



BEST STRATEGY
Carney can follow with Trump

► ERROL P. MENDES PAGE 13

IF GAP NARROWS, SEATS WITH MARGIN OF LESS THAN 1,000 VOTES DECIDE

► SHEILA COPPS PAGE 9



TIKTOK INFLUENCERS IN ELECTION

► RIDDHI KACHHELA PAGES 20-21

Exclusive news: inside



THE HILL TIMES

Exclusive opinion: inside

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NEWS

Despite dip in polls, Conservative victory still possible, say political players

BY ABBAS RANA

The ongoing trade war with the United States and Justin Trudeau's exit as prime minister have significantly altered the political landscape for Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, but some believe his path to victory lies in a sharp focus on the cost of living and trade tariffs, placing their hopes on the upcoming leaders' debates—where they expect him to “wipe the floor” with Liberal Leader Mark Carney.

“This certainly isn't the sprint to glory that we had all been promised and it's definitely been tough ‘events, dear boy, events’ for sure, as part of it, but still there's a path to victory,” said one former senior Conservative, who spoke to *The Hill Times* on not for attribution because they were not authorized to speak on this subject. “Poilievre should wipe the floor with Carney [in the debates].”

Since early January, the Liberals have surged from a 25-point deficit to holding a lead that ranges from single to double digits, depending on the poll. Since the writ was dropped for the current election campaign, the Liberals have consistently led in most polls, often within majority government territory. However, with two weeks remaining until election day, there's still room for shifts in voter sentiment.

The Liberals' dramatic bounce back is largely attributed to Trudeau's announced departure, the trade war sparked by U.S. President Donald Trump, and the president's controversial remarks about potentially annexing Canada.

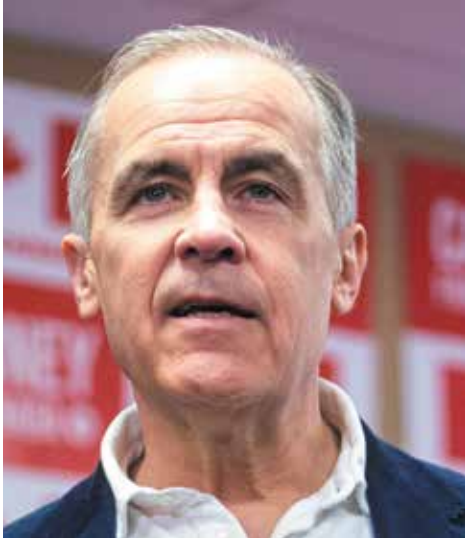
Before this resurgence, Poilievre's Conservatives had enjoyed a solid two-year lead in the national public opinion polls, often by double digits. But Trump's on-again, off-again tariff threats and inflammatory rhetoric have significantly altered the political landscape.

Continued on page 22

NEWS

Carney's driving Grits' momentum, but polls suggest Tories hold upper hand in ‘commitment gap’

Angus Reid's poll released last week found that 46 per cent of respondents planned to vote Liberal and 36 per cent planned to vote Conservative. But that 10-point spread is reversed for committed voters, and the Angus Reid Institute's Shachi Kurl said the challenge for the Liberals is to ensure that voting intention becomes a reality. **See story, by Christopher Guly on p. 18.**



Carney is Canadians' pick to remain prime minister

- In the Angus Reid Institute survey, released on April 7, Liberal Leader and Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, earned more support, at 50 per cent, than Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, right, (28 per cent), for who ‘would make the best prime minister of Canada’ along age and gender lines.
- For men between the ages of 35 and 54, Carney got 44 per cent support compared to Poilievre at 37 per cent. For women in the same age group, 49 per cent chose Carney and 25 per cent picked Poilievre.
- And most (53 per cent) of the 55-plus crowd, regardless of gender polled by the Angus Reid Institute, said that Carney was best to hold that position. However, within that demographic group, 36 per cent of men felt Poilievre has the right stuff to be PM—or 10 points more than women.
- Fifty-three per cent of men between the ages of 18 and 34 chose Carney for best PM; 27 per cent went with Poilievre. For women in the same age group, 51 per cent of them gave Carney the nod for the same question, while only 15 per cent selected Poilievre (the same percentage who thought neither leader fits the bill).



The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade

NEWS

Campaigns quick to cut ties with candidates, have ‘less tolerance’ for controversy, in the age of social media, say politicians

BY IREM KOCA

With the election campaign in full swing, political parties are under pressure to avoid controversy at all costs. But in the digital era, where past posts, videos, or comments can quickly resurface and make headlines, candidates are one engagement away from being sent packing since parties are quick to shed candidates who risk tarnishing their chances of winning, say political insiders.

Parties lost a swath of candidates within the first two weeks of the campaign, with about a dozen candidates being dropped or stepping away from party slates before nominations were closed on April 7. Elections Canada released the final list of confirmed candidates for the 45th general election on April 9, which means the candidates are now locked in. If someone loses their party's endorsement or withdraws, their name will still appear on the ballot and the party can no longer replace them to gain that seat in the House of Commons.

Dan Arnold, former Liberal staffer and campaigner, said the growth of social media has changed the game for candidate vetting, with much of what people have said over the last two decades now publicly accessible. He noted that at least half the controversies where candidates were removed in the last couple of federal and provincial elections have stemmed from online posts.

“The challenge is everything people have said or thought is there to be seen,” Arnold said.

“If you go back 30 years, and if everybody had everything they

Continued on page 17

Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

Superstore's Mark McKinney plays Mark Carney on 22 Minutes



Canadian comedy legend Mark McKinney portrayed Prime Minister Mark Carney on CBC's *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* on April 8. Photograph by *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*

This Hour Has 22 Minutes called in a favour from Canadian sketch-comedy veteran **Mark McKinney** last week, as the former *Kids in the Hall* member portrayed Prime Minister **Mark Carney** on the CBC program's April 8 broadcast.

The episode was recorded on April 7 in front of a studio audience in Halifax. According to the show's executive producer **Mike Allison**, McKinney planned to stick "around for a few days to shoot material for the season finale," he told *The Globe and Mail's* **J. Kelly Nestruck** in an April 8 interview.

This isn't the first time McKinney—an Ottawa native whose acting credits also include *Superstore*, *Slings & Arrows*, and the new CTV show *Mark McKinney Needs a Hobby*—has played a Canadian politician on *22 Minutes*. In 2013, he portrayed then-Toronto city councillor **Doug Ford** alongside *22 Minutes'* **Mark Critch** as his brother **Rob**, then-mayor of Toronto.

Critch played U.S. President **Donald Trump** in last week's *22 Minutes'* segment which recreated Carney's first phone call with Trump when the two talked about tariffs and Trump's attacks on Canada's sovereignty.

McKinney, who's currently based in Los Angeles, jokingly changed his name on X to "Canadian Prime Minister Mark McKinney" a few weeks ago after someone on the Twittersphere mistook the comedian for Carney.

Having watched a lot of Carney's press conferences, McKinney described the Liberal leader as "an interesting cat" who "almost has an Obama-like cadence," he told *the Globe*. McKinney noted his caricature works best when he keeps his eyebrow "absolutely immobile," and that "the best thing about [Carney] is his inability to speak French."

Senate staffer Alison Korn bids farewell

Alison Korn's last day as issues management and media relations advisor for the Senate was last Monday, April 7.

"Looking forward to embarking on a new professional challenge as I move into my next career role. I'll start at NSERC as senior internal communications advisor on April 14," she told *Heard on the Hill* by email that day.

"It's been a tremendous privilege to serve the Senate of Canada for the last seven years. I'm very grateful for the chance to



have worked with so many kind and wise senators and staff, in my role as CIBA spokesperson," she said, referring to the acronym for the Senate's standing committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration.

A former reporter with the *Ottawa Citizen*, CBC, and *Post Media*, Korn worked in

media relations for the Canadian Paralympic Committee from

2011 to 2017 before she joined the Senate that same year, according to her LinkedIn profile.

Alison Korn starts a new role at NSERC on April 14. Photograph by *Brittany Gawley Photography*

Industry Canada's Simon Tuck returns to reporting

Another former reporter turned civil servant has also changed jobs, but this time it's a return to the field of journalism.

"Big news for me," **Simon Tuck** posted on Facebook last week. "After more than

a decade since leaving *the Globe and Mail* to work for the federal government, I have returned to daily journalism," he wrote. "I am excited to say that I started a new job today [April 7] working in the



After 10 years in government, Simon Tuck has returned to journalism, this time with *The National Post*. Photograph courtesy of Facebook

Ottawa bureau of the *National Post*. I will be covering federal politics, including the current election campaign," he wrote next to a photo of himself in front of the Peace Tower.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Tuck was *The Globe's* parliamen-

tary reporter from 1998 until 2007. Between then and 2017, he worked for Industry Canada, the Competition Bureau, and the Forest Products Association before returning to Industry in 2017.

Coronation medals for Marci Surkes, Scott Taylor



Former senior Liberal staffer **Marci Surkes** and *The Hill Times'* defence columnist **Scott Taylor** each received a **King Charles III** Coronation medal recently

Formerly executive director of policy and cabinet affairs in the Prime Minister's Office of **Justin Trudeau**, Surkes is now chief strategy officer with

Compass Rose Group. Taylor is the publisher of *Esprit de Corps* magazine, and is a former soldier, author and filmmaker.

"I was honoured to receive the King Charles III Coronation medal from [Conservative] Senator **Yonah Martin**. Proud to be in the company of so many Korean War Veter-



Conservative Senator **Yonah Martin** and Scott Taylor, left; Marci Surkes and ISG Senator **Hassan Yussuff**. Photographs courtesy of X and Facebook

ans" he wrote on Facebook on April 5, accompanied by a photo of himself with Martin and the Senate's Usher of the Black Rod, **Gregory Peters**.

Surkes' recognition took place on March 20, with Compass Rose founder **Jacquie LaRocque** sharing the "wonderful" news on Facebook.

Senator Hébert joins ISG

Quebec Senator **Martine Hébert** announced on April 9 that she's joined the Independent Senators Group.

An economist by training, Hébert is formerly senior vice-president for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and was Quebec's delegate to Chicago and later to New York City. She was nominated to the Senate on Feb. 7. Her addition to the Independent Senators Group brings the total membership to 43.

Ex-CRTC chair John Meisel dies, aged 101

Former CRTC chair **John Meisel** died March 30 at the age of 101, according to an obituary in the *Kingston Whig-Standard*.

Meisel led the commission from 1979 until 1983.

Born in 1923 in Vienna to Czech parents, Meisel's family moved to escape the Holocaust, eventually settling in Canada in 1942.

A graduate of Pickering College in Newmarket, Ont., the University of Toronto, and the London School of Economics, he taught political science at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., for more than five decades, beginning in 1949.

Meisel "was a pioneer in research on political behaviour in Canada, writing widely on political parties, elections, Quebec politics, broadcasting, and culture policy," reads an *In Memoriam* piece published by Queen's on April 7.

"A strong supporter of Canadian culture and the arts, he was appointed as chair of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), overseeing the introduction of pay TV in the country," reads the Queen's piece, which noted he became an officer of the Order of Canada in 1989, and was promoted to companion a decade later.

Jonathan Rose, professor and head of Queen's political studies department, called Meisel's most important legacy "the role he played as a mentor to generations of professors, public servants, journalists, and students in a language that was accessible."

Meisel is survived by his second wife, **Hanna Dodwell**. A celebration of life will be held at a later date, according to his obituary. —With files from *Paul Park* cleadlay@hilltimes.com *The Hill Times*

Public sector unions raise spectre of Trump, Musk in election campaign against cuts

The Canadian Association of Professional Employees called for a public service pension fund to dump all of its investments in Elon Musk's auto company Tesla.

BY STEPHEN JEFFERY

Several public sector unions are using the chaos and uncertainty unleashed by U.S. President Donald Trump's mass sackings in the American public service to warn election candidates against cuts to the federal bureaucracy in Canada.

"We cannot see a repeat of DOGE in Canada, even a kinder, gentler Canadian version that still serves the same oligarchs and throws ordinary Canadians under the bus," said Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE) president Nathan Prier. He was referring to the Department of Government Efficiency, set up by Trump and administered by his billionaire ally Elon Musk, that has caused mass layoffs across the U.S. federal public sector and slashed funding to international development, educational, and other programs.

"Canadians have been very clear that they do not want—in any way, shape or form—a Canadian DOGE."

On April 9, CAPE, which represents approximately 27,000 members, called for the Public Sector Investment Board (PSP Investments)—which manages retirement savings for federal public servants—to divest from all holdings in Musk's electric auto company Tesla.

CAPE said the board should divest from the company due to the role of its CEO as U.S. Trump's single-largest political donor and his role within the administration, which has threatened Canada's economy via tariffs and sovereignty through threats of annexation since January.

Speaking outside an Ottawa Tesla dealership with about a dozen CAPE members on April 9, CAPE president Nathan Prier said the union's demand was also in solidarity with American public servants subject to mass layoffs and uncertainty as a result of DOGE.

"The Canadian government's already going at Tesla, they're

Canadian Association of Professional Employees president Nathan Prier called for the Public Sector Investment Review Board to divest all Tesla stocks outside a Tesla dealership in Ottawa on April 9. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stephen Jeffery



Elon Musk is U.S. President Donald Trump's single-largest political donor and a key figure in his second administration. *Photograph courtesy of Flickr/NASA HQ*



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre is the target of Public Service Alliance of Canada attack ads. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



cutting Tesla out of the EV rebate program, so this isn't a new thing," he said. "We're just asking the Investment Board of one of the biggest pension funds in the country to take the next step. But this is a conversation that we want to explore more with our union siblings across the country and in the U.S., to look at ways that we can de-finance this attack on workers' rights and workers' livelihoods."

Prier said CAPE's letter was intended as a model for other unions across the country, especially for those that have some say over their members' pension

funds. He noted that public sector unions had a voice on the advisory committee of PSP Investments, but not a vote.

When asked by *The Hill Times* whether CAPE was asking for pension funds to divest from companies owned by other Trump allies, Prier said Tesla was the "most obvious symbol" to target.

"We should absolutely look into what's financing our enemy right now in this trade war, in the deepest way possible," he said. "Obviously, that takes some time to untangle with index funds, mutual funds, so Tesla is the most obvious example."

According to the most recent quarterly report filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission on Feb. 14, the Public Sector Pension Investment Board owned 690,063 shares in Tesla as of Dec. 31, 2024, worth US\$278.7-million (\$395.1-million) at the time. Since then, Tesla stocks have plummeted, meaning PSP Investments' position with the shares would have dropped to US\$159.9-million (\$226.70-million) as of April 9.

Trump's cuts to the United States' federal public service have featured heavily in election-related material from Canada's public sector unions, which have warned against replicating the process in this country.

So far during the campaign, the Liberals have promised a cap on the size of the public service and attempt to improve government efficiency via artificial intelligence and machine learning.

The Conservatives, meanwhile, have promised cuts to the federal public service—suggesting it could be achieved through natural attrition—and have hinted at providing clearer assignments and monitoring of public servants.

On April 4, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)—which represents approximately 240,000 members—warned in a press release that Trump's March 27 executive order to end collective bargaining with some federal labour unions was "a warning sign for all of us in Canada."

"We have seen what happens when governments attack unions: workers lose their rights, wages stagnate, and public services suffer," the press release said. "The right-wing propaganda machine has convinced millions of Americans to vote against their own best interests, and we can't let

that happen here. Trump's actions set a dangerous precedent that could fuel similar anti-worker policies in Canada."

The press release built on the "For You, Canada" campaign PSAC launched prior to the election, which urges Canadians to "vote to protect public services" and warns that "reckless cuts and political maneuvering put these services and our country at risk."

"Public service workers keep Canada running. From safeguarding borders, ensuring food and water safety, assisting farmers, delivering social programs, and responding to emergencies like wildfires, this work is essential in maintaining services that work for you, Canada," the campaign's website states.

According to the Meta Ad Library, PSAC was running 75 ads related to the "For You, Canada" campaign across Facebook and Instagram as of April 9. Some of those ads focused on specific public servants and the services provided to Canadians. Others targeted Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, accusing his policy platform of weakening the country through cuts.

"Pierre Poilievre's plan for Canada could weaken border security, delay emergency responses, and reduce the resources that keep people in Canada safe," one ad states. "Don't fall for the trap—Canada's safety depends on public service workers."

The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPPSC)—which represents approximately 70,000 members—sent questions to the Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats, Bloc Québécois, and Green Party about where they stood "on the issues important to our members."

The union asked for the party's commitment to 17 areas, including the protection of public service jobs and use of evidence-based program reviews, rather than mass layoffs; fair compensation for those affected by the Phoenix pay system; ending outsourcing of government services; and focusing on "human-centric AI policies that augment rather than replace workers."

PIPPSC will also join CAPE at a rally planned for April 23 at Tunney's Pasture, which will call for the federal government to sell excess federal office space to convert into housing. Further efficiencies could be found through permitting more remote work and work-from-home policies for the public service, Prier said during the April 9 press conference.

"Remote work might seem detached from this, but it's not. If we're serious about finding government efficiencies right now, the last thing we should be doing is cutting public sector jobs," he said.

"The first thing we should be doing is granting remote work rights to public servants that can work remotely so we can start downsizing our real estate footprint, get billions of dollars of office expenses out of the federal budget, and convert those to much needed housing."

sjeffery@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Green Party co-leader Elizabeth May, left, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, Prime Minister Mark Carney, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, and Green Party co-leader Jonathan Pedneault. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and illustration by Joey Sabourin

Liberals' lead could change if domestic concerns surpass U.S. tensions, says pundits, pollster

Prime Minister Mark Carney 'is still largely untested' in the political arena, and Jamie Carroll said 'Liberals should take almost no comfort from sitting on top of the biggest, fastest polling swing in modern Canadian history. It's a helluva lot better than being on the other side of it, but the folks I speak to on the campaign appreciate the precariousness of the moment.'

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

The Liberals have been boosted in the polls because of public concern about how Canada



Compass Rose Group's Andrea Sarkic says Mark Carney 'is still largely untested in the political arena.' *Photograph courtesy of Andrea Sarkic*

should deal with the United States, but a shift in focus to more domestic policy issues could make the outcome of the election much harder to predict, say lobbyists and pundits.

"The way I see it is, these last two weeks have been marred and had the cloud of [U.S. President Donald] Trump hanging over the election, and I would argue that the rubber hasn't hit the road yet," said Andrea Sarkic, a public affairs counsellor for Compass Rose Group and a former Conservative staffer.

"But I think it'll be curious to see if the electorate will stay focused, and if they continue to



Jamie Carroll, a former national director of the federal Liberal Party of Canada, said polling could change quickly. *Photograph courtesy of Jamie Carroll*

be influenced by Trump and the tariffs, or if you see folks ask questions and start to pay more attention to domestic policy, because ... I will argue all day long that I think [for] Mr. [Pierre] Poilievre, the policy is the focus. That's the bigger ticket."

Recent polling data has shown the Liberals in a narrow lead in an overall tight race against the Conservatives as Canada approaches election day on April 28. Data from Nanos Research released on April 8 put the Liberals at 43 per cent nationally, ahead of the Conservatives at 38 per cent. Abacus Data reported on April 6 that the



Nik Nanos, chief data scientist for Nanos Research, says, 'when the campaign is in regular campaign mode, it's a very tight race.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Liberals and the Conservatives were tied with 39 per cent support each, followed by the NDP at 11 per cent.

Sarkic told *The Hill Times* that, during the election campaign, Prime Minister Mark Carney has had to contend with U.S. President Donald Trump and recent tariff announcements, and that the Liberals will have a clear advantage if the "Trump issue" remains at the forefront of the electorate. However, she argued that the upcoming leaders' debates—a French-language debate on April 16 and an English-language debate on April 17—could help shift some support

back towards the Tories because of the opportunity to discuss domestic issues.

"Mr. Carney, I will argue, has cut his teeth over the last two weeks in the election, but he is still largely untested in the political arena of debate and that true campaign style," said Sarkic. "But a true campaign and that true, tested arena—this is something that Mr. Poilievre has done for over 20 years."

Jamie Carroll, a former national director of the federal Liberals, said the party is winning the campaign so far, but that could change, given the extremely volatile electorate.

"At the moment, I'm inclined to believe the vast majority of polling that Mark Carney and the Liberals are winning the campaign. But that could change just as quickly as ... well as it already did! Liberals should take almost no comfort from sitting on top of the biggest, fastest polling swing in modern Canadian history. It's a helluva lot better than being on the other side of it, but the folks I speak to on the campaign appreciate the precariousness of the moment," said Carroll.

"Poilievre, unfortunately for him, is the embodiment of Wells' Fourth Rule of Politics: 'The guy who auditions for the role of opposition will get the job.' That's a hard mold to break. The Liberals need to go on the attack, keep Poilievre in the mold, and start to pivot beyond Trump. Their rallies are getting bigger, but while Carney's magic on the tariff file is his calmness, it would be described as boring in any other campaign," said Carroll.

Nik Nanos, chief data scientist for Nanos Research, told *The Hill Times* that the gap between the Liberals and the Conservatives during the campaign has become narrower when there has been

Continued on page 5

2025 ELECTION

NEWS

Continued from page 4

“more of a traditional election campaign environment focused on issues” and not on Trump.

“What’s clear is that when the campaign is focused on Donald Trump, it seems to favour the Liberals. When the campaign is in regular campaign mode, it’s a very tight race between the Liberals and the Conservatives and the Liberals don’t enjoy the same type of advantage that they do when Donald Trump has his sights on Canada,” he said.

Nanos said both the Liberals and the Conservatives are winning the election currently, and all the other parties are losing.

“We’re seeing a consolidation of votes around the two main parties like we’ve never, ever seen before,” he said. “We have a Conservative party that’s at 37 to 38 per cent, which is usually enough to win an election in normal circumstances if the New Democrats, the Bloc and the Greens did their jobs and were more competitive. We also have a Liberal party whose support is in the low 40s that has basically come back from the dead, politically, over the last two to three months.

“I think there are two winners—the Liberals and the Conservatives, and then the rest are all losers right now,” said Nanos.

Dan Arnold, chief strategy officer at research consultancy Pollara, and a former top researcher for the Liberal Party’s election campaigns and in the Prime Minister’s Office under Justin Trudeau, told *The Hill Times* that when he looks at the current federal election, the day-to-day policy announcements that normally drive an election campaign are “pretty meaningless.”

“People will stand up and offer tax credits for this and programs for that, but it really feels to me like the only thing that is really on the minds of voters right now, and that is cutting through, is what is going on south of the border, and how voters are responding to that,” he said. “That seems to be what is driving the discussion, and ultimately what people are going to base their votes on, is who they feel can handle the Trump question. The Trump card beats all the other cards that are being played right now on the campaign trail.”

Arnold said that Canadians tend to trust Carney more than Poilievre to deal with Trump, partly because of the Conservative leader’s “vibe.”

“[Poilievre], over the last couple of years, is somebody who’s used a lot of slogans and catchphrases that are very Trumpian in nature. I think people find that off-putting, and it’s created a bit of a perception—not that he is necessarily Cana-

da’s Donald Trump—but that he follows the Trump playbook,” he said. “There’s a view out there among a lot of voters, I think, that somebody who follows Trump’s playbook is not the person we want in charge right now when we’re dealing with Trump.”

David Coletto, founder, chair and CEO of Abacus Data, said that the Liberals are winning the election, in terms of the polling data, but also because they are able to command the attention of more of the public on the issue they want to talk about, which is Trump.

“As long as that continues to be the case, I think [the Liberals] are going to continue to have the advantage,” he said. “The Liberals have the largest pool of accessible voters. They are owning ... any of the issues that voters are really thinking about now—mainly the economy and dealing with Trump, and we’re seeing the desire for change stay at a level that isn’t dangerous for the Liberals.”

Jordan Paquet, vice-president of Bluesky Strategies and a Conservative pundit, told *The Hill Times* that this week’s leaders’ debates will be “an important final contrast” between the Poilievre and Carney.

“If the question does come down to change and how do we build a more resilient Canadian economy, there are certain things in there that the parties are going to want to put out as their sticking points,” said Paquet. “For the Conservatives, it’s very much going to be about showing ‘We’re the agents of change, and it’s not Mark Carney. It’s not the Liberals,’” he said. “On the Conservative side, they really want to put out some of these new ... pro-affordability policies, really contrasting the Liberal record over the last 10 years. I think that’s where the policy is going to come into play.”

When asked about who is winning the election, Paquet said it’s incredibly hard to predict.

“If you look at a couple of polls, the Liberals have started out, certainly, at the top, and the Conservatives are now the underdog. I think now that you’re seeing things moving towards more people paying attention to beyond just what’s happening in the U.S.... you’re starting to see this tighten up quite a bit.”

Cam Holmstrom, founder of Niipaawi Strategies and a former NDP staffer, described Carney as “not a polished politician by any stretch of imagination,” arguing that he is not a great presenter with “okay” French.

“Mark Carney himself only has one gear. Nine times out of 10, that would probably sink him, but it just so happens that that gear [is] the perfect gear for what we’re facing right now. If this moment



Jordan Paquet, vice-president of Bluesky Strategies, says, ‘I think now that you’re seeing things moving towards more people paying attention to beyond just what’s happening in the U.S.... you’re starting to see this tighten up quite a bit.’ Photograph courtesy of Bluesky Strategies



Niipaawi Strategies founder Cam Holmstrom says ‘Mark Carney himself only has one gear.’ Photograph courtesy of Cam Holmstrom

ever passes and you come back normal times, that’ll probably be his undoing, unless he can’t grow with the position more,” he said.

Holmstrom said that Carney has the correct “tone” when speaking about Canada’s current tension with the U.S.

“When you’re hearing him talk about how our relationship with the Americans

will never be the same, how those days are over ... those aren’t the kind of things we used to hear our political leaders say ... and people aren’t running for the hills, crying and screaming over it. They’re like, ‘Yeah, he’s right.’ He’s got the tone of everything correct right now.”

jcnockaert@hilltimes.com
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Pollara’s Dan Arnold says voters’ minds appear focused on ‘what is going on south of the border.’ Photograph courtesy of Dan Arnold



Abacus Data’s David Coletto says the Liberals are owning ‘any of the issues that voters are really thinking about now.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

No 'perfect' solution in Carney asset disclosure calls, say law and political science experts

'If we believe as a society that the system doesn't work ... then we need to have a policy conversation,' says York University's Ian Stedman.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Prime Minister Mark Carney has followed the rules to avoid a potential conflict of interest related to his financial holdings, but no system is perfect and recent questions raised by opposition parties about asset disclosure could indicate a need to re-evaluate Canada's ethics regime, according to law and political science professors.

"The whole rhetoric that's coming out from the Conservative Party—that [Carney] should be telling everyone what he owns—no one would ever be expected to do that in his position. His responsibility is to disclose to the [federal ethics] commissioner and then for the commissioner to tell him how to proceed," said Ian Stedman, an associate professor of Canadian Public Law and Governance at York University. "If we believe, as a society, that the system doesn't work—it's not doing enough—then we need to have a policy conversation."

Since February, Carney has faced questions from opposition parties and media regarding his so-far undisclosed financial assets. The prime minister previously served as chair of Brookfield Asset Management, a leading global investment firm, but stepped away from the position in January when he ran for leadership of the Liberal Party.

Carney held US\$6.8-million (\$9.5-million) worth of unexercised stock options at the end of December, according to Brookfield Asset Management's 10-K report, filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Unexercised stock options represent a right to purchase a company's stock within a specified time frame at a predetermined price.

Since then, Carney has stated he put all of his publicly traded assets into a blind trust—or a legal contract where he will have no control over or knowledge of the assets in the trust or how they're managed. However, Carney has not publicly revealed whether his stock options were exercised prior to his assets being placed into the blind trust.



Prime Minister Mark Carney has stated he put all of his publicly traded assets into a blind trust and that he has contacted the federal ethics office about putting 'screens' in place. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

He also said that a process was underway with the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner to set up "screens" to help address conflicts of interest. A screen is a preventative measure intended to help public office holders avoid conflicts of interest by requiring they abstain from discussions, decisions, debates or votes concerning matters that may advance their private interests.

Conservative incumbent Michael Barrett, his party's ethics critic, has called on Carney to disclose all the assets he put into the blind trust, and also to release his conflict of interest plan with the federal ethics office. NDP incumbent Matthew Green, his party's ethics critic, called on Carney to "show Canadians where your money is," as reported in the *National Post* on Feb. 28. Green also said the Conflict of Interest Act should be reformed to require leadership candidates to publicly disclose their business holdings, directorships, and financial interests at the outset of their campaigns.

The Hill Times reached out to Barrett and Green to ask about their concerns and what steps could be taken by Carney to improve transparency, but did not receive a response from either by press time.

"This so-called 'blind trust' of his doesn't protect him. Why? Because these aren't stocks and ETFs like normal Canadians have, that a trustee can buy and sell freely. No, he raised the money from international billionaires and made the investments. He knows exactly what is in there. And those Brookfield funds are locked in with long-term con-

tracts," said Barrett in a statement released on March 18.

The Hill Times also reached out to the Prime Minister's Office to ask for a response from Carney to his critics, and to ask if he feels measures taken have been sufficiently transparent, but did not receive a response by press time.

Stedman told *The Hill Times* that a blind trust is not perfect, but that "within the system that we have, [Carney's] done what was asked of him." The only "surefire" way for Carney to avoid conflicts of interest would be to sell all his assets, according to Stedman, but also questioned if that would be a reasonable condition for people coming into public office.

"You don't sell an option; you exercise an option, so it's going to sit there until it's exercised. [Carney's] going to know that the better that company does—Brookfield—the better his option looks. There's no way around that," said Stedman. "I think we have to draw a line of best fit. We have to ask ourselves, what's the best policy that we can put in place with the results we want to achieve, which is that we want people to feel like they can put their hat in the ring to run for public office, and we want people to feel like they're not going to have to give up their lives and everything they've ever earned and everything they've ever worked for in order to do so."

Stedman added that he is hopeful that the scrutiny put to Carney in regard to his undisclosed assets may be taken as a sign following the federal election for a policy discussion on the matter.

"This was an issue during the campaign. This was slung back

and forth as a problem. So, let's have a talk. Let's have a conversation about it," he said. "While we're all here and everyone's taking their seats, let's put it in committee, and let's start hearing from people. Let's open up the act, and see if it's working for us."

Errol Mendes, a law professor at the University of Ottawa, told *The Hill Times* that this is not the first time members of Canada's federal government have had to deal with potential conflicts of interest similar to Carney's.

Former Liberal prime minister Paul Martin, who owned Canada Steamship Lines, put his assets in a blind trust when he joined Jean Chrétien's cabinet as finance minister, and was also advised to abstain from certain government decisions.

"You have that option to sell everything, but if you decide not to sell, your other option is to have a third party who is at arm's length from you—in other words, is strictly independent—to essentially manage it," said Mendes.

"But what's really not known is, do they still have any input into what happens with that third party holding those holdings? Very few people actually have come up with a clear answer, but I think as far as I'm aware, the clearest answer is they are allowed to give periodic statements as to whether things have crashed or not, or whatever. But [it's] very, very general."

"I only found this out just by talking to people. But, in general, the understanding is they don't have almost any connection whatsoever, and if there is something which is not really apparent, then it can only be a very, very general level thing, [like] the thing has crashed, or everything's okay, or something like that."

Duff Conacher, the co-founder of Democracy Watch, is critical of blind trusts as a measure to guard against conflicts of interest. In an emailed statement to *The Hill Times*, Conacher argued blind trusts are not actually blind.

"A blind trust is a sham facade that hides and does not prevent financial conflicts of interest because the politician knows they what investments and assets they put in the trust, chooses their own trustee, and is allowed to give the trustee initial instructions, including to not sell anything, and the politician is only required to disclose that they have a blind trust and other general information and is allowed to keep their actual investments in specific companies hidden from the public," said Conacher on April 7.

Conacher also criticized the effectiveness of conflict-of-interest screens, arguing the Conflict of Interest Act contains a loophole to allow for public office

holders to still participate in decisions that affect their investments. According to the act, a person's private interests do not include decisions or matters of "general application."

Conacher said that the vast majority of decisions made by a prime minister, cabinet ministers and other government officials would not be covered under a conflict-of-interest screen, since nearly all decisions are matters of general application.

"Every law, regulation, tax subsidy, tax credit, spending program or service program applies generally," said Conacher in an interview.

Conacher said that Carney has already taken part in decisions that affect Brookfield, such as by promising to remove the consumer-facing carbon tax.

"Brookfield is invested in renewables. That decision affects Brookfield. He also imposed tariffs. That decision affects Brookfield. Brookfield is a huge company involved in all sorts of industries," he said.

Conacher argued that an effective system would require every top federal public office holder involved in the decision-making process to sell their investments, and, if they can't sell an investment—such as a family business or family farm—to recuse themselves from every decision-making and policy-making process in which there is an appearance of a conflict of interest related directly, or indirectly, to their investments.

Andrew Stark, a professor of strategic management and political science at the University of Toronto, told *The Hill Times* that a call to publicly disclose all assets may have its own complications.

"I think one of the problems with that is likely to be that he may have holdings in Brookfield or in other entities that themselves have holdings that are not going to be disclosed because that would conflict with the business strategy of those entities," said Stark. "Brookfield may—I don't know, but it may—have holdings, or it may be doing business that it doesn't want to disclose, or can't disclose without jeopardizing some of its business operations, and its holdings may also be ever-changing. Disclosure is also imperfect, just as screens are imperfect, and just as a blind trust is imperfect. There's no perfect."

Stark said that the combination of a blind trust and screens, "is the best that can be reasonably done at this moment."

"If it should arise that something is presented to the prime minister ... that he really can't be screened from but that affect his holdings, then I would imagine at that point he would have to disclose that fact and materially, tell the Canadian people in detail what exactly the conflict is, so that people can judge his actions accordingly. That seems to me what should happen in a situation where he can't be screened and he still holds the asset, but that's a speculative thing down the road, and I don't think it would happen very often."

jcnockaert@hilltimes.com
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Editorial

Editorial

Poilievre: the biggest gatekeeper of them all

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, who’s been campaigning to be prime minister since February 2022, does not like the Hill media, and is not shy about it.

During his time as leader, Poilievre’s few scrums in the West Block have been belligerent and brief. His campaign platform includes a plan to defund the CBC but retain Radio-Canada, and regularly describes members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery as “bought and paid for” by the governing Liberals.

But if he wants the country’s top political job, he’s going to have to start talking more to the national media and answering questions. Poilievre has barred the media from officially joining his leader’s official bus and plane tour for this five-week campaign, and is only allowing four questions each day.

He’s also taking a page out of Trump’s playbook by wasting time picking apart the question, sometimes criticizing the reporter, or asking the reporter a question.

Some reporters covering Poilievre’s campaign told *The Hill Times*’ Stuart Benson that being barred from the plane and bus has only been the beginning of obstacles they have encountered in trying to cover Poilievre, and don’t want to be named out of fear of retaliation.

Between March 26 and April 6, Poilievre has answered 65 questions, while Prime Minister Mark Carney has answered 148, NDP Leader Jagmeet

Singh 208, and Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet 163.

In fairness to Poilievre, he has spoken to local media beyond the Ottawa bubble since becoming Conservative leader, but by answering just only four questions a day as Conservative staffers hold the microphone that journalists speak into, he’s also shutting out those reporters seeking questions about how his policies will affect the communities that they serve during campaign stops.

Journalists are not entitled to all-access passes, and the parties can conduct their campaigns as they see fit. But the way the Conservatives are managing this campaign hints at how they would handle government, and it does not paint a pretty picture. Tighter access and control, a lack of transparency and openness, and a belligerence toward anyone not already inside the Tory camp appear the *modus operandi* of this prospective government.

The country already experienced that apparent contempt for open and accountable government during the Trudeau and Harper governments, and both polling and elections showed what the public thought about it. If Poilievre, the politician who has a track record of publicly denouncing all “gatekeepers,” wants to avoid to appear offering more of the same—but with a blue label replacing the red one—he and his minders had best start being more open Canadians weighing up his political future.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor



Annexation threat just a diversion: Ottawa letter writer

Re: “Smith’s request to U.S. swings dangerously close to an ask for foreign interference,” (*The Hill Times*, March 31). I read, with interest, your editorial about Alberta Premier Danielle Smith. During her appearance with Ben Shapiro she stated, regarding Canada as the 51st state, “That would be like adding another California to your electoral system, and [you] would never have a Republican president in the White House again.”

Premier Smith hit on the main reason why I believe this issue is a diversion. Adding Canadians to the American electorate would almost always hand the legislative branch and the presidency to the Democrats. It is inconceivable that Republicans would take such a risk with their electoral prospects. In truth, we would probably not become part of the United States of America even if we were asking to join.

But what if we were forced in anyway—a.k.a. The Trump Effect? A more interesting outcome could see Canadians form a “Canada Party” in protest. The Democrats and Republicans rarely have more than slight majorities in their legislative branch, consequently a Canada Party would very often have the deciding vote on proposed legislation and budgets. This would allow us to make the Americans “offers they can’t refuse” in order to get anything of note passed. They would well understand the dire implications of handing Canadians leverage like that within the bosom of their political system. Again, this simply won’t happen. Good.

Incidentally, your coverage of the election has been outstanding. Well done.

Ronald A. Heale
Ottawa, Ont.

Still in favour of providing care for suffering over euthanasia: Ottawa reader

Re: “If you think that assisted dying in Canada is a mess, think again,” (*The Hill Times*, April 4, by James Downar and Jocelyn Downie). “According to every piece of objective data we have, Canada’s MAiD laws are being used for their intended purpose,” say Downar and Downie. The authors try to emphasize ‘objective data’ because other objective data indicates the opposite. And there’s plenty of it.

But data aside, it’s clear that Canada is providing death as a “solution” to suffering. Even the “enduring, intolerable, and unrelievable suffering” that Downar and Downie mention is subjective. The Criminal Code states it must be “intolerable to them,” and cannot be relieved “under

conditions that they consider acceptable.”

Rather than providing life-affirming care and relieving suffering, euthanasia ends the life of the sufferer and disincentivizes care. Downar and Downie dismiss concerns about loneliness and isolation, noting that people who aren’t euthanized are also lonely and isolated. But in either case, the solution must be care and support, not death.

No matter how many times I “think again” about assisted dying in Canada, it’s still a mess. Governments in this country should think again about the many problems with euthanasia in Canada, and seek to provide care instead of death for those who are suffering.

Daniel Zekveld
Ottawa, Ont.



If gap narrows, number of seats with a margin of less than 1,000 votes could decide the election

We are at the halfway point in the election, but much could happen in the yin and the yang of the campaign.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner



Prime Minister Mark Carney, top left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, and Green Co-Leaders Jonathan Pedneault and Elizabeth May. The debates in French and English will be very important because if Carney stumbles, he will definitely curb the enthusiasm of his campaign. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

OTTAWA—Does size matter? Pierre Poilievre seems to think so.

In this regard, he is aligning himself closely with U.S. President Donald Trump, who claimed that his inauguration day crowds during his first term were bigger than anything posted by Barack Obama.

Poilievre has also claimed his crowds are the biggest in history, which, of course, is false.

Back in 1979, governing Liberals managed to organize a rally of more than 20,000 people in Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens and then went on to lose the election to the Conservatives.

Rallies definitely help to charge up the base, which serves

to grow the ground game of local candidates, but they also chew up a lot of time that could be better used recruiting new supporters.

In Poilievre's case, he has a solid group of core followers who will never waver. They also tend to be opponents of vaccinations, and the so-called "woke" world they are living in.

But the work to grow his base will actually decide the election. If he cannot do that, it doesn't matter how many of the faithful line up to join his rallies, he won't win.

As for organizers, most will tell you that the campaign focus should be on local organizational voter-identification. This is not

getting done when people are busy getting supporters to rallies.

How is that relevant?

When prime minister Brian Mulroney won his second election back in 1988, his party managed to secure victory in 20 ridings by less than 1,000 votes. In a tight race, what matters most is who actually gets to the polls to vote.

If the current numbers hold, (and that is not likely) the Liberals will win a comfortable majority and the race will be called within an hour of the polls closing.

But if the gap narrows, the number of seats with a margin of less than 1,000 votes could actually decide the election.

We are at the halfway point in the election, but much could happen in the yin and the yang of the campaign.

The debates in French and English will be very important because if Prime Minister Mark Carney stumbles, he will definitely curb the enthusiasm of his campaign.

Poilievre's support is obviously not as wide, but it is very deep. In the case of Carney, his supporter is much broader, but without the depth of loyalty that Poilievre is enjoying.

People like Carney's background and think that he has the right financial chops to deal with the chaos caused by Trump's tariffs.

He will need to reinforce that impression during the debates, with particular attention to his performance in the French language.

Most French speakers are satisfied that Carney's capacity in Canada's second official language is not a vote-loser. Carney is particularly popular in Quebec.

During the final days of prime minister Justin Trudeau's time in office, Liberals were lagging badly, but the Conservatives were not much more popular. The Bloc benefited from those numbers, with leader Yves-François Blanchet looking to form a majority in Quebec. But the Quebec numbers

now show that Blanchet could lose even in his own riding.

New Democratic Party Leader Jagmeet Singh is facing the same possibility as his single-digit polling could mean a massive rout for his party, including the potential loss of his own seat.

Singh is focusing his message on convincing Canadians that minority governments work better for people, in an effort to stem the massive move of New Democratic voters to the Liberals.

As long as Trump keeps threatening the world order, Canadians who are seeing their cost-of-living rise and their bank accounts shrink, want to rally around a leader who will fight the American president.

A minority Parliament would not provide Canadians with certainty in the global crisis that Trump has created.

A tight race between the Liberals and the Conservatives will create even more challenges for the Bloc and the NDP. In the global crisis, Canadians will want a strong prime minister. Those dynamics mean that this election has become a two-party race. And if you look at crowd-size, it looks as though Poilievre has an edge.

Carney's crowds are growing in size as well, but the Liberal party's focus is on a tight, get-out-the-vote campaign in every riding. That means that, while Tory supporters are following their leader in rallies, Liberals are looking for new voters in canvassing, phoning and social media activities.

Both parties are obviously working their ground game, but Poilievre's push for big crowds does not mean victory.

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

The Hill Times

The theatre of leaders' debates

The election debates we see on TV nowadays are little more than political leaders going on a stage to express carefully crafted talking points and mini speeches. In short, it's less like an intellectual debate and more like political theatre. So buckle up, it's showtime.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit



OAKVILLE, ONT.—I don't want to get into a debate about this, but the leaders' debates, which will pit Prime Minister Mark Carney, Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh against each other, won't really be a debate.

After all, according to my dictionary, a debate is a formal, structured discussion with the goal of reaching a conclusion on a proposition.

With that in mind, if you want to see an example of a real debate, check out the series of three-hour (!) rhetorical battles that occurred in 1858 between Republican Abraham Lincoln and Democrat Stephen Douglas over the question of slavery.

It was Lincoln's dramatic mastery of language during those debates—"A House divided against itself cannot stand"—which cemented his reputation as a leading Republican and helped pave his way to the White House.

Of course, our society has changed a lot over the past 167 years; in today's modern, fast-

paced, short-attention span world, audiences certainly wouldn't have the patience to sit through three hours of debate over policy issues, meaning the days when politicians offered soaring oratory and articulate, cogent arguments on contentious matters are long gone.

Instead, today's politicians must use 15-to-20-second sound bites to get their messages out as quickly and concisely as possible.

Thus, with this reality in mind, the election debates we see on TV nowadays are little more than political leaders going on a stage to express carefully crafted talking points and mini speeches.

My point is that all the arguments and counter-arguments, attacks and defences, rhetorical jabs, and tautologies put on display during these encounters are preplanned and rehearsed.

In short, it's less like an intellectual debate and more like political theatre.

Indeed, what really matters in a political debate is how well

the leader is presented to the audience.

Do they look like a leader, do they look trustworthy and confident, do they come across as likable and personable?

Basically, debates give voters a chance to judge books by their covers.

We all know, for example, how, in 1960, Richard Nixon supposedly lost a televised debate to John Kennedy because of how he looked: pale and tired with a "five o'clock shadow."

This is why, when leaders are preparing for debates, they will practise not only what they will say but, just as importantly, how they will say it.

In other words, they will practise their body language, including gestures, facial expressions, posture, and making eye contact with the camera, the kind of things that will mostly register on a subconscious level with viewers.

What the candidates won't do, on the other hand, is get too mired in detailed research or the minutiae of policy.

Again, debate preparation focuses on sound bites rather than facts.

And one sound bite that campaigns spend a lot of time preparing is the debate "zinger," a clever one-liner that, if it works, will resonate with audiences long after the debate is over.

Ronald Reagan's "There you go again" or Brian Mulroney's "You had an option, sir" are good examples of zingers.

At any rate, all of this, the prepared talking points, the rehearsed body language, the zingers, are designed to achieve limited strategic campaign goals.

For example, in the upcoming debate, Prime Minister Mark Carney's goal will be to maintain his momentum by avoiding serious gaffes; Poilievre's goal will be to make a favourable impression on those Canadians who still don't know who he is, while Singh will aim to remind disgruntled Canadians that the NDP is still an option.

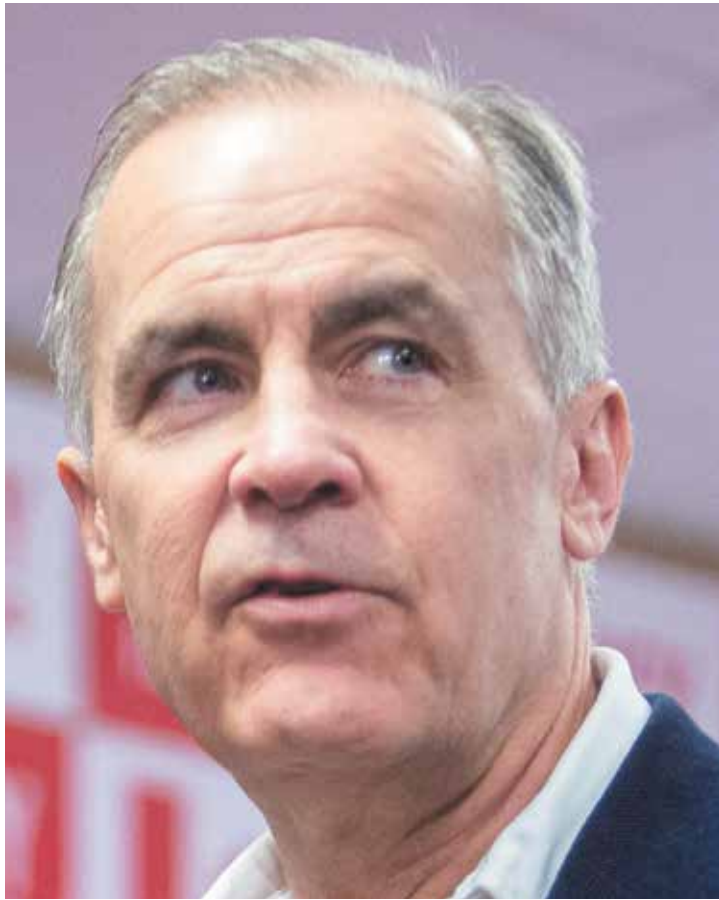
Just remember, while it might be interesting, it won't be a debate.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

COMMENT

2025 ELECTION



Liberal Leader Mark Carney, left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. Carney understands that Canada needs to reinvent itself as a self-sufficient country, allied to new trading partners who share our values, writes Michael Harris. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

Carney grasps a key point that Poilievre has missed in the trade war

It can never be politics as usual again with the United States. Mark Carney has talked about the political imperative that this new and totally unexpected truth poses for this country.

Michael Harris

Harris



HALIFAX—The dramatic collapse in the once insurmountable lead Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre held over the Liberals is the most astonishing reversal of political fortunes I have ever seen.

For one thing, it happened in a matter of a few weeks. For the two years before that, the Liberals could barely see Poilievre's tail lights. He was on cruise control to 24 Sussex Drive.

For that same two years, former prime minister Justin Trudeau's popularity took a meteoric plunge. It was so bad that some commentators openly mused about the complete wipeout of the Liberal Party, à la Progressive Conservative Kim Campbell in 1993. Most observers treated it as a given that an historic Conservative majority was just an election away.

But from the get-go of this election—now at the half way point—Poilievre has been losing the battle with the Liberals. Virtually all polls give Liberal Leader Mark Carney and his party a national lead of somewhere between five and seven per cent. Those numbers have been consistent throughout the campaign.

There are two other deadly signs for the Conservatives that can't be talked away by crowd size at rallies, or sarcastic put downs. Mark Carney enjoys a double-digit lead over Poilievre when it comes to who Canadians prefer as their prime minister.

But the most desperate poll numbers for the Conservatives are the regional breakdowns. Carney and the Liberals have huge leads over Poilievre in vote-rich Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes. They also lead in British Columbia.

Bottom line? At this moment, the numbers are just not there for a Conservative victory of any kind. In fact, CBC's latest poll tracker seat projections show Carney winning 200 seats, compared to just 118 for Poilievre.

How could this have happened? Trudeau gone? Yes. Carney in? Yes. A Conservative campaign of dubious strategic insight? Yes.

When Trudeau was hitting rock bottom, a lot of people, including me, were asking the same question: did the Liberals have a Trudeau problem or a brand problem? The numbers have since provided the answer. The resurgence of the party took off after the former PM's departure. And it has kept going ever since.

Though a political neophyte, Carney has been a hit at the box office. His credentials as the governor of two central banks, and his work in the private sector compare favourably with Poilievre's "one job" resumé. All the more so at a time of economic crisis.

Finally, the Poilievre campaign is slick but not selling. As several Conservatives have pointed out, Poilievre and his campaign manager, Jenni Byrne, were slow to pivot to the new political land-

scape they faced. In a way, they still haven't.

They talked kitchen table issues while the house was on fire. They campaigned against the Trudeau record, rather than the threat to our economy and very sovereignty represented by the Mad King to the south.

Poilievre's response to Carney has been puerile and preposterous. The point here? You don't blow off an accomplished rival with childish, ad hominem attacks. You make your case and critique the case of your opponent. You don't become Marjorie Taylor Greene in a suit.

Nor has it helped that Poilievre has continued his contemptuous mistreatment of the press. Not allowing the best in the business on his plane—at their expense—to cover the election was a bone-headed blunder.

Penning reporters up like sheep, as the party did at a recent news conference in Sault Ste. Marie, just shows that Poilievre has the same aversion to the press as you-know-who. U.S. President Donald Trump wants to gut National Public Radio and PBS in the U.S. Poilievre wants to gut the CBC.

Here is the essential skinny. Halfway through Canada's federal election, the thug

in the White House who runs a gangland government remains the top-of-mind issue for Canadians. The Conservatives either don't get it, or refuse to seriously change course.

If the Poilievre campaign thinks that Trump's recent pausing of his planetary retaliatory tariffs means the Conservatives can return this election to a backward look at the hyperbolic "lost Liberal decade," good luck.

The fact is, Trump had no choice but to pause the new round of tariffs just 15 hours after he announced them.

Why? Because countries like Japan began selling off their immense holdings of U.S. treasury bills. The bond market, traditionally the safe haven of choice when the stock market goes south, was crumbling too.

If the bond sell-off continued, it had the potential to destabilize the United States' precarious debt load. In other words, the U.S. could turn into Argentina. That's why Trump blinked. It wasn't a change of heart about how to treat his friends.

There is another thing to consider in Trump's flip-flop on retaliatory tariffs. As reported by *The Washington Post* and others, Trump has paused one tariff war only to begin another.

By placing a 145 per cent tariff on China, Trump has plunged the world into a game of chicken between the two global superpowers. No one knows who will win. But you can bet on one thing—Xi Jinping won't be kissing anyone's ass in America any time soon. Trump's disgraceful boast will come back to haunt him.

Finally, the pause in the latest round of Trump tariffs still leaves plenty of trouble on the table for countries other than China.

Canada still faces potentially ruinous tariffs on automobiles made in this country. Auto parts are scheduled to be next. The tariffs on steel and aluminum remain in place. And Trump is threatening further tariffs on specific sectors like softwood lumber and pharmaceuticals.

Carney has grasped something that Poilievre has missed: it can never be politics as usual again with the United States. Carney has talked about the political imperative that this new and totally unexpected truth poses for this country.

Canada needs to reinvent itself as a self-sufficient country, allied to new trading partners who share our values. In attacking its friends and allies, the U.S. has proven it is no longer a reliable partner. What is required at this moment in time is tough negotiation and no ass-kissing with a contemptible bully.

With just two weeks left before electoral D-Day, the Conservatives have very little time to address the real ballot question, move the numbers, and get back in the game.

Trying to blow up Mark Carney's credentials, or call out his "banker's haircut" won't do the job.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist.

The Hill Times

Trump threatens Canada's bilingual and cultural foundations

Make no mistake. Trump has designs on the cultural and linguistic foundations of our nation. But are Canada's political leaders ready to defend our bilingual character, to say nothing about standing up for Indigenous languages and cultures?

Alionka Skup

Opinion



Though Donald Trump may deny it, the rapacious president of the United States wants

Canada's water. He covets our North and its strategic value. Just as he is squeezing Ukraine in its time of need, Trump wants Canada's rare minerals. He wants our hydro, oil, and natural gas.

But it's not only economic assets that are in his administration's sights. The French language has now been declared an official trade irritant by the U.S. trade representative.

Make no mistake. Trump has designs on our nation's the cultural and linguistic foundations.

But are Canada's political leaders ready to defend our bilingual character, to say nothing about standing up for Indigenous languages and cultures? These are amongst the issues that have brought Canadians together at rallies and events across the country since Trump launched his first verbal and economic attacks towards us.

Trump's attitude toward Canada is fuelled by many factors. Among them is sheer disdain for many of the things that make us Canadian, including bilingualism and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Countries with two official languages have been described as "failed states" by some Republican representatives. The Trump

administration seems to regard bilingualism in Canada as the ultimate state-sponsored sop toward diversity, inclusion, and equity, if not a barrier to trade. Imagine what the Trump gang will do when they learn the CBC broadcasts in eight Indigenous languages in addition to French and English.

If Trump succeeds in bringing Canada to its knees through the economic terrorism of his illegal tariffs or through outright military might, it won't be long before he imposes the policy of English-as-the-only-official-language he has already declared in the U.S.

For the most part, this country's national, provincial and municipal leaders have stood up to U.S. economic threats to jobs in the auto, aviation, aluminum and other sectors. Counter tariffs and strong words from Team Canada have made our message about jobs and the economy clear.

Prime Minister Mark Carney promises French language and Canadian culture are off the table in talks with Trump. At the same time, Carney's very first act as PM was to eliminate official languages as a distinct responsibility in his cabinet, instead asking Steven

Guilbeault to attend to this assignment off the side of his ministerial culture desk, a move that would be noticed in the Oval Office.

Few among the opposition parties—save for the Bloc Québécois—have pointed this out as a critical error, especially at this moment in our history.

There's more.

For months before the election was called, and behind the scenes in the House, MPs representing the two parties most likely to form the next government have routinely advocated that official language interpreters be forced back to work in dangerous conditions that make it impossible for them to deliver a quality service. The MPs seem to be saying, "give us the interpretation we need and to hell with the well-being of the interpreters." Meeting the requirement of the Official Languages Act for Parliament to function in both official languages of equal quality has become nothing more than an aspiration.

One cannot help but wonder about the next government's commitment to our linguistic duality, especially under pressure from Trump. Indeed, while Parliament is shuttered for the election, gov-

ernment officials are drafting new rules for official language interpreters who will work in the next Parliament that could well have this homegrown disdain built in.

Canada as we know it was founded by two distinct language and cultural groups on the backs of multiple Indigenous nations that were already here. Our multicultural reality has grown over the years, and is a nascent source of strength and unity especially under the threat we now face.

Finally, after more than 150 years of Confederation, the Translation Bureau of Canada is taking steps toward offering some limited Indigenous language interpretation. This is a welcome—if long overdue—step forward in the name of reconciliation. This modest effort will be washed away if Trump has his way.

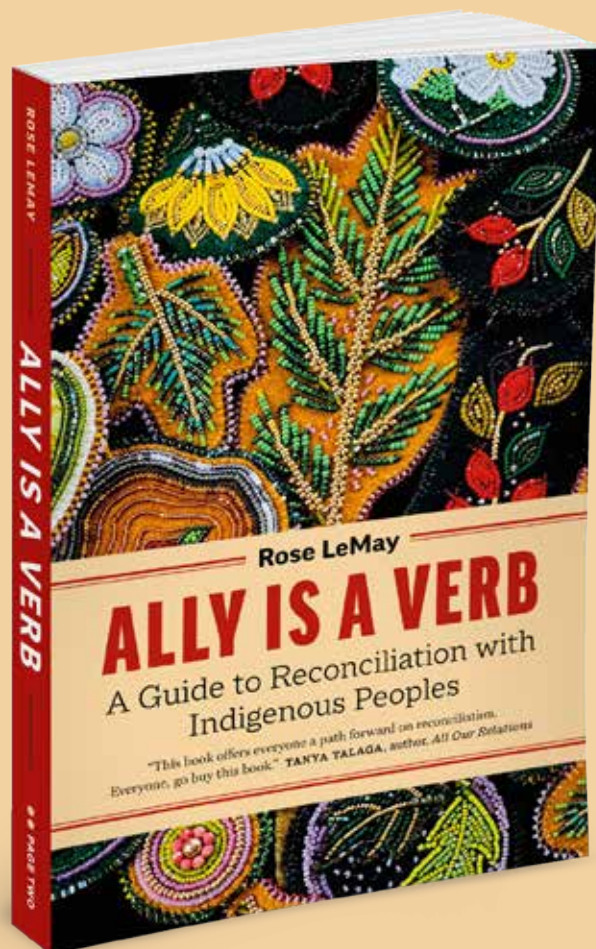
One can only hope that when the party leaders face off during the upcoming election debates, they will defend our distinct bilingual and cultural character, as well as Canadian jobs. We Canadians are not willing to sell our soul for purely mercantile interests. Our leaders must speak up now and defend these foundations before it's too late.

Alionka Skup is president of the International Association of Conference Interpreters-Canada Region whose members include the interpreters who translate the French and English speakers in Parliament.

The Hill Times

● ● PAGE TWO

Available April 22, 2025



YOUR NEXT STEP ON THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION STARTS HERE

This potent, practical book from author Rose LeMay is an essential manual for allies of Indigenous Peoples. It presents a roadmap to creating better relationships, equity, and true reconciliation—offering concrete steps individuals can take, in the organizations they work for and in their personal lives, to become powerful allies.

Rose LeMay is a speaker, trainer, and coach on reconciliation, and an unrelenting champion for the inclusion and well-being of Indigenous peoples. LeMay will speak at the Ottawa Writers Festival on May 4. Join her for an engaging and practical conversation on the next steps for reconciliation.

COMMENT

2025 ELECTION

Poilievre: we're just not that into him

Pierre Poilievre's polished daily performances continue to be, primarily, laments for the sorry state of the country, extended complaints about the 'lost Liberal decade,' simplistic policy promises and the occasional tangle with any real journalist who breaks through the daunting line of party enforcers that police every large rally.

Susan Riley

Impolitic



CHELSEA, QUE.—That was a very short-lived pivot by Pierre Poilievre.

Yes, after internal party dissent and at the urging of various Conservative worthies, he now weaves more criticism of Donald Trump into his stump speeches. It doesn't seem terribly heartfelt, but, to be fair, the opposition leader betrays no hint of admiration for the rampaging U.S. president.

But Poilievre's polished daily performances continue to be, primarily, laments for the sorry state of the country, extended complaints about the "lost Liberal decade"—including unconvincing smears directed at Liberal leader Mark Carney—simplistic policy promises, and the occasional tangle with any real journalist who breaks through the daunting line of party enforcers that police every large rally.

And they are large rallies. They are the best rallies, possibly the biggest in Canadian politics, to hear Poilievre tell it. They fire up his base, make his rivals nervous, and, no doubt, drive even more wavering voters into the arms of the Liberal Party. The simple math is that Poilievre needs more than his base to win a majority, but he is so viscerally partisan he cannot even fake out-



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, pictured March 4, 2025, on the Hill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

reach. He doesn't want a big tent, so much as he wants an adoring congregation.

As a result, it is hard for people who don't like Poilievre to begin with to open their minds and hearts to him. He has never seemed interested in genuine interaction with anyone who doesn't fully embrace his views. He doesn't discuss, or persuade; he chides, or he instructs. He figured out all the answers, to all the questions, many years ago and can barely disguise his impatience when presented with an unauthorized view.

To spare himself that annoyance, he holds journalists deemed unfriendly at arm's length. When the occasional subversive gets the mic, Poilievre responds to unvetted questions with a fusillade of his own, delivered in a taunting tone, a fake smile pasted on his face.

It happened to the *Globe and Mail's* Laura Stone last week—she barely got her question out, when Poilievre started asking her how many people attended his huge rally in Edmonton the night before, pressing her for a number, after she said she didn't know. You're an experienced journalist, he said, feigning disbelief—you don't know?

Poilievre, who continued to smirk, then encouraged onlookers to applaud the 10,000-12,000-strong gathering, which featured a rare appearance by guest speaker Stephen Harper. That brief skirmish, replayed later on social media, was more than a little Trump-like.

He may think he "won" the exchange with the reporter, because every conversation for him is a competition, but it only reminded unconvinced onlookers of who Poilievre is, and has been, for his 24-some years in politics: snarky, arrogant, and, apart from a small inner circle, seemingly

isolated. It is Pierre Poilievre for prime minister, with the "Conservative" tag an afterthought. Only a few select members of his caucus—the most rabidly partisan (Melissa Lantsman, Andrew Scheer)—have any campaign profile. Meanwhile, the sidekick role has fallen to Poilievre's equally polished wife, Anaida.

Former political journalist Mark Bourrie's new book, *Ripper*, is a bracing reminder of some of the reputations Poilievre has ruined, the malicious fictions he has promoted (Trudeau "pushing" drugs, personally letting repeat killers loose, destroying Alberta's oil industry), the tiresome slogans he stitches into every utterance. He is a honed, disciplined quote machine, one of those dolls with a string you pull to elicit a limited number of chirpy responses. (Axe the tax. Bring it home. Boots not suits, etc.)

His victims include the grandfatherly former governor general David Johnston—appointed by Stephen Harper and broadly popular in the role—who was asked by Justin Trudeau to look into Chinese interference in our electoral process some years back. When Johnston didn't produce an answer Poilievre liked, he became Justin's "ski buddy," his "family friend," beholden to the Trudeau Foundation, and obviously incapable of impartial judgment.

Former Liberal finance minister Bill Morneau, a politically hapless recruit from Bay Street, where he ran his family human resources firm, was driven from office after Poilievre suggested, without evidence, that Morneau had manipulated the tax system to enrich his own business and was "showered with luxury accommodation" by the now-defunct We Charity, another victim of Poilievre's bloodlust.

Not all his targets are blameless, but most are guilty, at worst,

of carelessness, or having the wrong friends. Poilievre doesn't do nuance. Liberal Leader Mark Carney, his most formidable foe so far, is "not a businessman, he's a political grifter." That was Poilievre's verdict last week after a convoluted effort to tie Carney, when he was governor of the Bank of England, to the increased cost of jet fuel, thereby ruining vacation plans for the blue-collar workers standing dutifully behind Poilievre's podium.

In response to questions about his own campaign support from Indo-Canadians close to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Poilievre suggested, on the slenderest of grounds, that Carney is somehow beholden to the Chinese. He also revived the accusation that "while [Carney] was advising Trudeau to raise your taxes, he made sure his own funds were stashed safely offshore and out of reach."

First, there is no evidence Carney was advising Trudeau to raise taxes, and second, the two funds Carney placed in a Bermuda tax haven for his former employer, Brookfield Asset Management, were green investments dedicated to transitioning to a net-zero economy. In other words, funds directed at a green future, not into his personal piggy bank.

This casual slander—and Conservatives like Jean Charest, or anyone who might have spoken to a Liberal in a Parliament Hill elevator, are not spared—was accompanied by one of Poilievre's simple, compelling policy proposals. He vowed to "shut down tax havens" which, though legal, smack of privilege and an uneven playing field: one for the rich who can avoid Canadian taxes and another for the small business person, or retired senior, diligently following the rules and paying every penny owed.

Poilievre's plan—getting an expert panel to identify loopholes, enriching an existing snitch line for whistleblowers, and "naming and shaming" multinationals who use the havens—have all been tried, or mooted, before, including by previous Conservative governments. They've also been a long-time target of the NDP. The use of tax havens exploded in the Harper years, continued to grow under Trudeau, and have survived several attempts by successive governments to curb the practice. The rich like them.

Will Poilievre succeed when others failed, or is he just highlighting the policy to embarrass Carney, who, for the record, shows no enthusiasm for fixing the seemingly intractable and global injustice? To be excessively charitable, maybe he hasn't yet learned to pretend.

The other echo chamber—not this one, the one that loves Poilievre—seems to buy into his simple remedies for complex problems, problems that are, incredibly, entirely the former Liberal government's fault. So Poilievre will fast-track large energy projects, getting provincial, First Nations, and private sector buy-in, and environmental assessment, in six months to a year. Why didn't someone think of that before? Same with those foreign-trained doctors driving Ubers: he'll have them out of their cabs and into operating rooms in no time, even though many of the roadblocks (provincial, professional associations, lack of funding, shortage of supervising physicians) are beyond federal control.

Poilievre is good at identifying problems that resonate with many Canadians, even if his language is often florid ("crime and chaos in our streets"). And Carney, while clearly more prime ministerial and ready to deal with Trump on equal footing, has not sealed the deal with some progressive voters.

It isn't just his seeming indifference to tax havens—not to protect his own holdings, but because "he knows the way the world works"—but Carney's pro-pipeline, pro-carbon capture boosterism that is troubling. He hardly mentions clean energy, he muses about smaller government, and sounds like the most conservative Liberal prime minister since Paul Martin.

If some voters want a conservative, but can't stand Poilievre, there is Carney. And if the Liberal leader gives progressive voters pause, he is still not driving them in numbers towards the NDP, or the Bloc, if polls are correct. Anecdotal, too, there appears to be a large contingent of voters—many of them women—who are flocking to the Liberal, any Liberal, to stop Poilievre. The sentiment seems to be: we'll deal with Carney later, let's first defeat Poilievre.

Why? They just don't like him: his sarcasm, his cockiness, his outlandish attacks, his vitriol.

Clearly, pivot or not, he couldn't care less.

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

Here's the best strategy Carney can follow negotiating with Trump



After studying Trump's dramatic tariff measures, Mark Carney's first major reaction was that the U.S. president has fundamentally changed the international trading system while at the same time asserting that Trump officials had professed to preserve a number of key elements of the commercial relationships between Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. Photographs courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, *The Hill Times*, and illustration by Joey Sabourin

All leaders across Canada should be working with each other and the federal government to build up a strong domestic economy in the same areas Mark Carney has promoted with the U.S.

Errol P. Mendes

Opinion



What is the best strategy that Prime Minister Mark Carney can follow in negotiating with a trade partner like United States President Donald Trump that ignores the global trade norms and America's domestic rule of law?

After studying Trump's dramatic tariff measures, Carney's first major reaction was that the U.S. president has fundamentally changed the international trading system while at the same time asserting that Trump officials had professed to preserve a number of key elements of the commercial relationships between Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.

However, the Trump tariffs that remain in place include those



on steel and aluminum, and also portions of the automobile and parts tariffs. While our nation escaped the massive so-called "reciprocal" tariffs Trump imposed on other countries, the remaining tariffs on cars and parts may be reduced perhaps to around 12.5 per cent if they can somehow be fitted into the USMCA trade treaty that Trump himself signed during his first presidency. How each vehicle qualifies for even the reduced tariff will be a paperwork nightmare, and could still lead to massive shutdowns and layoffs for a sector that relies on margins much less than 12.5 per cent.

In the opinion of this author, who for decades has studied and



Prime Minister Mark Carney noted the White House has warned that other sectors such as pharmaceuticals, lumber, and semiconductors could be hit by tariffs. He promised that we would fight back with counter measures, while protecting our workers, writes Errol Mendes. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Ontario Premier Doug Ford, right, has perhaps adopted one of the best strategies when, in going on Fox News and in talks with the Trump administration, he has advocated the idea of a "Fortress North America" writes Errol Mendes. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

taught global governance issues—including the multilateral legal system built up since the Second World War—one of Carney's critical reactions should be discussed further both in at home and abroad. He stressed that Trump has profoundly undermined one of the most important norms of the global trade regime, namely "the most favoured nation" commitment. This norm ensures that countries treat all their trading partners equally, meaning if one nation grants favourable trade terms to another, it must extend the same benefits to all World Trade Organization members. If the Trump administration continues to ignore this and other

essential norms established since the Second World War, the global trade regime starts to disappear, and it becomes the survival of the mightiest.

The challenge facing Carney is how to deal with someone who is supposed to lead the country that shaped the post-world global multilateral trading system, but who now essentially cares little for signed bilateral or multilateral trade treaties. Trump seems to care as little for the constitutional and trade policy safeguards in his own U.S. Congress in terms of improperly using national security to justify tariffs against Canada on the grounds of non-existent massive flows of fentanyl

and migrants into the U.S. Even a number of Republican Senators have teamed with the Democrats to condemn this narrative.

Much of Trump's tariff decisions could be part of a megalomaniacal and—in the view of some experts—irrational goal by the president to use the massive U.S. market to bring the world's trading and manufacturing nations to their knees, forcing them to abandon their manufacturing base and supply chain sectors, and to relocate them to the U.S. This illusionary dream could ultimately not only seriously damage the American economy, but—as the 1930s Smoot-Hawley tariffs in the U.S. that prolonged the Great Depression demonstrated—the Trump's shattering of global trading norms could push the world to another deep economic abyss.

Given such irrational foundations, what are some of the best strategies to be adopted by Canadian leaders for dealing with Trump in terms of negotiating better longer-term economic and security terms over the next two to four years—even while the negative impacts of the Trump global tariffs hit the North American and global economies? Perhaps Ontario Premier Doug Ford had already adopted one of the best strategies when, in going on Fox News and in negotiations with the Trump administration officials, he advocated the idea of a "Fortress North America." This goal would be with the U.S. being the prime benefactor of such an approach, built upon the existing CUSMA treaty Trump signed in his first administration.

This approach may well have prompted Trump not to impose what he calls "reciprocal" tariffs on Canada and Mexico as he has done with the rest of the trading world. If this approach was part of the damage control, perhaps Carney should create a Canada-U.S. critical minerals, artificial intelligence, housing, defence procurement and energy—both renewable and fossil fuels-based—fortress. The goal would be to combat the rise of the real adversaries of the democratic world, namely China, Russia (after the romance of Trump and Putin has ended) and its allies in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, all leaders across Canada should be working with each other and the federal government to build up a strong domestic economy in the same areas Carney has promoted with the U.S. At the same time, these leaders should also be seeking new or enhanced trade, defence, and political ties with Europe and other allies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa to lessen the reliance on America in case we have not seen the end of the Trump-MAGA legacy for many more elections and decades to come.

Professor Errol P. Mendes is editor-in-chief of the *National Journal of Constitutional Law*; president of the *International Commission of Jurists, Canadian Section*; and he teaches law at the University of Ottawa. *The Hill Times*

OPINION

2025 ELECTION

Canada's talent dilemma: how to win the global innovation and technology race

If Canada wants to compete globally in innovation and technology, it must do more than attract skilled talent—it must retain, integrate, and fully utilize their expertise. This requires not just expansion of immigration programs, but a comprehensive strategic approach to linking top talent, research institutions, and industry in a globally competitive ecosystem.

Jatin Nathwani & Münür Sacit Herdem

Opinion



History is shaped by individuals whose innovations transformed economies and societies. A select illustrative example includes luminaries—Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Steve Jobs, Marie Curie, Albert Einstein—whose ideas and contributions have left an indelible mark on global history. Talent alone is not enough, but it is an important harbinger of future potential. Where these brilliant minds chose to work, innovate, and build their legacies was critically dependent on whether the country offered them sanctuary, succor, and the right opportunities to flourish.

One recent example is Erdal Arikan, a pioneer in information



The question is not whether Canada has the talent, but whether we will do what it takes to keep it, and build robust bridges for those who wish to be part of a modern, tolerant pluralistic liberal democracy, write Jatin Nathwani and Münür Sacit Herdem. Image courtesy of Pixabay

theory who solved a long-standing problem in data transmission, laying the foundation for 5G technology. After graduating from two prominent American universities—Caltech and MIT—the United States failed to retain him due to visa complications. He returned to Turkey, where China swiftly recognized and leveraged his research, giving it a decisive edge over the U.S.

Such missed opportunities are a hallmark of impenetrable administrative protocols that amount to thick barriers to entry, and it is a stark warning of what can happen when a country fails to attract, retain, and fully utilize top talent.

Canada faces a similar dilemma. Although we may be viewed as a tolerant and a welcoming country, we must ask ourselves a hard question: are we truly a global magnet for innovators and creators? Do we have an effective ecosystem spread across the country at specific geographic nodes and research clusters for talent to thrive and turn ideas into

economic success? What barriers prevent our nation from winning the global innovation and technology race?

Barriers holding us back

Canada's established immigration programs to attract skilled talent all too often fall short of fully integrating newcomers into high-impact productive roles. More than a quarter of recent immigrants with a bachelor's degree or higher work in low-skilled jobs with minimal educational requirements. That is not just wasted potential, it's also a failure to capitalize on the talent that could drive innovation.

The problem goes even deeper. Recent government policies—ham-fisted as they are—compound the problem by capping international graduate students, and threatening to shrink the talent pipeline that has helped position Canada as a leader in AI. Think of Geoffrey Hinton and Raquel Urtasun—two immigrant scientists whose

work put Canada on the global innovation map. What happens if the next generation of top minds chooses to go elsewhere? As the U.S. turns inwards and becomes a hostile place for truly creative and talented individuals, is there an opportunity for Canada to roll out the welcome mat targeting such individuals?

Beyond attracting talent, a parallel problem is that we struggle to commercialize emergent ideas because of weak business strategies to be scaled for global platforms, inadequate marketing and sales capabilities, and poor intellectual property (IP) protections. We create world-class research in our publicly funded institutions of higher learning, but are not able to capture the fruits of those endeavours as other countries exploit the basic research and turn it into profitable enterprises.

Take AI patents developed by Canadians. Our firms don't own many—as they're snapped up by foreign companies and the economic gains drift elsewhere.

Canada's abysmal record of national economic productivity is well recognized, and is centre stage in the current political debates. How can we expect to compete, thrive, and improve our national productivity if we let homegrown IT-driven breakthroughs slip away?

Canada-EU talent hub: a solution for innovation leadership

If Canada wants to compete globally in innovation and technology, it must do more than attract skilled talent. We must retain, integrate, and fully utilize their expertise. This requires not just expansion of immigration programs, but also a comprehensive strategic approach to linking top talent, research institutions, and industry in a globally competitive ecosystem.

A Canada-European Union Talent Hub offers a bold solution. By establishing a structured transatlantic innovation corridor, this initiative would position Canada and the EU as global leaders in emerging technologies, reducing reliance on the U.S.

The zeitgeist of the day dictates a firm commitment and a strategy that is not just another talent exchange program. The goal at the core of immigration reform should provide a pathway for fast-track visas, joint innovation fellowships, startup accelerators, and direct industry-academia placements, ensuring that top researchers, engineers, and entrepreneurs can seamlessly move between Canada and the EU.

Beyond mobility, the hub would expand the mutual recognition of professional credentials—currently limited to fields like architecture—to include AI, clean-tech, and quantum computing. This would allow professionals in these high-impact sectors to work across both regions without regulatory barriers.

Most importantly, the Canada-EU Talent Hub would address this country's commercialization challenges directly. By fostering joint R&D centres, cross-border venture capital investment, and policy alignment on IP protection, this initiative would help home-grown innovations stay in Canada rather than be acquired by foreign firms.

This is more than talent flow—it is about keeping Canada in the global innovation race. If Canada and the EU seize this opportunity, we could build a powerful alternative to the dominant U.S.-China tech rivalry, securing their place at the forefront of the industries that will define the future.

The question is not whether Canada has the talent, but whether we will do what it takes to keep it and build robust bridges for those who wish to be part of a modern, tolerant pluralistic liberal democracy.

Jatin Nathwani is professor emeritus, management science and engineering, at the University of Waterloo, and is a fellow at the Balsille School of International Affairs (BSIA). Münür Sacit Herdem is a scholar and fellow at BSIA.

The Hill Times



As Prime Minister Mark Carney's visits to France and the U.K. reminded us, Canada's society and institutions have non-American roots. In a period of dislocation, we should rediscover them, writes Michael W. Manulak. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Rediscovering the Commonwealth foreign policy

The Commonwealth provides a means for re-engaging a wider spectrum of states. While this includes Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, all highly likeminded actors, it reaches well beyond. It is an institution that includes rising global powers, such as India, Malaysia, Nigeria, and South Africa. In a fractious, more dangerous world, these are relationships Canada needs to cultivate.

In a world of global transformation, Canada finds itself at a foreign policy crossroads. How should our country respond to the United States' shocking realignment? One path, the dominant one right now, focuses heavily on links with likeminded states. Intensified minilateral collaborations with other wealthy countries such as Germany and South Korea can help to fill part of the void left by the U.S. This approach makes sense, as far as it goes.

Yet, it is ill-suited to co-operation on problems of global scope, such as climate change. Indeed, recent U.S. behaviour threatens the very architecture of multilateralism. To best secure its national interests in broad-based co-operation and collective security, Canada needs to strengthen ties with a wider spectrum of states.

For decades now, our nation has neglected its links with countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Our two unsuccessful bids for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council illustrate the extent to which many of our diplomatic relationships have atrophied.

Critically, the federal government has lacked a framework for its global relations. In the past, the Commonwealth of Nations provided such a framework. It should again.

The Commonwealth is a global grouping of 56 countries from all the world's regions. At its core are shared language and traditions. Its Charter and declarations embody principles of democracy,

“PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE COMMONWEALTH DOES NOT INCLUDE CHINA, RUSSIA, OR THE UNITED STATES.”

human rights, and sustainable development. In a world where such values are under threat, a strengthened Commonwealth serves as a crucial means of reinforcing key international norms.

But isn't it a relic of the past? A vestige of British colonialism?

There is an element of truth here. It is partly for this reason that Canada—and many other countries—have relegated it to the second tier of diplomatic venues.

It need not be. In the current context, the Commonwealth should be re-imagined, reformed, and reconstituted as a vital international institution. It should then re-emerge as a core instrument of this country's foreign policy. It could cure much of what ails Canadian diplomacy.

Canada's international engagement has become one-dimensional: too focused on the United States and other G7 countries. Yet some of our most significant diplomatic successes have been achieved via the Commonwealth connection, including during the 1956 Suez crisis, and in helping to end South African apartheid.

The Commonwealth provides a means for re-engaging a wider spectrum of states. While this includes Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom—all highly likeminded actors—it reaches well beyond. It is an institution that includes rising global powers such as India, Malaysia, Nigeria, and South Africa. In a fractious, more dangerous world, these are relationships Canada needs to cultivate.

Such ties can reinforce a multilateral system under threat. They can be used to help maintain a world where the rule of law—rather than the rule of force—prevails.

Perhaps most importantly, the Commonwealth does not include China, Russia, or the United States. It offers much higher upside than more limited groupings, such as CANZUK.

It is not imperial nostalgia, therefore, that would rejuvenate the Commonwealth. It is pragmatism and enlightened self-interest. The Commonwealth—to a greater extent even than La Francopho-

nie—includes many of the world's fastest-growing economies. These countries are the future. More than 1.5 billion people between the ages of 15 and 29 live in Commonwealth countries. These nations are resource-rich, and have a growing middle class that could buy Canadian goods.

A common language and similar legal traditions occasion a long-heralded “Commonwealth advantage” in trade and investment. Yet, this advantage is largely unrealized. As our nation seeks urgently to diversify our trading relationships, Canada should strengthen intra-Commonwealth trade.

Thickened political and economic relations could help to tighten the Commonwealth into a dynamic, global bloc that includes 2.7 billion people. If this could be achieved, Canadians stand to benefit.

Such a grouping could pay dividends in the international promotion of democracy and human rights. The stronger these values are held globally, the stronger they will be held in our own country.

And, when your very sovereignty is threatened, it is nice to have friends. Last month, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group reiterated its “support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all member states.”

On climate change and environment, where global co-operation is facing real challenges, the Commonwealth can emerge as a venue for action. Commonwealth countries can do more to pursue nature-based solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate impacts. The Commonwealth's Blue Charter and Living Lands Charter should be bolstered and better-resourced.

And, as Prime Minister Mark Carney's visits to France and the U.K. reminded us, Canada's society and institutions have non-American roots. In a period of dislocation, we should rediscover them.

Michael W. Manulak is an associate professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University.

The Hill Times

Michael W. Manulak



COMMENT

2025 ELECTION



U.S. President Donald Trump, centre, Prime Minister Mark Carney, top left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. Trump's trade war has forced Canada to rethink its economic position in the world, but David Crane says Canada's political leaders are missing the mark with talk of accelerating oil and gas projects and critical minerals. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade, Wikimedia Commons, and Pixabay, and illustration by Joey Sabourin

Election campaign should be about creating a new economy, not extending and expanding the old one

So far, the politicians are letting us down. If the job of government is to represent the future to the present, they get a failing grade. But we will all be losers.

David Crane

Canada & the 21st Century



TORONTO—It has been said that if everyone thinks the same way, then no one is thinking. This might be said about our election campaign.

The solution to Canada's huge challenges, we are told by both Mark Carney and Pierre Poilievre, is to become an energy superpower, accelerating the development of oil and gas projects and critical mineral mines.

To be sure, there are important differences between the way the Liberals and Conservatives would accomplish this, with the Liberals acknowledging the climate

change impacts and the need to transition to a clean energy economy, while the Conservatives are in more of a rush to approve projects and lighten regulatory processes, with much less acknowledgment of the climate challenge.

Yet it is far from clear that investors share this enthusiasm and are willing to provide the capital for new oil and gas projects without generous taxpayer subsidies and guarantees, since projects may not be commercially viable on a stand-alone basis. Moreover, even with a light regulatory touch, projects can take many years to engineer and build, and can only do so if they get private-sector finance. Without long-term customer contracts showing a project can be viable over a 20-25 year life, it cannot be financed by private capital. Projects also have to take climate change into account.

Likewise, while Liberals and Conservatives point to possibilities in critical minerals—and some will be viable—to date the list of such potential projects is much smaller than the aspirational potential that is touted. Even with projects, they are unlikely to have much impact on our overall trade numbers.

To some extent this is a repeat of history. After the OPEC oil

embargoes and an oil crisis in the West in the early 1970s, the Pierre Trudeau government also set out to make Canada an energy superpower.

A pipeline—the Arctic Gas Pipeline—was to carry gas from the far north, Panarctic Oils was established to search for oil and gas in the Arctic, Petro-Canada was established. A Major Projects Task Force launched, and the first major oil sands facility, Syncrude, was built, with 30 per cent of the equity from the federal, Alberta and Ontario governments, along with major tax concessions from the federal government.

While the federal government could not find funds to advance Canada's science and technology capacity and its technological progress, it could find \$300-million in equity and huge tax concessions for Syncrude, and while Ontario could not find the money to upgrade technology in the province's engineering schools—they were still doing punch-card entry in their computer systems—it could find \$100-million for Syncrude. We paid a big price and lost many opportunities in new industries, new markets, and brain drain.

By allowing ourselves to be seduced by the idea that Canada's role in the world was simply to

be a raw materials or commodity producer, we limited our future potential. The danger is that we will make the same mistake again.

The more important election issue, if we are to become a more prosperous and independent nation with a high-value economy and diversified export markets, is how to build a more innovative and independent economy. We have to focus on technological progress and a future economy built around a new generation of Canadian companies that are based on knowledge, ideas and intellectual property. This is where we need much bolder thinking and action.

Statistics tell much of the story. Canada lags behind other advanced countries in research and development, a critical source of new ideas for a more competitive, innovative, and productive economy, one capable of generating good jobs and prosperity. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Canada currently ranks 23rd in R&D spending as a percentage of GDP among advanced and major developing nations.

In 2023, we spent 1.79 per cent of our economic output on R&D, compared to 3.45 per cent by the United States, 2.58 per cent by

China, and even more in other countries—6.26 per cent by Israel, 4.8 per cent by South Korea, and 3.60 per cent by Sweden. We have been stuck at a low level for many years—only Italy is lower in the G7—despite claims by various Canadian governments that their policies would put us among the five most innovative nations in the world. We have never come close.

A major factor is the low level of business in new knowledge. While Canadian businesses account for 47 per cent of R&D spending in Canada, and perform 59 per cent of all R&D, U.S. businesses are much more dynamic, funding 75 per cent of all U.S. R&D and performing 78 per cent.

If R&D spending is a key input for a successful innovation nation, productivity is a good measure of output. Not surprisingly, Canada lags here as well—ranking 18th in productivity as measured by the OECD. A report from Statistics Canada earlier this month showed the weak role of innovation in Canada. Multifactor productivity—a proxy for innovation and scale—declined by 1.7 per cent in our business sector in 2023. In fact, the contribution of innovation to productivity has been falling since 2000, and has been at zero growth or in decline over the past quarter century.

Not surprisingly, the growth rate of the economy has also declined. From 1980 to 2000, the economy grew at an annual average of 3.2 per cent, meaning it would double in just over 20 years. From 2000 to 2018, the economy has grown at an annual average of 1.8 per cent, meaning it would take about 40 years to double. Building another pipeline won't change that.

So this campaign should really be about creating a new economy, not extending and expanding the old economy. So far, the politicians are letting us down. If the job of government is to represent the future to the present, they get a failing grade. But we will all be losers.

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

The Hill Times

Campaigns quick to cut ties with candidates, have 'less tolerance' for controversy, in the age of social media, say politicians

Candidates now campaign 'on their resumé and a record of drunk tweets and Facebook impulses,' says political commentator Scott Reid.

Continued from page 1

said in barroom conversations transcribed and available for public domain, a lot of candidates would probably get rejected for things they've said, too," he said.

Alex Marland, Jarislowsky Chair in Trust and Political Leadership at Acadia University and co-author of *Inside the Campaign: Managing Elections in Canada*, said that dropping candidates has become a norm in elections, with parties growing more cautious over time, "and it's really connected to social media, for information to be unearthed and then circulate [quickly] and cause embarrassment."

Political commentator Scott Reid said the volume of candidates being removed in this campaign suggests the "standard for dumping a candidate has shifted," and that the risks are now more pronounced because "there's a greater catalogue of history with online commentary."

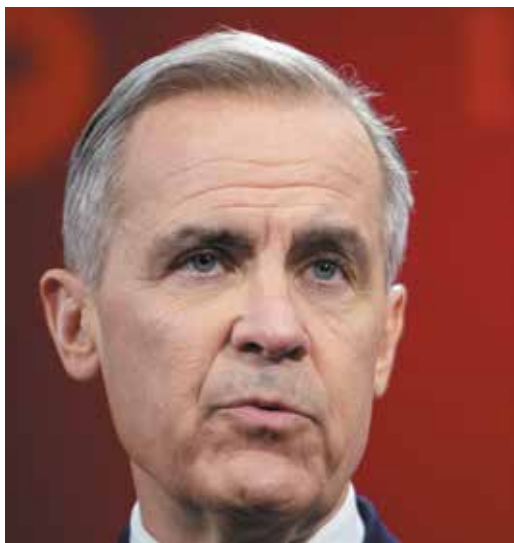
"It used to be that people would campaign on the resumé. Now they campaign on their resumé and a record of drunk tweets and Facebook impulses," Reid said.

"Do we now have a better opportunity to judge people at their worst moments than we ever have before? Probably. Does that give us a distorted notion of what some candidates are all about? In some instances. Does it also reveal people's judgment? That's why the 'when' is so important," Reid said.

"Was this something that somebody said when they were shit-faced in second-year university at 11 o'clock at night, or is this a view that they held and repeated and reinforced multiple times over many years? And that's all part of the subjective evaluation that's being undertaken now," he added.

Who has been dropped so far?

Chandra Arya, a Liberal backbench MP who was re-seeking



Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's campaigns dropped several candidates during the first part of the election campaign. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

election in the Ottawa riding of Nepean, Ont., was not cleared as a candidate, which made room for Prime Minister Mark Carney to run for his seat. The party hasn't said why Arya—first elected in 2015—was not allowed to run. *The Globe and Mail* reported his ouster was due to alleged foreign-interference concerns involving India, which Arya denies.

Former Liberal MP Paul Chiang who was seeking re-election in the Toronto-area riding Markham-Unionville, Ont., had to withdraw from the race following days of controversy surrounding his comments to Chinese-language media that people should take Joe Tay, a Conservative candidate running in the Toronto riding of Don Valley North, to the Chinese consulate to collect a bounty.

Rod Loyola, the former Liberal candidate in Edmonton, was dropped a few days later after remarks from a 2009 video surfaced in which he appeared to praise Hezbollah and Hamas, both of which are designated as terrorist organizations in Canada. Loyola, who left his seat as an NDP MLA to run federally, later told CBC News that he condemns terrorism, regardless of who commits it. He also said that he had been upfront about his stance on Palestine and emphasized his commitment to "fight for the rights of Palestinians, always."

Mark McKenzie, Conservative candidate for Windsor-Tecumseh-Lakeshore, Ont., and city councillor, was the first one to be dropped from the campaign for expressing support for death penalty and suggesting former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau should be executed speaking in a 2022 podcast. When asked about the incident during a campaign

stop in Kingston, Ont. Poilievre said his leadership has "zero tolerance for anyone who acts unacceptably," and claimed their vetting process is "stronger than all the other parties."

The Conservatives dropped four more candidates within the span of days. Simon Payette, the candidate nominated in Bethier-Maskinongé, Que., who accused Liberal candidate and 1989 École Polytechnique shooting survivor Nathalie Provost of using the incident to advance her cause.

Former Tory candidate Don Patel, who was running in Etobicoke North, Ont., was dropped after it came to light that he had endorsed a social media post calling for "certain" people to be deported to India.

Stefan Marquis, who was running in the Montreal riding Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que., was reportedly booted for his social media posts which included conspiracy theories on COVID-19 vaccines, the World Economic Forum, and the invasion of Ukraine.

Another former Conservative Laurence Singh, who was set to run in the Vancouver riding of New Westminster-Burnaby-Maillardville, B.C., was reportedly dropped due to his previous comments concerning the Chinese government on a podcast four years ago.

Former NDP candidate Brendan Mosher, who was running in Nova Scotia riding of Chester-St. Margarets left the race after the official nomination deadline. A statement from the NDP said Mosher stepped down "for personal reasons," and that a new candidate, Hayden Henderson, is running in Mosher's place.

However, Elections Canada's official list shows Henderson is running as an independent, which

according to the NDP is due to the rules not allowing the party to endorse a new candidate after the deadline. "[Henderson] has our full support. He's a strong voice for our values and a proud part of our team," said the statement.

'Record of drunk tweets and Facebook impulses'

Politicos agreed that campaigning in the social media era, where candidates are more visible, accessible, and prone to scrutiny, every misstep is amplified, and even minor gaffes can turn into bigger controversies. This forces party leadership to sometimes prioritize caution over loyalties. And as the race tightens and the margin for error narrows, parties are becoming increasingly risk-averse.

"Any day you're talking about whether or not you should fire a candidate is a day you've lost talking about policy, or talking about something that you want to talk about," said Marland.

Former Conservative adviser Tim Powers said it's likely that more candidates will be dropped in future elections due to their past online behaviour given they grew up using social media, so they will have to practice caution. "You may have said things you regret that don't reflect what you [mean] or you just said something dumb and stupid, and guess what that's gonna come get you at some juncture, so be careful."

Arnold noted that each case is unique, which makes it hard to apply a definitive criteria for dropping candidates, and also why these situations often aren't resolved right away.

Reid noted that there are several subjective questions defining the fate of a candidate, such as how offensive the statements

were at the time they were made, what are their chances of success or their significance in the riding they run, and how deeply they are connected to the party hierarchy and the leader.

Marland said it is a difficult process, because when controversial information surfaces about a candidate, it doesn't automatically disqualify them, so it is often about how the public reacts to it and how the candidate and leader handle it, he explained.

"Sometimes [the party leader] can stand up for the person to say, 'Listen, this happened years ago, it's not the same person anymore. They've learned from it.' And then other times, for whatever reason, everybody agrees this person has to go," Marland said.

That willingness for a leader to stick their neck out also depends on who the candidate is, politicians agree.

"Maybe you said something entirely defensible, but good luck getting them to defend you unless you're a superstar candidate and they knew this was coming, they're prepared for it," Powers said.

Andrew Lawton, a Conservative candidate for Elgin-St. Thomas-London South, Ont., and Poilievre biographer, is one of the candidates under scrutiny as a London-based advocacy group fighting Islamophobia is calling on the Conservative Party to remove the candidate over his past comments Muslim community, women, and 2SLGBTQ+ groups.

Both Carney's initial "willingness to tolerate" Chiang, which Reid deemed irrational, and Poilievre's decision to not drop Lawton, who Reid says is "tight" with the party leadership, serve as examples of this.

"Anyone who looks at which candidates have been dumped, and which candidates have been retained, searching for a pristine logic and a set of standards will be sorely disappointed. They don't exist," Reid said.

To surrender a candidate is to surrender a seat

Politicos say campaign war rooms actively work to vet their own candidates while also digging for dirt on the opposition—most of which is often held back until later in the race to cause maximum damage.

Now that the nomination deadline has passed, "to surrender a candidate is to surrender a seat. And that changes the calculus," Reid said.

Arnold referenced the last election, where two Liberal candidates were dropped after the nomination deadline—one in Kitchener Centre, where they lost a seat they might have won, and another in Toronto, where the candidate became an independent, essentially costing the party two MPs. "That will impact the willingness, I think, of leaders, to stick by their candidates," he said.

Arnold speculated that there could be more candidate controversies to come. "It wouldn't surprise me if there's at least one or two people that get dropped to the stage in the game," he said.

ikoca@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Carney's driving Grits' momentum, but polls suggest Tories hold upper hand in 'commitment gap'

Angus Reid's poll released last week found that 46 per cent of respondents planned to vote Liberal and 36 per cent planned to vote Conservative. But that 10-point spread is reversed for committed voters, and Angus Reid Institute's Shachi Kurl said the challenge for the Liberals is to ensure that voting intention becomes a reality.

BY CHRISTOPHER GULY

As the Liberals maintained about a 10-point lead against the Conservatives in an Angus Reid Institute survey last week, the Grits were also closing what the pollster called the "commitment gap" between them and the Tories.

The results of the online poll, involving 2,184 Canadians and released on April 7, found that 46 per cent of respondents planned to vote Liberal compared to 36 per cent who would cast their ballots for the Conservatives—positioning the governing party for a fourth consecutive term in office, and with a majority in the House of Commons seats based on the Liberals' performance in seat-rich provinces.

However, that 10-point spread is reversed in terms of committed voters. Seventy-two per cent of Conservative supporters said they were "very committed" to voting Conservative, while 62 per cent of Liberals felt the same way about their party—or a 13-point increase from when Prime Minister Mark Carney called the general election on March 23.

During that time, the "mushiness" of committed Liberal voters has begun to "solidify," said Sha-



Prime Minister Mark Carney is driving the Liberals' momentum, but the challenge for the Liberals is to ensure that voting intention becomes a reality, says Angus Reid Institute president Shachi Kurl. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

chi Kurl, president of the Angus Reid Institute.

The shift began just days into the campaign, when the Angus Reid Institute found a significant pool of "Liberal switchers," particularly 35 per cent who moved their support to the Liberals from the NDP, as a survey released on March 27 found. Another Angus Reid poll, released three days before, reported that half of 2021 voters intended to vote for the Grits.

Also of significance: 29 per cent of Liberal switchers previously supported the Conservatives, according to the March 27 poll, which also tracked the two top reasons for the Liberal gains.

More than half—56 per cent—said it was Carney becoming party leader. Not far behind, at 51 per cent, was U.S. President Donald Trump's attacks on Canada via his administration's imposition of tariffs and his dreams of annexation.

The challenge for the Liberals is to ensure that voting intention becomes a reality, said Kurl.

She noted that the Conservatives "have a super-enthusiastic base, very motivated not only voting Conservative because they like Pierre Poilievre and what he stands for, but also because they are very motivated to see a change in government after almost a decade of the Liberals in power."

Beyond Carney and Trump, Canadians are also considering the Liberals—based on the so-called "ABC" or "Anyone but

Conservative" factor—to "stop Pierre Poilievre from becoming prime minister," said Kurl. Angus Reid found 30 per cent of Liberal switchers were in the ABC camp.

Carney is driving the Liberals' momentum.

Fifty-five per cent of respondents in the recent Angus Reid survey said they had a favourable view of Carney; 38 per cent had an unfavourable view.

Sentiments toward Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre trended in the opposite direction.

Sixty-per-cent of Canadians said they had an unfavourable view of the Conservative leader compared to 34 per cent who view him favourably.

Kurl said that when the Liberals won the 2015 federal election and formed a majority government, their victory included votes from Conservatives disaffected by their party, which had been in power for nearly a decade at the time.

"There is a segment in the population that believes strongly in change," she explained.

But until the recent change in leadership for the Liberals, their party drove the desire for change, which in part was accomplished with Justin Trudeau's departure as prime minister and Liberal leader, said Kurl.

But she added that "real problems, like housing affordability, the cost of living, inflation, and low productivity numbers remain."

"What has improved, in a very short period of time, is belief in a

Liberal government to address or change those things, and a lot of that has to do with people looking at Mark Carney and saying, 'He appears to be a qualified leader.'"

In Angus Reid's recent survey, 50 per cent of respondents said that Carney would make the best prime minister. Only 28 per cent felt the same way about Poilievre, whose biggest support came from men 35 years of age and older.

Along gender lines, the Conservatives—at 44 per cent—only have a lead over the Liberals—at 40 per cent—in the 35-54 age group for men, based on Angus Reid's latest numbers.

"The Conservatives, pre-dating Pierre Poilievre, have long had a problem attracting female voters," explained Kurl, who noted that it hasn't gotten better under Poilievre's leadership.

While he might resonate with young male voters—"leaning into bro energy, crypto, Bitcoin and that Jordan Peterson interview [posted online earlier this year], those are things that really turn a lot of women off," said Kurl.

She said that "when women were starting to come around to the Conservative Party—predominantly women between the ages of 35 and 54 last year—because of cost-of-living issues around the household purse" involving rising grocery prices, rent and mortgage payments, "Pierre Poilievre chronically struggled with net-positive favourability in our surveys."

"Even though women were prepared to look at his party as an alternative to the Liberals, it's

not like they ever warmed up to him personally—and he's paying for that now," said Kurl, who also doesn't think Poilievre's party has fully gotten the message about its situation in the polls.

"When you hear Conservative strategists saying, 'It's not that bad, it's not that terrible, we're mostly holding onto our traditional base.' Sure, yes that's true. They haven't lost that much, they haven't imploded," she said. "But they've lost enough to fundamentally change their situation in this moment from cruising to what would have been a parliamentary victory to having to measure every vote," said Kurl.

In an Angus Reid Institute poll released on Dec. 30, the Conservatives were in super-majority territory with 45 per cent support, compared to the Liberals at 11 per cent and were even trailing the NDP, now at seven per cent.

While the Tories held one of the largest campaign events in Canadian history—attracting about 12,000 people by Conservative Party estimates to an April 7 rally in Edmonton featuring former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper—Poilievre's team had more than a comfortable lead in Alberta with 54 per cent support, or nearly 20 points ahead of Team Carney at 35 per cent in Angus Reid's latest survey.

But as that poll illustrated, it's in Canada's four major metropolitan centres where the Conservatives, at 36 per cent, were trailing the Liberals at 46 per cent overall.

The gap between both parties in each of the four cities is sizable. In the 905 zone outside Toronto, the Liberals had 55 per cent support with the Conservatives at 38 per cent.

In Toronto, the Grits enjoyed a bigger lead at 64 per cent support compared to the Tories at 25 per cent. At 52 per cent, the Liberals also outpaced the Conservatives at 27 per cent in Vancouver.

In Montreal, it was almost no contest between both parties. The Tories had 16 per cent support; the Liberals: 50 per cent support. The Bloc Québécois, at 24 per cent, was in second place.

As Kurl told *The Hill Times*: "The Liberals have reset the dynamics of this campaign in the cities."

Their challenge, especially among younger voters, will be to get their supporters to the ballot boxes.

However, the significance of the upcoming election might serve as a motivator for voters.

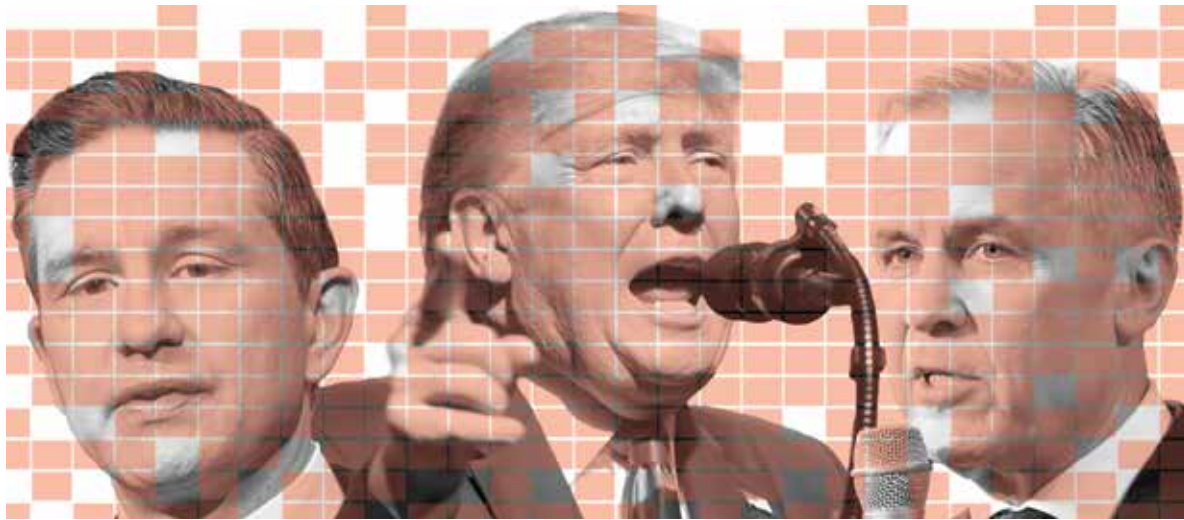
In an Angus Reid Institute survey released on March 24, 79 per cent of Liberal supporters said this year's national vote was "way more important" than the one in 2021. Not far behind were Conservative supporters, 76 per cent of whom felt the same way.

As Kurl outlined, "Conservative supporters think it's very, very important not to give the Liberals a fourth term. Many Liberal supporters believe it's important to elect someone who is best to stand up to Trump, and also to prevent Pierre Poilievre from forming government."

"Everyone's got their reasons," she added, "but that would suggest a higher turnout."

The Hill Times

Cost of living, housing the top priority for young voters, not Trump



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, left, and Prime Minister Mark Carney, right, are fighting in a campaign where the electorate is focused on who can best handle U.S. President Donald Trump. But that's not the chief concern for young voters, according to a new poll. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade, Sam Garcia, and courtesy of Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia Commons, illustration by Neena Singhal

In a federal election dominated by trade and sovereignty, generation Z is prioritizing affordability when casting their ballots, a recent Abacus Data poll suggests.

BY ELEANOR WAND

Young voters' top priorities are not being addressed by federal leaders most focused on proving their party is best equipped to tackle the Canada-U.S. trade war and sovereignty threats, observers say. While those issues are a main concern for middle-aged and older Canadians, they aren't shared to the same degree among Canada's youngest generation of voters, a recent Abacus Data poll reveals.

Generation Z—which Abacus classifies as voters under the age of 30—places cost of living as a top issue (46 per cent), followed by housing affordability (33 per cent), according to a survey tracking more than 3,200 respondents released on April 5. Dealing with U.S. President Donald Trump ranks a distant third in importance among 23 per cent—which amounts to a 15-point gap between generation Z and other voters polled, with baby boomers listing Trump as their top issue by a significant margin.

There are a few different reasons for this divide, experts say. One factor is that young voters, unlike older Canadians, have not experienced previous trade

disagreements with the U.S., and therefore may be less motivated by trade threats, said Laura Stephenson, a political science professor at Western University and co-director of the Consortium on Electoral Democracy.

"The thing for young people is that they haven't lived through these kind of crises in the past, whereas older people have," she said. "[Older people] remember what happened with the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement after 1988. They remember the adjustments after."

The 1988 bilateral agreement phased out a number of barriers to free trade between Canada and the U.S. over a 10-year period, but was subject to criticism by those who were concerned the agreement could weaken the Canadian economy and result in job loss and dependency on the Americans. While the agreement resulted in increased trade, it had little impact on long-term cumulative earnings.

Affordability is also at the forefront of younger voters' minds simply because their future is the most likely to be affected by the housing crisis and the uncertain job market. Many generation Z and millennial Canadians increasingly fear that home ownership is unattainable—yet 84 per cent still consider home ownership a priority, an August 2024 Royal LePage survey found.

Both the Conservatives and the Liberals plan to cut GST from the sale of some new housing. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has promised to remove GST from all new homes under \$1.3-million, whereas Liberal Leader and Prime Minister Mark Carney plans to remove the tax for all first-time homebuyers. The NDP is taking a different route—their pitch is low-interest public-backed mortgages.

On March 31, Carney also unveiled a housing plan aimed at doubling the number of housing developments built annually in Canada. The plan involves the creation of a new federal housing entity—Build Canada Homes—that would oversee the development of affordable housing and accelerate construction. The NDP has also committed to building more housing. NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said he wants to build three million new homes by 2030 by training more skilled trades workers, speeding up construction, and incentivizing municipalities to build more.

"The cost of living hits everybody," Stephenson said. "But for a young person starting out who's thinking forward to their future, the idea that things are so rough—how are they going to be able to save for a house? And is a house even a realistic goal anymore? These kinds of frustrations, I think, are motivating them to a great extent."

The patriotism divide

Patriotism is another dividing generational factor among Canadians, which may be skewing how different demographics perceive threats to Canadian sovereignty, Stephenson said. A February Angus Reid poll found a significant drop in the number of people "very proud" to be Canadian. The percentage tanked from 78 to 34 per cent comparing 1985 to 2024, but saw a rise to 44 per cent this past February as U.S. threats increased. As of the February updated figures, 53 per cent of respondents under the age of 35 said they were proud of their nationality, compared to the 81 per cent of those over the age of 55.

"Older people have a bit different attachment to Canada," Stephenson explained. "I mean,

coming for your sovereignty—if you have been a proud Canadian all your life, it's different than for a young person who doesn't have quite as much of an attachment."

One of the reasons for decreased patriotism can be traced back to the ideology espoused by the Trudeau Liberals, Stephenson said. In 2015, then-prime minister Justin Trudeau famously said Canada could be the "first postnational state," saying "there is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada." Many young Canadians grew up under Trudeau's government, influenced by a perspective that national pride wasn't "fundamental," Stephenson noted.

"When you're in a society like that, the challenge is that you lose a bit of pride in the nation. Without a clear identity, it would be unclear what people might be trying to stand for," she said, making sovereignty less of a motivating factor at the ballot box for young people.

Though affordability remains a top concern for all ages, this election cycle has been dominated by the state of Canada-U.S. relations, meaning very few campaigns are addressing younger voters' priorities—even if some policies may be beneficial to youth, said Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, a professor of political studies at Queen's University.

"The Liberals and Conservatives are promising to cut the tax rate on the lowest income bracket, which would result in nice savings, and youth disproportionately fall into that," Goodyear-Grant said. "But even then, I don't see it being framed or targeted towards youth in particular."

Poilievre has promised to cut income tax by 15 per cent, including by bringing the lowest income bracket down from 15 per cent to 12.75 per cent. The Liberals have pledged a similar tax cut with their plan to reduce the marginal tax rate for the lowest income bracket by one per cent.

Lower voter turnout among young Canadians

The decision not to focus on engaging younger voters is partly strategic. Young Canadians tend to vote at a far lower rate, leading campaigns to often focus their efforts on the older voters they can count on to show up to the polls.

A notable exception to this was Trudeau's 2015 election campaign, when the overall voter turnout for youth aged 18 to 24 was about 57 per cent—an 18-point rise compared to 2011. Trudeau's success in mobilizing young voters has been widely remarked on, but the spike did not last. In 2019, turnout among youngest Canadians fell to around 54 per cent, dropping by a further 10 points to about 47 per cent in 2021. General voter turnout for each of these elections, on the other hand, was above 60 per cent.

Goodyear-Grant highlighted that even the Conservatives, who have been gaining support specifically among young men in previous years, have few

campaign promises specifically geared towards them.

"They are obviously appealing to open doors—middle-aged and older—like relief on capital gains," she said. "But how many young voters under the age of 29 are in the category of wondering what to do with their capital gains?"

The Conservatives have also promised to cut income taxes for seniors earning up to \$34,000 a year. Julie Simmons, an associate professor of political science at the University of Guelph, said she thinks the plan showcases a lack of focus on the interests of young Canadians.

"He wants to give a tax break to senior citizens so that they have more money to spend on their grandchildren or to take a vacation," Simmons said. "To me, that doesn't demonstrate a lot of empathy for younger taxpayers who are paying for [Old Age Security] payments ... through their taxes, and who are trying to make that down payment for that first house."

Young people tend to be a more progressive voter base, yet 31 per cent of gen Z are polling for the Conservatives, according to an Abacus poll, with 35 per cent intending to vote Liberal, and 12 per cent intending to vote NDP. This is a much tighter race than among boomers—where Liberals are leading with 38 per cent of the vote—and could be attributed to the rise in support for the populist right, said Goodyear-Grant.

"The Conservatives have, over time, been doing a lot better among youth than has historically been true, especially with young men," Goodyear-Grant said. "But it's funny, I don't see a lot in this platform that would actually speak to that demographic of voters. So, I don't know if they're just counting on or assuming the support of this group, or what."

Young people 'need to be at the table'

This is something Young Politicians of Canada—created to engage youth in politics—aims to change. Sixteen-year-old Jaden Braves, who founded the non-profit last year, released a report last week on young voters' federal election priorities, urging politicians to take them seriously.

"We're not seen as the demographic voter that's needed to win an election," Braves said at a Parliament Hill press conference.

The report listed 11 priorities, derived from roundtables and consultations held across Canada with almost 4,000 youth, including housing affordability, the climate crisis, unemployment and improved career opportunities. Braves said it is imperative—now more than ever—that young people use their voice and get involved in politics.

"It's our future. The decisions that are being made today are going to have a larger impact tomorrow," Braves said. "Young people need to get into these issues, make sure politicians are being held accountable, and make sure we're actually at the table."

The Hill Times

FEATURE

Tête-à-tête with TikTokers going viral

With party campaigns largely staying off the platform, micro influencers have filled the vacuum, says social media strategist Harneet Singh.

BY RIDDHI KACHHELA

Public perception can play a big role in a general election, and thousands of Canadians are turning to social media influencers to help shape their opinions on party leaders and their platforms. Their videos reach audiences that many mainstream news outlets are missing, and speak politics in a language they say is more palatable to users.

One such platform is TikTok, reaching about 14 million users in Canada each month. After Meta’s ban of hosting Canadian news on its platforms in August 2023, a report by Media Ecosystem Observatory this March found that social engagement with Canadian news media has seen a marked shift with TikTok replacing Facebook and Instagram as an important platform for Canadians to discuss politics.

It was among the platforms that United States President Donald Trump deployed during that country’s election last year, posting to his more than 15 million followers, getting millions of views on his channel during the campaign. In Canada, TikTok has not been similarly adopted by political parties primarily because of the app’s security concerns and its parent company, ByteDance’s, links with the Communist Party of China.

Last November, the Canadian government ordered ByteDance

to shut its offices in the country, but the app was allowed to continue. Individual Canadian creators have taken over the political content space on the platform, and during the snap election, many have amped up their messaging with some offering factual analysis blended with opinion.

Harneet Singh, a managing principal at EOK Consults and social media strategist, told *The Hill Times* that while safety concerns around TikTok are legitimate, he believes it is a “missed opportunity” for political leaders this election to leave the platform out of their campaign strategies. The federal NDP and some provincial New Democrat parties maintain a presence, but the other political parties are largely absent.

Voters between 18 to 35 years of age, who typically have a lower turnout during elections, could especially be a good audience for parties to target on TikTok, said Singh. A 2024 survey by Pollara of 3,500 adult Canadians found about 33 per cent respondents said they get their news from social media. About 57 per cent of these respondents were Gen Z, 42 per cent were millennials, and 32 per cent were Gen X.

“TikTok is also one of the most-used search engines in the world,” he said. “Especially when you talk about newcomers and first-time voters, they go on TikTok to learn about the country and lifestyle ... so there is actually a chance to attract a lot of new voters there.”

Singh said “micro influencers” have filled the vacuum created in the absence of official party channels and Canadian mainstream media outlets. There is a good mix of them offering perspectives on all sides of the political spectrum, with channels pulling thousands to millions of followers and likes. Among the popular Canadian names creating traction for political content are Rachel Gilmore,

Cole Bennett, Elle James, Mario Zelaya, Jasmin Laine, and Sonduren Fanarredha. *The Hill Times* spoke to the creators behind four popular accounts—all of whom said they don’t work with any political party—to find out what drives them to talk politics, praise some political figures, and critique the others.

Elle James
Channel: Shameless Elle
1 million followers,
19 million likes



Elle James garnered a huge fan base with her comedic videos before she transitioned to using her platform to share her political views. Photograph courtesy of Elle James

When British Columbia-based creator Elle James first started posting in 2020, she did not intend to be a voice promoting the Liberal Party. But since Mark Carney won the leadership race in March, she has turned her attention to Canada’s electoral future.

Politics wasn’t always an area of interest for James, though she now likes to call herself a Liberal. The 40-year-old has never voted in a federal election before, but decided to cast her ballot for Carney in the March 9 contest alongside 86 per cent of the Liberal membership.

On her channel, which has one million followers and 19 million likes as of April 7, she talks about policies proposed by both the Liberals and the Conservatives, and topics like Indigenous and women’s reproductive rights. She also dissects conspiracy theories floating online, including reviewing artificially created images linking Carney to Jeffery Epstein.

Since the election was announced on March 23, James has released 20 videos, that fetched at least 1.7 million views as of April 9.

Her transition from making funny viral videos to political commentary came after watching Trump win the American election for a second term, and in response to the policies that followed.

“Every day since Donald Trump’s inauguration, I have been in disbelief as to what has happened. I can’t even begin to imagine what some of these people are going through,” she said.



“The deportation of immigrants just breaks my heart.”

“I just kept thinking, what if that happens in Canada? What if we get a prime minister that sells us out to the United States?”

Some of her friends are immigrants, and James said spreading awareness about political leaders, their policies, and track records was her way of standing up for them.

“I won’t be able to look them in the eye and say I did nothing ... and that was just kind of it for me,” she said of the shift in her content. “I have a platform and I have a voice, and I can say something to try to stop this from potentially happening.”

She disapproves of Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, describing his campaign as one built on “hate and a broken Canada.”

Poilievre’s association with the convoy protest, his views towards transgender people and Indigenous rights, and his stance on abortions are some examples James cited that framed her negative opinion of him.

One of her recent videos has a “slogan poem” invoking Poilievre’s oft-used “axe the tax” and “boots not suits” catchphrases. It got about 43,000 views, and around 300 shares, with several viewers agreeing on her take, and some defending Poilievre.

Endorsing political views on social media can come at a cost, and creators like James often have hate and threats targeted at them. Female creators, especially, can have a harder time sharing political opinions online, James noted. Some of the hateful comments label her as “dumb” and question her authenticity, she said.

“I also represent a lot of people that are too scared to use their voice ... and I just want to make it

easier for people to find the truth about things, to navigate through misinformation.”

James claimed that a majority of her videos are watched by people over the age of 35. On her Instagram channel, however, she said the views are higher among those younger than 34 years old.

Her sense of humour is one of the main through-lines in her work. Entertaining content works best on TikTok, noted Singh.

“For any content influencer on Tiktok or video-first platforms, being entertaining or informative are the two prime choices,” he said.

Sonduren Fanarredha
Channel: Life with Sonduren
97,000 followers,
2 million likes

For Sonduren Fanarredha, growing car thefts and home invasions—both in his Oakville,



Sonduren Fanarredha started off making videos about cars, but now uses his channel to encourage people to vote for Conservatives this election. Photograph courtesy of Sonduren Fanarredha

Some of the major Canadian Tik Tokers making political content		
Channel name	Number of followers	Number of likes
Shameless Elle	1,000,000	19,000,000
Mario Zelaya	245,000	13,000,000
JB—Canadian Politics	227,000	6,000,000
Rachel Gilmore	172,000	4,000,000
Cole.NotCole	153,000	3,000,000
Frank Domenic	127,000	11,000,000
Jennifer—Indig Politico	111,000	5,000,000
Life with Sonduren	97,000	2,000,000
Lisa	96,000	4,000,000
Dylan Homer	90,000	10,000,000
Jasmin Laine	65,000	1,000,000
Vivian Kaye	46,000	2,000,000
Canuck	36,000	967,000
Jaw-Knee	33,000	632,000

Source: TikTok

for their political content this election



The Hill Times spoke with four Canadian TikTokers who are talking politics this election: Cole Bennett, left, Jasmin Laine, Elle James, and Sonduren Fanarredha. Photographs courtesy of Cole Bennett, Jasmin Laine, Elle James, and Sonduren Fanarredha. Illustration by Naomi Wildeboer



Cole Bennett said his aim is to make sure people know the right facts and cut down disinformation on the platform. Photograph courtesy of Cole Bennett

first started making annexation threats last year as the then-incoming president increasingly referenced Canada as the 51st state.

The Alberta resident said seeing the level of disinformation on social media spurred him to action, sending the 27-year-old down a path to uncover truth.

"I watch a lot of the news and, like, especially when we are talking about Trump... There's so much that gets said that's not true or that needs context. And so that's where I was kind of coming from at the start," said Bennett, who launched his channel, COLE.NOTCOLE, in August 2024.

Since Carney triggered the snap election on March 23, Bennett has made 31 videos garnering 18 millions views until April 9.

But this wasn't his first time dabbling in the content space. Bennett covered politics on TikTok years ago, he revealed, and briefly created videos on Alberta's provincial election in spring 2023 on another channel. But he stopped after receiving hate for his opinions at the time.

Growing up in Manitoba, Bennett worked in agriculture and described himself as a "farm kid." As years passed, he started taking an interest in politics and talking about current affairs.

His videos now are much more detailed and regular, with commentary on the latest political happenings every day. He also has a Substack channel, and a daily newsletter in which he rounds up the major headlines and gives an analysis of a top story.

Geared more towards the Liberals, his content promotes Carney as the election front-runner and debunks claims made by the Conservatives.

In a recent video, he talked about Carney's new housing plan and what it means for Canadians, pulling 91,000 views, and some 13,000 likes.

"For me, personally, this is what I am voting for...this is change," he declared, to which a user with a top comment said:

"Mark Carney is the man with the brains and know how!"

While Bennett said he sees himself as more of an "NDP person," he views some candidates, like Carney, as "more suited for the job."

On the topic of Conservatives and their appeal among younger voters, Bennett said he suspects many people his age align with Tory messaging due to issues, like affordability. To him, a party's track record is an important factor in deciding who to vote for and propaganda online could skew people's views on that.

That's where he said he believes creators like him can bridge the gap by meeting people where they are.

"Obviously my content leans left, but you have to use factual information to back that up as to why you think that," he said. "There's a lot of people that like to go down that conspiracy theory route ... they use inflated numbers, or they don't give the real numbers ... And I think that can be kind of risky."

His audience is spread out, with people from various age groups across Canada tuning in, he said. But being a progressive himself, he attracts users who are likeminded.

JASMIN LAINE
Channel: Jasmin Laine
65,000 followers,
1 million likes



Jasmin Laine said she started making political content to make people with similar views as her feel less alone. Photograph courtesy of Jasmin Laine

Jasmin Laine has worked in mainstream media for several years, but the 28-year-old Manitoban said she left it to pursue "something more honest and independent."

Her channel, originally launched in October 2020, is now more right-leaning and promotes Poilievre because she said he "offers real solutions to real problems, especially for working-class Canadians and small businesses."

"I believe the Conservative Party—under Pierre Poilievre—has struck a chord with Canadians who are tired of rising costs, government overreach, and

institutional censorship," she told *The Hill Times* by email.

In one of her recent videos—which received more than 233,000 views and 16,000 likes—she dissected why she thinks the 25-per-cent U.S. tariffs on the auto industry are not a big threat for Canada, saying they apply to the non-U.S. portion of vehicles.

A most-liked comment on it said: "Trump and the USA are not Canada's enemy. Canadian government is."

Laine has produced 15 videos since the election was announced, that got her 859,000 views as of April 9.

In her email, Laine shared that she has always been passionate about political and social issues, and noticed that there were not many female creators sharing commentary about these topics.

While her channel initially contained non-political content, Laine started commenting regularly on politics last October, with one video questioning whether eliminating the the consumer carbon tax would change prices.

Since then, she has regularly done videos fact-checking claims made by Liberals, giving a gist of latest headlines, and defending conservative leaders like Alberta Premier Danielle Smith.

Her audience, she added, is primarily between 18 and 35 years of age, many of whom are "politically curious but disillusioned with mainstream news" in her view.

"They're looking for content that feels real, honest, and not condescending. I think the casual tone of my videos makes politics feel more approachable for a lot of younger Canadians who might otherwise tune out," said Laine.

Through her channel, she aims to "inform and empower people," as well as "encourage critical thinking and respectful dialogue," and make people feel "less alone," she said.

"I want to make political discussion feel less elitist and more human. I don't pretend to have all the answers—I speculate, I question, and I often ask my audience what they think."

TikTok's challenges with reliability

Like every social media platform, TikTok comes with its caveats.

In 2024, BBC found that the app fed "misleading election news" to users, especially to young people, despite the platform's claims that it has a fact-checking system in place.

Canada's chief electoral officer, Stéphane Perrault, sent a letter to TikTok at the start of the election highlighting its role in curbing threats to the electoral process to this effect.

rkachhela@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Ont., neighbourhood and elsewhere—triggered his pivot from making videos about cars to sharing political views on TikTok.

The first such incident was personal, when a friend's car was stolen about two-and-a-half years ago. He said he posted a video about it on his channel, and now has several of these, with some getting as many as 14 million views.

The 34-year-old claimed people from across have Canada sent him videos of break-ins and thefts to highlight the problem of rising crime.

"I started speaking with police officers across the [Greater Toronto Area]," he said, including RCMP and border officers. "I started to learn and understand why and how this is happening. And that kind of drove me to start going down to the root cause of the issues."

As per the Insurance Bureau of Canada, in 2023, the cost of insurance claims on stolen vehicles peaked to \$1.3-billion, and was the second year when claims exceeded \$1-billion. Between 2018 and 2021, the number of claims averaged \$556-million annually, as per the Bureau. The federal government launched a crackdown on car thefts under a national plan, and a report claimed that in 2024 auto thefts across Canada decreased by 20 per cent.

Fanarredha blames the crisis partly on Liberal policies like Bill C-48, which deals with bail reforms, and the justice system that, in his view, gives repeat offenders a free pass.

In a recent video, Sonduren shared a story where robbers allegedly brought ladders to break into a home in Oakville. It received 37,000 views, and about 1,131 likes. In another, he dissed Oakville Liberal incumbent Anita Anand, and accused her of not acting on the issues faced by their community. One of the top

comments on it echoed: "Voter her out Oakville!"

Resembling the points made by the Conservatives, he also critiqued the Liberals' handling of the immigration system, and said they failed to consider that the onslaught of people coming in did not keep pace with the housing and other infrastructure.

When asked what he thinks about Carney, however, Fanarredha agreed that the former Bank of Canada governor is more qualified and experienced on the economic front than Poilievre. But he said he dislikes that the majority of Carney's first cabinet were ministers from Justin Trudeau's team, dismissing many Liberal candidates as representing the old government.

On the policy front, he said he does not believe Carney has offered radical solutions to problems like affordability or public safety crises.

Through his videos, Fanarredha said he hopes to spread awareness firstly about what safety measures people can take to protect their homes and cars, and then about the political side of it, so people are encouraged to vote.

His 18 videos released since March 23, had a viewership of 1.2 million as of April 9.

His said his audience represents all age groups, with about 60 per cent of the views coming from people between 25 and 44 years of age.

Cole Bennett
Channel: COLE.
NOTCOLE
157,000 followers,
3 million likes

Cole Bennett started making political content after Trump



Though the Liberals led by Mark Carney, left, currently lead in the polls, the race is expected to tighten as voters assess whether he or Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, right, is best prepared to handle Donald Trump, say pollsters, as the parties siphon votes from NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh and Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade, illustration by Naomi Wildeboer

Despite dip in polls, Conservative victory is possible, say political players

If the Conservatives hope to win the next election, they'll need to address Trump tariffs alongside the cost of living, says pollster Nik Nanos. 'If he can come down with that extra punch, he can win the election.'



If the Conservatives want to win the next election, they will have to talk more often about the Trump tariffs, says pollster Nik Nanos. Photograph courtesy of Greg Skidmore, Wikimedia Commons

Continued from page 1

The source said that, internally, the senior campaign team is convinced that the cost of living is the winning election issue for their party. But Kory Teneycke, a veteran Conservative insider who has won three back-to-back elections for Ontario Premier Doug Ford, said that the trade war with the United States has become a critical issue for Canadians, but Poilievre has not given it the attention it deserves. On the other hand, the Carney Liberals are campaigning on this issue. If the Conservatives fail to shift their focus, they could lose the next election.

"It's like everyone in Canada has gotten together and said, 'Where are we going to go for dinner tonight?' And everyone agreed, 'Let's go for Italian,' and what Pierre is offering is a trip to the Mandarin buffet," said Teneycke in a speech at the Empire Club in Toronto last month, according to *The Toronto Star*. "His pitch is, 'Well, there's some sad pizza over in the corner, and we've got spaghetti and meatballs, also a little sad, but we've got sushi and we've got General Tsao's chicken and we've got chicken fingers and fries and soft serve ice cream,'" he said. "And everyone's like, 'But I want fucking Italian.'"

And last week on the *Curse of Politics* podcast, Teneycke said

the federal Conservative strategists were conducting "campaign malpractice at the highest fucking level." Said Teneycke: "This campaign is going to be studied for decades as the biggest fucking disaster in terms of having lost a massive lead."

According to a recent poll by Ipsos Research, if an election were to happen now, the Liberals would get 46 per cent of the votes, followed by the Conservatives who would get 34 per cent, the NDP 10 per cent and the Greens three per cent. The poll of 1,000 Canadians was conducted between April 1 and April 3 and had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

A Nanos Research poll suggested that the Liberals had the support of 42.8 per cent of Canadians followed by the Conservatives at 38.6 per cent, the NDP at 8.5 per cent, and the Greens at 2.3 per cent. The three-day rolling poll of 1,239 Canadians was released on April 9.

Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, said that it's unclear whether the Liberals have already reached their peak in the polls, or if their lead will continue to grow. At the moment, the Conservative Party's base remains highly energized. Meanwhile, Bricker said that Carney is leading a fragile coalition of progressive voters—many of whom have defected from the NDP and Greens in an effort to block a potential Poilievre government. This coalition also includes voters who initially sought change through Poilievre, but have since shifted their support to Carney.

Bricker said that Poilievre isn't avoiding talking about Trump. Rather, he spent the past two years positioning himself as a populist, similar in style to other populist leaders around the world. Poilievre campaigned on themes of change and dissatisfaction with the country's direction, which placed him within a specific political frame and comparisons have been made between Trump and Poilievre.

But since Trump's election as U.S. president, the ballot question has shifted. Now, voters are less focused on who can deliver change and more concerned with who is best equipped to lead the country through challenging times. He predicted that the polling numbers are expected to get tighter close to election time, as this is a high-stakes election and people will take their time to make a final decision who to vote for.

"It's fear, it's a real sense that the country and our future is in jeopardy," said Bricker. "As we move from a debate about who's best able to deliver change to who's best able to deliver the country the type of leadership they need to go through the difficult times that we're experiencing."

Nik Nanos, chief data scientist for Nanos Research, said that right now, two competing ballot questions are shaping the election: who is best equipped to handle Trump, and who can best address the cost of living. It's still too early to determine which of these will ultimately determine the election outcome, but that clarity will come as voting day approaches.

On the first question, Carney holds an advantage over the Conservatives, Nanos said. On the second, the Conservatives are seen as having the upper hand over the Liberals. Nanos predicted that a significant portion of voters will make their final decision in the last three days of the campaign, based on which ballot question they believe matters most at that moment.

"People are going to be a lot like last-minute holiday shoppers," said Nanos. "There's going to be more last-minute holiday political shoppers this particular election as they wait to see how both the two frontrunners perform over the course of the campaign. They're going to want to wait to the whole election before they make their final decision, which speaks to another level of volatility in the electorate."

Nanos said that many voters are holding off on making a final decision due to the uncertainty surrounding the Trump factor and its potential impact on the economy. They want to see how both frontrunners would respond to a possible crisis before casting their vote.

In a typical election, 38 per cent support would put the Conservatives in a strong position to win. But this time, the dynamics are different: NDP support has collapsed, and both the Bloc and the Greens are polling lower than usual. As a result, 38 per cent isn't enough to secure a victory.

Compounding the challenge is the inefficiency of the Conservative vote—it's heavily concentrated in the Prairie provinces, where they win by large margins, but that doesn't translate into more seats elsewhere in the country. By contrast, the Liberal vote is more efficiently distributed across ridings.

So far, Poilievre's campaign has been largely one-dimensional, concentrating almost entirely on the cost of living. According to Nanos, the campaign needs to broaden its scope by addressing how Poilievre would manage Canada-U.S. relations.

Nanos said he believes Poilievre is avoiding any spotlight on Trump because that area is a strength for Carney. He, however, said that Poilievre needs to show Canadians that he has a stronger plan for dealing with Trump—without necessarily criticizing the U.S. president.

"They [Conservatives] need to say everything that they're saying, but they need to add a new dimension in terms of Pierre Poilievre and managing the binational relationship and navigating a Donald Trump administration," said Nanos. "If he can come down with that extra punch, he can win the election."

arana@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Parliamentary Calendar

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

Canadian International Council co-hosts conference on 'Liberal democracy in the rearview mirror?' April 15 in Toronto



Former Quebec premier Jean Charest, left, former Conservative cabinet minister John Baird, and former Canadian ambassadors Louise Blais and Marc-André Blanchard will take part in a panel discussion, 'Canada's risks and opportunities in a changing world order,' hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations, in Montreal on Wednesday, April 16. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade, Jake Wright, courtesy of UN, and Canadian International Development

TUESDAY, APRIL 15

Conference: 'Liberal Democracy in the Rearview Mirror?'—Massey College, Section 1, and the Canadian International Council host a day-long conference on 'Liberal Democracy in the Rearview Mirror?' exploring the state of and prospects for liberal constitutionalism at home and in the world. Participants include former German ambassador to Canada Sabine Sparwasser, Canadian political scientist Thomas Homer-Dixon, and Sabreena Delhon, CEO of the Samara Centre for Democracy, among others. Tuesday, April 15, at 8:30 a.m. ET, at 4 Devonshire Place, Toronto. Details: masseycollege.ca.

2025 Canada Votes—The Greater Vancouver Board of Trade hosts "2025 Canada Votes," a chance for its members to hear from local senior candidates of the major federal parties as they present their parties' positions on the important economic and business issues facing Canada. Thursday, April 15, at 7:30 a.m. PT at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, 900 W Georgia St., Vancouver. Details: boardoftrade.com.

AMA: 'Election 2025 Countdown'—Ipsos hosts an interactive "Ask Me Anything" live webinar examining the current popular vote and the public opinion trends impacting key election issues featuring Darrell Bricker, Global CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs; and Sean Simpson, Ipsos' senior vice-president. Tuesday, April 15, at 12 p.m. ET happening online: ipsos.com.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16

Panel: 'Canada in a Changing World Order'—Former Quebec premier Jean Charest, former Conservative cabinet minister John Baird, and former Canadian ambassadors Louise Blais and Marc-André Blanchard will take part in a panel discussion, "Canada's risks and opportunities in a changing world order," hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Wednesday, April 16, at 11:30 a.m. ET at Le Centre Sheraton Montréal, 1201 Blvd René-Lévesque W. Details: corim.qc.ca.

Federal Candidate Meet and Greet 2025—The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce hosts a "Federal Candidate Meet and Greet 2025," an opportunity for members to connect directly with federal candidates from across Edmonton

and the surrounding region. Wednesday, April 16, at 9 a.m. MT at the World Trade Centre, sixth floor, 9990 Jasper Ave., #600, Edmonton. Details: business.edmontonchamber.com.

TUESDAY, APRIL 22

Mayor's Breakfast—David Coletto, founder, chair, and CEO of Abacus Data, is the special guest at the Mayor's Breakfast, hosted by Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe, the *Ottawa Business Journal*, and the Ottawa Board of Trade. Tuesday, April 22, at 7 a.m. ET Ottawa City Hall, 110 Laurier Ave. W. Details: business.ottawabot.ca.

Rose LeMay's Book Launch—The Hill Times' columnist Rose LeMay will discuss her new book, *Ally Is a Verb: A Guide to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*, at a private book launch hosted by Deloitte and Catalyst Canada. Space is limited. Tuesday, April 22, at 4:30 p.m. at Deloitte Greenhouse, Bayview Yards Innovation Centre, Suite E200, 7 Bayview Station Rd., Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 23

Bruce Heyman to Deliver Remarks—Former U.S. ambassador to Canada Bruce Heyman, now CEO of Power Sustainable, will deliver remarks on the environment at a lunch event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Wednesday, April 23, at 11:30 a.m. ET at a location to be announced in Montreal. Details: corim.qc.ca.

Panel: 'Charting Canada's Arctic Future'—Natan Obed, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, will take part in a panel discussion, "Charting Canada's Arctic Future," hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Other participants include Sean Boyd (Agnico Eagle), Heather Exner Poirot (Macdonald-Laurier Institute), and Jessica Shadian (Arctic360). Wednesday, April 23, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York, Toronto. Details: canadianclub.org.

THURSDAY, APRIL 24

Canada Growth Summit 2025—The Public Policy Forum hosts the Canada Growth Summit 2025 on the theme "Unleashing Canada's potential in turbulent times." Participants include Ontario Premier Doug Ford, Privy Council Clerk John Hannaford,

former Conservative cabinet minister Lisa Raitt, former ambassadors Louise Blais and Marc-André Blanchard, and former chief trade negotiator Steve Verheul, among others. Thursday, April 24, at 7:30 a.m. at the Fairmont Royal York, 100 Front St. W., Toronto. Details: ppforum.ca.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25

'An Inclusive Parliament?'—The Canadian Study of Parliament Group hosts "An Inclusive Parliament?" exploring equity, diversity, inclusion, and access in legislative spaces, from the experiences of legislators themselves to public engagement and staff participation behind the scenes. Friday, April 25, at 9 a.m. ET at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, 144 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.

The Walrus Talks: Tariffs—The Walrus Talks@Home presents a webinar on "Tariffs: Discussing What the U.S. Trade War Means for Canada, Both Now and in the Future." Speakers to be announced. Friday, April 25, at 12 p.m. ET happening online: thewalrus.ca.

Superintendent of Financial Institutions to Deliver Remarks—Peter Routledge, head of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, will speak at a lunch event hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Friday, April 25, at 12 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details: cdhowe.org.

FRIDAY, APRIL 25—SUNDAY, APRIL 27

IMF and World Bank Ministerial Meetings—The 2025 Spring Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund will take place from Friday, April 25, to Sunday, April 27, in Washington, D.C. Details: worldbank.org.

MONDAY, APRIL 28

Federal Election Day—Canadians from coast to coast to coast will head to the polls to vote in the snap election called by Prime Minister Mark Carney on March 23.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30

CANIC 2025—The Canadian Military Intelligence Association hosts CANIC 2025, the Canadian Intelligence

Conference. Participants include Nathalie Drouin, national security and intelligence adviser to the prime minister, and her predecessor Richard Fadden, among others. Wednesday, April 30, at 7:30 a.m. ET, Ottawa Conference and Event Centre, 200 Coventry Rd. Details via Eventbrite.

THURSDAY, MAY 1

Panel: 'Canada vs. Trump'—The Economic Club of Canada hosts a lunch event, "100 Days of Disruption: Canada vs. Trump" featuring Flavio Volpe, president, Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association; Benjamin Tal, deputy chief economist, CIBC Capital Markets; and Jeremy Kronick, C.D. Howe Institute's director of monetary and financial services research. Thursday, May 1, at 11:45 a.m. ET in Toronto. Details: economicclub.ca.

FRIDAY, MAY 2

Corporate Control with Nora Loreto—As part of the Ottawa International Writers' Festival, activist, author, and journalist Nora Loreto will discuss *The Social Safety Net*, the second book in her landmark series, *Corporate Control* for a deep dive into systemic inequality and the corporate web spun around Canada's economy, society, and politics. Friday, May 2, at 8 p.m. at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details: writersfestival.org.

SATURDAY, MAY 3

The Certainty Illusion with Timothy Caulfield—As part of the Ottawa International Writers' Festival, University of Alberta professor Timothy Caulfield will discuss his book, *The Certainty Illusion*, lifting the curtain on the forces contributing to our information chaos, and unpacking why it's so difficult—even for experts—to escape the fake. Saturday, May 3, at 11:30 a.m. at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details: writersfestival.org.

SUNDAY, MAY 4

From Truth to Reconciliation with Rose LeMay—As part of the Ottawa International Writers' Festival, *The Hill Times* columnist Rose LeMay will join Bruce McIvor to discuss their respective new books: *Ally Is a Verb: A Guide to Reconciliation with Indigenous*

Peoples, and Indigenous Rights in One Minute: What You Need to Know to Talk Reconciliation. Sunday, May 4, at 4 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details: writersfestival.org.

Canada in the New World Order with Lloyd Axworthy—As part of the Ottawa International Writers' Festival, former Liberal cabinet minister Lloyd Axworthy will discuss what is Canada's role in the world and what are our most pressing threats and opportunities. Sunday, May 4, at 5:30 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details: writersfestival.org.

TUESDAY, MAY 6

National Prayer Breakfast—Held under the auspices of the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons, the National Prayer Breakfast includes Canadian and international Christian faith leaders, ambassadors, MPs, Senators, and Canadians tuning in from across our nation and abroad. Tuesday, May 6, at 7:30 a.m. ET at Rogers Centre Ottawa, 55 Colonel By Dr. Details via Eventbrite.

Lisa Raitt to Deliver Bell Lecture—Former Conservative cabinet minister Lisa Raitt will deliver this year's Dick, Ruth and Judy Bell Lecture, hosted by Carleton University. Tuesday, May 6, at 7 p.m. ET at Carleton Dominion-Chalmers Centre, 355 Cooper St., Ottawa. Details: carleton.ca.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7

Patrons Circle Dinner with Gerald Butts—The C.D. Howe Institute hosts its Patrons Circle Dinner with Gerald Butts, former principal secretary to then-prime minister Justin Trudeau, now adviser to Prime Minister Mark Carney and vice-chair of the Eurasia Group. Wednesday, May 7, at 5:30 p.m. ET at 67 Yonge St., Suite 300, Toronto. Details: cdhowe.org.

MONDAY, MAY 12

Lunch: 'Legal Ethics and the Attorney General'—The University of Ottawa's Public Law Centre hosts a conversation with Andrew Martin on his forthcoming book *Legal Ethics and the Attorney General*, looking at the position of Canada's attorney general, emphasizing the ethical standards they must uphold as lawyers and the importance of professional accountability in maintaining the rule of law. Monday, May 12, at 11:30 a.m. ET at uOttawa, Fauteux Hall, Room 202, 57 Louis-Pasteur Priv. Details via Eventbrite.

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