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# THE HILL TIMES

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CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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NEWS

## House of Commons chaos a symptom of a past-expiry Parliament, not just Speaker's judgment, say politicians

BY STUART BENSON

The Speaker of the House of Commons is once again facing calls to resign from two parties in the Chamber following a raucous Question Period last week that saw two Conservatives—including the leader of the official opposition—ejected. But political observers say that addressing the real issue at the heart of the increasing erosion of decorum may not require a new Speaker, but an entirely new Parliament.

On April 30, during an unusually contentious Question Period,

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Speaker Greg Fergus enters the House of Commons on Dec. 13, 2023. Fergus is once again facing calls for his resignation over his handling of the April 30 Question Period, which saw the expulsion of Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and MP Rachael Thomas. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS

## CBSA's access-to-information woes continue with 12,000 requests inaccessible, requestors encouraged to resubmit

BY NEIL MOSS

The federal border agency's compliance with access-to-information law is under the microscope with the department telling thousands of people to resubmit months-old requests, while Parliament's information watchdog is taking aim at the organization's use of the access system for applicants to obtain their immigration files.

In February, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) revealed that it could not access information it had collected in processing its backlog of 16,000 requests through the Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) acts after maintenance performed by Shared Services Canada.

It has since been able to recover around 4,000 ATIPs, CBSA said in a May 3 release, leaving 12,000 inaccessible.

CBSA is now telling the requestors behind the sequestered ATIPs to resubmit requests that

were made between September 2021 and November 2023, noting that processing the resubmitted requests would be a "priority," and that the \$5 application fee will be waived.

CBSA spokesperson Rebecca Purdy told *The Hill Times* that legislated timelines would not restart with a resubmitted request, noting that responding to ATIPs will vary based on the request. The Access to Information Act mandates that access is given within 30 days of a request being received, but departments and agencies can extend the time limits for an undefined "reasonable period of time." The Privacy Act also mandates a response in 30 days, with an option of an additional 30-day extension if processing the request in the original timeline would "unreasonably interfere with the operations" of the organization.

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NEWS

## The 'jury is still out' on the value of foreign interference inquiry following preliminary report, says national security and intelligence expert Wesley Wark

BY STUART BENSON

With the release of the Foreign Interference Com-

mission's preliminary report last week, national security and intelligence expert Wesley Wark says "the jury is still out"

on whether it was a valuable exercise, or simply a retreat of

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NEWS

## Once a strategy, later a framework, Canada now unwilling to define Africa engagement rethink

BY NEIL MOSS

As the wait for Canada's re-imagined approach to African

engagement continues to grow, parliamentarians are becoming increasingly perplexed about how

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Christina Leadlay

## Heard On The Hill

# CP Style god James McCarten leaves the national wire service after 30 years



After 30 years with the Canadian Press, James McCarten announced May 3 was his last day. He is relocating in Toronto to work for Manulife. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

The Canadian Press' interim Ottawa bureau chief and Washington, D.C., correspondent **James McCarten** left the news service late last week.

"It's time (long past time, probably) for me to go and make room for those who are better equipped to confront what the future of journalism holds," McCarten wrote on LinkedIn on May 2, recalling when he first stepped into CP's office in 1994, he was drawn into the "intoxicating world of wonder" of "a downtown Toronto newsroom frantic with action, no matter the hour."

"Of course, that old Toronto newsroom isn't there anymore, both literally and figuratively. The news business has changed, as it always does: It's harder and faster and more demanding than ever."

McCarten confirmed to **Heard on the Hill** that May 3 was his last day at CP. He's been the agency's Washington bureau chief since 2018.

McCarten has also been editor of CP's *Caps and Spelling*, and the *CP Style Guide*, both go-to resources on the desks of most journalists in Canada whenever there's a question about capitalization, whether or not to hyphenate, or to confirm the correct spelling of a word.

"Due to the circumstances of the last few months, I have been helping out in Ottawa on an acting basis and travelling back and forth between D.C. and Ottawa as needed," he said by email, referring to his additional interim role as CP's Ottawa bureau chief following the departure of **Joanna Smith** back in February.

At the time, McCarten told *The Hill Times* that his assignment in

the U.S. capital "doesn't end until a little bit later this year."

McCarten confirmed to HOH that he's leaving the news industry.

"I start on Monday [May 6] with Manulife as global vice-president of information and analysis in their global government relations department. I'm working with **Mary-scott (Scotty) Greenwood**, formerly of the Canadian American Business Council in D.C." McCarten confirmed, noting his family will now be based in Toronto.

McCarten said he didn't know who would be taking over for him in his various roles at CP, saying that would be up to the news service's senior leadership at head office in Toronto.

## EU members host Eurovision watch party in Ottawa May 11

The European Union-member embassies in Ottawa—and the EU Delegation office, of course—have a bunch of events planned this week to mark Europe Day on May 9.

After sunset on May 8, the Ottawa sign in the ByWard Market is among a number of landmarks across Canada—including the CN Tower in Toronto, and Niagara Falls—that will be lit up blue and yellow to mark the eve of Europe Day.

On the big day, May 9, the EU flag will be raised at Ottawa's City Hall, and also at Queen's Park in Toronto. Diplomatic receptions will take place to celebrate Belgium taking over the group's rotat-

ing presidency in Ottawa and in Montreal.

But the showstopper event is on May 11 in Ottawa when the Alliance française, the Embassy of Sweden, and the Ottawa cluster of European Union National Institutes for Culture co-host "the best Eurovision watch party in Ottawa," according to the invitation. The grand finale of the (in)famous Eurovision song contest—hosted by Sweden in 2024, thanks to Swedish singer **Loreen**'s win last year—will be streamed live from 3-6 p.m. The party includes online trivia quizzes, live voting at each table, karaoke contests, and door prizes from EU-member embassies and the EU Delegation. The party will take place at the Maison de la Francophonie d'Ottawa, 2720 Richmond Rd. Limited tickets are available at af.ca.

Europe Day celebrates the Schuman Declaration, named after **Robert Schuman**, the post-Second World War French foreign minister who, in 1950, proposed a visionary idea of European unity and solidarity that marked the beginning of the 27-member union we know today.

## Senator Oudar and MP Turnbull update their titles

One Senator and one Liberal MP will be getting some new business cards.



Senator Manuelle Oudar joined the Independent Senators Group on May 2. Photograph courtesy of the Senate of Canada's X account

Quebec Senator **Manuelle Oudar**, who was appointed to the Red Chamber on Feb. 13, joined the Independent Senators Group on May 2.

"Oudar's impressive experience in public governance and accomplishments in the public sector, demonstrated leadership abilities, and knowledge of corporate administration qualify her as an invaluable addition to the Independent Senators Group," said ISG facilitator **Raymonde Saint-Germain**, whose group now totals 42 members.

Meanwhile, over in the House of Commons, Liberal MP **Ryan Turnbull** got his parliamentary secretary assignment quietly adjusted on April 29. The order-in-council that day calls for the Whitby, Ont., MP to henceforth be styled "parliamentary secretary to the deputy prime minister and minister of finance and parliamentary secretary to the minister of innovation, science, and industry." First elected in 2019, Turnbull was initially appointed as PS to Innovation, Science, and Industry Minister **François-Philippe Champagne** this past September.

## Stephen Harper to speak in Toronto May 13



Former prime minister Stephen Harper will speak in Toronto on May 13. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Tickets are sold out for former Conservative prime minister **Stephen Harper**'s May 13 address to the C.D. Howe Institute in Toronto.

Harper is scheduled to deliver the 2024 Hugh and Laura MacKinnon Roundtable Luncheon address. This is only the second MacKinnon Luncheon event to take place. The inaugural one was held just a few months ago in November 2023 featuring Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre** as the keynote.

## Bloc Leader Blanchet to address Montreal Chamber of Commerce on May 14

Bloc Québécois Leader **Yves-François Blanchet** will headline a lunch event at the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal on May 14.

The title of his talk—which he will give in French, naturally—is "A Quebec model of prosperity." Following his remarks, Blanchet will sit down with the Chamber's president and CEO **Michel Leblanc** to discuss issues affecting businesses in Montréal and Quebec.

This will be Blanchet's first talk at the Chamber, according to the event listing on its website.



Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet will address the Montreal Chamber of Commerce on May 14. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The presentation will take place at Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth, 900 René-Lévesque Blvd. W., in Montreal.

## The 20th Century Boys back on stage May 9

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Boys, a band featuring a rotating cast of current and former Ottawa media and political types including CPAC personality **Glen McInnis**, will perform a fundraising concert on May 9 at the Rainbow Bistro.

According to *Hill Times*' social butterfly **Stuart Benson**—a.k.a. **Party Central**—the Boys' show he attended back in December was standing-room only as loyal fans came out to hear former CPAC anchor **Peter Van Dusen** and the band crank out hits from The Rolling Stones, **Amy Winehouse**, The Temptations, and **Neil Diamond**, just to name a few.

Thursday's show is a fundraiser for PAL Ottawa which supports senior artists and arts workers. There will also be raffle prizes including a pair of Bronze Passes to this summer's Ottawa Jazz Festival.

The show starts at 8 p.m. on May 9 at the Rainbow Bistro, 76 Murray St: therainbow.ca.

## NAWL receives Women, Peace, and Security award

The National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) received the government's 2023 Women, Peace, and Security Civil Society Leadership Award in a virtual ceremony on May 2, which Foreign Affairs Minister **Mélanie Joly** tuned in for.

In her remarks as she presented the award, parliamentary secretary for women and gender equality and youth **Lisa Hepfner** highlighted the work of a strong feminist sector to helping end gender-based violence, and advancing equality for women.

NAWL's executive director **Tiffany Butler** thanked the group's partners, including PolySeSouvenir and the #Women4GunControl coalition, "who worked tirelessly alongside NAWL to make a safer Canada free from gun violence," she said in a press release.

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# Minister Holland

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## News

# House of Commons chaos a symptom of a past-expiry Parliament, not just Speaker's judgment, say politicians

Whether or not Speaker Fergus' difficulties in presiding over the House of Commons are entirely his fault, 'Parliament has to function, and if it can't, that's what an election is for,' says Conservative pundit Jordan Paquet.

Continued from page 1

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, Ont.) was named by Speaker Greg Fergus (Hull-Aylmer, Que.) after refusing to only withdraw his comments calling Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) a "wacko," rather instead attempting to withdraw and replace that word with "radical" and "extremist."

The Speaker gave Poilievre four opportunities to "simply withdraw" his comments before naming him and ordering his departure from the Chamber for the rest of the day.

Bloc Québécois House leader Alain Thérien says the House Speaker should resign because of his inability to manage the Chamber. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*



The tension had quickly ratcheted up during that day's Question Period, with Trudeau taking early shots at Poilievre over his impromptu pit stop to meet with anti-carbon tax protesters on the New Brunswick-Nova Scotia border, and accusing Poilievre of "shameful, spineless leadership," and shaking hands with "white nationalists" to court their support.

Following Poilievre's removal, the entire Conservative caucus left their seats and followed Poilievre out of the Chamber. Many tweeted their dissatisfaction immediately from the lobby, focusing their attacks on drug decriminalization in British Columbia.

While the Conservatives have previously mounted fundraising campaigns following the expulsion of caucus members from the House, including MP Raquel Dancho (Kildonan-St. Paul, Man.) in December 2022, this time the Liberals also got in on the action.

That evening, Parker Lund, the Liberal Party's director of communication, posted to X that the party's fundraising email following Poilievre's ejection had become that month's single best fundraising effort "in just over an hour."

In an emailed response to *The Hill Times* on May 3, Lund said that while the party doesn't disclose internal fundraising figures, the fundraising email was "the best of 2024 so far."

On May 1, both the Conservatives and Bloc Québécois called for Speaker Fergus to resign. The Conservatives argued that Fergus

had behaved in a partisan and biased way by ordering Poilievre to be removed, but allowing unparliamentary language from Trudeau.

While Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil-Chambly, Que.) had commended Fergus for using "common sense" following Poilievre's removal, the next day, Bloc House Leader Alain Thérien (La Prairie, Que.) said Fergus should resign because of his inability to manage the House.

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Conservative pundit Jordan Paquet, a senior consultant with BlueSky Strategy Group, said it was less a question of whether Fergus could still manage the House, and more an issue of a Parliament well past its best-before date.

Paquet, a former principal secretary to then-Conservative interim leader Rona Ambrose, said that in previous instances of a Parliament as dysfunctional as this one, the remedy would be to call an election and create a new one.

However, as a matter of "political survival," neither the Liberal government nor the New

Democrats supporting them with the supply-and-confidence agreement could afford to call an election now.

Unfortunately, whether an election is called tomorrow or in October 2025, all parties are already on a pre-election footing, Paquet said, adding he expects the Chamber to be increasingly "raucous" until the House is finally dissolved.

While Paquet said the Speaker is not entirely to blame for the difficulty of presiding over this House of Commons, he said Fergus had not done himself any favours with his handling of the April 30 Question Period, particularly given the previous issues that have arisen since he took up the chair.

"I think people were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, but [Fergus] is somebody who was serving as parliamentary secretary, so it was tough for people to see him as non-partisan, even if he entered with good intentions," Paquet explained.

However, Paquet said that the benefit of the doubt was quickly strained, initially when Fergus delayed a Question Period early in his tenure as Speaker attempting to deliver a speech on decorum, and then again last December following the controversy regarding a video he filmed that was used during an Ontario Liberal convention.

In the video filmed in his office, Fergus appeared in his Speaker's robes, thanking outgoing Ontario Liberal interim leader John Fraser for his friendship, and reminiscing about their time working together for the party to elect former Ontario premier Dalton McGuinty.

On Dec. 4, 2023, Fergus apologized to the House of Commons, telling MPs that he had been told the message would be "non-political" and intended for an "intimate gathering," and was not aware it would be shown at the convention.

However, that apology was not enough for either the Bloc Québécois or the Conservative Party, which both called for Fergus to resign as Speaker. Following a brief study, the Procedure and House Affairs Committee recommended Fergus issue another apology and pay a fine.

On Feb. 29, MPs on the Board of Internal Economy unanimously agreed to fine Fergus \$1,500 for using House of Commons resources to make the video.

Paquet said that while it was the Speaker's job to respond to issues of decorum and disrespect during proceedings, in the context of a chair who did not enjoy the confidence of nearly half the House of Commons, it would be incredibly difficult for his decisions to be seen as legitimate.

Paquet also said there was a perception of inequity in the way Fergus dealt with Poilievre's comments and those of Trudeau.

If Fergus had allowed Poilievre to reframe his comments as he had offered Trudeau the chance to do with his "spineless leadership" comment, Paquet said he believes "we wouldn't still be talking about it today."

Continued on page 5



BlueSky Strategy Group's Jordan Paquet says Speaker Fergus 'didn't do himself any favours' by not allowing Poilievre to reframe his comments as he had offered to Trudeau. *The Hill Times photograph by Stuart Benson*



Continued from page 4

“I think he may have already been irked because someone else had just challenged him,” Paquet said. Prior to Poilievre’s removal on April 30, Conservative MP Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, Alta.) was also named and asked to leave the House after calling Fergus’ handling of the day’s proceedings “disgraceful” following Trudeau’s “spineless” comment.

On May 1, Thomas challenged Fergus’ decision, arguing that her privileges as an MP had been violated since she had been removed despite withdrawing her comments. Thomas pointed to the unofficial transcript from the previous day, which indicated that she had withdrawn her comment before being removed. However, the official Hansard transcript did not include her withdrawal.

In response, Fergus asked Thomas to “share all information that she would like to have the speakership evaluate,” and that it would do so with “extreme importance.”

While his handling of Thomas’ removal and the subsequent removal of Poilievre can simply be attributed to human error, “it didn’t do Fergus any favours” in improving his legitimacy as an “independent referee” in the eyes of the Conservative caucus.

“He has to be extra careful going forward,” Paquet said, adding that even an unimpeachable performance from Fergus from now on may not be enough to remedy the underlying malady afflicting the functioning of Parliament.

“At the end of the day, Parliament has to function, and if it can’t, that’s what an election is for,” Paquet said. “I don’t think there will be one anytime soon, but it seems like that may be the only thing that could fix most of this.”

Olivier Cullen, a senior adviser with Summa Strategies and former chief of staff to Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu (Thunder Bay–Superior North, Ont.), said that while he had the “utmost respect” for Fergus, it was undeniable that the Speaker had lost control.

“When the heckling is aimed at the Speaker rather than through him, he’s lost control,” Cullen said.

However, Cullen challenged the idea that Fergus had been given a completely good-faith reception. He said that despite Fergus’ legitimate errors in judgement early on, he doesn’t believe those mistakes



Summa Strategies’ Olivier Cullen says that while he agrees Speaker Fergus has lost control of the house, the list of willing volunteers who could replace him is very short. Photograph courtesy of X

potential, willing replacements would be sparse.

“If I’m sitting as a Liberal backbencher, I wouldn’t be interested in that because you know exactly what will happen,” Cullen explained. “They’ll put you under a microscope, and watch your every single move and word you say. And as soon as there’s one slip, well, that’s the third Speaker down.”

While Cullen said he doesn’t believe there is a way to go back to the days before quick social media soundbites and controversy-fuelled fundraising efforts, he agreed with Paquet that there is a way forward after an election. However, much of that depends on who is elected to that new Parliament, and what kind of politicians they want to be.

“The only way forward is if there’s some concerted effort by people who want to change this behaviour to put their hand up to run because we’re not going backwards,” Cullen said.

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were grave enough to warrant the Conservatives’ “collective distrust.”

“He has lost confidence in the House, but the loss of confidence is based on

partisan jabs; it’s not based on reality,” Cullen explained, noting that if Fergus were to become the second Speaker to resign in less than a year, the list of

# Making the biggest impacts

...in the tiniest places.



Conservative MP Rachael Thomas arrives in the House of Commons foyer before Question Period on May 1, 2024. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

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## Comment

# Poilievre's clarion call to corporate Canada

While business has generally been complacent in political marketing, others have filled the void and taken greater control of the agenda.

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre is delivering a valuable message to the Canadian business community: if you want to move the policy needle, get more into the public selling and politicking of key agenda items, writes Tim Powers. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

More fascinating than the exchange of venom between the prime minister and the leader of the opposition was seeing the Conservative Party leader write an old-school op-ed in a "lamestream media"—his description—paper. In a direct and surly manner, he screamed to corporate Canada that they should fire their lobbyists, and make the case for their policies with the public.

A couple of disclaimers at this point: yes, I am an owner of a government relations/lobbying firm. So some may say I have some blatant self-interest here. Second, while we haven't put up the "for sale" sign yet—and aren't going to—I'd say to move past the headline and dig into the substance of the opinion piece, as there is some instructive guidance in there.

Beyond Pierre Poilievre's usual snarling and aggressive posturing, he is delivering a valuable message to the Canadian business community. If you want to move the policy needle, you need to do what labour unions, environment groups, and some civil society groups have been doing for years: get more into the public selling and politicking of key agenda items. Where you can get the public on board, do it. Don't assume it will happen as some kind of incidental contact.

For many of us, this is not a new message or foreign advice. The political marketing of a corporation's pursuit seems to be a strange concept for many in our business community. Yet many of those same companies spend millions upon millions of dollars selling their products to people assuming that direct product marketing is the same as political marketing, which it most often is not.

Justin Trudeau came to power in 2015 in part by benefiting from the able political marketing of environmental and labour groups. These various bodies helped create a climate where a politician talking about investing in climate change and playing on the aspirations of people in the middle class and those helping to join it could succeed. And succeed Trudeau did.

Even in this day and age, the Canadian business community still tends to be more conservative in public disposition—better to not make noise, and use civil con-

versations established through relationships to make their case to policymakers. While that still is important (read: self-interest here), now more than ever, we live in a show-me-the-money/polling-data world. Politicians—particularly federal Conservative ones—want to see if you have thought beyond your nose and have done the political modelling of a policy you are pursuing. Socio-economic modelling is nice, but the showing of money comes with the political viability of the proposal being proffered.

It can be argued that the Canadian business community hasn't really leaned into a public persuasion campaign since the 1988 free-trade election. Back then, they had to work hard to make the case in concert with the then-Progressive Conservative Mulroney government that free trade was a winner for all Canadians, not just those working in the private sector. That was 36 years ago.

In the intervening period, while business has generally been complacent in political marketing, others have filled the void and taken greater control of the agenda. What is that old saying? You snooze, you lose.

Poilievre has just set the alarm clock. Time to wake up to the reality of the political communications environment in which we live.

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

*The Hill Times*

# The right to protest doesn't come without consequences

In previous acts of civil disobedience, it was acknowledged breaking the law meant consequences, with going to jail held as a badge of honour for many.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



KAMOURASKA, QUE.—The concept of civil disobedience is as old as time itself. The early Greek philosophers grappled with it. In the nascent stages of democracy, the question was: should the authority of the majority always be respected?

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Henry David Thoreau coined the phrase

in his essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* in refusing to pay his taxes for wars and slavery. Mahatma Gandhi undertook unlawful activities against the British in India many times. Martin Luther King Jr. led civil rights protesters in marches that broke the law. And Saul Alinsky counselled leftists on how to develop strategies that defied the authorities.

But in each of these actions, it was acknowledged breaking the law meant consequences. Indeed for many, going to jail was a badge of honour. As protests and occupations have taken over Canadian streets and university campuses of late, this is pertinent to issues of free speech and the right to protest.

University of Waterloo professor Emmett Macfarlane is seen to be the constitutional expert heir to Eugene Forsey and Peter Hogg. In an April 30 blog, he sent out his thoughts on the "encampments" at American and Canadian universities: "They are technically trespassing. But so long as protesters are not otherwise committing crimes or interfering with the university's ability to get

on with its business, the quick reaction to call for police enforcement is repressive and contrary to the basic rights of free expression and peaceful assembly."

Subsequently, I read journalist Justin Ling, whose reports on the convoy occupation in Ottawa were the "go-to" source of information. In a piece titled "Leave those kids alone," he described what he saw at Columbia University. "There has been, however, lots of speech that makes people uncomfortable. ... You agree or disagree with any or all of that—some of it, you almost certainly should—but it ought to be protected speech. It may provoke emotional debates and arguments, but it is not violent."

Ling drew parallels with the protests in 1968 against the Vietnam War on the same Columbia campus, which involved a lengthy occupation and police intervention, but resulted in social change: "We look back at those protests, now, with some degree of nostalgia."

I responded to both Macfarlane and Ling directly. To Macfarlane's point, I noted the language and the comportment of

the protesters had been aggressive: there were clear examples of vandalism, intimidation, and "technical" trespass—many of the demonstrators camped out at McGill University are not McGill students by their own admission, but rather hailing from Concordia University—and therefore, police intervention should be considered.

I pointed out to Ling that the protests in the 1960s were often financed by the Soviet Union as a means of disrupting American society. By the same token, the funds and organization behind the encampments and anti-Israel disinformation on social media, come from Russia and Iran. Samidoun, a Canadian not-for-profit organization leading many demonstrations, is said to be a front for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a terrorist group. Samidoun has actively praised the Hamas terrorist attacks on Oct. 7, 2023.

So, none of this should be taken lightly. That said, free speech is not always benign. In 1977, in the predominantly Jewish town of Skokie, Ill., the American Civil Liberties Union supported the

right of Nazis to parade. It caused enormous angst, but was within the bounds of the American First Amendment.

In Canada, our Constitution sets out guarantees for rights subject to "reasonable limits prescribed by law...in a free and democratic society." So, we uphold the rights of even those we consider despicable, with limitations. And while it concerns me that antisemitic harangues could spark violence, at this juncture, both public and protesters are acting peacefully.

Last week, Quebec Premier François Legault called for the police to step in at McGill. Conversely, Quebec judge Chantal Masse rejected an injunction by two McGill students who felt "threatened" by the protesters. She wrote "freedom of expression and to gather peacefully would be affected significantly" if the injunction were granted.

If there is violence or clear hate speech on university campuses, the authorities would be justified in stepping in. And like Gandhi, King, and Alinsky, these protesters should accept the consequences of their actions. For the time being, calmer heads should prevail.

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

*The Hill Times*





# A CALL TO CANADIAN POLICYMAKERS: ENSURE EQUITABLE PUBLIC ACCESS FOR MEDICATIONS FOR MENTAL ILLNESSES

In Canada, a country celebrated for its fair and universal healthcare system, a significant disparity exists around the accessibility of medicines to treat mental illness. This inequity not only underscores a critical gap in our healthcare model but also highlights the urgent need for a tailored mental health approach to the review and reimbursement of medications for mental illnesses. It is imperative that Canadian policymakers prioritize the needs of individuals living with mental illness, a demographic historically marginalized and stigmatized who have not had the opportunities to advocate for themselves effectively.

## Pathways to Equity: Two key actions to improve outcomes for Canadians living with mental illness:

- Creation of a reimbursement Mental Health Committee with representation of clinical psychiatrists and the patient community.
- Invest in a holistic approach to mental health that includes counseling, therapy, and support services to ensure that medication is part of a broader, more effective treatment plan.

One in five Canadians experience a mental illness each year.<sup>1</sup> By the age of 40 years, 50% of Canadians will have or have had a mental health concern.<sup>2</sup> Despite the prevalence and the severe impact mental illness can have on individuals' lives, access to necessary medications remains a substantial challenge for

many. This obstacle is largely due to the variations in drug coverage across provincial health authorities and between those with and without private coverage, creating a patchwork of access that leaves many Canadians without the essential treatments they need. The inconsistency in drug access exacerbates the challenges faced by those living with mental illness, contributing to prolonged suffering and, in many cases, preventing recovery.

"As a co-author of Canadian treatment guidelines for mood and anxiety disorders and a consultant specializing in the treatment of patients who have not responded to prior treatments, I'm deeply troubled by Canada's inadequate, inequitable access to medications for mental illness," says Dr. Pierre Blier, MD, PhD; Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Cellular/Molecular Medicines, University of Ottawa. "In a country that prides itself on its public healthcare, it is unacceptable that access to vital medications for mental illnesses is deficient and remains inconsistent."

In 2023, Mood Disorders Society of Canada (MDSC) examined Canada's public reimbursement review process for psychiatric medications approved by Health Canada between 2012 and 2022. The resulting report "System Broken: How Public Drug Coverage is Failing Canadians with Mental Illness" ([www.accessmedication.mdsc.ca](http://www.accessmedication.mdsc.ca)) revealed substantial delays, a significantly higher rate of negative reimbursement recommendations for medications for mental illness compared to medications for other non-oncology medical disorders, and an inequality of publicly funded medications across Canada's most populated provinces.

"When mental illness strikes, all Canadians deserve to have swift and equal access to the medications they may need to recover their wellness," says Ken Porter, National Sustainability Director, MDSC. "We need to work with our government decision makers, health ministers, and all stakeholders to reduce the long administrative delays and other roadblocks to medication access for people living with all types of mental illnesses today." MDSC hosted a roundtable, Pathways to Equity, on May 7, 2024 to collaboratively look at solutions with a cross-section of health system stakeholders including people with lived/living experience, caregivers, patient organizations, government, HTA bodies,

**Dr. Pierre Blier, MD, PhD; Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Cellular/Molecular Medicines, University of Ottawa**

academics, policy experts, industry, and psychiatrists.

"For those that need them, medications to treat mental illness are imperative," says Dr. Pierre Blier. "They enable Canadians living with mental illnesses to lead productive, fulfilling lives. Importantly, access to newer medications provides critical benefits, such as enhanced effectiveness,

improved tolerability, easier administration, and/or less side effects."

Mental illness has long been stigmatized, and those suffering from it have been relegated to the shadows of healthcare policy discussions. When the needs of people living with mental illness are overlooked or minimized, it perpetuates a cycle of suffering as well as economic loss. Untreated mental illnesses lead to increased societal and healthcare costs, including workplace losses due to absenteeism, presenteeism, short and long-term disability, as well as decreased productivity. In fact, mental illnesses are the leading cause of workplace disability – and the fastest growing claim type.<sup>3</sup> Coupled with these costs is the significant toll mental illness levies on the individual and their caregivers, family,

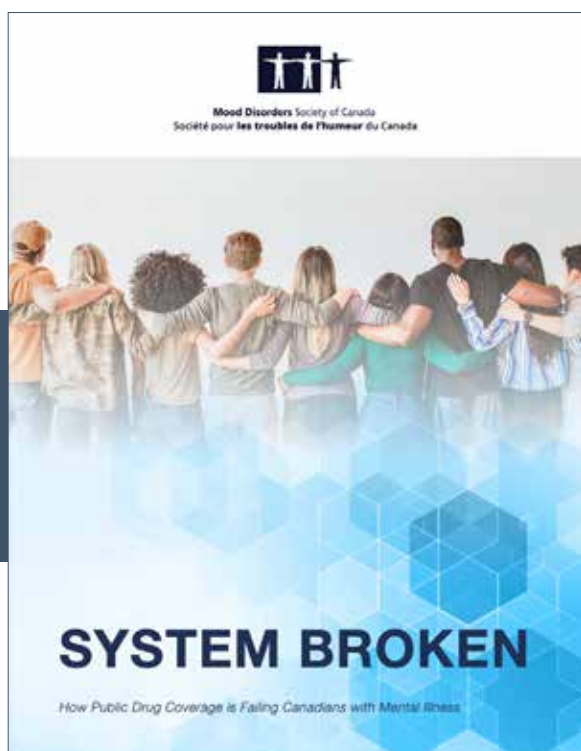
## Report highlights:

- **More than 50% negative:** more than half of the reimbursement recommendations for new medications for mental illness made by Canada's assessment bodies were negative (Quebec via INESSS: 62%, Rest of Canada via CDA: 54%<sup>4</sup>). This compared to only 17% negative recommendations for new medications for other non-oncology disorders during the same 10-year period in Canada (via CDA - NOTE: data not available for INESSS/Quebec).
- **Time delays:** average time from Health Canada approval to public reimbursement was 949 days or just over 2.5 years.
- **Provincial disparity:** the vast majority of new medications assessed for this report are not equitably accessible through public drug plans across the country (British Columbia: 54% of medications not publicly reimbursed, Alberta: 54%, Ontario: 46%, Quebec: 62%), or are not accessible at all.

friends, and co-workers.

It is time to change the paradigm by acknowledging mental health as integral to every single Canadian's overall health, which will also help to reduce hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and the need for more intensive, costly interventions down the line. It is time to rewrite the narrative, affirming mental illness' rightful place in the forefront of healthcare, fostering resilience, and building a brighter, more inclusive tomorrow.

**Mood Disorders Society of Canada is committed to ensuring that the viewpoints of People with Lived/Living Experience and caregivers, patient advocacy groups, physicians, government, esteemed academics and policy experts, and industry representatives are all represented in decisions. By bringing together a broad spectrum of perspectives, we seek to develop solutions-based recommendations that align with government priorities and address the identified access challenges effectively. [www.mdsc.ca](http://www.mdsc.ca)**



<sup>1</sup><https://www.cihi.ca/en/taking-the-pulse-a-snapshot-of-canadian-health-care-2023/canadians-short-on-access-to-care-for>  
<sup>2</sup><https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/what-we-do/anti-stigma/#:-:text=1%20in%205%20people%20experience,disease%20or%20type%20%20diabetes>  
<sup>3</sup><https://www.sunlife.ca/workplace/en/group-benefits/workplace-health-resources/health-insights/bright-paper-reports/changing-times/#:-:text=Mental%20disorders%20are%20the%20leading,Sun%20Life%20block%20of%20business>  
<sup>4</sup>"System Broken: How Public Drug Coverage is Failing Canadians with Mental Illness" report: MDSC engaged EVERSANA to prepare the analysis, which includes only original brand-name medications approved by Health Canada that underwent an initial or subsequent Health Technology Assessment between 2012 and 2022 in Canada by the CDA (Canadian Drug Agency, formerly the Canadian Agency for Drugs and Technologies in Health (CADTH)) and/or Institut national d'excellence en santé et en services sociaux (INESSS). The analysis evaluated reimbursement status and timelines for patient access to medications for mental illness that met the above parameters in four Canadian jurisdictions: British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec, as these four provinces account for more than 85 percent of the country's population. To access the full report, please visit [accessmedication.mdsc.ca](http://accessmedication.mdsc.ca).

# Editorial

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## Editorial

# Canada must commit to more than a monument

On May 1, ground was broken on Thunderhead, Canada's national 2SLGBTQI+ monument.

Tucked behind the Supreme Court of Canada, the new monument is a product of the LGBT Purge Fund, which was established with the proceeds of a 2018 class action settlement from the federal government following a lawsuit launched by survivors of a government campaign that "systematically hunted, harassed and fired 2SLGBTQI+ members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP and the federal public service between the 1950s and mid-1990s."

Slated to open in the summer of 2025, Thunderhead "is a monument of resilience, determination, and hope. It is not only a monument for LGBT Purge survivors, but for every 2SLGBTQI+ person in Canada who has experienced discrimination and exclusion because of who they are, who they love and how they express themselves," fund executive director Michelle Douglas said in a May 1 press release.

"While on one hand, it is a site of celebration of the progress made, we see the work must continue toward a safe, equal world where everyone can be who they are and love who they love. This monument brings us one step closer to a Canada where diversity and equality will brighten our future and triumph over hate," Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge said in the same press release.

That work towards a "safe, equal world" will come into focus this week

as 150 activists gather in Ottawa for a three-day conference on "Canada's Role In The World Advancing SOGIESC Human Rights," keying in on issues regarding sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.

Among the countries represented at the May 7-9 event are Ghana, Uganda, Lebanon, Tunisia, Thailand, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Jamaica, Singapore, and Colombia—many of which have had regressive laws and policies enacted that endanger the safety and security of their 2SLGBTQI+ citizens.

In the past, activists have looked to Canada to contribute to the pressure others are applying in the name of human rights.

For example, last year, Uganda passed a law that calls for the death penalty to be imposed for some cases of "aggravated homosexuality," as well as a 20-year sentence for those "promoting" LGBTQ issues, and a 10-year sentence for same-sex relations.

Canada expressed its "deep concern" and called for the law to be repealed, but observers said Canada needs to develop a "clearer foreign policy" on defending LGBTQ+ rights globally.

In the year that has passed, as domestic political rhetoric continues to fan the rabid flames of gender identity discrimination, it's more important than ever that Canada make a stand and protect the vulnerable who've routinely been failed simply for being who they are.

*The Hill Times*

## Letters to the Editor

# Thanks to our courageous students, says Vancouver reader

Re: "Campus crackdowns earning a failing grade," (*The Hill Times*, May 1, p. 10).

Thanks to Erica Ifill for pointing out the bravery of students on campuses across Canada and the United States who are protesting the terrible killing of innocents that is happening in Gaza right now.

Last week, I joined the student encampment at the University of British Columbia's main Vancouver campus. Also present were students from Simon Fraser University. As an older graduate of both these universities, I felt morally obligated to show solidarity with my younger student compatriots. I was impressed by the peaceful and well-organized nature of the camp, and the entirely reasonable demands for university divestment from and an academic boycott of Israel. I will

go back to the encampment at UBC soon to deliver groceries and other support.

I want to make it clear that I am not anti-Jewish. I am not anti-Muslim. I condemn the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. However, we cannot allow this genocide of thousands of Indigenous Palestinians to continue. The horror of so many children and adults being killed, maimed, psychologically wounded, or trapped in the rubble for days is intolerable. Not to mention the growing famine ravaging Gaza.

Thanks to youth for speaking out against this genocide and moral atrocity. As Ifill notes, they carry on a tradition from their university forebears who took a valiant stand during the Vietnam War.

**Paul Houle**  
 Vancouver, B.C.

# Government policies are hurting farmers, hampering solutions to Canada's housing crisis: Alberta Cattle Feeders' rep

In the face of Canada's housing crisis, farmers are feeling the squeeze due to unrealistic government policies. Several initiatives underway not only miss the mark in addressing the housing crunch, but also unfairly target the agricultural sector.

The urgent need for labour in agriculture cannot be overstated. The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council's recent report underscores a 3.7 per cent decline in sales due to more than 28,000 unfilled jobs in 2022 alone. With an anticipated 15 per cent increase in the domestic labour gap by 2030, the need for solutions is imperative, and foreign labour is one solution.

When farms apply for foreign labour, employers must show they have government-inspected housing available. While the processing time to bring in labourers regularly takes months, these houses must stay vacant.

The government's underused-housing tax presents a double-edged sword. The need to maintain housing for foreign workers clashes with the government's policies to tax Canadians for vacant housing.

The National Cattle Feeders' Association has advocated for an exemption for agricultural housing for farm workers, and budget legislation just tabled should release farmers from reporting.

No sooner was this addressed then the government issued a halt in accepting

housing waivers if workers choose to live outside of the accommodations provided. While employers are required to provide payment to assist with outside rent, they now also need to keep the original housing vacant in case the worker decides they want to move back.

The demand to maintain empty housing units for the Temporary Foreign Worker Program is not only economically burdensome, but also devoid of practicality, further exacerbating the housing crisis.

These policies epitomize a short-sighted approach that fails to grasp the interconnectedness of Canada's housing woes and agricultural labour needs. By targeting agriculture with increased taxation, regulatory burdens, and impractical housing requirements, the government not only undermines the vitality of the farming industry, but also perpetuates the housing crisis.

As we navigate these turbulent times, it's imperative for policymakers to adopt a more holistic approach recognizing the indispensable role of agriculture. It's time for a policy overhaul that prioritizes collaboration, innovation, and empathy in tackling one of the nation's most pressing challenges.

**Janice Tranberg**  
 President and CEO, Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association  
 Calgary, Alta.



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# No bars, just bad vibes

## The ‘soft landing’ for the economy may have to be a lot harder than usual

The economy may have to be guided toward near-recessionary levels to compensate for the housing bubble’s outsized impact on Canadians’ cost of living.

A note to Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre: B.C.’s drug decriminalization policy is not wacko, you’re just wack. Much like Drake, writes Erica Ifill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



The April 30 circus in the House of Commons featured no lyrical flow, no beat, just insults.

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



OTTAWA—Is Pierre Poilievre the Drake of Canadian politics?

It’s 2024 and we are being treated to what will go down in history for being one of the greatest rap beefs of all time. Rappers Drake and Kendrick Lamar are trading barbs, verses, auditory punches, and just pure shade and lyrical demolition. This beef has crowned Lamar as adding scholarship to the game through his use of literary devices such as euphemisms, double entendre, metaphors and similes, alliteration, and just plain insults layered one on top of the another. It’s been a treat, much like the one that preceded it between Megan Thee Stallion and Nicki Minaj.

Unfortunately, that was not the case on April 30 in the House of Commons. There was no lyrical flow, no beat, just insults.

Last week, the prime minister and the leader of the opposition got into a verbal sparring match over British Columbia’s government asking Health Canada to backtrack on its pilot program to decriminalize hard drugs in public spaces in an effort to counter the opioid crisis. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau defended the program, but Poilievre advocated for abstinence and criminalization of users, as though the war on drugs never happened. Talk about having no new ideas. Instead, the Conservatives just recycle policies that have proved to be harmful to constituencies that don’t necessarily vote for them. It’s the “me, myself, and I” brand of politics.

A reminder that these are the same people who demand decorum from others—notably racialized people—that they can’t show to each other.

The prime minister’s response to the leader of the opposition was to accuse him of linking up with—and failing to denounce—white nationalists. I mean ... he’s not wrong. The ties between Diagonol—the far-right, Canadian-born and -raised white nationalists—and the “anti-carbon tax convoy” stationed on the

border between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are tighter than at first glance. For example, as reported by CBC, “Poilievre ... is seen leaving a RV with a drawing of the black-and-white Diagonol flag on the door.”

And this is not his first offence. Poilievre has been courting People’s Party of Canada voters, which requires him to take certain stances, such as his transphobia—radical gender ideology, as he calls it. Then there’s his use of the thin blue line symbol that’s increasingly co-opted by and associated with the far right; his use of the n-word in the House; and members of his caucus meeting with Christine Anderson, who is a member of a German nationalist party. Although he condemned the Anderson meeting, as I wrote last year, “Poilievre has substantiated the claim that he can be sympathetic to bigots.”

Poilievre may be cosplaying extremism like Drake cosplays blackness, but the results will be catastrophic for marginalized communities. However, let’s continue with our story.

House Speaker Greg Fergus had the unfortunate position of herding dingoes. Not to be outdone by her leader’s idiocy, MP Rachael Thomas heckled the Speaker by telling him he acted in a disgraceful manner. She was

thrown out of the Chamber. She sounded as uncouth and pubescent as Marjorie Taylor Greene when MTG heckled United States President Joe Biden at his State of the Union address two years in a row.

At this point, Poilievre was vexed and lashed out at the prime minister like an emotionally immature 16-year-old boy by calling him and his policy “wacko.” No Pierre, the policy is not wacko, you’re just wack. Much like Drake.

Fergus ejected the opposition leader for not rescinding his adolescent outburst. And like a whiny Drake, he took to social media to claim persecution. A white man in a position of power claiming persecution is not only wack, but also unserious. As I wrote previously in this paper: “Unfortunately, in these serious times we are besieged by unserious people who have been instrumental in the memeification of politics and political discourse.”

The Conservatives’ response to Poilievre getting kicked out of the Chamber? They followed Regina George’s lead like tin soldiers. Another wack move for The Plastics.

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

*The Hill Times*

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—No one can argue that Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem’s effort to drive up borrowing costs to cool inflation hasn’t generally had the desired impact.

The higher interest rates set in motion by the central bank in the face of 40-year-high price increases have forced consumers and businesses to curtail the buying spree that emerged when several years of pent-up demand burst upon us at the end of the pandemic.

Overall, monetary policy has been proven to work. To wit, the life signs of Canada’s economy continue to be elusive. Economic expansion slowed markedly last year, and may be headed for another weak stretch in 2024 with growth of only 0.2 per cent in February, according to Statistics Canada.

Slower growth is, of course, what the BoC is looking for as it tries to wring inflation out of the system without driving the country into a recession—the so-called soft landing for an overheated economy.

Continued on page 10



## Comment

# The Canadian Armed Forces' disappearing act

Ongoing operational readiness issues are keeping Canada's soldiers from participating in key training and promotional activities.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



Although the band will play on, the Ceremonial Guard's participation in the summer Changing of the Guard ceremony is just the latest casualty of the Armed Forces' personnel problems. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The "expert" sounding the alarm bell on this development is none other than retired Lt.-Gen. Andrew Leslie, a former Army commander and Liberal MP.

Since Canadian battle groups began deploying to Latvia in 2017 as part of NATO's Operation Reassurance, the final phase of their training has been conducted at CFB Wainwright in Alberta. These qualifying exercises were combined-arms training wherein soldiers would co-ordinate infantry, tanks, artillery, and aircraft.

Leslie said without that level of training, he fears that Canadian soldiers are now "going to have to learn on the job, using other people's equipment and expertise."

The explanation given to the CBC by Chief of the Defence Staff General Wayne Eyre was that these qualifying exercises were cut to allow the soldiers deploy-

ing to spend more time with their families. "What we're finding was the battle groups, the various units that we're deploying, were spending a lot of time on exercise here at home to get to a very high level, and then going to Latvia and doing much of the same work." So in other words: "not to worry folks, no need to study for the exam, we'll pick it up during the test itself."

The problem with Eyre's comments is that he knows his former Army commander is correct.

The cracks in the CAF's operational readiness are not limited to just the Army. The Royal Canadian Air Force has recently announced that it is grounding its aging fleet of jet trainers—which are actually newer than Canada's CF-18 frontline fighters—and farming out pilot training to allied nations.

The current shortfall of trained pilots has resulted in the cancellation of international deployments in support of NATO objectives.

The commander of the Royal Canadian Navy, Vice-Admiral Angus Toppes, issued an unprecedented video message last year wherein he admitted that due to personnel shortcomings, the Navy will not be able to fulfill its operational objectives through the foreseeable future. It was a brave admission, but definitely one which resonated with Toppes's sailors.

As an Ottawa resident, I must admit that I was surprised to learn that the Ceremonial Guard will not be performing the Changing of the Guard ceremony on the lawn in front of Parliament Hill again this summer. The band will still make a daily appearance, and there is a much reduced

guard-changing ceremony performed at Rideau Hall.

However, that long-standing martial spectacle has been suspended. It was first halted in 2020 due to COVID-19, but now it is due to a shortage of personnel in the two reserve regiments that constitute the Ceremonial Guard: the Governor General's Foot Guards, and the Canadian Grenadier Guards.

Not everyone realizes that the scarlet-coated guardsmen with their towering bearskin hats were actually serving members of Canada's militia. They are combat-capable soldiers who have often deployed abroad alongside our regular forces. In order to keep the tourist-friendly event a fixture in Ottawa, the Changing of the Guard ceremony may need to become a privately owned re-enactor enterprise in the future.

Now, before the Colonel Blimps begin heartily thumping on their tubs at the loss of another tradition, there are many examples where this is indeed the case. At the Citadel in Halifax, the 78<sup>th</sup> Highlanders perform drill and musket demonstrations, and a foundation funds the re-enactors each summer at Fort Henry in Kingston, Ont. They have no formal connection to the CAF.

Perhaps it is also time to do something similar with the RCAF's demonstration squadron known as the Snowbirds. The aged-out Tutor planes the Snowbirds use are overdue for retirement, and it seems unlikely that any government of the day will spend the billions of dollars necessary to buy a new fleet of show planes. Particularly when skilled pilots are in such scarce supply.

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

*The Hill Times*

## The 'soft landing' for the economy may have to be a lot harder than usual

Continued from page 9

But, after a year of central bank-induced high borrowing costs and endless guesswork by analysts, the question still remains: how weak do economic conditions have to be to bring inflation down to the BoC's two-per-cent inflation target, which in turn would cause Macklem to start significantly reducing the bank's influential overnight interest rate?

Many economists have been thinking for a long time that this would happen this summer. But, although Macklem hasn't ruled it out—and would obviously like to ease the pain of higher interest rates as soon as he can—it's entirely possible that it won't happen in June or July. And that's for a very simple reason: the entire basis of monetary policy as

practiced in this country has been upended.

Like many other aspects of life in Canada, the BoC's approach to steering the economy has been thrown into doubt by the housing bubble that has been building for two decades, and greatly accelerated during the COVID years. Largely an offshoot of an economy so weak that the central bank had to keep interest rates at rock-bottom levels to stimulate growth ever since the 2008 financial collapse, runaway housing prices have fed into an affordability crunch so severe it is in the process of demolishing many of Canada's usual political and socio-economic guideposts.

For his part, Macklem is unfortunately caught in a vicious circle. Shelter costs make up a large portion of the inflation measure used by the central bank. So the

more the bank drives up interest rates to slow economic activity and curb consumer price increases, the more Canadians end up paying for mortgages and rent, which keeps the economy's inflation number higher.

Leaving aside increases in shelter costs, inflation has been running at about 1.3 per cent, well below the threshold where Macklem would normally use the central bank's influence over commercial interest rates to begin bringing down borrowing costs for consumers and businesses.

"High shelter inflation is the single biggest factor preventing the Bank of Canada from achieving its two per cent inflation target," TD Bank economist James Orlando noted in a recent report. "Mortgage interest costs are rising at the fastest pace ever, while rents have soared alongside

low vacancies. This has shelter inflation running at 6.2 per cent year-on-year. Given its huge 30-per cent weighting within the CPI [Consumer Price Index] basket, this component alone has accounted for more than half of overall Canadian inflation."

Orlando and others have argued that the BoC—for the sake of its ability to accurately respond to the economy as a whole—should change its inflation measure to give less importance to housing price increases.

But the central bank's governing council agreed recently that the BoC's current CPI measures are providing the insight decision-makers need. However, in its deliberations in advance of the Bank's April 10 rate-setting decision, the council acknowledged that easing monetary policy could increase the likelihood of boost-

ing housing market activity and driving up shelter inflation regardless of when the BoC begins to start reducing interest rates.

With the timing of lower interest rates now dominating discussions about when potential home buyers should get off the couch, the bank's concern about a further distortion of the economic picture as a result of a renewed frenzy in house-buying seems well justified.

"Will the story be high interest rates keeping a lot of people on the sidelines this year, or the much expected and anticipated first rate cuts enticing a lot of people back into the market?" Shaun Cathcart, senior economist at the Canadian Real Estate Association, asked in a recent commentary.

Given that there are no quick fixes for housing supply, all indications are that the economy will have to be guided toward near-recessionary levels to compensate for the housing bubble's outsized impact on Canadians' cost of living.

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

*The Hill Times*





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## News

# PSPC deputy minister challenges the procurement watchdog's 'favouritism' findings in McKinsey contracts

'I do not accept the findings ... I do not accept that there is favouritism for McKinsey in the current system, based on our assessment as a common service provider,' Arianne Reza told the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee on May 1.

BY IREM KOCA

Public Services and Procurement Canada's second in command says she "does not accept" the procurement ombud's perception of "favouritism" towards McKinsey and Company in the awarding of federal contracts, while the ombud "stands behind" his findings.

Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic's April 15 report concluded that federal departments changed procurement strategies so that McKinsey and Company—a multinational management consulting firm—would be eligible to win millions of dollars worth of contracts, which the report said created a "strong perception of favouritism" towards the firm.

Arianne Reza, deputy minister at Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), appeared at the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee on May 1 to discuss the procurement watchdog's findings. Reza was joined by Mollie Royds, associate assistant deputy minister, procurement branch; Dominic Laporte, assistant deputy minister of the procurement branch; and Catherine Poulin, assistant deputy minister of the departmental oversight branch.

Since January 2023, the committee has been looking into the federal contracts awarded to McKinsey and Company. Over the course of more than a dozen meetings, the committee has heard from 55 witnesses.

Reza, who has been deputy minister at PSPC since November 2023, previously served as the department's associate deputy



PSPC deputy minister Arianne Reza testifies at the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee about contracts awarded to McKinsey and Company on May 1. Screenshot courtesy of ParIVu

minister from August 2021. Reza was the senior official responsible for the procurements of billions of dollars worth of goods and services during the pandemic, such as vaccines, according to PSPC.

The deputy minister told MPs that PSPC generally agrees with the ombud's findings and recommendations regarding McKinsey, but added that the department did not find any examples of "favouritism" in the contracts on which PSPC signed off. According to the ombud's review, PSPC used its contracting authority to approve 23 contracts out of 32 assessed, and one national master standing offer (NMSO) awarded to the firm. The ombud's report also highlighted the NMSO for McKinsey Benchmarking Services "may have been improperly established."



Conservative MP Garnett Genuis is a member of the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

PSPC also agreed with most of the ombud's findings in its official response to the report, but "took issue with observations that are made based on assumptions and interpretations" that differ from the department's own conclusions.

"PSPC agrees that files should include documentation that outline decisions, however, the rationale for making the decision cannot be assumed in the report without evidence," read the response.

The department also defended its decisions, saying there were "legitimate reasons" for awarding the non-competitive NMSO, and using that fact as the impetus for all subsequent call-ups.

During her testimony, Reza noted that Jeglic had previously come before the committee "and



Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic's report said 'PSPC is unable to demonstrate that the tenets of fairness, openness, and transparency were considered and respected in the procurement process.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

spoken about the fact that he is making negative inferences. PSPC is a little bit more nuanced. We have found no examples of favouritism."

Jeglic's report said that "PSPC is unable to demonstrate that the tenets of fairness, openness and transparency were considered and respected in the procurement process."

"At what point do we make negative inferences associated with the lack of documentation? And this report starts that trend of negative inferences, where we alleged the fact, but ultimately came to a conclusion that in some there was favouritism towards [McKinsey]," Jeglic told MPs during his own April 29 appearance before the committee.

Conservative MP Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park-Fort Saskatchewan, Alta.), who characterized the deputy minister's responses as "ambiguous," pressed for a clearer answer.

"Do you accept the conclusion that favouritism was shown from McKinsey or do you not?" Genuis asked Reza.

"I do not accept the findings ... I do not accept that there is favouritism for McKinsey in the current system, based on our assessment as a common service provider," she responded.

*The Hill Times* asked for additional comments from Reza, but PSPC did not respond by the deadline.

"The Office of the Procurement Ombud stands behind the findings, and the information presented to the committee," the

office said in a May 2 response to *The Hill Times*' questions regarding Reza's remarks.

In his April 29 testimony, Jeglic said his review did not find any evidence of political interference in the McKinsey contracts, but defended his observations of favouritism towards the firm.

Jeglic told *The Hill Times* in an April 29 interview that he is "very comfortable with the findings," and defined the instances in McKinsey contracts as "under-the-surface favouritism."

"There was a consultation—either between the contracting authority in the project authority where it became known that McKinsey was not eligible, or even in communications directly with McKinsey, identifying that they are not eligible to participate—and then the change being made," he said.

## Where was the 'favouritism' observed?

While the ombud's report emphasized that there can be legitimate reasons for changing a procurement strategy, it also highlighted that in specific procurements approved by Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada (ISED), requirements were changed after the departments realized that McKinsey would not be eligible to participate in the process.

"Given these circumstances combined with the absence of any documentation on file to support the legitimacy of this decision, the efforts on the part of CBSA and ISED to ensure McKinsey could participate create a strong perception of favouritism," reads the report.

The federal government coughed up a total of \$117-million to the firm between 2011 and 2023 through contracts awarded by several departments, according to Jeglic. The value of the contracts was relatively low until 2017, but started to increase in 2018, and saw a significant boost between 2019 and 2022.

While government contracting is overseen by public servants, the Liberal government's relationship with McKinsey has been scrutinized over the past few years, particularly due to revelations of the company's growing earnings to the tune of millions of dollars from federal contracts since the Liberals came to power in 2015. Another factor fuelling the controversy is Dominic Barton's previous role as McKinsey's global managing director before he was appointed as Canada's ambassador to China by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) in 2019.

Alley Adams, head of communications for McKinsey and Company Canada, said the firm follows federal procurement laws, and that "any suggestion to the contrary is simply inaccurate," in a statement to *The Hill Times*.

ikoca@hilltimes.com  
*The Hill Times*

## Opinion

# While other countries add services, Canada adds public servants

Digital is the default—in everything except the delivery of government services across Canada.

CSG Senator  
Colin Deacon

Opinion



Governments worldwide are improving their digital services at breakneck speed. Meanwhile, Canada's municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal governments added 202,000 public servants last year alone, and the number of federal employees per 1,000 Canadians is now at its highest level in 30 years.

Thirty years ago, cameras were clumsy, expensive, and held only 36 photos. Today's camera is a smartphone that takes, stores, and shares thousands of images effortlessly. Canadians have also changed a lot in 30 years. We spend more than six hours of our day online. Digital tools plan our routes, deliver our food, schedule our days, and connect us to everyone.

Digital is the default—in everything except the delivery of government services across Canada.

Digital systems cost less and do more. Citizens prefer them. While fewer than 25 per cent of federal services were available online in 2021, 81 per cent chose the digital option when it was available. And if you're worried about the digital divide, consider that with more people using a virtual option, public servants have more time to help those who don't use online tools.

Canadians don't know how bad they have it. Ukraine delivered a nationwide digital platform called Diia that's so useful it's now being licensed to other countries. It did this while fighting an existential war. Canada's Budget 2024 announced a single sign-in for government services, and an additional \$3-billion to "modernize" the Employment Insurance and Old Age Security systems, just as these systems themselves hit Canada's retirement age. This will not reverse our slide in the United Nations' digital government rankings—we've dropped from third to 32nd, not because we went backwards, but because the rest of the world is racing ahead.

Neglecting public sector IT is also a security risk. Digital adversaries sow disinformation to divide neighbours, hack outdated critical infrastructure, scam our most vulnerable, and erode confidence in our financial systems. Generative artificial intelligence only makes this worse.

Yes, it will take significant investment to catch up to other G20 nations. But hiring historically high numbers of public ser-

vants comes at a massive *recurring cost*. To change course, we must commit to:

- **Make digital skills a requirement for advancement in government.** How will we progress if our leaders lack the skills, experience, and confidence necessary to own successful service delivery?

- **Deliver useful, simple wins quickly.** Large projects are far more likely to fail than small ones. Let's prove we can deliver value fast to restore confidence. The rapid delivery of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit proved that we can achieve wins when we must.

- **Create a single government interface.** Design services around citizen needs rather than around department responsibilities. Thirty-one countries have figured this out.

- **Change both citizen and government behavior.** All Canadians will have to relearn how they interact with their government using the new tools we build. The rewards will be significant: In Estonia, one simple rule—*the government may not ask for a piece of information twice*—slashed bureaucracy throughout the public sector.

- **Spending, schedules, and performance must be transparent.** We're clearly spending too much on transformation, and not getting enough in return. Yet nobody has a good handle on costs. From now on, every initiative must start with a clear definition of success, and then make simple metrics public throughout the delivery process.

- **Let leaders do the hard work.** There should be no responsibility without authority. If we task someone with making hard—even unpopular, changes—we need to give them the power, resources, and flexibility necessary to deliver citizen-centric services. It's the only way we'll attract serious digital talent to public service.

- **Create and re-use standard modules.** Create software "building blocks" that make building services faster, easier, and more secure—and then insist that every department uses them. Freeze the budgets of departments who refuse.

In his 1993 resignation address, the then-prime minister Brian Mulroney said, "whether one agrees with our solutions or not, none will accuse us of having chosen to evade our responsibilities by side-stepping the most controversial issues of our time."

We have been side-stepping the biggest shift in government of our lifetimes. Digital power will define the best countries of the coming century. If we want to remain among them, we must become a digital-first nation.

Let's get started.

Colin Deacon is a Senator from Nova Scotia and member of the Canadian Senators Group. Previously a technology entrepreneur, Deacon is an advocate in Canada's Upper Chamber for innovation and harnessing of the digital economy.

The Hill Times

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Opinion

# Budget 2024 a missed opportunity to address food affordability

To ensure food affordability, investment is needed to guarantee adequate incomes, reign in corporate profits, and support (w)holistic approaches to food provisioning.

Marissa Alexander & Wade Thorhaug



Opinion

When the finance minister tabled her budget on April 16, Canadians were hoping for measures that would address our crisis in food insecurity. In 2023, 8.7 million people—including more than one-in-four children—experienced food insecurity. These are the highest recorded rates since Canada began monitoring. The pattern of hunger also reflects Canada’s



Although the budget included funding for the important National School Food Program, it did not centre measures to ensure food affordability, write Marissa Alexander and Wade Thorhaug. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

ongoing colonialism and structural racism, with astounding percentages of people living with food insecurity among Black (40.4 per cent), Indigenous (36.8 per cent) and Latin American (31.1 per cent) households.

These figures do not include groups at high risk of food insecurity: people living on First Nation reserves, in some remote northern areas, or unhoused people. Canada needs to do much better.

Budget 2024 strengthens the social safety net in critical ways, including funding the important National School Food Program. Yet, it does not centre measures to ensure food affordability, a key aspect of food security. If this government is serious about food affordability, it needs to take a three-pronged approach. First, address poverty. The primary reason people do not have reliable access to sufficient, healthy, and culturally appropriate food is because they do not have the money. Going forward, budgets need to include robust, reliable income supports. There are concrete proposals on the table including: implementing and adequately funding working-age supplements, disability and housing benefits, comprehensive EI reform, livable minimum wages, and basic income.

Fundamentally, income supports need to be measured against Canada’s obligation to fulfill the right to food. And specific and clear targets are essential; the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council and food security organizations have called on the government to commit to reducing overall food insecurity by 50 per cent, and to entirely eliminate severe food insecurity by 2030.

Second, the government needs to strengthen efforts to rein in unconscionable corporate profiteering, with Budget 2024 very light on new measures. According to the Competition Bureau of Canada, in 2022, Canada’s three largest grocers—Loblaw, Sobeys, and Metro—collectively earned \$3.6-billion in profits. And, since the pandemic, their profits have increased by 46 per cent. Shrinkflation—cutting quantities, but not price—and skimpflation—cutting quality of ingredients—are just some corporate tactics used to boost profits. Further scrutiny and legislation are needed.

The Office of Consumer Affairs study that underlined the critical lack of competition in the grocery sector was a step in the right direction. But it was significantly hampered by an inability to force corporations to hand over details on pricing,

and a lack of requirement for action on recommendations. Parliamentary hearings on high food prices that compelled grocery store CEOs to testify were also useful contributions. These included much-memed testimony from Loblaw CEO (total compensation in 2022: \$11.7-million) decrying “our profits don’t go to me”—but those hearings similarly lacked any teeth. The result? A “voluntary” code of conduct for grocery stores that not even all of them agreed to follow.

Robust and bold action that releases Canadians from the stranglehold of the Big Food mega corporations is needed, including enforceable grocery codes of conduct and anti-merger policies, favouring the flourishing of small, independent food retailers. Immediate “windfall” taxation should be used to fund a more fair, diverse retail and food provisioning landscape.

Third, government plans should include significant investment in (w)holistic approaches, encompassing justice, resilience, and ecological sustainability aspects, as well as economic. Not everyone gets their food from large corporations. Indigenous foodways—including hunting, fishing, and gathering—have been a foundation of food, culture, and community since time immemorial, yet are increasingly under pressure. Action is needed to fulfill treaty rights, and provide support and recognition for self-directed First Nations, Inuit, and Métis food sovereignty initiatives. Meanwhile, local and regional food marketing mechanisms like food co-ops, direct farm sales, community-supported agriculture and fisheries, farmers markets, and the provision of local food to local shops are offering consumers alternatives to large grocery stores, and building long-term resilience and sustainability.

To ensure food affordability, investment is needed in all three areas: guaranteeing adequate incomes, reigning in and redirecting corporate profits, and supporting (w)holistic approaches to food provisioning. Though Budget 2024 was a missed opportunity, we are counting on the government to take bold and comprehensive steps going forward.

Marissa Alexander and Wade Thorhaug are co-executive directors of Food Secure Canada.

*The Hill Times*

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# ENVIRONMENT

A hand is shown at the top, pouring a large volume of plastic waste into a funnel. The waste consists of numerous plastic bottles, caps, and other debris, which is falling into a large pile at the bottom. The background is a solid green color.

The Hill Times  
Policy Briefing  
May 8, 2024

## A UNIFIED FRONT for climate equity

p. 18

*It is never too late to make  
brave and bold decisions  
that preserve a*

### **SURVIVABLE CLIMATE**

p. 20

**HARNESSING  
WINDFALL PROFITS**  
to tackle corporate  
greed and fund a  
greener future

p. 21

*Doing the same things over  
and again will not lead to*

### **DIFFERENT RESULTS**

p. 22

## **WE MUST TEMPER HYPE AROUND AI**

with sober reflection  
on its climate impacts

p. 23

## **HOW TO RESPOND TO CLIMATE CHANGE POSES A BIG QUESTION—**

*for answers we need  
to support science*

p. 24



## Environment Policy Briefing

# Environment minister Guilbeault must show 'courage' to finalize plastics treaty, says NDP MP Johns

The final round of negotiations to develop a global agreement to end plastic pollution by 2040 is scheduled to take place in South Korea from Nov. 25–Dec. 1.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Reaching a global agreement by the end of this year to address a plastic-waste crisis will require the environment minister to do more to push back against the oil, gas, and chemical sectors, according to an NDP MP who successfully passed a motion in 2018 to create a national strategy against plastic pollution.

"We need the minister to actually show courage and get something done," said NDP MP Gord Johns (Courtenay–Alberni, B.C.). "We need some courage. Stand up to the petrochemical industry, the chemical industry, and the oil and gas industry and say, 'No, we're not going to provide resources to you ... when we want to enact and implement policies to protect the health of Canadians.'"

The fourth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4) concluded in Ottawa on April 30. The conference gathered representatives from 175 United Nations-member countries to discuss the development of a legally binding global agreement to end plastic pollution by 2040. During the event, delegates worked on a revised draft, and discussed issues including greenhouse gas emissions, plastic production, and waste management. The fifth and final round of negotiations is scheduled to take



Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault addresses the plenary session at the fourth round of the United Nations Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding agreement on plastic pollution in Ottawa on April 23. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

place in South Korea from Nov. 25–Dec. 1.

Johns told *The Hill Times* he was disappointed in the INC-4 discussions, adding that "we can't be complacent" when it comes to plastic pollution, and "we need to attack the problem at its source."

As an example of plastic producers receiving federal government support, Johns pointed to Dow Chemical Inc., which has plans to expand capacity and to decarbonize its petrochemical facility in Alberta. The federal government announced on Nov. 29, 2023, its intention to contribute up to \$400-million to the project, which is expected to generate up to 500 permanent jobs, and up to 8,000 construction jobs at its peak. Dow Chemical stated the completed facility would create the world's first net-zero emissions "ethylene cracker," or a facility that converts fossil fuels into usable plastic products.

The project is expected to triple the facility's capacity to produce polyethylene, which is

commonly used for plastic bags and food containers.

Dow Chemical is also among the companies that jointly brought a court challenge against Ottawa's ban on single-use plastics. In June 2022, the Liberal government announced a ban on single-use plastics, including cutlery and straws, as part of an effort to achieve zero plastic waste by 2030. A coalition of companies in the petrochemical and plastics industry won a Federal Court ruling that overturned the ban on Nov. 16, 2023. The Liberal government is currently appealing the decision, although the single-use plastic ban remains in effect pending the outcome of the appeal.

Johns said that Canada needs to show leadership when it comes to addressing plastic pollution. He argued that countries such as Rwanda have implemented bans on single-use plastics, "but in Canada, we can't figure it out."

"[Plastic] piles up in our environment [and] in our bodies. Meanwhile, the government continues to subsidize plastic producers, supporting an industry that's not only the source of the pollution, but also has a lawsuit that succeeded in stopping advancing regulation of plastics," he said. "Canada says it wants an ambitious plastics treaty. Well, the best way to do that is to negotiate a sustainable level of production worldwide, and to do that here at home."

Johns tabled a motion in November 2017 to eliminate marine plastic pollution, which was passed unanimously in the House in December 2018. He also introduced a motion on April 16, 2024, intended to stop Canada from exporting plastic waste through the United States to developing countries.

to advance Canada's zero-plastic waste agenda."

Guilbeault said that Canada is committed to reaching a final negotiated agreement for the global plastic treaty by the end of 2024 in an Environment Canada press release on April 30.

"We are no longer talking about 'if' we can get there, but 'how.' It would mark one of the most significant environmental decisions since the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework," said Guilbeault in the press release.

Canada is also a member of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution, a group of more than 60 countries representing every United Nations region with the goal to end plastic pollution by 2040.

Green Party Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich–Gulf Islands, B.C.) told *The Hill Times* that there's a lot more work to be done when it comes to developing the international plastics treaty.

"It's not nothing that the Government of Canada provided the hosting of an important and critical negotiation towards a very important treaty to control plastics pollution. Guilbeault put Canada in the right group of countries negotiating as the High Ambition Group. That's a good place for us to be, but we need to pick up our own record and improve it," she said. "I think that the Government of Canada—not making it one person—should be doing a much better job in areas of federal jurisdiction of controlling substances that are inevitably going to become plastic pollution."

May said she would like to see the federal government take more aggressive action to ban the use of polystyrene in products that are intended for use in the water, such as in flotation devices.

Continued on page 18



NDP MP Gord Johns says, "[plastic] piles up in our environment [and] in our bodies. Meanwhile, the government continues to subsidize plastic producers." *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

## Canadian plastic statistics

- In 2019, there were nearly 6.2 million tonnes of plastic in products produced for Canadian consumption, and nearly 2.3 million (36.9 per cent) of those tonnes were in packaging. This is the largest proportion among all product categories, representing more than half a million tonnes more than the combined total of plastic found in vehicles, electrical and electronic equipment, and textiles.
- This proportion is down slightly from 2012, when packaging made up two-fifths (40 per cent) of the nearly 5.2 million tonnes of plastic in products for Canadian consumption. However, the amount of plastic in packaging has risen in most years, with one yearly decline (2015 to 2016).
- The largest increase in produced plastic was for bottles, rising by nearly 100,000 tonnes from 2012 to 471,393 tonnes in 2019.
- Of the more than 3.9 million tonnes of disposed plastic waste and scrap in 2019, about half (49.4 per cent or more than 1.9 million tonnes) was in plastic packaging. Nearly 70 per cent of the plastic in that packaging was in film (1.4 million tonnes), or about one-third (34.3 per cent) of all disposed plastic waste and scrap.
- In addition, nearly all (95.7 per cent) of the plastic in film produced for Canadian consumption in 2019 ended up as disposed waste and scrap, roughly in line with 2012 (96.2 per cent).
- Of the 43,140 tonnes of plastic leaked permanently into the environment in 2019, more than three-fifths (62.7 per cent) was used in packaging, similar in proportion to 2012 (63.5 per cent of 38,562 tonnes). Film (16,751 tonnes) and bottles (5,595 tonnes) accounted for most of the packaging leaked into the environment in 2019.



—Source: The message in a bottle: Plastic packaging waste, released on June 9, 2023, by Statistics Canada





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## Environment Policy Briefing

# Environment minister Guilbeault must show 'courage' to finalize plastics treaty, says NDP MP Johns

Continued from page 16

"This is one aspect of plastic pollution that, federally, the Government of Canada could move on without running into the objections that occurred around single-use plastics," she said. "We know [polystyrenes] break down pretty quickly. Whatever's a flotation device for the summer of 2022 is, by the summer of 2024 ... broken down into zillions of tiny, small plastic beads that are really significant plastic pollution on our coastlines."

Sarah King, the head of the plastics a oceans campaign for Greenpeace Canada, told *The Hill Times* that Guilbeault has made it clear that tackling plastic pollution is a priority for Canada, but the minister "has gone back and forth on what is required in order to do so."

King, who was a part of the Greenpeace delegation that attended INC-4, said she'd hoped to see more leadership by Canada in driving the strongest possible measures in the plastics treaty.

"What we saw from Canada was that earlier on in the negotiations they presented a position of compromise," she said. "On some of the key issues like ensuring that countries get to work discussing reductions in plastic production ... we just didn't see that Canada really stood with other High Ambition countries in sending a signal that those are going to be necessary in order to ensure an effective treaty."

King said Canada hasn't yet taken a strong position on the possibility of a cap limiting plastic production. Greenpeace is calling for the agreement to include a 75 per cent reduction in plastic production by 2040, according to King.

"We really need to see Canada champion significant reductions in plastic production if they're actually going to be able to say that they've played a role in landing an impactful treaty," she said. "What we've seen is a growing number of scientists, impacted groups, and now the public also saying, 'in order to actually begin to end plastic pollution, we need to turn off the plastic tap. We need to reduce production.'"

Guilbeault told the Canadian Press on April 26 that Canada is not opposed to the concept of a production cut, but added that he isn't sure how such a measure could be achieved or enforced. Guilbeault said that a treaty to end plastic pollution could be sufficiently ambitious without firm production caps, and argued there are easier policies that could achieve the same results, including single-use plastic bans, reuse and recycle policies, and design standards requiring minimum amounts of recycled content in new plastics.

Isabelle Des Chênes, vice-president of policy for the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada, agreed that a successful international treaty doesn't necessarily require caps on plastic production. Des Chênes argued in favour of a "circular economy" for plastics, or a model that seeks to reduce plastic waste and pollution

through companies designing products to be reused and recycled.

"I think [Guilbeault] knows the issue very well, and he's threading the needle in terms of really trying to ensure that the pieces in place within that treaty have some teeth, and certainly are able to address the issues around human health and the environment. And I think he's really doing a good job there," she said. "Circularity is what we'd like to see as the main outcome, where systems are in place to capture the plastics so it doesn't go into the environment, and then ensure that we can then reuse that as feedstock to create new plastics and ensuring that they're being used over and over again."

About 11 million tonnes of plastic waste flow annually into oceans, but a shift to a circular economy has the potential to reduce that volume of plastics by more than 80 per cent by 2040, according to a March 2022 press release from the UN Environment Program.

Des Chênes said the INC-4 negotiations went well. She noted that development of an international treaty is a long game.

"We saw them coming together and really having good substantive discussion in terms of whittling down that beast of a paper that they had. I thought that was good progress," she said. "Did they land on a final agreement on all of the provisions? No, but I think it sets them up quite nicely for INC-5, and certainly the intersessional work that they agreed to will help as well."

Sabaa Khan, climate director and director general of Quebec and Atlantic Canada for the David Suzuki Foundation, told *The Hill Times* she considers Canada to be moving in the right direction in principle regarding plastic pollution, and that it's a good step towards a potential chemical registry to know what exactly is inside the plastics being tracked.

"I do commend Canada for coming out with this [federal plastics] registry early on in the week because we know that ... just tracking brand names can hold producers responsible. We also know that food and beverage companies, for instance, are some of the largest polluters when it comes to the plastic waste in the environment. So, transparency is key," she said.

In regards to INC-4, Khan argued that Canada could have been more vocal in supporting plastic production caps.

"We know right now that plastic manufacturing and plastic pollution have a linear relationship, and so, unless we tackle upstream issues, unless we really look at producer responsibility and tracking what people are putting into the market and holding them responsible ... then we're just going to be dealing with the symptoms and not with the problem at its source," she said.

The David Suzuki Foundation has gathered more than 11,000 signatures on a petition calling for production limits to be included in the global plastics treaty.

[jcnockaert@hilltimes.com](mailto:jcnockaert@hilltimes.com)

*The Hill Times*

# A unified front for climate equity

Federal elected officials and staff can inspire action at all levels of governance through a commitment to equity and justice in every aspect of climate policy.

Linda Nowlan

Opinion



In the stifling heat of a dilapidated residence devoid of air conditioning or even a fan, where the windows stubbornly refuse to budge, the suffocating reality of climate change becomes painfully apparent. Nowhere is this more evident than in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTES) as extreme weather events exacerbated by climate change continue to increase, affecting dense urban areas with few trees even more than leafier neighbourhoods.

In the devastating 2021 heat dome that claimed more than 600 lives in British Columbia, individuals with schizophrenia and substance-use disorders had higher mortality rates than the general population. These groups are overrepresented in the DTES. The elderly, those living alone, and those without social networks suffered the most. The stark reality is this: the effects of climate change disproportionately burden those who have contributed the least to its creation.

Amidst commendable efforts by the federal government to curb carbon emissions, one crucial aspect remains underemphasized: equity. True climate justice demands embedding equity into all facets of our response to the climate crisis. The proposed environmental racism bill currently navigating Parliament will make necessary strides towards addressing equity in climate initiatives along with redressing a legacy of environmental racism. Funding programs are also of great assistance. But it's not enough. Much more must be done, and it must be done with urgency.

Take, for instance, the realm of housing. Deep retrofitting efforts are underway, though the expense and complexity mean quick results are not possible. The next version of the National Building Code—slated for 2030—is a distant horizon for those struggling today. Speeding up the revisions is an option. Acting on the recommendations of the Task Force for Housing and Climate is another action the federal government can take to make the links between these critical issues and equity. Regulation is a key part of the solution—the British Columbia Building and Fire Codes 2024 mandate new buildings to integrate safety, sustainability, accessibility, and climate resilience features, including ensuring at least one living space maintains temperatures below 26 C, which will provide relief to those living in new buildings. Existing buildings remain the problem.

Education and partnership are equally vital. Universities—like the University of British Columbia (UBC)—are taking proactive steps to embed climate justice into their academic, operational, and community engagement endeavours.

For example, UBC's Sustainability Scholars Program sheds light on actionable solutions, such as DIY cooling methods, that offer immediate relief to vulnerable communities facing extreme heat. A recent applied research project from this program delved into these DIY cooling options for residents of Vancouver's DTES. The project was led by Radhika Singh, a UBC graduate student who was mentored by Union Gospel Mission, which operates supportive housing in Vancouver's DTES neighbourhood, alongside additional frontline services within the community. Her work builds on studies on passive cooling strategies for multi-unit residential buildings in Vancouver, a Passive Design Toolkit, and many efforts by multiple organizations such as the DTES SRO Collaborative. The report's findings—from insulating walls with Tetra Paks, to evaporative cooling with wet cloths either directly in front of an open window or on a drying rack within the room, to painting building roofs white—offer tangible solutions that can be implemented swiftly and affordably.

The DIY cooling report is part of a larger project called Climate Equity Action and Resilience (CLEAR), a collaborative effort of the UBC Sustainability Hub, UBC Learning Exchange, Embers Eastside Works, Working Gear, Recycling Alternative, and Union Gospel Mission, supported by the McConnell Foundation. Such initiatives, supported by philanthropic organizations, governments, and universities, highlight the potential for impactful change at the grassroots level. More funding for this type of experiential learning and applied research, community partnership activities can go a long way. This is a role for the federal government, and all governments.

Too often, discussions surrounding climate change are mired in abstract terms like carbon reduction and economic incentives. But for the residents of Vancouver's DTES, these concepts are distant and irrelevant. What matters to them is survival in the face of imminent danger. This is where the federal government can increase its efforts to embed equity into climate responses.

The federal government can lead by example by expanding funding programs like Environment and Climate Change Canada's Climate Action Awareness Fund, developing more housing/climate initiatives, passing the National Strategy Respecting Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice Act, and fostering greater collaborative partnerships. Through a commitment to equity and justice in every aspect of climate policy, federal elected officials and staff can inspire action at all levels of governance.

In the battle against climate change, every individual and every community must be empowered to act. It's not just about reducing carbon emissions; it's about safeguarding lives and livelihoods, and moving us closer to a just and sustainable future.

Linda Nowlan is the senior director of the University of British Columbia Sustainability Hub.

*The Hill Times*



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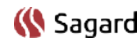
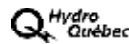
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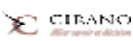
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## Environment Policy Briefing



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's plan of building pipelines and subsidizing fossil fuels is throwing gas on the wildfires across Canada, writes Elizabeth May. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

# It is never too late to make brave and bold decisions that preserve a survivable climate

Without making the 2030 goal deeper and urgent, net-zero emissions by 2050 is dangerous.

Green Party Leader  
Elizabeth May

Opinion



In asking a simple question—is Canada on track to meet our climate goals?—the first step is to identify Canada's climate target. But that's not so easy.

One statement often made is entirely true: no Canadian government has ever achieved a climate target. Hardly anyone notices that not only have we not hit a target, but also, historically, we have never gotten the direction right. We commit to reducing emissions, but increase them instead.

Over the decades, Canada has signed and backed away, spun, and dodged from our climate commitments. The June 1988 Toronto Conference—"Our Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security"—set out an early target that emissions must be reduced 20 per cent below 1988 levels by 2005, but it was

not endorsed by the Canadian government.

Canada's first target had an unusual genesis, when the country's then-environment minister set out our first national goal in May 1990 at a high-level ministerial gathering in Bergen, Norway. Negotiations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) were just beginning, and Canada's environment minister at that critical Bergen conference was Lucien Bouchard. Then-NDP environment critic, the late Jim Fulton, was there, too, and it was from him that I learned the story. During the Bergen talks, Bouchard committed that Canada would ensure we held our greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels until the year 2000. It fell so far short of the 1988 Toronto target of 20 per cent reductions. But Bouchard took a risk: that first global Canadian commitment had not been approved by cabinet. I have always wondered if Bouchard phoned then-prime minister Brian Mulroney for permission. But the circumstances on Bouchard's return could not have been more adverse. While Bouchard was busy with climate in Norway, his cabinet colleague Jean Charest was dealing with Quebec on Meech Lake. The discord between Charest and Bouchard led to the deepest of rifts: Bouchard quit cabinet and formed the Bloc Québécois.

And it was after that the Mulroney cabinet approved Bouchard's actions in Bergen as Canada's first climate target. In hindsight, that alone is breathtaking. When Mulroney signed the UNFCCC at the Rio Earth Summit in June 1992, our target remained at freezing 1990 emissions to the year 2000.

In the 1993 election, the Liberal *Red Book*—Jean Chrétien's platform—put forward the 1988 Toronto goal of 20 per cent below 1988 emissions by 2005. Unfortunately for the climate, in the 1993 election, Anne McLellan won

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Liberals have wanted credit with Alberta for increasing fossil fuel production while simultaneously claiming to care about climate goals.

her Edmonton seat by 12 votes earning her the nickname “Landslide Annie.” While Chrétien's administration delivered on most of the *Red Book*, the climate commitments were ditched. In what would become a pattern, Liberal climate policy was incoherent in the vain hope of winning more Alberta seats.

When one compares Mulroney's approach to acid rain and ozone with Liberal climate targets, the key difference is that Mulroney was committed to hitting targets, and used every policy tool to get there.

Liberals have wanted credit with Alberta for increasing fossil fuel production while simultaneously claiming to care about climate goals.

Our emissions continued to rise. It is only very recently—due to carbon pricing—that our emissions decreased at all, and the drop is far short of the target. Of the G7 nations, we have the worst record as the lone country whose emissions have dramatically risen above 1990 levels.

Under the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, national targets were included in the text, with Canada's six per cent below 1990 levels between 2008 and 2012. By spring 2005, Paul Martin's administration had a credible plan to reach the target.

That was all undone within months of Stephen Harper establishing a minority Conservative

government. Between 2006 and 2015, our target was weakened three times under Harper.

The weakest target remained in place under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau until spring 2021. Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, targets are not “baked in” to the treaty, but tabled with the UNFCCC secretariat. They can be changed at any time, but only “ratcheted up.” Canada's target ratcheted up in 2021, but not to a level that meets the overarching Paris goal of holding global average temperature increase to no more than a 2 C increase striving to hold to no more than 1.5 C. Our goal is expressed as a range—the only country to do so—of 40-45 per cent reductions against 2005 levels by 2030. It's no surprise the Liberals only mention the lower end of the range.

The “Global Stock Take” at COP28 in Dubai last December made it clear the world is not on track to hold to 1.5 C, or even 2 C. Of the industrialized nations, Canada's record is the worst. The oft-repeated climate goal—really a marketing ploy—centred on the so-called Climate Accountability Act is “net zero by 2050.” It is incompatible with the Paris treaty. Without inserting the 2030 target and making that 2030 goal deeper and urgent, net zero by 2050 is dangerous.

The bottom line is that the Paris climate targets are not political. They are based on science. Building pipelines and subsidizing fossil fuels is throwing gas on the wildfires across Canada. It is never too late for the Liberal government to make the brave and bold decisions that preserve a survivable climate for our children. Being better than the Conservatives is not responsible climate policy.

Elizabeth May is the MP for Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C., and co-leader of the Green Party of Canada.

*The Hill Times*



# Harnessing windfall profits to tackle corporate greed and fund a greener future

If the Liberals made big oil and gas companies pay their fair share, it would generate more than \$4-billion a year.

Laurel Collins

Opinion



On the eve of the federal budget, *The Globe and Mail* reported that Liberal Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland was considering implementing an excess profits tax on big oil and gas producers, but multiple sources confirmed that she backed down in the face of strong lobbying from oilpatch executives and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

These same lobbyists and executives are raking in record

profits, increasing their emissions, and gouging Canadians at the pump, all while handing out millions of dollars in bonuses to their CEOs. But, lucky for them, the Liberal government has their back.

Everyday Canadians haven't been so lucky. They have been experiencing the dual crises of climate change and the skyrocketing cost of living. Wildfires, extreme flooding, multi-year droughts, and heat domes have forced Canadians from their homes, cost billions of dollars in damage, and taken the lives of hundreds of people. At the same time, families across Canada are struggling to keep up with the corporate greed of real estate developers, grocery giants, big pharma, and big oil and gas who have driven up prices while seeing corporate profits hit record highs.

Left unchecked, soaring corporate profits are a major driver of the recent inflation spike, and these inflationary price increases hurt workers' pockets, while padding corporate profits—particularly in oil and gas. Most Canadians see greedflation as a problem, and the majority of Canadians

support a windfall profits tax on oil and gas.

The concept of a windfall profits tax on oil and gas is not radical. It is a pragmatic approach that has been adopted by countries around the world. A windfall tax has been implemented by the United Kingdom and more than 20 European countries, and raised more than \$10-billion. In response to record profits, the global surge in energy prices exacerbated by geopolitical tension, market manipulations and corporate greed, they levied additional taxes on the surplus profits of oil and gas companies.

In Canada, however, both the Liberal government and the Conservative opposition have shown a disheartening reluctance to take on big oil and gas. While New Democrats were able to successfully force the Liberals to implement a surplus profits tax on big banks, the Liberals refuse to ruffle the feathers of their friends in oil and gas. They lack the courage to take on corporate greed.

And then there is Pierre Poilievre, who continues to do the bidding of the oil and gas executives that flock to his fundraisers. Conservatives champion increasing production and increasing

emissions, and they disregard the long-term environmental and economic consequences of these policies. The corporate-controlled Conservatives have no climate plan, and they have no problem letting oil and gas companies pollute and gouge Canadians without consequence. But it's not surprising that Conservatives won't even talk about corporate greed or a windfall profits tax, when, despite Poilievre's top adviser appearing to use a shell company to try to hide her lobbying (which she denies), the fact is their party is run by lobbyists.

But no matter what the Conservatives believe, climate change is real. And the climate crisis costs our economy billions annually in disaster response, mitigation, and adaptation. The recent wildfires, floods, and extreme weather events across Canada are stark reminders of the price we pay for inaction. And the sector that produces the most emissions in Canada, fueling the climate crisis, is also receiving government handouts in the form of fossil fuel subsidies.

Freeland and the Liberals have shown that, despite a clear mandate from Canadians who support a windfall tax and demand

accountability, they'd rather be wined and dined by big oil than stand up to them. For years, the Liberals have sat on their hands while Canada's biggest polluters have made more money than ever before and done irreparable harm to the planet.

The parliamentary budget officer reported that if the Liberals made big oil and gas companies pay their fair share, it would generate more than \$4-billion a year. Billions that could be invested in clean energy, public transportation, helping families switch to heat pumps—ultimately driving down emissions and helping people with the cost of living.

A windfall profits tax on oil and gas profits is not just wise, it's essential. It represents a critical step to not only tackle corporate greed and discourage inflationary price increases, but also a way to fund climate solutions that make life more affordable and protect our environment for present and future generations.

NDP MP Laurel Collins, who represents Victoria, B.C., is her party's environment and climate change critic, as well as the deputy critic for families, children, and social development.

*The Hill Times*

# Development needs can conflict with nature, but with knowledge we can grow together

Digital land-use planning tools, local and Indigenous knowledge can help us get the best bang for our conservation buck.

Richard Schuster

Opinion



Our lives depend on nature. From the water we drink, to the air we breathe and the experiences we enjoy outdoors, na-



ture makes it possible. But what happens to these nature-based services as the world's resource needs evolve and climate change quickens?

In January, colleagues and I published research in *Nature Communications* that showed nearly one-third of the world's priority areas for biodiversity

conservation—about the size of North America—also intersect with industry and human development interests. That means that there will be potential conflicts

Interested in conserving habitat for a species like the endangered spotted turtle? New data-mapping technology can help you focus efforts, allowing communities to make informed and transparent choices about their relationships with the lands and waters around them, writes Richard Schuster. Photograph courtesy of Laura Wolf

between conservation, climate and development goals.

When you've got your feet on the ground, watching streams flow, flowers grow, and animals move up close, it's tough to grasp the scale of this challenge. But zoom out, and it comes into focus.

Satellite views, long-term studies, and local and Indigenous knowledge have shown we're losing or drastically altering nature at an alarming rate—more than 80 per cent of native Prairie grasslands across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have been lost, as have more than 70 per cent of southern Canada's wetlands, for example—and we've had significant impacts on the nature around us. So, how do we rebalance our relationships with the land? How do we conserve species, lands, and waters while

Continued on page 23



## Environment Policy Briefing

# Doing the same things over and again will not lead to different results

As the urgency of climate change escalates, the need for a comprehensive and co-ordinated policy framework becomes increasingly crucial.

Mauricio Latapí & Paul Varella

Opinion



Data from Environment Canada suggest that this country will fail in its commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2022, carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels, industrial processes, and combustion amounted to 548 million metric tons (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e), the same order of magnitude as the country's emissions in 2000. Only a concerted effort to change the energy matrix that powers the country's economy could bring any hope that Can-

ada will fulfill its international commitments.

We have been here before. Canada helped broker the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. We committed to reducing emissions by six per cent from 1990 levels by 2012. In reality, national emissions increased by more than 30 per cent during that period. Canada officially withdrew from the Protocol in 2011. Real action on climate change requires Canada to move away from its fossil-fuel energy matrix. Failing to do so will continue to erode our country's legitimacy in the global efforts to curtail the effects of climate change.

Our research with corporate and NGO professionals in sustainable development in North America and Europe brings some interesting insights. The current context of climate change requires an effective and efficient policy framework that could address greenhouse gas emissions through holistic and systemic approaches. To do so, federal, regional, and local policies should be designed and implemented using a comprehensive perspective considering their interdependence and interconnection. Such interrelationships are essential in the design of public policies

tackling Canadian emissions. Political posturing and jurisdictional tug-of-war only hinder our ability to reach emissions targets.

A serious challenge to Canada's commitments is the growing emissions of our oil sector. Canada's oilsands production released more than 85 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e in 2021, close to a six-fold increase from 1990. However, changing the country's energy matrix demands transformational policies. The design of the Canadian federation adds serious difficulty to developing such a transformational framework. Still, the climate change challenge will not disappear; the required economic realignment is a generational struggle for our country, especially for the oil-rich provinces.

Canada's Federal Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda underscores the importance of all Canadian federal institutions and agencies incorporating the 2030 Agenda while working towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Sustainable Development Goal 7 calls for "Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all."

The Canadian federal government defined that by 2030, 90 per cent of all electricity generated in Canada should come from

renewable energy sources and non-greenhouse gas-emitting sources. In 2023, Canada reached 80.73 per cent of electricity generated by emissions-free sources. However, historical data shows that we are moving backwards with this target. In 2015, Canada had already achieved 81.44 per cent, and by 2020, 82.34 per cent. Since then, the percentage of green electricity has steadily worsened. The poor figures result from unco-ordinated efforts between federal, provincial, and territorial governments. Alberta's 2023 "pause" on all new approvals of renewable energy projects has not helped either.

Our research supports the view that policies, institutional mechanisms, and regulatory instruments should work in a co-ordinated way that allows them to translate into transformational policies with a long-term vision, and long-lasting positive effects that would equally sustain regional economic stability and national environmental sustainability. Of course, this is easier said than done.

For some ideas of how to move forward, we could look at the European Union and see how successful cross-sector policies with high-level government funding have been. That is impressive progress under a much more complex jurisdictional and political environment than Canada. The EU has significantly transitioned from fossil fuels to renewable energy in less than two decades.

In 2011, fossil fuels accounted for 49 per cent of the EU's electricity production, while renewable energy sources contributed only 18 per cent. By 2021,

renewables have made significant progress, making up 32 per cent of the EU's electricity generation, closely approaching fossil fuels' share of 36 per cent. The key has been designing a series of legislative packages that motivate economic sectors throughout the region to move toward new energy sources.

Europe's Fit for 55 policy package includes ambitious targets, related regulatory instruments, and supporting financial incentives. This combination allows the industry to understand the expected market rules while having the financial support to transition and comply with the new rules. This reduces uncertainty for industry stakeholders and provides ways for them to remain competitive.

If we are serious about taking action, Canada needs an intentional and co-ordinated tackle of the climate change crisis.

Mauricio Latapí is an assistant professor at Mount Royal University, where he researches the transition to zero-emissions for the maritime sector with a particular focus on new technologies such as hydrogen fuel cells. He has been an adviser on sustainable transportation for a variety of governments, international projects, and NGOs. Prof. Paul Varella is formerly the associate dean of the Bissett School of Business at Mount Royal University, and a visiting professor with the Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development at Utrecht University. He has presented his research at numerous conferences and has published in leading journals in business studies.

The Hill Times

# Meanwhile, climate change is accelerating

Maybe we should quickly rethink our mitigation plans, and shift to how to actually rapidly reduce emissions—not just pretend.

Bill Henderson

Opinion



There is a new and obscure—but I think very important—paper on how diminishing amounts of snow greatly enhance the probabilities of more extreme forest fires: *Geographically divergent trends in snow disappearance timing and fire ignitions across boreal North America*, published in *Biogeosciences* in January. After the mildest Canadian winter ever, with a bare



Members of 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment, Royal Canadian Horse Artillery, use axes to break up ground to help the BC Wildfire Service in suppressing fire hot spots outside Topley, B.C., in August 2023. DND photograph by Corporal Alexandre Brisson

minimum of snow in most every forest, this paper is prescient and pertinent.

The federal and provincial governments are warning about and preparing for a fire season that could possibly be worse than the off-the-charts record forest fire disaster of 2023 when 18.5 million hectares burned, and smoke affected almost all of North America. Last year's forest fires produced more than two billion megatonnes of greenhouse gases—triple that recorded in

Canada's national GHG inventory. We are facing possible runaway positive feedback happening now, and not in the future anymore.

There are physical limits to the amount of permafrost that can thaw and release GHGs, but not, it would seem, for how fast forests could burn. Only around four per cent of Canada's forests burned last year, and it is within the realm of possibility that a higher percentage could burn this year. In this decade, an immense

long-term carbon sink is rapidly becoming a source of new GHGs to help warm the planet. It's becoming a carbon-bomb feedback we cannot stop.

Over the past year, climate scientists have been concerned that warming is accelerating—not just from El Niño—and that this means we have even less time to reduce emissions to keep from triggering potential feedbacks, a possibility that becomes more likely every day. The cascade of feedbacks used to be considered a one-in-20, long-tail risk, but is now becoming inevitable if we increase warming as projected by 2 C to 3 C.

The now largely forgotten 2023 Global Tipping Points report recommended an urgent adoption of a precautionary risk management framework to keep from setting off these feedbacks. A new pre-print paper by foremost climate scientist Stephen Rahmstorf—*Is the Atlantic overturning circulation approaching a tipping point?*—advocates for a similar precautionary risk management. Our burning forests could be helping to melt Arctic and Greenland ice, which then helps to slow

the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation ocean current—with potentially catastrophic consequences.

Maybe we should quickly rethink our mitigation plans, and shift to how to actually rapidly reduce emissions, and not just pretend. But nobody seems to be paying attention.

As warming accelerates, we need effective mitigation faster. Meanwhile, our government is opening a new pipeline to help increase oil production, and our official opposition is playing little-kid rhyming election games with one of our ineffectual mitigation policies. Wake up. We are in a plan to fail where we could lose everything we love and care about; where our emissions today could help make most of our one and only world largely uninhabitable for hundreds—if not thousands—of years; and where, in our politics, the laggards want to get rid of even the puny mitigation we do have.

Bill Henderson is a longtime climate activist. He can be reached at [bhenderson@dccnet.com](mailto:bhenderson@dccnet.com).

The Hill Times





AI algorithms can build more accurate climate models, but consumes vast quantities of energy to develop and run them. Photograph courtesy of Pexels

## We must temper hype around AI with sober reflection on its climate impacts

While AI offers the promise of transformational leaps in efficiency, productivity, and innovation, it comes with significant costs, including to the environment.

Mary Wells & Ashley Rose Mehlenbacher

Opinion



From health care to manufacturing, clean technologies, finance, and many other industries, there is growing hype around artificial intelligence (AI) and its potential to revolutionize operations.

The increasing allure of AI is evident in this year's federal budget where the government announced that it would invest \$2.4-billion to advance AI development and adoption in Canada.

While AI offers the promise of transformational leaps in efficiency, productivity, and innovation, it is not without significant costs, including to the environment. The world is in the midst of a climate emergency, making it imperative that we temper our excitement around AI with a sober reflection on its impact on climate change.

Greenhouse gas emissions continue to warm the planet, breaking rising global temperature records and increasing sea levels at unprecedented rates as ice cover declines and glaciers retreat. Extreme weather events, floods, droughts, and wildfires have become more common, with devastating consequences, including in Canada.

At the same time, there is a technological revolution underway as AI becomes more pervasive. Its ability to quickly analyze vast amounts of data, recognize patterns, and automate repetitive tasks is driving government, business, and industry interest in it.

And as countries—including Canada—strive to meet their climate goals, some see AI as an indispensable tool. Its algorithms can build more accurate climate models, provide better ice mapping, improve energy efficiency in buildings and decarbonize industrial sectors, among other uses.

Yet, AI is not the cure-all. It consumes vast quantities of energy as it develops and runs the algorithms it uses to analyze data and recognize patterns. If the energy comes from fossil fuels, it directly contributes to carbon emissions.

The computer equipment needed for AI must be regularly cooled to keep the machines operating, requiring large volumes of water while the world faces a freshwater scarcity. Discarded computer hardware—including waste from AI data centres—only adds to the planet's e-waste problems.

We also cannot overlook the fact that many AI applications focus on mitigation and adaptation, not the root causes of climate change. This is an important shortcoming. Indeed, scientists have expressed frustration that social and political inaction—not technical knowledge or means—impedes us from tackling the root causes, the burning of fossil fuels and depletion of forests.

In engineering, we teach students to look at problems holistically. We have many engineering case studies that show the importance of thinking about how to set up a problem and not just rushing into solving what we think the problem is. We need to use this thought process in relation to AI and climate change.

For instance, is the climate emergency a technical problem or a political one, and can AI help if it is a political problem versus the perspective that AI will fight

climate change. How we set up the problem is critical to how we solve it.

Enthusiasm for AI must not lead us to skip the important work of “problem setting.” Jumping right to solving a problem without carefully defining it could overlook key issues. When it comes to AI and the climate emergency, we should consider a full range of questions that will shape what problems we think we ought to be solving.

For instance, we need to consider what we already know about climate change, about how to slow climate impacts, and what communities need. Does a community want to know how to predict bigger storms through AI intervention or does it need resources for deep retrofits or making buildings more resilient?

We also need to recognize that we cannot rely on AI alone to save us from climate change. We need to tackle the problem holistically and use trained experts. While AI specialists may understand the technology, they are not necessarily experts in climate change.

We must continue to make room for the trained experts in climate science who can make decisions using all of the facts and difficult contextual data, including whether a particular solution is in line with the values of a community.

Instead of jumping head first into AI, policymakers and decision leaders need to consider all of its ramifications. After all, the decisions we make today about where to allocate resources—technical, environmental and social—will shape the decisions we can make in the future.

Mary Wells is dean at the faculty of engineering at the University of Waterloo. Ashley Rose Mehlenbacher is an associate professor in English language and literature and Canada Research Chair in Science, Health, and Technology Communication at the University of Waterloo.

The Hill Times

## Development needs can conflict with nature, but we can grow together

Continued from page 21

ensuring people have the space, food, and resources they need? We're now at a point where technology is revealing new ways of understanding our world.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada and researchers at Carleton University have built a digital land-use planning tool that accounts for species' ranges, biodiversity benefits, carbon storage, and many other layers that can now suggest to us how to get the best bang for our conservation buck.

Interested in conserving habitat for a species like the endangered spotted turtle? New data-mapping technology can help you focus your efforts, by highlighting the species' habitat range for you at the click of a button. It goes further, too. On top of the spotted turtle's range, our tool allows you to layer in elements such as other at-risk species' ranges, carbon sinks, drinking water sources, and human development maps. Seeing where all these elements might overlap, we can then give the tool a budget and ask it: how can we most effectively deploy our conservation resources?

Thanks to the quality of the data and the power of this technology, land-use models that once took teams of conservation planners many hours or even days to assemble can now be churned out in less time than it takes to brew a pot of coffee.

Of course, we must go further, too, because when you're doing land conservation, you need to understand that no species or natural process exists independently. Nature might be seen from satellites and maps, but it's experienced on the ground. By listening to Indigenous Knowledge, recognizing people's deep roots on the land, and involving communities in conservation decisions, we quickly see how everything connects.

It's by using tools like ours in tandem with local and Indigenous knowledge that we can efficiently find areas that—when conserved—offer compounding benefits to nature and people. We can model and better understand different scenarios and the future impacts of activities like nature restoration work and wetland

conversion, new developments, and species recovery, all through the lens of a changing climate. This way, communities can make informed and transparent choices about their relationships with the lands and waters around them.

As nature and communities are facing the ever-accelerating threats of biodiversity loss and climate change, the more efficiently we can restore, conserve, and sustainably manage ecosystems, the better we can contribute to nature and community resilience.

### Threading the needle on development requirements and nature's needs

Local and Indigenous knowledge teach us not only that humans can coexist with nature, but also that we must. Our new modelling tools show that, too. For instance, colleagues and I recently used land-use planning technologies to show how protecting native pollinator habitat near farmland in Canada can actually increase yields, resulting in net benefits for people and nature, bolstering regional food security, supporting native species, and creating economic opportunities. That's just the beginning.

But while it's great to know what to do in theory, it's another thing altogether to implement it on the ground. We need decision-making partners across

Canada to adopt these tools when doing land-use planning so that we can conserve the right places for species, nature, and communities. By collaborating with local and Indigenous communities, we can seek to identify how these tools can support our shared objectives. In doing so, they can make tough decisions transparent, accountable, accessible, and highly informed by multiple ways of knowing.

Richard Schuster is the director of spatial planning and innovation at the Nature Conservancy of Canada, which seeks solutions to the twin crises of rapid biodiversity loss and climate change through large-scale, permanent land conservation.

The Hill Times



## Environment Policy Briefing

# How to respond to climate change poses a big question—for answers we need to support science

Science provides the information and evidence our governments require to make sound decisions about the environment.

Roseann O'Reilly Runte

Opinion



A source of life and beauty, our environment—the air we breathe, the water and food we consume, the forests, quiet lakes, and the breaking waves of the oceans—is under siege and

we, ourselves, are the assailants. But we could also become its saviours.

Human existence has always benefited from nature's bounty. We have used resources and extracted great wealth while causing considerable damage to the environment. We can take heart from the work science has accomplished undoing much of the harm. We have developed ways to remediate damaged landscapes and to use available resources with greater efficiency, and less impact on the environment.

Look at water pollution. Last month, the mayor of Paris announced that, prior to the Olympics this summer, she will swim in the River Seine to demonstrate its restored level of purity. We can certainly celebrate this kind of achievement. However, there is much more to be done.

We face extraordinary challenges today: floods, droughts,

and wildfires have taken a serious toll, and make it increasingly urgent to respond effectively to our changing climate, but they also make it increasingly difficult to do so. Like the child in the Hans Christian Andersen tale, we can place a finger in the dyke as he did, but today the crisis is much worse: we see that the entire dam is bursting.

Where should we begin? We need fresh air, clean water, and adequate supplies of the appropriate nutrients to survive. Much has been said about our carbon footprint, and governments around the world are setting targets to decrease carbon emissions to lessen climate change and its impact on this planet. This is excellent, but problematic. We are not achieving the targets. Countries do not even agree on the targets which are set by different agencies. While our knowledge increases, so does the amount of

misinformation available, and we are faced with a confusing number of choices. As responsible citizens, how do we decide?

We need science to identify the best ways to preserve life, to determine when and what we need to remediate or improve, and where to begin. And where science does not yet know, we need to return to the lab and run experiments to test theories.

We must pose the questions we did not ask in the past, like Kelsey Leonard, founder of the Wampum Lab at the University of Waterloo. She is asking: should bodies of water have the same legal status as people? As corporations? The lab is taking a wider look at threats to communities from climate change, including access to potable water and rising sea levels. Leonard's research is blending Indigenous and western ways of understanding the world in the fields of science, law, and

policy with the goal of finding solutions.

To make better choices, we need the information gathered by scientists across the country. For example, it is useful to know about Dave Risk, a researcher at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, N.S., who has improved on a tool for measuring methane emissions. The team at his Flux Lab has gathered data on emissions from the melting Arctic permafrost, gas pipelines, farm fields and landfills. They provide accurate and unbiased data to government, industry, nongovernmental organizations, and the general public.

Science has never been more important. It provides the information and evidence our governments require to make sound decisions about the environment. As individuals, we need to use this information along with clear national and international guidelines in setting our own priorities. This shared responsibility should become the foundation for action.

Roseann O'Reilly Runte is president and CEO of the Canada Foundation for Innovation, a non-profit corporation that invests in research infrastructure at Canadian universities, colleges, research hospitals, and non-profit research institutions.

The Hill Times

# Transforming e-waste into digital opportunities: Canada's path to a sustainable future

Harnessing the power of technology for social good can ensure that Canada remains a global leader in the digital revolution.

Michel Langelier

Opinion



Where do all used laptops go when a government department or company gets rid of them? What if instead of them going directly to a landfill, they were upcycled and redeployed to classrooms, libraries, homework clubs, and to students and seniors who can't afford to buy their own technology?

In an era defined by unprecedented technological advance-

ments, Canada stands as a global leader in the digital revolution. Our commitment to innovation has propelled us to prosperous new heights, driving economic growth, and fostering a dynamic digital economy. However, amidst this progress lies a pressing environmental challenge: the proliferation of electronic waste, commonly known as e-waste.

The latest report from the United Nations serves as a sobering reminder of the magnitude of this challenge. Despite Canada's digital prowess, the exponential increase in e-waste poses a grave threat to both our environment and public health.

With digital consumption increasing daily, we must address the consequences of our dependence on technology and chart a path toward a more sustainable future. Canada's business leaders have a unique opportunity to be part of the solution: donating their used items for reuse, while helping to bridge the digital divide. Many digital devices are tools for success, but for many lower-income Canadians are very expensive, unattainable items. By

recycling and reusing the devices destined for landfills, we are squeezing out some extra life. And if we are going to reduce e-waste in this country, diverting and donating is a good place to start.

Computers for Success Canada (CFSC) stands as a pioneering force in tackling the growing problem of e-waste. Since 2005, CFSC has recycled more than 2,200,000 information technology assets, diverting these resources from the waste stream, and giving them new life through refurbishment and redistribution at little to no cost. Initiatives like our CEO Pledge, where some of Canada's biggest companies—like Microsoft and Desjardins—have already signed on, shows the widespread support for digital inclusion and the reduction of e-waste.

But we cannot do this alone. Today's policymakers have a unique opportunity and responsibility to continue to support initiatives like CFSC, and enact policies that promote sustainable practices and equitable access to technology. Several key steps can

be taken to address the e-waste challenge, and harness the potential of digital innovation for the benefit of all Canadians.

First and foremost, we must prioritize the development of comprehensive e-waste management policies and strategies that regulate the disposal and recycling of electronic devices. When organizations, corporations, and individuals donate devices they no longer need, they are reducing their impact on the environment by making the most efficient use of the raw materials required in computer production, minimizing e-waste, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In other words, by implementing extended producer responsibility programs and incentivizing sustainable practices, we can minimize the environmental impact of e-waste, and promote a circular economy.

Secondly, we must invest in initiatives that promote the reuse and refurbishment of electronic devices. Measures in Budget 2024 build off accelerated capital cost allowance incentivization for companies to donate their older equipment for refurbishment

and redistribution by CFSC to Canadians who lack access, all while receiving a significant tax benefit, charitable tax receipts, and contributing to their corporate environmental, social, and governance objectives.

Furthermore, prioritizing digital literacy and skills development is essential to ensure all Canadians can thrive in the digital age. Investing in education and training programs can empower individuals to fully participate in the digital economy and unlock new pathways to success. But it is more than just technical skills. Access to computers and technology is critical for business, but it is also essential for students, families, seniors, and newcomers with affordability challenges. They need access to technology to give them guidance for the future to learn and broaden their knowledge, and provide confidence in the skills they already possess.

The time is now for Canada to seize the moment and embrace the transformative potential of digital innovation. By working together to address the e-waste challenge and harness the power of technology for social good, we can ensure that Canada remains a global leader in the digital revolution. Join us on this empowering journey to make Canada digitally inclusive and competitive, and together, let us shape a legacy of innovation and sustainability that will endure for years to come.

Michel Langelier is the executive director of Computers for Success Canada.

The Hill Times



# Once a strategy, later a framework, Canada now unwilling to define Africa engagement rethink

The House and Senate Foreign Affairs committees are both currently undergoing studies looking at Canada's engagement with Africa.

Continued from page 1

the plan will be defined. Originally billed as a strategy before being labelled a framework, now Canada's foreign ministry isn't putting a name on it.

The House and Senate Foreign Affairs committees are concurrently undergoing studies looking at Canada's engagement with Africa.

Speaking at the House Foreign Affairs Committee last month, Cheryl Urban, Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) assistant deputy minister for sub-Saharan Africa, said the government is pulling together information to work on an "approach" to Africa.

"At the moment we're pulling together thoughts on engagement. It doesn't have a name at the moment," she told the committee on April 10.

Urban told the House committee last month that the government has been reviewing all its consultations and information on engagement with Africa, and is "at the moment looking at that, and articulating how that can inform a Canadian strategy."

That was the same message that she gave the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee last December, remarking that the department was "developing strategies and approaches based on what we have heard."

Consultations for the Canada-Africa economic co-operation strategy ended in July 2023.

During the April 10 meeting, Bloc Québécois MP Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, Que.), his party's foreign affairs critic, asked if Canada is reverting back to a "strategy" or a "framework," or "simply a willingness to intensify our relations with sub-Saharan Africa?"

"Please enlighten us, because I must say that it's hard to make

heads or tails of this. I, myself, have been completely lost over the past few years. I no longer know what the government's intentions are with respect to Africa," he remarked.

"We started with a strategy, which then became a framework, and ended up being an approach. Is that right?" Bergeron asked.

"I'm just saying that we don't have a name for it at the moment," Urban responded.

Urban cited the reference to a strategy for economic co-operation in International Trade Minister Mary Ng's (Markham-Thornhill, Ont.) mandate letter. Afterwards, Liberal MP Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Ont.), parliamentary secretary to Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.), undertook "a lot of work ... to get out there," she said.

Oliphant's work on a strategy for engagement Africa started in 2022. At the time, the Toronto MP told *The Hill Times* it would be a "foreign policy strategy." He said that the strategy would be about "political engagement, foreign policy, security and defence issues, looking at food and agricultural and food security issues, but also Canada's place [on the continent]." He had hoped to submit the plan to cabinet by the beginning of December 2022.

In May 2023, Ng launched public consultations for a Canada-Africa economic co-operation strategy. That same month, Oliphant's work was redubbed as a "framework," and he told this newspaper that the change was made to avoid "anything that even suggests or hints at neocolonialism."

"In the last 12 months, we've seen it go from a strategy to a framework, and then at the last meeting, we were told that it's now an approach. This is a deeply unserious way to engage with the continent of Africa," NDP MP Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.), her party's foreign affairs critic, told the House Foreign Affairs Committee on April 15.

As a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Oliphant has the awkward task of examining the work that he has helped propel forward. He remarked during an April 10

committee meeting that it could ask him to be a witness as some of Bergeron's questions should be directed to him.

"I am already fantasizing about a unanimous report from this committee that shines a light on Africa and demands that our government do more," he said at the onset of the study.

## 'We cannot delink the name from the content': Prof. Akuffo

University of the Fraser Valley political science professor Edward Ansah Akuffo, an expert on Canada's engagement with Africa, told *The Hill Times* that how this country defines its approach to African engagement has a large symbolic commitment to the priority it is placing on the continent.

"The name that we give to this engagement with the African continent is as important as the content of that engagement," said Akuffo, who appeared before the House committee on April 15. "We cannot delink the name from the content of the engagement in itself."

He said it's important how African leaders and regional organizations receive Canada's plan, remarking that the name the government gives to the process will send a signal.

"We cannot give something a name that is not going to be attractive to the African continent," he said. "So, the name is very, very important."

Akuffo said Canada has already set the standard when it dubbed its Indo-Pacific rethink as a strategy.

"It wouldn't work really well for the importance that we give to this engagement by giving it different names. In fact, it might sound a very wrong signal as how serious we take this," he added.

He said the government should go back to its original label for the exercise and call it a strategy.

Akuffo said the delay in defining what its engagement plan with Africa will be called represents not only indecision, but also shows the government doesn't understand the continent.

"For the years that we have disengaged, we have lost so much more traction that we don't really understand what the issues are



African Union Commission chair Moussa Faki, left, with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Ottawa on Oct. 26, 2022. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

right now, so we don't even know how to approach the continent right now," he said.

He said that if Canada doesn't come out with a strategy for African engagement, it could push Canada to the periphery for African nations.

Dalhousie University political science professor David Black, who researches Canada's approach to sub-Saharan Africa, said in an interview that the government's decision not to define its engagement plan with Africa is "symptomatic of a lack of clarity" about the purpose of the rethink.

"It's probably framed with an eye to the implications in terms of potential resource commitments, and a government that is uncertain—frankly—about how much it is prepared to commit to a more strategic engagement with African issues and countries," said Black, who appeared before the House committee on April 15.

He said it's "quite telling" that it has been two years since the government revealed it was working towards articulating a strategy, but hasn't yet provided more clarity of the level of engagement, or level of funding.

"In a certain sense, it's hard not to take as evidence [that] it still is not prepared to make this a more significant strategic priority," he said.

Black said the lack of clarity will show African countries that Canada has a "certain lack of seriousness" and how it views the continent as a priority.

"Canada's kind of indecision about how and how much it wishes to engage with African issues is sort of playing out at the same time as governments in other parts of the world have—over the last number of years—been engaging much more systematically and strategically and deeply with Africa than they have historically," he said. "It's hard for African governments to not see this as symptomatic of a lack of commitment."

Cooperation Canada's policy lead Carelle Mang-Benza said how the government defines its work is important, remarking "words have meaning" and they convey intent.

"A strategy would indicate a certain level of commitment," said Mang-Benza, who appeared during the Senate committee's study on Feb. 8, noting that strategy could require a meaningful funding allocation.

"A framework is a loose concept," she said. "There's no real commitment in a framework."

Mang-Benza said the lack of clarity and the lack of communication about its work could mean that Canada is disengaging or downplaying its relationship with Africa.

"The cynical view could be that Canada doesn't care enough, and if I were an African partner or even sitting in a political office somewhere in Africa, I'd say: 'You don't seem to care enough to publish something at the same time as the Indo-Pacific strategy or soon after,'" she said. "The very optimistic, maybe naïve view ... would be it's so important that they want to do it right, and they're taking everything into consideration."

University of Calgary instructor Chris W.J. Roberts, who was a witness during the House committee's study on April 15, said beyond how the plan is defined, there is a need for a "high-level, comprehensive strategy" that is backed with political will.

"The reality is that without an overarching strategy that reconceptualizes and restructures Canada's relationship with the African continent across policy domains and departments, the ongoing GAC, Senate, and House efforts are a waste of time," he said.

He added that Canada's recent defence policy update further decreases Africa's inclusion in security policies, adding that as the world is "reawakening to the realities of Africa's importance to global security and prosperity, Canada is ignoring some of its comparative advantages among all Western countries on the continent."

Both the House and Senate committees are set to resume their studies on Canada's African engagement on May 8.

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## News

# The ‘jury is still out’ on the value of foreign interference inquiry following preliminary report, says national security and intelligence expert Wesley Wark

The Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference released its first report on May 3, concluding that despite foreign interference occurring in the last two general elections, Canada’s electoral process remains ‘robust.’

Continued from page 1

the work already completed by former special rapporteur David Johnston. But those goals aren’t mutually exclusive, given how discredited—rightly or wrongly—Johnston’s position had become in the eyes of the public before his resignation from the role, says former defence department analyst Thomas Juneau.

In the first report released by the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions on May 3, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue said foreign interference in the last two federal elections was a “stain” on Canada’s electoral process, but did not undermine the results or the electoral process.

“Our system remains sound,” Hogue said in a press confer-



If left unchecked, foreign interference threats could further reduce Canadians’ trust in the resilience of our democratic institutions, says Commissioner Justice Marie-Josée Hogue. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

ence following the release of the report, adding that there was no evidence to suggest that the acts of interference that did occur impeded voters’ ability to cast their ballots, or affected which party formed government.

This initial report follows months of investigations and several weeks of hearings featuring nearly 70 witnesses, including diaspora groups, federal political party officials, politicians, intelligence officials, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.), members of his cabinet, and the top staffers in the Prime Minister’s Office.

The commission has been studying allegations of foreign-state-led election interference during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

The inquiry’s interim report was released less than a year

after former special rapporteur David Johnston’s first report was released on May 23, 2023, weeks before vacating the role to which he was appointed the previous March to investigate the issue of foreign interference in Canadian elections.

Johnston’s report also said that foreign interference is a “real and growing threat.” Still, it recommended against a public inquiry, arguing that there “should not and need not be a separate” inquiry as much of the most relevant information and testimony would need to remain secret.

However, during its investigation, Hogue said the commission had access to “all of the documents it deemed relevant,” free of national security redactions and that it conducted its work without

limitation on its access to classified information.

“I am reassured that our electoral system is—all in all—robust,” Hogue said, clarifying that foreign interference is a “real phenomenon that [Canada] must reckon with.”

“Interference occurred in the last two general elections and indeed continues to occur frequently,” Hogue said. “It is likely to increase and have negative consequences for our democracy unless vigorous measures are taken to detect and better counter it.”

Wark, a senior fellow with the Centre for International Governance Innovation, told reporters in the inquiry report lockup on May 3 that he expects the findings will disappoint those who “expected more bang for their buck” from the commission.

“I have always questioned how valuable this process would be as a replacement for [Johnston’s] report and his intentions to follow with a final report,” Wark said, noting that Johnston’s resignation had caused significant delays in the process, and that had he not stepped down in June 2023, his final report would have been completed by that October.

“Here we are in 2024. We won’t see a final report until December, and judicial inquiries usually produce recommendations which they typically give the government a year to respond to,” Wark said, noting that responding to those recommendations was not the same as actually implementing them.

However, while the initial stage of the inquiry was focused on fact finding—with policy proposals forthcoming in the final report at the end of the year—there is some immediate action from the government.

On May 6, Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.) tabled Bill C-70, An Act respecting countering foreign interference, which amends the CSIS Act, the Security of Information Act, the Canada Evidence Act, and the Criminal Code, creating new offences related to foreign interference and “sabotage.”

The bill also proposes a new Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act, which would create a foreign agents registry to be administered by an independent transparency commissioner.

Those working for foreign powers, economic entities, or states would be required to register if they are undertaking influence activity under foreign direction to communicate with the Canadian public or office holders, or are making disbursements of funding towards the development of policy, legislative proceedings, decision-making, or elections and nominations.

Those failing to register or found in contravention of the act could face a fine of up to \$5-million and/or up to five years in prison.

The bill would make it an indictable offence—punishable with up to life in prison—for anyone to act on the direction of a foreign government to engage in “surreptitious or deceptive conduct” in order to influence a governmental or electoral process, including party nomination contests.

The bill was placed on the notice paper on May 3 following the release of the inquiry’s report.

In a May 3 press conference responding to Hogue’s report, LeBlanc told reporters that the government would act immediately, and not wait until the commission’s final report in December. He said that the legislative reforms in the bill would “reinforce our capacity concerning foreign interference.”

During a May 6 technical briefing for the media about the bill, Public Safety Canada officials wouldn’t comment on how long the legislation could take from royal assent to implementation of the registry, or whether it could be ready for the next election, but said its implementation is a “priority.”

## Inquiry more valuable than ‘robotic’ retreat of Johnston report: Juneau

Wark said the public hearings and Hogue’s initial report have failed to advance the public’s knowledge beyond what had been indicated in Johnston’s report.

“I think the jury is still out, frankly, as to whether this judicial inquiry process is going to deliver on the expectations that people have for it,” Wark said, adding that he believes those expectations may already be too high.



Public Safety, Democratic Institutions, and Intergovernmental Affairs Minister Dominic LeBlanc tabled Bill C-70, which would create a foreign agents registry, on May 6. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

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Wark said compared to Johnston's initial report last year, Hogue's report is "in many respects ... much less hard-hitting," and that many of Johnston's "conclusions are essentially replicated."

While Hogue's report provides more information and detail regarding the irregularities and alleged foreign interference that occurred during the 2019 Don Valley North, Ont., Liberal riding nomination contest and the 2021 general vote in Steveston-Richmond East, B.C., Wark said he doesn't believe that information has advanced the public knowledge in a meaningful way.

Regarding the nomination of now-Independent MP Han Dong (Don Valley North, Ont.), Wark said there was still only a "vague understanding" of the irregularities or any greater insight into what Dong knew or his alleged involvement.

A former would-be Liberal Party candidate previously told *The Hill Times* that the light shone on party nomination contest practices had already provided a return on investment as a public-education exercise before the first stage public hearings had even wrapped.

In her report, Hogue called Dong's Liberal Party nomination race a "primary example of observed potential foreign interference," citing "strong indications" that Chinese international students were bused to the nomination contest to vote in support of Dong. And while Hogue said she "cannot exclude the possibility" that the People's Republic of China interfered with the nomination contest, and that it "may have impacted the result," she also said "it is not possible to determine the number of students who were on the buses, or how they ultimately voted."

Although the Don Valley North riding was considered a "safe" Liberal seat, and any foreign interference would not have affected which party held the riding in the general election, "it would, however, have affected who was elected to Parliament," Hogue said. "This is significant."

The report also singles out the Chinese government as posing the most significant threat of foreign election interference, with references to India, Pakistan, and Russia as countries that are more concerned with transnational repression outside of elections. But Wark said that wasn't anything new, either.

"CSIS has been saying that for quite a long time, as has the Communications Security Establishment on the [Chinese government's] cyber aggression front," Wark explained.

He also said Hogue's initial report failed to sufficiently address how the government responded to foreign interference, and how intelligence was shared and communicated, as required by her terms of reference.

"There's very little substance about that in her report," Wark said.

Hogue's report said she required further study before making "definitive recommendations," but the evidence she has heard so far "does not demonstrate bad faith on anyone's part, or that information was deliberately and improperly withheld." She did say however, that "on some occasions," information related to foreign interference did not reach its intended recipient, or in some cases was not properly understood by those who received it.

"These are serious issues that need to be investigated and considered," Hogue said.

Wark said that Johnston's report had already highlighted "considerable degrees

of dysfunction" in how intelligence is communicated by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and received by government officials and politicians. These would have already been addressed in the public hearings proposed as the secondary step in his study.

National security expert Thomas Juneau, an assistant professor at the University of Ottawa's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, said that while Hogue's report may not include any surprises, that doesn't mean the process was pointless.

"The bottom line is: yes, there was foreign interference; and yes, it's a problem, and we need to do more; but no, it did not fundamentally affect the integrity of the elections, and Hogue did not see evidence of bad faith on the part of key actors," Juneau explained. "That's more or less what Johnston's report said, and most reasonable experts have been saying it for a while."

However, Juneau said Hogue had struck an essential balance between "not seeing an apocalyptic threat and not being dismissive."

"There really is an emphasis in the tone that even if foreign interference did not fundamentally affect the integrity of our elections or change the result, it's still a problem," Juneau said.

While that finding was already observed in Johnston's initial report, reaffirming those findings in a way the public would more readily accept was still valuable, he said.

"I don't think it's mutually exclusive," Juneau said. "It repeats some of the key points of Johnston's report, but the reality is that Johnston had been so discredited politically, rightly or wrongly, that having



Former defence department analyst Thomas Juneau says that while the 'bottom line' remains the same in both Johnston's and Hogue's reports, the political discrediting of the former governor general necessitated confirmation of his findings by the commission. *Photograph courtesy of X*

a new process emphasize it again is not pointless."

Even if the Johnston report's "bottom line" remained the same, Juneau said that the public inquiry still provided more value than a "robotic" retread of those findings.

"There is a transparency dimension to this," Juneau explained. "Even if a lot of it remained classified or behind closed doors, there's a public education dimension to this. Raising awareness and explaining this stuff to Canadians does matter."

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## News

# CBSA's access-to-information woes continue with 12,000 requests inaccessible, requestors encouraged to resubmit

Following a technical glitch, CBSA is giving ATIP requestors until the end of next March to resubmit or follow up on their requests, otherwise they will be deemed closed.

Continued from page 1

If a requester doesn't either resubmit or follow up on their request by March 31, 2025, their request will be considered closed. It is unclear if CBSA is informing individual requestors that action is needed or else their request will be shuttered in less than 11 months.

ATIP researcher Ken Rubin told *The Hill Times* he has not received any communication from CBSA to resubmit his request, remarking that he only heard about the agency's troubles with processing ATIPs after inquiring about the status of his own submissions.

Ottawa-based journalist Dean Beeby said the border agency still needs to find a way to follow the legislative timelines set forth under the access-to-information law.

"Given that they've been handed this pile of crap, it doesn't absolve them from having to find the resources to deal with it

The Canada Border Services Agency, which is led by president Erin O'Gorman, can only access around 4,000 of its backlog of 16,000 ATIPs. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



appropriately," he said. "The onus is on those departments to cope with this bad situation by putting more resources into it."

Purdy said CBSA is using "various options and resources to mitigate additional overall delays in ATIP requests," which includes increasing personnel on a temporary basis. The agency's May 3 release noted that it had returned to its "full capacity" of responding to 1,000 to 1,200 requests per week.

The most recent CBSA annual report to Parliament on the Access to Information Act for 2022-23 paints a comparably rosy picture of the agency's track

record of adherence to the legislative timeline in processing ATIPs, as the internal report shows that it closed 90 per cent of requests on time.

But Beeby said, in reality, the agency is one of the worst offenders in adhering to access-to-information law.

"We have information from the information commissioner that points to a big problem—it's a red flag," he said.

In her annual report for 2022-23, Information Commissioner Caroline Maynard found that CBSA had the second most complaints of any government department and agency, only behind Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). CBSA's report to Parliament shows that 346 complaints were made to the information commissioner, of which 295 had to do with time delays.

"These are the departments that are keeping people waiting beyond legislative timelines and their complaints are about delays," Beeby said.

At issue is CBSA and IRCC forcing those who want to see their immigration files into the ATIP system, Beeby said.

"The misuse of the act for this administrative purpose has created its own problems, its own backlogs, and its own avalanche of complaints," he said. "That's

enough of a red flag to say clearly this is not working and these ... administrative systems belong somewhere else to be run more effectively for the purpose of helping would-be immigrants get their case files."

On May 7, Maynard tabled her most recent report showing that the ATIP system is the wrong avenue for those that need to gain access to immigration files to use.

In a similar report from 2021, Maynard found that IRCC's surging complaints were a "direct result" of applicants being obtain to access their immigration files "through other means," finding that the access-to-information

system was "not the most efficient means of providing potential immigrants with the information they need."

Beeby said even before ATIP records became inaccessible, the evidence shows that CBSA wasn't working efficiently.

"If you're already having efficiency problems and then they throw a curveball like this at you, of course it's going to make things much, much worse. And your record is that you're not very good at coping with problems with processing," he said. "What worries me is departments use these things as ways to cover up for their performance."

Beeby added that a lot of the outstanding files are from people wanting to immigrate to Canada, and they could have their own cases delayed further through no fault of their own.

"It's really not just an inconvenience for reporters or business requestors. It's a real big life problem for would-be immigrants that are relying on this inadequate system to get their immigration application up to scratch," he said. "This is an example where a technical screw-up is really impacting lives out there who deserve information about the status of their files."

"It shouldn't be this way. The Access to Information Act shouldn't be used to help people get access to their own immigration files. That's not what the Access to Information Act was intended for," he said.

British Columbia-based immigration and refugee lawyer Will Tao, co-founder of Heron Law, said CBSA not adhering to the legislative timeline to respond to ATIP requests is the norm.

He said the real-life impact for immigrant applicants is a delay in understanding why their files are taking so long, and if they should file for judicial review or mandamus to force IRCC to move on their application.

"I think the added inconvenience and the inevitable number of folks who will have difficulty navigating the re-application on technical grounds is concerning," he added, remarking that applicants are increasingly using the CBSA ATIP system since the agency has proven faster in responding to access requests than IRCC.

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Information Commissioner Caroline Maynard is taking aim at CBSA's use of the access-to-information system being employed for applicants to see their immigration files. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Access-to-information researcher Ken Rubin says he has not heard from CBSA to resubmit his ATIPs. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade





Stuart Benson  
**Party Central**

# Doolittle wins big at the Press Freedom Awards



Margaret Sullivan, *The Guardian* U.S. columnist, left, and *The Globe and Mail*'s Robyn Doolittle, winner of this year's World Press Freedom Canada career achievement award, at the WPFC awards luncheon at the National Arts Centre on May 1. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

World Press Freedom Canada hosted its annual luncheon on May 2 at the National Arts Centre, and an exclusive pre-reception the day before at the German residence.

World Press Freedom Canada honoured *The Globe and Mail*'s Robyn Doolittle with this year's Career Achievement Award at its annual luncheon on May 2 at the National Arts Centre.

Arriving just before 11:30 a.m. for the pre-luncheon networking reception, Party Central spotted most of the World Press Freedom Canada (WPFC) board of directors, including the Pendulum Group's Heather Bakken, who serves as president; Janet Silver, vice-president and former managing editor of *iPolitics*; Sussex Strategy Group's Shawn McCarthy; Accenture's Caitlin Kidd and Kathryn May; Compass Rose Group's Bea Vongdouangchanh; *Politico*'s Sue Allan, cartoonist Guy "Bado" Badaux; freelance journalists Deen Beeby and Susan Korah; *The Trillium*'s Linsey Raschkowan; Roy Christensen, former press officer to the European Delegation to Canada; *The Hill Times*' publisher Leslie Dickson; Bluesky Strategy Group's Alyson Fair; the Business Council of Canada's Howard Fremeth; 110 Percent Communications Services' Gord McIntosh; lawyer David Rodier; and David Schimpky, director of secretariat at the Canadian Commission for UNESCO.

Inside the NAC's Canada Room, Party Central navigated through the 35 sponsor tables, including the CWA Media Union, Compass Rose Group, The Business Council of Canada, TC Energy, Sussex Strategy, the Institute for Research on Public Policy,

Edelman Global Advisory, PostMedia, CPAC, *The Globe and Mail*, Unifor, WestJet, and *The Hill Times*. However, while the Creskeys and Dicksons had offered a seat at their table, Party Central had already accepted an invite from Kerry Patterson-Baker, the Forest Products Association of Canada's (FPAC) vice-president of communications and public affairs. Also joining the FPAC table was DG Stringer, principal secretary in Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's office; 3M Canada's Jackie Choquette; Global Public Affairs' Hannah Thibedeau; and KPMG's Leigh Harris.

The evening before, on May 1, WPFC hosted an exclusive VIP reception at German Ambassador Sabine Sparwasser's official residence for around 50 guests, serving complimentary wine and sparkling rosé, as well as a buffet of roasted eggplant salad, roasted chicken with sumac and red onions, and—you guessed it—roasted Moroccan spring vegetables.

Alongside most of the WPFC board at the VIP reception, Party Central also spotted IRPP's Kathryn May; Rubicon Strategy's Don Newman; Pendulum Group's Yaroslav Baran; Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge and her partner Maeva Proteau; House Speaker Greg Fergus; United Kingdom High Commissioner Susannah Goshko; Australian High Commissioner Scott Ryan; *Politico*'s Zi-Ann Lum; *The Toronto Star*'s Stephanie Levitz; Canadian Press' Dylan Robertson; CWA union president Carmel Smyth; and Anne McGrath, principal secretary to NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh.

Back at the NAC the next day, as Party Central dug into the free lunch featuring the same chicken, potatoes, and seasonal vegetable served at almost all of these luncheon events, Bakken called attendees to attention before handing things off to MC Catherine Clark, president of Catherine Clark Communications. Her speech was followed by a video from the Estonian and German Embassies, and speeches from



*The Hill Times*' table with Jim Creskey, founding editor and publisher, left; Diana Bracegirdle; Anne Creskey; Anne Marie Creskey, *HT*'s publisher and CEO; Leslie Dickson, publisher; and Ross Dickson, founding editor and publisher. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson



3M Canada's Jackie Choquette, left; Party Central's Stuart Benson; Kerry Patterson-Baker, Forest Products Association; DG Stringer, principal secretary in Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's office; Global Public Affairs' Hannah Thibedeau, and KPMG's Leigh Harris. *The Hill Times* photograph courtesy of Stuart Benson



Searchlight Strategy Group's Greg Westin, left; Global Public Affairs' Hannah Thibedeau, and *The Globe and Mail*'s Robert Fife. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson



*The Toronto Star*'s Stephanie Levitz, left, and *The National Post*'s Chris Nardi and Catherine Levesque. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

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Party Central

# Doolittle wins big at the Press Freedom Awards

Continued from page 29

**Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko**, secretary general of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, and **Anthony Ostler**, president and CEO of the Canadian Bankers Association.

**Margaret Sullivan**, columnist for *The Guardian U.S.* and the executive director of Columbia University's Craig Newmark Center for Journalism Ethics and Security, delivered the ceremony's keynote speech, urging the gathered journalists to "focus on the stakes, not the odds" by resisting the urge to reduce political reporting to "horse-race," polling-centre narratives.

"Democracy is on the ballot," Sullivan reminded the crowd, speaking not only of her country's elections in November, but also the 63 other national elections happening around the world this year that will see approximately half of the planet's 8.1-billion people cast a ballot.

As a reminder of the stakes and what happens when the press isn't free, Sullivan spoke about imprisoned *Wall Street Journal* reporter **Evan Gershkovich**, her former editorial assistant when they both worked at *The New York Times*, who was arrested in March 2023 by Russian authorities and remains in prison on BS espionage charges.

Following Sullivan's speech, Osler and Bakken returned to the stage alongside McCarthy, Silver, and Beeby to hand out the awards.

In her acceptance speech, Doolittle, a corporate law reporter and "do-a-lot" investigative journalist of *Unfounded* and *Secret Canada* fame, had a bit of an "Oscar moment" as the sound technicians apparently decided she had spoken too much when they began playing the wrap-it-up music.

Winnipeg *Free Press* reporter **Melissa Martin** also won this year's Press Freedom Award for her on-the-ground coverage of Russia's invasion and the war in Ukraine via Substack. Martin was unavailable to attend the luncheon but did send a video from sunny Kyiv, Ukraine.

Press Freedom certificates of merit were also handed out to *The Globe and Mail's* **Frédéric-Xavier Duhamel**, *The Toronto Star's* **Sara Mojtehdzadeh**, *Lighthouse-Now Progress Bulletin's* **Keith Corcoran**, Trent University student journalist **Evan Robins**, and Carleton University student newspaper *The Charlatan's* **Faith Greco**. **Charles Seguin** and **Naomie Duckett-Zamor** with the Université du Québec à Montréal's student newspaper accepted the Press Freedom Student Award for their coverage of the lack of democracy at student associations for which they endured threats and stolen newspapers.

Badeaux presented the 24<sup>th</sup> international cartoon award to this year's winner, **Bruce MacKinnon**, editorial cartoonist for the *Halifax Chronicle Herald*, for his cartoon depicting an OpenAI alligator preparing to clamp its jaws down on the unsuspecting Copyright Heron. This year's runners-up were Brazilian cartoonist **Dalcio Machado** and Serbian **Jugoslav Vlahović**.

Following closing remarks from Clark and **Christa Dickenson**, president and CEO of CPAC, **Party Central** made a quick exit and headed over to the House of Commons for Question Period like all of the other bandwagon press gallery members that **Dale Smith** has had to share the space with since wacko-gate.

sbenson@hilltimes.com  
The Hill Times



Sarah Andrews, Friends of Canadian Media, left; Catherine Cullen, host of CBC's *The House*; Devin McCarthy, Sussex Strategy; *The Globe and Mail's* Joy SpearChief-Morris; Sussex Strategy's Katherine Koostachin; CBC's Olivia Stefanovich; Sussex Strategy's Liam Daly; and FCM's Marla Boltman.



Valerie Polydore, the German Embassy's political department head, right, greets the guests and gives regrets on behalf of Ambassador Sabine Sparwasser who was attending the Arctic Climate Change summit in Montreal.



The World Press Freedom Canada board of directors: Howard Fremeth, left, Susan Korah, David Schimpky, Guy Badeaux, Leslie Dickson, Sue Allen, Gord McIntosh, Bea Vongdouangchanh, Roy Christensen, Heather Bakken, David Rodier, Shawn McCarthy, Caitlin Kidd, Alyson Fair, and Linsey Raschkowan.



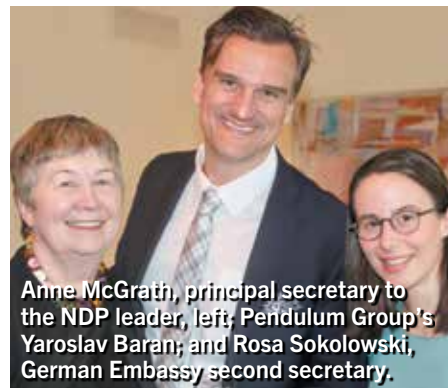
Maeva Proteau, left, and her partner Heritage Minister Pascal St-Onge, Pendulum Group's Heather Bakken, and cartoonist Guy 'Bado' Badeaux.



Bluesky Strategy Group's Alyson Fair, left, Politico's Zi-Ann Lum, and Estonian Ambassador Margus Rava.



Australian High Commissioner Scott Ryan, left, and U.K. High Commissioner Susannah Goshko.



Anne McGrath, principal secretary to the NDP leader, left; Pendulum Group's Yaroslav Baran; and Rosa Sokolowski, German Embassy second secretary.



Carmel Smyth, president of CWA Media Union, left; Rubicon Strategy's Don Newman; and House Speaker Greg Fergus.



Business Council of Canada's Howard Fremeth, left, Amy Castle, and Heather Scoffield; Reuters' David Ljunggren; and Compass Rose Group's Bea Vongdouangchanh.

The Hill Times photographs by Stuart Benson



Charles Seguin, left, and Naomie Duckett-Zamor, student journalists with the Université du Québec à Montréal's student newspaper; and Faith Greco, student journalist with Carleton University's *The Charlatan*.



*The Globe and Mail's* Bill Curry, left, and Frédéric-Xavier Duhamel.



# Ministers Rodriguez, Khera host inaugural Air Accessibility Summit in Ottawa on May 9



Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez, right, and Diversity, Inclusion, and Persons with Disabilities Minister Kamal Khera will co-host Canada's first National Air Accessibility Summit on Thursday, May 9, at the Shaw Centre. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

## 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: [sommetsclimatmtl.com](http://sommetsclimatmtl.com).

## WEDNESDAY, MAY 8

**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.

**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](http://donnerbookprize.com).

**Book Launch: From War Zones to Boardrooms**—The Rideau Club is hosting a book launch for Martin Rust, founder of Martin Rust Strategic Advisory Services Inc. and senior adviser for cybersecurity at Strategy Corp. Rust will share real-life “Moments”—pivotal stories that challenge conventional strategic planning—that inspired his book, *From War Zones to Boardrooms: Optimize the Moment When Strategic Planning Fails*. Join us for the author's presentation, book signing, and complimentary wine and canapés. Wednesday, May 8, 5-7 p.m., Rideau Club, 99 Bank St., 15<sup>th</sup> floor, Members' Lounge. Tickets available by request: [heather@pendulumgroup.ca](mailto:heather@pendulumgroup.ca).

**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](mailto:smleduc@cmha.ca)) to RSVP.

**Build a Dream Anniversary Reception**—Build a Dream is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a reception on Wednesday, May 8 at the Rideau Club from 6-8 p.m. This invite-only event will bring together government and community partners to celebrate Build a Dream's achievements in empowering young women to pursue careers in the skilled trades, STEAM, emergency response, and entrepreneurship fields.

## THURSDAY, MAY 9

**National Air Accessibility Summit**—Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez and Diversity, Inclusion, and Persons with Disabilities Minister Kamal Khera will co-host Canada's first National Air Accessibility Summit. Thursday, May 9, at the Shaw Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa.

**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](http://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](http://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, over-

coming 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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Clark's election as Canada's 16<sup>th</sup> prime minister. Wednesday, May 22, at 5:45 p.m. at the Shaw Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Contact [info@thePearsonCentre.ca](mailto: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 Pélouin, 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](http://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](http://corim.qc.ca).

**Vote16 Ottawa Summit**—Non-affiliated Senator Marilou McPhehdan 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.

**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](http://riverkeepergala.com).

## THURSDAY, MAY 30

**2024 Economic Reconciliation Summit**—Canada 2020 and Indigenous leaders from across the country host the 2024 Economic Reconciliation Summit: “The Indigenous-led Economy.” Explore cutting-edge Indigenous-led economic development projects, the unquestionable value of Indigenous leadership and innovation, and solutions for supporting the sovereignty, wealth, and well-being of Indigenous people and communities now and for generations to come. Thursday, May 30, at 10 a.m. ET the Westin Ottawa Hotel, 11 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Details online via Eventbrite.

**Panel: 'Canada's Current Economic Landscape'**—The Economic Club of Canada hosts a panel discussion, “Examining Canada's Current Economic Landscape” with former Bank of Canada governor Stephen Poloz and former federal Liberal finance minister John Manley. Which economic policies should Canada look to apply for the remainder of 2024, what are the options available, and what can be done in the immediate future to ensure the health and longevity of the Canadian economy? Thursday, May 30, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Hilton Toronto, 145 Richmond St. W. Details online: [economicclub.ca](http://economicclub.ca).

**Steve Paikin to Launch New Book**—TVO host Steve Paikin will take part in the Ottawa launch of his biography on former a prime minister, *John Turner: An Intimate Biography of Canada's 17th Prime Minister*. He will sign copies of the book, which is included with ticketed entry. A reception will follow. Thursday, May 30, at 5 p.m. ET at Walter House, 282 Somerset St W., Ottawa. Details online via Eventbrite.

**Tapirit 2024**—Join Inuit Tapirit Kanatami for an intimate celebration of Inuit culture and the traditions that unite us. Enjoy an evening of entertainment and a culinary journey of Inuit country food, hunted and harvested across the four regions of Inuit Nunangat. Thursday, May 30, 6-10 p.m. ET, National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St. For more information visit us on Facebook or Instagram. Purchase tickets on our website, [itk.ca](http://itk.ca).

## SUNDAY, JUNE 2

**Mexican Presidential Election**—Mexico's presidential election happens on Sunday, June 2.

## WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5

**Panel: 'Canada-U.S. Relations: The Road Ahead'**—Former Canadian ambassadors to the United States Gary Doer and David McNaughton will deliver remarks on “Canada-US Relations: The Road Ahead” at the C.D. Howe Institute's annual Directors' Dinner. Wednesday, June 5, at 5:30 p.m. ET the Fairmont Royal York, 100 Front St. W., Toronto. Details online: [cdhowe.org](http://cdhowe.org).





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