peer support worker, who has navigated a suicide crisis of their own, could be dispatched to make a home visit. Imagine being told you were going to get access to free, ongoing counselling for the mental illness that had brought you to a crisis point after going untreated for years. Or imagine that your child's school was implementing a skills-building emotional and social learn-

ing program to assist our youth grappling with the pressures of academics, social media, and other stressors.

Community-based services like these can be life-saving—where they exist—and access to them needs to be expanded. It's an investment that would address pressures on the public institutions, like hospitals and police departments, that are not equipped to bear the responsibility of comprehensive mental health care. It's also the compassionate thing to do.

By tangibly supporting evidence-backed, community-based care for people in mental health distress, federal leadership would have a rapid and significant positive impact on individual lives across the country. It would also uplift families, workplaces, and communities who suffer when their people suffer, and can thrive when they get the care they deserve.

Margaret Eaton is the national CEO of the Canadian Mental Health Association, the most established and extensive community mental health organization in Canada.

The Hill Times

Canada is grappling with overlapping crises in mental health and overdoses that are outpacing the capacity of the mental health and substance use health system to respond, write Kathleen Leslie and Jelena Atanackovic. Image courtesy of Pexels

HEALTH

Canada needs a workforce action plan to tackle overlapping crises in mental health and overdose deaths

With the ongoing mental health and overdose crises, Canada needs a MHSUH workforce action plan now so that Canadians can have timely and equitable access to these critical services. Federal, provincial and territorial governments must make this a priority.

Kathleen Leslie & Jelena Atanackovic

Opinion



Canada is grappling with overlapping crises in mental health and overdoses that are outpacing the capacity of the mental health and substance use health system to respond.

While governments across the country are taking steps to increase access to mental health and substance use health (MHSUH) services—including a recent federal government announcement of \$500-million to support community-based youth mental health organizations—these measures often overlook the MHSUH workforce itself, the psychologists and social workers, counselling therapists and addiction counsellors, peer support and harm reduction workers, nurses and physicians, occupational therapists and other practitioners who are the backbone of the system.

Canada cannot close the gap in access to MHSUH services unless we develop a MHSUH workforce action plan to co-ordinate planning across jurisdictions, provider types and the public and private sectors.

Although the mental health and overdose crises pre-dated COVID-19, they were exacerbated by the pandemic. Fears of infection, financial stress, shutdowns, isolation, and interruptions in work, education, family, social and healthcare routines in the early stages of the pandemic led to an alarming increase in mental health and substance use concerns.

One in three people reported moderate-to-severe mental health

concerns, and one in four Canadians who used alcohol or cannabis said their use was problematic.

Staffing shortages, restrictions on in-person visits, and the need to move to virtual care challenged the capacity of the MHSUH system to respond to growing population needs. The pandemic also further burdened the MHSUH workforce—especially those working in substance use health and addiction—who were already dealing with difficult working conditions, low pay, stigma, stress, and burnout.

While some MHSUH providers—particularly those in the private sector—increased their capacity to provide services during the pandemic, overall MHSUH workforce capacity decreased, widening the gap in access.

There have been some recent improvements reported in overall population mental health; however, the number of people reporting symptoms of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder has not declined.

The toxic drug supply that is fueling the overdose crisis is compounding the pandemic's lingering MHSUH impacts, putting further strain on the capacity of the MHSUH system and its workforce to provide timely access to needed services and supports.

To strike at the heart of these issues, Canada must develop a

MHSUH workforce action plan. Other countries—including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand—have already adopted plans to tackle issues such as workforce planning, recruitment, and training.

It is time for Canada to do the same.

The federal government needs to work with the provinces and territories to develop an action plan that focuses on priority areas for the MHSUH workforce, including hiring more workers, diversifying the workforce, and implementing measures—including fair remuneration and support for well-being—to improve retention. The recent expansion of the Canada Student Loan forgiveness to social workers and psychologists working in rural and remote communities is a step in the right direction.

The plan must also prioritize better data collection.

Despite the vital work of the MHSUH workforce, significant data gaps exist—especially for psychotherapists and counselling therapists, addiction counsellors, and peer support workers—that hinder workforce planning. Without robust data on all occupations providing MHSUH services across the country, decision-makers do not have a clear picture of gaps in

service delivery, or how to close them. The new federally funded Health Workforce Canada could play an important role in bridging these gaps.

The action plan must also include regulatory changes that develop and expand roles, scopes of practice, and the skill mix of MHSUH workers throughout Canada—including a flexible approach to quality assurance for some currently unregulated provider groups.

It must also address inequities in access, and the need for more public funding of MHSUH services. There are often long wait lists for publicly funded MHSUH services, leaving people to either wait longer for the support they need, or turn to the private system if they have employer-provided insurance or the financial means to pay out of pocket.

Education, training, and ongoing development must also be important components of the plan as must integrated team-based care so that mental health, substance use, primary care and other health sectors work together collaboratively.

Finally, given the shift to virtual care, it is also essential that the plan include funding to ensure that MHSUH workers have the digital infrastructure and training to provide virtual care in an equitable way.

With the mental health and overdose crises showing no signs of abating, Canada needs a MHSUH workforce action plan now more than ever so that Canadians can have timely and equitable access to these critical services. Federal, provincial and territorial governments must make this a priority.

Dr. Kathleen Leslie is an associate professor in the faculty of health disciplines at Athabasca University. Dr. Jelena Atanackovic is a senior research associate at the University of Ottawa.

The Hill Times

Health Policy Briefing

Getting everyone a ‘front door into the health system’: Jane Philpott weighs in on fixing health care, and her future in politics

‘I feel that it is a fundamental responsibility of anyone who is an elected official... to collaborate with other orders of government to be able to make sure that health care works,’ says the former health minister.

BY PETER MAZEREEUW

Former federal health minister Jane Philpott has written a book about how to solve Canada’s family medicine problem. Titled, *Health for All: A Doctor’s Prescription for a Healthier Canada*, the work is Philpott’s call to arms to Canadians who are fed up with kitchen-table conversations about the impossibility of finding a family doctor, or negotiating hospital emergency rooms that have been overwhelmed in part by patients with nowhere else to turn.

The physician and former Liberal cabinet minister lays out her solution: a new model for providing family medicine in Canada, and renewed efforts to tempt medical students into the field.

Philpott joined *The Hill Times’ Hot Room* podcast to talk about her ideas last week, the challenges of collaborating with provincial and territorial governments, and whether she plans to run for office again. The following interview has been edited for clarity.

You’ve written a book on how to overhaul Canada’s health systems. And what I love about this book is it doesn’t just talk about the problems or shortcomings in our systems. And it doesn’t just talk about how important it is to fix those problems. You actually make some specific suggestions about how we could rebuild our model for delivering primary health care using the elementary school system as a kind of tem-

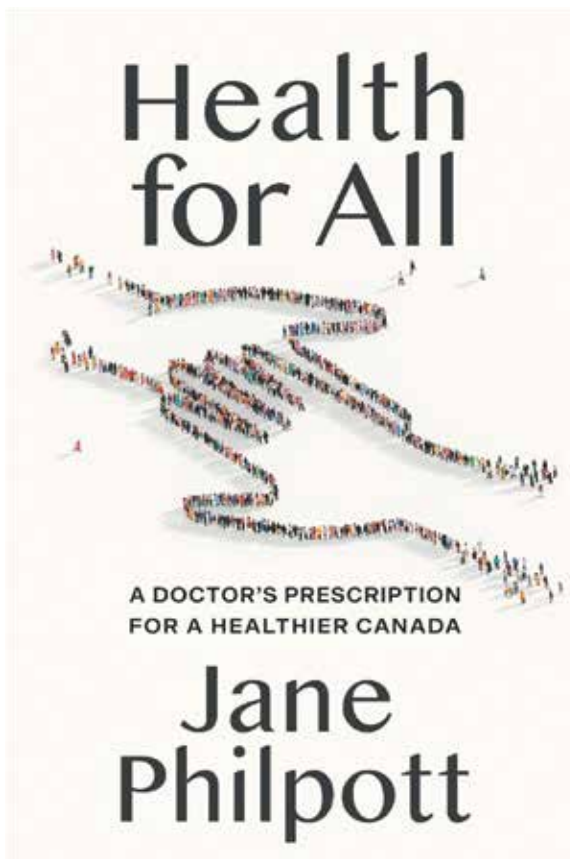


plate. Can you walk us through how it would work?

“Yes, it’s actually a pretty straightforward metaphor that I use. And I’m not the first person who’s used this, but I’m perhaps the first person who’s published a book describing this approach. Because, as people are feeling overwhelmed about health care and the huge challenges, the real problems with lack of access to primary care in particular—where we know that at least six and a half, and probably more like seven million Canadians don’t have a family doctor or any other primary care provider—it feels a bit overwhelming. And everyone, I think, begins to despair that it’s unfixable.

“And so I share this example of the fact that in Canada, for as long as any of us can remember, we have been able to have systems across the country where we know that every child has access to a publicly-funded education for elementary school and secondary school. It’s wonderful. And you know, it’s so reliable that you don’t worry when you move to

another town whether you’ll be able to find a school for your child. But you sure do worry right now if you move to another town whether you’ll be able to find a family doctor. So we need to design a system where everyone has access to a primary care team. And it’s doable because many other countries have done this.”

So why is this model—a sort of health centre in every community—why would that work better than what we have now?

“Well, what we have now is pretty ad hoc, right?”

“I’m a family doctor. And when I wanted to start a practice, I could pick wherever I wanted to start. I didn’t have to do it based on where there was need. But I did have to work with my group to lease a space, to hire our staff, to buy the computers that we needed, and essentially run the business. And so that has been the model that has existed in Canada, for the most part.

“There have been these facilities called Community Health Centres, which run under a slightly different model. But again, it’s a little bit ad hoc as to which community gets a Community Health Centre. And so what we need to do is get organized, and figure out where the gaps are, and then build facilities that will have a primary care team, not just a family doctor, but primary care nurse practitioners, and nurses, and dietitians, because that’s actually the most affordable way to get care. It’s the most patient-centred or person-centred way to get care, so that everyone has a

front door into the health system, because for seven million Canadians, they don’t have anything like that. And their only choice when they get sick is to go to the emergency department. And often they don’t go soon enough, because they’ve been waiting and waiting to get care. So we’ve left ourselves with a system that costs a lot more than it needs to, and people are not getting the care they need.”

Not all family doctors will want to practice in a family health centre, and work with and through all these other staff members. Some of them like the current model. What happens to them if the powers that be decide to implement your model?

“That’s a really interesting question. Of course, you know, physicians do enjoy a lot of autonomy, which is great, and there would be no likelihood that you could make people move out of the system that they’re happy with. But actually, what we are hearing, especially from young doctors, is that they are really interested in looking at these new models. They’re very interested in working with a salary-based approach, as opposed to the current models, which are often fee-for-service. And they very, very much want to work in teams. In fact, that’s one of the problems that happens when family doctors finish their training. We train them in these beautiful team-centred clinics, where they’re used to working alongside nurses and



others, but then they get out to practice, and there’s no public support for that except in very few cases. And so we know that that’s one of the reasons why they decide not to open up a practice; they end up going to work in hospitals or emergency departments or other areas, but they don’t do this comprehensive family practice with a team because the model doesn’t exist.”

The benefit of working through a team like this—I think the way you phrased it in your book—is, everyone is ‘working at the top of their practice.’ In other words, no one is spending time doing work that they’re overqualified to do, it’s very efficient. Is that right?

“Exactly. I mean, I don’t think I’d go so far as to say that you never do something that you know someone else could possibly do, but you ideally have everyone working as close as possible to what we would call the top of their scope. So if it’s something that, you know, only a doctor is qualified to do, then obviously the doctor does that. But there are lots of things that doctors end up doing that another person could easily do. You know, giving



Jane Philpott, speaking at the Canadian Museum of History in June 2018, says there is a ‘lack of political will’ to change Canada’s health-care system. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Policy Briefing **Health**

Jane Philpott, the former federal health minister and current dean of health sciences at Queen's University, spoke to *The Hill Times* about how to fix Canada's ailing family health systems.
The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

injections is an easy example, or suturing a wound, providing dietary counselling. There are so many things that other people on the team can do just as well, or sometimes even better. And so working together as a team is a way to make sure that we use our health workforce in the most efficient and effective way, because we know that we depend on that health workforce, and there are simply not enough family doctors to go around."

And right now, the reason we don't see more of this is because doctors have to pay out of pocket for anyone on their team if you're in family medicine, right?

"Exactly. There was, for a little while—in Ontario, for example—funding for family health teams. So about a quarter of the people in Ontario are attached to a team-based care model. That's fantastic where it exists. But apart from a few other isolated examples like that, doctors are paid in most parts of the country under a fee-for-service model. And if they want to have a nurse or someone else on their team, they pay for it themselves.

"One can certainly argue that that would be a good use of their resources, and many doctors do choose to do that. But it's less likely used, because it's not part of the plan, and the intentional design."

Your book presumes that a majority of Canadians want major change to the way primary health care is delivered. And that would seem obvious given how difficult it is for people to get a family doctor. Yet 10 Canadian provinces have had decades of opportunity to read all of these op-eds, and white papers, and books that have been written about this, and overhaul the system. And none of them have really done it. Why not?

"It's an excellent question. And I make the case in the book that

it's largely because of the lack of political will. You know, I think there are other reasons around that: in part, there aren't always a lot of people in either the political side of government, or even the public service side of government, that have had experience on the frontlines of health care. And it's a really complex environment. And I think they get a bit overwhelmed, and aren't sure how they can actually do this.

"I'm hoping that having written the book and sharing this model and this idea with people across the country, that it will take a little bit of the mystery out of it, and help Canadians in general to put the pressure on politicians to grow that political will to say, 'yes, we need to figure this out.' We aren't going to be able to do it overnight. But we can absolutely design an approach like this. We are doing a model like this now in Kingston: we've been funded for a portion of the population who have not got attachment to primary care. And with a little bit more funding, we could roll it out so that everyone in the city of Kingston would have access to primary care. And as we start to show what the models

look like, then it becomes much more palpable and easier for the political decision-makers to imagine that they could actually do this for the whole country."

Speaking of political decision-makers, will you be putting your name on a ballot again?

"Well, at the moment, I'm working at Queen's University and loving my job there. I loved politics, too. I would, you know—I think you should never say never. I'm really interested in this work on primary care, and if an opportunity ever came up that there would be the right path to be able to think about politics again, it's not impossible. But it's certainly not in my immediate plans."

You imagine a central role for the federal government in getting all the provinces in line and rowing together, using legislation and cash transfers. You also have seen firsthand how much of a fuss the provinces put up when a federal health minister tries to give them cash to fix health care with a few strings attached. In some provinces, it seems the prevailing wisdom is to oppose, on principle, anything that's led by Ottawa.

So how do you make the politics work?

"I will agree with you that politics, and particularly federal-provincial-territorial relationships, can be challenging. But when this country has done well on big social issues, like health care and other social services, it has happened when the federal government and the provinces and territories have sat down together, agreed upon what they want to do for their people, and collaborated to make it happen.

"It doesn't happen as often as it ought to, and probably less and less over time. But this is something that matters so much to Canadians. I feel that it is a fundamental responsibility of anyone who is an elected official: whether they are in the federal government or a provincial government, they have a responsibility to collaborate with other orders of government to be able to make sure that health care works. Because if Canadians don't have health care, then it leaves us with an unsustainable quality of life. And it's something that we simply need to expect our politicians to do better, and to sit down and meet together and agree upon a plan."

I sometimes find myself wondering whether the federal government's involvement might actually be doing more harm than good. We see this every few years: there are arguments over, 'Well, the health care systems aren't doing well enough.' And then the premiers will get together and say, 'it's the federal government's fault. They're not giving us enough money.' And then the federal government gives them more money, nothing changes, rinse and repeat. Is it possible Canadians are confused about who is actually responsible, accountable for fixing health care—and that means no one's being held accountable?

"Well, it's an interesting hypothesis. We have a long history of finger-pointing and blaming somebody else when things aren't going well. And I think Canadians are really frustrated with that. Different orders of government like to claim that it's their responsibility at different times. And the fact of the matter is that health is a shared jurisdiction; that there's a role for all orders of government in different ways to work together.

"But you know, when things have gone well for us in this country, and we've done some really great things on health care, we have seen that both the provinces and the federal government have had a role to play in it. And of course, the classic example of that is when hospital insurance was first introduced, and doctor insurance was first introduced. It was Saskatchewan that led the way and ensured that everybody in their province had hospital insurance, and then doctor insurance, and then it was eventually adopted across the rest of the country a few years later.

"So who knows who will be the first to jump on this model of primary care for all? I would love to see it happen at a national level, eventually. It's quite possible that a province may decide to do this. And I can tell you I've already heard from provincial officials in parts of the country who have wanted to talk about it. So I'm excited about that. I think that there's a real opportunity for a province to take on this task, to be leaders, and then, hopefully, to be able to see that kind of model adopted across the country."

You wrote a little bit about the value of expanding medical schools, taking more students. It's become extremely difficult for even top students to get admitted to medical school, and I've often wondered, why don't they just admit more students, train more doctors? Where has the resistance to doing that come from? Is it from the medical schools themselves, or from the provinces?

"It's not from the medical schools themselves. And I can tell you that things are changing quite rapidly right now. So medical education, like other forms of education, does depend upon public support, as well as the tuition fees that students pay. But medical school is something that's regulated by provinces in terms of the size of the schools, and so we need provincial support to be able to grow the schools.

"The good news is that almost every province is growing its medical schools. In Ontario, there are two new medical schools coming on board, and every other school is actually in expansion mode. So that's great. We're seeing in places like B.C., where Simon Fraser [University] is launching a medical school; P.E.I. is going to have a medical school. So there's a lot happening in the country. I think it's now widely recognized that we have undertrained the health workforce, both in doctors and nurses and others. But it takes time, you know, for that to have an impact. And hopefully a few years from now we'll have a much more robust workforce. What we need to do, though, is make sure that we do the work to improve the conditions of work for primary care so that our medical students will want to become family doctors. Because right now, that's certainly part of our challenge as well."

Health for All: A Doctor's Prescription for a Healthier Canada, by Jane Philpott, Signal, 296 pp., \$26.21

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Jane Philpott, centre, between Liberal MPs Yvonne Jones, left, and Carolyn Bennett in 2018. *The Hill Times* photograph by Cynthia Münster

Health Policy Briefing

Next step in universal drug coverage should prioritize 'essential medicines,' says pharmacare expert



Liberal MP Yasir Naqvi says 'I think it is best that we hear from experts as to what those next medications should be ... as opposed to us politicians making that determination.'
The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

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has shown, you will serve an extraordinary share of Canadians' needs and you will save billions of dollars more, both directly in terms of drug budget, but indirectly in terms of improvements in health care, then it will cost the government to run such a program."

Implementing a national formulary starting with essential medicines was also recommended in a study released in June 2019, which was led by Dr. Eric Hoskins, a former Ontario Liberal health minister. The study, commissioned by the Liberal government, estimated a cost of \$3.5-billion to implement pharmacare if the program launched in 2022, reaching \$15.3-billion by 2027.

Steven Staples, national director of policy advocacy for the Canadian Health Coalition, told *The Hill Times* that there is a clear need for national pharmacare, which he described as the missing piece out of Canada's medicare system. He said Bill C-64 is a positive first step, but there is still a lot more work to do.

"We're encouraged by Minister Holland's comments that he's willing to start talking to provinces now while the legislation is still going through its process. That's encouraging—that there's a sense of urgency to get some agreements in place and start rolling it out," said Staples. "Then eventually

... what we'd want to see is the list of medications covered under the program to become more comprehensive to include other areas because there's other patient groups and other diseases that require the same attention as these, and I'm thinking particularly heart diseases, stroke [and] cancer."

The 2024 federal budget, released on April 16, addressed pharmacare by proposing \$1.5-billion over five years to ensure an effective roll-out of the program, and to also provide immediate support by covering certain diabetes medications and contraceptives.

Staples described the budget announcement as an important milestone for pharmacare, but also said he isn't clear if that funding will be sufficient.

"Maybe the federal government has data to explain this, but we want to make sure that there's enough money there so that when Minister Holland goes out and begins to negotiate with provinces, the provinces know that there's sufficient funding," he said. "We want to make sure that the single-payer nature of the program continues. Right now, it's only stipulated for these two classes of drugs as it's mentioned in C-64. But as we expand, we want that framework to continue with new classes of drugs as they're added. That's something that's very important for us going ahead."

Liberal MP Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Ont.), who is Holland's

parliamentary secretary, told *The Hill Times* that there is "a patchwork within the provinces and territories," in terms of how pharmacare is currently delivered, and Ottawa wants to ensure that no Canadian is ever in a position where they are not able to afford prescription drugs.

"We're taking a very methodical and careful approach in building our pharmacare system," said Naqvi. "Of course, we're starting with contraception and diabetes because we think these are important medications that Canadians deserve, but in addition to that, doing the policy work that is required for Bill C-64."

In terms of the direction pharmacare is heading, Naqvi said he would leave that to the experts.

"Part of the legislation is the creation of an expert committee that will actually look at various models, do the evaluation, look at the costing, [and] look at what a national formulary looks like so that, again, they can give the government appropriate advice that could be acted upon," said Naqvi. "I think it is best that we hear from experts as to what those next medications should be ... as opposed to us politicians making that determination."

Naqvi said that the federal government will develop pharmacare in part by considering what the government has learned from a pilot project in Prince Edward Island.

In August 2021, an agreement was announced to provide \$35-million in federal funding to P.E.I. over four years to add new drugs to its list of covered drugs, and to lower out of pocket costs for drugs covered under existing public plans for Island residents.

When asked about the future of national pharmacare, and whether a universal program covering all drugs for health card holders will one day finally be a reality, Naqvi said that answer involves speculation.

"What I can tell you is that we are working towards making sure that Canadians never have to make a decision between choosing a medication that they need for their well-being or not," he said. "We really strongly believe that Canadians should have access to critical medication that is important for their own well-being and their health, and that's why we're building a national pharmacare framework. That's why we are going to be making insulin and contraception available to all Canadians. That is why we're investing in what P.E.I. is doing, so that we can develop a more fulsome program down the road, once we know what works best for Canadians."

Joelle Walker, vice-president of public affairs for the Canadian Pharmacists Association, said that her organization has advocated for a pharmacare model that builds on the public and private system. For a second phase, the federal government should look at Canadians who don't have coverage, and then extend coverage to as many medications as possible, rather than moving people with private coverage onto a public system, according to Walker.

"I think that's what the some of the provinces have signaled, as well, is that they have some systems that they feel currently work and they want help supplementing that for people who don't have coverage or not enough coverage. And that can vary considerably between provinces," she said.

When asked about a future phase of pharmacare focusing on essential medicines, Walker said there is already a fairly broad level of drug access in Canada, and the list of essential medicines by the WHO "would not do it justice."

She said that the federal government should think about a broad formulary that both public and private insurance needs to cover, "and think really about targeting those individuals."

For an example, Walker said that she spent three years of searching to find her current birth control medication, which is not on the federal government's list of covered contraception.

"Now I'm wondering—and I think my colleagues in pharmacy are wondering—are employers going to now no longer cover birth control because they think the federal government will cover it, which means that I might not have access to the drug that I'm currently covered for? Or will employers continue to supplement those coverages?" she said. "We can definitely achieve a full universal pharmacare, but I think we can achieve it through a mix of public and private, which would mean ultimately that everybody has coverage for drugs, but it's not all done through the federal government or a single payer. I think that's the nuance there."

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Canada prescription medications statistics



- About 22 per cent of Canadians have reported splitting pills, skipping doses, or deciding not to fill or renew a prescription due to cost.
- About 10 per cent of Canadians with chronic conditions have ended up in the emergency room due to worsening health because they were unable to afford prescription medications.
- One in five people in Canada don't have enough coverage (16 per cent), with more than one in four (27 per cent)

finding it difficult to afford the cost of prescriptions.

- More than one in four (28 per cent) of Canadians have had to make difficult choices to afford prescription drugs such as cutting back groceries, delaying rent, mortgage, or utility bills and incurring debt.

- Eight in 10 Canadians (82 per cent) agree the federal government has a responsibility to ensure there is prescription drug coverage for all people living in Canada.

Source: A national poll commissioned by Heart & Stroke and the Canadian Cancer Society, conducted by Leger, and released on Feb. 14, 2024. The online survey of 2,048 Canadians, age 18 years or older, was conducted between Jan. 24-29, 2024.

Bill C-64, the Pharmacare Act, info

- Health Minister Mark Holland introduced Bill C-64, an Act respecting pharmacare (Pharmacare Act), on Feb. 29, 2024, which proposes the foundational principles for the first phase of national universal pharmacare in Canada, and describes the Ottawa's intent to work

with provinces and territories to provide universal, single-payer coverage for a number of contraception and diabetes medications.

- Coverage for contraceptives will mean that nine million Canadians of reproductive age will have better access to contraception
- One in four Canadians with diabetes have reported not following their treatment plan due to cost. Improving access to

diabetes medications will help improve the health of 3.7 million Canadians living with diabetes.

- Bill C-64 also provides that the new Canadian Drug Agency work towards the development of a national formulary, develop a national bulk purchasing strategy, and support the publication of a pan-Canadian strategy regarding the appropriate use of prescription medications.

Source: Health Canada press release, issued Feb. 29, 2024

Protecting public health care has never been more important

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serious health complications like blindness or amputations.

Voting in favour of Bill C-64 is the right thing to do. Yet we have already heard the opposition use words like “terrifying” and “fantasy land” to describe the bill. Canadians do not want their uninsured neighbours to ration their insulin, or be more likely to face unwanted pregnancies. Spreading falsehoods on life-changing legislation like Bill C-64 is not only damaging to our public health system, but it also sends a terrible message to Canadians whose lives depend on it.

Finally, modernizing our health-care system means investing in innovations that will increase the safety and quality of the care that Canadians receive. We are committed to working collaboratively with provinces and territories to improve health-care services. With the recent completion of all 13 Working Together Bilateral Agreements, we are on the right path. Provinces and territories will receive nearly \$200-billion over the next 10 years to improve health-care across Canada. Through our partnerships, we will also achieve advancement in digital health through the Joint Action Plan on Health Data and Digital



Health Minister Mark Holland said ‘each and every Canadian should have access to the prescription drugs they need,’ when he announced Bill C-64, the Pharmacare Act, on Feb. 29, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Health and the Pan-Canadian Health Data Charter. Further, the Canadian Institute for Health Information and other federal

partners will receive \$505-million over five years to contribute to a world-class health data and digital health system. These in-

vestments will make a difference in the lives of our constituents.

As a father, I want to be confident that our public

healthcare system will be ready to support the next generation of Canadians. I want my children to grow up and be able to readily access their own electronic health records and be active participants in their care. I also want them to continue to use their health card—not their credit card—when they visit their doctor’s office.

The bold and relentless actions our government is taking makes me hopeful for the advancement of public healthcare in Canada. Through these initiatives, our government is working to both improve access to and quality of healthcare and working conditions for health professionals. National pharmacare will be extended to 3.7 million Canadians with diabetes and nine million Canadians of reproductive age. All provinces and territories have signed on to a 10-year deal to receive \$200-billion from the Government of Canada for healthcare services. There’s always more to do, but our government is pushing for progress and sustainable solutions to keep our public healthcare system running smoothly.

We are on a path to change millions of lives and members of Parliament of all stripes should be working to strengthen public health care—not diminish it.

Liberal MP Yasir Naqvi was first elected as the Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre in 2021. He previously served as parliamentary secretary to the president of the King’s Privy Council for Canada and minister of emergency preparedness.
The Hill Times

The health-care system’s hidden backbone: workplace supports for economic sustainability

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carer-employees. In Canada, 67 per cent of unpaid carers are carer-employees, balancing their full-time or part-time employment with their unpaid care responsibilities. This translates into one in four affected Canadians.

Carer-employees make up 35 per cent of our workforce, and with an aging population, this percentage is expected to increase. In the future, more Canadians will be juggling their paid employment with caring for loved one(s) who maybe sick, disabled, or dying, further impacting healthcare systems, the workforce, and the country’s overall economic development.

This balancing act leads many carer-employees to experience a range of negative health outcomes associated with their physical and mental health. This

includes burnout, fatigue, depressive symptoms, stress and anxiety. In order to meet the demands of their unpaid care role, many carer-employees have to reduce their hours of work, turn down job opportunities such as promotions, and even leave employment all together.

The sustainability of our healthcare system and workforce depends on the readiness of our workplaces to support and accommodate carer-employees to better manage their dual role.

Workplace supports for carer-employees offers the needed accommodations to continue providing unpaid care while working in paid employment.

Over 50 per cent of carer-employees are between the ages of 40-59 years old, representing the most experienced workforce. It is in the best interest of employers to support these folks, as doing

so reduces turnover rates and increases productivity.

A lack of supports and accommodation for carer-employees in the workplace can lead to negative impacts on the organization. Recruitment, retention, absenteeism, employee health and wellbeing, and productivity suffer when carer-employees do not have their needs met in the workplace.

Most employers in Canada do not offer supports or accommodations for carer-employees in the workplace, and this country receives a failing grade when compared to the rest of the Western world.

How can Canadian businesses and employers support carer-employees to improve work-life balance and sustain the economy?

Published in 2017 by the Canadian Standards Association, the B701:17 (R2021) *Carer-inclusive and accommodating organiza-*

tions standard (Carer Standard) and accompanying handbook, the B701HB-18 *Helping worker-carers in your organization* (Carer Handbook) was developed to provide a framework for organizations of all sizes and sectors to use as a foundation for building carer-friendly workplaces.

The Carer Standard is designed to be easily implemented into legislation and public policy.

Based on the research of the CIHR/SSHRC *Healthy Productive Work Partnership Grant*, *Mobilizing a Caregiver-Friendly Workplace Standard: A Partnership Approach* (McMaster University), the Carer Standard can be used by management or human resources to create and implement workplace policies and processes that are carer-friendly—specific to their employees needs. Addressing eight United Nations Sustain-

able Development Goals, the made-in-Canada Carer Standard was used to create the International Organization for Standardization’s standard.

To help guide organizations to build carer-friendly workplaces, a free online course called *Creating Caregiver-Friendly Workplaces* is available through McMaster University. Here you can learn how to structure and offer supports within your workplace, while also gaining a professional development microcredential.

Without unpaid carers, society as we know it would not be able to function. The Canadian employers has an ethical and moral responsibility to support carer-employees. More resources are available to both employers and employees at ghw.mcmaster.ca.

Dr. Allison Williams is a professor in the school of geography and earth sciences at McMaster University. A health geographer by training, Williams currently leads a multi-year Canadian Institute for Health Research/Social Science Humanities Health Research Healthy Productive Work Partnership Grant.
The Hill Times

News

Parties have 'free rein' with voter data, finds report, but veteran party ops say that's vital for democratic engagement

A court case about voter privacy rights in B.C. is taking place against the backdrop of a data 'arms race' by the federal political parties, says Matt Hatfield of OpenMedia.

BY IAN CAMPBELL

Canada's federal political parties are in an "arms race" when collecting and using voter data, say advocates calling for stricter privacy laws, but several veteran political operatives say parties need these practices to fulfill their unique democratic role.

This issue is at the heart of a judicial review taking place in a British Columbia courtroom from April 22 to 30. At stake is whether federal parties are subject to B.C.'s privacy laws, which are far more stringent than the current federal rules governing their behaviour. The case was set in motion in 2019 when three private citizens sought to use B.C.'s privacy laws to inquire what information the federal political parties possess about them—a request that cannot be made under federal law. The federal Liberals, Conservatives, and New Democrats objected, saying the B.C. privacy commissioner did not have jurisdiction to investigate these complaints, and that federal political parties were to be solely regulated by the Canadian Parliament.

Those jurisdictional and constitutional matters are among the legal issues being hashed out in the B.C. court. The trial will also examine if the request for judicial review was premature.

However, those calling for stricter privacy rules say their primary goal is not to make federal parties subject to provincial laws. They would welcome a federal statute to create stricter rules about the use of voters' data. They say Bill C-65, the government's electoral reform bill currently before Parliament, does not meet that standard.

"This whole complex and expensive case would go away



The parties led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh are fighting side by side in court this week in a judicial review over how their parties use Canadian voters' personal data. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade



Scott Lamb, a privacy lawyer and former Conservative Party president, says political parties require different privacy regulations than other organizations. *Photograph courtesy of Clark Wilson LLP*



Dan Arnold, who played a senior role on the last three Liberal national campaigns, says predictive modeling can provide insights about a voter 'even if you haven't knocked on their door.' *Photograph courtesy of Twitter*



Fred DeLorey, who managed the Conservative's 2021 campaign, says IDing and bringing out the vote 'goes back from the beginning of democracy.' *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Matt Hatfield, executive director of OpenMedia, says microtargeting voters may be 'distorting our abilities to have a public conversation.' *Photograph courtesy of OpenMedia*

if the federal political parties agreed to apply the same standards to their operations that they have been happy to impose on government agencies and private businesses over the years," digital privacy expert Colin Bennett previously told *The Hill Times*.

However, several veteran campaigners say political parties are not the same as other entities.

Scott Lamb, a former Conservative Party president who is also a B.C.-based privacy lawyer, said that parties are "players in the democratic process," and that means they must be treated differently by privacy law than businesses, governments, and not-for-profits.

"The essence of a political party is public engagement," said Lamb. "So barriers to engagement are not actually a good thing."

Fred DeLorey, who served as national campaign manager for the Conservatives in 2021 and held a variety of senior roles in the party, said "at the end of the day, political parties need to be able to communicate to Canadians."

"Soliciting through email and that sort of communication for corporations is heavily regulated for good reason—because it's spam," said DeLorey, who is now a partner at Northstar Public Affairs. "But this is basically the democratic right of political parties to be able to

communicate with people, and you can't hinder that. So privacy legislation needs to be very cautious."

Dan Arnold, a Liberal pollster who served as director of research on the party's last three federal campaigns and has worked in the Prime Minister's Office, also said parties would have reason to be concerned about tighter privacy laws. It's their job to "identify voters and get them to turnout on election day."

"If there is anything that makes it more difficult for them to do that, that's why I think we see some opposition there," said Arnold, who is now chief strategy officer at Pollara.

Parties have 'free rein' with data, finds OpenMedia study

However, a soon-to-be-released report from OpenMedia, an advocacy organization that looks at digital issues in Canada, says the way the parties use data could have adverse effects on the democratic process.

Executive Director Matt Hatfield said the parties are doing what the federal laws allow, which is "writing their own rules" for their privacy policies.

That leaves the door open to collecting any sort of data they choose. Each party's privacy

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policy lists illustrative examples of data they collect, but that's only "the portion they're telling you," said Hatfield.

"They give themselves free rein to collect absolutely anything they want," he said. "They're not actually restricting themselves."

An advance copy of the report provided to *The Hill Times* found the current privacy laws for federal parties allow them to violate at least six of the 10 privacy principles in PIPEDA—the federal law that governs the private sector. This includes principles such as requiring consent to collect information, limiting collection and use to what is strictly necessary, and providing citizens with a way to inquire what information the parties possess about them and correct it if it is inaccurate.

The B.C. law follows the same principles as PIPEDA, meaning that federal parties could become subject to these rules, pending the outcome of the judicial review.

One of Hatfield's key concerns is tied to door-to-door canvassing where parties may record not only the information a voter tells them, but also note any details about what they observe on the doorstep.

"They can write anything down that they want on their clipboards," he said. "They can write, 'Hey, he's got a nice car, probably in the upper income brackets,' and make that part of how you're targeted by whatever advertising or engagement political parties choose to do."

Hatfield said there are also concerns about how that data, once collected, is used to microtarget voters, and how this impacts the democratic process.

"I really worry about a world in which people are coming to canvass at your door not with a sort of genuine open presentation of what a party's fundamental policies are, but really with a pre-script written by AI [artificial intelligence] based off this data they've collected," said Hatfield. "It's really, I think, distorting our abilities to have a public conversation."

He said this can drive polarization between regions or demographics.

"One of the areas the Liberals have gone wrong in their time in office has been—they were amongst the first to really champion this kind of microtargeting of voters—and I think at a certain point, it's interfered with their ability to speak to Canadians at large," said Hatfield.

"They are so focused on policies that speak to very specific demographics," he said, "they've lost the plot of telling Canadians what the country as a whole needs to be doing. And I worry we're just going to see more and more of that."

Laws that hinder 'get out the vote' efforts are 'anti-democratic,' says DeLorey

Arnold said that parties do collect data and use it for predictive modeling and targeting, but said

this has a place in the democratic process.

"Essentially, what a predictive model is doing is it's collecting all of the data that the parties know about an individual voter—and a lot of that can come just from what door-knockers have found out about these voters over the last couple of elections when they're going door to door ... so you can kind of predict some things based on that," said Arnold.

"You can predict based on ethnicity, based on the name, and so basically you're taking all the data that you know about people, and their neighbours, and any polling that you have, and putting it into a giant algorithm that is basically telling you, you know, this person is 60 per cent likely to turnout, and they are 38 per cent likely to vote Liberal if they turnout," he added. "Even if you haven't knocked on their door, based on the model, you can kind of tell who those people are."

He said this could also be used to allocate resources, such as targeted mail drops, advertising, or even sending a volunteer or candidate to visit voters that the model identifies as persuadable.

Arnold disagreed that the parties' use of models to make campaigning decisions would limit voter engagement.

He said if voters want to find out more about political parties, there are lots of opportunities such as attending local debates,



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau campaigns during the 2021 federal election. The Liberal's use of microtargeting may now be hurting 'their ability to speak to Canadians at large,' says OpenMedia's Matt Hatfield. *The Hill Times* photograph by Cynthia Münster

looking at websites and social media, or calling a campaign office and asking for further details.

Even if tighter rules were to limit the use of data, Arnold said there would always be some targeting "based on geography or just gut feelings."

"Justin Trudeau is not going to drop into Medicine Hat in the next federal election campaign and go meet voters there—because he's picking ridings he thinks he can win," said Arnold.

"Or a Conservative door-knocker is going to see a hybrid in the driveway with 'I Love the CBC' bumper stickers, and is just going to skip the door."

DeLorey also made the case that data plays a positive role.

"At the end of the day, politics comes down to one thing: whoever can get their voters to vote," said DeLorey. "This goes back from the beginning of democracy. The way you win is you ID your vote, and you bring them out to

the polls. And anything that hinders that is problematic, and in a sense, anti-democratic."

Asked about some of the privacy principles in question—such as consent or limiting data collection and use—he said this could make it harder for parties to understand their voters.

"There's tremendous risk potentially here that it will become too cumbersome for political parties to collect data," said DeLorey. "If that happens, then they may lose a sense of what their supporters believe in."

Lamb said imposing principles like obtaining consent and limiting collection to what's strictly necessary would unreasonably impede the work of campaigns, particularly because of the large role played by volunteers.

He said the Liberals and Conservatives operate with a core staff of about 60 to 80 people, but take on thousands of volunteers at election time. He said an organization of this nature cannot comply with procedures to obtain consent the same way a private business can, and that an interaction on a doorstep should be considered implied consent to collect data.

He also pushed back against the suggestion that targeting voters to communicate with them about a particular issue was bad for democracy.

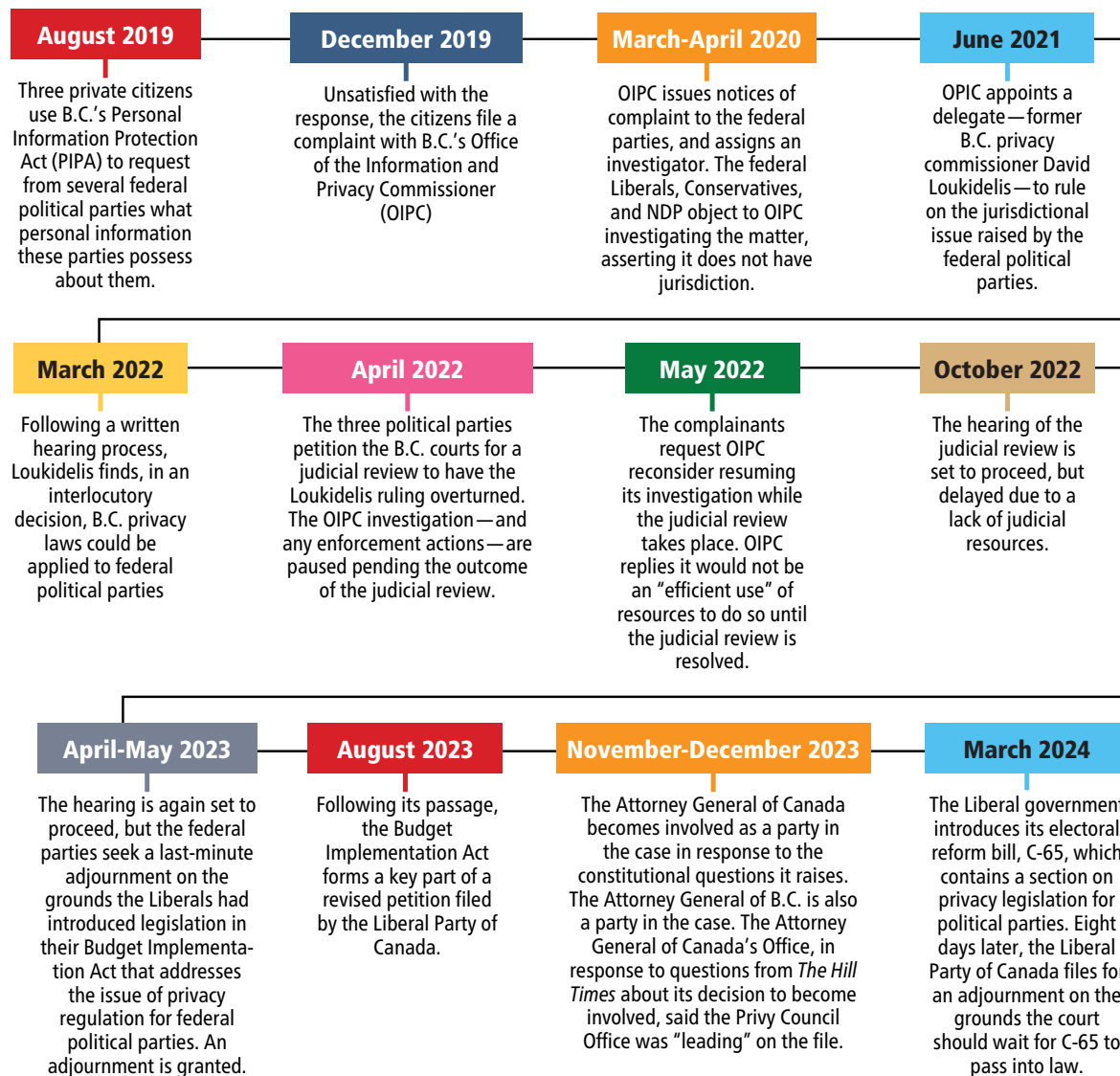
"You can look at that in a negative way. Or you can look at that in a positive way," he said. "We're engaging them on the issue they care about. That's what we really want to do. ... That's actually how people do vote."

However, Hatfield said the increasingly sophisticated tools used by the parties were "playing with fire," and called on them to step back.

"We need to de-escalate the arms race," he said. "Not in a way that benefits one [party] over the other. But if everyone agrees ... at least ramp this down some from a race that I think has gotten increasingly frenetic and that I think AI is going to really magnify over the next three to five years."

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Quick facts: key events in the case



The Hill Times infographic by Neena Singhal

News

Conservative Facebook ads reach out to Chinese-Canadians as Liberals take local approach to big budget sales pitch

The Tories are running ads about supervised consumption sites in Ontario and British Columbia on Facebook and Instagram. Meanwhile, individual Liberal MPs are advertising from their own pages about budget initiatives.

Continued from page 1

white image of Trudeau and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) with a colour photograph of Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) at a Lunar New Year celebration.

An earlier series of Chinese-language ads that ran from Feb. 13 to Feb. 17 encouraged people to sign up in opposition to a supervised consumption site in Richmond, B.C. Those ads ran in the same week that the city's council was examining a proposal to set up a supervised consumption site near the hospital.

The party also ran Chinese-language advertisements during the 2021 election campaign, usually accompanied by English-language translations.

Hogan said the advertising would have been targeted at Chinese-Canadian communities in Markham, Scarborough, Don Valley North, and Richmond Hill in Ontario, as well as in Richmond, Burnaby, and Vancouver in British Columbia. The topic of crime would resonate in metropolitan centres, Hogan said, while the issue of drug legalization remained contentious in those ridings.

As *The Hill Times* reported in 2018, the federal government's legalization of cannabis for recreational use had sparked concerns about the Liberals' competitiveness in ridings with a significant Chinese-Canadian population, with whom the legislation was generally unpopular.

"If you look at the Conservative stance on safe injection sites and the distributing of hard drugs, with the Chinese-Canadian community's natural disapproval of those policies, I think you see



杜魯多同新民主黨遏制犯罪率選擇，係將烈性毒品合法化，令毒品注射屋遍布加拿大。保守黨以常識為本，黨魁博勵治將禁止烈性毒品，停止毒品注射屋。要遏制犯罪，支持以常識為本嘅保守黨！



WWW.CONSERVATIVE.CA
Conservative Party of Canada - Parti conservateur du Canada

Learn more

One example of a Chinese-language advertisement the Conservative Party of Canada is running, which translates to: 'To curb crime, support the Conservative Party which is based on common sense.' Screenshot via Meta Ad Library

a pretty straight line as to why they're running those ads."

The two Chinese-language ads were, with the exception of a video about the Liberal-NDP supply-and-confidence agreement, the only Conservative Party ads running on Facebook last week. However, individual MPs ran advertisements from their own Facebook pages discussing the budget.

"After nine years of Justin Trudeau, I'm more determined than ever to stand up to his reckless spending and ideologically driven policies," said one ad by Conservative MP Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, Alta.), which ran in Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan. "A common sense Conservative government will respect taxpayer dollars so Canadians can bring home powerful paycheques!"

"The average family in our riding will be stuck with a \$2,400 bill to pay for Justin Trudeau's latest spending spree if his Liberal budget passes. Common-sense Conservatives will not support his inflationary budget and will vote non-confidence in his government," said another ad from Conservative MP Blake Richards (Banff-Airdrie, Alta.). "The NDP should grow a backbone and do the same. #budget2024"

Richards' post, paid for by the Banff-Airdrie Conservative



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Pierre Poilievre wants to make deep cuts to the middle class.

We can't let him take us backward.



ACTION.LIBERAL.CA
Pierre Poilievre's priorities: not you

Learn More

And an example of a Liberal Party of Canada ad running on Facebook. 'Pierre Poilievre wants to make deep cuts to the middle class. We can't let him take us backward.' Screenshot via Meta Ad Library

Electoral District Association, launched on April 22, and was seen exclusively in Alberta.

Conservative MPs were not the only ones to advertise their stance on the budget. Liberal MP Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast-Sea to Sky Country, B.C.) launched ads on April 19 about the government's housing plan that "will deliver millions more across the country by cutting red tape, investing in purpose-built rentals, and much more. This is a housing plan that's focused on fairness for every generation."

Liberal MP Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Que.) ran advertisements in English and French on April 12 and April 22 promoting a national school meals program. Fellow Liberals Darren Fisher (Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, N.S.) and Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Ont.) launched ads promoting an increase to the volunteer firefighters tax credit.

As for their party, the Liberals' main page launched a series of ads last week about some federal budget measures, but all were used to contrast the party with Poilievre.

For example, one half of an ad about the government's pharmacare plan features a colour photograph of Trudeau smiling, describing the prime minister as "providing free contraception to

nine million Canadian women," and "providing free access to medications for the 3.7 million Canadians living with diabetes." The other half of the ad features a black-and-white image of Poilievre below the words "refused to say whether he'd support a national universal pharmacare plan."

"Pierre Poilievre wants to make deep cuts to the middle class," the ad states. "We can't let him take us backward."

The ads, all launched on April 23, were presented to audiences in the seat-rich provinces of Ontario and Quebec.

A greater focus has been on organic posts made on Liberal Party channels, and on those of Trudeau and his cabinet. That included a weeks-long pre-budget blitz, and continued last week with ministers touring the country to publicize budget announcements.

The problem with the content posted to the Liberal Party's Facebook and X pages, Hogan said, was that it is preaching to the converted.

"This isn't converting any voters. I think, really, the only way that you reach the general public and sway public opinion is with an ad spend," he said. "If you look at the Liberal Party over the last year, so in terms of how they've spent, it's been pretty negligible."

The Canadian Press reported on April 20 that the government invited content creators and influencers into the budget lockup as part of an attempt to reach younger voters who had grown disillusioned with the Liberals.

Many of those influencers are involved in creating financial content, including Dani Nelson, who detailed budget day for her Instagram followers. She noted that the trip was entirely self-funded, and that she met with Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) on the day.

"Over the coming weeks, I'll be *transparently* breaking down my main takeaways from the budget and what it means for Canadians," she wrote in another Instagram post on April 17.

Any content produced by influencers would be part of an earned media strategy by the Liberals, Hogan said, but it would be tailored for a niche audience rather than the general public. At the same time, the decision to hold a series of pre-budget announcements helped ensure that the government had several weeks of stories about their policies.

"This way they were able to announce a few things on housing, they had a few other announcements as well, and then the main thing that came out of the budget was the capital gains tax," he said. "So we're talking about one thing after the budget, and they got an extra week or two out of the budget beforehand."

Whether that approach has had an impact on the Liberals' fortunes remains to be seen. An Angus Reid Institute survey of 2,643 people between April 19 and April 23 found that 43 per cent intended to vote for the Conservatives, 23 per cent for the Liberals, 19 per cent for the NDP, eight per cent for the Bloc Québécois, and four per cent for the Greens. Among 18-24 year olds, the NDP was backed by 37 per cent, followed by the Conservatives at 34 per cent, the Liberals at 12 per cent, and the Bloc and Greens at six per cent each.

The survey showed there was no significant difference in the voting intentions of those with detailed knowledge of the budget, and those who had barely heard about it. At the same time, however, many of the key budget announcements were broadly supported: 74 per cent of those surveyed approved of a new disabilities benefit for low income Canadians, 73 per cent for dental care funding, 70 per cent for the pharmacare coverage for contraception and diabetes medication, and 68 per cent for leasing federally owned lands for affordable housing.

The NDP, meanwhile, has focused its recent social media ad spend on healthcare.

"Make no mistake: This guy will cut your health care. It's what Cut and Gut Conservatives have always done," states one NDP ad that ran from March 7 to March 20 alongside a press conference in which Poilievre is asked about pharmacare.

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Trudeau tells Grit MPs not to expect any dramatic boost in public opinion until next year

The Tories' double-digit lead is not so much an endorsement of Pierre Poilievre as leader, but because Canadians want a change in government, says Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs.

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national caucus meeting, one day after the federal budget.

"He's [Trudeau] trying to downplay expectations. It's like treading water when you're drowning. [He was telling us] to not freak out while you're drowning, that you stay calm, and you can get back to the top for a lot of the Members who are below water."

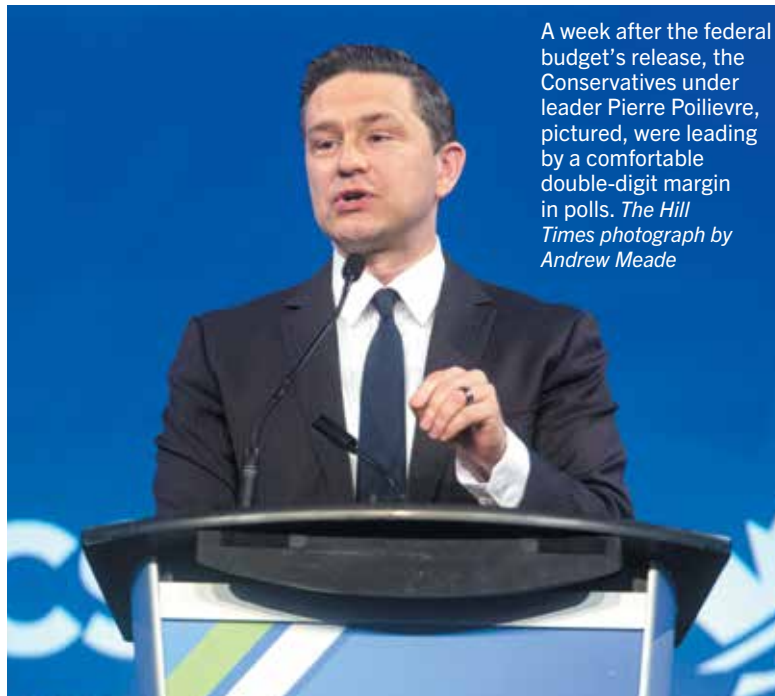
In an emailed response to *The Hill Times*, the Prime Minister's Office communications team did not directly address why Trudeau told his MPs not to expect any significant uptick in national public opinion polls for the Liberals until next year.

"The priority of our government is ensuring fairness for every generation of Canadian," wrote Jenna Ghassabeh, a spokesperson for the prime minister, in the email to *The Hill Times*. "The government is focused on building more homes, making life more affordable, and growing our economy."

Since last summer, the Liberals have been trailing the Conservatives by a double-digit margin. If the current polling trends do not change, the Conservatives could win more than 200 of the 343 seats in the House. For months, MPs and both current and former senior Liberals have been hoping to get a bump from the April 16 budget that announced \$53-billion in new spending over five years on housing and affordability, defence, Indigenous communities, community health and safety, immigration, disability benefits, and pharmacare.

But this expectation did not materialize in polls released last week.

According to an Innovative Research poll released last week, 53 per cent of Canadians were dissatisfied with the budget, compared to 23 per cent who



A week after the federal budget's release, the Conservatives under leader Pierre Poilievre, pictured, were leading by a comfortable double-digit margin in polls. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

were satisfied. The poll found 49 per cent were left feeling less favourable towards the federal government, and 33 per cent said the budget made no difference. At the same time, 74 per cent said the budget would have a negative impact, compared to 16 per cent positive.

The poll found that amongst decided voters, if an election were to happen now, 41 per cent would vote for the Conservatives, 26 per cent for the Liberals, 17 per cent for the New Democratic Party, eight per cent for the Bloc Québécois, and five per cent for the Greens. The poll also noted that 72 per cent of respondents thought it was time for change in government.

An Ipsos poll found last week that only 17 per cent of Canadians gave the budget "two thumbs up," 40 per cent "two thumbs down," and 43 per cent gave it a "shrug." The poll put the Conservative support at 43 per cent, the Liberals at 24 per cent, and NDP at 19 per cent.

Other polls released last week also showed similar findings.

A Leger poll also suggested that about half of Canadians had a negative view of the budget, and only 21 per cent opined positively about it. At the same time, 65 per cent gave thumbs up to the government's announced plan of spending \$8.5-billion on building 3.9-million houses in seven years.

Meanwhile, some Liberal MPs interviewed for this article said Trudeau seemed to suggest in his comments to the caucus that things will change for the Liberals when Canadians have to make a decision close to election time. They said their interpretation of

Liberal MPs—the government's support will start to improve.

These MPs said that the top Liberal strategists involved in the election strategy think that the longer people get to see Poilievre as the principal alternative to Trudeau, the more Canadians will dislike him. The strategists anticipate that while riding high in the polls the Conservatives would self-destruct and make mistakes that will give the Liberals more material to work with in the next campaign. These MPs cited the most recent example where Poilievre met with a far-right conservative group on the border of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia protesting against the carbon tax.

"The year out is the right answer, and I buy it—like, I buy the strategy—because it's what I've said all along: the more time people have with Pierre, the more they're gonna dislike him. And the more that they see the contrast, the better it is for us," said a second Liberal MP.

The MP said that they would prefer that their party be behind by two to three percentage points when the election is called as it's good for motivating the party base.

But a third MP said that it appears that their leadership's strategy to win the next election is to "hope" that things will change with time, and they have 18 more months until the scheduled Oct. 20, 2025, election date.

"It's more of a hope," said the MP. "Sometimes in politics being hopeful is too detrimental. It's the most obvious assessment that you hope your numbers go up with time. That's not an insight. That's just the fact you've got a bit of time and your numbers are low. Well, your hope is that over the next year, your numbers increase."



A number of political insiders expect Jagmeet Singh's New Democrats to pull their support for the Liberals early next year to distinguish themselves from the governing party before the 2025 election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

MPs and other Liberal political insiders told *The Hill Times* that barring a dramatic change in the federal political landscape, the earliest window for the election will be the next budget. This will be the time when the NDP might decide to pull its support from the Liberal government to distinguish themselves from the Liberals before going to the polls in 2025.

If the next budget is brought down in March or April 2025, that would be six to seven months before the scheduled election date. They said that the next budget—the last one before the vote—might be the one upon which the prime minister might want to be defeated.

Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, said that a strong correction in the Liberal Party's public support appears unlikely to happen in the immediate aftermath of the budget, and Trudeau appears to be conditioning his caucus for that.

"Manage expectations," said Bricker in an interview with *The Hill Times*, to explain Trudeau's outlook on the national Liberal caucus. "When things get entrenched, once people make up their minds, it's very difficult to get them to change their minds, particularly when it comes to a government that's been in power for as long as [this one] has. The character of the government is burnt in, the image of the government is burnt in. It would be very surprising if they were able to present another face. This is different from the one that's already been experienced by Canadians."

Bricker said that one of the options for the Liberals to get out of the current situation is to try to define their principal opponents—the Conservatives—in a negative light, but it may not work as so many people want change.

"It's not like Canadians are necessarily jumping on the Conservative bandwagon. They're jumping on the change bandwagon," said Bricker.

"They're [the Liberals] going to do what any party in the circumstance would do, which is to try and make the change look like really risky change, which means demonizing the Conservatives with everything that they can throw at them. The problem that they found themselves in is the more they do that, the more genuine they make the change look, because, remember, it's not the substance of the change, it's just change itself that the people are looking for," said Bricker. "So my expectation is that the Liberals will come up very, very hard on what that change might represent, and how it could be detrimental to the country and to Canadians."

Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research, said that Trudeau is trying to provide hope to his caucus members and keeping expectations in check.

"This [Trudeau's caucus remarks] means doing two things at the same time," said Lyle. "He's offering hope, and he's keeping expectations low."

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News

Public service unions sound alarm over feds' plan to trim bureaucracy by 5,000 jobs through 'natural attrition'

As the population grows, 'you have to invest and grow the public service,' said Public Service Alliance of Canada national president Chris Aylward.



Treasury Board President Anita Anand, left, and Public Service Alliance of Canada national president Chris Aylward. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

Continued from page 1

service as well as how we can, through natural attrition, reduce the size of the public service."

The Treasury Board president said that the government's process during the first phase of the federal spending review initiative involved all ministers.

"So we continue to work with all the ministers, to examine their officials in their departments, but it is very important to continue to reallocate, to refocus our spending towards our government priorities, and that is part of this process," said Anand.

'I think we can work with Treasury Board to figure out the least impact,' says PSAC national president

Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) president Chris Aylward said the union is never happy whenever cuts are coming down the line, "whether it's 5,000 or 50,000."

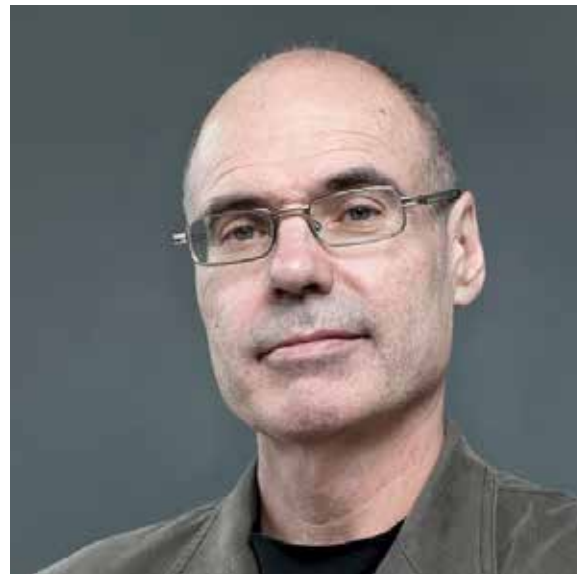
"It's always concerning to us, but to be honest, I think it's a modest number, and I think we can work with Treasury Board to figure out the least impact that this will have not just on our members, but on the services to Canadians as well if any services are going to be impacted," said Aylward.

Although there are many observers who have pointed out that the size of the public service under this prime minister has grown by "leaps and bounds," Aylward said "that's not how I see it from where I sit."

"From 2015 to 2020, the federal public service recovered from the Harper/Poillievre era where they cut almost 50,000 jobs" from the bureaucracy, said Aylward. "So from 2015 to 2020, the federal public service recovered from 10 years of Harper and Poillievre—



President of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees Nathan Prier says 'we've seen over and over again how cuts to the public sector just result in bloated and less regulated third party contracting for the same work.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Economist Don Drummond says 'the size of the civil service has increased so phenomenally under the Liberal government.' *Photograph courtesy of Don Drummond*

and then of course the pandemic hit."

Aylward said that as the population grows, the investment in the public service needs to continue.

When asked about the upcoming federal election, Aylward said PSAC "has to and will do everything we possibly can to prevent a [Pierre] Poillievre Conservative government."

"Because it would be a total disaster," said Aylward. "We know that all of the rights we have fought for for the last 40 or 50 years, all of our union rights, all of our human rights, all of our social justice rights—they're gone out the window if Poillievre gets elected."

Aylward said he was adamant that PSAC was willing to spend "millions of dollars" to prevent Conservative Leader Pierre Poillievre (Carleton, Ont.) from forming government.

'Some immediate relief that cuts were going to be through natural attrition'

Ryan Campbell, an economist with the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, the country's second-largest public sector union, said when he saw the number of planned reductions in the public service, "it became clear that it was providing detail

to the cuts that had been announced in the two previous budgets," said Campbell.

"And so to me, it was a big number. There was some immediate relief that cuts were going to be achieved through natural attrition, and didn't mean layoffs," said Campbell. "But for people who are quickly comforted, right away, there's this new frustration that for departments that have been struggling already, that this is going to make things harder for them."

Nathan Prier, president of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees, said his union was fairly concerned with the attrition question, which he noted was "making less people do more."

"And we feel that if the government wants to cut spending, it should be limiting contracting out, and especially in areas like translation. Contracting out costs the public purse a lot more than hiring and retraining skilled public sector workers to deliver the kind of results that are expected from our government," said Prier.

Prier said cuts to the public sector resulted in bloated and less regulated third-party contracting for the same work.

"There's a big rush to cut accountable public service jobs. That's not only bad for our members, but it's bad for Canadian taxpayers who still foot the bill for the ArriveCans of our time," said Prier, referring to the emergency procurement of the app that eventually cost nearly \$60-million during the pandemic.

Economist Don Drummond, who served as an associate deputy minister at Finance Canada and chief economist at TD Bank, recently penned a piece in *The Globe and Mail* where he wrote "no doubt the government did not want to present a budget with worse fiscal outcomes than previously projected after committing to keeping the deficit this year under \$40-billion."

"But an additional \$6.9-billion in tax revenue doesn't make a dent in more than \$1-trillion in total debt. And why this arbitrary figure of \$40-billion anyway?" wrote Drummond. "Even with the capital gains measure, we can only say the budget crawls over a questionable bar set by the government that has no standing in economics or public finance," noting that the economy is operating at about full capacity, and the government is facing a high debt burden.

"There should not be any deficit at all," wrote Drummond. "Whether it is a bit over or under \$40-billion is of little consequence."

In an interview last week, Drummond told *The Hill Times* that "the size of the civil service has increased so phenomenally under the Liberal government," and that Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) was very clear in her budget day press conference that the government is "demonstrating the power of spending."

"They don't even sense any trace of irony that they say this is a budget of fairness to young people and affordability for young people, but it's passing on a huge debt to them," said Drummond.

Drummond noted that the central bank is trying to fight inflation, but that the government is handing down a \$40-billion deficit.

"You actually could have easily shown it lower because they got this windfall of revenues because inflation was higher. But they chose to spend that," said Drummond. "I think they deliberately created the parameters around the capital gains to force an asset disposition so they get a ton of revenue this year to get the deficit down."

mlapointe@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne. The \$2.4-billion the budget proposes to spend on AI is a long-overdue investment to boost computing power essential to keep us in the AI game, not a bold statement of AI leadership, writes David Crane. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Budget's AI investment is Canada playing catch-up

A plan has to be more than just a litany of fresh promises in one budget after another. Where is the strategy, and what are the defined outcomes that will tell whether it's working?

David
Crane

Canada &
the 21st Century



TORONTO—In his pre-budget announcement outlining a \$2.4-billion commitment to boost Canada's artificial intelligence ambitions, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau boasted that "Canada is at the forefront of this technology" with AI "already unlocking massive growth in industries across the economy" based on this country possessing an "undeniable advantage."

There's no doubt that Canada has played an important role in the AI world, training a succession of talented AI researchers in our universities, advancing

fundamental research, launching AI start-ups, and transferring AI technology to the business world, starting with the major banks.

The Pan-Canadian AI Strategy unveiled in 2017 sent a strong message that this was to be a Canadian priority, with the implementation of the strategy to be centred in Montreal, Toronto, and Edmonton. Key figures in these three centres are among world leaders in AI, notably for their work in neural networks. Geoffrey Hinton, from Montreal's Vector Institute, and Yoshua Bengio, from the city's Mila AI Institute, in 2018 shared the Alan Turing Prize, a highly-regarded international award for fundamental contributions to the world of computing.

We have much to be proud of. But AI is a global revolution, and other countries, notably the United States, China, and United Kingdom, are investing heavily. Some of the most powerful players are the huge U.S. digital-world corporations, including Microsoft, Meta, Alphabet/Google, and their Chinese counterparts who are now outspending governments and universities in AI research, and in defining the future.

In the meantime, despite claims as a global leader, Canada is in reality losing ground. Moreover, we are underperforming in what should be two key goals: to commercialize AI research and create scaled-up, Canadian-owned

AI companies; and to achieve high levels of adoption of AI, both by businesses as a tool to boost productivity and competitiveness, and by governments for improved delivery of public services.

While there have been some accomplishments, it appears that much of our investment in AI has served to provide world-class talent for other countries and their corporations, and to generate research and related intellectual property for foreign corporations, which either buy up promising Canadian start-ups or establish R&D branch plants here to hire and benefit from local talent and university research. Indeed, with the world facing an increasingly intense competition for talent, U.S. and other foreign headhunters will be scouring our campuses even more aggressively to hire our graduates.

So, despite the boastfulness of Budget 2024, the \$2.4-billion it proposes to spend on AI is catch-up money. It's a long-overdue investment to boost computing power essential for the AI research capacity needed to keep us in the AI game, not a bold statement of AI leadership.

Canada has lagged in critical computing investment. Without access to high-level computing power, AI researchers cannot participate in next-generation development. Instead, they may need to leave Canada for other countries where investments in

computing power are far ahead. This is well set out by Joe Castaldo in a March 21 report in the *Globe and Mail*. In fact, there is already evidence that we are losing more of our talent. At the same time, lack of computing power will make it less likely that international researchers will want to come here.

As the *Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2023* underlines, "producing state-of-the-art AI systems increasingly requires large amounts of data, computing power, and money," resources that the giants of the digital world—Microsoft, Meta, and Alphabet/Google—have no shortage. They are now producing more AI research papers on machine learning, for example, than universities—a dramatic reversal over the past decade when the great majority of AI research papers came out of universities. It is also a field dominated by the U.S. In 2022, American researchers accounted for 16 significant machine learning systems compared to eight for Britain, three for China and two each for Canada and Germany.

Computing power—referred to as compute—is critical for AI. The rapid sophistication of generative AI is only escalating the need for ever-more powerful computing systems, with Canada falling behind significantly. As Stanford University's AI Index notes, "the more complex a system is, and

the larger the dataset on which it is trained, the greater the amount of compute required." Advances in AI used by significant machine learning systems has increased exponentially in the last half decade, the report says. Canada has failed to keep up, despite AI ambitions, and with the 2024 budget is now scrambling to avert a loss of research talent and their investment in new ideas.

In fact, it is time to revisit our AI ambitions, and bring much more clarity to the outcomes that are expected. What would be the government's test of success? Canada appears to have many programs, but neither a strategy with targeted goals, nor a plan to achieve those goals. Putting money into largely academic research and the training of talent is not enough. Trudeau can talk of Canadian advantages. But what will be the Canadian benefits? The government claims to have invested some \$2-billion in AI in this country since 2016, and now proposes another \$2.4-billion.

In her budget, Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland claims that "we have a plan that will increase investment, enhance productivity, and encourage the kind of game-changing investment that will create good-paying and meaningful jobs and keep Canada at the forefront. We're working to empower more of our entrepreneurs and innovators to put their ideas to work here in Canada."

But a plan has to be more than just a litany of fresh promises in one budget after another. Where is the strategy, and what are the defined outcomes that will tell whether or not it is working? AI is a good place to start. We are putting much money in, but what are we getting out?

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

The Hill Times

Books & Big Ideas

Most wrongful convictions lurk below the surface, unrecognized and unremedied

The following is an excerpt from Kent Roach's *Wrongfully Convicted: Guilty Pleas, Imagined Crimes and What Canada Must Do to Safeguard Justice*, published by Simon & Schuster, and one of this year's five finalists for the Donner Prize for the best book public policy written by a Canadian. The prize will be awarded in Toronto on May 8.

BY KENT ROACH

In 2019–20, more than 187,000 adults were found guilty or pled guilty in Canadian courts, and just over 136,000 of them were sentenced to jail. If you assume that the Canadian criminal justice system gets the correct result 99.5 per cent of the time—a very high success rate for a system run by humans under pressure—that still amounts to 393 people being wrongly convicted and sentenced to jail in just one year. Most wrongful convictions lurk below the surface, unrecognized and unremedied.

As Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld, the founders of the U.S. Innocence Project, predicted in 2000, DNA exonerations should help us learn about wrongful convictions, but they should not be the litmus test. DNA exonerations should eventually dry up as competent police and forensic experts have the tools to clear suspects by comparing their DNA with that left at some crime scenes, often sexual assaults or murders.

Guilty plea wrongful convictions

The American registry of exonerations reveals that about 800 of the 3,000-plus people who had remedied wrongfully convictions since 1989 pled guilty. The new Canadian registry of remedied wrongful convictions (wrongfulconvictions.ca) shows that 15 of the 83 entered a guilty plea. Moreover, 73 per cent of these false guilty pleas in Canada

(11 of 15) were made by women, Indigenous or racialized persons, or by those who suffered from a mental disability. Guilty plea wrongful convictions will always be with us so long as plea bargains and lesser sentences for pleading guilty are offered. Accused people will be scared, as they should be, by the worst-case scenarios of long prison terms or, in the case of murder, automatic life imprisonment.

Imagined crime wrongful convictions

Eight wrongful convictions associated with the work of disgraced pathologist Charles Smith were not only guilty plea wrongful convictions—they were crimes that never happened. The crimes were imagined first in Smith's suspicious mind but subsequently confirmed in the minds of police, prosecutors, defence lawyers, judges, and juries. Smith was part of a team that was told to “think dirty” and suspect child abuse.

Thinking dirty is a problem for all of us. Over one-third of the wrongful convictions in the Canadian registry are imagined crimes that never happened. The Supreme Court celebrates the presumption of innocence and the requirement that the accused receive the benefit of any reasonable doubt. These fundamental principles, it says, demonstrate our “faith in humankind” and protect the liberty and dignity of all people, ousting “social stigma and ostracism from the community.” Honestly, though, do most people think that way? Do jurors follow that advice even when a judge instructs them to do so? We do not run our lives on reasonable-doubt principles.

We are all susceptible to thinking the worst of people and jumping to conclusions that are not fully supported by the evidence. What of the stereotypes and assumptions that make it easier and quicker to conclude that a person is guilty in part because of their gender, race, class, or appearance?

Preventing wrongful convictions

In the United States, considerable bipartisan legislative reforms designed to prevent and correct wrongful convictions have been implemented. Unfortunately, Canada has made far fewer reforms in terms of preventing and correcting wrongful convictions. Indeed, Canada lags well behind Texas in its reforms. This will no doubt surprise many Canadians who may tend to view wrongful

convictions, like so much else, as mainly an American problem.

The Goudge Commission into wrongful convictions caused by Charles Smith made many similar recommendations to those set out a decade earlier in the Morin inquiry about the need for better training and oversight of expert witnesses. The main difference was that the Morin inquiry was concerned about Ontario's Centre of Forensic Sciences, while the Goudge Commission was directed at the Coroner's Office, where autopsies were conducted, as well as the Hospital for Sick Children. Even then, similar problems emerged at SickKids' Motherisk Program and required two more public inquiries.

As I get older, I am becoming disillusioned in seeing the same mistakes happening again and again. We cannot afford to reform forensic sciences discipline by discipline, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, public inquiry by public inquiry, and disgraced expert by disgraced expert.

That approach is simply too slow and fails to prevent the irreparable harm of wrongful convictions.

Correcting wrongful convictions

Although we can and should do more to prevent wrongful convictions, they are inevitable. The Supreme Court recognized this truth in 2001, when it ruled that it would always be unsafe to send people from Canada to face the death penalty in other countries.

After examining both the American experience of death-row exonerations and Canada's own wrongful convictions, the justices ruled that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (at least without an override) prohibits Canadian involvement with the death penalty—an important step in the right direction for sure, but only a step. Life imprisonment for a wrongful conviction may be better than the death penalty, but not by much. Indeed, some people might prefer the death penalty.

During the summer of 2021, I was privileged to assist Justice Harry LaForme and Justice Juanita Westmoreland-Traore as they conducted public consultations about how best to improve Canada's approach to discovering and correcting wrongful convictions.

Under the existing system, applicants who have exhausted their normal appeals must apply to the federal minister of justice for what is described in the Criminal Code as the “extraordinary remedy” of a new trial or a new appeal. They must effectively

identify new evidence to justify their applications, though most of them will lack the funds and the necessary powers to find the new evidence. Crucial evidence may, moreover, be buried in police and prosecutors' files or even destroyed.

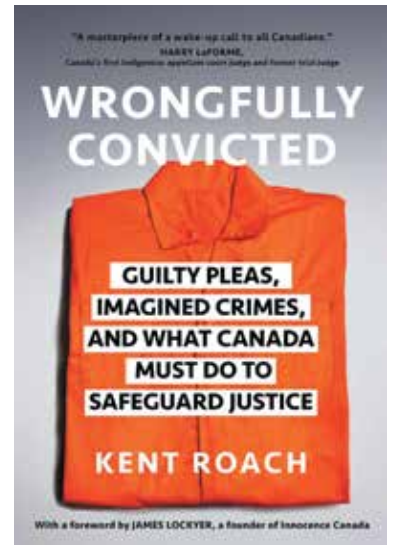
During the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom allowed us to hold 45 roundtables that involved 215 people. We had the honour to speak at length with 17 survivors of wrongful convictions who put a human face on the suffering they experienced as they waited, sometimes decades, to have their injustices rectified.... They told us they did not care for the federal government's proposed name for a new review body, the Criminal Cases Review Commission, even though this same title is used for similar bodies in England, Scotland, Norway, and New Zealand. They pointed out they were people, not criminal cases. They wanted their convictions reinvestigated and retried. They did not want their cases to be the subject of desktop reviews by bureaucrats in Ottawa.

They also told us about the inadequate support they received. Many of them obtained no compensation for the injustice they lived. Those who did obtain compensation often had to wait years. They generally had to threaten to sue or actually sue in court the governments that had wrongfully convicted them.

Whereas previous Canadian commissions of inquiry into wrongful convictions greatly admired the English Criminal Cases Review Commission, which has been operating since 1997, we heard it has suffered from massive budget cuts that have increased caseloads and required most applications to get nothing but cursory reviews.

Many English volunteer innocence projects and lawyers who work on wrongful conviction cases have lost confidence in the English commission. Even when it refers cases back to the courts, the courts sometimes do not even consider the new evidence that influenced the commission. There are also concerns that the commission is not independent enough from the government that appoints and funds it and from the courts to which it refers back its cases.

We were impressed by the New Zealand commission, created in 2019. We spoke to its chief commissioner as well as with two Maori commissioners. They genuinely wanted to treat applicants, including those from the over 50 per cent Maori prison population (compared to 17 per cent of the population),



The uncertainty surrounding the full implementation of LaForme-Westmoreland-Traore report is one reason why I wrote this book, writes Kent Roach. New legislation to establish a new commission has the potential to be the most important law reform with respect to wrongful convictions in a generation. *Book cover courtesy of Simon & Schuster, 2023*

with more respect and dignity than these people received from the rest of the criminal justice system. At the same time, we also heard alarming concerns that the New Zealand commission was already overloaded with applications.

We spoke to David Milgaard and were overwhelmed by his generosity and strength. When Justices LaForme and Westmoreland-Traore wrote their 212-page report for federal minister of justice David Lametti in October 2021, they began with Milgaard's wise words that reflect the 23 years he spent wrongfully imprisoned for a murder committed by someone else: “This can happen to you. ... The wrongfully convicted have been failed by the justice system once already. Failing a second time is non-negotiable.”

The uncertainty surrounding the full implementation of LaForme-Westmoreland-Traore report is one reason why I agreed to write this book. New legislation to establish a new commission has the potential to be the most important law reform with respect to wrongful convictions in a generation.

At the same time, if the new commission is underfunded and does not have sufficient powers, the situation could possibly become worse for the wrongfully convicted. At the very least, the hopes that David Milgaard and other exonerees had for the commission would not be realized. The stakes could not be higher.

This is excerpt from Kent Roach's Wrongfully Convicted: Guilty Pleas, Imagined Crimes and What Canada Must Do to Safeguard Justice (Toronto: Simon & Schuster, 2023). Wrongfully Convicted is one of the five books nominated for this year's \$60,000 Donner Prize for the best book public policy written by a Canadian. The prize will be awarded in Toronto on May 8.

The Hill Times

Environment commissioner to release five audits on April 30



Environment Commissioner Jerry V. DeMarco will deliver five performance audit reports in the House on Tuesday, April 30, followed by a press conference in Room 325, 180 Wellington St. at 11:30 a.m. ET. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

MONDAY, APRIL 29

House Sitting Schedule—The House is scheduled to sit for a total of 125 days in 2024. The House is back on April 29 and will sit for two weeks (April 29-May 10). The House returns on Tuesday, May 21, after the Victoria Day holiday, and will sit for five straight weeks until June 21. The House resumes sitting on Sept. 16, and will sit for four weeks from Sept. 16-Oct. 11, but take Monday, Sept. 30, off. It breaks Oct. 14-18, and resumes sitting on Oct. 21. It sits Oct. 21-Nov. 9, and breaks on Nov. 11 for Remembrance Day week until Nov. 15. It resumes again on Nov. 18, and is scheduled to sit from Nov. 18-Dec. 17.

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.

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.

NextGEN Assembly of Leaders—ISG Senator Tony Loffreda hosts the NextGEN Assembly of Leaders. One hundred and thirty elementary school students from Quebec and Ontario will be paired up with a politician, learn about a legislative issue, and report back with solutions. Participants include non-affiliated Senator Marc Gold; ISG Senator Donna Dasko; PSG Senator Andrew Cardozo; Bob Rae, Canada's ambassador to the UN; and Quebec Liberal MNA Jennifer Maccarone. Monday, April 29, at 9 a.m. ET at the Senate of Canada. Contact djohnson@swlauriersb.qc.ca.

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

CCSPA Annual Government Breakfast—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.

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.

Securing the Future of Advanced Manufacturing—International Trade Minister Mary Ng will deliver remarks at "Securing the Future of Advanced Manufacturing," hosted by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Other participants include Sara Wilshaw, Canada's chief trade commissioner; and former Conservative cabinet minister Lisa Raitt. Tuesday, April 30, at 12 p.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St. Details: chamber.ca.

Paramedic Association Reception—The Paramedic Association of Canada and Liberal MP Jennifer O'Connell co-host an evening reception. Paramedics from across the country are looking forward to sharing their priorities and experiences with parliamentarians at this event. Tuesday, April 30, at 6 p.m. ET in the Wellington Building, Room 320. Contact rsvp@summa.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.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 1

Symposium: 'NORAD Modernization'—National Defence Minister Bill Blair will deliver remarks at "NORAD Modernization: Enabling Connectivity for Interoperability," hosted by the Canadian Global Affairs Institute. This day-long conference will examine the advanced

capabilities and technology aspects of NORAD modernization, and how connectivity can help better defend the continent. Wednesday, May 1, at 8 a.m. at Westin TwentyTwo, 22nd Floor, 11 Colonel By Dr. Details online: cgai.ca.

Economic Club's Health Care Summit—The Economic Club of Canada hosts its annual health-care summit, "Healthcare Horizons: Navigating the Future of Canadian Wellness." Industry executives, policy-makers, and key government officials will provide an in-depth look at the health-care landscape in Canada as it pertains to the economy, innovation, and the health and well-being of our labour force. Wednesday, May 1, at 8:45 a.m. ET at the Hilton Toronto, 145 Richmond St. W., Toronto, Ont. Details online: events.economicclub.ca.

Flora's Walk for Perinatal Mental Health—The Canadian Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative hosts Flora's Walk. Mental Health and Addictions Minister Ya'ara Saks will be speaking, along with Liberal MP Pam Damoff, Conservative MP Karen Vecchio, NDP MPs Don Davies and Heather McPherson, and Green Leader Elizabeth May. Wednesday, May 1, 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, Ont. Details online: canadianclub.org.

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.

Celebrating the Paris 2024 Olympic Games—CBC/Radio-Canada, the Canadian Olympic Committee and the Canadian Paralympic Committee, and the Ambassador of France to Canada Michel Miraillet host an evening marking the countdown to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games and the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games. Wednesday, May 1 at 5:30 p.m. at the Résidence de France, 42 Sussex Dr.

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, starting with a reception at 6:30 p.m. followed by the forum at 7-9 p.m. at St. James United Church, 650 Lyon St. S., Ottawa, and online: not-the-nuclear-lobby.ca.

THURSDAY, MAY 2

World Press Freedom Day Luncheon—American journalist Margaret Sullivan will deliver a keynote speech at the World Press Freedom Canada Luncheon. Thursday, May 2 at 11:30 a.m. ET at the National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St., 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, Ont. Details online: afn.ca/events.

Panel: 'Canada's Place in the World'—The Canadian Club of Ottawa hosts a panel discussion, "Canada's Place in the World As It Takes On the 2025 G7 Presidency." Perrin Beatty, president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, is among the speakers. Mon-

day, May 6, at 11:30 a.m. at the Rideau Club, 15th Floor, 99 Bank St. Details online: canadianclubottawa.ca.

TUESDAY, MAY 7

National Prayer Breakfast—The National Prayer Breakfast will take place under the auspices of the House of Commons. Participants will include Canadian and international Christian faith leaders, ambassadors, Members of Parliament, Senators, and Canadians from across the country and abroad. Tuesday, May 7 at 7:30 a.m. at the Shaw Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Details online via Eventbrite.

Indian Envoy to Deliver Remarks—India's High Commissioner to Canada Sanjay Kumar Verma will deliver remarks in English to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Tuesday, May 7, at 12 p.m. ET at the Omni Mont-Royal, 1050 Sherbrooke St. W. Montreal. Details online: corim.qc.ca.

Webinar: 'Why Economists Should Care about the Constitution'—The Canadian Association for Business Economics hosts a webinar, "Why Economists Should Care about the Constitution." University of Alberta professor Andrew Leach will discuss what economists need to know about Canadian federalism, the constraints it imposes on policy development, and how a broader and better understanding of constitutional law is key for economists. Tuesday, May 7, at 1 p.m. ET, happening online: cabc.ca.

Politics & the Pen—The Writers' Trust will host the highly anticipated fundraiser Politics and the Pen event. The highlight of the evening is the presentation of the \$25,000 Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing, the best political book of year. This year's co-hosts are former Alberta premier Jason Kenney and former Ontario premier Kathleen Wynne. Tuesday, May 7, at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa.

TUESDAY, MAY 7-WEDNESDAY, MAY 8

2024 Montreal Climate Summit—Former Liberal cabinet minister Catherine McKenna, now chair of the UN High-Level Expert Group on the Net-Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities, will take part in the 2024 Montreal Climate Summit happening from May 7-8 at the Grand Quay of the Port of Montreal, Montreal, Que. Details online: sommetclimat-mtl.com.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8

Donner Prize Gala—The 2023 Donner Prize will be presented at a gala dinner. The annual award recognizes the best public policy by a Canadian author. The winner will be awarded \$60,000, and the four others will each receive \$7,500. Wednesday, May 8, in Toronto, Ont. Details online: donner-bookprize.com.

Mental Health Week Reception—The Canadian Mental Health Association invites Parliamentarians and officials to its annual food and drink reception in celebration of Mental Health Week, with opening remarks from Mental Health and Addictions Minister Ya'ara Saks. Wednesday, May 8, from 5-8 p.m. in Ottawa. By invite only, connect with Ms. SM Leduc (smleduc@cmha.ca) to RSVP.

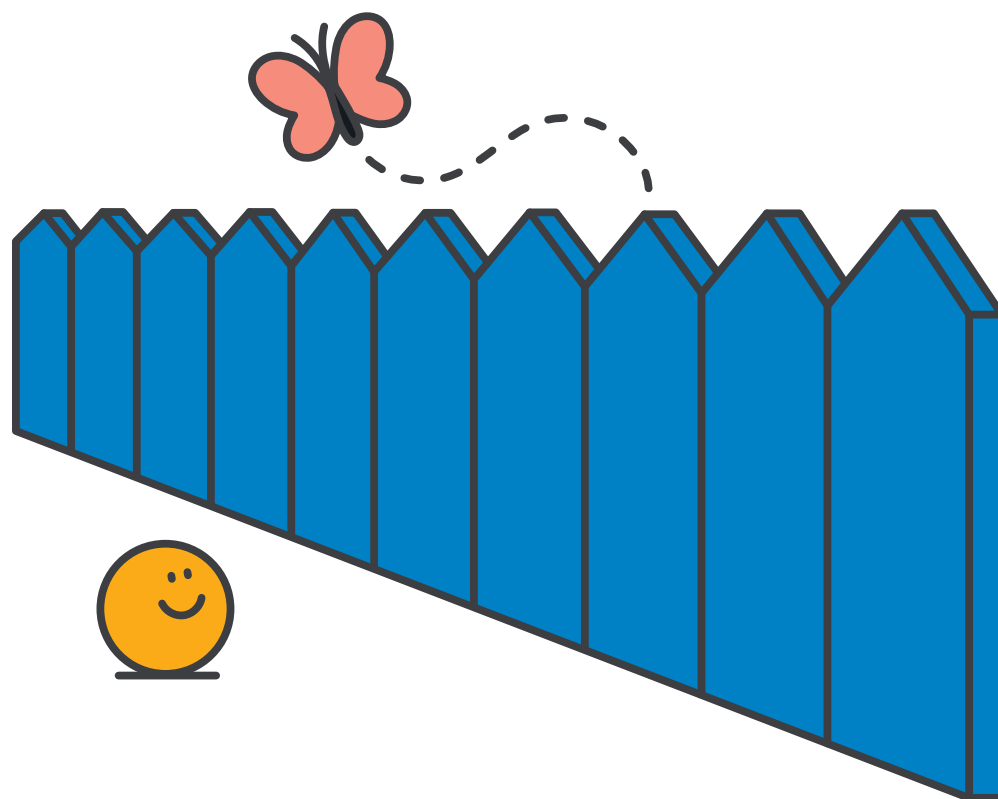
THURSDAY, MAY 9

National Air Accessibility Summit—Transport Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada will co-host Canada's first National Air Accessibility Summit. Details to follow. Contact laura.scaffidi@tc.gc.ca.

Innovation DM Kennedy to Deliver Remarks—Deputy Minister of Innovation Simon Kennedy will take part in a panel discussion, "Increasing Canada's Economic Resilience," hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Thursday, May 9, at 11:45 a.m. at the Fairmont Royal York, 100 Front St. W., Toronto, Ont. Details online: canadianclub.org.

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

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