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THE HILL TIMES

THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR, NO. 2286 CANADA’S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER WDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2026 \$5.00

NEWS

‘Nothing revolutionary’: \$3M government ad leans on campaign comms after loosening partisan prohibitions

BY STUART BENSON

The Liberals quietly tweaked policies on federal advertising shortly after launching a new \$3-million campaign, but while the line between public service announcement and partisan slogan has been further blurred, a political marketing strategist says the latest advertising push is a continuation of the Liberal government’s long-standing messaging strategy rather than a contradiction.

While the government of then-prime minister Justin Trudeau had attempted to rein in what it viewed as overly partisan advertising in response to the previous Conservative government’s spending record, it was far from averse to spending taxpayer funds to promote Liberal policies, noted Harneet Singh, managing principal with EOK Consults.

According to federal government data on annual advertising activities, the Liberals spent more than \$76.38-million on advertising in the 2023-2024 fiscal year, including \$39.18-million on digital media, and \$21.57-million on traditional media, including \$10.7-million on television advertising. That total is also a significant reduction from the government’s spending levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, when it spent \$128.9-million in 2020-2021—up from \$50-million the

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NEWS

Mexico takes firm stance on U.S. incursion in Venezuela as Canada walks cautious line ahead of CUSMA review



Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum condemned the U.S. capture of Nicolás Maduro, while Prime Minister Mark Carney didn’t directly mention the United States when responding to the raid.



Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, has taken a trans-Atlantic approach to addressing U.S. President Donald Trump, while Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum follows a hemispheric one. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade and photographs courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

BY NEIL MOSS

Canada and Mexico face the most risk when confronting United States President Donald Trump as a result of the looming review of the North American trade pact, but the two

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NEWS

Interpreter dilemma: pushback continues against changes to federal exam, freelance contract terms

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Concerns remain over the standard and future of interpretation services on Parliament Hill as pushback continues against recent changes made to both the Translation Bureau’s accreditation exam process, and the contracting terms for freelance interpretation services.

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NEWS

Senate committee casts doubt on feds’ ability to move on Africa strategy without new funds, calls for action plan

BY NEIL MOSS

A Senate committee report is calling on the government to create a plan for the implementation of the Africa strategy,

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Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

Ottawa's premier hatmaker to the House Speaker and Governor General has died



Milliner Madeleine Cormier-Brzezinski, left, died in Ottawa on Nov. 26, 2025. She created the headpiece worn by Governor General Mary Simon, centre, in 2022 for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and has made the tricorn hats worn by all the House Speakers, including current Speaker Francis Scarpaleggia, since 2011. Photographs courtesy of Instagram; by Sgt. Mathieu St-Amour, Rideau Hall; and The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade

About 80 former clients, friends, and family members celebrated the life of **Madeleine Cormier-Brzezinski**, the designer behind the House Speaker's iconic black tricorn hat, at Ottawa's Beechwood Cemetery on Dec. 19, 2025.

The 71-year-old milliner, known for her studio Chapeaux de Madeleine, died on Nov. 26 at the May Court Hospice. It had been her second battle with pancreatic cancer.

Chapeaux de Madeleine created hats and headwear for the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Senate, and the Governor General, as well as hats for diplomats and brides. Cormier-Brzezinski was also a regular participant at the Cornerstone Women's Shelter event held every spring at the Irish Ambassador's Residence, as well as when it was held at the British High Commission and the German Embassy.

Funeral guests lucky enough to get their heads under her creations wore them in her honour. In attendance were Cormier-Brzezinski's business partner **Frank Sukhoo**; **Janet Wilson**, former editor of *LUXE* and *Style Magazine* and now senior content editor at Export Development Canada; fundraiser and emcee **Joseph Cull** and his husband **Ian Engelberg**; **Richard Tardif**, photographer and former director-general at Justice Canada; and realtor **Nila Matthews**.

Former clients **Sharon** and **David Johnston** (who served as



A sketch from 2011 by Madeleine Cormier-Brzezinski of the House Speaker's tricorn hat, which she first made for then-assistant deputy Speaker Bruce Stanton. Photograph courtesy of the House Speaker's Office

governor general from 2010 to 2017) sent flowers, which were displayed at the front of the room.

Every House of Commons Speaker is fitted for a new tricorn hat when they are elected to the role in a tradition dating back to 18th-century Great Britain. The first hat Cormier-Brzezinski created for the House was for then-assistant deputy Speaker **Bruce Stanton** in 2011. Since then, Chapeaux de Madeleine has made the black hats worn in the daily Speaker's Parade for then-Speakers **Geoff Regan**, **Anthony Rota**, **Greg Fergus**, and the current Speaker **Francis Scarpaleggia**, as well as the deputies.

"Madame Cormier's work was therefore an integral part of an important parliamentary tradi-

tion. The care and precision with which she made her creations for successive Speakers was a mark of consummate professionalism and respect for the institution of Parliament," said Scarpaleggia in a statement to **Heard on the Hill** on Jan. 8.

Chapeaux de Madeleine also made two hats for Governor General **Mary Simon**: one for **Queen Elizabeth II's** Platinum Jubilee celebrations in the United Kingdom in June 2022, and another for the Queen's funeral in London that September, Rideau Hall confirmed to **HOH**.

An accomplished jazz singer who was proud of her New Brunswick Acadian roots, Cormier-Brzezinski was predeceased by her husband **Allan Brzezinski**.

—with files from Julie Beun

Two more events planned for Harper government anniversary in February

Two events bookending a gala celebration marking the 20th anniversary of former Conservative prime minister **Stephen Harper's** first government were announced last week.

The day before the gala dinner happening in Ottawa on Feb. 4, Harper's official portrait will be unveiled at an event on the Hill hosted by House Speaker **Francis Scarpaleggia**.

Canadian artist **Phil Richards** spent most of 2023 working on the painting, which "includes references to Mr. Harper's accomplishments while in power, as well as his personal interests, like a miniature Stanley Cup," he told *The Globe and Mail* on Jan. 8. Prime Minister **Mark Carney** is expected to attend the unveiling of the portrait, which will hang in the Prime Ministers' Portrait Gallery. Harper was prime minister from 2006 to 2015.

Then on Feb. 5, Harper will join Conservative MP **Shuvaloy Majumdar** in hosting a "Conservative caucus brunch" at 9:30 a.m. in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building.



Former prime minister Stephen Harper, left, and Conservative MP Shuvaloy Majumdar will host a 'caucus brunch' in Ottawa on Feb. 5. The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade and Sam Garcia

Added last week on Eventbrite, the brunch is described as a private event with a business dress code that's open to "sitting and retired members of the Conservative Caucus who remain in good standing." Media and guests are not permitted, and seating is "open and unassigned."

Majumdar is the current seatholder for Calgary Heritage, Alta., which Harper held from 2002 to 2016 (it was renamed from Calgary Southwest in 2015).

Ex-NDP chief of staff Jennifer Howard takes part-time role at Carleton

Former NDP chief of staff and 2025 election campaign director **Jennifer Howard** has joined Carleton University as a program fellow with the Ottawa school's master's of political management program, but says she's still available to take on other roles.

"The great thing about the role at Carleton is that it isn't full time and leaves me lots of time for other projects," she posted on LinkedIn on Jan. 11, a few days after Carleton's Clayton Riddell MPM Program announced the former Manitoba cabinet minister had joined its stable of program fellows.

"Recognized by *The Hill Times* in 2024 as one of the 100 most influential people in federal politics, she brings deep strategic insight and realworld political experience to the MPM community," reads a LinkedIn post from Carleton's Clayton Riddell MPM Program.

"I am definitely open to more opportunities this year, including a new full-time job," wrote Howard, noting that in addition to consulting public-policy leaders and politicians, she's been writing "some fiction, some non-fiction" on her Substack, titled *No Little Dreams*.

Howard served as then-NDP leader **Jagmeet Singh's** chief of staff from 2019 to 2025. From 2007 to 2016, she was an MLA in Manitoba, and served in various roles including as then-premier **Gary Doer's** minister of finance; minister of family services and labour; government House leader; and as deputy Speaker.



Former NDP chief of staff Jennifer Howard is now a program fellow at Carleton University's Clayton Riddell master's of political management program. The Hill Times photograph by Sam Garcia

Liberal MP Gould, Manitoba deputy premier to speak at Next Campaign Summit

Current and former MPs, provincial cabinet ministers, ex-party campaign managers, and former staffers are among the speakers lined up for the Next Campaign Summit opening Jan. 15 in Toronto.

This one-day summit features practical conversations on campaign strategy, leadership, and political participation featuring Liberal MP **Karina Gould**, former cabinet minister and the prime minister's erstwhile chief of staff **Marco Mendicino**, Manitoba

Deputy Premier **Uzoma Asagwara**, Ontario Transportation Minister **Prabmeet Sarkaria**, former Conservative MP now Mayor of Barrie, Ont., **Alex Nuttall**, ex-Conservative campaign manager **Hamish Marshall**, former PMO senior staffer **Vandana Katter-Miller**, Ontario PC campaign manager and Rubicon strategist **Kory Teneycke**, and Equal Voice's interim director **Lindsay Brumwell**.

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Carney, Trudeau, Singh among Top 10 most-searched Canadians

Prime Minister **Mark Carney**, former prime minister **Justin Trudeau**, and former NDP leader **Jagmeet Singh** were among the top five most-searched Canadians last year.

"I was one of the Top 10 Most Searched Canadians of 2025... Umm... thanks?" Singh posted on X on Jan. 7.

The data, sourced from Google Trends, places Carney in the top spot, followed in second place by Trudeau. Canadian singers **Justin Bieber** and **Tate McCrae** came in third and fourth, respectively, followed by Singh. Rounding out the final five spots were actor **Ryan Reynolds**, musician **Drake**, actor **Ryan Gosling**, singer **Shawn Mendes**, and actor **Rachel McAdams**.

‘Too weak, too vague, too slow’: PM Carney accused of ‘dragging his feet’ on foreign interference in pursuit of economic reset with China

The Liberal government published the draft regulations for the long-awaited foreign agent registry nearly 18 months after royal assent, but opposition parties say they have yet to be consulted on a potential commissioner.

BY STUART BENSON

As the prime minister travels to China this week in a bid to reset the fractured diplomatic and trade relationship, critics and diaspora groups are accusing his government of slow-walking the long-awaited foreign influence registry to prioritize economic concerns over safeguarding Canada’s democratic institutions.

“If this government is looking to move forward with expanding trade with China, they need to do it with eyes wide open and the proper safeguards to protect Canadians,” NDP MP Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, B.C.) told *The Hill Times*. “They have failed entirely on that.”

Kwan, her party’s public safety and national security critic, accused Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) of “dragging his feet” on the implementation of the long-awaited Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act (FITAA), Bill C-70, despite its expedited passage with the support of every opposition party in June 2024.

The draft regulations for the bill were published earlier this month in the *Canada Gazette*, beginning a 30-day consultation period that ends on Feb. 2.

The draft details the requirements for the proposed Foreign Influence Registry, including information that organizations and individuals operating in Canada will need to provide when

entering into an agreement with a foreign entity to influence Canadian institutions and officials.

Businesses, financial trusts and partnerships, non-profits and charities, and educational institutions would all be required to register as part of the proposed registry, with identifying information regarding those involved and the details of the arrangement, including the purpose and nature of the influence activity, published in a public registry.

The regulations also lay out the administrative monetary penalties for non-compliance or failing to register within 14 days of entering into an agreement, ranging from \$50 to \$1-million, as well as criminal penalties for more serious infractions, with a

maximum fine of up to \$5-million and/or up to five years in prison.

The document estimates that approximately 872 individuals and 1,550 businesses would be affected by the proposed regulations, with roughly 1,767 registrants required to submit information annually, and an estimated additional 54 new registrants each year. Those estimates are based on registration rates under Australia’s foreign agent registry, which it set up in 2018.

The proposed regulations cannot be fully implemented until Carney’s government appoints a commissioner to head the registry.

Last August, Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough–Guildwood–Rouge Park, Ont.) told CBC News the long-awaited commissioner would be named in September, 2025, with the registry to launch later in the fall.

According to the legislation, the appointment of the commissioner is to be made after consultations with the leader of the opposition, the leader of each “recognized party” with at least 12 members in the House of Commons, and leaders of every other recognized party or parliamentary group in the Senate. The appointment will also require

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NEWS

‘Too weak, too vague, too slow’: PM Carney accused of ‘dragging his feet’ on foreign interference in pursuit of economic reset with China

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approval by resolution in both parliamentary chambers.

In a statement to *The Hill Times*, Simon Lafortune, Anandasangaree’s press secretary, said that the registry can only be officially launched once the regulations have been finalized and the commissioner has been appointed, and that a secure IT solution will be procured through a third-party contract.

The regulations estimate a cost of \$1.25-million in 2026 for the development and acquisition of the IT system, with annual maintenance and support costs estimated at \$500,000 per year until 2030.

“The regulations are an essential step in getting the registry up and running, [and] establish requirements necessary to implement FITAA, including the necessary details to establish the registry,” wrote Lafortune. “The creation of the registry will also help to strengthen Canada’s democratic institutions and political processes by discouraging covert or deceptive foreign influence activities. Foreign influence transparency remains a priority for the Government of Canada, and we will be launching the registry as soon as possible.”

On Jan. 7, *The National Post* reported that multiple government sources had indicated that a candidate had been chosen but was still undergoing the approval process, which will “eventually include consultations with opposition parties.”

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre’s (Battle River-Crowfoot, Alta.) office confirmed to *The Hill Times* that the Liberal government had not yet made contact to initiate those consultations.

In response to the draft regulations, Conservative MP Frank Caputo (Kamloops-Thompson-Nicola, B.C.), his party’s public safety critic, called the Liberals’ failure to implement Bill C-70 or name a commissioner “no surprise ... as the Liberals have a long history of failing to combat foreign interference.”

In a statement released on Jan. 5, Caputo wrote that, without a registry, the Liberals “have no idea how many foreign agents operate inside of Canada, or what they do,” adding that the failure to implement one, coupled with the proposed minimum financial penalties of \$50, “are not the actions of a government that takes foreign interference seriously.”

“From Communist-Beijing police stations operating in Canada to discovering that hundreds of Hamas-affiliated operatives



Prime Minister Mark Carney’s delay in implementing the foreign influence registry ‘sends a clear message’ that safeguarding Canadian institutions and diaspora communities ‘is not a priority for the government,’ says the Canadian Foreign Influence Transparency Registry Coalition. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree said in August he planned to consult recognized party leaders on candidates for the promised Foreign Interference Transparency Registry before Parliament returned in September. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



NDP MP Jenny Kwan called the proposed regulations a ‘weak, partial framework’ that fails to meet the ‘explicit’ intention of the legislation to include all orders of government as well as foreign-funded media outlets. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

have domestic ties, foreign interference continues to multiply due to Liberal inaction,” Caputo wrote.

In a Jan. 12 statement, Kwan wrote that Canadians are being asked “to trust a system that does not yet exist,” and that the continued delay in appointing a commissioner for the registry “undermines the Hogue Commission’s findings and further puts Canadian democracy at risk.”

“Equally troubling is the fact that the government’s proposed regulations do not fully comply with the intention of the Act itself,” Kwan wrote, noting that “Parliament was explicit” in its intention that it apply to officials from all levels of government.

Additionally, Kwan criticized the lack of registration requirements for individuals linked to

foreign-funded institutions or media outlets, “which only serves to undermine confidence and accountability in the system” and leaves “Canadians in the dark.”

In an interview with *The Hill Times* on Jan. 9, Kwan said the Liberals “can have regulations coming out of your eyeballs, but if there’s no one to enforce them, it doesn’t matter.”

“It’s 2026, and we still have yet to appoint a commissioner,” Kwan said. “Carney is dragging his feet and not taking seriously the damage foreign interference can do to this country.”

While Kwan said that the Carney government is sending the message to Canadians—particularly diaspora communities in the crosshairs of transnational repression—that their concerns about for-

oreign interference are not a priority, she said that same message is also being sent to the perpetrators.

“The Liberals are sending a clear message to those foreign interference actors that this is not a priority for the government, and they can continue to run amok,” Kwan said.

Economic engagement cannot trump democratic integrity, say diaspora groups

Diaspora groups who spoke with *The Hill Times* said that Carney’s trip to China this week while leaving Canada without an operational foreign influence registry “underscores a critical gap in Canada’s ability to

address foreign interference and “leaves Canadians without basic transparency.”

“At a time of heightened geopolitical tension, this lack of accountability undermines public trust and weakens democratic safeguards,” said Landson Chan, a spokesperson for Hong Kong Watch. “Economic engagement must not come at the expense of democratic integrity or human rights. Trade discussions cannot overshadow the responsibility to protect Canada’s institutions and electoral processes.”

Chan added that while Carney’s trip is being presented as an effort to strengthen trade and investment, “Canada can pursue global engagement without compromising its values.”

Gloria Fung, a spokesperson for the Canadian Foreign Influence Transparency Registry Coalition, told *The Hill Times* that she has difficulty explaining the delay in implementing the registry, aside from concerns about “offending China.”

“I wonder whether our government has forgotten all the lessons we learned from the exposure of malicious foreign interference through the public inquiry,” Fung said, pointing to the findings in Justice Marie-Josée Hogue’s final Foreign Interference Commission report, released last January.

Released Jan. 28, 2025, Hogue’s report warned that “the fight against foreign interference will be a never-ending battle” requiring “relentless effort and perseverance,” and that China is the “most active perpetrator of state-based foreign interference” in Canada, followed by India.

“Canada cannot seek to recalibrate trade with China at the expense of our national security,” Fung said. “I really want to give the prime minister a serious warning to remember the lessons learned from our previous over-reliance on China.”

National security expert and former Canadian Security Intelligence Service analyst Stephanie Carvin told *The Hill Times* that while Canada can’t afford to ignore an economy of nearly 1.5 billion people, she is concerned that the Carney government is “moving full steam ahead” without taking the necessary steps to safeguard Canada’s national security and its diaspora communities.

“It’s obvious that the trade agenda has overtaken the foreign interference agenda, given the threats from the United States, but these two issues should move hand in hand, not one or the other,” Carvin said. “So it’s unfortunate that [the latter] has fallen so far behind, because it sends the signal that the government isn’t as concerned as it should be—intentionally or not.”

“Jumping into these negotiations without taking steps to reassure those communities that you are addressing their concerns is just adding complications to his overall agenda,” Carvin added. “If those communities felt more reassured about foreign interference, I think it would make it easier overall for Carney to advance his trade agenda.”

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COMMENT

How far will Trump go?

It's obvious that Donald Trump has established a situation where he can operate with little—if any—of the normal constraints of a U.S. president.

Les Whittington

Need to Know



OTTAWA—United States President Donald Trump must be really worried about what's in the yet-unseen Jeffrey Epstein files to stage a military takeover of a sideshow like Venezuela.

Shortly after the U.S. Congress' deadline for releasing all documents related to the Epstein

U.S. President Donald Trump's threats may at times be just pressure tactics and it's also possible he is going too far, even for today's Americans, writes Les Whittington. *White House photograph by Daniel Torok*



sex trafficking investigation, the Justice Department discovered another huge pile of up to two million records, many of

which will be made public in coming weeks.

The administration's slow roll on releasing these files, with their

revolting details about the president's erstwhile pal Epstein leading underaged women into sex with rich and famous men, seems

one of the few issues involving Trump that agitates his base.

The other is the rising cost of living, a problem he promised to solve but in fact directly exacerbated with his loopy tariff program.

But, as everyone knows, there's nothing like running up the flag of military action to dampen a country's discontent with a call to patriotic virtue. And the uproar about Epstein and the price of groceries has disappeared into the background since the president went postal.

Needless to say, depriving President Nicolás Maduro of his hold on Venezuela was worthwhile. But beyond that, the armed incursion into Caracas to capture the country's dictatorial leader has marked an alarming turning point in the president's view of himself and the world one year into his second four-year term.

As of this past weekend, Maduro's repressive, kleptomaniacal organization was still running Venezuela, and there had been no talk—at least from Trump—about undertaking the more difficult, time-consuming job of ousting the ruling thugs and restoring democracy.

Instead, the president is openly coveting the country's world-leading reserves of oil, which he claims were stolen from

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COMMENT

Trump exposed the risk of complacency. Will Canada learn from its mistakes?

It is critical to not repeat past mistakes, and for the Carney government to approach renewed relationships with countries like China with eyes wide open.

Josie Sabatino

Beyond the Headlines



OTTAWA—'Tis the season for bold political predictions that promise to make sense of the year ahead. And yet, if the first week of January was any indicator of things to come, “uncertainty” has officially replaced “unprecedented” as the defining buzzword. In many ways, it is the only term capable of describing what comes next in the face of the dismantling of the global geopolitical playbook that has governed the western world since the post-Second World War era.

For Canada, nothing is more critical at this moment than solidifying a diversification strategy that will give the Carney government some breathing room as it makes sense of the pain United States

President Donald Trump is inflicting across the globe. As Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement negotiations officially kick off, the U.S. is expected to apply significant pressure on Canada to make concessions on key regional sectors including automotive supply chains, supply management, and digital trade at the bargaining table.

Early indicators point to the Liberals confronting this restructuring head-on. Prime Minister Mark Carney's itinerary for January includes travel to China and Qatar, and provides a glimpse into nascent attempts to expand trade relations with countries who have traditionally failed to operate under the same democratic norms of respect for the rule of law, free and fair elections, and protection of human rights.

The why in all of this is obvious. Beyond trade concerns with the U.S. and the need to find new markets for exports, farmers in the Prairie provinces have been absorbing punishing Chinese tariffs on canola products, levied in response to Canada's own tariffs on electric vehicles. For trade conversations to advance in any meaning-

ful sense, concessions will need to be made early on in order to pave the way for more formal negotiations.

While finding new, non-traditional allies in the face of U.S. protectionism may be the obvious next step, Canada should proceed with caution. It wasn't that long ago that a public inquiry took place to investigate claims of foreign interference during the 2019 and 2021 federal elections. While opinions differed on the exact level of interference and its effectiveness, weeks of testimony made it clear that “transnational repression” is taking place in Canada. Justice Marie-Josée Hogue underscored the gravity of this situation in her final report, stating that the “targeting of immigrant communities by foreign states is one of the greatest strategic challenges to Canada's sovereignty and democracy.”

While many recommendations surfaced during the Hogue inquiry to address foreign interference, there has been no full accounting of actions undertaken to date. Some of the key items that could easily be implemented, like the creation of a foreign agent registry, have yet to be manifested despite being included in federal legislation. It is these types of low-hanging-fruit measures that would go a long way to signal that the current government is serious about protecting Canada's democratic institutions from malignant threats, even as it pursues friendlier relations with countries with questionable track records.

Trump's antics over the course of the last year have caught the world by surprise, and left many countries flat footed as they now attempt to course correct and shore up their defences in response to “America First” protectionism. It is critical that mistakes of the past are not repeated, and the Carney government approaches renewed relationships with countries like China with eyes wide open. First and foremost, this means protecting the western democratic values and institutions that underpin life in Canada.

It's anyone's guess whether the Carney government can bridge these gaps on its own terms, and in time to cushion the economy from any further volatility brought on by U.S. trade talks. The only safe bet is to continue to factor in uncertainty in any discussion related to the political quagmire in which we find ourselves.

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

The Hill Times

How to foil Trump's annexation of Greenland

NATO leaders should immediately offer the autonomous Danish territory of Greenland permanent membership in the alliance.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—In the early hours of Jan. 3, the United States military staged a whirlwind military intervention in Venezuela. When the dust had settled, President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores were in American custody, charged with narco-terrorism and the possession of a machine gun. Canadian military analysts were quick to take to the airwaves to praise the precision and efficiency of the U.S. special military operation.

Initially, no one wanted to address the legality of the Trump administration abducting a sitting president from a foreign sovereign state through the use of deadly military force. While seven U.S. service members sustained slight wounds, an estimated 80 Venezuelan and Cuban security forces were killed in one-sided clashes.

U.S. President Donald Trump's original premise for intervention in Venezuela was to stop the flow of deadly fentanyl into the U.S. However, when fact checkers pointed out that no fentanyl is produced in Venezuela and the majority of that country's drug exports are trafficked to Europe, Trump simply pivoted to say it was all about the oil.

While frightening on the surface, Trump's brazen honesty is a refreshing change from successive U.S. administrations denying that oil was the driving force behind the wars in Iraq and Libya. The truly scary part is that Trump's initial success in Venezuela has simply emboldened his administration.

They have suddenly realized that there are no guardrails to stop them from literally acting like an unchecked super power within their own hemisphere.

Between Trump and his secretary of state, Marco Rubio, the U.S. has already put Mexico, Cuba, Colombia, and Panama on notice that they could be next.

Canada, while still on Trump's hit list to become the 51st state, is seemingly on his back burner for now.

However, the heat is definitely being turned up on Trump's desire to annex Greenland. This crazy notion was floated during his first term as president, but it was dismissed as a bad joke.

However, after the military actions in Caracas, no one is laughing any more. Trump's narrative is that the U.S. needs Greenland for its own national security. For the record, the North Atlantic island territory of Greenland has been internationally recognized as the sovereign territory of the Kingdom of Denmark since 1814. But I digress.



The Royal Danish Navy frigate HDMS Triton passes an iceberg in the waters around Greenland. Photograph courtesy of NATO/Flickr

Trump's assertion that Greenland is strategically important to the U.S. is true. Which is why Denmark has had a Cold War-era security agreement with the U.S. since 1951.

Since Denmark is a member of NATO, any aggression towards the territory of Greenland would prompt a response from all 32 members of the alliance, including Canada. For the record, the Royal Canadian Air Force has long used the U.S. major military airbase in Greenland to facilitate the twice-annual missions to resupply Canadian Forces Station Alert in the High Arctic. Known as Operation Boxtop, these two-week-long missions are conducted each spring and fall to provision CFS Alert with food and fuel.

Currently called U.S. Pituffik Space Base, it was formerly known as the Thule Air Base. So, while the world wrings their hands in frightened apprehension of Trump's next move and White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller boasts in the media that taking Greenland by military force is not off the table, the truth is the U.S. already has more boots on the ground there than the Danish military.

As the Danish government was quick to point out, under Charter 5 of the NATO agreement, any aggression by the U.S. on Greenland would either result in 30 member states rallying to Denmark's aid, or the dissolution of the alliance, or both.

To cloud the issue further, former U.S. National Security Council member Alexander B. Gray was recently featured on Australia's 60 Minutes news program. His take was in line with Trump's in that he sincerely believes the U.S. needs to annex Greenland in order to prevent Moscow or Beijing from doing the same in the future. He cited the fact that Greenland could soon push for independence from Denmark.

To counter this argument, NATO leaders should immediately offer the autonomous Danish territory of Greenland permanent membership in the NATO alliance. If they decide to secede from Danish rule, they will still be protected by the collective. This would eliminate any encroachment by Moscow and Beijing.

And, most importantly, it would halt any need for the U.S. to annex it.

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

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Editorial

Editorial

Canada's Iranian response puts its U.S. silence in stark relief

After weeks of escalating protests that have been met by a draconian response from the Iranian government, the Canadian government issued a joint statement condemning the Iranian regime's lethal crackdown on its citizens.

Since Dec. 28, 2025, Iranians have flooded their streets in protest of the Iranian Republic government amid a faltering economy and desire for structural and cultural change.

According to the BBC: "The protests which began over soaring inflation are now calling for an end to the clerical rule of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran's attorney general said anyone protesting would be considered an 'enemy of God'—an offence that carries the death penalty—while Khamenei has dismissed demonstrators as a 'bunch of vandals' seeking to 'please' [United States President Donald] Trump."

News outlets have not been able to independently verify the figures, but humanitarian organizations and activists have put the death toll of citizens killed by Iranian forces at upwards of 400 people.

Demonstrations in solidarity have been held around the world, including this past weekend in Ottawa as allies and diaspora community members anxiously await word from Iranian citizens who have been made subject to communications blackouts in their country.

On Jan. 9, Global Affairs Canada issued a joint statement with its counterparts in Australia and the European Union commending the "bravery of the Iranian people as they stand up for their dignity and their fundamental right to peaceful protest."

It continued: "We strongly condemn the killing of protestors, the use of violence, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation tactics by the Iranian regime against its own people."

In their own sign of solidarity, some Conservatives have taken to social media to post videos of themselves lighting up a smoke with a burning photo of Khamenei, much like a viral image of a woman doing the same.

"Conservatives stand unequivocally with the people of Iran in their fight for freedom against the murderous Khamenei dictatorship," Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre said in a Jan. 12 social media post.

The messages of solidarity with the people of Iran are necessary. And they make the silence in the face of what's going on much closer to home all the more glaring.

"Canada strongly condemns the killing of protestors, the use of violence, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation tactics by the Iranian regime against its own people," said a Jan. 9 post from the official prime ministerial X account.

There is no corresponding message from any official channels in response to the death of Renee Good, who was gunned down by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer on Jan. 7 amid protests in Minneapolis against the influx of armed federal agents conducting raids in their city.

The silence—as with every instance of selective mutism when it comes to addressing the violations carried out by our southern neighbour—is revealing. And it's not showcasing anything good.

The Hill Times



Letters to the Editor

The UN Security Council has a Trump problem

The United Nations Security Council is widely viewed by critics as facing significant challenges and deep divisions that limit its effectiveness, a situation often referred to as being "impotent" or "paralyzed" in the face of major global crises. This perception is largely attributed to the veto power of its five permanent members and persistent geopolitical clashes, rather than solely the whims of a single leader.

As the UN and other international organizations brace for more years of United States President Donald Trump—who famously tweeted before becoming president the first time that the 193-member UN was "just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time"—it must do more than merely reflect on current geopolitical realities, and, in a competitive world, limit the amount of compromises it accepts.

Trump has publicly accused the UN of being ineffective and not "living up to its potential." He has argued



U.S. President Donald Trump. White House photograph by Daniel Torok

that the UN fails to end wars, and has claimed that his administration achieved more for peace than the UN did.

Regardless of the "ends," the "means" by which Trump executed his Venezuela campaign further erodes international law and safeguards, creating fan boys, including the leader of the official opposition, Pierre Poilievre. None of which we can afford.

William Perry
Victoria, B.C.

Don't let education investments dry up, says Vancouver letter writer

Some children wake up each morning eager to learn, but they have no classroom to go to. Others possess the talent and drive to change the world, yet they lack the most basic tool to do so: education. This is the reality for millions living in underdeveloped regions around the globe.

With International Day of Education on Jan. 24, I have been thinking about the role education has played in my life. Through education, I have learned to connect with others, understand my culture, and discover who I am. It has helped me believe in myself and stand up against injustice. These experiences have inspired my goal of becoming a lawyer one day.

No one's birthplace should decide if they get a chance to learn. Those of us with access to education must recognize our privilege and use it to support those who do not. Without education, many

young people who could become future leaders and changemakers are left without the resources they need to succeed. How can we say we are progressing as a global economy if entire communities, especially women and children, are denied equal opportunity from the start?

I urge Canada to defend decades of progress toward ending extreme poverty by strengthening its international assistance, especially in education. Canada has both the ability and the responsibility to help close these gaps. Growing together as a global community is much stronger than growing alone.

I encourage you to keep speaking out about the importance of education in our increasingly connected world and to acknowledge the injustice of a system that allows some to learn freely while others are left behind.

Bernice Ko
Vancouver, B.C.

COMMENT

Artificial action: feds offering tepid response to AI abuse

Knowing that Grok is a gender-based violence generator, why are institutional experts, organizations, and government officials still using X?

Erica Ifill

Bad+Bitchy



Artificial Intelligence Minister Evan Solomon is giving the impression that this government isn't that motivated to deal with the AI deepfake problem beyond reworking a few sentences in the Criminal Code, writes Erica Ifill. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade and Unsplash photograph by Salvador Rios

CALGARY—The #MeToo movement didn't go far enough. I wish it had become a militant uprising. Perhaps then our mostly male political class wouldn't be blowing smoke up our asses about the security and safety of women and girls.

On Jan. 2, award-winning journalist Kat Tenbarge dropped a piece that has reverberated throughout the social media sphere. Her *Spitfire News* article that Twitter users "discovered" that Grok, the platform's built-in AI chatbot, will create fake sexually suggestive edits of real photos of women and girls on request. "To be clear, we are talking about a fully accessible, artificial intelligence weapon whose unregulated and non-consensual content opens the door for the mass digital sexual abuse of women. X user pokey pup posted an example featuring actress Nell Fisher, known for her role in Netflix production *Stranger Things*, as an example. An account (which could be a bot) gave Grok the following command: "@grok, take her dress off please and thanks, but do not change single other thing about

the photo," to which Grok obliged. Fisher is 14 years old.

Bloomberg's investigation found that the scale of Grok's potential to generate deepfakes is unprecedented, "with Grok generating about 6,700 images every hour that were identified as sexually suggestive or nudifying, compared to 79 new AI undressing images per hour on other top websites." Since Grok is free, access and the possibilities are endless. Grok has also introduced a "Spicy mode" which only requires "a prompt like 'Generate a spicy video of [description]' to trigger the mode." (You do have to opt-in in settings.) While Grok apologized, X users noticed that the AI tool was still able to produce sexually exploitative images and videos quite easily. Earlier

last year, X owner Elon Musk introduced Grok Companions with a video depicting a girl or young woman teaching quantum mechanics in a sexually suggestive outfit, demonstrating her youth with her hair in pigtails. His tweet introduced the AI evolutionary tool with a kiss emoji. Revenge of the nerds, indeed. It is not known if these AI depictions will be available on Tesla.

In February 2024, I wrote about deepfakes, which is officially known as technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). I wrote that deepfake pornography primarily targets women and girls. Taylor Swift was the victim, then. Her images attracted 45 million views on X. Men used Microsoft Designer software to create them, origi-

nating from platforms such as Telegram and 4chan.

But sexual objectification, abuse, and harassment is not new in tech. Facebook began as Facemash, which rated women's attractiveness through the eyes of male peers. Google Images began as a result of Jennifer Lopez's revealing dress at the 2000 Grammy Awards. Revenge porn, the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, continues to be a growing problem. The earliest use of deepfakes were for pornography—by 2021, more than 90 per cent were non-consensual porn, as described in the *MIT Technology Review*. ChatGPT will introduce an "adult mode," which is expected to roll out later this year. *Gizmodo* confirms: "At this point, the promised 'adult mode' is

irrevocably linked to [a] specific promise of allowing ChatGPT to produce 'erotica.'" Rather than being a drawback, sexually explicit usage has become a selling point for many chatbots.

Some members of the public are asking a simple question: knowing that Grok is a gender-based violence generator, why are institutional experts, organizations, and government officials still using X? There are other platforms on which these social media actors can communicate their messaging such as Bluesky, TikTok, and Threads (which allows news platforms to post). Many of those entities have not expanded their social media presence to these other platforms that do a better job at warding off TFGBV; TikTok is infamous for its strict community guidelines.

For some, the answer is to ban X. This past weekend, many "news" accounts reported that AI Minister Evan Solomon was working with the United Kingdom and Australia to ban X. Conservative MP Dean Allison spread that misinformation throughout the Twittersphere before Solomon had a chance to respond to the reports. We are not banning X, but here's my problem with Allison and the rest of the political and media establishment: it is more important to prevent "sliding into tyranny" than it is to condemn the sexual violence of women and girls. Note that, as of writing, Allison's Jan. 10 tweet is still up.

Solomon's response, though, was tepid and uninspiring, which gave the impression that this government isn't that motivated to deal with the problem beyond reworking a few sentences in the Criminal Code: "Our government is continuing to advance responsible AI, including introducing Bill C-16, the Protecting Victims Act, to amend the Criminal Code to include deepfakes," reads Solomon's tweet. And what else? Criminal liability is only one part of the solution and is unsatisfactory in a culture that prefers women silent and obedient. Perhaps he should consult AI for an answer.

Erica Ifill is host of the *Bad+Bitchy* podcast. *The Hill Times*

How far will Trump go?

Continued from page 5

U.S. companies when Venezuela nationalized the industry in 2007. While American corporations were deprived of an estimated US\$60-billion in production assets, the idea that Venezuela stole its own oil, as Trump maintains, is, of course, absurd.

So far, he said he wants Maduro crony and interim leader Delcy Rodríguez to fully co-operate (under threat of ending up in a U.S. jail, or worse) to fulfil Trump's dream of making her country a U.S. oil bonanza again. But early indications are that

Big Oil in the U.S. is not going to jump at this highly costly (US\$100-billion), long-term (10 years), and very iffy opportunity.

Nonetheless, Trump has used the U.S. Army to take over a neighbouring South American nation and its oil sector for as long as he wants—with him in charge of the proceeds.

It's obvious that, in the wider sphere, Trump has established a situation where he can operate with little—if any—of the normal constraints of a U.S. president, and he clearly relishes the power of the American military to allow him to intervene, for

better or worse, anywhere that suits him.

Last year, this included attacks in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, Yemen, and Somalia. Exultant over the successful strike in Venezuela, Trump appeared this week to be considering what would have to be a massive military action against Iran's repressive regime.

In fact, the only question now seems to be where U.S. forces will strike next. Cuba, Colombia, Mexico, Greenland? Regarding the latter, Trump on Jan. 9 repeated his outrageous suggestion of annexing the semi-au-

tonomous territory of Denmark: "We are going to do something on Greenland, whether they like it or not ... I would like to make a deal the easy way, but if we don't do it the easy way, we will do it the hard way." This persistent talk has put NATO on the verge of collapse.

All in all, the president is clearly in the process of rewriting history by discarding the U.S.'s role in the rules-based international order that helped avoid a world war for the last 75 years. And the framework for thinking about U.S. goals, alliances, and principles that Canadians among others took largely for granted for decades in the post-war era is unfortunately no more.

In that context, Canada's concerns about preserving its

economic priorities in the intricacies of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico free-trade agreement in negotiations this year seem almost quaint. Some would say that, given the way Trump is acting, trade treaties should be the least of Canada's concerns.

However, there's no sense in being too alarmist. The president's threats may at times be just pressure tactics and it's also possible Trump is going too far, even for today's Americans. Indeed, things have reached a point down there where even some Republican members of Congress are starting to think about maybe upholding their constitutional duties.

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

COMMENT

Interesting times like these



Maybe, by month's end, the Conservative convention and the future of Leader Pierre Poilievre will be the biggest thing occupying our time. Or not, writes Tim Powers. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Will global dynamics further influence our ecosystem? What will bond us now, or divide us? These are weighty questions we can't escape in 2026.

Tim Powers

Plain Speak



OTTAWA—Domestic politics seem pleasantly dull and bland when compared to the pace of global uncertainty in these early days of January. It makes you almost yearn for all-day coverage of a Canadian parliamentary floor crossing.

We are not even halfway through the first month of 2026, and United States President Donald Trump is making waves in South America and Greenland. Some of it for the good, like the removal of Nicolás Maduro as head of Venezuela, but more of it unsettling as respect of international law might not be an option favoured by Trump. Musings from senior leadership in the U.S. administration about acquiring Greenland are causing discomfort among western allies and NATO partners, the likes of which we have not seen before.

In Iran, an anti-regime public uprising is happening, and many reports highlight significant loss of life. Yet, for Iranians outside of their country, there seems to be hope that the governing theocracy might be on its last legs. Potentially, there are some positive things here for the world.

Prime Minister Mark Carney is China bound—the first time in almost a decade a Canadian prime minister has made an official visit to the country. Carney, like Canadian prime ministers before him—albeit in more challenged circumstances—can't opt out of doing business with China. From seafood to agriculture products to cars, Canada has a lot of difficult economic paths to navigate. The management of the political and security challenges that come with China never get easy.

Soon enough, Canada and the U.S. will be trying to figure out the future of trade between us along with Mexico. For nearly 40 years, broadly, and for more than 60 years when it comes to the auto sector, it has been a no brainer. It is no longer that simple.

The world seems more chaotic now than it was when I was a grade schooler in the '80s. At that time, there was at least order—or so it seemed—between the world's great powers. An order not free of vulnerabilities and risks, but one where it felt like consequences were understood and some forethought was applied. It doesn't feel that way now.

The leadership of America, though, like any nation never free of error or misadventure, seems hell-bent on carving the world back into spheres of influence where allyship is less important, and historic relationships and bonds matter less than they ever have.

Many hope that, as the month and year progresses, the hyperkinetic pace of global events and what feels like a remaking of how we have ordered ourselves since the Second World War will dissipate. Perhaps, as the Conservative convention grows near, the future of Leader Pierre Poilievre will be the biggest thing that occupies our time. Such a very Canadian thing. Or not.

We do truly find ourselves, as a country, in a moment in time when focusing on our internal domestic challenges becomes a luxury as we need our efforts to be diligently applied to navigating the most challenged globe of our time. How will that influence our own politics in Canada?

We saw some examples of the Trump effect and the arguable benefit it afforded Carney in the 2025 election. But will global dynamics further influence our ecosystem? Where do addressing personal affordability challenges and global destabilization find accord with the Canadian electorate? What does that mean to the kind of political leadership we seek out in Canada? What will bond us now, or divide us? These are weighty questions we can't escape in 2026.

Happy New Year. Buckle up. As that old proverb goes, "oh, to live in interesting times."

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

The Hill Times

The American Imperium, MMXXVI

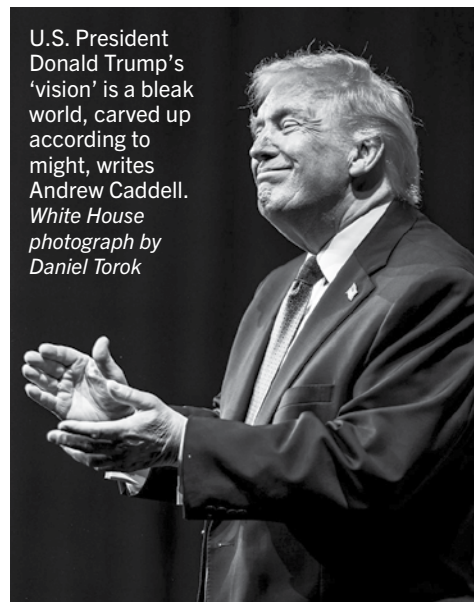
The Greek, Roman, and British Empires all declined from self-inflicted wounds. The National Security Strategy may be the last nail in the coffin for the Americans.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



U.S. President Donald Trump's 'vision' is a bleak world, carved up according to might, writes Andrew Caddell. *White House* photograph by Daniel Torok



KAMOURASKA, QUE.—Every so often, I draft a list of subjects I think might be interesting subjects for *Hill Times* readers. In the waning days of 2025, I made a list of issues I wanted to explore this year. At the top was United States President Donald Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS), released in early December.

Little did I know the NSS would be applied before I could read it in its entirety. The attack on Venezuela and the abduction of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife are a clear sign the U.S. plans to dominate the Americas. They will then leave the rest of the world to the Chinese and the Russians, except where their interests coincide.

The 33-page NSS is slim for these kinds of policy papers. Trump's introduction begins with a dishonest boast: "Over the past nine months, we have brought our nation—and the world—back from the brink of catastrophe and disaster." It proceeds in the same vein, claiming to have "obliterated Iran's nuclear capacity," settled eight "raging conflicts," and declares "America is strong and respected again."

On the contrary, it is an isolationist paper from beginning to end. It focuses exclusively on the U.S.'s self-interest, and belittles previous foreign and trade policy by "elites who placed hugely misguided and destructive bets on globalism and so-called 'free trade' that hollowed out [our] middle class and industrial base on which American economic and military pre-eminence depend."

It then asks: "What should the United States want? What are our available means to get it? and How can we connect ends and means into a viable National Security Strategy?" The answers:

- an American Empire in the hemisphere;
- through economic and military power; and
- by retreating into a Fortress America.

In a series of essays in early December 2025, the Brookings Institution broke down the strategy. It offers a prescient comment: "The assertion that the U.S. military can strike other countries also contradicts the strategy's embrace of the sovereignty of nations." It emphasizes the presumption the U.S. economy can continue to dominate from an isolationist stance, and "underestimates how dynamic—and how fragile—America's innovative economy, strong financial system, technological edge, and the soft power they generate truly are."

This is a theme analyst Anne Applebaum took up in a recent conversation with journalist David Frum when she said "America giving up on relationships with

the world ... It means that things that Americans took for granted—the ability to travel or the ability to do business in different parts of the world, maybe even the dominance of the American dollar that was accepted by people as a kind of *quid pro quo* in exchange for the *Pax Americana*—all those things will begin to fall away, and they will make Americans poorer."

The NSS sends a message to China and Russia: the world will be carved into three spheres of influence, so they can do as they like with Taiwan and Ukraine. Although President Vladimir Putin's Russia has a GDP the size of Canada (with four times our population), the NSS empowers him. Meanwhile, China can impose deals on Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Australia.

For now, Venezuela is just one piece on the chess board, a source of oil and wealth for the U.S. The American decision to maintain the current authoritarian government is a sign there will be no "democratic spring" there.

And Canada? Brookings underlines "the document ignores Canada, long a vital U.S. ally." This lapse is probably a deliberate slight—as a US "satellite" we don't count. Our government will have to spend real money on Canadian defence and infrastructure to be less reliant on the U.S. Business will find it hard to seek out other markets.

While Canadians worry Trump wants to annex us, the Americans know a Canadian counterinsurgency would be devastating given their reliance on our resources. But just as a con man works a shell game, I think the real prize for Trump is control of the Arctic and the Northwest Passage, which the Americans have long coveted and never recognized as Canadian waters.

The NSS's "vision" is a bleak world, carved up according to might. It is the repudiation of the rules-based international system, and the multilateral organizations created after the Second World War.

The Greek, Roman, and British Empires all declined from self-inflicted wounds: fragmentation, instability, and global conflict. The NSS may be the last nail in the coffin of the American Imperium.

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

The Hill Times

OPINION

A new morning for Canada-Japan economic relations

Kanji Yamanouchi

Opinion



At the start of 2026, the international community continues to face severe geopolitical realities, including the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, as well as ongoing challenges in relations with the United States. Climate change leaves no room for delay, making decarbonization inevitable, while balancing energy security with environmental policy remains a pressing task. At the same time, rapid advances in technologies such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing are raising serious concerns ranging from privacy to national security, even as they reshape the future. In short, the global environment surrounding both Japan and Canada has become increasingly harsh. Against this backdrop, a delega-

tion from Keidanren's Canada Committee visited Ottawa and Toronto on Dec. 1 and 2.

Keidanren is Japan's largest business organization, representing 1,574 world-leading Japanese companies and 106 national industry associations. Its chair is often referred to as the "prime minister" of the Japanese business community, reflecting the organization's significant influence. Founded in 1946, it has played a central role in Japan's economic development, guiding the country through postwar reconstruction, rapid economic growth, oil shocks, the collapse of the bubble economy, and successive reforms.

This was Keidanren's first visit to Canada in nine years. It underscored the strong determination of Japan's business community to deepen economic ties with Canada amid an increasingly uncertain global environment. From Canada's perspective as well, Japan is a crucial partner as Prime Minister Mark Carney's government pursues trade diversification and seeks to position

Canada as an energy superpower. Just ahead of the visit, the federal government and the province of Alberta signed a memorandum of co-operation on advancing energy-related infrastructure, making the timing particularly opportune.

The delegation's schedule was intensive, reflecting the depth of Japan-Canada economic relations. Despite his demanding official duties, Carney received the Keidanren delegation. In addition, Finance Minister François-Philippe Champagne, Foreign Minister Anita Anand, Industry Minister Mélanie Joly, Energy Minister Tim Hodgson, and International Trade Minister Maninder Sidhu each held individual meetings, allowing for frank and substantive exchanges of views.

The delegation also met with senior members of the Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group. With more than 200 federal parliamentarians currently affiliated—making it Canada's third largest after the Canada-U.S. and Canada-United Kingdom groups—this reflects strong expectations for bilateral relations. Despite the crowded parliamentary

calendar, ample time was secured for meaningful, forward-looking discussions thanks to the leadership of the group's co-chairs, Senator Stanley Kutcher and Liberal MP Terry Sheehan.

Keidanren's main interest lies in the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement. The delegation emphasized the importance of maintaining the free-trade framework among the three countries. From investors' perspectives, Canada's strengths include abundant natural resources such as critical minerals; a stable and inclusive society; high-quality human capital supported by an effective immigration system; and generous support measures from federal and provincial governments. Above all, Canada's position as an integral part of the North American market remains fundamental. Approximately 75 per cent of automobiles produced in Canada are Japanese brands, most of which are exported to the U.S.

The delegation also raised concerns regarding additional tariffs on steel recently introduced by the Canadian government. While stressing the importance of the World Trade Organization and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and calling for Canada's leadership in upholding the rules-based trading system, Keidanren requested appropriate treatment of Japanese steel

products. This issue was discussed amid the recent announcement of layoffs affecting around 1,000 workers at Algoma Steel, underscoring the difficulties faced by domestic industries. Even under such circumstances, it is essential for Japan and Canada to work closely together to address this issue through co-ordination and dialogue.

The highlight of the visit was the signing of a memorandum of co-operation between Keidanren and the Business Council of Canada. This document aims to further strengthen Japan-Canada economic relations at the corporate level, and I had the honour of witnessing it together with Anand. Major business projects are already underway in areas such as zero-emission vehicles, liquefied natural gas, small modular reactors, and critical minerals including lithium, graphite, copper, and uranium. Looking ahead, energy, technological innovation, supply chains, and decarbonization hold particular promise.

The further deepening of Japan-Canada economic relations is inevitable. We are now witnessing a new dawn. Despite challenging times, there is strong reason to hope that 2026 will be a bright and promising year.

Kanji Yamanouchi is the ambassador of Japan to Canada.
The Hill Times

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OPINION

Politicizing EDI in research puts Canadian science and patient care at risk

Equity, diversity, and inclusion policies do not compete with research excellence, but instead strengthen it.

Rachel Reeve

Opinion



The recent House of Commons committee motion seeking access to decades of individual-level data from federal health and science grant applicants should concern anyone serious about evidence-based policymaking.

While the motion was ultimately amended, the House Science and Research Committee's original motion revealed a deeper and more troubling trend: equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in research being treated not as a pillar of excellence, but as a political liability.

As many others have observed, the original request went well beyond legitimate oversight. It sought the release of names, demographic information, scientific review scores, and reviewer comments—material long protected by privacy and ethical norms.

These safeguards exist for good reason: scientific review depends on confidentiality, trust, and voluntary participation. Undermine those foundations and the entire system weakens.

The response from the research community was swift and unprecedented. More than 5,000 researchers signed an open letter warning the motion was unethical and would erode confidence in Canada's research ecosystem. The authors of the letter said, "This motion is incredibly damaging, unscientific in its approach, unethical, and puts minoritized researchers and graduate students at risk."

This was not institutional defensiveness. It was a warning about systemic risk. If researchers believe personal data can be retroactively exposed or politicized, participation drops, disclosure becomes less honest, and the quality of funded science deteriorates.

The committee's decision to revise its motion, replacing demands for disaggregated data with aggregated and anonymized information, was necessary, but it does not fully resolve the issue.

This attempt to turn back the clock is especially concerning as we've only just started seeing real progress in the field of research and medicine when it comes to underserved populations.

For years, researcher teams lacked diversity and relied on narrow study populations, producing guidelines and treatments that did not work equally well for everyone.

Diabetes disproportionately affects communities that have been historically

underrepresented in medical research: Indigenous Peoples, Black Canadians, newcomers, low-income workers, and rural populations. These are communities for whom diagnostic delays, gaps in clinical care, and social barriers to diabetes management are not abstract policy problems but daily realities.

Though we've made significant progress in addressing these gaps over the last decade, Canadian diabetes research still does not adequately reflect these populations in its study cohorts or in its research leadership. The result is predictable: blind spots in evidence, treatments and technologies that do not serve everyone equally, and policy recommendations that are not aligned with real-world needs.

For people living with diabetes, high-quality and inclusive research matters regardless of political beliefs or voting preferences.

Research that reflects Canada's real population leads to better prevention strategies, safer therapies, and more effective health system planning. Weakening EDI frameworks risks taking us backward, towards evidence that is less representative and less useful.

EDI priorities enable policymakers to identify inequities in access, outcomes and service delivery, and to design interventions that work for the people who need them most. Undermining the infrastructure that produces this evidence would make policy less precise, less effective, and more costly over time.

EDI does not compete with research excellence. It strengthens it.

Diverse research teams ask better questions. They see patterns that homogeneous teams miss. They design studies that are more rigorous because they account for lived experience and structural inequities. They generate findings that are more widely applicable because they test ideas across populations and in real world settings, not merely within the easiest or most accessible ones.

When it comes to diabetes, a disease with outcomes shaped profoundly by social determinants of health, these differences are not minor. They determine whether research improves care or inadvertently perpetuates inequality.

If Canada is serious about reversing the rise in diabetes prevalence and closing persistent gaps in outcomes, then the path forward requires strengthening—not weakening—the role of EDI in research and funding.

Canada stands at a crossroads. We can allow reactive politics to reshape research norms thereby undermining trust and discouraging the very people whose insights we most need. Or we can reaffirm the principles that make Canadian health research a global leader: integrity, inclusiveness, scientific excellence, and partnership with the communities most affected.

Strengthening EDI is not a distraction from research excellence. It is the path to it.

Dr. Rachel Reeve is the executive director of research and science at Diabetes Canada.

The Hill Times

Scrap the Indo-Pacific Strategy: a pragmatic path for Canadian sovereignty

Wenran Jiang

Opinion



Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to China this week—first by a Canadian prime minister since 2017—aims to discuss trade, energy, agriculture, and international security, highlighting a crucial effort to reset bilateral relations. The trip underscores Canada's profound strategic dilemma in 2026: our economic stability remains tethered to United States volatility, while our 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) constrains diversification away from this dependence.

This contradiction is our core vulnerability. The IPS locks Canada into a confrontational posture towards China that serves Washington, D.C.'s geopolitical priorities, even as recent U.S. actions—such as threats of annexation and military adventurism in Venezuela—demonstrate that the U.S., not China, is the primary disruptive force against the rules-based order the strategy claims to defend. We cannot achieve strategic autonomy while policy remains subordinated to American imperatives. To secure our future, we must discard this self-defeating strategy.

The IPS was conceived by adopting Washington's binary framework that reduces China to a "systemic rival." This imported premise misreads Canada's nuanced interests, ignoring the empirical reality of our economic ties. The scale is structural: Canada's trade with China reached \$118.7-billion in 2024, rivalling total trade with the entire European Union or the rest of the Asia Pacific region combined.

In the energy sector, diversification away from the U.S. depends on China. China is the dominant purchaser of oil shipped via the Trans Mountain pipeline, a premium-priced market essential to the project's viability. Alberta's proposed new pipelines to the West Coast likewise identify China as their primary buyer. The success of LNG Canada's Phase 1 and planned Phase 2 is predicated on long-term Chinese demand. With the U.S. buying 97 per cent of Canada's oil exports in 2023, this diversification is an economic imperative. To dismiss China as a strategic liability is to ignore the foundations of prosperity in key regions.

The human and economic costs of this strategic misalignment are immediate. Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe notes that farmers have been "put in the line of fire due to tariffs on Chinese [electric vehicles], which nobody wants, to protect North American EVs, which few can afford." This is not an exaggeration; retaliatory Chinese tariffs on Canadian canola—a direct response to Ottawa's own levies—now threaten a \$5-billion annual export market, and tens of thousands of livelihoods. On the West Coast, the seafood industry, dependent on China for most of its crab exports, faces similar ruin. This is a profound policy failure: our tariffs defend no meaningful domestic EV industry while provoking countermeasures that harm our exporters.

The recent U.S. military intervention in Venezuela—a violation of international norms—highlights the risks of our strategic trap. The lesson for Canada is clear: the greatest threat to a stable trading environment often comes not from across the Pacific, but from a White House willing to shred the rulebook. Our farmers and exporters are already paying the price for this alignment.

Critics rightly point to national security as a paramount concern. These concerns demand nuance. The need to protect critical infrastructure is legitimate, but the current approach is flawed. Blanket decoupling is counterproductive, causing self-harm without proportionately enhancing security. Canada already has robust tools, like the strengthened Investment Canada Act, to scrutinize risks case by case. Our security posture must be precise, focusing on tangible threats, not casting suspicion over all commerce. We can maintain vital alliances while pursuing a trade agenda calibrated to Canadian interests—a balance other allies achieve.

The path forward on China is not capitulation, but a clear-eyed recalibration toward strategic maturity—a "turning point," as Carney described it after meeting President Xi Jinping in October 2025.

First, de-escalation is urgent. Ottawa must act on the available off-ramp: a mutual rollback of tariffs on EVs and key agricultural goods, mirroring Australia's successful stabilization with Beijing. This is pragmatic damage control, offering immediate relief to our farming and resource sectors.

Second, we must rebuild through targeted engagement. The government should pursue co-operation in areas of aligned interest: clean energy standards, secure critical mineral supply chains, and concrete climate co-operation. Such incremental wins build confidence and prove engagement yields mutual benefits.

Ultimately, this pragmatic course requires the immediate retirement of the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy. It must be replaced with a genuinely Canadian framework that acknowledges the multifaceted relationship with China, and unapologetically prioritizes the resilience of the Canadian economy and the well-being of Canadian workers.

The 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy is a relic of an era where Canada blindly outsourced its foreign policy to Washington. That era is over. Carney's visit to Beijing signals that Canada will assert its sovereignty by engaging globally.

True 21st-century sovereignty requires the courage to defend the national interest by disentangling it from the volatile unilateralism of allies. For Canada, that means building economic resilience by responsibly engaging Asia's indispensable engine. We must do so with clarity, firm boundaries, and a focus on Canadian prosperity. Our communities have paid too high a price for confusion. The moment for a sovereign, pragmatic pivot is now.

Wenran Jiang—the founding director of the China Institute, and Mactaggart Research Chair emeritus at the University of Alberta—is an adviser at the Institute for Peace & Diplomacy.

The Hill Times

COMMENT

Federal environmental impact assessments are in even more jeopardy

The federal environment assessment tool was always limited, with powerful enemies fighting back well before the Carney government wanted to curtail its usage.

Ken Rubin

Opinion



OTTAWA—It's not just the previous government's promise to plant two billion trees that is going away under Prime Minister Mark Carney's watch.

It's also the whole idea of the environment as a priority addressed by caps, deadlines, the quashing of misleading green washing pitches, ending more oil pipelines, and—where possible—full-scale federal impact assessments carried out before projects are undertaken.

Significantly reducing carbon emissions, tackling growing pollution and toxicology, and fighting climate change are yesterday's priorities.

The reality I explore here is that the federal environment assessment tool—whose main goal was never to cancel projects, but to mitigate adverse impacts—was always limited, with powerful enemies fighting back well before the Carney government wanted to curtail its usage.

The pressure to do away with any federal environment assessments has been there for a long time.

I saw that in late 1996, when powerful forces led to the controversial cancellation of environment assessments involving Canadian technology being used in overseas projects.

Back then, the last thing the nuclear industry, the Chrétien government, and others wanted was a thorough, full assessment of the pending sale of Candu reactors to China.

After a delay of several months, I obtained a November 1996 consultant mini-assessment report that advised the then-External Affairs Department to pause



Environment Minister Julie Dabrusin is responsible for the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. To date, there have been more than 40 assessments of designated projects, with most taking years to do, writes Ken Rubin. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

signing a nuclear reactor agreement with Chinese authorities because not enough scientific data was provided to determine the environmental impact of the construction of two Qinshan Candu nuclear reactors near Shanghai. The consultants, Marbek Resource Consultant Ltd., were given less than a week to prepare their report and check data.

Instead, as an August 1997 *Globe and Mail* front-page story indicated, the Chrétien government choose to ignore this advice, and a week later, signed a contract with the Chinese to construct the two reactors.

The government also waived requirements under the then-Canadian Environment Assessment Act to do full-scale impact assessments to see whether this or other overseas projects complied with Canadian environmental standards.

As a result, for instance, many Canadian overseas mining projects—whose detrimental environmental impacts are still making the news and facing opposition—escaped such assessments.

As for those two China-based Candu nuclear reactors, almost 30 years later, AtkinsRéalis (formerly SNC-Lavalin) through its subsidiary, Candu Energy Inc., has started to refurbish them to extend their life for another 30 years in an agreement with Third Qinshan Nuclear Power Company Limited.

This time around, there is no requirement for Canadian authorities to first look at such refurbishment plans through the lens of a domestic environmental review.

Jumping forward, external pressures grew to diminish domestic assessments. The 2019 Impact Assessment Act required economic, social, as well as environmental issues to be considered by the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC). And assessments only applied in the case of certain designated large-scale projects with no requirement to do assessments for smaller projects.

I faced obstacles and many redactions when I tried to find out more using access legislation on behalf of several environmental groups on how some large-scale projects came to be on a designated list, and other smaller projects were not.

Why, for instance, were not all oil and gas developments, coal mines, and cement plants—as high emitters of carbon gas—not on the list to undergo impact assessment reviews, or why were smaller nuclear reactors exempted from assessment reviews?

Feeling frustrated with limited responses, these environment groups filed a petition with the auditor general for answers in 2021. But agencies responding did not provide the scientific evi-

dence—if there ever was any—for project designations.

To date, there have been more than 40 assessments of designated projects, with most taking years to do, and many being for mining projects.

It may come as a surprise that only two full-scale comprehensive assessments have been completed, both for British Columbia liquefied natural gas projects.

However, one thing that IAAC has done fairly well is to engage the public, allowing space for Indigenous voices, and making its work largely transparent by creating a public registry on these projects.

These efforts though did not sit well with some parties, like the Alberta and Saskatchewan governments, and some industries that have campaigned for several years to end such engagement and federal assessments.

They much prefer reliance on weaker provincial environment assessments processes, if anything. Some, like the federal Conservatives and then-Alberta premier Jason Kenney, labelled the federal Impact Assessment Act the “No More Pipelines Act.”

In 2023, after challenges, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the act was unconstitutional in some parts, and could overreach into provincial jurisdiction. In response, the federal government amended the legislation in 2024 to have assessments going

forward only when projects had possible adverse affects that were within federal jurisdiction.

The Carney federal government has now agreed with many provinces that only one assessment process needs to be done, deferring to the provinces' lead.

This, for instance, has meant that Ottawa has agreed to wrap up its IAAC review for the Ring of Fire road by June 2026, and in its co-operation agreement with Ontario, IAAC is limited to providing consulting expertise and help in dealing with Indigenous engagement.

IAAC has also been issuing decisions saying that no comprehensive impact assessments need to be done—as is the case in Alberta—for a new power generation facility fuelled by natural gas.

Further, the Building Canada Act gives cabinet enormous powers on designating national projects. Under this legislation, there are fewer expectations of any thorough assessments—either provincial or federal—being needed for designated major projects, and any such work needs to be done within two years.

The question remains how governments can avoid opposition and litigation from environment and Indigenous groups looking for tougher environmental assessments and proper consultations.

So, with IAAC wanting to keep a low profile, it came as no surprise that its required five-year review report on the controversial issue of future project designations only surfaced months later—and only after my filing and getting it in recent response to an access-to-information request.

That report, finalized last February, indicated there was much polarization in each industrial sector, with environment, Indigenous, and other civil society groups wanting more projects included and better assessed, while industries like nuclear, electrical, and mining wanting the exact opposite: less coverage, fewer in-depth reviews, and fewer requirements.

But in the report, IAAC exempted their assessment of parties' positions, and which way any future changes would go. As well, all 32 recommendations were exempted as “policy advice.”

So much for an independent agency striking forward and being transparent, though likely the recommendations were not too bold and could mean fewer designated project assessments being done.

Sadly, for far too long, Ottawa has been willing to weaken and rewrite Canadian environmental assessment rules to avoid offending industries, the provinces, and, at one point, China.

At a time of climate change, pushing forward projects without thorough environment assessments is not unexpected—but it is damaging to a healthy sustainable and protected environment.

The decision to have one fewer, or a weakened tool to try and protect the environment is very political, and, to some, earth shattering.

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The Hill Times

NEWS

‘A grain of salt’: unmasking Liberal floor-crossing talks carries potential risk for opposition MPs, say politicians

Although these kinds of revelations never tell the whole story, MPs are demonstrating they are open to being approached. But it also puts pressure back on opposition leaders who now know their MPs aren't happy, say former strategists.

BY IREM KOCA

Recent revelations that opposition MPs have been approached with—but ultimately rebuffed—attempts to lure them to Liberal benches may not be that helpful to their careers in the long term, say politicians.

Two-term NDP MP Lori Idlout (Nunavut) told the CBC she had been “asked to consider” joining the government party, both by the Liberals and some of her constituents, but said she decided she can't make that move “at this point.”

First-term Conservative MP Scott Anderson (Vernon–Lake Country–Monashee, B.C.) also said in a Jan. 5 social media post that he was approached by Liberals to cross the floor, but that he refused. Anderson said crossing the floor would have been a “betrayal of my constituents, a betrayal of the office to which I have been elected, and a betrayal of my own personal core beliefs.” He also expressed his support for his Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Battle River–Crowfoot, Alta.) ahead of the party's mandatory leadership review at the end of January.

Mélanie Richer, a former director of communications for the NDP, said revealing that they have been approached to join the ranks of the governing party, or that they've considered it, won't benefit those opposition MPs in the long run.

“If they're saying it, it is because the rumours going around about them are credible enough that they want to kind of put it to rest. So I appreciate why you would want to reassure the folks that voted for you that



you're staying with the party that they voted for,” she told *The Hill Times*.

Richer said that an opposition MP's credibility and ability to hold the government accountable comes under scrutiny when they are seen as “open” to being approached to join them.

While it's difficult to keep those conversations under wraps for too long, there is a real risk of leaks which could in some cases kill an entire plan with people involved getting cold feet, Richer said.

Tim Powers, a former adviser to Conservative leaders and chairman of Summa Strategies, said it could be surmised that there is some “activity either gently or more aggressively to solicit somebody's movement to another party,” but that those statements should be taken with a grain of salt as the public is not privy to all the details.

“I'm not saying there isn't truthfulness to them, but there's probably a truthfulness that reflects more favourably on the person issuing the statement,” he told *The Hill Times*.

While he would not speak to specific cases, Powers argued that MPs could be inclined to use this period to solidify their standing within their party or show loyalty to the leader.

“In the case of the Conservatives, it may mean that—were there to be a change of government—maybe that MP fares favourably,” he said.

“It's a great opportunity to kiss ass with your own leader and say, ‘You know what, sir or ma'am, I chose not to do this because I believe in you' ... Pucker up, as we would say, and kiss the butt.”

Powers also said he believes that MPs stating they are resist-

ing floor-crossing entreaties reflects more poorly on the opposition than it does on the government. He said it puts pressure back on Poilievre and perhaps the NDP “because it means people are at least opening themselves up enough to have a conversation that they're not happy.”

Two MPs, Chris d'Entremont (Acadie–Annapolis, N.S.) and Michael Ma (Markham–Unionville, Ont.), have left Poilievre's caucus over the last two months to join the government benches, bringing the Liberals closer to a majority in the House of Commons. With the Jan. 9 resignation of former deputy prime minister Chrystia Freeland, the Liberals are now at 170 seats, and need two more MPs to form a majority government. Another Conservative MP, Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, Alta.), announced in November his intention to resign in the spring, and has not voted in Parliament since.

Lori Turnbull, a senior adviser at the Institute on Governance, argued that MPs volunteering the information that they have been approached could mean “all kinds of things.”

“It might be something that they want to play up because it draws attention to themselves. They don't have to tell anybody that. If an MP is approached by someone across the floor, they don't have to tell the media that. So the fact that they're choosing to do it indicates to me that they want people to know that, and perhaps they're trying to send a signal to the government that they're interested, because otherwise I don't know why they would do it.”

Turnbull argued that Idlout—who won her riding in April 2025 with 77 more votes than her Lib-



NDP MP Lori Idlout, left, and Conservative MP Scott Anderson have both recently said they have been approached by Liberals to join the party, but that they have refused. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade and courtesy of Facebook

eral opponent—“might be trying to send out a trial balloon, test the water, see if the government is interested.”

“The government is only going to come to people who they think might be open to it... So they're not going to ask [Conservative MP] Michelle Rempel Garner if she wants to join the Liberals. They're not going to ask somebody who would make a big scene out of it, and use it as a Conservative game,” Turnbull said.

Meanwhile, Anderson is “trying to ingratiate himself to Poilievre and the leadership of the party” with his statement and to show that he's loyal to his leader, Turnbull said. Given the two floor-crossings have been from the Conservatives, it is smart politics for them to have a counter narrative showcasing support for Poilievre, she added.

‘It's almost a little bit glib’

When asked how the Liberals' have been managing this period so far, Richer said there is a “little bit of arrogance with the government” that leads to some of their efforts being more transparent than others.

That attitude ties back to Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) management style, which is more that of a CEO rather than a prime minister, according to Richer. She argued that it reads as though Carney does not feel he needs to work with the opposition, which would mean none of the government's bills get passed and work gets stopped.

“It's almost like this forgetting that you do actually need to work with others to get stuff done. Some of that arrogance, I think, is

seeping into some of these leaks. Maybe, like, ‘Look how good we are. People want to join us.’ And it's almost a little bit glib, so I don't know if that's totally helpful,” Richer said.

“At this point the Liberals are not terribly concerned about preventing leaks ... I don't think they care,” Turnbull said, echoing that there's just as much risk to the potential floor-crossers as there is to the government.

Richer pointed to Carney's year-end interview with the CBC in which he said there is “a spectrum of MPs” attracted by the Liberal policies as opposed to the government trying to poach MPs to secure a majority. She said that's when observers like herself knew he was hinting at an NDP MP.

“And at that point, then you're looking around and you're saying, ‘who do I need to speak to? Who do I need to get in front of to make sure that this doesn't happen?’ So it's almost like maybe [Idlout] was open to it, and that killed it at that point. So if you were looking for that to be successful, being too glib was maybe not a good thing. But again, it's hard to say without having all the details from the background conversations,” she said.

Richer said Carney's framing of the recent floor-crossings is tapping into Canadians' general sentiment of wanting their MPs in Ottawa to work together.

“It's another play of ‘People want to help us get our stuff done,’ instead of saying, ‘We are doing those backroom deals and trying to get people to come,’ because they know that, communication-wise, the former is better than the latter,” she said.

Powers defined the period of floor-crossing as a mixture of some “forethought, a lot of accident, and circumstance” as opposed to a strategic and well-thought out process.

“An orchestrated strategy is hard to do given the complexities—particularly the emotional complexities—that come with floor crossing,” he said.

“It's a bit like we're in the middle of winter. Sometimes there's a big snowfall coming, sometimes it's just a snow job.”

Powers argued that what constitutes an “approach” to attract an opposition MP to join the government benches is case dependent.

“Does somebody having a conversation over a cup of coffee constitute an approach? In one person's mind, maybe it does; in another, it doesn't,” he said, explaining that personal relationships between MPs from different parties, or connections formed through mutual parliamentary work come into play.

Turnbull noted that how crossing the floor could affect a politician's career is dependent on how the balance is struck.

“When somebody crosses the floor, it's never entirely beneficial. There's always a cost,” she said, explaining that people—from voters to campaigners who worked with those MPs in question—may feel a sense of betrayal when they switch sides.

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Climate advisers ask feds to put Net-Zero Advisory Body on ‘pause,’ say they can’t fulfill mandate in ‘skeleton state’

Following the December resignation of two members, the remaining four say they need six new appointees, clarity around their budget, and a pause of activities after limited direction from the government ‘significantly reduced’ the scope of their work.

BY ELEANOR WAND

The Net-Zero Advisory Body is asking Environment Minister Julie Dabrusin to publicly pause the advisory group until she appoints six new members and agrees to regular meetings, part of an effort to get the body “functional” again, says Karen Ross, one of only four remaining members.

“We cannot continue in a state in which we are, functionally and operationally, unable to fulfill our mandate,” Ross told *The Hill Times* on Jan. 8, about a month after two members resigned, saying the government has not been consulting with the Net-Zero Advisory Body (NZAB).

Ross said there have since been conversations with Dabrusin (Toronto-Danforth, Ont.) about expectations to get the body on track. Earlier this week, members sent a draft of those requests to the minister and departmental officials, asking for a meeting to discuss.

“We are hoping to agree that the NZAB is essentially on pause,” meaning there’s recognition it “cannot currently fulfill its legislative mandate,” said Ross, who has been a member since June 2023, and is also the executive director of Farmers For Climate Solutions.

The body is requesting the government make a public announcement to that effect.

The NZAB was reduced to only four members this past December after two of the government’s top climate advisers—including the former chair—stepped down. Their resignations came after Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) signed a memorandum of understanding



The only direction Environment Minister Julie Dabrusin has given the advisory body in the months after April’s federal election was to work on an annual report, which covers activities from the year before the election, according to current and former members. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

(MOU) with Alberta Premier Danielle Smith outlining a pathway to a potential pipeline project running from Alberta’s oil patch to British Columbia’s coastline.

In addition, previous members whose terms have expired have not been reappointed or replaced.

Ross said the NZAB is calling for six new appointments to bring their number up to 10, including the naming of co-chairs. They are also requesting a review of NZAB’s structure and function, looking at similar climate council structures around the world; clarity on the budget; a standing meeting with the environment minister every two months; and a pause of the body until such expectations are put in effect.

Ross said it’s important for the announcement to be public so Canadians can understand where things stand with the climate advisory group as members face questions.

“It would be good to make it official that right now we just cannot fulfill our role in our existing kind of skeleton state.”

The NZAB, established in 2021 with 14 members, is an independent group of experts that provides advice to the environment minister on reaching Canada’s goal of net-zero emissions by 2050—something the government is legally required to do under the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act. The act outlines the body’s legislative mandate, and requires annual reports be submitted to the minister on its “advice and activities.”

The NZAB submitted its last annual report to Dabrusin in December, covering activities from the year prior to the April 28, 2025, election. The report is

expected to be released publicly in the coming week, as the act requires it be made public within 30 days of submission. Dabrusin must also respond to the advice in the report within 120 days.

But Ross said working on the annual report is the only direction the body has received from Dabrusin since last April’s election, which “significantly reduced” the scope of the then-nine-member group’s work.

The NZAB “would have preferred to advance in our legislative mandate,” Ross said, “which is to do research and engagement, communications around Canada’s plans [and] progress, providing accountability to the government on net-zero.”

“Our staff was only able to work on summarizing the work from ... the shortened year previous to the election.”

‘Get a politician to do it,’ says former NZAB chair

Simon Donner, NZAB’s former chair who resigned in December, told *The Hill Times* that the only instruction he received as the group’s liaison to the minister’s office was a letter asking the body to reconvene and complete the report.

But he said the Alberta energy deal “made it clear” the report was “going to end up being performative.”

“We had a briefing we were about to do with the minister on the annual report, and I just didn’t feel comfortable leading it,” Donner told *The Hill Times* in a Jan. 8 interview. “And that’s why I felt like I had to resign.”

Donner was the sole chair at the time, after the body’s former

co-chair, Sarah Houde, was not replaced after she resigned earlier last year.

Dabrusin’s office told Donner he would be informed of the government’s decision making, he said, but instead, Donner explained he was often learning about policy developments from the media or getting a day’s warning ahead of decisions.

“It was putting me in the position that I felt like ... I couldn’t be honest with my assessment publicly about what was being done because I was being told, ‘no, no, don’t worry. You’ll have a chance to meet with us and tell us what’s going on,’” he said.

“And I was thrown into this position where, ‘well, hold on a second, I don’t represent the government. I’m not going to defend you on this.’”

Ultimately, Donner said, his decision to resign came down to integrity.

“I was happy to chair an advisory body where [the government] listened and considered our advice, but ultimately rejected it because they recognize nobody elected us,” he said. “But I was not willing to be part of a process that was [a] performance.”

“Because if you want that, don’t ask a scientist to run the body. Get a politician to do it.”

Body ‘at no point’ consulted on recent climate policies

Catherine Abreu, the other member who quit in December, agreed the NZAB’s recommendations would be an improvement, but added there should also be “principles put in place” about who can be a member and what their role is. While the act governing the body has advice about the expertise needed, it doesn’t outline what role people should be playing and who can be selected.

She said those appointed have “privileged access to the government,” and suggested it would be better to “avoid a situation” where a member is also speaking to the government through a different role and offering “contradictory messages.”

When recommending a member to the NZAB, the minister must consider their expertise and knowledge of climate change science; Indigenous knowledge; “relevant” physical and social science, including economics; climate change and climate policy at the national, subnational, and international levels; energy supply and demand; and relevant

technologies, reads The Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act.

Ross said Dabrusin has “showed every indication that she is committed to returning to a functional NZAB and understands the value of the independent body of expert advisers.”

Keean Nembhard, Dabrusin’s press secretary, said in a statement the minister “deeply appreciates the independent advice offered by NZAB,” and “looks forward to responding to their recommendations in 2026.”

The statement did not answer *The Hill Times*’ question about when new members and co-chairs would be appointed.

When asked about her decision to resign, Abreu said she felt “the principles and the requirements” of the legislation were not being respected.

She explained that “at no point” were the NZAB or Canadians consulted on recent federal climate policies, pointing to the MOU, the government’s Climate Competitiveness Strategy released in Budget 2025, and Bill C-5.

“It certainly has been the spirit of this legislation in the five years that it’s existed for the government to call on the Net-Zero Advisory Body to give it advice on major decisions relating to climate,” she said.

Previously, it was consulted on the oil and gas emission cap—which Carney has now ditched—and pathways to closing the cap on the 2030 emission targets, she explained.

The feds’ 2025 progress report on the 2030 emissions-reduction plan found that Canada is off-track for meeting its 2030 and 2035 emissions targets—a reality that had previously been forecast by the Canadian Climate Institute.

Member stayed to press for change in the ‘long run’

Donner also called the requests “reasonable,” saying that it’s “sad” that it took resigning to make changes. He explained that he’d been having conversations for months before he left about the state of the NZAB.

“If you have a ... set of advisers that have official government appointments, but they are outsiders with day jobs, they have the freedom to be frank with the government about things in a way that others just are unable to do,” he said.

He also agreed a pause is likely needed so the government can develop a clear system and mandate, as well as appoint enough members.

“We had something like that,” he said. “It did work, but it’s just been allowed to decay.”

As for whether Ross reconsidered her involvement, she said she stayed to make changes.

“I thought this brought probably the most powerful moment to create important changes to the NZAB, to make it impactful in the long run, and if I could leave that legacy during my term ... I think that contribution is incredibly important to Canada’s commitment to net-zero.”

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NEWS



Chrystia Freeland, centre, at the March 2025 Liberal leadership announcement, said she would vacate her Toronto seat on Jan. 9, after being appointed as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's economic development adviser. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Freeland departs Ottawa as 'objectively' one of Canada's most influential cabinet ministers: politicians

A longtime MP who saw the rise, fall, and resurrection of the Liberal Party, Chrystia Freeland is praised for a record of notable accomplishments as she departs Ottawa after more than a decade in politics.

BY MARLO GLASS

Longtime Liberal MP Chrystia Freeland, a political heavy hitter who was once considered heir apparent to then-prime minister Justin Trudeau—and the knife-wielder whose bombshell cabinet resignation was the final nail in his political coffin—leaves behind a storied tenure as she departs Ottawa after more than a decade in federal politics.

"I think she single-handedly ended her boss's career, and paved the way for the Liberals to be completely resuscitated," Andrew Perez, a principal at Perez Strategies and a Liberal commentator, said in an interview.

Last week, Freeland announced she would vacate her Toronto seat



Chrystia Freeland, left, embraces then-prime minister Justin Trudeau at a January 2017 cabinet shuffle where she became foreign affairs minister, and retained the Canada-U.S. relations file. *The Hill Times* photograph by Jake Wright

of University-Rosedale, Ont., on Jan. 9, after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced he had appointed Freeland to be an economic development adviser to the country.

"It has been an immense honour to serve my constituents and all Canadians in Parliament since 2013," Freeland said in a social media post on Jan. 7.

"Going forward, I will continue to support and help build Canada in every way I can, while championing the brave fight of the people of Ukraine, a cause I have been committed to my entire life."

First elected in a 2013 byelection, Freeland's reputation during the Trudeau years was something of an all-around cabinet minister, holding roles overseeing international trade, foreign affairs, and intergovernmental affairs

between 2015 and 2019. After the Liberals were re-elected in 2019, Freeland became deputy prime minister, and in August 2020 finance minister. Her shocking resignation in December 2024 ultimately led to Trudeau stepping down in early 2025.

While her bid for Liberal leader in the March 2025 contest proved fruitless, Freeland nevertheless held files in Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) cabinet as minister of transport and internal trade, before resigning again—this time in a less dramatic fashion—in September 2025. Carney then named her Canada's envoy to Ukraine.

Perez said he was inspired to volunteer for Freeland's 2013 byelection campaign after he read her 2012 book, *Plutocrats: The Rise of*

the New Global Super-Rich and the Fall of Everyone Else.

He described her as "someone who took a chance on the Liberal Party of Canada at its lowest moment when few were willing to do so."

"She's been on the receiving end of a lot of criticism, but people forget, she took a chance on this party," Perez said. "I think that is often lost on Canadians, and even Liberals."

Greg MacEachern, principal at KAN Strategies, said the Liberals' ability to attract Freeland as "such a high-profile candidate with such an interesting background" was a shot in the party's arm, and the start of the Liberals' path to the seismic 2015 third place to majority government victory.

Freeland's ascent through the ranks of the Liberal cabinet saw her steadily gain power and praise, particularly for her role in re-negotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 2018. But she also bore the brunt of criticism as finance minister and deputy prime minister during rocky economic times following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Freeland became synonymous with the Trudeau Liberals, and that proved to be a double-edged sword, Perez said.

"She became so closely associated with the Trudeau government and its failures, especially in the last two years of Trudeau's reign, that it was extremely difficult for her to be seen as a competitive leadership candidate," Perez said.

Dan Arnold, chief strategy officer at Pollara Insights and a former Liberal staffer, said Freeland is "objectively" one of the most influential cabinet ministers in Canadian history. He ranked her among the likes of Jim Flaherty and C.D. Howe, who similarly never nabbed the top job of prime minister.

"It's undeniable that she was at the epicentre of a lot of what happened in the Trudeau years," he said.

Arnold worked in the Prime Minister's Office during the NAFTA negotiations, and polling results showed Canadians had confidence in Freeland's negotiating skills, he said.

The NAFTA negotiations were "seen as a resounding win for Canada," Arnold said, "she rightly deserves a lot of credit for that."

Arnold said Freeland was even the voice of radio ads that ran in southern Ontario during the 2019 election, after polling results showed she was the best-known cabinet minister among Canadians.

But Freeland was also a "focal point of criticism" of the Trudeau era, Arnold said, "of maybe being too slow to respond to some of the challenges the country is facing, on inflation and housing."

He also suggested her dramatic resignation in December 2024 just as she was set to deliver a fall economic statement revealing a ballooning deficit—a sharp rebuke of Trudeau's fiscal policy—left a "sour aftertaste" in terms of Freeland's record, "even if it was the right thing to do."

"It maybe overshadows some of the other things she was able to do during her time there," he said.

James Cudmore, a former Liberal chief of staff, said Freeland was on the receiving end of sexist remarks from Harper-era Conservatives who called her "shrill" before the Liberals came to power.

"She had to fight this effort undertaken by her political opponents to define her as being kind of unserious, and using those gendered words," said Cudmore, now vice-president of strategic communications at Bluesky Strategy Group. "Which was really unfair because it turns out she's the smartest person in the room."

Cudmore counted the \$10-per-day childcare program as something that wouldn't have happened without Freeland's buy-in as finance minister.

"She was sort of central to that," he said, "and I think that also tells us a story about how important it is to have women in politics."

MacEachern previously described Freeland as the Trudeau cabinet's Swiss Army knife for her many roles—a position that has largely shifted to Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, N.B.) in recent years, he noted.

"The last five years have not been as positive for Freeland's career as, say, the previous times," he said, noting her tenure as finance minister during a period of high inflation and that she "often seemed to struggle to connect and communicate with average Canadians."

Freeland caught flak in 2022 for a comment about cancelling her family's Disney+ subscription, saying "I need to take exactly the same approach with the federal government's finances, because that's the money of Canadians," with the Canadian Press reporting she received thousands of negative emails about the clip.

Freeland's last days in Ottawa, too, were mired in controversy, as Zelenskyy announced she would be an adviser to Ukraine before she resigned her seat as an MP. She's also poised to lead the Rhodes Trust for the University of Oxford, and is expected to start that role this summer.

Freeland, though, will always be a part of Canadian history, MacEachern said, and is "a huge contributor to Canada, and we owe her a debt of gratitude for that."

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Senate committee casts doubt on feds' ability to move on Africa strategy without new funds, calls for action plan

The Africa strategy was released last March without any new funding or timelines attached. In the months since its release, the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee still has questions about how that's viable.

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raising concerns over the lack of resources that came with it.

The much-delayed Africa strategy was released in March 2025 at the tail end of the tenure of then-prime minister Justin Trudeau.

Work on the plan began in 2022, and when it was revealed, it came with no new funding, nor were there any associated timelines.

The Senate Foreign Affairs Committee's Dec. 11, 2025, report notes that it is "concerned about the lack of new funding associated with the strategy," contrasting it with the \$2.3-billion Indo-Pacific strategy.

Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) Cheryl Urban, assistant deputy minister for the Africa branch, told the committee last October that the strategy was "drafted in a way in which it can be implemented using the existing resources that we have."

The report notes that the committee "questions whether the government can actualize the strategy without new funding."

"It bears underlining that Canada's Africa Strategy was not mentioned once in the federal government's 2025 budget. In fact, there were no references to Africa at all in the budget," the report details.

The Senate committee is chaired by Independent Senator Peter Boehm (Ontario), with Progressive Senator Peter Harder (Ontario) serving as deputy chair. Both members of the Red Chamber are former senior officials in Canada's foreign service.

The committee's report recommends that the government fix the strategy's vagueness regarding implementation by developing a "detailed and concrete



Independent Senator Peter Boehm, left, chairs the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, with Progressive Senator Peter Harder serving as deputy chair. Both members of the Red Chamber are former senior officials in Canada's foreign ministry. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

action plan with measurable objectives, timelines, and dedicated resources." That recommendation includes setting up an annual report on the "status and outcomes" associated with the strategy.

"While Canada's Africa Strategy represents an important milestone, the document is short on specifics about measurable objectives, timeframes and resources," the committee report notes.

Urban told the committee that the strategy is "high level," and that there is a need to "develop plans at a much more concrete level that are focused on specific countries and specific sectors to achieve very concrete objectives."

Is Africa a priority?

Reimagining Canada's engagement with Africa took many shapes before the finished document was released last year.

It was initially billed as a strategy, before being called a framework, then it was detailed as an approach, before Canada's foreign ministry was unwilling to define it altogether.

Liberal MP Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Ont.), a veteran parliamentary secretary to successive foreign affairs ministers, helped develop the strategy since its infancy.

He told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in December that the strategy wasn't "every-

thing I pushed for," and encouraged efforts to "keep pushing for its actualization in government policy."

The House committee released a report in November 2024 that called on the still-pending strategy to have "strategic objectives," as well as "short- and long-term benchmarks for success."

Since Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) came to power, there have been questions about the government's commitments to Africa amid the pivot of attention to dealing with the fallout of the disintegrating relationship with the United States.

At the G20 in South Africa, Carney told reporters that Africa wasn't among its top priorities as he focused on regions with the "most immediate return" on economic opportunities.

"Africa is part [of the work]. Is it the first thing we work on in terms of prioritization? No ... because we have a responsibility to have that highest return," he said on Nov. 23, 2025.

During a meeting of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee on Nov. 27, 2025, Progressive Senator Amina Gerba (Rigaud, Que.) asked Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.) about the "contradiction" of releasing an Africa strategy, but later proclaiming it wasn't a top priority.

Anand remarked that "Africa is very important to us."

"The prime minister has made it clear that Africa is a priority for the government. Strengthening our relationship across the continent is one of the many items on our ambitious trade agenda," she said.

Limited personnel, expertise

Africa is where Canada has the shallowest diplomatic presence, with 22 embassies and high commissions across 54 countries.

During its study, the committee was told that Canada's presence on the continent is "limited by a lack of personnel," according to the report.

Carleton University professor David Hornsby noted that Canada's permanent observer mission to the African Union is staffed with only three officials.

Carney's election platform included a commitment to boost Canada's diplomatic presence abroad. At the same time, the foreign ministry—like nearly all government departments—is facing sizable budget cuts.

The report notes that the committee wants to see an increase in Canadian expertise on Africa.

"The committee heard that Canada lacks a depth of knowledge within GAC and across government with regard to Africa," it reads.

The Senate Foreign Affairs Committee had previously highlighted the "erosion" of expertise

in GAC's geographic branches in a 2023 report on the foreign service.

The committee is recommending that all Canadian diplomats have access to training courses on Africa, as well as the ability to serve successive postings abroad in Africa.

As part of the release of the Africa strategy, the government created two special envoy positions, both of which are staffed by sitting heads of mission.

Canada's observer to the African Union Ben Marc Diendéré was made special envoy to Africa, and Canadian Ambassador to Senegal Marcel Lebleu was made special envoy for the Sahel.

"The government has provided little information about the mandates and objectives of the two envoys. The committee encourages the government to provide more information on the respective roles and priorities of the special envoys and ensure that they have the resources necessary to fulfil their objectives," the report notes.

Africa is 'too important' for Canada to ignore: expert

University of the Fraser Valley professor Edward Akuffo, an expert on Canada's engagement with Africa, told *The Hill Times* that the Senate report combined with that of the House of Commons shows that the African continent is "too important" for Canada to ignore.

Akuffo, who appeared before the Senate during its study, told the committee that Canada is "at least two decades behind when it comes to broadening and deepening its relationship with the African continent," and that without a deeper engagement, it risks being a "peripheral" voice in Africa.

"Canada must see Africa for what it is and not as a place where we can just show up and do a little bit of charity," he said in an interview, remarking that too often it is viewed as a place of violent conflicts as opposed one of existing economic opportunities.

He said the prioritization of Africa has to start with Carney, adding that the prime minister's G20 remarks indicate that Canada won't be investing the additional resources needed to adequately engage with the continent and to implement the strategy.

"The launch of the strategy has only scratched the structural challenges of Canadian foreign policy on the African continent," Akuffo said. "It hasn't dealt with the real issues here."

Along with the lack of funding, challenges also include a lack of engagement from the Prime Minister's Office, he said, noting that Carney has had limited travel in Africa and didn't travel outside of South Africa in his lone trip to the continent.

"This is the greatest signal here to show the extent to which the Canadian government under Mr. Carney sees the African continent," Akuffo said.

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NEWS

Interpreter dilemma: pushback continues against changes to federal exam, freelance contract terms

As of last March, 84 freelance interpreters were covering Parliament Hill. Only 37 such bids were received by the first deadline for submissions under its new standing offer.

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While the changes on both counts have gone ahead, they're expected to be a topic of discussion at the House Board of Internal Economy (BOIE) when it holds its first meeting of the year in February, with Bloc Whip and BOIE member Yves Perron (Berthier-Maskinongé, Que.) having called for Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement Minister Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Que.) to hit the brakes and undo both reforms.

The federal Translation Bureau falls under the umbrella of Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), which Lightbound oversees.

Most recently, in December, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) Canada and the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE) raised red flags over the bureau's decision to change oversight of its accreditation exam, which both groups say has lowered the bar in a bid to boost interpretation capacity on the Hill. AIIC-Canada is an industry association whose membership includes Hill interpreters, while CAPE is the union that represents staff interpreters with the Translation Bureau.

Previously, exam candidates were assessed by a four-member jury made up of accredited staff interpreters, who together decided whether candidates passed or failed.

According to the AIIC and CAPE, with the most recent exam held on Nov. 7, 2025, the bureau has introduced an external juror to the process who is not a bureau-accredited interpreter, and has been given 50-per-cent weight in decision-making, with any ties broken by a Translation Bureau executive.

PSPC has disputed AIIC and CAPE's characterization of

weight in decision making, and said "the final pass-or-fail decision" on accreditation "was, and will always remain, the responsibility of the Translation Bureau."

"By giving decisive authority to someone who is not accredited for parliamentary work, the Translation Bureau is disregarding its own internal expertise, lowering the bar, and weakening the very standards that protect official languages in this country, and that will disproportionately impact French-speaking Canadians," reads a statement from CAPE vice-president Antoine Hersberger, calling for the bureau to "immediately reinstate the previous committee composition and process" and "restart the current accreditation process on this basis."

Speaking with *The Hill Times* last week, AIIC-Canada spokesperson Nicole Gagnon, an accredited freelance interpreter who has previously covered Parliament Hill, said the change is one of a number of "shortcuts" being taken by the bureau in its scramble to boost capacity.

"Parliamentary work does not compare to any other kind of [interpretation] work, so how can an examiner who does not hold accreditation grant accreditation to others?" asked Gagnon.

Noting the disproportionate weight given to the external juror's input, Gagnon called the change "really egregious." She said her association learned of it "at the last minute," and was not consulted in advance.

"The [Translation Bureau's] answer to its capacity issues is one of shortcuts, deception, and quantity over quality," said Gagnon.

Exam results shared with *The Hill Times* by PSPC on Jan. 7 indicate that 60 candidates sat the test overall, including six individuals already on staff with the bureau (who were not already accredited interpreters). Of the 54 external candidates, seven passed, according to the department. As of Jan. 7, none had—at least yet—been hired as bureau interpreters.

The Hill Times understands that three of the six internal candidates also passed the exam. That works out to an overall total pass rate of roughly 16.7 per cent—or almost 13 per cent looking just at external candidates.

According to a Dec. 23 Translation Bureau statement regarding the change, only 22 of the 194 external candidates who have sat the accreditation exam since 2022 have passed—a success rate of

roughly 11 per cent. The bureau said the November exam "was based on the same exacting evaluation criteria as previous years," and that "expectations for performance and quality remained unchanged."

"The only change was that, as part of our commitment to continuous improvement and inspired by best practices, we invited independent experts from the high-level conference interpretation community to provide an external perspective on the evaluations"—a new approach that it said allows the bureau "to gather diverse insights from recognized professionals, enhance transparency in the process and identify opportunities for improvement," with ultimate responsibility for pass-or-fail decisions still resting with the bureau.

In the exam prior to the Nov. 7 sitting, zero candidates were successful.

'Guarantee of quality': bureau CEO

Earlier last fall, the stringent nature of the accreditation exam to date was a proof-point for departmental reps responding to questions about how interpretation quality would be assured going forward in light of then-proposed changes to contract terms for freelancers.

On Oct. 24, PSPC officially published a new request for standing offers (RFSO) for freelance interpretation services on Parliament Hill. The new terms, among other things, shifted to prioritizing the "lowest evaluated price" in awarding contracts, and omitted the colour-coded Quality Index rating system previously used to categorize interpreters based on specified technique requirements. Previous open contract terms awarded assignments based on "best fit criteria" that first prioritized availability, followed by language profile, security clearance, professional domicile, and finally Quality Index rating.

Speaking with *The Hill Times* about the then-proposed changes last fall, Gagnon said prioritizing lowest bids would "encourage a race to the bottom," make experienced interpreters outliers, and overall discourage freelancers from re-offering their services, which could worsen the existing interpreter shortage on the Hill.

In addressing such concerns at the House Official Languages Committee on Oct. 7, Translation Bureau CEO Jean-François

Lymburner said he didn't "entirely agree that only the lowest bidder would be selected" under the then-proposed new process as successful interpreters would still also have to be accredited and attain security clearance. He highlighted the bureau's accreditation exam as a "guarantee of quality," and described it as "one of the most rigorous in the world."

Despite those concerns, the new RFSO went ahead. The bureau implemented a staggered deadline for individuals to make their bids, with the first deadline—open to existing accredited interpreters—on Nov. 24. The second deadline, for which individuals who passed the most recent exam are eligible, is Jan. 16.

A total of 37 individuals submitted bids for freelance parliamentary and high-level conference interpretation services as of the first deadline.

By comparison, in March 2025, the bureau told *The Hill Times* that—at the time—it had 61 staff interpreters, and 84 freelance interpreters "with an open contract to provide official language interpretation to Parliament."

While the second deadline has not yet passed, the 37 bids so far represent an almost 56-per-cent drop in freelance capacity.

Gagnon said that sign-up rate aligns with AIIC-Canada's previous expectations that a "critical mass of people" would not bid under the new RFSO terms.

The new RFSO was a subject of discussion at the BOIE last fall, with Perron in particular raising concerns over the potential impact on interpretation services, which he noted are particularly essential for francophone MPs given the predominant use of English in Parliament.

In a Dec. 2 letter from Perron to Lightbound, the Bloc Whip, in French, expressed his astonishment at the changes made to the accreditation exam process, saying that while the change was seen as aimed at increasing the success rate to alleviate the interpreter shortage, it would do so "at the expense of quality."

Perron has urged Lightbound to cancel the changes to both the accreditation and contract tendering processes.

Bloc staff confirmed last week that Perron has yet to receive a response from the minister, and that he intends to raise the matter at the BOIE again next it meets on Feb. 12.

Contacted by *The Hill Times*, Lightbound's office deferred to the department's response.

Interpretation service capacity dwindled in the wake of COVID-19 and the introduction of hybrid proceedings. Already faced with shortfall concerns—with rates of new graduates falling short of anticipated retirements—virtual proceedings (as constituted post-COVID) have presented increased risks to interpreters' health and safety, and shorter shifts, with more individuals assigned per shift, were among the measures introduced to try to protect the essential workforce.

While disruptions to regular committee meetings have decreased of late, capacity shortfalls continue, and interpretation services remain unavailable for some bodies—like regional caucus groups—that previously received such support.

As a result, the bureau has been under pressure from frustrated parliamentarians.

In a bid to boost the pool of new grads, the Translation Bureau has in recent years reached out to Canadian universities to try to increase the number of interpretation programs being offered. In October 2024, it announced a partnership with Laval University to create a "graduate microprogram in interpretation," and last February announced a second partnership with the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières to create a "specialized graduate diploma in conference interpretation." As part of both partnerships, the bureau said graduates would be eligible to sit the federal accreditation exam.

Gagnon described this decision as another "shortcut" being taken. Only individuals who hold a master's degree in conference interpreting are eligible to be hired as staff interpreters, and only York University's Glendon College and the University of Ottawa offer such programs.

Overall, Gagnon said she hopes parliamentarians "see through this charade," and hold the bureau and PSPC "to account" when Parliament returns later this month. She called for Lightbound to direct his department to "set aside" the "flawed" new procurement process and "start over," and in the meantime, extend the previous open contract "for as long as it takes for them to get it right."

Asked about the pressure coming from MPs, Gagnon said they "can't have it both ways."

"They can't say that they believe in our safety and security at work because of all the incidents we've suffered over recent years since Parliament became hybrid, and at the same time say, 'well, get us more people,'" said Gagnon.

"The association has said all along that there is no viable solution to address the shortage in the short term ... that the government had to invest in university training and scholarships, and that in the meantime, it should protect the existing pool of interpreters. So the government finally did get the message with the new training initiatives ... but it's still looking for shortcuts."

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‘Nothing revolutionary’: \$3M government ad leans on campaign comms after loosening partisan prohibitions

Trudeau-era limits for government ads were scrapped last year alongside the launch of a multimillion-dollar campaign drawing on the Grits’ 2025 ‘Build Strong’ election slogans.

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previous fiscal year—and another \$140.8-million in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, before falling to \$86.1-million in 2022-23.

While Liberals privately and publicly complained about the restrictions and Trudeau’s apparent aversion to government advertising for Liberal programs—particularly when it came to promoting the carbon tax rebate or, more recently, the national dental care program—last year, they allocated up to \$100,000 to purchase Facebook and Instagram ads for a campaign to promote the GST rebate, which began running in January 2025.

The latest *Nation of Builders* campaign, launched on Nov. 26, 2025, has appeared during televised broadcasts, including Sunday night football and other sporting events, as well as online and digital streaming platforms, and is expected to run through the rest of the winter “with possible future phases to be determined,” according to a statement from the Privy Council Office (PCO).

The ad, which features the Liberals’ oft-used “it’s time to build” slogan, as well as mentioning the St. Lawrence Seaway—which Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) frequently mentioned during the election as an example of Canada’s ability to “build big”—has been criticized by Conservatives for its apparent contradiction of the Liberals’ own rules against partisan fundraising.

While the PCO did not provide a breakdown of spending by platform, according to Meta’s Ad Library, the official page for Canada Business—which is operated by Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada—has spent roughly \$200,000 on similar video and static ads in the past 30 days, and more than \$60,000 since the beginning of January.



The government’s *Nation of Builders* ad campaign could have diminishing returns if key deals with the U.S. aren’t struck in short order, says Conservative Cole Hogan. Screenshot courtesy of X

After Canada Business and UNICEF Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada is the third-highest-spending page in the past month, having purchased more than \$90,000 on eight advertisements promoting dental care, the national school food program, the federal childcare program, and the new “Canada Strong Pass.”

Last week, Conservative strategist Cole Hogan accused the Liberals of “breaking their own rules,” pointing to the federal policy on “Communications and Federal Identity.”

Under Sec. 3, describing the “objectives and expected results” of government advertising, the policy requires government communications to be “non-partisan,” which it defines as “free from political party slogans, images and identifiers,” and does not use the primary colour of the governing party “in a dominant way,” and is “devoid of any name, voice or image of a minister, member of Parliament or Senator.”

During the 2015 election, the Liberals promised to tighten the rules surrounding government advertising in response to then-prime minister Stephen Harper’s Conservative government spending more than \$100-million on “economic action plan” advertising.

Since its implementation, the review process has required any government advertising campaign valued over \$250,000 to be reviewed by Ad Standards, a third-party industry group. As part of the review process, the government posts information on

all campaigns reviewed against the criteria and on any changes required by the process.

However, like many other Trudeau-era policies, Carney’s government has recently modified or removed several of the review criteria.

First reported by *The Toronto Star*, the advertising review criteria were updated late last year to remove both the requirement that ads “are not self-congratulatory or self-praising in nature,” and the prohibition on advertising any program that had not yet been approved by Parliament.

The new criteria also added an exception to the ban on political slogans if they are “later incorporated into the official name of a Government of Canada program, policy, or initiative.”

In a statement to *The Hill Times*, PCO spokesperson Pierre-Alain Bujold said the updated policy “maintains robust review processes that ensure campaigns present information clearly and factually, while improving review timelines.”

“As the Government of Canada responds to increased uncertainty in a more dangerous and divided world, it is critical to ensure that its communications and advertising can reach Canadians with timely, accurate, and essential information about government priorities and initiatives,” Bujold wrote. “Canada’s government has taken responsible measures to streamline and simplify this process as the previous policy was too slow and duplicative for the times, which can leave Canadians with delayed access to critical information.”

The *Nation of Builders* campaign “raises awareness of the Government of Canada’s actions to advance major infrastructure projects that will drive opportunities and support economic prosperity,” Bujold added.

While neither the ad content nor the level of spending is “revolutionary,” Singh said it would be an effective continuation of the campaign messaging that kept the Liberals in power, and would provide useful groundwork in case “things go south” under the current minority Parliament.

“I’m not putting a timeline on it, but if you run into an election earlier than expected, this is the message you would still need,” explained Singh. “As a new government, especially with a new leader, in a time like this, I’m not surprised they’re sticking with the message that kept them in power.”

Despite being an extension of the Liberals’ campaign slogans, Singh suggested that in the reverse circumstance, the Conservatives would and should be doing the same thing. Despite the feds having no major trade or economic breakthroughs to advertise, the messaging reflects what voters want to hear: continuity, stability, and an emphasis on “buy Canadian” themes, he said.

“The times are uncertain, and a deal has not been done [with the U.S.], so I think this is the message that people want,” Singh explained. “I’m not saying they’ve delivered, but this language is what got them elected less than a year ago; the situation hasn’t

changed, so why would their messaging?”

Liberal strategist Jamie Carroll told *The Hill Times* that while the government needs to remain cautious about perceived partisan overreach in its advertising, even with the policy changes, he hasn’t seen any examples that would approach an illegitimate use of government advertising.

“Any government is going to try and walk right up to that partisan line, but I haven’t seen anything that puts even a toe over it,” explained Carroll, a former Liberal Party national director. “It shouldn’t be any sort of surprise that the language that a party campaigns on when they win becomes the very same language that gets used by the government programs that were promised in that campaign.”

Hogan said that while he doesn’t believe the ad itself or the use of taxpayer funds would be particularly damning in the eyes of voters, “they [the Liberals] were against this for a decade and now they’re shifting gears.”

Beyond what he views as the hypocrisy of the change, Hogan said the Liberals were “smart” for launching the ad in November to run over the holidays, and added that the ad’s content or the policy it highlighted isn’t the issue.

“Even with the changes, you shouldn’t just take your own campaign slogan and put it into a widespread government-funded ad,” Hogan said.

Hogan added that the messaging may have diminishing returns if the Liberals continue to use the slogan in the next election, particularly if they haven’t secured a trade deal with the U.S. beforehand. However, even with a multi-million-dollar spend, Hogan said he doesn’t see the ad campaign as pre-election preparation, at least not currently.

This time last year, the official pages for both the Conservative Party and Leader Pierre Poilievre (Battle River–Crowfoot, Alta.) were spending upwards of \$50,000 each week, according to Meta’s Ad Library, compared to the Liberals’ \$20,000 spend in the first two weeks of 2025, before dipping into the single thousands in the last three weeks of February. Both parties also significantly increased their weekly and monthly spending totals in the months preceding the general election, with the Conservatives spending \$2.1-million in the first three months of 2025, compared to \$1.17-million from September through December 2024. The Liberals spent more than half of the Conservatives’ total with \$1.4-million from January through March, which amounts to more than three times their total for the previous four months when they spent \$405,207 on Facebook and Instagram ads.

“It’s still quiet days,” Hogan said, pointing to the level of advertising spending by all parties this time last year. “Things will start to ramp up ahead of the Conservative convention, and as we get closer to the spring, but we’re still a ways away from any indication of another election.”

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NEWS

Mexico takes firm stance on U.S. incursion in Venezuela as Canada walks cautious line ahead of CUSMA review

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum condemned the U.S. capture of Nicolás Maduro, while Prime Minister Mark Carney didn't directly mention the United States when responding to the raid.

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nations are taking contrasting positions in response to the capture of the Venezuelan president.

Nicolás Maduro and his wife were apprehended by U.S. military forces during an early morning raid on Jan. 3. The pair were brought to New York to stand on trial, but this has left an uncertain future for Venezuela as most senior officials of the Maduro government remain in place.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum opposed the U.S. action in a Jan. 5 statement.

"We categorically reject intervention in the internal affairs of other countries," she said. "We maintain that the American continent can and must move toward a new vision, one based on co-operation rather than intervention."

Following the military raid, Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) and Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.) released a series of statements that didn't directly condemn or support the action. Instead, they reiterated the Canadian position that Maduro was an illegitimate leader, and called on "all parties to respect international law." The initial Jan. 3 statements didn't directly refer to the U.S.

In his statement, Carney cited Canada's "long-standing commitment to upholding the rule of law, sovereignty, and human rights."

A subsequent statement posted to X by Anand on Jan. 6 didn't address the legality of the arrest, but instead noted that Canada is focused on "supporting the democratic will of the Venezuelan people as well as regional and hemispheric stability."

Former Canadian ambassador to Mexico Graeme Clark, who



Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand has been reluctant to address any alleged breaches of international law by the Trump administration. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

served as Ottawa's top diplomat in Mexico City from 2019 to 2024, said that the Carney government made a "very carefully calibrated" statement.

"This is in a fine Canadian tradition [of] seeing all 11 sides of an issue, and that comes in the statement that is perhaps a little more wordy and painful to read than the moral clarity that you get from other countries—but that's our reality, as well," he said.

He said that fits in line with Canada's overall strategy of not wanting to "wave a red flag in front of the bull."

"This is just part of the way that the Carney government wants to very carefully calibrate everything to do with the U.S., and to avoid some of the mistakes that we've made in the past," said Clark, citing the Ontario government's anti-tariff ad, after which Trump suspended trade talks with Canada.

"We want to avoid that," he said. "Moral clarity is fine—it makes you feel better. But the prime minister is in a world of *realpolitik* and he doesn't want to irritate Trump when there are so many more pressing issues for us to deal with, with Washington, such as the review of the CUSMA."

Both Canada and Mexico face Trump's trade pressure as the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) undergoes a mandated review later this year.

While Carney initially campaigned on standing up to the Trump administration—he remarked that the president's annexation rhetoric was not "idle threats" in his April 2025 election victory speech—his government has since adopted an increas-



Global Affairs Canada, which is headquartered in the Pearson Building, took its strongest stance defending sovereignty when highlighting threats toward Denmark and Greenland. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

ingly placating approach with the White House.

Clark said there are other conditions at play for Mexico, especially with the Trump administration now putting Cuba under the microscope, which could affect Mexican oil exports to the island nation.

Canada 'slow' to make 'common cause' with Americas: expert

Along with Mexico, many Latin American countries have also condemned the U.S. raid, including Brazil, Chile, Colombia, and Uruguay. But there wasn't universal rejection of the assault in the Americas as it was supported by some, such as Argentina and Ecuador.

Carney's response to Maduro's capture has been more trans-Atlantic than hemispheric, more closely mirroring that of the United Kingdom and the European Union (with the exception

of France and Spain), which also neither condemned nor supported the action.

University of British Columbia professor Maxwell Cameron, an expert on Latin American politics, said Carney's instinct is to align with Europe.

"Canadian government officials, Canadian civil society and thinkers are so slow to make common cause with the rest of the hemisphere," he said.

He said that it is clear that the U.S. National Security Strategy and the new "Trump corollary" of the Monroe Doctrine includes Canada. The Monroe Doctrine, which was put in place in 1823, put the Western Hemisphere under Washington's sphere of influence.

The strategy asserts that the U.S. is "pre-eminent in the Western Hemisphere as a condition of our security and prosperity—a condition that allows us to assert ourselves confidently where and when we need to in the region."

"The Americans are acting like a rogue power and we are on the front lines of the battle," Cameron said. "How long is it going to take us to wake up and recognize that our fundamental national security and national interests are threatened—and just as is the case for Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil."

He said Canada thinks it enjoys a different relationship with the U.S. compared to others in the Americas, and that there has been a calculation that it has little to gain by finding common cause with Latin American allies.

"Frankly, that's not the way we're seen anymore in the United States," said Cameron, remarking that Canada should be working with countries like Mexico and Brazil.

Views on intervention divides Canadian and Mexican response: former envoy

Former Canadian diplomat Patricia Fortier, who served as Canada's ambassador to Peru and has held a number of postings in Latin America, said that many countries in the Americas have "real concerns" over sovereignty due to their history of repeated colonizations.

"Mexico has a very strong [and] strict foreign policy because they lost a third of their country to the United States," she said. "Mexico has a very clear sense of what sovereignty means."

She remarked that Canada doesn't have a position of non-intervention as a backbone of its foreign policy as Mexico does.

"We've never had a non-interference line—we go to war," she said. "We're not an isolationist country in that sense. We do engage, and sometimes we engage militarily."

She pointed to the feds highlighting a long-standing lack of recognition of the legitimacy of Maduro government, which she noted is a key part of the difference in Canada's reaction to the Venezuela situation.

Global Affairs Canada has taken a stronger stance when advocating for Greenland and Denmark's sovereignty than the Latin American countries that have come under the threat of Trump.

"Canada supports Denmark's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Greenland," the department posted on X on Jan. 7.

Fortier said Canada's response to the U.S. raid was "muted" due to its view of the Maduro government despite the questionable legality of the action.

She said that there could be value in creating a joint front among countries in the Americas that have been threatened by Trump, but noted that there are open questions as to whether there would be willingness to do that at this moment.

But she said that a consensus view of how to react to Trump doesn't exist within the Americas.

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FEATURE

Colombia celebrates through music and art

The Hill Times photographs by Sam Garcia

1. Betty Leon Ossa, left, her husband Colombian Ambassador Carlos Arturo Morales López, Benedikta Sophie Marie A B Harris, and her husband Danish Ambassador Nikolaj Harris attend the Colombian Embassy's "Colombian Through Vinyl" event at Zibi House on Nov. 17. **2.** Morales López, left, delivers an award to Elizabeth Galindo for her 40 years of service as executive assistant to the ambassadors of the embassy, where she has served 15 different envoys. **3.** Jamaican High Commissioner Marsha Coore Lobban, left, Morales López, and Leon Ossa. **4.** Slovak Ambassador Viera Grigova, left, Greek Ambassador Ekaterini Dimakis, and Jordanian Ambassador Sabah Nizar Rashid Al Rafie. **5.** Hilder brando Osorno, a.k.a. Killabeatmaker, performs.

Taiwan draws a crowd on the Hill



1. The Ten Drum Art Percussion Group performs for guests at Taiwan Night hosted by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in the Sir John A. Macdonald Building on Nov. 25, 2025. **2.** Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Elder Verna McGregor, left, Taiwan Representative Harry Ho-jen Tseng, and his wife Yu-ling Lu. **3.** Bloc Québécois MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe delivers remarks. **4.** Lu, left, Tseng, and CSG Senator Krista Ann Ross. **5.** Conservative Senator Michael MacDonald delivers remarks.

Hill Climbers

By Laura Ryckewaert



Catching up with more former cabinet staffers

Former chief of staff Matthew Mann is now working for PepsiCo, while ex-policy adviser Emily Hartman is working for YMCA Canada.

With so much ministerial staff turnover last year, **Hill Climbers** is taking a second look at where ex-aides have landed since bidding farewell to their jobs in cabinet offices on Parliament Hill.

Some former staffers have gone farther than others, but there are a few who've found new jobs in the Other Place on the Hill: the Senate.

Jordano Nudo, a former deputy chief of staff and director of policy to then-Indigenous services minister **Patty Hajdu** up until last spring, is now busy as director of parliamentary affairs and issues management in the office of Ontario ISG Senator **Rosemary Moodie**.

It's actually Nudo's second gig since working for Hajdu. Prior to joining Moodie's office this past fall, he'd been a program manager for CLEAResult Canada, a consultancy firm focused on energy-related issues. Nudo worked for the federal Indigenous services minister from 2020 up until last year, starting as a policy adviser under then-minister **Marc Miller**.

Hillary Morgan, who was last director of operations to then-mental health and addictions minister **Ya'ara Saks**, is now director of parliamentary affairs to Ontario PSG Senator **Katherine Hay**.

A former assistant to then-Liberal MP **Celina Caesar-Chavannes**, Morgan landed her first cabinet-level job in 2019 as a special assistant to then-infrastructure minister **François-Philippe Champagne**, and has since also worked for then-northern affairs minister **Dan Vandal**.



Jordano Nudo now works for Senator Rosemary Moodie. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Hillary Morgan now works for Senator Katherine Hay. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

Nathan Bowles, most recently a senior policy aide to the federal jobs and families minister, is now working on the departmental side of things as a business analyst of Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) strategic and service policy branch.

After time spent working in the offices of then-Liberal MP **Pierre Breton** and Liberal MP **Angelo Iacono**, Bowles held various roles in cabinet offices on the Hill from 2020 up until last summer, beginning as a Quebec policy adviser to then-natural resources minister **Seamus O'Regan**. He'd most recently worked for then-jobs and families minister **Steven MacKinnon**, having tackled policy for then-citizens' services minister **Terry Beech** before that—both portfolios that fall under the ESDC umbrella. Bowles has also previously worked for then-families, children, and social development minister **Karina Gould**.

Isabelle Arseneau, a former press secretary to then-Treasury Board president **Ginette Petitpas Taylor**, has joined the media relations team in the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, a post currently held by **Raymond Thérberge**. With a background in journalism, including with CBC/

Radio-Canada in New Brunswick, Arseneau had been fielding media inquiries for Petitpas Taylor since the start of 2024, beginning in Petitpas Taylor's office as then-veterans affairs minister.

Turning to some former cabinet chiefs of staff, **Matthew Mann**, former chief of staff to **Lawrence MacAulay** as both then-agriculture minister and then-veterans affairs minister, is now director of government affairs for PepsiCo.

Mann was a longtime aide to MacAulay, who opted not to seek re-election last year. Starting in 2010 as an assistant in MacAulay's MP office, Mann went on to also be parliamentary affairs director to

MacAulay during the minister's first turn leading the agriculture portfolio, and later as then-veterans minister.

James Cudmore, who was last chief of staff to then-emergency preparedness minister **Harjit Sajjan**, joined Bluesky Strategy Group as vice-president of strategic communications late last year.

A former senior reporter with the CBC, including its parliamentary bureau, Cudmore had been working for Liberal ministers since 2016—aside from a brief stint away from the Hill in 2020—starting as a senior adviser to Sajjan as then-defence minister. He went on to oversee policy for Sajjan as defence minister, and later for Gould as then-democratic institutions minister, and is also a past communications director to then-public safety and emergency preparedness minister **Bill Blair**, and to Gould as then-families minister.

As noted in **Heard on the Hill**, another ex-cabinet chief of staff, **Cyndi Jenkins**, who was most recently a senior strategic adviser in Prime Minister **Mark Carney's** office, has joined Burson Canada as vice-president of public affairs.

Jenkins is a former chief of staff to then-health minister **Mark Holland**, but most recently worked in Carney's office between March and July of last

year—notably, during **Marco Mendicino's** tenure as chief of staff to Carney. Jenkins previously served as chief of staff to Mendicino during his time as then-immigration minister, and has also run

O'Regan's offices as then-veterans affairs minister and then-Indigenous services minister, been chief of staff to then-fisheries minister **Diane Lebouthillier**, and served as ex-Atlantic adviser to then-prime minister **Justin Trudeau**.

Olivia Batten is another staffer who's relocated to the United Kingdom—like ex-PMO

aides **Oz Jungic** and **Hartley Witten**, as noted in **Climbers'** first staff catch-up of the year. Batten, a former director of communications to then-seniors minister **Joanne Thompson**, is now a communications officer with the U.K.'s Serious Fraud Office, a non-ministerial government department.

A former aide to Liberal MP **Robert Morrissey**, Batten was hired as press secretary to Gould as then-government House leader in 2023, and went on to do the same for then-international development minister **Ahmed Hussen** before joining the seniors minister's office in early 2025.

The McGill-Parliament Hill two-way pipeline remains strong.

Katherine Cuplinskas, a former deputy director of communications to recently resigned Liberal MP **Chrystia Freeland** as then-deputy prime minister and finance minister and more recently communications director for Freeland's Liberal leadership campaign, is now working for McGill University as a senior adviser for media relations and issues management. It's actually Cuplinskas' second job post politics; between July and November of last year, she worked as a senior manager of media relations for Bell. Cuplinskas started on the Hill as an assistant in Freeland's MP office, and joined Freeland's aforementioned ministerial team as press secretary in 2020.

Rayna Sutherland, who last worked for then-Crown-Indigenous relations minister **Gary Anandasangaree**, is now pursuing a law degree at McGill.

A Parliamentary Internship Program alumna, Sutherland worked as a West and North regional adviser to Mendicino as then-public safety minister before joining the Crown-Indigenous relations office as a policy adviser to then-minister Miller in 2023.



Olivia Batten is now with the U.K.'s Serious Fraud Office. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Katherine Cuplinskas now works for McGill University. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn



Rayna Sutherland is now studying law at McGill. Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn

She was promoted to director of operations and strategic planning after Anandasangaree took charge of the file in 2024, and her LinkedIn profile indicates she ended as his chief of staff during a period when **Shaili Patel**, who otherwise ran Anandasangaree's Crown-Indigenous relations office, is understood to have been busy working on policy for the federal Liberal campaign.

Oliver Anderson, a past director of communications to then-environment minister **Steven Guilbeault**, is now vice-president of communications and growth for AquaAction, a non-profit focused on water security. Anderson had worked for United Way/Centraide Ottawa before being hired as a communications adviser to MacAulay as then-agriculture minister in 2016. He stuck with the agriculture office through to the 2021 election, ending as communications director, at which point he joined Guilbeault's team.

Emily Hartman, a former director of policy to then-families minister **Jenna Suds**, is now working for YMCA Canada as vice-president of government relations and advocacy. Hartman is also a past policy director to then-women and gender equality and youth minister **Marci Ien**, a former senior policy adviser to then-women and gender equality minister **Maryam Monsef**, and has been a senior policy analyst with ESDC, among other past jobs.

Lhori Webster, who exited as policy director to the federal employment minister in January 2025, recently joined Nexus Strategic Consultants as an expert adviser, and at the same time is currently pursuing a master's degree in comparative social policy at the University of Oxford.

Webster joined the employment office in the fall of 2024, just before then-minister **Randy Boissonnault** was dropped from cabinet and the file was taken over by Petitpas Taylor. Webster previously oversaw policy and labour relations for MacKinnon as then-labour and seniors minister, and is also a former policy adviser in Trudeau's PMO, and to Hajdu as then-health minister.

(Relatedly, Nexus was co-founded by former Trudeau PMO executive director **Brett Thalmann** as well as **Arthur Lam**, whose CV includes time spent doing policy work for then-innovation minister **Navdeep Bains** and then-trade minister **Mary Ng**.)
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Parliamentary Calendar

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

Commissioner Nancy Bélanger breaks down new lobbying threshold in virtual info session on Jan. 15



Lobbying Commissioner Nancy Bélanger will host a virtual information session to provide an overview of the federal requirements related to lobbying and the new threshold on Jan. 15. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

**TUESDAY, JAN. 13—
SATURDAY, JAN. 17**

Prime Minister Carney to visit China—Prime Minister Mark Carney will visit China. He is expected to meet with President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, and other government and business leaders. Tuesday, Jan. 13, to Saturday, Jan. 17, in Beijing, China. Details: pm.gc.ca.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 14

House Schedule—The House of Commons is adjourned until Jan. 26, and is scheduled to sit for 117 days this year. Here's the schedule for 2026: it will sit Monday to Friday, Jan. 26-Feb. 13; Feb. 23-27; March 9-13; March 23-Thursday, March 26; April 13-May 8; May 25-June 19; Sept. 21-Oct. 9; Oct. 19-Nov. 6; and Nov. 16-Dec. 11.

THURSDAY, JAN. 15

Next Campaign Summit 2026—The Next Campaign Summit returns for its third year. This one-day summit features practical conversations on campaign strategy, leadership, and political participation. Speakers include Liberal MP Karina Gould, Manitoba Deputy Premier Uzoma Asagwara, Ontario Transportation Minister Prabmeet Sarkaria, former Liberal MP Marco Mendicino, Mayor of Barrie, Ont., Alex Nuttall, former Conservative campaign manager Hamish Marshall, Ontario PC campaign manager Kory Teneycke, former PMO senior staffer Vandana Katter-Miller, and Equal Voice's interim director Lindsay Brumwell. Thursday, Jan. 15, at The Carlu, 444 Yonge St, Toronto. Details: nextcampaign.ca.

Lobbying Commissioner Bélanger to Discuss New Threshold—A lower registration threshold takes effect in January 2026, requiring more organizations and corporations to register their lobbying. Lobbying Commissioner Nancy Bélanger will host a virtual information session in English to provide an overview of the federal requirements related to lobbying and the new threshold. Thursday, Jan. 15, at 1:30 p.m. ET. Register: lobbycanada.gc.ca/en/info-session.

'Big Stories of 2026 that Will Shape Canada'—The Empire Club hosts "Empire Nights: The Journalists' Forecast — Big Stories of 2026 that

Will Shape Canada." *Globe and Mail's* Ottawa bureau chief Bob Fife, *Toronto Star's* Queen's Park bureau chief Robert Benzie, and Sabrina Nanji, founder and lead journalist with *Queen's Park Observer*, will forecast the big political stories that will shape Canada in the year ahead. Ipsos Public Affairs' Global CEO Darrell Bricker will also take part. Thursday, Jan. 15, at 5:30 p.m. ET at a location to be announced. Details: empireclubofcanada.com.

FRIDAY, JAN. 16

Liberal MP Bains' Year in Review—The Richmond East-Steveston-Federal Liberal Riding Association hosts an evening featuring MP Parm Bains who will provide a year in review. Friday, Jan. 16, at 7 p.m. PT at Riverside Grand Ballroom, 135-1231 Burdette St., Richmond, B.C. Details: liberal.ca.

SATURDAY, JAN. 17

Breakfast with Liberal MP Carr—Liberal MP Ben Carr will take part in a breakfast event in Winnipeg South Centre at a location to be announced. Saturday, Jan. 17, at 9 a.m. CT in Winnipeg. Details: liberal.ca.

SUNDAY, JAN. 18

Prime Minister Carney to visit Qatar—Following his visit to China, Prime Minister Mark Carney will travel to Doha, Qatar, for a one-day bilateral visit. He is expected to meet with the Amir of Qatar, His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and to engage with business leaders and investors. Sunday, Jan. 18, in Doha, Qatar. Details: pm.gc.ca.

MONDAY, JAN. 19

Lecture: 'Germany, Canada, and the Age of Trump'—Carleton University, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, and the Embassy of Germany co-host the lecture, "Transatlantic Relations at a Crossroads: Germany, Canada, and the Age of Trump", featuring German politician Metin Hakverdi, an elected member of the Bundestag since 2013. Monday, Jan. 19, at 2:30 p.m. ET at Pigiavik (formerly Robertson Hall), Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Details: events.carleton.ca.

**MONDAY, JAN. 19—
WEDNESDAY, JAN. 21**

Prime Minister Carney to Attend World Economic Forum—Prime Minister Mark Carney is expected to attend the World Economic Forum's annual meeting on the theme 'A Spirit of Dialogue.' Monday, Jan. 19, to Wednesday, Jan. 21 in Davos, Switzerland. Details: pm.gc.ca.

THURSDAY, JAN. 22

Lecture: 'Trump's Trade Policies and Prospects for the CUSMA Review'—The Balsillie School for International Affairs hosts a hybrid lecture by Carleton University professor Laura Macdonald on "Farewell to Regional Integration? Trump's Trade Policies and Prospects for the CUSMA Review." Thursday, Jan. 22, at 11:30 a.m. ET happening online and in person at 67 Erb St. W., Waterloo, Ont. Details: balsillieschool.ca.

Lobbying Commissioner Bélanger to Discuss New Threshold—A lower registration threshold takes effect in January 2026, requiring more organizations and corporations to register their lobbying. Lobbying Commissioner Nancy Bélanger will host a virtual information session in French to provide an overview of the federal requirements related to lobbying and the new threshold. Thursday, Jan. 22, at 1:30 p.m. ET. Register: lobbycanada.gc.ca/en/info-session.

MONDAY, JAN. 26

Lunch: 'Enabling Canada's Defence and Space Ambitions'—The Canadian Club of Ottawa hosts a lunch event featuring Mike Greenley, CEO of MDA Space, who will discuss 'Enabling Canada's Defence and Space Ambitions.' Monday, Jan. 26, at 12 p.m. ET at the Fairmont Château Laurier, 1 Rideau St., Ottawa. Details: canadianclubottawa.ca.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 28

Bank of Canada Interest Rate Announcement—The Bank of Canada will announce the new target for the overnight rate, and also publish its *Monetary Policy Report*. Wednesday, Jan. 28, at 9:45 a.m. ET. Details: bankofcanada.ca.

Ex-CSIS chief David Vigneault to deliver remarks—The Conference of Defence Associations Institute hosts a roundtable in French on national defence and economic security, featuring David Vigneault, former director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service; Dr. Gaëlle Rivard Piché, executive director of the CAD Institute; and Dr. Philippe Bourbeau, professor at HEC Montréal and co-director of the International Institute of Economic Diplomacy. Wednesday, Jan. 28, at 4:30 p.m. ET at Édifice Sun Life, 1155 rue Metcalfe, suite 800, Montréal. Details: cdainstitute.ca.

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

Conservative National Convention—The Conservative Party of Canada will hold its the National Convention. Thursday, Jan. 29, to Saturday, Jan. 31, at the Telus Convention Centre, Calgary. Details: cpc26.ca.

FRIDAY, JAN. 30

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, at 11:30 a.m. ET at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel, 1255 Jeanne-Mance St., Montreal. Details: corim.qc.ca.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 4

Gala Dinner to Mark 20 Years Since Harper's First Election—Former prime minister Stephen Harper will celebrate 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

Conservative Caucus Reunion Brunch—As part of events celebrating the 20th anniversary of the swearing in of the 28th Ministry and 39th Parliament of Canada, former prime minister Stephen Harper and Conservative MP Shivaloy Majumdar host a special Conservative Caucus reunion brunch.

Thursday, Feb. 5, at 9:30 a.m. ET at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building, 144 Wellington St., Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

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, at 11:30 a.m. ET. Details: empireclubofcanada.com.

**FRIDAY, FEB. 6—
SUNDAY, FEB. 22**

Olympic Winter Games—The Olympic Winter Games will take place over two weeks in Milano Cortina, Italy, from Friday, Feb. 6, to Sunday, Feb. 22. Details: olympics.com.

MONDAY, FEB. 9

Irish Ambassador in Edmonton—The Edmonton Chamber of Commerce and the Consulate General of Ireland host a networking reception featuring Irish Ambassador to Canada John Concannon. Monday, Feb. 9, at 2 p.m. MT at the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, 600 9990 Jasper Ave., Edmonton. Details: business.edmontonchamber.com.

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, at 6 p.m. ET at the Rogers Centre, 55 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Register: bit.ly/CAAINFireside.

**MONDAY, FEB. 9—
TUESDAY, FEB. 10**

AI in Defence Conference—The Canadian Global Affairs Institute and Department of National Defence "AI in Defence Conference," a two-day, invitation-only event focusing on the use, integration, and application of AI as a critical enabler of Canada's defence capability and sovereignty, incorporating both government and industry perspectives. Monday, Feb. 9, to Tuesday, Feb. 10, at 7 Bayview Station Rd., Ottawa. Details: cgai.ca.

TUESDAY, FEB. 10

'Diagnosing and Combatting Health Misinformation'—The Empire Club of Canada and the 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**

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, in Calgary. Details: afn.ca.

THURSDAY, FEB. 12

Bacon and Eggheads Breakfast—The Partnership Group for Science and Engineering's first breakfast event of 2026 will take place today. Stay tuned for an announcement regarding the topic and speaker. Thursday, Feb. 12. Details: page.org/bacon-eggheads.

Book Launch: Democracy's Second Act—Peter MacLeod, co-author of *Democracy's Second Act*, will chat with journalist Joanne Chianello about why frustration and polarization are rising—and how reclaiming the power of the public can lead to a more hopeful political future. Thursday, Feb. 12, at 6 p.m. ET at the Métropolitain Brasserie Restaurant, 700 Sussex Dr. Details via Eventbrite.



BACK TO PARLIAMENT

In our big **Back to Parliament** issue, *The Hill Times* will offer a solid primer on the top issues, priorities, and bills in this winter session, and we'll look at some of the top political people to watch in federal politics. This special issue will also offer a wide range of well-informed opinion columns on what's ahead and how Canada should steer through these difficult and challenging times in 2026. This one's a keeper.

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