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# THE HILL TIMES

THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR, NO. 2251 CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2025 \$5.00

NEWS

## Gripen fighter jet purchase would allow Canada to assert sovereignty, says past chair of House Defence Committee McKay



Former Liberal MP John McKay says military calculations may not be the most important arbitrator for picking Canada's next fighter jet. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

The future success of trade talks with the U.S. will weigh heavily when Canada decides if it wants to buy the American F-35 plane, says consultant Eric Miller.

**BY NEIL MOSS**  
A former chair of the House Defence Committee says the federal government should reverse course and buy Sweden's Gripen war-plane over the American F-35.

There has been a full-court press trumpeting Saab's fighter jet, which included a visit to Canada's capital by the Swedish royal family. Canada's selection of Lockheed Martin's F-35 for its next fighter jet fleet is currently under review.

Politics are colliding with the Air Force's wishes as Industry Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) has indicated interest in a Gripen purchase, and the domestic

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NEWS

## Cabinet spending tops \$92-million in 2024-25, up 3.7 per cent

**BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT**  
Cabinet spending totalled almost \$92.3-million in 2024-25, a roughly 3.7-per-cent increase from last year, and a 36.3-per-cent jump from the five-year, COVID-era low of \$67.7-million spent

to support ministers' office in 2021-22, as detailed in the most recent Public Accounts of Canada.  
The spending details are included in Volume 3 of the Public Accounts, the 2024-25 version of which—covering April 1, 2024, to

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NEWS

## PBO repeats calls for transparency after he says budget uses 'made-in-Ottawa' definition of capital spending

**BY ELEANOR WAND**  
Canada's interim parliamentary budget officer is again calling for more transparency in the government's fiscal approach after he says it changed the

definition of capital spending ahead of tabling its fall budget, and altered the fiscal anchors used to evaluate it.  
"The government has come up with a 'made-in-Ottawa' definition of capital," and

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# Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

## Press gallery dinner such a hot ticket, filling it up to overflow



Bloc MP Christine Normandin, left, then-NDP MP Lindsay Mathyssen, CPAC's Mathieu Cordeau, Liberal MP Mona Fortier, NDP MP Heather McPherson, and then-CPAC's Noah Richardson, plus Shannon Day-Newman, Global Public Affairs' Hannah Thibedeau, retired CBC host Don Newman, CBC's Kate McKenna, and Sarah Brunetti at the 2024 Gallery Dinner. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

This weekend is the Parliamentary Press Gallery's annual black-tie dinner, and the night is already such a hot ticket that the executive has had to book an overflow room.

**Heard on the Hill** has learned that while the dinner sells out pretty much every year, taking over a second space is unusual. That's because it all depends on the venue.

Recent previous dinners have been held in Gatineau, Que., in the Museum of History's capacious Canada Hall, which can easily accommodate last-minute guests. But the 2025 gala will take place for the second year in a row in Sir John A. Macdonald Building's Room 100, which has an approximate capacity of only 400 guests. So, the organizers have decided to reserve Room 250 on the second floor.

Guests assigned there—check your e-ticket for the room and table number—will get the same meal as everyone else, and will be able to watch the speeches on monitors set up for the occasion. However, moving between the rooms is discouraged for fire-code reasons.

After last year's gala, the executive "received a lot of great feedback from gallery members, who found it [Sir John A. Macdonald Building] easier to get to and a more intimate setting that made for a great night," Parliamentary Press Gallery president **Mia Rabson** told **HOH** last week by email.

"Returning to the same location this year contributed to the high interest in the dinner. It's also likely that a new prime minister, and a mostly new cabinet, drew additional interest," she said.

It's precisely new Liberal Prime Minister **Mark Carney** and his cabinet that caused the dinner's original spring date to be rescheduled earlier this year. Back in January, the gallery executive agreed to move the event to November "given the possibility of a federal election," according to the meeting minutes later shared with gallery members at the time.

The annual event, which began in 1928, originally took place in the National Press Building. Designed to bring politicians and journalists together for one night, the evening traditionally features a cocktail reception, sit-down dinner, speeches from political party leaders, dancing, singing, and plenty of alcohol. Press gallery members are strongly encouraged to invite their favourite parliamentarian or Hill-related staff member as their plus-one.

## Senator Hay honoured for her work at Kids Help Phone

Ontario Senator **Katherine Hay** was recognized for her leadership in mental health support at an awards ceremony in Toronto on Nov. 20.

The eMental Health International Collaborative (eMHIC) tapped Hay as this year's recipient of its Leadership Excellence Award (Global Impact category).

"I am deeply proud to stand alongside eMHIC and contribute to a brighter, more connected future for mental health," said Hay in a press release from her office that day.

Until she was appointed to the Senate earlier this year, Hay had

been Kids Help Phone's president and chief executive officer since 2017 where she "led a major digital transformation in Canada's youth mental health sector," according to the same release.

"Her leadership positioned Kids Help Phone as a global model for how technology and human connection can work together to transform mental health care."

A member of the Progressive Senators Group, Hay was honoured during the 2025 eMHIC Global Awards Dinner featuring international leaders, practitioners, and innovators from the digital mental health sector.



PSG Senator Katherine Hay has received a Leadership Excellence Award. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

## Steve Outhouse will run the Conservatives' next election campaign



Steve Outhouse, right, speaks with David Herle on *The Herle Burly* podcast earlier this month. "I believe that we should always be looking on how to improve on our campaigns and how to improve on our results," said Outhouse. *Screenshot courtesy of YouTube*

Veteran conservative backroomer **Steve Outhouse** will be leading the federal Conservatives' next election campaign, succeeding **Jenni Byrne**, who confirmed back in August that she no longer held that role.

The *Toronto Sun* reported on Nov. 23 the party's confirmation that the Nova Scotia native and longtime Ottawa resident will help **Pierre Poilievre's** Conservatives prepare for their next attempt at forming government.

As to when that could happen, "I don't think it really benefits anyone ... if you are seen as forcing something within a year," Outhouse told **David Herle** on *The Herle Burly* podcast three weeks ago.

"I think it would be very even risky for the Liberals to go ahead and trigger this right now even if the thought of being able to force it to get that elusive majority is tempting," Outhouse said, dropping no hints as to his then-forthcoming new job.

Outhouse is a former bureaucrat who was seconded to **Stephen Harper's** nascent minority government for two weeks in 2006, and has never looked back, joining the Conservative Party team and rising through the ranks from communications roles to being chief of staff to Poilievre as then-jobs minister in 2015. He is also a former Baptist minister.

In addition having run election campaigns for Alberta

Premier **Danielle Smith** in 2023 and now-Premier **Tony Wakeham's** successful election campaign in Newfoundland and Labrador last month, Outhouse is also the founder of Intercede Communication/Just Campaigns. (The former does non-partisan communication work for government, not-for-profits, and Canadian parliamentary clients; while the latter focuses purely on campaigning at any level of government.)

"I believe that we should always be looking on how to improve on our campaigns and how to improve on our results," he said, noting that while there were "just a lot of issues" affecting the outcome of the April 28 federal vote, Outhouse said he believes that "listening to what people are really concerned about and crafting your message that way ... in general it works for people in elections."

"I have worked well and I continue to work well with people across the spectrum, I guess, of the big blue tent and I think we need to continue to do that if we want to win and we want to include people in our coalition."

"From what I've seen from [Outhouse] over the years, he understands how to build coalitions without sacrificing principles. Giddyup," endorsed longtime Conservative MP **Michelle Rempel Garner** on X on Nov. 23.

## Six new envoys present their letters at Rideau Hall

Supreme Court of Canada Justice **Suzanne Côté** received the credentials from six new heads of mission at Rideau Hall on Nov. 25 on behalf of Governor General **Mary Simon**.

The new envoys include Hungarian Ambassador **Miklós**

**Lengyel**, Slovenian Ambassador **Andrej Medica**, Bangladeshi High Commissioner **Md. Jashim Uddin**, Ghanaian High Commissioner **Dora Francisca Edu-Buandoh**, Lebanese Ambassador **Bachir Tawk**, and High Commissioner for Brunei Darussalam **Lay Ling Ang**.

## Michael Ras joins Proof Strategies

Proof Strategies recently welcomed **Michael Ras** as its newest senior counsel.

Ras has more than 20 years of experience as a public affairs professional, most recently as CEO of at Employee Ownership Canada. His CV also includes stints as senior vice-president

at Counsel Public Affairs, and leading government relations for Meridian Credit Union.

In his new role, Ras will provide strategic counsel across Proof's public affairs and government relations practice.

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# Fentanyl tariffs, U.S. air strikes avoided at G7 ministers' discussion on drug trafficking

U.S. President Donald Trump placed tariffs on Canadian goods under the guise of addressing cross-border fentanyl trafficking, but those levies were not raised by the minister who oversees law enforcement and border security, citing the Canada-U.S. trade minister's responsibility for the file.

BY NEIL MOSS

Contentious issues that put Canada's southern neighbour in the spotlight were kept off the agenda for the second straight G7 ministerial meeting.

When the Group of Seven's interior and security ministers huddled in Ottawa from Nov. 22-23, neither American tariffs on Canada, nor the Trump administration's air strikes on alleged drug boats in the Caribbean were up for discussion, according to Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough-Guildwood-Rouge Park, Ont.).

In a closing press conference for the gathering held at the Diefenbaker Building, Anandasangaree said trade wasn't in his "purview."

"We highlighted many of the border progress that we made, including investments of \$1.3-billion ... as well as legislation that is currently going through the House," he said on Nov. 23. "This forum was a multilateral forum where we focused on the items that were on the agenda."

Anandasangaree also told reporters that the topic of United States air strikes on alleged drug boats was not part of the discussion. That is despite the joint communiqué noting that the G7 ministers reaffirmed their commitment to "intensifying co-operation to detect and disrupt the production, trafficking, and disruption of illegal synthetic drugs."

"We will continue to take a balanced and evidence-based approach to these efforts while respecting fundamental human rights, and the international drug



Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree, left, says his conversations with U.S. officials—such as Attorney General Pam Bondi—dealt with explaining the work that Canada has undergone to strengthen border security. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs and Migration Magnus Brunner, left, U.K. Minister of State for Security Dan Jarvis, Japanese Deputy Commissioner General of the National Police Agency Koichi Tachikawa, French Minister Delegate to the Minister of the Interior Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, German Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister of the Interior Christoph de Vries, Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree, Italian Ambassador to Canada Alessandro Cattaneo, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi, Interpol executive director for partnership and planning Darrin Jones, and U.S. Department of Homeland Security Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans Robert Law pose for a family photo at the G7 interior and security ministers' meeting in Ottawa on Nov. 22. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

control conventions," the statement reads.

It has been reported that some allies have stopped sharing intelligence with the U.S. for targeting the suspected drug boats, fearing that the strikes lack legality.

Earlier this year, U.S. President Donald Trump implemented tariffs on Canadian goods through the International Emergency Economic Powers Act under the guise of addressing cross-border fentanyl movement. Those tariffs are currently being challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Anandasangaree oversees law enforcement and border security in his ministerial capacity.

"Let me be clear, [Canada-U.S. Trade] Minister [Dominic] LeBlanc is our chief negotiator in this regard. He is the one in cabinet that engages in discussions around tariffs as well as agreements with the U.S. I will leave it to Mr. LeBlanc, and I've had conversations with him," Anandasangaree said.

Anandasangaree said that it is his responsibility to ensure that visiting U.S. officials understand the work that Canada is doing.

At the weekend G7 gathering, the Trump administration was represented by U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi and Department of Homeland Security Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans Robert Law.

It was the second time this month that Canadian officials chose not to raise the rocky trading relationship with senior Trump cabinet officials.

At the G7 foreign ministers' meeting earlier this month in Ontario's Niagara region, Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.) also deferred to LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.) as having jurisdiction over trade talks. The Canadian and U.S. readouts from a bilateral meeting between Anand and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio don't include any mention of trade being discussed.

The approach represents a sea change in approach compared to the first Trump term where there were ministerial leads on the file, but many cabinet members were involved in a broader "Team Canada" charm offensive.

Trade talks between Canada and the U.S. have been suspended

since Trump's eruption over an Ontario government anti-tariff ad that was broadcast on American airwaves in late October.

Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) said at the G20 summit in South Africa that he looks forward to speaking with Trump "soon," but remarked, "I don't have a burning issue to speak with the president about right now."

"When America wants to come back and have conversations on the trade side, we will have those discussions," he said, according to a Canadian Press report.

## G7 ignores U.S. boat strikes for second straight gathering

Despite the G7 security ministers gathering to discuss joint action on drug trafficking, the unilateral U.S. air strikes killing alleged drug runners was not on the agenda.

"That was not part of the discussion," Anandasangaree told reporters.

The U.S. has conducted 21 strikes since the beginning of September, killing 82 people.

The public safety minister didn't directly respond to a question on whether Canada has a view if those attacks were in violation of international law.

Earlier this month, Anand told reporters at the G7 foreign ministers' meeting that it is "within the purview of U.S. authorities to make that determination."

Former Liberal foreign affairs minister Lloyd Axworthy and other international law experts and human rights advocates told *The Hill Times* that she needed to walk the comments back.

So far, the Canadian government hasn't released any clarification on the position outlined by Anand. France has called the unilateral attacks a breach of international law.

Anand told reporters on Nov. 12 that the strikes weren't raised when G7 top diplomats held a multilateral session on maritime security.

## Sun setting on Canada's G7 presidency

The meeting of G7 interior and security ministers was a low-key affair, with some countries sending either junior ministers, or no ministers at all.

Anandasangaree hosted Bondi and Law, as well as Magnus Brunner, European Union commissioner for internal affairs and migration; Dan Jarvis, United Kingdom minister of state for security; Koichi Tachikawa, Japanese deputy commissioner general of the National Police Agency; Marie-Pierre Vedrenne, French minister delegate to the minister of the interior; Christoph de Vries, German parliamentary state secretary to the federal minister of the interior; Alessandro Cattaneo, Italian ambassador to Canada; and Darrin Jones, Interpol executive director for partnership and planning.

When Italy hosted an interior ministerial meeting in October 2024 as part of its G7 presidency, LeBlanc—Canada's public safety minister at the time—travelled to Mirabella Eclano for the event.

During that 2024 meeting, the Group of Seven released a 18-page joint communiqué with 79 points. This time around, the Ottawa meeting participants agreed to an eight-page communiqué with 52 points, including on organized crime, synthetic drug threats, cybercrime, terrorist and violent extremist content online, transnational repression, child sexual exploitation and abuse, and support for law enforcement.

Anandasangaree described the two days of meetings as "very productive," remarking that "everyone around the table understood how the threats to nations' safety are increasingly complex and interconnected, and our agenda reflected this reality."

Canada's G7 presidency will conclude in 36 days, and will hand over the reins to France in 2026. There is one final event currently on the docket, with a G7 industry, digital, and technology ministers' meeting set to be held in Montreal on Dec. 8-9.

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## NEWS

# ‘I’m not into games’: NDP MP Johns defends decision to abstain from budget vote

After meeting with municipal and Indigenous leaders in his B.C. riding, all of whom opposed an election, NDP MP Gord Johns says he was ‘confident’ in his decision to intentionally sit out the Nov. 17 budget vote.

BY ELEANOR WAND

Despite heckling from Conservatives when he remained in his House of Commons seat and abstained from the Nov. 17 budget vote, NDP MP Gord Johns says his decision was a “confident” one that he wouldn’t have changed—even if enough Conservatives had sat out the vote to otherwise allow the budget to pass.

“We weren’t playing games,” said Johns (Courtenay–Alberni, B.C.). “I’m not into games. ... I showed up. I showed up with my full intention. My vote wasn’t going to change ... depending on what others did.”

Johns is one of four MPs who abstained from the Nov. 17 budget vote, allowing the Liberals to squeak through Prime Minister Mark Carney’s (Nepean, Ont.) first budget with a vote of 170-168.

NDP MP Lori Idlout (Nunavut) was the only other member of the New Democrat caucus to abstain from the vote, though she did so electronically. The five other NDP MPs all voted against the budget, tabled Nov. 4.

Conservative MP Matt Jenneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, Alta.), who announced he would be resigning in the new year, also abstained from the vote, as did Conservative MP Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, Alta.), who is currently on medical leave.

Johns said he decided to abstain from the budget vote after consulting with his constituents. He said he met with the nine mayors in his riding, and they were “almost entirely unanimous” that they didn’t think the budget was adequate, but they didn’t want an election.

“The message was overwhelming, and I listened.”

Johns said he also “wasn’t willing to vote down key gains” the



document was promising for his riding. The four-time MP has been pushing for a national biomass investment tax credit, as well as a national fleet of aircraft for fighting wildfires—both of which were included in the budget.

Ottawa will spend \$257.6-million over four years to lease four aircrafts to “bolster provincial and territorial aerial firefighting capacity,” the budget reads. Currently, provinces and territories are responsible for their own firefighting crews, and there is no national fleet to assist.

Idlout declined an interview with *The Hill Times*, but wrote on Facebook that she abstained for similar reasons. There were “elements” in the budget for her constituents, Idlout wrote, pointing to the commitments to building 700 homes in Nunavut under the feds’ new housing entity, Build Canada Homes, as well as the Arctic Infrastructure Fund, as factors that swayed her vote.

“There were things for my riding, and that’s why I have to abstain,” Idlout told reporters in a Nov. 17 press conference after the vote.

## ‘When you make a decision, you show up in person’: Johns

Johns was heckled by some in the House when he didn’t rise to vote against the budget. But he said he was “glad” he was able to do it and represent his riding.

“Where I come from, when you make a decision, you show up in person,” Johns said, adding he felt “confident” in his abstention.

“The bottom line is the catcalls come from the Conservatives,” he

said, noting that there were also two official opposition members who abstained from the vote.

“The Conservatives were ... disingenuous in [suggesting] that they wanted an election when they didn’t.”

Conservative House Leader Andrew Scheer (Regina–Qu’Appelle, Sask.) and Conservative caucus chair Scott Reid (Lanark–Frontenac, Ont.) entered the House to vote after it was clear the budget was going to pass with Idlout and Johns’ abstentions, saying they had issues with voting electronically.

On a CTV panel, Kathleen Monk, the former director of communications to then-NDP Leader Jack Layton, said the Conservatives “literally hid behind the curtains” because they weren’t willing to say they didn’t want an election.

As reported by the CBC in the days following the budget vote, video footage appears to show two people standing behind curtains on the Conservative side of the House as the count was underway. Scheer’s chief of staff denied it was either him or Reid.

“I didn’t hide behind a curtain,” Johns said.

Unlike other parties, the NDP were noncommittal on how they would vote on the budget, staying tight-lipped in the days and hours leading up to the crucial confidence vote for the minority government.

The Bloc Québécois said they would not be voting for the budget if their six non-negotiable demands were not included. Hours before the vote, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich–Gulf Islands, B.C.) said she would vote in favour of the

But Lechnitz said she doesn’t think the NDP has lost its leverage by not entirely voting against the budget.

“This budget vote, Mr. Carney had ample public support, and so [he] had the option of not conceding anything to the NDP, to opposition parties, in order to get his budget through,” she said. “I don’t think that that dynamic is going to hold over time.”

“You get to do a ‘my way or the highway’ budget once when you’re in a minority, but not on an ongoing basis.”

## Leadership candidate Johnston says NDP ‘can’t afford an election right now’

But some NDP leadership candidates disagree with the party’s tactic to partially abstain from the budget vote.

In an email statement to *The Hill Times*, Rob Ashton said he would have “guided the party to vote ‘no’ on [Nov. 17],” if he had been the leader.

“This budget leans too heavily on cuts when people need support, and the NDP should have reflected that in its vote,” he wrote.

Asked about how the party should vote going ahead, Ashton said those votes “will be decided in caucus when the time comes,” but added that no “MPs should be voting for an austerity budget, especially not now.”

Tanille Johnston, a British Columbia city councillor who is also running for the party leadership, told *The Hill Times* that “everyone took the approach they needed to take.”

“There’s a lot of [electoral district associations] ... that can’t afford an election right now,” she said. “Arguably, the party can’t afford an election right now.”

She said it “puts the NDP in a very vulnerable position” as the Liberals know the NDP can’t afford an election.

When asked about future votes, Johnston said, “every situation deserves its own assessment,” adding that “good governments work together.”

“Minority governments are great,” she said. “They spark a lot of conversation, a lot of debate, and that’s good. We should be talking a lot. Decisions should be challenging.”

NDP leadership candidate Tony McQuail wrote in an email statement to *The Hill Times* that he would have voted against the budget. He said he would have advised caucus to meet with their constituencies so “we could decide as a caucus whether we had a clear unified message.”

A spokesperson for Avi Lewis, who is also running for NDP leader, referred *The Hill Times* to Lewis’ social media posts where he said he is “with the majority of the NDP caucus who voted against” the budget.

NDP MP and leadership candidate Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.), who voted against the budget in the House of Commons, did not respond to *The Hill Times*’ request for an interview by publication deadline.

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## COMMENT

# In-house relief: new Conservative campaign manager a positive signal

It's good news, but the Conservatives' ultimate path to success still rests with the leader and his willingness to empower Steve Outhouse and others.

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—Pierre Poilievre and the Conservatives have earned themselves some positive public relations with the announcement that Steve Outhouse will serve as the next federal election campaign manager for the party. After a few difficult weeks of news for the party, the Outhouse appointment is being heralded as a good thing.

First, there is the symbolism of the announcement, which comes with the fact the next federal campaign featuring Poilievre will be run by someone whose name is not Jenni Byrne. Fairly or unfairly, previous campaign manager Byrne was blamed for not getting the Conservatives across the finish line. That it was "Jenni's fault" was always a source of Conservative palace intrigue and gossip when things went sour for the Tories. Her style. Her approach. Deserved or not, only a few people really know the truth, but nonetheless, by making her the villain Poilievre gets to relieve himself of party pressure.

By many reports, it is Poilievre who is often complained about for all manner of alleged human resource weaknesses, but the Conservatives aren't currently in the mood to turf a leader, so Byrne is the convenient target. Coming off of a surprise political win for the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, Outhouse provides a new option and approach, or at least that is narrative.

Second is that, outwardly, the Outhouse appointment looks like a new face and new approach—though Outhouse did serve as Poilievre's chief of staff when Poilievre was a minister in the Stephen Harper government. Outhouse is known as a builder of teams, someone who learns from all he does, and is disciplined, which are all important elements. Will he be given the room to do what he is capable of doing to lead a successful campaign? Will the leader loosen his grip, and make some modifications? Outhouse, Byrne, or whomever can only succeed if they have the latitude to do so.

Some will criticize Outhouse because he is a person of faith, and too often an argument crops up that one's faith and a desire to see it reflected in a government's agenda is inevitable. But look at Outhouse's body of work and it would be difficult to make that conclusion.

Widely viewed as a mature professional, Outhouse has run and won campaigns for different Canadian conservative leaders in various parts of the country, which can only

be encouraging for the federal Conservatives. The Nova Scotia-born campaigner has been successful in both the East and the West.

In the recent Newfoundland and Labrador campaign, he used limited resources to win an election that both he and now-Premier Tony Wakeham weren't even supposed to even be in. While, yes, Outhouse was aided by their opponent's off-track and seemingly

disoriented campaign, Wakeham, Outhouse, and others executed a near flawless run.

Most instructive during the provincial writ period was the tone of approach. While Wakeham was critical of his opponents, his language was not overly hysterical or inflammatory. Yes, he probably used more talking points than the other candidates, but he came across as mostly authentic.

Wakeham and Outhouse found common connection with a large enough number of Nlers in Labrador and outside the city of St. John's. These voters were less focused on the Churchill Falls memorandum of understanding—the Liberals' main target—and more focused on affordability, a lack of services, and a sense they were being taken for granted. Outhouse and Wakeham connected to their grievances in a measured way.

Outhouse is not a miracle worker, and he shouldn't be saddled with unrealistic expectations. He is a capable, grounded professional who—given the necessary autonomy—puts the Conservatives in a better spot than they were in last week. The Conservatives' ultimate path to success still rests with the leader and his willingness to empower Outhouse and others. Hopefully, the Outhouse appointment goes beyond symbolism.

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

*The Hill Times*

ADVERTISEMENT

## China and Canada: Enhancing Convergence of Development Strategies for New Opportunities in Win-Win Cooperation

Not long ago, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China adopted its recommendations for formulating its 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030), outlining China's major objectives for economic and social development for the next five years. It laid out twelve major strategic tasks, including building a modernized industrial system achieving greater self-reliance and strength in science and technology, building a robust domestic market, promoting high-standard opening up, and accelerating the green transition across the board, etc. At the same time, Canada has formulated a new federal budget, mapping out investment priorities for the next five years in infrastructure, housing, energy and mineral resources, industrial development, scientific innovation, and so on. Against this backdrop, China and Canada face important opportunities to enhance strategic convergence, unlock cooperation potential, and achieve mutual benefit in support of our respective development.

We should consolidate the foundation of traditional practical cooperation. During the 15th Five-Year Plan period, China will focus on upgrading traditional industries, boosting consumption, expanding opening up at the institutional level, promoting broader international economic flows, and continuing to unleash the benefits of its vast domestic market. China and Canada enjoy highly complementary economic structures and resource endowments, each with its own comparative strengths, thus formulating significant potential for our cooperation. Both sides should work fast to resume mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation, and further promote mutually beneficial engagement in trade, agriculture, investment, energy and minerals, infrastructure and others. Such efforts can generate new drivers of our respective growth and inject sustained momentum into the China-Canada relationship.

Recently, altogether 125 Canadian companies participated in the 8th China International Import Expo in Shanghai, marking a record-high Canadian presence. China welcomes more Canadian businesses to invest and operate in the Chinese market, and likewise supports more Chinese enterprises in exploring opportunities in Canada.

We should cultivate momentum in emerging sectors. During the 15th Five-Year Plan period, China will prioritize fostering emerging industries and industries of the future, comprehensively enhance its independent innovation, advance the Digital China Initiative, and move faster to develop a new type of energy system to drive forward its green development. Canada being a technologically advanced country with global leadership in several emerging fields, the two sides have promising prospects for collaboration in finance, elderly care, e-commerce, information technology, green technologies, clean energy, electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, bio-medicine, and others.

We should pool efforts for more people-to-people exchanges and cooperation. During the 15th Five-Year Plan period, China will engage in deeper exchanges and mutual learning

with other cultures. This provides fresh impetus for expanding cultural and people-to-people exchanges with Canada. A recent visit by a Canadian First Nations delegation to China featured the screening of a documentary on the totem pole that they gifted to a local Qiang ethnic community after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake of China. This reflects the deep friendship between the two peoples. Recently, China has reinstated group travel to Canada for Chinese citizens, and we also welcome Canadian citizens to travel to China, so as to further facilitate exchanges of people of the two countries. Both countries can deepen cooperation in the fields of education, culture, sports, youth and women's programs, and exchanges at the local level, thereby strengthening the public support for the bilateral relations.

We should enhance cooperation on multilateral and global issues. During the 15th Five-Year Plan period, China will continue to promote the building of a community with a shared future for humanity and pioneer an equal and orderly multi-polar world and universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization. In September this year, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Governance Initiative, with the aim of fostering a fairer and more equitable global governance system. China and Canada share broad converging interests in upholding multilateralism, safeguarding free trade, and advancing reform of the international economic order. The two countries can also expand cooperation in climate change, disaster preparedness and relief, food security, combating drug-related crimes, and the governance of artificial intelligence. By strengthening communication in these areas, China and Canada can jointly address global challenges and contribute to shared development and prosperity of the world.

This year marks the 55th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Canada and the 20th anniversary of our bilateral strategic partnership. The recent meeting between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Mark Carney in Gyeongju, the Republic of Korea, opened a new chapter in China-Canada ties. Delivering the consensus reached by the two leaders is the most important task at present. China stands ready to work with Canada to put the leaders' important consensus into action, take concrete actions to restore cooperation across the board at a faster pace, deepen convergence between China's 15th Five-Year Plan and Canada's national development strategy, identify further areas of shared interest, and cultivate new drivers of cooperation. Through these efforts, China and Canada can promote the healthy, stable and sustainable growth of bilateral relations and bring greater benefits to both peoples.

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## COMMENT

## Ukraine: once more around the loop

Every month brings another chance for some political, economic, or technological change that alters the current equation, and gives Ukraine a better bargaining position for an eventual ceasefire.

Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs



LONDON, U.K.—If the Ukrainians feel the time has come to surrender to the Russians, they don't need United States President Donald Trump's help. The "ungrateful" wretches can do that for themselves.

The "peace" offer that Trump is trying to force on Ukraine this time is almost identical to the one that Russian President Vladimir Putin pitched to him in Alaska last summer. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will reject it again unless he thinks his country's defences are about to collapse—but why have they all been stuck in this loop for so long?

Putin's goal is to reunite the parts of the former Soviet Union where at least a minority of the population speaks Russian, and Ukraine is the biggest of those parts. (Others are Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and maybe Kazakhstan.) Beyond that, he probably has no territorial ambitions—but just doing that would involve conquering around 50 million people.

The war, while murderous, is essentially frivolous from the Russian perspective. No major Russian strategic or economic interest is at stake, and Ukraine lost its ability to threaten Russia militarily when it gave up the nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union 30 years ago (in return for U.S. security guarantees that proved to be useless).

Putin's Ukraine invasion can best be seen as a heritage project to secure his historical position as one of Russia's greats, à la Peter and Catherine. But he would certainly not have attacked Ukraine in 2022 had he known it would be a four-year war, and not a four-week one.

Too late, and he must now have a big win in Ukraine to justify one million Russian casualties. Otherwise he will certainly lose power, and perhaps also his life. In this strictly limited sense, his current refusal to bargain or compromise is quite rational, although there has never been a plausible military threat to Russia.

Zelenskyy's position is equally rational and equally inflexible. Although he is the most unlikely war leader ever—a Russian-speaking Jew from the world of entertainment—he quickly

realized that his job is to hold on to as much Ukrainian territory as possible for as long as possible.

That may not be forever because Russia has four times the population of Ukraine, and an economy 10 times bigger (mainly because it's the world's third-biggest oil exporter). Fortunately for Zelenskyy and for Ukraine, we live in an era where defensive weapons and tactics have suddenly gained a huge advantage over the old blitzkrieg-style offensives.

God is still ultimately on the side of the bigger battalions, but recent technological changes—mainly drones—mean that Ukraine can lose very, very slowly. Ukrainian forces periodically retreat in baby steps along various parts of the 1,250-kilometre front, but the Russian army at its current rate of advance would not even reach the eastern suburbs of Kyiv until 2030.

Losing slowly is therefore not necessarily a futile waste of Ukrainian lives. Every month brings another chance for some political, economic, or technological change that alters the current equation, and gives Ukraine a better bargaining position for an eventual ceasefire.

Zelenskyy's job is to know if and when the morale of the Ukrainian army and the general public is starting to break. At that point, he would have to make whatever deal he still can; but since the deal Trump's people have just cooked up with Putin's people would already reduce Ukraine to the status of a Russian colony, he has nothing to lose by saying "no" now.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's job is to know if and when the morale of the Ukrainian army and the general public is starting to break, writes Gwynne Dyer. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam García

Unless, of course, Ukraine is at that point already. But it probably isn't.

Trump is the only one in a hurry. He doesn't really care what happens to Ukraine either way, but he would probably collect enough frequent peacemaker points to win the Nobel Peace Prize if he can impose a ceasefire there before next year's winner is chosen.

It would have to be a ceasefire that gives Russia its maximal demands—partly because of Trump's weirdly intimate relationship with Putin, but mainly because Putin believes he is winning anyway. Besides, a Ukrainian surrender would mean an end to sanctions against Moscow, and immensely lucrative trade deals with Russia for Trump's family and friends.

However, Trump's leverage on Zelenskyy has diminished recently because he has man-

aged to monetize U.S. arms aid to Ukraine. Now, instead of going directly from Washington to Kyiv as aid, it is sold to NATO countries at full price, and they pass it on to Ukraine as interest-free loans or gifts.

The only direct harm Trump can now do to Ukraine is to cut off the supply of U.S. intelligence, which he is already threatening to do again. But we've seen it all before, and he'll probably once again be shamed into restarting the flow of intelligence before long.

The Ukrainians have not lost the war yet, and this is probably just one more trip around the loop.

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

*The Hill Times*

## The future fighter debate

Saab's fighter jet offer must be music to the ears of those Canadians who truly want to send a message of patriotic defiance to the White House.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—For the senior brass at the Royal Canadian Air Force, there is no question what-



The fight over who gets to replace Canada's aging fleet of CF-18 Hornets heated up recently, writes Scott Taylor. *DND photograph by Sgt. Norm McLean*

soever that they want the Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning as the replacement for their aging fleet of CF-18 Hornet fighter planes.

They have wanted the F-35, and only the F-35, since this fifth-generation stealth strike fighter was first on the drawing board in 1997.

In 2010, Stephen Harper's Conservative government announced a sole-source deal to purchase 65 F-35s for the Air

Force at a cost of \$9-billion for the aircraft, and a total program cost of \$16-billion. However, as the F-35 experienced technical teething trouble, and the costs soared, Harper pushed the reset button on the entire controversial procurement.

In 2015, the Justin Trudeau Liberals were elected on a promise they would replace the old CF-18s with any aircraft but the F-35. The recalcitrant RCAF brass objected to this exclusion, and ensured that the F-35 was included in a competitive process.

Naturally, the RCAF brass picked the F-35, and only the F-35, as their replacement for the now even more aged CF-18 fleet.

In January 2023, the Trudeau Liberals signed a contract to purchase the first 16 of an eventual 88 F-35s. These first 16 aircraft are to cost \$7-billion of an eventual projected cost of \$29-billion to purchase all 88 F-35s on the order book.

However, before the RCAF brass could relax into their

Continued on page 10

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# Editorial

## Editorial

### Vulnerable Canadians deserve more than an ‘aspect’ of consideration

A Nov. 21 Prime Minister’s Office press release announcing the deliverables out of Mark Carney’s visit to the United Arab Emirates had an opening line that would put Charles Dickens to shame.

“The world is more dangerous and divided,” the release ominously began. Step aside, “it was a dark and stormy night.”

This framing has been the underpinning of the Carney government’s motivations over the past seven months, driving its “laser focus” on economic growth, as well as opening doors to international partners who aren’t the United States.

This is neatly summed up in the release’s second sentence: “The scale and speed of recent trade shifts and technological developments mean that Canada’s economic strategy must change dramatically.”

But how dramatic are these changes? That depends on perspective. The UAE committing what was described as a “historic” \$70-billion in investment into Canada could fall into that category of drama.

Carney also recently returned to Canada from the G20 summit in South Africa where he met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and agreed to “launch negotiations for an ambitious Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) encompassing goods, services, investment, agriculture and agri-food, digital trade, mobility, and sustainable development.”

If you only wind the tape back about three years to when then-prime minister Justin Trudeau rose in the House of Commons to reveal allegations that the Indian government was involved in the killing of a Canadian

Sikh leader, this would also seem like a major step. Of course, you’d have to ignore that Canada has been trying to land this deal with India since 2010 when CEPA negotiations between the two countries first began.

The deepening of ties with international partners like India haven’t come with a commensurate domestic policy on protecting Canadians from transnational repression. The office of the foreign interreference registry commissioner still remains bafflingly empty.

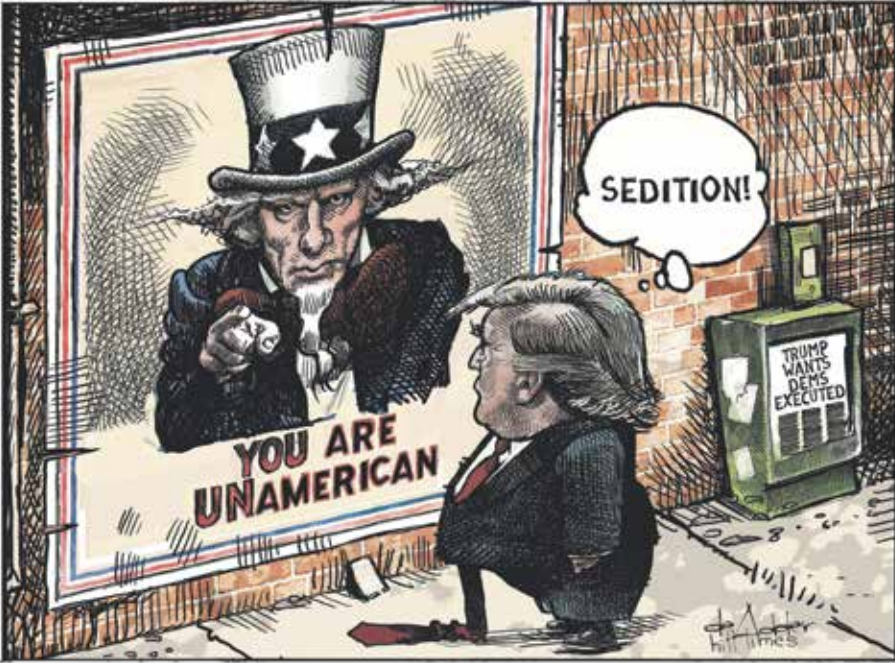
And, just mere days before the Nov. 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Carney confirmed the demise of his predecessor’s so-called “feminist foreign policy.”

“The world is more dangerous and divided.” Therefore, we’re going to lean in to what unites us by ignoring what divides us?

That may be an unfair characterization, as Carney did say that upholding values like gender equality remains an “aspect” of the country’s foreign policy. And as Foreign Minister Anita Anand told The Canadian Press, she and Women and Gender Equality Minister Rechie Valdez are “ensuring that feminism is part of our internal government policy, and that is all going to be reflected as Canadian core values in the work of our foreign policy. So we are going to be working on multiple axes at the same time.”

Money and economic partnerships can’t solve all of the country’s ills. If the “world is more dangerous and divided,” then it’s time to lean in harder to protect the most vulnerable, and not relegate these “aspects” to the back burner in the name of closing the deal.

The Hill Times



## Letters to the Editor

### Ratios aren’t everything in government finances, says letter writer

Re: “Interim PBO says he is focusing on parliamentarians, not media,” (*The Hill Times*, Nov. 20).

Federal spending is always “sustainable” in the ordinary sense of the word because government cheques are issued by its wholly owned Bank of Canada, which will always honour them.

However, the Parliamentary Budget Office is guided by an Alice-in-Wonderland definition, designed ideologically to restrain government action, that ties “sustainability” to arbitrary fiscal markers such as the debt-to-GDP ratio. In the real world, that ratio can go up or down for good or bad reasons, and tells little about the state of the economy or government fiscal capacity. For example, Japan—the country with the

highest ratio for decades—has experienced low inflation rates and no difficulty issuing new bonds even at negative interest rates, confounding the Chicken Little predictions of mainstream economists.

The economy can be likened to a cup. While we want to avoid overfilling and causing inflation, neither should we underfill, tolerating insufficient job creation and much human suffering such as exists today. Targeted government spending can get 1.6 million unemployed Canadians back into productive work.

Ratios did not alarm renowned economist John Maynard Keynes who gave simple advice: “Look after the unemployment, and the budget will look after itself.”

Larry Kazdan  
Vancouver, B.C.

### Will the U.S. make a return to legality?

The recent call by former members of the United States military and intelligence communities to the country’s troops to live up to their laws, Constitution, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice was met by hostility and dangerous accusations by the “leader of the free world,” U.S. President Donald Trump. As usual, his unhinged thought processes and motor mouth had him roundly attacked by those who do understand the rule of law, and the protections it provides all citizens—even non-U.S. folk. Of course, Trump had to backtrack because the comments were without foundation. He seems unable to think even 10 minutes into the future to see the impact his comments might have, especially for the safety of those he singles out for unfounded insults and accusations. He released 1,600 devout, but incarcerated followers charged with crimes after the Jan. 6, 2021, attempted coup who are out there waiting to do harm to anyone at whom he points his

finger. This is the height of irresponsibility.

However, an even more concerning issue is that this kind of twisted rhetoric has been put out as “official” White House communications. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt was quoted in *The Guardian* saying: “Let’s be clear about what the president is responding to ... You have sitting members of the U.S. Congress who conspired together to orchestrate a video message to members of the U.S. military, to active duty service members encouraging them to defy the president’s lawful orders.” This was an outright lie. The video by Democratic lawmakers was simply a reminder to members of the military to live up to the goals of their institutions, not to respond to illegal orders, and to protect the reputation of the U.S. government.

If only Trump’s nose grew longer with each lie. He wouldn’t be able to stand up.

Tom McElroy  
Toronto, Ont.



## COMMENT



Prime Minister Mark Carney has been going ahead with what has to be called a top-to-bottom renovation of Canada's economic posture and place in the world, writes Les Whittington. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

# With even Conservatives conspiring to pass Carney's budget, PM turns attention to the wider world

The prime minister is engaged in a series of strikingly ambitious undertakings from leveraging Canada's status as a global middle power to launching a new post-NAFTA economy at home.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—Was that Conservative House leader Andrew Scheer lurking behind the curtains in the Commons during the much-watched Nov. 17 vote on the Liberal minority's determinative budget?

His office denied it, but there's no denying the fact that Scheer and Conservative caucus chair

Scott Reid waited somewhere until it was clear the budget would pass before hurrying into the Commons Chamber to have a "No" vote recorded, claiming with a smirk that they were unable to vote virtually. Talk about "frat house" antics, as now-Liberal MP Chris d'Entremont described the goings-on in the Conservative caucus.

So it should be clear to everyone, despite Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's claim that his party was willing to defeat the budget and force an election, that he had no intention of doing so.

Nobody wants an election, Poilievre is 20 points behind Prime Minister Mark Carney in personal standing in the polls, and the Conservative leader has his hands full preparing for a much more iffy approval vote at a party convention in January than anyone would have expected a year ago.

As far as I can tell, Poilievre—as of Nov. 24—hadn't made himself available for the specific purpose of answering any questions on his party's hypocritical stance on the budget confidence vote.

The NDP's handful of MPs also wanted to condemn the budget while at the same time avoiding a non-confidence vote.

But at least they were honest about it. Interim leader Don Davies flopped around like a fish out of water trying to explain the contradiction to uncomprehending reporters.

Meanwhile, as Poilievre and colleagues continue as always to spend their time belittling the Liberals and railing about the budget deficit, Carney has been going ahead with what has to be called a top-to-bottom renovation of Canada's economic posture and place in the world.

That Carney is operating on a different level than Poilievre hardly needs mentioning.

While it may be jarring, painful, and disorienting on many fronts, the prime minister is responding to the United States' rupture of Canada's economic way of life with a plan to galvanize a new, more prosperous industrial system—one powered by infrastructure-building, advanced tech, resource exploitation, and defence production.

Beyond that, Carney—an experienced and respected figure in multilateral circles—is intrinsically moving to reposition Ottawa as a more active, influential player in the world. This includes an uphill struggle to meaningfully

reduce trade dependence on the U.S. by cementing and expanding commercial activity everywhere, and particularly in fast-growing nations that used to be called developing countries.

It also means asserting leadership globally at a time when the post-war geopolitical underpinnings going back 75 years are in upheaval marked by the rise of China and U.S. President Donald Trump's basically destructive approach to the rest of the world.

Carney did his part, for instance, in helping create a new sense of purpose at the G20 summit in South Africa this past weekend that the U.S. president boycotted.

Carney praised the value of the summit, which "brought together nations representing three-quarters of the world's population, two-thirds of global GDP, and three-quarters of the world's trade, and that's without the United States formally attending."

"It's a reminder that the centre of gravity in the global economy is shifting," the prime minister said. "At a time when too many countries are retreating into geopolitical blocs or the battle-grounds of protectionism, Canada believes that the G20 must remain a bridge."

Besides meeting with numerous other leaders to discuss such issues as the environment, trade, and Ukraine, Carney took the controversial step of restarting talks on a possible trade deal with India, which he said could double Canada-India trade to \$70-billion. Discussions on an investment protection act with South Africa were also put in motion.

Earlier, following Carney's meeting in Abu Dhabi with United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Gulf country promised to invest an unprecedented \$70-billion in Canada.

Carney said his idea is that Canada should not only survive Trump's trade war, but also thrive in response to it. "We're signing new deals and finding new investors to fuel our plans for Canada's economic ambition," he added. "We'll expand trade and catalyze investment in increased partnerships across a range of areas from AI to energy in the Indo-Pacific and Europe."

Whether it's about leveraging Canada's status as a middle power to take a bit more important role in global affairs or launching what is in essence a new post-NAFTA economy at home, the prime minister is engaged in a series of strikingly ambitious undertakings. The risks are commensurate, and Canadians are implicitly being asked to be very patient about seeing tangible results.

No doubt Carney's strategies and ideas could fall apart, particularly if Trump decides to gut North American free trade in the upcoming review of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement.

But, whatever the risks and pitfalls, Carney in any case has moved beyond the small thinking and petty politics that make the daily fare in Poilievre's world.

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



## COMMENT

# McCartney still shines

The former Beatle's recent Montreal concert was proof there is a formula for a live show with depth.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



MONTREAL—I will never forget Sept. 8, 1964. That was the day The Beatles came to the Montreal Forum for what turned out to be their only appearance in the city. I had just turned 12 years old, and it had been 10 months since I first heard their cover of *Roll Over Beethoven* played on Montreal radio. My friend Brian Greenway and I listened regularly to rock 'n' roll stations in Montreal and across the American eastern seaboard.

But this was different: the melodies, guitars, percussion, harmonies, the mix of blues and rock all said something more than the Tin Pan Alley creations of the past. We grew our hair, consumed all things Beatle, watched them on the *Ed Sullivan Show* that February, and went to *A Hard Day's Night*. We were "Beatlemania," and formed our own rock group with two friends. Greenway went on to fame with April Wine.

So, the two concerts in Montreal (afternoon and evening) were a huge event, with tickets affordable at \$4.50. Then my parents weighed in: I could not go, as the prospect of a riot at the Forum was too great. Thousands of screaming teenage girls might crush a 110-pound pre-teen like me. My objections were ignored.



Now in his 80s, Paul McCartney's tour was a gift to all us aging Beatlemania, writes Andrew Caddell. Photograph courtesy of Flickr/Raph\_PH



Paul McCartney played at the Bell Centre in Montreal on Nov. 17. Photograph courtesy of Andrew Caddell

Little did we know there was a plot by the separatist Front de libération du Québec to kidnap Ringo Starr to disrupt the tour of these British stars. The Beatles played the concerts with more police protection than normal, sang a dozen songs in a little more than half an hour, and left Montreal immediately.

Fast forward 61 years, 56 years after the Beatles broke up, with John Lennon and George Harrison long dead. Paul McCartney

announced he was coming to Montreal for two shows. I decided it was worth \$600 to sit 50 metres away from him and his band, and listen to an 83-year-old sing songs from decades ago.

The three hours of music on Nov. 17 were worth every penny.

Yes, this is not the McCartney of yesteryear or even *Yesterday*: he had trouble hitting the high notes, and uses a teleprompter to remember the lyrics of his songs. But he is still a phenomenal musi-

cian, playing his standard Hofner bass guitar, ukulele, mandolin, piano, and a variety of acoustic and electric guitars.

His guitar and drums back-up offered superb music and harmonies, accompanied by a trio of trombone, trumpet and saxophone, so every song was as good as the original version. It is notable The Beatles stopped touring because of all that screaming, and their inability to replicate the sophisticated instrumenta-

tion of the studio. This show was proof there is a formula for a live show with depth. And the use of multimedia screens was a perfect complement to the music.

Every lyric of virtually every song was familiar to the more than 20,000 people present, beginning with *Help!* and through to *Let Me Roll It, I've Just Seen a Face, Michelle, Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da, Band on the Run, Get Back, Let It Be*, and *Hey Jude*. The inevitable encore featured *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, Helter Skelter, Golden Slumbers/Carry That Weight*, and, suitably *The End*.

Sir Paul recognized his late bandmates Lennon and Harrison with touching tributes, playing *Something*, and offering a duet with Lennon on the big screen signing *I've Got a Feeling*. He was sentimental about the early days of the band in Liverpool in 1958, 67 years ago.

When Monty Python's Flying Circus toured the world, John Cleese saw people mouthing the scripts as they knew them by heart. The same with McCartney: every person, whatever their mother tongue, knew the lyrics and sang along. There was enormous appreciation of the francophones in the crowd for his attempts to speak French, and of course, for *Michelle*.

At the end of the show, McCartney and his band came on stage waving the flags of Canada, Quebec, and the United Kingdom. There was a scattering of "boos" for the Maple Leaf and Union Jack, but that was a brief downer in a magical evening.

As the last line of *The End* emphasized at the conclusion of the concert: "And in the end/The love you take/is equal to the love you make." Indeed, what may be McCartney's last tour was a gift to all us aging Beatlemania.

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

## The future fighter debate

Continued from page 6

lounge chairs, United States President Donald Trump got elected and immediately began imposing tariffs and threatening Canada's sovereignty.

In response, Prime Minister Mark Carney issued the rally call for Canadians to get their "elbows up" as a display of defiance to Trump's threats. More practically, Carney stated that the U.S. is no longer a trusted ally, and that going forward, Canada should reduce our reliance on purchasing 75 per cent of our defence technology from our southern neighbour.

Much to the dismay of the RCAF braintrust, it was pointed out that Canada has thus far

only committed to purchasing 16 F-35s. Carney has ordered a complete review of all options that would allow Canada to seek an alternate replacement aircraft for the CF-18s. That review was promised to be complete by the end of "summer." Defence Minister David McGuinty also committed to publicly releasing the review document.

However, now as the November snow is falling, the review is still under wraps.

Predictably, the review has apparently recommended buying the F-35 and only the F-35, according to news reports. However, it would seem that Carney may indeed be serious about getting his elbows up.

In recent days, defence firm Saab—with the full backing of the Swedish government—has launched a full-court press to convince the Canadian public of the merits in purchasing their Gripen fighter jets instead of just F-35s. In the last CF-18 replacement competition, Saab's Gripen finished a close second to the F-35, despite the Air Force already predetermining they only wanted the F-35.

There is no question that the fifth-generation F-35 is more technologically advanced than the Saab Gripen. However, the Gripens are more cost effective to operate, and have a far greater readiness rate than the F-35.

They also have different tactical strengths wherein the Gripen

is primarily an interceptor, and the F-35 is a stealth strike aircraft.

One would think that 16 F-35s would be adequate to fulfil any sneak attack on a near-peer adversary on Day 1 of a conflict—especially as there is no fathomable scenario wherein Canada would initiate such a conflict on our own. A fleet of 72 Gripen interceptors in the role of defending Canada's airspace would also seem more than adequate.

More importantly, Saab has sweetened the pot by offering to assemble the Gripen here in Canada. This is estimated to create 6,000 high-tech aviation jobs over the next four decades.

That sort of offer must be music to the ears of those Canadians who truly want to send a message of patriotic defiance to the Trump administration. We would be partnering with a

European ally to build domestic defence capacity.

Simultaneously, we would be following through on Carney's promise to wean ourselves off the current dependency on the U.S.

More importantly we would be hitting Trump in the chequebook to the tune of cancelling close to \$22-billion worth of future F-35s.

As much as I would love to see this play out in Saab's favour, I fear the RCAF brass will once again prevail, and Canada will get the F-35, and only the F-35. At the very least, one hopes that the substantive benefits offered by the Saab Gripen bid will force concessions from Lockheed Martin in terms of better industrial benefits resulting from the F-35 purchase.

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

The Hill Times



## OPINION

# Adopting a made-in-Canada policy could result in losing the battle for AI supremacy

Canada has played an important role in creating and defining the very essence of AI, but most of those minds were not born in this beautiful country.

Michael Cholod

Opinion



On the campaign trail, Prime Minister Mark Carney described artificial intelligence as a key pillar of Canada's economic transformation, and promised to invest big to establish Canadian supremacy in this groundbreaking new technology. Since his April 28 election victory, he's gone all in on AI, promising to spend \$2.5-billion on data centres and other infrastructure necessary to support advanced research and development. He even appointed Evan Solomon as the country's first minister of AI and digital innovation, and AI was mentioned at least 71 times in the 2025 federal budget released on Nov. 4.

Solomon has hit the ground running, travelling from coast to coast touting the benefits of AI, and promoting our new strategy. Canada's Advisory Council on AI was tasked with conducting nationwide stakeholder meetings and surveying experts, academia, and the general public over 30 days to come up with a plan.



Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation Minister Evan Solomon. Making Canada a leader will require a lot of smart AI students, researchers, engineers, and entrepreneurs from around the world, writes Michael Cholod. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

While this frenetic pace is necessary if Canada doesn't want to be left behind by AI leading nations like the United States and China, it could also see us lose our opportunity to expand our early lead in the development of the foundational ideas that made AI a reality. Canada can proudly claim British-Canadian computer scientist Geoffrey Hinton, who won the 2024 Nobel Prize for Physics, for his work at the University of Toronto on foundational discoveries and inventions that enable machine learning with artificial neural networks. Hinton and fellow Canadians Yoshua Bengio and Richard Sutton are widely considered to be the godfathers of AI.

With this proud heritage, it's easy to see why we'd want to build on this made-in-Canada tradition, but it would be a mistake not to recognize that Hinton

was United Kingdom-born and educated, Bengio was born in France, and Sutton was born in Ohio and educated in the U.S. In fact, of the 13 most notable doctoral or post-doctoral graduates of Hinton's research lab at the University of Toronto, only three were born in Canada.

Currently Canada is under economic attack by an ex-ally who wants to take our jobs and stop buying our products, so it's understandable how applying a made-in-Canada label to AI seems like a golden opportunity. However, losing sight of what makes Canada great—welcoming people from all corners of the world with open arms and a double double—is an opportunity lost, especially when it comes to AI.

One of the reasons so many American and overseas AI companies like OpenAI (ChatGPT), Anthropic, and Lovable have

reached such eye-watering valuations is because they have attracted very scarce AI talent, and locked them down with unfathomable signing bonuses and million-dollar stock options. Canada has played an incredibly important role in creating and defining the very essence of AI, but most of those minds were not born in this beautiful country. This is why it's very important to not to mistake "made in Canada" with "born in Canada."

Unemployment, especially among youth, combined with cost-of-living concerns are driving Canadians to be increasingly more xenophobic, forcing Carney to respond by curbing immigration. South of the border, the Trump regime has deployed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) troops to round up anyone with an accent or the wrong skin colour, and dra-

matically increased the cost of an H1B visa—the one used to recruit skilled AI technology minds from around the world.

One of the more interesting things that has happened to me since returning to Kyiv this past summer is that I have co-founded an AI startup with a few of my Ukrainian friends. To pay people and develop our prototype into a product, we need to raise money, just like any other startup, but raising money in Ukraine in return for equity is almost impossible so we are considering incorporating in Canada. Ukraine also has a lot of very smart developers, many with AI experience and many with relatives already living in Canada.

If the government is serious about AI, how about adopting a come-to-Canada AI policy tied to immigration? Offer the best and brightest AI minds and entrepreneurs a package that includes incorporation, startup funding, and work visas for all their employees in return for developing their intellectual property and their companies in Canada? I bet you might even entice a few hot startups from the U.S. to come to Canada, especially if they already have a diverse staff that has to run the ICE gauntlet every day they go to school or to work.

Canada has a lot to be proud of, and Carney is right to identify AI as a pillar of Canada's future economic prosperity; however, AI supremacy cannot be built overnight. Making Canada a leader will require a lot of smart AI students, researchers, engineers, and entrepreneurs from around the world. The real golden opportunity is to embrace the made-in-Canada rhetoric, and begin aggressively recruiting and welcoming more immigrants—especially from the U.S.

*Michael Cholod is executive director of The Peace Coalition, an international, non-profit association of NGOs, academic institutions, and independent experts currently co-ordinating a variety of initiatives aimed at seizing Russian money to pay for Ukraine's resistance and recovery. He is also the proud co-founder of a brand new Ukrainian-Canadian AI startup that will be emerging from stealth mode very soon.*

*The Hill Times*

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# OPINION

Excluding women from AI planning will risk slowing down AI adoption nationwide, write Rebecca Bailey and Sarah Hashem. *Unsplash photograph by Christina @wocintechchat.com*



## The federal budget misses Canada's biggest AI opportunity

With targeted investment, women could play a transformative role in shaping this next phase of Canada's artificial intelligence-fuelled growth.

Rebecca Bailey & Sarah Hashem

Opinion



Canada's artificial intelligence frontier is shifting fast. As models learn to write code on their own, our next competitive advantage won't be technical skills but judgment: the ability to connect technology to business outcomes, ethics, and impact. The federal budget misses a key opportunity to build the talent pipeline Canada desperately needs to compete in these areas.

The federal budget has now passed its first hurdle in the House of Commons, but it came with some quiet statistics that have loud implications. Buried deep in the annexes is an analysis of which Canadians the budget will benefit, and what net fiscal impact those population groups will create as a result.

### The problem

Much of the investment targets construction, technology, infrastructure, and AI—sectors where men currently comprise the majority of the workforce, and are projected to both receive and produce the greatest benefit. The effect here is cumulative and reinforces old tropes about who will drive GDP growth in Canada.

Budgets do not just spend money; they signal who counts in the story of progress. When governments pour money into industries where women are underrepresented without any effort to help them catch up, they are missing a critical opportunity to create powerful economic growth.

Excluding women from AI planning will risk slowing down AI adoption nationwide. This will cost us dearly at a time when our economy is fragile, and every dollar counts. Early data shows that Canadian women are adopting AI at slower rates than their male counterparts. This is a big economic problem for Canada.

To succeed in a time of unprecedented economic and global uncertainty, we need the lion's share of our national workforce to quickly become AI fluent. Canada is already a smaller market and workforce compared with other nations in the AI race; to remain competitive, we need a larger share of the Canadian population engaged with and deploying AI. With targeted investment, women could play a transformative role in shaping this next phase of Canada's AI-fuelled growth.

### The solution

We believe investing billions of dollars in growth industries is the right call. That said, if we extend legacy funding patterns into the AI era, we will simply reinforce a male-dominated tech workforce. Instead, we urge the government to strategically leverage federal funding to ensure women are trained, represented, and leading in AI-driven growth. Done well, this budget could truly shape a new workforce architecture.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape how our economy grows by deploying our full workforce. At this moment in history, Canada's greatest risk is underutilization. A budget that invests in only half the workforce will not propel Canada to become a leader on the world stage.

The federal budget is a national bet on resilience and relevance. We believe Canada has a unique opportunity to become a world leader in AI, and the budget is the right lever to get us there. How much of our workforce benefits from it will ultimately be the limiting factor of Canada's economic outlook.

Rebecca Bailey is the CEO of Women in Communications & Technology. Sarah Hashem is the vice-president of corporate partnerships at WCT.

The Hill Times

## Now is the time for Canadian businesses to invest in Ukraine



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, left, and Prime Minister Mark Carney. Canada has the tools and the trusted relationships to open the gates to more business opportunities. *Photograph courtesy of X*

The federal government can act on a number of fronts to help kickstart Canadian companies' investments in Ukraine.

ISG Senator Stan Kutcher & Zenon Potichny

Opinion



Canada has been a global leader when it comes to western countries' business relationships with Ukraine. It was the first western country to recognize Ukraine's independence in 1991, and in 2024, signed the modernized Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement. This agreement provides a clear framework for Canadian investment in Ukraine, making it easier for domestic businesses to sell their products and services there—and for Ukrainian companies to do the same in Canada. This past August, the countries' respective defence ministers signed an agreement to produce defence products jointly, an agreement that, if properly executed, will boost business-to-business activities.

Underlying these formal country-to-country engagements is the long-standing close and warm person-to-person relationship between Canadians and Ukrainians. The Ukrainian diaspora in Canada measures some 1.5 million people. The contribution of Ukrainians displaced by Russia's genocidal war on their country has further cemented these ties. Canadians have long been involved in assisting Ukraine to strengthen its democratic institutions, and those relationships add to the glue that binds the countries together.

However, more recently, other western countries appear to have leapfrogged over Canada when it comes to business investment in Ukraine. For example: Bayer, the German pharmaceutical and agricultural company has announced a 60-million euro investment from 2023 onwards in its corn seed production facility in Ukraine; Carlsberg Group, the Danish beer producer, has invested more than 40 million euros in Ukraine during the war, and operates three breweries; and Saint-Gobain, the French company that manufactures sustainable

construction materials opened its first factory in Ukraine in 2024. All this has happened during the war.

There has been some activity by Canadian companies that has shown success during this time. For example, Fairfax has successfully invested in a number of agriculture and insurance projects in Ukraine, and Cameco signed an agreement with Ukraine's state-owned nuclear energy utility Energoatom to supply Ukraine's needs for natural uranium for nuclear fuel until 2035. Prime Minister Mark Carney has also reached out to Ukraine a number of times. The Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce has long-standing linkages to the Ukrainian market, and can offer support for Canadian companies investing there. Yet, to date, only a small number of Canadian companies are taking advantage of the opportunities that now exist in Ukraine.

Given this situation, the federal government can act on a number of fronts to help kickstart Canadian companies' investments in Ukraine. For example, Global Affairs Canada, through the Canada-Ukraine Trade and Investment Support initiative, could strengthen its "matchmaking" function connecting Canadian companies with Ukrainian opportunities they might not otherwise discover.

Ukraine's Prozorro platform already offers a transparent system for government procurement. However, use of that initiative is complex and off-putting to companies that otherwise might be successful in obtaining contracts. Additional federal funding to the Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce to support its UCANPRO platform will help Canadian companies to successfully navigate the Prozorro process, thus increasing their possibility for success.

There are many opportunities for successful investment by Canadian companies in Ukraine or in collaboration with Ukrainian companies in both countries. Some additional assistance from the federal government can help open the gate for success. And that success is measured not only by new investments now, but also by already being present in Ukraine when reconstruction investment begins.

The time is short. The opportunities are real. Canada has the tools—and the trusted relationships—to open the gates. It's time for those gates to be opened, and for Canadian companies to walk through them.

The Hon. Dr. Stanley Kutcher is an Independent Senator from Nova Scotia. Zenon Potichny is president of the Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce.

The Hill Times



# OPINION

## Alberta's hybrid health-care plan breaks the spirit—and likely the law—of Canadian Medicare

The safeguard Alberta seeks to eliminate prevents doctors from playing both sides at once, which would create a slower, second-class system for people who can't afford to pay.

Karen S. Palmer

Opinion



Alberta's government is gearing up to take the province into uncharted and potentially dangerous territory. Draft legislation reveals that Premier Danielle Smith's United Conservative government intends to allow physicians to work simultaneously in both the public and private health-care systems—a model unlike anything permitted anywhere else in Canada.

The plan would create a new class of “flexibly participating physicians” who could decide, patient by patient, whether to bill



The plan from Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's government is a recipe for legalized queue-jumping, writes Karen S. Palmer. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

the province or charge patients privately.

This isn't innovation. It's the quiet dismantling of principles that have guided Canadian Medicare for 40 years. And it unquestionably violates the spirit of the Canada Health Act, if not the law itself.

To understand why, you need to understand how Medicare works. Contrary to popular belief, private pay health care is *not* banned in Canada. Physicians in every province except Ontario are free to leave the publicly funded system and run a fully private pay practice—provided they unenrol completely, and do not bill the public plan for anything. This rule isn't a bureaucratic quirk; it is a structural safeguard to protect the integrity of the publicly funded system. It prevents doctors from playing both sides at once, which would create a slower, sec-

ond-class system for people who can't afford to pay.

Alberta's proposal would eliminate this safeguard. A physician could bill the province for one patient, and charge another patient out-of-pocket for the same service at any price the doctor chooses. It's a recipe for legalized queue-jumping.

A doctor could bill the government \$45 for an office visit at the regulated rate, or charge a private patient hundreds of dollars for the exact same service. Under Alberta's proposed model, physicians would be free to choose, case-by-case. Health Canada repeatedly claws back federal health transfers from provinces that allow even modest extra-billing or inadvertent user charges. Alberta's model invites patient charges by design.

But at least as concerning is this: it is impossible to pretend

that care for public-pay patients would be of equal priority. Regulation and policy tools cannot easily counter the natural economic gravity pulling doctors toward the more lucrative private-pay stream.

This is precisely the scenario the Canada Health Act was designed to prevent. The Act does more than prohibit charging patients for insured services. It requires provinces to ensure that access to health services is provided on uniform terms and conditions, and that nothing—including government policy—impedes reasonable access. As British Columbia's Supreme Court affirmed in 2020, “The primary purpose of having a universal public health care system is to ensure that medically necessary care is provided based on need and not the ability to pay, with respect to all patients ... saying that the equity principle only applies to some patients but not necessarily to all would defeat the idea of universality and accessibility.”

If publicly insured doctor appointments become harder to obtain because doctors devote time to lucrative private-pay care, then access is impeded. If timely access increasingly depends on a patient's ability to pay, then access is no longer uniform. These are not grey areas. They are direct violations of the Act's core Accessibility criterion.

Global evidence on dual practice is cautionary. In systems that allow physician dual practice, the public-pay system may absorb sicker and more complex patients, while simpler more profitable cases flow to the private-pay side. Public wait times rise, driving more patients to pay privately, entrenching the very two-tier multi-payer system the Canada Health Act was designed to prevent.

Defenders argue that other countries embrace dual practice. But Canada is not the United Kingdom, or Australia, or Sweden. Those nations do not have a federal law requiring equitable access to medically necessary services. Canada does. And our law has teeth: mandatory dollar-for-dollar deductions from the Canada Health Transfer if a province enables extra billing, user charges, or policies that impede access.

Alberta's government insists its commitment to publicly funded care is unwavering, and that no one will ever have to pay for an insured service. That may be true on paper. But in practice, this plan would create a reality in which timely access to care depends on your wallet. That is not public Medicare. It is the construction of a private fast track inside a publicly funded system.

Alberta is free to reform health care. It is not free to undermine the national principles that guarantee Canadians—Albertans included—equitable access to medically necessary care. Ottawa should make it clear that if Alberta proceeds, it may do so at the cost of federal health care funding and the integrity of Medicare itself.

*Karen S. Palmer is an adjunct professor at Simon Fraser University, and University of Toronto. She was born and raised in Alberta, and lives in B.C.*  
*The Hill Times*

## Ottawa plans to modernize the Energy Efficiency Act. Here's how to do it right

To reduce energy bills and reach net-zero emissions, Canada's update to the legislation must strengthen standards and broaden its scope.

Sarah Riddell

Opinion



Tucked away in an annex of the recent federal budget is a proposal to amend and modernize Canada's Energy Efficiency Act.

Despite rising energy costs and mounting climate pressures, Ottawa hasn't adequately updated the Act to reflect the monumental technological change or growth of online appliance purchases over the last three decades. When the Act was passed in 1992, the internet was in its infancy. Today, we can buy and control appliances from our smartphones.

The 2025 budget's proposal for the Act includes provisions “for regulatory sandboxes, incorporation by reference to simplify and streamline regulatory development, new statistical powers,

coverage for online retailers, and updated fines.”

With details remaining sparse, Canada has a critical opportunity to bring the Act into the 21<sup>st</sup> century by expanding energy labelling, ensuring meaningful progress, and upholding stronger national standards.

Here's what a modernized Energy Efficiency Act should look like to make life more affordable for Canadians and drive the country toward net-zero emissions.

### Expanding energy labelling

“Coverage for online retailers” presumably means requiring online sellers to display EnerGuide labels for regulated products, which would help consumers compare the efficiency of

competing products. These labels are required for in-store retailers, but with online sales growing, expanded requirements would give Canadians clear access to information wherever they shop.

Efficiency Canada and the global non-profit CLASP highlighted this among our 10 recommendations in the *How to Modernize Canada's Energy Efficiency Act* report, along with transformative changes like considering system efficiency, setting pollution standards for equipment, and requiring demand flexibility.

### Ensuring meaningful progress

Canada should review and, when applicable, strengthen efficiency standards at least every five years to keep pace with technology. Standards for most major home appliances, including dishwashers and refrigerators, were last updated more than a decade ago. Major appliances were initially included in both the 2022 and 2025 amendments to the Energy Efficiency Regulations, subsequently removed, and now announced as part of the next amendment.

The Act should also include a provision mandating that efficiency standards can only be strengthened, removing the risk of backsliding due to political lobbying, harmonization with lower international standards, or pressure from manufacturers.

Together, this would ensure consistent momentum for strengthening standards that save households and businesses on their energy bills, reduce peak demand stress on the electricity grid, and lower emissions.

### Will the free trade agenda weaken the modernized Act?

Between 1995 and 2030, the Energy Efficiency Regulations are projected to save enough energy to power all 16 million existing Canadian households for 5.5 years. Higher efficiency standards remove the worst-performing equipment from the market, improving savings and reducing energy waste.

While one federal policy modernizes the Energy Efficiency Act, another policy agenda might

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## OPINION

# Canada's G7 leadership: the ambition is there, but is the budget?



Prime Minister Mark Carney. Canada needs a foreign policy that enables it to have meaningful impact on the global forces that increasingly define the health and sustainability of our societies, writes Joseph Ingram. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Instead of acknowledging the moral imperative of reducing global inequality, the government has chosen to further cut an already paltry foreign aid budget by \$2.7-billion over the next four years.

Joseph  
Ingram

Opinion



Producing a national budget in a time of exceptional global chaos—what many scholars and scientists consider today to be a “polycrisis”—is no easy feat. Producing something that satisfies a majority of Canadian voters, including economic and political pundits, is even more difficult, especially in a country that is still not a single economic space, and is so geographically and economically tied to one of the planet’s two super powers. When one adds to the mix an American president who is not only the principal

source of much of today’s global uncertainty, but also aspiring to fulfill America’s “manifest destiny” of creating a United States of all of North America, the task is without historical precedent.

Prime Minister Mark Carney was elected because a plurality of Canadians viewed him as best qualified to lead the country through both the economic challenges—persistent inflation, growing inequality, declining productivity growth, accelerating immigration—and the geopolitical threats we face from autocrats and powers hostile to democracy itself, as well as from global warming. In most respects, the government’s *Canada Strong* budget seeks to address these challenges, especially domestically. With help from Carney’s former Bank of Canada deputy, now-Governor Tiff Macklem, and a shrewd response to U.S. President Donald Trump’s tariffs (notwithstanding Ontario Premier Doug Ford’s untimely TV ad), the budget seeks to minimize the Trump-induced pressure on prices. This in part through providing financial support to certain large industries hard hit by American tariffs, including preferential loans for those industries instrumental in the building of lower-cost housing.

Through a substantial boost in public spending, supplemented by increased private investment, the budget also endeavours to enhance Canadian competitiveness, making major investments in transport infrastructure, digital corridors, cleaner energy (includ-

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ing nuclear), low-carbon emitting liquefied natural gas, carbon capture and storage, and reduced methane emissions. The ambition is to become “a clean energy superpower.” Combined with measures to improve Canada’s productivity growth—including through the elimination of interprovincial trade barriers and creating a single economic space—while diversifying our trade and commercial ties away from an increasingly unreliable neighbour, the budget is intended to transform Canada’s economy into “the strongest in the G7.” But are the expenditures proposed in this budget truly commensurate with the prime minister’s global leadership ambitions? And do they reflect the core Canadian values, which, at least until the Stephen Harper government took power in 2006, had elevated our national profile into one of respected global leadership?

In a 2020 opinion piece in *The Hill Times*, I made the case that the unwillingness of then-prime minister Justin Trudeau’s government to reset the short-sighted parochialism of his Conservative predecessor by increasing Canada’s foreign aid budget had not only further tarnished our global standing as a middle power (as a result, we twice failed to be elected to the United Nations Security Council), but was also widening the exposure of Canadians to the inexorable threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—notably, the impact of the demographic transition, and a warming planet. I also argued that these threats would be most impactful in the

planet’s poorest regions, producing increased drought, water scarcity, and pandemics. In other words, by heightening the “push factors” that led the World Bank to conclude that by 2050, we will likely see some 320 million to 350 million migrants globally, up substantially from the 184 million estimated in 2022. The Nov. 6 announcement by Iranian authorities that they might have to evacuate most of Tehran’s 10 million inhabitants due to an absence of water resulting from six consecutive years of drought is likely a portent of things to come.

And yet, instead of acknowledging both the moral imperative of reducing global inequality and injustice, while at the same time recognizing that desperate and dissatisfied people can no longer be ignored and contained indefinitely, the Carney government has chosen to further cut what was already a paltry foreign aid budget by some \$2.7-billion over the next four years. Excluding the domestic cost of refugees, this places Canada amongst the most parsimonious of bilateral donors at only 0.26 per cent of gross national income (GNI)—well short of the UN target of 0.7 per cent of GNI. It also diminishes the impact Canada can have on eliminating migratory “push factors” that will transform immigration from a strategically managed program needed to provide demographic and fiscal balance to our aging population into increasingly unmanageable numbers with disruptive economic, social, and geopolitical consequences.

If the prime minister’s international leadership ambitions are to be realized, Canada needs a foreign policy that enables it to have meaningful impact on the global forces that increasingly define the health and sustainability of our societies. While the experience of a former investment and central banker is certainly needed in addressing Canada’s economic challenges, our foreign policy needs to be securely anchored on a dual track. One being that of traditional diplomacy, security, and trade, alongside a track of increased international assistance using development specialists and macroeconomists skilled in helping low-income economies mitigate the climate-induced factors that are producing more economic hardship and increased conflict; conditions resulting in desperate attempts by those most affected to improve their lives through emigration to the global north, Canada included. If, instead of addressing these global priorities through increased foreign aid, Canada continues to massively subsidize the fossil fuel emitters—thereby adding to the global causes of the polycrisis—we cannot expect to position ourselves as an effective leader within the G7, and the prime minister’s worthy goal will prove to be nothing more than the lofty rhetoric of his two predecessors.

Joseph Ingram is the former special representative of *The World Bank* to the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, a former president of the North-South Institute, and a fellow of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute.

*The Hill Times*



# TRANSPORTATION

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# TRANSPORTATION Policy Briefing

## Budget investments in transportation, trade require long-term strategy and private sector support, say experts

The Nov. 4 budget announced \$5-billion towards a Trade Diversification Corridors Fund intended to strengthen trade corridors across ports, rail, and roads; and \$1-billion for an Arctic Infrastructure Fund.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

A multibillion-dollar investment in trade and transportation infrastructure announced in the recent federal budget is a good start, but overcoming decades of under-investment in those sectors will require attracting greater private funding, and a more comprehensive strategy for the long term, according to transportation and supply-chain experts.

"I don't think a \$5-billion investment focused on trade diversification is going to take us to where we need to get to," said Fraser Johnson, an operations management professor with the Ivey Business School at Western University, urging the need for a "comprehensive" federal transportation strategy and corresponding investments.

The 2025 federal budget narrowly passed its first hurdle with a vote of 170-168 on Nov. 17. Major funding announced in the budget related to trade and transportation include \$5-billion towards a Trade Diversification Corridors Fund intended to strengthen trade corridors across ports, rail, and roads; as well as \$1-billion for an Arctic Infrastructure Fund to support transportation projects in the North, including airports, seaports, roads, and highways for both civilian and military use.

Johnson told *The Hill Times* that he welcomes the funding announcement for the trade corridor, but called it a drop in the bucket when it comes to addressing deficiencies in trade infrastructure in Canada, arguing that the federal government should be doing more.

"If we learned anything during the [COVID-19] pandemic as consumers, there are choke points



Transport Minister Steven MacKinnon said that a total of \$6-billion in the federal budget towards trade and transportation infrastructure will 'help Canadian businesses get their goods to new markets,' in a Nov. 21 Transport Canada press release. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

in our supply chains, and those choke points include things like our ports and our rail system and our transportation network, and we have to make sure we have sufficient capacity and productivity and efficiency in areas such as ... container handling in our port system, like the Port of Vancouver," he said. "The Port of Vancouver is the biggest port in Canada, and its productivity levels are relatively low if you take a look at other major ports around the world. It's pretty well at capacity right now."

The Port of Vancouver handled a record 85 million metric tonnes of cargo in the first six months of 2025, with growth driven by surging exports of Canadian crude oil, canola oil, grain, potash, and coal. The port is currently trying to grow its trade capacity to meet demand, according to Peter Xotta, president and CEO of the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority in a Sept. 26 press release.

Canadian port authorities do not receive federal funding to meet operating costs or deficits, but they can partner with the private sector, borrow from a commercial lender, or apply for certain federal grants related to infrastructure, the environment, or security.

To help address trade and transportation woes, Johnson emphasized the importance of attracting private sector investment in transportation, which could be complemented by a comprehensive transportation strategy.

"My basic premise is that the federal government has been under-investing in our transportation network for decades, and we need a comprehensive transportation strategy and suitable investments to make sure that our transportation network is mostly efficient and effective," he said. "My concern is that, as a country, there's been a lot of discussion around ... how our productivity is falling behind that of other nations. One of the things that can help us ... is by having an effective and efficient transportation network that has adequate capacity to be able to handle the demands in the country."

Ryan Greer, senior vice-president of public affairs and national policy for Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, told *The Hill Times* that the funding announcements for export infrastructure will require a long-term planning component.

"If I were to ask a simple question right now ... What are the top 10, [or] 25, or 50 trade infrastructure projects that we think will drive Canada's long-term economic expansion in the decades ahead? There is no answer to that question, and there's really only one level of government that can answer it: the federal government," he said. "Alongside these investments ... we do think there are still some holes in terms of how we, as a country, are thinking about and planning and trying to identify what those projects are

that are the most important to our long-term success."

Greer described the transportation and trade-related funding in the budget as a good start, but added the federal government should go even further.

To ensure that these funds deliver practical results, Greer argued that it will be important for money to be invested sooner, rather than later.

"It takes a long time to plan and execute on these projects, so [Step 1 is] ensuring that we are getting funding out the door, ensuring that we have a timely intake process so that applicants can put their project in the window and get a speedy answer," he said.

Greer said that while he is supportive of efforts to diversify Canada's trade, there is no substitute for the United States, which is the destination for about 70 to 75 per cent of Canada's exports.

"For manufactured goods, especially, it is hard to diversify. Sixty per cent of all Canadian exports to the U.S. are intermediate goods. We are talking about parts [and] components ... that are used in many cases in the U.S. manufacturing processes," he said. "Diversification is going to help mitigate some of the impact of what's been happening with the U.S., but it's not a solution to it, and we have maintained the only way to solve our U.S. problem is ultimately going to be to solve our U.S. problem."

Jeff Morrison, president and CEO of the National Airlines Coun-

cil of Canada, told *The Hill Times* that his organization is waiting for confirmation of whether airports will be eligible for funding under the Trade Diversification Corridors Fund. Airports are specifically mentioned in the budget as eligible for funding under the Arctic Infrastructure Fund, but not in the Trade Diversification Corridors Fund.

Morrison argued that airports should be considered a critical component when it comes to trade diversification.

"When people think about trade diversification, and even sometimes when the prime minister talks about it, it's usually framed as being about ports or rail, but the reality is that aviation also is a key component of that supply chain," said Morrison. "Goods do move in the belly of aircraft."

Morrison argued that trade is not just about goods, but also about services and people.

"The tourism trade is very lucrative. It's been doing extremely well in Canada," he said. "In order to move people—not just goods, but people—as well as part of that trade diversification, airports and aviation play an absolutely critical role within that overall supply chain."

To facilitate infrastructure improvements for airports, an examination of the regulatory framework for the aviation sector would be critical, Morrison argued.

The House Transport, Infrastructure, and Communities Committee released a report in October on the state of airline competition in Canada. Recommendations in the report included that the federal government should conduct a review of regulatory and administrative burdens on airlines in Canada; and the federal government should review all taxes and fees that impact the aviation sector and costs passed on to passengers, and compare to other jurisdictions.

Transport Minister Steve MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.) assumed responsibility for his current portfolio on Sept. 16, and has also been serving as the government House leader since May 13.

Morrison met MacKinnon on Sept. 24 during a session of the International Civil Aviation Organization in Montreal. He said the minister asked insightful questions, and came across as very practical with a common-sense approach.

"My perception is that he's going to make an excellent transport minister, given how quickly he jumped into the role," said Morrison.

However, Morrison also expressed some concern given MacKinnon's two roles within the federal government, arguing that transport minister should be a full-time job.

"I think for any minister holding more than one portfolio, it's a challenge," said Morrison. "We haven't actually had a full-time, permanent, long-standing transport minister for several years. My hope is that Minister MacKinnon will be interested in taking the job on full time."

David Johnston, director of the George Weston Ltd. Centre for Sustainable Supply Chains

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# TRANSPORTATION Policy Briefing

## Driving change: how investing in youth and transportation can power a greener future

By connecting the dots between youth employment, transportation innovation, and climate action, we can design policies that deliver a more resilient, inclusive economy.

ISG Senator  
Farah Mohamed

Opinion



Canada's future will be shaped by two urgent forces: creating meaningful employment for young people, and accelerating our response to climate change. Both challenges are formidable, but together, they present an unprecedented opportunity for Canada. If we are strategic, the investments we make in transforming our transportation systems can fuel a new generation of skilled workers, innovators, and entrepreneurs—while powering the low-carbon transition our economy needs.

Transportation is responsible for roughly a quarter of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. We often hear about the need to electrify public transit and fleets, invest in rail, and build more climate-resilient infrastructure. What we do not often hear about is that the transformation will require both technology and people. Thousands of them. The engineers designing charging networks, the technicians maintaining electric buses, the planners rethinking how cities are shaped will be all just as essential as the infrastructure itself.

This is where young people and transportation intersect. Young people today are not only ready to work—they want to work for a purpose. Surveys show that youth are motivated by meaningful, climate-action-oriented opportunities. Many are asking, "How can I help combat the climate crisis?" Offering them paid apprenticeships, training, and jobs in transportation infrastructure is more than a workforce strategy—it is a response to a desire for contribution. It connects the drive of youth to make a difference with concrete roles in building a cleaner, better-moving Canada.

We already see this model taking shape overseas. For example, across multiple Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries including France, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal, and Spain, governments have launched programs such as Youth Employment Network for Energy Sustainability in Islands to help young people enter the green economy. These initiatives combine training, internships, and employer partnerships to steer youth into jobs aligned with a low-carbon future.

A 2021 OECD study revealed that countries with robust vocational programs like Germany averaged youth-unemployment rates near 8.5 per cent, compared

with 16 per cent in those without. Germany is now weaving hydrogen and e-mobility technologies into its 342 recognized trades, ensuring apprentices earn while learning in future-oriented fields.

Canada could adapt this approach: embed paid apprenticeships within transit agencies so youth maintain electric bus fleets while studying battery systems or sustainable-mobility planning. Employers gain skilled workers, youth earn while learning, and taxpayers see durable returns on infrastructure spending.

Canada has the tools to do this, but we need to be intentional. Here are a few ways forward:

- Require that all federal funding for transit and transportation projects reserve at least 20 per cent of hiring for the next generation of builders and problem-solvers.
- Accelerate outreach through schools and community organizations to highlight roles beyond bus operation: electric-vehicle technician, data analyst, mobility planner, systems operator.
- Colleges and technical institutes should co-design curricula with transit agencies, manufacturers, and unions for electric-vehicle servicing, hydrogen propulsion, and smart-system analytics.

From an economic-modernization lens, this is about unlocking growth in an innovative and intentional way. When we invest in low-carbon systems, we're not sacrificing growth; we're driving it. The shift will generate new industries: electrified fleets, smart mobility services, active-transport pathways, and resilient infrastructure. These industries will need talent—and young Canadians are available and eager.

Transit investment delivers dual dividends, environmental and social. Studies suggest each \$1-billion spent on public transit generates roughly 10,000 direct and indirect jobs. Broad youth participation would add digital fluency and innovation capacity, which are skills essential for an AI-driven economy.

Canada has an opportunity to lead—to show that decarbonization and job creation are not opposing forces, but partners in prosperity. By connecting the dots between youth employment, transportation innovation, and climate action, we can design policies that strengthen civic trust, create purpose-driven work, and deliver a more resilient, inclusive economy.

The infrastructure funding is already on the table. The talent is waiting. What's missing is deliberate integration: a national strategy that embeds youth training and hiring within every major transportation investment. Done right, Canada's next generation won't just ride the clean-mobility transition—they'll drive it.

*The Hon. Farah Mohamed was appointed to the Senate of Canada to represent Ontario on March 7. She is a charitable sector leader, advocate, and public speaker with more than 30 years of experience in addressing systemic inequities in Canada, and around the world. Before joining the Senate, she led The King's Trust Canada, The Malala Fund, and founded FORA (formerly G(irls)20).*

*The Hill Times*

## Striking a balance



When there's a work stoppage at one of our major ports, Canadian businesses that ship containerized goods and bulk exports lose a main access point to international markets, writes Sen. Todd Lewis. *Photograph courtesy of Flickr/John Bollwitt*

If the prime minister wants to diversify exports and enable investment, he needs to address the frequency of rail and port strikes in Canada.

CSG Senator  
Todd Lewis

Opinion



As a farmer, I've been affected by work stoppages in the transportation sector for my entire career. For farmers, work stoppages have real consequences: degraded grain quality, penalties for not delivering product according to contract terms, accrued interest on loans that would have been paid had product been delivered, and international clients who decide that they'd rather do business with countries with more reliable supply chains.

And it's not just agricultural producers who are affected. When there's a work stoppage at one of our major ports, Canadian businesses that ship containerized goods and bulk exports lose a main access point to international markets. A backlog at a port due to a work stoppage in the rail or marine sector can result in layoffs for employees of manufacturing, construction, and sales businesses unable to source production inputs. For every one day of work stoppage, it can take up to seven days for service to recover once work resumes.

This fall, the Standing Senate Committee on Transportation and Communications is studying labour disruptions in federally regulated rail and marine sectors. The federal government evidently recognizes the danger of prolonged work stoppages; Ian Lee, an associate professor at Carleton University, told the committee that the Government of Canada used back-to-work legislation to intervene in labour disputes 37 times from 1950 to 2024. The vast majority of strikes that were legislated back to work occurred in the transportation sector.

More recently, the federal government has foregone back-to-work legislation; instead, labour ministers have used their discretionary powers under Sec. 107 of the Canada Labour Code to intervene in labour disputes. In 2024 alone, the federal government used Sec. 107 on seven separate occasions.

Union representatives have told the committee that going on strike allows

workers to exert economic pressure on the employer. But strikes in the rail and marine sectors impact the entire Canadian economy, resulting in lost wages, lost contracts, and lost opportunities for businesses and individual Canadians who have no representation at the bargaining table.

Both unions and employers have told our committee that the current system isn't fit for purpose. Tom Doran, first vice-president of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, told us: "the system is broken. If [employers] can rely on the government to constantly give them an off-ramp, whether it is the use of section 107 or continued use of back-to-work legislation that provides for binding arbitration ... it doesn't get to the core issues."

Daniel Safayeni, president and chief executive officer for Federally Regulated Employers-Transportation and Communications, told us, "We all agree the current system isn't working and that there is a legitimate role for government not to impose outcomes, but to facilitate fair and timely resolutions while keeping both parties meaningfully engaged in the process."

We need to find a way to ensure that work stoppages are a last resort. A potential model is the United States' Railway Labor Act (RLA), which was enacted in 1926. In an overview of the Act, the U.S. Department of Transportation notes: "The purposes of the RLA are to avoid any interruption of interstate commerce by providing for the prompt disposition of disputes between carriers and their employees and protects the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively." The American legislation is effective. Erik Loomis, a labour historian at the University of Rhode Island, wrote in a 2022 article for *The Conversation* that, "Strikes that obstruct transportation rarely occur in the United States, and the last one involving rail workers happened three decades ago."

In the 2025 budget, the government notes that "Canada's path to long-term economic resilience hinges on diversifying our exports." It also "acknowledges the interdependence within Canada's grain supply chain and is committed to ensuring interests are appropriately balanced and that the system enables business investment and confidence in our capacity to meet the transportation needs of the sector." If Prime Minister Mark Carney wants to diversify exports and enable investment, he needs to modernize the Canada Labour Code to address the frequency of rail and port strikes in Canada.

*Todd Lewis represents Saskatchewan in the Senate, and is a member of the Canadian Senators Group. He and his family operate a fifth-generation farm in Gray, Sask.*

*The Hill Times*



# Policy Briefing **TRANSPORTATION**

## Canada needs a strong EV market to secure future jobs

Electric vehicles draw on the sectors where Canada already has natural advantages: critical minerals, battery components, vehicle assembly, and maintenance.

Adam Thorn  
& Megan  
Gordon

Opinion



Canada's auto sector is in the middle of a historic transition. For decades, automotive factories operating in Canada have largely produced vehicles for the United States market. But that model is increasingly vulnerable as global competition intensifies and protectionist policies reshape the industry. The result is clear: between 2014 and 2024, Canada's vehicle production fell by more



If Canada wants to protect and grow auto jobs, we need to build the market that will define the next generation of manufacturing, write Adam Thorn and Megan Gordon. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

than 50 per cent, and our share of global production also halved.

These losses began well before electric vehicle debates or tariff battles. Sales of gasoline and diesel vehicles have been declining since 2017, while global demand for EVs continues to accelerate. EVs will make up more than one-quarter of new car sales globally in 2025 (well over half in China), and are expected to reach 40 per cent of the more than 100 million passenger cars projected to be sold in

2035. Canada has captured little of this growth so far, with almost no domestic EV production.

If Canada wants to protect and grow auto jobs, we need to build the market that will define the next generation of manufacturing. That means creating strong, predictable domestic demand for EVs. Countries that build for themselves are able to scale the expertise, technology, and supply chains that make them competitive exporters. Without that foundation, Canada risks losing not just production, but also the skilled workforce that has long been the backbone of our auto industry.

A strong domestic EV market is also one of the most effective ways to create jobs across the entire value chain. EVs draw on the sectors where Canada already has natural advantages: critical minerals, battery components, vehicle assembly, and maintenance all offer opportunities for high-quality work that builds on existing skills. These are jobs that many autoworkers can transition into with focused training and reskilling, benefitting every region of the country.

Another part of this growing ecosystem is the critical minerals

sector, which shows how demand for EVs lifts employment across the full supply chain. EVs and battery storage are expected to drive about half of the global growth in clean-energy technologies over the next two decades. That demand gives industry the certainty it needs to invest in mineral refining and battery startups here in Canada—projects that create skilled, long-term jobs while strengthening our ability to process and supply the materials that power the clean economy.

Getting this right requires deliberate, predictable policy. The Electric Vehicle Availability Standard is the most efficient way to provide the kind of long-term demand signal businesses need to invest in skills, technology, and production. Today, at least 130,000 Canadians are employed directly and indirectly by the EV sector. With current EV policies maintained, that number could reach 600,000 people by 2035.

Workforce planning is central to achieving that growth. Short-term upskilling can help maintain production in existing auto and parts plants. Building out EV charging networks will require targeted recruitment and new training pathways. Auto service workers need access to programs that help them move from internal combustion engine repair into advanced technologies used in electric and hybrid vehicles. When market signals are clear, unions, colleges, and training institutions can design

and sequence programs that align with industry needs, so when workers finish training, real job opportunities are available.

These strategies matter even more as traditional auto jobs decline due to global market shifts and U.S. protectionist policies. Canada can respond by building a resilient domestic market that allows us to retool facilities, redeploy skilled workers, and create new opportunities for those displaced by recent plant closures. Workers and communities will also need supportive measures such as workforce-sharing arrangements and employment insurance programs that cover retraining periods.

Diversifying trade and reducing dependence on the U.S. is part of building economic and industrial resilience. Canada already has what we need to succeed: a skilled workforce, abundant critical minerals, and an electricity grid that is among the cleanest in the world. What we need now is the confidence to build at home.

If we get this transition right, the payoff will be real and lasting. A strong domestic EV market will create jobs, anchor investment, and position Canadian workers and industries to take advantage of the global shift already underway.

Adam Thorn is the director of transportation with the Pembina Institute. Megan Gordon is the manager of equitable transition with the Pembina Institute.

*The Hill Times*

## Let's End the Export Monopoly in the Port of Prince Rupert

The Prince Rupert Port Authority has said...

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- No to competitive pricing for exporters
- No to trade diversification away from the U.S.
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# TRANSPORTATION Policy Briefing

## Breakfast at Café Olimpico, lunch at Piano Piano

While the rest of the world races ahead with high-speed rail projects, we need to get on board before it's too late.

Behrouz Bakhtiari

Opinion



Prime Minister Mark Carney reaffirmed his government's support for the Alto high-speed rail project in the recent budget, promising to streamline approvals and reduce regulatory uncertainty, writes Behrouz Bakhtiari. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Toronto and Quebec City, with stops in Peterborough, Ottawa, Montreal, Laval, and Trois-Rivières. Once operational, trains will reach speeds of up to 300 km/h, connecting approximately 18 million residents along the corridor. In the 2025 budget tabled on Nov. 4, Prime Minister Mark Carney reaffirmed his government's support for the project, promising to streamline approvals and reduce regulatory uncertainty through the planned high-speed line, aiming to get construction underway within four years. The budget highlights that Alto could create 51,000 jobs during construction, and contribute up to \$35-billion to Canada's GDP.

There are numerous studies from around the world consistently showing the positive socioeconomic impacts of high-speed rails. Most notably, studies on Europe's networks (cross-national HSRs) and those in Japan and China (national HSRs) highlight contributions in areas such as regional economic growth through connecting peripheral regions to metropolitan centres, reducing economic disparities, and driving urbanization and real estate development. These impacts are fuelled by improved labour mobility, and expanded employment opportunities. This could be particularly beneficial for Canada where more than 90 per cent of the population lives within a relatively narrow strip of land, roughly 160 kilometres

from the U.S. border, making HSR projects highly efficient, and enabling more effective population distribution. In addition to economic and growth benefits, this improved connectivity brings stronger tourism and cultural exchange, enhanced environmental protection through fewer cars on the road, and greater social well-being and cohesion, ultimately improving quality of life for a larger share of the population.

The idea of better population distribution and access is also timely as there has been a push from the federal and various provincial governments for internal trade reforms, and the dismantling of interprovincial trade barriers. Several provinces have already established agreements, including the New West Partnership Trade Agreement, and the Manitoba-British Columbia Memorandum.

Canada has a choice to make. While the rest of the world—especially other G7 and G20 nations—races ahead with high-speed rail projects, we need to get on board before it's too late. Whether the Alto project becomes a catalyst for economic growth, environmental sustainability, and national cohesion across interprovincial boundaries remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the question is no longer whether we can afford to build HSR networks, but whether we can afford not to.

*Dr. Behrouz Bakhtiari is a faculty member in the operations management area at DeGroote School of Business, McMaster University. He is currently serving as the director of MBA programs at DeGroote.*

*The Hill Times*

Imagine starting your day with a classic English breakfast at Lumi Camden in London, United Kingdom. Soon after, you hop on the train, Paris-bound, to meet a friend for lunch at Le Relais De L'entrecôte where you enjoy their signature steak and fries, perhaps paired with a glass of Sévigné. After lunch, you find yourself en route to Brussels, Belgium, for a high school reunion at the Poechenellekelder where you will savour a *tête pressée* washed down with a pint of Gulden Draak. Hours later, you're back in London, lying comfortably in bed, dreaming about the wonderful day you had.

Since 1994, this has not been just a European dream. It is actually a reality, thanks to the

Eurostar Group network of high-speed rails (HSRs) connecting cities in the U.K., France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany. It is one example of a growing number of regional and international HSR networks connecting regions and nations together around the world.

While Europe has more than 8,500 kilometres of dedicated HSR, it pales in comparison to China's network, which spans more than 49,000 kilometres—the largest in the world. The only operational "quasi" HSR system in North America is Amtrak's Acela Express connecting Washington, D.C., to Boston, Mass. It's considered "quasi" because its trains share conventional rail lines, preventing them from maintaining top speed across the entire route.

A comprehensive HSR network in Canada is long overdue. Geographical and climate challenges, along with a lack of political will and investment from federal and provincial governments, have left Canada as the only G7 nation—and one of just two G20 nations—without an operating HSR system. Such a network would deliver immense socioeconomic benefits, directly and indirectly advancing regional and national goals.

The nation's inaugural HSR initiative, the Alto project, was announced by then-prime minister Justin Trudeau this past February. Still in the design and consultation phase, the project will include approximately 1,000 kilometres of new electrified rail between

## What will it take to get out of the supply-chain crisis?

Speed, throughput, and the removal of constraints need to be made the cardinal organizing principles of Canada's transportation and goods-moving policy.

John Coleman

Opinion



Twenty years from now, Hollywood scriptwriters looking for a good storyline to crib will find a tantalizing cliff-hanger sitting in old news articles they read about Canada in 2025: will the Canucks pull themselves out of an economic nose-dive, or won't they?

We certainly won't without fixing our transportation supply chains. In gradual decline for a decade, their lacklustre performance has steadily dragged down our commercial fortunes and economic well-being. Once in third place globally, our standard of living is now below the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development mean. Ouch. And that was before United States President

Transport Minister Steven MacKinnon. We need to treat transportation for what it actually is: an integral part of logistics, writes John Coleman. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Continued on page 21



Policy Briefing **TRANSPORTATION**

# What will it take to get out of the supply-chain crisis?

Continued from **page 20**

Donald Trump's tariffs turned our faltering ability to get goods to market from a malaise into a crisis.

The fundamental problem is an unspoken assumption we retain from the 1800s, when the world was a slower and simpler place. There were no supply chains, no Lean production, no complex interconnected networks, no globalization, no developing-country competitors, no impatient foreign customers, and no urgency. Now there are. Yet the 1800s premise is still governing Canada's transportation space today.

Organized transportation was originally thought of as a service provided by a carrier to a shipper, with obligations on the former but few if any on the latter, and no consideration of other players in the same transport system. Transportation stood apart from production—the two were considered independent.

Dispute resolution was done on a one-by-one basis, with negligible consideration of how a ruling—or the cumulative effect of multiple rulings—affected the system as a whole. Today, those presumptions are demonstrably counterproductive.

The 1800s premise was conceived to solve an 1800s problem. So, what is our problem today?

The 2022 National Supply Chain Task Force found that not a single stakeholder was satisfied with how well transportation supply chains were serving their needs. It took the Task Force eight pages to list what companies said was holding them back. Most of them had one thing in common: when it came to getting their goods to market, they were suffering from constraints somewhere in their supply chain that reduced its throughput capacity—constraints that had not been fixed.

The governing barrier in any system not only reduces throughput, it slows everything down. But at no time in Canada's transport policy history have legislators seriously considered questions of speed, throughput, or finding and removing constraints. Yet those things enable a system to flow. Flow has become a cardinal organizing principle of global commerce, but it doesn't factor into Canadian transport policy. The Canada Transportation Act proclaims eight unrelated goals. Almost nowhere does policy explicitly recognize the concept of time. And we wonder why our commercial opportunities have been narrowing, and our reputation as a prompt and reliable trading partner has been fading?

First, we need to treat transportation for what it actually is: an integral part of logistics. No longer a process standing apart, transportation needs to be managed as part of a broad system for the production and distribution of goods, and subject to more or less the same rules of regulatory governance and of the marketplace as those of other supply chain participants, neither elevated nor subordinated.

All manner of modern methods and tools can be brought to bear from industrial optimization practices that emerged in recent decades. The basic principles were conceived and applied by intellectual giant Taiichi Ohno of Toyota in the years after the Second World War. Powerful discoveries have been made in theory of con-

straints. And technologies like digital twins and artificial intelligence have made the finding and removing of constraints in any supply chain a practical reality.

Unidirectional obligations, multiple unrelated goals, and silence about the value of time—these aren't doing us much good anymore.

Speed, throughput, and the removal of constraints—these need to be made the cardinal organizing principles of Canada's transportation and goods-moving policy.


From that will emerge updated legislation, regulations, and government activities that affect the business climate and influence business decisions in a direction that gets Canadian goods to market.

But it calls for boldness by government, and collaborative leadership by Canadian businesses.

How will this movie end? Will Canadians get their supply-chain act together for a happy ending? Or will movie-goers be watching an "it slipped through our fingers" tragedy?

*John Coleman is adjunct professor in the School of Public Policy and Administration at Carleton University, and a member of the Transportation Policy Innovation Centre. He spent most of his career at the National Research Council of Canada where he held a number of senior positions including vice-president of engineering, and director general of surface transportation technology.*


*The Hill Times*



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# TRANSPORTATION Policy Briefing

## Budget investments in transportation, trade require long-term strategy and private sector support, say experts

Continued from page 16

at the Schulich School of Business at York University, told *The Hill Times* that, as Canada moves to diversify trade away from the U.S., it will be important to look at how the flow of goods are rebalanced, in an emailed statement on Nov. 20.

"If we buy and sell less to the [U.S.], truck and rail volumes will be less. If that goes to Europe and Asia, ports and airports increase. But also, how we get product into ports and airports need to change to deal with volume changes. That is a component of realigning our logistical network (rail lines, distribution centres, road ways) to support a more east-west and potential northern flow of goods," said Johnston in the email. "This involves private firms in the logistics/transportation industry realigning their capital investments and deployment of people and assets to different places. The more certain the federal government can be about its support for trade and supporting infrastructure the more likely private industry will respond with investment."

Johnston also called the funding for the Trade Diversification Corridors Fund a good start, but in a separate phone interview on Nov. 20, added that he "wouldn't delude myself that it's basically enough."

"Remember, [the] prime minister is basically a banker who is very familiar with investment, and you've got to basically put seed capital in to get things

moving," said Johnston. "I think the prime minister has been somewhat clear that he's also trying to signal to private enterprise that investing in Canada is a good deal. We've had foreign investors before come in and invest in infrastructure in Canada because it's a good, stable investment. I would be curious as to what the plan is to take what I would consider a good start and leverage that with private investment, whether that's from domestically here in Canada or from abroad."

Johnston said that Canada needs to look at "the productivity side of what we're doing" to ensure that infrastructure improvements are being deployed "in the most productive fashion."

"We need to be prepared [so that] whatever we create is ready for the contingencies of the future—which, of course, one of them is climate change—but also has some flexibility to deal with other geopolitical issues," he said. "There's a lot of other things to deal with, other than 'do we have enough money?' We also have to think about the managerial side of whatever we decide we need to upgrade—whether we're going to have it be as efficient and effective as possible, and also to some degree flexible enough for whatever comes at us, because I'm pretty sure [U.S. President] Donald Trump is not going to be the only geopolitical issue that we have to deal with in the future," he said.

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The Hill Times

## High-speed potential, high-stakes decisions: the policy case for Alto

Alto high-speed rail represents a sweet spot across much-needed transport modernization, and an opportunity for broader economic and social transformation.

Tasnim Fariha  
& David Jones

Opinion

Canada's Toronto-Quebec City rail corridor was built for a different era—one far less crowded and connected than today. Decades of population growth, economic expansion, and rising transport demand have placed a strain on this aging infrastructure, prompting renewed debate over high-speed rail.

Existing congestion on the Via Rail line—with on-time performance for passenger rail around 65 per cent—indicates that demand for services already exceeds capacity. With freight services having "right of way," investment is required in dedicated passenger rail infrastructure.

Our recent C.D. Howe Institute paper explores the economic and environmental benefits of Alto, the proposed high-speed rail service in this corridor. Using scenario modelling over a 60-year period, it estimates total benefits ranging from \$15-billion (in present value terms) under a conservative passenger growth scenario, to \$27-billion under the most optimistic scenario. It examines five key impacts: rail-user benefits, reduced road congestion, improved road safety, agglomeration effects (leading to productivity growth and higher GDP), and lower emissions.

Focusing on the gross economic impact of the project across construction and operation, Alto estimates that it could generate approximately one per cent of Canada's GDP, and result in more than 50,000 jobs during construction. Forecast GDP impacts often generate higher estimates than transport appraisals due to differential treatment of economic opportunity costs. Alto also forecasts that the high-speed rail network will drive higher-density transit-oriented developments, support the development of 63,000 residential units, boost land values, and generate municipal tax revenues. Indeed, there are various international case studies that observe economic development and higher land values around high-speed rail stations.

Home to 43 per cent of Canada's labour force, the Toronto-Quebec City corridor is the country's most densely populated and industrialized region, generating approximately 41 per cent of Canada's GDP. With Transport Canada projecting a 21-per-cent population increase by 2043—adding five million people in Quebec and Ontario, more than half of Canada's total growth—demand for all modes of transportation, including passenger rail, will only intensify. Where else in Canada could such a project make this great an impact?



Existing congestion on the Via Rail line indicates that demand for services already exceeds capacity, write Tasnim Fariha and David Jones. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Of course, no major project comes without uncertainties. Alto's costs are not yet fully clear, and while preliminary estimates are in the \$60-billion to \$90-billion range, final figures will depend on numerous variables, such as the level of government subsidy, ticket pricing, the pace of construction, and financing arrangements.

Some wider issues have also been raised. While the corridor connects Canada's largest economic hubs, benefits may concentrate in major cities like Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec City, leaving smaller municipalities with fewer direct gains and risking regional disparities. Passenger demand remains uncertain, particularly amid shifting immigration trends, and lower-than-expected ridership could weaken the project's returns. Environmental and land-use concerns persist since building the line would require significant land acquisition, and could disrupt sensitive ecosystems or agricultural areas.

Whilst Alto was not listed among the first two sets of "major projects" announced by Prime Minister Mark Carney this fall, it has been included as one of seven "transformative strategies" identified by the federal government. If subsequently designated as a "major project," the Major Projects Office could help to accelerate regulatory approvals and structure financing, bringing forward delivery timelines, and allowing Canadians to reap economic and social benefits sooner. Moreover, through the work of the Indigenous Advisory Council, designation would help to advance Alto's vision of a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples, fostering economic reconciliation, and creating socio-economic benefits for communities.

Although some project details require further development, the federal government signalled its support for Alto in the 2025 budget by allocating more than \$125-million of funding over the next five years, alongside a proposal to accelerate the project's development. In the context of Canada's push to drive investment and nation-building, Alto high-speed rail represents a sweet spot across much-needed transport modernization, and an opportunity for broader economic and social transformation.

Tasnim Fariha is a senior policy analyst with the C.D. Howe Institute, where David Jones is a senior fellow.

The Hill Times

## Canada international trade statistics



Image courtesy of Pexels.com

- Following a 12.4-per-cent decrease in February, exports to countries other than the U.S. rose 24.8 per cent in March 2025, representing the second-largest percentage increase on record.
- Canada's trade deficit with countries other than the U.S. narrowed from a record \$12.2-billion in February to \$9-billion in March 2025.
- Total exports rose six per cent in the first quarter of 2025 to reach a record high of \$214-billion. This follows a strong increase of 4.6 per cent observed in the last quarter of 2024. Exports of energy products (+7.5 per cent) and motor vehicles and parts (+13.2 per cent) were the largest contributors to the growth in the first quarter of 2025.
- Meanwhile, quarterly imports increased 5.2 per cent to a record \$212.8-billion in the first quarter. Higher imports of motor vehicles and parts (+9.1 per cent); industrial machinery, equipment, and parts (+10.6 per cent); and consumer goods (+4.9 per cent) contributed the most to the quarterly increase. Canada's quarterly merchandise trade balance went from a deficit of \$461-million in the last quarter of 2024 to a surplus of \$1.2-billion in the first quarter of 2025.
- In 2024, Canada's domestic exports on a customs basis totalled \$721.1-billion, with 75.9 per cent of these shipments destined to the U.S. Other leading destinations for Canada's domestic exports included China (4.1 per cent), the United Kingdom (3.7 per cent), and Japan (2.1 per cent).

—Source: Statistics Canada data released on May 6, 2025.



# Deloitte's certification as partner to Indigenous firms raises questions about access to feds' contract regime, says Indigenous business owner

'Billions of dollars are at stake, and corporations understand that Indigenous participation is now a central factor in how those dollars will move,' says Indigenous business owner Steven Vanloffeld.

BY IREM KOCA

When Deloitte Canada was certified as a gold-standard business partner by the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business on Oct. 15, it became the first professional services firm to do so under the Partnership Accreditation in Indigenous Relations program. But for some, it raises questions about whether it is a "strategic" move by the company tap into billion-dollar contracts intended for Indigenous companies, while others call it a "positive step" for Indigenous businesses.

The Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB) certifies Indigenous firms and maintains a list of non-Indigenous firms under its Partnership Accreditation in Indigenous Relations (PAIR) program. Companies earn the gold certification under PAIR after a three-year-long process including training, preparation, and identification of goals for procurement and employment and community engagement; a verification process done by a third-party verifier contracted by CCIB; and confirmation of that verification by a CCIB jury.

"Deloitte's certification reflects a broader shift," said eSupply Canada founder Steven Vanloffeld, who is principal at INDsight Consulting, an Indigenous-led advisory firm.

"There is a growing push to unlock the full economic opportunities tied to Indigenous procurement, resource development, and major project delivery. Billions of

dollars are at stake, and corporations understand that Indigenous participation is now a central factor in how those dollars will move. That is why firms are building Indigenous units, hiring Indigenous staff, and pursuing certifications. They see where federal policy is heading, and they want a piece of that."

When asked if Deloitte's recognition could help it bid for and benefit more from major contracts set aside for Indigenous business, Vanloffeld said "that risk is real."

"Large firms build internal Indigenous relations units and collect certifications because there is commercial advantage in doing so. These tools can be used to compete for work that communities reasonably believe should flow to Indigenous-owned companies," he said.

"With more federal dollars tied to Indigenous participation and more major projects requiring Indigenous consent, certification becomes a strategic asset for big firms. Without oversight, that asset can be used to capture opportunity rather than support Indigenous economic participation."

The recognition comes at a time when federal government departments are struggling to meet their five-per-cent targets under the Procurement Strategy for Indigenous Business (PSIB), and amid intense scrutiny over weak oversight of its own procurement policies allowing contracts intended for Indigenous businesses to be awarded to non-Indigenous companies in so-called "rent-a-feather" schemes where large non-Indigenous companies partner with smaller Indigenous businesses and reap the benefits.

According to PSIB, in joint ventures, business must be at least 51-per-cent owned and controlled by an Indigenous entity, and the Indigenous business partner must perform at least 33 per cent of the contract value.

Tabatha Bull, president and CEO of the CCIB told *The Hill Times* in a Nov. 21 interview that the PAIR program has four pillars including business development, Indigenous engagement, Indigenous employment, and leadership.

"The whole purpose of PAIR is to move corporate Canada to do better working with Indigenous



Deloitte Canada was recently certified as a business partner by the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business, raising questions about the firm's access to federal contracts set aside for Indigenous business. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

businesses and communities. And because we are holding them accountable through PAIR, we're ensuring that the targets that they're setting and the work that they're doing is measured and reported on. And procurement is a big part of that," Bull said.

The CCIB website says companies with PAIR certification are well-positioned to raise their profile "by promoting their success in Indigenous relations with the PAIR logo, opening the door to procurement initiatives, partnerships, and business development opportunities."

CCIB's own report from 2024 cites abuses associated with non-Indigenous companies partnering with Indigenous ones, "without a well-defined Indigenous engagement plan." That report offers the organization's PAIR certification as a way of "combatting" those problems.

Shannin Metatawabin, CEO of the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association and a member of First Nations Procurement Organization, said it is a "positive step" for a large company to take steps to ensure that its operations and its business align more with Indigenous values, as that may lead to more Indigenous employment and procurement. But he said he does not know enough about the PAIR program to anticipate how Deloitte's certification may affect their partnership with Indigenous businesses for procurement opportunities.

Liberal MP Iqra Khalid (Mississauga-Erin Mills, Ont.), who

is a member of House Government Operations and Estimates Committee studying federal procurement, said Deloitte's certification shows growing corporate commitment to economic reconciliation and that such certifications should "catalyze systemic change" by expanding Indigenous business capacity and creating pathways to larger contracts.

"The critical measure of success lies in implementation. This means sustained contracting with Indigenous-owned businesses. It means direct procurement rather than subcontracting arrangements. It means partnerships grounded in equity and genuine respect," she said.

"Our government is working to strengthen Indigenous procurement across federal supply chains. We expect the private sector to follow suit... Economic reconciliation must benefit Indigenous communities directly, not just in principle."

Deloitte's certification—or that of any non-Indigenous firms—would not directly support them partnering with Indigenous businesses getting federal procurement, according to Bull.

Deloitte had 81 contracts with the federal government as of September, according to government records, with the largest one being a \$17.2-million contract for professional services with National Defence. None of those were awarded under PSIB.

Alexandra Biron, senior manager in Deloitte's Indigenous, Purpose and Sustainability Office told *The Hill Times* in an interview that the recognition is ultimately "a stamp of approval" showing Indigenous communities that Deloitte is an ally in advancing the prosperity of Indigenous communities, and a good place to work for Indigenous employees.

When asked how that helps the company in federal procurement, Biron echoed that the certification does not have direct benefits in terms of giving Deloitte access to more government contracts but confirmed this would be possible through joint ventures.

Deloitte entered into a new joint venture called R8dius in 2024 with majority owner Kitsaki, an Indigenous-owned company that manages the economic development activities of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. Biron added that at R8dius, which focuses

on technology and managed services business, 80 per cent of the employees are Indigenous.

Vanloffeld argued that CCIB's certification has become a credibility tool for corporations, and that it strengthens their competitive posture in government bidding but it does not, on its own, create pathways for Indigenous suppliers.

"When an accreditation can be granted without engaging the very people a company claims to be aligned with, it raises real concerns about what, exactly, is being certified," he said.

Vanloffeld, who is a former elected councillor for Saugeen First Nation in Ontario, also argued concerns about CCIB's legitimacy are "real and growing." He said the organization only represents about two per cent of more than 60,000 Indigenous-owned businesses operating in the country so that alone raises a question about the CCIB's representation, reach, and interests.

During a December 2024 House Indigenous and Northern Affairs Committee meeting, NDP MP Lori Idlout (Nunavut) repeatedly asked then-Indigenous services minister Patty Hajdu (Thunder Bay-Superior North, Ont.) whether she believed CCIB qualifies as an Indigenous organization led by rights holders.

Hajdu, now jobs and families minister, responded that she was "really uncomfortable being in the position of determining whether an Indigenous organization is a legitimate Indigenous organization."

During the same December 2024 meeting, Bloc Québécois MP Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Que.) said, "What's most concerning is that the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business is trying to take control of the Indigenous business directory, a role that should rightfully belong to organizations led by and for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit."

When asked by *The Hill Times* if the federal government works with CCIB for verification of Indigenous businesses, Bull said their list is publicly available, but "they don't call and ask us to certify." Bull said the CCIB would like to see its list recognized by the federal government, as the small and medium businesses find it burdensome to obtain multiple certifications. "And we all need to be removing barriers for them," she said.

CCIB said it has removed five companies from its Certified Indigenous Business program over the past 12 months, with three of those being due to change in the ownership and two due to unresponsiveness to audit inquiries within the provided two-week response window.

Asked about whether Deloitte expects any backlash due those questions around CCIB's credibility, Biron said: "CCIB continues to be a credible organization. There's going to be backlash, I'm sure, from varied communities, depending on their stance with different organizations, but more and more companies are joining the CCIB's PAIR program, and it is the most credible group within Canada currently."

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# OPINION

## Seeing beyond the cave: bridging culture in defence and procurement

Both Public Services and Procurement Canada and the defence sector carry assumptions shaped by years of operating within their own institutional caves, and are only perceiving a portion of the truth.

Dan Doran

Opinion



The coming years will reshape Canadian defence in ways few have fully absorbed. The 2025 federal budget is expected to trigger one of the largest modernization efforts in a generation. This will include major capability renewals, new continental defence commitments, and a demand signal that will test every part of the defence ecosystem. Success will depend not only on resources or technology. It will also rest on the ability of the public service and the defence industry to work



Industry and the public service each see shadows on the wall and interpret them as the complete picture when it comes to defence procurement, writes Dan A. Doran. *Unsplash photograph by Skyler Gerald*

together with a shared understanding of culture, incentives, and institutional reality.

There is a temptation to see this as a problem of process alone. In truth, it is a problem of people and the cultures they inhabit. Both Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) and the defence sector carry assumptions shaped by years of operating within their own institutional caves. Plato's allegory remains surprisingly relevant. Each group sees shadows on the wall and interprets them as the complete picture. Yet both are only perceiving a portion of the truth.

For the government, risk management is a professional

obligation rooted in accountability, fairness, and stewardship of public funds. For industry, risk is a feature of innovation and competition. Both perspectives are valid, and both have their own institutional logic. Challenges arise when each group assumes the other lives by the same shadows. The public service often believes industry resists discipline and oversight. Industry often believes government delays stem from caution rather than structural constraints. Neither interpretation captures the full reality experienced on the other side.

This shared risk aversion is not born of ill intent. It is a rational response to decades of

scrutiny, siloed mandates, and a history of program delays that have shaped behaviours on all sides. It is also understandable when one considers the scale of the decisions that PSPC and the Department of National Defence must make. Major programs carry national-level implications. Industry must, in turn, balance competitive pressures with long-term investment planning. Each group seeks stability in an environment that rarely provides it.

The result is a system that often reacts to shadows rather than the underlying truth. The government expects industry to deliver certainty in a domain where certainty is rarely possible. Industry expects government to move at the pace of commercial innovation while navigating public sector obligations that do not change quickly. Both want progress. Both fear missteps. Both end up reinforcing a culture of caution.

The next phase of defence modernization will make this approach untenable. The investments required for modern sensors, resilient networks, advanced munitions, secure digital environments, and a renewed continental defence posture will require a level of collaboration that neither side has historically practiced. The scale of change ahead will challenge old habits. It will also create an opportunity.

This opportunity lies in stepping outside the cave. It begins with understanding the reality

in which the other operates. The public service must appreciate the pressures of global competition, and the capital decisions industry must make decades in advance. Industry must better understand the public accountability and procedural discipline that guide procurement officials. Both perspectives are legitimate. Both contain truth. Neither is complete without the other.

Progress will come from openness rather than defensiveness. It will come from early engagement, shared expectations, and a recognition that trust is a strategic enabler. When both sides see the world through the eyes of the other, the shadows on the wall become easier to interpret. The work becomes less adversarial and more aligned with the national interest.

Canada has the talent, institutions, and industrial capacity to meet the demands of the coming decade. What remains is the cultural shift required to match the ambition of the moment. Leaving the cave requires courage on all sides. It requires a willingness to question long-standing assumptions, and to build a relationship grounded in transparency and shared purpose.

If industry and the public service can walk outside together, they will find that the real world offers far more clarity than the shadows they once debated. In that shared light, Canada will be far better positioned to build the modern military the country needs and the future its citizens expect.

Dan A. Doran is the vice-president, business development and marketing, with ADGA Group, a Canadian defence and national security technology firm.

*The Hill Times*

## Ottawa plans to modernize the Energy Efficiency Act. Here's how to do it right

Continued from page 13

be undermining it. On Nov. 17, Canada announced new regulations under the Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act that effectively recognize provincial standards as nationally "comparable."

This measure is meant to support interprovincial trade, but it will needlessly complicate matters because the Energy Efficiency Act already provides a uniform standard for products crossing provincial borders. With this change, outdated and lower provincial efficiency standards would be accepted nationally. This could allow provincial governments to purposefully adopt lower standards, directing manufacturers to game a more confusing array of rules instead of focusing on producing

more innovative and productive equipment.

Provinces have traditionally acted as testbeds for more advanced point-of-sale regulations, with federal standards acting as the uniform backstop. This improves energy productivity while supporting national consistency. As we modernize this critical federal power, let's not undermine it at the same time.

### From proposal to priority

By acknowledging the need to modernize the Energy Efficiency Act, Budget 2025 creates a valuable opportunity to advance progress on affordability and climate targets.

While online retailer coverage is an encouraging update, how other proposed changes will help

or hinder appliance and equipment efficiency remains unclear. For example, regulatory sandboxes—a key component of the 2024 Red Tape Reduction Act—would introduce temporary exemptions for new products entering the market, therefore requiring careful oversight to prevent loopholes.

Energy efficiency remains an often-overlooked solution to the affordability and climate crises. Strengthened national standards, improved labelling, mandatory review cycles and stronger provisions are just some updates that would position Canada as a leader in energy efficiency while delivering benefits to households, businesses, and the environment.

Sarah Riddell is the policy research associate, appliance and equipment efficiency at Efficiency Canada.

*The Hill Times*



Energy and Natural Resources Minister Tim Hodgson oversees the Energy Efficiency Act. Energy efficiency remains an often-overlooked solution to the affordability and climate crises, writes Sarah Riddell. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*



# Gripen fighter jet purchase would allow Canada to assert sovereignty, says past chair of House Defence Committee McKay

The future success of trade talks with the U.S. will weigh heavily when Canada decides if it wants to buy the American F-35 plane, says consultant Eric Miller.

Continued from page 1

economic benefits that will accompany it, while the F-35 is widely believed to be the air force's preferred choice.

"The instability of the Americans is locked in for the foreseeable future. It may or may not go away with [U.S. President Donald] Trump. But we need to make a decision now," said former Liberal MP John McKay, who served as the chair of the House Defence Committee in the last Parliament and co-led the Canadian section of the Canada-U.S. Permanent Joint Board on Defence, which serves as the main strategic advisory body for bilateral defence co-operation.

McKay said that Trump isn't a reliable defence partner. "Canadians should take the measure of the man," he said.

He said that Canada can assert its own industrial and military sovereignty through having the ability to build an airplane that is not dependent upon the whims of an American president or anyone else.

In March, Trump told reporters in the Oval Office that he would think about selling allies "toned-down versions" of jets while speaking about the planned F-47, which is currently under development.

McKay said that he would advise Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) to proceed with the Swedish proposal as a new partner.

"There's a real opportunity here to do a lot of things that Canada has talked about for years, and has never actioned on," McKay said. "It asserts our own sovereignty. It gives a huge boost to the military industrial complex that we're trying to develop."

Saab has suggested that 9,000 to 10,000 Canadian jobs would be created if the government chose the Gripen, according to media reports.

*The Globe and Mail* reported that Saab is in talks with the fed-

For years, the Canadian government has wrangled with the decision about which fighter jet would be best suited for the future of its air fleet as the CF-18s continue to age. DND photograph by Master Corporal Gary Calvé



eral government and Bombardier to build the jets in Canada.

The procurement of a new fighter jet fleet has been a Sisyphean task for Canada. The government of then-prime minister Stephen Harper chose to purchase F-35s in 2010. That decision became a political football. When Justin Trudeau succeeded Harper in 2015, he cancelled the purchase, but later reversed that decision and chose Lockheed Martin's fighter jet for the future of the Canadian Air Force.

Amid trade shocks with the U.S. and Trump's threats of Canada being absorbed as a "51st" state, Carney announced a review of the purchase in March. That review was supposed to be finished in September, but remains ongoing.

## Gripen offers 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity: McKay

McKay said that picking the Gripen could lead to some sort of American trade action given Trump's penchant for retaliatory threats.

"We are in a new environment, and we can no longer depend on the United States for a rules-based trading environment," he said.

He called the Gripen offer a "once-in-a-lifetime" opportunity to



Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne is pictured testing out an F-35 fighter jet simulator at CANSEC on June 1, 2023. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

develop an aerospace industry in Canada.

"Canada has talked for years—for years—about having an independent aerospace industry. We talk, we talk, we talk, and we talk. But we end up buying American products and we end up as the junior partner, sometimes as the junior, junior partner. At this juncture, [it's] not a very wise choice," McKay said.

"It's a huge opportunity that overwhelms whatever the military considerations are," he said, remarking that those who consider the F-35 superior to Gripen "may well be right," but added that Canada can choose something that is "almost best in class" over the best-in-class jet.

McKay said that it is clear that the Air Force and the military have lined up behind the F-35.

"We aren't likely going to be at the pointy end of conflicts. We aren't the lead nation as far as

conflicts are concerned. We are a supporting nation," he said, remarking that one option is having a mixed fleet of Gripens and F-35s.

Ahead of his sit-down with his Canadian counterpart at the Halifax International Security Forum this past weekend, Colombian Defence Minister Pedro Arnulfo Sánchez told *The Hill Times* on Nov. 20 that he expected the topic of the Gripen to come up when he

met with Defence Minister David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Ont.). Colombia recently announced that it would buy 17 Gripen jets for US\$3.6-billion.

Asked why Colombia chose the Swedish option, Sánchez remarked that it aligns with his country's interest geopolitically.

He added that it is also a good economic choice since it was cheaper than other options. The F-35 wasn't one of the options in Colombia's procurement.

## Beyond a military choice

Macdonald-Laurier Institute senior fellow Richard Shimooka said that the fighter jet procurement has transformed into a political choice and not a military one.

"If it was a military choice, this wouldn't happen," he said. "This is an effort to overturn a pretty rock-solid bureaucratic decision."

He said Carney has given room for doubt to build in the

F-35 by conducting the review to acquire trade leverage.

Shimooka said that there has been a lack of strategic analysis in looking away from the F-35, suggesting that the promises from Saab for Canada's industrial base are likely being overstated, as are the arguments that purchasing the Gripen would save money in the end.

He said that the Gripen is no more capable than a modernized version of Canada's current CF-18 fleet, remarking that picking anything but the F-35 would betray any attempt by Canada to show its seriousness in its defence investments.

The argument for selecting the Gripen for increased self-reliance is less convincing as parts of the supply chain for the Gripen flow out of the U.S., said Shimooka.

Trade consultant Eric Miller, president of the Washington, D.C.-based Rideau Potomac Strategy Group, said a decision to not pick the F-35 would be met with ire by the Trump administration, noting that the F-35 is structured as a global partnership since one country cannot afford the program on its own.

"Once you start taking partners out of that, it means the unit cost for the U.S. goes up per plane," he said.

He said that there would be questions about whether Canada is getting the right plane, but also noted that the promised industrial benefits are hard for the federal government to ignore.

Miller said that if a trade deal with the U.S. is on the table in the coming months, then buying the F-35 becomes more attractive for Canada.

"But if the trade talks remain broken down and there is no pathway back, then I find it unlikely that Canada is sitting where it would be next summer—if there is still massive uncertainty about Canada's trading relationship with the U.S.—I find it hard to imagine that they would not want to take the Swedish offer," he said.

"The determining factor—putting aside the performance characteristics of the aircraft—it could ultimately come down to a decision on whether the U.S. is willing to make a deal and to have a reciprocal agreement that would extend the ... tariff exemption into the future in perpetuity," Miller said.

Currently, the Trump administration has levied 35-per-cent tariffs on all Canadian goods under the guise of dealing with the fentanyl emergency. Goods that are compliant with the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement are exempt.

"If we're not in that position, by that point Canada would definitely be looking at alternatives. And will find it politically very difficult to explain why it is spending billions of dollars on U.S. fighters when the U.S. is undermining—from the perspective of many officials in Ottawa—the Canadian economy," he said.

Miller said that could mean that a decision would not come anytime soon.

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## NEWS

# Cabinet spending tops \$92-million in 2024-25, up 3.7 per cent



Unsurprisingly, then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's office was the highest spender, with a total of \$13.1-million in expenses reported.

Continued from page 1

March 31, 2025—was tabled in the House of Commons by Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali (Brampton-Chinguacousy Park, Ont.) on Nov. 7.

The front bench—both the individuals on it, and the names of portfolios—changed a number of times through the course of the fiscal year, with cabinet shuffles large and small having taken place under then-prime minister Justin Trudeau. That includes smaller tweaks to replace resignations, like that of now-Quebec Liberal Leader Pablo Rodriguez, and larger ones, like Trudeau's late December 2024 revamp that came just 17 days before he announced he would resign as leader on Jan. 6. Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) subsequent elevation to the office of prime minister this past March led to another substantial cabinet rework just before the end of the fiscal year.

All in all, it meant a total of 52 individuals held cabinet positions—of various names and combinations—through the course of 2024-25.

Funding for ministers' offices is reported by ministry in the Public Accounts, with some ministers receiving money from multiple ministries—for example, then-diversity, inclusion, and persons with disability minister Kamal Khera received funding for that office through both Employment and Social Development Canada, and through Canadian Heritage.

The Hill Times compiled all ministers' office expenditures reported for 2024-25 to

determine totals by individual. Unsurprisingly, Trudeau's PMO tops that list, with a total of almost \$13.1-million in expenses recorded between April 1, 2024, and March 14, of which roughly \$11.14-million is tied to personnel costs, with transportation and communications-related spending making up about \$1.74-million, and professional and special services totalling \$100,837 for the year.

The Privy Council Office (PCO) confirmed that the \$11.14-million in personnel expenses reported for Trudeau's PMO does not include any discretionary separation payments, which staff are eligible for when they lose their job because of their ministerial boss' exit, as per the Treasury Board's Policies for Ministers' Office. It does, however, include roughly \$224,000 "in pay in lieu of leave"—payments made to staff who cashed out their unused vacation time.

Overall, that's a roughly 10.1-per-cent jump in spending by Trudeau's PMO, compared to the roughly \$11.89-million expensed in all of 2023-24.

For Carney's part, during the 18 days he held the prime

minister's office in the 2024-25 fiscal year, the PMO spent a total of \$319,109—putting him at 47<sup>th</sup> in the overall ranking—of which \$306,677 was tied to personnel. According to the PCO, about \$76,000 of that was pay in lieu of leave, with no discretionary separation payments included.

The second-highest overall expenses were reported by then-minister Chrystia Freeland (University-Rosedale, Ont.), who spent most of the year as deputy prime minister and finance minister—during which time expenses related to ministers' regional offices also came under her heading—before resigning in mid-December, and then returning in March as minister for transport and internal trade. Altogether, \$4.6-million in spending was reported for Freeland's offices, of which almost \$1.57-million was tied to her office as deputy PM, \$1.9-million to finance, and \$66,016 to transport and internal trade.

The 16 ministers' regional offices (MROs) across Canada—which support ministers across cabinet, include a mix of public servants and political staff, and organizationally fell under Freeland's umbrella as

then-deputy PM from April 1 to Dec. 15, 2024—contributed almost \$1.05-million to her bottom line.

In third is now-Canada-United States Trade, Intergovernmental Affairs, One Canadian Economy, and Internal Trade Minister and Privy Council President Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.), who held even more titles through the course of 2024-25 than he does now, and logged a total of \$4.1-million in office spending through the year.

That includes almost \$1.39-million through Public Safety Canada from his time as then-public safety, democratic institutions, and intergovernmental affairs minister, plus about \$1.28-million from the PCO in relation to that role, which LeBlanc held from April 1, 2024, up until December 2024 when he became finance and intergovernmental affairs minister. LeBlanc held the finance portfolio from Dec. 16, 2024, to March 13, over which period his office logged a total of \$327,970 in related expenses, but he kept the intergovernmental affairs portfolio through to the end of the fiscal year, including after he was named international trade minister and Privy Council president

by Carney in mid-March. A total of \$646,676 in expenses were reported for LeBlanc between December 2024 and March 31 in connection to his intergovernmental affairs, international trade, and Privy Council responsibilities. He also succeeded Freeland as the minister responsible for MROs, adding \$458,089 to his total tally.

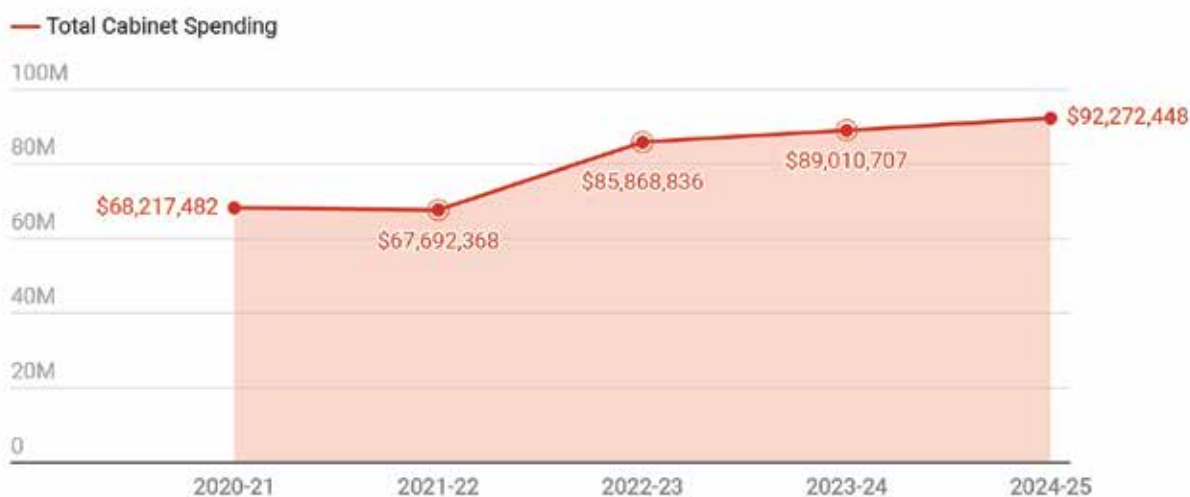
In all, MROs cost a total of \$1.51-million through the course of the fiscal year.

Fourth on the list of expenditures by individual is now-Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.), who started the fiscal year as Treasury Board president, took over as transport minister following Rodriguez's resignation in September, was made transport and internal trade minister in December, and ended the fiscal year as then-minister of innovation, science, and industry—during which time she was also the minister responsible for rural economic development, small business, tourism, and multiple regional economic development agencies. Anand's offices spent a total of \$2.82-million through the course of the year, with \$1.6-million of that tied to her time leading the Treasury Board.

Rounding out the top five is now-Industry Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.), who was largely just responsible for foreign affairs, but added on responsibility as the minister for international development for the last 18 days of the fiscal year. In all, Joly's offices spent a total of almost \$2.76-million.

Aside from Freeland—who, as noted, has MRO expenses included in her bottom line—all of the top 20 cabinet spenders spent the full year, or 18 days shy of it, in cabinet with the exception of now-Justice Minister Sean Fraser (Central Nova, N.S.), who ranked 17<sup>th</sup> and was housing, infrastructure, and communities minister up until the Dec. 20, 2024, shuffle. Fraser did not return to cabinet until Carney's May 13 post-election shuffle, which came after the end of the

## Total cabinet spending, 2020-21 to 2024-25



Source: Public Accounts of Canada





Then-prime minister Justin Trudeau, centre, speaks with reporters in the West Block on March 4 alongside ministers Mélanie Joly, left, Dominic LeBlanc, and David McGuinty, right. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Ministers’ Office Expenditures 2024-25, by individual

Minister	Portfolios	Total Time in Cabinet	2024-25 Combined Expenditures
1. Justin Trudeau	Prime Minister	11 months, 14 days	\$13,086,261
2. Chrystia Freeland	Finance; Deputy Prime Minister; Ministers' Regional Offices; Transport and Internal Trade	9 months, 2 days	\$4,598,710
3. Dominic LeBlanc	Finance; International Trade; Intergovernmental Affairs; President of the Privy Council; Ministers' Regional Offices; Democratic Institutions; Public Safety	All year	\$4,107,082
4. Anita Anand	Innovation, Science, and Industry; Rural Economic Development; Smal Business; Tourism; ACOA; Western Economic Diversification; FedDev Ontario; Transport; Internal Trade; Treasury Board	All year	\$2,823,218
5. Mélanie Joly	Foreign Affairs; International Development	All year	\$2,759,294
6. Steven MacKinnon	Employment and Workforce Development; Labour; Families, Children, and Social Development; Citizen Services; Diversity; Inclusion; Persons with Disabilities; Seniors; Government House Leader	All year	\$2,686,737
7. Steven Guilbeault	Canadian Heritage; Youth; Sport and Physical Activity; Official Languages; Environment and Climate Change; Public Health Agency of Canada; Quebec Lieutenant; Women and Gender Equality	All year	\$2,684,520
8. Jean-Yves Duclos	Quebec Lieutenant; Public Services and Procurement	11 months, 14 days	\$2,582,181
9. Mark Holland	Health	11 months, 14 days	\$2,551,623
10. François-Philippe Champagne	Finance; Innovation, Science, and Industry	All year	\$2,499,509
11. Marc Miller	Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship	11 months, 14 days	\$2,459,019
12. Gary Anandasangaree	Crown-Indigenous Relations; Northern Affairs; Justice	All year	\$2,398,678
13. Arif Virani	Justice	11 months, 14 days	\$2,394,150
14. Bill Blair	National Defence	All year	\$2,292,626
15. Patty Hajdu	Indigenous Services; FedNor	All years	\$2,218,965
16. Pascale St-Onge	Canadian Heritage; Tourism; Quebec Economic Development	All year	\$2,146,219
17. Sean Fraser	Housing, Infrastructure, and Communities; Office of Infrastructure Canada	8 months, 20 days	\$2,013,461
18. Jonathan Wilkinson	Energy and Natural Resources	All year	\$1,990,410
19. Ginette Petitpas Taylor	Official Languages; Employment and Workforce Development; Treasury Board; Veterans Affairs	All year	\$1,918,889
20. Kamal Khera	Diversity, Inclusion, and Persons with Disabilities; Health	All year	\$1,917,750
21. Harjit Sajjan	Pacific Economic Development; Privy Council; Emergency Preparedness	11 months, 14 days	\$1,853,908
22. Mary Ng	Export Promotion, International Trade, Economic Development	11 months, 14 days	\$1,844,778
23. Marci Ien	Youth; Women and Gender Equality	11 months, 14 days	\$1,831,081
24. Jenna Sudds	Families, Children, and Social Development	11 months, 14 days	\$1,692,422
25. Gudie Hutchings	Rural Economic Development; ACOA	11 months, 14 days	\$1,639,718
26. Diane Lebouthillier	Fisheries, Oceans, and Canadian Coast Guard;	11 months, 14 days	\$1,540,080
27. Ahmed Hussen	International Development	11 months, 14 days	\$1,484,453
28. Pablo Rodriguez	Quebec Lieutenant; Transport	5 months, 19 days	\$1,439,534
29. Randy Boissonnault	Official Languages; Employment and Workforce Development	7 months, 20 days	\$1,438,942
30. Soraya Martinez Ferrada	Tourism; Quebec Economic Development	10 months, 6 days	\$1,342,492
31. Lawrence MacAulay	Agriculture and Agri-Food	11 months, 14 days	\$1,290,963
32. Ya'ara Saks	Mental Health and Addictions; Associate Health	11 months, 14 days	\$1,235,496
33. Rechie Valdez	Small Business	11 months, 13 days	\$1,216,304



Now-former minister Chrystia Freeland reported the second-highest total expenses across her cabinet offices in 2024-25. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

fiscal year. For the eight months and 20 days he was in cabinet in 2024-25, Fraser’s office spent a total of \$2.01-million, of which roughly \$1.83-million was tied to personnel costs.

Four individuals were in cabinet for a grand total of 18 days through the fiscal year. Along with Carney, there was Liberal MP Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Ont.), who was government House leader and the minister responsible for democratic institutions from March 14 until the end of the fiscal year; Liberal MP Kody Blois (Kings–Hants, N.S.), who was agriculture and agri-food minister during that period; and Liberal MP Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Ont.), who was then-minister for government transformation, public services and procurement.

While the bulk of Kayabaga’s expenses are dated as having been incurred between March 14 and 23 in the Public Accounts, *The Hill Times* confirmed that her position as government House leader—as with other cabinet roles—would have continued through the end of the fiscal year, including after Parliament was dissolved for the election. (Funds for the House leader’s office are dated to March 23, and listed separately from spending tied to the democratic institutions file,

though both are paid through the Privy Council.)

“In recent decades, the Government House Leader has typically been sworn in as a member of the ministry (i.e., a cabinet minister). In this context, the incumbent would retain that position following a dissolution of Parliament until a new individual is sworn into that role,” said PCO media relations by email.

PCO was not able to address questions regarding the date discrepancy by filing deadline, but in a Nov. 13 statement responding to recent media coverage of Kayabaga’s expenses, Liberal MP Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Man.), parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, said the expenses detailed in the 2025 Public Accounts cover March 14 to March 31.

Overall, \$173,574 in expenses were reported for Kayabaga’s cabinet office—all of which was tied to personnel costs. As noted by both Lamoureux and Kayabaga in their respective statements, \$57,872 of that total went toward staff salaries, with the rest attributed to payouts for unused vacation.

Expenses for Blois, meanwhile, totalled \$104,470 over the 18-day period, while Ehsassi’s office spent a total of \$35,205.

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*The Hill Times*



## NEWS

# PBO repeats calls for transparency after he says budget uses ‘made-in-Ottawa’ definition of capital spending

Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer Jason Jacques recommends the creation of an independent body that would define the government’s spending categories, after the feds unveiled a new structure shortly before the Nov. 4 budget was tabled.

Continued from page 1

made “very substantial changes to fiscal anchors within a relatively short period of time,” interim Parliamentary Budget Officer Jason Jacques told MPs at the House Finance Committee’s Nov. 24 meeting, arguing that the change should come with more transparency.

“It does come back to ... transparency,” he said, adding that Parliament and Canadians would benefit from “a more open and clearer discussion” on the changes.

On Oct. 6, ahead of the Liberals tabling their budget, Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Que.) unveiled a new budget structure that distinguishes operating from capital spending, and defines capital investment as including tax expenditures or government expenses that “contribute to public or private-sector capital formation held directly on the government’s balance sheet or on that of a private-sector entity, Indigenous community or another level of government.”

Jacques said that a quick change to definitions “could create a perception” that the “numbers are political.”

The Parliamentary Budget Office called the definition “overly expansive” in its report on the Nov. 4 document, saying it “blends policy measures with capital formation.”

The report says that, based on the PBO’s definition—which does not include corporate income tax expenditures, investment tax credits, and operating subsidies—investments from 2024-25 to 2029-30 would be about 30 per cent less

than the investments outlined in the federal budget. That represents about \$94-billion.

Prime Minister Mark Carney’s (Nepean, Ont.) first budget lays out \$311-billion in capital spending for this fiscal year to 2029-30. The document, tabled in the House on Nov. 4, outlines a spending increase from \$581-billion to \$644-billion for the same period, as well as a \$78-billion deficit.

But Jacques told the House Finance Committee that the government’s “linkage” between some measures and its capital are “a bit strange,” adding it makes it “challenging” for him as a professional to quickly understand it.

Bloc Québécois finance critic Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, Que.) asked Jacques whether early retirement and recruiting military personnel could be considered investments, suggesting that’s how they’re represented in the budget.

The feds will spend \$216.8-million over the next five years to extend an early retirement program to Canada Border Services Agency officers and other front-line employee groups, the budget reads. That program allows some employees to retire after 25 years with an unreduced pension. Ottawa will also spend \$81.8-billion over the next five years on defence, with the highest level of

funding going towards recruiting and retaining Canadian Armed Forces members.

Jacques responded in French that those examples “aren’t necessarily intuitively investments,” and could be an “indicator of this very broad definition of capital.”

The budget also shifts the federal government’s “fiscal anchors”—budgetary guardrails that are used to guide fiscal decision-making and keep the government’s debts on track—to using a declining deficit-to-GDP ratio, abandoning the previous anchor of federal debt to GDP.

The budget projects that ratio will decline from 2.5 per cent this

year to 1.5 per cent by 2029-30, but the PBO says there is only a 7.5-per-cent chance the ratio will decline every year until then.

## Independent body recommendation ‘shocking,’ says Conservative MP Cobena

Jacques noted that the government does have discretion to change its fiscal anchors “as it sees fit,” but said that the government should do so “in a transparent way that brings everyone along.”

He reiterated to the House Finance Committee that an independent body should be in charge of defining spending categories, including capital, a recommendation included in his office’s report on the budget.

“Somebody else should be defining the definition of what capital actually looks like,” he said. “You want to ensure that the people coming up with the budget and then evaluating the target—that those individuals don’t have control over the definitions.”

Conservative MP Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, Ont.) suggested the recommendation of an independent body comes as a result of the Liberals’ move to change definitions.

“If the definitions had not been changed, made so broadly ... we wouldn’t necessarily be calling for an independent expert body,” she said.

“This is as a result of the changes, of the layers of difficulty that we have in actually understanding what counts as an operating expense and what counts as a capital expense, is that fair to say?” she asked Jacques, who replied that her assessment was fair.

“It is surprising, it is shocking, that we need an independent body to sort of police the numbers,” Cobena also said.

Liberal MPs pushed back on Jacques’ assessment at the committee, asking him to clarify if tax exemptions and deductions work to grow the economy.

“Are you saying that tax exemptions and deductions do not contribute to capital formation in the economy?” Liberal MP Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Ont.) questioned Jacques, who replied “no.”

Turnbull then listed a number of countries that include tax incentives as capital in their budgetary frameworks. Garon later accused the Liberal of using ChatGPT for his research, requesting Turnbull table his sources to the committee.

Liberal MP Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, P.E.I.) also suggested that the PBO’s forecasting is only a “moment in time analysis.”

“Growth is very slow in Canada, and it’s the result of negative shocks from tariffs and situations like that,” MacDonald said.

Jacques also told the committee that the PBO has been having difficulties obtaining data on the government’s planned cuts to the public service from some departments. He said his office has communicated the difficulty with House Speaker Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Que.) and is awaiting that ruling.

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Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer Jason Jacques testified at the House Finance Committee on Nov. 24 about his report on the Liberals’ budget. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Conservative MP Sandra Cobena says the recommendation of an independent body is as a result of the government changing the definition of capital. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



# Diplomatic Circles

By Neil Moss



## Joint co-operation needed to tackle spread of narcotics, says Colombian defence minister

Colombian Defence Minister Pedro Arnulfo Sánchez says the fight against international crime requires global solutions.

Colombia's defence minister came to Canada last week looking to build bridges to tackle the spread of narcotics in the Caribbean as he says United States air strikes on alleged drug boats increase tensions in the region.

The U.S. has conducted 21 strikes since the beginning of September, killing 82 people. These attacks are "undoubtedly an aggression against Latin America," Colombian President **Gustavo Petro** told NBC News.

Colombian Defence Minister **Pedro Arnulfo Sánchez** said he came to Canada to increase the joint effort to defeat the common enemy of the spread of narcotics. "We face a big threat: international crime. So the response must be international co-operation," he told *The Hill Times* during a Nov. 20 interview at the Colombian Embassy.

"International crime must be defeated with international co-operation," he said.

While in Canada, Sánchez travelled to the Maritimes to attend the Halifax International Security Forum where he held a bilateral meeting with Defence Minister **David McGuinty** and met with counterparts from Estonia, the Netherlands, and Sweden, as well as a delegation of U.S. senators.

Sánchez said that when lethal force is applied in the Caribbean Sea, it leads to an increase in tensions in the region.

"The important thing is to apply international law, to respect international treaties, and to respect human rights, and respect the sovereignty of all countries," he said.

At the G7 foreign ministers' meeting earlier this month, Foreign Affairs Minister **Anita Anand** was asked if Canada held the view that the boat strikes violate international law.

"I would say it is within the purview of U.S. authorities to make that determination," she said on Nov. 12.

Sánchez said that the issue of the strikes is being handled by Petro, remarking that his focus as defence minister is how to apply his military forces to protect his country.

### Countries need trust to share information: Sánchez

Sánchez said there is a need to develop stronger relations between countries to address the drug trade.

"We propose one organization similar to NATO in terms of attacking international crime," he said, remarking that the work involves intelligence sharing and interoperability.



Colombian Defence Minister Pedro Arnulfo Sánchez, left, met his Canadian counterpart David McGuinty at the Halifax International Security Forum. Photograph courtesy of X/National Defence

Sánchez said trust needs to be built between countries to share information.

"When you are going to fight international crime, maybe you share a little information. It is necessary to increase the trust to share more information," he said.

He said that intelligence sharing must be used for the capture of suspected criminals, and not used in the application of lethal force. He said that is the policy under which Colombia shares its information.

According to a Department of National Defence readout, Sánchez and McGuinty spoke about "the growing defence relationship between Canada and Colombia—focused on peacebuilding, security co-operation, and regional stability."

Sánchez said an additional area where Canada and Colombia can work together is in the cyber theatre, which he called a threat but also an opportunity.

"We have big problems with terrorist groups that are using social media to recruit minors, to increase the [number of] terrorists through social media, to share this information," he said, remarking that Colombia is looking to work with BlackBerry to create a hub to build cyberspace capabilities.

Government bombing campaigns against a dissident group of drug traffickers have killed a dozen child recruits over the last two months, according to media reports. The Colombian government has maintained that the deaths won't stop the offensive against rebel militant groups, placing the blame of their death on the organizations that recruit them.

However, Sánchez maintained that there is a "high ethical behaviour" in the fight against international crime.

"We have a lot of control, a lot of training to respect international law, to respect human rights," he said. "We have the confidence that we apply the law in the correct way."

He said when the Colombian government targets terrorist groups, it captures 94 per cent of individuals.

"Their life is a priority. We share a good behaviour—an ethical behaviour—to other countries," he said.

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*The Hill Times*

## Peru celebrates Navy Day

*The Hill Times* photographs by Sam Garcia



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1. Senior Colonel Li Yao, defence attaché to the Chinese Embassy, left, and Captain Marco Castro, naval attaché to the Peruvian Embassy, attend the Peruvian Navy Day reception at the official residence on Oct. 3. 2. Heidy Calonge Garcia de Talavera, wife of the Peruvian ambassador, left; Peruvian Ambassador Manuel Talavera Espinar; Castro; and his wife Maya Rahamn. 3. Castro, left; Talavera Espinar; Peruvian Embassy ministers Guino Arciniega and Patricia Duran; Colonel Fernando Huaman, air attaché to the Peruvian Embassy; and Colonel Ronald Gonzales, military attaché to the Peruvian Embassy. 4. Castro, left, Rahamn, Iveta Kudlis, and her spouse Colonel Oskars Kudlis, military, naval & air attaché to the Latvian Embassy.

## Latin American soldiers remembered



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1. The Latin American Soldiers Committee (LASC), in partnership with the Embassy of Guatemala and the Canadian Armed Forces, hosted the fourth Latin American Remembrance Day ceremony at Beechwood National Cemetery on Oct. 19. 2. Captain Rey Garcia-Salas, a founding member of LASC, delivers remarks. 3. Liberal MP Mona Fortier lays a wreath during the ceremony. 4. Numerous military and naval attachés from various embassies and high commissions in Ottawa gathered for the event.



# Hill Climbers



By Laura Ryckewaert

## Minister Guilbeault's current seven-member Quebec lieutenant shop



Quebec Lieutenant Steven Guilbeault also serves as minister of Canadian identity and culture, and as the minister responsible for official languages. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Sam Saint-Vincent is the most recent addition to the Quebec lieutenant team led by chief of staff Ann-Clara Vaillancourt.

There are currently seven staff working to support Canadian Culture and Identity Minister **Steven Guilbeault** in his capacity as cabinet's Quebec lieutenant, a roster that includes **Cédric Sarault** as director of policy.

As previously reported by *Hill Climbers* back in June, **Ann-Clara Vaillancourt** is in charge as chief of staff for the Quebec team. She's a former media relations director in then-prime minister **Justin Trudeau's** office, and spent this year's election campaign on the road as a Liberal spokesperson.

A former Liberal staffer at Quebec's national assembly, Vaillancourt has been working on the Hill since July 2018, and over the years has also been press secretary to then-international trade

diversification minister **Jim Carr**, then-infrastructure and communities minister **François-Phillipe Champagne**, and to Trudeau.

**Samuel Saint-Vincent** is the newest addition to the Quebec lieutenant team as director of regional affairs and operations.

It's a return to the office for Saint-Vincent, who was previously director of policy to then-Quebec lieutenant **Jean-Yves Duclos** from November 2024 up until this past May. From May until his return to federal politics last month, Saint-Vincent had been a director with consulting and communications firm MERCURE in Montreal.

Saint-Vincent first began working on the Hill as an assistant to then-Liberal MP **Yves Robillard** in 2018. His first cabinet-level role came in December 2020 when he was hired as a

Quebec regional affairs adviser to then-public services and procurement minister **Anita Anand**. He went on to be a policy adviser, and later senior policy adviser in the public services office under then-ministers **Helena Jaczek** and **Duclos**, and is also an ex-senior policy adviser to then-deputy prime minister and finance minister **Chrystia Freeland**.

Saint-Vincent replaces **Taous Ait**, who had been director of regional affairs to Guilbeault up until the end of September.

Ait briefly worked as director of operations to Duclos as then-lieutenant in late 2024 before exiting to become director of communications to then-official languages and associate public safety minister **Rachel Bendayan**, who was added to cabinet as part of the Dec. 20, 2024, shuffle. Ait is also an ex-aide in the Liberal research bureau, and a former senior adviser for Quebec to **Pablo Rodriguez** as then-transport minister.

It's also a return to the office for Sarault, who was last director of regional affairs in the Quebec lieutenant's office between July 2023 and November 2024, starting under Rodriguez and ending under Duclos' turn in the role. Much like Saint-Vincent, Sarault's last gig before joining the Quebec lieutenant team was in Freeland's office as deputy PM and finance minister, in Sarault's case as a Quebec regional adviser.

Sarault is also a former Quebec policy and regional affairs adviser to **Ahmed Hussen**

as both then-families, children, and social development minister, and as then-housing, diversity, and inclusion minister; a former MP's assistant; and spent the greater part of 2018 working as a co-ordinator for a project looking at the urban revitalization of

Old Gatineau (the Revitalisation urbaine intégrée du Vieux-Gatineau), as noted on his LinkedIn profile.

Working closely with Sarault are senior policy adviser **Anaïs Kasongo** and policy adviser **Djamel Boumenna**.

Kasongo is yet another returnee; she previously worked in the Quebec lieutenant's office under Rodriguez, starting as executive assistant to the chief of staff in December 2021. After the summer of 2023—which saw a lot of cabinet staff shakeups after a major shuffle that July—Kasongo left the Hill to work for PAA Advisory in Montreal as a consulting analyst, where she remained until her recent return. Kasongo is also an ex-aide to former MP Robillard, and has spent time working for the non-profit Force et Leadership Africain, and for the International Bureau for Children's Rights' sub-saharan Africa section, among other things.

Boumenna is an ex-Quebec regional adviser to then-heritage minister **Pascale St-Onge**, and a former assistant to St-Onge as the then-MP for Brome-Missisquoi, Que.

Meanwhile, working closely with Saint-Vincent as regional affairs director is adviser **Anaëlle Paradis**, a former assistant to Guilbeault as the MP for Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.

Finally, capping off the Quebec lieutenant team—at least for now—is director of communications and issues **Laurence Gagnon**.

Gagnon spent the previous five-and-a-half years doing communications and administrative work for the Cree Nation of Nemaska. She's also a past producer with the production company Romeo & Fils, and a former journalist with TC Media.

It appears Guilbeault's Quebec team will be growing by at

least one in the near future, with a job opening for a communications adviser recently posted on LinkedIn, the location for which is identified as Montreal.

Gagnon's LinkedIn profile similarly notes she is in Montreal, as do those of Vaillancourt, Saint-Vincent, and Kasongo. There is a ministers' regional

Laurence Gagnon is director of communications and issues. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

office located in Montreal—one of 16 such offices that support all of cabinet across Canada

For those curious about Guilbeault's Canadian culture and identity team, Climbers last did a rundown of that office in late September. (However, the only constant is change, and that is especially true when it comes to staffing in cabinet offices—so, stay tuned for further updates on that team.)

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Cédric Sarault is director of policy. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Sam Saint-Vincent is director of regional affairs and operations. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn





# 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](mailto:news@hilltimes.com) by Wednesday at noon before the Monday paper or by Friday at noon for the Wednesday paper.

## NDP leadership candidates face off for first debate in Montreal on Nov. 27



NDP leadership candidates Tanille Johnston, left, Avi Lewis, Tony McQuail, Heather McPherson, and Rob Ashton will participate in the first debate in Montreal on Nov. 27. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

### WEDNESDAY, NOV. 26

**House Schedule**—The House of Commons will sit Nov. 24-28; Dec. 1-5; and Dec. 8-12. In total, the House will have sat only 73 days this year. Last year, it sat 122 days, and in 2023, it sat 121 days. In 2022, it sat 129 days, and in 2021, it sat 95 days.

**Virtual Remarks with Canada's Envoy to Russia**—The C.D. Howe Institute hosts a virtual event featuring Canada's Ambassador to Russia Sarah Taylor. Wednesday, Nov. 26, at 10:30 a.m. ET happening online: [cdhowe.org](http://cdhowe.org).

### THURSDAY, NOV. 27

**NDP Leadership Debate**—The first leadership debate as part of the New Democratic Party's Leadership Race is tonight, and will be held mainly in French. The second leadership debate will take place in February 2026, with the new leader to be announced in Winnipeg on March 29, 2026. Thursday, Nov. 27, at 7 p.m. ET in Montreal. Details: [ndp.ca](http://ndp.ca).

**Creating Pan-Domain Continental Defence**—Defence Minister David McGuinty and Secretary of State for Defence Procurement Stephen Fuhr are scheduled to take part in this full-day conference on Canada's role in continental defence, bridging NORAD and aerospace continental defence, and looking at defence in the CAF from a pan-domain perspective. Thursday, Nov. 27, at 8:30 a.m. ET at Westin TwentyTwo, 11 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Details: [cgai.ca](http://cgai.ca).

**Build Canada Homes CEO to Deliver Remarks**—Ana Bailão, CEO of Build Canada Homes, will deliver a keynote address entitled "Building Canada's Future: A New Era for Housing Delivery," hosted by the Empire Club of Canada. Thursday, Nov. 27, at 11:30 a.m. ET happening online and in person at a location to be announced. Details: [empireclubofcanada.com](http://empireclubofcanada.com).

**Student Networking with Liberal MP Ntumba**—Liberal MP Bienvenue-Olivier Ntumba hosts an exclusive networking 5 a 7 event with students and young leaders from across the region. Featuring candid conversations about Ntumba's journey from community engagement to the House of Commons, and inspiring exchanges with other Black MPs. Thursday, Nov. 27, at 5 p.m. at 144 Wellington St., Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

**Lecture: 'The Future of Canadian Immigration'**—In the final of three 2025 McGill Max Bell Lectures, *Globe and Mail* columnist Tony Keller explores

the options for restoring the Canadian immigration consensus, rediscovering the immigration middle-ground shared by most voters, and building a model immigration system that will benefit Canadians, the Canadian economy, and immigrants. Thursday, Nov. 27, at 5:30 p.m. ET at the Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge Street, Toronto. Details: [mcgill.ca](http://mcgill.ca).

### FRIDAY, NOV. 28

**Panel: 'Promoting Democracy at Work'**—The Canadian Club of Toronto hosts a panel, "Promoting Democracy at Work: Why It Matters." A panel of business leaders will explore how fostering informed teams can enhance civic resilience, social cohesion, and stronger workplace cultures. Friday, Nov. 28, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, 100 Front St., Toronto. Register: [canadianclub.org](http://canadianclub.org).

**2025 Democracy Awards**—The Parliamentary Centre, Engage-ParlDiplo, and the British High Commission host the fourth annual Democracy Awards, honouring individuals who've made significant contributions to strengthening democracy. Featured speakers include: former Conservative cabinet minister Lisa Raitt, former Liberal cabinet minister Anne McLellan, and the Parliamentary Centre chair Yaroslav Baran. Friday, Nov. 28, at 5:30 p.m. ET at the British High Commission, 140 Sussex Dr., Ottawa. Contact: [heather@pendulumgroup.ca](mailto:heather@pendulumgroup.ca).

**PEN Canada Awards Night**—PEN Canada hosts its annual event celebrating a year of advocacy, literature and free expression, featuring poetry readings from emerging Toronto voices, and the celebration of the recipients of three prizes: RBC/PEN Canada New Voices Award, the Ken Fikow Prize, and the Marie-Ange Garrigue Prize. Friday Nov. 28, at 6:30 p.m. ET at the William Doo Auditorium, University of Toronto. Register: [pencanada.ca](http://pencanada.ca).

### SATURDAY, NOV. 29

**Press Gallery Dinner**—The Parliamentary Press Gallery will host its annual gala dinner. Saturday, Nov. 29, at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, Ottawa. Details: [collin.lafrance@parl.gc.ca](mailto:collin.lafrance@parl.gc.ca).

### SUNDAY, NOV. 30

**Minister Joly to Attend Fundraising Brunch**—Industry Minister Mélanie Joly and her parliamentary secretary Carlos Leitão are expected to attend a brunch hosted by the Marc-Aurèle-

Fortin Federal Liberal Association. Sunday, Nov. 30, at 11 a.m. ET at Le Château Royal, 3500 Blvd. du Souvenir, Laval, Que. Details: [liberal.ca](http://liberal.ca).

### TUESDAY, DEC. 2

**Panel: 'Art of Compromise or Trap of Concession?'**—The Montreal Council on Foreign Relations hosts a hybrid panel discussion in French: "The art of compromise or the trap of concession: How to revive a quality relationship between Canada and the United States?" featuring former Canadian ambassador Louise Blais, former Quebec cabinet minister Pierre Fitzgibbon, and Richard Ouellet, professor in international economic law, Université Laval. Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 11:30 a.m. ET at Fairmont Le Reine-Elizabeth, 900 Blvd René-Levesque W., Montréal. Register: [corim.qc.ca](http://corim.qc.ca).

**'Redefining Primary Care in Canada'**—The Economic Club of Canada hosts a keynote and fireside chat with David Markwell, interim president of Shoppers Drug Mart, titled, "Redefining Primary Care in Canada: Insights from Shoppers Drug Mart." Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 11:45 a.m. ET at the Hilton Toronto. Register: [economicclub.ca](http://economicclub.ca).

**Sergio Marchi's Book Launch**—Former Liberal cabinet minister and ambassador Sergio Marchi is hosting a launch of his new book, *Pursuing a Public Life*, for parliamentarians and their staff in Ottawa. Tuesday, Dec. 2, from 5-7 p.m., at Metropolitan Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr., Ottawa. To RSVP, please contact the office of Liberal MP Yasir Naqvi.

**ALPA Canada Hill Day Reception**—The Air Line Pilots Association hosts its annual Hill Day holiday reception, bringing together professional pilots from across Canada and MPs to discuss key aviation policy priorities. An ALPA professional pilot will guide guests on a virtual flight simulator. Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 5 p.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa. RSVP: [James@sandstonegroup.ca](mailto:James@sandstonegroup.ca).

**Panel: 'How to Defend Ourselves'**—The Canadian International Council's national capital branch hosts a panel discussion, "World on Fire: How to Defend Ourselves," featuring Norway's Ambassador to Canada Hanne Ulrichsen, deputy minister of National Defence Stefanie Beck, and Royal Military College professor Christian Leuprecht. Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 5:30 p.m. ET at KPMG Conference Facility, 150 Elgin St., Suite 1800, Ottawa. Details: [thecic.org](http://thecic.org).

**Pathways to Indigenous Prosperity Reception**—The National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association hosts a reception, "Pathways to Indigenous Prosperity," bringing together Indigenous economic leaders, members of Parliament, and key sector partners for discussions on access to capital, entrepreneurship, and the evolving Indigenous economic landscape. Tuesday, Dec. 2, at 6 p.m. ET in W-180 Committee Room, 1 Wellington St. RSVP: [nolan@sandstonegroup.ca](mailto:nolan@sandstonegroup.ca).

### TUESDAY, DEC. 2—THURSDAY, DEC. 4

**AFN Special Chiefs Assembly and Gala**—The Assembly of First Nations hosts a Special Chiefs Assembly from Tuesday, Dec. 2, to Thursday, Dec. 4, at the Rogers Centre Ottawa, 55 Colonel By Dr. A Winter Gala, "Celebrating the Solstice," will take place on the final day at the Westin Hotel Ottawa. Details: [afn.ca](http://afn.ca).

### WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3

**Dinner with Former MP Chris Alexander**—The Kingston and the Islands Conservative Association hosts a dinner featuring special guest Chris Alexander, former MP for Ajax-Pickering, Ont., and past minister of citizenship and immigration, who will deliver remark on issues of interest to modern Conservatives. Wednesday, Dec. 3, at 5:30 p.m. ET at 285 Queen St., Kingston, Ont. Register via Eventbrite.

**The Munk Debate: 'Two-State Solution'**—The Munk Debate returns! This year's motion is "Be it Resolved, it is in Israel's national interest to support a two-state solution." Arguing in favour is former Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert and former Israeli justice and foreign minister Tzipi Livni. Arguing against the resolution is former Israeli ambassador to the United States Michael Oren, and Ayelet Shaked, who most recently served as Israel's justice minister and minister of the interior. Wednesday, Dec. 3, at 7 p.m. ET at Meridian Hall, Toronto. Details: [munkdebates.com](http://munkdebates.com).

### THURSDAY, DEC. 4

**REEL Politics Film Series**—As part of the ongoing REEL Politics Film Series fundraiser, today's screening (with special guests) is Michel Brault's 1974 film *Les Ordres*, drawing on the testimonies of some 50 civilians who were detained after the War Measures Act was invoked in Quebec in October

1970. Thursday, Dec. 4, at 5:30 p.m. ET at the ByTowne Cinema, 325 Rideau St., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.

### SATURDAY, DEC. 6

**Press Gallery Children's Christmas Party**—The Parliamentary Press Gallery hosts its annual Children's Christmas Party for PPG members' children aged 10 and younger. Lunch will include hot dogs and pizza. Donations of non-perishable food items and gifts for less fortunate children are encouraged. Saturday, Dec. 6, at 12 p.m. ET in Room 100, Sir John A. Macdonald Building. RSVP: [jean-francois.chevrier@parl.gc.ca](mailto:jean-francois.chevrier@parl.gc.ca).

### MONDAY, DEC. 8

**Prime Minister Carney to Attend Mayor's Breakfast**—Prime Minister Mark Carney will take part in a fireside chat with Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe as part of the Mayor's Breakfast, hosted by the Ottawa Board of Trade and the *Ottawa Business Journal*. Monday, Dec. 8, at 7 a.m. ET at a location to be announced. Details: [businessottawabot.ca](http://businessottawabot.ca).

**Panel: 'Solving Canada's Housing Crisis'**—Ana Bailão, CEO of Build Canada Homes, will take part in a panel discussion on "Solving Canada's Housing Crisis: What It Takes To Build More, Faster," hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Monday, Dec. 8, at 11:45 a.m. ET at The Hyatt Regency Toronto, 370 King St. W., Toronto. Register: [canadianclub.org](http://canadianclub.org).

**Pearson Centre Holiday Party**—The Pearson Centre hosts its holiday party. Please join us to celebrate a successful year, and a look ahead to the next one. Monday, Dec. 8, at Metropolitan Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr., Ottawa. Details: [thepearsoncentre.ca](http://thepearsoncentre.ca).

### TUESDAY, DEC. 9

**Lunch and Learn: 'Transparency in Advocacy'**—Lobbying Commissioner Nancy Bélanger will take part in "Transparency in Advocacy: Understanding Your Obligations," a conversation on transparency, ethics, and compliance in advocacy, hosted by the Ottawa Association Exchange. Tuesday, Dec. 9, at 11:30 a.m. ET at AC Hotel Ottawa Downtown, 201 Rideau St. Register via Eventbrite.

**UNHCR Rep to Deliver Remarks**—Tracey Maulfair, representative to Canada for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, will take part in a conversation on "UNHCR's work in a contemporary world," hosted by Carleton University. Tuesday, Dec. 9, at 12 p.m. ET at Room 2420R, Richcraft Hall, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Details: [events.carleton.ca](http://events.carleton.ca).

**Heritage on the Hill Reception**—A coalition of national heritage organizations host the "Heritage on the Hill" reception. This country's leading heritage organizations to talk with parliamentarians about the future of heritage preservation and Indigenous cultural heritage rights in Canada. Tuesday, Dec. 9 from 6 p.m. ET in the Senators' Lounge, Senate of Canada, 2 Rideau St., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.

### THURSDAY, DEC. 11

**Book Launch: *Un village au Parlement***—The Institute for Research on Public Policy hosts the launch of IRPP associate director Valérie Lapointe's new book, *Un village au Parlement: La mobilisation LGBTQ+ dans l'arène partisane canadienne*. This book traces the history of the relationship that the LGBTQ+ movement has built and maintained with political parties in Canada from 1960 to 2019. Thursday, Dec. 11, at 6 p.m. ET at IRPP offices, suite 200, 1470 Peel St., Montreal. Details: [irpp.org](http://irpp.org).

### MONDAY, DEC. 15

**Liberal MP Zahid to Attend Fundraiser**—Liberal MP Salma Zahid will take part in a party fundraiser hosted by the Scarborough Centre and Don Valley East Federal Liberal Association. Monday, Dec. 15 at 6:30 p.m. ET at the Kennedy Convention Centre, 1199 Kennedy Rd., Scarborough, Ont. Details: [liberal.ca](http://liberal.ca).



# *The Hill Times'* 100 Best Books

Issue date:  
**Monday, December 8, 2025**

**IN 2025**

Advertising deadline:  
**Tuesday, December 2, 2025**



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