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NEWS



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, left, and Liberal Leader Mark Carney, right, can't afford to take the same gambles on social media influencers that worked for U.S. President Donald Trump, say digital strategists. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade, Sam Garcia, courtesy of Gage Skidmore, and illustration by Neena Singhal

Project competence, avoid silly dances: parties seek balance with social media strategies

BY STUART BENSON

Following the success of American presidential candidates' appearances with social media influencers or as guests on longer-form podcasts, digital communications pros had expected those strategies to play

an outsized role in Canada's current election.

However, following President Donald Trump's election last fall, the ensuing tariff chaos, and tightening of the polls, the Liberals' "simple, safe, and serious" tone is far more appropriate than any silly TikTok dance, says

digital communications strategist Dave Sommer. The tenor of this election is also a factor in how the Conservative campaign is using social media, while the NDP's rollout has hit a stumbling block, according to observers.

"The most important thing for the Liberals' social media

strategy has been that they have understood the tone of this election better than any of the other parties," explained Sommer, who worked on digital communications in then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's office, and as the

Continued on page 21

NEWS

Canadian election outcome not of 'pivotal strategic importance' for China and India, say observers

BY NEIL MOSS

Despite a spotlight on electoral interference during this campaign, foreign policy observers say that China and India likely only have "minor" interest over the results of the Canadian vote.

Since the launch of the campaign, the federal team tasked with keeping an eye on foreign interference has highlighted a Beijing-linked campaign boosting the messages of Liberal Leader Mark Carney. At the same time, media reports have suggested

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NEWS

NDP has a familiar team fighting to keep its presence in the House

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

The federal NDP is facing plenty of challenges this campaign—from poor polling, to breaking into the Canada-United States relations narrative that has dominated the race—but the party has a familiar, experienced team on hand leading the fight.

"The campaign has pulled a seasoned team of workers from

many NDP sections and regions across the country," said Jordan Lechnitz, a former deputy chief of staff to then-NDP leader Thomas Mulcair. "This is going to be a really hard campaign for the NDP, and the people who've come out are very high calibre, very experienced, and a lot of them are fresh off recent campaigns where they have won."

Continued on page 14

NEWS

Trade talks more opaque after Canada's foreign ministry cuts live briefings in wake of media leaks

BY NEIL MOSS

The Liberal government has consistently trumpeted a commitment to transparency in trade negotiations, but Canada's foreign ministry ended verbal briefings to stakeholders on the status of trade talks to "better control" information after leaks to media.

The Hill Times previously obtained information from briefings on negotiations regarding trade talks with Indonesia, India, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This newspaper confirmed those verbal briefings ended last summer through emails and documents obtained under the Access to Information Act.

Transparency during trade negotiations has been an ongoing concern for parliamentarians and some members of the public.

As part of its "inclusive trade" agenda, the government acknowledged that there is "a perceived lack of transparency in trade agreement negotiations," and committed to "improving transparency throughout negotiation processes and related activities."

But instead of the previously offered video briefings—which included a question-and-answer segment—to provide an update on recent rounds of negotiations, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) switched to a policy of providing written debriefs on its website

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Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

Ex-PC MP Bob Corbett has died

Former longtime Progressive Conservative MP **Robert 'Bob' Corbett** died in Fredericton on April 6. He represented Fundy Royal, N.B., from 1978 to 1993.

A "lifelong entrepreneur" and avid boater who had "twice crossed the Atlantic and competed in two Caribbean 1500 races," according to his obituary, Corbett's first leap into politics was at the provincial level in 1974. After sitting for four years in the New Brunswick Legislature, he successfully won a federal byelection in Fundy Royal, and first took his seat in the House of Commons in 1978. Corbett was re-elected four times, but lost the 1993 contest to Liberal candidate **Paul Zed**.

"Despite the demands of business and politics, Robert invested in cultivating deep, lasting friendships, many of which endure to this day," reads his obituary, which noted he leaves behind his "large and boisterous family" of five children and 14 grandchildren.



Former longtime Progressive Conservative MP Bob Corbett died on April 6. He represented Fundy Royal, N.B., from 1978 to 1993. *The Hill Times* photograph by Kate Malloy

"Such a dear friend and former special colleague in the House of Commons," wrote former PC MP **Bill Vankoughnet**—whose time in the House coincided with Corbett's—on

Corbett's virtual tribute wall. "A member of a caucus group called The Common Sense who met every Wednesday after caucus. I will miss him so very much."

Carney 'did alright,' Poilievre 'was good' on *Tout le monde en parle*

Ottawa Citizen columnist **Brigitte Pellerin** live-posted on social media during the separate interviews that Prime Minister **Mark Carney** and Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre** each did with **Guy A. Lepage** on his popular Radio-Canada program *Tout le monde en parle* on April 13.

Her hot take? "If Poilievre campaigned like he performed on the show, he wouldn't be losing."

She wrote that "Carney did alright in the face of harder questions. He won a few cultural points," noting that she felt

Lepage's questions were "tougher for Carney than they were for Poilievre."

"The questions were good and challenging, but not aggressive," Pellerin posted on X, noting that the Conservative leader replied "without sarcasm or sneer."

"Other than gaslighting everyone on his relationship with the media, he was good."

She noted that Carney's French seems to be improving, and that "Poilievre's body language and demeanour were much improved."

Putting a pin in 'Buttongate'

"A juvenile stunt," "doofuses," and "U.S.-style smear tactics" are some reactions to the story that's become known as "Buttongate."

"After many news reports last week about Conservative infighting and prominent Trump allies being hosted at [the Canada Strong and Free Network] conference, it's been reported that Liberal campaigners had created buttons poking fun at those reports—which regrettably got carried away," reads a Liberal Party statement acknowledging the issue that was first reported by the CBC's **Kate McKenna** on April 13.

The next day, Prime Minister **Mark Carney** apologized "unreservedly" for the staffers' actions of planting the buttons—one of which read "stop the steal"—at the conference, and said "the responsible people ... have been reassigned within the campaign."

"Reassigned? No charges. Not fired?" asked former Tory MP **Gerry Ritz** on X on April 14. "Should have been fired," agreed *The Toronto Star*'s **Bruce Arthur** that same day, following up on his April 13 "Doofuses" post.

"This is a juvenile stunt. And bragging about it in a bar, is doubly juvenile," said Mount Royal University professor **Duane Bratt**, to which *Hill Times* columnist **Matt Gurney** replied: "I don't think we should dismiss it as a stunt. This was a deliberate effort to mislead the public during an election."

"Importing U.S.-style smear tactics, division, and arrogance. You trust these people?" posted Conservative Senator **Leo Housakos** on X on April 13.

Senator Dhillon joins ISG; Cardus honours Shugart with lecture series

Membership in the Independent Senators Group is growing by the day.

British Columbia Senator **Baltej Dhillon** announced on April 10 that he's joined the ISG, which remains the largest grouping of Senators now with 44 members. Dhillon's news comes just one day after his Quebec colleague Senator **Martine Hébert** announced she was joining the group. Both Hébert and Dhillon, who is a retired RCMP officer, were nominated to the Senate back in February.

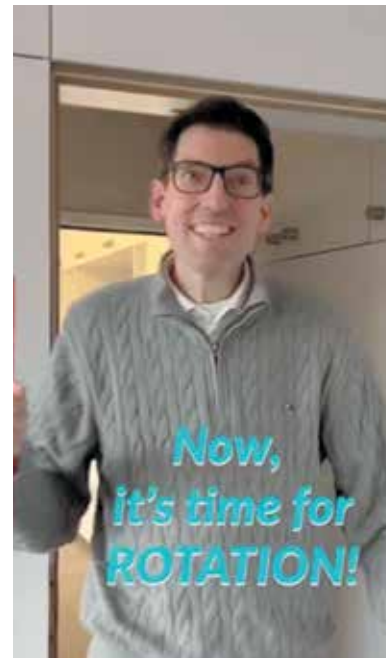
Speaking of Senators, the legacy of the late Senator **Ian Shugart** will be honoured with

a new annual event. Cardus announced on April 9 that it's launching the Ian Shugart Lecture Series, which "will honour the life and work of Ian Shugart in the federal public service by highlighting and exploring the creative possibilities, tensions, and realities that accompany the integration of faith and public life."

Shugart was the 24th clerk of the Privy Council before his Senate appointment in 2022. He died in office in 2023.

The first lecture is set for Nov. 20 at Ottawa's National Arts Centre featuring *New York Times* columnist **Ross Douthat**.

Ambassador updates from German, U.S. missions



Matthias Lüttenberg, left, officially took over the role of German ambassador to Canada from his wife Tjorven Bellmann on April 8. Screenshots courtesy of X

Two bits of news from Ottawa's diplomatic community last week.

First, the American Embassy is preparing for the arrival of its new ambassador, **Pete Hoekstra**, who was confirmed to the role on April 9.

A spokesperson with the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa told *Heard on the Hill* last week that they didn't have anything to announce regarding the timing of Hoekstra's arrival.

"I will work with the Canadian government to review and strengthen our strong trading partnership, secure our borders, confront the deadly threat of fentanyl to our citizens, and build our national security co-operation," Hoekstra said in an April 9 press release.

Meanwhile, the job-sharing deal between ambassadorial couple **Tjorven Bellmann** and **Matthias Lüttenberg** from Germany continues as Bellmann officially passed over the head of mission duties to her husband on April 8. Lüttenberg will now lead the chancery for the next eight months, after which his wife will

resume the helm. The Embassy shared a hockey-themed video of Bellmann literally and figuratively passing the puck to Lüttenberg last week to mark the occasion.

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CORRECTION:
The Hill Times, April 9 issue

Re: "Comeback kids? Ex-MPs Brosseau and Aldag join the race at 11th hour," (*The Hill Times*, April 9, p. 2). This *Heard on the Hill* column incorrectly stated that Liberal candidate John Aldag's Conservative opponent in the newly redrawn Langley Township-Fraser Heights, B.C., is Tamara Jansen. It is actually incumbent Tako van Popta. Liberal candidate Kyle Latchford is still on the ballot in Aldag's former riding of Cloverdale-Langley City, where Jansen is defending her seat. *The Hill Times* regrets the error.



Prime Minister Mark Carney, above, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, below, each sat down with host Guy A. Lepage, right, on Radio-Canada's *Tout le monde en parle* on April 13. Screenshots courtesy of Radio-Canada.

Is Mark Carney is the valium for Canada's Trump-induced anxiety?

Unlike the spotlight-searching Justin Trudeau, the current Liberal leader looks like he'd be more comfortable reading a ledger than showboating on YouTube or TikTok.

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—Just before this election began, it was billed as one of—if not the—most consequential of our time. Indeed, it may be, given the threat pre-

sented to Canada and the global community from United States President Donald Trump's quest to reshape the world order, and the economy.

However, to date, the campaign itself has been pretty bland, and a generally uninspiring affair. Boring, almost, with the only drama coming when Trump has decided to be Trump. The debates this week could shake things up, but rarely is that the case.

The most consequential things about this election seemed to happen before it actually began: namely, then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's resignation in early January, and the inability of the Conservatives—so far—to capably adjust to the change of circumstances on the playing field.

In two weeks, the story could be different, and the Conservatives could be hailed as brilliant, and the rest of us commentators—myself included—labelled as idiots. Anything is possible, but as we get closer to the finish

line, there is the feeling with each passing day that the die is cast.

Some polls here and there show small bits of Conservative Party movement, but most have the Liberals with a four- to eight-point advantage. The NDP show no signs of life. Nothing of significance seems to be sticking to Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney to destabilize his campaign.

The Conservatives chortle about crowd sizes and momentum, but that isn't giving them a big enough bump in public opinion. It's more the case of the Conservatives being able to use the data of identified supporters they have, and mobilize them in specific places at specific times. You'd be hard pressed to believe these are organic outbursts of appreciation in the extremely controlled environs of Canadian political campaigns.

Don't get me wrong, I wish there was enthusiasm and a surge in desire to participate.

There is that enthusiasm in the Liberal Party, which can now sense a fourth mandate in the offing. While the team running Mark Carney's campaign may deserve credit when all said and done, to borrow from renowned Canadian historian Donald Creighton, character and circumstance have played a big role to date—not Liberal strategic brilliance.

Creighton argued that history was defined by character and circumstance, and history now is being kind to Carney, so top marks to him for seizing it. Enough Canadians believe Carney is the man for the moment. In their eyes, he is best able to deal with the threat presented to Canada via Trump's threats.

His background and calm banker's presence are being touted as assets in Canada's dilemma, and he shines against longtime professional bloviating politicians. For now, his serious demeanour and political clum-

siness are the winning formula when put up against his performative peers. As Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, and Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet are discovering, Carney is hard to battle against because he is not being scored the same way as they are.

Unlike the spotlight-searching Trudeau, Carney looks like he'd be more comfortable reading a ledger than showboating on YouTube or TikTok. Carney is the valium for Canada's Trump-induced anxiety, and the medicine temporarily reins in anger, too.

The anger that Canadians felt towards Trudeau is displaced. His polar opposite in style and approach as Liberal leader is also making sure that campaign has an even—if not boring—keel to Carney's benefit.

To date, this election has been more of a therapy session than a fiery campaign. And the Liberals aren't about to deliberately change that dynamic with two weeks to go—no matter how consequential the moment.

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

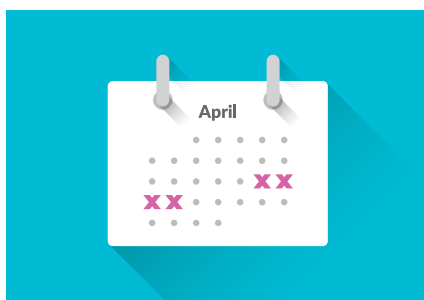
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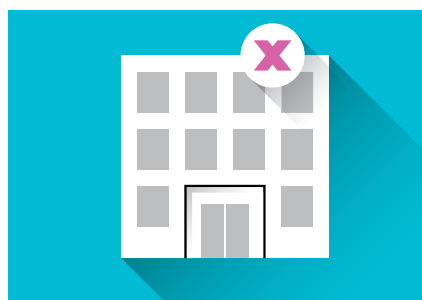
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COMMENT

2025 ELECTION

Do Canadians really want Stephen Harper back?



The current Conservative leader's campaign is taking on more and more aspects of former prime minister Stephen Harper's politics, writes Les Whittington. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

While the former prime minister remains an icon among the Conservative base, his presence may remind voters of what they didn't like about him in 2015.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, who used to sound like he was angry at the Liberals, now sounds like he's angry at the entire electorate.

No matter what he's saying or where he's talking, the Conservative leader can't seem to get past his smug, preachy, entitled, impatient, and annoyed demeanour to project some sense of positive engagement with his audience.

It's as though his whole attitude is: what are you people out there thinking about? I've been at this for two decades and had it all figured out, and had a clear runway to the Prime Minister's Office, and now look what's happened. Aren't you people ready for scorched-earth populism anymore? Didn't we all think the right-wing trucker riot in Ottawa



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre had his former boss on hand to help rally supporters at an April 7 event in Edmonton. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

was a great moment? Didn't we all have fun hating Justin Trudeau?

And: how can you people desert me now just because United States President Donald Trump—who invented the uber-resentful, everything-is-broken campaign I had been using so successfully to work Canadians into an angry mob—went too far and tried to destroy Canada along with everything else he is trashing?

And, on top of that, it seems as though his thought process is: this guy that people seem to be turning to is a globalist, a sophisticated, successful, worldly

guy with international ties who is just the type of leader we populist poseurs have convinced everyone to despise and fear. And a banker, of all things. Didn't you all used to think these financial elites meeting in Davos and London and Washington were trying to take over the world and make everyone eat insects?

However things have evolved, the almost instantaneous—in political time—reversal in popularity between the Conservatives and the Liberals in the polls is, of course, something that has never been seen before.

Poilievre is so desperate that he had to call in former prime minister Stephen Harper to try to patch up the party's leaky campaign. It was a risky decision, for while the former prime minister remains an icon among the Conservative base, his appearance might have reminded voters of what they didn't like about him in 2015. Namely, Harper's cold-hearted, austere fiscal policy in a time of national need.

Harper did his best to inject some energy into Poilievre's campaign. But he didn't have much to work with. In fact, anyone

paying attention might have been reminded that Harper himself didn't think enough of Poilievre to appoint him to any senior cabinet positions. In 21 years in Parliament, today's Conservative leader spent about two-and-a-half years in cabinet, and not in top-line portfolios.

Harper tried to finesse it like this: "Political experience—elected, accountable political experience—and the capacity for growth with that political experience, that is what Pierre has demonstrated for two decades."

Looking back to his term as Bank of Canada governor, Carney responded: "I worked closely with the late and great Jim Flaherty during the [2008] financial crisis. I note that Pierre Poilievre was not at any of those tables, was not given any of that responsibility, and note further that in subsequent years, he has not gained any responsibility in managing crises or difficult situations." The Liberal leader has also pointed out that Harper tried unsuccessfully to recruit him as finance minister in 2012.

In addition to junking the Kyoto Protocol, undermining employment insurance, sharply reducing the portion of federal spending support carried by corporations, and trying to ruin labour unions, Harper is best remembered by many for scrapping the Liberals' national childcare plan. His protégé in the Conservative leader's role now has been largely mum on how he would accomplish his plan to radically reduce federal spending. But what Poilievre has said appears to be carefully phrased to open the way for what would in effect be social program cuts.

When asked on March 25 if a Conservative government would maintain existing federal dental care, pharmacare, and childcare coverage, Poilievre said, "We will protect these programs and nobody who has them will lose them." That sounds like a recipe for blocking any expansion of these social benefits. As for childcare, Poilievre said he would take steps to provide more flexibility, which is similar to the argument Harper used when replacing the childcare program in 2006 with a taxable monthly allowance to parents that was of much more value to well-off Canadians than other parents.

Poilievre's campaign is indeed taking on more and more aspects of Harper politics. This includes mention of Carney's "banker's haircut"—reminiscent of Harper's jibes about Trudeau's locks—and Poilievre's plan to enrich the rewards for informants who blow the whistle on illegal tax havens—a proposal that reminded some of Harper's ill-advised "barbaric cultural practices" snitchline from 2015. Then there's Poilievre's embrace of Harper's hang-'em-high, unconstitutional crime policies. And now the Conservatives are proposing a repeat of Harper's Accountability Act—in this case, a drive-by smear of the man who came out of nowhere to short-circuit Poilievre's sure-thing election hopes.

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



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's aggressive style, victimization, and constant attack mode of communication attracts young men and repels women, writes Erica Ifill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Red-pill populism

Conservative politics and its embrace of populism have merged with toxic masculinity for validation in the mainstream.

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



CALGARY—Crowd size is the new phallic symbol. The red-pilling of Canadian politics is complete.

In *The Matrix*, the main character Neo is faced with two choices: living an illusion represented metaphorically by taking the blue pill, or awakening to a hidden reality, represented by the red pill. The dilemma is popularized by the manosphere, the radicalization of men through misogynistic content online. It attracts young men in particular, and encourages the digestion of philosophies relating to male supremacy and feminist hatred. These are the beliefs that lead to belittling and violent behaviour towards women and LGBTQ+ people known as toxic masculinity. In their media ecosystem, the definition of masculinity—as explained by political science professors John Grant and Fiona MacDonald—is a “narrow and constraining understanding of masculinity primarily characterized by dominance, aggression, strength, sexual conquest and the rejection of any traits or behaviours associated with femininity.”

Conservative politics and its embrace of populism have merged with toxic masculinity for validation in the mainstream. Grant and MacDonald connect these ideas: “Populism offers a natural political vehicle for toxic masculinity, while toxic masculinity provides an everyday home for populist sentiments.” CBC News reports that in Canada, the number of gun licence applicants has grown rapidly among young men, and that these new voters “are looking for leaders who are signalling they’ll ease up on gun laws.” Sociologist Marc Lafrance explained the spike as generation-Z men becoming more conservative than baby boomers. He blamed social media content, telling the CBC that “the social media

‘manosphere’ feeds young men a steady stream of ‘right-wing messages about gender,’ defining male power with muscles and guns.” The subsequent violence—as exemplified by the 2018 Toronto van attack, and the 2020 Nova Scotia massacre—becomes a natural evolution to aggression in the quest for the dominance of men in society.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre embodies the political manifestation of male hegemony. His aggressive style, victimization, and constant attack mode of communication attracts young men, especially, and repels women. This is why he polls so poorly with women. Abacus Data concluded from their statistical analysis, “Since the start of the campaign, impressions of Pierre among women have remained stable but negative.” Abacus quantified this as a 10-point gap relative to Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney.

In 2022, Global News reported: “Pierre Poilievre’s official YouTube videos included a hidden tag appealing to misogynistic online movements that Canada’s intelligence agencies view as a danger.” The tags used YouTube’s algorithm to distribute Conservative Party content to followers of the men’s rights movement. The Conservatives tried to thwart accountability by describing their inclusion as errors, however tagging content on YouTube is a deliberate act; YouTube also happens to be ground zero for the manosphere.

In addition to the rejection of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in the workplace, institutions, and society, Poilievre’s “anti-woke” campaign is an anti-feminist backlash. His anti-trans crusade has been vicious and exclusionary, establishing in a CP24 interview his alignment with United States President Donald Trump in recognizing only two genders: “I’m not aware of any other genders than men and women.” Poilievre supports Alberta Premier Danielle Smith’s policy on removing treatment from youth who are taking puberty blockers. This is the state regulating trans bodies, and denying care to a community that is too often marginalized. Like a bully, he picks on the weakest of society. As I previously wrote in this paper: “Once transgender people’s bodies became the topic of regulation in Poilievre’s Canada, cisgender women were next.”

If the Conservatives are encouraging the invasion of trans bodies, how does that translate into policies regarding bodily autonomy for cisgendered women?

Poilievre has stated that “there will be no laws restricting abortion passed when I am prime minister.” He went on to say that for the past 20 years, Conservative

Party policy has refrained from restricting a woman’s right to choose, but that’s not entirely true. The party has encouraged voting with one’s conscience when considering abortion legislation. Its 2023 policy declaration recognizes “deeply held personal convictions among individual party members and the right of Members of Parliament to adopt positions in consultation with their constituents and to vote freely.” The Abortion Rights Coalition notes: “The Conservative Party has continued to introduce private member’s bills restricting abortion access.” Bill C-311, unsuccessfully introduced by Conservative MP Cathay Wagantall in 2023, sought to “specify that knowingly assaulting a pregnant woman and that causing physical or emotional harm to a pregnant woman are to be considered aggravating circumstances for sentencing purposes.” This is a back door to fetal rights, a monumental step towards defining a fetus as a person and therefore criminalizing abortion down the road. In her debate speech, Wagantall highlighted that her bill “also being used by those who deny fetal rights, and that is wrong on all levels.”

I watched *Adolescence*, a new limited series on Netflix, which is a masterpiece in television that aims to demonstrate the origins of rage in young men. The exposé revealed ways in which that rage is developed, and Poilievre channels its political expression.

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

The Hill Times

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NEWS

2025 ELECTION

Election platform release a 'pass/fail' exercise with little reward for expedience, say politicians

Parties must weigh the optimal time to capture voters' attention with the potential pitfalls caused by even minor errors when deciding on platform-release dates.

BY STUART BENSON

The first three weeks of the 45th election campaign have featured a plethora of daily campaign promises and policy announcements, but anyone looking for a one-stop shop for political commitments in the form of a comprehensive platform has been left wanting. Parties are increasingly choosing to delay scrutiny until the last moment, and pollsters and strategists say going early has become an exercise in "mutually assured destruction," offering little reward and potentially fatal consequences for the slightest mistake.

Pollster Nik Nanos, chief data scientist for Nanos Research, told *The Hill Times* that while the average voter won't examine every detail of the parties' platforms once they are released, they remain a "pass/fail" exercise, where even a single error can be "completely lethal" to the campaign.

"If the platform has a mistake or a stupid error, it'll undermine the party's credibility as a potential government," Nanos explained. "Platforms are a resource to keep all the candidates on the same page when they're talking about issues, but they're more of a political risk to be managed than a benefit."

Nanos added that while he doesn't expect any party platform to receive much fanfare and attention, or to contain anything drastically new from the flurry of announcements that have already been made and extensively covered in the media, he believes the Liberals will receive more scrutiny than the others.

Nanos said that while Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, who is running for re-election in Carleton, Ont., has been consistent over the past three years about what he plans to do and how he will pay for it, Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney—who is running in the neighbouring riding of Nepean—is less established as a politician and has more to prove.

"People will be looking to compare and contrast the platform



In a crisis election, voters are more concerned about how Liberal Leader Mark Carney, left, or Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre plan to act than how they'll pay for it, according to politicians. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and illustration by Naomi Wildeboer



Pollster Nik Nanos says costed platforms are more of a risk to be managed than an opportunity for reward. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

with the direction of the Liberal Party over the past 10 years," Nanos said. "They'll want to see if [Carney] is taking the party in a new direction—more towards the centre of the political spectrum—or is this the same old, lefty Liberal Party."

Since the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) was granted the ability to check parties' platform math as of the 2019 election, the first leaders' debate has generally been viewed as the unofficial deadline for releasing fully costed platforms. But the actual release date has varied wildly.

During the 2021 campaign, the three main parties released their platforms early. NDP Leader Jag-

meet Singh released his party's uncoded platform, *Ready for Better*, three days before the election was called in mid-August, but the funded version didn't come out until nine days before the Sept. 20, 2021, voting day. The Conservatives' uncoded *Canada's Recovery Plan* under then-leader Erin O'Toole dropped on Aug. 16, with the costed version coming Sept. 8, the day of the French-language leaders' debate. The Liberals' platform—*Forward, For Everyone*—was the latest to be released of the three, arriving on Sept. 1.

The NDP also was the earliest to release its full platform ahead of the Oct. 21, 2019, election, coming out on June 16—but the

costed version didn't arrive until Oct. 11. Only the Liberals' fully costed platform was released before the first English debate, on Oct. 7, with the Conservatives releasing theirs on Oct. 11, the day after the final French debate.

During the 78-day 2015 election campaign, all three main parties released their platforms more than 60 days after the election was called. The Liberals released theirs on Oct. 5, three days after the fifth and final debate, while both the Conservatives and the NDP released theirs on Oct. 9.

On April 9, *The Globe and Mail* reported that all three parties were working with the PBO to cost this year's promises, but

would not commit to releasing their platforms ahead of the April 16 French leaders' debate.

During a press conference in Ottawa on April 11, *The Hill Times* asked NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh—who is running for re-election in the redrawn Burnaby Central, B.C., riding—whether he would commit to the release of his party's fully costed platform before the leaders' huddle in Montreal.

"We will be releasing our costed budget, and we'll let you know when that's available," Singh said, but did not clarify a timeline for when it would be released.

On April 14, Carney told reporters his party's costed platform would be released in the coming days.

In response to a follow-up request for clarification, Liberal campaign spokesperson Guillaume Bertrand would also not commit to a timeline, but said the party would present "a fully costed platform supported by a credible and transparent fiscal framework."

Parliamentary Budget Officer Yves Giroux declined *The Hill Times*' request for comment. The PBO's work on the parties' platforms is confidential, unlike its work under its independent parliamentary mandate.

Pollara's Dan Arnold, who previously led the Liberal Party's research since the 2015 election, told *The Hill Times* that while there can be benefits to putting a platform out earlier and particularly before the first debate, it only matters to the extent that voters care about what's in it.

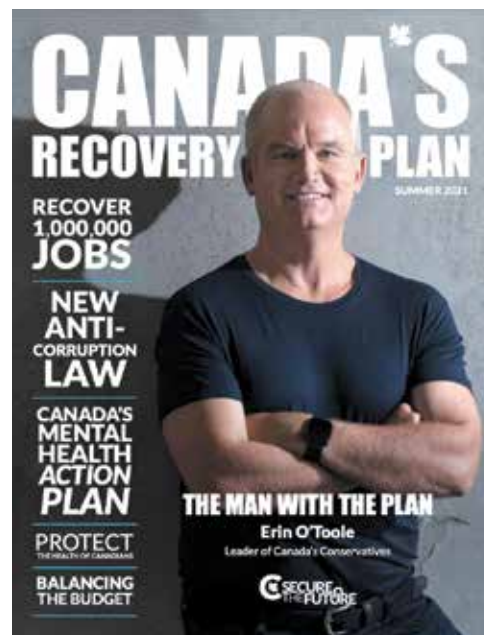
"There's no real indication that voters care about a costed platform at this stage," Arnold said, explaining that things like spending, deficits, or balancing the budget are lower down the list of voters' priorities this year in the wake of the tariff and annexation threats from United States President Donald Trump. "When you've got a crisis situation overshadowing everything, people are more willing to say 'do what you need to do,' and worry about how the accounting lines up afterward."

Arnold also pointed to the recent provincial election in Ontario where Premier Doug Ford and his Progressive Conservative Party were re-elected to a fourth majority while only releasing an uncoded platform with \$40-billion in promises just three days before the Feb. 27 election. The provincial New Democrat and Liberal parties released their platforms on Feb. 21, while the Ontario Greens released theirs on Feb. 12.

Furthermore, as a federal budget has yet to be tabled in Parliament this year, and with the added uncertainty wrought by Trump's tariffs, any accounting the parties will attempt will be questionable at best, Arnold said.

"Even if they wanted to, it's hard to say how reliable their numbers and estimates could even be," Arnold explained.

Former Conservative campaign staffer Dan Mader, who led the development of the party's 2021 campaign platform and



Then-Conservative leader Erin O'Toole poses on the cover of his party's platform book *Canada's Recovery Plan*, released on the first day of the 2021 election. Screenshot courtesy of the Conservative Party of Canada



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Editorial

Editorial

Feds’ lack of transparency continues to be a shame

The ongoing trade war with the United States has prompted the Canadian government and most politicians currently running for federal office to look somewhere other than our southern neighbour for goods and services. Diversifying international trade isn’t a new goal, but it’s definitely taken on a renewed urgency in recent months. And whoever forms the next government will be looking to either strike new deals or strengthen existing ones with countries, particularly in Europe and Asia. However, when that happens, Canadians—whether they have specific business interests, or are just looking to stay informed—may have a tough time knowing what’s at stake. As *The Hill Times’* Neil Moss reports, Global Affairs Canada has already clamped down and reversed the small step forward it took towards trade-deal transparency out of what appears to be a misguided fear of negative outcomes if people know anything about negotiations. Last summer, the department ended the live video briefings it was holding for stakeholders after this newspaper reported on information shared during trade talks with Indonesia, India, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. While publicly officials put on a smiling face and glossed over the talks with an “everything is great” patina, Moss reported that behind the scenes there were substantive issues still being worked out, delays in negotiations due to changes in government, and procedural hold ups. The government knows there are issues, and even set out an “inclusive trade” agenda in which it acknowledged that there is “a perceived lack of

transparency in trade agreement negotiations,” and committed to “improving transparency throughout negotiation processes and related activities.” A department draft letter explained away the about-face by claiming that the “release of the information can have the effect of undermining Canada’s negotiating position, which diminishes our ability to secure outcomes that are in Canada’s economic interests.” One GAC official said this newspaper had “no shame” in its reporting on these briefings. When pressed for examples that information released is “often being incorrectly reported on or taken out of context,” as was put in a draft letter, the department did not provide any. When asked specifically about the Indonesia agreement, GAC spokesperson John Babcock said that “in this case, we do not have reason to believe that revelations to the media impacted the final agreement,” remarking that the final agreement is a “significant achievement” in deepening the bilateral relationship. The government’s track record on transparency is woeful, and this is yet another step in the wrong direction. “When you are negotiating anything new—and particularly as it impacts different sectors in Canada on a sector-to-sector basis—the industries need to know,” said Green co-Leader Elizabeth May. Information about the end of the verbal briefings was obtained under the Access to Information Act, and required a complaint to the federal information commissioner to get the department to comply with the law on receipt of requests. Talk about “no shame.” *The Hill Times*



Letters to the Editor

Time for a ‘clean slate’ with China?

Re: “Poilievre vows to renegotiate North American pact, but Trump’s repeated trade breaches imperil plan,” (*The Hill Times*, April 9, p. 12). Prime Minister Mark Carney is facing calls to negotiate with China as United States President Donald Trump’s tariffs hit Canada. Western Canadian leaders want Carney to discuss changes to our relationship with China, particularly with respect to agricultural products, including canola. Why should we respect vindictive actions taken by the Trump government to stifle trade with China? Particularly since it was Trump’s billionaire friends that off-shored the jobs in the first place, and hardly the fault of the Chinese. This is an excellent time to talk with Beijing, starting from a “clean slate,” and finding trade elements in our mutual interest—without politics. Trump is putting inappropriate tariffs on automobiles “made in Canada,” even though all autos built under the aegis of the former pact are partly made in both countries. With tariffs on the Canadian side, in retaliation

for the ones put in place by the Trump government, the cost to Canadians to buy a car—partly built here—will be punitive and unrealistic. We could start by discussing importing Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) with little or no tariffs in return for a joint manufacturing agreement where the cars would be made in China but with the batteries made in Canada. In Ontario, large provincial and federal subsidies to foreign battery companies were granted in an attempt to support the province’s auto industry. But Premier Doug Ford’s government cancelled subsidies to buy EVs, and also did away with the program the former Liberal government had put in place to install large numbers of charging stations around the province. Increased EV sales of less-expensive Chinese cars could put the province back on track. Without Canadian EV sales, the battery manufacturing capacity in Ontario will be a “stranded asset.”

Tom McElroy
Toronto, Ont.

Civil political dialogue a key component of elections: B.C. reader

First, I believe in election polls. Why don’t the opposition parties? Because they are trailing the front-running Liberals. These conversations reinforce the truism—though it is too often forgotten—that the Canadian electorate is complex. Some attitudes stand in stark contrast with much of the facile commentary we’ve been reading online. The official narrative seems to be that Prime Minister Mark Carney and the Liberals are triumphing on a wave of populist economic rage created and exacerbated by United States President Donald Trump. There is some truth in that. But those of the far-right persuasion in Canada with allegiance to the Conservatives and the People’s Party know it is much more. In fact, perhaps the most fervent support for Poilievre is due to the Conservative leader mirroring Trump’s behaviour. If, in all their diverse and complicated glory, Canadians can engage in a civilized election post-mortem, then so, too, can the political parties. We’ll admit that this doesn’t dampen disappointment at the projected election result. Nor does it do much to assuage concerns about what the future will bring. But it provides some measure of comfort to know that we—the collective—are capable of civil political dialogue, in spite of it all. Generalizing about a broad group of people is almost always unwise. Falling short of handing Trump-Poilievre supporters a perceived political appeasement, each of the opposition parties possess a lot of well-intentioned people who will be insulted because they misunderstand criticism meant to be constructive.

William Perry
Victoria, B.C.

There goes the neighbourhood



Mexican marines perform drills at Camp Pendleton, Calif., in June 2018. The Mexican military is structured almost entirely for internal defence and security, writes Scott Taylor. *DND*
photograph by OS Justin Spinello

If our old relationship with the U.S. 'is over,' then we can learn from our southernmost neighbour how to be creative in rethinking what constitutes defence spending in Canada.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—For the sake of history, it needs to be remembered that Canada did not start the current spat with the United States. The blame lies entirely with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Immediately following his re-election last November, Trump began ramping up his rhetoric in order to cast Canada as a "nasty" trading partner, and weak on border security. When Trump's initial fixation was on illegal fentanyl crossing the U.S. border, Canada and Mexico were tarred with the same brush. This was despite the fact that less than 0.02 per cent of that drug trade crosses from the Canadian border.

However, once Trump's focus shifted to trade deficits and tariffs, it became clear that we were entering into an entirely new era

globally. On March 27, Prime Minister Mark Carney told the media: "Our biggest challenge as a country is becoming the most urgent. Over the coming weeks, months, and years, we must fundamentally reimagine our economy. We will need to ensure that Canada can succeed in a drastically different world. The old relationship we had with the United States—based on deepening integration of our economies and tight security and military co-operation—is over."

Carney made it clear that time is of the essence. "We will need to dramatically reduce our reliance on the United States," he said. "We will need to pivot our trade relationships elsewhere, and we will need to do things previously thought impossible, at speeds we haven't seen in generations."

For those in Canadian military circles, this about-face in relations with our long-standing closest ally is a tough pill to swallow. Canada may not spend the NATO target goal of two per cent of gross domestic product on defence, but over the past 25 years, our soldiers have spilled their blood supporting American-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. We also helped to bomb the bejeezus out of Yugoslavia in 1999 and Libya in 2010 in support of U.S. and NATO interests—albeit those two interventions did not result in a single Canadian casualty.

Of course, the immediate knee-jerk reaction from the military brain trust is to spend more on weapon systems, but maybe partner with European suppliers instead of our usual U.S. defence contractors.

I suggest that we take a closer look at what role Canada wants

for our Armed Forces moving forward.

One example of a starkly different approach is practically next door to us, and happens to be the third neighbour on our shared continent: Mexico.

The Mexican military is structured almost entirely for internal defence and security. Historically, Mexico has remained extremely isolationist in terms of military force. During the Second World War, they did declare war on Germany and Japan, and sent a small force to the Philippines.

In terms of United Nations peacekeeping, Mexico has only ever sent a handful of soldiers to the mission in Haiti.

In total, there are roughly 340,000 personnel in the Mexican armed forces, and its defence budget is around US\$7.5-billion. As of 2023, the country's defence budget was roughly 0.7 per cent of Mexico's GDP.

One reason that Mexico gets such a big bang for its buck in terms of defence is that it is equipped for domestic operations as opposed to an expeditionary force. The Mexican army does not have main battle tanks. They have armoured cars and Humvees.

The modest Mexican navy has five frigates along with roughly 130 smaller, fast coastal defence vessels. They have no submarines.

The Mexican air force has just eight really old F-5 fighter jets, with one of those fighters dedicated to training.

In other words, the Mexican armed services are tailored to defeat the actual threat that they face, which is that of criminal drug cartels. Since 2006, some 45,000 Mexican military personnel have been deployed alongside

federal and state police forces in that ongoing conflict. To date, some 750 soldiers and 4,100 police officers have been killed battling the drug cartels.

If—as Carney stated—the days of "tight security and military co-operation" with the U.S. are over, then we need to seriously rethink the entire structure of our military. What is the point of purchasing 88 F-35 fighter aircraft from the very nation that is threatening to annex Canada into becoming the 51st state? The U.S. air force alone has 5,500 combat aircraft.

Are the 82 Leopard II tanks in the Canadian Army's inventory a tangible deterrent to any would-be invader of our nation?

Thank God that Canada is not battling well-armed drug cartels like the Mexican military has to do. However, we can still be creative in rethinking what constitutes "defence" spending in Canada.

We could never spend enough to successfully stave off a U.S. invasion.

However, we could invest heavily in developing infrastructure in the Arctic, as well as vastly expanding the reserves and equipping them for the role of natural disaster responders. Battling forest fires in British Columbia may not be as challenging as fighting a counter insurgency in Afghanistan. However, protecting Canadian natural resources and domestic infrastructure is far more morally noble than battling Afghans into submission in a war that the U.S. Pentagon knew they could never win.

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

The Hill Times

Welcome to 'Gaffapalooza'

In one of the shortest election campaigns in our history, each of the leaders has proven to be seriously accident-prone.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



MONTREAL—One of the best life lessons I learned from my football coach more than half a century ago was how competitive sports can be dependent on mistakes. If you made someone miss, you gained ground; if you failed, you were stopped dead. It's why we drilled the same plays over and over: to ensure we didn't screw up.

It was a life lesson I carried through to politics and government. No matter how tedious, there was nothing wrong with repeatedly going over a speech or an event binder to make sure everything went as planned.

It's why the current federal election campaign astounds me. In one of the shortest election campaigns in our history, each of the leaders has proven to be seriously accident-prone. They have been on the hustings for only three weeks, and already the campaign could be summed up as "Gaffapalooza." It reminds me of Major League Baseball manager Casey Stengel's comment about his 1962 New York Mets: "Can't anybody here play this game?"

Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney began the campaign by refusing to reveal his personal assets and condescendingly lecturing to journalists—has there ever been a more cringe-inducing comment than "Look inside yourself, Rosemary"?—and rapidly mixed up both the name of his star Montreal candidate and the location of the Polytechnique shootings. Then he dithered on jettisoning former MP Paul Chi-ang for disgraceful remarks about an opponent.

Meanwhile, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has provided an impression of Wile E. Coyote. Poilievre spent the last three years vilifying then-prime minister Justin Trudeau, spending a fortune on negative advertising, fine-tuning the pre-campaign messaging of "Axe the Tax." Then Trudeau resigned, Carney eliminated the price on carbon, and Poilievre was frozen in mid-air on his "Acme Inc." rocket. It seemed no Conservative thought the Liberal transformation from Trudeau to Carney merited a pivot. And then they put journalists in pens on the campaign.

It was such a horrendous performance that Conserva-

Continued on page 10

COMMENT

2025 ELECTION

What Conservative rally crowds reveal—and why it matters

Showcasing energized supporters at every stop serves not only as momentum-building, but also as a critical internal motivator for the thousands of volunteers.

Josie Sabatino

Beyond the Headlines



OTTAWA—One of the standout features of the 2025 federal election has been the ability of Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre to draw thousands of people out to listen to his stump speeches—even in ridings where the party currently holds no seats and has been shut out for years. From airport hangars to warehouses and convention centres, Poilievre has seen no shortage of enthusiastic supporters standing in line for hours, and filling venues at his campaign stops.

On the one hand, partisan supporters of Poilievre use these massive rally crowds as evidence that the Conservative message is resonating, even in traditionally unfriendly territory. But what do



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, right, and wife Anaida attend a rally in Ottawa on Feb. 15. Local campaigns will be able to tap into this data to effectively convert voter intention into turnout, writes Josie Sabatino. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

these seismic campaign numbers mean for election night? Does enthusiasm actually translate into the kind of voter turnout needed to capitalize on a declining NDP and Bloc Québécois vote?

Let's start with the fact that no one would mistake the federal political scene as a hotbed of enthusiasm. Unlike in the United States where political events draw tens of thousands of people and can feature celebrity endorsements, there are strict campaign financing restrictions in place in Canada that mean political parties that run a full slate of candidates can spend no more than

\$35-million for the entirety of the campaign.

One of the largest expenses is advertising, whether on traditional broadcast platforms or social media. Because of strict spending limits, national campaigns rely heavily on grassroots efforts by local campaign teams to promote upcoming rallies and mobilize identified supporters to see the party leader in person.

And while local media might mention crowd sizes in coverage, the numbers usually remain a footnote rather than the headline. This year, however, Poilievre has flipped that script.

His ability to consistently pack venues could become a decisive factor in winning swing ridings in key battlegrounds. For one, these rallies give the central campaign access to the contact information of thousands of potential voters. While many are likely already confirmed as supporters, it's just as likely that some haven't been reached through traditional voter identification tools like canvassing, phone banking, or party emails.

As we head into Week 4, and campaigns begin shifting from identifying voters to getting out the vote, the Conservatives will be focused on mobilizing their base

early so they can redirect efforts toward swaying undecided voters on election day. Thanks to strong rally turnouts, local campaigns will be able to tap into this data to effectively convert voter intention into turnout.

Second, Poilievre has spent years cultivating his social media following, with more than a million subscribers on X, and more than 500,000 on YouTube. By live-streaming rallies, the leader can amplify the enthusiasm of in-person crowds to a much broader audience online. This also helps keep volunteers and campaign workers across the country energized and engaged.

Polling from Abacus Data has shown the Conservatives either tied with or slightly trailing the Liberals through much of the campaign. In that context, showcasing energized supporters at every stop serves not only as momentum-building, but also as a critical internal motivator for the thousands of volunteers who have been tasked with making direct contact with voters over the phone or at the doorstep.

Campaigns matter, and part of their impact on election night is getting people to the polls. While some will dismiss rally sizes as irrelevant in the grand scheme of things, the Conservatives have a major opportunity to leverage the data and energy these events generate. In a tight race, the ability to convert enthusiasm into turnout may be what determines victory in battleground ridings across the country.

Josie Sabatino is a senior consultant at Summa Strategies. Prior to joining Summa, Sabatino spent nearly a decade as a Conservative political staffer, providing communications and issues management advice to Members of Parliament and the leader of the official opposition.

The Hill Times

Welcome to 'Gaffapalooza'

Continued from page 9

tive Kory Teneycke, fresh from managing Premier Doug Ford's victory in Ontario, eviscerated Poilievre's team on *The Curse of Politics* podcast. He accused them of "campaign malpractice at the highest level," adding "this campaign is going to be studied for decades as the biggest f—king disaster in terms of having lost a massive lead in ways that are so obvious."

Meanwhile, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh has run a decent campaign, dumping the fancy suits and the Rolex for a sweater, but he is the campaign's invisible man. Likewise, sinking Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet desperately appeared in front of world-renowned McGill University, blaming the federal government for spending too much on Quebec's anglophones.

This is a crucial week for the leaders. It began on the night of

April 13 with Carney and Poilievre on *Tout le monde en parle*, the Radio-Canada show that has a history of either making or breaking reputations. Quebecers still talk about how Jack Layton's appearance in 2011 started the NDP's "Orange Wave" in Quebec, which led to him becoming official opposition leader.

This past Sunday night was not one of those moments for either Poilievre or Carney. Neither made a major blunder, and both gave the impression of being relatable, competent in French, and willing to deal with United States President Donald Trump. Poilievre was affable, spoke highly of Radio-Canada, and Carney got points for identifying host Guy A. Lepage as once being part of the comedy group Rock et Belles Oreilles.

Later this week, the major leaders will debate. The April 16 French debate is Blanchet's last chance to recoup seats expected

to go Liberal. On April 17, the English debate will be Carney's to win or lose. I predict 15 million people will watch; that said, I think most voters have already made up their minds.

This campaign is one of the most consequential in Canadian history. It ranks with the Confederation election in 1867, the free trade elections in 1911 and 1988, and the return of Pierre Trudeau in 1980. The stakes are that high.

Because of its importance, the party leaders must finish on a high note. But it will be Canadians—not pollsters or high-paid consultants—who will decide the parties' fates on April 28. Whether or not the gaffes have registered, what really matters is who will have the responsibility of steering the ship of state for the next four years—through very rough waters. And they cannot let her run aground.

Andrew Caddell is retired from Global Affairs Canada, where he was a senior policy adviser. He



Bloc Leader Yves-François Blanchet, left, Liberal Leader Mark Carney, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh must finish on a high note, but it will be Canadians—not pollsters or high-paid consultants—who will decide the parties' fates on April 28, writes Andrew Caddell. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and illustration by Joey Sabourin

previously worked as an adviser to Liberal governments. He is a town councillor in Kamouraska,

Que. He can be reached at pipson52@hotmail.com.

The Hill Times

Canada's next government must stand up for humanity

This election is a chance for Canada to reaffirm its role as a global leader in restoring human dignity for the most vulnerable people across the world.

Sana Bég

Opinion



As Canadians prepare to vote in the upcoming federal election, they do so against the backdrop of unprecedented global upheaval. From the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Myanmar to the ongoing brutal conflicts in Sudan and Gaza, and the devastating consequences of funding cuts on health-care systems worldwide, the crises of

today demand urgent political leadership. The question facing Canada's next government is clear: will they step up decisively, or retreat into silence?

If current election campaigns are any indication, Canada's political leaders are currently choosing retreat at a global moment that demands more courage. Since the election was called, little has been said by party leaders about Canada's role in responding to the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges. Foreign aid has been raised as a topic, but only in terms of whether or not it will be cut—an unthinkable choice at a time when a staggering 362 million people worldwide desperately require lifesaving assistance.

Put plainly: today, world leaders are failing to protect people affected by conflicts and crises. In Sudan, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) teams see aid delivery repeatedly blocked by warring parties—a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, civilians are targeted by armed groups, and sexual violence is used as a weapon of war, leaving the most vulnerable

to bear the brunt of the conflict. These are not isolated incidents. They are symptoms of a deeper, systemic failure to protect humanitarian spaces and uphold basic human rights.

What the world needs today is more humanitarian leadership—not less.

Canada and other countries must lean into the reality that they have a responsibility to find meaningful solutions to the political crises that give rise to humanitarian emergencies and human suffering. If Canada retreats from this role, the consequences will be felt not just in distant war zones but in our ability to navigate a world increasingly defined by instability and health emergencies.

The world is also witnessing alarming shortfalls in funding for essential health-care programs. Cuts to United States support for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief threaten millions of lives, while the decision to end U.S. funding for Gavi jeopardizes childhood vaccination programs globally. MSF teams are witnessing first-hand how these decisions are catastrophic for vulnerable populations and how they undo decades of progress in fighting



Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh. Little has been said by party leaders about Canada's role in responding to the world's most pressing humanitarian challenges, writes Sana Bég. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and illustration by Joey Sabourin

diseases like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

These decisions—with far-reaching implications for the most vulnerable—are not emerging from the U.S. alone. The United Kingdom, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, and others have all reduced their international aid contributions—with disastrous implications as lifesaving programs around the world are forced to close.

Despite cuts to global aid, there is no evidence of compassion fatigue among Canadians. On the contrary, there is a hunger for meaningful action and change. The world is deeply interconnected, and failure to address medical and humanitarian needs in one place can have far-reaching consequences in others, including in Canada.

Political leaders must recognize that neglecting global crises

today will only exacerbate suffering tomorrow.

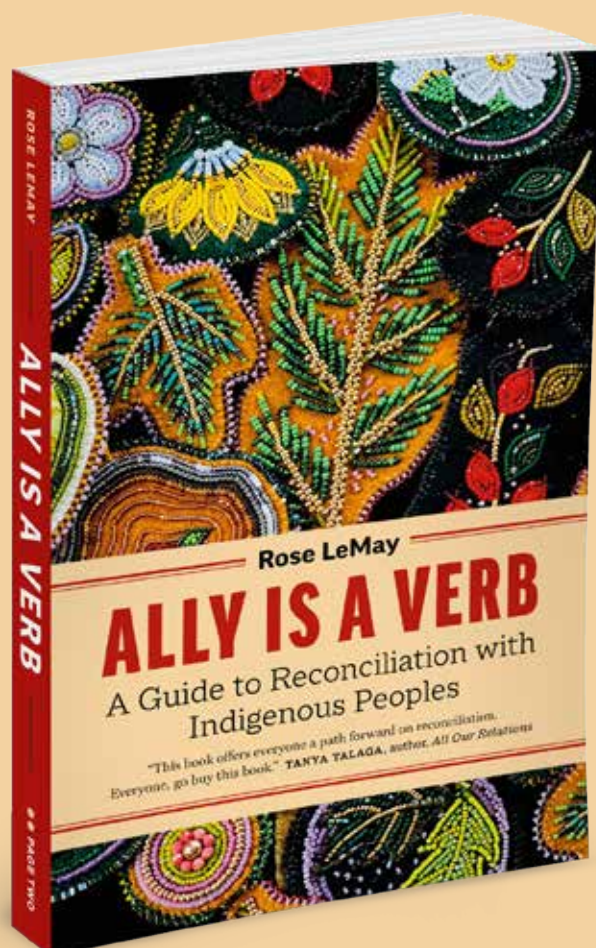
Canada's next government has an opportunity to lead boldly by prioritizing humanitarian action as a cornerstone of its foreign policy agenda. This election is a chance for Canada to reaffirm its role as a global leader in restoring human dignity for the most vulnerable people across the world.

MSF calls on all Canadian political leaders to stand up for humanity at this historic juncture. As Canadians cast their ballots, they must demand leadership that reflects their values: compassion, courage, and commitment to a better world. Canada's next government has an opportunity—and a responsibility—to prioritize humanity over indifference.

Sana Bég is the executive director of Doctors Without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières Canada. *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.

OPINION

Navigating a new global era

These volatile times call for broadening our relationships with countries beyond North America, moving promptly to pay our NATO dues, and thinking more militarily.

Andrew Tzembelicos

Opinion



As Canada grapples with the new reality of co-existing beside an unpredictable, at-times volatile neighbour, it might look to Greece for a path forward.

For centuries, Greece and Turkey have had an often fractious relationship—one that has included Turkish incursions into Greek territory, shadowing the plane of a former Greek prime minister, and aggression on the open seas. In 1996 and again in 2020, the two countries came close to war over territories.

In recent years, the situation has been especially delicate due to Turkish claims that significant parts of the Aegean Sea belong to it, not Greece. Beyond being an affront to Greek sensibilities and the residents who call those island territories home, the “Blue Homeland” doctrine—as Turkey is calling it, and now teaching in Turkish schools—directly contravenes what was negotiated more than a century ago in the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne following the First World War.



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' approach to relations with his Turkish neighbour may offer some lessons for Canada, writes Andrew Tzembelicos. Photograph courtesy of Flickr/CC-BY-4.0: © European Union 2022—Source: EP

So how is Greece safeguarding its sovereignty?

At the start of this month, the centre-right New Democracy government of Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced a plan to invest 25 billion euros (nearly \$39 billion) in a 12-year defence strategy. “The price of freedom is eternal vigilance,” said Mitsotakis in making this announcement, adding, “There can be no progress without security.”

In the past half-decade, Greece has strengthened its military capacity by making meaningful, concrete, incremental investments, such as purchasing 24 Rafale fighter jets from France since 2021; three Belharra frigates, also from France, while recently announcing its intent to purchase a fourth; and, in December 2024, committing to procure various drones and

armoured military vehicles from the United States.

Over the years, Greece has consistently paid its NATO dues, notably even during the difficult years of its 10-year economic crisis. Casting back to a column I wrote for *eKathimerini.com* in 2018: “Even in the face of that [economic] crisis, tiny Greece continued making its requisite payments—spending more than two per cent of its gross domestic product on defence. Despite the extreme difficulties that plagued its economy, Greece continued making its payments.”

Beyond these steps, the Mitsotakis government quickly and consistently embarked on a concerted diplomatic relationship-building effort since coming to power in 2019 and getting re-elected in 2023. This has included building stronger

relationships with its neighbours—namely Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel—as well as deepening its ties with European counterparts—namely France—and looking further to Saudi Arabia and India, with whom the latter recently completed joint military exercises.

Also helping Greece enhance its ties with neighbours and other allies: it has increasingly become a vital player in the global energy sector since the war with Ukraine.

For Canada, these volatile times call for broadening our relationships with countries beyond North America. In his initial days on the job, Prime Minister Mark Carney did well by meeting the European leaders of England, France, and Germany. To secure reliable, global partnerships, much more must be done. Like Greece, it

is also time Canada tapped into its unrealized potential in the global energy sector.

A second and crucial task involves moving promptly to pay our NATO dues—to demonstrate to our allies that Canada is a trusted partner. As former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley said and subsequently wrote in *Policy Options*: “We love to talk about sovereignty, about how we punch above our weight in the world. Well, it’s time to pay ... We can’t sit at the ... table and when the waiter arrives with the bill, excuse ourselves to go to the washroom.”

A final thing Canada must also do in this rapidly changing new global era is to think more militarily. We now have a neighbour we can no longer call a trusted partner. Equally worrisome are the territorial aspirations of other actors in the Arctic—namely Russia and China. As such, investing in our military must be an immediate priority. Canada’s security depends on this; for too long we have rested on our laurels, relying on others.

As part of this shift in mindset, Canada might also consider introducing mandatory military service. In Greece, this is a requirement for men aged 19 to 45 (since March, women can also now participate on a voluntary basis). Beyond what this would signify to the world beyond Canada’s borders, having a knowledgeable civic service body of disciplined trainees could help in emergency situations such as natural disasters—which are increasing in frequency—and future pandemics.

These are uncertain times. The post-Cold War global era that provided relative stability and defined Canada’s relations with the rest of the world since 1989 is over. Canada must adapt accordingly.

Andrew Tzembelicos is a Greek-Canadian writer and editor who worked with the federal Liberals in Ottawa for nearly a decade.

The Hill Times

The Ottawa Treaty at a crossroads: time for a middle path?

The conversation on landmines cannot be reduced to a binary. Canada must instead explore whether there’s a different path forward.

Alexander Landry

Opinion



We’ve recently passed International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action—a day meant to reaffirm our collective humanitarian commitments. But this year, it lands differently. In recent weeks, five nations on NATO’s Eastern Flank—Poland, Finland, and all three Baltic states—have either signalled or formalized their intent to withdraw from the 1997 Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel landmines.

In the wake of these decisions, two camps have emerged in stark opposition. On one side, advocates—and original proponents—Lloyd Axworthy and Louise Arbour urge Canada to recommit

and lead as a moral guardian of the Treaty. On the other, scholars such as Andrew Latham argue the Treaty no longer makes strategic sense, calling for an honest reckoning with the harsh realities of modern warfare. Both arguments have merit. But both also ignore a middle ground—one where Canada can begin leading a discussion on whether, and how, the Ottawa Treaty can be responsibly modernized without eroding its humanitarian core.

Unequivocally, landmines are horrific. They kill indiscriminately, they linger long after wars end, and civilians—particularly children—bear the brunt of their legacy. The Ottawa Treaty was one of Canada’s

proudest diplomatic achievements. I firmly agree that Canada must not walk away from it. The symbolism alone would be devastating. Conversely, another reality must be acknowledged concurrently: it is easy to uphold idealism when no one is shooting at you.

The capacity to sustain idealism is often a luxury afforded by geopolitical distance from existential threat. Canada particularly has championed humanitarian disarmament for decades, often with great effect. But for frontline states facing revanchist adversaries, the logic of deterrence and layered defence increasingly dominates planning. For them, disallowing the use of certain tools represents

unilateral disarmament in the face of an opponent who observes no such restraints.

In facing the spectre of invasion as our allies now do, it is understandable to reach for every possible deterrent. Asking these nations to restrain themselves with one arm metaphorically tied behind their back while their adversaries operate with no such limits feels not only unfair, but strategically naive. This is not weakness. Rather, weakness is disregarding Alliance defence spending targets while others scramble for survival. But that’s a debate for another day.

The deeper issue here is one of worldviews. Canada has long been a champion of liberal internationalism, grounded in the “rules-based international order.” Yet this order is now being tested in ways not seen since the Cold War. The return of great power

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OPINION

There is no Team Canada strategy without Indigenous people

We want to work together to develop the resources that will help us make our way economically in the uncertain world created by Donald Trump.

Stephen
Buffalo



Opinion

President Donald Trump's America is puzzling to say the least. Many of us involved in the resource sector wonder about his bullying tactics towards Canada, America's loyal friend and largest trading partner. To navigate these challenges, we need a strong resource sector with Indigenous voices at the table.

Under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA)—a deal negotiated by Trump that he once labelled the “best deal EVER”—I expected a better business environment for North America.

But that hasn't materialized. Canada is now scrambling to deal with an ever-changing tariff regime.

Canada's first ministers have organized a Team Canada response to this unjust treatment. Like many Canadians, they now seem to realize the country should have prepared a decade ago. Had we followed the lead of other energy powers like Norway, we would have enhanced our infrastructure and improved upstream development to get our resources to Asia and Europe. We could have ended our near-exclusive reliance on the U.S. market.

The world wants our oil and gas. But an ideologically driven agenda has gutted our ability to deliver. Anti-development legislation and the cancellation of key projects limited our ability to expand critical infrastructure. We've been playing catch-up instead of achieving our potential as global energy leaders, which would have netted revenue to expand social programs and bolster our independence. That's the legacy of former prime minister Justin Trudeau.

As an Albertan, Ottawa's anti-oil and gas agenda felt a lot like an anti-Alberta agenda. There's no question that external interests—including well-funded international anti-development groups (many of them American)—made public efforts to shape the debate around Canada's resources. Few Canadians outside the Prairies stood up.

As the economic engine of Canada—also known by the Cree word Kanata, which in our community means “clean”—the resource sector is vital to our response to Trump's unpredictable tariff war. Alberta can lead the way with its revitalizing and expanding energy sector, which has some of the world's best environmental guardrails.

The prosperity is not Alberta's alone. The sector creates positive ripple effects for the rest of Canada through equalization.

In the past, the industry's success also created frustration and division—often

because the rest of Canada does not appreciate its contributions. But that may have changed.

Trump's bullying tactics have drawn the nation together behind the Team Canada banner. The country may finally build more pipelines and infrastructure. The 2025 federal election provides an excellent opportunity to find out where the political parties stand on the development of Canada's energy potential.

Economists are united on this topic: without a robust energy sector, there won't be a robust Canadian economy to attract billions of investment dollars lost over the past decade.

To succeed, Team Canada requires a solid and prominent Indigenous partnership.

The misleading narrative that Indigenous communities oppose oil, gas, and pipelines is simply not true. Our organization, Indian Resource Council (IRC)—which represents more than 130 oil- and gas-producing First Nations—has long supported responsible resource development because it drives economic opportunity for our people.

Indigenous Peoples do not need or want activists speaking for us. We are tired of the ecological colonialism of environmentalists who persist in believing that they know what is best for us. We speak for ourselves. This means we must be at the Team Canada table.

More than a century of government dependency under a regressive Indian Act badly hurt our communities. We struggle daily with its effects—including the unbelievable reality of boil-water advisories for dozens of Indigenous communities. The absence of revenue-sharing agreements between governments and Indigenous people are a sign of unfinished treaty business. Our elders remind us routinely that we only agreed to share this land “to the depth of the plough.” Oil and gas is, for Western Canada, the new buffalo.

I am proud of the progress we have made. Initiatives such as the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, and the recently announced and expanded federal Indigenous Loan Guarantee program finally promise access to much-needed capital to engage fully in the modern economy.

The IRC advocates that Indigenous people and their institutions be included in national deliberations on our collective energy future. We have been ignored far too long.

We stand with the energy industry, and consider ourselves an essential part of Canada's economic present and future. We are proud Canadians—in fact, we are the First Peoples of Kanata. Companies and governments will come and go, but First Nations people will always be here. We want to work together to develop the resources that will help us—and all Canadians—make our way economically in the treacherous, uncertain world created by Trump.

Getting started means including Indigenous people and institutions in national economic planning and policymaking in a meaningful way.

Stephen Buffalo is president and CEO of the Indian Resource Council of Canada, and a senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute.

The Hill Times

Status of the artist: this a moment for leadership

As Canada chooses its next leader, let's be clear: you can't claim cultural sovereignty while leaving artists behind.

Zainub
Verjee



Opinion

With an election campaign in full swing, there's no shortage of talk about economic nationalism, energy superpowers, and productivity. But amid the campaign stops and national conversations, a crucial issue remains consistently overlooked: the status of the artist in Canada.

In the spring of 2023, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage presented a report that should have prompted national discussion. With 20 recommendations focused on improving the working conditions of Canadian artists, the report took a serious look at an often-neglected sector. Yet it landed with barely a ripple in media or political circles.

That's not just disappointing—it's revealing.

The conversation about cultural labour in Canada has been stalled for decades. The federal government passed the Status of the Artist Act in 1992, following Canada's commitment to the 1980 UNESCO declaration. But since then, its implementation has been uneven and insufficient. While the act recognizes artists as professionals, its lack of enforcement mechanisms has left too many creators in precarity.

The Heritage Committee's recent report had the potential to correct that. So why hasn't it gained traction?

More troubling, we still struggle to integrate the arts into our broader economic policy framework. Artists don't fit neatly into labour categories shaped by traditional employment models. Because of that, their work is undervalued—even as the cultural economy grows in size and influence.

Artists earn 46 per cent less than the average Canadian worker. Read that again.

They lack predictable income, employment benefits, and—often—basic labour protections. They face the same structural disadvantages as farm and migrant workers. Yet they remain almost entirely outside of mainstream labour policy discussions.

We hear much about “maximum sustainable employment”—the phrase behind the Bank of Canada's current mandate. On paper, it sounds promising: get as many people working as possible without pushing inflation too high. But dig a little deeper, and it becomes clear how shaky that promise is. No one—not even central bankers—can define what “maximum” employment looks like. It's based on estimates, models, and assumptions that often have little to do with how real people live and work.

This raises a simple but essential question: where do artists fit in all this?

The short answer is: they don't. The economy we've built doesn't know how to



If we're serious about rethinking work in the 21st century, we can't keep pretending that artists exist outside of the economy, writes Zainub Verjee. Photograph courtesy of Zainub Verjee

count artistic labour. Artists rarely have steady jobs. Their income is unpredictable. Their work doesn't always produce a “product” you can sell. That makes it hard to measure—and even harder to protect.

In economic terms, we call this “decommodified labour”—work that doesn't fit neatly into a marketplace. But in plain language, it just means precarious. For artists, decommodified often means unpaid, underpaid, or ignored. And yet this is the kind of labour that enriches our lives, builds our communities, and fuels entire industries—it underwrites cultural sovereignty.

If we're serious about rethinking work in the 21st century, we can't keep pretending that artists exist outside of the economy. They are part of it, and deserve to be treated like it.

The failed effort to pass former senator Patricia Bovey's bill—a declaration recognizing the essential role of artists—only underscores how fragile support for this sector really is. While the bill passed the Senate, it died after being introduced in the House by then-Liberal MP Jim Carr. There was no replacement, no push, and no public campaign.

Is there a conflict between the vision in the Bovey bill and the more procedural approach of the Heritage Committee report? Possibly. But that's no excuse for inaction. The two could have been complementary. And in a time when other sectors receive rapid policy attention, the absence of urgency here is telling.

The Heritage Committee's 20 recommendations provide a good base. But they need political champions. This is a moment for leadership—one that moves beyond lip service and addresses the real economic vulnerability artists face.

Culture is not a frill. It's a policy domain. Art is a public good.

As Canada chooses its next leader, let's be clear: you can't claim cultural sovereignty while leaving artists—the ones who built it—behind.

Zainub Verjee is an artist, writer and public intellectual, a member of the Order of Canada, and a recipient of the Governor General's Visual and Media Arts Award. Her contributions to Canadian art and culture have been recognized with honorary doctorates from leading Canadian universities. A former mentor to Action Canada, she is currently the executive director of Galleries Ontario Galleries.

The Hill Times

NDP has a familiar team fighting to keep its presence in the House

‘For the NDP, the battle of this campaign is going to be fought in their incumbent ridings,’ and target ridings, says strategist Jordan Lechnitz.

Continued from page 1

Mélanie Richer, a former NDP staffer and now principal at Earncliffe Strategies, noted many members of this year’s campaign were on the bus or in the war room during the last few federal elections, and that lends them a “certain level of comfort” and “understanding” in how best to operate.

“You have those relationships built; you know people’s strengths, people’s weaknesses, and ultimately everybody knows the leader,” said Richer, who worked on the 2015, 2019, and 2021 campaigns, last as media lead on tour.

Lechnitz and Richer both complimented the team’s work so far, with Lechnitz describing it as a “very focused operation,” with “well executed tour events.”

“The NDP always relies on a very strong ground game, and you can see evidence of them spinning up that machine across the country, particularly in incumbent seats,” said Lechnitz.

But the campaign isn’t without its challenges, including, most notably, the NDP’s consistently poor polling numbers. As of April 10, poll aggregator 338Canada had the party at around eight per cent support nationally.

Veteran NDP strategist Karl Bélanger said with the focus on U.S. President Donald Trump and Canada-U.S. relations, this year’s campaign is unlike any he’s been involved with.

While the NDP has made some good steps with recent announcements related to supporting Canadian workers, in his view, the party has struggled to “insert itself in the main political narrative of this election,” and “it’s partly why they have suffered in voting intentions,” said Bélanger.

Former NDP staffer **George Soule**, who’s helping out the 2025 campaign, agreed that this election is unlike any other due to the existential threats facing Canada.

“There’s a lot of challenges in this campaign as a result of that that make it different,” poor polling included, said Soule.

Despite that, he said “the people doing this work also



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh is backed by a team of experienced, and familiar, party organizers this election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Media got a look inside NDP headquarters in the Jack Layton Building in Ottawa on March 21, two days before the campaign officially kicked off. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

She’s also a former executive director of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, among other past jobs.

Richer noted that a number of the NDP’s incumbent seats are orange-blue ridings where the Conservatives are the leading challenger, and said thanks to her Manitoba roots, Howard understands that audience “and that orange-blue fight really well.”

Jonathan Gauvin, who was elevated from deputy chief to chief of staff upon Howard’s exit last fall, is deputy national campaign director and is once again overseeing the party’s campaign effort in Quebec. As part of his campaign responsibilities, Gauvin is helping with policy, rapid response, and issues management work.

A former assistant to then-Quebec NDP MP Ruth-Elle Brosseau, Gauvin is also a past issues co-ordinator for policy and research in the NDP caucus services office, and a former deputy director and later director for policy and research to Singh on the Hill.

Also working on policy this campaign is **Blake Evans**. A former senior staffer with the NDP in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta—including as director of government business to the government House leader to then-Alberta premier Rachel Notley—Evans has been on the

understand that there’s lots of campaign left,” and noted that heading into the 2011 leaders’ debates, the NDP was polling at around 13 per cent and people were “writing our obituary,” but “things shifted hard,” with the party ultimately being vaulted to official opposition status for the first time that election.

Lechnitz said the campaign appears to be doing “everything” it can to break into the Canada-U.S. relations narrative. “But for the NDP, the battle of this campaign is going to be fought in their incumbent ridings,” and target ridings to try to “keep a

solid presence in the House of Commons,” she said.

Leading that battle for the third election in a row is national campaign director **Jennifer Howard**, who exited as chief of staff to Singh to begin preparing for the election at party headquarters last September.

A former Manitoba cabinet minis-



Jennifer Howard is once again leading the NDP campaign as national director. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

ter, Howard had been running Singh’s leader’s office since 2018. Once an adviser to then-Manitoba premier Gary Doer, Howard sat in the provincial legislature from 2007 to 2016, and was a member of cabinet—including turns as minister of finance and of labour and immigration—between 2009 and 2014.

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NEWS

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Hill as director of parliamentary affairs and research to both the NDP whip and House leader since 2019, effectively serving as chief of staff for both offices.

Running the federal campaign in British Columbia is veteran NDP organizer **Glen Sanford**. He was similarly B.C. campaign director during the 2011, 2015, and 2019 federal elections, and worked as a B.C. strategist during the 2021 race.

Sanford has been working on campaigns at the provincial, municipal, and federal levels for decades, including as deputy campaign director for the BC NDP in 2017, and as a regional campaign director during the province's 2024 election. Outside of campaigning, Sanford is executive director of the Comox Valley Art Gallery.

As NDP national director since January 2024, **Lucy Watson** is another key figure in this year's campaign, including when it comes to fundraising.

Watson has been working for the federal party since ending her almost five-year run as executive director of the Ontario NDP in 2023. Watson was part of the 2015 federal campaign team, and subsequently joined then-leader Mulcair's office as director of operations; she was soon after named as one of three deputy chiefs of staff. Watson is also a former director with the Canadian Federation of Students.

NDP matriarch **Anne McGrath** has taken up the title of campaign spokesperson this election, but she's also serving as senior strategic adviser.

McGrath began working for then-NDP leader Jack Layton in 2005, starting as director of operations for NDP caucus services on the Hill, and has worked on every federal campaign since, including as political lead on the road with Layton during the 2011 election, and as national campaign director in 2015.

McGrath was federal party president from 2006 to 2009, and served as chief of staff to Layton from 2008 through to his death in 2011. She went on to run interim NDP leader Nycole Turmel's office, but left the Hill in 2012 and subsequently joined Ensisight Canada before returning to party headquarters to lead election preparations in 2013. From 2014 to 2015, McGrath was NDP national director. After the 2015 federal election, she made her way West to work for the Alberta NDP, including as deputy chief of staff to then-premier Notley. McGrath served as national director of the federal party again from 2019 to 2024, and returned to the Hill last year as principal secretary to Singh.

Leah Ward is director of communications, as part of which they're tackling issues management and rapid response for the campaign. Most recently a vice-president with Wellington Advocacy in Edmonton, Ward worked for the Alberta NDP between 2013 and

2021, including as an issues manager in Notley's office—where Ward crossed paths with McGrath—between 2017 and 2019, and later as communications director.

Alana Cahill and

Nina Amrov are both deputy communications directors, and both come from Singh's Hill team

where Cahill was most recently director of communications, supported by Amrov as deputy director.

A former assistant to then-B.C. NDP MP Murray

Rankin, Cahill became a federal caucus press secretary in July 2019, and was promoted to deputy director of communications in 2021, and to director in 2023.

Amrov is an ex-aide to then-Quebec NDP MP Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe and then-Saskatchewan NDP MP Georgina Jolibois, and a former president of the NDP staffers' union. In 2018, she became regional tour and media co-ordinator for the

federal NDP's Quebec caucus, and has since been a caucus press secretary and press secretary to Singh. Amrov was promoted to her current deputy director title in 2023.

Heather Stoutenburg is the campaign's director of digital. She spent the last almost five years as provincial director of the BC NDP—starting on an acting basis in 2020—and as such played a senior role in the party's 2020 and 2024 campaigns. Over her more than eight years working for the BC NDP, Stoutenburg has also been deputy provincial director and deputy digital director—including during the province's 2017 election.

Tanya Fredette is field director. Fredette worked on the party's 2015, 2019, and 2021 campaigns, including as an organizer in Quebec during the 2015 race. She's also a former assistant to then-Quebec NDP MP Raymond Côté, and lent a hand to Singh's 2017 leadership campaign. Her years working on the Hill include time spent as a training co-ordinator with the NDP caucus services team, and as acting director of the federal caucus' outreach team.

Ali Chatur is once again Singh's director of tour. He's been working closely with Singh for years, and was similarly tour director during the 2021

election, deputy tour director in 2019, and deputy tour director for Singh's 2017 leadership bid. Hailing from Toronto, Chatur has previously worked at Queen's Park, including as a tour and outreach officer to then-Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath, and as an MPP's assistant. He's also a former deputy director of outreach for the federal NDP, and past co-chair of the New Democratic Youth of Canada.

Playing a key role on the road with Singh is **Erin Morri-**

son, who has a background in communications and is this year's political lead.

As political lead, Morrison is the main go-between connecting the team on tour, and the team at party headquarters in Ottawa.

"Both are separate, but work really, really well together," said Richer, with each team focused on their respective responsibilities.

"Headquarters is making the decisions, is weighing the pros and cons ... and then they come to you [on the bus] with a plan, and you push that plan out."

Morrison replaced Gauvin as deputy chief of staff to Singh this past September. She previously worked for the Ontario NDP between 2017 and 2022, including as communications director during the 2018 and 2022 provincial campaigns, and is a former director of communications and media relations for the Saskatchewan NDP, a past senior communications strategist for the City of Regina, and was once a reporter for *Regina Leader-Post*.

Laura Ziemba is wagon master for the 2025 NDP tour, offering support to media on the campaign trail and making sure Singh gets to events on time.

Another campaign veteran, Ziemba did the same in 2021, and in recent years has similarly been wagon master to Horwath as then-Ontario NDP leader in 2022, and to then-B.C. premier John Horgan during the 2020 provincial election. In 2018, Ziemba was tour manager for the Ontario NDP campaign. She previously worked in the Ontario government House leader's office for a number of years under Bob Rae's NDP government, and is a former manager of public relations for the Ontario Nurses Association. Ziemba is currently owner of Paper Chase Communications.

Also on the road with Singh is press secretary **Simon Charron**.

Outside of the campaign, Charron has been press secretary to Montreal Mayor **Valérie Plante** since the start of 2024. He previously served as a local campaign director for Plante's Projet Montréal party during city's 2021 municipal election, and as deputy director supporting candidates in eastern Montreal during the 2017 municipal race. Charron has also worked for the non-profit Équiterre, and has been active with the NDP's federal riding association in Rosemont-La Petite-Patrie, Que., among other things.

lryckewaert@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Jonathan Gauvin is deputy director of the national campaign, and Quebec campaign director. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia



Ali Chatur is tour director. *Photograph courtesy of Facebook/Lindsay Duncan*



Lucy Watson is NDP national director. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Anne McGrath is once again on hand for the NDP's 2025 national campaign. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Leah Ward is communications director. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Erin Morrison is political lead on the road with the NDP. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Laura Ziemba is the NDP wagon master. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



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OPINION

2025 ELECTION

Foreign interference didn't damage our democratic institutions—our institutions did it to themselves



If you read the final report of Foreign Interference Commission chair Marie-Josée Hogue closely, you'll see the failures lie with politicians, civil servants, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and the media, writes Mark Johnson. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The needless secrecy, selective leaks, political theatre, dark undertone of racism, and the gullible media who ate it up stoked the fears of foreign interference and did harm.

Mark Johnson

Opinion



As Canadians plow through another election, the issue of foreign interference is arising again. Given the oceans of ink that has been spilled on this topic, perhaps our leaders of all types can avoid repeating their past mistakes.

The final report of the federal commission into foreign interference was published a little more than two months ago. I've taken an interest in this topic as I ran as the Conservative candidate in the 2021 federal election in a riding with a large ethnic Chinese population, Scarborough-Agincourt,

Ont. What did Justice Marie-Josée Hogue, the commission chair, conclude after almost 18 months of detailed investigation?

The harsh truth is a perverse irony. Public confidence in our democracy was not damaged by foreign powers, but instead by the very institutions that should have protected it. If you read Hogue's report closely, connect the dots, and then pull up to a greater height to see where the failures lie, you'll see them scattered across Ottawa, from politicians and civil servants to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and the media.

For months on end throughout 2023 and 2024, Canada was seized by salacious allegations in breathless media reports of interference in our 2019 and 2021 federal elections. Reports that our democracy was under assault from Beijing, New Delhi, and Moscow were coming from all sides.

Among the stories were claims that our politicians had secret meetings with foreign agents to sell out Canada, candidates were bought and paid for, overseas relatives of MPs were being threatened, and several parliamentarians had even engaged in treason. Spies in Parliament!

Some of these claims were false or exaggerated. Over and over again.

Ultimately, the inquiry found possible interference in only "a very small number of isolated

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cases” where it “may have had some impact on the outcome,” as stated in the report's summary, but not a single MP won or lost because of it.

The most explosive chapter in this story broke last June when the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) issued a bombshell report alleging that several parliamentarians were conspiring with foreign powers. A national uproar followed.

It was a false alarm. Hogue's report castigates NSICOP for shoddy workmanship, and reckless language. Despite all the torqued headlines, she found “no evidence of ‘traitors’ in Parliament.” The claim of parliamentarians colluding with foreign powers was not supported by the intelligence, it “contained inaccuracies,” she “did not see evidence,” and it had the sad, troubling effect of casting suspicion on politicians with ethnic backgrounds.

Most importantly, Hogue concluded there was “no evidence ... that our institutions have been seriously affected” by foreign interference. To all the chicken littles who screamed that our fragile democracy is under siege, she found “no cause for widespread alarm.” Moreover, foreign interference “should not be overblown.”

To sum it up, much ado about not much of anything. Our elections are safe and sound, but be alert.

Who came in for serious criticism in the report? Our own institutions. Our elected leaders, top bureaucrats, and intelligence officials need to up their game and improve their performance, co-ordination, and communications, both with themselves and with the public.

Exacerbating the problem were politicians and officials who were much too secretive when transparency was called for. This led to leaks that formed the basis of inaccurate media reports, causing public fears to spiral uncontrollably upward. It's human nature to become suspicious when information is withheld. We saw this phenomenon on a national scale.

Hogue also rebuked the media, stating that the detrimental impact on our democracy was caused in part by them not having “a full and accurate picture.” Perhaps the media did their best with what they had. Perhaps they got played by their sources. Perhaps they should have known better.

In May 2023, former governor general David Johnston, as special rapporteur on this issue, was likely right when he concluded in his initial report that a full inquiry was unnecessary, looking strictly at the facts. But once public alarm had been jacked up to a wild level, we needed Hogue and her team to be the cooler heads who would prevail, to put the problem in perspective, and to criticize those who deserved it.

Remember why we started that exercise: we wanted to restore confidence in our elections. I hope the final report goes some distance to doing just that. We should be grateful.

When you string it all together, actual foreign interference didn't do any serious damage, for that was never more than minor, local stuff. The real damage was done by our own politicians, civil servants, intelligence agencies, and media—the ones who needed to be level-headed, who lost control of the whole thing.

Perhaps most importantly, let's be aware that inflated claims of foreign interference will cast aspersions on ethnic minorities. Accusatory rhetoric may be twisted by the unscrupulous or misinterpreted by many. When we create fears of an “enemy within”—that Canada is rife with Chinese or Indian government agents—we imperil innocent Canadians.

The exaggerated claims, needless secrecy, selective leaks, political theatre, dark undertone of racism, and the gullible media who ate it up—that's what stoked the fears of foreign interference and did the harm.

Let's be clear. The people who damaged our democracy are not in Beijing, New Delhi, or Moscow. They're in Ottawa. Let's hope they do a better job in this election.

Mark Johnson was a Conservative candidate in Toronto in the 2021 federal election, and is a corporate lawyer who has worked in the private and public sectors. His *Substack* is *Thoughts and Ideas*. He can be reached at mgj@bell.net.

The Hill Times

Trade talks more opaque after Canada's foreign ministry cuts live briefings in wake of media leaks

Global Affairs Canada says it ended live trade briefings because leaks could threaten the final deal, but the department says it has 'no reason to believe' that the Canada-Indonesia trade pact was actually affected after reporting by *The Hill Times*.

Continued from page 1

after the various rounds of negotiation, offering more-limited information than what was released during the briefings.

"Some of the verbal debriefs resulted in leaked information, which was not the intention, and senior management has decided to convey only high-level written summaries as a result," said Scott Gordon in an email on July 24, 2024. Gordon is a senior trade policy officer in GAC's trade policy and negotiation division for Asia.

In August 2024, Alicia Barker-Åström, a junior trade policy analyst in GAC's trade policy and negotiations division for Asia, noted in an email that the new policy would allow the department to "better control information we give to external audiences," remarking that it "can ensure that we do not jeopardize negotiation positions by revealing any details that could be used against Canada by negotiating partners or other entities."

The change came a number of months after *The Hill Times* reported on the state of negotiations with Indonesia, including information obtained from a stakeholder briefing after the fourth round of talks. Alisha Somerville, GAC's deputy director for ASEAN and Indonesia, noted in an email that this newspaper reported on information from a stakeholder briefing and remarked: "no shame."

Canada and Indonesia concluded talks for the trade pact in late 2024. The text of the agreement has yet to be released, and the pact has not entered into force. GAC released a summary of "benefits and negotiated outcomes" for the deal in February.

The change applies to current negotiations, as well as future ones, according to draft letters.



Then-trade minister Mary Ng concluded negotiations with Indonesia on a new trade pact in late 2024. Photograph courtesy of X/Mary Ng

GAC did not respond with receipt of the Access to Information request regarding its decision to end verbal briefings within the legislated 30-day timeline, and complied only after *The Hill Times* launched a complaint with the information commissioner.

Indonesia trade pact not affected by leaks: GAC

Asked if the final agreement with Indonesia was diminished due to leaks to the media, GAC spokesperson John Babcock said that "in this case, we do not have reason to believe that revelations to the media impacted the final agreement," remarking that the final agreement is a "significant achievement" in deepening the bilateral relationship.

Babcock said the Canadian government attempts to balance its "commitment to transparency" while protecting its "negotiating prerogative" in all trade talks, remarking that a "degree of confidentiality" is needed to secure the best deal.

"Revealing sensitive details to a wide audience, which includes our negotiating partners, risks jeopardizing Canada's negotiating positions, which in turn can undermine efforts to secure positive outcomes for Canadian stakeholders," he added.

One draft letter explaining the change notes that a written debrief would be in line with the European Union's approach, but acknowledges that the Canadian format "is shorter, and shares a lesser amount of detail" than that of Brussels. It states that a written debrief allows for the department to "reach a broader audience."

After *The Hill Times* sent questions to GAC in February 2024 regarding negotiations with Indonesia—some of which included information obtained from a stakeholder briefing—emails

show that Canada's chief negotiator for those talks indicated that he would start releasing less information during the briefings.

"Next stakeholder debrief I'm giving people the absolute barest of details and I'm telling them why," said Aaron Fowler in an email on Feb. 16, 2024. "I'm not playing this game anymore."

Fowler is GAC's associate assistant deputy minister for international trade, and is currently the department's senior official for Canada-U.S. trade.

"The release of the information can have the effect of undermining Canada's negotiating position, which diminishes our ability to secure outcomes that are in Canada's economic interests," one draft letter reads, noting that leaks can "create tensions" with countries that Canada is negotiating with, as they can be "inconsistent" with "positions committed by Canadian negotiators at the table."

During the NAFTA renegotiations, it was the United States that became irate with the Canadian government leaking information about the state of trade talks to the press.

"Negotiations were especially tense at one point last fall when one story after another popped up on Canadian news sites about unusual U.S. proposals. U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer scolded his Canadian counterparts over media leaks," *Politico* reported in 2018. "The Americans fumed as their proposals went from the negotiating table to the internet."

Prepared talking points for a stakeholder briefing in April 2024 provide insight into how Fowler explained a change in format of the briefings to stakeholders, as it notes that the briefings are for "businesses, organizations, and people who have a stake in the negotiations," and are "not media briefings," indicating that "media

has access to us through other channels."

Emails released to *The Hill Times* through the Access to Information Act show the limits of those "other channels."

When GAC officials were discussing how to respond to questions from this newspaper, Fowler commented that the department doesn't comment on ongoing trade negotiations, suggesting it take a "very general approach" to the questions.

The department didn't directly respond regarding what "other channels" were being referred to.

The talking points note the department's willingness to speak with individual stakeholders in a "more intimate setting" to "better assess" if information "is not treated with appropriate discretion."

Some—but not all—of the draft letters claim that information released is "often being incorrectly reported on or taken out of context."

The Hill Times asked GAC to provide specific instances of information being incorrectly reported on or taken out of context. The department did not provide any examples.

'We need a lot more transparency': Green co-leader

Opposition MPs' frustration over the lack of transparency in Canada's trade negotiations peaked as the government was trying to swiftly move an implementation bill for the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) through the House of Commons in 2020.

To gain NDP support for the passage of the CUSMA implementation bill in 2020, the Liberal government agreed to amend the policy for parliamentary oversight over trade bills, which now includes tabling a 90-day notice of intent before beginning trade talks, tabling the objectives of those talks 30 days before they begin, and the tabling of an economic impact assessment with an implementation bill.

MPs were again miffed later that year as they were called to study the Canada-U.K. Trade Continuity Agreement before seeing the text of the pact.

During this spring election campaign, the Bloc Québécois pledged to introduce a bill in the House to have the preliminary texts of trade deals voted on by Parliament before they are signed. Currently, parliamentarians don't vote on the trade agreements, but on an implementation bill for the pact, which changes domestic law to coalesce with the deal.

Unlike in Canada, other legislatures around the world give

lawmakers more involvement in the process.

In the U.S., the White House must be given Trade Promotion Authority from Congress. That authority gives Congress the ability to define negotiating objectives, as well as mandates an oversight and consultation process during negotiations.

In Canada, trade negotiations are the sole justification of the executive.

The European Parliament can't change the mandate of negotiations—which is in the European Commission's jurisdiction—but the commission is required to share confidential information about trade talks with MEPs to be informed about progress made during trade talks.

Green co-Leader Elizabeth May said there have been improvements in injecting greater transparency in the trade negotiations process—such as the role of stakeholders during the CUSMA negotiations—but she said that a lot more work is needed.

"[Transparency] is better since 2020, but it's not as good as it could be," she said.

"We need a lot more transparency," she said. "When you are negotiating anything new—and particularly as it impacts different sectors in Canada on a sector-to-sector basis—the industries need to know."

She said it's possible to inform the public about negotiations without compromising the deal.

"The full engagement of stakeholders and sharing of relevant information so that the public knows what its government is doing on its behalf can certainly be improved," May said.

She said there is a role for parliamentarians to work with the trade minister to understand why more information can't be shared given what is disclosed to lawmakers in the European Parliament.

"Let's start with the default assumption that we should do it here and if we're not going to, tell us as opposition MPs 'why.' Let's review this," she said. "Well-meaning, intelligent people can disagree, but it would be awfully good to hear their rationale if they don't want improved transparency—such as we see in the EU—within Canada when we're negotiating a trade deal."

A 2017 Senate report on free trade raised the concern over a lack of transparency and consultations during trade negotiations.

Neither the Liberal, Conservative, nor NDP campaigns shared how their prospective governments would handle government transparency, including during trade negotiations.

Babcock said the Canadian government is "committed to ensuring transparency" in trade negotiations, citing the example of providing notice to Parliament, having public consultations to "inform" talks, disseminating reports after negotiating rounds, giving "regular updates" to "provinces and territories, Indigenous partners, and interested stakeholders," and tabling the text of a trade pact before moving a implementation bill.

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On (and off) the



Chad Wolf, left, former acting United States secretary of homeland security, speaks with John Walsh, former Conservative Party of Canada president, at the Canada Strong and Free Network (CSFN) conference in Ottawa on April 9. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



During his opening address on April 9, Michael Binnion, CSFN's board chair, reminded attendees that there would be no partisan activities or federally-affiliated partisans included in the conference's program. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Bari Weiss, founder and editor of American *The Free Press*, delivered the headline-keynote address on April 9. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



John Baird, a former Harper-era cabinet minister, moderated the hour-long discussion with Weiss. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Retired Canadian Armed Forces general Rick Hillier closed out the first night of conference speakers on April 9 with a call to action for attendees to be 'allies' to Canada's Jewish community in the face of rising antisemitism. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson



The Toronto Sun's Brian Lilley, left, told Alberta Premier Danielle Smith during their fireside chat at the CSFN on April 10 that she has been 'taking a lot of hits lately' for recent lobbying efforts in the U.S. where she's spoken with right-wing influencers. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Smith waves to the audience gathered to listen to her speech at the CSFN on April 10. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



NDP strategist Brian Topp, left, moderated a panel with former U.S. trade representative official Beth Baltzan, and past Canadian trade negotiator Steve Verheul at the Broadbent Institute's Progress Summit at Ottawa's Delta Hotel on April 10.



Verheul, who led the CUSMA negotiations as well as Canada's trade pact with the European Union, told the audience 'Canada is now in a difficult position,' with many countries opting against retaliation in response to American tariffs. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

campaign trail



Baltzan said the attempts to dissuade the Trump administration over its current trajectory may feed into its view of being part of an 'extractive relationship' with other countries. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Bea Bruske, president of the Canadian Labour Congress, speaks at the Broadbent Institute's Progress Summit on April 10. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh speaks at the Broadbent Institute Progress Summit on April 11. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia



Singh takes questions from reporters at the conference on April 11. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia



Prime Minister Mark Carney arrives for a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Canada-U.S. Relations and National Security on Parliament Hill on April 11. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Carney, who paused on his campaign activities for the day, speaks with reporters after the committee meeting. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, left, and his wife Anaïda arrive for a campaign announcement at the Tomlinson Environmental Services shop in Nepean, Ont., on April 12. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Conservative candidate for Nepean, Barbara Bal, introduces the party leader. Though the event was in the Ottawa suburb of Nepean, it was officially in Poilievre's riding of Carleton, Ont. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



During the campaign stop, Poilievre unveiled his party's plan to support Canada's veterans. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canadian election outcome not of 'pivotal strategic importance' for China and India, say observers

China is focused on its budding trade war with the U.S., says Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada VP Vina Nadjibulla, but former envoy Guy Saint-Jacques thinks Beijing would still prefer a Liberal government.

Continued from page 1

New Delhi-linked agents aided the party leadership campaign of Conservative Pierre Poilievre in 2022. There is no evidence that either campaign was involved in the efforts.

"I don't think Canada is very high on Beijing's agenda," said Vina Nadjibulla, vice-president of research and strategy at the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, remarking that China is focused on its budding trade war with the United States and fostering support in Southeast Asia.

"To the extent that Beijing is paying attention, it is essentially watching to see what each candidate might be saying about China, and in general, China is interested in making sure that views that are not friendly to it are not being discussed in the context of the election," she said.

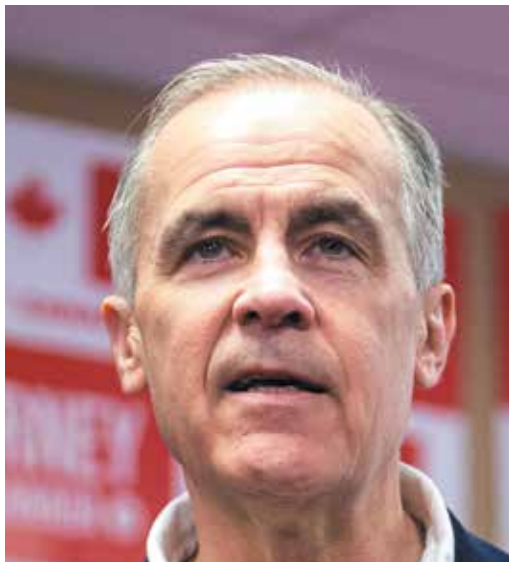
Nadjibulla said the same is true for the Indian government as geopolitical upheavals outshine any concern about the next Canadian government.

Former Canadian diplomat Randolph Mank said that given the asymmetrical nature of Canada's relationship with China and India, their interest in this country's election is "very minor."

"They might have favourites for whatever personal reasons, but I doubt that they are pouring in enormous resources into a critically considered outcome in Canada," said Mank, a former ambassador in the Indo-Pacific region. "[American President] Donald Trump occupies much more bandwidth than anyone else can deal with."

Toronto Metropolitan University professor Sanjay Ruparelia, an expert on Indian politics, said any indication of foreign interference is worrying, but it isn't high on the agenda for India or China.

"I don't think the Canadian election is of pivotal strategic importance to Beijing or New Delhi, in terms of who forms the next government," he said.



Liberal Leader Mark Carney, left, and Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, right, have been mum on how their governments would engage in the Indo-Pacific region. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

Neither Carney, nor Poilievre have offered any indication of whether they would largely continue the path of former prime minister Justin Trudeau and his 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy in the region, as almost all foreign policy discussion has been reserved for Canada's relationship with the U.S., and shoring up relationships with European allies.

"We haven't heard much from either candidate," said Nadjibulla, remarking that any efforts to diversify trade away from the U.S. will have to be centred on Asia and not Europe.

"Regardless of who's the prime minister, if Canada truly wants to diversify and have more options outside the U.S., we need to redouble our efforts on the Indo-Pacific," she said.

Both leading party leaders have called for increased trade diversification, but Carney has snubbed the notion that China is a partner with which to do so. He has called on increased trade with "like-minded countries," citing his first trip as prime minister to France and the United Kingdom.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives have questioned Carney's ties to China, including a 2024 trip he took to Beijing as chair of Brookfield Asset Management.

Beijing prefers Liberals in power: former envoy

Though Canada may not be high on Beijing's list of priorities, that doesn't mean the government may not be playing favourites, according to a former ambassador.

Former Canadian ambassador Guy Saint-Jacques, Canada's top diplomat in China from 2012 to 2016, said that based on his experience, Beijing prefers a Liberal government in power in Ottawa.

But Saint-Jacques said a return to the Canada-China relationship as it was prior to the Two Michaels affair won't happen.



The inquiry led by Justice Marie-Josée Hogue, pictured, highlighted interference efforts by China and India in Canadian politics. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

"Carney knows very well that trust has been broken, and that China can act as a bully," he said, but added that efforts to diversify trade will require a renewed look at the type of economic relationship Canada wants with China.

He said that he expects Poilievre to take a hardline position on China, in a similar vein to past Conservative leader Erin O'Toole. But that still involves having a diplomatic relationship with China that involves dialogue, Saint-Jacques said.

"If you want to pursue foreign policy, you need to speak to countries that you don't like to discuss issues with them, especially countries that are very influential like China and India," Saint-Jacques said.

Gordon Houlden, director emeritus of the University of Alberta's China Institute, echoed Saint-Jacques that China prefers a Liberal government in Canada.

"On balance," he said, "the Chinese would rather the Liberals would form a government because of the more vigorous criticism of China from the Conservatives."

But Houlden noted that since the Two Michaels episode, both

the Liberals and Conservatives have adopted a critical note when dealing with China.

He said Beijing likely has some residual memory of closer ties it had with past Liberal governments even after the frostiness that developed under Trudeau.

The path forward

Nadjibulla said diversification efforts in Asia should involve deepening engagement with Japan and South Korea, as well as in Southeast Asia. In late 2024, Canada concluded negotiations on a free trade pact with Indonesia, and is currently negotiating a deal with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"That effort needs to be redoubled," Nadjibulla said. "We need to help Canadians do much more in that region."

She said there is also an opportunity to develop a roadmap for resetting the relationship with India in a post-Trudeau government.

The Canada-India relationship hit a nadir after Trudeau alleged that the Indian government was tied to the extraterritorial assassination of Sikh independence leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in 2023. That devolved as both countries expelled high-level diplomats—currently neither has a high commissioner in the other's capital. In October 2024, the RCMP said its investigations "have revealed that Indian diplomats and consular officials based in Canada leveraged their official positions to engage in clandestine activities, such as collecting information for the Government of India, either directly or through their proxies; and other individuals who acted voluntarily or through coercion."

Prior to the election, Carney said that there are "opportunities" to rebuild Canada's relationship with India, noting the need for

"share values" in the commercial relationship.

During the campaign, Poilievre has remained muted on Ottawa's bilateral relationship with India, despite previously criticizing the Liberal government's handling of ties. A Global News report found that former leaders of a Canadian group tied to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party donated thousands of dollars to the Conservative Party.

"I received 37,000 separate donations that anybody can make online," Poilievre said when asked about the story. "We don't have the capacity to do CSIS background checks on every single person who makes those 37,000 donations."

Ruparelia said that since the days of the Conservative government of then-prime minister Stephen Harper, the party has focused more on the Canada-India economic and commercial relationship over other issues.

He said that any attempt by the Indian government to boost the Conservative Party is less tied to Poilievre as it is to the party as a whole.

"What happened was the relationship had become unfortunately personalized in many ways [with Trudeau]," Ruparelia said, which has led to some commentators believing that a change would help reset the relationship—whether it be a Liberal or Conservative government.

Sikh community can't be used as 'bargaining chip': spokesperson

Sikh Federation of Canada spokesperson Moninder Singh said the Indian government has to be held to account "at the highest level possible" before any process can begin to normalize relations between the two countries.

"Until then, it is very difficult for the Sikh community in Canada to say that the relationship should be normalized because there are just more people at risk," he said.

Singh said it would be "disheartening" and "completely unacceptable" to strike deals to diversify trade that could put Sikhs at risk by using the community as a "bargaining chip."

He said the spotlight is on the Conservative Party to see how it would handle the relationship going forward.

He said the Liberals under Trudeau and the New Democrats have taken "firm stands" against India and in defence of Canada's sovereignty.

"We haven't heard much from the Conservative Party," he said.

Singh's Sikh Federation has distributed a questionnaire to national parties and candidates in more than 30 ridings to gauge their views on foreign interference and other important issues for the Sikh community.

He said to date the candidates have addressed India's alleged foreign interference reactively, instead of proactively.

"It's been when we've raised the issue—people have been compelled to answer," he said.

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Project competence, avoid silly dances: parties seek balance with social media strategies

A fragmented media landscape has increased the value of social media experimentation, but an NDP stumble may show the risk of full campaign integration, says digital strategist Michael Roy.

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Liberals' creative lead during the 2015 and 2019 elections.

"The tone is serious, existential, and it has pivoted 180 degrees since last fall," Sommer continued. "The conversation both online and off is dominated by Trump, and the Liberals' content is only about that."

Aside from the Liberals' two pre-election ads featuring actor Mike Myers, *Elbows Up* and *Canada is Everything*—which have collectively garnered nearly one million views across YouTube, X, Facebook, and Instagram, as well as significant attention south of the border—Sommer noted that one of the most successful and truly "organic" pieces of social content has been Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney announcing that "Canada is ready to lead" in response to Trump's April 2 tariff announcement. While the initial post on Carney's X account has garnered more than 1.2 million views, the video has also been viewed millions of times more as other larger accounts reshared the video.

Sommer, now a vice-president of strategic communications with Enterprise Canada, said that given the prevailing context of the election, it is appropriate for Carney's tone on social media to be less playful, and any future instances of levity would be incredibly "safe."

"It says a lot about the tone of the election when the riskiest thing we've seen the candidates do is be interviewed by Nardwuar," explained Sommer, pointing to the appearances by Carney and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh on



Enterprise Canada's Dave Sommer says the Liberals' 'safe, serious, and simple' social media strategy is the appropriate tone for voters looking for a projection of competence online and IRL. Photograph by Jared Leckie



Conservative strategist Jordan Paquet says the Tories are taking 'calculated risks' with the party's social media policy, and keeping a close watch on which influencers they are willing to gamble on appearing with the leader. Photograph courtesy of Bluesky Strategy Group



NDP digital strategist Michael Roy says the NDP's explicit integration and the Conservatives' unofficial accommodation of social media influencers on the campaign is 'a distinction without a difference.' Photograph courtesy of Michael Roy



NDP strategist Jordan Lechnitz says that elevating right-wing independent media over mainstream journalists may be trapping the Conservatives' message in a 'digital cul-de-sac.' Photograph courtesy of Jordan Lechnitz

the music journalist and "human serviette's" interview program.

"Carney is doing what he needs to do; he's making announcements, doing the hero videos, kissing babies, and making Passover matzo balls," Sommer said. "They're hitting the social media signposts, they don't need to do much more; just project competence and don't do the silly dances."

Alternatively, Sommer noted that while expectations had been higher, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's campaign isn't doing much more experimental social media work as part of its official strategy, but noted the party still benefits from "nearly 50 years of movement conservatism's experiments with alternative media."

However, while Sommer said Poilievre's more recent appearances alongside his wife Anaida on the inaugural episode of the *C-Suite* podcast with Camila Gonzalez, a former broadcaster and Miss International Canada, or his one-on-one interview with *The Knowledge Project*'s Shane Parrish will likely garner millions of views, including through secondary clips and reshares, they may not necessarily expand his reach.

Sommer added that Anaida is an obvious asset, and the couple's

interactions both on the podcast and during the campaign while travelling with their children have been an effective way to "humanize" Poilievre, and show a softer, more personal side that can be hard to display as opposition leader in the House of Commons, but it may be too late in the game for that.

"These alternative channels and podcasters can be effective at reaching those larger audiences, but that also requires a message that's going to resonate, and right now, Poilievre's isn't," Sommer said.

"On social media, Poilievre has lived and died as a partisan destroyer, and people were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt, but the second Trudeau was gone and his messaging required a different gear, people started tuning out because he didn't have one."

Former Conservative PMO staffer Jordan Paquet told *The Hill Times* that despite the expectations for Poilievre to branch further beyond the mainstream than he has this election, given the close race, the Conservatives could only take very "calculated risks."

Although appearing on an episode of the massively popular Joe Rogan podcast would undoubtedly offer Poilievre a

huge audience to which he could spread his message, the campaign's calculation needs to focus on which audiences would grow the base rather than just get it excited, Paquet said.

And while Poilievre's official appearances have been with influencers with softer edges than some Conservatives would prefer, that was also a strategic part of the calculation.

"The biggest risk you want to avoid is associating the leader with someone who has or will say something that will end up being a distraction to the campaign," Paquet said, pointing to the "stumble" the NDP had in its inaugural attempt to fully integrate social media influencers into the campaign.

More than a month before the campaign officially began, Singh—the only federal leader currently active on TikTok—took to the platform to call out "creators" and invite them aboard his campaign bus to help the NDP make content during his leader's tour. Once the campaign began, Singh posted additional callouts regularly on Instagram to update potential collaborators on where the tour was heading next.

However, early in the campaign, the NDP had to boot one of those creators from the bus, after past comments she made com-

paring Israel's war in Gaza to the Holocaust resurfaced online.

In a statement, the NDP said the influencer had been removed from the campaign and would not participate in future events. The party blamed the incident on a lack of vetting, and said it would be "reviewing how we engage with online voices to ensure alignment with our values."

Former NDP digital director Michael Roy said that despite the initial stumble, the only way to learn and improve is to experiment and sometimes fail, but he doesn't believe a single mishap will make or break the election, nor discredit future attempts.

While the Conservatives have been careful to keep their fingerprints off of any social media activity by the influencers and independent media that follow Poilievre's campaign, whether or not they are officially sanctioned by the party is "a distinction without a difference," Roy said. "I think the NDP is being much more forthright, but just because the Conservatives are trying to maintain that plausible deniability, I wouldn't let them off the hook if I were in an opposing war room."

While those influencers and independent media have not been invited on the party's official tour bus or plane, unlike the "mainstream media," influencers have received a far greater level of accommodation and access, including the ability to roam freely during Conservative rallies and access backstage areas.

According to a post by the influencer popularly known as "The Pleb Reporter," one recent example of the literal and figurative "elevated status" those influencers enjoy over traditional media is a large step ladder to allow them to capture an overhead view of the rallies.

Speaking with *The Hill Times*, "The Pleb Reporter" said he doesn't consider himself a "VIP or invited guest," and shows up to rallies of his own volition to film, but has applied for accreditation at certain events to gain access to the media riser.

NDP political strategist Jordan Lechnitz told *The Hill Times* that while the Conservatives haven't explicitly detailed an influencer strategy, it has been abundantly evident content creators are receiving far greater access and accommodation from the campaign than the average journalist.

However, Lechnitz said that beyond any past problematic statements or behaviour by one of those influencers that could reflect negatively on the party, the Conservatives' biggest concern should be whether the party's message is trapped in a "digital cul-de-sac" of its own making, and failing to reach anyone who isn't already subscribed.

"The theory of the Conservatives' campaign is very much about downplaying traditional media and instead relying on a sort of right-leaning online media environment," Lechnitz said. "It's obviously deliberate, but whether their viewers represent a growing base or just the audience they already had is the key question."

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OPINION

The Ottawa Treaty at a crossroads: time for a middle path?



The Ottawa Treaty has saved countless lives, but clinging to static interpretations while the global order shifts is not a virtue, writes Alexander Landry. Photograph courtesy of Flickr/Clear Path International

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competition and disregard for international norms demand that Canada confront a difficult truth: liberalism only works when everyone plays by the rules. And right now, not everyone is.

Does that mean we abandon our values? No. But it does mean we must adapt. The conversation on landmines cannot be reduced to a binary. Canada must instead explore whether modernization, conditional flexibility, or operational caveats offer a path forward. As a key example, NATO has different rules in crisis. Perhaps the Convention needs a review mechanism to address wartime exigencies without abandoning its moral compass.

Importantly, this middle ground cannot be soulless compromise. It must engage with the real fears and strategic needs of our allies while remaining anchored in principle. The Ottawa Treaty could introduce provisions allowing for host-nation authorization of defensive mine deployment under NATO or UN missions—subject to transparent conditions, time limits, and post-conflict clearance obligations.

Smart technologies could also be part of the answer, as capacity exists to deploy mines with precision, integrate them with GPS and time-bound controls, and remove them efficiently post-conflict. These aren't

perfect solutions, but if they reduce the harm to civilians while addressing security concerns, they deserve exploration. The alternative remains a precedent where nations feel compelled to leave simply because no mechanism exists for constructive reform.

Ultimately, the Ottawa Treaty has saved countless lives, remaining a vital instrument of humanitarian law. Yet clinging to static interpretations while the global order shifts is not a virtue; it is a vulnerability. Canada should not have to choose between moral clarity and strategic necessity. With leadership and nuance, both can be preserved.

What's needed now is not a wholesale retreat from the Treaty's ideals, nor a stubborn refusal to acknowledge new realities. Rather, what's required is a conversation regarding what responsible, adaptive Treaty stewardship looks like in an age where deterrence and defence must co-exist with humanitarian restraint.

Alexander Landry is director of federal engagement and partnerships at OVA, and is a research fellow for the Institute for Peace & Diplomacy. He is a graduate from King's College London's International Affairs postgraduate program, and sits on the Royal Canadian Military Institute's Defence and Security Studies Program Committee.

The Hill Times

NEWS

Election platform release a 'pass/fail' exercise with little reward for expedience, say politicos

Continued from **page 6**

oversaw policy and speechwriting during the election, said that while there are strategic reasons for the parties to delay releasing their platforms, there may also be an operational one.

Unlike in fixed-date elections, when parties can submit their platforms to the PBO well before the writ period, during a snap election, those documents can only be submitted once it has officially begun.

"The Conservatives have announced a lot of substantial policies this election, and I expect them to put it all together as one coherent document," Mader said, adding that Poilievre is more "rigorous" than most politicians when it comes to wanting "solid numbers" when he makes promises.

Yet, while Mader expects the Conservatives to release those numbers before the first debate, he also understands the benefit of pushing it even further to "seize the agenda in that last week."

While O'Toole decided to release early to regain attention amid the pandemic response, Poilievre doesn't have the same concern and may only lose some of the attention once he releases his comprehensive plan, Mader said.

"In Canadian elections, the coverage is driven by those daily announcements, but you get more coverage if they're actually new," Mader explained. "Once you've released your full platform, your daily announcements are less exciting because they're no longer new."

Former Liberal ministerial staffer Olivier Cullen said that while the leaders' national campaigns may be able to survive on broad-stroke promises and slogans, the details are still of significant value to the parties' local candidates.

"The strategic advantage is less about gaining votes on its own, but as a way to make sure those candidates know what they're talking about," Cullen explained.

Cullen, now a director with First Nations and Indigenous-focused Blackbird Strategies, said that those platform details

are of particular value to him and his clients, who are keen on what the parties will do on those issues.

"My clients are continuously asking me those questions because they haven't been talking about it much, but if we had a platform, we could answer those questions," Cullen explained.

Proof Strategies' Matthew Dubé, a former Quebec NDP MP from 2011 to 2019, can attest to the challenge of running a local campaign without a detailed platform.

Alternatively, if the candidate can point to the relevant section of the platform to say, "We would commit X or do Y," that can potentially be a make-or-break moment in whether they earn that vote, Dubé said.

While Dubé said he is surprised that more candidates don't have a more vocal desire for their parties to provide that tool, he believes that was just another example of how "leader-focused" Canadian elections have become, with the outcomes relying less on any particular candidate's ability to sell any particular policy.

Despite the "crass politics" of the strategy behind parties' increasingly delayed platform releases, Dubé said he hopes for a reversal of that trend.

"It's an exercise in transparency, and democracy is not well served without it," Dubé explained. "I think we're worse off for it."

However, Dubé said there isn't much incentive, as releasing costed platforms early only ensures "mutually assured destruction."

"The later it happens and the fewer parties there are that do put it out early, the fewer incentives there are to buck that trend," Dubé said. "If the other parties aren't doing it, then why would any of them bother?"

"Until one of the parties dares to change that trend, then I think we're kind of stuck with this, until their candidates and voters decide to demand it."

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The Hill Times



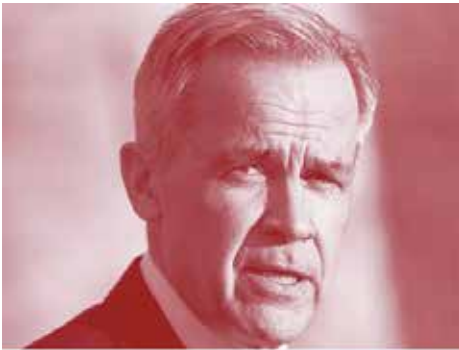
Then-Liberal MP Catherine McKenna, right, joins other National Capital Region Liberal candidates in Ottawa on Oct. 15, 2019, to respond to the release of then-Conservative leader Andrew Scheer's platform announcement. The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade



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.

Party leaders face off on Montreal debate stage April 16 and 17



Prime Minister Mark Carney, top left, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, bottom left, and Green Party co-Leaders Elizabeth May and Jonathan Pedneault. Pedneault will rep the Green Party during leadership debates in Montreal on April 16 and 17. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and illustration by Neena Singhal

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.

French-Language Leaders' Debate—The leaders of Canada's five major federal political parties will hit the stage for their first of two televised debates at the CBC's broadcast headquarters in Montreal. The debate will start at 8 p.m. ET, and will be moderated by Radio-Canada's Patrice Roy.

THURSDAY, APRIL 17

English-Language Leaders' Debate—The leaders of Canada's five major federal political parties will hit the stage for their second of two televised debates at the CBC's broadcast headquarters in Montreal. The debate will start at 7 p.m. ET, and will be moderated by TVO anchor Steve Paikin.

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 Hannafor, 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

World Press Freedom Day Lunch—World Press Freedom Canada hosts its annual luncheon on the theme "Disinformation and Democracy: Standing on Guard." Former newscaster and current disinformation watchdog Kevin Newman will address the threat that the growing flood of disinformation poses to Canadian unity, security and democracy, and to the country's traditional media. Thursday, May 1, at the National Arts Centre, 1 Elgin St., Ottawa. Details: worldpressfreedomcanada.ca.

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.

TUESDAY, MAY 13

Webinar: 'Lobbying in Post-Election Ottawa'—Lobbying Commissioner Nancy Bélanger will take part in a webinar hosted by the Public Affairs Association of Canada's Saskatchewan Chapter on "New Government, New Reality: Lobbying in Post-Election Ottawa." This session will explore what public affairs professionals need to know to effectively and ethically navigate federal lobbying in the post-election environment. Tuesday, May 13, at 2 p.m. ET happening online: publicaffairs.ca.

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