



Centre Block peeled back

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THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR, NO. 2253

CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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NEWS

Global Affairs
misses
benchmark
after report
shows only
58 per cent
of properties
abroad in
'good' or 'fair'
condition

BY NEIL MOSS

Just over half of Canada's foreign ministry's properties abroad are rated in "good" or "fair" condition, missing the target of 85 per cent that should be in that state, according to a recently released departmental report.

The substandard state of Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) real property portfolio abroad was revealed in the 2024-25 departmental results that were tabled in the House of Commons on Nov. 7.

Based on the Facility Condition Index (FCI), that would leave 42 per cent of GAC's Crown-owned properties rated in "poor," "critical," or "unknown" condition.

The departmental results explain the missed target by highlighting a change to the "more robust" FCI to calculate the conditions of property, as well as noting that "since 2017-18, portfolio growth, rising building values and static budgets—combined with low reinvestment rates—have led to fewer assets rated as 'good' or 'fair.'"

In 2023-24, the year's results report cited 82 per cent of properties

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NEWS

Constituent seeking help
for brother and others
fleeing Sudan civil war
says immigration
minister 'angry, rude, and
dismissive' in phone call

BY NEIL MOSS

A constituent trying to bring her brother and his family to Canada and raise awareness for others trying to flee the catastrophic Sudanese Civil War says she was yelled at by her MP, Immigration Minister Lena Diab.

Huwaida Medani—who lives in Diab's riding of Halifax West, N.S.—has been trying to bring her brother to Canada, as well as his wife and their children whose ages range between nine and 23 years old.

Civil war erupted in Sudan in April 2023, leading to more than 3.5 million people becoming refugees, and more than 8.5 million people internally displaced. It is largely considered the worst active humanitarian crisis. The United Nations has declared that nearly half of the country faces "acute food insecurity."

For the last 18 months, Medani's brother and his family have been stuck in Saudi Arabia as he waits for Canada to process his resettlement application. He is unable to work, and his children are unable to go to school due to

Continued on **page 14**



A constituent of Immigration Minister Lena Diab says she was told by the cabinet member that she wouldn't speak about matters under her ministerial responsibility while in Halifax. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS

Liberal border
bill returns to
the House after
Conservative,
Bloc
enhancements
at committee

BY STUART BENSON

Recognized opposition parties are signalling they remain open to advancing the Liberals' updated border bill that would expand federal powers to deny entry to Canada and to remove migrants already here. And despite their amendments being "expeditiously rejected," the NDP and a broad coalition of migrant and civil liberties groups are reaffirming their demands to withdraw a bill they say would make former prime minister Stephen Harper blush.

"If this bill had been introduced under a Conservative government, the Liberals would be the first out there howling [against it], louder than anyone," NDP MP Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, B.C.), her party's immigration and public safety critic, told *The Hill Times*.

Introduced on Oct. 8, Bill C-12, the Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act, updates the Liberals' stalled Bill C-2, one of several omnibus bills introduced by Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) new government in June.

The new bill is almost identical to C-2, but without some of the more controversial measures, such as provisions on mail searches, large cash transactions, and lawful access, which remain in Bill C-2. Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough-Guildwood-Rouge Park, Ont.) told the House Public Safety

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Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

CPAC's future at risk as CRTC hits 'mute' on channel's funding boost request



CPAC CEO Christa Dickenson, left, says the CRTC's move to delay its decision on their request for a funding boost could mean the cable channel, which broadcasts parliamentary activities including House of Commons business, could go dark. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson and screenshot courtesy of CPAC

The cable channel dedicated to broadcasting activities on Parliament Hill—from Senate committees to press conferences to the daily theatre of Question Period in the House of Commons—is at risk of going dark due to a delay in ruling on a rare and critical funding boost.

"It's actually about being on the air or not being on the air," said CPAC CEO **Christa Dickenson** in a Nov. 21 interview with *The Wire Report*, a sister publication to *The Hill Times*.

"This silence for us, it's not only deafening, we are an organization that is absolutely emaciated."

Dickenson was referring to the Canadian Radio-television and

Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) having hit the "mute" button on whether to grant CPAC its July 2024 request for a three-cent increase to its per-subscriber fee.

"In a decision released on Nov. 21, 2025, the CRTC attributed the deferral to its continued implementation of the modernized Broadcasting Act," according to reporter **Maria Collins**.

In its more than 30-year history, CPAC has only twice received a one-cent increase to its funding. "Its current \$0.13 rate has remained unchanged since 2018," reads a Nov. 27 press release from the channel.

According to Dickenson, those three pennies per subscriber

would translate into an extra \$3-million a year for CPAC, which is limping along with out-of-date equipment, and has already made staffing and program cuts.

"This comes at a time when democratic trust is eroding, and more and more Canadians are relying on CPAC for transparent, unfiltered access to parliamentary proceedings," reads the CPAC press release.

"I'm particularly biased as a former employee," wrote *The Globe and Mail's* **Emily Haws** on X last week, "but it's important to point out how many people in politics—including media—depend on CPAC to do their jobs."

Guilbeault's culture, Quebec roles split between Miller, Lightbound

The federal cabinet was lightly shuffled on Dec. 1, with former minister **Marc Miller** returning to the front bench as minister of Canadian identity, culture, and official languages.

Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement **Joël Lightbound** received the added role of the PM's Quebec lieutenant.

And **Julie Dabrusin** got a longer title in the Monday afternoon ceremony at Rideau Hall, with "and Nature" added to her current role of Environment and Climate Change.

This shuffle came about after then-Canadian identity minister **Steven Guilbeault** quit caucus on Nov. 27, showing his displeasure with Prime Minister **Mark Carney's** pipeline deal with the Alberta government.



Former cabinet minister Marc Miller was brought back to the Liberals' front bench following a Dec. 1 shuffle. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Miller had been immigration minister from 2023 until Carney called the election this past March, and had been minister of Indigenous services and also of Crown-Indigenous relations in the **Justin Trudeau** government.

This was Privy Council Clerk **Michael Sabia's** first time being involved in such an event since he took over his current role this past July.

This was also Governor General **Mary Simon's** first public appearance in recent weeks, having been hospitalized with a respiratory virus in early November, entrusting her public duties to her deputy, Supreme Court of Canada Chief Justice **Richard Wagner** during her recovery.

Irish rap group serves Liberal MP Gasparro with legal action

Irish rap group Kneecap said it has served Ontario Liberal MP **Vince Gasparro** with "legal action" after learning neither the Prime Minister's Office nor the Canada Border Services Agency were involved in a social media video Gasparro released in September.

In a Nov. 28 statement posted on social media, Kneecap said the allegations Gasparro made in his Sept. 19 video—that the trio were deemed "ineligible to enter our country," due to "actions [and] statements that are contrary to Canadian values," and "amplified political violence, and publicly displayed support for terrorist organizations—"were wholly untrue and deeply malicious."

Kneecap has vowed to "be relentless in defending ourselves



Liberal MP Vince Gasparro has been served with legal action by Irish rap group Kneecap. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

against outrageous and baseless allegations."

The band's newest legal threat follows the response NDP immigration and public safety critic **Jenny Kwan** received to her Order Paper question on Nov. 24, calling on the government to explain the justification and decision-making process behind the entry ban.

The CBSA said it was "not consulted," and the PMO responded that it was "not involved

in the decision" to have Gasparro make the announcement.

Kwan has since written a letter to Prime Minister **Mark Carney** requesting his "immediate intervention" into the matter to provide "definitive" answers on the decision.

—by Stuart Benson

Former Green MP Morrice is party's new deputy leader

Former one-term Green MP **Mike Morrice** is the party's new deputy leader.

He will serve alongside current deputy leader **Rainbow Eyes**, whose term started last year.

"I am thrilled Mike has agreed to serve in this leadership role," said Green Leader **Elizabeth May**, who was in the Waterloo, Ont., region to announce the news on Nov. 28.

In a nearly two-minute video on Facebook following the announcement, Morrice gave a very campaign-style speech about billionaire-owned grocery chains, affordability for the working class, public transit expansion, building social

housing, "investing in truly universal health care," and ending handouts to "foreign-owned fossil fuel giants."

"On all this and more, I am thrilled how this role will give many more opportunities to build the momentum we need to address the priorities of folks in our community," said Morrice.

Morrice held the riding of Kitchener Centre, Ont., for the Greens from 2021 until this past spring, when he

was defeated by Conservative MP **Kelly DeRidder** by 300 votes. Morrice is already confirmed as the Greens' candidate in that riding whenever the next federal election takes place.



Former Green Party MP Mike Morrice is the party's new deputy leader, and will run again in the next election. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Former Tory MP Ferreri joins EVE Initiative

In other post-Hill job news, former Conservative MP **Michelle Ferreri** is the new vice-president at the EVE (End Violence Everywhere) Initiative's Canadian board.

EVE's founder **Cait Alexander** posted the news on X on Nov. 29: "Welcome to the EVE family—it feels like you've been here all along Michelle."

"A former Member of Parliament, respected media professional, and lifelong advocate for survivors, Michelle has spent her career using her voice to protect

women, children, and families," wrote Alexander.

"I'm honoured," Ferreri replied that same day. "Ready to keep pushing for change, accountability, safety and fairness for survivors!" Ferreri represented the Ontario riding then-known as Peterborough-Kawartha from 2021 until earlier this year when she was defeated by now Liberal MP **Emma Harrison** by more than 10,000 votes.

Continued on page 3

HEARD ON THE HILL

Continued from [page 2](#)

U.S. envoy ‘quote’ in Canadian satire mag fools *Time* magazine



U.S. ambassador to Canada Pete Hoekstra at the Ottawa embassy on May 22. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Time magazine found itself wanting to turn back the clock last week when it was revealed that an Oct. 1 article featuring a quote attributed to United States Ambassador to Canada **Pete Hoekstra** was actually made up.

The quote in question was from Canadian satire site *The Beaverton* inspired by an event that really happened in Halifax on Sept. 18 where Hoekstra expressed his disappointment with the “elbows up” sentiment towards Americans during Canada’s election campaign.

The Beaverton’s reporting of that event, titled “U.S. Ambassador threatens to tariff, annex, and bomb Canada if anti-American sentiment doesn’t improve,” included the made-up passage, “‘I’m disappointed that I came to Canada,’ Hoekstra said during a public event in Halifax. ‘A Canada that it would be very easy to target with 500 per cent steel tariffs, or one patriot missile aimed at Parliament Hill, I might add.’”

The two paragraphs that followed that “quote” in *The Beaverton* clearly didn’t faze the *Time* editorial team when their story, *What Trump Doesn’t Understand About Alliances* was published Oct. 1:

“The Ambassador added, ‘We need to take the tone and tenor of the debate down, and by ‘we’ I mean ‘entirely Canada’ because you are all weak losers who would be better off as the 51st State.’”

“Hoekstra then poured out a bottle of Labatt Blue while spitting on a photo of **Terry Fox**, before decrying how ‘it’s so difficult to find Canadians who are passionate about the American-Canadian relationship’.” (The latter quote the envoy actually did say at the event).

The Beaverton’s site includes a disclaimer whenever real events and people are mentioned.

Time issued a correction on Nov. 28—nearly two months after the article originally was published.

“When your ambassador is SO deranged that *Time* Magazine says, ‘Yeah, that quote sounds real,’” *The Beaverton* posted on Facebook late last week.

Speaking with CTV News about the incident, *Beaverton* writer **Ian MacIntyre** mused that this serious error could be a sign that artificial intelligence may have been used for the research.

Canada-Uganda Business Forum wraps up with MOU

The Uganda High Commission wrapped up a two-day Canada-Uganda Business Forum in Brampton, Ont., held Nov. 24-25.

On the theme “Strengthening Bilateral Trade, Investment, and Tourism Partnerships,” the forum brought together key stakeholders from Canada and Uganda in business, industry, government, and trade.

Permanent Secretary of Uganda’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs **Bagiire Vincent Waiswa** opened the event, encouraging the Canadian business community to invest in Uganda, particularly in the agriculture, tourism, mining/energy, and science and technology sectors.

Brampton Mayor **Patrick Brown**—a former Conservative MP—delivered remarks, lauding the relationship nurtured by Uganda’s acting high commissioner **Allan Kajik**, who encouraged Canadians to step out and explore his East African country.

The two-day forum concluded with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce and the Uganda National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which will act as a channel for further engagement between Canadian and Ugandan business communities.

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The Hill Times



Uganda’s acting high commissioner Allan Kajik, front left, Brampton Mayor Patrick Brown, front centre, and Permanent Secretary of Uganda’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bagiire Vincent Waiswa, front right, with members of the Ugandan High Commission at the Canada-Uganda Business Forum in Brampton, Ont., on Nov. 24-25. *Photograph courtesy of the Ugandan High Commission*

ADVERTISEMENT

Ontario’s Economy Is Out of Time: Compete or Fall Behind

By Dr Bryan Brulotte



For more than a century, Ontario was the engine of Canada’s economy. Our factories built the machinery, automobiles, and technologies that fuelled a continental middle class. Toronto grew into a global financial hub. Waterloo and Kanata emerged as centres of innovation. The North supplied the minerals that kept industry moving. Prosperity was earned through discipline, ambition, and a clear commitment to excellence.

Today, that foundation is under strain. Ontario faces competitive pressures that are sharper and more unforgiving than anything seen in a generation. If we continue to drift, and if we mistake past success for future security, we will watch the pillars of our prosperity weaken while faster economies race ahead. The world is moving with purpose. Ontario must decide whether it intends to keep pace.

Manufacturing is the clearest warning. Once the backbone of communities across the province, it has been battered by global competition, high input costs, slow approvals, and electricity prices that erode our advantage. Plants that once sustained entire towns now sit silent. Even our auto industry, built on decades of investment and deep supply chains, is under pressure. Rising trade tensions with the United States have added new uncertainty. Ontario can compete. But if energy remains expensive, if taxes punish investment, and if regulatory approvals move too slowly, the next generation of manufacturing jobs will not be created here.

The financial sector faces its own reckoning. Toronto remains a heavyweight in banking, insurance, asset management, and pension governance. The sector employs hundreds of thousands and anchors provincial revenue. Yet global finance is being reshaped by new technologies. Fintech innovators, artificial intelligence, digital payments, and novel asset classes are transforming the rules of the game. No financial centre can rely on legacy advantages. Toronto will not retain its place unless it becomes more agile, more innovative, and more willing to lead. Reputation alone is not enough.

Ontario’s technology sector mirrors this challenge. Between 2016 and 2021, Toronto was one of the fastest growing tech hubs on the continent. Venture capital surged. New companies flourished. The province earned global recognition for research in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cybersecurity, and digital health. But higher interest rates, tighter capital markets, and an acute housing crisis are now choking that momentum. Young firms cannot scale quickly enough. Too many are acquired by larger American companies, taking intellectual property and long-term value out of the province. Ontario’s ideas are strong, but commercialization remains a weakness that must be addressed.

Northern Ontario presents both extraordinary promise and continued frustration. The region holds some of the most strategically important mineral deposits in the world: nickel, cobalt, graphite, rare earth elements, and lithium. These are the essential inputs for electrification, defence production, clean technology, and advanced manufacturing. The global demand for these resources is enormous. Countries such as the United States, Japan, Korea, and Australia are racing to secure them. Ontario should be a leader in this field. Instead, the Ring of Fire remains delayed by infrastructure gaps, permitting challenges, and governance issues. Meanwhile, other jurisdictions are approving projects in months rather than years and are attracting billions in private capital. If Ontario cannot move faster, investment will go elsewhere.

Across every sector, the pattern is the same. Ontario has remarkable talent, world-class institutions, abundant resources, and a strategic location. What we lack is competitiveness. Productivity has stalled. Regulation is too slow. Infrastructure is aging. Energy costs remain high. Housing is increasingly unaffordable. Capital investment lags behind our peers. Strength is not the same as leadership. Ontario’s natural advantages are still significant, but they are no longer enough by themselves.

Ontario needs a modern economic strategy that rewards ambition, accelerates approvals, lowers costs, builds infrastructure, and creates the conditions for investment. The provinces and countries we compete with are acting decisively. They are moving faster than we are. They are willing to take risks to secure the industries of the future. Ontario can lead again. But leadership is earned, not inherited.

We must compete, or be left behind.

Dr Bryan Brulotte is the Chairman of Sterling-Trust and can be reached at Brulotte@Sterling-Trust.ca.

NEWS



Bloc Québécois MP Marie-Hélène Gaudreau says OGGO committee members need to see the results of the contract review requested by ministers to find savings in order to hold the government accountable. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

‘The only thing we want to see is transparency’: MPs call to view results of feds’ internal review of high-value contracts

Public Services and Procurement Canada says the 45-day review into finding savings through federal contracting ‘was completed on schedule’ and that results will be ‘communicated in due course.’



Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne, left, and Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement Minister Joël Lightbound ordered a contract review across government departments in mid-September. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

BY IREM KOCA

Federal departments say they’ve wrapped up a review of high-value contracts and have drafted a plan to cut costs as requested by two ministers, but have not yet revealed where or how much they found in savings. One opposition MP says they need to see those records to hold the government accountable.

“The only thing we want to see is transparency. Of course we are going to ask for the report,” Bloc Québécois MP Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides-Labelle, Que.) told *The Hill Times* after a Nov. 27 meeting of the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee (OGGO). Gaudreau serves as vice-chair of the committee, which studies federal procurement.

On Sept. 11, Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne

(Saint-Maurice-Champlain, Que.) and Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement Minister Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Que.) sent a letter to senior public servants responsible for government procurement, asking them to submit a detailed proposal within 45 days on how to find savings through federal contracting.

Nicole Allen, a spokesperson for Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), confirmed in a Nov. 26 email to *The Hill Times* that “the review was completed on schedule, and appropriate next steps have been identified and will be communicated in due course.”

Allen said PSPC has “provided a comprehensive plan focused on high-value contracts, targeted planned procurements, and key procurements categories,” and that the plan aims to “identify

opportunities for cost savings and greater efficiency, while ensuring that contracts continue to meet the evolving needs of Canadians and maintain key government priorities.”

PSPC, Finance Canada, and the Treasury Board did not respond to further questions from *The Hill Times* about what the review found, and when exactly the results were submitted to the ministers’ offices.

The federal government purchased more than \$66.9-billion worth of goods and services in the 2024-25 fiscal year. PSPC and Shared Services Canada manage more than three-quarters of that total spending.

“There is a lack of transparency from the government. We saw it with the president of the Treasury Board at committee [OGGO]. Only government slogans and empty answers. It is our role as parlia-

mentarians to hold the government to account,” Gaudreau told *The Hill Times* after MPs grilled Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali (Brampton-Chinguacousy Park) for “refusing” to fulfill a request from the Parliamentary Budget Officer concerning the government’s Comprehensive Expenditure Review (CER).

Conservative committee members Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current-Grasslands-Kindersley, Sask.), Kelly Block (Carlton Trail-Eagle Creek, Sask.), Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale-Langley City, B.C.), and chair Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, Alta.) did not respond to *The Hill Times*’ request for comment.

Champagne wrote in a Sept. 12 LinkedIn post that ministers asked for a plan with concrete measures within 45 days, looking into “benchmarking contracts, integrating international best

practices, prioritizing Canadian vendors, opportunities for pooling buying power with provinces and territories, updating procurement policies, and more.”

“This is another step in building a more efficient government that delivers for Canadians,” Champagne wrote.

The minister-mandated review to find savings followed Prime Minister Mark Carney’s (Nepean, Ont.) broader directive to reduce government operating spending by 15 per cent over the next three years.

The government is aiming for \$60-billion in savings through the CER over five years, according to the 2025 budget.

What Champagne and Lightbound described in their letter as a “targeted policy direction” was done in the spirit of CER to ensure “best value to the Crown.”

The ministers asked the public service to review existing and planned contracts to identify and secure cost reductions, benchmark against the lowest global price for comparable goods and services, and look at best practices internationally including the United States and European Union.

The letter also directed senior officials to prioritize renegotiating contracts in categories with highest potential for cost savings, and highlighted areas like real property and construction, professional services, communication, IT, transportation, travel, and office management.

It also called to engage with provinces and territories to centralize buying power on major procurement contracts to renegotiate on better pricing and terms to take full account of bulk buying.

The directive follows years of intense scrutiny of the federal government due to a series of contracting controversies, political scrutiny, committee showdowns, scathing watchdog reports, a historic admonishment of a contractor, and multiple RCMP investigations. Most of those revelations came through parliamentary committee studies into the nearly \$60-million Arrive-Can debacle.

The government has since been on a mission to fix procurement woes, implementing a series of measures to cut red tape, implement stronger oversight, and use procurement in a way that matches with the overall objectives of the federal government. As part of that work, PSPC recently revealed that it recovered \$4.1-million from subcontractors who fraudulently over-billed the government.

Multiple watchdog reports—including those by Auditor General Karen Hogan and Procurement Ombud Alexander Jeglic—have called for a major overhaul of the government’s procurement system.

In his October report, Jeglic found “systemic issues that persist year after year,” and reported an 113-per-cent increase in procurement complaints to his office this year. Jeglic said there is an “urgent need for foundational change in federal procurement” to address long-standing issues.

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COMMENT

Is Carney’s expense of political capital coming out of Sudan’s bottom line?

The United Arab Emirates is looking to bolster its reputation by cozying up to Canada as a deflection from allegations that it is supporting militias in Sudan.

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, returned home with a \$70-billion investment commitment after meeting with United Arab Emirates President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan last month. Screenshot courtesy of LinkedIn

OTTAWA—Canadian exceptionalism is at the core of this country’s political identity. Human rights is a value that is ingrained in our national psyche.

On Nov. 21, Prime Minister Mark Carney announced that he secured an investment of \$70-billion from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), following his

trip to Abu Dhabi. The pledge is set to make these investments in a one-year period. In addition, he secured \$1-billion in project funding for critical minerals process-

ing. This trip signalled Carney’s aspirations for Canada to become a global player, and a more powerful force in the rapidly changing multipolar world.
This deal is part of the UAE’s attempt to diversify their investments from their one-stop oil shop. They are now spreading their largesse with alacrity to the United States, Canada, Pakistan, and countries throughout Africa. This includes Sudan, and herein lies the problem.
A genocide in Sudan is unfolding before our very eyes, yet it has not taken enough space in the Canadian broadcast cycle. This catastrophe, which began in April 2023, has become the largest humanitarian crisis since records were first kept. It is currently the world’s worst hunger crisis in decades, and has the largest and fastest-growing forced displacement in the world, at a count of 12 million people strong, as reported by the International Rescue Committee. (When arguing against more refugees, one should take into consideration why they’re refugees in the first place.) An estimated 400,000 people have been murdered.
What is the origin of this monstrosity? The British, of course, since nothing wrong in the world happens without British

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NEWS

U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham a repeat contact for Canada's foreign minister, documents show

Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand had half as many calls with U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham as with her formal counterpart, Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

BY NEIL MOSS

Canada's top diplomat held three calls with a close ally of United States President Donald Trump in the Senate over the summer, recent documents tabled in the House of Commons show.

Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.) held calls with U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina on three separate occasions between May 13 and Sept. 26. A call on June 27 dealt with Russia and Ukraine, as well as the Middle East and Iran. On Aug. 22, the listed topic was Ukraine. And on Sept. 15, the subject matter was broadly "foreign policy."

Details of the interactions were tabled in the House of Commons on Nov. 17 in response to an Order Paper question from Conservative MP Jacob Mantle (York-Durham, Ont.). The question asked, in part, for details on meetings Canadian officials such as ministers, secretaries of state, parliamentary secretaries, and deputy ministers held with U.S. government officials since May 13, which is the date Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) post-election cabinet was sworn in.

The Liberal government has been reluctant to publicly detail its outreach efforts with the U.S.

Graham has served in the Senate since 2003. The Republican Senator is a foreign policy hawk, and backer of the Ukrainian cause. He is currently sponsoring a bill that would give authority to place secondary sanctions on countries that buy Russian oil and gas.

Former Canadian diplomat Louise Blais, who twice was Canada's consul general in Atlanta—which includes coverage of South Carolina—said that past foreign minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic-Cartierville, Que.) had built a



U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, right, with U.S. President Donald Trump in 2019. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

relationship with Graham which has continued under Anand.

"He's one of the handful of Republican Senators that still has the ear of the president," Blais told *The Hill Times*.

Graham is the only member of Congress with whom Anand had multiple interactions in the time period. Graham is chair of the Senate Budget Committee, and doesn't hold any formal roles that intersect with Canada.

Politico reported in October that Joly met with Graham when the industry minister was in Washington, D.C., as part of Carney's Oct. 7 Oval Office visit with Trump.

Joly's interactions with U.S. officials aren't disclosed within the tabled document as Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada said that the information is "not systematically tracked in a centralized database," and that compiling a response in the mandated timeline was not possible and risked disclosing "incomplete and misleading information."

Graham has transformed from being a critic of Trump during the 2016 election—posting on social media at the time that if his party nominated Trump, it would "get destroyed" and "deserve it"—to one of the president's most ardent defenders.

One piece of advice Graham gave then-foreign minister Joly early in the year was regarding how to disincentivize Trump's

annexation rhetoric on Canada being absorbed as a "51st" state.

"Ain't no way in hell I'm voting to make Canada a state because they'll have two Democratic senators," Graham told *Politico* in February. "I told Mélanie last night: 'we're not going to absorb a bunch of liberals from Canada into our system.'"

In the same time frame in which Anand spoke with Graham three times, she had six engagements with her formal counterpart, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

Embassy consistently reaches out to Graham: Norton

Former Canadian diplomat Roy Norton said that Graham is "notoriously accessible." Norton had interactions with Graham when he served as minister for congressional affairs at Canada's embassy in Washington, D.C., from 2006 to 2010.

Norton said that accessibility alone makes Graham a go-to person as Canada knows it can get a meeting with him. Norton added that during his time in Washington, the Embassy routinely reached out to Graham.

"For a whole bunch of reasons, he seems to like Canada. A lot of Canadians visit his state and indeed own property in his state. He's always been disposed to us for that reason," he said.

Graham is also a close associate to former U.S. ambassador to Canada David Wilkins, who is a former speaker in the South Carolina House of Representatives. Wilkins served as national finance chairman for Graham's short-lived campaign for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016.

Given Graham's connection to Trump and his focus on the foreign file, Norton said that the Senator would be regarded as a "natural interlocutor."

He said that in outreach efforts to Americans, it is an open-ended question if those with whom Canada is speaking bring its case to the Trump administration.

"But because he has historically been accessible, the embassy consistently recommends reaching out to him," Norton said. "Graham is often available more than most, and is worth talking to."

"A lot of folks who may be more disposed to toe the Trump line would be reluctant perhaps to even meet with you if they thought you were trying to persuade them of the merits of some other point of view," he said. "Graham can tell you what he's hearing, and doesn't shy away from doing so."

Those conversations can be quite useful, or at least appear to be so, Norton said.

"If you want to do something rather than nothing, then reaching out to Graham who is likely to take your call or your meeting is worth the effort or perceived to be worth the effort," Norton said.

Blais said that Canada needs to engage on both sides of the Congressional aisle, even with American lawmakers with whom the government may disagree.

"We don't have the luxury to pick and choose who we feel is palatable to our own values," she said. "We just have to engage. If anything, to hear what they're thinking and understand how they're thinking, and be able to see things coming way in advance."

At the same time, care has to be made in the outreach, Blais said, remarking that Congressional contacts should be managed by Canada's ambassador to the U.S., who can develop a long-term relationship even after ministers are shuffled out of their portfolio.

"In my experience, it's been more effective to do it that way," she said.

Congress has been a consistent outreach target for the

Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., for decades given the power it holds in the U.S. system. But there are questions over its current influence given the deference the Republican-controlled Congress has shown to the White House.

Jamie Trones, executive director of the Washington-based Center for North American Prosperity and Security, said that Congress has been publicly deferential to the Trump administration, but has privately raised concerns.

"So it is important to continue to engage with Congress, to engage with Senators, to engage with the next generation of Republicans and Democrats," she said.

Trones said that Graham is someone who is very close to the administration.

"In terms of people that could be allies, he's certainly a powerful one to have," she said.

Who was on LeBlanc's agenda?

The tabled document also details the recorded communications that Canada-U.S. Trade Minister Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.) had with his American counterparts as negotiations were heating up in the summer.

He interacted with U.S. Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick five times between May 13 and Sept. 26. During the same period, he spoke with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer three times, and U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent twice.

He met with Bessent and Greer, as well as Trump, on the margins of the G7 Leaders' Summit on June 16.

That same day, Carney and Trump pledged to finalize a trade deal within 30 days.

LeBlanc met with Lutnick in Washington, D.C., on June 20. He had two virtual meetings with Greer on June 27 and 29. That was followed by a virtual meeting with Lutnick on July 10.

From July 22 to 25, LeBlanc was in Washington again as he met with Lutnick and a group of U.S. Senators. He was back in the American capital from July 29 to 31, where he met with Lutnick, U.S. Vice-President J.D. Vance's national security adviser Andy Baker, as well as U.S. Senator Bill Hagerty of Tennessee.

On Aug. 26, LeBlanc was joined in Washington by Privy Council Clerk Michael Sabia for a meeting with Lutnick. LeBlanc also held a virtual meeting with Bessent on Sept. 9.

Since then, Canada's trade talks with the Trump administration have stalled as Trump suspended negotiations after an anti-tariff ad produced by the Ontario government was broadcast on American airwaves at the end of October.

Meetings by Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. Kirsten Hillman weren't included in the Order Paper question. The response also seemingly didn't include informal interactions, such as text messages.

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Editorial

Editorial

Delays in Sudanese immigration stream unacceptable as genocide rages on

There was a beleaguered air to former federal justice minister Irwin Cotler when he addressed reporters about the ongoing genocide in Sudan on Parliament Hill on Nov. 25.

The Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights (RWCHR) founder noted that, as an MP in 2003, he established the All-Party Save Darfur Parliamentary Coalition.

“It’s tragic and painful that some 22 years later, we have to come again because of a second and even more horrific genocide continuing as we meet today,” he said, lamenting the “genocide foretold, forewarned, ignored, and the complicity of silence.”

A new All-Party Parliamentary Coalition for Sudan has been struck, including Liberal MPs Fayçal El-Khoury and Greg Fergus; Conservative MPs Michael Chong and Shuvaloy Majumdar; Bloc Québécois MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe; and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May.

“We must ask the Canadian minister of immigration that the pathways that were supposed to be there for the families of Sudanese with Canadian connections, that they get to Canada before they die waiting as they have been doing,” May said.

As *The Hill Times*’ Neil Moss has been consistently reporting, the pleas from those families appear to be going unheard by those in positions to act, as applicants are hearing it could take up to 99 months—that’s more than eight years—to process their files.

In December 2023, the Liberal government announced a Sudanese family reunification program to be capped at

3,250 applicants. Applications opened in February 2024. The stream has been marked by constant delays and accusations of double standards in processing times. In October 2024, *Hill Times* sources described what they saw as “complete apathy towards Sudanese refugees,” and that the discrepancy between processing times had a “racist undertone.”

In addition to formally recognizing the crisis in Sudan as a genocide, among the six action items the coalition called for during last week’s press conference was providing a boost to the emergency immigration measures, “including expediting all pending applications and reuniting and ending the discriminatory treatment of Canadian Sudanese families,” said RWCHR’s Yonah Diamond.

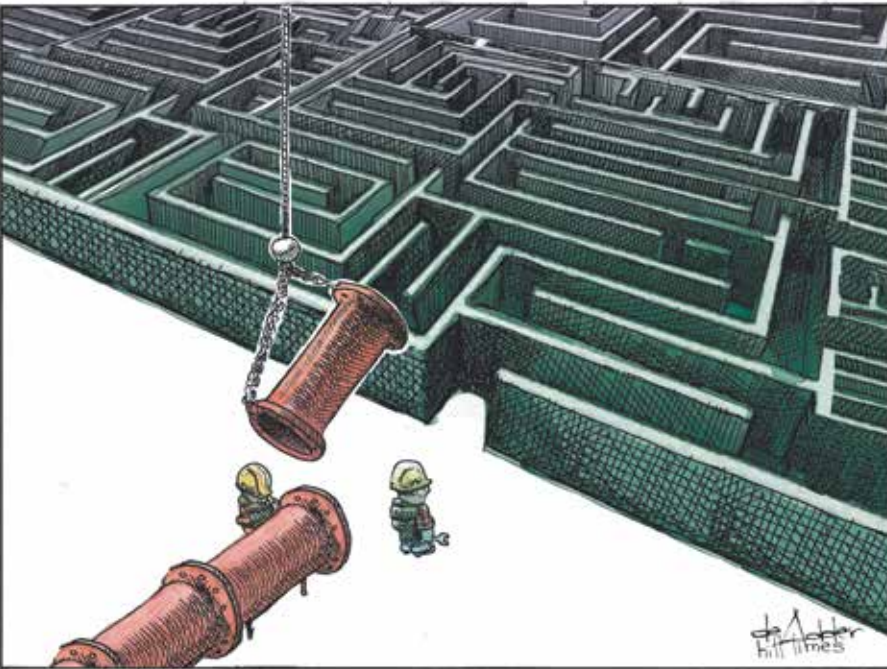
“There is no more time for vague condemnations, or moral platitudes,” Diamond said.

What there is time for is action, and that begins with having someone leading the immigration file who those advocating for people fleeing genocide feel is listening.

Mutasim Ali, also with the RWCHR, noted that the crisis in Sudan—“unlike so many others where the world claimed ignorance too late—is not over. It is not inevitable; it is still preventable. The world has a chance, perhaps its last, to stop genocide in real time. We must not fail the people of Sudan a second time.”

Those trying to bring their family members to Canada are doing their part. The government must hold up its end of the deal.

The Hill Times



Letters to the Editor

Signals matter in disarmament discussion, says letter writer

On Nov. 20 in the House of Commons, the Green Party’s Elizabeth May suggested to Liberal MP Rob Oliphant, parliamentary secretary to the minister of foreign affairs, one way Canada could restore its reputation as a champion of nuclear disarmament: attending meetings of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) as an observer. A majority of United Nations states—99—have signed, ratified, or acceded to the 2017 treaty, and though no NATO state is among them, six (Belgium, Finland, Netherlands, Germany, Norway, and Sweden) have attended meetings as observers. Candidly conceding that “this is where I get dangerous and ignore the remarks that have been given to me,” Oliphant assured May he would “take back” her “earnest” and “heartfelt” suggestion, describing it as “a smart idea that needs good consideration from our government.”

On Nov. 25, I emailed Oliphant to applaud his open-mindedness. The next day, he replied that he had “long been an advocate to join other key NATO allies in observing the work of friends and allies who are part of the Treaty,” adding “conversation, dialogue, and engagement are key tools to disarming our world.” The window is thus now open for Canada to attend and observe the First Review Conference of the TPNW late next year. No obligation to join the Treaty is entailed by such attendance, and Oliphant is opposed to Canadian membership until the nuclear-armed states signal a readiness to disarm. But he understands that simply waiting for this to happen is not an option; other signals matter, too.

Dr. Sean Howard
Disability Rights and Disarmament Initiative,
Cape Breton University
Main-à-Dieu, Cape Breton

Ottawa-Alberta MOU exposes flaws in electoral system: N.S. reader

This is a classic example of why our winner-take-all election system needs to be reformed to using the principle of proportional representation where the percentage of seats awarded equals the percentage of the votes received.

With proportional representation at the federal level, there would have been more voices from Alberta in the governing coalition so less western alienation. Therefore, the prime minister would not have felt the need to mollify Alberta’s oilpatch at the cost of overheating our planet.

There would have been consultation with British Columbia and First Nations before any agreement was reached. This deal is the same as the backroom pact between Russian President

Vladimir Putin and United States President Donald Trump affecting the war in Ukraine, but Ukraine was not part of the discussion.

Liberal MP Steven Guilbeault, a hard-working member of Prime Minister Mark Carney’s cabinet, felt he had to resign his position over this policy lurch by his own party. Countries with proportional representation have less extreme policy lurch because more people agreed to the deal that was reached in the first place.

What could be a better nation-building project than electoral reform so that future policy decisions are designed by consensus for long-term economic and health benefits?

Deb Taylor
West Berlin, N.S.

COMMENT

Is Carney's expense of political capital coming out of Sudan's bottom line?



Sudanese Canadian Ismail Adam speaks at a press conference held by the National Council of Canadian Muslims and the Sudanese Canadian Community Association about the humanitarian crisis in Sudan in the West Block on Nov. 24. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Continued from page 5

or French destructive hands involved. The Council of Foreign Relations provides some historical facts: "For the first half of the twentieth century, Sudan was a joint protectorate of Egypt and the United Kingdom." In 1956, after relinquishing the territory, the Republic of Sudan was born. Since then, civil wars have devastated the country. "The stark internal divide between the country's wealthier northern region, which was majority Arab and Muslim, and its less-developed southern region, which was majority Christian or animist, sparked two civil wars, the second of which would see the country split into two states in 2011." In 2019, protests of then-president Omar al-Bashir's leadership led to a coup carried out by both the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and a militia, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). (Ironically, the RSF was organized to protect Bashir from coups.) Naturally, this alliance didn't last, and eventually they turned their violence on the people: mass executions, mass rapes, kidnappings, and whatever other war crime you can think of. The RSF seized control of the gold mines, of which there are more than 40,000.

Sudan's civil war is so brutal that blood could be seen from satellite images. Enter the United Arab Emirates.

The UAE has been funding and arming the RSF, allegedly. They deny it, but let's be real; these accusations don't just wantonly fall out of someone's mouth. As reported by the United Nations, Sudan filed a case with the International Court of Justice accusing the UAE of being complicit in the genocide: "Sudan's military government is alleging that the UAE has been directly supporting the RSF and allied militias, which have embroiled in a brutal civil war with the national army since April 2023." Unfortunately,

this war is more than just a land grab or resource theft from Sudan. A *Sunday Times* investigation confirms that this is a proxy war: "Saudi Arabia and Egypt have thrown their weight behind the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the country's official army. Cairo sees Sudan's generals as a bulwark against Islamist influence and a guardian of the Nile waters on which Egypt depends. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, fears the RSF's growing ties to rival Gulf networks."

To counter the bad press, the UAE—like Saudi Arabia—is spending a lot to build a positive, benevolent brand, and to distract from human rights abuses. Sportswashing is the marketing strategy of using high-profile sporting events, investments in sports teams, and athlete endorsements to improve its international reputation and to distract from its human rights record. This method is one way to rehabilitate a dastardly image. For example, the Emirati own Manchester City football club, which is a juggernaut in European football, and they host a Formula 1 Grand Prix in Abu Dhabi.

And this is what Canada brings to the table: reputational laundering, which is of great value to the Emirati for the same reason as sportswashing—distraction. Seeking propriety on the world stage means getting a better squad, so cozying up to well-regarded states that are known for protecting against human rights abuses would be prudent. The reason I'm blathering on about Canadian identity is that our brand values are precious currency on the global stage (hopefully they didn't burn that capital with Gaza), and Carney would be wise to be more circumspect with how he spends it.

Erica Ifill is host of the *Bad+Bit* podcast.

The Hill Times

Bibi awaits the next Trump distraction to dodge legal troubles

The ceasefire in Gaza intensifies the Israeli prime minister's legal problems since he can no longer demand postponements in his trial proceedings due to the war.

Gwynne Dyer

Global Affairs



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, left, with the country's president, Isaac Herzog, in 2022. Netanyahu has asked Herzog to pardon him in his ongoing corruption trial. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

LONDON, U.K.—Israel's prime minister, Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu, has just asked the country's president, Isaac Herzog, to "fully pardon" him of all three charges—bribery, fraud, and breach of trust—for which he has been on trial since 2020. And the question is: why did he only ask for it now?

The alleged crimes were the kind of petty malpractice that often trips up politicians: accepting gifts (mostly cigars and champagne) from powerful businessmen, and bribing media for positive coverage. However, a former Israeli prime minister, Ehud Olmert, served 18 months in jail after conviction on similar charges, so Netanyahu does have a potential problem.

He has dealt with the charges for the past five years by delay tactics in court, and latterly by requesting endless postponements on the grounds that he was too busy fighting a war in the Gaza Strip. But there is currently a ceasefire in Gaza, which some people hope can be turned into a peace deal and the reconstruction of the devastated homes of its 2.3 million people.

The ceasefire intensifies Netanyahu's legal problem, however, since he can no longer plausibly demand postponements in the trial proceedings because there is a war on. Moreover, there must be an election for the next Knesset by next October, and according to current opinion polls, Netanyahu's coalition is unlikely to win.

But why are Israeli voters so ungrateful? Didn't Netanyahu win the war, crush the Palestinians, and get all the hostages back? Well, yes, but he was also the man in charge on Oct. 7, 2023, when Hamas fighters took Israel by surprise and murdered more than 1,200 Israelis in their own homes. A great many people have not forgiven him for that.

In Israel, major government failures like this usually end up before an independent state commission of inquiry led by a retired judge. That would be political death for Netanyahu: his mistaken belief that he had tamed Hamas by letting large sums of money reach it from Arab sources was why Israel was so unprepared for the October attack.

Netanyahu has neutered that threat for the time being by putting himself in charge of the inquiry, but he could not hope to keep that position if there is a different government in Israel after the elections. Indeed, his whole agenda for creating a Palestinian-free Gaza—building on United States President Donald Trump's project

for a "Middle Eastern Riviera"—would go out the window if he loses power.

Netanyahu seemed very close to his goal in September, but Trump himself then forced Bibi to accept the ceasefire, implicitly abandoning his "Riviera" project in the process. (Why did Trump do that? Maybe he was swayed by pity for the Palestinians, or perhaps he just realized that the Saudi Arabians were getting very unhappy about it.)

At any rate, the best solution for all of Netanyahu's problems—legal, strategic, and political—would be a resumption of the war in Gaza. He could go back to stalling court hearings on his corruption charges, he could get started on pushing Palestinians out of Gaza, perhaps he could even win the elections next year if the expulsions went well enough.

The only big obstacle to all that is Trump, who now sees the ceasefire in Gaza as one of his major achievements. It's going nowhere politically, and even in terms of stopping the killing it's not very effective; in November, Israeli forces killed at least 300 Palestinians in Gaza, most of them civilians. But Trump is quite protective about it, so Bibi must wait.

He can't do that indefinitely, but he can probably do it for long enough. He is both patient and persistent, whereas Trump is neither. Netanyahu will jump through as many hoops as necessary, fly to Washington, D.C., to kiss the ring whenever it's required, and sooner or later Trump will go chasing off after some other shiny object.

It should be easy to restart the war in Gaza once Trump is sufficiently distracted. Hamas fighters know that they will lose as badly in any future fighting as they did in the last round, but most of them will probably choose to die on their feet rather than live on their knees.

Israeli reservists might be a bit harder to motivate for yet another round of the war, but the habit of duty plus the promise of a mass expulsion of Palestinians, at least from Gaza, would probably be enough to get most of them back out one more time.

I'm not saying that all of this is bound to happen. I'm just saying that these are probably Netanyahu's calculations at this moment in time—and that they are entirely rational and realistic, if perhaps a bit ruthless.

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

The Hill Times

COMMENT

Untrodden ground: Carney looks to kickstart post-NAFTA economy

The decision to put the possibility of a pipeline back in the national conversation marks a seismic shift in the Liberals' approach to climate action and the economy writ large.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—Prime Minister Mark Carney's pipeline pantomime reverberated around the country in a manner that was reminiscent, in a wholly different way, of Pierre Trudeau's announcement of the National Energy Program way back in 1980.

Some four decades later, that policy still shapes electoral outcomes in Canada's West. It may seem an exaggeration to compare that historic moment to last week's memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Carney and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith. But the Liberal government's sudden embrace of a master plan for oil and gas giants on Nov. 27 was the biggest event in this country's politics in at least 10 years, and maybe longer.

It's hard to believe that a pipeline to carry tarsands oil from Alberta to a tanker port on the northern British Columbian coast will ever get built. I've written before that the prospects for such a pipeline died on March 24, 1989, when the Exxon Valdez dumped 10 million gallons of crude up the coast in Alaska.

But Carney's decision to put the possibility of such a pipeline back in the national conversation marks an unexpected and seismic shift in the Liberals' approach to climate action and the economy writ large.

Since 1992, only Stephen Harper's Conservative government—to his misfortune—denigrated climate action. Then-Liberal prime minister Justin Trudeau took the climate crisis for the menace that it is, and, despite Canada's reliance on the petroleum sector to drive exports and investment, made it his business to reduce the carbon economy and demand action from industry, the provinces, and consumers (sort of) to try to meet environmental goals.

But, over the last six or seven years, the context for this crusade has evolved drastically. With an economy generally stuck in low gear, wealth disparity accelerating, and the main challenge for many Canadians having narrowed to how to find a job and/or pay for groceries, support for climate action—no matter how valid—appears to have dropped down the public agenda. Carney signalled his thinking on this new reality when he quickly dodged the political third rail of the consumer carbon tax.

At the same time, of course, United States President Donald Trump's determination to wreck the Canadian economy, originally expressed as a means to annex his northern neighbour, is proceeding apace. It is becoming clear that this country faces a post-NAFTA era in which the main questions are going to be how much of the industrial base will disappear and how bad the hit to Canadians' standard of living will be.

In this potentially devastating situation, Carney and Energy Minister Tim Hodgson have tossed all the past economic and political assumptions out the window, and challenged Canadians to do the same. It's a revolutionary approach in a country given to tentative, incremental change filtered through seemingly endless layers of provincial and interest-group accommodation.

Even if no company ever comes forward to take on the Sisyphean task of constructing a new \$35-billion-plus oilsands conduit to the B.C. coast, the Liberals' MOU rollout let everyone know in one bombshell move that the Canada of recent decades is probably gone, and Canadians are going to have to find new ways of making a living, so to speak.

Following up on Carney's efforts to get nation-building projects off the ground quickly, including a budget packed with financial incentives to unleash what he once called corporate "dead money," the MOU amounts to another shock notice for Canadians. The message: that the most obvious way to remake the economy and promote prosperity is by moving hastily to develop resource projects in energy, mining, and clean tech that for a variety of reasons have often fallen between the cracks in recent years.

Part of this extensive renovation of federal strategy is just trying to get beyond the enervating clash between Ottawa and Alberta, an improvement the prime minister sought to set in motion last week. It's theoretically in Smith's interest to latch onto the feds' blueprint for pursuing a possible pipeline to tide-water in B.C. And Carney hopes to offset the MOU's unwinding of emissions regulations with commitments by Alberta to a higher industrial carbon tax and major advances in carbon-capture-and-storage development.

And, however Smith's pipeline obsession unfolds, Carney has the more reasonable fall-back position of supporting the expansion of the existing, government-owned Trans Mountain pipeline from Alberta to its Vancouver area port.

The point is that Carney is seeking, at least in the short term, to lessen the binary choices on the environment and conventional energy development. It's a key element in a much wider plan to cut through the usual government/business inertia and enlist Canadians in the building of an economy that can flourish independent of the U.S. in the years ahead.

It's a risky, not to say reckless, political gambit. But Carney is hoping to redefine the standing political matrix and win Canadians over on the need to look at new, previously unimaginable solutions at a moment of economic threat equivalent to a wartime emergency.

Les Whittington is a regular columnist for The Hill Times.

The Hill Times

Quebec nationalists are still fighting the 1995 referendum

The current furor is a dress rehearsal for the election campaign in Quebec next October, which the separatist Parti Québécois are expected to win.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



Separatist politicians and the nationalist media have dredged up accusations of cheating in 1995 to tarnish Canada's reputation, writes Andrew Caddell. Screenshot courtesy of CBC News

MONTREAL—In early 1995, I developed a proposal for my then-boss, federal minister of public works David Dingwall. It involved a series of initiatives his department, Canada Post, and the Mint could take in advance of the Quebec referendum expected that autumn. It was not dissimilar to a strategy employed by Ottawa prior to the 1980 referendum.

I proposed the new \$2 coin featuring former governor general Georges Vanier, instead of the Queen—a departure from tradition. I also suggested Canada Post issue a series of stamps featuring prominent Quebecers, and launch them in their birthplaces. Plus, pro-Canada advertising.

Meanwhile, then-citizenship and immigration minister Sergio Marchi wanted to have new citizens swear allegiance to Canada, not the Crown. In the end, nothing was done by the Chrétien government. I was told, "the referendum will be a slam dunk for us." Of course, the "Non" side won by only 54,000 votes.

Now the 1995 referendum is being refought by Quebec separatists, furious at remarks by the same Marchi in the Nov. 25 *Journal de Montreal*. Marchi described how his department hurried citizenship applications in Quebec on then-prime minister Jean Chrétien's recommendation.

He told the *Journal*: "I remember Jean telling me, 'Look, I know we always have a backlog of citizenship applications, but do your best to move them along because the referendum is coming up.'" The story outlined how 30,000 new citizens were processed in Quebec before October 1995.

The comments fed a firestorm by sovereigntist media commentators and political leaders. Parti Québécois Leader Paul St-Pierre Plamondon declared, "This revelation is just the tip of the iceberg of this enormous fraud orchestrated by Ottawa."

Despite separatist *Journal* owner Pierre Karl Péladeau's best efforts to whip up anti-Ottawa sentiment, neither *La Presse* nor Radio-Canada pursued the story. For one thing, it's not news: it was reported in *La Presse* by Chantal Hébert in 1996. The 2007 Grenier Commission on referendum irregularities determined "Operation Citizenship" was legal: after all, the applicants qualified to be citizens, and it was a secret ballot.

The furor is a dress rehearsal for the election campaign in Quebec next October. So, all the federal government's supposed "crimes" in 1995 are being dredged up; among them the "Love-In" rally of a hundred thousand people in Montreal a few days before the vote. But

there are differences of opinion as to whether the rally swayed voters.

And while the message was "Quebecers alone will decide," Canadians elsewhere felt they should have a say in the future of their country. In the pre-referendum period, Ottawa supported "pro-Canada" organizations, but the PQ government of the time spent tens of millions of dollars of public funds on propaganda. There were 18 regional consultations on separation, promotional advertising, and each household received the "Future of Quebec Bill" (independence legislation). This was capped off with a confusing referendum question, and 86,500 rejected ballots, mostly in non-francophone ridings.

To ensure the next referendum will be fair, in 2000 the Chrétien government passed the Clarity Act based on a Supreme Court judgment in 1998. It called for a "clear question and a clear majority" before negotiations on separation took place.

However, St-Pierre Plamondon intends to ignore the Clarity Act, brandishing Quebec's Bill 99. A 2021 court judgment on Bill 99 says Quebec is sovereign within its own jurisdiction, but the law does not apply to ramifications for Canada as a whole if Quebec separates. This leads to a scenario where St-Pierre Plamondon undertakes a unilateral declaration of independence in blatant contravention of international law, following a referendum victory for the "Oui."

That is why he is promoting separation as "more efficient" for Quebecers, by taking back the \$90-billion they send to Ottawa. He repeatedly attacks Ottawa's deficits, programs, and its "colonial" attitude towards Quebec. It is why he and the nationalist media have dredged up accusations of cheating in 1995: to tarnish Canada's reputation.

At the moment, the Quebec Liberal Party is in disarray due to corruption accusations and internal squabbles involving new leader Pablo Rodriguez. The PQ under St-Pierre Plamondon is expected to win next year, and there is no federal leadership for the "Non" forces prior to a possible 2028 referendum.

Despite polls showing Quebecers' attachment to Canada, a "Non" will be anything but a "slam dunk."

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.

The Hill Times

COMMENT

F-35 fighter purchase takes flak

The Air Force brass can't control public perception and the longer this Gripen versus F-35 debate continues, the more people become aware of the pros and cons of both aircraft types.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—In recent weeks, social media platforms have been abuzz with defence and aviation enthusiasts weighing in on the advantages of the Royal Canadian Air Force purchasing either the Lockheed Martin F-35, or the Saab Gripen fighter jet to replace our aging fleet of CF-18 Hornets.

The crazy part about all of this ongoing discussion is that if the Canadian defence procurement system actually worked, according to the original program timeline, the RCAF would have been flying the F-35 since 2016.

However, the politics of procurement in Canada ensured that successive Conservative and Liberal governments kept kicking the can down the road rather than investing in new aircraft.

Which brings us to the present dilemma. When United States

President Donald Trump initiated his tariff war, Prime Minister Mark Carney declared that the U.S. was no longer a trusted partner, and vowed to reduce Canada's near total dependency on American weapon systems for the Armed Forces. To add some gravitas to his words of defiance, Carney ordered the RCAF to review the ongoing F-35 purchase in March.

In January 2023, the Trudeau Liberals had signed a contract to purchase the first 16 of an eventual 88 F-35s. These first 16 aircraft cost \$7-billion of an eventual projected cost of \$29-billion to purchase all 88 F-35s on the order book. While the first delivery of an F-35 is set for 2026, the remaining 62 F-35s are on the order books but have not actually been contracted as of yet.

Hence, there appears to be some wiggle room for Canada to back out of the full program.

Politically, the idea is popular among patriotic Canadians who want to see Canada truly get our "elbows up," and hit back at Trump's punitive tariffs and rhetoric.

Recognizing that an opportunity was presenting itself, the Swedish government and Saab have launched an all-out charm offensive to sell Canadians on the benefits of buying their Gripen fighter jets as part of a new bilateral defence initiative.

That joint initiative was announced during a royal visit of Sweden's king to Ottawa in November. To further sweeten the pot, Saab has committed to assembling and maintaining a future RCAF Gripen fleet in Canada, thereby adding some 6,000



There appears to be some wiggle room for Canada to back out of the full program to buy American jets to replace Canada's aging fleet of CF-18 Hornets, writes Scott Taylor. DND photograph by Sgt. Norm McLean

jobs to the aviation sector over the next four decades.

Taking a different tack, U.S. Ambassador to Canada Pete Hoekstra has been attempting to bully the Carney government into sticking with the original full purchase or face consequences as a result. In very undiplomatic tones, the bombastic Hoekstra has suggested a trade deal will be off the table, and the Canada-U.S. NORAD alliance would be in peril if Canada decides against buying the remaining 62 F-35s.

Patriotic Canadians are not impressed by American ambassadors who act as imperial consuls. So Hoekstra's comments have only served to strengthen the resolve of those not wishing to reward the Trump administration with a huge defence windfall if there is any other feasible option available to the Air Force.

Unfortunately for those with their elbows up, the RCAF senior leadership have made it clear from the outset that they want the F-35 and only the F-35.

Last year, long before the current review was requested by Carney, a *National Post* columnist wrote an article based on leaked documents, which outlined how the RCAF brass had rigged all competitive processes to ensure that the F-35 would be selected.

Close followers of Canadian defence news will recall that despite the F-35's initial cost

overruns and mechanical teething troubles, the RCAF remained steadfast in their support of this aircraft. The Harper Conservative government had originally announced the purchase of 65 F-35s in 2010 at a cost of \$9-billion, but had to push the reset button on the project just months later due to escalating costs and ongoing technical problems with the aircraft.

The Trudeau Liberals ran in 2015 on the campaign promise that they would replace the CF-18 fleet with any fighter jet but the F-35.

Yet, once again, the Air Force brass successfully navigated the F-35 to the front of the list during a 2021 competition.

For those who are following the current media coverage of the Gripen versus F-35 debate, you will know that somehow, the results of that 2021 RCAF competition were leaked to the CBC last week. To those lobbyists and proponents of the F-35 purchase, these "results" are the smoking gun as to why the Gripen is not a real contender.

According to the leaked data, the F-35 scored an impressive 95 per cent suitability rating while the Gripen managed only 33 per cent. For those who know how determined the Air Force is to get the F-35 and only the F-35, this comes as no surprise. They ran the competition, and they set the parameters for an aircraft's suitability.

The results of the review that Carney ordered this past March was to be released "by the end of summer," yet remains under wraps. I have no doubt that the RCAF brass have long since filed their review with Carney's office, and it will only restate the position that the F-35 is the only choice for Canada.

However, what the RCAF brass cannot control is public awareness. The longer this Gripen versus F-35 debate continues, the more people become aware of the pros and cons of both aircraft types.

The Swedish Gripen is a highly capable interceptor, easily maintained and operated in a cold climate, and designed to defend Arctic airspace.

The F-35 is far more expensive to operate, and due to its technological complexity, requires specialized hangars and has a much lower availability rate compared to the Gripen. In my opinion, Canada should plan on operating a mixed fleet of fighters. We can take delivery of the first 16 F-35s, and, with Saab's investment, we can build and maintain 62 Gripens in Canada. The real plus is the thought of Hoekstra having to tell Trump that their bully tactics didn't work, and we walked away from the rest of the F-35 deal.

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

The Hill Times

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NEWS

Centre Block reno tour highlights excavations, reconstruction, and a ‘Buy Canadian’ shift

By this time next year—or early 2027, depending on how things progress—scaffolding is expected to cover the entirety of Centre Block’s iconic south façade.

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Design plans for Centre Block’s overhaul have now been finalized, with some late-stage adjustments made to keep spending in check. And one year before the historic structure will disappear behind layers of scaffolding for the remainder of the multi-year project—and one year since media last got a look—Public Services and Procurement Canada took reporters on a tour of the building to show off the progress.

The Centre Block Rehabilitation Project, which involves both renovation of the 100-year-old building and construction of the new, underground Parliament Welcome Centre (PWC), comes with a currently estimated budget of \$4.5-billion to \$5-billion and is expected to be complete by 2030-31, though it’ll be another year, roughly, after construction finishes before the building is reoccupied.

The last time reporters were let into the building in November 2024, demolition work had just been finished, steel piles central to a support network being built under Centre Block were still being installed, and the first of three tower cranes was being erected in the 23-metre-deep PWC pit.

Now, reconstruction is underway, the steel-and-concrete support network is being put to use as excavations steam ahead in Centre Block’s west and east internal courtyards, and all three tower cranes in the PWC site are at work hauling materials in and out as the new, three-storey underground structure takes shape.

The Nov. 26 tour started with a look at the PWC pit where the concrete skeleton of the first of three floors has now been poured. The complex will serve as the new public entrance to the Precinct, and will be a hub for the tunnel network that will connect all buildings on the Hill—including the new Block 2 complex south of Wellington Street—once completed.

Creating about 32,000 square metres of new space, along with serving as the new home for security screening and Parliament’s boutique, the welcome centre will feature new facilities for the public, including a café, a multimedia theatre, an exhibition space, and classrooms. It’s where tours will begin and end, and is intended to be a “destination in and of itself,” explained the Library of Parliament’s Kali Prostebby.



Centre Block’s east courtyard, where excavation work underway since July has now reached five metres below the foundation level. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



A look at the top of the Hall of Honour where a new, three-storey infill will be built and connect to Centre Block’s fourth, fifth, and sixth floors. *Photograph courtesy of Public Services and Procurement Canada*

Entering Centre Block through the western MP entrance, reporters were led down the north corridor of the first floor—now largely stripped down to bare bricks and steel frames, like much of the building—to the eastern courtyard that flanks the Senate Chamber.

Excavations in both of Centre Block’s courtyard got underway this year ahead of previous projections—in April in the western courtyard that flanks the House Chamber, and in July in the eastern courtyard beside the Senate—thanks to an engineering rejig.

Digging in the east courtyard has reached five metres below the foundation, with the west courtyard a few metres ahead.

Here, the support network onto which much of the building’s load has been transferred is in full view: steel piles connected to steel beams, upon which sit orange hydraulic jacks attached to the concrete footings of the historic structure. Both courtyards will ultimately be covered by glass roofs, and are where visitors coming from the underground PWC will

emerge. The courtyards will also house new stairwells and elevators that will help make the galleries of both Chambers universally accessible for the first time.

The Hill Times first sat down with Siavash Mohajer, senior director of the Centre Block Rehabilitation Program, to talk about planning for the then-upcoming excavations under Centre Block—and the “complex,” “monumental,” and “delicate” task involved in ensuring the historic structure is kept safe in the process—back in 2023.

Leading the Nov. 26 tour, Mohajer’s excitement at showing off those plans put in action was evident. “To me, it’s awe inspiring,” he said.

Digging in the west and east will eventually meet up, and then head south to connect to the PWC on either side of the Peace Tower.

“We have to be very, very delicate, very very careful of how we remove the rock,” explained Joe Farquharson, site superintendent for Taggart, which has been subcontracted to do the mass excavation



Reporters stepped inside the historic Centre Block building for the first time in a year on Nov. 26. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

tion under Centre Block. “We’ve got a number of different new tools, new technologies that we’re using,” including a “fleet of robotic demolition excavators,” which can be operated “off to the side using remote controls in a safe manner,” along with older methods, like “drilling and splitting.” Thanks to the “very hard rock” under Centre Block, it’s a process that is “tedious and slow,” he said.

To protect the building, various sensors—monitoring vibrations, temperatures, and more—have been installed “all over the building,” noted Farquharson. “We are very stable, we’ve been monitoring the whole way.”

From the courtyard, reporters made their way back up to the south corridor of the second floor—past the Senate Chamber and foyer, both largely blocked from view by scaffolding and protective boarding—to the Salon de la Francophonie, where officials highlighted how the historic woodwork and other features are being protected on site, as is the case in various rooms throughout the building.

A subsequent stop in the Rotunda—the pillars of which were surrounded by wooden boarding, rather than the festive garland that previously would have covered them this time of year—featured a talk from Heritage Grade’s Sam Pollock, who spoke about woodwork restoration efforts. There, reporters also met Richie Potvin of Potvin Construction, an Indigenous-owned company working on a number of high-heritage rooms in Centre Block.

As Pollock explained, white oak wood from old panelling and baseboards removed from a number of “subordinate spaces”—rooms and offices off of upper-floor corridors—is being used to restore panelling being returned to the building. The wood used in these features came from trees that were between 200 and 400 years old—a “stock that is not available today”—and reusing materials means the restored panels will feature wood of the same age that’s gone through the same “life cycle.”

Next was a stop in an area of the fifth floor where efforts to replace almost all of the floor slabs throughout Centre Block were in clear view, with a section of the sixth floor absent, giving a glimpse up to the stripped-back ceiling of the building’s uppermost level.

As Mohajer explained, floor slab replacement—which is now more than 50-per-cent complete at the building’s base level—has started on the upper floors to “provide lateral stability” to the structure, but will soon get underway on the first and second floors as well.

“A big milestone for us will be the demolition of the Chambers’ slabs. Those have to get rebuilt as well, but they’re a bit more complicated because they’re more tied into the building [structure],” said Mohajer, noting that work is expected to start next year.

The final stop was the sixth-floor Parliamentary Restaurant, which today is largely shrouded by scaffolding and tarps. Here, Darrell de Grandmont, the House of Commons’ director for the project,

talked reporters through plans to restore the high-heritage space, and the changes that will be made. Along with restoring original features like “detailing work” on the ceiling that had been painted over, the restaurant will include a “brand new,” “state of the art” kitchen facility, new universally accessible washrooms, and a new coat room.

By this time next year—or early 2027, depending on how things progress—the scaffolding already covering Centre Block’s northern, western, and eastern façades is expected to span the width of its iconic southern face (already, some has been erected along its southwestern end), blocking the public’s view of the 100-year-old structure until the end of renovations.

Scaffolding is needed both for masonry restoration, as well as to help support the temporary roof that’s been installed while Centre Block’s copper roof is replaced—with “Canadian copper,” noted Mohajer. Roughly 25 per cent of it has already been taken down, and the copper is being saved, he noted.

“The idea is to be able to incorporate it back into some of the design elements of either our building, or share it within the other parliamentary buildings,” like the new Block 2 complex, said Mohajer.

The Peace Tower itself, however, can’t support the weight of normal scaffolding, and as a result, a (Canadian) steel structure will instead be built around the entirety of the tower, he explained.

Along with masonry restoration, the Peace Tower will see modifica-

tions inside to improve accessibility, and the overall visitor experience. That includes opening up the ceiling of the observation level to give a clearer view of the back of the tower’s clock.

Its carillon bells—which last rung in 2022—have also been restored. Twenty-two of the 53 bells that make up Parliament’s carillon were shipped to the Netherlands for restoration with assistance from the Department of National Defence, and are scheduled to return—once again with an assist from DND—next year.

Finalizing the design

Modernization is a key component of Centre Block’s overhaul. New building systems are being installed—including on the roof, which will sit about five metres higher as a result—and “future proofing” is being incorporated in designs to leave space for technology infrastructure that may be needed down the road, said Mohajer.

But ultimately, he said, the aim is to restore Centre Block to its original glory, and return a space that, “to the layperson,” will “look exactly the same as it was pre-closure.”

To those familiar with the building pre-closure, however, it won’t be entirely identical. Aside from the changes already noted, the opposition and government lobbies that flank the House Chamber are being extended down one level (and will feature washrooms, coat rooms, and other facilities



An artist rendering of the new public café being included in the Parliament Welcome Centre. *Image courtesy of Public Services and Procurement Canada*



An artist’s rendering of the scaffolding that will cover Centre Block’s southern façade—sans the trompe l’oeil tarping that’s to come—and the steel frame that will surround the Peace Tower by late 2026 or early 2027. *Image courtesy of Public Services and Procurement Canada*

for MPs), an infill offering work and meeting spaces for MPs and Senators is being built atop the Hall of Honour (which will connect to levels four through six of the building), the old fifth-floor cafeteria will instead be situated on the first floor (where the old security screening sat), and the warping on Centre Block’s stone stairs earned over a century of use—will be levelled out.

Restoring the building to its original glory also means the reproduction of features unfamiliar to most past occupants: for example, natural light will once again stream into the House and Senate foyers, and in the House Speaker’s suites, painted designs on the walls and gold gilding on the ceiling will be restored.

Seating in the House Chamber is also being revamped. MPs were firmly against early-stage proposals to expand the Chamber’s footprint, and so to accommodate the future growth of the Lower Chamber—membership of which has already jumped from 338 to 343 MPs since the move out of

Centre Block—the layout will have to be rejigged. The possibility of bench-style seating—and no desks—has been floated for a number of years, and as de Grandmont told *The National Post* last week, it’s an option currently being actively explored. Early seating mock-ups were first tested in the fall of 2024, and MPs are set to trial reworked versions in the new year.

Recent months have seen the finalizing of the detailed design plan for Centre Block, and in the lead up—faced with a number of project cost pressures—PSPC presented a range of cost-optimization measures, many of which were recently given the green light by parliamentarians, including scaling back some sustainability plans, as reported by *The Hill Times* last month.

The project’s \$4.5-billion to \$5-billion estimated budget was announced back in 2021, and since then, a lot has changed, explained PSPC director general Jean-François Robert in a pre-tour Nov. 21 interview with *The Hill Times*.

There’s been an “unprecedented escalation in numbers” in terms of construction costs, along with a new “volatility of market conditions” thanks to both general inflation seen since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recently due to United States tariffs. “All of that indeed had an impact on supply chains,” he said.

At the same time, “functional requirements” from parliamentary partners in the project have evolved.

“You add this all up, indeed we are proactively flagging budget pressure,” Robert said, but stressed that—as it stands now—the “project is not over budget,” with some \$1.4-billion spent to date, and measures being taken to scale back upcoming spending.

Along with sustainability measures, PSPC has scrapped one of the three new basement levels being carved out underneath Centre Block. “Back of house” spaces—closets, mechanical and electrical systems—were relocated “within other floors, [or] elsewhere ... in the building,” said Robert, as was the aforementioned cafeteria, which is now going on the first floor.

The footprint of the glass roofs that will top the east and west courtyards has also been reduced, said Robert, and their design has been “refocused[ed]” to use more Canadian materials, altogether making it “less expensive.”

As noted at the Senate Internal Economy Committee on Nov. 27, the “parliamentary campus tunnel strategy” has also been scaled back, and will no longer be built to facilitate material handling. Instead, it will be focused on “pedestrian use,” explained CSG Leader Scott Tannas (Alberta), chair of the Senate’s subcommittee on renovations, saving an estimated \$100-million.

With the design recently completed, “PSPC will be working on assessing project costs in the next months to confirm” the previously announced budget range “still reflects the project’s scale and complexity,” said the department.

Mohajer touched on PSPC’s “Buy Canadian” shift during the Nov. 26 tour.

“This is a nationally significant undertaking and so we want to support, as much as we can, Canadian industries and businesses. Obviously we’re spending taxpayer money here,” he said.

The project is a “relatively steel-heavy program,” and PSPC is buying steel from “Canadian sources as much as possible,” said Mohajer.

While PSPC is touting expectations that steel being used in Centre Block will ultimately be 100-per-cent Canadian, documents tabled in the House this fall put a question mark over that claim, as reported by *The Hill Times* in October.

The “Buy Canadian” focus goes beyond steel, and Mohajer said PSPC is “working with our suppliers and contractors to see are there other ways where we can redirect our supply chains that are currently not Canadian to that?”

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NEWS

Constituent seeking help for brother and others fleeing Sudan civil war says immigration minister ‘angry, rude, and dismissive’ in phone call

A Halifax constituent and an advocate for Sudanese applicants are both calling for Immigration Minister Lena Diab to be shuffled out of her role as the federal program for Sudanese resettlement is marked by increasing delays.

Continued from page 1

the restrictions imposed by his visitor's visa. There is a constant fear that the family could be deported back to Sudan.

Medani said that when her local MP became the immigration minister this past May, she had tried to get a meeting with Diab with no success, including stopping by her constituency office to arrange a meeting. Medani said that she wanted to meet with Diab to encourage her to sit down with Sudanese Canadian community members about the Sudanese family resettlement stream as their request to meet had been ignored.

A call finally came on June 25, just hours before Diab was set to hold a local town hall event, which Medani had planned to attend.

“Anything to deal with the minister of immigration, I do not discuss here in my time here in Halifax,” Medani said Diab told her about her unwillingness to speak about Sudan and the family reunification program.

Medani said that Canadian Sudanese community members had urged her to meet with Diab because they have been unable to get any meetings with the minister. Medani said her goal was to convince Diab to work with the community members as previous immigration ministers had done.

“On the phone, unfortunately, she was just yelling at me,” Medani said, recalling that as she insisted that she needed to speak with Diab in her capacity as immigration minister, the call was disconnected.

“I think she hung up on me,” she said.

Medani said one of Diab's staffers was on the other line, and asked if she wanted to see if she could get Diab back on the phone.

“I said, ‘No,’ because it will be another negative yelling [conversation], and something that I don't really need in my already messy life,” she said.

The next morning, Medani sent an email to Sudanese Canadian community members in which she described Diab as being “angry, rude, and dismissive.” Medani shared the email with *The Hill Times*.

“The way that she behaved and dealt with me was very racist, and hateful, and dismissive,” Medani told this newspaper.

“She felt annoyed—she did not want to hear from me or people like me; that is such a struggle because this is my minister of immigration.”

Medani said that she got the impression that Diab doesn't want the stream for those seeking to come to Canada to escape the war in Sudan to work, referencing the inability of Sudanese Canadian community members to get a meeting with her, as well as past interactions Medani had with her MP.

Laura Blondeau, a spokesperson for Diab, said in an email that the immigration minister “treats all individuals and groups with respect.”

“Our government's priority is to ensure the safety and security of Canadians while endeavouring to help the vulnerable, in what are often truly difficult circumstances. Minister Diab comes from an immigrant family that fled civil war in Lebanon. This lived experience helps inform her approach as minister and as the MP for Halifax West,” Blondeau said.

The Hill Times sent Diab's office a detailed list of questions about Medani's comments. The response from the office neither directly answered questions about the interaction, nor directly denied Medani's assertions. In a subsequent text message, Blondeau said that “we don't agree with the characterization of various interactions that you conveyed.”

Further delays mark Sudanese resettlement program

In December 2023, the Liberal government announced a Suda-

nese family reunification program to be capped at 3,250 applicants. Applications opened in February 2024.

Applicants have to pay thousands of dollars in application fees, and hold thousands more in untouched bank accounts while the process is delayed.

Medani said that she took two days off of work to go through the byzantine process for her brother and his family.

The stream has been marked by constant delays and accusations of double standards in processing times, as previously reported by *The Hill Times*. Sources have previously told this newspaper that when the Sudanese resettlement program was announced, they were expecting the same level of urgency that Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) showed during other refugee crises, such as when it approved travel authorizations for more than 780,000 Ukrainians within 16 months of the onset of Russia's February 2022 invasion.

In its anti-racism strategy for 2021-24, IRCC noted that concerns have been raised over “potential bias” when identifying special measures for refugees—citing the examples of Ukraine compared to the Middle East and Africa—and said that “the department needs to be open-minded and self-critical in a more vigilant way.” As part of developing the strategy, IRCC had been told by its own employees

that it needs to “think through selection and admissibility biases in immigration (e.g. Africa) and differential responses to global refugee crises (e.g. Ukraine, Afghanistan, Middle East, Africa) to eliminate any trace of racism.”

In October 2024, sources described what they saw as “complete apathy towards Sudanese refugees,” and that the discrepancy between processing times had a “racist undertone.”

The Sudanese Canadian community has described the wait as a death sentence as a number of Sudanese nationals have died while waiting for the Canadian government to process their applications.

Members of the Sudanese Canadian community say things have only gotten worse since Diab became immigration minister, with processing delays increasing and an inability to get meetings with the immigration minister.

“Diab has behaved in a uniquely cruel manner,” said an advocate for Sudanese applicants speaking on a not-for-attribution basis to speak freely. “I think she holds a deep apathy towards Sudanese applicants, and Black applicants, and her behaviour shows that.”

The advocate said they were told by IRCC that the previous ministerial directive to prioritize Sudanese applicants was rescinded under Diab.

The source also told *The Hill Times* that IRCC has said that



applications could take up to 99 months.

The Hill Times requested an interview with Diab regarding comments made by Medani and the advocate, and sent questions to the minister's office about both that and the Sudanese resettlement program more broadly. A response from IRCC—not the minister's office—declined the interview request on Diab's behalf before sending a response to address the resettlement program.

In September 2024, MPs were telling applicants that IRCC had given them a processing timeline of around 42 to 54 months.

Liberal MP Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre–Don Valley East, Ont.) said in an Oct. 21 meeting of the House Immigration Committee that she had heard from the Sudanese Canadian community regarding the 99-month processing timeline in some cases.

“We have facilitated the program based on the levels that are available to us in the yearly immigration level plan,” IRCC deputy minister Harpreet Kochhar told the committee.

“The yearly immigration level plan actually sets up a fixed-capacity model as to how many people we will need to bring in on humanitarian and compassionate grounds through a crisis response, as well as for economic and family reunification,” he added. “That is where we have the constraint. We can accommodate the processing and approval only of those people who fit in that level; hence, the forward-looking processing time looks a little longer.”

Stakeholder groups have been meeting with Liberal and opposition MPs to raise concerns about the pathway for Sudanese nationals to come to Canada. Those included Zahid, as well as Liberal MP Iqra Khalid (Mississauga–Erin Mills, Ont.).

On Nov. 27, Khalid posted on X that she had a conversation with Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) about “community



Liberal MP Salma Zahid says she has heard from Sudanese Canadian community members that processing times could take 99 months in some cases. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS



Huwaida Medani, left, and Immigration Minister Lena Diab, centre, interacted for the third and final time during a Nov. 12 meeting. Photograph courtesy of Facebook

still in Sudan, and those who have fled the country to surrounding regions,” Krupovich said.

“Canada will continue to stand with the people of Sudan, offering support and stability through these temporary measures and broader humanitarian efforts,” he added.

Carney urged to shuffle Diab

Medani said that the June 25 call with Diab wasn’t her only negative experience with her MP. Medani and an associate met with Diab prior to her being named to cabinet.

Medani said Diab was “very dismissive from the get-go.”

“This is my voice in Parliament and I just felt very, very dismissed,” she said, remarking that she felt ill-treated and that the atmosphere was lacking empathy.

Her third and most recent interaction with Diab came on Nov. 12 when Medani was invited to join a meeting with the immigration minister organized by the National Council of Canadian Muslims to discuss the Sudan and Gaza settlement streams.

Medani said that during the meeting, she felt singled out because the list Diab’s office had of the participants had a different spelling of her name, as well as mentioning the previous call the two had.

“[Diab] singled me out from the get go when I entered that office—that of the minister of immigration. Can you imagine the massive power disparity?”

She said that she had the feeling that Diab was holding a grudge against her because of their June 25 call.

Medani said that Diab showed empathy when talking about the situation in Gaza, with the minister referencing that she was from the region having lived in Lebanon, and that she understood what they were going through given her experience escaping the Lebanese civil war as a child. But Medani said the same was not shown in relation to Sudan, remarking that empathy needs to be shown for both crises.

Medani said she wants to see Diab shuffled out of the portfolio.

“If she cannot benefit from the resources available to her through her position as the minister to learn how to show empathy and to learn how to make programs created by her own government succeed, maybe she shouldn’t be there,” Medani said.

The advocate for the Sudanese Canadian community echoed those feelings.

Asked if she needed to be shuffled, the source responded: “absolutely.”

A small cabinet shuffle occurred on Dec. 1 to replace recently resigned minister Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.), with a larger shuffle expected soon.

Little progress for Sudanese mothers and their Canadian children

Since April 2024, advocates have been raising the issue of Sudanese mothers with Canadian children who need visas to come to the country.

Contact details were shared with IRCC in July 2024, and a meeting was held with then-immigration minister Marc Miller (Ville-Marie-Le Sud-Ouest—Îles-des-Sœurs, Que.) in October 2024.

The Hill Times reported on the situation this past April, including of Salma Mohammed and her four-year-old son Mohammed Mostafa, a Canadian citizen. The pair have been stranded near Khartoum since Mostafa’s father, a native of London, Ont., died in July 2023.

Advocates for the case haven’t been able to reach Mohammed since the beginning of November.

“There’s no reason why no one acted,” the advocate said. “We’ve shared that she lived in an unsafe area that was conflict prone.”

IRCC has since told advocates that they will start to contact the mothers. As of Dec. 2, none have yet to arrive in Canada.

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Liberal MP Iqra Khalid, right, says she spoke to and Prime Minister Mark Carney about ‘Sudanese families waiting to be reunited with their loved ones.’ Photograph courtesy of X/ Iqra Khalid



Immigration Minister Lena Diab joined Prime Minister Mark Carney's cabinet on May 13. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia

priorities” that included “Sudanese families waiting to be reunited with their loved ones” in Canada.

Former Liberal justice minister Irwin Cotler, now the international chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, announced the launch of a new All-Party Parliamentary Coalition for Sudan during a Nov. 25 press conference. The coalition includes Liberal MPs Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval-Les Îles, Que.) and Greg Fergus (Hull-Aylmer, Que.); Conservative MPs Michael Chong (Wellington-Halton Hills North, Ont.) and Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, Alta.); Bloc Québécois MP Alexis Brunelle-Ducpeppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, Que.); and Green Party Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.).

May told reporters at the same press conference that Diab needs to expedite the pathway so Sudanese applicants can reach Canada “now.”

“Every single day matters,” she said. “We cannot afford to sit on

our hands and tie our self up in IRCC red tape.”

Currently, Sudanese applicants are under the “other” category—along with those fleeing Ukraine and Hong Kong—which has a target of 5,800 people in 2026, 4,000 in 2027, and 4,000 in 2028. The level decreased from the previous plans for 2025-27, which put Sudanese applicants—along with the two other groups—in a basket of 10,000 people for 2025, 6,900 for 2026, and 4,300 for 2027.

“It’s so wrong that the minister has decided to pit different tragedies against each other, and expose them to such inhumane long delays,” the advocate said.

IRCC spokesperson Matthew Krupovich said in an email that “Canada remains deeply concerned by the ongoing conflict in Sudan. We empathize with those in this extremely difficult situation.”

He said that the cap for applications was increased in February to more than 5,000 from

3,250, which will allow more than 10,000 people to come to Canada using the pathway.

“As of Sept. 30, 2025, there are approximately 3,817 applications still being processed, 1,160 applications approved (representing 2,410 persons), and 2,099 people have arrived in Canada under the family-based permanent residence pathway,” Krupovich said.

He noted that processing times “vary depending on the details of each application.”

Outside of the family-based resettlement program, nearly 13,000 Sudanese and non-Sudanese nationals have been approved for resettlement in Canada since April 2023 as of the end of September, according to the department.

“IRCC continues to prioritize the processing of temporary and permanent residence applications already in our inventory for those affected by the conflict in Sudan. This includes individuals who are



Salma Mohammed and her son Mohammed Mostafa have faced a long wait to come to Canada. Photograph courtesy of Salma Mohammed

COMMENT

Demystifying the detection of fraud and coerced victims



Employment and Social Development Canada is a partner in the Public Safety Canada-led effort to combat human trafficking and support survivors' rehabilitation—and at times, forgiveness of debts—using taxpayer money, writes Ken Rubin. Photograph courtesy of Pexels

The public needs to know about incidents involving the fraudulent use of social benefits, and about how fraudsters forcefully exploit and draw others into their operations.

Ken Rubin

Opinion



OTTAWA—Fraud can be carried out directly by scammers, thieves, criminals, or indirectly by forcing others to carry out fraudulent acts for them.

Heavily redacted access-to-information records from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) show both means are in use to gain, or try to gain, government social benefits. These documents provided two cases of attempted fraudulent use of stolen personal information.

In one case, between April 30 and May 23, fraudsters attempted to file and claim 8,096 employment insurance (EI) applications that were associated with 5,496 social insurance numbers (SINs), according to a May 28 incident report. Documents indicated that most SINs used in this surge of

applications were likely stolen, as were personal access codes and “My Service” personal account details. But most such attempts to fraudulently try and get EI benefits were stopped.

In another case, a September 2024 privacy breach report found evidence from 2022 of 122—or possibly up to 165—fake T4A income slips being posted to Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) accounts to fraudulently obtain grants from the Canada Student Financial Assistance program, which is administered by ESDC.

This breach was only discovered in late 2024 and reported to the CRA. According to the incident report, the agency began the process of notifying affected individuals and monitoring other accounts.

In way of background, the obtained ESDC documents elaborated on their submissions for the Public Accounts that reported annual financial losses in the student loan program as being more than \$12-million in the last few years.

The highest year of fraudulent claims—amounting to \$6.35-million—was in the 2023-24 period. The amount in the 2024-25 period was \$4.61-million, and \$1.64-million in 2022-23. For 2023-24, that amounted to 324 fraudulent cases of which 167 cases made use of stolen SIN cards, and another 132 were a result of forgeries of enrolment documents. Some of these monies were reported as being recovered, but this is still a significant amount of individually filed false student loan claims.

On the other front, where fraudsters exploit victims to falsely gain social benefits, a

rather intriguing but opaque and partly severed ESDC undated report—likely done in early 2024—was titled “Human trafficking: program impacts and identification of potential victims.” It concerned 15 clients from the Canada Student Loan Program who were “allegedly victims of human trafficking” brought to the attention of ESDC’s Integrity Business Analytics Division (IBAD) in December 2023.

The ensuing examination by the Analytics and Research for Integrity Services (ARIS) group, a subdivision of IBAD, indicated that some of the 15 victim clients’ addresses were at shelters, including a youth-at-risk place, or at flow-through houses, and that there was a loose connection that some had been victimized through two employers. The internal analysis did reveal six victims had some links, but that they were mostly “isolated from each other.”

ARIS looked into whether these victim clients had received EI or pension benefits. Their internal analysis linked the 15 victim clients’ SINs to having “some connection” to an additional 1,091 clients, some of whom were at these shelters, and who were found in the EI data base (782), the pension income support data base (274), or both programs (35). ESDC noted the investigation was continuing to see whether any of these interactions were “suspicious or potentially fraudulent.”

Whether the 15 victims were coerced as part of human trafficking operations into making fraudulent student loan or other social benefit claims filed in their

names was not explicitly stated, but the ARIS report called the 15 people “victims,” not fraudsters.

In a Nov. 10, 2024, Global News interview, Julia Drydyk, executive director of the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, noted that human traffickers were systematically putting the expenses associated with trafficking in the victims’ names to control them and avoid prosecution. Coercive debt and financial abuse were seen as a systematic part of how sex traffickers operate in Canada with at least a quarter of all survivors dealing with fraudulent debt.

In a brief interview, Drydyk noted that the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking is coming out with a research report that indicates that such sexual and labour and financial exploitation continues and happens daily. She said that greater action is needed to combat such exploitation, as is greater support for the victims, including the need for relief from debts forced on those caught in the trafficking network.

ESDC is a partner in the Public Safety Canada-led effort to combat human trafficking and support survivors’ rehabilitation—and at times, forgiveness of debts—using taxpayer money.

The public needs to know about incidents involving the fraudulent use of social benefits, and about how fraudsters work sometimes forcefully to exploit and draw others into their operations.

Ken Rubin is an investigative researcher reachable via kenrubin.ca.

The Hill Times

OPINION

When Canadians and Americans build together, we build stronger

For a century, our partnership has kept North America safe. It has built the world’s most capable defence industrial base, and ensured our Forces can move, fight, and win together.

Rick Tachuk

Opinion



The 2025 budget marked a turning point for Canadian defence. The government’s decision to invest historic amounts in new capabilities is the kind of ambition needed in a world that has not grown safer.

Canadians are right to expect more from their defence investments. The budget’s new “Buy Canada” provisions are significant. They will help ensure that taxpayer dollars strengthen the country’s industrial base and workforce. But it is equally important to recognize that many of the American Chamber of Commerce in Canada’s members have been building that base for decades. They are not newcomers. They are part of Canada’s economic story, employing thousands, investing in research and training, and supporting supply chains that reach into every region of the country.

From aerospace and engines to sensors and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems that help militaries see, share information, and co-ordinate, United States primes and their Canadian subsidiaries employ thousands here and buy from hundreds of local suppliers. RTX employs more than 8,500 people across the country, and supports upwards of 2,500 suppliers. Bell Textron Canada employs 1,650

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OPINION

Stepping back from feminism in foreign policy exposes a deeper crisis of commitment at home

A serious foreign policy must still include measurable commitments to women's leadership, safety, economic security, political participation, and bodily autonomy.

Yusra Qadir

Opinion



Canada's decision to stop describing its international engagement as a "feminist foreign policy" landed with a thud—but with little surprise. For those working on the frontlines of gender justice, the past several months have made two truths unavoidable. First, progress toward gender equality in Canada remains fragile, contested, and increasingly shaped by political winds rather than principled commitments. Second, someone needs to advise Prime Minister Mark Carney on the timing of his announcements.

To understand the significance of this shift on the world stage, we must start at home.



Prime Minister Mark Carney. Canada's feminist foreign-policy identity was more than branding—it signalled that gender equality and women's leadership were central to how Canada engaged diplomatically, economically, and developmentally, writes Yusra Qadir. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Canada faces ongoing, urgent gender-justice crises. National data shows one woman or girl is killed every 48 hours by an intimate partner. Indigenous women are up to six times more likely to be victims of homicide compared with non-Indigenous women.

And yet, organizations addressing gender-based violence, economic insecurity, and systemic discrimination have had to fight simply to keep a minister for women and gender equality (WAGE) in cabinet. They then had to fight again—off the side of their desks, while stretched thin due to funding shortfalls—to secure predictable departmental resources. Against that backdrop, Canada's decision to step back from the language—and principles—of a feminist foreign policy feels less like a pivot and more like an inevitability.

But inevitable does not mean inconsequential.

Having worked with Canadian-funded programs across the Global South, I can attest that Canada's feminist foreign-policy identity was more than branding. It signalled that gender equality and women's leadership were central to how Canada engaged diplomatically, economically, and developmentally. It allowed Canada to punch above its weight in multilateral forums, influence international discourse, and align with progressive states championing human rights and inclusive governance.

Backing away from that position without offering a clear, measurable alternative leaves a vacuum. It risks weakening Canada's credibility with global partners and feminist movements that viewed the country as a staunch ally. And it sends a reputation-damaging message,

intentional or not, that gender equality is negotiable or expendable for Canada when political or geopolitical priorities shift.

What is missing in this moment is recognition of a simple truth: gender justice and economic prosperity are inseparable. Evidence shows that when women lead, economies grow. When caregiving is supported, labour markets are stronger, families are healthier, and productivity rises. The care economy alone contributes between 10 per cent and 39 per cent of global GDP yet remains largely undervalued and unsupported. Gender-based violence costs countries billions of dollars annually in lost productivity, health expenditures, and justice-system burdens.

Deprioritizing gender equality—at home or abroad—undermines Canada's long-term economic and social resilience. The broader global context requires reaffirming leadership that values gender equality.

Instead, we are stepping back. And we seem to choose the worst possible moments to communicate these decisions. When the caretaker cabinet was announced without a minister for WAGE, that news broke while Canada's diplomatic delegation was in New York for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, forcing civil society leaders to explain—awkwardly (ashamedly)—why a government claiming to champion women's rights had sidelined its own

gender-equality portfolio. Now, this announcement of "no feminist foreign policy," with an unmistakable "let's talk trade; rights can wait" subtext, has come during the G20 Summit and a couple of days before the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence—leaving Liberal MPs and civil society leaders scrambling to justify or reinterpret what the announcement means.

If Canada no longer intends to call its foreign policy feminist, then it must articulate what it is. A serious foreign policy must still include measurable commitments to women's leadership, safety, economic security, political participation, and bodily autonomy—both domestically and internationally. It must offer a plan for how Canada will engage with women's movements globally, support feminist civil society, and address the realities of women and girls in the least-developed and fragile states.

Canada's voice on the world stage is only as credible as its actions at home. Canada should not step back from gender equality; not because the world is watching, but because this is who we claim to be.

Yusra Qadir is an Erasmus Mundus Fellow and senior gender-equality leader with over 15 years of experience advancing women's rights across the Global South and Canada. A former UNDP staff and consultant with deep expertise in gender justice, governance, and social inclusion, she has represented Canada at the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the High-Level Political Forum. She currently serves as chief programs and advocacy officer at Mothers Matter Canada, and brings both global-policy insight and lived newcomer experience to national debates on feminist policy and public leadership.

The Hill Times

When Canadians and Americans build together, we build stronger

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people, including 232 employees supporting the Royal Canadian Air Force's Griffon Limited Life Extension and in-service support programs, along with several suppliers across the country. General Dynamics Land Systems Canada employs about 1,800 people in London, Ont. L3Harris Wescam's Ontario footprint exceeds 1,200 people. Lockheed Martin Canada lists 1,000 employees across several cities from coast to coast. Boeing's Canadian presence supports more than 14,000 jobs through payroll and suppliers. Even though these companies are owned by U.S. corporations, they are Canadian grown,

rooted in local communities, and managed here.

The broader picture is clear. In 2023, foreign multinationals employed about 2.7 million Canadians, led by U.S.-controlled firms. They dominate professional, scientific, and technical services—the sectors that drive innovation. American-owned subsidiaries that are managed by Canadians hold more than half of all foreign-controlled corporate assets in Canada, and are already among the country's biggest engines for advanced manufacturing and high-value jobs.

North American security is a shared fence. A gap on one side is a gap for both. Our adversaries do not respect borders. Missiles, drones, and cyber threats do not

stop at the 49th parallel. The best way to avoid seams is to procure interoperable systems that are already proven with our closest ally. As Chief of Defence Staff General Jennie Carignan said, "Interoperability is extremely important." That is not outsourcing sovereignty. It is exercising it.

There is an urgency to ensuring that our shared fence is strong. The Arctic is thawing, the electromagnetic spectrum is contested, and cyber probes are constant.

American primes and their subsidiaries operating in Canada are ready to deliver again:

- By using existing Canadian facilities and proven programs to deliver, sustain, and support equipment already in service;

- By relying on mature designs and certifications to shorten schedules without sacrificing safety or value; and

- By leveraging our enduring partnership: investing in Canadian talent, strengthening local supply chains, and deepening the collaboration that already powers our shared industrial base.

None of this diminishes Canadian champions. It strengthens them. Integrated supply chains help Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises scale, place graduates in high-value roles, and spread prosperity beyond Ottawa and Toronto. When Canadian and American firms build together, we share not only technology, but resilience.

For a century, that partnership has kept North America safe. It has built the world's most capable defence industrial base, and ensured our Forces can move, fight, and win together. In moments of tension, whether political or economic, cool heads must prevail. The foundation we have built over generations is strong. Now we need to build on it quickly and confidently so that the women and men in uniform have the interoperable and reliable tools they need. Not in 2040, but in the years that actually matter.

Rick Tachuk is the president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Canada. Representing the views of major U.S. companies invested in Canada, he works closely with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C., and other national business associations as an advocate for the expansion of Canada-U.S. trade and investment.

The Hill Times

OPINION

Canada's renewed pipeline fixation threatens more than the environment

The risks to federalism, Indigenous reconciliation, and our ability to navigate a hostile global trading environment make it clear that this is a profound strategic error.

Aliénor Rougeot

Opinion



Prime Minister Mark Carney has just plunged the country back into an era many of us hoped was behind us: pipeline-obsessed politics masquerading as economic strategy. The move quashes Canada's ability to meet its climate commitments. But it doesn't stop there. It also risks tearing at our national unity, setting back fragile progress on Indigenous reconciliation, and weakening Canada at the very moment we must respond to an

increasingly aggressive trade war with the United States.

On Nov. 27, Carney announced a deal with Alberta to explore a new bitumen pipeline to the northwest coast of British Columbia. In exchange for an increase in Alberta's industrial carbon price with unclear timelines and details, Ottawa has opened the door to a new pipeline, signalled a willingness to relax a 50-year-old tanker moratorium, exempted Alberta from the Clean Electricity Regulations, removed anti-greenwashing rules from the Competition Act, and even committed to exploring further expansion of Trans Mountain. It didn't take long for Liberal MP Steven Guilbeault, a longtime advocate for Canada to do its fair share on climate, to resign from the prime minister's cabinet in protest.

This move is however far from just another fight on climate policy. It is a serious mistake with potentially costly consequences.

Tearing another seam in Canada's fragile federal unity

Carney's deal amounts to federalism *à la carte*, not "co-operative federalism." Tailoring national laws to placate a part of the country is a slippery slope, and one the Liberals themselves confronted last year when

exempting home-heating oil from the carbon price for Atlantic Canada triggered the eventual demise of the policy. Predictably, other provinces are already sending in their own Christmas wish lists.

The precedent is dangerous. Alberta's carveouts to the Clean Electricity Regulations come soon after the province ran an \$8-million taxpayer-funded advertising campaign riddled with misinformation about the very same rules, followed by similar attacks on the oil and gas emissions cap. Ottawa has now broadcast a clear lesson: run misleading ads on the public dime, and you'll get fast-tracked access to the Prime Minister's Office.

More troubling still, the deal pits provinces against one another. It explicitly signals that Ottawa will not obstruct the pipeline, while leaving B.C. to shoulder the burden of saying "no." As I sit in same institution in which the prime minister once studied economics, I am confident Carney knows this pipeline will never be built: the economics of high-cost, high-carbon Canadian crude are deteriorating while the legal uncertainty surrounding the fast-track for major projects remains profound. No rational private investor will gamble on such unstable ground. Rather

than level with Albertans, the federal government is effectively outsourcing the political backlash to B.C. In an astonishingly reckless move, Ottawa is manufacturing interprovincial conflict at a moment when the very idea of Canada is under pressure, from a resurgent Trump in the south to foreign interference from India and beyond.

Scapegoating Indigenous communities

Since the pipeline is unlikely to ever materialize, the most harmful outcome may be the expectations created. Many Albertans will now believe that, were it not for B.C. or Indigenous nations, this pipeline could proceed. The federal government has therefore written Indigenous Peoples directly into the centre of a future political backlash, reinforcing dangerous stereotypes that they are "anti-development," and inviting a rise in racist rhetoric.

Through the memorandum of understanding, the Crown also attempts to evade its constitutional responsibility to uphold Indigenous rights by placing the burden on Alberta alone. Years of building trust with Indigenous rights holders may have already been lost by the fact that, once again, the federal government

jumps on the occasion to bail on its Treaty commitments.

Creating instability in the midst of trade war

The federal government should be delivering on housing or the exorbitant cost of food. Instead, it is wasting time, political capital, and institutional focus on an expensive political theatre piece. Meanwhile, MPs who joined the Liberals during the climate-forward era are now likely questioning their place in caucus, inching us closer to an election in a minority Parliament. Last April, we voted for stability and focus to respond to the U.S.'s aggressive trade agenda. We are getting the exact opposite.

Climate imperatives alone should have been reason enough to reject this MOU. But when combined with the risks to federalism, Indigenous reconciliation, and our ability to navigate a hostile global trading environment, it becomes clear that this is a profound strategic error. One that will cost Carney, and sadly all Canadians, dearly.

Aliénor Rougeot is a Canadian climate advocate currently completing her masters of public policy at Oxford University in the United Kingdom.

The Hill Times

B.C. offers a warning to Ottawa's billion-dollar construction fund

Letting small and independent firms bid on public infrastructure projects free from union-only restrictions levels the playing field, and lets them grow.

Ryan Mitton

Opinion



It's a \$50-billion road paved with good intentions—but watch out for potholes.

The federal government's recent budget sets ambitious

goals to build a more competitive Canada, create certainty, and attract private investment across the country. But before building can even start, the government has tied a hand behind its back by deciding to block small independent businesses from bidding on major projects. It's the exact opposite of competition.

The \$50-billion Build Communities Strong Fund is earmarked to favour "use of unionized labour, and use of Community Employment Benefits agreements." This excludes most firms—especially small, local, and independent contractors—from even bidding on those projects.

The law of supply and demand tells us fewer bidders mean higher project prices, eroding taxpayer value and inflating project costs. British Columbia's own experience offers a cautionary tale for the federal government.

In 2018, the B.C. government created a Crown corporation—

BC Infrastructure Benefits—to enforce union-only access to public infrastructure projects. At the time, many in the business community warned that these "good intentions" would lead to higher costs, more red tape, and the exclusion of smaller local firms.

The result? A procurement framework known as the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA)—a 336-page document requiring workers on certain publicly funded projects to be members of one of 19 designated building trade unions. Even some unions were excluded. Only those special unions selected by the government could participate, a process conducted behind closed doors.

This CBA agreement includes highly specific operational mandates, with work camps requiring a daily dessert table and steak and roast beef each served once per week. It is all-you-can eat, at the taxpayer's expense.

But these rich concessions are minor compared to the main flaw in the B.C. government's CBA scheme. Any contractor wishing to bid or work on the project had to hand their workers over to a government-run hiring hall and "lease" them back under the CBA's complex and expensive terms, including paying into the 19 select unions' dues and pension funds. It is a recipe for inefficiency focused on dollars spent, not what gets built.

The evidence is in the cost of CBA projects themselves, which are massively over budget:

- **Pattullo Bridge Replacement:** promised at \$1.38-billion; currently at \$1.64-billion.
- **Cowichan Hospital:** promised at \$350-million; currently at \$1.45-billion.
- **Broadway Subway Line:** two years behind schedule, \$127-million over budget, and devastating for small businesses along the route.

It may be tempting to assume that all large projects are subject to some complexity, but even a simple two-kilometre widening of the Trans-Canada highway at Illecillewaet saw a 35-per-cent cost increase after the project was subjected to a CBA.

This isn't just bad policy—it's bad economics.

Open bidding fosters real competition and strengthens communities by allowing independent businesses to fully participate in building the infrastructure that keeps our country moving, which delivers better value for taxpayers.

There is still time for the federal government to do the right thing, and ensure everyone can participate in building our communities stronger. Letting small and independent firms bid on public infrastructure projects free from union-only restrictions levels the playing field, and lets them grow.

Ultimately, it is broad based, grassroots growth that builds communities strong—not picking and choosing winners and losers.

Ryan Mitton is the Canadian Federation of Independent Business' director of legislative affairs for British Columbia.

The Hill Times

Liberal border bill returns to the House after Conservative, Bloc enhancements at committee

NDP MP Jenny Kwan says it was ‘astounding and horrific’ to see the Liberals work with the Conservatives to lead Canada toward a more ‘draconian’ immigration system through Bill C-12.

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Committee on Oct. 9 that he vows to “work with law enforcement and all parties to ensure that a lawful access regime that is in line with Charter principles will be passed by this House” in the future.

A spokesperson for Anandasangaree told *The Hill Times* that the government intends to amend and pass C-2 at a later date, rather than introduce another bill.

What Bill C-12 retains includes provisions that give the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) increased power to search facilities that store goods destined for export, and that make it easier for the health minister to ban chemicals used to make synthetic drugs. It would also authorize the Coast Guard to do security and intelligence work, includes new money-laundering penalties, and gives authorities more power to collect and share information about sex offenders.

It would also give the government significant new powers to crack down on asylum seekers, and block or cancel visa applications. Those powers, first proposed in C-2, also attracted plenty of criticism outside Parliament, but have been included in the new bill essentially unaltered.

On Nov. 24, a coalition of civil society and immigration advocates held a press conference on Parliament Hill to “denounce” Bill C-12, and to demand its withdrawal.

“Bill C-12 proposes changes to nine pieces of legislation, is 70 pages long, and yet has only been given three weeks of study,” said Karen Cocq, a spokesperson for the Migrant Rights Network, adding that “no migrants who would be impacted by C-12, who could have their permits cancelled or their refugee protection denied, have spoken to the committee.”

The coalition also raised concerns with C-12’s provisions to allow the sharing of immigration information with foreign governments, including the



After successfully proposing nearly 30 amendments to strengthen and enhance Bill C-12, Conservative Immigration critic Michelle Rempel Garner says the Liberals still need to go further to meaningfully reform Canada’s immigration system. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Karen Cocq, centre, a spokesperson with the Migrant Rights Network, calls for the withdrawal of Bill C-12 alongside the Canadian Drug Policy Coalition’s Nick Boyce, left, and Gauri Sreenivasan, co-executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees on Nov. 24. *Screenshot courtesy of CPAC*

United States and “potentially authoritarian states from which those migrants are fleeing,” and the “further criminalization and militarization of Canada’s border” and its approach to the flow of illegal drugs across the border. Civil liberties groups whose primary concerns remain in the newly pared-down Bill C-2 have also reaffirmed their opposition to Bill C-12.

Despite the marathon length of the Public Safety Committee’s Nov. 25 meeting—beginning at its scheduled time of 11 a.m. and wrapping up at midnight—the actual bulk of the clause-by-clause examination was dispensed with quickly and mostly collaboratively.

While much of the committee’s time was consumed by hour-long digressions by Conservative members to present unrelated motions or quibbles over speaking order, as well as a 90-minute recess for Question Period, those delays were intended—at times explicitly—to allow Conservative immigration critic Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose

langes–Huntingdon, Que.), who was attempting to dispense with her party’s sole amendment—adding language to ensure that searches of dwellings require a warrant. Once agreement on the Bloc amendment was secured, the committee voted to recess for another two hours. However, over the previous 90 minutes, the committee breezed through the rest of the bill’s 138 clauses, the majority of which had no proposed amendments.

Once the committee returned, Rempel Garner was able to present the remainder of the Conservatives’ amendments, the majority of which were adopted by the committee, with some exceptions, in many cases because they were deemed inadmissible for dealing with legislative changes outside the scope of the bill.

Despite some of her amendments being voted down, including one to prevent people coming from the European Union or G7 nations from making asylum claims in Canada, Rempel Garner congratulated her colleagues at the end of the meeting.

“I think we did something that resembled work tonight, colleagues,” Rempel Garner said, just before midnight as the committee wrapped.

Rempel Garner did not directly respond to questions from *The Hill Times* about whether the bill as amended is now sufficiently strong for her party to vote in favour of it. In a Nov. 28 statement, she said “the committee took meaningful steps” toward that end.

“Conservatives are calling on the Liberals to listen to Canadians and implement the changes needed to make Canada’s immigration system fair and efficient, while serving citizens and newcomers alike,” Rempel Garner’s statement reads. “The time for meaningful reform is long overdue.”

In response to a request for comment, the Bloc said it supports the bill, but had wanted to see the original version strengthened, and that the “irritants” it had contained “have been eliminated” in the amended version.

Following her unsuccessful attempt to amend the legislation the night before, Kwan condemned the other three parties for “working hand in hand” to copy “[U.S. President Donald] Trump-style policies,” which she described as “dangerous, and fundamentally un-Canadian.”

Kwan said the NDP’s amendments had been intended to “minimize the harm Bill C-12 will inflict.” She added that she had hoped the Liberals would relent in response to the calls from immigration and civil liberties groups, and support the NDP’s

changes, particularly to the provisions on the one-year time limit for refugees to make asylum claims, or the powers to cancel or stop accepting applications from new immigrants when the government decides it’s in the “public interest.”

Immigration Minister Lena Diab (Halifax West, N.S.) and department officials have said “public interest” is kept intentionally vague in the legislation to give the government leeway to address a range of future situations, such as pandemics or espionage threats.

The Liberals’ sole amendment successfully clarified that language to define the powers in cases of fraud, threats to public health, safety, or national security, or to correct an administrative error. Rempel Garner also successfully moved an amendment requiring that, should the government use those powers, the immigration minister present a report in Parliament to explain why.

In an interview with *The Hill Times* following the committee meeting, Cocq condemned what she viewed as “gamesmanship” by the Conservatives to delay the committee’s work until Rempel Garner could appear, as well as a “problematic and truncated” three-week study of the bill.

“The whole process has been flawed, but the fact that the Conservatives were so willing to play games yesterday speaks to the real impetus behind this bill to begin with,” Cocq said on Nov. 26.

Cocq said there is “no fix” to the level of racism embedded in the bill, nor strong enough safeguards to the discretionary powers the legislation would give the federal government, noting that the Liberals had revealed their hand with which measures they chose to fast-track, and which they kept in Bill C-2.

“I think it says a lot about [the Liberals] that they assume a bill that targets the rights, freedoms, and safety of migrants would be an easier sell,” Cocq said.

Kwan said the NDP shares the coalition’s view of the legislation, and “stands behind them 100 per cent ... in preserving and protecting Canada’s reputation and the fundamental human rights of refugees.”

However, beyond the Liberals’ singular adjustment, Kwan said the NDP’s suggested changes were “expeditiously rejected at every single turn,” in many cases without debate or even a vote.

The committee also dismissed the single amendment from Green Party Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich–Gulf Islands, B.C.) without debate.

Kwan said she isn’t surprised that the Conservatives seem happy to support the bill as an opportunity to propose more “draconian” immigration measures. However, she said she is surprised the Liberals proposed the legislation in the first place.

“It is absolutely horrific and astounding the direction the Liberals are taking this. They’ve brought in measures that even a Conservative government would not dare have brought forward,” Kwan said.

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The Hill Times

NEWS

Global Affairs misses benchmark after report shows only 58 per cent of properties abroad in 'good' or 'fair' condition



Global Affairs Canada, headquartered in Ottawa's Pearson Building, has missions in Japan, Mexico, and Senegal, among others, that are rated in 'critical' condition. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand has to oversee missions abroad that are in declining condition with a shrinking budget. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



A 2024 memo to foreign affairs deputy minister David Morrison raised concerns over the financial crunch that GAC's foreign properties were under. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Former diplomat David McKinnon says the state of the foreign ministry's properties abroad is a long-standing concern, but that similar pressures go far beyond Global Affairs.

Continued from page 1

in "good" and "fair" condition, just shy of its 85 per cent target. The department also referenced the switch to an FCI model as the reason for falling short that year. It hit its 85-per-cent target in 2022-23.

In 2024-25, GAC also missed a target to spend two per cent of the replacement value of its real property portfolio on "repairs, maintenance, and recapitalization." It spent 1.6 per cent.

The department cited "insufficient resources to complete required maintenance activities" as the rationale for missing its target.

GAC didn't directly respond to questions regarding what percentage of its properties abroad are in "good," "fair," "poor," or "critical" condition.

A departmental spokesperson referred *The Hill Times* to the Treasury Board Secretariat's Directory of Federal Real Property.

That directory lists GAC as having 2,435 properties abroad, but only 541 properties are listed

with their condition, including those whose condition is listed as "unknown."

It lists 32 GAC foreign properties in "critical" condition, including its embassies in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Ivory Coast, Japan, Mexico, and Senegal, as well as its high commissions in Guyana and Zimbabwe, and its Washington, D.C., chancery.

The directory lists 51 properties in "poor" condition, 66 properties as "fair," 239 as "good" condition, and 153 in "unknown" condition.

"Global Affairs Canada ... places a high priority on the condition, management, and overall stewardship of its real property assets. Ensuring that these assets remain safe, functional, and aligned with operational needs is essential to supporting program delivery abroad and long-term planning," said GAC spokesperson Thida Ith in a statement.

"GAC regularly assesses the condition of its assets and prioritizes investments to maintain safety, security, and operational integrity. Typical investments include repairs and maintenance to essential safety, security, and building-code systems, as well as electrical, plumbing, fire suppression, and water systems," Ith added.

Increased complaints about state of GAC foreign properties: PAFSO

Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers president Pamela Isfeld said there have been increasing complaints over the last few years about the state of GAC's properties abroad.

"We have heard of the last five [to] six years a lot more complaints about the overall standards of maintenance in missions, in offices, and also in staff quarters," she said.

She said that she is most concerned about the safety and security of Canadian diplomats who go abroad.

"People need to be safe where they're working and living abroad—or as safe as possible," Isfeld said. "People have the right to expect that the employer is going to do everything within its power to make sure that where they are living and working is safe."

She said that is not just the physical security of the perimeter of the building, but also the upkeep that can threaten security.

"I'm concerned when I see these things [outlined in the report that] if they are investing to ensure people are safe when they are serving their country abroad," she said.

At the same time, GAC—like all governmental departments—is facing spending cuts. The recent budget outlined a cut of \$560-million in 2026-27 that will climb to \$747-million in 2027-28, \$1.1-billion in 2028-29, and \$1.1-billion in 2029-30.

The Nov. 4 budget mapped out a pathway for savings that included reducing mission expenditures including "consolidating embassies with multiple properties into fewer buildings, acquiring Crown-owned properties in certain cases, and co-locating some offices with allies where appropriate."

A March 2024 memo to foreign affairs deputy minister David Morrison sounded the alarm that "current financial pressure and the increasing investments needed

to maintain and/or recapitalize our buildings may negatively impact the sustainability of our mission network and impact duty-of-care obligations," as reported by *The Hill Times* last year.

Those cuts have been forecast even as the Liberal campaign platform had pledged to put more Canadian diplomats abroad.

Isfeld said that PAFSO will be looking for assurances that GAC can properly care for any increase in diplomats abroad.

Nothing new about GAC's property shortcomings: former diplomat

Former diplomat David McKinnon said concern over the state of the foreign ministry's properties abroad is not new, and not one that is just affecting GAC, citing the ongoing saga with the deteriorating state of 24 Sussex Drive in Ottawa.

"This has long been an issue, not only in Global Affairs, but more broadly for the Government of Canada about the maintenance of buildings and the quality of them," he said.

During his career in the foreign service, McKinnon was director general of the foreign ministry's physical resources bureau.

"It's just chronic underinvestment in repair and maintenance in government organizations," he said. "Ultimately, the bills do come due, and it's a lot more expensive in the long run to rebuild a place or build a new chancery than repair the one you have, but that doesn't fit within the short-term calculations about budgets."

He said issues with properties can range from mould, quality

of lighting, [and] ventilation," adding that security issues get prioritized.

McKinnon said there has been an issue with GAC expanding its network without having the funding to support it.

In recent years, Canada has announced the opening of new missions in Europe, Africa, and the Indo-Pacific.

Canadians are "very good at counting our money, but not so much at investing and making money," McKinnon said, adding that the importance of physical properties in diplomacy isn't properly understood.

"The kind of advocacy and relationship building that you can do in a private home versus a restaurant is completely different," he said, citing the department's tight wallet due to negative attention to spending on properties abroad by opposition parties or the media.

A 2024 purchase of a new residence for Canada's consul general in New York became a political football after it was reported that a new property would cost \$9-million.

McKinnon said ambassadors may forgo necessary upgrades or renovations because they don't want negative publicity.

But he said the more general problem is that repair budgets are vulnerable because they are not long term and are targeted when other pressures come up.

"It's a short-term, relatively painless thing to squeeze. Whereas the long-term pain is when we have serious damage in a mission that we need to rebuild it rather than just maintain it," he said.

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Party Central



By Stuart Benson

A double shot of Poilievre at the 2025 Press Gallery Dinner

After skipping the annual Parliamentary Press Gallery Dinner for the past three years, Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre** made up for at least one of those absences by attending twice last weekend alongside hundreds of parliamentarians, diplomats, and assorted politicians for a night of good food, good humour, and possibly too much alcohol as they partied into the early hours of Sunday morning.

The annual Press Gallery Dinner returned to the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on Nov. 29, and, for the first time in over a decade, all five party leaders in the House of Commons were in attendance. And while this year's was the first for Prime Minister **Mark Carney** since becoming his party's leader, it was also Poilievre's first since becoming leader. Yet, as guests filed into SJAM's main hall and upstairs into the second-floor pre-dinner reception, the chances of an appearance from the Conservative leader were dismissed by most guests as less likely than one from the Sasquatch.

Arriving slightly after 5:30 p.m., alongside the rest of *The Hill Times* crew and their plus ones, **Party Central's** Spidey senses began tingling immediately after observing a noticeably large contingent of Conservatives in attendance, including MPs **Michael Barrett**, **Stephanie Kusie**, and **Michelle Rempel Garner**, OLO staffers like **Katy Merrifield**, media relations manager **Sam Lilly**—as well as his predecessor, **Sebastian Skamski**—and the party's new campaign manager, **Steve Outhouse**.

There were also plenty of other Tories in attendance, including former prime minister **Joe Clark**, former Progressive Conservative leader **Jean Charest**, former transport minister **Lisa Raitt**, and Rubicon Strategy's **Kory Teneycke**, who was spotted wearing a more culturally appropriate silver dinner jacket, having what seemed like a relatively civil chat with MP **Jamil Jivani** much later in the evening.

Speaking of tension, **Party Central** also felt the attention of nearly the entire party divert the moment now-former minister **Steven Guilbeault** walked in and right up to Natural Resources Minister **Tim Hodgson**. However, their chat was equally amicable and anticlimactic.

While Carney also wouldn't arrive until later, **Party Central** spotted plenty of his cabinet and caucus. There were several Bloc Québécois and New Democrat parliamentarians, and all three of the NDP's leadership frontrunners—MP **Heather McPherson**, **Rob Ashton**, and **Avi Lewis**—fresh from last week's French-ish debate. **Party Central** also spotted Supreme Court Chief Justice **Richard Wagner**, Communications Security Establishment chief **Caroline Xavier**, CSIS director **Daniel Rogers**, Parliamentary Librarian **Christine Ivory**, Senate Clerk **Shaila Anwar**, Northwest Territories Premier **R.J. Simpson**, now-former United Nations ambassador **Bob Rae**, British High Commissioner **Robert Tinline** and his predecessor **Susannah Goshko**, Irish Ambassador **John Concannon**, Scotland's Government Office head **John Devine**, and Canada's Ambassador to the United States **Kristen Hillman**. For one reason or another, however, the U.S.

Ambassador to Canada **Pete Hoekstra** was not in attendance.

By sometime around 7 p.m., the majority of the guests had found their way to the ballroom.

Special shout out to the dry-witted *Le Journal de Québec's* **Guillaume St-Pierre** for shouldering emcee duties solo this year—and that's not just this reporter returning the shout-out favour.

The Charles Lynch Award, recognizing outstanding coverage of national affairs, was presented to *Le Devoir's* **Hélène Buzzetti** by *La Presse's* **Joël-Denis Bellavance** and veteran newsmen **Don Newman**. Shared Bylines, the BIPOC-focused scholarship and mentorship program, was this year's worthy recipient of the giant novelty cheque for \$5,000, raised from the night's proceeds, which will help to create two new scholarships in hopes of fostering the next **Mark Ramzy** or **Alessia Passfiume**.

Carney's first PPG roast kept things slightly safer than the leaders who followed, but the self-deprecating humour and jabs fell into place alongside the somewhat predictable nature of his academic verbosity.

"Campaign in poetry, govern in prose, speak in econometrics," Carney joked before informing the audience his next punchline would have "three points."

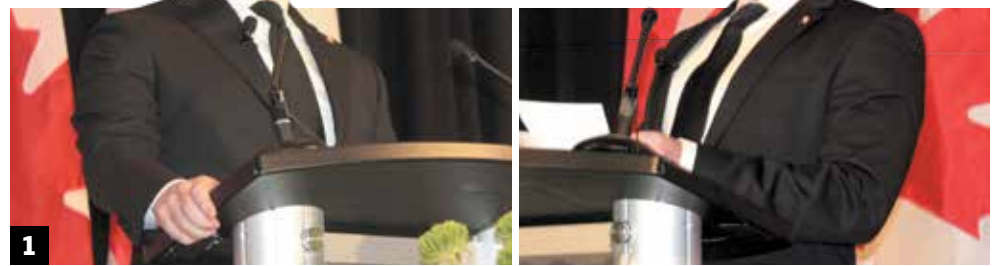
While **Party Central** had been tipped off about a rumoured "special guest," even this hopeful reporter fell for the bait when the Conservative leader's arrival was announced, only for *This Hour's* 22 Minutes' **Chris Wilson** to walk on stage in full Poilievre-face. Unfortunately, while Wilson's impression is always entertaining, **Party Central** had already returned to the table when the switch happened, and the "real" Poilievre stood up on stage and stared down the "Temu version" of himself.

Party Central also doesn't have space to go into detail for any of the other leaders' speeches. However, Bloc Leader **Yves-François Blanchet** continued his tradition of delivering nearly his entire speech *en français*, except for a single line in English about how, ironically, U.K. envoy Tinline is one of the few anglophones in his good books. NDP interim leader **Don Davies** channelled the spirits of **Don Rickles** and **Rodney Dangerfield** for, by overwhelming consensus, the funniest roast the dinner has seen in years. The madman even got away with a pronoun joke and a shot at Quebec's secularism.

Unfortunately for Green Party Leader **Elizabeth May**, who took to the stage at nearly 11 p.m., her slow-burning sense of humour struggled to hold the attention of the crowd, with many tables beginning to get up and mingle as she spoke.

Truth be told, dear reader, at this point in the night, **Party Central's** journalistic focus and note-taking started becoming increasingly spotty, and for everyone's benefit, called a lid, and joined the growing conga line on the dance floor. What happens on the SJAM dance floor mostly stays there.

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The Hill Times photographs by Stuart Benson

1. Seeing double: Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, left, and *This Hour's* 22 Minutes' Chris 'Temu Poilievre' Wilson, both made their first live appearances at the Press Gallery Dinner this year. **2.** Women and Gender Equality Minister Rechie Valdez, left, Northwest Territories Premier R.J. Simpson, up, and CPAC's Michael Serapio. **3.** Liberal staffers Alisson Levesque, left, Hermine Landry, and Laurence Gagnon. **4.** *Toronto Star's* Mark Ramzy, left, NDP MP Heather McPherson, The Canadian Press' Kyle Duggan, and Liberal MP Lisa Hepfner. **5.** CBC's Karina Roman, left, British High Commissioner Rob Tinline, centre, and J.P. Tasker. **6.** House Speaker Francis Scarpaleggia, left, lawyer and author Maureen McTeer, CTV's Vassy Kapelos, and former Progressive Conservative prime minister Joe Clark. **7.** Environment Minister Julie Dabrusin, left, and CPAC CEO Christa Dickenson. **8.** *The Toronto Star's* Althia Raj, left, and Rubicon Strategy's Kory Teneycke. **9.** *Bloomberg's* Nojoud Al Mallees, left, Liberal MP Rachel Bendayan, *The Globe and Mail's* Stephanie Levitz, Tasker, Liberal MP Emma Harrison, CTV's Rachel Hanes, Radio-Canada's Valérie Gamache, Montreal Mayor Soraya Martinez Ferrada, Prime Minister Mark Carney, and PPG president and Canadian Press deputy bureau chief Mia Rabson. **10.** Don Newman presents *Le Devoir's* Hélène Buzzetti with the 2025 Charles Lynch Award. **11.** Clockwise from centre left: the CBC's Catherine Tunney; CSE's Caroline Xavier; CBC's Kate McKenna; Brandon Rowe, chief of staff to the Canada-U.S. trade minister; Radio-Canada's Daniel Leblanc; Simon Lafortune, press secretary to the public safety minister; Global News' Mackenzie Gray; and Audrey Champoux, PMO press secretary. **12.** *The Hill Times'* Christina Leadlay, left, and Marlo Glass, Compass Rose Group's Bea Vongdouangchanh, *HT's* Riddhi Kachhela, NDP MP Gord Johns, *HT's* Eleanor Wand, Senate Clerk Shaila Anwar, and Parliamentary Librarian Christine Ivory.

Hill Climbers

By Laura Ryckewaert



Jobs and Families Minister Hajdu down a chief of staff

Plus, AI and Digital Innovation Minister Evan Solomon recently bade farewell to one of his directors of policy, among other changes.

Jobs and Families Minister **Patty Hajdu**, who is also responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor), is down a chief of staff, with **Chris Evelyn**'s departure from the role made official at the end of October.

Chelsea Kusnick, who had been in place as director of parliamentary affairs to the minister, is now acting chief of staff.

Evelyn had been tapped to run Hajdu's office this past May, marking his fourth chief of staff position. He'd most recently run the office of then-families, children, and social development minister **Jenna Suds** through the entirety of Suds' time in the role between 2023 and 2025, and before then had been chief of staff to then-women and gender equality ministers **Marci Ien** and **Maryam Monsef**.

It was Monsef who first promoted Evelyn to the chief of staff chair in 2020 as then-women and gender equality and rural economic development minister. Evelyn had previously been Monsef's director of operations, and over his years on the Hill—which date back to December 2015—he's also been a policy adviser to then-democratic institutions minister **Karina Gould**.

Prior to joining Hajdu's office last spring, Kusnick was parliamentary affairs director to then-employment, workforce development, and seniors minister **Steven MacKinnon**. She's also been a parliamentary affairs adviser to MacKinnon as then-labour and seniors minister, communications director to then-Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) minister **Filomena Tassi**, and issues manager to then-public services and procurement minister **Anita Anand**, among other past jobs.

Evelyn is one of six recent staff exits from Hajdu's office. The others are: digital communications adviser **Kheyi Isichei**, communications adviser **Samantha Jerome**, issues manager **Joseph Pagani**, parliamentary affairs adviser and assistant to the parliamentary secretary **Osman Omer**, and office manager **Salam Samara**.

Isichei had previously worked under Evelyn in Suds' families office, where Isichei had similarly filled the role of digital communications adviser since January 2024. Prior to that job, Isichei worked for Rogers Sports and Media in Montreal. **Hill Climbers** understands he is now doing the same for Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation Minister **Evan Solomon**—more on that team shortly.

Prior to joining Hajdu's office, Jerome had been working on the employment file since first landing on the Hill in November 2024, starting as a digital communications adviser to then-employment minister **Ginette Petitpas Taylor**.

Originally from New Zealand, Pagani had likewise been working for Liberal ministers since 2024, beginning as an issues manager to then-labour and seniors minister **Seamus O'Regan**, and later doing the same for MacKinnon as both then-labour and seniors minister, and later as then-employment minister.

Omer is a past Quebec regional adviser and assistant to the parliamentary secretary to then-citizens' services minister **Terry Beech**, and has also been an operations assistant to Anand as then-Treasury Board president.

Samara, meanwhile, is a past executive assistant to then-health minister **Mark Holland**, and a former aide to then-Liberal MP **Omar Alghabra**. Like Isichei, she, too, has since joined Solomon's office, in her case as a regional affairs adviser for Ontario.

With Kusnick now filling in as acting chief of staff, **Sarah El-Tohamy** has been hired to Hajdu's office as director of parliamentary affairs.

El-Tohamy last appeared in these pages as senior issues and parliamentary affairs adviser to then-heritage minister **Pascale St-Onge**, whose office El-Tohamy exited in August 2024. El-Tohamy is also a former deputy director of parliamentary affairs to then-public services minister **Helena Jaczek**, legislative and policy adviser to then-Crown-Indigenous relations minister **Marc Miller**, Ontario regional adviser and issues management assistant to then-fisheries and oceans minister **Bernadette Jordan**, and a past assistant to Liberal MP **Terry Duguid**.

Two staff have taken on new titles in Hajdu's office: director of operations **Karam Chima**, who's been promoted to the added role of deputy chief of staff; and policy adviser **Nima Mehrtash**, who has become an adviser for parliamentary affairs.

Chima previously oversaw operations for Suds as then-families minister, and worked as a special assistant for parliamentary affairs in Ien's office as then-women and gender equality minister.

She's also a former assistant to Suds as an MP, and as an Ottawa city councillor. Mehrtash is a former communications adviser and executive assistant to Beech as then-citizens' services minister, and previously worked part time as a communications aide with the office of the Senate Speaker **Raymonde Gagné**.

Along with these changes, Hajdu has also added to three aides to her team since **Hill Climbers**' last update: issues manager **Amy Falkner**, senior policy adviser **Alana Powell**, and FedNor adviser **Nimra Noman**.

Falkner recently graduated from The London School of Economics and Political Science with a master's degree in philosophy and public policy. An experienced ski instructor, her CV includes a co-op place-

ment as an advocacy campaign support co-ordinator with Global Affairs Canada during Falkner's time studying for a bachelor's degree in international relations and philosophy at the University of British Columbia, as well as a 2021 internship with the United States Consulate General office in Vancouver, among other things.

Powell is new to the Hill. A registered early childhood educator, she was most recently executive director of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, and a member of the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care. Powell has also previously taught at George Brown College as a contract lecturer.

Noman was most recently an occasional teacher with the Peel District School Board, but has previously worked on the Hill, including as a special assistant for policy to Alghabra as then-transport minister, and as a casework manager in

Alghabra's office as then-MP for Mississauga Centre, Ont. She also spent close to half of 2019 as a special assistant for operations to Hajdu as then-employment minister, and interned in then-innovation minister **Navdeep Bains**' office over the summer of 2018.

With these changes, Hajdu's office now stands at 26 staff in all. Aside from those already mentioned, the team currently includes: director of policy **Sebastian Clarke**; deputy director jobs policy **Crystina Dundas**; deputy director of families policy **Ellen Galupo**; senior policy advisers **Tyler Freeman**, **Juan David Gonzalez Camacho**, and **Miles Wu**; policy advisers **Amen Ben Ahmouda**, **Tenzin Chogkyi**, and **Reem Al-Ameri**; deputy director of operations and Atlantic regional adviser **Andrew Welsh**; senior Ontario regional adviser **Wendy Wu**; senior West and North regional adviser **Simaloi Sikar**; Quebec regional adviser **Michael Danzer**; special assistant for operations **Tréden Roseau**; director of communications **Aïssa Diop**; senior communications adviser and press secretary **Jennifer Kozelj**; communications adviser **Allysa Pierre-Louis**; assistant to the parliamentary secretary **Nanki Singh**; and execu-

tive assistant to the chief of staff **Fabrice Ahadi**.

Staff changes for AI Minister Solomon

Solomon, who's currently also the minister responsible for FedDev Ontario, bade farewell to director **Melissa George** at the end of October.

George had been director of policy for Solomon's economic development agency file since June. A former human resources adviser in then-prime minister **Justin Trudeau**'s office between 2020 and 2022, George went on to tackle policy for the national defence minister, work as a senior consultant with Navigator, and—prior to working for Solomon—had most recently been director of labour relations for then-Treasury Board presidents **Anand** and **Petitpas Taylor**.

Hill Climbers understands there are currently no plans to directly fill George's old role. **Michael Paramathanas** is director of policy to Solomon for the AI and digital innovation file.

Also having left Solomon's team since **Hill Climbers**' last check-in is senior digital communications adviser **Camelia Celestino**, who exited for a job as a communications and digital assistant in Prime Minister **Mark Carney**'s office.

On the flip side, three staff have joined Solomon's team. Along with Isichei and Samara, **Simon Wood** has been hired as an issues management and parliamentary affairs adviser to the minister.

Wood spent the last two years as an assistant to Ontario Liberal MP **Marcus Powlowski**, and joined Solomon's team last month.

For her part, it's worth noting that Samara is tasked with weighing in on regional affairs related to all of Solomon's files—including FedDev Ontario—in the province outside of the Greater Toronto Area.

Led by chief of staff **Anson Duran**, Solomon's office now has 15 staff in all, including: director of operations **Meron Cheway**; Prairies, West, and North regional adviser **Benjamin Ebadi**; Quebec adviser **Klara Mancini-Hupel**; senior policy adviser **Anushka Kurian**; policy and parliamentary affairs adviser **Giuliana Endrizzi**; senior special assistants for operations and stakeholder relations for FedDev Ontario **Hamid Mohamed** and **Tanveer Tur**; director of communications **Peter Wall**; press secretary and issues adviser **Sofia Ouslis**; and executive assistant **Linda Hooper**.

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The Hill Times



Chris Evelyn is no longer chief of staff to Minister Hajdu. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Osman Omer is no longer working for Minister Hajdu. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Chelsea Kusnick is now acting chief of staff to Minister Hajdu. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Sarah El-Tohamy is now director of parliamentary affairs to Minister Hajdu. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Simon Wood is an issues and parliamentary adviser to Minister Solomon. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Amy Falkner is now an issues manager to Minister Hajdu. 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 by Wednesday at noon before the Monday paper or by Friday at noon for the Wednesday paper.

Mark to Mark: PM Carney sits down for breakfast chat with Ottawa Mayor Sutcliffe on Dec. 8



Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, will take part in a fireside chat with Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe as part of the Mayor's Breakfast on Dec. 8. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

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.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3

House Schedule—The House of Commons will sit 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.

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.

THURSDAY, DEC. 4

IPAC Holiday Reception—The Institute of Public Administration of Canada invites members and friends to celebrate the season. Guest speakers include Ted Gallivan, interim deputy national security and intelligence advisor to the prime minister; and Transport deputy minister Arun Thangaraj. Thursday, Dec. 4, at 5:30 p.m., at 150 Elgin St., Suite 1800, Ottawa. Register: zeffy.com/en-CA/ticketing/annual-holiday-reception.

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.

FRIDAY, DEC. 5

Press Gallery Mugging Lunch—Members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery are invited to a Mugging Lunch to honour former members. Members are encouraged to bring a donation of non-perishable food items for the Press Gallery Food Basket. Friday, Dec. 5, at 12:30 p.m. ET in Room 100, Sir John A. Macdonald Building, Ottawa. Contact: Stephanie.Gagne@parl.gc.ca.

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.

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: business.ottawabot.ca.

Workshop: 'Strategic and Operational Role of Autonomous Systems'—The Conference of Defence Associations Institute hosts an exclusive Chatham House workshop on "The Strategic and Operational Role of Autonomous Systems." Experts from government, industry, and academia will examine how autonomous systems can be adopted by the Armed Forces and integrated into Canadian operations. Monday, Dec. 8, at 8:45 a.m. ET at 150 Elgin St., Suite 1800, Ottawa. Register: cdainstitute.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.

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 Metropoli-

tan Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr., Ottawa. Details: thepearsoncentre.ca.

TUESDAY, DEC. 9

Minister Joly to Deliver Remarks—Industry Minister Mélanie Joly will deliver remarks in French and English on "Strengthening industrial capacity in a changing world," a breakfast event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Tuesday, Dec. 9, at 7:45 a.m. ET in Montreal at a location to be confirmed. Register: corim.qc.ca.

'Reflections on 2025 G20 Summit'—The Canadian International Council's National Capital Branch hosts "Global Priorities, Local Perspectives: Reflections on 2025 G20 Summit in South Africa," featuring South African High Commissioner Rieaz Shaik, and John Kirtton, director and founder of the G7 Research Group and the G20 Research Group at the University of Toronto. Tuesday, Dec. 9, at 11 a.m. ET at Richcraft Hall 5306, NPSIA, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr. Details: thecic.org.

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.

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.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 10

Equal Voice Gala 2025—Equal Voice hosts its annual fundraising gala, bringing together leaders from across political, business, and community sectors to support Equal Voice's mission of advancing gender parity and inclusion in political representation.

Wednesday, Dec. 10, at 6 p.m. ET in Canada Hall, Rogers Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Contact: justine@equalvoice.ca.

THURSDAY, DEC. 11

Parl Sec Leitão to Take Part in Panel—Parliamentary Secretary for Industry Carlos Leitão will take part in a French panel discussion on "Globalization under pressure: how can we prosper in 2026 in an unstable world?" hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Thursday, Dec. 11, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Fairmont Le Reine-Elizabeth, 900 Blvd René-Levesque W., Montréal. Register: corim.qc.ca.

Webinar: 'Trump's Middle East Peace Plan'—The Macdonald-Laurier Institute hosts a webinar, "Trump's Peace Plan: Assessing the Future of Canada-U.S. Relations in the Middle East" featuring Dr. Michael Doran, senior fellow and director, Center for Peace and Security in the Middle East at the Hudson Institute; Dr. Ronen Hoffman, former Israeli ambassador to Canada; and Dr. Casey Babb, director of MLI's Promised Land Program. Thursday, Dec. 11, at 1 p.m. ET happening online. Register via Eventbrite.

'Trump and the Revenge of Geopolitics'—Canada 2020 hosts a discussion on "Trump and the Revenge of Geopolitics" featuring Edward Luce, U.S. national editor and columnist at *The Financial Times*. Thursday, Dec. 11, at 4 p.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa. Details: canada2020.ca.

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.

FRIDAY, DEC. 12

Minister Anand to Deliver Remarks—Foreign Minister Anita Anand will deliver remarks on "Charting Canada's Path on the Global Stage" hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Friday, Dec. 12, at 11:45 a.m. ET in Toronto. RSVP for location details. Register: canadianclub.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.

TUESDAY, DEC. 16

Minister Chartrand to Deliver Remarks—Minister of Northern and Arctic Affairs Rebecca Chartrand will deliver remarks at a breakfast event hosted by the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 7:30 a.m. CT at the RBC Convention Centre, 375 York Ave., Winnipeg. Register: business.mbchamber.mb.ca.

Bank of Canada Governor to Deliver Remarks—Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem will deliver remarks mainly in French on "Insights on the Canadian Economy," hosted by the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal. Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Details: ccmm.ca.

Panel: 'ASEAN-Canada Relations in a Disrupted World'—The Canadian International Council's National Capital Branch hosts a panel, "Finding Our Footing: ASEAN-Canada Relations in a Disrupted World," featuring Malaysia's High Commissioner to Canada Dr. Shazlina Z. Abidin, Indonesia's Ambassador to Canada Muhsin Syihab, and the Philippines' Ambassador to Canada Victor V. Chan-Gonzaga. Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 5:15 p.m. ET at 150 Elgin St., Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

SATURDAY, DEC. 20

Liberal MP Chang to Take Part in Fundraiser—Liberal MP Wade Chang will take part in a fundraising dinner hosted by the Burnaby Central Federal Liberal Association. Saturday, Dec. 20, at 6:30 p.m. PT at Five Sails Restaurant, 999 Canada Pl., Vancouver. Details: liberal.ca.

THURSDAY, JAN. 29—SATURDAY, JAN. 31, 2026

Conservative National Convention—The Conservative Party of Canada will hold its the National Convention. Thursday, Jan. 29, to Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at the Telus Convention Centre, Calgary.

FRIDAY, JAN. 30, 2026

Minister Anand to Deliver Remarks—Rescheduled from November, Foreign Minister Anita Anand will deliver bilingual remarks on "Canada's economic diplomacy and strategic autonomy in a multipolar world," hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Friday, Jan. 30, 2026, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, 1255 Jeanne-Mance St., Montreal. Details: corim.qc.ca.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 4, 2026

Gala Dinner to Mark 20 Years Since Harper's First Election—Former prime minister Stephen Harper is celebrating the cabinet, caucus, staff and officials who served Canada's Conservative government from 2006-2015 with a gala dinner. Wednesday, Feb. 4, in Ottawa at a downtown location to be confirmed. Details: harperx20.ca.

THURSDAY, FEB. 5, 2026

Bank of Canada Governor to Deliver Remarks—Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem will deliver remarks on "Forces Reshaping Canada's Economy in 2026," hosted by the Empire Club of Canada. Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Details: empireclubofcanada.com.

MONDAY, FEB. 9, 2026

An Evening with PS Blois and Kim McConnell—The Canadian Agri-Food Automation and Intelligence Network, and the Government of Canada host "In a World of Tariffs, What Does the Future Hold for Canadian Agri-Food?" a discussion featuring Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister Kody Blois, and Kim McConnell, founder and former chief executive officer of AdFarm, on the technology and policies needed to keep Canada atop the global ag ecosystem. Reception to follow. Monday, Feb. 9, 2026, at 6 p.m. ET at the Rogers Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Register: bit.ly/CAAINFireside.

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