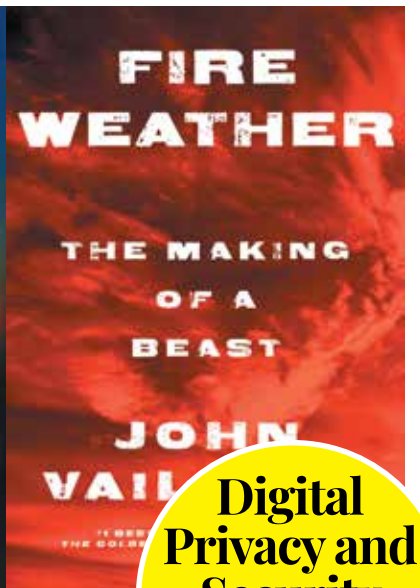
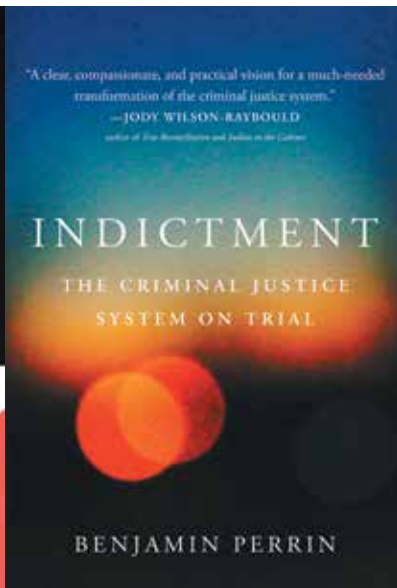
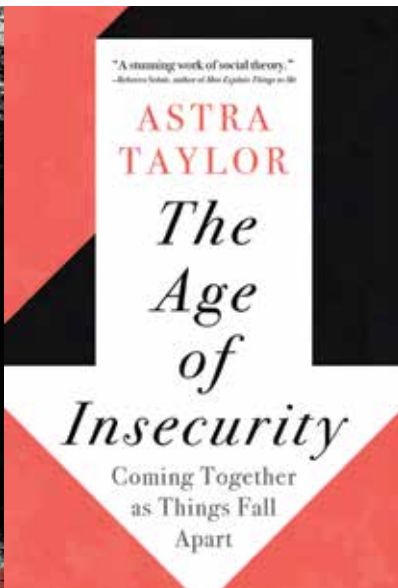
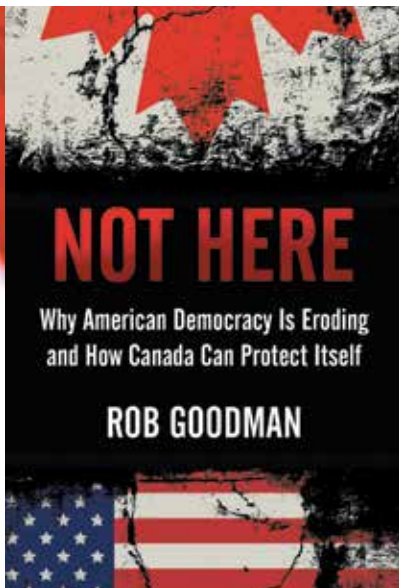
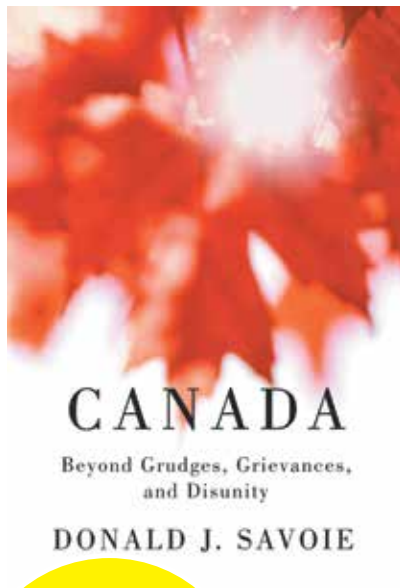


Politics & the Pen: 2024

Special section inside



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THE HILL TIMES

Digital Privacy and Security briefing
pp. 25-31

THIRTY-FIFTH YEAR, NO. 2121

CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

MONDAY, MAY 6, 2024 \$5.00

NEWS

If Prime Minister Trudeau stays, he needs one 'last reboot' this summer, say Liberal MPs, pollsters, and political insiders

BY ABBAS RANA

With the Liberals 21 points behind in the polls, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will need to "supercharge his front bench" and give his government "a new sense of energy" if he really wants to lead his party and be competitive in the next election, say Liberal MPs, pollsters and party insiders.

"Assuming that he wants to lead the party in the next election, the budget impact has been flat," said Nik Nanos, chief data scientist for Nanos Research. "It means that if he wants to be competitive, he has to do something different. He has to perhaps talk about what does Justin Trudeau version 2.0 mean."

Most post-budget national public opinion polls have suggested that last month's federal budget which announced \$53-billion of new spending has failed to pro-

Continued on page 32

OPINION

Bring back civility and morality to the House before it's really gone

Last week's disgraceful incident in the House should have all federal elected officials hanging their heads in shame. Just how did you let it get to this? Who's going to lead?

BY ROSE LEMAY

OTTAWA—Workplaces often expect professionalism of their employees, but rarely define what it is.

When teams dig into the meaning, they find that "professionalism" means something

Continued on page 14

NEWS

Disinformation campaigns having long-term impact on public trust, MPs warned

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

While misinformation and disinformation proliferated by both domestic and global actors has so far failed to affect the legitimacy of Canadian federal elections, a House committee has been warned that there are longer term consequences to the spread of fake information intended to polarize Canadians.

"The effects are more pernicious over the long term," said Aengus Bridgman, an assistant professor at the Media Ecosystem Observatory. "One of the major consequences of misinformation is actually that it reduces confidence in politics ... what we see in the last five years among Canadians is there's been a change in the confidence that people have in journalists, the media, and politicians, which is partly the role of disinformation and misinformation."

Bridgman made the comments in French during a House Ethics Committee meeting on April 30 examining the impact of disinformation and misinformation on the work of parliamentarians. He was one of six witnesses to speak on the topic, all of whom recommended providing both politicians and the public with

Continued on page 33



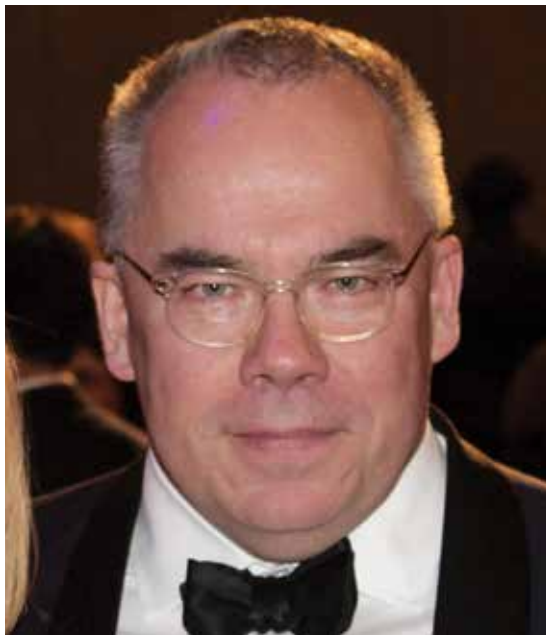
Let's not do this: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. When Poilievre called Trudeau 'wacko' for a policy position last week, it went beyond expectations of professionalism. Poilievre exhibited childish behaviour which doesn't meet anybody's metrics for leadership. But Trudeau doesn't get a free pass either, writes Rose LeMay. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade



Mike Lapointe

Heard On The Hill

Wells' book on Trudeau hits bookshelves this week



Veteran political journalist and writer Paul Wells has a new book coming out this week, which delves into the 'enigmatic leadership of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and explores Trudeau's journey against the backdrop of a tumultuous era marked by polarization, misinformation, and global upheaval.' Book cover image courtesy of Sutherland House, *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

Veteran journalist and author **Paul Wells**, who recently won this year's Charles Lynch Award for outstanding coverage of national issues from the Canadian Parliamentary Press Gallery, has a new book coming out, *Justin Trudeau On the Ropes*, which explores the prime minister's ascent to power in 2015 and essays on his nearly decade-long stint in Canada's top job.

"Trudeau's vision was relentlessly optimistic: the word 'positive' was heard eight times in his victory speech, along with references to 'sunny ways' and 'hope and hard work,'" according to the book description. "But the fates decreed that he would govern in darker times. His rookie government, itself mainly staffed by rookies in federal politics, had to learn on the job in an age of polarization, misinformation, and pandemic, while dealing with the rise of Trump and Brexit, a newly belligerent China, and wars in Ukraine and the Middle East."

The book, separated into four parts, delves into the prime minister's "enigmatic leadership," and "explores Trudeau's journey against the backdrop of a tumultuous era marked by polarization, misinformation, and global

upheaval," according to a press release.

Wells has also authored *The Longer I'm Prime Minister*, a portrait of former prime minister **Stephen Harper** during his time in power, as well as *Right Side Up: The Fall of Paul Martin and the Rise of Stephen Harper's New Conservatism*. Wells worked for *Maclean's* magazine for 19 years as a columnist, editor and writer before his departure from the publication in March 2022.

Jeff Rubin pens book on 'new normal'

Staying on new book releases, bestselling and award-winning author **Jeff Rubin**, a former chief economist and chief strategist at CIBC World Markets, has a book coming out later this month, titled *A Map of the New Normal: How Inflation, War and Sanctions Will Change Your World*.

Rubin, who also served as a senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance founded by **Jim Balsillie**, warns that the inflation that took the world by surprise in 2021 is in fact the front of a perfect storm of war, supply-chain disruption, geopo-

litical realignment, domestic upheaval, and energy scarcity that will change everything, according to the book's description.

The book explores how the Canadian government's borrowing patterns inflated the national deficit by a factor of 10 in just two years during the pandemic, noting that the ramifications of global COVID-19 spending "could potentially last for decades, and inevitably one of the first manifestations of these consequences will be that central banks will lose control of interest rates, and therefore of growth and inflation targets."

Rubin's first book, *Why Your World Is About to Get a Whole Lot Smaller*, became a bestseller that won the National Business Book Award, and was longlisted for the *Financial Times* and Goldman Sachs Business Book of the Year Award.

Ex-Australian PM Tony Abbott joins Macdonald-Laurier Institute

The Macdonald-Laurier Institute announced it's welcoming **Tony Abbott** into its team. He will serve as a visiting senior fellow for CANZUK (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the UK).

Abbott served as the prime minister of Australia from 2013 to 2015.

A recent profile in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Tony Abbott, a Fighter in the Cold War With China", described the Australian as "a fighter as well as a thinker," and "fight he does, against China and Russia's tyranny, against climate change alarmism, and for the moral soul of the Western world," according to MLI's release.

"Mr. Abbott speaks his mind. He's a fixture of strong, principled political leadership throughout the Anglosphere," according to the MLI press release. "We're pleased to welcome him to the Institute and to further his message to our audience both in Canada and around the world."

Abbott spoke at this year's Canada Strong and Free Network conference, appearing on stage alongside former British prime minister **Boris Johnson**.

A few changes in public service's senior ranks

On April 26, Prime Minister **Justin Trudeau** announced a number of changes in the senior ranks of the public service.

Sony Perron, currently president of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, will serve concurrently as deputy minister of Economic Development.

Andrew Brown, currently associate deputy minister of employment and social development, has been tapped to serve as associate deputy minister of Canadian Heritage.

Brigitte Diogo, currently deputy commissioner of the Canada Revenue Agency, becomes associate deputy minister of transport.

Jean-François Fortin, currently associate deputy minister of justice, will be the new deputy commissioner of the Canada Revenue Agency.

And finally, **Samantha Maislin Dickson**, currently assistant deputy minister, Public Safety, Defence and Immigration Portfolio, Department of Justice Canada, becomes associate deputy minister of justice.

All of the moves are effective May 6.

National Prayer Breakfast to be held in Ottawa May 7

The annual National Prayer Breakfast is just around the corner. Bringing together Canadian and international Christian faith leaders, ambassadors, Members of Parliament, Senators, and other Canadians, the event takes place under the auspices of the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons on behalf of the Parliamentary Prayer Breakfast Group.

The Prayer Breakfast was first held in June 1964, and has been held annually except for three occasions: in 1968, when a federal election led to its cancellation, and in 2020 and 2021 during the pandemic.

One of the longest running continuous events on Parliament Hill, the breakfast returned in 2022.

Conservative MP **Richard Bragdon**, who represents Tobique-Mactaquac in New Bruns-

wick, is the event's current chair. His office is responsible for coordinating the 59th iteration of the breakfast.

Unlike the event of the same name held annually south of the border, Canada's National Prayer Breakfast doesn't actively court media coverage. **Peter Stockland**, a former Hill reporter and now-publisher of *The Catholic Register*, told *The Hill Times* in 2022 that "it would kind of run counter to the nature of the thing."

The event will take place on Tuesday, May 7, at 7:30 a.m. at the Shaw Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr. in Ottawa. Details are available online via Eventbrite.

Tim Powers to run the 96th Tely Ten race in St. John's

Conservative commentator and *Hill Times* columnist **Tim Powers** is set to run the 96th Tely Ten.

The 10-mile road race—that's 16km—takes place every year in St. John's, N.L. This year's race day is June 23.

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

Powers will be joined by his son **Patrick**. Funds raised by the pair will go toward supporting the VOICM Cares Janeway Foundation Family Support Fund.

The fund, administered through the Janeway Social Work Team, supports Janeway patients and their families who cannot afford to pay for items like orthopedics, prosthetics, special eyeglasses, necessary medications, accommodations or meals.

You can help Team Powers raise funds to ensure children have the necessary medical assistance they need to get better. To donate, visit vocmcares.com

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The Hill Times

CORRECTIONS:

The Hill Times, April 29 issue

Re: "Polls have Singh worried and it shows," (*The Hill Times*, April 29). This column originally reported that Anne McGrath called the polls "bullshit," but it was American political strategist LaToia Jones who said this at the Progress Summit on April 11, as correctly reported by *The Hill Times*. The column was corrected and updated online on April 30.

Re: "Budget's AI investment is Canada playing catch up," (*The Hill Times*, April 29). This column incorrectly reported where Vector and Mila are located. Vector is based in Toronto and Mila is in Montreal. This column was corrected and updated on April 30 online. *The Hill Times* apologizes for these mistakes.



Jeff Rubin, a former chief economist and chief strategist at CIBC World Markets, has a new book out exploring how inflation, war and sanctions will change the world. *The Hill Times* file photograph, book cover image courtesy of Penguin Random House Canada

Minister Holland

You said that you intend to restrict NRT flavours.

That's okay. As long as you understand that flavours are important to help adult smokers quit.

We kindly suggest you visit ZonnicTruth.ca to see how our flavours are no different than other NRT flavours available in Canada.

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IMPERIAL
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News

‘Overconfident’ Poilievre exposing vulnerabilities, but Liberals failing to capitalize on them, say pollsters and political insiders

There’s no evidence to prove that Pierre Poilievre had an organized meeting with some extremist protesters in Atlantic Canada, says Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research.

BY ABBAS RANA

By meeting with anti-carbon tax protesters and far-right extremists with “Fuck Trudeau” flags in Atlantic Canada, and getting himself kicked out of the House last week, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has given an opening to the Liberals, but it remains to be seen if the governing party can capitalize on the opportunities, say pollsters and political insiders.

“All those can be things which reflect potential exposed planks,” said Frank Graves, president of Ekos Research in an interview with *The Hill Times*. “But I don’t think there’s any evidence that the Liberals or anybody else is capitalizing on them to this point in time.”

At issue is Poilievre’s (Carleton, Ont.) meeting recently with convoy-style “hold the line” protesters camped out near the border between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. According to social media videos, Poilievre told the protesters that everyone hates the carbon tax because everyone’s been “screwed over.” These protesters had “Axe the tax” and “Fuck Trudeau” signs and flags.

“People believed his lies,” Poilievre said, according to a news report by Press Progress. “Every-

thing he said was bullshit, from top to bottom.”

A second video shows Poilievre leaving an RV with a drawing of a Diagonon flag on the outside door. Diagonon is a far-right extremist network that believes that the overthrow of Western governments is inevitable.

In a second incident, House Speaker Greg Fergus (Hull-Aylmer, Que.) kicked the Conservative leader out of the House last week over the use of unparliamentary language, after Poilievre called Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) “wacko” during the daily Question Period on April 30. After his expulsion, all the Conservative MPs followed their leader and left the House *en masse*.

Recent polling numbers are showing that the Conservatives are 21 points ahead of the second place Liberals. Political insiders and pundits are saying the Tories lead in the polls appears to be making Poilievre “overconfident,” and that could lead the party to make unforced errors.

“I think Pierre’s getting overconfident,” said one former senior Conservative who spoke to *The Hill Times* on a not-for-attribution basis to share candid views. “Because just wandering around and visiting here, there, and everywhere, it’s lack of discipline. Again, I doubt if the thing in the House of Commons will hurt him because, again, people are going to vote on things like housing and cost of living—unless you’re a political junkie who heard it. But he’s getting overconfident right now. And he needs to pull it in.”

A Leger poll released May 1 suggested that the Conservatives were leading the pack with the support of 44 per cent of Canadians, followed by the Liberals who were at 23 per cent. The NDP was at 17 per cent, the Bloc Québécois eight per cent, and the Greens five per cent.

A well-connected Hill insider said that Poilievre is ahead of the Liberals by a comfortable double-digit margin, and he should be acting more prime ministerial. By meeting protesters who were using controversial slogans, signs and flags, and getting himself kicked out of the House, the source said, the Conservative leader is engaging in uncalled-for controversies. The source said that an overwhelming majority of the trucker convoy and alt-right voters are already behind Poilievre, so he doesn’t need to double down on this group of voters.

“If I were him, I would just lay low, act like a prime minister, which is not getting your ass thrown out of the chamber,” said the source. “I don’t get it. I don’t understand where it gets him. It shows complete disrespect and disregard for the institutions.”

David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data, said that he’s not sure what Poilievre achieved by meeting with the protesters, but he has given one more example to the Liberals that they could use against his party in the next election by describing them as dangerous. Most political observers, including Coletto, believe that the Liberal Party will try to paint the Conservatives as extremists, and these examples will be the proof points that the Liberals will use in their attack ads against Poilievre either before or during the election campaign.

“They [Liberals] have to make a case that Pierre Poilievre is not suitable to be prime minister,” said Coletto. “And for some Canadians, these might be examples of why that’s the case. So, the Liberals now need to make sure that every Canadian who’s switched away from the Liberals, who’s thinking about voting Conservative and maybe hasn’t in the past, they need Canadians to know that he did these things. Or else if it’s just



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has exposed a vulnerability that the Liberals could use against his party before or during the election campaign, says pollster David Coletto. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

in the Twitter-verse, it’s going to have no impact.”

Since Poilievre won a landslide leadership victory in September 2022, veteran Liberals have been calling on senior strategists in their party to define the new Conservative leader before he had a chance to define himself. So far, the Liberals have not made a serious effort on that front. The Conservative Party, however, has spent millions of dollars in defining their new leader in a positive light, which is one of the reasons why Poilievre has been able to get traction with Canadians.

In not-for-attribution-based interviews with *The Hill Times*, senior Liberals argued that the reason why the Liberals are behind in the polls is not because of any “Poilievre mania.” Instead, it’s because of the affordability and cost-of-living issues. They say their team is laser-focused on addressing those issues. Once the government is successful in delivering on this, the Liberal Party’s public support will automatically go up. At that point, they said, they will define Poilievre. When asked whether, by that time, it’s too late to define the Conservative leader, they said the party strategists are monitoring the polls closely, and will not let that happen.

Meanwhile, Coletto said that one possible explanation that he can think of for why Poilievre met with protesters is to ensure that alt-right voters do not vote for Maxime Bernier’s People’s Party of Canada in the next election. In the 2021 federal election, the PPC won five per cent of the vote nationally. According to a CBC analysis, the vote split between the two parties may have cost the Conservatives 24 seats across the country.

“I believe this from the beginning [that the Conservatives

are] trying to contain any threat that the People’s Party gets any traction anywhere. That core part of their strategy has always been to decapitate the People’s Party, make sure that they are never seen as an option for people who would otherwise vote Conservative,” said Coletto.

He added that even though the Conservatives are 21 points ahead, they should be careful about coming across as overconfident, and giving more ammunition to the Liberals who will use it against them.

Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research, said that he is not inclined to read too much into Poilievre meeting with protesters in Atlantic Canada. He said that these people were protesting against the carbon tax, and it’s not surprising that Poilievre would meet with them. At the same time, Lyle said, these kinds of protests always tend to attract people with extreme positions, and party leaders don’t have any way of screening all people, all of the time.

“Of course, he’s going to meet with and go to ‘Axe the tax’ rallies,” said Lyle. “He’s driving that movement, and the reality is, just like the convoy, [these protests are] going to attract some extreme people as well as the people he’s really focused on. He’s not setting up specific meanings with those groups, they’re just showing up. And all politicians have that issue where extreme groups try to get close.”

As for the House speaker kicking out Poilievre, Lyle said, it appears deliberate on the Conservative leader’s part. This “stunt” would help the Conservatives in raising funds and firing up the party base, he said.

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ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH IN CANADA'S FISHERIES INDUSTRY



Paul Lansbergen
President,
Fisheries Council of Canada

The Canadian fisheries industry has a long and proud history, dating back over 200 years. Today, it has earned a reputation of producing some of the world's best, most sustainable and delicious seafood, with over 200 species available for harvesting from Canada's three oceans. However, as we look towards the future, it becomes abundantly clear that Canada continues to fall short of its potential. With the longest coastline

in the world, Canada's fish and seafood industry presents the unique potential to benefit the economy, environment and a growing global population. The time has come for Canada to claim its rightful place as a global seafood powerhouse and fully utilize the resources of our vast and pristine oceans.

Embracing the Blue Economy: A Gateway to Doubling Canadian Seafood Value

Embracing the blue economy is not just about increasing the volume of seafood that Canada produces; it's about enhancing the value of what we already catch. A vision set forth by Fisheries Council of Canada (FCC) and the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance (CAIA), the national associations representing wild capture and farmed seafood respectfully, speaks to a future where Canadian seafood is not only known for its sustainability and great taste, but for its value on the global market. We aspire to double the value, economic benefits and domestic consumption of Canadian seafood by 2040. Through strategic innovation and optimizing the utilization of our seafood products, Canada's fisheries industry can increase its economic footprint, propelling it forward against global competition.

Key to realizing this vision is a regulatory environment conducive to growth. We need a strong, supportive policy framework. This involves a commitment from government to fisheries science, balancing marine conservation with sustainable use, and providing certainty and predictability as the industry prioritizes investments in cutting-edge technologies and practices. There is no better time than now to steer the industry towards a future where our seafood is as valuable as possible. By working together, we can set a global benchmark for how maritime resources can and should be sustainably managed for prosperity.

Harnessing the Power of Sustainability and Nutrition in Canada's Fisheries

Supporting the harvest and production of Canadian fish and seafood is not just about maximizing sustainability efforts, it is also about contributing to nutrition and food security. These considerations are crucial not just for the health of consumers but also for the long-term health of our oceans and the economy.

By leveraging Canada's leadership in sustainable fishing practices, recognized globally through its top five ranking in Marine Stewardship Council sustainable fisheries certifications, we not only safeguard our country's marine ecosystems but provide a low carbon food. Fish and seafood often have a much lower carbon footprint compared to other land-based proteins. Simply put, switching to seafood reduces the carbon intensity of our diet.

The consumption of fish and seafood - twice a week as recommended by Health Canada - represents a powerhouse of nutrients, omega-3 fatty acids and protein that contributes to heart health, prevention of chronic disease, and overall wellness.

Navigating Towards Global Leadership in Fish and Seafood Innovation

The Canadian fisheries industry's journey toward global leadership in fish and seafood is propelled forward by innovations that work to meet the demands of the future. Through the concerted efforts of Canadian fisheries industry leaders, Canada is poised to find and develop solutions to the problems of yesterday and today and is proof of the Canadian fisheries industry's commitment to sustainability.

This innovative spirit is captured in FCC's Innovation Storyboard, showcasing pioneering developments in precision harvesting, processing automation, and much more. The Innovation Storyboard demonstrates our industry's commitment to not only keeping pace with global innovations but to leading the charge, ensuring Canadian seafood is synonymous with quality, sustainability, and value.

The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy has concluded that investments in ocean-based proteins carry a 10:1 benefit ratio and connect with all priorities of the government: environmental, health, and economic. As we navigate the complexities of the blue economy, one thing remains certain: Investment in ocean-based innovations is a smart investment.

A Look to the Future

Canada's fisheries stand at a critical juncture, ready for significant value growth. Our goal is clear: to promote innovation, ensure sustainability, and capitalize on the nutrients from our oceans. This strategy not only ensures the long-term success of our fisheries but also furthers our progress in becoming a global leader in fish and seafood. By working together to harness and optimize Canada's fisheries potential, we are committing to a future of lasting prosperity for future generations.

Seafood is a good idea.

Discover the value the Canadian fisheries industry has to offer.

- Economic growth
- Sustainable production
- Health and food security



Fisheries Council of Canada
Conseil Canadien des Pêches



www.fisheriescouncil.ca

FCC is the voice of Canada's fish and seafood industry, promoting a sustainable resource and prosperous industry playing a vital role in the Canadian economy.

News

Liberal budget comms ‘a miss’ at catching young voters, unlikely to achieve ‘narrative shift,’ say pollsters

Like with traditional media, there’s no guarantee about the kinds of coverage when courting earned media from influencers, and there will be some ‘growing pains,’ says former PMO staffer Alex Kohut.

BY IAN CAMPBELL

The government’s attempts at reaching younger voters through a pre- and post-budget media blitz may not be delivering the results the Liberals had wanted.

Alex Kohut, a former Liberal Party pollster and PMO staffer, told *The Hill Times* that polls show a slight uptick in awareness about the fiscal plan among younger voters when compared to previous years.

That finding comes after the Liberals invited several social media influencers who make content about personal finance to attend the April 16 budget lockup as part of the party’s effort to reach a younger demographic. A key theme of the budget was “generational fairness,” and many of the core policy announcements, such as items related to housing, were seen as being targeted towards younger voters.

But a small rise in awareness was not enough to count as a win for the government, said Kohut.

A poll conducted by Spark Insights—where Kohut is a senior director—suggested that six in 10 Canadians had seen, read, or heard something about the government’s latest fiscal blueprint. However, only 39 per cent of respondents under 30 years of age said they were aware of it, according to the survey taken between April 18 and 22, following the budget’s release.

Kohut modeled the questions off ones used by the Privy Council Office (PCO) in its annual polling about the budget—which he used to be involved in when he worked in the Prime Minister’s Office. He said the numbers show a slight overall increase in



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, left, and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland appear for photographs with a group of cabinet ministers before the tabling of Budget 2024 on April 16. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

the number of Canadians who expressed some awareness of the fiscal blueprint, and that rise was driven by younger voters.

In 2021, he said, the PCO polling found 26 per cent of that demographic had seen news coverage about the budget, and in 2022 that number was 36 per cent.

Kohut said the increase in awareness by only a few points was not likely to deliver a big change in levels of voter support, or drive the “narrative shift” the government needs.

“There’s still twice as many seniors as young people who have heard something about the budget,” said Kohut. “That’s a miss if your target audience is hearing about it way less than another audience.”

Messenger must match the message: Kishchuk

Oksana Kishchuk, director of strategy and insights at Abacus Data, said her firm is observing a similar trend with only a small rise in budget awareness this year, and that “represents a very difficult environment” for the trailing Liberals.

The party is struggling to regain control of the political agenda from the Conservatives who have been successful at framing the narrative around most issues for at least a year. Winning back the younger voters who brought the Liberals to power in 2015 is often seen as key to restoring their political fortunes.

The strategy to reach younger voters by inviting

social media influencers to the embargoed budget lock-up may at first seem a sound concept, but Kishchuk said there are some challenges when it comes to execution.

She said it makes sense to want to “go where the people you want to talk to are,” and—in the case of younger voters—that’s social media.

However, a challenge that Kishchuk often observes is “the messenger needs to fit the message.”

“We do a lot of work with clients who say, ‘We want to talk to young people, and we know they really like listening to influencers,’” she said. However, matching the message to the messenger is necessary for that to succeed.



Oksana Kishchuk of Abacus Data said when using social media influences to reach an audience it is vital for the messenger to match the message. *Photograph courtesy of Oksana Kishchuk*

She said some younger Canadians may have been surprised to see influencers they follow posting content about the federal budget on platforms like Instagram and TikTok—something that would be unusual to see from those creators.

That might have raised questions for some audiences about whether the influencers had been paid, or if they had the expertise to speak about that topic.

Even though most influencers who attended the lockup made a point of noting in their feeds that they were not paid to do this—a point reiterated by the government in traditional media stories about their involvement—Kishchuk said that information may not have landed, especially since there is an expectation that influencers are often paid to speak about items covered on their channels.

“The average Canadian isn’t really paying attention to the budget ... so I think it would be inaccurate to say that they’re also paying attention to how folks can be paid or not paid to be part of these announcements,” she said. “These folks weren’t paid. They’re not allowed to be paid. But that doesn’t matter because people think that they are. And people think that these influencers are no longer independent.”

Capital gains changes a ‘least fav’ item for one influencer

Several of the influencers who attended posted about their

personal experience on budget day, photos with Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.), and short videos listing some of the key budget items and messages. More detailed breakdowns of the budget’s contents were less common, and not posted in the budget’s immediate aftermath.

For example, financial advice influencers Stephanie Gordon and Dennis Mathu posted a photo on April 18 about their budget day early access experience, and promised to later offer key takeaways to their 215,000 Instagram followers. On their YouTube channel Steph & Den—with 108,000 subscribers—a video was posted several days after the budget’s release about strategies for saving for a home. However, that video does not explicitly discuss how measures in the budget might help.

Kishchuk said these influencers know what content their audience is looking for.

“The budget didn’t necessarily present a personal finance, quick-and-easy solution to cost of living for young Canadians,” she said. “It really focused on sort of housing and complicated tax law... But that’s complicated, confusing, and probably not content that they thought their audience wanted to see.”

Changes to the capital gains tax inclusion rate were another element the government looked to highlight in budget coverage. But that policy ended up on the list of “least fav” budget items from another influencer, Educk Brooks, who is known as Two Sides of a Dime. Brooks has over 16,000 followers on Instagram.

Kishchuk said that announcement may not have been a good fit with the focus taken by some financial advice influencers.

“The objective of these personal finance influencers is to increase personal wealth for young people,” she said. “Even if their audiences aren’t likely to pay that tax yet, the messaging around a tax on wealthier Canadians might not have been in line with what some of these channels were looking to highlight.”

Kohut said the government would have been hoping to get as much coverage from these channels as possible about its housing announcements, but it faces the same challenges that come with trying to generate stories in traditional media.

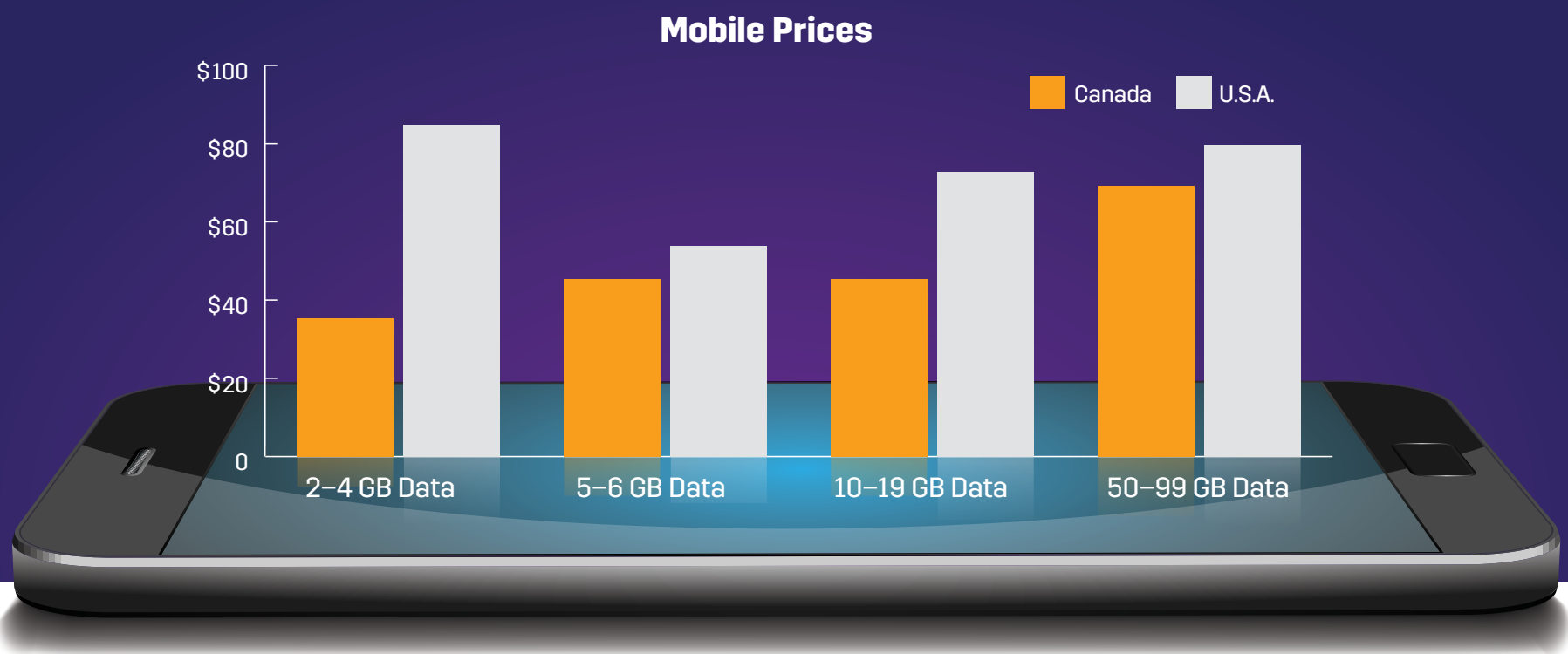
“They can put all this stuff in front of the influencers, but they’re not necessarily going to know what the influencer will latch on to and talk about,” he said.

“Having that photo-op of some influencers standing beside a minister, it’s a fun story for the influencer, but it’s not going to tell their audience something that will make their life better,” he added. “So I think they’re still testing this out. They’re still trying to make this work in the best possible way. And I think there’s going to be some growing pains.”

icampbell@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

It's Cheaper up Here

The Government of Canada's newly released annual telecom price comparison study confirms that the average price of mobile wireless service plans was lower in Canada than in the U.S. in 2023. What's more - Statistics Canada's Consumer Price Index shows Canadian mobile prices have since declined another 11%*.



2023 Average Monthly Price in PPP adjusted \$ CDN**

Cell service price change from January 2019 to January 2024 – country comparison***

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 +1.5%

 -47.1%

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Canadian Telecommunications Association  Association canadienne des télécommunications

* Source: StatCan, Consumer Price Index – Cellular Services (October 2023-March 2024)

**Source: Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada, Price Comparisons of Wireline, Wireless and Internet Services in Canada and with Foreign Jurisdictions: 2023 Edition. Price data collected October 2023

*** Source: StatCan, Consumer Price Index - Cellular Services; UK Office for National Statistics, CPI Index Wireless telephone services; US Bureau of Labour Statistics Data, BLS Database, Wireless telephone services

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Editorial

Canadians deserve better than this nonsense

Pity the parents trying to find role models among our so-called leaders; they won't find them in Ottawa.

Last week was a particularly grotesque display of pigheaded childishness in what has already been years of nonsense that Canadians have endured from the halls of power.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, fresh from palling around with protesters associated with a far-right movement and silent about an—admittedly unsolicited—endorsement from school shooting conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, was ejected from the House of Commons on April 30 after refusing to withdraw an unparliamentary remark.

This MP of 19 years, well-versed in what can and cannot be said in the House of Commons, turned his expulsion into a cry of being “censored,” which he plastered on every social media platform he could, while the Conservative Party machine kicked into overdrive by fundraising off their leader's unparliamentary behaviour. Poilievre called the prime minister a “wacko,” and refused to withdraw the remark.

Out came the Liberals, feigning shock and disappointment in front of any microphone they could find about the incident, acting as if the circus that is the Lower Chamber is all their own.

Never mind that this whole brouhaha came about following deflections from the prime minister to questions about the serious topic of drug addiction and overdoses.

The outrage over the goings-on in the House also conveniently distracted from questions about the ethical judgment of yet another cabinet minister after Global News reported about a lobbyist with business ties to Employment Minister Randy Boissonnault.

So on the clown show goes: Conservative crocodile tears about being treated unfairly by a government that the party's MPs are more than happy to ahistorically describe as tyrannical, while Liberals puff their chests and describe themselves as the adults in the room. Both use the people's House as a fundraising vehicle with the kind of hijinks that would land a mountain of paperwork on the HR desk of any other workplace.

But there's a difference between passion and churlishness. Responding to the bad actions of your own side with whataboutisms and name calling is the action of a child, and one who's pretty likely to be disciplined for it. If we wouldn't accept this behaviour from a school student, why would we expect it from the people to whom we grant control of the public coffers and military?

Every poll for months has shown an electorate eager for a change from the status quo. Judging by the nonsense we see day-in, day-out on Wellington Street, they're unlikely to find it from any current resident of the House of Commons.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

Nuclear energy never will be ‘clean,’ write Jones and Edwards

The 2024 federal budget contains many references to nuclear energy as a “clean” source of electricity. In our view, referring to nuclear electricity as “clean” is the height of absurdity.

The nuclear fuel chain begins with the mining of uranium from rock underground where, without human intervention, it would remain safely locked away from the biosphere. Uranium has many natural radioactive byproducts, including radium, radon, and polonium-210 that are discarded in voluminous sand-like “tailings” at uranium mine sites. These materials are responsible for countless thousands of deaths in North America alone. Canada has accumulated 220 million tonnes of these indestructible radioactive mining wastes, easily dispersed by wind and rain over the next 100,000 years.

Inside a nuclear reactor, uranium atoms are split to produce energy. The atomic fragments are hundreds of newly created radioactive poisons, most of them never found in nature before 1940. They make used fuel millions of times more radioactive than the original uranium. One used fuel bundle, freshly discharged, will deliver a lethal dose of radiation in seconds to any unshielded human nearby. There are hundreds of thousands of tonnes of waste irradiated fuel bundles worldwide and the quantity grows larger each year. There is no operating repository anywhere in the world for such wastes, but there are several failed repositories.

Radioactive waste has the “reverse midas touch” turning everything it touches into more radioactive waste. This includes the nuclear vessel in which the waste is created, and everything that comes in contact with the cooling water needed to prevent the waste from melting down. Containers for radioactive waste become radioactive waste themselves. All radioactive waste must be kept out of our food, air and drinking water for countless millennia.

Radioactive atoms are unstable. They disintegrate, throwing off a kind of subatomic shrapnel called “atomic radiation.” Emissions from disintegrating atoms damage living cells. Chronic radiation exposure can cause miscarriages, birth

defects, and a host of degenerative diseases including cancers of all kinds. Genetic damage to eggs or sperm can transmit defective genes to successive generations.

Plutonium is one of the hundreds of radioactive byproducts created in used nuclear fuel. It is of special concern because it is the primary nuclear explosive in nuclear arsenals worldwide. “Reprocessing” of nuclear fuel waste to extract plutonium is sometimes called “recycling” but this is disinformation; the resulting waste is more difficult to manage than the original fuel waste. Many serious accidents have occurred around the world at reprocessing plants. Places where extensive reprocessing has occurred are among the most radioactively contaminated sites on Earth. Plutonium can be used as a nuclear fuel, but extracting it is a nuclear weapons proliferation risk.

Managing radioactive waste is difficult and very expensive. The projected multi-billion-dollar cleanup cost for the legacy waste at Chalk River, Ont., is the federal government's biggest environmental liability by far, exceeding the sum total of all other federal environmental liabilities across Canada.

The multinational consortium running Canada's federal nuclear laboratories is receiving close to \$1.5-billion annually, much of it for managing legacy radioactive wastes. The consortium's plans include piling up one million tonnes of waste in a giant mound beside the Ottawa River and entombing old reactors in concrete and grout beside major drinking water sources. Many are of the view that the plans fail to meet the fundamental requirement to isolate waste from the biosphere and have been met with widespread concern, opposition and legal challenges. Nuclear energy is not now, never has been, and never will be “clean.” The sooner our elected officials come to terms with this fact, the better for Canada and Canadians. Honesty is the best policy.

**Gordon Edwards, Montreal
 Canadian Coalition for
 Nuclear Responsibility**

**Lynn Jones, Ottawa
 Concerned Citizens of
 Renfrew County and Area**



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Poilievre's parliamentary outbursts reflective of his dripping dislike for Trudeau

Going after an unpopular prime minister will likely not cost Pierre Poilievre politically. But it does give Canadians a glimpse into what kind of leadership he would provide if he were elected prime minister.



Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre on the Hill on April 16, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

cusations, but the leader refused to do so and made a dramatic exit with his whole team in tow.

Under House rules, the leader of the opposition was allowed back the day after his ejection, and he did not have to apologize.

Going after an unpopular prime minister will likely not cost Poilievre politically. But it does give Canadians a glimpse into what kind of leadership he would provide if he were elected prime minister.

Most leaders start their term in office showing respect for their opponents and the workings of Parliament.

By the end of their time, personal hubris and frustration may overtake calm, but it usually doesn't start out that way.

In Poilievre's case, his parliamentary outbursts are reflective of his dripping hate for the prime minister.

In the session where Poilievre was asked to withdraw his accusation that Trudeau is "the guy who spent the first half of his adult life as a practising racist" the attacks of both leaders were caustic.

Trudeau, for his part, had to apologize for name-calling of the leader of the opposition. The prime minister accused Poilievre of courting white supremacists,

as allegedly the previous week, a symbol of white supremacist group Diagonal was seen at a carbon-tax protest which Poilievre attended.

At the end of the week, few spectators outside the House will pay that much attention to what appears to be a schoolyard scrap in Parliament.

But Poilievre's refusal to respect the ruling of the House Speaker will have repercussions.

Conservatives have all made it clear that they are after Fergus' head, claiming he is too close to the Liberals.

For its part, the government lost no time in comparing Poilievre's tactic to that of former U.S. president Donald Trump, who recently complained that he was being muzzled in a New York courtroom because he violated a gag order.

Tories were complaining they were muzzled by the Speaker, and it was clear that Poilievre wanted to be kicked out.

Normally, this level of heat in the House usually happens just before an election.

When tempers get high, it is very difficult to cool things down, and sometimes the only way to clean the place up is by going to the people in an election.

That could be the reason behind the drama. As Poilievre is riding high in the polls, the timing for an election could not be better for the Conservatives.

Most people won't be paying that much attention to the parliamentary shenanigans as Canadians generally expect that level of behaviour from politicians at the best of times.

But for those who do, the decision by Poilievre to simply ignore the Speaker's ruling and focus his attack on Fergus should be a harbinger of what to expect in a Poilievre government.

Government Whip Steven MacKinnon linked Poilievre directly to Trump, referring to the dark state influence on the politics of both leaders.

Poilievre has worked hard to try and separate his party's right-wing perspective from that of the former American president.

But his actions in the House make the link for him.

The government has obviously decided to pivot from "happy days" and attack the nature of Poilievre's political support.

A week earlier, Trudeau had accused Poilievre courting conspiracy theorists and extremists. He highlighted Poilievre's refusal to denounce American conspiracy theorist Alex Jones who recently endorsed Poilievre for "saying the same things as me."

Trudeau is banking on the fact that the majority of Canadian voters may not want to be associated with white supremacists and conspiracy theorists.

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

The Hill Times

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



against his opponent will attract voters to his cause.

"Shameless, spineless" leadership and "wacko" were comments exchanged between Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Poilievre on April 30.

But Trudeau withdrew his unparliamentary attacks while Poilievre refused to.

As a result, House Speaker Greg Fergus was forced to "name" Poilievre and eject him from the House.

Fergus offered several chances for Poilievre to withdraw his ac-

Is it time for Singh and Trudeau to make bold moves?

In politics, it's often worth taking a risk. As the ancients understood, sometimes fortune does favour the bold.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit



That's to say consultants will sometimes urge their political clients to take bold risks, especially when defeat seems imminent.

When all seems lost, why not roll the dice? What have you got to lose?

This has me wondering if Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh—both of whom, as of this writing, have terrible polling numbers—are being pushed by their consultants and strategists to make some sort of dramatic and unexpected move.

Canadian pollster Darrell Bricker, for instance, recently mused that the NDP should play hardball with the Liberals when it comes to the budget.

As he put it on Twitter, "Until I saw our polling for Global News on politics and budget, would have bet \$1 NDP would support budget. Not so sure now. Why wait for LPC to make all deci-

sions about election timing? In change election a chance NDP could pass LPC and become official opposition."

In short, Bricker argues it'd be better for the NDP to face the Liberals in an election now when Trudeau and the government are at their weakest, rather than waiting for another year when the political equation might be much different.

And, yes, a year is a long time in politics. Lots can change.

Who knows? The Liberals might get a new leader, or Trudeau might stage a comeback.

So, it's certainly possible a consultant in the NDP's inner circle is pushing a bold Bricker-style plan to Singh.

But what about Trudeau? What would his bold move be?

Well, if I were advising the prime minister—which I'm not—I'd urge him to put a pause on his hated carbon tax.

Yes, I know that'd be seen as a massive and embarrassing retreat for the Liberals and, no doubt, environmental activists would scream bloody murder, including perhaps his own environment minister.

But, despite all that, it still might be worth a try.

For one thing, if Trudeau were to pull the plug on the carbon tax, it'd take away Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre's main talking point, i.e., "Axe the Tax."

Plus, by scrapping the carbon tax, Trudeau could present himself as a leader who empathizes with middle-class Canadians who are having a hard time making ends meet during these tough economic times.

That's a good message. It might even be good enough for Trudeau to turn the tide.

True, Poilievre and elements in the media would certainly assail

Trudeau as a flip-flopper, but in my view that's a weak political attack.

After all, if foisting the carbon tax on Canadian consumers made Trudeau wrong, then lifting it from Canadians would make him right.

Also keep in mind, last year Trudeau introduced a temporary pause on the carbon tax in Atlantic Canada for home heating oil, so, to a certain degree, he already has flip-flopped on this issue.

As they say, "in for a penny, in for a pound."

Of course, it's the easiest thing in the world for consultants to come up with brilliantly bold plans that sound good in theory; yet they always come with a risk.

For example, if Singh were to force an election over the budget, his party might get wiped out and he might even lose his seat.

And if Trudeau did pause the carbon tax, he might end up alienating the core of his own base.

Yet in politics it's often worth taking a risk.

As the ancients understood, sometimes fortune does favour the bold.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Opinion



Liberal MPs Pam Damoff, left, Francesco Sorbara and Salma Zahid. Damoff announced she would not run in the next election, citing misogyny, death threats, misinformation, disinformation, and the lack of civility. Politics is a place for bullies and belligerence, not public-spirited Canadians who want to serve their country, writes Michael Harris. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Pam Damoff's departure a canary in the coal mine on polarization

If this disenchanted MP has it right, in the caustic politics of polarization, only the fanatically partisan need apply.

Michael Harris

Harris



HALIFAX—It wasn't the biggest story coming out of Ottawa last week, but make no mistake about it, Pam Damoff's decision to leave politics is a canary in the mine. The call to public service is losing its lustre.

The Liberal MP cited misogyny, death threats, misinformation, disinformation, and the lack of civility as her reasons for not running in the next election. It sounds a little like what Fani Willis, district attorney of Fulton County, Ga., and former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi

faced in Trump World south of the border.

Damoff made clear that it's no fun coming to work anymore. The name of the game is no longer mediating policy differences on the merits in a rational and respectful way. It is all about scoring the damning quip/clip out of Question Period, misleading voters, demonizing opponents, and maximizing aggrievement, all of which undermine faith in basic institutions. Politics is a place for bullies and belligerence, not public-spirited Canadians who want to serve their country.

What Damoff has described as Canada's new way of doing politics, though, is not new at all. It is an American import straight out of Donald Trump's playbook.

It mimics Trump's attacks on the U.S. Department of Justice, on women, and on the free press—and anyone else who dares oppose him. Swift-boating has been replaced by crucifixion.

Trump's touchstones are chaos, confrontation, and calumny. That is increasingly becoming the signature of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Both Trump and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre have claimed that everything is

broken. The most rudimentary comparisons between North America and the rest of the planet make those claims patently absurd. But as political messaging, the politics of aggrievement is working. Why?

The landscape of traditional politics has profoundly changed. The *New York Times* recently published a piece saying that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was "no match" for today's polarized politics. The piece predicted that Trudeau is destined to lose the next election.

More than that, Canada could lose its fundamental nature as a multicultural society with what seems likely to be a lurch to the right.

The *Times* piece opined that Trudeau was on his way out, not because of poor polls alone, as gruesome as those polls are. The more important reason is the "flummoxed figure of Trudeau himself" who appears out of touch with the new world of division and extremism. The world Damoff has rejected.

"The right-wing tide overwhelming global politics has come late, but with pent-up energy to Canada," Stephen Marche wrote in the *Times*. Pent up energy, indeed.

Poilievre's recent ejection from the House of Commons is being used to undermine the institution of Parliament. The Conservative leader called the PM "wacko," and repeatedly refused to take back this clearly "unparliamentary" language.

Conservative MP Rachael Thomas was also ejected from the House after saying that Speaker Greg Fergus was acting in a "disgraceful manner"

When Poilievre left the House for his one-day expulsion, the entire Conservative caucus also left the chamber. Many of his MPs defended Poilievre's choice of words, and then moved the standoff to the next level.

Not only was their leader justified in calling Trudeau a "wacko prime minister", but the Speaker of the House was acting as a partisan Liberal when he gave Poilievre the boot. That's because Fergus allowed the prime minister to accuse his opposite number of "spineless" leadership without ejecting him. The Conservative message to Canadians? The House of Commons is rigged.

The Poilievre camp accused the Speaker of trying to protect the prime minister from "tough questions." Last time I looked, calling someone "wacko" is not a question, but a slander. It is noteworthy that in accusing Fergus of being a biased Liberal, there is an unmistakable echo of America's most indicted politician.

During his current trial for falsifying business records to conceal from voters before the 2016 election his affair with an adult film actress, Trump has accused both the judge and the jury of being "Democrats."

That is plainly absurd. Trump is merely hedging against the impact of a guilty verdict in the Stormy Daniels case. His message? If things don't go his way, it means it's all rigged.

So no matter what the jury finds, he is not guilty; the system is just corrupt. Trump wants the judge in his case to recuse

himself, and Poilievre wants Speaker Fergus to resign. What a coincidence.

Poilievre's polarizing politics were on full display in his recent appearance in the Maritimes at an anti-carbon tax protest.

Normally, a national political leader would not want to be seen attending an event where people had "Fuck Trudeau" signs. Not exactly the path to statesmanship for a man who wants to be prime minister.

Normally, a national leader wouldn't enter a trailer, as Poilievre did, with a Diagonol symbol drawn on the door. Diagonol is on the radar of the RCMP as a group that believes that civil war and the collapse of government is inevitable. The group would like to see that happen sooner than later.

Again, Poilievre's refusal to denounce white nationalists—like his refusal to disavow the endorsement of American conspiracy theorist Alex Jones—has a Trumpian echo.

Remember Charlottesville, Virginia, where a white supremacist rally, Unite the Right, was met by counter-protestors?

Thirty-two year old Heather Heyer was killed when a young man drove his car into the counter-protestors. Thirty-five others were injured. Not only did Trump fail to denounce the white supremacist march, which followed a rally by the Ku Klux Klan, he said that there were "very fine people on both sides."

If Damoff's departure from politics tells us anything it is that there may soon be a shortage of "very fine" people in public life, people willing to invest their time and shed their privacy in the name of serving their country.

If this disenchanted MP has it right, in the caustic politics of polarization, only the fanatically partisan need apply.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist.

The Hill Times

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Global



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, left, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, and France's Front National Leader Marine Le Pen. Each country is doing a good job of invoking the quote that history repeats itself first as tragedy, and then as farce. Photographs courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, European Union

Europe is not leading a charge to the right

Americans may elect Donald Trump this November, and Canadians may elect Pierre Poilievre next year, but Europe is not leading a charge to the right.

Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—“History repeats itself—the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce,” said Karl Marx. He was talking about European history, of course, and here it comes again, a century later, doing a tribute act to the 1920s.

In Germany, we have had a replay of Adolf Hitler’s failed coup attempt of 1923. The first of three trials opened in Stuttgart last week, targeting nine alleged ring-leaders of the ‘military wing’ of the far-right ‘Reichsbürger’ group who were arrested two years ago on charges of high treason, attempted murder, and membership of a terrorist organization.

Further mass trials will follow in Frankfurt this month for the ‘political wing,’ and in Munich in June for what the prosecutors chose to call the ‘esoteric wing.’ There’s a clue there, if you are paying attention. These would-be emulators of Hitler are not actually ex-stormtroopers hardened by years in the trenches. They are nasty, but marginal fantasists.

Another clue lies in the name of their leader, a 72-year-old self-styled aristocrat calling himself Heinrich XIII, Prince Reuss. They really did want to take over Germany and remake it as a neo-fascist state, they really did hate the Jews, and at least some of them were willing to kill, but they were never a serious threat.

In Italy, where the other great inter-war dictator, Benito Mussolini, seized power and created the world’s first fascist state in 1922, there is already a neo-fascist in power. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni formed her first government in 2022, but she uses no violence, she’s loyal to the NATO alliance, and she seems almost harmless.

Maybe she’s just biding her time, but there’s no sign that she is planning to invade Ethiopia or even Greece. There are no gangs of fascist thugs beating people to death, and no political prisoners. Life in Italy is pretty normal, in fact.

So it is in Spain, although you wouldn’t think so if you listened to the People’s Party (PP), the increasingly hard-right, ultra-nationalist opposition to Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez’s Socialist Workers’ Party. The PP calls him a “psychopath,” a “traitor,” and a “terrorist sympathizer” who deserves to be “strung up by his feet,” but it obeys the law.

Claims that the Spanish prime minister’s wife is really a man and that her family runs the drug

trade in Morocco were so hurtful that Sánchez took five days off to ponder whether he really wants to stay in politics. However, it’s really just the online rules of engagement leaking into the real world. There’s no new Franco plotting an armed fascist rebellion.

And in Poland, the ultra-nationalist, militantly religious Law and Justice Party was voted out of power last year despite claiming that the opposition leader, Donald Tusk, is planning to give half of Poland to Russia, and bring “German order” to what’s left. (You know, exactly like the Nazis did). The point is that the Law and Justice Party didn’t win, and neither did the PP in Spain.

Meloni only won by pretending very hard not to be a fascist, and the Reichsbürger in Germany were just a comic opera group (albeit with loaded guns).

Marine Le Pen in France may come closer to winning the presidency on her fourth try in 2027 than ever before, but her Rassemblement National party has achieved that by ditching almost all of its extreme-right policies

except for its trademark hostility to immigration.

Britain’s Conservative Party has shifted steadily to the right during its 14 years in power, but whatever influence that might have had in the alleged rightward migration of other European parties was nullified by its lunatic obsession with Brexit, and its stunning incompetence and indiscipline. It will be all but annihilated in the election due this year.

The Labour Party—which will take its place—is pretending to have no intention of shifting the United Kingdom even a millimetre to the left because it is superstitiously terrified of scaring the voters back into the arms of the Conservatives, but that is not a realistic possibility. After it wins, it will set about rescuing the welfare state.

The results of the forthcoming elections to the European Union’s Parliament may provide some apparent evidence for a rightward drift in European politics, but that’s because people use their EU votes as a safe way to express their dissatisfaction with the economy. However, national elections really matter.

Americans may elect Donald Trump this November, and Canadians may elect Pierre Poilievre next year, but Europe is not leading a charge to the right.

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

The Hill Times



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Opinion

Bring back civility and morality to the House before it's really gone

Last week's disgraceful incident in the House should have all federal elected officials hanging their heads in shame. Just how did you let it get to this? Who's going to lead?

Rose LeMay

Stories, Myths, and Truths



Continued from page 1

different to almost everybody. It's a term and expectation that is based in culture, both one's own culture and the subculture of the organization. The fastest way to internal conflict is to avoid having this essential discussion: what do we expect

in each other's behaviour while we work together?

The fact is that "professionalism" just like any other cultural norm in that it changes over time. Picture the 1970s and the male boss—because women were rarely promoted back then—with his feet on his desk. What was considered "professional" in the 1970s wouldn't meet the mark for "professional" in the 2020s, which is evidence that it is based more in cultural norms than a static construct.

But when Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre called Prime Minister Justin Trudeau "wacko" for a policy position in the House last week, it went beyond expectations of professionalism. Poilievre exhibited childish behaviour which doesn't meet anybody's expectations for leadership.

Trudeau doesn't get a free pass in this disgraceful incident on the Hill. In his attempts to call out Poilievre for meeting with certain far-right elements that appear to support Diagonal, Trudeau also used some childish words and called him "spineless."

Yes, Poilievre needs to be called out for meeting with individuals from the far-right who appear to be working to take down governments in any way possible. And no,



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre on the Hill on April 16, 2024. Last week, he was asked to leave the Commons after refusing to withdraw his 'wacko' comment directed at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. All Conservative MPs followed him. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

this use of the word "take down" is not Indigenous when we devolve decision-making closer to community. Diagonal, in its white supremacy hoodies proclaiming "pure blood," wants to destroy governments to bring the end times faster to your doorstep.

This disgraceful incident should have all federal elected officials hanging their heads in shame. Just how did you let it get to this? How did you allow the tone of debate to devolve into the gutter, so bad that we can't let our kids watch you work?

The results of this hot mess will continue to ripple.

The Liberals blew this moment to hell. Canadians need leaders who can call each other in, not lose their heads. We need

leaders who can bridge divides, not toss grenades to widen them.

The Conservatives appear to be in bed with the far-right in this country, but how will they be held accountable? Conservatives are sounding more and more like the U.S. Congress member Marjorie Taylor Greene, the conspiracy theorist on any given day most likely to say something unhinged from reality and accountability.

Getting to the point, are the Conservatives getting closer to white supremacy and hate towards 2SLGBTQ+ people by showing up with this far-right hate group? Prove me wrong.

Let's also talk about the weird response by Conservatives who, instead of an apology, claimed that "wacko" has been said before on the Hill, so there. Just because it was done before doesn't mean you can continue. That's questionable logic.

Case in point, about 100 years ago, some MPs argued against the immigration of non-white people. We realized the grave error of our ways, and stopped this criminal racism of the past. We have evolved past this criminal racism as a country. The quality of debates on the Hill must evolve and improve, just like anything else we do as humans.

House Speaker Greg Fergus attempted to hold the Commons to a higher standard, and yet again was met with child-like resistance. Conservatives walked out, a move very much like my grandchildren when they don't get their popsicles.

Please get back to governing, debating policy positions with professionalism and respect. Bring back civility and morality to the House before you lose it all.

It's not only your careers in question, it is our society. Model something that we can allow our children to see.

Rose LeMay is Tlingit from the West Coast, and the CEO of the Indigenous Reconciliation Group. She writes twice a month about Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation. In Tlingit worldview, the stories are the knowledge system, sometimes told through myth and sometimes contradicting the myths told by others. But always with at least some truth.

The Hill Times



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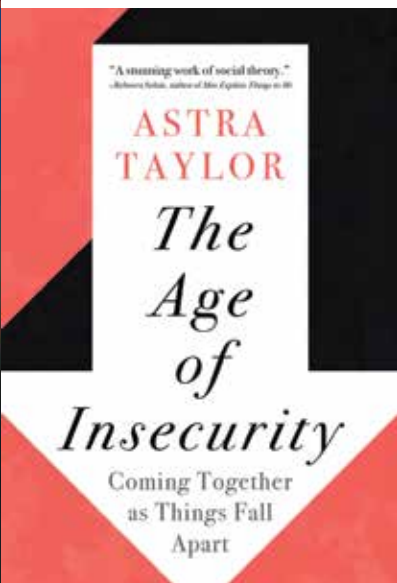
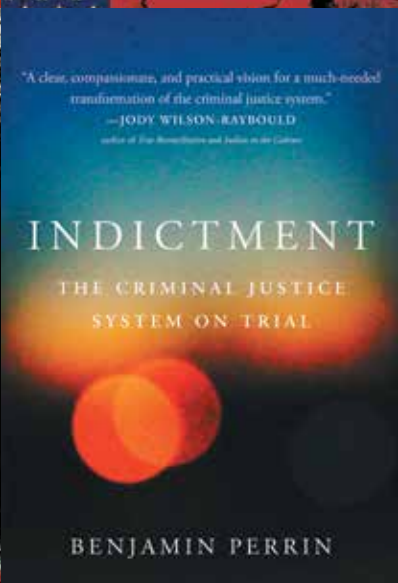
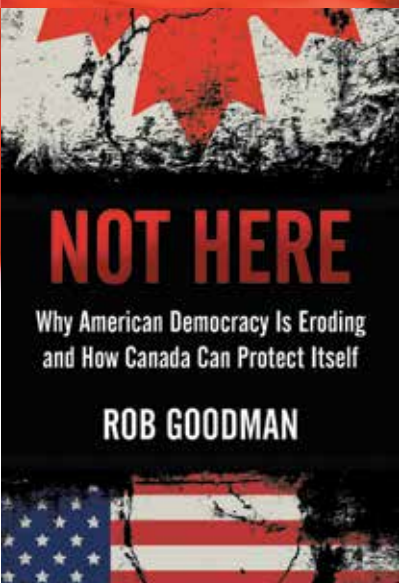
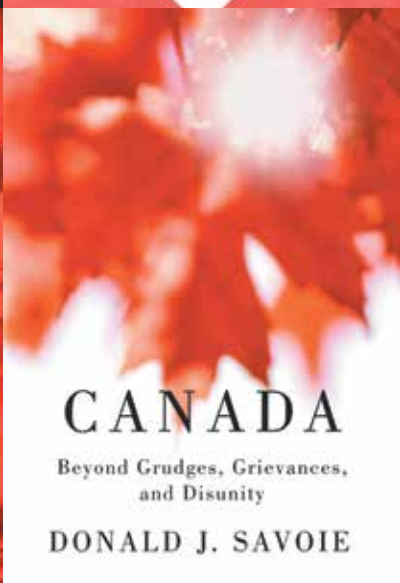
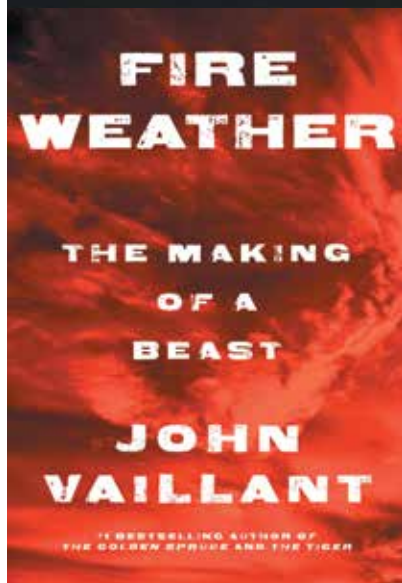
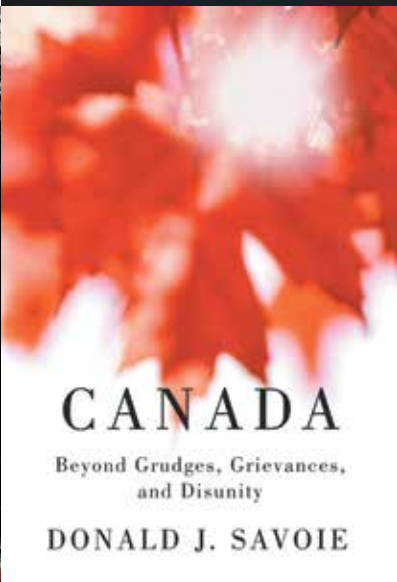
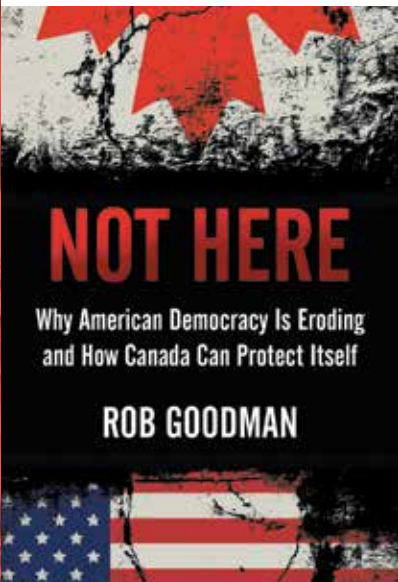
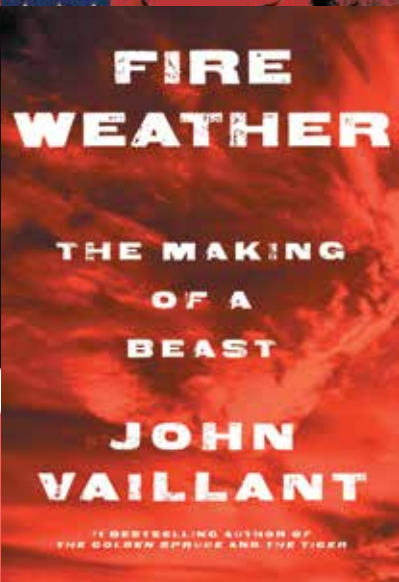
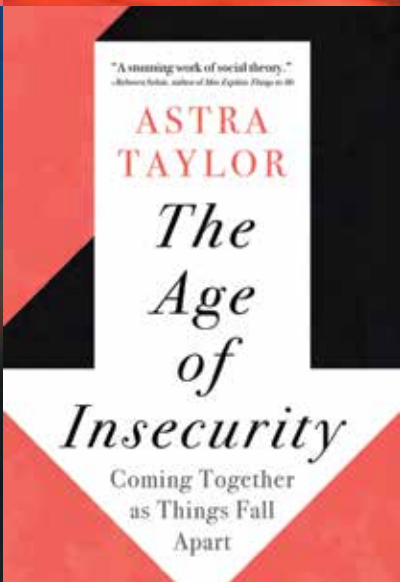
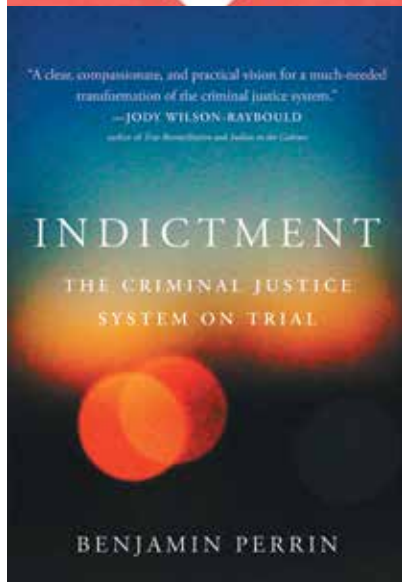
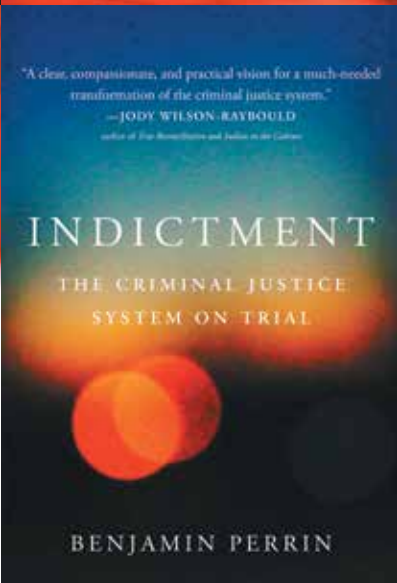
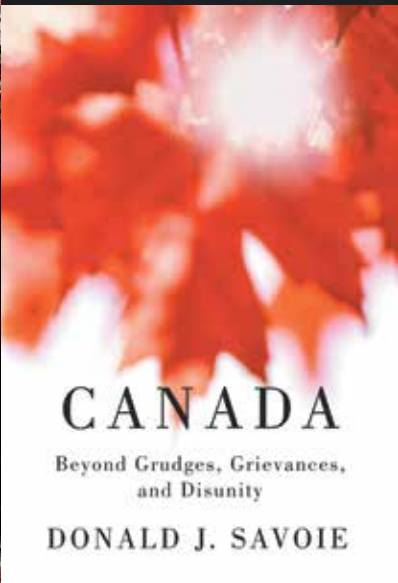
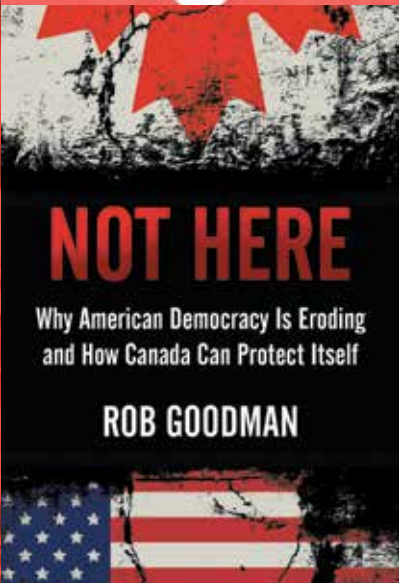
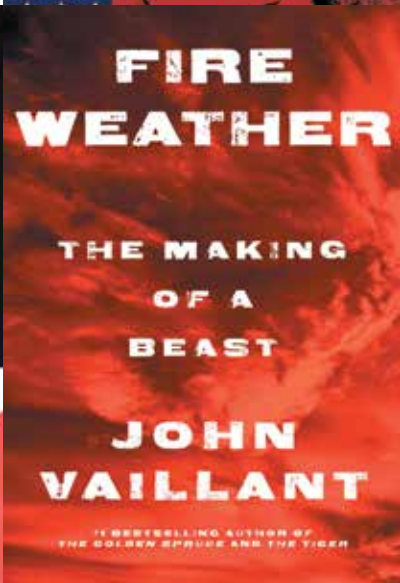
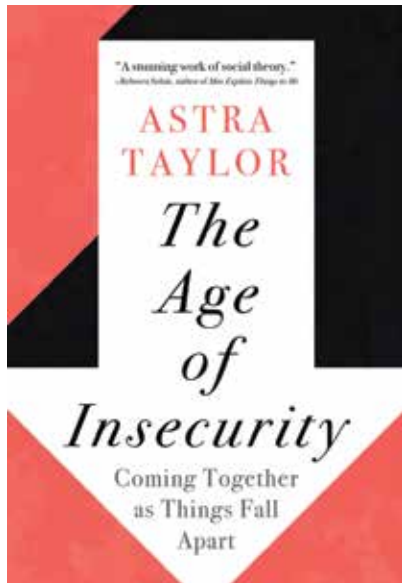
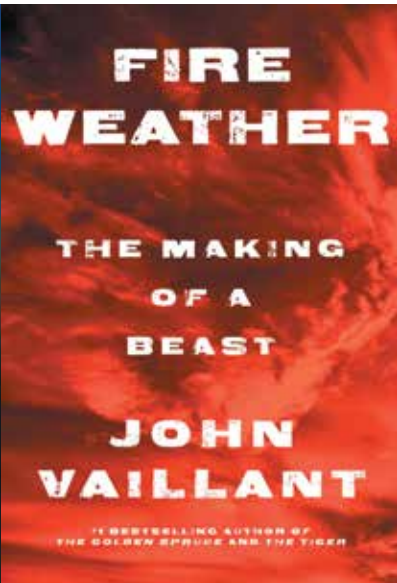
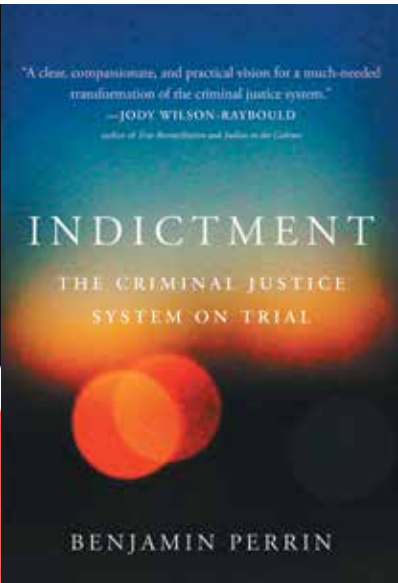
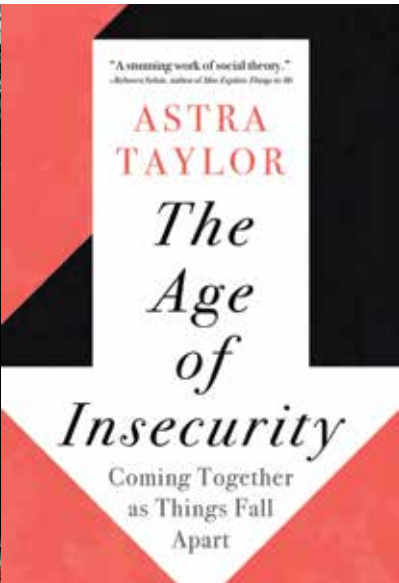
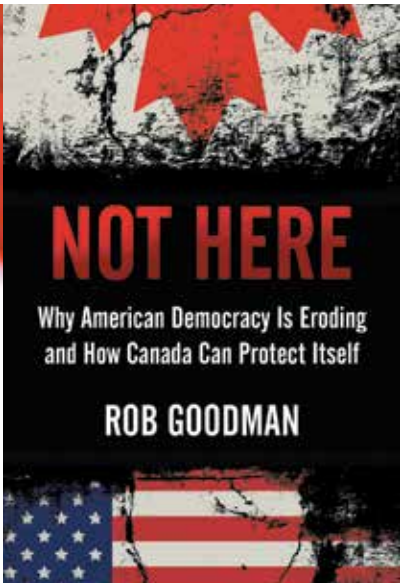
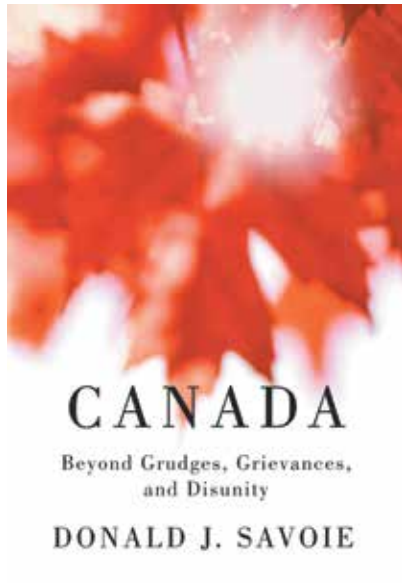
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Politics & the Pen: 2024



Politics & the Pen

‘This is a big night’: Politics and the Pen returns for annual black-tie event

This year’s Shaughnessy Cohen Prize nominees touch on wildfire, threats to democracy, the criminal justice system, social insecurity, and national unity.

BY ZACK LADOUCEUR

On May 7, Politics and the Pen’s black-tie fundraiser will fête writers, reporters, corporate sponsors, politicians, bureaucrats, diplomats, and lots of authors in a celebration of the literary word, and a cash prize for one lucky scribe.

“This is a big night in Ottawa, if not the most anticipated. All that makes the heart of the Parliamentary Precinct beat converges in one room, in one night, to celebrate what we love best: political writing,” said Elizabeth Gray-Smith, co-chair of the Politics and the Pen organizing committee. “It is a boisterous toast to the truth found between the pages, one that rumbles through the halls of the Fairmont Château Laurier and spills onto Wellington. If you are not in that room, you certainly hear it.”

The annual event at the Château Laurier is an important revenue source for the Writers’ Trust of Canada. Since 2000, the fundraiser dinner has cumulatively raised more than \$5-million. The net proceeds go to support The Writers’ Trust’s literary programs. Last year, for example, the event raised more than \$350,000 with about 500 attendees.

“The money raised is a significant shot in the arm to the operations of the Writers’ Trust of



CBC’s Raffy Boudjikianian, left; Elizabeth Gray-Smith, co-chair of the Politics and the Pen; and CBC New Brunswick’s Jacques Poitras at the Politics and the Pen Gala on May 10, 2023. Politics and the Pen is one of the most important fundraisers for the Writers’ Trust of Canada, with about 500 people attending last year’s event. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canada. Every dollar pours into the ink of the writers they support across the country,” said Patrick Kennedy, co-chair of the Politics and the Pen organizing committee. “Writers bring us stories and an understanding of the world around us. Anyone who picks up a book written by a Canadian writer benefits.”

Two former premiers are hosting this year’s gala: Alberta’s Jason Kenney, and Ontario’s Kathleen Wynne.

Central to the event is the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing, the winning author of which will receive a prize of \$25,000. The prize was created in 2000, in honor of Shaughnessy Cohen, a Liberal MP for Windsor-Tecumseh, Ont., who suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and collapsed in the House of Commons on Dec. 9, 1998, becoming the first MP to die in the Chamber.

Five non-fiction authors are up for this year’s prize, and the remaining finalists will receive \$2,500. Each was selected because their work demonstrates a distinctive voice, as well as a persuasive

and compelling command of tone, narrative, style, and analysis.

The award’s recipient, according to the Writers’ Trust website, will be an “exceptional book of literary nonfiction that captures a political subject of relevance to Canadian readers and has the potential to shape or influence thinking on contemporary Canadian political life.”

“The winning work combines compelling new insights with a depth of research and significant literary merit. The prize values books that provide the reader with an informed perspective on the practice of Canadian politics, its players, or its principles,” the website states.

The first shortlisted book is, *Not Here: Why American Democracy Is Eroding and How Canada Can Protect Itself*, by Rob Goodman, and published by Simon & Schuster Canada. A former U.S. congressional staffer, Goodman wrote about his experiences witnessing growing authoritarianism in that country, and how Canada can protect democracy from threats that have already

affected the system of our closest neighbour.

Benjamin Perrin’s *Indictment: The Criminal Justice System on Trial*, published by Aevo UTP is another nominee. A law professor at the University of British Columbia, former law clerk at the Supreme Court of Canada, and in-house legal counsel in the Prime Minister’s Office, Perrin examines growing polarization over how Canada’s criminal justice system should operate, and includes the perspectives of those on the frontline of that system.

Past prize nominee Donald J. Savoie has again been shortlisted, this time for *Canada: Beyond Grudges, Grievances, and Disunity*, and published by McGill-Queen’s University Press. The book description states that it “describes how Canada’s colonial institutions designed for a unitary state and organized contrary to the north-south economic pull have posed a challenge for leaders to operate successfully. The struggle has created regional schisms of people that feel less than part of the Canadian community and self-identify as victims.” Savoie was previously nominated for the 2013 Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for *Whatever Happened to the Music Teacher? How Government Decides and Why*.

Next up is *The Age of Insecurity: Coming Together as Things Fall Apart*, written by Astra Taylor, and published by House of Anansi Press. The co-founder of debtors union Debt Collective posits that seemingly unrelated national and global crises come from a social order built on insecurity.

The final nominee is *Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast*, written by John Vaillant, and published by Knopf Canada. The

book documents the 2016 wildfire that devastated Fort McMurray, Alta., the factors that caused it, and the relationship between fire, fossil fuels, and a heating world. Vaillant is an author and journalist who has received the Governor General’s Literary Award, and the Pearson Writers’ Trust Prize for Nonfiction, among other awards.

The jurors this year are Dale Eisler, host Wynne, and Joanna Chiu. They each read 46 books submitted by 28 publishers. Both Chiu and Eisler are former nominees, with Chiu winning the award in 2022 for her book *China Unbound: A New World Disorder*. She is the China editor for technology publication *Rest of World*, has previously worked for the *Toronto Star*, and has appeared on CBC, BBC World, Al Jazeera, and NPR. Eisler is a former journalist and a top federal public servant who has written four books, three of which are nonfiction. His book *From Left to Right* was shortlisted for last year’s Shaughnessy Cohen Prize.

The other Politics and the Pen committee members are Jim Armour, Hardave Birk, Maureen Boyd, Heather Bradley, Dan Mader, Rob Rosenfeld, and Alex Spence.

The Hill Times

List of previous winners:

- 2023: *How to Be a Climate Optimist: Blueprints for a Better World*, by Chris Turner
- 2022: *China Unbound, a New World Disorder*, by Joanna Chiu
- 2021: *Reset: Reclaiming the Internet for Civil Society*, by Ronald J. Deibert
- 2019: *Truth Be Told: My Journey Through Life and the Law*, by Beverley McLachlin
- 2018: *Boys: What it Means to Become a Man*, by Rachel Giese
- 2017: *Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City*, by Tanya Talaga
- 2016: *Brown: What Being Brown in the World Today Means (To Everyone)*, by Kamal Al-Solaylee
- 2015: *Stephen Harper*, by John Ibbotson
- 2014: *Enlightenment 2.0: Restoring Sanity to Our Politics, Our Economy, and Our Lives*, by Joseph Heath
- 2013: *The Longer I’m Prime Minister: Stephen Harper and Canada, 2006*, by Paul Wells
- 2012: *Walls: Travels Along the Barricades*, by Marcello Di Cintio
- 2011: *Nation Maker: Sir John A. Macdonald: His Life, Our Times; Volume Two: 1867-1891*, by Richard Gwyn
- 2010: *The Ghosts of Europe: Journeys Through Central Europe’s Troubled Past and Uncertain Future*, by Anna Porter
- 2009: *Just Watch Me: The Life of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, 1968-2000*, by John English
- 2008: *An Imperfect Offering: Humanitarian Action in the Twenty-first Century*, by James Orbinski
- 2007: *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar*, by Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang
- 2006: *Young Trudeau: Son of Quebec, Father of Canada, 1919-1944*, by Max & Monique Nemni William Johnson



Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc, centre, and Hardave Birk, right, at the Politics and the Pen Gala on May 10, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

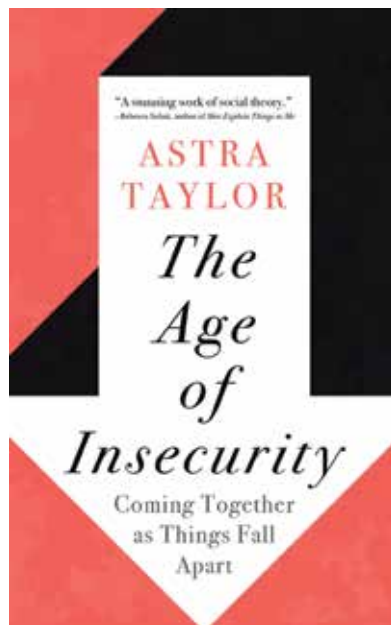
Inequality and its pernicious effects on culture and democracy

The following is an excerpt from *The Age of Insecurity: Coming Together as Things Fall Apart*, by Astra Taylor, and published by House of Anansi Press. The book is one of five finalists for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

BY ASTRA TAYLOR

Capitalism, as economists from Karl Marx to John Maynard Keynes and Thomas Piketty have understood, is prefaced on producing a profit, which can then be reinvested to make more profit in turn. It is, in philosopher Nancy Fraser's terminology, "voracious," relentless in its pursuit of new markets and growth. This means that our current capitalist system is set up less to meet and fulfill our current needs than it is to generate new ones, which, of course, can only be met through additional consumption—consumption of new lifestyles, experiences, products, upgrades, and apps with features we suddenly can't live without.

Capitalism thrives on bad feelings, on the knowledge that contented people buy less—an insight the old American trade magazine *Printers' Ink* stated bluntly: "Satisfied customers are not as profitable as discontented ones." Consumer society thus capitalizes on the very insecurities it produces, which it then prods and perpetuates, making us all insecure by design. It had never occurred to me, for example, to fret over the buccal fat in my cheeks until I recently saw it described by the *Guardian* as a "fresh source of insecurity to carry into the new year." No matter how much we have, we are ensnared in systems that are structured to trigger insecurity, propelling us to endlessly strive for an ideal that we will always fall short of. This is why no advertising or marketing department will ever tell us that we're actually okay, and that it is the world, not us, that needs changing.



Astra Taylor: 'How we understand and respond to insecurity is one of the most urgent questions of our moment, for nothing less than the future security of our species hangs in the balance. Insecurity can cut both ways, serving as a conduit to empathy, humility, and belonging—or it can spur defensive and destructive compulsions.' Book cover and author photograph courtesy of House of Anansi Press Inc.

This kind of insecurity, which I call "manufactured insecurity," contrasts with the "existential insecurity" that is an inherent facet of human life. Where the latter is an ineradicable feature of our being, one reflective of our innate vulnerability and mortality, the former is a mechanism that facilitates exploitation and profit and is anything but inevitable. Indeed, the insight that capitalism is a kind of insecurity-producing machine—that insecurity is not an unfortunate side effect, but a core attribute of the system—is one that this book examines through different lenses. For too long, manufactured insecurity has been viewed as a useful mechanism to incentivize people to perform or suffer the consequences, goading us to keep working, earning, and craving—craving money, material goods, prestige, and more, more, more. "Along with the carrot of pecuniary reward must go the stick of personal economic disaster," Canadian-American economist John Kenneth Galbraith observed. This approach relies on a cynical theory of human motivation, one that says people will work only under the threat of duress, not from an intrinsic desire to create, collaborate, and care for one another.

My perspective is shaped by the years I've spent focused on the topic of inequality and its pernicious effects on culture and democracy both in my creative work as a filmmaker and writer and as an activist. Nearly a decade ago, I helped found the Debt Collective, the world's first union for debtors, which has become a

bastion for people who are broke and overwhelmed. Inequality is, indeed, out of control, with 10 billionaire men possessing six times more wealth than the poorest three billion people on Earth. But numbers do not capture the true nature or extent of the crisis. Insecurity, in contrast, describes how inequality is lived day after day. Where inequality can be represented by points on a graph, insecurity speaks to how those points feel, hovering in space over a tattered safety net or nothing at all. The writer Barbara Ehrenreich, in her 1989 study of the psychology of the middle class, dubbed the condition "fear of falling." But today there's barely any middle left, and everyone is afraid of what lies below.

Part of the insidious and overwhelming power of insecurity is that, unlike inequality, it is subjective. Sentiments, or how actual people actually feel, rarely map rationally onto statistics; you do not have to be at rock bottom to feel insecure, because insecurity results as much from expectation as from deprivation. This is why insecurity impacts the well-being of people on every rung of the economic ladder, from the impecunious to the privileged (albeit in very different ways). Recent years have produced an abundance of scholarship demonstrating the negative effects of inequality on health and happiness across the board. Rising inequality, and the insecurity it causes, correlates with higher rates of physical illness, depression, anxiety, drug abuse, and addiction. Living in a highly competitive and consumer-

ist society, research shows, makes everyone more status-conscious, stressed out, and sick.

Economic issues, I've learned, are also emotional ones: the spike of shame when a bill collector calls, the adrenaline when the rent is due, the foreboding when you think about retirement. But where my organizing work has focused primarily on the problems endured by the poor—debtors, by definition, have negative net worth—my conviction is that our current economic arrangement also harms people who have means, and that the pervasiveness of insecurity provides evidence of this fact. When we examine society through the lens of insecurity, which affects everyone, as opposed to inequality, which emphasizes two opposing extremes, we can see the degree to which unnecessary suffering is widespread even among those who appear to be "winning," according to the logic of the capitalist game. No one is totally immune to anxiety and bad feelings, no matter how high they sit on the income graph, just as no one can totally insulate themselves from the economic and ecological shocks to come.

Recognizing how we are all made insecure improves our odds of devising a just, collective response to our era's intersecting crises. Trying to cope alone, in contrast, puts us all at risk. History, including recent history, shows that hard times, or even the mere anticipation of them—the subjective feeling of being economically insecure and anticipating the worst, whether or not those fears are objectively justified—can

increase the appeal of racism and xenophobia. Across the world, the reactionary far right has gained ground by speaking directly to atomized and isolated people's fears and anxieties, and offering scapegoats to blame: immigrants, Muslims, Jewish people, Black people, trans people, women seeking abortions, and so on. Too often, insecurity propels the embrace of social hierarchy and domination, much the way the threat of environmental disaster and the coronavirus pandemic have fuelled science denial and other doomed attempts to escape insecurity by taking false solace in superiority and certitude.

And yet this rightward tilt is far from preordained. Insecurity can also inspire a more hopeful response. My own experience organizing financially insecure debtors validates research confirming that economic insecurity can also, as one recent academic paper puts it, make people "more likely to sympathize with the poor than resent them," and increase their support for redistributive policies and an expanded welfare state. And we can certainly see, from the efflorescence of social movements in recent years, that the experience of shared oppression and ecological calamity can also help unite people, serving as a catalyst for positive social change. But that process of building solidarity doesn't happen automatically. This is why I believe talking about insecurity and, ultimately, organizing to address it are such urgent tasks. Even as we pay more and more attention to the problem of inequality, continuing to ignore its companion insecurity will only accelerate already grave political risks, including the already formidable authoritarian backlash.

How we understand and respond to insecurity is one of the most urgent questions of our moment, for nothing less than the future security of our species hangs in the balance. Insecurity can cut both ways, serving as a conduit to empathy, humility, and belonging—or it can spur defensive and destructive compulsions. We can run from insecurity or we can learn from it, finding connection in our common fragility and reorienting our priorities in recognition of this existential fact.

This is an excerpt from *The Age of Insecurity: Coming Together as Things Fall Apart*, by Astra Taylor, published by House of Anansi Press.

The Hill Times

Author Q&A with Astra Taylor

Why is this book important?

"The status quo isn't working for anyone, even those who appear to have it all. By facing our existential insecurity and embracing our vulnerability, we can begin to develop more caring, inclusive, and sustainable forms of security to help us better weather the challenges ahead."

Who should read it?

"Everyone who feels insecure and anxious about the future."

Politics & the Pen

An enthralling exploration of the Petrocene Age

In *Fire Weather*, John Vaillant combines history, science, and Promethean fable to place the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires as a harbinger of a new fire century.

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

Before the 2023 evacuations of Yellowknife, the suburbs of Halifax, West Kelowna, and Chibougamau, there was Fort McMurray.

For just over eight years, the wildfire that swept through the northern Alberta city in May 2016 and forced the evacuation of more than 88,000 people from their homes has loomed large in the minds of Canadians and international observers alike. Thousands of homes were destroyed, tens of thousands of people were displaced, and production in the Athabasca oilsands temporarily ground to a halt.

This disaster is the focus of John Vaillant's *Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast*, but it would be a disservice to both the book and its author to state that it is a mere retelling of those horror days in spring 2016.

Vaillant's goal in writing this book is far more ambitious than a mere recount—it seeks to place this disaster in the context of the “Petrocene Age” in which we find ourselves. It is simultaneously a post mortem on firefighting response, a geology textbook on oilsands, a travelogue on the world's boreal forests, a history of northern Alberta's petroleum industry, a philosophical treatise on the nature of fire, and a prophecy of things to come in a world of accelerated climate change, packed into just under 400 pages.

In addition to the book's title, *Fire Weather* is also the subheading for the longest of the book's three parts. It is in this section that we follow the protagonist—Fire 009—from its birth and discovery on May 1, 2016, to its path of destruction over a few short days. We are joined by a cast of charac-



An aerial view of the aftermath of wildfire in Fort McMurray, Alta., as seen in September 2016. Flickr photo by Jason Woodhead

ters—firefighters, oil sands workers, radio presenters, municipal officials—who try their damndest to fight Fire 009 and save their community, or otherwise do their best to survive the onslaught.

Wildfire is fast and unpredictable, and this is reflected in the text. The difference between

11 a.m. on May 3, 2016, and a few hours later is the difference between normal life—thinking about school or work, tidying up the house—and localized apocalypse.

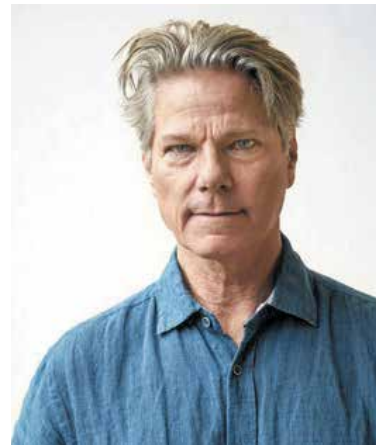
It is that transition phase that is so terrifying, and so well documented. Vaillant takes us almost minute by minute as it dawns on residents, officials, and firefighters that this is no ordinary wildfire, and that the details in a press conference about the state of the blaze became redundant almost as soon as that conference ended.

Anyone who has found themselves in the moment that an out-of-control fire turns towards you—and I am among them—knows the experience is chilling. One minute, the cloud of smoke is safely confined to your horizon, present but unalarming. The next, the sky has darkened, the air smells of burning, ash and embers land on you, and the world turns a deep orange.

Vaillant captures both that moment, and its aftermath, taking us to the front lines as firefighters do what they can to save houses, into the trucks of evacuees as they pray that they have enough gas to make it out of the danger zone, and into the

evacuation centres as anxious families fear their worst about their loved ones.

It's the formula that serves disaster films so well, in which we briefly meet the cast of characters in their normal lives before they are thrust into an upside-down hell. If that were the book's entirety, it would remain an excellent read. But Vaillant goes further. He doesn't want to tell you what happened, he wants you to know *how*.



Author John Vaillant. Image courtesy of Penguin Random House Canada/Ian Hinkle

That, then, is how the remaining two thirds of this story unfolds. Bookending the “Fire Weather” section are the book's “Origin Stories” and “Reckoning” sections.

In “Origin Stories,” we learn the context, about the life cycle of the boreal forest, and of the natural development of bitumen in the Athabasca region.

Then enter humans, from the Indigenous Peoples of the region, to the early European explorers, the first inkling that the sands throughout the region could be utilized for the growing industrial revolution, attempts to develop the sands into usable crude oil, and the resulting boom town that is modern-day Fort McMurray.

Snaking its way through the tale is fire, from its role in the regeneration of the boreal ecosystem to its controlled use in everything from the internal combustion engine to gas stoves in the modern “Petrocene.”

Vaillant brings us on this journey with a precision that leaves the reader with an understanding of what fuelled the disaster, but in broad enough terms to leave us entertained. It is in these sections that his work as an author shines—chapters about the chemical composition of fire are just as riveting as the later passages about the mass evacuation of an entire city.

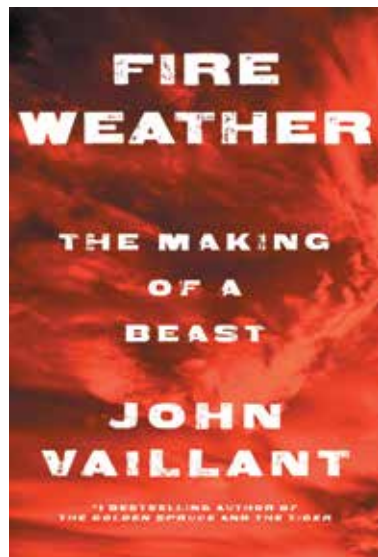
In “Reckoning,” the cost—both present and future—is counted. The reckoning mentioned in the title is not just of the devastation wrought by Fire 009, but of the continued burning of fossil fuels and resultant climate change. In the final chapters, we are taken through the worst-case scenarios of unimpeded greenhouse gas emissions, we travel to other fire-grounds in California and Australia, and to a future in which we adapt to these conditions brought about by the Anthropocene.

Whether historical recount, Promethean fable, or human drama, *Fire Weather*'s greatest quality is its readability. Unlike so many nonfiction titles, it is easy to pick up again after a long spell and immediately understand the stakes. Whether giving his audience a satellite view of Western Canada, a human-level view of an incoming firestorm, or a ground view of smouldering forest litter, Vaillant places the reader firmly in wildfire country, whether you're reading in Fort McMurray, Nunavut, or the Sahara.

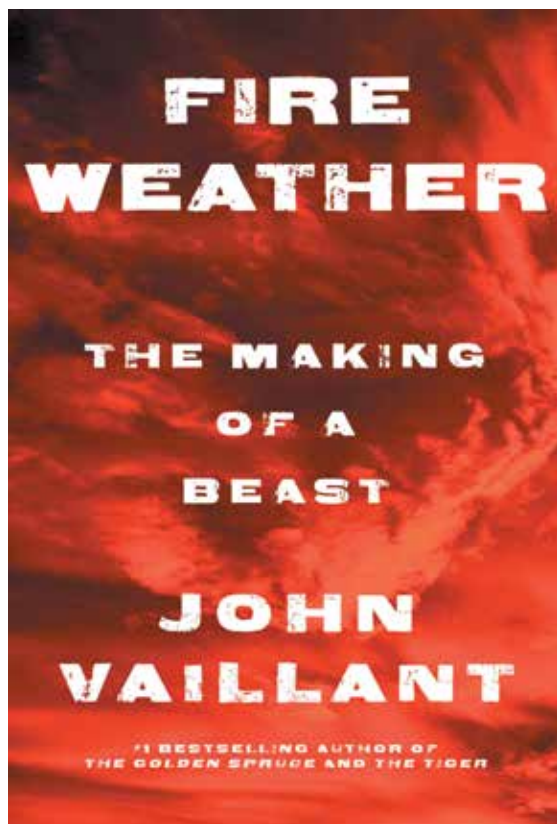
As anyone who lived through the smoke clouds that hung over our largest cities last summer can attest, wildfires are becoming part of our lives no matter how far we are from the inferno. Vaillant lays out the consequences of the fossil fuel-driven world we have created in alarming, riveting detail.

Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast, by John Vaillant, published by Penguin Random House/Knopf Canada, is one of five finalists for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize, the Writers' Trust award for the best political book of the year.

The Hill Times



Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast, by John Vaillant. Image courtesy of Penguin Random House Canada



Author John Vaillant: 'Anyone concerned about the future of our nation, and why a quarter of a million—Canadians were forced to flee their homes due to wildfires last summer.' Book cover and photo courtesy Knopf Canada

Vaillant's *Fire Weather* looks at devastating synergy between our dependence on fossil fuels and its impact on the climate

Below is an excerpt from *Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast*, by John Vaillant, published by Knopf Canada, one of the five finalists for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

BY JOHN VAILLANT

On a hot afternoon in May 2016, five miles outside the young petro city of Fort McMurray, Alta., a small wildfire flickered and ventilated, rapidly expanding its territory through a mixed forest that hadn't seen fire in decades.

This fire, farther off than the others, had started out doing what most human-caused wildfires do in their first hours of life: working its way tentatively from the point of ignition through grass, forest duff, and dead leaves—a fire's equivalent to baby food.

These fuels, in combination with the weather, would deter-

mine what kind of fire this one was going to be: a creeping, ground-level smoulder doomed to smother in the heavy dew of a cool and windless spring night, or something bigger, more durable, and dynamic—a fire that could turn night into day and day into night, that could, unchecked and all-consuming, bend the world to its will. It was early in the season for wildfires, but crews from the Wild Fire Division of Alberta's Ministry of Forestry and Agriculture were on alert.

As soon as smoke was spotted, wildland firefighters were dispatched, supported by a helicopter and water bombers. First responders were shocked by what they saw: by the time a helicopter with a water bucket got over it, the smoke was already black and seething, a sign of unusual intensity. Despite the firefighters' timely intervention, the fire grew from four acres to 150 in two hours.

Wildfires usually settle down overnight, as the air cools and the dew falls, but by noon the following day this one had expanded to nearly 2,000 acres. Its rapid growth coincided with a rash of broken temperature records across the North American subarctic that peaked at 33°C on May 3 in a place where temperatures are typically between 15 and 20°C. On that day, Tuesday, a

smoke- and wind-suppressing inversion lifted, winds whipped up to 20 knots, and a monster leaped across the Athabasca River.

Within hours, Fort McMurray was overtaken by a regional apocalypse that drove serial firestorms through the city from end to end—for days. Entire neighborhoods burned to their foundations beneath a towering pyrocumulus cloud typically found over erupting volcanoes. So huge and energetic was this fire-driven weather system that it generated hurricane-force winds and lightning that ignited still more fires many miles away.

Nearly 100,000 people were forced to flee in what remains the largest, most rapid single-day evacuation in the history of modern fire. All afternoon, cellphones and dashcams captured citizens cursing, praying, and weeping as they tried to escape a suddenly annihilating world where fists of heat pounded on the windows, the sky rained fire, and the air came alive in roaring flame. Choices that day were stark and few: there was Now, and there was Never. A week later, the fire's toll conjured images of a nuclear blast: there was not just "damage," there was total obliteration.

Trying to articulate what she saw during a tour of the fire's

aftermath, one official said, "You go to a place where there was a house and what do you see on the ground? Nails. Piles and piles of nails."

More than 2,500 homes and other structures were destroyed, and thousands more were damaged; 2,300 square miles of forest were burned. By the time the first photos were released, the fire had already belched 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, much of it from burning cars and houses.

The Fort McMurray Fire, destined to become the most expensive natural disaster in Canadian history, continued to burn, not for days, but for months. It would not be declared fully extinguished until August of the following year. Wildfires live and die by the weather, but "the weather" doesn't mean the same thing it did in 1990, or even a decade ago, and the reason the Fort McMurray Fire trended on newsfeeds around the world in May 2016 was not only because of its terrifying size and ferocity, but also because it was a direct hit—like Hurricane Katrina on New Orleans—on the epicenter of Canada's multibillion-dollar petroleum industry.

That industry and this fire represent supercharged expressions of two trends that have

been marching in lockstep for the past century and a half. Together, they embody the spiraling synergy between the headlong rush to exploit hydrocarbons at all costs and the corresponding increase in heat-trapping greenhouse gases that is altering our atmosphere in real time. In the spring of 2016, halfway through the hottest year of the hottest decade in recorded history, a new kind of fire introduced itself to the world.

"No one's ever seen anything like this," Fort McMurray's exhausted and grieving fire chief said on national TV. "The way this thing happened, the way it travelled, the way it behaved—this is rewriting the book."

This is an excerpt from Fire Weather: The Making of a Beast, by John Vaillant, Knopf Canada, one of the five finalists for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing. The winner will be announced on May 7 in Ottawa.

The Hill Times

Author Q&A with John Vaillant

Why did you write this book?

"This book is important because it demonstrates in visceral scenes, backed up by deep research, the devastating synergy between our dependence on fossil fuels and its impact on the climate—in particular the fires—destabilizing our society and our planet. Along the way, *Fire Weather* unpacks and challenges some deeply held myths Canada tells about itself while highlighting the centrality—and the vulnerability—of the Canadian worker in this great enterprise.

Why is your book important, and who should read it?

"Anyone concerned about the future of our nation, and why a quarter of a million Canadians were forced to flee their homes due to wildfires last summer."

Politics & the Pen

What makes Canada the country that it is, what should we work to preserve, and what should we try to change?

Rob Goodman and Daniel J. Savoie tackle the same questions but in completely different ways. Thoughtful and compellingly argued, both books have been deservedly short listed for the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

Christopher Dornan

Opinion



As I write this, the U.S. Supreme Court is hearing arguments on whether a former president enjoys unqualified and perpetual immunity for any act committed while in office, and the court's conservative majority seems perfectly willing to entertain the prospect that the chief executive shall be so above the law it would be within his power to, say, execute any Supreme Court justice whose decisions he doesn't like. This is an odd thing for any country to be considering, much less one founded on the principle that it didn't want an emperor. This is only one sign of the extremes that are now thinkable in the United States.

When Donald Trump was elected U.S. president in 2016, the worry in Canada was what he might do to

upend an established international order, and whether we might be sideswiped by an America First economic policy. Eight years later, those technocratic concerns have been superseded by something

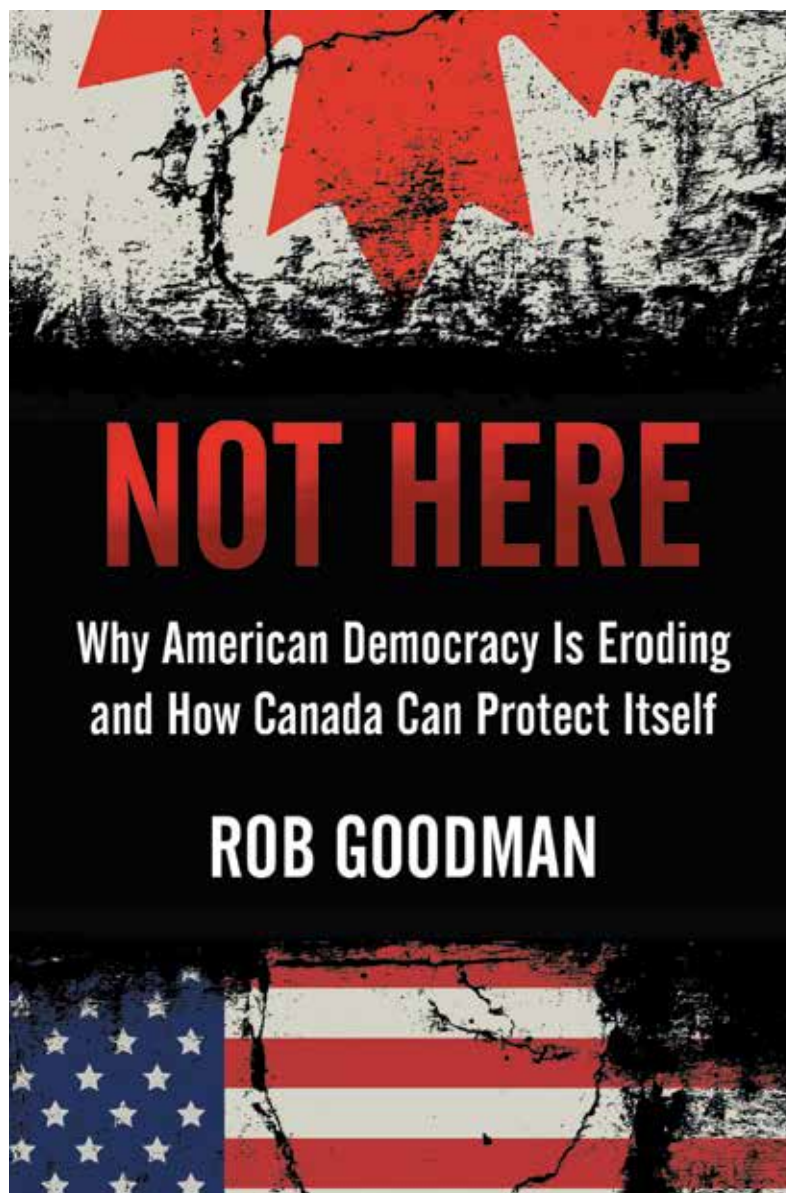
more existential. If Trump were re-elected, what would it mean for Canada to be nestled against a military and economic superpower newly contemptuous of democratic niceties, as though we woke up to

discover we share an undefended border with the People's Republic of China?

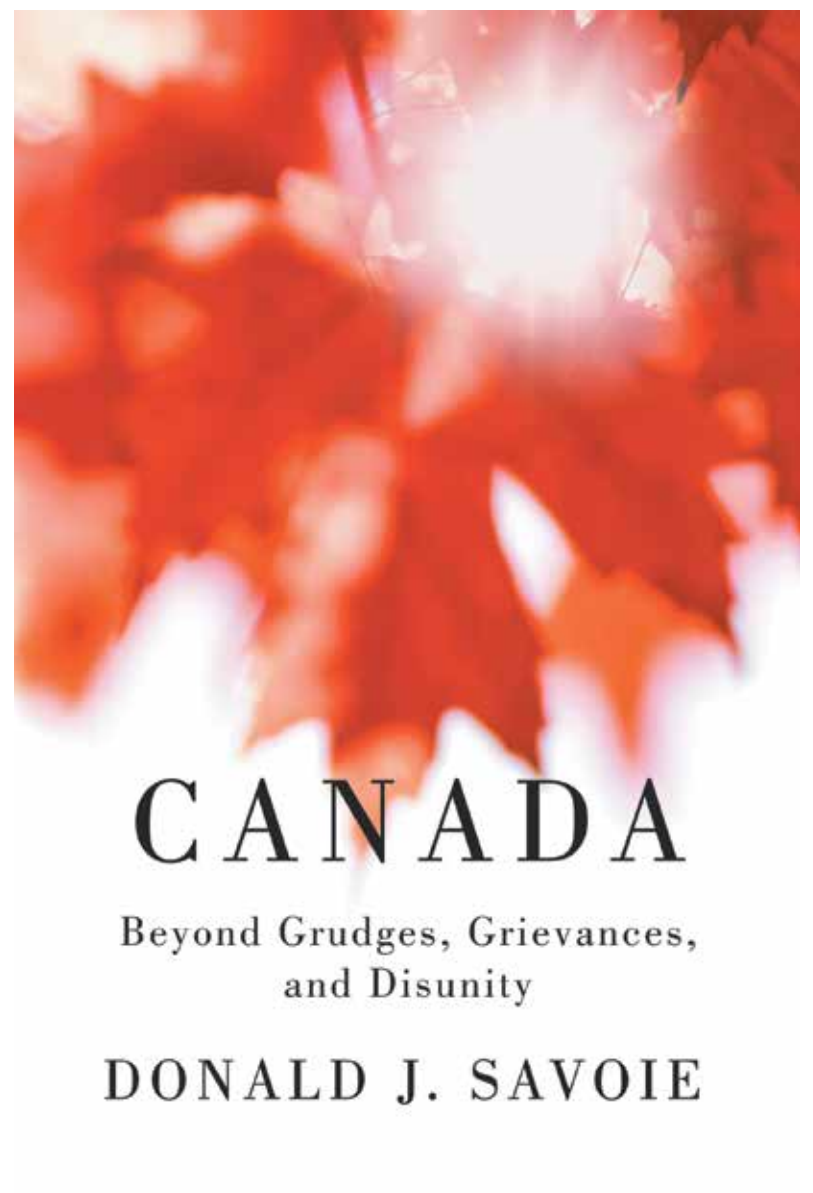
Even if Trump is not elected, the MAGA movement will not disappear. If anything, it will be

even more inflamed. What will it mean for Canada to be adjacent to an America riven internally and armed to the teeth?

Continued on page 24



Not Here: Why American Democracy Is Eroding and How Canada Can Protect Itself, by Rob Goodman, left, and *Canada: Beyond Grudges, Grievances, and Disunity*, by Donald J. Savoie, McGill-Queen's University Press. Book covers courtesy Simon & Schuster Canada and McGill-Queen's University Press



Savoie gets to the bottom of the story in *Canada: Beyond Grudges, Grievances, and Disunity*

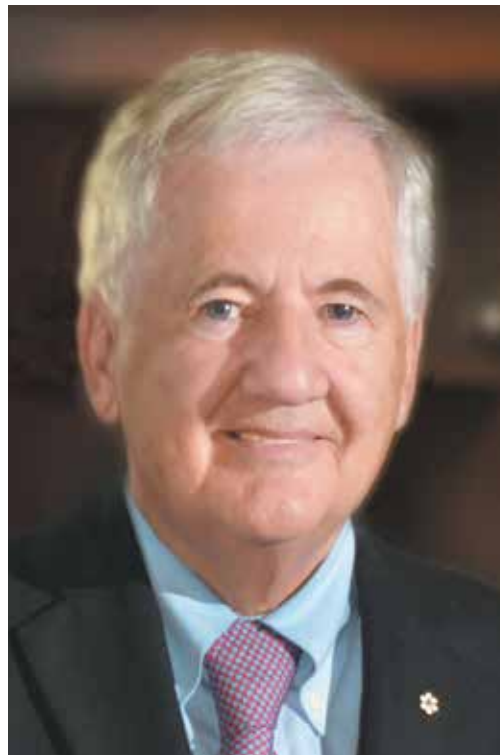
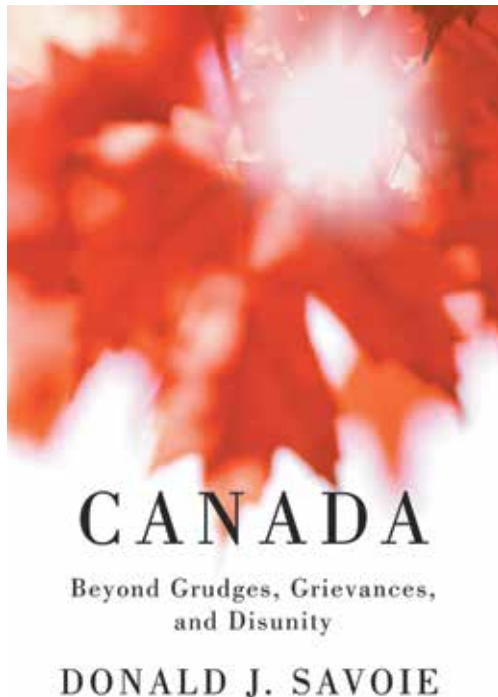
The following is an excerpt from *Canada: Beyond Grudges, Grievances, and Disunity*, by Donald Savoie, one of five books shortlisted for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

BY DONALD J. SAVOIE

When the Fathers of Confederation set out in 1864 to create a new country, addressing the “Indian” problem was very low on their agenda. They felt that they had more pressing matters to which to attend. They simply added, without much debate at the Quebec Conference, the words “Indians and Lands reserved for the Indians” in a sub-clause to Section 91 of the British North America Act and then assigned responsibility for both to Ottawa, making it clearly a so-called Ottawa problem in the eyes of provincial governments.

No one in a position of influence had an interest in fixing the flaws in the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians. For one thing, there were no representatives of the First Nations present in the negotiations. For another, there is no indication whatsoever that any of the Fathers of Confederation had any interest in exploring the role Indigenous Peoples could play in developing Canada or how best to encourage their participation in the country's political institutions. Indigenous Peoples were viewed as a stubborn problem that somehow had to be dealt with in order to let the Fathers of Confederation get on with building a country for White Europeans.

The way to approach the problem was to let the status quo prevail. The basic outline of protection and assimilation established by pre-Confederation colonial policy would stay the course. However difficult it is to imagine today, it is important to underline the point that Indigenous Peoples were completely excluded from the Charlottetown, Quebec, and London conferences. The *Canadian Encyclopedia* even goes further and points out that they “were excluded from public life.”



Donald J. Savoie on who should read this book: ‘I wrote this book for all Canadians. I think that it is important for Canadians to take stock of what works, what does not, who benefits from the country's national political institutions, who does not, and how collectively we can make them better.’ *Book cover and author photograph courtesy of McGill-Queen's University Press*

George Brown, one of the four key architects of Confederation, tabled a document at the 1864 Charlottetown Conference that outlined the responsibilities that would be assigned to the federal and provincial governments. He made no reference to First Nations Peoples and things were no different for the other papers prepared by other Fathers of Confederation.

The best that the country's political leadership could come up with were paternalistic policies that, at times, even worked at cross-purposes. Don McCaskill explains: “Missionaries, educators, Indian agents, judges, and police were sent to the reserves to facilitate the transition from savagery to civilization. The Indians themselves had little to say about the process, because there was no political structure within which they could operate effectively.” The Fathers of Confederation either saw no reason to change the approach, could not come up with anything better, believed that the issue was not important, or, perhaps more importantly, they saw that Europeans settlers were benefitting from the status quo. It was also not in their DNA to think that Indigenous Peoples could offer anything of value in shaping institutions or that they should be brought into the negotiations as equals.

The federal government did handle the so-called problem by simply taking over the responsibility that previously belonged to the British Crown. Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867, gives the Parliament of Canada legislative authority to deal with

the “Indians.” The provinces were frozen out of any responsibility and Indigenous Peoples would, from 1867 to this day, look almost exclusively to Ottawa. In this sense, Sir John A. Macdonald got his unitary state, at least, when it came to the Indigenous Peoples.

The view widely held in Canada at the time of Confederation, was that Indigenous Peoples were “uncivilized, economically backward and morally inferior to Europeans” and that their traditional forms of governance had nothing to offer to anyone, including Indigenous Peoples themselves. Simply put, the goal was to “civilize” Indigenous Peoples and have them embrace Christianity. If they were to die of starvation, somehow it would be their fault. Macdonald told the House of Commons: “I have reason to believe that the agents as a whole ... are doing all they can, by refusing food until the Indians are on the verge of starvation, to reduce the expense.”

Macdonald was not alone in thinking or wishing ill on Aborigines. David Mills, a minister in the Liberal government of Alexander Mackenzie, said: “No doubt the Indians will bear a great degree of starvation before they will work, and so long as they are certain the government will come to their aid, they will not do much for themselves.”

The Indian Act was passed by the Mackenzie government. One can gain a better appreciation of the position of the Indigenous communities in Canadian society at the time of Confederation by reading the Indian Act. The act, passed in 1876, only nine years

after Canada was born, is nothing short of a highly offensive, racist, and unacceptable document, particularly when viewed from today's perspective. I invite readers to consult the Indian Act and some of the publications that it has generated. Readers should reflect on how they would react if the act were directed at them, their communities, or their ancestors.

The purpose of the act was to strip the Indigenous Peoples of their language and culture and assimilate them, as Macdonald put it, “with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change.” Little wonder that the Indian Act reflects a complete non-Indigenous perspective. Indian agents were told, for example, to employ whatever means necessary to discourage dancing at traditional ceremonies. An 1884 amendment to the Indian Act prohibited the “Tamanawas dance.” The amendment was designed to protect the “Indians” from their own culture and traditions because Ottawa decided that such traditions would inhibit any progress in civilizing them.

The act built on the “reserve” system where land is held by the Crown for the “benefit” of bands. To be sure, the Indigenous Peoples did not ask for this “benefit,” it was imposed by the government. Residents having a registered status may own land on a reserve but the ownership remains at the discretion of the federal government and, accordingly, it “does not entail full legal possession.” The reserve system holds many benefits, but not for the Indigenous Peoples. It

enabled the government to stop the “wandering Indians,” to exert greater control on Indigenous Peoples and to facilitate the task of missionaries educating them in the ways of the white Europeans.

In the early years, the Indian agents held near dictatorial powers. They were even granted judicial authority in addition to their bureaucratic powers. In short, the Indian agents had the power to control all aspects of Indian life on reserves. The 1876 Annual Report of the Department of the Interior provides important insights on how the “Indian problem” was viewed. It reads: “The Indian legislation generally rests on the principle, that the aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the state. I am firmly persuaded that the true interests of the aborigines and of the State alike require that every effort should be made to aid the Red man in lifting himself out of his condition of tutelage and dependence, and that it is clearly our wisdom and our duty, through education and other means, to prepare him for a higher civilization by encouraging him to assume the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship.”

The Indian Act has generated a number of legacies, precious few of them positive for the Indigenous Peoples. The elective band council system is at the top of my list. The thinking was that, if Ottawa imposed non-aboriginal political structures, Indigenous Peoples would learn the merits of the ways of the broader Canadian society. The initiative failed miserably and is at the root cause of many problems First Nations are experiencing to this day. It undermined the authority of traditional leaders and their processes.

Excerpt from Chapter 6, ‘Indigenous Peoples: Canada's True Victims,’ pages 125-127, ‘Along Came Confederation’ from Donald J. Savoie's *Canada: Beyond Grudges, Grievances, and Disunity*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023. The book has been nominated for the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing. The winner will be announced on May 7.

The Hill Times

Author Q&A with Donald J. Savoie

Why did you write this book?
“I saw many Canadians and Canadian regions essentially arguing that they were victims. Nothing new here, but the call was heard more often and it became more intense. I decided to take stock and to see if the victim label applies to all Canadians and all regions. I did what I have often done in the past when trying to make sense of things—attempt to get to the bottom of it and write a book.”

Who should read it?
“I wrote this book for all Canadians. I think that it is important for Canadians to take stock of what works, what does not, who benefits from the country's national political institutions, who does not, and how collectively we can make them better.”

Politics & the Pen

Our neighbour is an eroding democracy

An eroding democracy is a threat to democracy in its neighbours. The following is an excerpt from *Not Here: Why American Democracy is Eroding and How Canada Can Protect Itself*, by Rob Goodman. The book is one of the five finalists for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

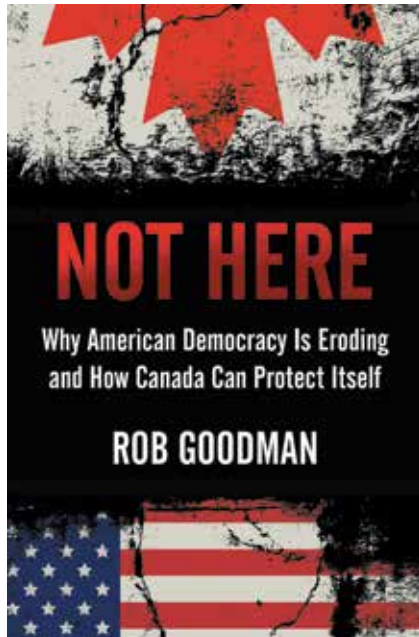
BY ROB GOODMAN

If there is one theme in the literature of Canadian nationalism, it is the all-pervasive fear of being reduced to a cartographical fiction—or perhaps the fear that Canadians already are, and simply, mortifyingly, haven't noticed yet.

Historically, the Canadian fear of absorption has been compounded by the self-deprecating sense that our differences from America are trivial, that nothing much is in danger of being absorbed after all. As Northrop Frye put it: "What is resented in Canada about annexation to the United States is not annexation itself, but the feeling that Canada would disappear into a larger entity without having anything of any real distinctiveness to contribute to that entity."

But that claim, if it ever was true, is simply not true anymore. Canadians of an older generation could look south and see a more-or-less equally democratic neighbour, louder and richer, but not enormously distinct from English Canada. Canadians of this generation look south and see something that demands our fear.

Set aside the many millions of Americans who celebrate what their country is becoming; among the rest, over the past decade, I've observed a diversity of personalized breaking points that I can only describe as kaleidoscopic. A photo of an immigrant boy behind chain-link, draped in a foil blanket; police in riot gear smashing the head of an elderly protester onto the concrete in upstate New York; the president, in a



Rob Goodman: 'Our future depends on our mental independence from America. We can't effectively protect our own institutions—from parliamentary government to a remarkable openness to immigration—without understanding what makes them our own. We can't aspire to anything meaningfully better until we are secure in our difference.' Book cover and author photograph courtesy of Simon & Schuster

cloud of teargas, brandishing the Bible like a weapon; Uvalde; or El Paso; or Parkland; or Tree of Life; or Pulse nightclub; or Charleston; or Sandy Hook.

I don't know how Jan. 6, 2021, will be remembered, how my children will learn it in school one day: as a failure, a blip, the high-water mark of an authoritarian movement that Americans decisively rejected, beginning with the elections two years later; or as a trial run, a proof-of-concept, a beginning rather than an ending. But I also don't know if I'll ever see another American presidential election that both parties accept as legitimate. I do know that a majority of Republican representatives voted to overturn the 2020 presidential election. I know that, even in the midst of a disappointing midterm for their party, some 200 election-denying Republicans were elected to federal office. I know that 19 states responded to the election of a Democratic president by rolling back voting rights. I know that politicians have long been in the practice of selecting their own voters for House elections, that the Supreme Court shows no inclination to stop them, and that the algorithms helping them draw their districts have never been more sophisticated. I know that the Senate is the institutional expression of white, rural, minority rule, and that this is fine, because America is a republic not a democracy. I know what *autogolpe* means now. I suspect that American English is done being

a net importer of authoritarian terms.

In June 2020, a reporter asked Justin Trudeau about Donald Trump's threat to crush protesters with military force. Nothing sums up the Canadian response to all of these developments better than Trudeau's famous 21 seconds of silence. Say what you will about him, but in that moment he spoke authentically for his people: our terror at the mere thought of antagonizing the big neighbour; our self-congratulatory sense that truly bad things happen elsewhere, leavened by a *pro forma* allowance that, of course, we aren't perfect ("It's time for us as Canadians to recognize that we too have our challenges").

Twenty months later, our capital was occupied, our crossings to America cut off, our Emergencies Act invoked for the first time. We too have our challenges.

What I heard in those 21 seconds of silence was the most eloquent expression possible of the great Canadian exemption, the idea that the forces upending democracies around the world somehow don't reach this far north. What I saw in the Ottawa truck blockade was its convincing refutation. Our exemption has rarely seemed less secure.

If that is true, then asserting our difference—asserting it in a way that shapes our culture, our diplomacy, our domestic politics, our sense of ourselves—matters in this generation in a way that it has rarely mattered before. Because there is a difference,

beginning with this, the basic fact that has yet to penetrate our politics: *our neighbour is an eroding democracy.*

Canadian politics needs to start from that reality, because it is the political fact with the farthest-reaching consequences for Canadian life. Canada is not exempt from the polarization, the authoritarianism, and the conspiracizing that have put the future of American democracy into doubt. But Canada is different. If those forces are not so advanced here, it is not because Canada is congenitally behind the times. It is because our democracy can draw on a set of resources that are distinctly of this place.

Reading reports of the first shots of the American Civil War, the Ontario Reform leader George Brown said simply: "We are glad we are not them." Our future depends on our ability to say something similar, and to mean it; to say it explicitly, not silently; to say it openly enough that it becomes an organizing principle of our national life, not simply a comforting excuse for our failures. Our future depends on our mental independence from America. We can't effectively protect our own institutions—from parliamentary government to a remarkable openness to immigration—without understanding what makes them our own. We can't aspire to anything meaningfully better until we are secure in our difference, until we stop seeing ourselves through American eyes.

An eroding democracy is a threat to democracy in its neighbours. Think of the ways in which far-right and nativist forces collaborate across borders. Think of Tucker Carlson filming from Viktor Orbán's Hungary, or Steve Bannon's post-Trump career as a European fascist, or the cheers for Nigel Farage at a convention for American conservatives, or the pipeline of funding that connects Vladimir Putin and Marine Le Pen, or the 2023 re-enactment of the January 6th riot, planned from Orlando and staged in Brasília. Globally, as measured by Freedom House, those forces have contributed to 16 consecutive years of democratic erosion. Such forces bear on Canada in many ways, from interference in federal elections to real estate prices bid up by foreign oligarchs in Vancouver or Toronto. But, by virtue of proximity and power, the most important conduits of democratic instability run due south.

In the words of a 2022 report issued by Canadian intelligence experts, including high-level advisers to both the Harper and Trudeau governments, "the United

States is and will remain our closest ally, but it could also become a source of threat and instability." A little less cautiously, we might say that it already has. As one of the report's authors put it, "there are serious risks of democratic backsliding in the U.S., and at this point, that is not a theoretical risk. So all of that is a threat to our sovereignty, to our security, and in some cases, to our democratic institutions."

On their own, those facts are worrisome enough; in context, they are more so. The history of this hemisphere is a history of a hegemon willing and able to build up and pull down neighbouring governments—a history from which Canada has by no means been exempt. It is hard to imagine a democratically-eroded America being *more* friendly to Canadian democracy, a democracy that would begin to look like a standing rebuke.

More abstractly, America's power and prestige have always lent it a sort of political gravity. Powerful states, whatever their form of government, prompt envy and emulation. It seems as if they make the history the rest of us merely watch, as if they come from slightly in the future. They set the bounds of common sense within which the rest of us operate. Maybe an authoritarian America would only provoke revulsion here—I'm sure it would in many of us. But authoritarianism wouldn't have a constituency if it didn't have its own glamour and appeal. Slowly and steadily, without any of us explicitly acknowledging its influence and many of us loudly disclaiming it, it would shape our sense of what is possible here—of what is permissible here.

Resisting that process begins by looking the facts in the eye: the historical situation in which Canadians find themselves is fundamentally changed. Once, our connections to America were so many channels through which democratic ideas and practices entered our country; today, the situation is closer to the opposite. A free society cannot insulate itself from such influences, nor should it want to. But it can sharpen its critical capacity to assess and filter those influences as they arrive—to build what David Graeber and David Wengrow called "structures of refusal," the deliberate and systematic choices through which we define and maintain our difference. We are what we refuse. In an age of democratic decline, Canada's democracy depends on refusal—serious, targeted, and creative.

Our difference is not a luxury good, something for a rich and mostly contented people to worry about in the absence of more pressing concerns. On the contrary, it is our democratic immune system.

Excerpted from Not Here: Why American Democracy is Eroding and How Canada Can Protect Itself, by Rob Goodman. Copyright © 2023 by Rob Goodman. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster Canada, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

The Hill Times

Perrin puts the criminal justice system on trial

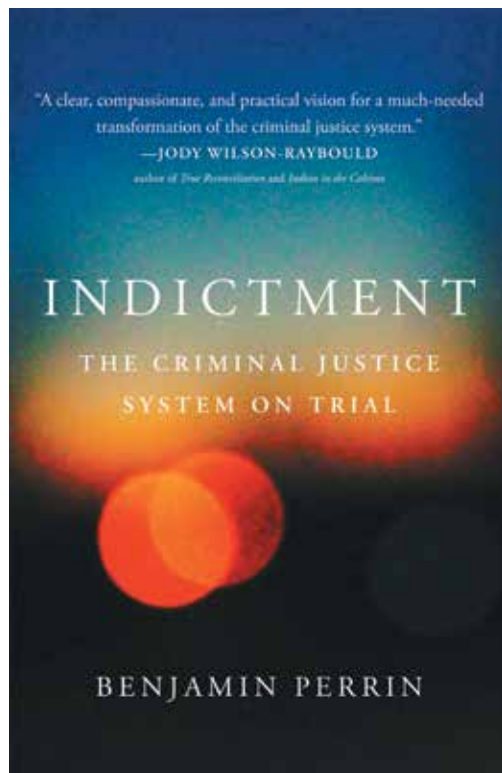
Our criminal justice system is facing an existential crisis. The following is an excerpt from Benjamin Perrin's book, *Indictment: The Criminal Justice System on Trial*, one of five finalists for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

BY BENJAMIN PERRIN

“Stop holding conferences. Stop with the symposiums. Give it up. You are wasting air. You haven't implemented the modest tinkering that you endlessly discuss. Your ideas are too little and too late,” wrote Harold Johnson, a Harvard-trained lawyer and member of the Montreal Lake Cree Nation, in his 2023 book *Peace and Good Order: The Case for Indigenous Justice in Canada*. His tough talk didn't stop there.

“Instead of coming together for discussions amongst yourselves, spend the time, energy, and money you presently waste by having those same conversations with Indigenous Peoples. If you insist on holding a symposium, make sure you hear from someone who has spent time in your jails. If your conference is in a city, bring in Indigenous People from the street, give them something to eat, let them warm up and then listen to what they have to say. You are never going to find solutions if you continue to have conversations about us without us.”

I knew exactly what Harold (as he asked me to call him) was talking about. I'm a white, male law professor and a settler. I have had challenges in my life, but have also benefited enormously from that privilege. I've also been educated and indoctrinated into the Canadian legal system at some of the country's top law schools. I've spoken at judicial conferences at five-star hotels. I've attended beautifully catered cabinet meetings on Parliament Hill. I've sat fireside at the Supreme Court of Canada listening to guest speakers. I've schmoozed at academic cocktail receptions. The food I ate at such events surpassed what is served at many weddings. These are elite places that exclude the people impacted



Benjamin Perrin on why his book is important: *'Indictment'* shares the first-hand stories of people whose lives have been devastated by the criminal justice system along with the latest research. It proposes a new transformative justice vision to help transform trauma rather than continue to transmit it.' Book cover and author photograph courtesy of Aveo UTP

by the criminal justice system whom Harold calls on us to welcome inside and hear from.

My first round of interviews for this book were with 34 “experts”—professionals working in, and around, the criminal justice system (I describe my methodology at the end of this book). I asked them: What are the major challenges facing the criminal justice system? And if they could design a new system, what would it look like?

I interviewed law professors; criminologists; Crown prosecutors and defence counsel; lawyers representing crime victims; a chief of police; a chief peacekeeper; an Elder; Indigenous leaders; Black and Indigenous scholars; non-profit organizations that support victims and offenders; public health officials; a forensic psychiatrist; gang outreach workers; restorative justice practitioners; legal aid lawyers; justice reform activists; prisoner and victims' rights advocates; disability, substance use, and mental health professionals; civil liberties proponents; a corrections officer; federal correctional investigators; and trauma experts.

They had many valuable insights but, ultimately, I knew something was missing. It was through this process that I met Harold. Already, I was thinking I needed to interview people who had been directly affected by the system. After speaking with him, I couldn't ignore his call to action. They were the real experts.

“Courtney” (her name has been changed to protect her privacy),

a 39-year-old Indigenous woman from Yukon, was the first person to respond to my research poster. It asked a simple question in big, bold text: “What was your experience like with the criminal justice system?” I quickly realized that I wasn't prepared to hear her answer. I awoke the next night with a nightmare about how she had attempted to take her own life in a maximum-security prison cell.

“I ended up becoming really suicidal and I cut my veins and I bled out and I almost died,” Courtney had told me. “They had to give me a blood transfusion and take me to the hospital.” When she returned to prison, instead of being treated with care and compassion, she was instead locked in a segregation cell alone for three months.

“That was pretty devastating on me because I was really trying to kill myself. I was so seriously suicidal at the time,” said Courtney. “It's saddening to be so secluded when I go to seg. I believe I am treated extremely inhumane when I was in seg. It was sad. I didn't feel I could make it.”

In all, Courtney has spent 25 years of her life incarcerated—starting when she was 12 years old. At that age, she was already addicted to alcohol. She has lived most of her life behind bars in Yukon, Alberta, and British Columbia.

Within days, the emails and voicemails became a flood as more and more people contacted me to share their stories like Courtney. They wanted to talk—and for someone to listen.

“I know as a victim the system sucks,” wrote one person. “I am

very well aware of the injustices and I believe society should know about them, so glad to see a research study being done.”

“I have never told my story publicly before and hope to shed light on how police brutality is covered up,” said another. The calls and emails kept coming.

“Inquiring about your study but I'll tell you now if you're looking for me to say how the system is good, that won't happen. Our prison system is broken. If you are looking for the truth then I'm all for it.”

“This gives me the chance to share my story, one I've barely told others and would love to get this off my chest and help others.”

“Yes, we have laws and punishment for breaking those laws. However, we need to be sure that the men and women we send to prison come out better than when they went in. This doesn't happen often enough and the revolving door begins for far too many. So, if my words will help you in some small way, I will help.”

They were survivors of assaults, death threats, sexual assaults, intimate partner violence, and human trafficking. People incarcerated for murder, manslaughter, sexual offences, drug trafficking, robbery, assault causing bodily harm, firearms charges, fraud, criminal harassment, and other crimes. Most of these offenders also told me about being victimized themselves, particularly as children and while imprisoned.

After accepting Harold Johnson's challenge and speaking with three dozen individuals—many of whom were Indigenous—

about their lived experiences with the criminal justice system, I can categorically tell you he is right. I learned vastly more from them than all the cocktail receptions, fireside talks, and conferences panels combined. In a single word, the common thread connecting all their stories was trauma.

#MeToo. Black Lives Matter. Defund the Police. Decriminalize Drugs. Land Back. These aren't just slogans, protests, and movements. Discontent about the criminal justice system is not only a growing social and political force—it's backed up by statistics, reports, inquiries, commissions, and scholarly research that is shaking its very foundations.

Our criminal justice system is facing an existential crisis. In part one of this book, you will hear from witnesses directly impacted by the system and read the evidence for yourself as we put the criminal justice system on trial. This crisis of confidence is so serious that a Justice Canada public consultation asked: “If you could create a new criminal justice system from scratch, what would it look like?” Part 2 of this book aims to provide one answer to this provocative question, setting out a compelling new transformative justice vision for Canada.

An understanding of trauma will be our guide because trauma is deeply interwoven with all of these issues. Literally every encounter people have with the criminal justice system, whatever their role or involvement, needs to be informed by a compassionate understanding of trauma. The stakes are high. As we will see, when a trauma-informed approach is lacking by victim services, police, lawyers, judges, courthouse staff, corrections officers, parole officers, community corrections, and other justice system practitioners, we witness greater harm, worse outcomes, and even the tragic loss of life.

Excerpt from Benjamin Perrin's *Indictment: The Criminal Justice System on Trial* (Toronto: UTP, 2023). Reprinted with permission. The book is one of five finalists for this year's Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

The Hill Times

Author Q&A with Benjamin Perrin

Why is this book important?
“*Indictment* shares the first-hand stories of people whose lives have been devastated by the criminal justice system along with the latest research. It proposes a new transformative justice vision to help transform trauma rather than continue to transmit it.”

Who should read it?
“The debate about Canada's criminal justice system has rarely been so polarized. *Indictment* offers a new perspective and innovative policy ideas for concerned Canadians, people who work in the justice system, and elected officials to see there are better ways to make us all safer.”

Politics & the Pen

What makes Canada the country that it is, what should we work to preserve, and what should we try to change?

Continued from page 20

How we preserve our country in the face of the gigantism of the U.S. and our own internal divisions is the central question of Canadian culture and politics. What is it about our curious, unlikely, and unwieldy political arrangement that makes it—for all its faults—a good place to live, a place you want to live? On global metrics of pretty much everything from standards of living to freedom of expression, Canada is a geography and a jurisdiction that scores right at the top. The people who live in Canada are exceedingly fortunate.

And the one thing they all complain about—the government—is the key to their good fortune. There are plenty of resource-rich countries that aren't ours. What Canada guarantees to the world and to its citizens is political stability, even if it is built on a volatile English-French fault line. Political tempers flare, governments come and go, but the nation endures as a peaceable dominion that manages to accommodate its political differences. The country's prosperity derives from that stability.

Authors Rob Goodman and Daniel J. Savoie tackle the same questions—what makes Canada the country that it is, what should we work to preserve, and what should we try to change?—but in completely different ways. Thoughtful and compellingly argued, both of their books have been deservedly short listed for the Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing.

Savoie barely mentions Trump. He doesn't consider the rise of populism or its sharp scratch on the political seismograph. As a distinguished professor of public administration and governance at the Université de Moncton, he's interested in the machinery of government, not so much the partisan arena or the politicians who oversee the ministries of the public service.

Goodman is a younger professor of politics and public administration at Toronto Metropolitan University. Trump and the MAGA movement loom throughout his book. His core concern is how Canada can insulate itself from the fever that in the U.S.

has produced elected officials like Marjorie Taylor Greene and Matt Gaetz, laws banning “divisive concepts” in schools, and anti-democratic measures that impede certain types of Americans from voting. Goodman used to be a speechwriter in the U.S. Congress, and it shows. Lyrically written, his book is a polemic, and a persuasive one. I would vote for anyone who delivered a speech like this.

Savoie draws on a lifetime of study, along with his experience working in government, to deliver a clinical assessment of Canada as it is. Given the structural fissures and entrenched animosities he describes, it's a wonder our nation works at all, much less as well as it does. The book is a detailed catalogue of Canadian complaints to the point that the true triumph of the country looks to be our ability to function despite our frictions and resentments. While Red and Blue America seem ever more incommensurable antagonists, Canada is an ongoing exercise in managing grievance.

To be a Canadian, Savoie suggests, is to be victimized, either by history, the political apparatus, or both. Savoie is an Acadian, so his list of the aggrieved starts with the expulsion of the Acadians from their land and homes by the British crown in the 1750s—an act of political violence that scarred an entire people, just as the Scottish were scarred by the Highland Clearances and the Irish by the Potato Famine in the mid 19th-century. Quebec, needless to say, sees itself as victimized by English Canada. The Maritimes have been victimized by a political and economic union that all but ensures their impoverishment relative to Ontario and Quebec, and the West by a political structure rigged to deprive it of its rightful clout in confederation. Even Ontario and its business interests—in large measure the coddled son in the Canadian family, whose wishes always come first—sees itself as victimized, first by the predations of the American colossus, and second by a federal government that too often fails to do the bidding of Ontario and its business classes, preoccupied as Ottawa is with balancing the interests and

demands of the country's constituent regions.

And, of course, the original sin of Canada—the disgrace at the heart of the nation, every bit as unforgivable as the American sin of slavery—is its victimization of its original peoples.

Canada, in Savoie's telling of it, is a quilt of injustice. But, crucially, the country is also aware of this. It is a place with a conscience, a nation forever trying to make amends. Guilt may never erase the wrongs committed, but it is better than not feeling guilty at all. Savoie points out that Canada has apologized for the internment of Japanese Canadians (1988), for the Chinese Head Tax (2006), for turning away Jewish refugees in 1939 (2018), for the treatment of Italian Canadians (2021), for the prejudice against the LGBTQ2 community (2017), and for the expulsion of the Acadians (2003). And, of course, the nation continues to apologize for the atrocities done to Indigenous Peoples. On Canada Day 2021, in the wake of the discovery of children's gravesites at residential schools, flags flew at half-mast on what was supposed to be a day of national celebration. The U.S., by comparison, has apologized for almost nothing.

The subtitle of Goodman's book is *Why American Democracy is Eroding and How Canada Can Protect Itself*, but this is not strictly accurate. He doesn't explain why American democracy is eroding. He simply accepts that it is. His real focus is on how Canada should respond—how to ensure that the extremism currently raging in the U.S. doesn't take root here.

Both he and Savoie recognize that compromise is the chief political mechanism of the Canadian federation, which makes for a dominion of interminable negotiation—incessant bickering in pursuit of accommodation. It may be infuriating, but it works. It's when the bickering breaks down that the real trouble begins. Goodman believes that in the U.S., at least one side of the political divide no longer has any interest in accommodation. It just wants to rule, and to rule in the name of the Real America.

The idea that there is a Real America casts anyone who is not

part of it as un-American, and therefore politically illegitimate. It is a rationale that disenfranchises dissent, and permits a minority to rule, which is what makes it anti-democratic. What makes it authoritarian is the use of state power and state violence to enforce its anti-democratic order.

Goodman argues that it would be difficult for that type of thinking to establish itself in Canada because we have done away with the notion that there is a Real People who rightfully should govern. There was such a thing once, certainly in the Upper Canada of pre-confederation, where a gentry of Protestant landowners held sway, arrogant in their confidence that they simply mattered more than Catholics, immigrants, French Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. But in the post-war years, Goodman contends, Canada reinvented itself as a multi-national, multiethnic democracy that makes the idea of a Real Canada “structurally implausible.”

Goodman's prescription is for Canadians to be vividly aware of what makes this country different from the United States: “Our most potent weapon against antidemocratic ideas ... is our ability to stigmatize them as ‘alien.’” But what happens when what were once accepted as the virtues of a place—the aspects that make it somewhere you want to live—are no longer seen as virtues because they impose duties and responsibilities, which are seen as anathema to “freedom”? Goodman simply assumes that Canadians thank fortune and history that Canada is not the U.S., but there are many of use who resent the fact that Canada is not the U.S. (For that matter, there are some Canadians in the ranks of the freedom convoys who resent the fact that Canada is not the Confederacy.)

And though Goodman is correct that this country rejected a narrative of the Real Canada based on race or historical precedence, what if a narrative of the Real Canadians is being forged right in front of our eyes in the melting pot of fury against the perceived injustice that is the federal government? In this populist narrative, Real Canadians don't split urban-rural. Race doesn't

matter. Region doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you're a recent immigrant, or if your family has been here for generations. The Real Canadians are the ones who are politically furious at money being forcibly extorted from them by a wasteful, misguided, and illiberal state. It's bad enough there are unjust taxes—just look at what those taxes are being spent on.

To these Real Canadians, anyone not outraged by this state of affairs is a member of the Laurentian elite—people like Mark Carney and Chrystia Freeland. Trust Canada to come up with a form of populism where everyone puts their differences aside to focus their anger on the one thing they all have in common. Extremism through compromise.

If this is what is happening, it may set Canada against itself. Because in addition to the ceaseless search for compromise, Savoie points out that what makes Canada work is federal spending power. The British North America Act prohibited the federal government from enacting the sort of social programs essential to making the country secure, prosperous, and content. So the federal government simply muscled its way into provincial jurisdictions with money. With federal spending power comes federal authority in almost every aspect of Canadian life. Which is exactly the thing that fires the angry energies of an ascendant far-right populism.

Grievance remains the motor engine of Canadian politics.

Canada: Beyond Grudges, Grievances, and Disunity, by Donald J. Savoie, McGill-Queen's University Press, 329 pp. **Not Here: Why American Democracy is Eroding and How Canada Can Protect Itself**, by Rob Goodman, Simon & Schuster Canada, 260 pp.

Christopher Dorman taught at Carleton University for 33 years, where he served as director of the School of Journalism and Communication, and director of the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs. He is the co-editor of *The Canadian Federal Election of 2021*, along with seven previous volumes in this series.

The Hill Times

DIGITAL PRIVACY AND SECURITY

The Hill Times
Policy Briefing
May 6, 2024

DATA PRIVACY AS HUMAN RIGHT

must be recognized by privacy and AI bill, say advocates

HOW CANADA'S PRIVACY LAWS can be modernized

WHEN WILL TIKTOK'S time be up?

Deeper questions about
SOCIAL MEDIA IN OUR SOCIETY

Time to strengthen Canada's
CYBERSECURITY DEFENCES

Protecting businesses from
CYBERATTACKS

BILL C-26: CATCHES UP on cybersecurity, but misses out on revolutionary technologies

CANADA'S CYBERSECURITY gap needs to be addressed

Digital Privacy and Security Policy Briefing

Data privacy as a human right must be recognized by privacy and AI bill, say advocates

Bill C-27 fails to mention human rights in the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act, says Tim McSorley, national coordinator of the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Proposed legislation intended to strengthen consumer privacy protections and establish accountability frameworks for artificial intelligence (AI) requires an overhaul, according to some groups arguing acts within the bill don't go far enough to protect human rights.

"Overall, the [Artificial Intelligence and Data] Act treats human rights and human rights impacts of artificial intelligence as a secondary issue, and actually fails to establish adequate protections for—and take into account—human rights impacts when assessing and developing AI tools," said Tim McSorley, national co-ordinator of the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group. "It fails to do that by failing to mention human rights in the legislation itself whatsoever."

On April 24, an open letter was sent to Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne (Saint-Maurice-Champlain, Que.) calling for the Artificial Intelligence and Data Act (AIDA) to be split from the rest of Bill C-27, the Digital Charter Implementation Act, and given a full public consultation.

The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group was among the nearly 60 civil society organizations, corporations, and academics who signed the letter arguing the MPs' study of AIDA was "hasty, confusing and rushed," which resulted in a "gravely and

fundamentally flawed bill that lacks democratic legitimacy."

Bill C-27 was introduced in June 2022. It completed second reading in the House in April 2023, and is currently under consideration by the House Industry Committee. The bill bundles together three proposed acts: AIDA, as well as the Consumer Privacy Protection Act, and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act, which—if passed—would amend the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, Canada's 23-year-old data protection law.

Currently, AIDA includes provisions for the assessment of AI tools being developed before they're released to the public, but doesn't include a requirement for assessing the affect on human rights and civil liberties, according to McSorley.

"The legislation focuses on the risks posed to individuals, and particularly individuals as consumers," he said. "Without mentioning human rights as a factor, it means that, eventually, if there are concerns and problems about the impacts of the [AI] tools and somebody files a complaint based on the fact that it violates human rights, it wouldn't fall under the purview of the regulations

being put in place, because it's not explicitly mentioned."

As an example, McSorley talked about how AI tools, such as for facial recognition programs, may be used by law enforcement agencies.

"If those [facial recognition tools] aren't assessed for specific human rights impacts before they're released, and used by law enforcement, then it could have a discriminatory impact on racialized communities, on marginalized communities, that already face over-policing," he said. "We could see people who already face heightened levels of surveillance, or heightened levels of false accusation, face even greater repercussions because of artificial intelligence tools that haven't been properly assessed for their impacts on those Canadians and impacts on fundamental human rights."

How well AIDA addresses human rights is not the only concern with the bill, according to McSorley. Another issue is its lack of independence for the AI and data commissioner, who would have the responsibility of monitoring compliance and intervening if necessary to ensure that AI systems are safe and non-discriminatory.



Tim McSorley, national co-ordinator of the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, says if Bill C-27 ignores human rights, ways to address human rights violations would not fall under the legislation. *Photograph courtesy of Tim McSorley*



Yuan Stevens, an academic associate at McGill University's Centre of Genomics and Policy, says 'there is this pretty important window of time where countries are proposing laws on AI,' and 'they will look to Canada for how to regulate this.' *Photograph courtesy of Yuan Stevens*



"Under the proposed rules, [the commissioner] would be a part of [Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada], whose mandate is the promotion of Canada's AI sector. Our concerns with how the rules established under AIDA would be enforced would be significantly addressed if the government agreed to make the proposed commissioner an independent officer of parliament, similar to the Privacy Commissioner," said McSorley in an emailed statement to *The Hill Times* on April 30.

The open letter calls for Ottawa to initiate an "in-depth and meaningful" consultation process so AIDA can be revised and reintroduced.

The International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, along with OpenMedia and the Privacy and Access Council of Canada, also released a list in March of recommended "bare minimum" changes to AIDA in the event the federal government moves forward with Bill C-27 without additional public consultation. Among the recommendations is a call for the inclusion of the "fundamental right" to individual privacy, and "human rights" pertaining to privacy and data protection in the bill's preamble.



Lyndsay Wasser, a partner at McMillan LLP, says Bill C-27 'should be legislation that facilitates trade and commerce and strikes the right balance between the legitimate interest of businesses versus individual privacy rights.' *Photograph courtesy of Lyndsay Wasser*

Yuan Stevens, an academic associate with Centre of Genomics and Policy at McGill University in Montreal, told *The Hill Times* that AIDA failed to address human rights risks posed by the use of AI systems.

"Right now, there's only a two-tiered approach in the law which basically says certain uses of AI are fine, and then the other tier says, 'let's be careful, this is a high risk,'" said Stevens. "We can contrast that to the [European Union] AI Act, which actually includes several prohibitions on the use of AI because of the impacts of the law in terms of rights."

Stevens' research examines data governance, privacy, and human rights. She said AIDA should include a ban list of some of uses for AI that could be considered harmful, such as facial recognition tools in public spaces, or for predicting crime.

"People who are Black, people of colour, will be over-represented in things like mugshot databases, and are subject to being stopped by the police more often, and therefore will end up in a feedback loop that will impact peoples' right to life, liberty and ... the right to privacy," she said. "I don't actually think that a tweaking of a line will address the concerns that I'm personally raising



University of Ottawa law professor Teresa Scassa says 'when there are data breaches, that puts people's personal financial security and other forms of security at risk.' *Photograph courtesy of Teresa Scassa*

Policy Briefing Digital Privacy and Security

Innovation Minister François-Philippe Champagne sent a letter to the House Industry Committee chair on Oct. 20, 2023, which included several draft motions for Bill C-27, including one that the preamble be amended to qualify the right to privacy as a fundamental right. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canada has an opportunity right now to propose a law on AI that would be robust, sustainable, and future-proof and comprehensive, and it's not clear to me that, right now, the law in its current form actually meets those criteria."

'Human rights' language considered in Bill C-27

The issue of acknowledging human rights has also formed part of the overall discussions of Bill C-27 during the bill's examination by the House Industry Committee.

In April, 2023, Privacy Commissioner of Canada Philippe Dufresne argued in a letter to Liberal MP Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Que.), chair of the committee, that the preamble of Bill C-27 "does not go far enough in recognizing the fundamental right to privacy," and that stakeholders in civil society shared the view that the bill "should go further in recognizing privacy as a fundamental right."

Among a list of proposed changes, Dufresne argued the preamble should be modified to include references to fundamental rights.

Champagne also sent a letter to Lightbound on Oct. 20, 2023, which included several draft motions, including a motion that the bill's preamble be amended to qualify the right to privacy as a fundamental right.

On April 8, 2024, Conservative MP Brad Vis (Mission-Matsqui-Fraser Canyon, B.C.), introduced a motion for amendments to Bill C-27, including for the preamble to specify "the protection of the fundamental right to privacy of individuals." That amendment passed on April 10.

Lyndsay Wasser, a partner at McMillan LLP who acts as a strategic advisor to organizations in the technology industry, told *The Hill Times* that proponents of including "human rights" in the bill's language may argue that would be beneficial in situations where the law needs to be interpreted. Proponents may also argue that such an inclusion would help align Canada's laws with global privacy laws and standards, such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which is "the big one," according to Wasser.



Pedestrians walk along Bank Street at Queen Street in Ottawa. The issue of acknowledging human rights has formed part of the overall discussions during the House Industry Committee's study of Bill C-27. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

because what will be needed is a law that is premised upon the protection of human rights, and, therefore, there will probably be an entire section of the law that says these certain uses of AI are unacceptable, and therefore they are prohibited."

Stevens said that she has conducted research into how countries around the world are regulating AI, and found that Canada is one of the few jurisdictions to have proposed binding general laws that would regulate the technology. She said it is important Canada get the law right when regulating AI, and recommended following the lead of the European Union AI Act, which passed on March 13 and is regarded as the world's first comprehensive legal framework for AI.

Stevens said that act is "by no means perfect," but more comprehensive than the current form of AIDA.

"There is this pretty important window of time where countries are proposing laws on AI. Many, maybe, won't ever do that, but for the ones that will and have actually shown that they want to regulate this, they will look to Canada for how to regulate this," she said. "It seems to me that

However, a distinction between the GDPR and Bill C-27 is that the bill tackles private sector privacy regulation, as opposed to the public sector, according to Wasser.

"The GDPR governs the activities of both public sector and private organizations, and when you talk about fundamental rights in Canada, we typically look to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. When you look at that, you don't see privacy in there, and there are some rights that do touch upon privacy ... but those rights are vis-à-vis the government, not private organizations," she said.

In PIPEDA currently, there's a balance between the interests of businesses and the promotion of the digital economy versus employee privacy rights, according to Wasser.

"In my view, the most important factor is to ensure that the legislation properly falls within the constitutional authority of the federal government, and in that regard, it should be legislation that facilitates trade and commerce, and strikes the right balance between the legitimate interest of businesses versus individual privacy rights," she said.

Wasser said that it should not be lost on the federal government that consumers in Canada want access to new, interesting, innovative and exciting technologies, and therefore protecting the interests of businesses also has benefits for the nation.

"Although I understand the need to protect individual privacy—obviously, that's critical—I also think that there are benefits both to businesses and consumers to taking a balancing approach that's

not overly restrictive or prescriptive, such that Canadians lose out on the opportunity to be part of these developments worldwide," she said. "Firstly, it will facilitate businesses that are developing these types of technologies, which is great for our economy, and it's also, in my view, good for consumer access to see new and interesting technologies that will be available in other parts of the world.

Teresa Scassa, a law professor and researcher in the areas of privacy, data protection and AI for the University of Ottawa, told *The Hill Times* that she considers the most important question pertaining to the Bill C-27 being whether or not human rights should come first.

"The volume of data that is now being collected about people and the many, many different ways in which it can be used, has already had a very significant impact. Some of those are privacy impacts and that people can be tracked and monitored in fairly unprecedented ways. When there

are data breaches, that puts people's personal financial security and other forms of security at risk," she said. "The use of personal data to track who may have had an abortion in the United States, for example, all of these types of things. There's just so much data that's being collected that it can make people quite vulnerable to a variety of different intrusions, manipulations, fraud, you name it."

Scassa argued that see Bill C-27 being viewed as a balance between individual's right to privacy on one hand, and the need to access and use data on the other, creates a risk of privacy eroding away.

"You'd start to talk in terms of pragmatics and 'well, maybe these rights aren't as important,' and certainly there's a broad public interest in these uses of data, and, 'it's not that harmful,' and 'the data isn't that sensitive,' and it's like a death by 1,000 cuts, in a lot of ways," she said.

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The Hill Times

Canada Privacy Concerns Statistics:

- About 93 per cent of Canadians expressed some level of concern about the protection of their privacy
- Just over half of the Canadians surveyed (58 per cent; down from 63 per cent in 2020) feel that the federal government respects their privacy rights. Far fewer believe that businesses respect their privacy rights (39 per cent; down from 45 per cent in 2020).
- Three-quarters each said they have a fair amount or a great deal of trust in banks (76 per cent)

and law enforcement (76 per cent). Fewer have this level of trust in telecommunications firms and internet service providers (41 per cent), retailers (36 per cent), and Big Tech (34 per cent). Canadians are least likely to trust social media companies. Just one in 10 trust these businesses to protect their personal data.

- Most Canadians (91 per cent) believe that at least some of what they do online or on their smartphones is being tracked by companies or organizations. In contrast, fewer Canadians (73 per cent) believe at least some of what they do online or on their smartphone is being tracked by the government.
- Three-quarters of Canadians have adjusted privacy settings on a social media account (75 per cent) or refused to provide an organization or business with their personal data due to privacy concerns (74 per cent). One-third (32 per cent) said they have raised a privacy concern with a company or organization.



Source: 2022-23 Survey of Canadians on Privacy-Related Issues, released on June 14, 2023, prepared for the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada.



In a letter to the chair of the House Industry Committee, Privacy Commissioner of Canada Philippe Dufresne argued Bill C-27's preamble should include references to fundamental rights. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Digital Privacy and Security Policy Briefing

Strengthening Canada's cybersecurity defences: a call to action

To safeguard our nation's digital future, concerted efforts by the federal government are needed to strengthen cybersecurity defences, bolster resilience against emerging threats, and empower Canadians to protect themselves in an increasingly interconnected world.

NDP MP
Alistair
MacGregor

Opinion



In an age where the digital realm intertwines seamlessly with our daily lives, cybersecurity

threats loom large. Canada, being a global leader in technology and innovation, finds itself at the crossroads of this digital age, facing a myriad of cyber threats emanating from foreign governments and non-state actors alike.

At the forefront of Canada's cybersecurity concerns are the evolving tactics employed by foreign governments to infiltrate and compromise critical infrastructure, government networks, and sensitive data repositories. From state-sponsored espionage to cyberwarfare tactics aimed at disrupting essential services, threats are constantly evolving, presenting new challenges for Canadian cybersecurity agencies and policymakers. Readers familiar with the work of the House Public Safety and National Security Committee (SECU) will recall many of these topics of concern explored through the committee's study and assessment of Canada's security posture in relation to Russia, tabled in the House in March of 2023, with recommendations to the government.

One of the primary concerns is the growing sophistication of cyberattacks orchestrated by adversarial nations. Whether it's the theft of intellectual property, election interference, or the spread of disinformation, foreign actors are

leveraging advanced techniques to exploit vulnerabilities in our nation's digital infrastructure. These threats undermine national security, and pose significant risks to the economy, public safety, and democratic institutions.

Canadian businesses, both large and small, are increasingly becoming targets of cyberattacks, posing significant risks to their operations, finances, and reputation. From ransomware attacks to data breaches, the impact of cyber incidents on businesses can be devastating, leading to financial losses, legal liabilities, and erosion of consumer trust. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in recent years, experienced the theft of private, personal medical records of thousands of patients, with far-reaching consequences.

Empowering individuals with the knowledge and tools to safeguard their digital lives is paramount in building a cyber-resilient society. This entails practicing good cyber hygiene habits such as using strong, unique passwords, enabling multi-factor authentication, and staying vigilant against phishing attempts and other social engineering tactics. The Government of Canada has an important role to play, and a responsibility in ensuring the

data of Canadians is secure and protected. The Chinese-owned TikTok app, for example, has been in the media of late with fears of possible Chinese government oversight at the forefront. U.S. President Joe Biden recently signed into law a ban on the app that will take effect in that country unless it is sold within one year to an American-owned company. Several years ago, the Canadian government banned the app on all federally regulated devices borne of similar concern.

SECU conducted its study of government Bill C-26, An Act respecting Cybersecurity, Amending the Telecommunications Act and Making Consequential Amendments to other Acts, and reported it back to the House, with many amendments, on April 19, 2024. As I expressed through an op-ed in *The Hill Times* back in October 2022, Bill C-26 grants the minister of public safety wide-reaching powers exempt from scrutiny under the Statutory Instruments Act that include bringing secret evidence to secret hearings, and provides for judges to deliver rulings on that evidence, which is not provided, even in summary, to applicants or their legal representation.

In relation to Bill C-26, the establishment of a Special Advo-

icates Program at Public Safety Canada to increase judicial transparency has been strongly recommended by a coalition of seven organizations and academics: Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Canadian Constitution Foundation, International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group, Ligue des Droits et Libertés, National Council of Canadian Muslims, OpenMedia, Privacy and Access Council of Canada, professor Andrew Clement, and Dr. Brenda McPhail. The government would do well to heed this recommendation, ensuring the privacy of Canadians is protected while government agencies take steps to increase cybersecurity.

Canada stands at a critical juncture in its cybersecurity journey, facing an ever-evolving array of digital threats from foreign governments and malicious actors. To safeguard our nation's digital future, concerted efforts by our federal government are needed to strengthen cybersecurity defences, bolster resilience against emerging threats, and empower Canadians to protect themselves in an increasingly interconnected world. Only through collaborative action and collective vigilance can we navigate the complexities of the digital age and secure a safer, more resilient future for Canada and our citizens.

NDP MP Alistair MacGregor, who represents Cowichan-Malahat-Langford, B.C., is his party's public safety and national security critic.

The Hill Times

Canada's cybersecurity gap needs to be addressed now

Effective defence against cyber threats requires robust two-way communication between government agencies and the private sector.

Ulrike Bahr-Gedalia
& David
Shipley

Opinion



Canada faces an escalating wave of cyber threats that directly endanger the critical infrastructure and essential services we rely on every day. From the disruption of municipal services as seen in Hamilton, Ont., to delayed medical treatments due to ransomware attacks on hospitals to the billions of dollars lost by Canadians because of cyber-enabled fraud, we find

ourselves confronting the realities of a sophisticated cyber dark-age with insufficient defences.

That's not to say we aren't making some progress in correcting this alarming situation—there have been strides recently in securing federally regulated sectors like banking, transportation, telecommunications, and energy transmission; as well as the Government of Canada's announced funding for boosting the cyber resilience of critical infrastructure, including government departments. But these measures alone are not enough. Especially since Canada's cybersecurity ecosystem resembles a medieval castle: robustly protecting the government inside, but leaving the broader domain of provinces, municipalities and businesses vulnerable.

Passing Bill C-26 this spring and refining its regulations over the next year has never been more critical. However, this legislation is only part of the work needed to address Canada's cybersecurity gap.

Effective defence against cyber threats requires robust two-way communication between

government agencies and the private sector. Currently, barriers—chief among them concerns over privacy and legal repercussions—inhibit this essential exchange. Government can incentivize the private sector to share threat data by offering legal protections, financial rewards, and enhanced cybersecurity support.

Such offerings will not only foster greater participation by business, but also promote digital trust and ensure that both public and private sectors can respond to threats with agility and co-ordinated precision. Improved collaboration will prevent cyber criminals from exploiting the weaknesses in our patchwork of regulations and outpacing our defensive efforts.

A national summit on ransomware is one example of taking a proactive step towards uniting stakeholders against this pervasive threat, and setting a strategic agenda to bolster Canada's digital defences.

Alongside increased collaboration, we also need to continue advancing cybersecurity in national discourse and through intergovernmental work with

provinces and municipalities. Elevating the parliamentary secretary for cybersecurity to a cabinet-level position would be a declaration from Canada that cybersecurity is a top government priority, crucial for our national interest. A full-seat cabinet role would mean improved resources, streamlined decision-making, a clear mandate for rapid action, and accountability for collaboration and coordination—all the necessary measures for strengthening our cybersecurity posture, and safeguarding the digital economy upon which Canadians are increasingly dependent.

However, no cybersecurity defence strategy would be complete without measures to empower small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with the resources and capabilities to fend off cyber-attacks. Making up 98 per cent of all businesses, SMEs are the backbone of our economy, yet many lack the financial resources and expertise to effectively respond to cyber threats, making them easy targets. By redirecting funding from lower-priority government

spending to a dedicated SME Cyber Defence Fund, Canada can help SMEs improve their cyber resilience, and close the cybersecurity investment gap.

The stakes are high. The time for decisive action is now. If Canada is to have a hope of surpassing or at least catching up to cyber criminals—and our allies—we need to move from fragmented and reactive to unified and proactive.

Through an updated national cybersecurity strategy that includes robust information-sharing mechanisms, increased collaboration, and coordination between government and private sector, a full cabinet position and help for SMEs, we could safeguard our economy and enhance the prosperity of all Canadians.

Bill C-26 is a starting point, but should be viewed as the foundation upon which we build a more resilient cybersecurity framework and national strategy that is inclusive of all Canadians. And while we're at it, why not also position ourselves as a leader in global cybersecurity efforts?

Ulrike Bahr-Gedalia is the senior director of Digital Economy, Technology and Innovation at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and council lead of the chamber's 'Cyber. Right. Now.' campaign. David Shipley is the CEO of Beauceron Security, and council co-chair of 'Cyber. Right. Now.'

The Hill Times

Policy Briefing **Digital Privacy and Security**

We need more accountability and transparency for not only TikTok, but other social media firms that are designed to draw our attention, money, and communicate information to millions of people, writes Kristen Csenkey, a PhD Candidate at the Balsillie School of International Affairs.

Photograph by Geri Tech, Pexels.com



When will TikTok's time be up?

The TikTok case brings to the forefront the complex political-economic-social relationships between private firms, governments, and our data.

Kristen Csenkey

Opinion



Most Canadians are concerned about their online safety and privacy—and they don't trust social media companies to protect them or their personal informa-

tion. That's according to a 2023 study based on public opinion research prepared for the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada by Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. The federal government doesn't trust certain social media companies, either, and, in September 2023, the Liberals quietly ordered a national security review of the popular video platform, TikTok. This review comes ahead of the minister of innovation, science and industry and the minister of Canadian heritage's announcement about new policies relating to foreign investment as part of the recent amendment to the Investment Canada Act this past March.

TikTok is owned by the Chinese technology company ByteDance Ltd., and is widely popular around the world, especially in the United States and among younger users. According to a study commissioned by TikTok, the company contrib-

uted US\$24.2-billion in GDP in the U.S. in 2023. The company frequently boasts that its platform contributes to economic growth and jobs, builds communities, and brings awareness to social movements.

TikTok's popularity and rising security concerns are more than just about interactive video creation and engagement. The social media platform's collection of vast amounts of user data, paired with the ability to facilitate participation in politics, information sharing, and conversations about power have raised national security concerns in many countries. Among these concerns is the association between ByteDance Ltd. and the Chinese government, and by extension the possible interference by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

To date, there is no publicly available evidence of CCP interference. Classified intelligence data was made available to

U.S. Senators in a briefing, and before the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act ('TikTok Ban') in April. The bill prohibits 'foreign adversaries' from controlling applications, and requires them to sell or face restrictions. TikTok's CEO Shou Zi Chew told the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee that ByteDance Ltd. is not owned or controlled by the Chinese government because it is a private entity. Many security experts and pundits alike have questioned the links between the CCP and the firm, especially the political power that the party can exercise over Chinese companies.

Although TikTok and, by extension, ByteDance Ltd. are not owned by the Chinese government, the company may act to support their current investors and in alignment with the demands of political powers in the People's Republic of China. Yet, there are other immediate security and privacy concerns relating to the platform including data protection, storage, and security, the possibility of malware through app updates, among other issues. TikTok—like many social media apps—collects sensitive data on users, such as location, contacts, demographic information, and biometric identifiers. When compiled together, this data can present a user profile and other sensitive information for trading, espionage, or other nefarious purposes. In this regard, it makes sense that the TikTok app was banned from government devices in Canada in 2023.

To be clear, there are certain risks that this technology poses through its connection to a Chinese company, and these risks are compounded with the bigger issues surrounding social media platforms. Like semiconductors and quantum technologies, national security concerns

about TikTok are often tied up in U.S.-China economic rivalry, great power strategic competition, and the geopolitics of technology. It is important not to lose sight of the bigger picture that the TikTok case brings to the forefront: the complex political-economic-social relationships between private companies—whether foreign-owned or not—governments, and our data.

Many other social media businesses collect massive amounts of data, have weak security, contribute to the economy, use algorithms and other technologies to amplify or remove content, and can be used to influence public perceptions about issues in society. The difference in the TikTok case is that currently it is an economic powerhouse with global reach. We need more accountability and transparency for not only TikTok, but also other social media companies that are designed to draw our attention, our money, communicate information to millions of people, and use our data to create and sell more products.

If Canadians are overwhelmingly concerned about their digital privacy and security, and don't trust social media companies to protect them and their data, then a national security review, foreign investment acts, and any future Parliamentary or Senate studies or reports must ensure that steps are taken to protect Canadian data. This protection may mean increased transparency about data collection, use, and flow, accountability thorough external third-party review, and give Canadians a real choice about what, where, when, and how their data is used.

Kristen Csenkey is a PhD candidate at the Balsillie School of International Affairs in Waterloo, Ont. She studies cyber governance and the management of emerging technologies.

The Hill Times

Digital Privacy and Security Policy Briefing

Protecting businesses from cyberattack starts with awareness and understanding

The COVID-19 pandemic saw the majority of businesses go virtual with many firms trading off cybersecurity for digitalization of services. However, cybercriminals are used to working remotely, and taking advantage of the new ways to hack companies.



Artificial intelligence, which can be used for many legitimate purposes, is also used more and more by cybercriminals to launch and automate cyberattacks, writes Diane Ouandji, an information security and data protection advisor. *Photograph by Nick Youngson, CC BY-SA 3.0, Pix4free*

Diane
Ouandji

Opinion



Mitre, an organization established to advance (cyber) security in new ways and serve the public interest as an indepen-

dent adviser, reported in April that it experienced a breach. If such a group is experiencing a breach, what does it say about the evolving cyber threat?

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a vast majority of businesses go virtual with many companies making a trade-off between cybersecurity and digitalization

of services. On the other hand, cybercriminals are used to working remotely and are taking advantage of the new opportunities to hack companies, which has led to a surge in ransomware attacks.

Businesses need to be aware of this evolving threat. A long time ago, cybercriminals were pictured as geeks working from a basement. Now, the threat is more akin to organized crime. We have cybercriminal groups specializing in developing malware, groups specializing in operating infrastructure used to launch cyberattacks, others trained in laundering the ransoms criminals get paid by victims and even providing ransomware as a service.

Furthermore, artificial intelligence (AI), which of course can be used for many legitimate purposes, is also used more and more by cybercriminals to launch and automate cyberattacks. It is now increasingly easy to create a targeted phishing email using information gathered from social media posts. Once we told employees to watch out for poor grammar, links, or attached documents to detect phishing emails. This is no longer enough.

How can businesses protect themselves against cyberattacks? It starts with awareness and understanding: awareness that

no business is safe from cyberattacks—no business is too uninteresting for cybercriminals. It takes an understanding that sometimes a firm is hacked as a way to get in the system of its clients, understanding that paying the ransom only gives cybercriminals more ammunition, that ransomware attacks are not the only kind of cyberattacks, and that cybersecurity is like physical training: you have to keep doing it to maintain your conditions because once you stop, that very condition you worked so hard for deteriorates. So, keep working to reinforce your cybersecurity posture, even when there are set backs.

Companies of all sizes can also gain by deploying basic cybersecurity controls by maintaining a cyber hygiene. Some groups like the U.S. Center for Internet Security provides excellent and internationally recognized—and free—resources to help organizations select cybersecurity controls appropriate to their contexts.

Finally, invest in your people. Phishing email and business email compromise—an attack where an employee is lured into paying a fake bill or transferring money from a business's bank account to a cybercriminal account—are still vastly used by cybercriminals.

According to Verizon 2023 Data breach report, 74 per cent of all breaches include the human element, with people being involved either via error, privilege misuse, use of stolen credentials, or social engineering.

Understanding the risks, context, and risk appetite of a company to choose the best controls and tools, training employees, are key to ensuring a company invests its resources where they are most needed to protect itself against cyberattacks and data breaches.

All of this will help you to prevent cyberattacks or to minimize their impact when they happen. Having cyber insurance adapted to your organization's needs, having a breach coach, and training your employees to better handle cyberattacks are all essential steps worth taking to limit the impact of a successful cyberattack.

Remember: It is not a question of whether a cyberattack will succeed, but when. So, hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

Diane Ouandji is an information security and data protection adviser based in the vibrant city of Montreal. She is also a LinkedIn Learning lecturer with several cybersecurity courses available online.

The Hill Times

Deeper questions about the place of social media in our society

TikTok's privacy and security issues may lead us to miss an arguably more important concern: the sheer impact on mental health and productivity caused by daily usage of the platform.



More frequent use of social media is associated with higher incidence of depression among Americans aged 19-32, with similar findings reported internationally, writes Katrina German is the founder of EthicalDigital.ca. *Photograph by Solen Feyissa, Pexels.com*

different from the version used in China, which is more educational in nature. With a Google Study sharing that 40 per cent of people aged 18-24 use Instagram and TikTok to search for decision-making information, we have to wonder at the strategy behind providing less-educationally based content.

At the same time, TikTok's privacy and security issues may lead us to miss an arguably more important concern: the sheer impact on mental health and productivity caused by daily usage of the platform.

There are more Canadians on TikTok than on X (formerly Twitter). Some 14.89 million Canadians — 41 per cent of the population—were using the platform as of March 2024. Nearly 76 per cent of Canadians aged 18 to 24 are on TikTok, one of the most addictive social media platforms. Users are spending an average of 46 minutes per day on the app and on average, open it eight times daily. As many of the videos are 15 seconds long, users could be consuming 180 videos per day.

For young people in particular, the impact on education and productivity has been staggering.

Small wonder that several Ontario school boards have sued the social media giants for the effect that their products have had on learning and in-class behaviour. A government that purportedly wants to spur innovation and growth should be worried.

But, of course, this is not only about the economic cost. Our young people are suffering. Research shows the effects of social media usage on mental health. More frequent use of social media is associated with higher incidence of depression among American individuals between the ages of 19 and 32. Similar findings have been reported internationally. The extent to which this relationship is causal or correlational is a matter of debate. It is far from obvious, though, that social media companies deserve the benefit of the doubt, given that their apps are typically designed to be as addictive as possible.

There has been a great deal of attention on the national security implications of TikTok. That is appropriate. While the Canadian government considers how to respond to the American legislation, however, it should also reflect on deeper questions about the place of social media generally in our society — and in the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

Katrina German is the founder of EthicalDigital.ca, a certified B-Corp that is changing the trajectory of the internet.

The Hill Times

Katrina
German

Opinion



On April 24, U.S. President Joe Biden signed a bill that would require ByteDance either to sell TikTok to a non-Chinese company within 270 days, or have the app blocked in the United States.

Insider reports suggest that ByteDance is unlikely to sell.

The American legislation has been driven by privacy and national security considerations. As a Chinese-owned company, ByteDance could be compelled to provide TikTok user data to Chinese authorities, potentially compromising the privacy and security of millions of American users. Such concerns have led a number of governments—including Canada's—to prohibit their employees from having the TikTok app on their smartphones.

Such privacy and national security concerns are legitimate—though one could fairly ask if it makes sense to focus so myopically on ByteDance. Nearly 60 per cent of Canadians expressed concern over TikTok's lingering privacy issues. This isn't just idle speculation or paranoia: there have been confirmed reports of TikTok employees tracking the location of reporters from *BuzzFeed* and *Financial Times* in an attempt to identify their confidential sources.

Moreover, it's important to realize that the TikTok with which we are familiar is completely

Policy Briefing **Digital Privacy and Security**

Bill C-26: catching up on cybersecurity, but missing out on revolutionary technologies

Morva Rohani*Opinion*

Canada is woefully behind the curve when it comes embracing the upside of new technological opportunities and mitigating their risks. We need to embrace, not avoid, emerging tech like blockchain and artificial intelligence to revolutionize how we secure our critical infrastructures.

As the last G7 country (and one of the few G20 nations) lacking a robust regulatory framework for cybersecurity, the government is trying to take action to safeguard the nation's critical infrastructure assets. Earlier this month, the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security amended Bill C-26: An Act respecting cyber security, which has trudged through Parliament since June 2022.

The legislation has two primary goals: first, to prevent telecom networks in Canada from

incorporating hardware from adversarial countries that could put Canadians at risk; second, to strengthen our critical infrastructure against a broad spectrum of new digital threats.

To do that, the bill introduces the Critical Cyber Systems Protection Act, which empowers the government to impose cyber security measures on sectors of the federally regulated private sector that are considered crucial to national security. This encompasses a range of sectors, including telecommunications and federally regulated transportation. It also covers energy and power systems, such as pipelines and nuclear facilities, along with banking and financial settlement processes.

While establishing a baseline of cyber hygiene for those in the banking and financial sectors will be a net positive, C-26 is by no means a panacea.

The latest National Cyber Threat Assessment from the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security outlines how disruptive technologies are both targets and tools for cyber threat actors to enable

malicious cyber threat activity, referring to digital assets such as cryptocurrencies, and decentralized finance. There are certainly risks associated with new technologies, especially those associated with our growing and increasingly borderless digital economy. While only 0.34 per cent of all crypto transaction volume is associated with illicit activity, crypto scams and cybercrimes in general can be complex to navigate due to a variety of factors, including quickly advancing technology.

We can use these quickly advancing technologies to our advantage, though. Blockchain technology is one such solution. More than just crypto, it can provide the solutions we desperately need to get ahead of criminals and contribute to securing our nation's critical infrastructures. Blockchain, being inherently decentralized and driven by consensus, makes it naturally resistant to attacks. The development of blockchains can also be improved by using AI to identify and thwart malicious manipulation of data.

For example, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, the number of "high impact" cyber incidents reported by Canada's banks nearly tripled last year. Bill C-26 would allow the federal government to direct the response strategies of critical industries like banks to potential attacks. But tackling the evolving sophistication of Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS), data breaches, and ransomware attacks requires looking to evolving technologies for solutions. Hackers exploit the existing structure of the internet to both preserve their anonymity and circumvent defenses against their attacks. Increasing the distribution of security protocols, software deployment, and database management might make targets less susceptible by dispersing weak points in cyber defences while reducing dependence on centralized trust. Ultimately, blockchain technology offers a decentralization strategy that can counter hackers more effectively and outmaneuver them at their own game.

Canada needs to be bold in its utilization of the blockchain

sector to solve critical problems in the cybersecurity space. One successful example involves the Calgary Police Service, which recently partnered with Chainalysis, a blockchain data platform that provides services and research to government agencies, law enforcement, financial institutions, and cybersecurity companies, to create the CPS Blockchain Investigation Team and help them fight illicit activity.

Canada needs a robust regulatory framework for cybersecurity, especially when it comes to our evolving digital economy. But this is just an initial step. Governments at all levels, law enforcement, and our critical infrastructures need to catch up and embrace new technologies like blockchain instead of resisting them, or we risk falling behind the criminals.

Morva Rohani is the founding executive director of the Canadian Web3 Council (CW3), a non-profit trade association representing Canada's blockchain and Web3 sector.

The Hill Times

How can Canada's federal public and private sector privacy laws be modernized to contend with the constantly evolving digital landscape?

Katrina Ingram*Opinion*

Data is the currency of our digital society. We're collecting, processing, storing, and reusing an ever-growing volume of data, often devoid of context, considerations about where it came from, or how it is being remixed. New ways of using data, such as training artificial intelligence (AI) systems, continue to drive us further down this path. Increasingly, data is seen primarily as fuel for digital innovation, specifically AI.

But AI has a problem that more data will not solve: it lacks public trust.

A recent study notes that 27 per cent of Canadian companies have banned AI citing legal and privacy concerns as key reasons. The latest Edelman Trust Barometer finds that 54 per cent of Canadians surveyed reject AI innovation, while only 17 per

cent embrace it. Anecdotally, I hear similar concerns from clients and other professionals working in the AI governance space.

If we want to build a responsible and trustworthy AI ecosystem then we need to take data privacy seriously by strengthening privacy regulations. Perhaps this feels antithetical. Yet, the Edelman report finds that the government's inability to effectively regulate new technologies puts trust in innovation at risk. Privacy is a core element of what needs to be addressed in effectively regulating digital technologies which rely on the use of data.

As it stands, Canadians should be concerned.

Our current privacy laws are antiquated, and based on upholding the comforting myth that data can be anonymized to remove the parts that would compromise privacy, specifically personally identifying information (PII). A growing body of research shows that anonymization is not possible when we have big data that can be easily recombined to re-iden-

tify individuals, a risk that grows with increased datafication.

Furthermore, data that might not be considered PII, but that involves human behaviour, can also be used in ways that create risks and cause harm. Our data doesn't just impact us, it also impacts other people who are algorithmically determined to be similar to us—a lesson we should have learned in the years following Cambridge Analytica. The nature of machine-learning techniques relies on the ability to use aggregated data from individuals to make predictions about groups of people, which troubles the notion of legal protections focused solely on the individual. Instead, legal scholars have argued that privacy is interdependent in nature. Our narrow perspectives about data mask issues that are central to the conversation around how data is actually used in AI systems, and why it's deemed valuable.

In addition, consent mechanisms for data use are broken. The notion of giving meaningful, informed consent online is ob-

scured by long and cumbersome terms and conditions concealed by digital 'clickwrap'. More recently, some organizations are trying to retroactively redefine the terms of consent by posting disclosure notices for new and potentially lucrative uses for data, such as training generative AI. While consent remains important, it may no longer be sufficient in and of itself to provide adequate protections for all people in a digital context.

Modernizing Canadian privacy laws involves rethinking our perspectives about data. Data is an extension of people, determining our access to fundamental goods that determine life chances such as education, healthcare, financial resources or social services. Taking a broader human rights-centered approach can address current issues while providing a solid foundation upon which to guide future digital technologies. In her June 2020 paper, *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Data Protection in Canada*, legal scholar Teresa Scassa has

written extensively on this topic. One concrete step in the privacy reform process could be to include a set of recitals that would enshrine privacy as a human right, and "give legislative voice to the principles and human rights values that are meant to underlie data protection law in Canada," as Scassa writes in the report. Embracing and prioritizing a human rights perspective allows us to seek clarity as to how data involving humans should or should not be used in this digital era. To truly embrace the principles of autonomy and justice, they must extend to our digital selves—our data—as a fundamental entitlement. Though it sounds paradoxical, this isn't an affront to innovation. It could, instead, be part of sustainable, trustworthy innovation based on the public good. Real trust needs to be earned and freely given when parties act in ways that are trustworthy. Providing comprehensive protection for the privacy interests of Canadians that aligns with human rights, could engender greater public trust and advance more responsible AI development and adoption.

Katrina Ingram is the founder and CEO of Ethically Aligned AI, a company focused on helping organizations to drive better outcomes in the design, development and deployment of AI systems. She is the former data ethics adviser for the City of Edmonton, an IAPP-certified information privacy professional, and has been named to the "100 Brilliant Women in AI Ethics" list.

The Hill Times

News

If Prime Minister Trudeau stays, he needs one 'last reboot' this summer, say Liberal MPs, pollsters, and political insiders

But one thing that could improve the Liberals' electoral fortunes is change at the top, not a reset, says David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data.

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vide any uptick in support for the Liberal Party's electoral fortunes.

A Nanos Research poll released April 26 suggested that the Conservatives had the support of 43 per cent of Canadians, followed by the Liberals who were at 23 per cent. The New Democratic Party is at 16 per cent, the Bloc Québécois eight per cent, the Greens four per cent, and the People's Party of Canada three per cent.

Similarly, an Abacus Data poll released late last week suggested that the Conservatives had a 21-point lead over the Liberals, 44 per cent to 23 per cent. The NDP was at 17 per cent, the Bloc seven per cent and the Greens four per cent.

All those who were interviewed for this article said that one obvious strategy that could help the Liberals to be competitive is to elect a new leader, but Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) has been insisting he has no plans to leave. Some current and senior Liberals still think that if the current polling trends do not improve, Trudeau will take one last hard look at his decision this summer to about his future

Even after \$53-billion in new spending announced in last month's federal budget, Justin Trudeau's Liberals have failed to gain any traction with Canadians. Last week's polls suggested that the Liberals are 21 points behind the Conservatives. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

plans. If he still decides to run next time, then the government will have to undertake some "big, bold and dramatic ideas" in terms of a cabinet shuffle, bringing on new staffers at the most senior level, and come up with some new policy ideas that will capture the attention of Canadians.

To explain what they meant by this, MPs and political insiders said Trudeau has to make major changes as if a new government is coming to power. To boost the bench strength, some said, as an example, the prime minister needs to bring in at least three high-profile people—such as former Bank of Canada governor Mark

Carney—and will have to come up with a new and bold agenda.

These sources said that the next election is scheduled for Oct. 20, 2025, but it's highly unlikely that the Liberals will be able to stay in power until that time. So far, the NDP has been supporting the government on all confidence votes. But, in preparation for the next election, at some point, the NDP will have to decouple itself from the Liberal government. The sources said that after the pharmacare bill is passed, all bets are off that the NDP will keep propping up the government. So, these sources predicted that the next budget will be the last in which that the New Democrats will keep supporting the Liberals.

MPs and Liberal insiders said that if the prime minister did not hit reset, the only other hope the party would have is that Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) and his senior team start to make gaffes big enough to move the public opinion against the Official Opposition.

"Either the prime minister is seen as tired, or the government is seen as tired," said one former senior Liberal. "So how do you reset a tired government? The easiest way is to change the leader, and if the leader is not going to change, it is to change the face of government outside of that."

Some Liberal MPs interviewed for this article said that the polling trends since last year are suggesting that Canadians want change. To deal with that, "we need to bring in a new face of the

government as otherwise there's no pathway left for us."

"If the leader is going to stay then the team around the leader needs to look different. That needs to be a field of change because if there's an appetite for change, there needs to be a look and feel of change," said a Liberal MP, who spoke on a not-for-attribution basis to express their candid views. "The people around him need to be adept communicators that are political, that are able to manage political message, and deal with difficult circumstances without being afraid."

MPs said that it's too late to bring in new people from outside of government because that would require those people to be elected in byelections. So, that plan should be implemented in the next federal election, they said. Right now, they said, there is enough talent available in the backbenches that could provide a boost to a "tired-looking" front bench.

Nanos said that Trudeau can emulate then-Liberal leader Jean Chrétien's 1992 strategy before he won government. At the time, Chrétien was not personally very popular, so he showcased his team to Canadians, which helped him win the 1993 election. Nanos said that bringing in a few star candidates could likewise give renewed profile to Trudeau's team, and invite Canadians to draw their own conclusions.

"Justin Trudeau has become a lightning rod for many Canadi-

ans," he said. "He can put senior cabinet ministers in the window, and the job that they're doing, and people might say, 'well, you know, maybe they're not hot on Justin Trudeau, but look at the team that he has, he has a better team than the alternative.'"

Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, said that the Liberals have been in power for nine years, and considering the current polling numbers, it appears highly unlikely that even a major reboot—short of leadership change—would yield favourable results for the Liberal Party.

"None of this stuff makes a difference," said Bricker. "I mean, you just saw from the budget. The government is throwing everything they could possibly throw at something—like, as much as they've ever done for anything they've ever done—and you saw the effect. So, yeah, you should try everything, you never know what's going to work. But we're now in the realm of hope rather than actually being able to do anything to that you could define that would change things".

David Coletto, CEO of Abacus Data, said that if Trudeau goes ahead with a shuffle and comes up with a new legislative agenda in the fall, there's no guarantee that the NDP would support it. He said that the key reason for the government's tanking support is the leader, and unless something is done to address that issue, it appears unlikely that the polling trends will reverse. Coletto said that even if the Liberals bring in people like Carney, he's not a household name, and most Canadians across the country won't have any idea who he is.

"I'm not sure what else there is to reset," said Coletto. "He's tried to shuffle the cabinet [last summer]. He's brought in a big budget. He has done the circuit in trying to talk directly to Canadians through the media ... I'm having a hard time figuring out what's left in his tool belt other than him, obviously, stepping down, that achieves the goal of getting Canadians to refocus and, I guess, view him and the government in a completely different light."

Coletto said that the only thing that could likely save the Liberals is some external event like a disaster, which causes people to change the way they evaluate the government, and who they want to have making decisions on their behalf. A second option that may work for the Liberals is to spend millions of dollars in running attack ads against the Conservatives.

"That's the one thing they haven't done yet, and I don't know if that's going to work, raising doubts about the opposition and what the alternative could look like," said Coletto.

"The only path forward for the prime minister in an election, or in a period before an election is to make people feel that the outcomes if he wasn't in charge would be worse, or fundamentally different in a bad way than the outcomes that his choices have produced for people."

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The Hill Times



Mark Carney, former governor of the Bank of Canada and of England, is widely expected to seek the Liberal leadership whenever Prime Minister Justin Trudeau steps aside. Some Liberal MPs and insiders say he should be brought in the caucus as part of a government reset. *The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia*

Disinformation campaigns having long-term impact on public trust, MPs warned

MediaSmarts executive director Kathryn Hill urges parliamentarians and all Canadians be trained to identify trusted sources, but in a way that focuses on ‘discernment over just debunking.’

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tools to better recognize the signs of mis- and disinformation.

The Media Ecosystem Observatory, a collaboration between McGill University and the University of Toronto, took part in studies of misinformation and disinformation during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, plus the 2022 Quebec provincial election. Bridgman said in all cases, misinformation was widespread, but it had little impact on the vote outcomes.

“It’s not that it’s inconsequential, it does matter, but it is not existential, at least not yet in Canada, to the extent that there’s this sort of pervasive feeling that this is really deeply damaging,” he said. “It matters, we need to study it to address it, we need to think about it in a holistic way, but we don’t need to stamp it out, and the notion that it even could be stamped out or addressed in that way is sort of spurious.”

Much of the discussion centred on disinformation as a form of foreign interference. Such campaigns are not necessarily launched in order to sway public opinion toward one cause or another, according to Jakub Kalenský from the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, but they can also be used to exacerbate polarization within other countries.

“We saw the Russians organizing both pro-Muslim and anti-Muslim rallies in the United States, we saw them spreading both radically feminist messaging and very anti-feminist messaging, we saw them spreading both aggressively pro-migration content and anti-migration content,” he said. “The point is to portray the other side of the barricade as unreasonable and something you cannot agree with... so you decrease the possibility of reasonable discussion.”

Asked by Liberal MP Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Que.)



The House Ethics Committee is studying the impact of misinformation and disinformation on the work of parliamentarians. Patrick White, associate professor of journalism at the Université du Québec à Montréal, said the world is at a crossroads with mis- and disinformation. He said Canada should be on a ‘war footing’ against fake news content farms. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

about potential Russian campaigns to promote antisemitism in North America, Kalenský said the country could be running such campaigns both to spread anti-American sentiment, and to distract from the invasion of Ukraine.

“If more people focus on what’s happening in the Middle East, less people will be focusing on what’s happening in Ukraine,” he said.

The threat of foreign-organized disinformation campaigns is particularly pronounced for diaspora communities, said former Conservative MP Kenny Chiu, who has long said that he was the target of propaganda and disinformation on WeChat during the 2021 election campaign.

Chiu, who lost his re-election attempt in Steveston-Richmond East, B.C., that year, said articles alleging that his private member’s bill proposing a foreign influence registry would pose a danger to Chinese-Canadians had circulated on WeChat, while other articles said that both Chiu and the Conservative Party harboured anti-Asian sentiments. The 2021 census indicated that 39,385 of the 101,985 people living in Steveston-Richmond East listed a Chinese language as a “mother tongue.”

Chiu told the committee that diaspora groups that primarily communicated in languages other than English or French bore the brunt of misinformation and disinformation campaigns.

“[What would happen] if mis- and disinformation are being spread on WeChat in a language that is not one of the official languages, what kind of discourse we’d have, what kind of response we’re going to have? A parliamentarian would not even be aware of the misinformation being spread,” he said. “That’s why I keep saying on WeChat, on TikTok, on Douyin, these are platforms that are

problematic for us, these are controlled by foreign actors, and these dictatorial regimes that are interested in harming the very peaceful harmony that Canada is in.”

At the same time, Bridgman said it was important to note that the origin of a lot of the misinformation and disinformation comes from domestic actors who are exploiting an already polarized political environment.

“They use opportunities afforded by our political environment, events, moments when there’s tension in Canada or in the United States or other countries... and they try to amplify that,” he said. “So there needs to be a concerted effort collectively to say, ‘Okay, here’s a moment when they’re trying to polarize us.’”

NDP MP Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, Ont.) asked Bridgman about how such content affected the self-described “Freedom Convoy” that occupied Ottawa in early 2022. He noted that the results of such campaigns disproportionately resulted in hate targeting racialized and 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians, as well as Jewish and Muslim communities.

Bridgman said mis- and disinformation can exacerbate existing anger. In many cases, it only needs to affect a small subset of the population already predisposed to believe such information in order to be effective, he said.

“There is also this other dimension of politics, and we can’t confuse the two. We can’t say just because there is mis- and disinformation behind or part of a political phenomena, that that political phenomena wouldn’t exist without mis- and disinformation,” he said.

Media literacy is critical

Witnesses repeatedly raised the development of education

campaigns to help Canadians better understand the signs of misinformation and disinformation as a way to mitigate the effects.

Kathryn Hill, executive director of digital media literacy centre MediaSmarts, said she wants such training to be mandatory for parliamentarians and their staff, and a digital media strategy for government as a whole.

“Folks who work for government are as vulnerable as any of us are to being fooled, to reading something and not knowing how to verify well and easily,” she said. “We know that there are really easy skills that folks can learn very quickly that will help them feel confident about the information they’re consuming, knowing what’s a reliable source and sharing good information.”

That education will become increasingly important as artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and other emerging technologies improve the ability to create misleading content online. Conservative MP Larry Brock (Brantford-Brant, Ont.) pointed the committee to a related incident in last year’s Slovakian parliamentary election.

Two days before the vote, a fake audio clip purported to unveil journalist Monika Tódová and Progressive Slovakia leader Michal Šimečka discussing the latter’s rigging of the election. The pro-NATO party was subsequently defeated in the election by the Smer party, which had promised to cut all aid funding to Ukraine.

Closer to Canada, a deepfake imitation of U.S. President Joe Biden robocalled New Hampshire voters in January telling them not to vote in the state’s presidential primary.

Patrick White, associate professor of journalism at the Université du Québec à Montréal, said the world is at a crossroads with mis- and disinformation. He said Canada should be on a

“war footing” against fake news content farms.

“AI is an opportunity as well as a threat,” he said. “As far as deepfakes are concerned, I would strongly urge the government to legislate on that matter in the next 12 to 18 months ... taking into account the upcoming federal election in Canada.”

White said the provisions promoting Canadian content in the Online Streaming Act and Online News Act would help with those efforts, as would some parts of Bill C-63, the Online Harms Act. At the same time, however, White said consumers had been engaged in news avoidance since the COVID-19 pandemic first broke out, while Facebook’s ban on news content in Canada has been reducing exposure to more reliable sources on social media.

Matthew Johnson, MediaSmarts’ director of education, told the committee that the lack of information about how social media algorithms recommend content to Canadians was also concerning.

“We have moved from an environment where most of the information we consumed was curated by humans, where even if we didn’t necessarily have access to the rooms where it happened, those processes were documented, they were understandable,” he said. “We’re now at a situation where that is being done in a way that is not knowable to the consumer, and in many cases is not knowable even to the people who operate these platforms.”

Such decisions were being made by machine learning algorithms that Johnson said “frequently make decisions based on data or proxy data that may be inaccurate, that may be discriminatory, that may in some cases lead people who have already begun consuming some conspiracy or disinformation-adjacent information will lead them down rabbit holes. In an even broader sense, it makes us alienated from our information ecosystem because we don’t know how these decisions are being made.”

Asked for examples of “best practice” countries that had managed to stem the impact of mis- and disinformation, Hill said Finland’s media literacy education system was an excellent example.

The country, which ranks first in a 2023 Media Literacy Index of 41 countries by the Open Society Institute Sofia and European Policies Initiative, teaches school students, politicians, journalists, and seniors media literacy and how to find trusted sources of information.

“We need to promote information verification as a social norm and habit in Canada,” she said.

“Most importantly, it is essential to focus on discernment over just debunking. Many interventions aimed solely at teaching people to recognize misinformation have a side effect of reducing trust in reliable sources as well, essentially teaching people to be cynical instead of skeptical.”

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News

Treasury Board, unions, leaders, experts contend with evolving federal in-office requirements

PIPSC's head of public affairs Stéphanie Montreuil says 'we want to make sure that we're choosing a path that is the best for our members,' and that 'we are currently seriously assessing our options.'

BY MIKE LAPOINTE



Treasury Board President Anita Anand. The government recently announced all federal public service employees would be mandated to come into the office at least three days a week. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The federal government's decision to require that public servants come into the office for a minimum of three days a week beginning in September is not sitting well with public service unions, but it's part of a trend that's increasingly called for by political leaders at other levels of government.

Stéphanie Montreuil, head of public affairs for the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC), Canada's second largest federal public service union, said there had been no consultation about the decision—unveiled last week and to take effect in September—to increase the number of required days in the office from two to three per week.

"We were told, hours before the meeting, that there would be an announcement. But at this point, we all know that this was leaked way ahead of time. So we kind of suspected what the announcement was going to be. But I can definitely confirm that it was a complete surprise, and that there were no consultations with PIPSC at all," said Montreuil.

When asked what the union's plans are on this issue in the upcoming days and weeks, Montreuil said there are "various mechanisms" that could be used, including a demand for an emergency meeting with Treasury Board, and the exploration of legal avenues when the announcement was made.

"We are still studying those options, and want to make sure that we're choosing a path that is the best for our members," said Montreuil. "We haven't defined what that will look like. But we are currently seriously assessing our options."

In a press release, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), the government's largest public sector union, said it would file an unfair labour practice complaint, is examining additional legal options, and would update

its members and take further action in the coming days.

"PSAC members are incredibly frustrated and angered by this announcement," according to the release. "In every corner of the country, we have seen how the current in-office requirements aren't being consistently or equitably managed by most departments."

Government formalized the announcement on May 1 following leak to media

Le Devoir reported on April 29 that the federal government would announce changes to its hybrid working method, and that Treasury Board President Anita Anand (Oakville, Ont.) would announce to public servants that they would be required to work in the office for three days per week.

That leak to the press was confirmed on May 1 when the government updated its direction on prescribed presence in the workplace, outlining that the direction "sets out the requirement for deputy heads to implement a minimum requirement of three days per week in the workplace for all public servants."

In the last couple of weeks before and since the April 16 federal budget came down, other levels of government publicly lobbied to have public servants return to the office more frequently.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford called on the federal government "to get people back to work," during a press conference on March 29 in Ottawa, standing next to Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe.

"It sounds crazy. I'm begging people to go to work for three days—not that they aren't working at home, but it really affects the downtown," said Ford at the time.

A month later, on April 29, Ford and Sutcliffe came together in Ottawa once again, with the

mayor saying "if federal public servants are going to be in the office three days a week, instead of the current scenario, I think it will be better for downtown Ottawa and better for public transit."

Ford, in his remarks to reporters, noted that back in March, he and Sutcliffe "talked about the city of Ottawa's unique needs as our provinces second largest city, as our nation's capital, and as an economic and service hub for all of Eastern Ontario."

"Recognizing these distinct circumstances and wanting to see the city succeed and grow, we put our heads together and reached a landmark deal for the city," said Ford, referring to a \$543-million agreement to provide provincial funding for housing, travel, and public safety over 10 years.

Of that figure, \$181-million was allocated for roads, highways, and other transportation needs, in addition to \$20-million allocated through Invest Ottawa. Ford also spoke about attracting more investment to the region to help revitalize the city's downtown core.

Sutcliffe also met with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.)—with the prime minister opting to meet at Ottawa City Hall for the first time in the city's history, rather than having the meeting take place at the Prime Minister's Office.

Sutcliffe told CTV News that he raised "Ottawa's unique challenges" in his conversation with Trudeau, and that if the federal government was looking to move out of properties across Canada and in the downtown core, "that's having a huge impact on the downtown core and on our public transit system."

'Outside views did not influence the decision' to boost in-office mandate, says Treasury Board

The federal public service adopted a common hybrid work

model to "ensure the experience of working in the public service or receiving services is the same across the government and across the country," according to a statement from Rosa Salem with Treasury Board media relations.

"To maximize the benefits of presence in the workplace, and to bring greater fairness and consistency to the application of hybrid work for our employees, the direction on prescribed presence in the workplace has been updated," wrote Salem.

Salem said requiring a minimum of three days in the workplace per week reflected the benefits consistent with in-person interactions, including more effective collaboration and onboarding of new talent, as well as creating a strong culture of performance that is consistent with the values and ethics of the public service.

The Treasury Board also noted that the "direction remains in line with the government's commitment to reduce its office footprint," noting that departments and agencies worked with Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to ensure workplaces could accommodate the implementation of the common hybrid work model in March 2023.

PSPC has also since confirmed that workplaces can accommodate the three-day minimum, according to the government.

"This was an administrative decision taken by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, working with deputy heads across government," according to Salem. "Outside views did not influence this decision. We continue to invest in and monitor how hybrid work is implemented and optimized across the public service and ensure that it continues to provide fairness, flexibility, and focus on a high performing public service delivering for Canadians."

'It's not serious fiscal policy,' says Wernick of recent cuts announcements

At the same time, the 2024 budget announced plans to shrink the federal public service by 5,000 full-time equivalent jobs via "natural attrition" over the next four years, projecting \$15.8-billion in savings down the line.

Former clerk of the Privy Council and top bureaucrat Michael Wernick said that "lacks any kind of seriousness as a strategy or a plan and doesn't seem connected to anything."

"It's not serious fiscal policy. It's not public sector reform. It's not an HR strategy. It doesn't

even qualify as a half measure," said Wernick.

Wernick also alluded to the policy announced by the government just over a year ago on telework, as well as the collective agreements with some unions, but questioned whether any circumstances had changed to necessitate the change.

"What's the rationale for doing anything different? Whether you agree, or disagree with it, what triggered this? What's new?" said Wernick.

Professor Alex Marland, who holds the Jarislowsky Chair in Trust and Political Leadership at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, said that "regardless of who forms government, maybe with the exception of the NDP, they will be looking at reducing the size of the public service."

Noting that the Liberals have already said that they're going to cut 5,000 jobs through attrition, Marland said Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's (Carleton, Ont.) "bread and butter" is on lower taxes, and smaller government is part of that agenda, as is trying to address the deficit and the debt.

"So I think it's fair to say there's no way under a Poilievre government for growing the public sector," said Marland. "And I think it's fair based on the fact that he was part of the Harper cabinet, and very much ideologically is more libertarian, that it seems quite likely that you would see fewer public servants by the end of a Pierre Poilievre government than at the start of it."

Marland did present a caveat to that, recounting a conversation he had with Canadian public administration scholar Donald Savoie who said that everybody comes into government says they're going to shrink the size of government. By the time they leave, though, the government is usually bigger, even if the leaders had not have sought that outcome.

"The reality is that as the population gets bigger, as the country gets bigger, often governments just have a habit of getting bigger," said Marland.

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Number of federal public servants in Canada since 2010:

| | |
|------|----------|
| 2010 | 282,980 |
| 2011 | 282,352 |
| 2012 | 278,092 |
| 2013 | 262,817 |
| 2014 | 257,138 |
| 2015 | 257,034* |
| 2016 | 258,979 |
| 2017 | 262,696 |
| 2018 | 273,571 |
| 2019 | 287,983 |
| 2020 | 300,450 |
| 2021 | 319,601 |
| 2022 | 335,957 |
| 2023 | 357,247 |

*Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was sworn into office on Nov. 4, 2015

—Data courtesy of the Treasury Board of Canada

Federal procurement already feeling blowback from ArriveCan scandal, say experts

As the government grapples with the repercussions of the ArriveCan debacle, industry experts say over-scrutiny in the process will likely slow down business.

BY IREM KOCA

As the ArriveCan scandal unfolds, the ripple effects from the federal government's cautionary actions are being felt throughout the industry, which experts predict may slow down business.

Public Services and Procurement Minister Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec, Que.) and Treasury Board President Anita Anand (Oakville, Ont.) announced new measures on March 20 to strengthen oversight, and prevent misconduct and fraud in federal procurement processes. This includes the launch of a new Office of Supplier Integrity and Compliance program to bolster Public Services and Procurement Canada's capacity to identify and respond to misconduct. The Office of Supplier Integrity and Compliance is replacing the PSPC's Integrity Regime.

The new measures come amid a dozen investigations, including those led by two parliamentary committees and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) into allegations of procurement misconduct surrounding the ArriveCan application.

Both the ongoing controversy with the procurement of the ArriveCan app and the federal government's subsequent actions, including the implementation of additional procurement measures, have impacts to the overall procurement system, industry experts agree.

The potential "over-application of scrutiny" of suppliers and subcontractors could affect how the federal procurement system works overall, according to Marcia Mills, partner at Fasken National Security Group, who specializes in procurement and government contracts.

"When you increase scrutiny, and have layers and layers of rules that no one clearly understands, plus staffing turnover, then the efficiency decreases. I anticipate we'll see a lot of projects start to slow down and we're going to see a lot of reduction in consulting for contracts," said Mills in an April 25 interview with *The Hill Times*.

The challenges could become more pronounced, especially in launching large-scale, high-risk procurements promptly where a lot of the work is being done by industry, according to Mills.

"Every time the government needs to bring in a consultant to support a project—even if it makes sense to do so—there will be questions on whether or not they can. We'll see public servants who are extremely concerned about finding themselves in another ArriveCan scandal even though they're following policy," she said.

Another risk, as pointed out by Mills, is the potential for waning interest within the industry to do business with the federal government due to the prolonged time to receive a contract.

"You [might] end up with a conflict between the federal government's application of heightened scrutiny, and a commercial

partner who needs to get the work done and move on to their next project. That's a tension that always exists because the objectives of the two parties are not always aligned."

While the unfolding of the ArriveCan controversy has been "disturbing," it was "not surprising," argues Mills, given insufficiencies in procurement expertise, funding, and training in the government, which makes it difficult for public servants to execute their roles.

"You cannot continue to cut the public service and expect it to deliver at the level of [the private sector]," Mills said.

The government's new procurements measures also include updated procurement guidance for managers to reinforce prudent use of public funds, and examining human resources and staffing strategies before procuring professional services. It also includes due-diligence protocols to ensure there is no conflict of interest, that subcontractors uphold all contractual obligations, and a focus on preventing and resolving potential issues in billing.

PSPC also announced on March 20 it had detected "several fraudulent billing schemes" by three private contractors in the information technologies sector working on federal contracts, with payments totalling nearly \$5-million.

What will the new measures do?

Paul Lalonde, who leads Dentons Canada's public procurement practice, said it's not clear to him how much the new measures would affect business practices.

"There wasn't necessarily all that much wrong about the existing policies and regulations that govern procurement. They just don't seem to have been adequately followed in the context of ArriveCan," said Lalonde, whose government procurement experience covers a wide range of sectors, including defence, information technologies, infrastructure, and professional services.

"[The application of new measures] might mean slower approvals for things like authorizations for funds that weren't anticipated at the beginning of the contract, but became necessary for the project to be completed, for invoicing and billing," he said. "It might take more internal work and justifications within the government to complete."

The measures signal that the government is going to be more vigilant about spotting fraud schemes, according to Lalonde, who expects there to be additional layers of control for things like the approval of invoices, scope changes, or modifications to contracts.

The government is also implementing revisions to the Ineligibility and Suspension Policy, expanding the criteria for supplier suspension or debarment. Stakeholders previously pressed for more transparency in government decision-making under the policy, according to Lalonde.

"The integrity regime had been in place for several years and needed a refresh," he said. "A number of things—such as a review of the list of offences committed by suppliers that lead to their ineligibility—were highlighted as in need of improvement."

Mills noted the federal government has existing tools, processes, and policies—like codes of conduct, values, and ethics—as well as conflict of interest and lobbying legislation.

"Until I actually see what they've done, I won't know whether it's just a repackaging, or if there will be meaningful restructuring," she said. "If they're reviewing how the rules are being applied, and looking for failures in the system, then forward they go."

"But if it's going to be nothing more than putting on more layers and we are painting the entire procurement system with the same brush... then I don't see it will have much success. It's just another burden that people will have to deal with," she added.

From a supplier perspective, there's an acknowledgment that doing business with the federal government entails a certain administrative workload, as well as red tape and delays, Lalonde noted.

Feds need 'game plan' for emergency procurement scenarios

"It's a very regulated activity, and if you want to play in that sandbox, you have to accept that reality," said Lalonde, adding that the revised measures might slow down certain procurement processes, but won't necessarily deter firms from seeking contracts with the government due to the added hassle.

"Suppliers want to be reassured that there won't be any scandals, and that their

competitors are not getting away with shenanigans or getting work because they're playing games," he said.

Lalonde, who describes the ArriveCan app's problematic procurement as an "outlier," emphasized that the biggest lesson for both the government and suppliers should be putting in place systems and plans for emergency procurements prior to crises.

The emergency procurement of the app cost an estimated \$59.5-million, according to Auditor General Karen Hogan.

The multi-million-dollar project has been under further scrutiny since the fall of 2022 due to its snowballing price tag as well as allegations of procurement misconduct—which the RCMP is investigating. The actions of public servants overseeing ArriveCan's procurement sparked widespread public interest amid revelations from a dozen investigations—some still in progress—with several bureaucrats placed on unpaid leave.

"We need to plan in advance for the unpredictable, and have an established structure, a game plan for emergency procurement for when the next national crisis hits," Lalonde said.

"We need to be able to say, 'Here are the senior decision-makers that are going to oversee this process,' and then to wheel out the emergency plan in a manner that's a little bit less haphazard," he said, referring to Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic's recommendations, Lalonde said the government should implement.

"When you set aside the usual rules and controls [in an emergency], it's not altogether surprising that you're going to have some problems," he added.

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Books & Big Ideas

Privacy law needs an update

The following is an excerpt from *The Privacy Fallacy: Harm and Power in the Information Economy*, by Ignacio Cofone, published by Cambridge University Press, one of the five finalists for this year's \$60,000 Donner Prize for the best public policy book written by a Canadian. The winner will be announced in Toronto on May 8.

BY IGNACIO COFONE

Privacy law needs an update. It's older than the internet—let alone AI. But the issue isn't that there are new technologies that it didn't foresee. Rather, the issue is that it's built on rules for a society that no longer exists. Privacy in the information economy is about regulating relationships of power. And, to regulate power, one needs meaningful accountability for the powerful.

When you log into your social network of choice, you're likely aware that it tracks what you "like" or "share" to form a profile about you for advertisers who wish to spend their budgets targeting those they're most likely to influence. What you're likely unaware of is the sheer amount of collected and inferred information that the social network and other corporations it trades with already have about you. Parts of it you expressly or inadvertently provided, and parts of it were inferred using algorithms and behavioural tracking. You also have no idea what the future uses of your data may be. Some pieces of data that appear innocuous today will be significant and harmful in the future, but you can't know which ones.

Personal data exchanges occur second by second and their consequences never leave you. They're different from traditional two-party consumer experiences, where a transaction begins when you approach the cash register and ends when you leave it. Every time we use a new app, we quickly click "I agree" to its privacy policy. In an instant, we're taken to have consented to the collection of countless data points for various corporate actors, who will go on to create detailed profiles of us that they may subsequently sell to marketers and to each other. This process is inordinately



Ignacio Cofone, author of *The Privacy Fallacy: Harm and Power in the Information Economy*, writes 'privacy law is built on false behavioural assumptions that treat it, for the most part, like traditional two-party commercial exchanges.' Photograph courtesy of Cambridge University Press

opaque. And it certainly doesn't provide us with an opportunity to realistically assess the risk of each "I agree" click. Under these circumstances, privacy law can't rely on even the most sophisticated versions of individual consent provisions.

Privacy law is built on false behavioural assumptions that treat it, for the most part, like traditional two-party commercial exchanges. The rules that dictate what happens with our data are thus built on a misguided understanding of the social and economic interactions that involve those data. These assumptions lead to major misunderstandings: that people don't care about their privacy anymore, that they have nothing to lose if they have nothing to hide, and that they can take other options if dissatisfied with how their data are handled. I call this the traditionalist approach. Modern economists moved past the simplified 19th-century paradigm that inspired it. But privacy law hasn't. When people click "I agree" to data practices that yield them little benefit and expose them to great harm, contrary to what laws assume they'll do, individual users aren't to blame. Our regulatory landscape is perpetuating constant agreement without a clear sense of what harm can follow the data practices that people agree to.

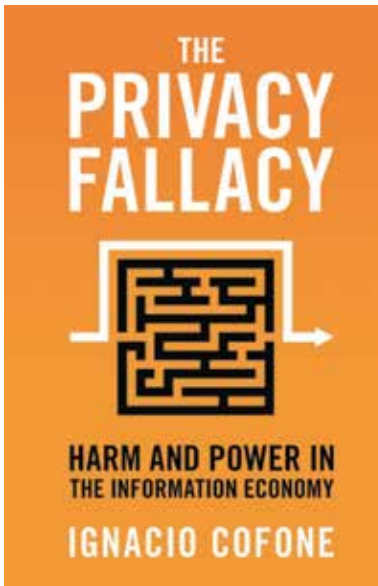
As long as the traditionalist approach acts as the cornerstone of privacy law, our digital landscape will perpetuate a dynamic where tech companies garner tremendous profits and power at our expense. Companies have perverse incentives to misuse our personal data in ways that create risks and harms for us. Data aggregators, for example, are risk amplifiers. Their business model is based on accumulating as much data as possible from as many people as possible. Traditionalist regulations focus on giving people individual control over their data and establishing procedural safeguards. These safeguards, though, provide marginal improvements over a free data market. In their worst forms, they perpetuate corporate profit-

ability while forgetting the people they're supposed to protect. As a result, people receive little more than expensive lip service through a discourse of control and rights they can rarely use.

Harms fall through the cracks. "Move fast and break things" was an internal Facebook motto abandoned in 2014 that turned into a Silicon Valley mantra, taken as synonymous with innovation and tech disruption. The motto made it to a letter to shareholders when Facebook went public, where Mark Zuckerberg clarified: "The idea is that if you never break anything, you're probably not moving fast enough." It shows how data profiteers had and continue to have impunity for the harms they create—the "things" they break. Making them responsible for these harms is at the core of accountability.

Informational exploitation is pervasive. To exploit someone is to take advantage of their vulnerability or weakness for one's own benefit. Wrongful exploitation adversely affects the dignity of the exploited person because they're treated as an object for someone else's ends. This exploitative dynamic is reflected when corporations misuse our personal information for profit or profit from our information without keeping it safe, exposing us to data harms for surveillance dividends.

Philosophers explain that exploitation entails exerting power over others for self-enrichment. This dynamic is perceptible in the information economy. In it, power relationships exceed asymmetric bargaining or information. They extend into shaping the systems through which we communicate and into making decisions about our lives based on our data—such as our credit score to determine loan opportunities and what options of housing and employment we're exposed to. And corporations that take, infer, and share our data are ever-present. This dynamic widely exceeds contractual or consumer relations. Some of these are companies we've never heard of. There's an incongruity in applying contract law remedies,



such as defaults and unconscionability, to address abuse of power and discretion.

The dynamic of power and discretion is one in which entities that profit from us have the ability to unilaterally inflict harm on us. Corporations in the information economy have the power to exercise harms with significant impunity. Traditionalist laws, by establishing procedural, box-ticking compliance divorced from consequences, entrench this power. So do traditionalist regulators when they defer to these symbolic compliance mechanisms, performing privacy without protecting people. The unenviable result is socially costly mechanisms that don't rein in harms created by the information economy's business model and don't effectively curb corporate power. Procedural measures and sanctions for eventual noncompliance lead to large compliance costs that big players can withstand but small players can't. In that way, they keep power in the information economy unaccountable. The only way out is for legislators, regulators, and courts to shift attention toward individual and social privacy harms.

The privacy fallacy results from such a misunderstanding, where we see the intrinsic value of privacy but not the possibility of harming it. We fall prey to it when we believe that, while privacy is valuable in itself and it's worth protecting, that value can't be harmed in and of itself and we only need to be protected from tangible consequences. Saying that if there's no tangible harm from a data practice there's nothing to worry about ("If you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to lose") runs into the problem of being systemically exposed to exploitation.

These provisions aren't merely a relic from the past. They play an outsized role in emerging privacy legislation too. Google's former CEO Eric Schmidt once confessed to *The Atlantic*: "The average American doesn't realize how much of the laws are written by lobbyists ... and it's obvious that if the system is organized around

incumbencies writing the laws, the incumbencies will benefit from the laws that are being written." The numbers add up. There are almost twice as many Amazon lobbyists registered in the US as there are senators in the U.S. Congress. In 2021, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, and Meta (Facebook) spent \$50-million just in their Washington, D.C., lobbying efforts. The tech industry together spends about 100-million euros per year in lobbying European Union institutions.

Mark Zuckerberg thinks that "[i]n a lot of ways Facebook is more like a government than a traditional company." Tech giants hold so much power in the information economy that scholars also believe they have equivalent powers to state actors. One reason is size. These are some of the largest companies in the world, with billions of users, enormous resources at their disposal, and more money than some governments. Their size includes an actual airline (Prime Air), airports (Air Hubs), and spacecrafts (SpaceX, technically owned by Elon Musk, not Twitter). Another reason is control over interactions. Designing the platforms that we use to communicate, access information, and share information grants influence over private behaviors and public opinion. Meta brags about its ability to nudge democratic outcomes. They even have systems of dispute resolution—some call it a "Supreme Court." A third reason is reach. Tech giants operate globally, with the ability to exert influence across almost all national borders. On one occasion, they influenced those very borders. These factors combined bestow an amount of power that's unprecedented. Not even the Dutch East India Company could do this much.

Reckoning with informational exploitation explains why tech companies can be similarly powerful to state actors. The source of their power is our data. Tech giants hold power over us based on the data they have about us, even independent of their market position. They exercise this power not through money but through data. Because they collect and infer vast data about their users and others, they can turn our personal information against us. They can, for example, use data about activities and preferences to manipulate behaviour in ways that benefit the company but aren't in its users' best interests, with consequences as varied as inflating purchasing behaviour, enabling discrimination, and swaying presidential elections. Their growing power, crystallized in their ability to produce harms with significant impunity, leads to a growing need to curb the harms that it causes.

Excerpt from *The Privacy Fallacy: Harm and Power in the Information Economy*, by Ignacio Cofone, published by Cambridge University Press, is one of the five finalists for this year's \$60,000 Donner Prize, the best public policy book written by a Canadian. The winner will be announced in Toronto on May 8.

The Hill Times



Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Gary Anandasangaree sponsored Bill C-29, which achieved royal assent on April 30. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Bill C-29 an attack on Inuit self-determination

A national council for reconciliation will be an ineffectual body duplicating work that Indigenous representative groups are already undertaking with the federal government.

Natan Obed

Opinion



Bill C-29, an act to provide for the establishment of a

national council for reconciliation, received royal assent on April 30 after being introduced in June 2022, and receiving minor amendments in the Senate in late 2023. It will create an ineffectual body that will at best duplicate work that Indigenous representative organizations are already undertaking with the federal government, and—at worst—work at cross purposes to existing efforts by Inuit, First Nations, and Métis towards reconciliation.

Early bill discussions focused on harmful proposals to include in the council's scope organizations who illegitimately claim to be Inuit, and who would thereby be included in defining the reconciliation priorities of Inuit. This is end-stage colonialism, not some innovative and new form of reconciliation.

But even free of those damaging amendments, C-29 is a bad bill. It would create a National Council for Reconciliation, a

decade-old idea put forward in the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Canadians and Inuit have made substantial advances in how we work together, and how we advance reconciliation that no longer reflect the realities of the past.

The government's development of the legislation was handled in a similar way to its division of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada into two departments in 2017, based on a recommendation the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples made in 1996—again, implementation of an outdated idea without meaningful co-development with Indigenous Peoples.

It comes on the heels of two fully co-developed pieces of legislation: Bill C-92, an Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families; and Bill C-15, an Act respecting the

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Unfortunately, these pieces of legislation are being followed up by an act creating the council that could undermine the implementation of UNDRIP.

Bill C-29 was developed through a process heavily driven by government officials who consulted with an extraordinarily small number of individuals. There was never any serious attempt to co-develop this bill, and it is clear that by any standard, the legislative process did not reflect the standard of ensuring consultation and collaboration with Inuit to ensure the legislation is consistent with the laws of Canada, as required by the UNDRIP Act.

A new council is not needed to manage reconciliation work—and the creation of one would only slow progress, and sow confusion over how best and with whom to pursue reconciliation in Canada.

Even with Inuit participation on the board of the council, our experience with other pan-Indigenous bodies has been that First Nations and Métis solutions do not work well for Inuit. We also note that Inuit-driven solutions and reconciliation initiatives between Inuit and the Crown would not work for First Nations or Métis because the impacts of colonialism on our peoples are distinct and require distinct approaches.

Reconciliation is hard work and takes considerable effort from ministers, government officials, and Indigenous Peoples. This government and previous governments have demonstrated that it is possible to craft a meaningful reconciliation agenda. Attempting to defer that hard work to a council which does not have the right to determine the priorities of Inuit or the power to do anything to advance progress on Inuit priorities is an irresponsible abdication of the need for Parliament, for the government of Canada, and for the department to do this work directly with Inuit.

Canadians should not accept efforts to delay, confuse, and deny the ability of reconciliation just because it is hard work. Inuit leaders, ministers, and unelected officials can and should do the hard work necessary to achieve reconciliation in Canada. This is the legacy we owe future generations, not a legacy of creating large corporations to develop discordant and inconsistent opinions about the future Inuit want.

Natan Obed is president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national organization securing Inuit prosperity through unity and self-determination.

The Hill Times



Stuart Benson
Party Central

Parliamentarians and politicians play dress up at CMPA wrap party



CMPA President and CEO Reynolds Mastin, left, and Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge, right, pose with Paw Patrol's Officer Chase at the Canadian Media Producers Hill Day reception at the Château Laurier on April 30. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

The Canadian Media Producers Association hosted its post-lobby day reception at the Château Laurier on April 30. It was fun.

The Canadian Media Producers Association hosted parliamentarians, staffers, producers, and industry insiders for a post-Hill Day wrap party on April 30 at the Château Laurier, celebrating the best of Canadian television, from the long-running series *Murdoch Mysteries*, *Mr. Dressup*, and *Heartland*, to the new favourites like *Love It or List It*, *Law & Order Toronto*, *The Great Canadian Pottery Throwdown*, and *Shoresy*.

While the final tally of the night's attendees approached nearly 150 over the course of the two-hour reception inside the Château's Adam Room, the festivities got off to a slower start as most of MPs and Hill staffers were still caught up in the House with budget debates.

Fortunately, that gave **Party Central** a chance to grab a pre-shift beer from the well-stocked bar in the centre of the room and regale the Canadian Media Producers Association (CMPA) senior staffers on the day's Question Period silliness they had missed while busy with their own lobby day.

Yet, while the politicians were away, the assembled Canadian media industry folks had plenty of chances to play with the show-accurate costumes at several booths around the room's perimeter. The costumes—including hockey sticks, jerseys, and helmets courtesy of New Metric Media's *Shoresy*, and the cowboy hats, boots, and chaps provided by Seven 24's *Heartland*—made for much more interesting party photos than the usual shots of politicians standing in a semi-circle while hiding drinks behind their backs.

While there weren't any handcuffs or Toronto Police uniforms at the *Law & Order* booth, Lark Productions' Erin Haskett saddled over with Seven24's Michelle Wong to the haybales at the *Heartland* booth alongside CBC CEO Catherine Tait, Ideacom International's Josette Normandeau, and Sphere Media's Sebastian Pigeon.

A special shout-out to Wong for really getting into the spirit of the event and

making **Party Central's** job a lot easier by taking the charge of organizing and staging a bunch of group photos, including not taking "no" for an answer when people were concerned the Sudbury Bulldogs' jersey and helmets might mess up their hair and outfits.

As more guests started arriving and the bar began to have its intended effect, it was nice to see the usually buttoned-up and professional crowd loosen up a bit and let out a bit of their inner children. However, it's hard not to blame them when the genuine *Mr. Dressup* Tickle Trunk sat in the corner of the room and a very good boy in blue, *Paw Patrol's* Officer Chase, posed for selfies near the fresh popcorn stand.

A little after 6 p.m., parliamentarians and their staffers began to appear, including Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge and her staffers Shane Mackenzie, director of communications, and Nina Bouteldjia, director of issues and stakeholder management; Liberal MPs John McKay, Julie Dabrusin, Rob Oliphant, Patricia Lattanzio and Anthony Rota; Conservative MP Ted Falk; Senators Andrew Cardozo, Scott Tannas, Ratna Omidvar, Tony Loffreda, Toni Varone, Rob Black, Donna Dasko, and Clément Gignac.

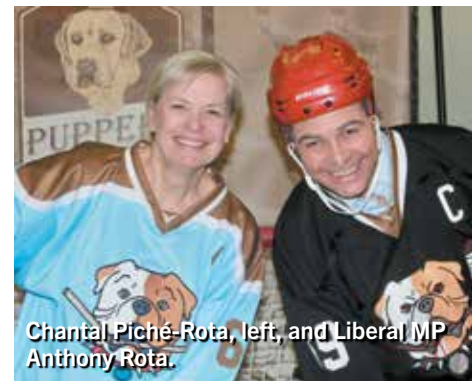
Party Central also spotted CPAC's Christa Dickenson, Global Public Affairs' Hannah Thibedeau, Sussex Strategy Group's Liam Daly, and also caught up with Ronny Al-Nasir for a toast to his last day as press secretary to Treasury Board President Anita Anand. While Al-Nasir still had nothing but great things to say about his time on the Hill and then-boss for the next few hours, he seemed to be feeling the same itch many young staffers experience after a few years as the honeymoon wears off and the long hours take their toll.

Near the end of the evening, Damon D'Oliveira, CMPA board chair and co-founder of Conquering Lions Pictures, made a quick speech to remind the gathered parliamentarians that Canada's media producers are also entrepreneurs with small to medium-sized businesses that create thousands of jobs across the country. The growing industry is also bringing in ever more outsider eyes to the market, as D'Oliveira noted that for the first time ever, the industry saw over \$1-billion in foreign investment last year.

sbenson@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



The usual suspects: Lark Productions' Erin Haskett, left, Ideacom International's Josette Normandeau, and Seven24's Michelle Wong pose for their lineup in front of the *Law & Order Toronto* booth.



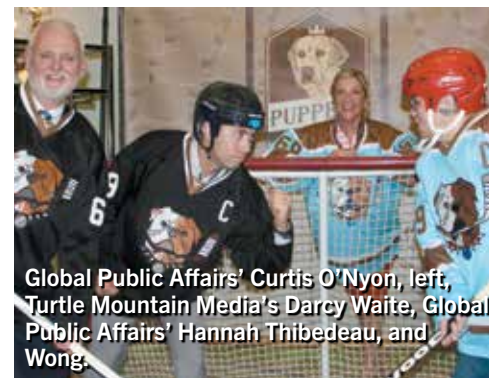
Chantal Piché-Rota, left, and Liberal MP Anthony Rota.



CBC CEO Catherine Tait, left, Haskett, Normandeau, and Sphere Media's Sebastian Pigeon.



Lisa Broadfoot, CMPA vice-president, left; Blue Ant Media's Mark Bishop, and CMPA COO Liz Shorten pose with *Mr. Dressup's* Tickle Trunk.



Global Public Affairs' Curtis O'Nyon, left, Turtle Mountain Media's Darcy Waite, Global Public Affairs' Hannah Thibedeau, and Wong.



Thibedeau, left, CMPA's Tracey Friesen, PSG Senator Clément Gignac, Liberal MP Patricia Lattanzio, Auguste Content's Ann Bernier, and ISG Senator Donna Dasko.



Shaftesbury's Elysse Goldman, left; Sarojita Csete, CMPA director of mentorship and international development; Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Tandy Yull, and Wong.



New Metric Media's Mark Montefiore, left, and Damon D'Oliveira, CMPA board chair and co-founder of Conquering Lions Pictures.

The Hill Times photographs by Stuart Benson



ISG Senator Marty Deacon, left, and Andrew Addison, CMPA vice president of communications, marketing and membership.



Rota, left, and ISG Senators Tony Loffreda and Toni Varone.

Liberal talk of provincial clawbacks a tactic to distract from ‘insultingly low’ disability benefit, say advocates

‘People with disabilities were led to believe this program would lift them out of poverty,’ says social policy expert John Stapleton, but none believed the Liberals would go ‘so low’ with the monthly benefit amount.

BY KEVIN PHILIPUPILLAI

The Liberals’ post-budget messaging about preventing provinces from clawing back the coming Canada Disability Benefit is a distraction intended to help them weather the disability community’s outrage, say advocates and experts, following the fiscal blueprint’s “woefully inadequate” funding and restrictive eligibility criteria.

Amanda Mackenzie, national director of public affairs for March of Dimes Canada, told *The Hill Times* that “there was no discussion about the provinces and territories until the federal government knew the backlash was going to be so strong.”

She acknowledged that provincial-level advocacy has focused on the “immorally low” levels of support provinces and territories provide to people with disabilities, but pointed out that it was “a bit rich” to hear this from the federal government, considering there are more than 300,000 people who receive the Canada Pension Plan Disability Benefit at rates far below the poverty line.

The April 16 budget repeated the federal government’s frequent call to provinces and territories to exempt benefit payments “from counting as income in relation to provincial or territorial supports.” Such clawbacks could see eligible recipients receive even less than the \$2,400-a-year maximum set out for them in the federal budget. Disabilities Minister Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Ont.) has also repeated that language when defending the benefit.

Green Party MP Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, Ont.) called the clawbacks messaging both in the budget and after “a distraction from what the government is putting forward, which is a completely inadequate starting point that doesn’t reflect the expectation that they set.”

“It doesn’t reflect other programs that they themselves

compared it to,” Morrice added, referring to commitments in the 2020 Speech from the Throne and the 2021 Liberal Party platform to model the promised Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) on the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for seniors and the Canada Child Benefit (CCB).

The budget was the first time the government announced its overall funding envelope: \$6.1-billion over the first six years, and then \$1.4-billion a year on an ongoing basis.

“The Guaranteed Income Supplement is a \$24-billion-a-year program,” said Morrice. “That’s the extent of the inadequacy. It’s not clear that this benefit will lift a single person with a disability above the poverty line.”

Every advocate and expert interviewed for this article told *The Hill Times* they were surprised by how little the government allocated for what has been presented, over the last four years, as a major social program that would slot in alongside existing poverty-reduction measures for seniors and children.

The Canada Disability Benefit Act, the relatively thin framework legislation that gave the relevant minister the authority to begin designing a benefit for low-income people with disabilities aged 18-64, received royal assent in June 2023 after receiving unanimous support at every reading, in both the House and Senate.

But none of those votes required MPs or Senators to put any real money behind the benefit.

The government described the benefit funding as the largest single spending item in the budget, but social policy experts, advocacy groups, and disability community members soon realized these figures paled in comparison to the two landmark social assistance programs the government had repeatedly said the CDB would be comparable to—the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors and the Canada Child Benefit for families.

Payments are expected to begin in July 2025, would be capped at \$2,400 a year (or \$200 a month), and would go to people who had applied and been approved for the Disability Tax Credit—an existing program that federal and provincial governments routinely, and controversially, use as a gateway to determine eligibility for many other disability programs.

‘I didn’t think they would go so low,’ says policy expert

Rabia Khedr, national director of the advocacy group Disabil-

ity Without Poverty, said the \$2,400-a-year maximum benefit falls far below even the lowest of three possible estimates the Parliamentary Budget Officer contemplated in a November 2023 report. That estimate described an overall disbursement of \$2.1-billion in the first year, with a maximum benefit of \$14,356 per recipient and an average benefit of \$7,683.

“It’s just sad. My heart breaks because I sincerely fought this battle, and thought I could trust this government,” added Khedr, who is blind. “But I always say every obstacle is an opportunity. So the only hope I have right now is that that spirit of unanimous consent that Parliament demonstrated in the last three years will show up again, without political biases and theatrics and conflicting political goals.”

“Nobody has ever voted against this [benefit].”

Social policy expert John Stapleton, a former longtime Ontario civil servant, said landmark social programs such as the GIS and the CCB started small and were increased over the years. Still, he said he was “very surprised” to see the math work out to \$200 a month.

“I didn’t think they would go so low,” he said. “I speculated it might be \$500 a month to start. And some people came out saying it might be \$250 or \$300. But nobody I know predicted as low as \$200.”

“People with disabilities were led to believe this program would lift them out of poverty,” which created the expectation among the community that the government was designing a program with a level of ambition comparable that of the GIS, said Stapleton.

“You say you’re going to implement something like [the GIS],” he added, “and then you spread \$6-billion out over six years, and then ratchet it down to \$1.4-billion a year. Newsflash: the GIS is going to spend \$80-billion in the next five years.”

Sherri Torjman, a social policy consultant and former vice-president of the Caledon Institute, said the budget makes clear that Ottawa has chosen an approach that seeks to help people with disabilities defray some of their expenses, instead of an approach that sets a minimum income level.

In an April 29 report for the CSA Public Policy Centre, Torjman wrote that \$2,400 a year was too low even under this alternative approach. Instead, she suggested the government start with \$7,200 a year (\$500 a month), relying on a precedent the previous Ontario government set for people with

disabilities who participated in its now-cancelled basic income pilot project.

The budget says persons with disabilities will be consulted on “key elements of the benefit’s design,” but that the final design “will need to fit the investment proposed in Budget 2024.”

Mackenzie said it’s not clear if that will allow for any substantive changes. “It looks like the key regulations have already been decided upon, based on the nature of the financing. They’ve decided on the amount and on eligibility.”

She said she and other advocates would work for a repeat of the grassroots push that sent 20,000 letters to Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.) asking her to “budget the benefit.”

“Two-hundred-dollars a month is not even close to enough,” Mackenzie said, to meet the needs of the people her organization serves. “When you commit to lifting people out of poverty, giving them \$200 a month is a slap in the face.”

Disability Tax Credit creates more barriers, advocates say

Morrice questioned whether, by setting the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) as the gateway to the new benefit, the government was violating a provision in the *Canada Disability Benefit Act* that requires the application process to be barrier-free. He advocated instead for automatic consideration when a person files their taxes.

Torjman, who was involved in the design of the Canada Child Benefit and who later served as vice-chair of the minister of national revenue’s disability advisory committee on tax measures, shared other experts’ concerns about the use of the tax credit to determine eligibility for the CDB.

“The DTC is not geared towards lower-income Canadians,” she explained, and is very narrow in its application. She said there would need to be “a lot of work to open those doors and explain to people that they’re eligible.”

Mackenzie added that she hasn’t spoken to a single organization or community member who recommended using the DTC as the eligibility mechanism. “So for all this talk about needing to consult, [the government] proposed something that so clearly did not come from the community,” she said.

Laurent de Casanove, press secretary to Khera, said in a May 1 statement that the overall

\$6.1-billion investment in the budget was “a major milestone” in getting the new benefit to Canadians “in a fiscally responsible way.” The statement said using the DTC was key to delivering the new benefit as quickly as possible while ensuring consistency across the country, and that the Canada Revenue Agency has made improvements in recent years to allow for broader access.

Inclusion Canada, a national federation representing people with intellectual disabilities, expressed “profound disappointment” in the benefit, saying in an April 17 press release that it was supposed “to lift persons with disabilities out of poverty, not merely make them marginally less poor than they already are.”

Michael Prince, a prominent social policy expert at the University of Victoria, resigned as an advisor to Khera on disability policy on April 19, and told *The Toronto Star* the budget announcement was “a colossal failure” and “a profoundly disappointing outcome.”

Singh says benefit amount a sticking point, but will support the budget

Khera faced tough questions on the CDB from MPs from all parties when she appeared before the House Human Resources Committee on April 29.

The Conservatives, the Bloc Québécois, and the Greens had all previously announced they would vote against the federal budget, which left the NDP as the only party with any leverage over the Liberals.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, B.C.) told reporters on April 29 that the benefit was one of the remaining sticking points in his negotiations with the Liberals, but declared on May 1 that he would support the government in the confidence vote. Singh said the Liberals had made commitments about limiting clawbacks by the provinces, but were not willing to increase the overall funding for the benefit.

NDP disability critic Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, B.C.) added in an April 29 statement to *The Hill Times* that the version of the CDB laid out in the budget is “woefully inadequate” and “insultingly low,” and that it will not cover groceries, rent, medication, and other life expenses.

But unlike dental care, pharmacare, and affordable housing, the CDB is not part of the NDP’s supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberals. Disability advocates have expressed doubt about how far Singh and his team would go to push the Liberals to increase the overall funding envelope for the CDB, possibly at the risk of jeopardizing gains on their other priorities.

Khedr said she was glad the NDP are “using the political tools at their disposal to speak up, but really I hope it’s not just a negotiation tactic on the backs of disabled people.”

The Hill Times

Feature

Parliamentary Calendar

India's high commissioner to Canada to deliver speech to Montreal Council on Foreign Relations on May 7



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. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

MONDAY, MAY 6

House Sitting Schedule—The House is scheduled to sit for a total of 125 days in 2024. The House is sitting May 6-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.

AFN Dialogue on Transport and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel—The Assembly of First Nations hosts the third in a four-part series, "Regional Dialogues on the Transportation and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel" from April 9-May 22, to advocate for First Nations' active involvement in decisions about used nuclear fuel, management, and transportation across Turtle Island. Monday, May 6, at 8 a.m. ET at the Sheraton Centre Toronto Hotel, 123 Queen St. W., Toronto. Details online: afn.ca/events.

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. Monday, 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 Speakers of the Senate and 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: cabe.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. Details online: sommelclimatmtl.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. Details online: donnerbookprize.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. Details online: canadianclub.org.

Book Launch: *Canadians Who Innovate*—Roseann O'Reilly Runte, president of the Canadian Foundation for Innovations, will discuss her new book, *Canadians Who Innovate: The Trailblazers and Ideas That Are Changing the World*. Thursday, May 9, at 7 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details online: writersfestival.org.

Mental Health Summit—The Hi Dad Foundation, alongside Conservative MP Matt Jeneroux, NDP MP Gord Johns, Liberal MP Majid Jowhari, and Bloc MP Julie Vignola, in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Centre for Suicide Prevention, and the Mental Health Commission of Canada, hosts the Mental Health Summit. This event will delve into pressing issues concerning prioritizing youth mental health, overcoming barriers to men's mental health awareness, equitable supports, and public policy reforms. Thursday, May 9, at 8 a.m. ET the National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St. Details online via Eventbrite.

SATURDAY, MAY 11

The King's Birthday Luncheon—The Ottawa Branch of the Monarchist League hosts a luncheon in honour of King Charles' birthday, a celebration of the Canadian Crown marking Victoria Day, the King's official birthday in Canada. Saturday, May 11 at 12 p.m. ET at the Ottawa Hunt and Golf Club, 1 Hunt Club Rd. Details online via Eventbrite.

TUESDAY, MAY 13

Stephen Harper to Deliver Remarks—Former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper will deliver the 2024 Hugh and Laura MacKinnon Roundtable Luncheon hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Tuesday, May 13 at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300. Details online.

TUESDAY, MAY 14

Justice Minister to Deliver Remarks—Justice Minister and Attorney General of Canada Arif Virani will deliver remarks on "Where Online Harms Have Real World Consequences: The Case for Legislating Against Harm and Hate," a hybrid event hosted by the Empire Club of Canada. Tuesday, May 14, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Details online: empireclubofcanada.com.

Bloc Leader Blanchet to Deliver Remarks—Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet will deliver remarks in French on "A Quebec model of prosperity" hosted by the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal. Tuesday, May 14, at 11:30 a.m. ET at Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth, 900 René-Lévesque Blvd. W., Montreal. Details online: ccmm.ca.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15

BDC President Hudon to Deliver Remarks—Isabelle Hudon, president and CEO of the Business Development Bank of Canada, will deliver remarks at a breakfast event, "Development that Matters: Entrepreneurship in Atlantic Canada" hosted by the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. Wednesday, May 15, at 8 a.m. AT at Courtyard by Marriott Halifax Dartmouth, 35 Shubie Dr., Dartmouth, N.S. Details online: business.halifax-chamber.com.

Ministers Blair and Champagne to Deliver Remarks—National Defence Minister Bill Blair and Industry Minister François-Philippe Champagne will take part in a lunch event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Wednesday, May 15, at 11:30 a.m. ET in a downtown Montreal hotel. Details online: corim.qc.ca.

Lunch: 'Renewing CUSMA and Perspectives on the U.S. Election'—Canada's former chief trade negotiator Steve Verheul will deliver remarks on "Table Stakes: Renewing CUSMA and Perspectives on the US Election" at a lunch hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Wednesday, May 15, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details online: cdhowe.org.

THURSDAY, MAY 16

Ambassador Theodore to Deliver Remarks—Nadia Theodore, Head of Canada's Permanent Mission in Geneva,

Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the WTO, UNCTAD, ITC and WIPO, will deliver remarks in a webinar hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Thursday, May 16, at 12:30 pm. ET happening online: cdhowe.org.

FRIDAY, MAY 17

Pink Tea with Charlotte Gray—The Famous 5 Foundation hosts award-winning non-fiction author Charlotte Gray for its virtual Pink Tea. Friday, May 17, at 2 p.m. ET, happening online: famous5.ca.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22

AFN Dialogue on Transport and Storage of Used Nuclear Fuel—The Assembly of First Nations hosts the fourth 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. Wednesday, May 22, at 8 a.m. ET at the Delta Hotels by Marriott, 2240 Sleeping Giant Pkwy., Thunder Bay, Ont. Details online: afn.ca/events.

SOCAN Parliamentary Reception—The Society of Composers, Authors, and Music Publishers of Canada (SOCAN) is back on the Hill hosting its annual reception that will showcase some of the best in Canadian musical talent. Wednesday, May 22, from 5:30 p.m. (or after votes) to 7:30 p.m. in the East Block Courtyard, Parliament Hill. Details to follow.

An Evening with Joe Clark—The Pearson Centre hosts "An Evening with Joe Clark," a celebration of the 45th anniversary of Clark's election as Canada's 16th prime minister. Wednesday, May 22, at 5:45 p.m. at the Shaw Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Contact info@thePearsonCentre.ca.

THURSDAY, MAY 23

Breakfast: 'VIA Rail's 2030 vision'—The Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal hosts a breakfast event with Mario Pélouquin, president and CEO of VIA Rail, who will deliver remarks in French on "VIA Rail's 2030 vision: To be at the heart of Canada's passenger journey." Thursday, May 23, at 7:30 a.m. ET at Le Centre Sheraton, 1201 René-Lévesque Blvd. W., Montreal. Details online: ccmm.ca.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29

Ambassador Hillman to Deliver Remarks—Canada's Ambassador to the United States Kirsten Hillman will deliver remarks in French at a lunch event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Wednesday, May 29, at 11:30 a.m. at Le Centre Sheraton Montréal, 1201 Blvd René-Lévesque W., Montreal. Details online: corim.qc.ca.

Vote16 Ottawa Summit—Non-affiliated Senator Marilou McPheeran hosts the Vote16 Ottawa Summit, a historic gathering of groups and leaders working towards youth empowerment through democratic reform. Wednesday, May 29, at 2 p.m. the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, 144 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details online via Eventbrite.

Vancouver Fraser Port Authority Reception—The Vancouver Fraser Port Authority will be holding a reception. Wednesday, May 29, at 5:30 p.m. ET at the Métropolitain Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr., Ottawa.

LAC Scholar Awards—Get ready to honour outstanding Canadians who have left an indelible mark on our country's cultural, literary, and historical heritage at the 2024 Library and Archives Canada Scholar Awards. Presented by The Library and Archives Canada Foundation and Library and Archives Canada, with generous sponsor Air Canada. Wednesday, May 29, 6 p.m. ET, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details to follow.

Riverkeeper Gala—The 2024 Riverkeeper Gala will take place on Wednesday, May 29, 6-11 p.m. ET at the NCC River House, 501 Sir George-Étienne Cartier Pkwy., Ottawa. Tickets: riverkeepergala.com.

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.

