100 Best Books 2025

▶PAGES 13-44

Exclusive news: inside

Exclusive opinion: inside

THE HILL TIMES

THIRTY-SIXTH YEAR, NO. 2254 | CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER | MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2025 $5.00

NEWS

Ottawa-Alberta energy deal could open door for other provinces to pursue weakened climate policies, say environmental experts: 'this is just a massive step back'

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT & RIDDHI KACHHELA

Ottawa's recent landmark energy agreement with Alberta that creates a path forward for a possible bitumen pipeline is "troubling," according to experts and advocates from the environmental sector who say the door is now open for other provinces to seek similar deals to suspend federal climate policies, which could push Canada even further from its climate targets.

"When [provincial premiers] look at this [memorandum of understanding], they're like, 'Oh, okay, so, that's how it works. We all get to have an MOU with the federal government now, and we'll sort of pick and choose what we want,'" said Chris Severson-Baker, executive director of the Pembina Institute, a clean energy think tank.

"Our concern is that, through a series of bilateral negotiations with each of the provinces, we end up with weakening climate policy overall, and it results in a signifi-

Continued on page 52

NEWS

In these precarious economic times, Carney goes all in on oil pipeline, leaving some B.C. caucus members nervous

BY ABBAS RANA

With United States President Donald Trump threatening to end the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement and imposing tariffs on goods and services from this country, Prime Minister Mark Carney's high-stakes decision to sign a memorandum of understanding for an oil pipeline with Alberta is risky. It could also give a political opening to the federal NDP and Green Party in British Columbia, a key base of support for Carney's party in Western Canada, say some Liberal MPs and pollsters.

"The degree to which environmentalism drives progressive politics, there's no better representation in the country than British Columbia—particularly urban British Columbia," said Darrell Bricker, CEO of Ipsos Public Affairs, in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

"What they've done is they've opened up a space" for the NDP and the Greens, said Bricker.

Continued on page 51

Prime Minster Mark Carney, pictured Dec. 2, 2025, speaking with delegates at the Assembly of First Nations' Special Chiefs Assembly in Ottawa. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

NEWS

Hundreds of application packages from prospective nomination candidates, actual candidates, and MPs said to be compromised in recent cyber hack, say Conservative sources

BY ABBAS RANA

Conservative sources say that a data breach initially reported to have impacted 15 MPs could actually extend to hundreds of potential nomination candidates and candidates of record.

"Hundreds of us got an email, [including] anyone [that] even tried to apply for a nomination in the last [election] cycle," said a recent nomination candidate in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

"So, yeah, everyone's affected."

Other current and former senior Conservatives also told *The Hill Times* that the number of compromised application packages is in the hundreds.

Sarah Fischer, director of communications for the Conservative Party, would not say how many individuals' application packages had been compromised when asked by *The Hill Times*.

Fischer said by email that individuals affected by the incident

Continued on page 53

Publications Mail Agreement #40068926

Heard on the Hill

By Christina Leadlay

'An extraordinary level of detail': new edition of 1,339-page House Procedure and Practice book out now

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Fourth Edition, 2025, is edited by House of Commons Clerk Eric Janse, right, and deputy clerk of procedure Jeffrey LeBlanc. *Book image courtesy of the Library of Parliament and The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Looking for the perfect gift for that political nerd on your list? Great news! The massive *House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Fourth Edition, 2025* is out now, available both digitally and in hard copy.

In the much-anticipated follow-up to 2017's third edition, House of Commons Clerk **Eric Janse** and deputy clerk of procedure **Jeffrey LeBlanc** explain how business is conducted in the House and in committees, and how the work of members is governed.

But compiling the 1,339-page book—intended to be a more convenient, user-friendly guide than the previous edition—was very much a labour of love.

"Our work as senior editors spanned over two years, though thankfully not on a full-time basis!" Janse told **Heard on the Hill** by email on Dec. 3.

While the groundwork for this new edition started in 2018—when neither Janse nor LeBlanc were in their current roles—the real push began in 2022.

"A team of procedural clerks began research, writing and editing in early 2023, and the content revision was completed shortly after the last election," said Janse, who became House clerk in December 2023.

Producing an accurate book was top of mind for the editing duo. "Preparing and editing a resource of this nature requires an extraordinary level of detail and precision," as well as a "substantial" time commitment, said Janse.

"We were determined not to risk releasing a book that would already be out of date by the time it reached readers."

So, has a lot changed in House procedure and practice in the eight years since the last edition?

"Absolutely," said Janse, listing how "procedural responses to the pandemic, the introduction of hybrid proceedings, revisions to the Standing Orders, major questions of privilege, and a number of new precedents are just some of the most striking changes," as well as the impact of successive minority Parliaments.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, Fourth Edition, 2025 costs $145.99, and is also available in French through the Library of Parliament's online boutique.

Zita Cobb launches Shorefast Institute in Ottawa

Zita Cobb launched the new national Shorefast Institute for Place-Based Economies at the State of Canada's Cities Summit in Ottawa last week.

Zita Cobb. *Photograph by David Howells*

While Cobb and her siblings founded the Shorefast charity on Fogo Island, N.L., over 20 years ago, this new institute will take the charity's principles of place-based economic development and bring them across the country.

"We have an opportunity to evolve our economic systems so that markets, governments and communities work more effectively together for ground-up and top-down economic development," said Cobb in a press release.

"No single organization or sector can drive economic growth alone. We created the Institute so people who live in Canada's communities can access the tools they need to be economic innovators and active contributors to nation-building."

Supported by several Canadian families and foundations including the **Arthur** and **Sandra Irving** Foundation, **Hilary** and **Galen Weston** Foundation, River Philip Foundation, and others, this new initiative aims to address this country's complex economic challenges by equipping communities with proven tools and networks to steward local prosperity, drive innovation, build economic momentum, and bring local innovations to a countrywide scale and impact.

Four new ambassadors meet GG

Governor General **Mary Simon** received the credentials of four new heads of mission during a ceremony at Rideau Hall on Dec. 3: Ambassador of Central African Republic **Martial Ndoubou,** Ambassador of Iceland **Auðbjörg Halldórsdóttir,** Ambassador of Montenegro **Jovan Mirković** and Ambassador of Timor-Leste **José Luis Guterres.**

Governor General Mary Simon, centre, with Timor-Leste's Ambassador José Luis Guterres, left, Icelandic Ambassador Auðbjörg Halldórsdóttir, second left, Montenegrin Ambassador Jovan Mirković, second right, and Central African Republic Ambassador Martial Ndoubou on Dec. 3 in Ottawa. *Photograph courtesy of gg.ca.*

Competition commish Boswell bows out early

Canada's competition commissioner **Matthew Boswell** announced last week that he is stepping down from his post early. His last day on the job will be Dec. 17. Originally slated to end his term in February 2026, Boswell confirmed he is leaving early for personal reasons. **Jeanne Pratt**, currently a senior executive in the office, will step in as acting commissioner on Dec. 18.

Diana Carney marks World Aids Day in Ottawa

Diana Fox Carney, the prime minister's wife, made a rare public appearance at the Clarendon Tavern in Ottawa's ByWard Market on Dec. 2, at a reception for the Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research (CANFAR) and Gilead Sciences Canada's World AIDS Day. This year's reception, with the theme "See the Person, Not the Status," was emceed by sexual and mental-health activist and model **Myles Sexton**, with remarks from *The Toronto Star's* **Althia Raj**—drew nearly 100 attendees. Also spotted were Liberal MPs **Rob Oliphant** and **Helena Jaczek**; Bloc MP **Andreanne Larouche**; Senators **Donna Dasko** and **Andrew Cardozo**; Catalyze4's **Anne McGrath**, CTV's **Rachel Aiello**, KAN Strategies' **Greg MacEachern**, and **Jade Mallette**, chief of staff to Health Minister **Marjorie Michel**.

Earlier that day, the HIV Legal Network released a report on Canada's progress on eliminating the disease, at a time when HIV rates are on the rise in Canada. Data from Health Canada shows more than 1,800 new cases of HIV were reported in 2024 across the country, excluding Quebec. The network is calling on Canada to meet its United Nations' 95-95-95 targets, to ensure that 95 per cent of people living with HIV in Canada know their status, 95 per cent who are diagnosed are accessing treatment, and 95 per cent of those on treatment can achieve an undetectable viral load, allowing them to live a healthy life and preventing onward transmission.—*Stuart Benson*

Diana Carney, left, and Gilead Sciences' Bobby Sutherland at the World AIDS Day reception on Dec. 2 in Ottawa. *Photograph courtesy of Peter Warren*

U.S. envoy's views of tariffs has changed in 22 years

United States Ambassador to Canada **Pete Hoekstra** decried U.S. tariffs on steel imports for wreaking havoc on consumers and raising prices—back in 2003.

Investigative journalism outlet ProPublica drew attention to Hoekstra's 2003 speech in a report published Dec. 1.

Then a Congressman for Michigan in the House of Representatives, Hoekstra delivered a stern rebuke to the then-U.S. government's tariffs during a meeting of the Ways and Means Committee. He made the case for ending those tariffs, warning that they were "creating an anti-competitive environment and driving many companies out of business."

In his current role, 22 years later, Hoekstra is now a defender of U.S. President **Donald Trump**'s tariffs on steel and other products from Canada.

cleadlay@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

ADVERTISEMENT

Working Together to Strengthen Canada's Workforce

Michael Sangster,
CEO of the National Association of Career Colleges

As Canada faces mounting pressure to strengthen its workforce and accelerate economic growth, it's time to shine a spotlight on a sector that, for 130 years, has equipped Canadians with the skills they need to reinforce our economic strength and keep our country competitive: regulated career colleges.

These institutions, which are in operation across the country, are the unsung heroes of skills development and deployment. Yet as their success stories continue to grow, government must take care to ensure its policies align with the outcomes that matter most.

According to a new and comprehensive survey conducted by Nanos Research, Canada's regulated career colleges are exceeding expectations when it comes to connecting students with employment quickly and effectively.

OVER **80%** OF EMPLOYED CAREER COLLEGE GRADUATES **REPORT WORKING IN JOBS RELATED TO THEIR PROGRAM OF STUDY**

The numbers are striking. Over 80% of employed career college graduates report working in jobs related to their program of study. Even more impressive, three in five graduates found employment within three months of graduation.

At a time when Canadians are rightfully concerned about the return on investment in post-secondary education, these results are more than just statistics - they're a vote of confidence in a sector that is nimble, responsive, and tuned-in to labour market needs.

NACC institutions have deep connections to the labour force, working directly with employers to create curriculum that matches evolving industry needs. They provide training to learners close to home, offering flexible and accessible options for Canadians looking to kickstart their careers, upgrade their skills, or make a career change. These learners are then able to be redeployed into the local labour force, finding good jobs and strengthening local economies from coast to coast to coast.

3 IN 5 GRADUATES **FOUND EMPLOYMENT WITHIN THREE MONTHS** OF GRADUATION

In fact, the same Nanos study demonstrates that nearly a third of graduates are hired by the very organization where they completed their practicum or internship.

Regulated career colleges are more than educators — they're an engine reinforcing our country's financial foundation and empowering the sectors that matter most to our economy. Every year, these institutions provide thousands of ready-to-work graduates in health care, the skilled trades, business, early childhood education, information technology, and social services – fields that are all at the heart of Canadian communities. They deliver hands-on, practical training that equip graduates with the skills they need in real workplaces, ensuring they can enter the workforce confident that they have the tools to succeed.

The facts are clear. Career colleges offer a strategic advantage to a government focused on "building Canada strong."

But too often, these powerhouses of education face policies that stop them from unleashing the full potential of Canada's workforce. Despite being subject to more stringent regulation and greater oversight - something the sector overwhelmingly embraces - these institutions are prevented from accessing the same supports as their public counterparts.

So, if the Prime Minister truly wants to provide "timely access to education and training," as he outlined in his mandate letters, it's time to ensure that federal policies follow the facts.

This should start by ensuring career college learners have equitable access to federal student aid programs. Instead of limiting student choice, federal student aid policies should be aligned with these institutions that have a proven track record of delivering the workers Canada needs.

Unfortunately, recent changes proposed in the Budget are likely to have the opposite effect – limiting Canada's supply of skilled tradespeople, health care professionals, early childhood educators, and IT and AI experts.

But it's not too late to change course. Career colleges are eager to work with the federal government to create greater fairness and enable it to achieve its policy goals by delivering in-demand workers who will strengthen our economy for the long term.

As we look to build a confident, future-proof workforce, it's time for policymakers to embrace career colleges as key partners - moving past unsubstantiated assumptions and embracing the evidence. It's time to recognize the essential role these institutions play in helping Canadians reach their goals, and in building the strong, adaptive workforce our country desperately needs to meet the challenges ahead.

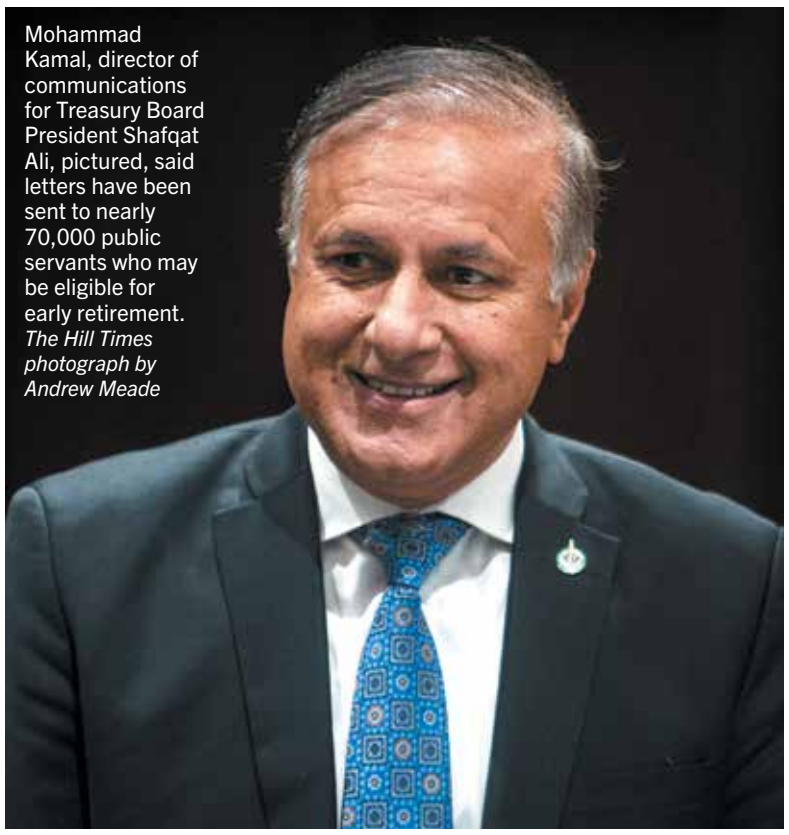
nacc NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CAREER COLLEGES

NEWS

Early retirement pitch to nearly 70,000 public servants outlines 120-day deadline to apply

Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada president Sean O'Reilly says he's worried the incentive will lead to a 'mass exodus' of skilled government workers.

BY MARLO GLASS



Mohammad Kamal, director of communications for Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali, pictured, said letters have been sent to nearly 70,000 public servants who may be eligible for early retirement. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Public servants may have to decide quickly whether or not to take the voluntary early retirement promised in the 2025 budget, while unions warn of a "mass exodus" of workers who might be keen to punch their ticket out of a shrinking civil service.

Mohammad Kamal, director of communications for Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali (Brampton—Chinguacousy Park, Ont.), said letters have been sent to 68,000 public servants who may be eligible for the early retirement incentive program.

Details are slowly emerging about the incentive, how it might work, and who might be eligible. The program may start as early as Jan. 15, 2026, or when budget-related legislation comes into effect–whichever is later, according to the Treasury Board. That bill, C-15, is currently at second reading in the House.

Public servants would have to apply within 120 days, or about four months, of the legislation coming into effect, and would have to retire within 300 days.

"The government intends to conclude the process within 300 days (approximately 10 months) of implementation," the Treasury Board Secretariat, the employer of the federal public service, says in a fact sheet.

The department is currently gauging the interest of how many public servants may be interested in an early retirement, Kamal said.

Conservative MP Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, Alta.), her party's critic for the Treasury Board, called the plan "very ambitious," though she supported it, noting the Conservatives campaigned on reducing the public service via natural attrition during the spring election.

"We do support it, but I'm a little concerned that the numbers the government is considering currently are too ambitious," she said.

It's unclear how many public servants the Treasury Board anticipates would take early retirement. Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) is looking to cut the number of jobs by about 40,000 from a peak of 368,000 positions in 2023-24, partially through attrition and an early retirement incentive. About 10,000 jobs were eliminated over the previous fiscal year, and Budget 2025 lays out a loss of 16,000 full-time equivalent positions as the government aims to cut billions in dollars of departmental spending.

In the fact sheet, published on Nov. 24, the Treasury Board explained that typically, when a civil servant retires early, their pension takes a five-per-cent hit for each year of early retirement. A person retiring five years early, for example, would have their pension reduced by 25 per cent. This would be waived under the early retirement incentive program, though.

"This incentive would help manage workforce reductions to the greatest extent possible through attrition and voluntary departures," the fact sheet reads.

The Public Service Alliance of Canada put out a notice on Dec. 3, warning members who may be eligible for early retirement to "carefully consider their options and understand their rights" during this process.

"While the employer says the [early retirement incentive] exists outside of the negotiated workforce adjustment process, PSAC's position is that all involuntary layoffs fall under the collective agreement, and we will enforce it," the union, which represents a large swath of public servants, says in a statement.

The union warned accepting the early retirement may mean workers won't receive a lump-sum payment based on years of service, which PSAC had previously negotiated as part of the workforce adjustment and employment transition process.

"PSAC welcomes efforts to prevent involuntary layoffs. But any early departure program must be negotiated with the union and must honour the hard-fought contractual benefits enshrined in our collective agreements. We are pressing the government to meet with us to discuss the full details of the [early retirement incentive]. Once we have this information, we will provide further advice to members."

Union head fears 'they're going to lose some great minds'

Public servants are being offered the ability to retire 10 years early without penalty. Eligibility for the early retirement incentive is split into two groups: civil servants who joined the public service pension plan on or before Dec. 31, 2012, who are at least 50 years old, have been employed in the public service for at least 10 years, and have at least two years of pensionable service. The other group is public servants who joined the public service pension plan on or after Jan. 1, 2013; who are at least age 55; and meet those same criteria for time employed and pensionable service in the public service.

Meeting these age, pension, and service requirements doesn't necessarily guarantee an early retirement, though.

"Employees must apply and secure endorsement from their deputy head based on parameters established by the Treasury Board," the fact sheet says. "These parameters are currently being developed and will be shared in due course."

But Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC) president Sean O'Reilly says he's worried the incentive will lead to a "mass exodus" of skilled government workers.

"I'm concerned there's going to be great interest in my membership," he recently told *The Hill Times* in an interview.

The early retirement offer is "great" for people who are ready to leave, "but I think it's really going to hurt the public service in general," he said. "I believe we will have a bit of a mass exodus, and that really concerns me."

O'Reilly said he wishes the government's plan to reduce the public service was "better planned," as unions are currently receiving workforce adjustment notices "almost on a daily basis," he said.

"It just doesn't feel, right now, that there's any real plan to this," he said. "It just feels like they want to hollow out the workforce, which, in my opinion, is not going to help the government because they're going to lose some great minds that are providing advice and guidance every day."

O'Reilly said there's been approximately 200 notices of a workforce adjustment sent to his members in recent weeks, and he expects more are coming. Everyone who receives a workforce adjustment notice does not necessarily lose their job, or have to leave the public service.

O'Reilly said it's obvious the government is "working quickly" to reduce the size of the bureaucracy.

"I'm worried that there isn't a lot of forethought," O'Reilly said, "because what's going to happen is we have these [workforce adjustment] notices… but we're also going to have these mass retirements."

Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE) president Nate Prier also said the early retirement process appears to be rushed, and will begin "without the unions having been duly informed."

"CAPE is not against a voluntary departure program, but let's do things in order and after consultation and thoughtful process," he said in a statement. "This isn't the time to improvise, when not only people's livelihoods and retirements are at stake, but also programming and services to Canadians."

Public servants, by the numbers

Demographic information is published by the Treasury Board Secretariat annually, and shows the public service is slowly growing younger.

According to the 2024 demographic snapshot, which includes both the core public administration and many separate agencies, the average age of federal public servants decreased from 45 years old in 2015 to 43.4 years as of 2024, the most recently available year.

The demographic snapshot also shows the cohort of bureaucrats aged 50 to 54 and 55 to 59—the ages largely targeted by the early retirement buyout—has fallen over approximately the past 10 years. In 2015, 17.2 per cent of the public service was aged 50 to 54, but that fell by nearly five percentage points by 2024. Similarly, 12.2 per cent of the public service was aged 55 to 59 in 2015, compared to 9.8 per cent in 2024.

However, the cohort of public servants between 60-64 years of age grew slightly during that same time period, from 5.4 per cent in 2015 to 5.7 per cent in 2025. The same is true for civil servants aged 65 and up, who made up two per cent of the public service in 2015 and 2.7 per cent in 2024.

The demographic snapshot further explains that up until 2015, "baby boomers," or people born between 1946 and 1966, made up the largest group of public servants. But they're now being replaced by "generation Xers," born between 1967 and 1979, and millennials, born between 1980 and 2000.

Millennials make up the largest group of public servants, or just over 50 per cent, followed by gen-Xers at 33.9 per cent.

While the proportion of baby boomers in the public service has steadily declined since 2010, the percentage of gen-Xers has stayed relatively stable, accounting for approximately one third of the bureaucracy for the past 15 years.

Along with early retirement, the budget also pledged to reduce the number of executives by 1,000, or a nearly 11 per cent decrease, as the demographic snapshot pegged the number of executives at 9,155 as of March 31, 2024.

The demographic snapshot said the average age of "junior" executives in the federal public service has remained stable at approximately 50 years of age between 2010 and 2024, and likewise the average age of more senior executives remained between 53 and 54 years of age during those years.

Between 2010 and 2024, the federal public service workforce grew by 30 per cent, while the executive population grew by 35.2 per cent.

mglass@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Dabrusin top-lobbied cabinet minister, Nature Canada pushes for nature strategy after absence of support in budget

A nature strategy to protect Canada's biodiversity was released in June, 2024, but has yet to be funded and implemented.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

An environmental group says it's getting nervous about the government's intention to follow through on a plan to protect biodiversity in Canada after the release of a federal budget that did not include any funding to implement a nature strategy, and the recent resignation of the cabinet minister who helped develop that roadmap during the previous administration.

"The [2025 federal] budget did not include the funding that would have been necessary to implement the nature strategy, which was what our push was for in October," said Scott Mullenix, director of communications for Nature Canada. "How is the government going to get this strategy of theirs done if they're not prioritizing it as a funding project?"

Environment Minister Julie Dabrusin (Toronto-Danforth, Ont.) was the top-lobbied federal minister in October in terms of the total number of communication reports filed for that month which listed her. Nature Canada communicated with Dabrusin on three occasions that month—on Oct. 6, Oct. 27, and Oct. 28—as part of the organization's push for the Liberals to not forget support for a nature strategy in the Nov. 4 federal budget, according to Mullenix.

Nature Canada filed 32 communication reports in October, which included the organization's lobbying days on the Hill between Oct. 27 and 29.

Liberal MP Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.) released Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy on June 13, 2024, while serving as the environment minister during then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's administration. The strategy provides a roadmap for protecting nature in this country, as well as how to halt and reverse the loss of nature and biodiversity.

The 2025 budget did not include any support towards implementation of a nature strategy. However, Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.), speaking in the House on Nov. 17, said that he could confirm that such a strategy would be "released in the coming weeks."

Environment and Climate Change Minister Julie Dabrusin appears at the House Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development on Dec. 1, 2025. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Mullenix said that Carney's statement—that a strategy would be released soon—was confusing because the strategy has already existed for more than a year. Nonetheless, Nature Canada posted Carney's quote on its website, calling the statement "reassuring," and adding "this is the commitment we need."

Mullenix described the nature strategy as one of Guilbeault's big achievements while serving as Environment minister.

Guilbeault abruptly resigned as minister of Canadian identity and culture, minister responsible for official languages, and minister of Nature and Parks Canada on Nov. 27, though he remains as a Liberal MP. In a letter posted on X, Guilbeault cited a conflict with the Carney government, which reached an agreement with Alberta laying out a path for construction of a new pipeline project running from province's oilsands through to the British Columbia coast.

"The nature strategy is intact—it just needs funding, and as far as we know it still has the support of the government," said Millenix.

"We're pushing for the funding of it. It wasn't in the budget. It wasn't mentioned in Carney's mandate letters, and now with Steven Guilbeault leaving cabinet, we're nervous."

In an email to *The Hill Times* on Dec. 3, Mullenix said that his group has been doing its best to get meetings with decision-makers in Ottawa since the April 28 federal election, but added that it's "a bit of an uphill battle."

Scott Mullenix, director of communications for Nature Canada, says, 'The nature strategy is intact—it just needs funding, and as far as we know it still has the support of the government.' *Photograph courtesy of Scott Mullenix*

As an example, he cited an article from *The Narwhal* on Oct. 16, which found that Carney's first 100 days in office "were flooded with natural resource lobbyists." Between April 28 to Aug. 6, about 45 per cent of the 44 organizations that communicated with Carney represented natural resource interests, according to *The Narwhal*.

Nature Canada is represented on the registry by StrategyCorp consultants Frédérik Larouche, Liam Thompson, and Lisa Samson, as well as by four PAA Advisory consultants including Sarah Cann and Sean Casey.

Economic development was the overall most popular subject matter in federal lobbying in October, appearing in 1,853 communication reports that month. Economic development was also the most popularly-discussed subject matter for every month in 2025 so far, except in March and April when international trade was the top subject.

Among organizations communicating with the government about the economy, the most active was the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), which filed 36 reports on that subject in October.

Bill Huber, SARM's acting president, told *The Hill Times* that the group's interests that month related to infrastructure and infrastructure funding for rural communities in Saskatchewan. Agriculture was another topic that was top of mind because of current tariffs and their impact on trade to Saskatchewan and western Canada, according to Huber. Saskatchewan is home to more than 40 per cent of Canada's cultivated farmland, and this country's largest export market for canola is the United States, followed by China.

China has imposed punitive levies on Canadian agriculture, including 100-per-cent tariffs on canola oil, meal, and peas, as well as a 25-per-cent tariff on certain pork and aquatic products. Canada is also currently engaged in a trade war with the U.S., although most of this country's agricultural products are exempt from those tariffs under the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA).

Huber described the trade issues as devastating for Canadian producers.

"We've avoided that somewhat from the president of the U.S., but every day is a new day on that," said Huber. "Donald Trump—we never know where he's going. He has honoured the CUSMA agreement so far, but there's no indication that he's going to hold his word on that, or things could change daily. It's like rolling the dice."

Between Sept. 6 and Sept. 9, Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, N.S.), Carney's parliamentary secretary, participated in a trade delegation to China led by Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe where they discussed trade irritants and the duties imposed on imports of canola products from Canada. A Sept. 16 statement from the Prime Minister's Office said the delegation "had constructive discussions with Chinese officials and key organizations involved in bilateral trade."

On Sept. 5, Carney announced measures intended to help support Canada's agriculture sector, including a pledge of $370-million for new biofuel production incentives, and amendments to the Clean Fuel Regulations intended to "spur the development of a vibrant biofuels industry in Canada."

During October, SARM's representatives communicated with public office holders including Blois, Conservative MP Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, Alta.), her party's energy and natural resource critic, and Conservative MP Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, N.B.).

SARM is represented on the registry in-house by executive director Laurel Feltin, as well as nine board of directors members including Blair Cummins and Sheila Keisig.

jcnockaert@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Top-Lobbied Cabinet Ministers (October)

Minister	Communication reports
Minister of the Environment Julie Dabrusin	42
Minister of Industry Mélanie Joly	38
Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Tim Hodgson	36
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Heath MacDonald	21
Minister of Transport Steven MacKinnon	20
Minister responsible for Canada-U.S. Trade Dominic LeBlanc	19
Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Rebecca Alty	19
Minister of Public Safety Gary Anandasangaree	16
Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation Evan Solomon	16

The above table shows the federal cabinet ministers who were listed in the most communication reports for lobbying activity in October. Based on a search of the federal lobbyists' registry on Dec. 3, 2025.

NEWS

Bloc Québécois joins push for mandatory labelling of genetically engineered foods

‘We want to know what’s on our plate, we want to know what we’re buying,’ says Bloc Québécois agriculture critic Yves Perron about the petition he recently tabled calling for labels.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Yves-François Blanchet, centre, holds a press conference in the West Block on June 18, 2025, with Bloc MPs Christine Normandin, left, and Yves Perron. The Bloc is throwing its weight behind a move by the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network asking for mandatory labelling on genetically engineered foods. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

BY TESSIE SANCI

A recently tabled petition supported by the Bloc Québécois aims to pressure the federal government to reverse a policy allowing genetically engineered foods to land on store shelves without indicating they’ve been altered.

With 4,152 signatures, petition e-6768 calls on the government to “establish mandatory labelling of all genetically engineered foods sold in Canada.”

It’s a “simple” request, said Yves Perron (Berthier--Maskinongé, Que.), his party’s agricultural critic, during a recent press conference in West Block where he discussed the petition.

“We want to know what’s on our plate, we want to know what we’re buying, we want to be able to choose our food according to our values and concerns,” Perron said in French on Dec. 1.

The petition was initiated by Lucy Sharratt, co-ordinator at the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN), who’s worked to convince Ottawa to implement mandatory labelling on genetically engineered foods for 25 years.

Sharatt told *The Hill Times* in a phone interview following the press conference—where she appeared alongside Perron—that transparency is the issue. She said that multiple polls, including one released by her organization on Oct. 30, show that more than 80 per cent of Canadians support mandatory labelling because they want to know how their food is produced.

CBAN is asking for labelling that would fall under the category of “non-health reasons.”

Sharratt said an example of “non-health” labelling enforced by the CFIA is found on irradiated food. Health Canada deems irradiation as safe, and, according to her, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) enforces the use of the label identifying irradiated products.

The Hill Times sent questions to Health Canada and the CFIA about its policy regarding the labelling of genetically engineered foods. Both the department and the agency acknowledged the request, but were unable to provide responses prior to deadline.

Lack of pre-market assessment for some goods adds to transparency problems, says CBAN

Adding to Sharratt’s concern is that newer technologies are impacting how these foods are engineered, which is resulting in some products finding their way into stores without an extra layer of regulatory oversight by Health Canada or the CFIA.

Genetically engineered organisms, where foreign DNA is added, are considered a “novel food” that must go through a federal pre-market assessment, which means that a regulatory team personally evaluates the item in question.

But those that are altered using the organism’s existing DNA are not considered novel foods, and are, therefore, not personally evaluated by either Health Canada or the CFIA.

Sharratt argued that the lack of labelling for genetically engineered products and the missing additional oversight by regulators mean that the government and the Canadian public don’t actually know which products in stores have been subject to this technology.

“This lack of transparency is very deep, and could undermine further the trust that Canadians have in food systems and create confusion in the grocery store,” Sharratt said.

“No one will be able to answer the questions that consumers have. The federal government won’t be able to answer the question; they won’t know what products are on the shelves.”

Labels not required if there’s no nutrition or safety issue, says CropLife Canada

CropLife Canada’s Ian Affleck told *The Hill Times* that regardless of whether a food item is subject to a pre-market assessment by a federal regulator, all food products are subject to Canadian safety rules.

“A subset of those might require an approval prior to going on the market,” said Affleck, vice-president of biotechnology, referring to the need for a pre-market assessment.

“So, even if you don’t have an approval, you still have to meet the health and safety standards. You just wouldn’t have passed through a government office before you went to market.”

He added that the vast majority of food that is sold isn’t subject to a pre-market assessment, but “it has to meet the health and safety standards.”

Affleck’s organization, which represents the manufacturers, developers, and distributors of pesticides and plant breeding technologies, does not support the move for mandatory labelling for genetically engineered foods. Affleck said it supports the Government of Canada’s focus on mandatory labelling for issues of nutrition and safety.

“So, if there’s no nutrition or safety issue, then there’s no mandatory label,” Affleck said.

Affleck said Ottawa’s decision not to personally review every food item before it reaches consumers is similar to other regulatory structures across the world because the government “would never have the resources” to oversee every possible item.

“You’ve got to kind of pick your spots where there’s additional interest, and then that’s where the government focuses on.”

In this case, the government chooses to focus on organisms with foreign DNA, but that’s not to say that those without it are never subject to additional oversight, according to Affleck.

“Just because it doesn’t have foreign DNA doesn’t mean you don’t come in. It just means you don’t automatically come in,” Affleck said, adding that the government has criteria for when it would require non-novel foods to be reviewed by the regulator.

Affleck argued that international regulators, including those for Europe, Australia and the United States, agree that gene editing is “equally as safe as any other method of plant breeding.”

As for why CropLife Canada opposes labelling, Affleck said that the government focuses its labels on nutrition and safety, and a label on genetically engineered foods would “imply” that the issue is about nutrition or safety.

Health Canada ‘indefinitely’ pauses plan to deem cloned meat as non-novel foods

Sharratt’s petition was tabled nearly two weeks after Health Canada backed away from a proposal that would have considered food products from cloned cattle and swine as “non-novel” foods, and, therefore, not subject to the pre-market assessment.

An update on Health Canada’s website states that the department “received significant input from both consumers and industry about the implications of this potential policy update” and has “indefinitely paused the policy update to provide time for further discussions and consideration. … There are currently no approved foods from cloned products on the market in Canada.”

Sharratt said there was strong public opposition to the proposal.

“It was clear there was no support for having a food system open to unlabeled products from clone swine and cattle, and this is also what we’re talking about,” she said.

“With a lack of mandatory labeling, you have a food system that’s just open to these new technologies without any kind of real understanding about them. …If we’re going to have new technologies—powerful new technologies—in our lives and on our plates, we simply want information about them,” she added.

The federal Canadian General Standards Board (CGSB) is currently reviewing the standard for the voluntary labelling of genetically engineered foods. Submissions are due by Jan. 23, 2026.

But the board, which has a broad mandate for standards development, will “wind down” its activities, as per the 2025 budget, after having been caught in Prime Minister Mark Carney’s (Nepean, Ont.) spending review.

The budget justified the CGSB’s upcoming shutdown saying that its services can occur through the other 15 accredited standards development groups operating in Canada.

In a statement to *The Hill Times*, PSPC said the CGSB will cease operations on March 31, 2026.

“Services currently offered by the CGSB are also offered via other accredited Standards Development Organizations operating in Canada. The CGSB is currently developing a plan for a transition to ensure reliable continuity and minimize disruption for partners and interested parties. The plan has not yet been finalized for the standard on Voluntary Labelling and Advertising of Foods that are not Products of Genetic Engineering,” the statement reads.

Bloc agriculture critic Perron spoke about the CGSB’s upcoming closing during his Dec. 1 press conference, saying that he recently learned of the news and wants to review the issue, but that he still has concerns. He also said that he will table a motion to study the issue of labelling food at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee because of the “gaps” in labelling policies.

A spokesperson for the Bloc told *The Hill Times* on Dec. 3 that the motion hadn’t yet been tabled, but would likely be presented to the committee during the week of Dec. 8.

tsanci@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Liberals hold steady post budget, but pipeline talks may test progressive coalition, pollsters say

With the small increase in favourability numbers for both the Liberals and Prime Minister Mark Carney's after the budget and the Ottawa–Alberta MOU, 'the last thing the Conservatives should be doing is attacking the NDP,' says pollster Nik Nanos.

BY STUART BENSON

The 'slight' boost to Prime Minister Mark Carney's polling numbers may be due to the 'hope' the budget offered to Canadians that he 'might have a plan,' says Abacus Data CEO David Coletto. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Post-budget polling suggests the Liberal government has emerged from the passage of its first budget last month largely unscathed.

While only a sprinkling of polls have been released since the federal government announced a new energy agreement with Alberta in late November—and the subsequent resignation of a prominent cabinet minister—338 Canada's Philippe Fournier is forecasting a flurry of year-end polls that will better show whether the cracks in the Liberals' winning election coalition will grow into larger divisions.

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Fournier said it is still too early to determine any meaningful trends in public reaction to the budget, but his "early read" is that there hasn't been any evidence to suggest it has hurt the Liberals in a significant way.

There has also been a trickle of polling since Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Alberta Premier Danielle Smith on Nov. 27, which lays out a path for the federal government to facilitate the construction of a pipeline project running from Alberta's oilsands through to the British Columbia coast.

Several hours after the MOU was signed, then-heritage minister and Quebec lieutenant Steven Guilbeault (Laurier–Sainte-Marie, Que.) announced his resignation from cabinet, but said he would remain in the Liberal caucus. A former environment minister under then-prime minister Justin Trudeau, Guilbeault wrote in his resignation statement that he "strongly" opposes the MOU, that "environmental issues must remain front and centre," and cited the lack of consultation with First Nations and the B.C. government.

In a Dec. 1 shuffle, Carney replaced Guilbeault with another Trudeau-era cabinet minister from a neighbouring Montreal riding, naming Marc Miller (Ville-Marie–Le Sud-Ouest–Île-des-Soeurs, Que.) as both minister of Canadian identity and culture as well as official languages minister. Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement Minister Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Que.) will now serve as Carney's Quebec lieutenant; and Environment and Climate Change Minister Julie Dabrusin (Toronto–Danforth, Ont.) has added "Nature" to her title, and oversight of Parks Canada.

Budget 'didn't hurt' Liberals, pollsters say

Abacus Data's first survey after the MOU—conducted within 24 hours of its release—found public awareness of the agreement "reasonably high" given the short timeline. Nearly 60 per cent of respondents said they had heard about the deal or were aware of the idea of a new pipeline. But it was too soon to assess any lasting political impact, Abacus cautioned.

Meanwhile, the latest Abacus voter intention results suggest the Liberals are falling back into a tie with the Conservatives, with a slight increase in government approval to 47 per cent, and relatively stable numbers across the provinces. CEO David Coletto told *The Hill Times* the MOU has the potential to "redraw the lines along which the next energy and climate battle will be fought."

The survey released on Nov. 30 suggested a slight increase in the Liberals' support and impressions of Carney in the wake of his first federal budget, but that those changes "had not fundamentally altered the dynamics" between the government and the opposition Conservatives.

Conducted between Nov. 20 and Nov. 27, Abacus' survey found the Liberals ahead of the Conservatives by just one point, 41 to 40 per cent—a margin that hasn't been that small since August. The survey also found eight per cent support for the NDP, followed by the Bloc Québécois at seven per cent, and the Green Party at one per cent.

Carney's approval rating held steady at 45 per cent, while his disapproval fell two points to 31 per cent. The government's approval rose by four points to 48 per cent, while disapproval dropped to 32 per cent. Meanwhile, Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's (Battle River–Crowfoot, Alta.) net favourability remains in the negatives at -3, but better than the -7 score the week prior, with a slight dip in his disapproval to 42 per cent and a three-point jump in approval to 39 per cent.

Coletto said "the budget certainly didn't hurt, and it may even have helped," noting that there was also a "slight uptick" in the government's approval rating and the public's optimism about the direction of the country.

"It may have given some people hope that things are moving along in the right direction and the prime minister might have a plan," Coletto said.

Nanos Research's latest tracking, released on Dec. 2, puts the Liberals at 42 per cent support, a four-point lead over the Conservatives. The NDP sits at eight per cent and the Bloc at seven per cent. Carney remains far ahead as preferred prime minister at 53 per cent, compared with Poilievre's 25 per cent.

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, Nik Nanos, founder and chief data scientist, said the polling remained tight, but the Liberals seemed to be benefiting from "downward pressure" on the NDP after the budget.

Nanos said that, for the Conservatives, it is in their best interest to create an environment to relieve that pressure as he doesn't see a path to victory for the official opposition without the NDP polling at 15 per cent or higher.

"When the progressive vote consolidates behind the Liberals, it is just structurally difficult for the Conservatives to win, even at 37-per-cent support behind them," Nanos explained. "The last thing they should be doing is attacking the NDP."

Fournier agreed with Nanos' assessment, noting that the NDP's polling is "regressing to the mean" below double digits in the 338 post-budget tracker. He also advised that boosting the NDP's approval ratings may be easier than improving Poilievre's.

As for whether the pipeline plan and Guilbeault's resignation could fracture the Liberals' core coalition, Fournier said it is too early to tell, "but it is absolutely the kind of thing that could do it."

Political climate favours economy over environment: David Coletto

In the post-MOU survey shared with *The Hill Times*, Abacus found 55 per cent of Canadians support building a new pipeline to the West Coast, compared with 18 per cent opposed. In B.C. and Quebec—where Liberals face the most significant risk of alienating their climate-focused base—support still outpaces opposition: 53 to 30 per cent, respectively, in B.C., and 42 to 26 per cent, respectively, in Quebec.

Asked what the agreement says about Carney's leadership, 54 per cent of respondents said it was a pragmatic move that could bring economic gains "even if it represents a step back" on environmental policy. Only 24 per cent called it a "betrayal" of ecological progress and Carney's past positions.

In a similar poll released on Dec. 1, Angus Reid Institute (ARI) found much the same.

Conducted Nov. 26-30, ARI found Carney's approval holding steady at 52 per cent nationally and in B.C., but had a three-point drop in Quebec to 48 per cent. Carney's net favourability remained +11 in both provinces, and climbed three points in Alberta, where approval reached 45 per cent.

Nationally, ARI put the Liberals three points ahead of the Conservatives—40 to 37 per cent—with the Bloc and NDP each around 10 per cent. But provincially, the Liberals dropped five points in B.C. while the Conservatives gained three. In Alberta, the Liberals fell three points to 27 per cent, while the Conservatives rose five points to 54 per cent.

In an interview with *The Hill Times*, ARI president Shachi Kurl said that "unless there is something in a budget that is so singular that it captures people's attentions"—generally in a negative way—the document can have little impact on public opinion.

"The budget is not a document that the vast majority of people have read," Kurl explained. "Canadians are much more worried about losing a job this Christmas, and they're certainly paying more attention to the pipelines."

While Coletto notes that it is still too early for the MOU to have any lasting effects on the political environment, it could still threaten to fracture the Liberal coalition among those voters who still prioritize climate over the economy.

"They [climate-focused voters] would say this is likely a step in the wrong direction in addressing that issue, but overall, this move is much more in tune with the public mood," Coletto continued, explaining that concerns over the climate have continued to drop down the list of "salient issues," while the economy has risen.

While the MOU has not significantly affected national approval ratings for Carney, his unfavourables are up seven points in B.C. to 36 per cent, even though he retains a +4 net approval in the province. In Alberta, he remains underwater at -11, although his favourability has risen by nine points.

Coletto said the level of discontent could grow to create space for the NDP to "chip away at that Liberal coalition" that won the last election, but "it's going to require a sustained effort to get public opinion onside, because they're not starting from a place of opposition."

"The public is much more inclined to put economic opportunity over climate; even [B.C. Premier] David Eby has come around in the past few days to say he's open to a pipeline," Coletto said, pointing to comments Eby made on CTV's *Question Period* on Nov. 30.

Eby told host Vassy Kapelos that if the coastal oil tanker ban remained in place, he would be open to "conversations" on a pipeline.

Coletto said there is always a risk that any big government project "runs the risk of angering somebody," but "context matters."

"In the current moment, people are deeply anxious about the economy, the job market, and that's taking precedence over pretty much everything else," Coletto explained. "What voters saw in Carney was someone who they felt would do the best job of handling the situation at hand, and this announcement would—to them—align with what they expected from him."

sbenson@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

THE HILL TIMES

Editor: Kate Malloy
Managing Editor: Charelle Evelyn
Digital Editor: Samantha Wright Allen
Executive Editor: Peter Mazereeuw
Deputy Editors: Laura Ryckewaert, Tessie Sanci
Deputy Digital Editor: Marlo Glass
Assistant Deputy Editor: Abbas Rana
Publishers: Anne Marie Creskey, Jim Creskey, Leslie Dickson, Ross Dickson
General Manager, CFO: Andrew Morrow

EDITORIAL

NEWS REPORTERS
Stuart Benson, Jesse Cnockaert, Riddhi Kachhela, Irem Koca, Neil Moss, and Eleanor Wand

ENGAGEMENT EDITOR
Christina Leadlay

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Sam Garcia, Andrew Meade, and Cynthia Münster

EDITORIAL CARTOONIST
Michael de Adder

COLUMNISTS
Andrew Caddell, John Chenier, Sheila Copps, David Crane, Jim Creskey, Gwynne Dyer, Matt Gurney, Michael Harris, Erica Ifill, Joe Jordan, Rose LeMay, Alex Marland, Arthur Milnes, Tim Powers, Susan Riley, Ken Rubin, Josie Sabatino, Bhagwant Sandhu, Evan Sotiropoulos, Scott Taylor, Lori Turnbull, Nelson Wiseman, and Les Whittington

ADVERTISING

VICE PRESIDENT MARKETING AND MULTIMEDIA SALES
Steve MacDonald

DIRECTORS OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Craig Caldbick, Erveina Gosalci, and Martin Reaume

DIGITAL AND DESIGN

CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER
David Little

SENIOR WEB DEVELOPER
Nick Vakulenko

DIGITAL AND PRODUCTION MANAGER
Joey Sabourin

SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Neena Singhal

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Naomi Wildeboer

ADMINISTRATION

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER
Tracey Wale

SUBSCRIPTIONS

MARKETING DIRECTOR
Chris Rivoire

LOYALTY AND SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER
Melanie Grant

SUBSCRIPTION SALES EXECUTIVE
Sean Hansel

OFFICE AND CIRCULATION MANAGER
Irma Guarneros

SALES CONSULTANT
Puran Guram

DELIVERY INQUIRIES
circulation@hilltimes.com
613-688-8821

Published every Monday and Wednesday by Hill Times Publishing Inc.

246 Queen Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E4
(613) 232-5952
Fax (613) 232-9055
Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40068926
www.hilltimes.com

Please send letters to the editor to the above street address or e-mail to news@hilltimes.com. Deadline is Wednesday at noon, Ottawa time, for the Monday edition and Friday at noon for the Wednesday edition. Please include your full name, address and daytime phone number. *The Hill Times* reserves the right to edit letters. Letters do not reflect the views of *The Hill Times*. Thank you.

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40068926
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO: CIRCULATION DEPT. 246 Queen Street Suite 200, Ottawa, ON K1P 5E4

CMCA AUDITED

2012 Better Newspaper Winner

Editorial

Editorial

Reluctance to consult caucus, opposition parties could spell trouble for Prime Minister Carney

One of the key reasons former prime minister Justin Trudeau was pushed out this past January was because his caucus no longer wanted him to stay. Throughout his almost 10 years as prime minister, Trudeau never seemed to believe that his caucus support was critical for a party leader or a prime minister's success.

MPs are the leader's foot soldiers, and the eyes and ears on the ground. Yet, the former prime minister did not pay enough attention to maintaining their confidence. In the end, that oversight cost him his job.

Prime Minister Mark Carney appears to be making the same mistake.

The rollout of the memorandum of understanding signed between the federal government and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith's provincial government for an oil pipeline is a good example of that. British Columbia Liberal MPs have complained privately that they first learned about the MOU through news reports, and not directly from their own government. Natural Resources Minister Tim Hodgson did brief his B.C. caucus colleagues, but that occurred only one day before the deal was signed. Carney's Quebec lieutenant Steven Guilbeault, who resigned from cabinet last week over the deal, learned of important details about the agreement in media stories. Hodgson also had to apologize to a coalition of First Nations for initially offering only a Zoom meeting rather than meeting with them in person.

At last week's national caucus meeting, MPs told the prime minister directly that they should have been consulted before the policy was finalized and informed before journalists were.

Carney is one of the world's sharpest economic minds. He's someone who has led two G7 central banks and held top roles in the international corporate sector.

But he must remember that politics is a very different ball game and demands a different skill set. The support of his caucus is essential to his success, and he will have to earn it.

Trudeau lasted a decade because most of his caucus had been elected under his leadership in 2015, and they personally believed they owed their jobs to the Liberal leader. In contrast, the caucus inherited by Carney is seasoned, politically experienced, and far more independent compared to that from 2015.

As the old saying goes: friends come and go in politics; enemies accumulate.

During the budget vote last month, the opposition parties complained they had not been meaningfully consulted. Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet expressed his frustration by describing the Liberals as "bad partners" who used an approach that will "bite their ass."

Although it was unparliamentary language, Blanchet is not wrong. It is a very valuable piece of political advice that the prime minister would be wise to heed. Meanwhile, Green Party Leader Elizabeth May has already said that supporting the Liberals in the budget vote was a mistake, and that she will not repeat it.

The Hill Times

Letters to the Editor

Changed political climate is bad for fixing climate change: letter writer

The climate has changed. Where are we headed for now?

Liberal MP Steven Guilbeault has resigned as minister of Canadian identity and culture. Alberta has a premier who wishes to build another pipeline. Canada has a prime minister who has changed direction on climate change, and a nation in self-destruction because of climate change.

Yes, the climate has changed. Whether or not is not a pun, but an accumulating mass that will affect every person in this country and throughout this world. Climate change is not only the weather that will determine our future, but there are also the political consequences of our political direction that will determine our existence.

Pipelines that will sell out the very purpose of having regulations and laws against pollution. Bridges—or policies—that are built to keep us safe from ourselves from polluting our environment. Which one of these two will keep us alive?

There's a reason there is a climate change in this world, and there's a reason why there is a reversal in the direction in which we were heading. The question is which direction serves us best, and not the politics behind it.

Guilbeault quit cabinet for a reason, and he has specifically stated why. He believes the government is headed in the wrong direction concerning its commitments to the climate targets that were set and that those will not be achievable. So, is petroleum full of gas, or is the government? Which one is most likely to pollute the most?

Climate change is real, and our lives will continue to change, unless we get a handle on it. We are experiencing the consequences of climate disruption now. What will it be like later if we don't change our ways?

Pipelines are becoming increasingly a pipe dream because of the cost to build them. If built, the cost of these Alberta dreams is an enormous burden on our society because it will contribute more to climate change after we sell the product as well as to its production. Money is the maker of these projects. We, as Canadians, are not the oil companies who will be benefitting the most from this; instead, we will be the innocent victims who contributed to the price of a more environmentally polluting and damaging energy product, and to our deteriorating environment that we all share in.

Yes, there is a political change and a climate crisis, but which of these is the least of the worst? Which one is politically correct, but inhumanely irresponsible? Which star in the heavens should we follow, or should we chase that wandering star that glitters in greenbacks?

There is only one planet, and there are billions of lives living on it. What will Canada's contribution be to keep it alive?

The real climate change is in ourselves.

Cran Campbell
Langley, B.C.

Trump is a megalomaniac: British Columbia reader

The definition of a megalomaniac is United States President Donald Trump. If you are bothered beyond reason by this despicable man, perhaps these words will help you to self-regulate your stress and frustrations.

"People with megalomania are obsessed with power and will do anything to gain it. They have delusions of grandeur and can't see their faults or shortcomings. Additionally, they don't always realize that their view doesn't correspond to reality. These people often use insults and narcissism to cover their subconscious fears. Their fear of inferiority makes them want to hurt others with ridicule and threats because it makes them feel good about themselves."

Good luck.

Lloyd Atkins
Vernon, B.C.

Politics

In America, there's now an ominous darkness under Trump's lawless abuse of power

U.S. President Donald Trump, left, and Prime Minister Mark Carney, pictured in the Oval Office on May 6, 2025. What America is offering the world under Trump's administration is neither admirable, inspirational, nor defensible, writes Michael Harris. *Photograph courtesy of official White House photographer Daniel Torok*

The current U.S. president likes to present himself as a champion of fighting crime, but his record paints a very different picture. This president undermines the law at every turn.

Michael Harris

Harris

HALIFAX—The United States has given the world a lot firsts, including some of the most inspirational moments in human history.

Standing up to tyrants like the Nazis trying to bully democracies into submission by force, and conferring liberty and intrinsic value to all of its citizens in the heroic civil rights movement, among them.

To be sure, there have also been grievous shortcomings, as there are in every country's history. But the list of positive American accomplishments is longer and inarguably more laudable.

The latest thing America is offering the world is neither admirable, inspirational, or defensible, particularly from the self-described "greatest democracy" in the world.

Before everyone's eyes, the U.S. is falling apart as a nation built on the rule of law, basic democratic principles, and a once formidable commitment to the truth.

The author of the deconstruction of the America that the world has come to know and often mythologize is Donald Trump.

Before Trump's terms as president, the U.S. had often been described as "a shining city on the hill." That phrase, used by former president Ronald Reagan, evolved from the biblical sermon on the Mount, where Jesus famously said, "You are the light of the world."

That light, which once shone so brightly in the U.S., has now turned into an ominous darkness in Trump's America. The president has recently said and done some things that have turned foundational American ideals into a tawdry parody of themselves. And it was done with the most outrageous excesses of bigotry and white supremacism imaginable—coming from, of all places, the White House.

Trump used the alleged and monstrous shooting of two members of the National Guard by former Afghan national Rahmanullah Lakanwal into an ugly excuse for xenophobia.

Trump went far beyond denouncing the alleged shooter. Instead, he launched into a hateful rant against all immigrants.

The president named 19 countries that are no longer welcome and will be kept out of Trump's America by a travel ban.

The president cancelled citizenship ceremonies for individuals from these banned countries.

He halted immigration applications from those same nations.

Trump put a stop to all asylum claims from nationals whose countries are on the list. For the alleged actions of one immigrant, Trump has sunk into an orgy of collective punishment and hate-mongering.

As if all that weren't enough, he is also threatening to "denaturalize" naturalized Americans from his hit-list of "shit-hole" countries.

Consider his remarks in the wake of a fraud case in Minnesota allegedly involving a handful of immigrants from the Somali-American community.

Trump described all Somali immigrants—many of them now U.S. citizens—as "garbage." He said that their country of origin "stinks," and that he wanted them all out of the country. He also used the term "garbage" to describe Ilan Omar, a member of Congress of Somali decent. Omar has been an American citizen since 2000.

Trump's growing dismissiveness of American values and respect for the law has prompted the man *The Wall Street Journal* calls "the most powerful journalist in America" to speak up. George Will, the dean of conservative columnists and commentators in the U.S., recently described the Trump administration as a "moral slum."

No hyperbole there. The proof for Will's assertion is everywhere. Trump has created the largest police force in America through the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, commonly referred to as ICE. Some have called this national police force Trump's "Gestapo."

Financed with a massive $45-billion budget, ICE now has an estimated 30,000 officers. Their primary target is so-called undocumented immigrants, though in practice, this often violent and amateurish police force singles out its targets by skin colour and ethnicity.

The dubious tactics of ICE have made it unpopular with many Americans. They don't like seeing men chased and tackled, or women knocked to the ground during encounters with ICE. And they don't see how deporting children enhances national security.

ICE has recently placed an order for 20 armoured vehicles from Canada to be delivered in just 30 days. Given the people these vehicles will be used against, this is $10-million is not worth making.

And while ICE wages war on people who don't have criminal records, President Trump has dispatched the National Guard to fight crime in several of the biggest cities in the country.

There are problems with that.

Neither state governors nor mayors wanted the troops, and in fact expressly asked that they not be sent. Second, a federal judge has ruled that the president is violating the Constitution by sending them.

For that reason, District Judge Charles Breyer has ordered the Trump administration to stop using troops in California to police places like Los Angles. That practice is illegal under the Posse Comitatus Act.

Though Trump likes to present himself as a champion of fighting crime, his record paints a very different picture. This president undermines the law at every turn.

Another case in point. Trump has already killed more than 80 people who were summarily executed by the U.S. military as suspected drug runners.

Their motorboats were blown up by American missiles on the high seas. And if *The Washington Post* reporting has it right, the U.S. military also killed two survivors of one of those missile attacks as they clung to the wreckage of their boat. If true, that is a war crime and murder.

Trump is now on the verge of bombing the sovereign state of Venezuela ostensibly because he alleges drugs from that country are "poisoning" the U.S. And he is about to drop those bombs inside Venezuela without any authorization from Congress—another breach of the Constitution.

There is a bitter irony to Trump's claim to be a champion in the war against drugs. At the same time as he is threatening to attack Venezuela to stop drug-trafficking into the U.S., he pardoned Ross Ulbricht.

Ulbricht was sentenced to life in prison in 2015 for running the underground marketplace for drugs known as the Silk Road. Drug dealers used that online market to do $200-million worth of illicit drug dealing. Here's how Trump explained to the drug dealer's mother why he pardoned her son. He did it, he said "in honour of her and the Libertarian Movement, which supported me so strongly."

And Ulbricht isn't the only major drug dealer who received a get-out-of-jail-free card from Trump. The president also granted a pardon to the former Honduras president, Juan Orlando Hernandez. Hernandez was serving a 45-year sentence for conspiring to import cocaine into the United States.

It's an odd way to fight transnational drug networks—and to stand up for the rule of law.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist.

The Hill Times

COMMENT

Liberal women are taking notice, Carney would be wise to remember the estrogen wave that handed him the election

The prime minister's refusal to embrace a feminist foreign policy did not get him a single vote. Nor did the abolition of an ambassadorship. But women are taking notice.

Sheila Copps

Copps' Corner

OTTAWA—Prime Minister Mark Carney was elected this past April thanks to an estrogen wave.

That was what a key female Liberal organizer had to say about his victory. She said that wherever she travelled, knocking on doors for the Grits, women had confidence in him, and they were the ones reversing the Liberal electoral fate.

Only a few months ago, Liberals were expecting to hold their next Christmas party in a phone booth. Instead, the party is flooded with requests from people who want to join the winning team in this seasonal celebration.

All has been going well. But there are some clouds on the horizon that the leader should be taking seriously.

Words matter—especially when you are in politics. A single comment can be parsed to death.

How many articles were written when then-prime minister Jean Chrétien in 1997 downplayed the police use of pepper spray during a protest against a G20 meeting in British Columbia?

"For me, pepper, I put it on my plate," was Chrétien's comical way of minimizing the confrontation.

More recently, Prime Minister Mark Carney declined to characterize Canada's foreign policy as "feminist" during a press conference following the recent G20 summit in South Africa.

Some saw this as wordsmithing. Others saw it as a pivot away from the Justin Trudeau government's 2017 Feminist International Assistance Policy, intended to focus on foreign aid that supports women's empowerment and gender equality.

The policy was a rebuttal of the previous Stephen Harper Conservative government, which instructed officials to remove gender-based analysis from all cabinet documents.

Carney's international admission that Canada's feminist foreign policy was dead has sent ripples throughout the domestic foreign aid community.

Last week, a group of 92 organizations headed by Oxfam addressed an open letter to the prime minister, complaining of foreign aid cuts, and confusion around gender equality.

The organization also called for the re-establishment of an ambassador for women, peace, and security, a post that was folded into the foreign affairs department last March.

Most of us have probably never heard of this envoy, but according to Global Affairs Minister Anita Anand, Jacqueline O'Neill will continue to advocate in that area, sans official ambassadorial designation.

Carney's statement in South Africa reinforced his initial cabinet decision to eliminate the department of Women and Gender Equality, arguing it could responsibly be included in the ministry for culture and identity.

That *faux pas* was reversed two months later because of the political backlash it caused.

Similar opposition is quietly brewing internally on feminist foreign policy issues.

A group of senior Liberal women, united on social media, have made it very clear they would be lobbying colleagues at the Christmas party next week.

There is also work within the Liberal women's caucus, headed by Quebec MP Linda Lapointe, to have the issue referred to the main caucus.

The women's caucus was crucial in getting Carney to reverse his position and reinstate WAGE as a full ministry.

The open letter from many groups that work internationally on women's issues will definitely have some effect, but the angst of Liberal women will be even more crucial.

Carney probably thought his rebuttal of a feminist foreign policy would be understood.

He said he wanted gender equality to be a part of the government's funding mechanisms.

But his focus on defence spending and identifying major projects for national funding means the majority of mega-financing will be focused on men's jobs.

Like it or not, fewer than 20 per cent of the jobs in the energy sector go to women.

Less than 20 per cent of the Canadian military is also made up of women, and similar numbers apply to defence industries supplying the military.

If only one in five of the big jobs created goes to women, it will be felt in our employment numbers.

More importantly, Carney's election to the top job was largely dependent on the women's vote. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre was able to secure support from young and middle-aged men in numbers big enough to form government.

But it was women who made sure that Carney got the nod.

No wave lasts forever. An estrogen wave is just as vulnerable to destruction as any other wave.

But surely the loss of support from women should not be based on misspoken messages.

Carney's refusal to embrace a feminist foreign policy did not get him a single vote. Nor did the abolition of an ambassadorship. But women are taking notice.

The prime minister needs estrogen to win. A feminist agenda reset is in order.

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

The Hill Times

Outhouse will tweak the Tory engine

The upshot is that the changes Steve Outhouse will bring to the party will likely be subtle, not flashy, more about tweaking the party's engine than giving it a complete overhaul or retool. And maybe that's all the Tories need.

Gerry Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit

OAKVILLE, ONT.—When the Conservatives hired Steve Outhouse as their latest campaign manager, they acquired a new face, but, to my mind, it's unlikely the party will get much of a new look.

Of course, some Conservatives are hoping for big changes under the new regime.

For instance, while speaking about Outhouse, Saskatchewan MP Kevin Waugh recently told the media, "We need a retool."

And, yes, I can certainly understand why many Conservatives might want significant changes to their party's approach and branding.

After all, the last federal election was a massive disappointment for Conservatives, and many pointed the finger of blame directly at the party's campaign strategists.

Most famously, during the election, Ontario Premier Doug Ford's long-time campaign adviser, Kory Teneycke, publicly accused them of "campaign malpractice."

But now that the old strategist is out and a new one is in, the question is, what would a Conservative "retool" look like in practice?

Some might answer that question by saying what the party desperately needs right now is a total strategic makeover.

I'm sure, for example, that many "Red Tories" would argue the party must become less populist, less combative, that it needs to move more to the centre ideologically, that it should embrace a more positive communication style.

On the other hand, Conservatives from the more populist wings of the party would likely push for stronger, more militant stances on issues such as immigration, crime, and international trade.

Meanwhile, social conservatives might seek a greater focus on moral issues.

My point is, I don't think there's any clear consensus within the Conservative Party as to how to fix what's broken.

How could there be?

Keep in mind, the Conservative Party is really a coalition of ideological tribes, clans, and factions, each of which has its own perspectives, values, and goals.

Indeed, about the only thing they'd all agree on is that they don't like Liberals.

This is why it'd be so difficult for Outhouse to implement any sort of dramatic shift to the party's branding.

Simply put, anything he does would risk alienating at least one bloc within his party.

As a smart and experienced strategist, Outhouse would be the first to understand this point.

The other factor to keep in mind is that Pierre Poilievre is still the leader of the Conservative Party, and as long as that's the case, it'll be him—not Outhouse—who will direct the party's grand strategy.

In other words, I don't read Poilievre as the kind of leader who will surrender strategic control to his advisers and consultants.

Nor do I see him as the kind of leader who will shift gears when it comes to his persona and tactics.

For all these reasons, I don't think Outhouse's arrival on the scene will bring about much change for the Conservative Party, at least on the surface.

However, that's not to say he won't have a positive impact on the party.

If Outhouse is proficient at reading and interpreting polling data, he'll be able to give Poilievre a better understanding of where Canadians stand on the major issues of the day.

Or if he's adept at political persuasion, he'll come up with ad campaigns with messages that'll effectively resonate with the public.

And if he's a good political tactician, Outhouse will find ways to efficiently exploit the weaknesses of the party's opponents.

The upshot is that the changes Outhouse will bring to the party will likely be subtle, not flashy, more about tweaking the party's engine than giving it a complete overhaul or retool.

And maybe that's all the Tories need.

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

OPINION

Prime Minister Mark Carney, second right, and U.S. President Donald Trump, right, in the White House's Oval Office on Oct. 7, 2025. Maybe Carney is playing a long game, concentrating on getting past the curse of Trump on the world before making any giant moves. Maybe, writes Douglas Roche. *Photograph courtesy of the White House*

I'm still trying to figure out who Carney really is

Underneath the welter of new alliances Mark Carney is forming to save Canada economically and recover some of our strength internationally, I sense that he's holding back from boldly advancing UN principles and international law.

Douglas Roche

Opinion

EDMONTON—It will soon be one year since Prime Minister Mark Carney stepped into electoral politics and quickly established himself as a highly intelligent leader capable of steering Canada through the shoals of the shattered international order. Yet, despite his global stature, I find myself still trying to figure out who Carney really is, and I suspect I'm not alone.

While working to extricate Canada from the economic clutches of United States President Donald Trump, Carney has paradoxically deepened our country's military integration with America, embracing the fantasy of a Golden Dome. Though he once advised the United Nations secretary-general on the environment, Carney put his stamp of approval on an oil pipeline that his own environment minister (at the time) couldn't stomach. He holds intimate conversations with world leaders, but says nothing of consequence in Canada's Parliament.

Carney claims to have the world figured out. He wrote in *The Economist* that the international system has been "ruptured" by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gridlock at the UN, rising American mercantilism, and paralysis at the World Trade Organization—all factors contributing to the breakdown of the post-Cold War multilateral order. He sees the world now entering an era of "variable geometry" where pragmatic, interest-based coalitions will replace traditional global structures. The "coalition of the willing," the *ad hoc* group of nations which has come together to support Ukraine is, to him, a prime example of this new pragmatism.

Carney sees himself as a builder—of new energy systems, vital infrastructure, and streamlined inter-provincial trade at home, and new international alliances abroad. He has to outwit the most irrational, vengeful and dangerous president the U.S. has ever produced. Carney wisely lowered his elbows in dealing with an autocrat who holds the power to severely weaken—if not invade—Canada. Still, the prime minister faces immense challenges as the effects of Trump's chaos spread.

Every day is packed with activity that no other politician in Ottawa faces. I have watched 14 prime ministers in my lifetime, and known many of them; I cannot recall one occupant of the office who drives himself as hard as Carney does. His schedule, as he admits, is "relentless." The strain is visible on his face. The pressure on his staff and subordinates must be gruelling.

Why, then, can I not bring myself to shout out three loud cheers for Mark Carney?

The core reason is that he has elevated military might through arms over diplomacy as the route to peace. The entire UN structure, built on the ashes of the Second World War, is grounded on the idea that human security comes not from more arms, but from the steady infusion of diplomacy into crisis areas, economic development and social progress. By inflating Canada's defence spending to five per cent of GDP while simultaneously cutting Canada's foreign assistance programs, Carney has inverted the value system he laid out in his 2021 book, *Value(s)*.

In that book, he lambasted free-market fundamentalism for its disregard for the human condition. He warned that growing income inequality, unemployment, systematic racism, global pandemic crises, and the existential threat of climate change all stem from a profound crisis in values. Yet, in the Prime Minister's Office, Carney now concedes that the "strength of our values" has morphed into "the value of our strength."

It is as though he is reluctant to use his star power to lead both Canada and his new international partners away from the excessive reliance on military might. Carney prides himself on pragmatism, yet pushes into the background the essential idea for mutual survival in a world increasingly tolerant of the violation of international law. That essential idea is common security, not bloc power. In today's world, Carney should be energizing Canadians with the key idea that the U.S., Russia, and China should work together—not against one another—for humanity's survival.

Several of his predecessors demonstrated moral leadership and were able to lift up Canada's contribution to world peace: Lester B. Pearson started UN peacekeeping, Brian Mulroney rejected apartheid, Jean Chrétien kept Canada out of the Iraq war, Paul Martin said 'no' to missile defence. Their courage to go against American pressure allowed Canada to lead in developing the Landmines Treaty and the International Criminal Court.

Underneath the welter of new alliances Carney is forming to save Canada economically and recover some of our strength internationally, I sense that he is holding back from boldly advancing UN principles and international law.

It is hard to feel inspired. Maybe, inside his polished exterior, Carney is searching for his true political self and, as time goes on, a more assured Carney will lead this country to more humane policies that protect both humanity and the environment. Maybe he is playing a long game, concentrating on getting past the curse of Trump on the world before making any giant moves. Maybe.

Former Senator Douglas Roche's latest book is Keep Hope Alive: Essay for a War-free World *(Amazon).*

The Hill Times

OPINION

Forty years of Anglo-Irish agreement

Forty years ago, the United Kingdom's then-prime minister Margaret Thatcher, left, and Ireland's Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, the British royal family's residence in Northern Ireland. *Photographs courtesy of Commons Wikimedia*

We have learned that support from international partners is indispensable. The principled and sustained engagement of global partners like Canada in Northern Ireland was crucial to lifting us up in bad times. We will always remember that, and we keep paying it forward by engaging actively in peacebuilding work internationally.

Simon Harris

Opinion

DUBLIN, IRELAND–Forty years ago, something extraordinary occurred: the heads of the Irish and British governments—Taoiseach Garret FitzGerald and prime minister Margaret Thatcher—signed the AngloIrish Agreement at Hillsborough Castle, the British royal family's residence in Northern Ireland.

It was a historic moment. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was the first time that Ireland and Britain forged a lasting partnership on Northern Ireland. It was the product of deft diplomacy and political courage, beginning a process which ended the three decades of violence we call The Troubles. If you are interested in Ireland, you have heard of the Good Friday Agreement, the culmination of the peace process. Fewer will remember the AngloIrish Agreement that preceded it.

Anniversaries are important. They situate us in history to see how a story fits together, backwards and forwards. Sometimes they can offer lessons.

This year's anniversary does just that. When we look at the Middle East or Sudan, it can be easy to fall into a kind of fatalism that tells us conflict in divided societies is intractable. Peace in Northern Ireland is a rare and precious thing: a political settlement that has endured.

The Troubles began in 1969, when violence broke out across community divides in Northern Ireland. The situation spiralled over the following years: in 1972, around 500 people were killed. There were fears of civil war.

From 1977, the numbers killed each year hovered around the 100 mark. This may seem a small figure when set against other modern conflicts. But each death was a tragedy that frayed the fabric of a small place. Northern Ireland had become the most violent and militarized region in Western Europe.

Violence and division persisted throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Political initiatives came to nothing. Then, in 1983, an Irish official, walking along a Dublin canal with his British counterpart, made a radical proposition: an 'Irish dimension' to governing Northern Ireland, in exchange for recognition of Northern Ireland's status in the United Kingdom.

The negotiations that followed were long and complex, but that basic equation held. What emerged was remarkable: an international treaty that gave the Irish government a formal role in the governance of Northern Ireland, the territory of another state.

The spirit of partnership between the two governments realized in the agreement would prove the essential stabilizing force for the peace process. It led to the Good Friday Agreement, which took the gun out of Irish politics for good.

The British and Irish governments directly negotiated the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This was a huge step forward in the bilateral relationship. But it also marked the beginning of the internationalisation of the peace process.

In 1986, in the immediate aftermath of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the British and Irish governments established the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), an independent international organization which aimed "to encourage contact, dialogue and reconciliation between nationalists and unionists throughout Ireland."

When we sought international support for the fund, Canada stepped forward under the leadership of then-prime minister Brian Mulroney, becoming one of the founding members alongside the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the European Union. This international support for reconciliation on our island was fundamental to the success of the peace process.

Canada has provided almost $8-million and has focused its contribution on programs for young people. Over the last 40 years, 18,000 young people from disadvantaged communities in Northern Ireland have benefited from IFI programs that Canada has supported.

In the years that followed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Canada again stepped forward. Initially asked by the Irish and British governments in 1995 to support the peace negotiations that were underway for a short period of time, Canadian General John de Chastelain ultimately oversaw the decommissioning of weapons by paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland through his role as chair of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning. What was supposed to be a 60-day contract turned into 15 years of painstaking work and commitment. His role in finally taking the gun out of Irish politics will never be forgotten.

As the process moved from negotiation to implementation, the late Justice Peter Cory contributed to the complex efforts of reckoning with the legacy of the conflict, by examining the difficult question of collusion between State forces and paramilitary groups. He was ably assisted by Renée Pomerance, then a legal adviser, now an Appeal Court Judge in Ontario.

Canada also generously shared its experiences in police reform, community policing and integration, helping with the establishment of a new cross-community policing service: the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

In recognition of Canada's contribution, our governments have recently agreed to establish a joint scholarship program, named for Gen. de Chastelain. This program presents an opportunity for Ireland and Canada to work together in addressing the root causes of instability and conflict, fostering peace and reconciliation on a global scale.

What can we take from all this for today's world? No two conflicts are the same, but our experience tells us that it takes creativity and hard compromises to make peace. It takes political leadership and a spirit of inclusivity.

We have learned that support from international partners is indispensable. Principled and sustained international engagement in Northern Ireland, including from Canada, was crucial. It lifted us up at the worst of times. We will always remember that contribution and we continue to pay it forward by engaging actively in peacebuilding work internationally.

Simon Harris TD is the Tánaiste (deputy prime minister) of Ireland. He is also the minister for finance. He served as minister for foreign affairs, trade and the minister for defence until Nov. 18, 2025. He is also the MP for Wicklow, Ireland.

The Hill Times

Loyalist banner and graffiti on a building in the Shankill area of Belfast, 1970. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

The Hill Times

Dec. 8, 2025

100 BEST BOOKS 2025

JIM COUTTS & **RON GRAHAM**

DARRELL BRICKER & JOHN IBBITSON

ELAMIN **ABDELMAHMOUD**

MARCELLO **DI CINTIO**

FRANCINE PELLETIER

TIM **COOK** · **ROSE** LEMAY · MIRIAM **TOEWS** · **STEPHEN** AZZI

OMAR EL AKKAD · **MARK** BOURRIE · **J.D.M.** STEWART · **PATRICE** DUTIL

JUSTIN LING **LYSE DOUCET** GREG MERCER **OLIVIER JACQUES & ALAIN NOËL**
LINDEN MACINTYRE KEVIN LYNCH & JAMES MITCHELL **PATTY KRAWEC**
JACK CUNNINGHAM & JOHN MEEHAN **DAVID A. ROBERTSON** CLAIRE CAMERON
PETER KUITENBROUWER BRIAN DAY **STEPHEN MONTEIRO**
LEANNE BETASAMOSAKE SIMPSON **CHARLES BURTON** VINH NGUYEN
ALEX MARLAND, JARED J. WESLEY, & MIREILLE LALANCETTE

CONTENTS

Mark Critch

▶ PAGE 38

Funny guy Mark Critch is goddamned serious about Canada. He talks about his new book, *Sorry, Not Sorry: An Unapologetic Look at What Makes Canada Worth Fighting For*.

Bob Joseph

▶ PAGE 30

In his book, *21 Things You Need to Know About Indigenous Self-Government*, Bob Joseph breaks down many assumptions about the Indian Act and easily relating how this alternative can be used to circumvent this antiquated legislation.

Marsha Lederman

▶ PAGE 16

Marsha Lederman's *October 7th* is a book that comes out of the Hamas attacks on Israel and Israel's military response, but it's not an account of the war in Gaza or how it is playing out in Israeli politics or in the Arab world. It is about how the conflict is being felt here in Canada, culturally.

Lyse Doucet

▶ PAGE 15

BBC News' chief international correspondent Lyse Doucet's book, *The Finest Hotel in Kabul*, presents the stories of Afghans working in Kabul's first luxury hotel throughout decades of war.

Sirous Houshmand

▶ PAGE 32

'If you have a purpose, then you become resilient. Then you want to fight for something. But if you don't have a purpose … I have seen people in isolation lose their mind because they just didn't want to be there and didn't know why they were there,' says Sirous Houshman, author of *The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days*.

J.D.M. Stewart

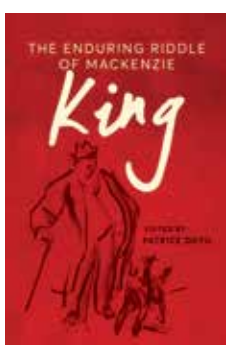
▶ PAGE 35

The Canadian historian says he was speaking to a group of high school students and none of them knew who Lester B. Pearson was, so he decided to write a book about every prime minister in Canada.

Andrew Coyne

▶ PAGE 28

Andrew Coyne is right to raise his voice about the crisis of Canada. But the extinction-level political disaster he's so worried about hasn't happened over the span of this country's ungainly, unworkable existence. Which means that Coyne could be right tomorrow, but so far has been wrong for the past 158 years.



Patrice Dutil

▶ PAGE 26

Editor Patrice Dutil's collection of essays in *The Enduring Riddle of Mackenzie King* dives into the former prime minister's personality, relationship with society, and policies—and why Canadian politicians 'need to re-learn King's statecraft.'

THE HILL TIMES
100 Best Books 2025

Editor: Kate Malloy
Managing Editor: Charelle Evelyn
Digital Editor: Samantha Wright Allen
Executive Editor: Peter Mazereeuw
Deputy Editors: Laura Ryckewaert, Tessie Sanci
Deputy Digital Editor: Marlo Glass
Assistant Deputy Editor: Abbas Rana
Publishers: Anne Marie Creskey, Jim Creskey, Leslie Dickson, Ross Dickson
General Manager, CFO: Andrew Morrow

EDITORIAL
CONTRIBUTORS
Christopher Dornan
David Herle
Irem Koca
Christina Leadlay
Kate Malloy
Alex Marland
Peter Mazereeuw
Neil Moss
Abbas Rana
Eleanor Wand
Samantha Wright Allen

ENGAGEMENT EDITOR
Christina Leadlay

PHOTOGRAPHERS
Sam Garcia, Andrew Meade, and Cynthia Münster

EDITORIAL CARTOONIST
Michael de Adder

ADVERTISING
VICE PRESIDENT MARKETING AND MULTIMEDIA SALES
Steve MacDonald

DIRECTORS OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Craig Caldbick, Erveina Gosalci, and Martin Reaume

DIGITAL AND DESIGN
CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER
David Little

SENIOR WEB DEVELOPER
Nick Vakulenko

DIGITAL AND PRODUCTION MANAGER
Joey Sabourin

SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Neena Singhal

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Naomi Wildeboer

ADMINISTRATION
HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER
Tracey Wale

SUBSCRIPTIONS
MARKETING DIRECTOR
Chris Rivoire

LOYALTY AND SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER
Melanie Grant

SUBSCRIPTION SALES EXECUTIVE
Sean Hansel

OFFICE AND CIRCULATION MANAGER
Irma Guarneros

SALES CONSULTANT
Puran Guram

DELIVERY INQUIRIES
circulation@hilltimes.com
613-688-8821

Published every Monday and Wednesday by Hill Times Publishing Inc.

246 Queen Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E4
(613) 232-5952
Fax (613) 232-9055
Canadian Publications Mail Agreement No. 40068926
www.hilltimes.com

Please send letters to the editor to the above street address or e-mail to news@hilltimes.com. Deadline is Wednesday at noon, Ottawa time, for the Monday edition and Friday at noon for the Wednesday edition. Please include your full name, address and daytime phone number. *The Hill Times* reserves the right to edit letters. Letters do not reflect the views of *The Hill Times*. Thank you.

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40068926
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO: CIRCULATION DEPT. 246 Queen Street Suite 200, Ottawa, ON K1P 5E4

CMCA AUDITED
2012 Better Newspaper Winner

100 Best Books 2025

The Finest Hotel in Kabul is a window into Afghan endurance through the eyes of locals working at the Intercontinental Hotel

BBC News' chief international correspondent Lyse Doucet's book presents the stories of Afghans working in Kabul's first luxury hotel throughout decades of war.

See story by Eleanor Wand, pp. 22–23

Canadian journalist Lyse Doucet, pictured recently at *The Hill Times*' office in Ottawa, lived for many years at Kabul's Intercontinental Hotel as a BBC News journalist. She's compiled the stories of the local hotel staff into a new book, *The Finest Hotel in Kabul*. *The Hill Times photograph by Eleanor Wand*

100 Best Books 2025

EXTREMITIES OF ANGER

Marsha Lederman's *October 7* is a book that comes out of the Hamas attacks on Israel and Israel's military response, but it's not an account of the war in Gaza or how it is playing out in Israeli politics or in the Arab world. It is about how the conflict is being felt here in Canada, culturally.

BY CHRISTOPHER DORNAN

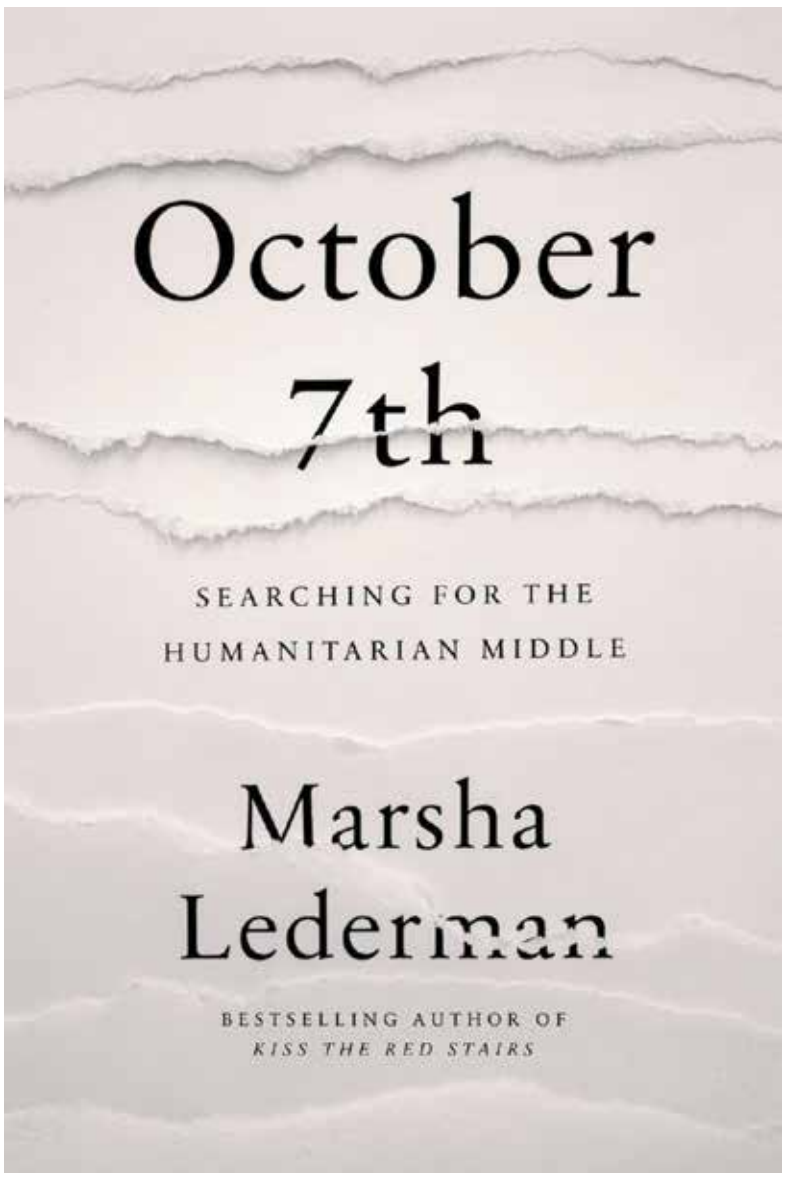
What does it mean, in a free society, to be "brave enough to speak up"? If nothing else, it implies there are others who are afraid to speak up. What are they afraid of? What hushes them into keeping their opinions to themselves?

To be brave enough to speak up means you have something to say that you know a lot of people are not going to like. They are going to lash out at you, but you have the courage to say it anyway in defiance of the outrage. You brave the consequences. And you do so because you believe that what needs to be said can make a difference in how people think. You can change minds. Even if you are mocked, despised, intimidated for what you say, you believe in your right to say it.

It is a heroic thing to stand against the majority, unless it is a vile thing to do. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Oswald Mosley were both jailed for speaking up.

Marsha Lederman's *October 7* is a book that comes out of the Hamas attacks on Israel in 2023 and Israel's military response, but it's not an account of the war in Gaza, or how it is playing out either in Israeli politics or in the Arab world. It is about how the conflict is being felt here in Canada, culturally. It is about protests and speaking up, student encampments, and campaigns of complaint. It worries about intimidation and a tense, fearful politics of confrontation that has nothing to do with Prime Minister Mark Carney or Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, Alberta or Quebec, right-wing or left-wing. The politics she describes runs underneath all that, like a poison. The book is about antisemitism, but not only about antisemitism.

Lederman is a columnist and arts correspondent for *The Globe and Mail*, and is the author of *Kiss the Red Stairs*, a memoir of the Holocaust and her grandparents. She abhors what Hamas planned and executed on Oct. 7, 2023, an unforgivable act of butchery. She also detests the politics of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the butchery of what his government has done in response in the name of Israel. And she is shaken by the fury and hatred stirred up by both.



Just as not all Palestinians were responsible for Oct. 7, not all Jews are culpable for what has happened to Gaza. Not even, by a long shot, all Israelis. In their intensity and persistence, the anti-Netanyahu protests in Israel dwarf anything the anti-Trump constituency in the United States has managed to muster. It is not a people or an ethnicity or a faith that has destroyed Gaza, it is a political faction. Just as it was not a people or an ethnicity or a faith that carried out the Oct. 7 attacks. It was a political faction.

This book is a collection of columns and articles Lederman wrote for *The Globe and Mail*, unspooling with events. We see things as she reacts to them. She comes to the problem not with policy proposals, but with vignettes. First and foremost, she wants us to *feel* what this means.

What is it like to go about your day in this liberal democratic society of tolerance and diversity, knowing there is hostility out there toward you that could catch you at any moment? Anything from a small slight to a gross injustice to an ugly scene. Maybe an encounter in a convenience store, maybe something that happened to your kid coming home from school, maybe a cop who just takes a dislike to you, maybe a crowd of people massed in the streets, chanting against you.

Lederman is well aware that this thrum of anxiety is shared by Arab, Muslim, Indigenous, Black, Asian, brown, gay, lesbian, trans, and every Canadian who has felt bigotry and spite from their supposed fellow Canadians. She knows the pain of Palestinians because she can feel it through the pain of what happened to her family. She uses antisemitism to illustrate every other vicious prejudice we have in Canada, of which—goddamn it—one is too many.


Marsha Lederman is a columnist and arts correspondent for *The Globe and Mail*, and also author of *Kiss the Red Stairs*, a memoir of the Holocaust and her grandparents. She abhors what Hamas planned and executed on Oct. 7, 2023, unforgivable act of butchery. She also detests the politics of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, writes Christopher Dornan. *Handout photograph*

Any society that allows free speech is going to end up with antisemitism and Islamophobia. For that matter, any society that prohibits free speech will still have antisemitism and Islamophobia. The quandary is what to do about it. How does one respond to rage? How can one undo the unjust vilification of entire peoples?

The book is subtitled "Searching for the Humanitarian Middle," but there is no humanitarian middle between what Hamas did on Oct. 7, and what Israel has done in return. There is, though, perhaps a humanitarian middle to be found in how we in Canada speak about our differences on the Middle East and the issue of Palestine and Israel, how we can protest one another without threatening one another. That's what Lederman is advocating.

Her vignettes put the reader in the position of having to decide. She lays out the particulars and you must play along. What would you have done, for example, had you been on the board of a performing arts institution in the wake of Oct. 7 when an avalanche of angry opinion demanded that an upcoming engagement be cancelled because the author/artist/musician was Israeli/Palestinian/had expressed views that enraged Israelis and/or Palestinians? (It's interesting how many engagements were cancelled in the heat of the political moment. Then later, when temperatures cooled, how many statements of regret were issued for decisions that had been too hastily taken.)

Lederman is a calm, measured voice who writes for *The Globe and Mail*, whose readers are in the main calm and rational themselves. Even so, the subject matter of Israel and Palestine, antisemitism and Islamophobia, has become so incendiary that it takes a measure of bravery to speak up. The book's final chapter provides a sample of the hate mail Lederman received in response to these pieces when they were first published. She was called a self-hating Jew. Someone hoped she had a pager Mossad could detonate remotely so that she would be killed or severely burned. "It's become normal for me this year, this hatred," she writes.

Though an important institution, *The Globe and Mail* is an old-school media property with a much smaller footprint than the YouTube, Reddit, Discord, etc. platforms through which the discourse on Oct. 7 and Gaza is now playing out in all its fury. Lederman hopes to help find a middle ground between the extremities of anger, but that's not what the new-school media are interested in. For them, it's all about the extremities of anger. Speaking out in order to stir things up.

Christopher Dornan taught at Carleton University for 33 years where he served for nine of those as director of the School of Journalism and Communication, and six years as director of the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs. He is the co-editor of The Canadian Federal Election of 2025 *(forthcoming, McGill-Queen's University Press) and eight previous volumes in this series.*

October 7: Searching for the Humanitarian Middle, by Marsha Lederman, McClelland & Stewart, 259 pp., $36.95.

The Hill Times

Did You Know?

Canadian-owned publishers produce roughly 80% of English-language books by Canadian authors, yet they are overshadowed by hundreds of multinational imprints competing for shelf space. In 2024, books published by Canadian companies accounted for **just 5.6% of reported sales across the country.**

The Certified Canadian Publisher program, administered by the Association of Canadian Publishers, makes domestic ownership visible in the marketplace.

Impact Across Industries

Purchasing from a Certified Canadian Publisher:

- **Supports local printing & production,** including Canadian printers and manufacturing jobs.
- **Benefits ancillary sectors**, including bookstores, libraries, and wholesalers.
- **Champions Canadian education**, keeping Canadian perspectives front and centre.
- **Encourages cultural & economic development** across Canada.

CERTIFIED CANADIAN PUBLISHER

ADMINISTERED BY

acp association of CANADIAN PUBLISHERS

LEARN MORE

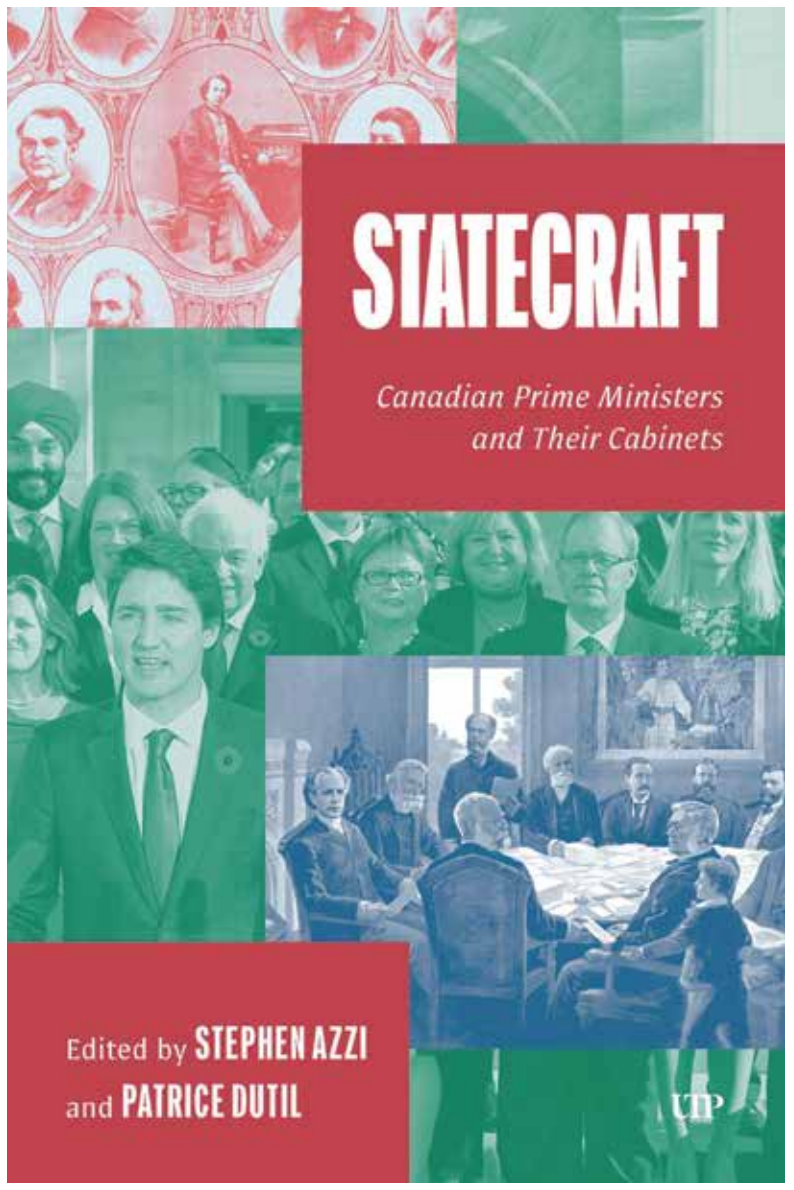
Visit: certifiedcanadianpublisher.com

Contact: admin@canbook.org

100 Best Books 2025

Statecraft opens the cabinet door on prime ministerial power in Ottawa

How do prime ministers create and manage their cabinets? That's the central question behind the new book, *Statecraft: Canadian Prime Ministers and Their Cabinets*.



Statecraft: Canadian Prime Ministers and Their Cabinets, edited by Stephen Azzi and Patrice Dutil, University of Toronto Press, 552 pp., $49.95. *Book cover courtesy of University of Toronto Press*

BY ALEX MARLAND

Editors Stephen Azzi and Patrice Dutil—professors at Carleton University and Toronto Metropolitan University, respectively—have spent years studying and publishing about Canadian prime ministers. In *Statecraft*, they introduce a novel lens to a literature that has traditionally focused on prime ministers as heads of government striving to advance an agenda without being derailed by political firefighting or character flaws. Normally, books about PMs are a deep examination of a single person's time in office. Other works examine a selection of PMs, sometimes attempting to rank all of them, often pitting William Lyon Mackenzie King atop the prime ministerial career ladder whereas those who were barely in office clutch to the bottom rung. There are also books that deliver a thematic twist on executive power, such as prime ministers and their foreign policy. But until now, we haven't seen a book exclusively about their statecraft, addressing a dearth of information about how prime ministers manage their cabinets.

Investigating the inner workings of cabinet is never easy, given that the institution is designed to operate in secret behind closed doors. *Statecraft* sets out to examine political leadership, the dynamics of cabinet collegiality, and the stewardship of government. These three elements blend the political sensibilities of popularity, the underappreciated skill of human resource management, and the demands of overseeing institutional structures of government. Each chapter profiling a prime minister features detailed lists of ministries and ministers, including portfolios, shuffles and even their prior occupation and age at appointment. This cataloguing will please historians looking for comprehensive reference in one place. Others will look for thematic patterns, where broad trends matter more than cataloguing individuals.

Azzi and Dutil have assembled a crack team of expert historians and political scientists to contribute chapters, among them Raymond Blake, Robert Bothwell, John English, Mari Janigan, J.P. Lewis, Lori Turnbull, and Paul Wilson. (Full disclosure: I co-authored the chapter on Justin Trudeau, alongside former PMO staffers Jeni Armstrong and Dan Arnold. For several years we were regularly updating the piece to reflect cabinet machinations as Trudeau's popularity eroded, right up to Mark Carney becoming prime minister.) Upon receiving the book, I immediately read Wilson's chapter about Stephen Harper, given that he too worked in the PMO. I was not disappointed: there's lots of rich insights into Harper's statecraft, including preparing for Question Period, the use of daily briefing notes to keep the prime minister and his senior staff informed, and the unintended consequences of sidelining memorandums to cabinet that did not include a clearly defined funding commitment.

Each chapter similarly has knowledge nuggets that will delight those who like prime ministerial history. We're reminded that diversity in John A. Macdonald's day meant balancing the number of Catholics and Protestants in cabinet, though region—particularly representation from Ontario and Quebec—dominated cabinetmaking, as it has with everyone who has sat in the big chair. Ministers in Wilfrid Laurier's cabinet were given ample opportunity to express their views, both in cabinet meetings and in public policy decisions. King institutionalized cabinet processes while managing ministers who were alcoholics; Louis St. Laurent prized administrative ability and team players. John Diefenbaker might have won by a landslide in the 1958 election, but he lacked support from his ministers: "The Ontarians in cabinet never liked him, the Quebecers did not trust him, the Westerners did not know what to make of him," (page 258). We also see the rise of the power and influence of political staff: Pierre Trudeau's cabinets featured former PMO staffers (page 295), while Brian Mulroney assigned a staffer to be his "personal representative" on free trade negotiations, thereby marginalizing Pat Carney, the minister of international trade (page 341). We also see that prime ministers gradually build institutional and personal influence over their cabinets, though the book adds further evidence that Canadian PMs have not been nearly as domineering as many scholars and pundits allege.

The effort required to piece together evidence of statecraft from more than a century ago is impressive. Historians invest considerable energy in tracking down old correspondence and archival fragments, which requires deciphering handwriting and establishing context. Across the chapters, there is a noticeable methodological shift: research on 19th-century prime ministers relies heavily on letters and newspapers; for 20th-century leaders, scholars draw more on books and academic articles; and for 21st-century counterparts, about whom far fewer books exist, the analysis often depends on online news sources and information from participants.

Each chapter ends with a perceptive summary of the prime minister's approach to statecraft. Political scientists might elect to gravitate first toward these concluding sections and the editors' framing chapters, while historians will likely prefer to immerse themselves in the richer detail found within each narrative. In my view, the editors' reflections on whether prime ministers have passed key managerial tests (pp. 446–457) are some of the book's strongest intellectual contributions because they generalize the findings across cases, thereby empowering us with a theoretical lens to assess past, present and future leaders. Throughout, chronologies about prime ministerial statecraft are interspersed with political cartoons and photographs of cabinets from yesteryear that bring the subjects and their politics to life.

All prime ministers have their shortcomings, and so do books (as do book reviewers!). A paragraph nestled on page 455 where the editors acknowledge the need to theorize about the impact of women on cabinet lays bare a striking omission in *Statecraft*. Kim Campbell receives only the briefest of mentions, a gap the editors attribute to her short 75-day tenure before the 1993 election campaign. Ellen Fairclough, who in 1957 became the first woman to serve in the federal cabinet, hardly registers, with no attention to the substantial barriers she confronted. The book would have been stronger had it mentioned some of these obstacles, ranging from Fairclough being asked to leave cabinet meetings during contentious policy discussions deemed too garish for a woman to the simple but telling fact that she had to walk a long distance, accompanied by a security guard, to reach one of the few women's washrooms on Parliament Hill.

Readers would likely appreciate learning, for example, how Judy LaMarsh had her speeches vetted by Lester Pearson's PMO in the 1960s—a constraint her male colleagues apparently did not face—or grasping the difficulties Karina Gould encountered when giving birth in 2018 while serving as a cabinet minister and taking parental leave in Justin Trudeau's government. A chapter dedicated to outlining the challenges that women have encountered in Canadian statecraft would have been a welcome addition to knowledge.

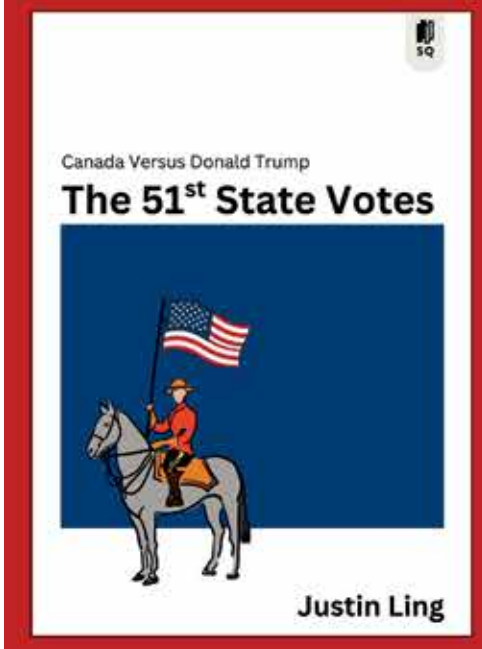
Statecraft is a smart, detailed, and highly welcome book that will appeal to anyone interested in Canadian prime ministers, political history, or the craft of executive leadership. It promises to be an essential reference for understanding how Canada's leaders have structured their cabinets and exercised power over time.

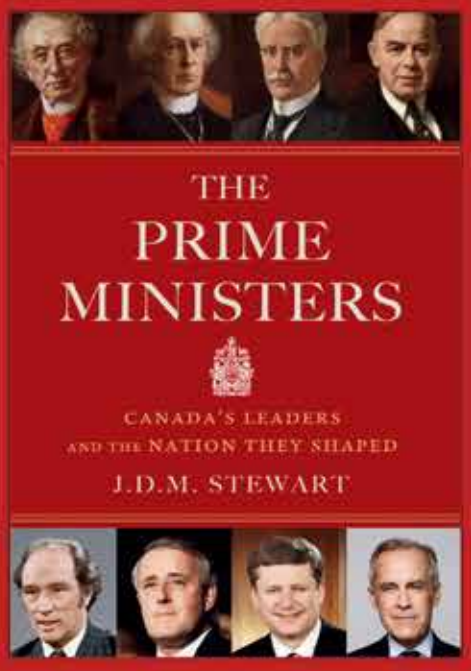
Alex Marland researches and teaches Canadian politics, specializing in party politics, leadership, and political communications. He is the author of Brand Command, Whipped, and No I in Team *(with Jared Wesley and Mireille Lalancette).*

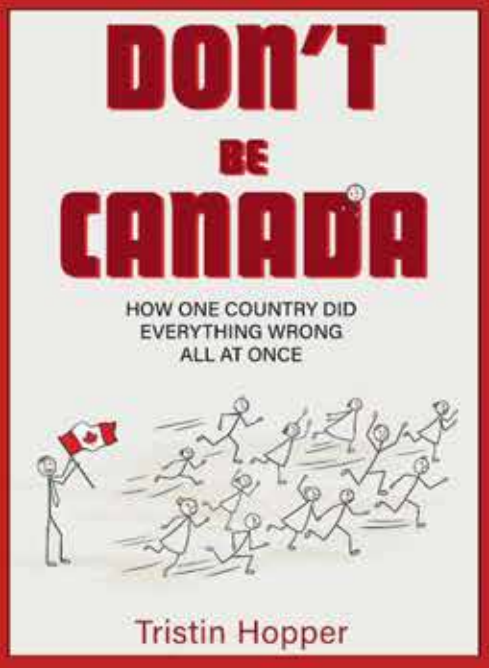
***Statecraft: Canadian Prime Ministers and Their Cabinets*, edited by Stephen Azzi and Patrice Dutil**, University of Toronto Press, 552 pp., $49.95.

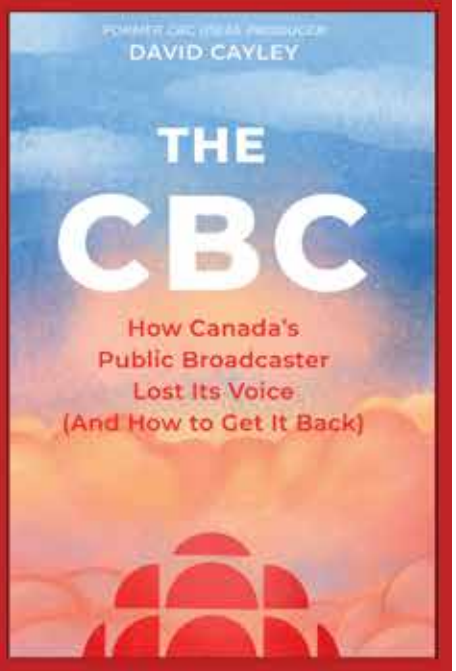
The Hill Times

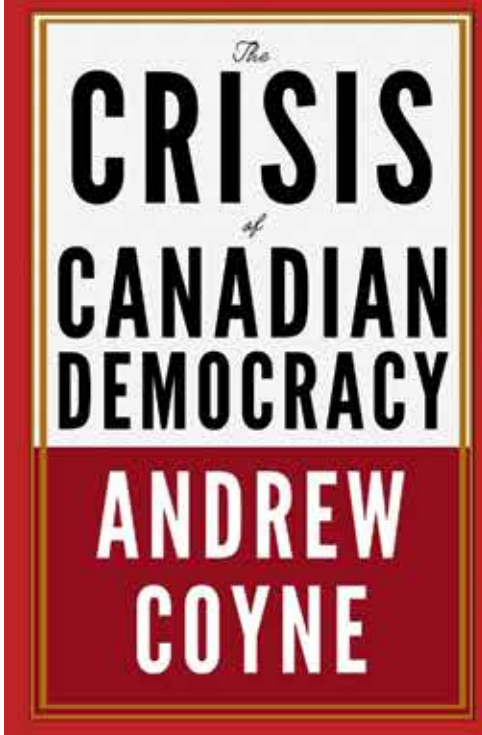
this year, give the gift of Canada's best political nonfiction

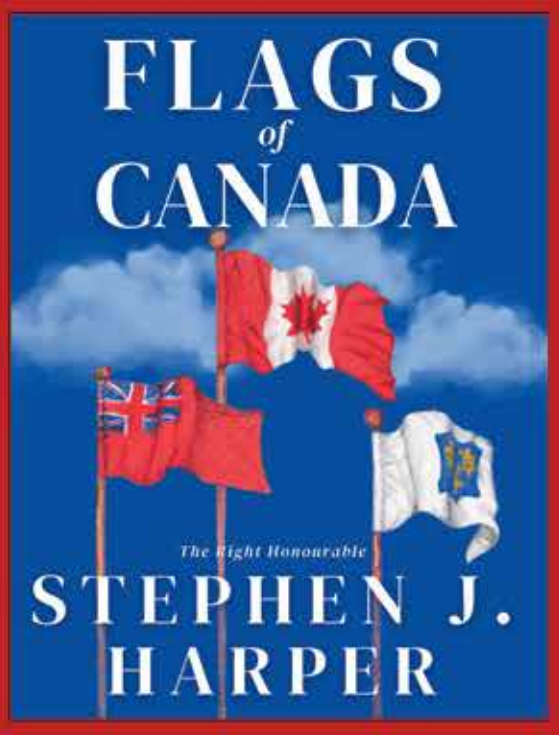


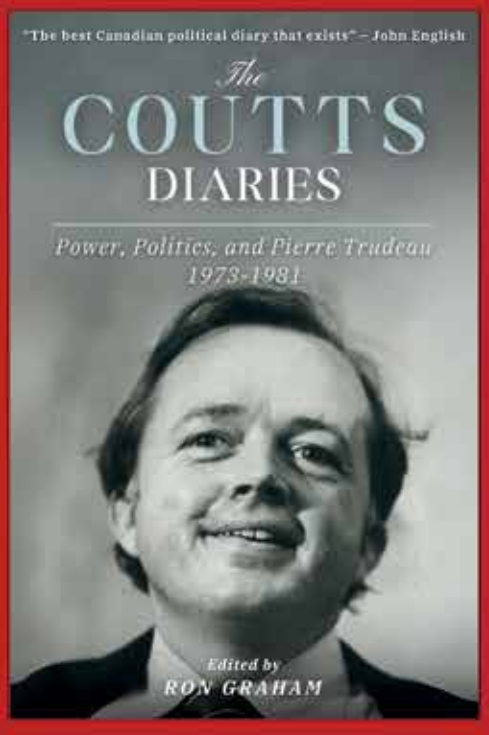


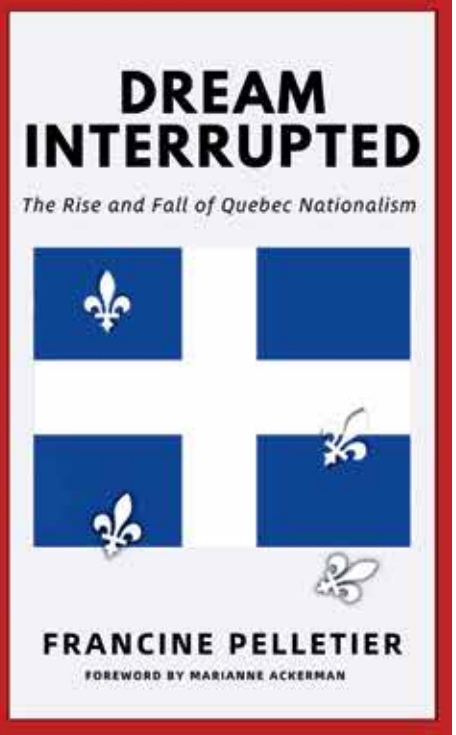


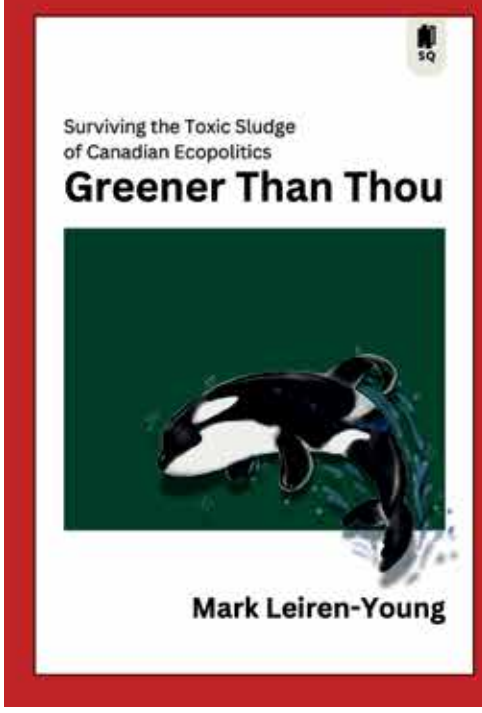


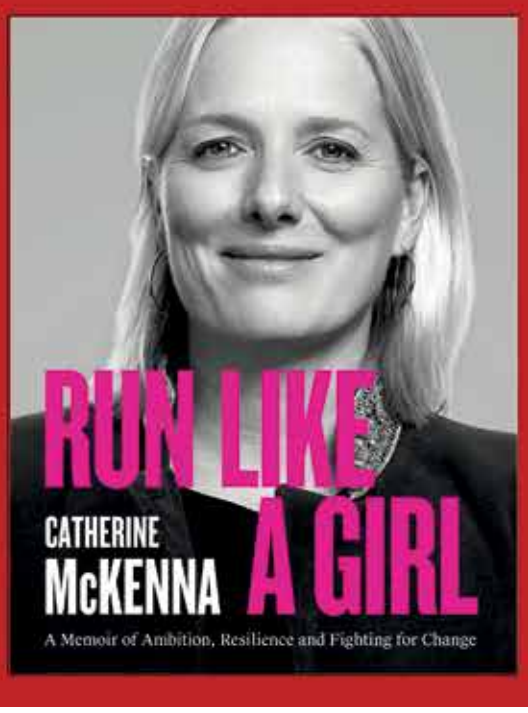


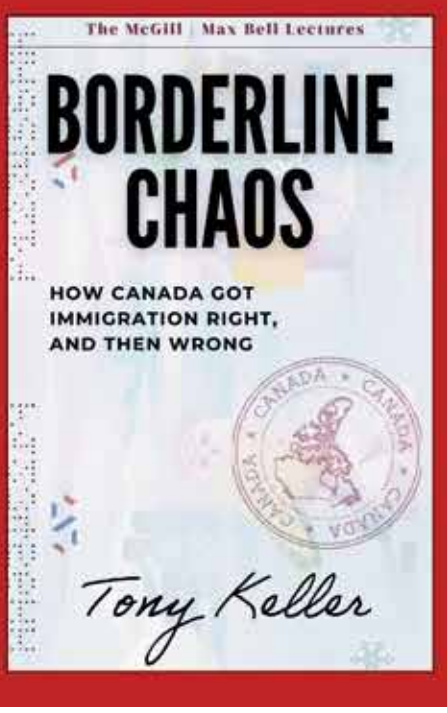












sh.
SUTHERLAND
HOUSE

100 Best Books 2025

The Coutts Diaries is the most revealing book ever written about Canadian politics

Then-U.S. president Richard Nixon, left, and then-prime minister of Canada Pierre Trudeau inside the Prime Minister's Office in Centre Block on April 14, 1972. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

This is a previously unseen view of Pierre Trudeau, one that is sure to alter your opinions of him. It is an unvarnished look inside the government that brought you wage and price controls, the Charter of Rights, and the National Energy Program. And it is a darkly moving account of the life of a senior political staffer.

BY DAVID HERLE

TORONTO—*The Coutts Diaries: Power, Politics and Pierre Trudeau 1973-1981* is the most revealing book ever written about Canadian politics, and one of the most important. This is a previously unseen view of former prime minister Pierre Trudeau—one that is sure to alter your opinions of him. It is an unvarnished look inside the government that brought you wage and price controls, the Charter of Rights, and the National Energy Program. And it is a darkly moving account of the life of a senior political staffer. Coutts gave the best years of his life to Pierre Trudeau, and, at the end, concludes that their relationship had never graduated to that of 'friend'.

The events described in this book took place 50 years ago, and the subject of this book is no longer a household name. So, trust me when I tell you that no staff person in modern Canadian history has wielded more power than Jim Coutts did under Pierre Trudeau.

By the time Coutts joined Trudeau's PMO in 1975, the Liberals were already a 10-year-old government. Some of its best people—most notably John Turner—had left. Others, like Allan MacEachen, were past their political best-before date. A weak ministry combined with a prime minister who was interested only in a few discrete aspects of his job created a void of policy and authority that was filled by Coutts, working hand in glove with then-clerk of the Privy Council Michael Pitfield. Universally considered to be both brilliant and ruthless, Coutts' dominance of both the government and the party make him the most important Liberal, other than Pierre Trudeau, of the 1970s.

And he kept a diary. Almost daily. Unfiltered and raw. Names and all.

For those with an interest in this era of politics, the revelations come fast and furious. Some of the entries are delicious gossip, others detail nation-changing decisions. Pierre Trudeau comes off as prone to long stretches of ordinariness when he's not fundamentally changing the country. Famous names are revealed to have feet of clay. Here's a sampling.

"Friday, Oct. 23, 1978, (more than four years into the mandate): PM went on Friday night to the National Executive meeting. I had briefed him on the meeting and said all that is needed is for you to say we have tough work ahead, we're all Liberals, I need your help, etc. The PM was in a bad mood, didn't want to go to the meeting, did, but performed very badly. He was to respond to questions. The first was, 'what do we say as Liberals when we knock on doors in Vancouver?' The PM said, 'If you don't know that why are you on the executive?' The meeting went downhill from there, with the PM showing up the contradictions in what they said and generally making them feel quite unwanted and unloved. He finally got up and left without saying goodbye."

"Thursday, June 26, 1980, (four months after securing a majority government): Was up this morning at 6:00 to celebrate the beginning of the sixth day without cigarettes. This is the fifth or sixth time I've quit smoking. Spent about an hour before coming to the office at the apartment thinking about where we stood on a number of fronts. I have had the uncomfortable feeling for several weeks that the government and the party are quickly losing the punch that is needed by a new government and the direction and drive that is needed by a party to keep things progressing in a positive way. It seems to me that on the major economic issues, we have no real plan or goals to achieve. I would be much happier if there was any kind of a plan that we were pursuing but I do not see that and my experiences convince me that it will not come from officials and probably not from cabinet."

"Thursday, Oct. 2, 1980 (the day before Trudeau launched his bid to patriate the Constitution): When the PM hung up, he said Davis (Ontario premier Bill Davis) told him a number of things. First, he would phone [John] Buchanan but he didn't want to phone [Richard] Hatfield. Second, he had a long chat with [Joe] Clark and he had warned Clark, who wanted Davis to be critical of the whole process, that he was not going to be and he suggested to Clark that if he ever wanted to win seats in Ontario he should not oppose this whole matter. He suggested that [Allan] Blakeney was probably not trustworthy on the whole process."

If that doesn't make you want to read more, I can't help you.

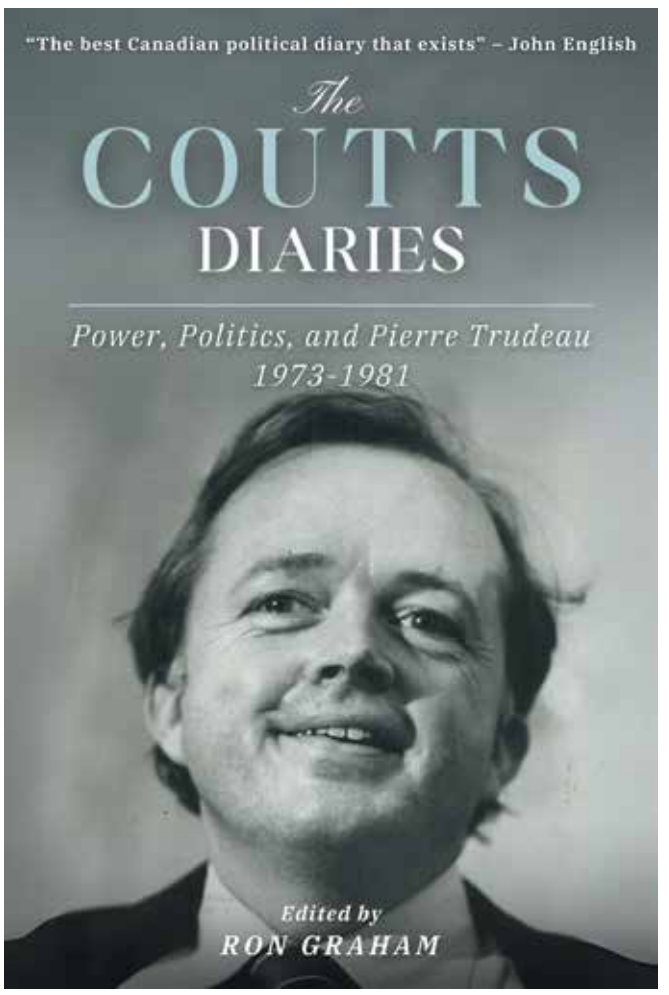
Fifty years later, what's the relevance? For one thing, a lot of the issues are the same. The separatist/nationalist drive in Quebec and the accompanying constitutional issues, the energy wars with Alberta and the seeds of Alberta separatism, the decline of manufacturing, and the reluctance of Canadian business to invest—they all started here. Secondly, this is a very compelling portrait of a full life in politics. The electoral highs and lows, the policy wins and losses, feeling like you are on top of the world, feeling completely lost, being certain of your cause at times and full of doubt at others, the weird impacts on your personal life. And it ends in defeat, rejection and bitterness. Coutts is a hell of a story.

We know of it primarily because of two people. Ron Graham artfully and thoughtfully edited the diaries into something digestible. Graham is as authoritative an expert on that period in Canadian politics as exists, having written a number of books and biographies on the principals of that era. It's one thing to write a book in Canada these days, another to get it published. If it is published, it is likely because of Sutherland House. Ken Whyte's publishing company is doing its best to keep Canadian non-fiction alive, and saw these diaries as the matter of the public interest that they are.

David Herle is a long-time Liberal campaigner, current host of The Curse of Politics *and* The Herle Burly *podcasts, and is a partner at Rubicon Strategy.*

The Coutts Diaries: Power, Politics and Pierre Trudeau 1973-1981, by Jim Coutts, edited by Ron Graham, Sutherland House Books, 463 pp., $50.

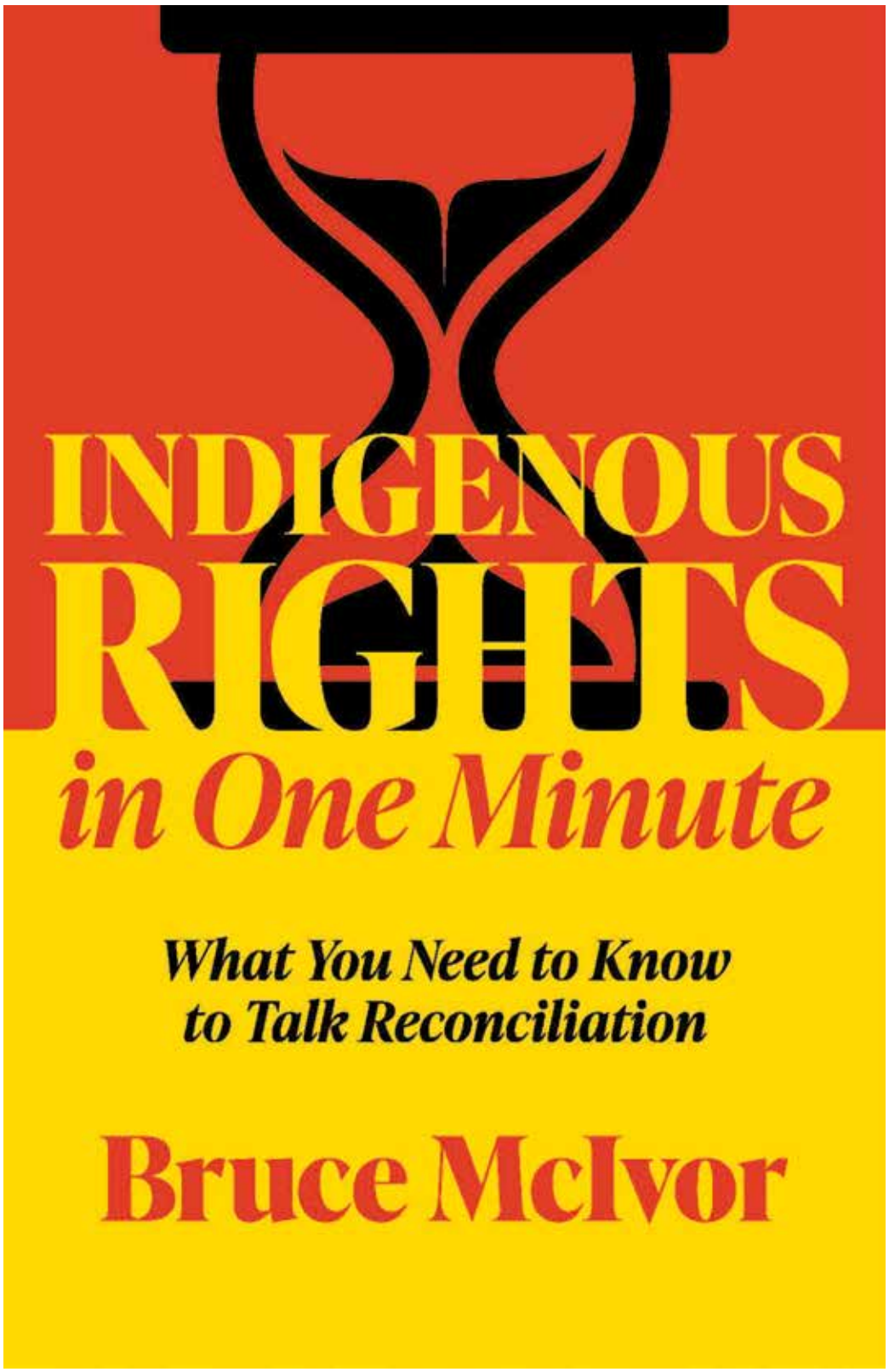
The Hill Times



The Coutts Diaries: Power, Politics and Pierre Trudeau 1973-1981, by Jim Coutts, edited by Ron Graham, Sutherland House Books, 463 pp., $50.

Essential Reading from Nightwood Editions

AVAILABLE ONLINE AND AT YOUR LOCAL BOOKSTORE | FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO WWW.NIGHTWOODEDITIONS.COM



During his nearly three decades advocating for Indigenous rights and teaching Aboriginal law, Bruce McIvor has recorded the fundamental questions that Canadians from all corners of society have asked about reconciliation. In *Indigenous Rights in One Minute*, he provides answers.

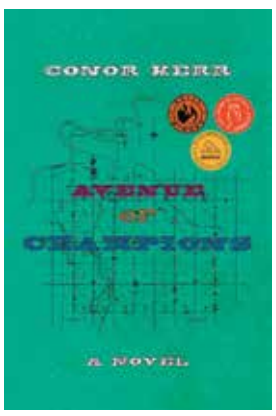
McIvor's explanations of complex legal issues demonstrate a unique mix of a deep knowledge of the law, the ability to write clearly and concisely, practical experience from the frontlines of advocating for First Nations at negotiation tables and in courtrooms, and a profound passion for justice rooted in his work and personal history.

To ensure the country's reconciliation project progresses from rhetoric to reality, ordinary Canadians need straightforward answers to fundamental questions.

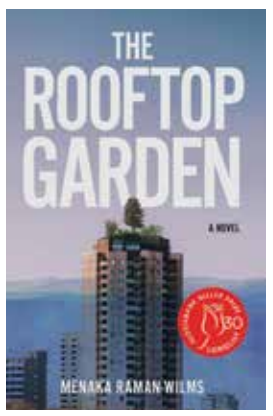
McIvor provides the context to support a thoughtful and respectful national conversation about reconciliation—and the fulfillment of Canada's commitment to a better future for Indigenous people.

NIGHTWOOD EDITIONS

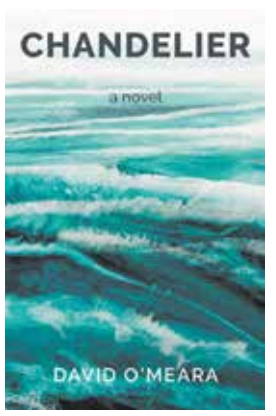
NEW AND NOTABLE NOVELS AND POETRY



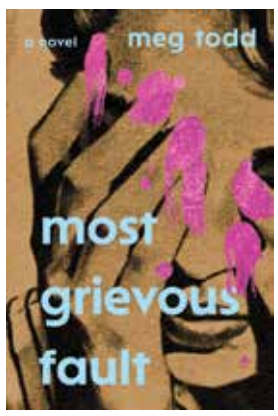
Avenue of Champions
a novel
Conor Kerr



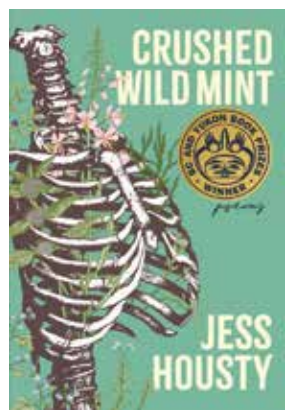
Rooftop Garden
a novel
Menaka Raman-Wilms



Chandelier
a novel
David O'Meara



Most Grievous Fault
a novel
Meg Todd



Crushed Wild Mint
poems
Jess Housty

The Big Melt
poems
Emily Riddle

100 Best Books 2025

The Finest Hotel in Kabul is a window into Afghan endurance through the eyes of locals working at the Intercontinental Hotel

The Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, in the 1970s. *Photograph courtesy of Penguin Random House*

BBC News' chief international correspondent Lyse Doucet's book presents the stories of Afghans working in Kabul's first luxury hotel throughout decades of war.

BY ELEANOR WAND

Lyse Doucet, BBC News' chief international correspondent who has spent decades of her career reporting in places of conflict, says her latest book, *The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan*, takes a different approach to storytelling that "goes beyond the kind of snapshots that we see in the news."

The Finest Hotel in Kabul tells the stories of Afghans working at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan, the country's first luxury hotel, and Doucet's home for many years as a correspondent posted in the country.

It's an easy but powerful read, chronicling the country's story via the everyday routines and lives of the Intercontinental Hotel staff devoted to keeping its doors open amid the changing rulership and wars shaping the nation.

Doucet said her ambition with the book was to offer "a different kind of storytelling" at a time when many are "turning away" from the news. People are presented with the worst moments when watching the news about places in conflict, she said—but she wanted to take a different approach in the book.

"It's people running from the bombs, people wailing in the rubble of their homes, in the hospital—the worst moment of their lives," she said in an interview with *The Hill Times*. "But of course, like all of us, no matter where we live, there are the spaces in between that they, too, have to get up in the morning, find an everyday courage to get through the day."

"Literature has a way to open our hearts," she said.

"This is a book, yes, it's about war, but it's also about a singing contest, *Pop Idol*. It's about women pop stars. It's about weddings and celebrations woven through these hardest of lives," explained Doucet.

The Finest Hotel in Kabul is structured like a narrative history, offering accounts told from the perspective of a cast of locals working at the Intercontinental Hotel. The book opens in 1971—in Afghanistan's "golden years"—and closes in 2021 with the Taliban's return to power.

"I could write a history of Afghanistan [with] watches of information but … I wanted to find a way to tell it as a story," Doucet said.

'I will never know it like an Afghan'

The Canadian journalist, originally from New Brunswick but who now lives in the United Kingdom, wrote the book from years of on-the-ground relationship-building and interviews, conducted alongside her Afghan colleague, Mahfouz Zubaide, who assisted with translation and interpretation.

Doucet said she spent "hours and hours and hours" verifying the translations, explaining she was "deeply conscious" about author authority and authenticity as a non-Afghan writing the stories of locals.

"No matter how long I spend in Afghanistan, I will never know it like an Afghan," she said.

Doucet began reporting in Afghanistan in 1988, arriving to cover the Soviet withdrawal from the region for the BBC, which she called "the most grievous war in the world" at the time. It's when she first began to live at the Intercontinental Hotel alongside other journalists working to capture the story.

She has continued to report in Afghanistan on and off since then, last visiting the country in January 2023. But she said securing a visa under the Taliban government has been more challenging.

"I have copies of the book to bring to them," she said of the people featured in the book, "and I keep pushing and pushing to get there. Hopefully. Now it's getting late in the year, [but] I keep being promised a visa."

Doucet said the places from which she's reported—including Pakistan, Jerusalem, and countries in West Africa—"are places which are not just stories that come and go." They are "places and people who are apart of my personal life," and that is "especially the case in Afghanistan."

The Finest Hotel in Kabul was written while Doucet was working full-time at the BBC. Doucet said she would sit down with the hotel staff after she had filed her stories for the day, listening to their testimonies to piece together her book. After it became more difficult to enter the country, Doucet was forced to move the interviews online.

"I was worried," she said, "but even people like Abida, the first female chef who's not literate—and I thought, 'Oh, is this going to be hard for her?'—and she was brilliant."

But Doucet said there were "one or two people who didn't want to be in the book because they feared there could be consequences." Others didn't want to go back though old stories.

"When they turned to sad stories, they found it too traumatic," she said, adding that, as a journalist, she finds it the "hardest thing" to ask people is about difficult topics.

But, "we always say that Afghans are natural storytellers," Doucet said.

"They're all poets, and they have this wonderful recall," she said. "My Afghan colleague and I would laugh after we finish[ed] an interview. We'd say that we

Hazrat, a housekeeper at the Intercontinental Hotel in Afghanistan, pictured at the hotel. *Photograph courtesy of Penguin Random House*

100 Best Books 2025

Abida, the first female chef at the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan. *Photograph courtesy of Penguin Random House*

can't even remember what we had for lunch yesterday, and they are remembering 50 years."

"They were a gift for me in terms of writing the book."

'The hotel is a character, as well'

Doucet emphasized that though her book wields the "conventions of fiction," it is a true story, depicting the lives of real people, many of whom she's known for decades.

"It's an International Hotel. I've lived the re. It's a hotel which had foreign guests, including, in some periods, a lot of journalists, so I felt I had a corner on the story," she said.

But the author said she tried "very much" to present the narrative in the voice of Afghans, and not her own. Though Doucet herself is included in the book, she is not the focus, and she is primarily written about in the third-person.

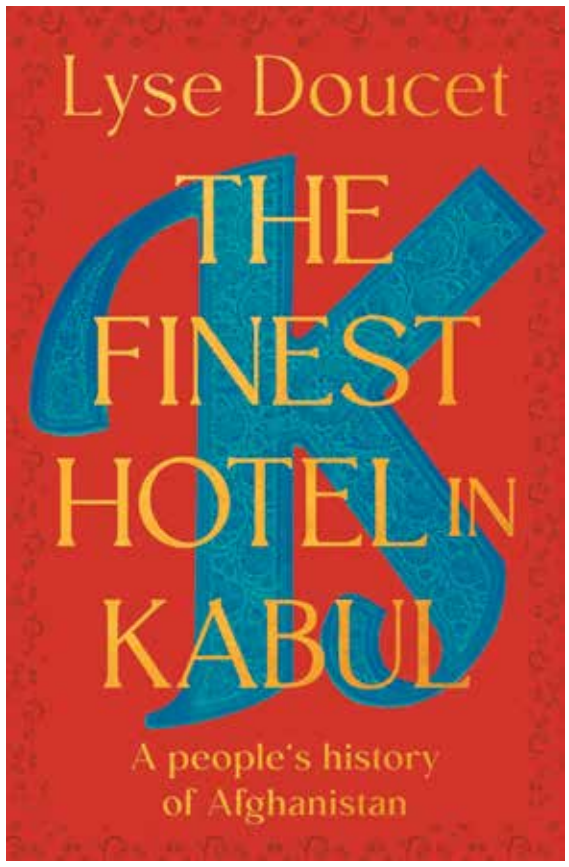
"I was writing in a way that would make more sense to me as a story in terms of a story I would be drawn to," she said. "And the hope, of course, was that others would also be drawn into this."'

Doucet said she was "struck" by the employees' dignity and pride in doing a job well, even though they were doing it through the "worst of times."

"For those like Hazrat, trained by the real Intercontinental Hotel—to this day, he still values that, that he had proper training and that he knows about running the hotel," she said. "I wanted to try to convey that dignity despite all of what was happening around them."

For Doucet, the human side of the story is the facet worth emphasizing.

"I often say in my job that I see it as trying to narrow the gaps between us and them and you and I, and to say that all stories, no matter how complex and consequential, when you drill down, what are they about? They're about mothers and fathers and families and streets and societies—things that all of us can understand."



The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan, by Lyse Doucet, Allen Lane Penguin Random House Canada, 448 pp., $39.

Doucet said she chose to use the hotel as a focal point for the story because it is a "familiar prism" that most people can understand.

"The hotel is a character, as well," Doucet told *The Hill Times*, "because so much of history has gone through Afghanistan's first luxury hotel, first five-star international hotel."

Throughout the book, the changes in governance and the periods of ongoing conflict are reflected in the Intercontinental Hotel itself, its interiors shifting to reflect new rulers.

Afghanistan is one of the few countries to have survived "every possible political system," Doucet highlighted.

"And, throughout it all, the hotel kept working," she said. "The cooks kept pots on the boil, the waiters kept waiting, the bell boys kept lugging luggage. They found ways to carry on while history went back and forth."

Doucet explained that the Intercontinental Hotel's leadership is tied to Afghanistan's. The hotel was originally part of the Intercontinental chain, but it hasn't been associated with it since Russia invaded Afghanistan at the end of the 1970s.

"As soon as the Soviet tanks rumbled in during the Cold War, the luxury international chain—a Western British-American chain—pulled out, so it became a government hotel," she said.

"Whoever rules Afghanistan sets the rules in the Intercontinental, so they kept changing. And so the staff had to keep adjusting to different rulers," she said.

Doucet said she doesn't think she could write another book about Afghanistan. If she were to write again, it will be something "closer to Canada," she said, focusing on the Acadian story.

"I think the Acadian story is a beautiful story of people rising up from great tragedy," she said.

Doucet has Acadian ancestry, coming from a French-speaking part of New Brunswick.

The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan, by Lyse Doucet, Allen Lane Penguin Random House Canada, 448 pp., $39.

ewand@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Ottawa's Premier Independent Bookstore
For Over 30 Years

PERFECT BOOKS

A THOUGHTFULLY CURATED SELECTION

Fiction and nonfiction from local, Canadian, and international authors

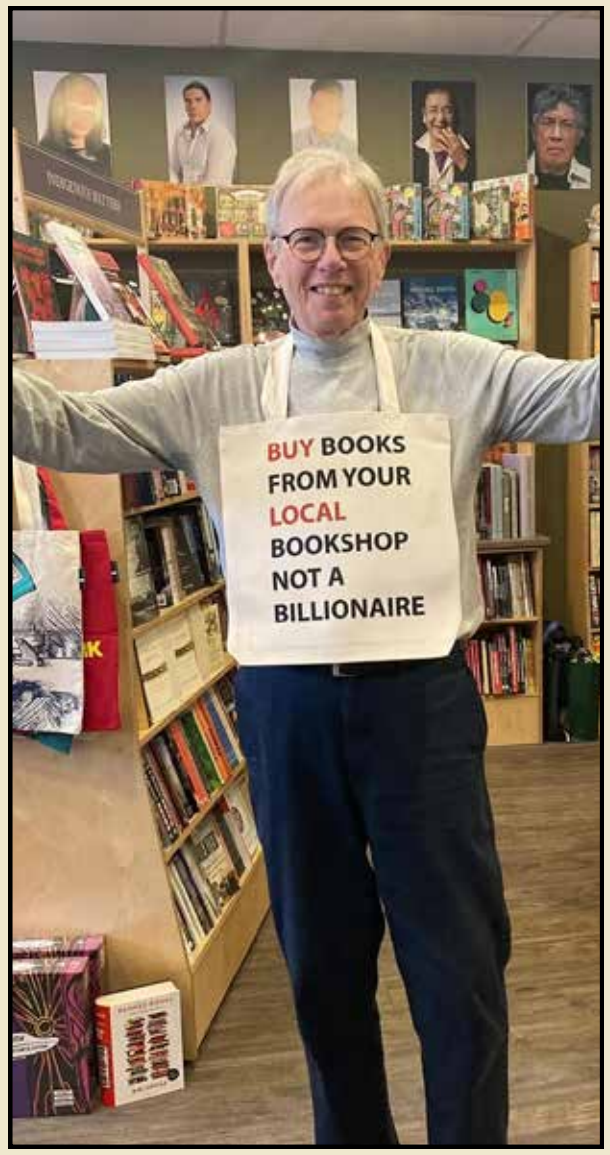
AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LITERARY COMMUNITY

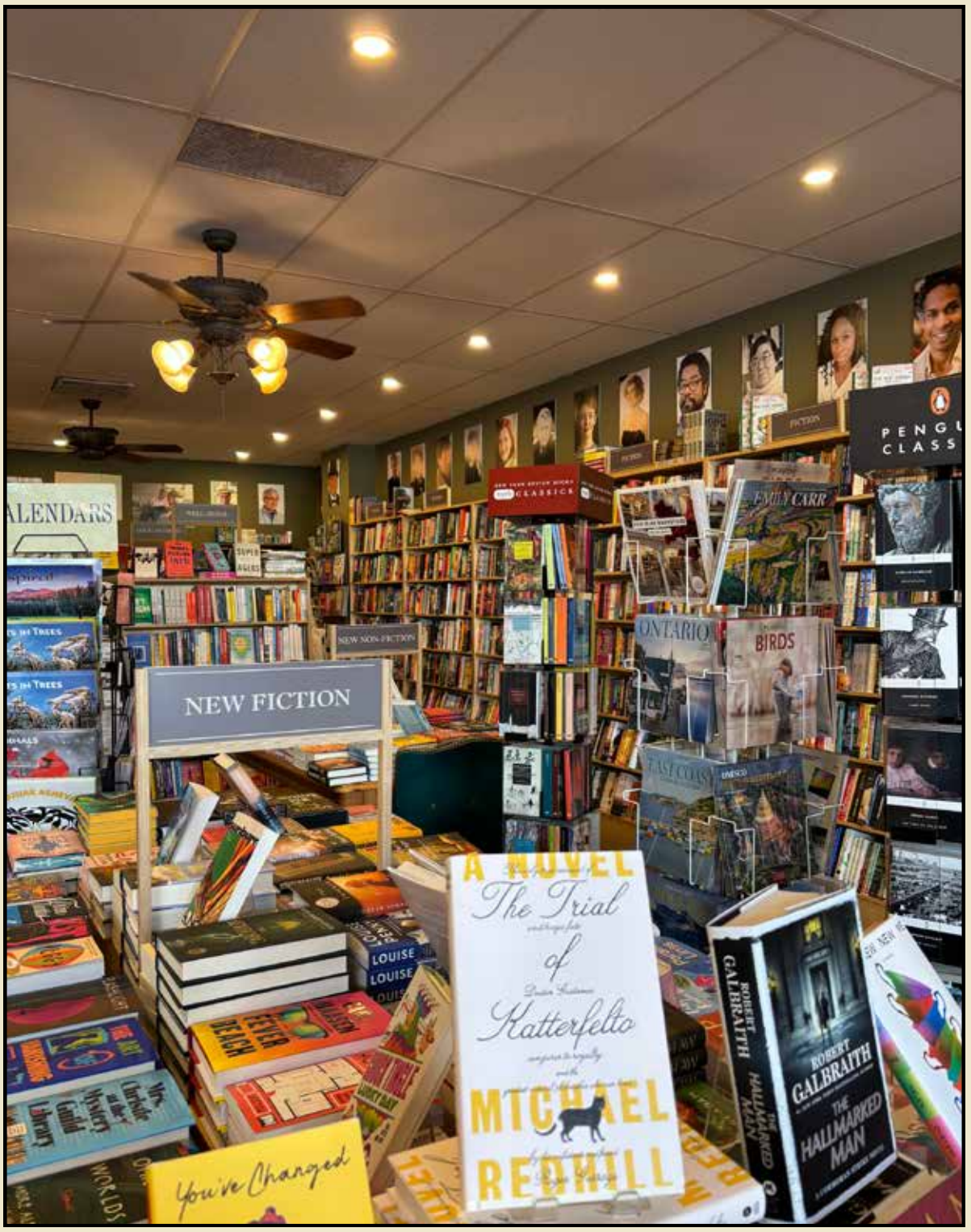
In store book launches, book signings, and discussions

A TRUSTED EVENT PARTNER

The National Arts Centre, The Ottawa Public Library,
The Irish Embassy, The Ottawa International Writers Festival,
Library and Archives Canada, and more

WWW.PERFECTBOOKS.CA | 613-231-6468 | 258A ELGIN ST., OTTAWA, ON


BUY BOOKS
FROM YOUR
LOCAL
BOOKSHOP
NOT A
BILLIONAIRE


NEW FICTION
A NOVEL
The Trial
of
Katterfelto
MTCHAEL
REDHILL
ROBERT
GALBRAITH
THE
HALLMARKED
MAN
You've Changed

100 Best Books 2025

‘Treating politics as a system of balance, not battle’: new book brings fresh insights into Mackenzie King and lessons for today’s leaders

Former prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, pictured in 1932 in Ottawa when he was opposition leader. *Photograph courtesy of Library and Archives Canada/Flickr*

Editor Patrice Dutil’s collection of essays in ‘*The Enduring Riddle of Mackenzie King*’ dives into the former prime minister’s personality, relationship with society, and policies—and why Canadian politicians ‘need to re-learn King’s statecraft.’

BY SAMANTHA WRIGHT ALLEN

Canada’s longest-serving prime minister could offer a lesson for modern politicians who should study William Lyon Mackenzie King’s patient negotiation and political style that sought “balance, not battle,” and aversion for “ideological purity” in a regionally fractured country, says the editor of a new book dedicated to understanding the “captivating” statesman.

“In a new age of polarization, King’s instinct for coalition-building feels newly relevant,” Patrice Dutil told *The Hill Times* in an email interview about *The Enduring Riddle of Mackenzie King*, released on Oct. 1.

King led Canada for over 21 years—inconsecutively—between 1921 and 1948, with most of his governing occupied by minority Parliaments.

Successive Liberal prime ministers have “thrived by embodying King’s formula: flexible, pragmatic, and rooted in the middle. Their opponents often lose—not for lack of ideas—but for misreading Canada’s cautious temperament,” said Dutil, a professor of politics and public administration at Toronto Metropolitan University.

As Dutil explains in his introduction, King was a fascinating figure subject to both ridicule and praise. King’s innermost thoughts were mined thanks to a trove of diaries that he kept with “quasi-religious fervour,” allowing scholars to understand how a prime minister’s “personal attitudes can shape policy.” Chapters dig into that primary source and others, outlining how King was “a media manipulator,” skillful in handling “explosive issues,” central in re-establishing Canada’s role in Confederation,” and both “a political realist” and “opportunist when it came to issues of race.”

The understanding of King’s “views on race needed an update,” Dutil told *The Hill Times*. In chapters examining King’s “Chinese Exclusion” Act, jailing of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War, and indifference toward Indigenous communities and others, the book’s 18 contributors offer “new thinking on his racism, his political ideas, his relations with the press.”

The collection features a “who’s who of historians” selected to “push the envelope” of our knowledge of King, including Arthur Milnes, Mark Bourrie, John MacFarlane, Pierre Anctil and J.L. Granastein—“the dean of Mackenzie King scholars” as Dutil said—and two chapters by Dutil himself.

Patrice Dutil is the editor of *The Enduring Riddle of Mackenzie King*. *Handout photograph*

The following Q&A, conducted over email, has been edited for length and clarity.

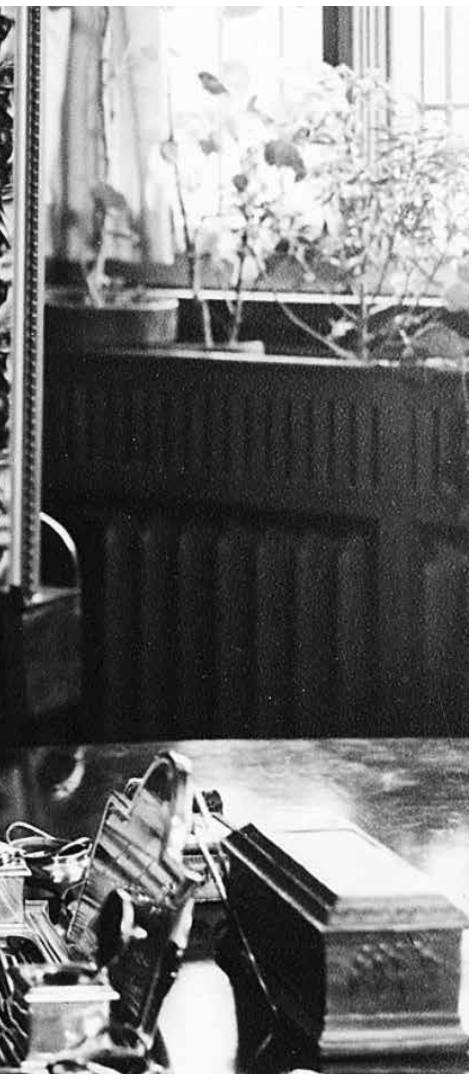
What inspired you to pull together this collection of essays?

“There are many books out there on Mackenzie King, but I do see this book as the third in a trilogy of important volumes published at 25-year intervals. In 1974, on the 100th anniversary of King’s birth, a new generation of scholars, led by John English, a young University of Waterloo historian at the time, pulled together to produce a volume on Canada’s longest-serving prime minister. *Mackenzie King: Widening the Debate* was actually a remarkable accomplishment at the time because King was not seen as even slightly interesting. They did so again 25 years later, again with English in the lead, and *Mackenzie King: Citizenship and Community* was the product.

“We know so much more about King today, so I thought a volume of new thinking on his 150th birthday was in order. The King presented in *The Enduring Riddle of Mackenzie King* is even more multifaceted. New thinking on his racism, his political ideas, his relations with the press, the Indigenous, and with minorities is presented. His policy ideas—from city-building, the arts, even taxation—are explored in more detail and nuance than ever before.”

Isabel Grace Mackenzie and John King, left, with their son William Lyon Mackenzie King, right, at the Scarborough Fair in 1911. *Library and Archives Canada photograph by William James*

100 Best Books 2025



Then-Canadian prime minister Mackenzie King, left, and then-U.S. president Franklin Roosevelt on July 31, 1936. *Photograph courtesy of Library and Archives Canada*

Mackenzie King on the veranda of Kingswood Cottage, Kingsmere, Que. *Photograph courtesy of Library and Archives Canada*

What were some surprises you learned about King from your collection of the "who's who" of King historians? Were there notable angles of analysis that felt fresh?

"Each essay uncovers a surprise. It's a truism that King viewed the world through the eyes of a man born in a Victorian Protestant, English-speaking middle-class family that saw the world as its oyster. He was confident that the 'British' way of doing things had the best solutions for a country like Canada.

"One chapter scrutinizes King's dramatic changes to the income tax during the Second World War, showing how willing he was to break all precedent and go after Canadian salaries. The government needed the revenue, and not all Canadians were happy with his decisions, but he forged ahead. King saw himself as a connoisseur in matters of art, culture, and architecture, as a few chapters describe him. His relations with the press were another surprise. The lengths to which he applied himself to curry favour across many sectors and with so many varying personalities and groups made him unique. It may also explain his longevity in power.

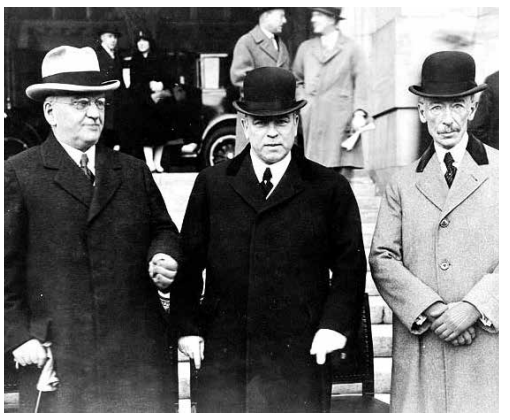
"He quickly learned that Canada was in substantial part also a French-speaking country and found a way to accommodate that reality, though I really doubt he ever warmed to the very Catholic French-Canadians. It was with the guidance of people such as Ernest Lapointe, Raoul Dandurand and, later, Louis St. Laurent, that King "conquered" Quebec. The province remained an indispensable pillar of support for him throughout his career. And I don't forget that King was the first prime minister to appoint an Acadian to cabinet: P.J. Veniot, a former Premier of New Brunswick, in 1926."

You opted for a deliberate focus away from the well-trod analysis of King's foreign policies, war management, or military relations. Instead, the essays dig into his ideas and personality, relationship with society, and policies. How did those three themes emerge?

"I did commission two essays on neglected aspects of foreign policy that needed more scrutiny: on international organizations, which King favoured as long as they did not commit Canada to any significant engagements; and on the personal rapport between King and president Franklin D. Roosevelt because it was so consequential and ironic. He was always wary of Americans though he deeply respected the U.S.

"Our understanding of King's views on race needed an update. For instance, it's easy to conclude that King was indeed a racist. He was deeply suspicious of Jews and Asians, that's for sure. One of the first things he did was legislate a 'Chinese Exclusion' Act, and notoriously jailed a good part of the Japanese-Canadian population during the Second World War. He was, at best, indifferent to Indigenous communities. That said, the authors who each deal with these issues conclude that King was no better or worse than the average Canadian in his rapport with minorities.

Miss Shirley Temple, right, with Mackenzie King at the opening of the sevent Victory Loan on Parliament Hill on Oct. 21, 1944. *Photograph courtesy of the Library and Archives Canada*



Then-prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, centre, with then-Ontario premier Howard Ferguson, left, and then-Quebec premier Louis-Alexandre Taschereau in Ottawa in 1927, one year after Mackenzie King's return to the House of Commons was made possible through a byelection in Prince Albert, Sask. *Photograph courtesy of Library and Archives Canada*

"Then again, King ended his career by passing the Canadian Citizenship Act in 1947. There are always two sides (if not three or four) to every question in King's mind, and how each of these considerations were weighed in his mind makes him captivating. The same man who limited Canada's international involvement in the 1920s and 1930s will fight a savage war and then take pride of place in the founding of the United Nations. What is fascinating is how he can justify to himself—and to a changing nation—that these contradictions could be accepted."

Do modern-day politicians have lessons to learn from King?

"In a new age of polarization, King's instinct for coalition building feels newly relevant. He understood that in a country as regionally and culturally fractured as Canada, ideological purity was a liability. King built power by making room for difference and by treating politics as a system of balance, not battle. Today's leaders, from Ottawa to the provinces, could study his patience in negotiation and his respect for process. In my view, his belief that 'politics is the science of organized opinion' anticipated modern data-driven governance and the consensus politics of minority Parliaments.

"Secondly, King really did come to believe that institutional competence mattered a lot more than competence and devoted a lot of energy to building Ottawa's policy capacity—this was notable in Finance, External Relations and Military Affairs, and Public Works.

"Yet King's flaws are just as instructive. His aversion to risk sometimes meant paralysis. His policy paralysis during the 1930s—especially toward Jewish refugees fleeing Europe, his insensitivity to the plight of workers and his indifference to the League of Nations and building new institutions to deal with the Depression—remains a stain on his record. In a world demanding leadership on climate, security, and social inequality, King's style of incrementalism can look like avoidance. The lesson is that prudence, if left unchecked, becomes drift. Adaptation must not substitute for vision.

"King's long tenure built a template for Liberal dominance that persisted for a long time: a big-tent party anchored in the centre, balancing progressive rhetoric with managerial competence, and governing by accommodation rather than revolution. Liberal leaders have thrived by embodying King's formula: flexible, pragmatic, and rooted in the middle. Their opponents often lose—not for lack of ideas—but for misreading Canada's cautious temperament."

William Lyon Mackenzie King en route from Westminster Abbey to 10 Downing St. during the Economic Conference in London, U.K., on Oct. 19, 1926. *Photograph courtesy of the Library and Archives Canada*

This book kicks off with your essay "GOAT or goat?" What did you hope to capture with that framing of King?

"Surveys among historians and political scientists over the last 25 years have placed King on top—The Greatest of All Time—but at the same time, many agree that he had the personal manners of a goat. My task was to explain the contradiction. My answer is that King knew that, as a person, he was not a shining example of humanity. He struggled electorally—most of the time he only won minorities and he was personally defeated in his riding on numerous occasions. This shaped him more than what is commonly understood. He had to work hard to win the confidence of people and when that did not work, he looked for more people to convince that he was indeed up to the task."

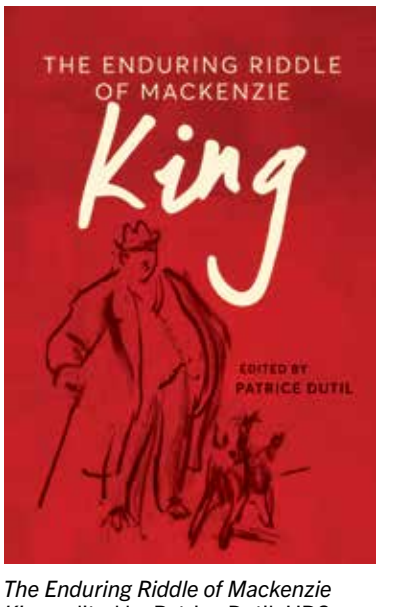
"As a manager," you write, "King was deliberate and demanding. He recruited exceptional civil servants and ministers and gave them room to act, provided they stayed loyal." Do you see this style of management persisting in politics?

"I think it's been lost. King's management style had a legacy with Louis St. Laurent, his successor, and Lester B. Pearson, who worked so closely with King. It had an impact on Pierre Trudeau and with Brian Mulroney but, I suspect, did not survive the 1990s. Mulroney was a keen student of political history and paid attention to those lessons. Jean Chrétien did too, to some degree. But I don't see these traits in our 21st-century prime ministers. They need to re-learn King's statecraft."

Do you think this collection helps solve some of "the enduring riddle"? If so, how so?

"I really think so. Of course, no answer is definitive, but these essays really do capture the state of thinking on Mackenzie King and its chapters are rich with clues to the riddle. I'm sure a new book will come out in 2050 with even better answers."

swallen@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



The Enduring Riddle of Mackenzie King, edited by Patrice Dutil, UBC Press, 402 pp., $49.95.

100 Best Books 2025

100 Best Books 2025

Andrew Coyne fears and foretells the fall of Canada

Andrew Coyne is right to raise his voice about the crisis of Canada. But the extinction-level political disaster he's so worried about hasn't happened over the span of this country's ungainly, unworkable existence. Which means that Coyne could be right tomorrow, but so far has been wrong for the past 158 years.

BY CHRISTOPHER DORNAN

The world is full of analysts, or at least it has been up until now. Let us consider what is about to become of them.

Analysts are people whose intellectual aptitude is keeping a close watch on a complex flow of events and information, and who then write up reports to help make sense of it all. If you work for an investment house, a law firm, a government department, are in the officer ranks of the military or the management echelons of any corporation, you have either read or written an analyst's report. A university is nothing but analysts endlessly writing reports to one another, from the undergrad whose paper is marked by the graduate student, to the doctoral student whose thesis is being examined, to the professor's paper under peer review.

Analysts are brokers between knowing what's happening and deciding what do about it. Unlike propaganda, analysis isn't supposed to do our thinking for us. It's supposed to make us think. Right now, the whispered selling point of generative AI is that the large language models can fulfill this function, the way the desktop computer killed the typing pool. We won't need analysts anymore.

Andrew Coyne is one of Canada's pre-eminent public political analysts, and we are lucky to have him. He's like one of the judges on *Canada's Got Talent*, but for parliamentary democracy and public policy. His métier is a form of political skepticism—like the Senate, but with more people paying attention to him.

I've been following Coyne's work for 30 years as he has opined in *The Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, the CBC, then back to *The Globe and Mail*, etc. He's thoughtful, perceptive, astute, informative, quick-witted, and he writes really well. Sometimes he's persuasive and sometimes he isn't, but he almost always jogs you with some perception or point of argument you would not have thought of. He can get worked up, but he's never inflammatory. Quite the opposite: his rationality helps to keep things calm. He's everything we want in a political columnist.

In The Crisis of Canadian Democracy, Andrew Coyne fears and foretells the fall of Canada, not through annexation by some demented megalomaniac, but because of our self-worsening, writes Christopher Dornan. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Is he also the last of his kind?

Could an LLM trained on the 30-year corpus of Coyne's writing, speeches, radio and television appearances anticipate his reaction to a political turn of events sufficiently well that it could write the column without him and be close enough you couldn't be sure if he wrote it or not? Would it matter?

What might an AI version of Andrew Coyne look like, as a way to make money? Let's say you just want Coyne-like bursts of opinion on things. Is it theft if an AI company memorizes the entirety of Coyne's digital record in order to spit out imitations of him without compensation? Or would it be better if Coyne endorsed an AI franchise that generated on-demand political analysis in his name, if not by his pen, like a George Foreman Grill for politicos in a hurry?

I, a mere human, am not a large language model, but having followed Coyne over the years, I know something of his tics and tells. Don't get him started on public support for news journalism, for example. For him, any public money that goes toward news reporting means someone made a decision about who would get the money, hence commissars are in charge of how people will be politically informed, not the market. That's Coyne's big tell. He's an absolutist.

I figure it comes from his education in economics. To this day, he thinks economics trumps other ways of understanding current affairs and human history. Economists believe there are laws of trade and banking and the value of money that can no more be defied than the law of gravity. This is their mistake. It makes them absolutists, while those of us untouched by degrees in economics can see humankind as a living thing that creates its own laws, and then defies them.

Which brings us to *The Crisis of Canadian Democracy*, Coyne's analysis of the perilous state of present-day Canada. He has spent a career chronicling our partisan arena and the constitutional framework that is supposed to impose order on the whole ill-behaved mess. This is his summation of where we stand. An absolutist looks at Canadian politics, with its referendums and its shaky Constitution that Quebec didn't sign, its built-in friction between the provinces and the feds, and he sees only catastrophe ahead. There is no happy, prosperous Canada of tomorrow unless we repair the political structure that got us this far.

The complaint—not a new one—is that our democratic system is nowhere near democratic. It is a distorted, manipulated, untrue register of political will. The first-past-the-post system. The unfair weighting of votes from different ridings. The Senate. Party membership drives, leadership contests, and riding nomination procedures. The meaninglessness of being an MP, the end of government by cabinet, the rise of political consultants, and the consolidation of power in the Prime Minister's Office. It's all a sham democracy, really. We get the governments we ill-deserve, Coyne argues, because we are running 21st century politics through 19th century plumbing.

What he fears and foretells is The Fall of Canada. Not through annexation by some demented megalomaniac, but because of our own self-worsening. We take our stability for granted when it's not guaranteed at all, and it's the faith in ourselves that will be our undoing.

"Part of the crisis," he writes, exasperated as all get-out, "is that so many people do not see it as a crisis." If we don't fix the unfixable, either the country sleepwalks into constitutional collapse and dissolution, or pressure points in the electorate will tear the place apart.

In this way, Coyne helps to keep the place together.

Just as former British prime minister Winston Churchill said that truth, in time of war, must be protected by a bodyguard of lies, so a true and working democracy must be accompanied by a halo of complaint from serious people about how it's not as democratic as it wants you to believe. That's how you know it's a free society. Coyne has long been a resolute member of this bodyguard of complaint.

He has some suggestions about how we might un-worsen things. Some are worth considering, and some, I have to say, teeter on the cockamamie. He has a whole theory about how the incivility in this country's House of Commons could be undone by reconfiguring the Chamber in which they meet. He believes it is not sufficiently cramped, and he doesn't like the fact that our MPs have desks which, back in the day, they used to thump. He prefers the United Kingdom's model, where MPs crowd into tiered benches, from a time before lumbar support had been invented.

He nods quite a lot to the U.K. parliamentary system as superior to ours. But, measured by outcomes, is the U.K. a better governed country than Canada? No, it is not. (Ahem, Brexit.)

What Coyne admires about the American system is that its Constitution is a binding document in which the division of powers is written down and fixed, guaranteeing inviolable checks on arbitrary and unlawful executive privilege. Unlike our troublesome Canadian constitution, an unbinding document with the notwithstanding clause rattling around inside it like a weight in loaded dice.

The book clearly went to press before U.S. President Donald Trump reassumed office in 2025 and made arbitrary, unlawful executive privilege his signature move. Turns out a sternly worded Constitution is not by itself enough to keep a country from going off the rails.

Coyne is right to raise his voice about the crisis of Canada. But the extinction-level political disaster he's so worried about hasn't happened over the span of this country's ungainly, unworkable existence. Which means that Coyne could be right tomorrow, but so far has been wrong for the past 158 years.

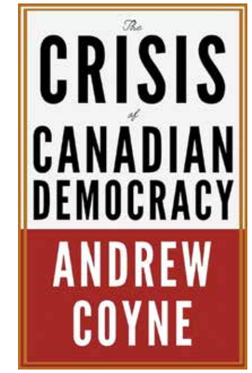
Perhaps the incompatibility of Canada's working parts is not a constitutional deathtrap, but a thing that must be negotiated forever, a reality where nothing is certain, everything is contingent, and decisions are deferred.

This is no country for absolutists.

And how will we know about our politics in the Canada of tomorrow? Who will inform us, how will they do so, and for whom will they work? An AI version of Coyne is conceivable, though an AI version of businessman Kevin O'Leary would probably make more money. But the real money, the tetra-billions of dollars, will come from the transformative machine takeover of the analysis function in every corporation and government ministry in the world. Isn't that right, AI Minister Evan Solomon?

Christopher Dornan is the co-editor of the upcoming volume The Canadian Federal Election of 2025 *(McGill-Queen's University Press), and eight previous books in this series, in which a roster of academics and journalists dissect the campaigns through which each successive Canadian government has come to power.*

The Hill Times



The Crisis of Canadian Democracy, by Andrew Coyne, Sutherland House, 266 pp., $28.95.

100 Best Books 2025

First Nations are 'ready' to move beyond the Indian Act, but time's running out, says author Bob Joseph

In his book, *21 Things You Need to Know About Indigenous Self-Government*, Bob Joseph breaks down many assumptions about the Indian Act and easily relating how this alternative can be used to circumvent this antiquated legislation.

BY CHRISTINA LEADLAY

Bob Joseph is in a hurry.

Throughout his 194-page best-selling book *21 Things You Need to Know About Indigenous Self-Government: A Conversation About Dismantling the Indian Act*, there's an underlying sense of urgency to get Indigenous Peoples out from under the yoke of the colonialist Indian Act.

So, what's the rush?

"Cultural survival," he tells *The Hill Times* in a telephone interview on Nov. 12 speaking from his home in Victoria, B.C., following a national tour for his new book, the follow up to his 2018 book *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act and Indigenous Relations*.

When he's not writing, Joseph educates the corporate world and governments in Canada about what reconciliation means, and how to live it.

"I will tell our business clients, 'You are not doing business with another business. You are doing business with a culture. You need to keep in mind that's their objective'."

First Nations "need to make money, but it's not to keep shareholders happy. It's to try to save their languages and their cultures and traditions," explains Joseph, who's a hereditary chief of the Gayaxala (Thunderbird clan) in his home province of British Columbia.

Joseph says the Fortune-500 companies he works with are open to having positive and respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

"They will say, 'Bob, we don't mind any of this stuff, we just want to know who we have to talk to.' They just want things to be clearer," says Joseph.

He gives the example of Coastal Gas Link's 2020 dispute with the Wet'suwet'en in B.C. which he says some knock-on effects (like the rail blockade) could have been averted had it been clear that hereditary chiefs and the First Nations community in general should have been included in any talks about projects affecting the people and their land.

"I think if we were to move to self-government, that [would be] clear," he says.

Joseph cites this 2020 dispute a handful of times across the 21 things he feels are key to understanding about how Indigenous self-government works, at once dispelling many assumptions about the Indian Act and relating, in un-technical terms, how the alternative of Indigenous self-government can be used to circumvent this outdated legislation.

'We have been self-governing since time immemorial'

Joseph says he wrote *21 Things* with a non-Indigenous Canadian reader in mind as the person with whom he's conversing about the Indian Act and self-government, but he's very pleased that First Nations people are taking an interest, too.

"I think this book is timely, even for First Nations people, because we really have to decide what we are going to do about this," he tells *The Hill Times*.

"This" is getting past the Indian Act's fiduciary duty to First Nations peoples tangled up in with racist, colonial policies designed to assimilate their cultures. Joseph says he takes inspiration from the Seminole tribe in Florida whose answer to that question started with a bingo game and ended up with the tribe of 1,200 people owning the Hard Rock Café franchise.

Joseph retells a story he shares *21 Things* where, in the early 1980s, whilst discussing Indian affairs at their tribal councils, the Seminole knew they were "not going to make it" if they sat around waiting for their federal government to look after them. "So [they] decided to get into business at that point. They started with a bingo night, and it turned into two, three, five, seven. They bought an adjacent bingo parlour, set up a casino, and basically Monopoly-gamed their way to the Hard Rock Café international gaming and food chain.

Author Bob Joseph, a Status Indian, feels Indigenous Peoples would thrive if there were more self-government agreements with Canada's over 600 First Nations. "We are totally ready. We just need to take that action," he told *The Hill Times*. *Photograph by Nathan Smith*

"And for me, I thought it's such a timely message for First Nations right now. That's really what we have to do."

Hence this book. It's Joseph's way of starting to "build comfort around this idea that we would dismantle this really old piece of legislation that was designed primarily to assimilate people'," he explains, clarifying that Indigenous Self-Government isn't a separatist movement, but "rather the next step to move beyond the Indian Act."

Curiously, it was the author's own father who sowed a seed of doubt. "His first question to me was 'are we ready?' And I laughed just like that and I said 'you know, it really concerns me that you have asked that question. Now I have got to go find out if we are ready.'"

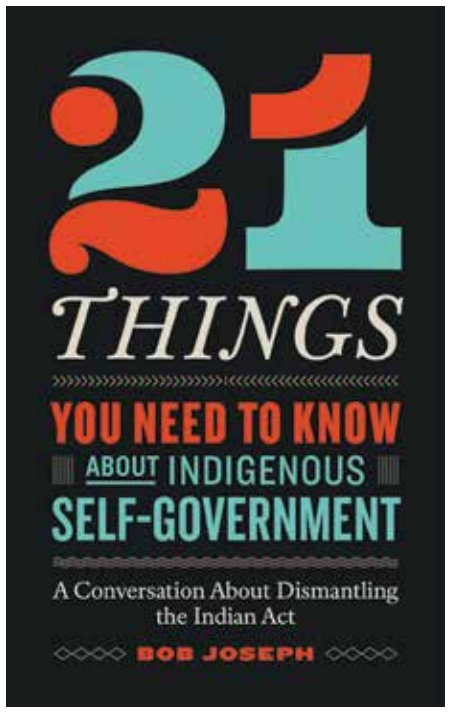
Joseph said a friend gave him the confidence that he was on the right track.

"I said, 'Here is a challenge I am having. From the Indigenous perspective, are we ready?' And my good friend Cheryl said 'Bob Joseph, we have been self-governing since time immemorial. The archeologists say it's 10,500 years we have been self-governing the whole time. We still look after our lands and resources.'

"It was such a great moment for me. It was like 'oh yeah, we have been doing this. We are totally ready.' We just need to take that action, like the Seminole, and really start to look after people and our cultures," says Joseph.

And with the Indian Act turning 150 years old in 2026, Indigenous Peoples in Canada will need to act quickly to make sure it's them and not this policy that will be thriving into the next century. The problem is: negotiating the self-government agreements takes time, which some cultures just don't have a lot of left.

"We have 25 self-government agreements with about 45 to 50 First Nations largely negotiated since the early 1980s," says Joseph. "And my feeling is that's just long considering there's just over 630 First Nations across the country."



21 Things You Need to Know About Indigenous Self-Government: A Conversation About Dismantling the Indian Act, by Bob Joseph, Indigenous Relations Press, 2025. *Book cover courtesy of Indigenous Relations Press*

Self-government could help save money at time of budget cuts

"Nothing about us without us" is the overarching theme, that First Nations need to be involved in *all* decisions that affect them, from education and health policies to band membership criteria and economic reconciliation and in between.

Joseph notes that Indigenous self-government is no cookie-cutter policy, as it has to suit each First Nation's regional, cultural differences and political differences.

For example, he explains how the Nisga'a Nation's 2000 treaty "break[s] from the chief and council system and replace[s] it with something that's more driven by them, and they dealt with citizenship as opposed to being Status Indians," while "Westbank First Nation was more interested in taking over ministerial responsibilities in their self-govt agreement."

It's this taking on of ministerial duties that pitches self-government as cost-saving measure for Ottawa, especially at a time when this year's federal budget forecasts cuts to Crown-Indigenous relations programs.

"If I were like a financial analyst, I would say we are in for choppy seas and strong headwinds," Joseph offered as his impression of the Carney government's first budget.

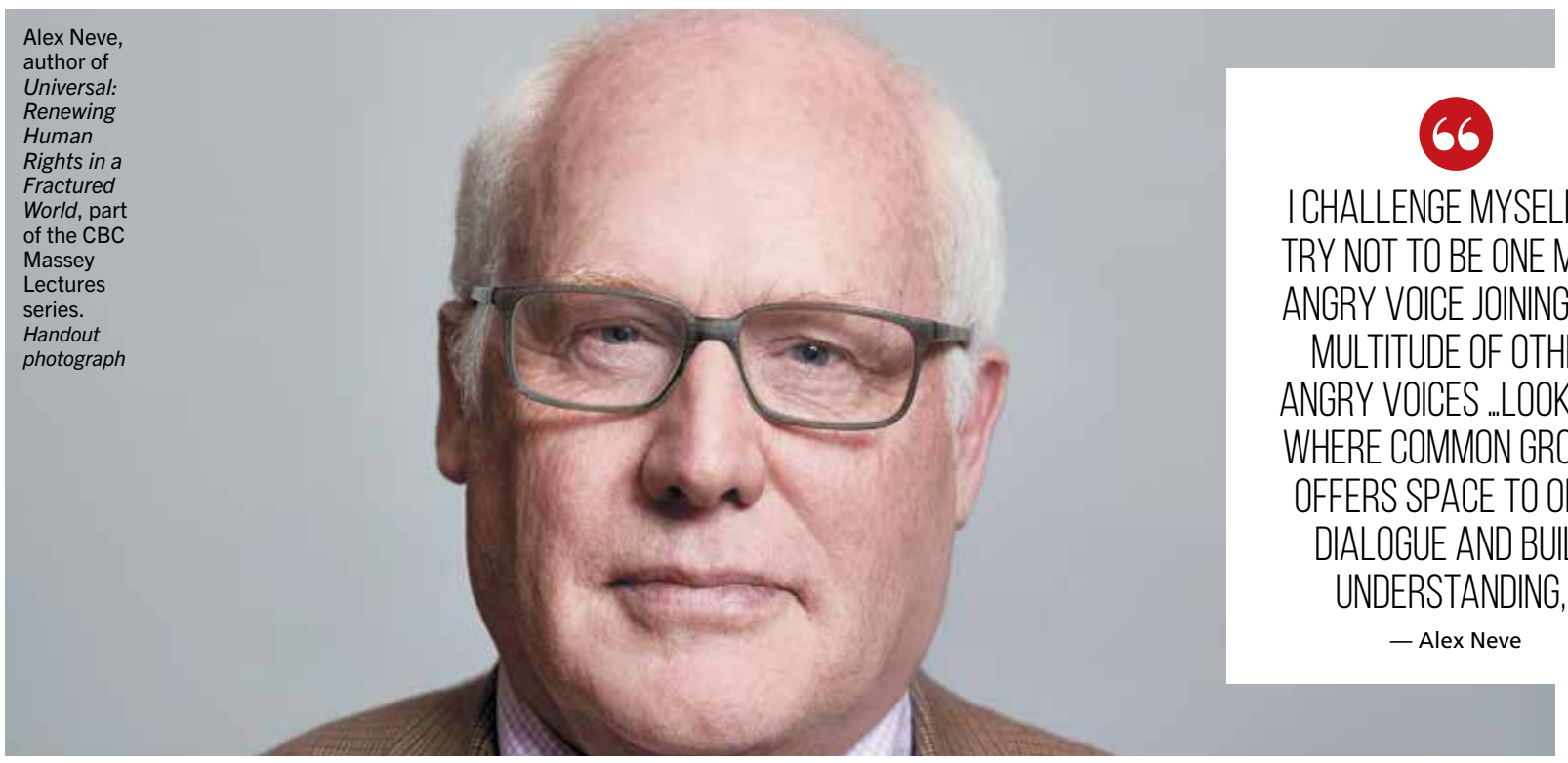
"We are still struggling with clean drinking water and mouldy houses and the socio-economic stuff has been slow to change. And then to chop over $2-billion from the budget [for First Nations programs], I don't know how you are able to move quicker. It seems like a step back."

Joseph says while he "would give the Carney government high marks for saying all of these big projects will be done in partnership with First Nations" and sees "some priority spending with First Nations who are going to be in the vicinity of the major projects, but there is a lot that don't fit into that."

21 Things You Need to Know About Indigenous Self-Government: A Conversation About Dismantling the Indian Act, by Bob Joseph, Indigenous Relations Press, 2025.

cleadlay@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

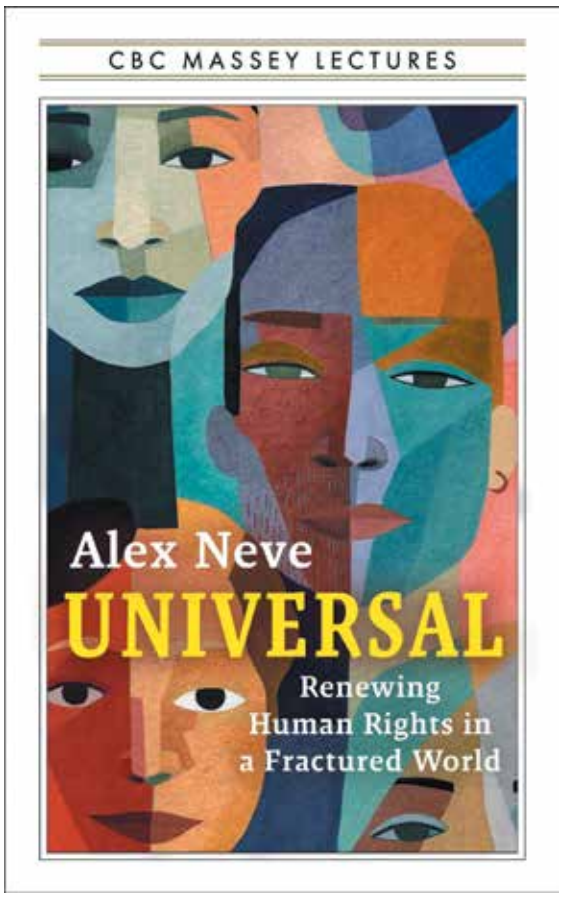
The 2025 Massey Lecture: silence is not an option



Alex Neve, author of *Universal: Renewing Human Rights in a Fractured World*, part of the CBC Massey Lectures series. *Handout photograph*

In *Universal: Renewing Human Rights in a Fractured World*, Alex Neve looks into why we should be fighting to preserve universal human rights. 'In a world permeated with crises many of which come right to our front door, that surely must mean going further, even when it takes us beyond our comfort zone.'

BY JIM CRESKEY



Universal: Renewing Human Rights in a Fractured World: CBC Massey Lectures, by Alex Neve, House of Anansi Press, 336 pp., 2025 $24.99.

The people at House of Anansi Press, CBC's Ideas, and Massey College at the University of Toronto have been working together since 1961 to orchestrate the annual Massey Lectures. The lectures include a book, a cross-country reading tour, and a radio show. The first Massey lecturer was Remembering Barbara Ward, which speaks volumes about the quality and the moral insight behind the lectures from their very beginning.

"Human Rights" as a topic appears with some regularity in the lectures. This year, Alex Neve brings his own lifelong commitment to human rights to the theme. He blends his personal experiences and a wide-ranging historical knowledge of how the Golden Rule has been practiced—and how it has been betrayed.

Neve, a human rights lawyer, a senior fellow at the University of Ottawa and the two-decades secretary general of Amnesty International Canada, is now chair of Canadian Leadership for Nuclear Disarmament. There are few people in Canada who could create such a wide-ranging survey of human rights failures and successes. But *Universal: Renewing Human Rights in a Fractured World* also aspires to offer a modest path out of the torturous status quo "of inequality and the lucrative economy of war and conflict."

"We start in small places," he writes, "close to home. We start with Canada."

Universal human rights is hardly a new idea. Neve writes, "Paul Gordon Lauren beautifully suggests that 'all of the great religious traditions share a universal dissatisfaction with the world as it is and a determination to make it as it ought to be.'"

The Golden Rule, writes Neve, "is foundational in Islam: 'Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others that which you wish for yourself'; in Christianity: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself'; and in Judaism: 'Whatever is hateful and distasteful to you, do not do to your fellow man.'"

In 1948, as the world stood in the ashes of Second World War and witnessed the apocalyptic threat of newly created nuclear weapons, the United Nations began to set in motion a series of agreements and treaties dealing with refugee law, disarmament, aid, and international cooperation. Today, nearly every aspect of international law has been broken by many of the very nations that helped create it.

"The promise of the future," writes Neve, "used to be that each succeeding generation would be better off than the previous one: be wealthier and healthier, have more leisure, inhabit a more peaceful world, live longer lives. Now the very promise of a future is in question. Which is to say, will there be a future? When the only thing that is certain is the present, what is there to promise?"

> "I CHALLENGE MYSELF TO TRY NOT TO BE ONE MORE ANGRY VOICE JOINING THE MULTITUDE OF OTHER ANGRY VOICES ...LOOK FOR WHERE COMMON GROUND OFFERS SPACE TO OPEN DIALOGUE AND BUILD UNDERSTANDING,"
>
> — Alex Neve

Neve has two urgent suggestions about what to do in this singular present.

"I challenge myself to try not to be one more angry voice joining the multitude of other angry voices ...look for where common ground offers space to open dialogue and build understanding," he writes.

I take this to mean in part that we are ill-served by the innate disrespect of cancel culture in any form.

Neve's second plea is that "Silence is not an option."

He quotes the 1967 Massey lecturer, Martin Luther King, Jr.: "'in the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends,' wrote King. 'The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people."

Neve has a such a long list of human rights demands for Canada, both globally and domestically, that it feels overwhelming to take on so much at once. And then I remember that he has spent 20 years at the head of Amnesty International, investigating the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, of Palestinians, of migrants, victims of war, and witnessing the ravages of an earth tortured by climate extremes. How could he not present us with such a gaping chasm of moral dilemmas?

But, "Take a breath," he says. And he quotes the Persian poet Rumi: "Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder."

"In a world permeated with crises," writes Neve, "many of which come right to our front door, that surely must mean going further, even when it takes us beyond our comfort zone."

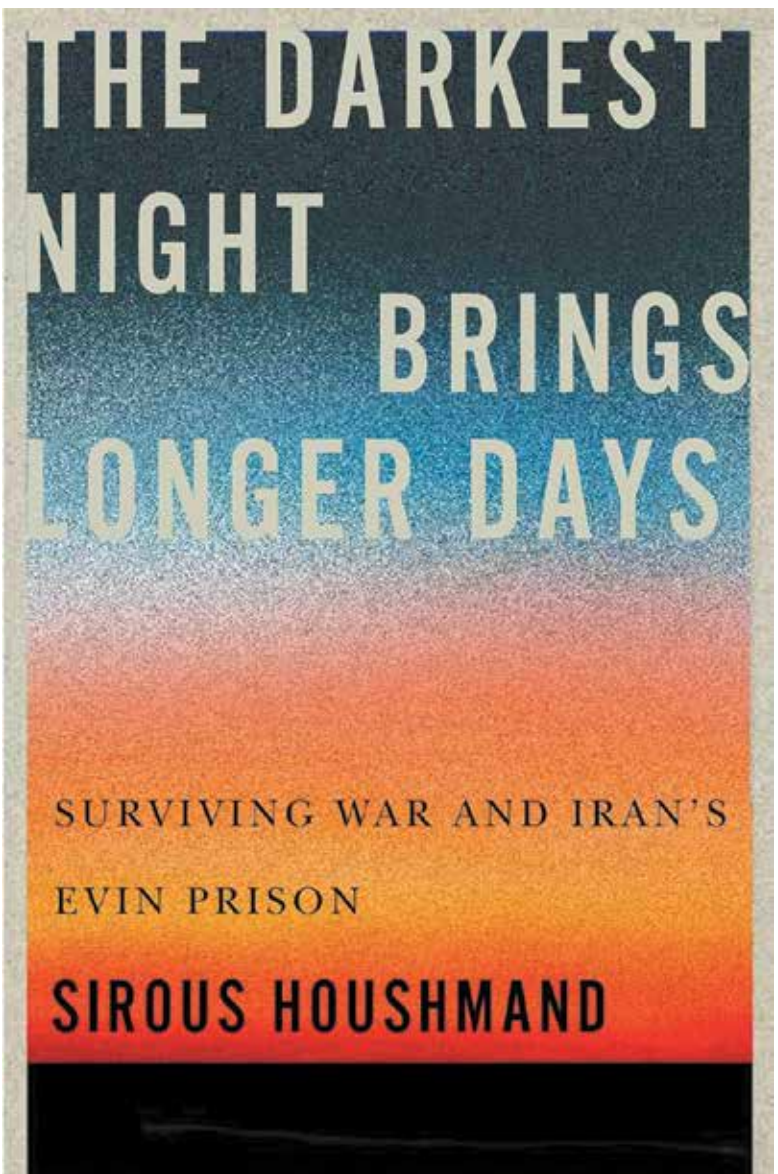
In other words, make yourself uncomfortable.

Universal: Renewing Human Rights in a Fractured World: CBC Massey Lectures, by Alex Neve, House of Anansi Press, 336 pp., 2025, $24.99.

The Hill Times

100 Best Books 2025

Author Sirous Houshmand features his life story through the 1979 Iranian revolution in his book *The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days*. *Photograph courtesy of McGill-Queen's University Press*



The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days: Surviving War and Iran's Evin Prison, by Sirous Houshmand, McGill-Queen's University Press, 228 pp., $24.95.

'Don't be indifferent': Iranian-Canadian author shares story of his life inside infamous Tehran prison in new book

'If you have a purpose, then you become resilient. Then you want to fight for something. But if you don't have a purpose… I have seen people in isolation lose their mind because they just didn't want to be there and didn't know why they were there,' says Sirous Houshmand, author of *The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days*.

BY IREM KOCA

"I was prepared to see the door open and hear one of the prison guards shout, 'All your belongings,' code for, 'You are coming with me to line up for mass execution.'"

In his memoir, *The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days*: *Surviving War and Iran's Evin Prison*, author Sirous Houshmand offers first-hand testimony of living through revolution, war, and incarceration.

Born in Iran and educated as a youth in the United States, the author returned home during the 1979 revolution. While he served as a medical aide during the Iran-Iraq War, he was captured and incarcerated in Tehran's infamous Evin Prison during the 1988 mass executions.

In his first book, Houshmand shares his life story, both the personal and the political, weaving stories from his boyhood spent between Iran and the U.S., to his time as a new father and a political prisoner.

Houshmand talks about his life as a small child surrounded by family in Iran, touching on feelings of familiarity and belonging. He then takes the reader to California where he lived with American families. He shares delicate moments of his life as a young boy, the first time he fell in love, his introduction to Western freedom and consumerism, his political awakening and ideas of revolution, and finding his identity and moral compass.

As the narrative moves between Houshmand's intertwined worlds, readers get a glimpse of life during America's anti-Vietnam War movement and 1970 Kent State shootings, and the Black Friday Massacre of 1978 that ignited the 1979 revolution in Iran.

The author's life between the two countries also showcases the duality between a capitalist, conformist society, and one fighting for civil rights and freedoms and social justice.

Writing as part therapy, part honouring influencial people

Houshmand told *The Hill Times* in a Nov. 11 video call interview that it took him decades to reconcile those memories, and put pen to paper. It took about six years to gather these memories that woke him up at night, and the historical facts supporting them, another four years and a rigorous back and forth with the editors at publisher McGill-Queen's University to get it right.

"It's just that the trauma and the experience was so difficult that I needed time to share my story. That's when I became aware that this is going to help a lot. That was one of the very important reasons for writing the book," Houshmand said.

Another reason was to tell the stories of the people who crossed his path, he said, from family members to the like-minded idealists he met in prison, some of whom were brutally executed for their beliefs.

Houshmand honours the stories of those influential figures throughout the book, like his father, a physician who refused to take part in corruption, and his feminist grandmother who embodied courage and defiance.

Caught in the regime's crackdown on the opposition as a follower of the revolution, Houshmand recounts the memories of his imprisonment from daily routines and whispered exchanges between prisoners to the interrogation, torture, and executions of his friends.

The book also zooms in on moments of hope, and acts of love and sacrifice, such as the time the author's mother wore a black chador, a veil covering her hair and body, in one of her prison visits in the hopes that the guards would treat Houshman better.

Houshmand said that despite it all, he's never lost his political fervour. However, these days that looks less like activism and more like studying philosophy and discussing politics in book clubs with friends, Houshmand said.

"My age is not a young age to be a very prominent activist," says the 76 year old,"but I love to know more and I keep up with current events constantly."

When asked what he would hopes Canadian readers will take from his book, Houshmand says

100 Best Books 2025

Evin Prison's main entrance, pictured in 2008. *Photograph courtesy of Commons Wikimedia*

he wants his audience to leave with more awareness and care for the life beyond their bubble.

'I don't want Iran's sovereignty to be destroyed'

"The first thing that is very important to me is not to be indifferent. That is huge. Because that's the only way that societies can really go towards positive change," he said.

In his memoir, Houshmand defines his values as rooted in democratic socialism, and himself as a non-violent secular activist. His criticisms about the world rooted in consumerism, capitalism, systemic inequality, as well as ideas against religious and political repression, and systemic cruelty appear throughout *The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days*.

While he does not directly comment on the current turmoil in Iran, Houshmand underlines that the most important thing is for the movement to be immune to influence of foreign political actors or "Western-elites" as he put it.

"Even if I'm in the opposition camp, I don't want the sovereignty of Iran to be destroyed," he told *The Hill Times*.

Houshmand argues that societies—mostly Western ones—have been moulded into living in a system where people get lost in their daily routines, focusing on their own lives and hardships, rarely looking outside their windows which he says leads them to detach from the rest of the world.

"As [French philosopher Albert] Camus says, 'this repetition of life becomes a little bit meaningless'… And, to me, it is a problem that creates indifference."

The author said he hopes his story will encourage readers to strive towards a goal, regardless of what that goal might be.

"That really helped me go through the prison," Houshmand said.

"If you have a purpose, then you become resilient. Then you want to fight for something. But if you don't have a purpose… I have seen people in isolation lose their mind because they just didn't want to be there, and didn't know why they were there," he said.

He also offers criticism of traditional media for reporting news events selectively, using biased language, and reporting half-truths.

Houshmand also argued that "legacy media" holds a lot of sway with those in power, which he says makes it difficult to know what is propaganda and what is real. In such an environment, democracy—which the author argues is a 'very theoretical word' to begin with— is hindered.

"We're talking about 'corporatocracy' rather than democracy in— at least— the United States, and the media is a huge part of it that helps that type of a system. So, to be honest with you, I feel that the real news is something that is not easy to find. You have to really work for it," he said.

The author also name drops the thinkers that shaped his outlook in life such as Camus, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jean-Paul Sartre. "Through the work of these intellectuals,I realized how a fabricated culture of consumption and immediate pleasures creates a false psychological need for material goods and services," he writes in his book, referring to American intellectual Noam Chomsky.

Houshmand observes that the West's perception of Iran has been changing over the last 15 years, with social media breaking through the monopoly on information.

The author says he hopes that an informed section of the international community understands that Iranians are being "pressed from two sides" with domestic issues as well as global pressure such as economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. as well as military attacks from Israel, while Iranians understand that their independence and changes they'd like to impose should not be in the hands of others.

Following his release from prison, Houshmand continued to live in Iran for almost another decade. He co-founded a factory with colleagues, and worked as an industrial engineer. He migrated to Canada in 1998 to prevent his son from having to join Iran's mandatory military service, and to be back in an English-speaking country.

Houshmand told *The Hill Times* that Canada, as a progressive, English-speaking country, was the best choice for him and his family, especially with Toronto being the home to the second-largest Iranian diaspora in the world—the first is in Los Angeles.

During the 27 years he has been residing in this country, Houshmand has only visited Iran once, in 2001, when his father passed away.

The Hill Times

Zahra Kazemi-Ahmadabadi, an Iranian-Canadian freelance journalist who was taking photographs outside the Evin Prison of family members of the missing, was arrested, raped, and tortured by Iranian officials and died in custody at the Evin Prison in 2003. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

Q&A: Sirous Houshmand

Why did you want to write this book?

"My decision to write a memoir was challenging—painful, but also therapeutic. Before beginning it, I struggled with doubt and indecision. Ultimately, however, I had to come to terms with the memories of my horrific captivity, and after years of reflection I recognized the importance of sharing my extraordinary and tumultuous life story with the public.

"In the late 1980s, I was one of the political prisoners held at Tehran's notorious Evin Prison, where thousands of prisoners were executed in 1988, my prison friends among them. My memoir, *The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days: Surviving War and Iran's Evin Prison*, serves as a testament to their lives and the profound impact they had on me. It is also an eyewitness account of the momentous events surrounding the revolution. Through it all, my lives in two different worlds, the United States and Iran, affected the decisions I made.

"During my incarceration I realized that only by having a firm belief or conviction—regardless of its nature—could one endure the otherwise unbearable conditions. This made people both resilient and resistant. Less resolute prisoners often succumbed to pressure and grief; some lost their sanity.

"I was privileged to learn from, and live among, many principled, altruistic individuals who believed passionately in their cause. They represented, I believe, the best of society. They resisted the pressures of mainstream society that encouraged them to live a 'normal life' and turn away from the suffering of others. I aim to honour their memory by reanimating their aspirations and struggles. If this helps to inspire a more vibrant political discourse and challenge ennui, so much the better."

Why is this book important?

"My memoir provides a new perspective on the Iranian Revolution, and the subsequent mass executions because it explores the inner psyche as well as the public square. It thinks deeply about the nuances of human behaviour and reveals the emotions of prisoners facing the looming possibility of death. Given the plight of international political prisoners, a demographic that is growing at a concerning speed, this exploration helps guide readers behind the curtain of incarceration to develop empathy and, from there, to work towards a better world.

"Going beyond a narrow focus on imprisonment, the book also addresses universal themes such as marriage, parenthood, social relations, and understanding cultural differences. My familiarity with Western culture provides a unique lens to engage readers.

"Today, as young people are experiencing a significant political and ethical awakening, my story can provide a touchstone. My journey brought me from relative apathy to wanting to make a meaningful difference. I reflect on the heightened consumerism and individualism of the West—while buying things, travelling, and having casual relationships can be pleasurable, joy has an entirely different texture. I thus sought the more authentic and transcendent aspects of life: the delight of looking a loved one in the eye, the thrill of marvelling at an artistic creation, the excitement of knowing another person deeply, the importance of a philosophical search for meaning, the intrigue of being a rebel, and certainly the exhilaration of fighting for a cause larger than a single person.

"In recounting the early months of the Iranian Revolution, I draw out its valuable lessons for addressing the growing division between international progressive movements and the negative impact of sectarianism. I also use the moment to speak to women's struggles for liberation, emphasizing the need to break free from patriarchal constraint."

Who should read it?

"My memoir will interest readers curious about Iran's current situation and the long-standing tensions between it and the United States. These tensions escalated with [President] Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018, the imposition of additional sanctions, and subsequent military actions from Israel and, later, the U.S.

"The political climate in many countries, particularly the United States, has become divisive, heated, and unequal. My book should resonate with those across the political spectrum, as it emphasizes how those with wealth and power have marginalized the voices of ordinary people.

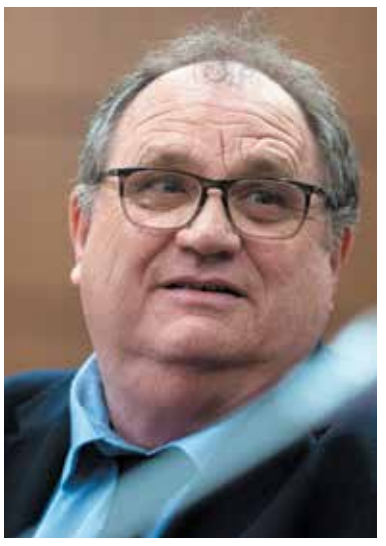
"Immigrants from many countries will find parts of this book relatable, as they will draw parallels between their experiences and struggles and my story. Diaspora Iranians (a sizeable group of approximately 3.1 million) will want to read this book, especially those who feel passionately about their country of origin or descent and are interested in these historical events."—*by Kate Malloy*

ikoca@hilltimes.com

The Hill Times

100 Best Books 2025

The *Ripper: The Making of Pierre Poilievre* focuses on Poilievre within the modern media environment in Canada



Author Mark Bourrie: 'The book is as much about the failings of modern political parties and the Canadian media as it is about Poilievre.' *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Mark Bourrie says *Ripper: The Making of Pierre Poilievre* is as much about the failings of modern political parties and the Canadian media as it is about the Conservative leader.

BY KATE MALLOY

Mark Bourrie wanted to write a book about federal Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre because he saw a need for a biography that focused on Poilievre within the modern media environment in Canada. He also wanted to look at the rise of the right in Western democracies, and the undermining of this country's democratic institutions. The result is *Ripper: The Making of Pierre Poilievre*, Bourrie's 430-page, gripping, and exhaustive look at one of the more controversial leading figures in federal politics today. The book is detailed, well-written, and was on *The Globe and Mail*'s bestselling Canadian non-fiction books list this year.

Bourrie, who is a lawyer, author, former Hill journalist, and a historian, has written numerous non-fiction books, including *Bush Runner: The Adventures of Pierre-Esprit Radisson*, which won the prestigious RBC Taylor Prize for non-fiction in 2020. He is also author of *Crosses in the Sky: Jean de Brébeuf and the Destruction of Huronia*; *Big Fear Me*; *The Killing Game: Martyrdom, Murder and the Lure of ISIS*; *Peter Woodcock: Canada's Youngest Serial Killer*; and *Kill the Messengers: Stephen Harper's Assault on Your Right to Know*.

Bourrie argues that Poilievre is "a ripper," a politician "who sees politics as a war that gives their lives meaning," and says rippers make "fantastic opposition leaders," but "awful" prime ministers.

Conservative Party Leader Pierre Poilievre. Author Mark Bourrie argues that Poilievre is a 'ripper,' a politician 'who sees politics as a war that gives their lives meaning,' and says rippers make 'fantastic opposition leaders,' but 'awful' prime ministers. 'Poilievre is a classic political ripper. So is Charlie Angus. The Liberal Rat Pack were also pretty good rippers back in the day. The media has a few rippers who make important contributions to politics.' *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

This Q&A, originally published on April 21, 2025, has been edited for length and clarity.

How long did it take you to write this book?

"I worked on it from late May or early June 2024 until late February 2025."

Where do you write and what is your writing process for writing big biographies?

"I write at home. I buy every book that I think will be relevant, then normally use Library and Archives Canada for research. With the Poilievre book, I got a lot of material at the Ottawa City Library, which gives people access to huge, expansive media databases. I also use university online academic databases (though they weren't that useful in this project."

What were your sources of information (documents, books, newspaper stories, reports), and why did you decide not to interview people?

"I'm trained as a historian. I found the written record to be much more useful and accurate than interviews. Poilievre is a polarizing figure in ordinary times. By the time I started the project, he'd been leader of his party for almost two years and we were, supposedly, 18 months away from an election. Finding anyone in Ottawa who was non-partisan and fair was almost impossible.

"People who didn't want him to win *really* didn't want him to. I would spend hours listening to hours of rumour and come away with nothing usable. On top of that, there was a strong element of fear, especially in the media. I realized few people in Ottawa really know him. All this confirmed my bias against oral history. Poilievre's life is well-documented. He's been in the media spotlight since high school, and an MP for 21 years. I'm very comfortable with the written record. A lot of it was created before people became so polarized."

Why did you want to write this book?

"In 2016, I wanted to follow up on books about Stephen Harper's information control and ISIS's use of the internet as recruiting and communication tools. I hoped to start a book about the changing media environment and the creation of alternate media universes, but, at the time, no publisher was interested. Then I pitched a book about foreign use of the internet in asymmetrical warfare against Western democracies. No takers there, either. A proposal for a book on Pierre Radisson from 2004 was still kicking around and was picked up by Biblioasis, a boutique publisher that hadn't handled much non-fiction. So I did that.

"The book sold well and won a prestigious prize. That allowed me to do another project that had been on my mind for years, a biography of *Globe and Mail* founder George McCullagh. It allowed me to delve into modern anti-democratic thinking in Canada. I also did a legal text for journalists for a law book company, and a biography of the Jesuit mystic Jean de Brébeuf. I'd never intended to be a biographer, but I've realized you can use biography to make important points about politics and society. They're an awful lot of work, though, if you are serious about doing them well."

Why did you want to write a book about Pierre Poilievre, specifically?

"I believed there was a need for a book that centred Poilievre within the modern media environment in Canada and, to a lesser extent, the rise of the right in Western democracies. I've been concerned for a long time about the undermining of democratic institutions in Canada. [Former prime minister] Paul Martin tried to address what he rightly called the 'democratic deficit,' but politicians and the media lost interest when Paul Martin lost to Stephen Harper."

Why is this book important, and who should read it?

"Everyone should read it. What else would I say? The book is as much about the failings of modern political parties and the Canadian media as it is about Poilievre. It's a warning that political parties are no longer democratic organizations where like-minded people can debate policy, develop local followings, and run for office to represent the interests and values of their regions.

"They're election-campaign machines that are run by long-established cliques designed to elect whipped MPs to Parliament while 'The Centre' of unaccountable staffers and 'strategists' who propelled the leader forward takes real control of the country's administration. This has been happening for 40 years, in both major parties, and it is killing democracy. It's even worse here than it was in the United States. Though there, they now have a fascist in power who has no use for democracy and would get rid of it if he could."

Why was it important to publish this book now in the midst of an election campaign?

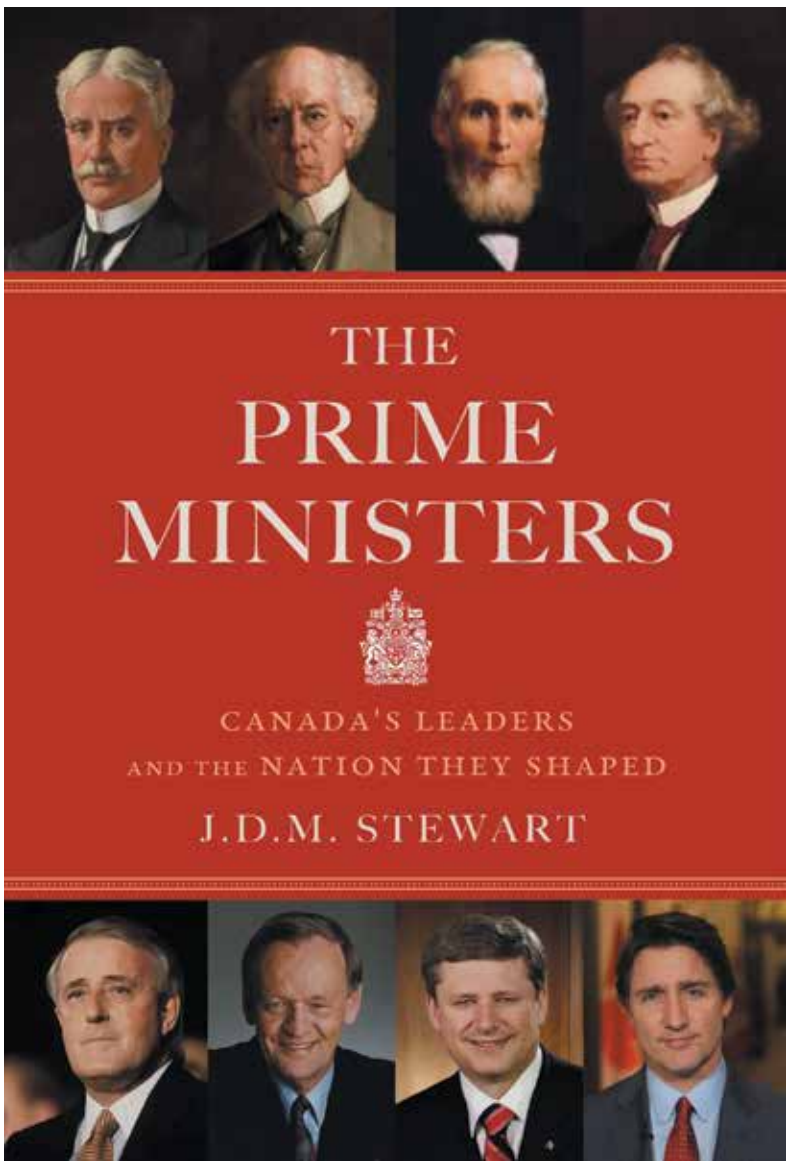
"It wasn't published in the midst of the campaign. It came out before the campaign started. We had planned for a late April or early May launch, with the late spring and summer to promote

Continued on page 43

‘I was speaking to a group of high school students, and none of them knew who Lester B. Pearson was’: historian J.D.M. Stewart wants to change that

Author and historian J.D.M. Stewart’s new book *The Prime Ministers: Canada’s Leaders and the Nation*, covers all of this country’s prime ministers from John A. Macdonald to Mark Carney. *Photograph courtesy of Sutherland House*

Learning and understanding Canada’s political history is ‘part of being an informed and civic minded citizen,’ says author and historian J.D.M. Stewart of his new book, *The Prime Ministers: Canada’s Leaders and the Nation They Shaped*.



Author J.D.M. Stewart says he decided to write his book, *The Prime Ministers: Canada’s Leaders and the Nation They Shaped*, after meeting a group of Ontario high school students who didn’t know who Lester Pearson was. *Photograph courtesy of Sutherland House*

Jean Chrétien, who was prime minister from 1993-2003, pictured in a Hill scrum. *The Hill Times photograph by Jake Wright*

Then-prime minister Stephen Harper campaigning at a rally at the Irving Oil refinery in Saint John, N.B., on Sept. 10, 2015. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

BY ABBAS RANA

If Canadians want to understand today’s Canada, they must first know the political history of the country and the leaders who shaped it, says historian J.D.M. Stewart, author of the new book, *The Prime Ministers: Canada’s Leaders and the Nation They Shaped*, in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

“As I say in the book, [author] Peter C. Newman once wrote that an hour in the Office of the Prime Minister is an hour in the history of the country,” said Stewart.

“So, if we want to understand what has made Canada into what it is today, we need to have an understanding of the people who have led the country and the decisions that they made and the consequences of those decisions. It’s part of being an informed and civic minded citizen to understand the history of the country.”

Stewart said that he decided to write his book on Canadian prime ministers after meeting a group of Ontario high school students who didn’t know who Lester Pearson was. This experience alarmed him because Ontario requires students to take history in Grade 10, a requirement not shared by most other provinces. If Ontario students lacked this basic knowledge about Canadian political history, Stewart said, students elsewhere likely knew even less. When he asked the group’s teacher why these students didn’t know anything about a Nobel Prize–winning former prime minister, the teacher said that “no one teaches about prime ministers anymore.”

In his newly released book, Stewart writes about all of Canada’s prime ministers, from John A. Macdonald to Mark Carney. He said this book will be a useful source of information for anyone interested in Canadian political history, whether they are a young student or an adult. This is Stewart’s second book. His first book was *Being Prime Minister*, published in 2018.

The following is a Q&A which has been edited for length and clarity.

Why did you decide to write this book?

“I was speaking to a group of high school students, and none of 35_09102015CPCrallySaint-JohnNbAndrewMeade014 them knew who Lester B. Pearson was. And I mentioned that to the teacher afterward, and she said to me, ‘Well, no one teaches about prime ministers anymore.’ And so I was a bit alarmed by that, and I feel that the political history of the country is very important, particularly as it runs through the Office of Prime Minister. It’s been more than 25 years since anybody has written a book about Canada’s PMs. And so it was past time due to get a new history of them in front of Canadians.”

What does this tell you about how political history is taught in Canada when students don’t know who Pearson was?

“It tells us we need to do a better job of teaching our history,

Continued on page 42

100 Best Books 2025

Former Liberal MP Sergio Marchi, right, pictured during an interview with journalist Andrew Cohen at the launch of his new book in Ottawa on Nov. 18, 2025. *The Hill Times photograph by Tessie Sanci*

Sergio Marchi says he regrets Rat Pack's contribution to loss of decorum in House

In his new book, Sergio Marchi recounts his time as a Hill staffer, alderman, opposition MP, cabinet minister, and ambassador.

BY NEIL MOSS

In the years after the federal Liberals a devastating electoral defeat in 1984, the Rat Pack helped rejuvenate the party, but also crossed red lines with their performance in the House, which Sergio Marchi says he regrets.

The group was composed of four "charter" members in then-Liberal MPs Don Boudria, Sheila Copps, John Nunziata, and Brian Tobin. In his new book, Marchi writes he was an "honorary" member.

"They were exciting to watch, but they were also controversial since not everyone agreed with their 'take-no-prisoners' approach," he details in the recently published *Pursuing a Public Life: How to Succeed in the Political Arena.*

Marchi notes that the government of then-Progressive Conservative prime minister Brian Mulroney and his cabinet ministers found the group "unbecoming and dishonourable."

"Points of order and privilege regularly flew back and forth, and the poor Speaker had to constantly figure out how to keep order and decorum. Often, he ejected members for unparliamentary language. But inadvertently that only furthered the drama," Marchi writes.

"The wild scenes contributed to a greater degree of incivility in the House and no doubt deepened public cynicism."

It is that deepened public cynicism that has led young Canadians today not wanting to pursue careers in public life, Marchi says, and it's a problem that inspired the former Liberal MP and cabinet minister to write his new book.

Marchi told *The Hill Times* that the Rat Pack was a "two-sided coin" that both re-energized the Liberal caucus, but also crossed red lines.

"I do regret when we would cross the line because what that would do is that would then encourage the subsequent opposition to do the same thing," he told *The Hill Times.*

"The overly aggressive mindset," Marchi writes, "contributed to a poorer political culture. It created a race to the bottom. When the government went low, we in the opposition went lower. Everything seemed to constitute a scandal."

He recounts a line of questioning from Boudria over the country of origin of the wine that was served on the prime minister's plane.

"'Don, if we ever get to the promised land of the government, the opposition will undoubtedly rake us over the coals, as well,'" Marchi recounts in his book. "And that's precisely what happened."

Following his years on the opposition benches, Marchi was tapped by then-prime minister Jean Chrétien to join his cabinet—first as immigration minister, then as minister to the environment, and last as international trade minister. Marchi left the House in 1999 and was appointed Canada's ambassador to the World Trade Organization, where he also hosted soccer games played by envoys in Geneva.

The following Q&A was conducted by phone, and has been edited for length, style, and clarity.

What was the reason that you chose to write this book?

"This book was written because I was deeply concerned that so many Canadians—particularly young Canadians, which is my chief concern—are giving public life a pass. And that concerns me because for all the potential of AI [artificial intelligence], AI will never run a country, AI will never provide empathy, and AI will never safeguard our values."

"Public and political leadership requires good women and good men to step forward, to have bold voices, and to have new ideas. That's how we rejuvenate and sustain our politics and, more importantly, our democracy. But more and more people are not choosing to consider it. And I get it, politics hasn't become any easier or nicer. In fact, it's become, you know, increasingly more divisive and polarized and nasty. But that doesn't mean we don't need good people to roll up the shirt sleeves and obviously face the challenges as we grow our country."

At times, backbench MPs are looked at as trained seals in a way. You discuss the levels of subservience to the leader that MPs show, and you mentioned that has regressed. Is that something that is causing people to not enter political life because they lack agency? How do you fix that?

"I think in the long reasons for not running—perhaps it might not be at the top of the list—but if people think that an MP is a rather powerless position or always beholden to the leader or the prime minister or PMO or the leader's office, then they might say, 'Look, I want a position where I'm more independent, more in control, where I dictate.' And for that, the municipal level is terrific."

100 Best Books 2025

"I think it's a balance because on the one hand—as I say in the book—there's no question that people like strong MPs. …. So allow MPs to be strong, allow MPs to be able to work freely in committees [and] to give them a little more latitude in terms of national debates, in which they can participate.

"On the other hand, you also need some balance because Sergio Marchi didn't get elected as an Independent."

"The fact is that the pendulum has swung too much towards the leader, and we need to calibrate it a bit."

You talk about some of the Rat Pack's activities, the loss of decorum in the House, and scandal hunting-type questions—where you talk about Boudria's question on foreign wine on the prime minister's plane. Do you think that those Liberal opposition years have led to the state of the House we are in now?

"The Rat Pack was a two-sided coin. On the one side, the Rat Pack brought a lot of energy to our caucus because you have to remember that we were brutally defeated by Brian Mulroney in 1984. … We were down and out and trying to fight back. In that context, the Rat Pack provided a lot of oxygen, a lot of energy, a lot of enthusiasm, not taking no for an answer.

"But the flip side of that is the Rat Pack often crossed a so-called red line of good, acceptable political behaviour and the loser in that was political decorum. I don't think it was just the Rat Pack in that era that contributed [to the current state of affairs]. There are things that happened before and since, but I think those years where political decorum suffered. … No question that it didn't help the kind of relationships that are required in the House, regardless of who is in power and who is in opposition.

"So the Rat Pack had a two-fold impact positive for the party because it gave us some juice at a time when we were desperate, but the decorum suffered during those years."

Is there any amount of regret in terms of having been a part of that process where the red line was crossed?

Members of the Rat Pack included then-Liberal MPs John Nunziata, top left, Brian Tobin, Don Boudria, Sheila Copps, bottom left, and honorary member Sergio Marchi, bottom right. *The Hill Times file photographs*

"When you look back at it in a less partisan, less sharp way … I don't think everything the Rat Pack said and did was wrong, but the things they did say and do that were wrong, you do regret. Because what you do after a few years, is you put yourself in the shoes of a viewing public tuning into Question Period, and how do you think they would react to watching their politicians fight and pull their hair out and call each other names and get ejected."

"I do regret when we would cross the line because what that would do is that would then encourage the subsequent opposition to do the same thing."

You mention in the book that traditionally there has been consensus built around trade with support from both the Liberals and Conservatives. When you look at the last Parliament, the Conservatives had voted against the modernized Ukraine trade deal due to their opposition to language around carbon pricing in the deal. Is that consensus still here?

"It's a weaker consensus. Not only here, but across the world."

"When I got the trade portfolio, I would say to people, 'I think I've got one of the best portfolios in cabinet,' because it's hugely positive. You're working in terms of bringing down trade barriers. You're working trying to help companies sell their goods and services around the world. You're on trade missions with incredible, talented business leaders. What possibly could be negative about that?"

Sergio Marchi, pictured at a briefing with reporters in his ministerial office in Gatineau, Que., in the 1990s, served as Liberal minister of immigration, environment, and international trade. *The Hill Times photograph by Kate Malloy*

"Now, it's been turned on its head, not just because of what [United States President Donald] Trump has been up to, but preceding that, there's been, I think, a weakening of political leadership. Trade became known in many parts of the world as something that was hurting the economy, where jobs were being exported to developing countries because of cheaper labour. All of a sudden there were parades against trade, and the politicians, rather than fighting those parades, chose to lead them so it became much more politicized."

You mentioned the WTO hasn't recovered since the Battle of Seattle, where we have negotiations that haven't finished even after a quarter century. Have we reached a point where there are questions if the WTO will ever recover?

"It's a factor of leadership, right? If there's no leadership, they won't move. It's as simple as that."

"When you have the United States, with the leader that it has who actually has called for the elimination of the WTO publicly. Can you imagine? … It was just irresponsible."

"As they moved from the locomotive to the caboose, not only did they take themselves off the leadership front, [but] no one has filled the void. … If no one fills the void, it's just going to be stationary and you are going to just get the status quo. And that's where it is right now."

"It's a precarious moment, and it's going to likely be there during the duration of the Trump time because he's not going to change his attitude anytime soon. But that doesn't mean other countries don't have to."

To go back to cabinet and cabinet shuffles that you experienced: What was the ultimate decision that made you turn down the Defence Ministry offer that Jean Chrétien gave you?

"I just didn't feel an affinity. You don't have to be an expert when you become a minister because the biggest thing a minister brings is their judgment. … I just didn't feel that I had the affinity for a defence portfolio. I didn't have an intuition. I wasn't involved ever in military issues, *per se*. I said to myself, 'Jeez, I wasn't even a Boy Scout.'

"So I thought it wasn't going to be a good fit, and I thought I needed to be honest with how I felt with the prime minister."

Looking back at your political life, do you have any of any 'what ifs'?

"I mention in the book two regrets. … One is I probably overdid it in my early years being away from my family. I missed many birthdays, many anniversaries, many firsts of the kids because I was always either in a riding or somewhere in the country. Later when I was a minister, I was traveling abroad. So I now look back because you can't have those moments back—they're gone."

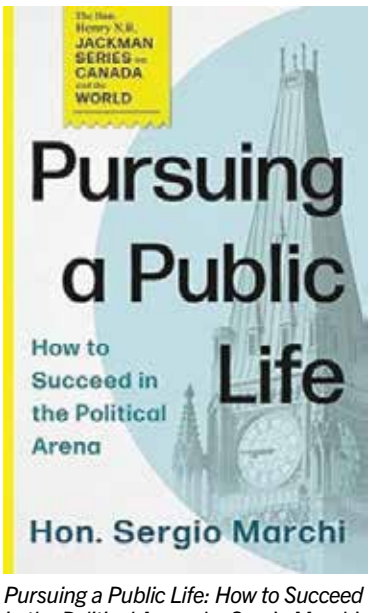
"And the second regret is I was one cabinet meeting away from changing the citizenship oath to go from swearing allegiance to, at the time, Queen Elizabeth II and her heirs and successors, to an Australian-type narrative, which was an oath to country."

"I thought there was support for it, and would have, you know, complimented our own flag, our own anthem, our own institutions in terms of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our own constitution."

"At the last minute, the prime minister asked me to park it. Because of the [Quebec separatist] referendum, he didn't want to fight —he told me—monarchists and separatists at the same time."

"I just thought it was the right thing to do, and I still think it's the right thing to do. I hope one day, not too far away, that a minister of citizenship will make that move."

nmoss@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Pursuing a Public Life: How to Succeed in the Political Arena, by Sergio Marchi, Dundurn Press, $27.95

100 Best Books 2025

‘An upset tummy of a anger, humour, and why

The comedian reflects on his latest book’s inspiration, including Donald Trump, national identity, and the chaos of Canadian politics.

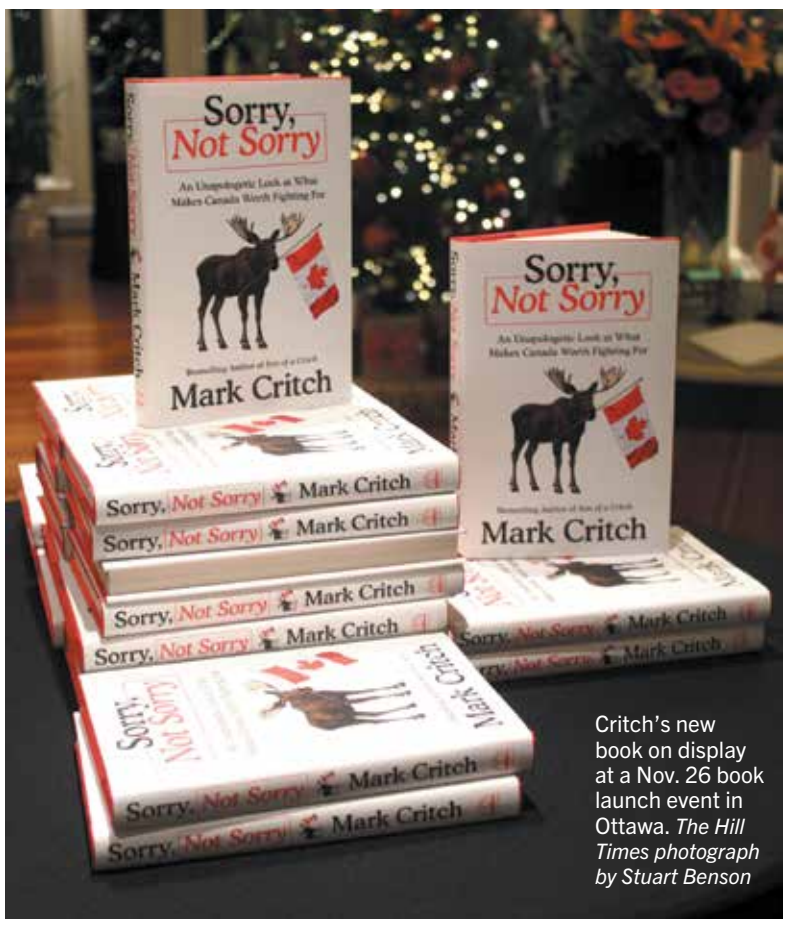
BY PETER MAZEREEUW

The star of the long-running Canadian sketch comedy show *This Hour has 22 Minutes* has a new book out, *Sorry, Not Sorry: An Unapologetic Look at What Makes Canada Worth Fighting For*, released on Nov. 25. In the essay collection, Mark Critch considers Canadian identity and rising patriotism, United States President Donald Trump, the monarchy, and more in comedic pieces that both offer his perspective and fictionalized scenarios.

The following interview first appeared in The Hot Room *podcast, and has been edited for length, style, and clarity.*

There are parts of the book that feel like a monologue you might give on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, and then it goes into a history or civics lesson, or something biographical. I’m interested in the history. You’ve got Newfoundland entering Confederation, CanCon, and the creation of Bob and Doug McKenzie, Rupert’s Land, and historic U.S. invasion plans. Was that research that you did for the book, or are you secretly a history wonk?

“I’m a history nerd, you know? I’m really a 90-year-old guy in a 51-year-old’s body. And I’ve always been kind of 90, I think. So I’ve always been interested in history. My dad, he was born in the ‘20s. He’d be 100 and something now; he passed when he was 93. But he covered Confederation with Canada for *The Daily News* back in St John’s, Nfld. He was a reporter, and so I would always get these stories kind of from an older generation about life and growing up because I had an old dad. Dad was 50-something when he had me, and so I always kind of felt a little step out of time. So I very much loved history, Newfoundland history, especially. And then, you know, Canadian history as well. And some of these things, when you’re writing the book, you start to go down little rabbit holes. And so I’m learning a lot while I was writing it, as well.”



Critch’s new book on display at a Nov. 26 book launch event in Ottawa. *The Hill Times photograph by Stuart Benson*

You make a point in the book about the value of shared experiences in a culture. We seem to have less of that with each passing generation. Now content is very niche, endless choices. How do we keep Canadian culture alive?

“That’s a great question. Not too really sure, because it seems to be ever-evolving as well. I think when we were growing up, it was very different, because you had a table, a set, that people would come to at certain times, like *The Littlest Hobo*, like any kind of CanCon and MuchMusic, when we would have these great Canadian hits because that’s what was on while you’re waiting to see the *Thriller* video. And you had a shared experience. And when it’s presented to you alongside the other stuff, it’s good. So you do accept it, but it’s easy to get drowned out.

“Now I’ve noticed from the *22 Minutes* show I do, instead of something being on—and this is what is on, we’re all going to watch as a country—every now and then, things go viral. So the people kind of decide what those touchstone moments are, and the people decide what they’re really excited about or upset about or what have you. I went to the bank a while ago and the guy at the counter was like, ‘Hey, you’re the guy from TikTok.’ I said, ‘No, no. I don’t really have a TikTok account.’ And he started showing me *22 Minutes* videos that other people are sharing. So it’s still out there, but it’s floating in algorithms, but it is much different than it was when we were growing up. So I hope some of that Canadian identity doesn’t kind of float away into the ether now that the windows open.”

You say at the very end of the book that you wrote it because you were angry, and that definitely comes through in places. I think you got as far as page 3 before calling Donald Trump an asshole. You devoted a whole chapter to Canadians who you think have acted like traitors. Tell me what was going through your mind when you decided to write this book?

“Well, when I was writing the book, I was writing this other historical novel, actually, set in Newfoundland, and all this stuff was happening, and *22* was not at the time, and I had all these little things I’d want to say. I’d be writing, and in the background, you’d hear [Trump say] ‘the 51st state, quite frankly.’ And I go back to type in my thing, and it’d be like, ‘the governor of Canada,’

and then so I wrote a message to [publisher] Penguin. I said, ‘Look, I think I really want to write a little book of essays about Canada and what’s happening.’ And then they said, ‘Okay, yeah.’ And it’d be a bit of a mad rush to get it out, because, typically, you pitch a book, and it’s a year of this and that, and then another year, and then it comes out. And they’re like, ‘When can you have it by?’ This is probably April. And I was like, ‘End of May, June.’

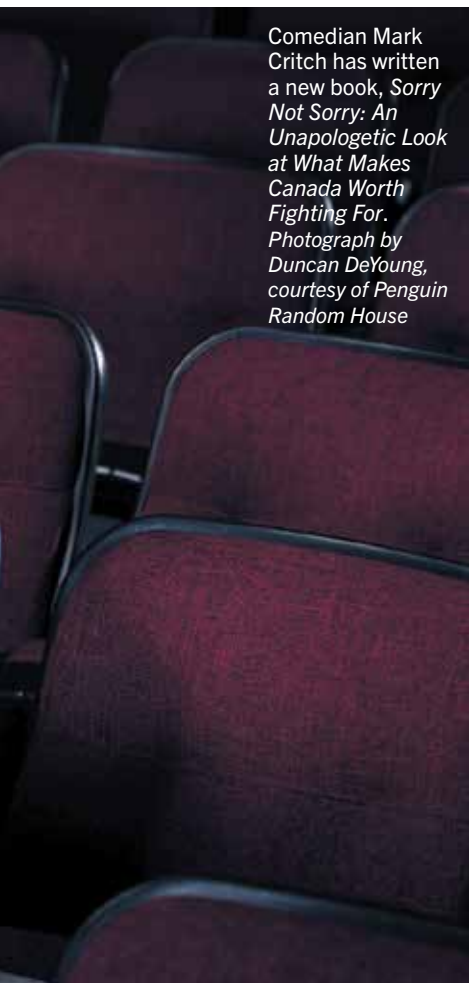
“[With essays] everything is different, each one, and the character ones are much easier to write because you kind of get lost in that world. And then I love reading about history. I just had to get it out of my head because it’s what I was thinking of. I always say, for *22 Minutes*, the sketches that are the best are always the ones I can’t get down fast enough because it’s coming through and it’s authentic. And if something is authentically what you feel, that’s what you should work [on] and so I thought, ‘well, I need to do this now.’ And I got it out. So this was really an upset tummy of a book.”

You obviously spend a fair bit of time thinking about Trump. You have studied all of his mannerisms. I think comedians can often be sensitive gauges of what makes society tick. What is it about Trump, do you think, that draws Americans—and even some Canadians—to him?

“I think it’s, first of all, celebrity because he was a celebrity

100 Best Books 2025

book': Mark Critch on he was itching to write



Comedian Mark Critch has written a new book, *Sorry Not Sorry: An Unapologetic Look at What Makes Canada Worth Fighting For*. *Photograph by Duncan DeYoung, courtesy of Penguin Random House*

before, and people lean into that. Like with the [former prime minister Justin] Trudeau factor. When he was starting out, it was like, 'Oh, it's a dynasty kind of thing.' And love, like it, or lump it, people do lean into that a bit. And people say [Trump's] a straight-talker and he's a straight-shooter, and he tells it like it is. People get frustrated, and oftentimes when times are tough and when the economy's not doing great, a lot of people would like somebody to say, 'It's everybody else, somebody else's fault, and it's not me, it's not you, it's them, and it is going to be okay.' And then it becomes a gang.

"It's like all the Freedom Convoy stuff. After the 'F*** Trudeau' flags came down, and then up go the 'F*** Carney' flags. It's a lifestyle now. It's a culture. They're looking for a reason. And it's less about purpose and more about community. I think the more we're brought together by the internet, the less we're together as people and real communities. And upset, angry people will find each other in a group, and the only thing holding together is a dislike or blame of something. And then they find a personality there, a persona, and a status there, and then it kind of floats. And I think a lot of that is kind of MAGA, a lot of that is Freedom Convoy and stuff like that. The more I'd get frustrated with it, then you kind of go like, 'Oh, that's sad. They're lonely, I think.' And with Mr. Trump, I don't think he believes half the things he said.

"I think the problem with Canada was, he [Trump] liked Justin. He thought Justin was cool and handsome. His daughter really liked Justin, and then Justin was caught on a hot mic talking trash about him to other world leaders, and that really hurt him. I think he felt betrayed. And then when he was coming in the second time, he made that little joke about the 51st state and the governor, and then he bragged about doing it. And then people thought, 'Oh yeah, that's a good idea.' I think he does that a lot, where something happens, and then he just follows that path without really thinking of it. So I think all this kind of started with him being hurt and betrayed, and then, it becomes all this other foolishness. I think that the bigger the community, sometimes the lonelier the people in it."

Mark Critch in the studio where he and the *22 Minutes* cast record before a live audience in Halifax. *Photograph courtesy of This Hour Has 22 Minutes*

Mark Critch portrays U.S. President Donald Trump on screen for *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. *Photograph courtesy of This Hour Has 22 Minutes*

Mark Critch, left, former prime minister Justin Trudeau, his sons Hadrien and Xavier, Melissa Royle Critch, Irish Ambassador John Concannon, and Mary Concannon at the Critch's Ottawa book launch party. *The Hill Times photograph by Stuart Benson*

What do you make of the current state of Canadian politics?

"It's fascinating, because I always say, 'People often say, there'll be peace on earth when we find aliens because everyone will see themselves as people, and we're afraid of the green people now.' And I think that kind of happened with Trump in the White House, where it's like we're always fighting between ourselves and bickering, and then all of a sudden, people get together, and this is 'Team Canada' for a little while. Then all the old, little petty things come up again. Now they're there's this pipeline thing going forward. And I think we're looking more inward because of that because there was the thing that let people finally unite a bit more is this common enemy threat.

"It's been a whirlwind. [Conservative Leader] Pierre [Poilievre] is definitely going to be the prime minister. Oh, no, Justin is stepping down? Oh, [Mark] Carney is actually going to do it after tipping his foot in the water. Oh, wow, Carney won that. Oh, the budget, well, [Conservative MP] Andrew Scheer is hiding behind a curtain. Oh, okay, the budget passed. Now, what's going on? And is there an NDP? Green and the NDP can't you just get together and become a thing together? No? Okay, you're very different. I understand.

"And it's all this, this madness happening and this spiralling. And I think it's going to be very interesting because Mr. Carney is so different from Justin. It's very much, you know, like the company of Canada now. It's ever-changing. And I think we're probably going to be in for another big change before too long. It's so flippy-floppy, tenuous now. It seems like—especially this whole pipeline thing—seems like it's just going to blow up politically for politicians very soon. So it's interesting to watch. It's chaotic right now, and more so than normal. And I think more Canadians are paying attention than normal. I see that certainly with a reaction to some of our political sketches. Some of the more political stuff is doing better online because people are paying attention, they know about it, and they're interested."

As a comedian, you're looking out at the world, and a lot of the news is pretty bleak. How do you decide what subjects are worth poking fun at and which ones are off limits?

"Always kick up, you know. And that's the old thing with comedy. You have the Charlie Chaplin tramp and the cop. If Charlie Chaplin tramp kicks the cop in the bum, it's funny. If the cop kicks him in the bum, it's not. It's two people, the same action, right? So you have to look at that all the time. I will talk to a politician and I'll make a few jabs and stuff. I don't try to be cruel. I like to make a joke that if I said to the person to their face, I would feel comfortable doing it. You can disagree with someone, you can criticize someone, but if you're not comfortable, if you wouldn't say it to their face, don't say it. So that's kind of my role, and I get to say to a lot of faces. You can make fun of the situation. You can say 'prices are crazy.' You don't want to pick at a family struggle to pay the bills. But you can say, 'hey, I'm here too. Let's laugh at this situation together because we're in it together.' And comedy can be a great thing if you're not mocking somebody. If you're saying, 'Hey, we're both in the same situation, here's a laugh.' If you can share a laugh about it. It was a bit of life, and I think laughter is a great tool for that."

peter@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

100 Best Books 2025

Treachery' and 'troublemaker' MPs: why going against party leaders is verboten in Canadian politics

In the new book *No I in Team*, political scientist Alex Marland and his co-authors unpack why party discipline has gone too far.

BY PETER MAZEREEUW

Before MPs even make it to the House of Commons' hallways, political parties are "indoctrinating" their candidates to toe the leader's line, instilling fear that dissenting voices will face "serious consequences," says political scientist and author Alex Marland.

"We've just reached a point that somehow, if somebody says something that goes against their leader, it's treated like a dramatic episode of treachery," said Marland in an interview on *The Hot Room* podcast about his new book, *No 'I' in Team: Party Loyalty in Canadian Politics*.

Marland and co-authors Jared Wesley and Mireille Lalancette unpack why party discipline has gone too far in the 408-page book, outlining the centralization of control with the leader, and how criticism from backbench MPs is regarded with suspicion.

That elected officials are so reluctant to voice their opinions, and divert from party "message discipline," raises questions about the health of our democracy, he said.

"On anything that's high stakes, you can never be against your party or there's serious consequences," he said.

"It is simply a norm, it is an expectation, and if you don't toe the line, you are seen as a troublemaker."

The following interview has been edited for length, style, and clarity.

Tell us in a nutshell what your book is about.

"I think we need to pull back, even to just start with the question that I've been trying to figure out for so long: if Canadian democracy is so good and so strong, why do we have this normal expectation that if you are part of a political party, you can never criticize the party? You can never criticize the leader, you always have to be in lockstep together. It doesn't sound like free speech to me. It doesn't sound like good representation, and we've just reached a point that somehow, if somebody says something that goes against their leader, it's treated like a dramatic episode of treachery. Surely, in a democracy, we should have an ability to have good, constructive debates.

"Obviously, there's times that you're part of a party and you're not going to agree. This whole notion of the place to discuss things is in caucus meetings has turned out to be baloney because what's happening in caucus meetings now is there's an increasing number of staff there. It's performance. It's not about honest, good conversation, certainly on the government side, sometimes it is on the opposition side.

"So amidst all of that, and my research about how party discipline has become message discipline—and what I mean by that is it used to be about just making sure everybody voted the same way in the legislature, but now it's about making sure everybody says the same thing, whether they're in the legislature or anywhere outside it.

"That's what the book ended up being about. It's trying to understand what is it about Canadian party politics that in the House of Commons and in the 10 provincial legislatures, why is it that you have to constantly be on side with your party? I appreciate that there are exceptions, but when those exceptions occur, they're usually on low-stakes matters. So on anything that's high stakes, you can never be against your party or there's serious consequences. Doesn't sound very democratic to me."

I started my career when Stephen Harper was prime minister, and there was a lot of control going on from the Prime Minister's Office then. And the conventional wisdom was this is a Harper thing. He wants to really be in control of everything. It's his personality. Then we saw Justin Trudeau come in with a very different personality, and we heard a lot of the same things. Is personality part of it? Or is there another explanation behind this trend?

"When Trudeau first came in, he made a big deal about making everybody more accessible. And cabinet government was going to be back, but after the first year when they really got staffed up, the Prime Minister's Office just went back to its regular pattern. And even during the 2015 election campaign, Trudeau had said that he was really keen to reverse the trend of centralization that a lot of people say began with his father.

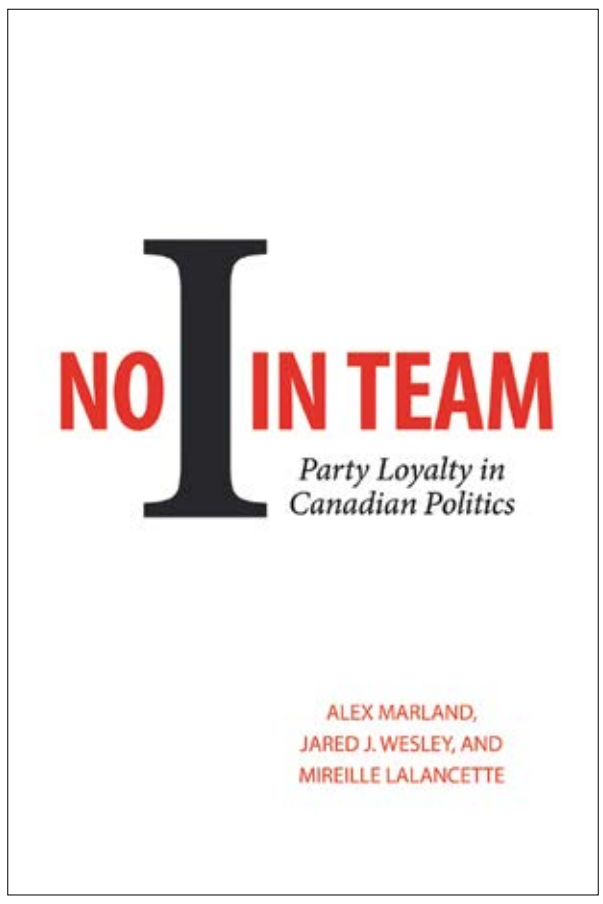
"The reality is that I think what's going on is in a world of fractured media, the ability for politicians to communicate directly with audiences through social media and websites, etc., and the fact that you know you can have a digital megaphone and say something and it goes viral and causes controversy and derails agendas and requires crisis communications, all of these things really emerged during the Harper government. Social media was still in its infancy in 2004 when [then-prime minister Paul] Martin was there, and 2006 when Harper became prime minister.

"And, over time, what has happened is political parties have realized, starting in an election campaign, you train your candidates to never say anything that is going to be controversial. And so we are indoctrinating our election candidates and our future elected officials to think that the party knows best, that the leader is always right, and that if you do anything that goes against the leader, that you are the anomaly, that you are the problem.

"There are lots of reasons why political parties are good. They do a lot of good things, especially in large legislatures. But why do we need to exist in a world where there are so many politicians who are afraid to speak out, and who really clam up, even in caucus meetings? It's not good."

How much of a role does the Parliamentary Press Gallery have in perpetuating this trend? I think of the stories we see on a semi-regular basis about MPs anonymously criticizing their leader. 'That's a really big deal. They shouldn't be doing that,' is the implication, right?

"Well, the first point is that they're anonymously doing it because they don't have the wherewithal to do it publicly because they know the consequences. And the consequences aren't even going to just start from what the leader has to say to you, or even the leader's chief of staff. The consequences are going to come from your peers. Other members of caucus are going to take you aside and say, 'What do you think you're doing? You're



No 'I' in Team: Party Loyalty in Canadian Politics, by Alex Marland, Jared Wesley, and Mireille Lalancette, University of Toronto Press, 408 pp., $39.95.

100 Best Books 2025

Prime Minister Mark Carney, pictured at a Liberal caucus meeting on the Hill. We are indoctrinating our election candidates and our future elected officials to think that the party knows best, that the leader is always right, says Alex Marland. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

causing all sorts of problems. Stop it.' And it can really make life difficult, and it can upset relationships.

"You can look at how Justin Trudeau's tenure as leader and prime minister came to a slow end. And I'm just amazed at how few Liberal MPs were willing to say anything. I mean, there was Wayne Long in New Brunswick, Ken McDonald in Newfoundland and Labrador were the only ones really putting their names to things. And then the other one that I find just amazing is how Mark Carney becomes prime minister, and obviously leader of the Liberal Party, and just with a stroke of a pen theatrically cancels the price on carbon … that so many Liberals for so long had insisted was essential, and we didn't hear a peep. How is it that we didn't have any Liberal MPs willing to go out and say, 'I don't agree with this decision?' Surely, there were some of them who had real, grave concerns about it?

"The whole idea of this book—*No 'I' in Team*—it's an expression that is used all the time, not just in politics. But when we were doing interviews with politicians, it comes up a lot, and political staff will tell you the same thing, campaign managers will say the same thing.

"You are not the person to decide what the party's direction is. If you come out and say something that is controversial, that the press gallery will jump on you about because you are an aberration by saying something about the leader, you are a distraction. You are a troublemaker, and we need to stop that. And there could be serious repercussions for you doing that. So it just begs the question of, 'where are we going in a democracy when power is being centralized in the leader's office?' And the people who are meant to hold the leader to account—particularly on the government benches—are really the people who are saying very little because they're afraid to do so."

Let's talk about that centralized power. What happens to the MPs if they decide to go publicly against the leader or the prime minister?

"I think I should start by differentiating between if you're in opposition versus if you're on the governing party. Clearly, if you're a member of cabinet, you know you're going to need to support the prime minister. That's just a convention, and that's well understood. But if you are a member of the governing party who is a backbencher—so you are a parliamentary secretary, you are somebody with no title—your job is to hold the government to account.

"But what is happening is backbench MPs are being told that they are the government, and, really, the only people who are the government are members of cabinet. And so it creates this mentality that you shouldn't say anything, and if you do, there are different types of consequences.

"At a very basic level, you will get a call from a staffer somewhere saying, 'Why did you like this on social media? You should really think twice and not like that.' I've had many politicians tell me that happens, and it goes from there. I think a lot of us think, well, the worst possible outcome is you could get booted from the party. But that's usually only when something's egregious, or there being just so many episodes, that finally they cut ties.

"The reality is that there's a lot of other things that happen behind the scenes. There's social ostracization. That's a huge part of it. You're not getting favours that you would like. Maybe you want to go home on a Thursday after the House shuts because there's events going on in your constituency, and you live a long way away and have to travel.

"They'll tell you have to stay for your House duty on Friday. And they'll make your life difficult. And then, of course, you've got an election campaign going up, and maybe the leader won't visit you. There's a lot of consequences that can occur. So, again, there's positive reasons for being part of a political party, but the norm's that if you criticize the leader, you are in big, big trouble. It has gone too far."

The prime minister has carrots to offer, as well. If you're an ambitious backbench MP, you think, 'I'd like to be a cabinet minister: almost double my salary, better career prospects post-politics,'—you're depending entirely on the goodwill of the prime minister to get there, right?

"Well, that's the thing. It's not just the prime minister, but it's the circle of agents around the prime minister. And because we know that senior political staff are involved in conversations about who ought to be in cabinet and how they're performing and problems and this sort of thing. And so the presence of staff at caucus meetings, therefore, becomes a challenge because it becomes very hard for backbenchers who want to get into cabinet to be critical of what the Prime Minister's Office is doing, or what the government is doing because they know that the people who are making decisions about whether they should potentially get an appointment are right there in the room.

"I think one of the remedies to all of this is there needs to be a norm where backbenchers insist on *in camera* sessions with the prime minister. Staff need to be told to clear the room, and it should just be a standing regular thing. And the only way for that to happen is if backbenchers understand that they can ask for this and they can demand it. We've seen it happen sometimes with Justin Trudeau. Mark Carney said he was doing it initially. … Having opportunities to have one-on-ones or group discussions without the presence of staff is one step that needs to be considered."

Is it like this in other countries?

"Not to the degree that it is here that I can tell, certainly not in Western liberal democracies. I think the real question for me is: what is it about Canada that has led us to this point? Along the way, during this research for this book, part of me just thought, 'maybe it's part of the human condition to be a Canadian?' You want to be polite, you don't want to cause trouble, but there's obviously a lot deeper things going on there. So it's still a bit of a mystery, other than the fact that we've reached a point where it is simply a norm, it is an expectation, and if you don't toe the line, you are seen as a troublemaker."

You end the book with recommendations on how to fix the problem. Some would require people with power—the party leaders—to make changes to reduce their power. What's in it for them?

"Really, the only way that we can push back against the centralization of power is for backbenchers to work together as a team. Backbenchers, as an individual, it's really easy to pick them off, but when you have several who have a concern, it becomes a problem for the leadership circle.

"I don't think that backbenchers necessarily always know that. The experienced ones will, but also sometimes the experienced ones are the ones who have been around a long time and have bought into the system. A big challenge we have is there's political scientists who will say that Canadian legislatures are characterized by amateurism. What they mean by that is, at every election, there is a lot of turnover. There's a lot of people who don't run again.

"There's a lot of people who are brand new after an election, and it's really hard to come in a brand-new elected MP and try to disrupt norms. And so this is why it's essential, really, for the people who have some experience to mobilize and say, 'Look, we need to do something and work on the rules.' [Conservative MP] Michael Chong was able to do it with his Reform Act in 2014. It was a really rare case of a backbencher able to move something forward.

"But what we really just don't see is elected officials in Canada see[ing] this as a priority. They're so busy dealing with their constituency case work, they're trying to get through the day. They're faced with … all sorts of requests for their time. The last thing that they need is to start stirring trouble. So I think part of the answer here is really more civic education, so that the people who end up running for office have more awareness. And that's part of the reason behind this book. It's just to raise awareness so that hopefully in classrooms and other places, people can start saying, 'Listen, there are good reasons for political parties, but maybe sometimes it's not good for everybody to always agree with the leader.'"

Jared J. Wesley, left, Alex Marland, and Mireille Lalancette, authors of *No I In Team: Party Loyalty in Canadian Politics*, published by the University of Toronto Press, 2025. *Photograph courtesy of Angela Wagner*

No 'I' in Team: Party Loyalty in Canadian Politics, by Alex Marland, Jared Wesley, and Mireille Lalancette, University of Toronto Press, 408 pp., $39.95.

The Hill Times

100 Best Books 2025

‘I was speaking to a group of high school students, and none of them knew who Lester B. Pearson was’: historian J.D.M. Stewart wants to change that

Then-prime minister Justin Trudeau at a Black History Month event in Ottawa on Feb. 5, 2025. *The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia*

Continued from page 35

and this was in Ontario, where we actually do require a high school history course in Grade 10. And as you may know, in most of the other provinces of the country, there’s no high school history requirement. So that’s a bit of a problem, if you ask me.”

Leaving aside high-school students, I’m not sure how many average Canadians would know who Pearson was.

“That’s another reason why I needed to write the book because even the average Canadian may need a refresher course in the political history of our country.”

Why is it important for Canadians to know about their prime ministers?

“As I say in the book, Peter C. Newman once wrote that an hour in the Office of the Prime Minister is an hour in the history of the country. So, if we want to understand what has made Canada into what it is today, we need to have an understanding of the people who have led the country and the decisions that they made and the consequences of those decisions. It’s part of being an informed and civic minded citizen to understand the history of the country.”

What were some of the most interesting things that you learned while researching this book?

“One of the interesting things was how much Indigenous history there was that went through the Office of Prime Minister. And I knew that I would find material on prime ministers and the Indigenous file, but I didn’t realize that it would be so extensive, and run through the office of virtually every prime minister. So that was a very interesting thing that I discovered. And I would say a similar thing about the environment. We often think of environmental history as only perhaps beginning with maybe the Brian Mulroney government, but it actually goes back to Sir John A. Macdonald who established the first national park.”

You have studied all the prime ministers of Canada. Any lessons learned from their successes and failures that you can share with this country’s current prime minister and future prime ministers?

“Plenty of them: pragmatism is a big part of being a successful prime minister. And we can look at any number of prime ministers to see who was successful because of the way that they approach the office in a pragmatic way. I think also there is a lesson to be learned in trying to understand the regional nature of Canada, because it is very much a regional country with different needs and different concerns, and you have to be very tuned into that. There’s a lesson to be learned from some of our better prime ministers who tried to inspire the nation with their speech and rhetoric. And we could use a little bit of an uplifting moment from our leaders by the power of their words. So those are just a few things off the top of my head.”

Which prime minister do you think is the most misunderstood, and why?

> If we want to understand what has made Canada into what it is today, we need to understand the people who have led the country, the decisions that they made, and the consequences of those decisions.

“I suspect Sir John A. Macdonald is one of the most misunderstood. And it’s funny to go back to the first prime minister because you might think he would be the best understood. But I think recent attacks on his legacy have showed that maybe he’s not as well understood as a man and a policymaker as maybe we think we should know him.”

Which prime minister had best political instincts?

“[William Lyon] Mackenzie King had excellent political instincts. When I spoke about pragmatism earlier, he was able to steer the ship of state through very difficult times and maintain his hold on power, particularly during the Second World War. So he would come to mind for sure. And Jean Chrétien, as well, had excellent political instincts. And I say that because he was able to win three majority governments, but he also had good political instincts in the way that he worked with other people, and that’s part of politics as well, and he had very excellent relations with his caucus, his cabinet, and foreign leaders.”

Do you think that the role of the prime minister has evolved over the years?

“It certainly has evolved. It’s become a much bigger job with a much bigger office, and it has become a job where you’re much more exposed as a leader now, whereas before, there was quite a bit of power spread out among cabinet and you weren’t exposed in the media like you would have been, or like you are today. In the days of [Wilfrid] Laurier and Mackenzie King and others from an earlier time, you were not seen on social media all the time. And so there’s a big focus just on the prime minister, even as not only as a government figure, but also as a political celebrity, and that has changed things quite a bit.”

How about the centralization of power? There’s been a lot of discussion over the years about how the power is centralized in the Prime Minister’s Office.

“It’s mostly true. It’s also important to understand that, in the end, prime ministers make the decisions, and so prime ministers have always had the power because of their position as the head of the executive branch, as the head of the cabinet. Now, there is a bigger entourage around the prime minister, but the prime minister has always been the person who makes the decision. He’s always been the person around which the power revolves.”

Based on your research, which prime minister did more than others to improve the lives of Canadians?

“That’s hard to just pin on one prime minister because many of them have made contributions. So if you look at somebody like Mackenzie King, he started the opening of the welfare state. Pearson contributed to it afterward and created some of the symbols of identity, such as the Maple Leaf flag. Pierre Trudeau gave the Charter of Rights, somebody like Laurier, if you go back to the turn of the 20th century, he gave Canadians a confidence that they could be one of the great nations of the world. So everybody makes a contribution. It’s hard to just pin it on one prime minister in terms of how they made life better for Canadians, because many of them have made a contribution. It’s a bit of a complex answer.”

In the chapter about Justin Trudeau, you wrote that as his time in office neared its end, the public’s dislike of him grew more intense. Why do you think it happened?

“Some of it was just that he and his government were past the best-before date. Some of it was a lack of self awareness on the prime minister’s part, that he didn’t seem to be able to change course or change message, a lot of his messaging that just didn’t seem genuine anymore.”

In the chapter about Harper, you wrote that he served as prime minister for about 10 years, but it is unlikely that many could name a signature achievement from his years in office. What do you think is the reason for that?

“Because the success of the Harper government was steady and unflashy management, and sometimes that works. Harper had a lot of successes, but they weren’t very flashy, and he was a little bit like Mackenzie King, a bit bland as a personality, but the management of government was pretty strong. … So if you give good government, that’s a pretty good achievement.”

arana@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

The *Ripper: The Making of Pierre Poilievre* focuses on Poilievre within the modern media environment in Canada

Continued from page 34

the book. By the start of the fixed-date election campaign, the book would have had most of the media coverage that it was going to get, and it would be around like, say, Stephen Maher's book on Trudeau (which I expected to be out in paperback by then).

"In the summer of 2024, I believed Justin Trudeau would be the Liberal leader and we'd go to the polls when we were scheduled to. Launching the book early to get it out before a spring election was not part of a plan, and it was bad for the book. Once the election was called, the CBC—the one media organization that can make a book a success—dropped its invitation for a major interview and the discussion of the book was caught up in the campaign."

As the book's title says, you argue that Pierre Poilievre is "a ripper," a politician "who sees politics as a war that gives their lives meaning." The entire book argues this quite forcefully, but can you explain here why Poilievre is a "ripper," and not a "weaver"?

"Rippers are fantastic opposition leaders. They find real and imagined scandals, force governments to defend policies, raise new issues, and are always challenging the status quo. Poilievre is a classic political ripper. So is Charlie Angus of the NDP. The Liberal Rat Pack were also pretty good rippers back in the day. The media has a few rippers who make important contributions to politics.

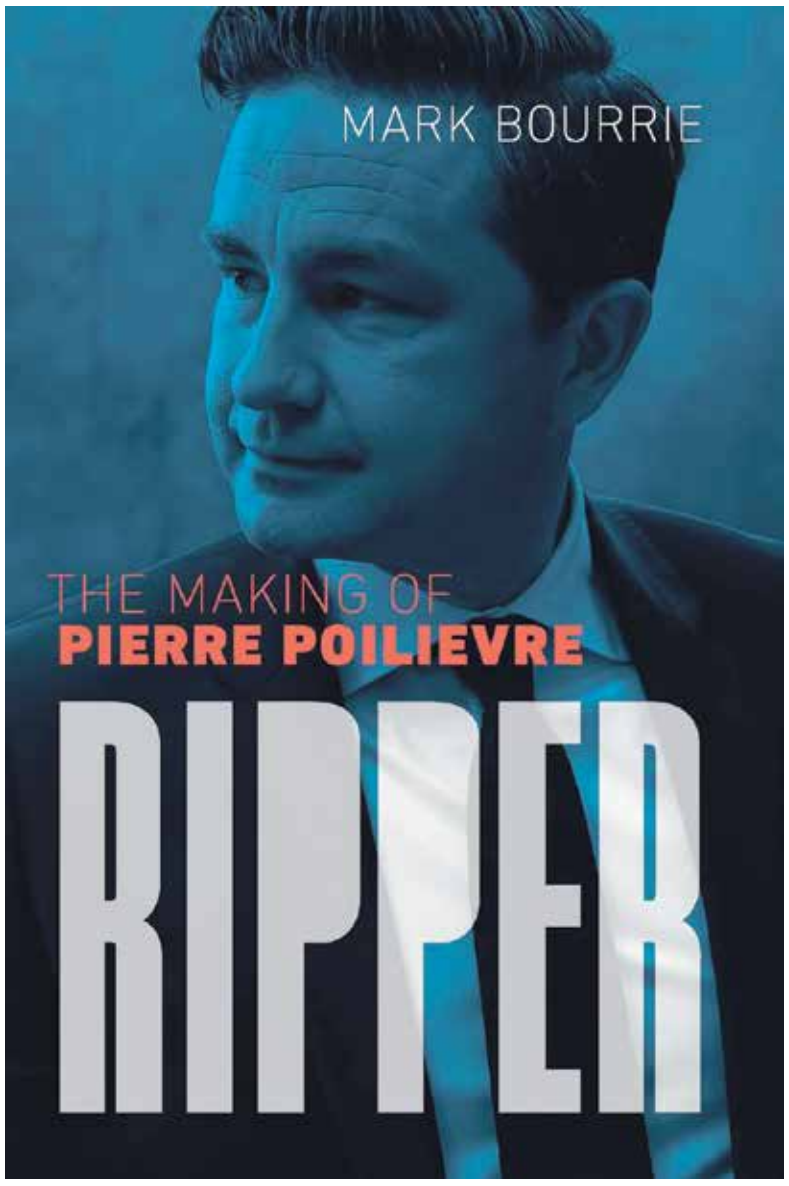
"Poilievre takes it farther by personalizing his attacks. Rippers, however, aren't good at developing policy, partly because they don't tend to socialize well, and they don't get the rush and quick political results that come from a tough attack. Weavers, on the other hand, get gratification from developing policies and putting together coalitions. I think Justin Trudeau has the empathy of a weaver, but not the organizational skills. Right now—and surprisingly, at least to me—Doug Ford has become the most vocal weaver in Canada, at least on the issue of saving our sovereignty."

***New York Times* columnist David Brooks was the one to first categorize between "rippers" and "weavers." Why did this column resonate with you, and did this inspire you to write the book?**

"It didn't inspire me to write the book. I saw Brooks' model as a way to explain Poilievre in a simple way. I wrote the book because, in the spring of 2024, I believed Trump would be back, [Nigel] Farage would gain ground in the U.K., [Geert] Wilders would continue to be at the centre of power in the Netherlands, [Viktor] Orban would keep his lock on Hungary. A neo-fascist was on the verge of power in Austria, a fascist had the Italian premiership, the AfD was the most dynamic party in Germany, and the hard-right was making big gains in France.

"I believed then, and I still believe, we are in the early stages of an anti-democratic revolution in the West.

"Democracy in Canada was already in a sad state at least in terms of real public participation and even interest. A Canadian government that made common cause with that movement would be a disaster."



Ripper: The Making of Pierre Poilievre, by Mark Bourrie, Biblioasis, 430 pp., $28.95.

Can "rippers" be good prime ministers, and has there ever been a "ripper" prime minister in Canada?

"No. They're awful. We've had two already: Arthur Meighen and John Diefenbaker. Meighen's nastiness doesn't show up in the history books because he never really got a chance to do much. He finished Robert Borden's term after the First World War and served a few weeks after the King-Byng affair, losing the 1926 election. You have to dig deep into the politics of the time to see how hard he was, and how he scared people.

"For example, in the mid-1930s, the Ontario Liberals and Conservatives came up with an admittedly strange plan to form a coalition provincial government to try to deal with the problems created by the Great Depression and to stop the spread of unions into Ontario factories and mines. Meighen, who was a Senator at the time, crushed the proposal in one meeting.

"Diefenbaker was a great opposition leader. He was a brilliant, compassionate lawyer. But he had no ability to tolerate anyone who disagreed with him or to listen."

How do you think Poilievre's style of politics has affected and changed federal politics today?

"Poilievre has made the never-ending campaign a real thing. I'm not sure that could continue through four years of a majority government, but I expect it to be normalized when we have minorities. It puts the prime minister at such a disadvantage since the PM's administrative work and security concerns prevent that much travel. This kind of politics requires a huge amount of fundraising and organizing. We could see the House of Commons become even more of a prop and less of a democratic institution where MPs debate about proposed laws and use committees to examine policy and administration.

"The bigger change is in the development of pseudo-media to replace what used to be the mainstream media. Poilievre and his campaign were always miles ahead on creating their own 'news' content on platforms like YouTube, and partnering with partisan organizations that run outlets that produce what can best be called propaganda disguised as news and analysis."

What were some surprises you learned about Poilievre?

"I'm amazed at his drive, his luck, his determination. I was also surprised at his rigidness. He's not a stupid man at all.

"I think he gives very little thought to policy. He just scans the political environment, looking for things that will sell. That could change. To a much lesser extent, and without the anger, Joe Clark was just as obsessed with strategy when he was young, then developed into a more thoughtful politician. But Clark never made politics personal the way Poilievre does."

Why do you think Poilievre distrusts the Hill media so much?

"I distrust the Hill media. They're the last people to realize they must get their act together very quickly. They need to stop seeing themselves as political players, spend some time outside their bubble, and end their craving for access, which never produces great journalism.

"At the same time, they made Poilievre. He's been a favourite dial-a-quote for decades. I find it odd that he so utterly despises journalists who fawningly covered his campaign against WE Charity in 2020-2021, and turned a fairly uncritical and a very lazy eye to his pro-convoy work in 2022. I suppose his disdain is grounded in the right-wing myth of a liberal press. Donald Trump and Stephen Harper believe it, too."

Why do you distrust the Hill media, especially as a former Hill journalist?

"I believe informing the public is not the top priority of many Hill journalists. I see far too much social climbing and status seeking with journalists more concerned about 'access' than bravely telling people what's going on. With some very notable exceptions, press coverage of the Hill is just the repetition of some interest group or politicians' talking points and analysis by people who have a minimal understanding of law, economics, history, and public administration and no research skills to speak of. Too often, public affairs are covered as sports or social events. I suppose that's what media managers in this country thinks sells, though it doesn't seem all that interesting to the vast majority of people."

What do you think of Poilievre's treatment of the Hill media? Does it work for him?

"If I were advising Poilievre, I'd suggest he give separate substantial interviews on policy to senior journalists from all the country's major media outlets to try to put to rest the idea that he's a policy lightweight, if, indeed, he isn't one. … All the party leaders seem to me to see all journalists as bad-faith actors, which is understandable, considering some of the recent big media failings.

"Still, I believe the campaign should be covered, and that candidates should have the self-confidence to deal with journalists. The situation has been getting worse over the years, and the public doesn't seem interested in punishing candidates and government leaders who shun the media. Nor do journalists stick together and push back, so I expect it to work.

"If real media want to survive in Canada, journalism needs to professionalize: real qualifications, professional standards, and a mechanism to enforce those standards in a meaningful way, including the discipline and, if necessary, expulsion of bad actors. So much of the media's problems are created by journalists themselves, and the door is wide open to propagandists and political actors claiming to be media. Without rebuilding credibility, it's impossible to get public support."

Ripper: The Making of Pierre Poilievre, by Mark Bourrie, Biblioasis, 430 pp., $28.95.

kmalloy@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

100 Best Books 2025

The Hill Times' 100 Best Books in 2025

1. ***After Redress: Japanese Canadian and Indigenous Struggles for Justice***, edited by Kirsten Emiko McAllister and Mona Oikawa, UBC Press, 302 pp., $34.95.

2. ***Against the Grain: Defiant Giants Who Changed the World***, by Terry O'Reilly, HarperCollinsCanada, 304 pp., $36.99.

3. ***A History of Photography in Canada, Volume 1: Anticipation to Participation, 1839-1918***, by Martha Langford, McGill-Queen's University Press, 600 pp., $85.

4. ***Ally is a Verb: A Guide to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples***, by Rose LeMay, Page Two, 179 pp., $24.95.

5. ***An Accidental Villain: A Soldier's Tale of War, Deceit and Exile***, by Linden MacIntyre, Penguin Random House Canada, 384 pp., $38.

6. ***A New Blueprint For Government: Reshaping Power, The PMO, and The Public Service***, by Kevin G. Lynch and James R. Mitchell, University of Regina Press, 224 pp., $29.95.

7. ***A Tight Grip: State Power and Control in Modern China***, by Wen-Hsuan Tsai, Contemporary Chinese Studies series, UBC Press, 226 pp., $39.95.

8. ***A Truce That Is Not Peace***, by Miriam Toews, Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 192 pp., $34.

9. ***Bad Indians Book Club: Reading at the Edge of a Thousand Worlds***, by Patty Krawec, Goose Lane Editions, 232 pp., $25.95.

10. ***Ballots and Brawls: The 1867 Canadian General Election***, by Patrice Dutil, Turning Point Elections Series, UBC Press, 328 pp., $27.95

11. ***Banana Capital: Stories, Science, and Poison at the Equator***, by Ben Brisbois, University of Regina Press, 368 pp., $34.95.

12. ***Behead and Cure: Humanitarian Work in the Vietnam War***, by Susan Armstrong-Reid, McGill-Queen's University Press, 444 pp., $34.95.

13. ***Bloodied Bodies, Bloody Landscapes: Settler Colonialism in Horror***, by Laura Hall, University of Regina Press, 288 pp., $32.95.

14. ***Book of Lives: A Memoir of Sorts***, by Margaret Atwood, McClelland & Stewart, Penguin Random House Canada, 624 pp., $45.

15. ***Borderline Chaos: How Canada Got Immigration Right, and Then Wrong***, by Tony Keller, Sutherland Books, 101 pp., $23.95.

16. ***Breaking Point: The New Big Shifts Putting Canada at Risk***, by Darrell Bricker and John Ibbitson, Signal Penguin Random House Canada, 240 pp., $40.

17. ***Canada's Prime Ministers and the Shaping of a National Identity***, by Raymond B. Blake, the C.D. Howe Series in Canadian Political History, UBC Press, 414 pp., $39.95

18. ***Canada Under Siege: How P.E.I. Became a Forward Operating Base for the Chinese Communist Party***, by Michel Juneau-Katsuya and Garry Clement, Optimum Publishing International, 256 pp., $26.95.

19. ***Certified Beauties: More of Hockey's Greatest Untold Stories***, by James Duthie, HarperCollinsCanada, 320 pp., $36.99.

20. ***Challenging Exile: Japanese Canadians and the Wartime Constitution***, by Eric M. Adams and Jordan Stanger-Ross, UBC Press, 384 pp., $34.95.

21. ***Chrétien and the World: Canadian Foreign Policy from 1993 to 2003***, edited by Jack Cunningham and John Meehan, the C.D. Howe Series in Canadian Political History, UBC Press, 376 pp., $45.

22. ***Crackdown: Surviving and Resisting the War on Drugs***, by Garth Mullins, Doubleday Canada Penguin Random House Canada, 288 pp., $34.95.

23. ***Deciding on Death: Rodriguez, Carter, and Medically Assisted Dying in Canada***, by Kent McNeil and Wayne Sumner, UBC Press, 378 pp., $32.95.

24. ***Dream Interrupted: The Rise and Fall of Quebec Nationalism***, by Francine Pelletier, Sutherland House Quarterly, University of Toronto Press, 172 pp., $23.95.

25. ***Elbows Up! Canadian Voices of Resilience and Resistance***, edited by Elamin Abdelmahmoud, McClelland & Stewart Penguin Random House Canada, 312 pp., $25.

26. ***Encampment: Resistance, Grace, and an Unhoused Community***, by Maggie Helwig, Coach House, 176 pp., $24.95.

27. ***52 Ways to Reconcile: How to Walk with Indigenous Peoples on the Path to Healing***, by David A. Robertson, McClelland & Stewart Penguin Random House Canada, 240 pp., $25.

28. ***Foreign Affairs in the Canadian Constitution***, by H. Scott Fairley, UBC Press, 324 pp., $110.

29. ***Future-Generation Government: How to Legislate for the Long Term***, by Nicholas Chesterley, McGill-Queen's University Press, 274 pp., $34.95.

30. ***Hearts of Freedom: Stories of Southeast Asian Refugees***, by Peter Duschinsky, Colleen Lundy, Michael J. Molloy, Allan Moscovitch, and Stephanie Phetsamay Stobbe, McGill-Queen's University Press, 333 pp., $32.95.

31. ***Homegrown Radicals: A Story of State Violence, Islamophobia, and Jihad in the Post 9/11 World***, by Youcef Soufi, University of Regina Press, 272 pp., $29.95.

32. ***How To Survive a Bear Attack***, by Claire Cameron, Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 304 pp., $34.95.

33. ***Is A River Alive?***, by Robert MacFarlane, Penguin Random House Canada, 384 pp., $39.

34. ***John Candy: A Life In Comedy***, by Paul Myers, House of Anansi Press, 376 pp., $34.99.

35. ***John Hart: A Businessman in British Columbia Politics*** by Patricia E. Roy, UBC Press, 238 pp., $34.95.

36. ***John Horgan: In His Own Words, A Memoir***, by John Horgan with Rod Mickleburgh, Harbour Publishing, Douglas & McIntyre, 256 pp., $38.95.

37. ***Knowledge, Power, and Migration: Contesting the North/South Divide***, edited by Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Mireille Paquet and Ethel Tungohan, McGill-Queen's University Press, 414 pp., $42.95.

38. ***Leading From the Heart: The Battles of a Feminist, Union Leader and Politician***, by Judy Darcy, Douglas & McIntrye, 312 pp., $40.

39. ***Little Deaths: Sex and Psychoanalysis in the Age of Pandemics***, edited by Ricky Varghese, University of Regina Press, 272 pp., $32.95.

40. ***Look Ma, No Hands***, by Gabrielle Drolet, McClelland & Stewart, Penguin Random House Canada, 272 pp., $24.95.

41. ***Maple Syrup: A Short History of Canada's Sweetest Obsession***, by Peter Kuitenbrouwer, Doubleday Canada Penguin Random House Canada, 328 pp., $36.95.

42. ***Mega Pipelines, Mega Resistance: Tar Sands, Social Movements, and the Politics of Energy Infrastructure***, by Amy Janzwood, UBC Press, 312 pp., $34.95.

43. ***My Fight for Canadian Healthcare: A Thirty-Year Battle to Put Patients First***, by Dr. Brian Day, Sutherland House, 458 pp., $39.95.

44. ***Needy Media: How Tech Gets Personal***, by Stephen Monteiro, McGill-Queen's University Press, 240 pp., $34.95.

45. ***1929: Inside the Greatest Crash in Wall Street History—and How It Shattered a Nation***, by Andrew Ross Sorkin, Viking Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 592 pp., $48.

46. ***No 'I' In Team: Party Loyalty in Canadian Politics***, by Alex Marland, Jared J. Wesley, and Mireille Lalancette, University of Toronto Press, 408 pp., $39.95.

47. ***Nowhere Girl: Life as a Member of ADHD's Lost Generation***, by Carla Ciccone, Penguin Random House Canada, 288 pp., $35.

48. ***October 7th: Searching for the Humanitarian Middle***, by Marsha Lederman, McClelland & Stewart Penguin Random House Canada, 272 pp., $36.

49. ***On Book Banning: Or, How the New Censorship Consensus Trivializes Art and Undermines Democracy***, by Ira Wells, Biblioasis, $21.95.

50. ***One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This***, by Omar El Akkad, McClelland & Stewart Penguin Random House Canada, 208 pp., $36.

51. ***On Settler Colonialism in Canada: Lands and Peoples***, edited by David B.A. MacDonald and Emily Grafton, University of Regina Press, 384 pp., $36.95.

52. ***Precarious: The Lives of Migrant Workers,*** by Marcello Di Cintio, Biblioasis, $24.95.

53. ***Pursuing a Public Life: How to Succeed in the Political Arena***, by Sergio Marchi, Dundurn Press, 368 pp., $27.95.

54. ***Ripper: The Making of Pierre Poilievre***, by Mark Bourrie, Biblioasis, 430 pp., $28.95.

55. ***Run Like A Girl: A Memoir of Ambition, Resilience, and Fighting for Change***, by Catherine McKenna, Sutherland House, 360 pp., $28.95.

56. ***Securing the Continental Skies: The Development of North American Air Defence Co-operation, 1945–1958***, by Matthew Paul Trudgen, McGill-Queen's University Press, 306 pp., $44.95.

57. ***Settler Colonial Sovereignty: Visions of Improvement and Indigenous Erasure***, by Liam Midzain-Gobin, McGill-Queen's University Press, 246 pp., $34.95.

58. ***Smartphone Nation: Why We're All Addicted to Our Screens and What You and Your Family Can Do About It***, by Dr. Kaitlyn Regehr, Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 256 pp., $36.

59. ***Social Resilience and International Migration in the Canadian City***, edited by Valerie Preston, John Shields, and Tara Bedard, McGill-Queen's University Press, 312 pp., $39.95.

60. ***Social Resilience and the Urban Migrant Experience***, edited by Valerie Preston, John Shields, and Tara Bedard, McGill-Queen's University Press, 288 pp., $39.95.

61. ***Sorry, Not Sorry: An Unapologetic Look at What Makes Canada Worth Fighting For***, by Mark Critch, Viking, Penguin Random House Canada, 232 pp., $36.

62. ***Standing Up to Big Nickel: The Story of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers' Strike, 1958***, by Elizabeth Quinlan, McGill-Queen's University Press, 228 pp., $34.95.

63. ***Statecraft: Canadian Prime Ministers and Their Cabinets***, by Stephen Azzi and Patrice Dutil, University of Toronto Press, 496 pp., $49.95.

64. ***Students by Day: Colonialism and Resistance at the Curve Lake Indian Day School***, by Jackson Pond, McGill-Queen's University Press, 282 pp., $29.95.

65. ***Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead***, by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Alchemy By Knopf Canada, Penguin Random House Canada, 224 pp., $35.

66. ***Territories of Inequality: How Federalism and Redistribution Interact***, edited by Olivier Jacques and Alain Noël, McGill-Queen's University Press, 370 pp., $44.95.

67. ***The Beaver and the Dragon: How China Out-Manoeuvred Canada's Diplomacy, Security, and Sovereignty***, by Charles Burton, Optimum Publishing International, 239 pp., $26.95.

68. ***The CBC: How Canada's Public Broadcaster Lost Its Voice (And How to Get It Back)***, by David Cayley, Sutherland Books, 252 pp., $26.95.

69. ***The Coutts Diaries: Power, Politics and Pierre Trudeau, 1973-1981***, by Jim Coutts, edited by Ron Graham, Sutherland House, 463 pp., $50.

70. ***The Crisis of Canadian Democracy***, by Andrew Coyne, Sutherland Books, 266 pp., $36.95.

71. ***The Darkest Night Brings Longer Days: Surviving War and Iran's Evin Prison***, by Sirous Houshmand, McGill-Queen's University Press, 228 pp., $24.95.

72. ***The Debt of a Nation: Land and the Financing of the Canadian Settler State, 1820–73***, by Angela C. Tozer, UBC Press, 276 pp., $37.95.

73. ***The Dollar A Year Men: How The Best Business Brains in Canada Helped To Win The Second World War***, by Allan Levine, Barlow Books, $42.

74. ***The Duel: Diefenbaker, Pearson, and the Making of Modern Canada***, by John Ibbitson, Signal, Penguin Random House Canada, 456 pp., $28.

75. ***The Enduring Riddle of Mackenzie King,*** edited by Patrice Dutil, UBC Press, 388 pp., $49.95.

76. ***The 51st State Votes: Canada Versus Donald Trump***, by Justin Ling, Sutherland House, 100 pp., $19.95.

77. ***The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan***, by Lyse Doucet, Allen Lane, Penguin Random House Canada, 448 pp., $39.

78. ***The Friend Machine: On the Trail of AI Companionship***, by Victoria Hetherington, Sutherland House, 330 pp., $23.95.

79. ***The Good Allies: How Canada and the United States Fought Together to Defeat Fascism During the Second World War***, by Tim Cook, Penguin Canada, 576 pp., $26.

80. ***The Higgs Years: Leading and Dividing New Brunswick***, edited by Gabriel Arsenault, McGill-Queen's University Press, 338 pp., $39.95.

81. ***The Lobster Trap: The Global Fight for a Seafood on the Brink***, by Greg Mercer, McClelland & Stewart Penguin Random House Canada, 320 pp., $36.99.

82. ***The Making of Canada: An Epic History in Twenty Extraordinary Lives***, by Greg Koabel, Sutherland House, 310 pp., $37.95.

83. ***The Migrant Rain Falls in Reverse: A Memoir***, by Vinh Nguyen, HarperCollinsCanada, 272 pp., $24.99.

84. ***The Mind Mappers: Friendship, Betrayal and the Obsessive Quest to Chart the Brain***, by Eric Andrew-Gee, Penguin Random House Canada, 368 pp., $38.

85. ***The Price of Gold: Mining, Pollution, and Resistance in Yellowknife***, by John Sandlos and Arn Keeling, McGill-Queen's University Press, 275 pp., $34.95.

86. ***The Prime Ministers: Canada's Leader and the Nation They Shaped***, by J.D.M. Stewart, Sutherland House, 386 pp., $37.95.

87. ***The Shape of Thought: Reasoning in the Age of AI***, by Richard H.R. Harper, McGill-Queen's University Press, 264 pp., $34.95.

88. ***The Taking of Vimy Ridge: First World War Photographs of William Ivor Castle***, by Carla-Jean Stokes, Wilfrid Laurier-University Press, 166 pp., $64.99.

89. ***Times of Transformation: The 1921 Canadian General Election***, by Barbara J. Messamore, Turning Point Elections series, UBC Press, 366 pp., $27.95.

90. ***Trading on Art: Cultural Diplomacy and Free Trade in North America***, by Sarah E.K. Smith, UBC Press, 296 pp., $34.95.

91. ***21 Things You Need to Know About Indigenous Self-Government: A Conversation About Dismantling the Indian Act***, by Bob Joseph, Indigenous Relations Press, 194 pp., $24.95.

92. ***Unceded: Understanding British Columbia's Colonial Past and Why It Matters Now***, by George M. Abbott; foreword by Steven Point, Purich Books, an imprint of UBC Press, 280 pp., $29.95

93. ***Under Assault: Interference and Espionage in China's Secret War Against Canada***, by Dennis Molinaro, Penguin Random House Canada, 352 pp., $38.

94. ***Universal: Renewing Human Rights in a Fractured World***, by Alex Neve, CBC Massey Lectures, Anansi Press, 336 pp., $24.99.

95. ***Unravelling MAiD in Canada: Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide as Medical Care***, edited by Ramona Coelho, K. Sonu Gaind, and Trudo Lemmens, McGill-Queen's University Press, 552 pp., $39.95.

96. ***Vanished Beyond the Map: The Mystery of Lost Explorer Hubert Darell***, by Adam Shoalts, Allen Lane, Penguin Random House Canada, 288 pp., $37.

97. ***Voices of Resistance: Diaries of Genocide***, by Batool Abu Akleen, Sondos Sabra, Nahil Mohana, and Ala'a Obaid, Biblioasis, 224 pp., $24.95.

98. ***Walking The Bypass: Notes on Place From the Side of the Road***, by Ken Wilson, University of Regina Press, 320 pp., $27.95.

99. ***We Breed Lions: Confronting Canada's Troubled Hockey Culture***, by Rick Westhead, Penguin Random House Canada, 408 pp., $38.

100. ***Wilful Neglect: The Federal Response to Tuberculosis Among First Nations, 1867-1945***, by Jane Thomas, McGill-Queen's University Press, 318 pp., $34.95.

—By Kate Malloy, The Hill Times'
100 Best Books list is compiled annually, based on bestselling lists, publishers' picks, published book reviews, and opinions. The list is ranked alphabetically.

The Hill Times

Defence Minister David McGuinty, pictured third from left with Canada's Chief of Defence Jennie Carignan, second right, is one of the ministers in charge of bolstering Canada's defence capabilities. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Building up Canada's defence sector will depend on long-term homegrown support

The promised defence industrial strategy offers a significant opportunity to advance Canada's innovation performance and the high-value jobs that should go with it. The biggest question is how we build the leadership and management skills that are essential for success.

David Crane

Canada & the 21st Century

TORONTO—In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the great hope was that the transition to a green economy would provide the economic boost for jobs and innovation needed for economic recovery. Investments were made, but in retrospect, it appears these hopes were never realized.

Today, as the United States becomes a less reliable ally, the focus is on military procurement as the answer to our flagging economic prospects. Prime Minister Mark Carney's government is betting big on the potential. And while military procurement can never by itself be large enough to drive growth across the economy, it nonetheless offers a way to generate opportunities to advance our homegrown technology, and build and expand Canadian companies that can provide good jobs and create high-value exports.

This won't be easy, but is not impossible.

In the fast-changing world of defence needs, new technologies such as drones, sensors, cryptosecurity and communications systems, software, and satellites have all become much more significant. Many of these technologies are dual-use, meaning they can be used for either military or commercial purposes so that initiatives to build a stronger defence industry in Canada can also provide the opportunity to more broadly develop Canadian technology firms that can succeed in both.

Sensors developed to monitor activity in the Arctic Ocean may lead to sensors for smart-city applications. Cryptosecurity capacity is needed throughout the economy, and drones are already of great and growing importance in surveillance of public infrastructure.

But how much we really gain in technology, jobs, and exports will depend heavily on how well the government—and industry—lead, manage and implement the promised new defence industrial strategy and the new agencies and funding promised.

So far, we know very little about the promised defence industrial strategy, the functioning and plans for the new Defence Investment Agency, the promised Bureau of Research, Engineering and Advanced Leadership in Innovation and Science (BOREALIS) in the Defence Department, or how the "Buy Canadian" promises will interact with the need to ensure the CAF have the best available equipment regardless of where it's made.

Lots of money is promised in Budget 2025. This includes $4.6-billion over five years for initial investments under the defence industrial strategy; $1-billion this year to Business Development Bank of Canada to provide loans and equity to small and mid-size businesses aiming to contribute to this country's defence and security capabilities; $656.9-million over five years to the industry department to develop and commercialize dual-use technologies in a range of industries, including aerospace, automotive, marine, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, biodefence, and life sciences; $334.3-million over five years to the National Research Council, and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council for programs to support quantum technology companies in Canada, and to bring quantum technology adoption to defence-related applications; $182.6-million over three years to Defence to establish a sovereign space launch capability; and $68.2-million over three years to establish BOREALIS.

Overriding all of this, we need a new defence policy that provides clear guidance to industry, and to researchers in universities and elsewhere about what the future challenges and needs will be. As Philippe Lagassé, a professor at Carleton University and an expert in defence procurement writes, "To achieve the government's defence industrial aims, the CAF must buy what Canadian industry is selling. This can't be a series of one-offs either. Canada's government must provide industry with a consistent demand signal over several decades."

That's because industry won't invest unless it knows there is a buyer, which is why an updated defence policy is needed. Moreover, as Lagassé has argued, successful policy requires deep research and development partnerships with Canadian firms—large and small—to build the capabilities we will need as well as built-in export capacity since the domestic market is not big enough in many cases.

In turn, if Canada is to grow the defence firms of the future—or even better, dual-use technology companies—then access to capital will also be critical.

One example came from Katheron Intson, president of Sentinel Research and Development, a young drone manufacturer based in Hamilton, Ont.

Canadian venture capital doesn't like defence, and this includes government-backed venture funds, Intson recently told the House Industry Committee, thereby making Sentinel dependent on U.S. venture capital firms.

Sentinel was turned down by a government-backed accelerator fund at MaRS Discovery District in Toronto because "it was a defence-first company." In fact, Intson said, "I have many friends who are incredibly talented entrepreneurs who have not been able to get Canadian investors on their capitalization tables."

If talent cannot get money here, it will go to the U.S. where it can.

This is part of the capital challenge. Promising companies need capital, not just for their early days through the valley of death that are faced by many start-ups, but over the long term so that businesses can build and grow, and become exporters.

The defence industrial strategy, Intson argued, should focus on firms with validated international markets and also give priority to companies building original Canadian intellectual property, and not just those assembling foreign-designed systems. "We need anchor firms developing new platforms and technologies that Canada owns, controls, and exports," she said.

Like the green transition, the defence industrial strategy—including dual-use tech—offers a significant opportunity to advance Canada's innovation performance, and the high-value jobs that should go with it. This is a massive challenge, and the biggest question is how we build the leadership and management skills that are essential for success.

This is more than just about engaging in cross-cutting programs in government and moving away from siloed initiatives. It is really about achieving the expectations raised in an efficient, transparent and accountable manner to make the plans work and delivers the results Canadians are entitled to expect, even if past performance does not inspire confidence.

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

The Hill Times

OPINION

Alberta's intent to suspend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for trans health care for youth sets a dangerous precedent

When Alberta Premier Danielle Smith invoked the notwithstanding clause to prevent the courts from challenging three transgender bills in Alberta, she used the very tools of democracy against itself. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

An Amicus Brief to the U.S. Supreme Court by a panel of experts reveals there is, in fact, a long history to trans medicine.

Jennifer Evans, Alison Li & Jacqueline Murray

Opinion

When Alberta Premier Danielle Smith invoked the notwithstanding clause to prevent the courts from challenging three transgender bills in Alberta, she used the very tools of democracy against itself. Trading in false truths and emotion, such actions threaten the very foundation of Canadian society. We should all be concerned.

Transgender health care is a particular flashpoint, but this is also a ruse. First in Hungary and Poland in the 2000s, and especially now south of the border, illiberal actors fixate on gay, lesbian, and trans issues. These fundamentally private matters provide a focus to incite public outrage and provide a pretext to introduce legislative oppression. In each country, this has occurred in the context of democratic backsliding and social (Christian) conservatism.

Worryingly, each instance has been based on deliberate misinformation, a woeful disregard for truth, and a rejection of science.

Alberta's intent to suspend the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for trans health care for youth sets a dangerous precedent and worse, the evidence does not support this threat. An Amicus Brief to the U.S. Supreme Court by a panel of experts reveals there is, in fact, a long history to trans medicine.

There have always been trans people—in the Catholic Middle Ages some of them were saints. Across all histories, cultures, and religions, gender non-conforming people have lived among us, sometimes accepted, sometimes vilified, but always there.

A binary two-sex system is simply too narrow and there is historical evidence of people transitioning from a birth-designated sex to another category, often using early versions of the same medical procedures used today. Indeed, some transition procedures date from antiquity, with documented cases of orchiectomy and penectomy and breast tissue alteration or removal.

Gender-affirming health care is a part of modern scientific development. Advances in laboratory measurement, antibiotics, surgical techniques, and operating room sterilization protocols—to say nothing about the development of distinct medical specialties—formed the basis of surgical and hormonal interventions for what is now termed gender dysphoria. Gender-affirming care is not some dark corner of medical knowledge; it is a fundamental part of our healthcare regime.

Similarly, it is well-documented that for the past 60 years, adolescents, with parental consent, have had access to medical interventions to alleviate distress from gender dysphoria. From the 1950s to the 1970s, drawing on international collaboration and the collection of datasets, clinicians standardized a series of uniform diagnostic principles to identify and treat gender dysphoria. Gender-affirming medicine for youth grew alongside these developments and coalesced into a formal pediatric specialty.

As the authors of the Amicus Brief confirm, surgical interventions, cross-sex hormone therapy, and even the use of puberty blockers to alleviate symptoms of gender dysphoria are long-established practices of medical care. Hormone therapy appeared in the 1930s, at the same time that the Harriet Lane Home's pediatric endocrine ward (Johns Hopkins University) developed specific hormonal treatment protocols to slow the onset of puberty and the development of secondary sex characteristics in children and adolescents.

Perhaps most importantly, based on a series of letters to New York sexologist Harry Benjamin, the Amicus Brief demonstrates that since the 1960s young people have displayed "a deep certainty" around their gender and "an impressive understanding of the risks and rewards of medical intervention–including the risks of doing nothing."

There is a long history to trans medicine, including research specialties and treatments for gender dysphoric youth.

There is also evidence that in periods of political turmoil, gender non-conformism becomes a focus for extremists seeking to remake society. It was not coincidental that German-Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's research library was among the first looted and burned by the Nazis, reflecting the regime's flagrant disregard for scientific research, democracy, and human dignity.

Given the many disturbing examples of governments from across the globe repealing laws that protect minority groups, and using transgender issues to lead the way, we, as Canadians, must be vigilant. Do we turn a blind eye to the mis- and disinformation that threatens our democratic institutions, and the laws that undergird them? Or will we work to protect the rights, security, and access to gender-affirming healthcare of trans people, including trans youth?

The fate of our Canadian society and its values depend on these decisions.

Dr. Jennifer V. Evans is a professor in the department of history at Carleton University in Ottawa, and a fellow with the Royal Society of Canada. Jacqueline Murray is a medieval historian of sexualities and genders, and is a fellow with the Royal Society of Canada. Alison Li is a writer and historian based in Toronto who won the Royal Society of Canada's James Hannah Medal in medical history for her book Wonderous Transformations *in 2025 and she helped write the Amicus Brief on trans medicine in United States vs. Skrmetti. She is also a fellow with the Royal Society of Canada.*

The Hill Times

Imagining Canada into being

The narratives of nation building have always been aspirational, and for a country that holds itself to be just and tolerant, Canada's past and present are rife with injustices and intolerances. Amid the prosperity, there remains poverty. Alongside compassion there is an ineradicable strain of selfishness. The project that is Canada is not yet finished. Long may it remain a work in progress.

The prime ministers: From top left, to right, row by row: Mark Carney, Justin Trudeau, Stephen Harper, Paul Martin, Jean Chrétien, Kim Campbell; Brian Mulroney, John Turner, Joe Clark, Pierre Trudeau, Lester B. Pearson, John Diefenbaker; Louis St-Laurent, R.B. Bennett, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Arthur Meighen, Robert Borden, Wilfrid Laurier; Charles Tupper, Mackenzie Bowell, John Sparrow David Thompson, John Abbott, Alexander Mackenzie, and John A. Macdonald. *Photographs courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

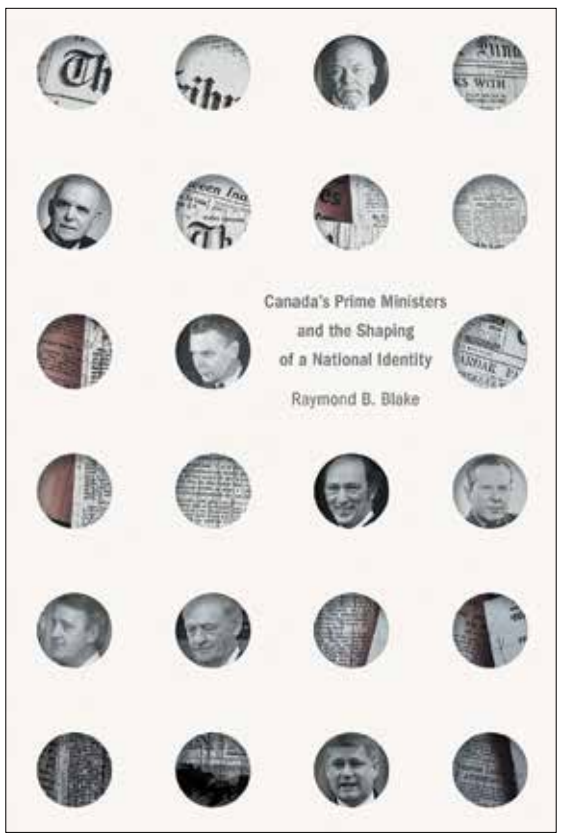
BY CHRISTOPHER DORNAN

I like to think that United States President Donald Trump, in as much as he is capable of registering anything that lies outside his own monstrous narcissism, was surprised at the vehemence with which Canadians reacted to his suggestion that their country join the U.S.A. as its 51st state. On the one hand, he knew that his talk of annexation, and his references to the prime minister as "Governor of Canada," was belittling. It was intended to be. By the same token, the American ego can hardly fathom that the U.S. might be perceived in any light other than the self-congratulatory myths it has spun for itself. Who wouldn't want to join the greatest, richest, freest, most powerful nation in the history of the world, given the chance? The insult to Canada was also intended as a compliment. Trump, after all, was not making the same offer to Mexico.

If there were ever any doubt, the visceral reaction to Trump's musings about the Coca-colonization of Canada was evidence of a polity dedicated to itself, to a collective "we." Canadians might not be able to easily articulate what their shared identity consists of, but they knew what they didn't want any part of. (Most of them, at any rate. There are some pockets of far-right fervour who would prefer to be American, but there are also people who cannot be convinced that the Earth is not flat.)

It has been a longstanding canard that Canada's national identity consists almost wholly of its rejection of the United States and Americanism. Canada is not the sum total of its attributes, because its regions and peoples really have so little in common, but is defined instead by what it is not. This was never actually true, but the response to Trump's efforts to economically subjugate the country has prompted a renewed reflection on what it is the nation stands for; what we value about ourselves, and what would be lost were we to be Anschlussed into Greater America. The differences between Canada and the U.S. have likely never been more vivid than at this moment in history, but the defence of our realm surely starts from more than simply recoiling from the political grotesqueries to our south.

Raymond B. Blake's excellent book, *Canada's Prime Ministers and the Shaping of a National Identity*, is therefore especially timely, and deservedly won the 2025 Shaughnessy Cohen Prize for Political Writing. It focuses precisely on how the country has come to understand itself over the decades, and how a workable political union—an exercise in perpetual compromise—was forged without any of the anchors by which national identity was rooted in the Old World. Canada includes people who came from Spain and Sweden and Scotland, but Canada is not Spain, or Sweden, or Scotland. It is not a nation of a single people, united by one common language or a shared faith. It is a nation made up of people from other nations, including the First Nations and Indigenous Peoples. It was this that prompted Justin Trudeau, on becoming prime minister in 2015, to muse aloud that, "There is no core identity … in Canada," and this is what makes us "the first post-national state." (There may be an element of truth in that, but it is lousy politics to tell a country that it has no core identity. "It was a claim," Blake wryly observes, "that Trudeau would not repeat.")



Canada's Prime Ministers and the Shaping of a National Identity, by Raymond B. Blake, UBC Press, 414 pp., $39.95. *Book cover courtesy of UBC Pess*

What Trudeau meant was that, in the absence of a fixed, historical identity as a people, Canadians instead share a set of values and aspirations, and that these have been collectively and willfully created and reworked over the years in response to changing circumstances and successive waves of immigration, while staying true to the core tenets. Canada, Blake notes, no less than any other nation and probably more so, is what the scholar Benedict Anderson called an "imagined community": a place that conceives itself into being. It does so by contriving a constitution and passing legislation—laws that set down priorities and govern behaviour—but first it conjures a sense of itself by talking to itself.

Blake, a distinguished professor of history at the University of Regina, charts the development of Canadian values and aspirations by examining how eight of the most prominent Canadian prime ministers in the post-Second World War period (William Lyon Mackenzie King, Louis St-Laurent, John Diefenbaker, Lester B. Pearson, Pierre Trudeau, Brian Mulroney, Jean Chrétien, and Stephen Harper) gave voice to the narrative of Canada in their speeches and addresses to the nation. Each of them understood the country in different ways. Each of them led a government that pursued different policy goals. But what's striking is how the narrative of the nation is a continuous thing. The Canada that each of these prime ministers wanted to build and defend is essentially the same place. Blake is especially instructive on how policy priorities percolate through time, from one government to the next. People of my generation think of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms as the creation of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, but in fact it was John Diefenbaker who first put a Canadian Bill of Rights into law, in 1958. Similarly, the legalization of marijuana, which young people today will see as a Justin Trudeau initiative, was pre-rolled, if you will, by Jean Chrétien in the 1990s.

What at the time felt like sharp political differences—the Canada of St-Laurent vs. the Canada of Diefenbaker; the Canada of Pierre Trudeau vs. the Canada of Mulroney; the Canada of Chrétien vs. the Canada of Harper—start to recede in the long view of history into mere differences of emphasis. Even more, much of what in the past looked like grubby political manoeuvring starts to look principled from the vantage point of today.

Diversity. Opportunity. Tolerance. Freedom. Justice. Standard of living. Security. Dignity. Compassion. All the values and fortune of a good place to live, a country anyone would be happy to call home, have always been the national aspiration. That's been the promise of Canada since Mackenzie King and probably before. We fight over what to tax and how much to tax and what not to tax and how to spend the tax—the usual squabbles of a well-to-do democratic state. We have fights over what we mean by diversity or justice or freedom, or how best to create economic opportunity, but it's all the same master narrative.

One must fight the temptation to see the Canada of today as somehow inevitable, as though of course John A. Macdonald's Canada leads to the Canada of Laurier and King and Mulroney and Harper, and it has all teleologically culminated in where we are today, a prosperous, politically stable, resource-rich country that is not only important to the world as an economy but as an example, no matter who happens to be prime minister. But it was not inevitable. The rhetoric may have been there from the beginning, but the concrete elements that we today take to be the markers of a decent, caring, tolerant Canada were only added to the national superstructure over the decades, from Medicare to same-sex marriage.

Nor should we allow ourselves to be complacent in our sense of ourselves. The narratives of nation building have always been aspirational, and for a country that holds itself to be just and tolerant, Canada's past and present are rife with injustices and intolerances. Amid the prosperity, there remains poverty. Alongside compassion there is an ineradicable strain of selfishness. The project that is Canada is not yet finished. Long may it remain a work in progress.

Christopher Dornan taught at Carleton University for 33 years, where he served for nine years as director of the School of Journalism and Communication and six years as director of the Arthur Kroeger College of Public Affairs. He is the co-editor of The Canadian Federal Election of 2025 *(McGill-Queen's University Press) and eight previous volumes in this series. @chrisdornan.bsky.social*

Canada's Prime Ministers and the Shaping of a National Identity, Raymond B. Blake, UBC Press, 414 pp., $39.95.

The Hill Times

OPINION

Bring back the political ministerial regional offices

One of the few changes that were announced last week—which is telling in a couple of ways—was to appoint Joël Lightbound, pictured, as the new Quebec lieutenant, one of Steven Guilbeault's additional jobs. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Quebec is the only province to have a recognized 'lieutenant' or regional minister. We think this is a mistake. It was a mistake under Justin Trudeau and it's a mistake under Mark Carney. If all politics is local, having a focused source of advice about local politics is a no-brainer.

Jamie Carroll & Brian Klunder

Opinion

OTTAWA–Last week, Prime Minister Mark Carney shuffled his cabinet for the fourth time in about eight months, this time necessitated by the sudden, dramatic departure of Steven Guilbeault.

These changes were stop-gaps: holes that needed plugging until a larger shuffle can take place, generally expected early in the New Year.

And so, given that larger shuffle remains in the offing, we thought we would take it upon ourselves to offer the PM a bit of advice from two folks who have been around Ottawa and the Liberal Party—it feels like, at least—since Moses wore short pants.

First, every change the PM makes to his front benches should be focused on only one of two things: delivering on existing commitments, and getting better at politics.

Let us explain.

Since January 2025 through a leadership race, an election, and governing (including a Speech from the Throne and a budget), the Carney government has promised approximately 2,340,265 things—some of them pretty big deals like ports, pipelines, high-speed rail, small nuclear reactors, and completely re-arming the Canadian Armed Forces.

And while that number may be a slight exaggeration, the importance of showing Canadians the goods before the next election is not. Carney saved the Liberal Party from an impending ignominious electoral disaster by showing up, looking and sounding the part, and promising Canadians he could get shit done. The PM has promised outcomes, and by God, Canadians are expecting outcomes!

Whenever the next election—which could legitimately be anywhere from 2026 to 2029—Carney will need to be able to point at a list of accomplishments and say "yay, verily, I delivered these things for Canadians."

Tied to that is doing politics better. That's not the same as doing politics "differently" or "smarter" or any of the jingoistic euphemisms that one hears from leadership and opposition candidates. Carney needs to just get better at honest-ta-gawd politics.

One of the few changes that were announced last week—which is telling in a couple of ways—was to appoint Joël Lightbound as the new Quebec lieutenant, one of Guilbeault's additional jobs.

Officially, Quebec is the only province to have a recognized "lieutenant" or regional minister. We think this is a mistake. It was a mistake under Justin Trudeau, and it remains a mistake under Carney.

If one accepts the maxim that all politics is local, one ought to accept that having a focused source of advice about local politics is no brainer.

This is a big, complicated country with radically different points of view depending on where in Canada you're standing. And, again, while Carney has recognized that is true for Quebec, he doesn't seem to have accepted the truth of it for the nine other provinces and three territories.

The PM clearly likes to make decisions and doesn't have a lot of trouble telling his cabinet colleagues what they should think about those decisions—and that's not necessarily a bad thing at a time when delivering results is the order of the day.

But.

Regional ministers—that is to say, a minister in at least each province who has the confidence and authority of the prime minister when it comes to speaking to the provincial government and about issues that impact the province directly—are invaluable in terms of shaping those decisions and understanding their consequences. Such a minister is also tasked with identifying problems when they are small and solving them before they become big.

A good regional minister also has their pulse on caucus members within their region, and understands how to work with each caucus member to advance their interests and to ensure that come election time—that seat can be properly defended. This helps create harmony in caucus which, in turn, allows the prime minister to focus on delivering those outcomes he promised.

To this end, robust MROs—ministers' regional offices—with political staff that report to the regional minister are part of what's necessary. These become not only fonts of information and activity, they also ensure coordination between different ministers during trips to the regions.

Greater skeptics than us have described regional ministers as one-stop patronage shops—the folks who hand out "jobs for the boys" and ensure contracts go to the right people. And there probably was a time and a place when that was fair—this month at Queen's Park, for example.

But.

The events of the last two weeks are a bit of a political Rorschach test: was doing a deal with Alberta Premier Danielle Smith genius or folly? Was it worth losing Guilbeault—and, by the way, future support from Green Leader Elizabeth May? Where are the seats the Liberals can pick up to replace the ones they put at risk in British Columbia and Quebec (two provinces that collectively represent 64 of the Liberals 170 seats) by making the deal? Are there any that can realistically be gained in Alberta as a result?

We don't know. We have suggestions, but you know who would know? Any regional minister worth their salt.

The PM has surrounded himself with very smart people, unsurprisingly. But *real politik* requires on-the-ground knowledge and networks—there's no substitute for the people who have eaten the rubber chicken and pounded in the lawn signs. If, as we pointed out, all politics is local—then it is time for the Carney government to bring local into this government when the cabinet is shuffled again in January.

Bring back the political MROs!

Jamie Carroll is a former national director of the Liberal Party of Canada and now a consultant and entrepreneur. Brian Klunder is the former director of the national membership secretariat at the Liberal Party of Canada and works as a senior counsel at Temple Scott Associates.

The Hill Times

MPs order release of records from new Defence Investment Agency after it leaves the PBO waiting

The House Government Operations and Estimates Committee took the step to compel the release of information after hearing from the parliamentary budget officer that multiple government departments have yet to comply with his post-budget requests to analyze financial plans.

BY IREM KOCA

MPs are hoping that the weight of a House committee order will help the Parliamentary Budget Office get the information it's been requesting from the government.

During a Dec. 2 meeting of the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee (OGGO), MPs voted 5-4 in support of a motion by Conservative MP Kelly Block (Carlton Trail–Eagle Creek, Sask.) that compels the new Defence Investment Agency (DIA) and five federal departments to hand over requested documents to the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) for review within two weeks.

"I have to say it's beginning to feel a bit like a co-ordinated effort to keep Canadians in the dark while billions of dollars are being committed behind closed doors," Conservative MP Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale–Langley City, B.C.) said during the meeting.

"If the people entrusted with these responsibilities believe that they can avoid scrutiny or refuse lawful orders, blocking all sorts of information, blocking the PBO's information, dodging the committees as we see, and yet they still claim to be stewards of the public money, I think they've misunderstood the job."

OGGO recently grilled Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali (Brampton–Chinguacousy Park) about why the Treasury Board similarly "refused" to fulfill a PBO request.

The Dec. 2 motion came after Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer Jason Jacques told OGGO that a request for information about the DIA came from the Senate National Finance Committee, so his team asked for "basic tombstone information" from the agency about its budget and number of employees.

Conservative MP Kelly Block moved a motion at the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee to compel departments to respond to the Parliamentary Budget Office's information request on Dec. 2. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

The agency requested an extension, and was in contact with the PBO as recently as Nov. 28, according to Jacques.

"They indicated we were unlikely to receive it any time in the near future, and that the request was sitting on the deputy's desk and they didn't know when the deputy would sign it," he said.

"At that point I reached the conclusion that if the data exists … and there's no explanation from the government department regarding why we're not receiving it or when they will provide it to us. At that point, we concluded that it was a deemed refusal."

The PBO's analysis of the budget was published on Nov. 14 ahead of the Nov. 17 confidence vote that ultimately passed to support the minority Liberals' budgetary planning. Ahead of that report, the PBO requested information from five departments about pending budget cuts, but did not receive a response.

Those departments were: Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Correctional Service Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

The PBO sent letters to the ministers responsible for each department, asking for a breakdown of the planned savings by program, the impact on staff reductions, and potential impacts to service delivery. The requests were sent Nov. 5, and the deadline to provide the information was Nov. 19.

A separate request was made to the DIA under Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) to provide basic operating information concerning the agency, which the department also did not comply with.

Interim Parliamentary Budget Officer Jason Jacques told MPs that the new Defence Investment Agency did not provide his office with the information requested for a financial analysis. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

The DIA is set to receive $30.8-million over four years, starting in 2026-27, with $7.7-million ongoing, according to the 2025 budget. The agency is meant to "overhaul and streamline" defence procurement, and is in charge of military contracts worth more than $100-million.

The PBO asked for a detailed profile of the agency's planned and actual budgetary expenditures, broken down by category of expenses and fiscal year from 2025-26 to 2029-30. It has also asked for the corresponding estimated annual planned full-time equivalent positions. That request is now "completed" with "requested information not provided," according to the PBO.

Neither PSPC nor the office of Secretary of State for Defence Procurement Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna, B.C.) immediately responded to *The Hill Times*' questions as to why they did not provide this information.

Mujtaba Hussain, press secretary for Fuhr, told *The Hill Times* in an email that the DIA "will provide an update to the PBO and is working to deliver the requested information as soon as possible," but did not provide further details.

The committee's motion underlines that the information should be satisfactory to the PBO's requests, and be provided to the OGGO clerk, who would only make it accessible to the PBO and his staff. The second part of the motion says if Jacques is "not satisfied that the documents were produced as ordered," he should notify the committee chair and clerk, who would then prepare a report and raise the matter with the House.

Jacques told *The Hill Times* after the committee meeting that "we look forward to analyzing the data provided to the committee over the holidays and hope to publish a report in the new year."

"The information is needed to support the PBO's analysis of Budget 2025 and enable transparent, timely reporting to Parliament."

In its request to the departments, the PBO specifically wanted a breakdown of the planned savings by program, with information on planned personnel reductions and details of potential service-level impacts for the years 2026-27 to 2029-30 from each department. While the PBO noted that the Canada Food Inspection Agency has provided "some" information, the rest of the departments did not respond to their request.

A Nov. 7 letter from the PBO to Government Transformation, Public Works, and Procurement Minister Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Que.) says that the requested information for use in a financial analysis pursuant to Parliament of Canada Act, which mandates the PBO to prepare reports on significant matters that are listed in an annual work plan—which in this case would be the budget—and are related to Canada's economy.

Liberal committee members—who voted against the motion—unsuccessfully attempted to amend it to give departments more time to respond, and to remove the part about accelerating the issue to the House.

"I don't see the value of rushing something and not getting complete answers or a complete picture, which would help the PBO do the work which he is intending to do with this information," said Liberal MP Jenna Sudds (Kanata, Ont.), who also serves as the parliamentary secretary to Lightbound.

On Dec. 2, OGGO was supposed to hear from both Fuhr and DIA CEO Doug Guzman, who officially started in his new role on Nov. 12. However, Guzman could not attend, and Conservative committee chair Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, Alta.) said Fuhr "refused" to attend the meeting in the CEO's absence, which then led to the last-minute testimony of Jacques and his team.

"Ministers have appeared before OGGO several times in recent weeks, and the government will continue to appear to answer questions when needed," Hussain said.

Asked why Fuhr declined to testify at committee, Hussain said the secretary "was intended to and had agreed to appear with Mr. Guzman, and that remains the plan once Mr. Guzman is able to appear."

Hussain confirmed that Guzman could not testify at committee as he had a medical emergency requiring immediate surgery and that as part of his recovery, is unable to travel for several weeks. Hussain added that the process is underway to find an alternative time for Guzman to appear at committee.

McCauley also said Lightbound has also "refused" to show up for a testimony despite multiple attempts by the committee to set up a date. Lightbound's office did not respond to *The Hill Times*' request for comment.

ikoca@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

NEWS

Public service unions demand answers addressing rumours about the end of remote work

The 'volume and specificity' of full-time return-to-office rumours 'warrant immediate clarity from Treasury Board' says union president Sean O'Reilly.

BY MARLO GLASS

Unions representing federal public servants are calling on the Treasury Board to clarify if workers will be mandated back-to-office full time amid "persistent rumours" that the government is eyeing an end to its current hybrid work policy.

In a letter to Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali (Brampton–Chinguacousy Park, Ont.) dated Nov. 28, the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE) addresses concerns the government may introduce a new directive this month, requiring employees to be on-site up to five days a week as early as 2026. Currently, most federal public servants are expected to be in-office three days a week, with supervisors and management in-office four days per week.

"Coming so soon after staffing cuts announced in Budget 2025, these rumours are causing significant anxiety among our members, who are already facing uncertainty from workforce adjustments and unresolved issues from previous RTO [return-to-office] directives," CAPE president Nate Prier writes of what he calls the "persistent rumours."

"We ask that you urgently confirm whether an RTO directive is being considered or prepared," Prier writes. "We are requesting a call at your earliest convenience, ideally by the end of this week, to obtain clarity."

Sean O'Reilly, president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (PIPSC), wrote a similar letter to the Treasury Board on Dec. 1, asking Ali to address the "persistent and escalating rumours," citing internal Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) documents that have been leaked.

On Dec. 1, *La Presse* reported the government is considering a full return-to-office for all federal public servants by 2027, with senior civil servants returning to office full-time in January 2026.

Those documents reference "sequenced" RTO requirements, O'Reilly writes, "including executives returning on-site five days per week in 2026, and non-executive employees subject to a phased-in increase from four to five days per week."

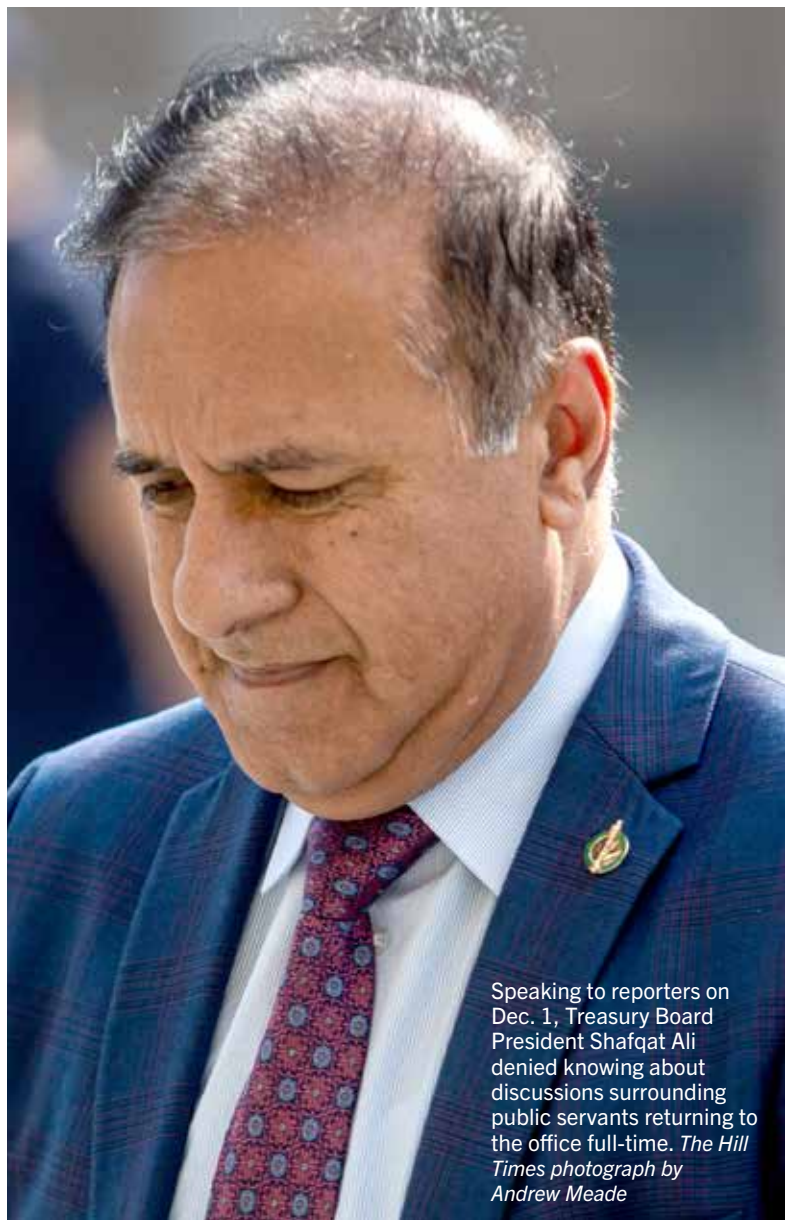
"PIPSC has been in consistent, direct contact with both [Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer] and TBS officials, who have stated, as recently as last week, that they are not aware of any such conversations or proposals currently underway. While we welcome this assurance, the volume and specificity of the rumours warrant immediate clarity from Treasury Board," O'Reilly writes.

Though the Ontario provincial government and Ottawa's municipal government have similarly mandated staff back into the office full-time, the feds have been tight-lipped about their plans, saying only that the current mandate remains in place.

Speaking to reporters on Dec. 1 before Question Period, Ali denied knowing about discussions surrounding public servants returning to the office full time, saying only he was "hearing from news outlets," and looking into it, but "nothing has changed."

Mohammad Kamal, a spokesperson for Ali, said via email that the directive remains unchanged.

"The directive on prescribed presence in the workplace, which sets a minimum presence requirement for the federal public service (three days for eligible employees and four days for executives), has not changed."



Speaking to reporters on Dec. 1, Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali denied knowing about discussions surrounding public servants returning to the office full-time. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Michael Sabia, clerk of the Privy Council and the top public servant, was asked on Dec. 1 to comment on potential changes to return to office rules, and told The Canadian Press, "no, not today."

The responses come as a cold comfort to union leaders seeking answers for employees, though.

"It's really bothersome because there's tons of stuff in the media, on social media," O'Reilly said in an interview. "I've seen the denials from the minister, the clerk, but that doesn't really engender hope."

O'Reilly said he hopes to sit down with Treasury Board officials and find out "exactly what they're thinking" about return-to-office requirements, saying there's "no evidence" the department wants to have an open discussion with unions.

"I don't see us having discussions about real issues," he said, adding return-to-office is a pressing topic for public servants, who expect their employer to have open dialogue with unions.

Unions have been trying to meet with the Treasury Board, but the lines of communication are not open, O'Reilly said.

"I understand the employer has difficult decisions to make," he said, "but I wish they were doing it in collaboration and co-operation with the unions because, at the end of the day, we have the same goals as them."

Conversations about remote work pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic, which quickly ushered in an era of remote-first work and saw many public servants working full-time from home. O'Reilly noted the "GC Workplace" initiative dates back to 2017, and conversations then included unassigned work spaces and flexible arrangements with teleworking.

As recently as 2022, then-Treasury Board minister Mona Fortier (Ottawa–Vanier–Gloucester, Ont.), said hybrid work was "here to stay."

Unions have long been advocating for flexible working arrangements, citing its increase in productivity and lower costs for the government to maintain offices. Public Services and Procurement Canada has also committed to significantly reducing the government's office footprint, though the department has admitted this plan has been at least somewhat thwarted by the government's push to increase in-office work.

O'Reilly said "it feels like we're going back to the 1990s, the 1980s … but we've evolved, and so has the technology."

He added it's emblematic of a bigger problem of a lack of communication between the government and unions.

"I have gotten the feeling that there is a want for openness," O'Reilly said, "but I'm not seeing it."

mglass@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Privy Council Clerk Michael Sabia arrives at Rideau Hall for a cabinet shuffle on Dec. 1 where he declined to answer questions about return-to-office rumours. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

In these precarious economic times, Carney goes all in on oil pipeline, leaving some B.C. caucus members nervous

Several MPs told *The Hill Times* that they wished the government had consulted them before finalizing the details of the MOU. Instead, they learned about key details through the media, and began receiving questions from constituents, which they found difficult to manage.

Liberal MP Steven Guilbeault resigned from cabinet on Nov. 27 in protest of the federal government's MOU with the Alberta government about a pipeline project. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Continued from page 1

The only province west of Ontario where the Liberals hold a substantial number of seats is B.C., where the Grits currently hold 20 seats in the House. The Liberals have four seats in Manitoba, one in Saskatchewan, and two in Alberta.

Bricker said that the pipeline deal could anger environmentally conscious Canadians across the country. The pollster also said that he agrees with all the economic reasons for signing the MOU, but warned that the situation is politically risky for the Liberals both in B.C. and Quebec.

Liberal MP Steven Guilbeault's (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.) recent resignation from cabinet as culture minister and the prime minister's Quebec lieutenant, along with the ensuing media coverage over the issue, could also create an opening for the Bloc Québécois, said Bricker. Similarly, he said, there are significant numbers of people in major urban centres, like the Greater Toronto Area, where climate change is one of the key policy issues that factor in voters' decision.

Bricker said that the Liberals did very well in all regions of the country in the last election except in Alberta and Saskatchewan. If the Liberals lose some seats in B.C., Ontario, and Quebec, the question becomes whether they will be able to make up the difference in Alberta and Saskatchewan, according to Bricker.

He said the answer is unknown at this point.

"If you even lose a few seats, the question is not just that you lose those seats, it's where do you get them back?" said Bricker. "So, the gamble is they're going to get them back in Alberta. That's quite a gamble."

Late last month, Carney (Nepean, Ont.) and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith signed an MOU establishing a pathway for a bitumen pipeline to the west coast. Officials from both governments say the project would help diversify the Canadian economy hit hard by Trump's tariffs, and would support the growth of Alberta's energy resources.

The proposed pipeline would transport one million barrels of oil every day to the Pacific Coast for export to Asian markets. Unlike the Trans Mountain project, this pipeline would be privately funded, and include Indigenous co-ownership. If this project were to clear all the procedural hurdles successfully, it would be several years before it becomes operational.

In the lead-up to the signing of the project, Natural Resources Minister Tim Hodgson (Markham-Thornhill, Ont.) held a closed-door briefing for nervous B.C. Liberal MPs. During last week's national caucus meeting, MPs discussed the issue with Carney for about 45 minutes.

Several MPs told *The Hill Times* that they wished the government had consulted them before finalizing the details of the MOU. Instead, they learned about key details through the media, and began receiving questions from constituents, which they found difficult to manage. Now that the project has been launched, MPs said, they have little choice but to support it. Some warn that the decision could cost the party seats in the next election in B.C., Quebec, and other regions of the country.

"A lot of us are unhappy with the way this was handled by 'the Centre,'" said one B.C. Liberal MP who did not want to be identified. "The lack of messaging, the lack of communication with the caucus, the lack of engagement with members who are exposed to the political risk."

An Ontario Liberal MP told *The Hill Times* that if climate change proves to be an important issue for Canadians in the next election, the fallout will not be limited to B.C. and Quebec, but could also include Ontario.

"Ontario [Liberal] MPs are getting a lot of emails from their constituents [on this subject]," said this MP who spoke not for attribution to share their candid views.

Bricker said then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals viewed the national electoral map as a contest between the progressive vote and the Conservative vote, and won three consecutive elections—one majority and two minorities—by consolidating the progressive side. Carney, however, is trying to move his party toward the political centre, and it remains to be seen how much success he will have with this new group of potential supporters as those voters have migrated rightward.

That shift, Bricker said, has created an opening for the New Democrats and the Greens nationally, and for the Bloc Québécois in Quebec, which is home to 78 House seats, the second-largest after Ontario's 122. In the last election, the Liberals won 44 seats in Quebec, the Bloc 22, the Conservatives 11, and the NDP one seat.

"So where Carney has been focused is more that kind of centre-right, traditional Laurentian elite, red Tory, blue Liberal-type of positioning," said Bricker.

Carney won the last election by targeting the centre and centre-right voters, and it worked at the time because it was a very unique election, Bricker said.

"This is the Laurentian-consensus strategy, and it paid off for him pretty much close to a majority in the last election campaign," said Bricker.

"But the only reason that that happened is the election was a fluke, and the reason it was a fluke was because Justin Trudeau quit, and because Donald Trump won the election [in the U.S.]."

Budget, MOU mix should help the NDP, says pollster Lyle

Greg Lyle, president of Innovative Research, said that based on his polling right after the MOU signing on Nov. 27, many Canadians were not paying close attention to the issue. Those who have paid attention have a favourable view, which could change as more details emerge about the project in the coming weeks and months.

According to Lyle's online survey, only 27 per cent of Canadians are familiar with this MOU. Of those, 40 per cent are in Alberta, and 34 per cent are in British Columbia. Of the ones who are familiar, 42 per cent had a favourable view of this initiative. Lyle also said that the last federal budget and the MOU has given an opening to the NDP, but it remains to be seen if they can capitalize on this.

"The combination of the budget and the MOU should help the NDP," said Lyle.

An Angus Reid poll released last week suggested that the Liberals had lost five points in support in B.C., with most of that bleeding to the Conservatives and the Greens. It also showed a 15-point drop for the Liberals in Metro Vancouver, with those losses moving to the Conservatives, the NDP, and the Green Party.

But according to an Abacus Data poll, Canadians across the country expressed strong support for the MOU. This poll suggested that the net support went up by 23 per cent in B.C., 63 per cent in Alberta, 47 per cent in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario, 16 per cent in Quebec and 38 per cent in Atlantic Canada.

In a video posted on X, Liberal MP Nate Erskine-Smith (Beaches-East York, Ont.) said that the government will most likely make economic gains by constructing the pipeline, but it will be at the expense of making compromises on the important issue of climate change.

"As we build the strongest economy in the G7, we cannot lose sight of the impact our choices will have on our children and grandchildren," he said quoting from his party's 2025 election platform.

"We must always be mindful of long-term sustainability and the kind of economy and environment we want for them, words and promises we would do well to heed."

Liberal MP Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood-Port Kells, B.C.) told *The Hill Times* that the proposed pipeline is a "win–win" for the federal government, B.C., and Alberta, arguing it will create new jobs and generate revenue for all three governments. He added that, given the economic headwinds caused by U.S. tariffs, Ottawa needed to take action to diversify the economy.

"We have a trade war with the U.S., we need to diversify ourselves to a different economy," said Saini. "The prime minister has a vision and, to do that, we need to find different markets."

Liberal MP Parm Bains (Richmond East-Steveston, B.C.) described this as a framework, and "an opportunity to unite the country on major projects." He said that he's satisfied with Hodgson's briefing about the MOU for Liberal MPs. He said that, as more detailed information about the project becomes available, those who are currently unhappy will likely be persuaded that it is worth pursuing.

"We need to unite the country on major projects, and we need to have everybody at the table to do that," said Bains.

arana@hilltimes.com
The Hill Time

NEWS

Ottawa-Alberta energy deal could open door for other provinces to pursue weakened climate policies, say environmental experts: 'this is just a massive step back'

Under the MOU, Ottawa's commitments include suspending clean electricity regulations and the oil and gas emissions cap in Alberta.

Continued from page 1

cant loss of progress on achieving our climate targets as a country."

Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) and Alberta Premier Danielle Smith signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Nov. 27, outlining a shared commitment to establish Canada as "a global energy superpower," and which sets out a series of conditions that could result in a private-sector proponent bringing forward a proposal for a pipeline from the province's oil patch to British Columbia's coast. According to the MOU, an application for a proposed pipeline—that would carry a million barrels of oil per day—is expected to be submitted to the feds' Major Projects Office on or before July 1, 2026.

Under the pact, Ottawa has made commitments including to suspend the clean electricity regulations (CER) in the province while the two governments negotiate a new carbon pricing agreement by April 1, 2026. Ottawa also agreed not to implement its oil and gas emissions cap in the province.

Alberta's commitments include consulting with Indigenous leaders and using the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation to help "backstop" Indigenous co-ownership of the pipeline project, and to extend the Alberta Carbon Capture Incentive Program to support Pathways Plus, a proposed, large-scale carbon capture, utilization, and storage project in the province.

The two governments also agreed to increase the industrial carbon price in the province—from $95 a tonne currently to a minimum of $130 a tonne.

Although the MOU states that Canada and Alberta remain committed to a goal of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, Severson-Baker, in an interview with *The Hill Times*, said that some elements of the deal need to be clarified or strengthened, "or this is just a massive step back in terms of climate progress for Canada."

Among other concerns, he argued there could be less motivation to introduce lower-emitting forms of electricity generation in the province without the regulatory backstop provided by the CER.

"If the carbon price isn't sufficient to send the message, then the CER sends a message that, in combination with the carbon price, there's a regulatory requirement to actually achieve this sort of performance standard by a certain time," Severson-Baker said.

"Without the clean-electricity regulation, that calls into question what happens if the effective carbon price is not sufficient to provide the right kind of economic signal? I think it's also worth pointing out that nowhere in this MOU is there a mention of the two levels of government working to bring back the renewable energy sector to Alberta."

Canadian Climate Institute president Rick Smith told *The Hill Times* in a Nov. 27 interview that the MOU serves as a notice that the federal government is open for "special one-off deals on climate policy," as opposed to presenting a national approach.

"I'd be surprised if it doesn't result in many copycat requests from other provinces in the days ahead, looking for their own special deals. So, it feels to us like an invitation to fragment Canada's approach to climate change progress," he said.

Smith called the stricter carbon price for Alberta a positive change in the MOU, but still argued that the suspension of the CER and oil and gas emissions cap were "not good signs of continuing forward momentum on climate change."

He argued that a national approach for climate policy is the only path forward, but Alberta has been granted a special carve out by Ottawa.

"Of course, climate change is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. But up until now our country's approach to climate change has been through agreeing on minimum national standards, and it's kind of hard to do that when you start making a bunch of one-off, ad hoc, politically-motivated deals [that] vary by province. That's a recipe for incoherence," he said.

Smith said the CER included flexibility for provinces to implement those regulations in a way that made sense for them.

"It makes zero sense to us to wholesale exempt a province from regulations that were working. So, yeah, honestly, I'm hard pressed to understand what's going on there," he said.

Environment and Climate Change Minister Julie Dabrusin (Toronto-Danforth, Ont.) denied that the MOU language around the CER constitutes a carveout for Alberta, during an Nov. 30 interview with CBC News. Dabrusin argued the MOU instead allows her to negotiate with provinces, allowing them to demonstrate they will meet the regulations' objectives in their own way.

'Government is focused on results—not how we get there': statement from energy minister's office

NDP MP Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont-La Petite-Patrie, Que.), his party's environment critic, told *The Hill Times* that he has big concerns that other provinces may want to pursue their own deals with Ottawa, following the Alberta MOU.

"Everything will fall apart if every province wants their own little deal with the federal government," said Boulerice.

"If we give exceptions or exemptions to every province that [is] trying to do something that doesn't respect federal regulations or legislation, and if Mr. Carney is ready to say 'yes' to everyone, those regulations and legislations mean nothing. It's all about business and nothing about the environment and climate."

Pathways Plus has been described as the world's largest carbon capture project, and which would deliver economic benefits including more than $16-billion in GDP and more than 40,000 jobs annually, in a statement from the Prime Minister's Office on Nov. 27.

Boulerice criticized the plan to implement carbon capture technology in Alberta as "magical thinking."

"Nobody in the environmental sphere takes that seriously" he said. "It's not easy to do, and it's not really efficient, and the technology is not really proven."

The David Suzuki Foundation argued carbon capture is not a viable climate solution, stating on its website that the technology has captured only 0.001 per cent of global emissions since its implementation five decades ago.

Stephen Thomas, clean energy manager for the David Suzuki Foundation, told *The Hill Times* on Nov. 27 that the MOU is "a wholesale abandonment of climate action and economic vision in Canada."

"Looking at this deal, there's no scenario in which this bargain leads to a reduction in emissions in any significant way. The only possible outcome here is that emissions will rise significantly in Canada as a result of our exported emissions with increased fossil fuel exports," he said.

"The Pathways project for carbon capture, utilization, and storage will not work, and even if it works perfectly it will only address a tiny fraction of the emissions that are resulting from producing oil sands in Alberta."

Thomas argued that industrial carbon pricing alone will not be enough to address the emissions from the Alberta oil sands, which he described as Canada's largest and fastest growing source of emissions.

"We actually need to start reckoning, as a country, that we need to move away from fossil fuels," he said.

"I hope this is a rock bottom for this moment in climate politics in Canada, and I hope that the federal government wakes up and begins steering the ship around."

Following the MOU announcement, Liberal MP Steven Guilbeault (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, Que.) resigned as minister of Canadian Identity and Culture with responsibility for Official Languages, Nature, and Parks Canada. In a letter posted on X, Guilbeault said his reasons for resigning include Ottawa' lack of consultation about the agreement with Indigenous nations of B.C.'s West Coast or with the provincial government. He also argued that a pipeline to the West Coast would contribute significantly to climate pollution, and move Canada away from its greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

"We cannot hope to decarbonize our economy without decarbonizing the electricity sector. The proposal to exempt Alberta from the Clean Electricity Regulations in exchange for stricter industrial carbon pricing rules and the Pathways project is, in my view, a serious mistake," Guilbeault said in the letter.

In a Nov. 28 episode of *The Bridge* podcast hosted by journalist Peter Mansbridge, political commentator Chantal Hébert argued that the MOU has granted a carve out for Alberta from clean electricity regulations.

"Ontario is going to be asking—if not tomorrow [then] the day after—[for] the same carve out to do the exact same thing. So will Saskatchewan, so will New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. What you have at the end of the day is an electricity sector that is moving back to fossil fuel-generated electricity," she said.

"We have undone, over the past year and a half, almost a decade of climate policy. If Canadians are fine with that, fine, but it does bring us back to a fossil fuel-based economy in a much major way, as compared to where we were going a year and a half ago."

Keith Brooks, program director of Environmental Defence, told *The Hill Times* that the MOU is "extremely troubling," in part because it is a deal between a province and Ottawa, leaving out other provinces.

"Really, the extent of it is that the prime minister has completely upended Canada's emission reduction plan in a bilateral conversation and agreement with the province of Alberta. This is supposed to be a plan for the nation," he said.

Brooks said the MOU creates uncertainty around Canada's emissions reductions plan.

"We definitely have no modeling, no analysis that's been done to tell us the net impact of this MOU with Alberta, or any possible outcomes that might be agreed to with other provinces. We know we weren't on track already for our 2030 target, and how far does this set us back? We have no idea," he said.

"To me, that's irresponsible, quite frankly. It's irresponsible to be upending the plan that we had without actually doing the analysis and getting out the pencils and the calculators and crunching the numbers."

A Dec. 3 emailed statement to *The Hill Times* from the office of Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Tim Hodgson (Markham—Thornhill, Ont.) states that the MOU does not indefinitely suspend the CER, cancel the oil and gas emissions cap, or facilitate the construction of a bitumen pipeline.

"As we have repeatedly stated, Canada's new government is focused on results—not how we get there. The MOU between the federal government and Alberta creates a series of conditions that, if met, may result in Canada deciding some environmental regulations like the Clean Electricity Regulations are not required, as Alberta has shown that a new carbon pricing agreement inclusive of Alberta's electricity sector creates a credible path to net-zero by 2050," said the statement.

"Similarly, for the emissions cap, the MOU—like Budget 2025—notes that effective carbon markets, enhanced oil and gas methane regulations, and the deployment at scale of technologies such as carbon capture and storage would create the circumstances whereby the oil and gas emissions cap would no longer be required, as it would have marginal value in reducing emissions.

The emailed statement said that Canada is "open to engaging constructively with every province and territory to move shared priorities forward through the most appropriate and effective channels."

jcnockaert@hilltimes.com
rkachhela@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Hundreds of application packages from prospective nomination candidates, actual candidates, and MPs compromised in recent cyber hack, say Conservative sources

The Conservative Party must release the findings of its internal investigation, including how the data breach occurred, who was responsible, and what accountability measures have been taken, say some victims of last month's cyber security incident.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, pictured greeting caucus members in Ottawa. The party is currently investigating who is behind a recent data breach affecting at least 15 Conservative MPs but could actually extend to hundreds of potential nomination candidates and candidates of record. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Continued from page 1

have been informed, that the party is conducting an internal investigation, and has informed the Ottawa Police, the RCMP, and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. She did not say if the investigation report and information about the culprit or culprits will be shared with the victims.

"On Nov. 17, 2025, the CPC learned that a bad actor had emailed personal information about 15 MPs to an unknown number of recipients," wrote Fischer.

"We immediately notified the individuals affected and began internal investigations. We also immediately engaged experts with specialized expertise in cyber matters, including a world-class cyber incident response services provider to technically and forensically investigate the matter and determine what information was affected. As we learned of others who could be potentially affected by this incident, we also notified them."

The 2025 election, held this past April, was the first time the Conservative Party used an online application portal for its nomination process. Potential applicants were required to submit detailed information about personal matters, their family, finances, and profession. They were asked to proactively disclose any embarrassing information that opposing parties could use against them or the party if they were to become a candidate.

Before receiving approval, all applicants went through an extensive vetting process, during which party headquarters conducted due diligence to ensure their candidates met the party's standards. For this, applicants had to provide their social insurance numbers, driver's licences, addresses, family information, credit history, assets and liabilities, any involvement with the police, and criminal background checks, amongst other details.

In 2023 and 2024, the Conservatives enjoyed a high double-digit lead in national public opinion polls, which generated strong interest from prospective candidates. Many believed the 2025 election would produce a blue wave, and deliver one of the largest landslide majorities in Canadian history. This drove potential candidates to sign up thousands of new members and raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to prove their fundraising and organization prowess to the party.

Party learned of security breach following email from 'Rory McTory'

The Conservative Party became aware of the security breach after a number of party insiders received an email from a made-up user name "Rory McTory," which contained the credit reports of 15 first-term MPs. *The Hill Times* has obtained a copy of this email.

When the party learned of the incident, it launched an internal investigation to figure out who and how many individuals' files had been compromised.

"As you may be aware, the Conservative Party of Canada recently experienced a cyber security incident. We are writing to update you on our investigation. Unfortunately, the cyber security incident impacted a system that holds your personal information," reads the letter sent by party headquarters late last month to the victims of the hacking incident, and obtained by *The Hill Times*.

Conservative MP Jamil Jivani released a video on X confirming that he was a victim of the recent cyber security incident. He blasted the 'scumbags and weirdos' who illegally obtained his personal and financial data to intimidate him. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

"The application package you submitted in connection with applying to be a candidate was downloaded by an unknown person(s) without authorization. Regrettably, this information was what was affected. So far, we are only aware of the bad actor(s) misusing the information as described above. It is possible that your application package could be used to facilitate identity theft, fraud, or other harm. We are communicating this to you so that you can take the steps outlined below to protect yourself."

The letter stated that in addition to undertaking its internal investigation, the party is providing a free two-year subscription to a credit monitoring and identity-restoration service. This includes daily updates to credit reports and scores, ongoing credit monitoring, access to identity-restoration specialists, and dark-web surveillance, reads the letter.

"In the unlikely event that you become a victim of fraud, a personal restoration specialist will help to resolve any identity theft. Once you enrol, this service includes up to $1,000,000 of expense reimbursement insurance," states the letter.

It also states that dark web monitoring tracks surface, social, deep, and dark websites for potentially exposed personal, identity, and financial information; and can help protect against identity theft.

'What a pain in the ass, man': Conservative party member

Conservative MP Jamil Jivani (Bowmanville-Oshawa North, Ont.), one of the 15 MPs whose credit report was sent to party insiders, later posted a video on X confirming he was a victim of the cyber security incident. In the video, he said that "some scumbags and weirdos" had illegally obtained his personal credit report and shared it in an effort to intimidate him. He also said that he has nothing to hide.

Jivani said that at the age of 29, he had been diagnosed with a very serious illness and believed he would never be able to walk or work again. Raised by a single mother, Jivani said, he was not in a stable financial position because of his medical challenges. During that time, he relied on his credit card to cover student loan payments and other expenses, which led him into debt.

"I don't come from money, I'm not a country-club dude. I was raised by one parent: my dear mother. So in my family, when you're told you can't work, you don't have money. I had to defer student loan payments. I had to put student loan payments on credit cards. I had to put a lot of things on credit cards. My credit score took a hit. I went into debt," said Jivani in his video.

"I had to survive. Now, if you've been seriously ill, or you know someone who has been, you understand what I mean when I say your life just gets turned upside down, and you're not thinking about your finances every day. You're trying to just make it to the next day. A lot of things in my life changed."

Meanwhile, in interviews with *The Hill Times*, some of the victims of the data breach expressed disappointment, saying they had entrusted the party with sensitive and personal details only to see it ending up in the hands of bad actors. They said the party sent a standard letter to all who were affected in which no one took responsibility for the incident. They called on the party to share with them the results of its internal investigation.

"I'm so upset because my entire candidate application was downloaded, and it has every single [detail] about me: my driver's license, my social insurance number, my financial information, my account numbers, my credit scores [information about] my family members," said one impacted Conservative member.

"I don't know how to express my anger regarding this one, it's just like they are trying to brush [this] aside just hoping people will forget. What kind of sincerity or accountability or transparency is this? Nothing, really, nothing."

A second Conservative echoed the same view: "What a pain in the ass, man."

"Somebody has to be held accountable for a breach like this. This information can be used at any time. This information doesn't change: your social insurance doesn't change, your family doesn't change, your place of employment rarely changes. The core things you need to pursue an identity theft—they [hackers] got it. Whether it's now or 10 years from now, it's likely it will be used by somebody who has a nefarious [motive]."

arana@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Hill Climbers

By Laura Ryckewaert

Immigration Minister Diab adds new policy director to her team

Elizabeth Cheesbrough, who had been deputy chief of staff and director of policy to the minister, exited in October.

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Minister Lena Diab speaks about Francophone immigration outside of Quebec at St. Paul University in Ottawa on Nov. 27. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Minister **Lena Diab** recently found a new director of policy for her office in **Jonathan Alomoto**, filling a gap left by former deputy chief of staff and policy director **Elizabeth Cheesbrough**'s exit this past fall.

Alomoto officially joined Diab's team at the end of November. He's a former senior policy adviser to then-trade minister **Mary Ng**, and earlier to then-northern affairs minister **Dan Vandal** whose office Alomoto joined in April 2023 after roughly four years working for the Government of Nunavut.

Among his roles in the territory was lead negotiator and senior adviser for international and internal trade with Nunavut's central administrative department, the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, through which Alomoto gave advice to the territory's premier, trade minister, and other officials. He's also a past manager of the territorial department's COVID-19 secretariat, among other things, and briefly worked for then-Ontario health and long-term care minister **Helena Jaczek** (prior to her own time at the federal level). As well, Alomoto has sat as a member of the board of the Internal Trade Secretariat, and as a territorial representative with the Standards Council of Canada.

Jonathan Alomoto is now director of policy to the minister. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Cheesbrough had returned to the Hill to work as deputy chief of staff and policy lead for Diab after this year's federal election, having last been chief of staff to then-Treasury Board president **Mona Fortier** up until the July 2023 cabinet shuffle. A veteran staffer who worked for Liberal ministers under the **Jean Chrétien** and **Paul Martin** governments, in more recent years Cheesbrough has also been policy director to Fortier as then-middle class prosperity and associate finance minister, senior policy adviser to then-public safety minister **Ralph Goodale**, and an assistant to then-Toronto MP **Adam Vaughan**.

That's not the only recent change to Diab's policy team: senior policy adviser **Isabelle Buchanan** has also left the minister's office, while senior policy adviser **Mathieu Saint-Wril** has been promoted to director of Quebec, Francophone, and legal affairs.

Isabelle Buchanan has left Minister Diab's office. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Buchanan had been with the immigration office since 2023, beginning as a senior policy assitant—and later adviser—to then-minister **Marc Miller** after following Miller from the Crown-Indigenous relations portfolio where Buchanan had worked as a communications assistant since 2022. She was kept on and promoted to senior policy adviser by Diab this past spring. Over the summer, Buchanan also helped respond to media queries to Diab's office.

Saint-Wril is a former assistant to Quebec Liberal MP **Rachel Bendayan** and has been working for immigration ministers since March 2022, starting as a Quebec adviser to then-minister **Sean Fraser**. Saint-Wril stayed on after Miller took over the portfolio in July 2023, eventually becoming a policy and Quebec regional affairs adviser in the office before being named senior policy adviser by Diab earlier this year.

Alomoto isn't the only new director to join Diab's office since **Hill Climbers**' last update on the team in August: **Sadie Ghosn** has been hired as director of operations to the minister, while **Laura Blondeau** has been tapped as director of communications.

It's a return to the Hill—and Ottawa—for Ghosn, who previously worked for federal Liberals between 2016 and 2021, last as director of operations to then-employment minister **Carla Qualtrough**. Ghosn went on to briefly work as associate director of operations to then-Nova Scotia premier **Iain Rankin**—whose tenure as premier lasted less than a year—and was most recently busy as an operations consultant for primary health care with the Nova Scotia Health Authority.

During her previous years on the Hill, Ghosn also worked as an assistant to then-Ontario Liberal MPs **Gagan Sikand** and **Kirsty Duncan**, as a special assistant for parliamentary affairs in the Liberal research bureau, as a policy and Atlantic regional adviser to then-infrastructure and communities minister **Amarjeet Sohi**, and as a regional economic adviser for the Atlantic to then-innovation minister **Navdeep Bains**.

Sadie Ghosn is director of operations. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

While Diab is still in the market for a press secretary, Blondeau was brought on as communications director in August (after Climbers' last update).

She was most recently busy as executive vice-president of public affairs firm FocusGRP, but previously spent roughly a decade working at Queen's Park as communications director to then-Ontario Liberal minister **Rick Bartolucci** through his turns as northern development and mines ministers, community safety minister, municipal affairs and housing minister, and again as northern development and mines minister ending in 2013.

Blondeau has since also worked for the utilities company Alectra, last tackling internal communications and community outreach.

Also new to Diab's office are senior special assistant for Atlantic regional affairs **Samuel Gruchy**, and executive and operations assistant **Megan Ducker**.

Samuel Gruchy is a senior special assistant for the Atlantic. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Laura Blondeau is director of communications. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Gruchy is a former constituency assistant to Diab as the MP for Halifax West, N.S., and joined her new ministerial team this past September. Between those two jobs—from 2023 until earlier this year—Gruchy worked as an Atlantic regional affairs adviser to then-national defence minister **Bill Blair**. His online CV includes part-time work as a commissionaire in Nova Scotia doing security for the National Research Council and Court Administration Service of Canada, and as an infanteer with the Princess Louise Fusiliers primary reserve regiment, among other things.

These changes bring Diab's team to 15 staff in all. Led by chief of staff **Adam Carroll**, the office also currently includes: **Lisa Cheskes**, director of case management; **Lisa Stewart**, Ontario regional adviser for casework; **Akshala Surendranath**, operations and policy adviser; **Arash Rahmani**, senior adviser; **Philip T. Gebert**, regional adviser for British Columbia and the North; **Stefany Sorto**, regional adviser for the Prairies; **Juan Sarmiento**, regional adviser for Ontario; and **Conor Noseworthy**, special assistant.

lryckewaert@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

Parliamentary Calendar

Joly to speak at Montreal Council on Foreign Relations on Thursday, Dec. 18

Industry Minister Mélanie Joly will deliver remarks in French and English on 'Strengthening industrial capacity in a changing world,' at a breakfast event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Thursday, Dec. 18, at 7:45 a.m. ET in Montreal. *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

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.

MONDAY, DEC. 8

House Schedule—The House of Commons will sit 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.

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 Métropolitain Brasserie, 700 Sussex Dr., Ottawa. Details: thepearsoncentre.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 Kirton, 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., Ottawa. 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., Ottawa. 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

GRIC 2025 Holiday Party—The Government Relations Institute of Canada's Board of Directors hosts its 2025 Holiday Party. Enjoy some festive fun with friends and colleagues! Monday, Dec. 15, at 5:30 p.m. ET at Starling Restaurant and Bar, 2nd floor, 54 York St., Ottawa. Tickets: gric-irgc.ca.

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 Metropolitain Montreal. Tuesday, Dec. 16, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the Palais des congrès de Montréal, 1001 place Jean-Paul-Riopelle. 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. Shazelina 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.

THURSDAY, DEC. 18

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. Thursday, Dec. 18, at 7:45 a.m. ET in Montreal at a location to be confirmed. Register: corim.qc.ca.

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.

TUESDAY, FEB. 10, 2026

'Diagnosing and Combatting Health Misinformation'—The Empire Club of Canada and the Canadian Medical Association host "Diagnosing and Combatting Health Misinformation: 2026 CMA Health and Media Tracking Survey Launch" featuring Abacus Data's David Coletto, Dr. Jen Gunter, Vass Bednar, and Dr. Tom Frieden, former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Tuesday, Feb. 10, in Ottawa (location to be confirmed). Details: empireclubofcanada.com.

TUESDAY, FEB. 10—WEDNESDAY, FEB. 11, 2026

AFN Natural Resources Forum—The Assembly of First Nations hosts its second annual Natural Resources Forum under the theme "Strengthening Our Sovereignty." Tuesday, Feb. 10, to Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026, in Calgary. Details: afn.ca.

TUESDAY, FEB. 24, 2026

Chief Justice Wagner to Deliver Remarks—Rescheduled from Jan. 27, 2026, Chief Justice Richard Wagner will take part in a roundtable luncheon hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Feb. 24, 2026, at the C.D. Howe Institute, 110 Yonge St., Suite 800, Toronto. Register: cdhowe.org.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4—FRIDAY, MARCH 6, 2026

2026 Progress Summit—The Broadbent Institute hosts its 2026 Progress Summit on the theme "Defending Democracy Across Borders." Wednesday, March 4, to Friday, March 6, at the Delta Hotel City Centre Ottawa, 101 Lyon St. N. Details: broadbentinstitute.ca.

SUNDAY, MARCH 29, 2026

NDP Leadership Election Results—The results of the election for the federal NDP's new leader will be announced today in Winnipeg.

THURSDAY, APRIL 9—SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2026

Liberal National Convention—The 2026 Liberal National Convention will take place from Thursday, April 9, to Saturday, April 11, 2026, in in Montreal, Que., featuring policy discussions, guest speakers, training sessions, and the election of the next national board of directors. Details: liberal.ca.

TALK POLITICS TO ME

Subscribe to *The Hill Times* today.