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THE HILL TIMES

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NEWS



Prime Minister Mark Carney's, centre, recruitment of former Ontario NDP deputy leader Doly Begum, left, and health-care advocate Dr. Danielle Martin represent big 'strategic gets' to shore up the Liberals' left flank, says former Grit staffer Dan Arnold. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia and courtesy of LinkedIn

BY STUART BENSON

With the selection of two young, progressive women candidates in the upcoming Ontario by-elections, strategists say Prime Minister Mark Carney is attempting to signal he hasn't drifted as far from his predecessors' feminist bona fides as his critics may claim. But some say unless he makes a concerted effort to make space for, and listen to, those voices, they may simply become "one of many" in the Liberal women's caucus sitting on the outside of the PMO "boys' club."

Dan Arnold, chief strategy officer for Pollara Strategic Insights and a former Prime Minister's Office staffer under then-prime minister Justin Trudeau, called the two choices "phenomenal" politics, commanding Carney for choosing two "strong women," and predicted the choices "should quiet down some of the 'boys' club' chatter."

On Feb. 3, the Liberals announced that Ontario NDP deputy leader Doly Begum would be the party's candidate to defend the federal riding of Scarborough Southwest, Ont., the same riding

she currently holds at the provincial level, following the appointment of incumbent MP Bill Blair as high commissioner to the United Kingdom.

On Jan. 31, the Liberals announced that Danielle Martin, a high-profile family physician and chair of the department of family and community medicine at the University of Toronto, will run to replace Chrystia Freeland, who had represented University-Rosedale, Ont., since 2013 and resigned on Jan. 9 after accepting a role advising Ukrainian President Volodymyr

Zelenskyy on post-war economic development.

"It's a strong positive signal to the groups who were feeling that Carney hasn't done enough to promote women," Arnold told *The Hill Times*, adding that while it may be "just a signal at this stage; in politics, perception means a lot."

Arnold said appointing a deputy leader of the Ontario NDP will help counter accusations that Carney (Nepean, Ont.) is governing like a Conservative.

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NEWS

**'All the fundamentals are there':
Conservatives bank unity and cash,
but need to buy time and 'hope' for
a renewed NDP, say politicos**

BY STUART BENSON

With a united caucus, a massive fundraising advantage, and a leader fresh off an overwhelming confidence vote, the

Conservative Party has "all the fundamentals" needed for electoral success, but avoiding the results of the last campaign will also depend on Liberal stumbles

Continued on page 34

NEWS

**Defence official says Canadian
transiting of Taiwan Strait
'likely' to continue**

BY NEIL MOSS

A senior Canadian defence official told the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the military will "likely" continue to sail through the Taiwan Strait

as part of its operations in the Pacific.

Since 2018, the Canadian Navy has transited through the Taiwan Strait 13 times. Defence officials said Canada's presence

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NEWS

**New in-office
mandate could
send more
public servants
out the door,
union says**

BY MARLO GLASS

A public service union leader says the newly announced mandate requiring civil servants to be in-office four days a week, and ending hybrid work for executives, could be a tactic to reduce the bureaucracy's headcount amid thousands of notices of potential job layoffs.

"Like with DOGE [Department of Government Efficiency] in the U.S., this does seem to be

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NEWS

**'Something new
is needed':
Ottawa's
diplomatic corps
still trying to
grasp Carney's
worldview after
Davos**

BY NEIL MOSS

Foreign diplomats in Ottawa are applauding the vision of Canada's foreign policy direction outlined by Prime Minister Mark Carney in his Davos address, but they're coming to different conclusions about how it will get implemented.

Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.)

Continued on page 33

Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

New polling-driven podcast explores the ‘why’ behind public opinion



An Ottawa-based pollster and a former Queen's Park senior adviser turned public-opinion nerd now living in California are mixing up an experimental new podcast launching Feb. 18.

Relay Strategies' **Kyla Ronellenfitsch** and post-doctoral researcher **Gabriel De Roche** are the co-hosts of *Culture Lab*, the latest podcast from Air Quotes Media.

The idea behind *Culture Lab* had been percolating since last summer, the co-hosts told **Heard on the Hill** by email last week.

"Kyla and **Michael Spitale**, co-founder of Air Quotes Media, had independently been circling the same idea: a polling-driven podcast that looks beyond the daily

political horse race to explain *why* public opinion is moving in the first place," they wrote.

It was Spitale who suggested De Roche join as Ronellenfitsch's co-host. "We didn't know each other at all," they told **HOH**, joking that De Roche is "the Toronto to Kyla's Saskatchewan, the opera to Kyla's Taylor Swift, [but] that contrast turned out to be a strength," they told *The Hill Times*.

Working across time zones has also proven "surprisingly seamless," they conceded. "The distance is an asset: Kyla is steeped in Ottawa's political ecosystem, while Gabe is immersed (a detriment to his mental health) in the U.S. con-

versation and continues to have strong connections in Toronto through his consulting work."

Culture Lab's first in a series of hour-long weekly episodes will feature their Air Quotes Media cousin **David Herle**. "We'll turn the tables on someone more accustomed to asking the questions on *The Curse of Politics* and *The Herle Burly*, and dig into the thinking of one of the Liberal Party's most influential modern-day strategists," they said.

And while cultural forces don't respect borders, De Roche and Ronellenfitsch say *Culture Lab* will "always re-anchor the discussion in the Canadian context, [and] what it means for Canadian politics."

'Could you please start doing the right thing?' Chrystia Freeland says on Bill Maher's show



Former Liberal minister **Chrystia Freeland** and ex-New Jersey governor **Chris Christie** were on *Real Time with Bill Maher* on Feb. 6. They talked about the **Jeffrey Epstein** files, and singer **Billie Eilish**'s recent comment at the Grammys that "no one is illegal on stolen land," which prompted a discussion on Indigenous land claims and reconciliation, with Freeland explaining Canada's work on Indigenous prosperity.

During the show's "Overtime" segment, host Maher asked Freeland for her opinion of Prime Minister **Mark Carney**'s recent Davos speech—which she called "brilliant," noting that Carney is her son's godfather. She then said that Canadians still really like Americans, but are waiting for them to do better.

"Canadians like America. ... [Y]ou have done so much as a country, and the world—especially the world's democracies—will be really much poorer if you guys don't get your act together because a world in which we need to start relying on China—this is not a world where human rights matter, this is not a world where democracy matters," said Freeland, who's now a senior adviser to Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky**.

"I think [former British prime minister] **Winston Churchill** was right when he said 'America does the right thing after trying everything else first,' so could you please finish trying the other stuff and start doing the right thing?" she said.

House interpreter Peter Douglas is retiring

In the House on Feb. 6, Liberal MP **Yasir Naqvi** honoured **Peter Douglas**, a trained lawyer and career interpreter who's retiring after 30 years interpreting French into English and vice versa in the House of Commons and in the Supreme Court.

Naqvi called Douglas' voice "instantly recognizable to members of the House," saying he has "been the voice of francophone leaders for 10 dif-



ferent leaders' debates, and interpreted numerous budgets and Speeches from the Throne. As a professor of conference interpreting at the University of Ottawa since 2007, he has transmitted his vast expertise to numerous cohorts of young interpreters who themselves now work on the Hill."

Naqvi wished Douglas a happy retirement at the curling rink, saying he would be "greatly missed."

Carleton journalism professor Elly Alboim has died

Former Parliamentary Press Gallery journalist and political consultant **Elly Alboim** died last weekend, aged 78.

Alboim served as the CBC's parliamentary bureau chief between 1977 and 1993. He went on to work as a political consultant to a collection of senior Canadian politicians through the firm Earscliffe Strategies, and taught journalism at Carleton University.

Condolences poured in from Alboim's former colleagues and sources.

"Canada has lost a wise, skilful practitioner and teacher of the art of communications," former Liberal cabinet minister **Ralph Goodale** posted on X on Feb. 8. "For critical

thinking, astute analysis, corporate memory, effective messaging, Elly Alboim was a master."

CBC's chief political correspondent **Rosemary Barton** noted on social media that Alboim was not only one of her past professors, but that he "was also a mentor and a wise counsel for me when I was starting out in Ottawa and whenever I needed it. Thinking of his many friends and family."

Pendulum Group co-founder **Yaroslav Baran** called Alboim a "cherished friend and colleague," on X. "His calm wisdom and deep perspective were a refreshing and necessary antidote to the click-bait and excessive partisanship of our age."

Two new faces at Pendulum Group

Pendulum Group recently welcomed two new faces to its fledgling geopolitical advisory team: **Jennifer Irish** and **Anna Romashash**.

"Threats don't stay in neat categories anymore, and organizations need advisers who understand the full spectrum from intelligence operations to information warfare to strategic communications," said Pendulum's founding partner **Heather Bakken** in welcoming Irish and Romashash.

Irish is a former career diplomat and national security expert who founded the University of Ottawa's Information Integrity Lab. She is Pendulum's Information Integrity lead in its Geopolitical Advisory team.

Romashash is an award-winning journalist and former Media Freedom ambassador of Ukraine, will be a senior adviser for the agency's Information Integrity practice.

Paul Wells takes his show on the road

Freelance journalist **Paul Wells** is adapting his popular Christmas stage show for a Canadian tour.

Debuting in Vancouver on March 20, *The Paul Wells Road Show* will feature a combination of interviews, panel discussions, and musical interludes at the Norman & Annette Rothstein Theatre.

"Two things happened to make this possible: my friends at Vancouver Opera extended an invitation to come out West, and my other friends at Netflix came in as my top-tier Presenting Sponsor to help pay the bills. That means I could book a wonderful venue, the 300-ish seat Rothstein Theatre," Wells wrote on his Substack on Feb. 6.

British Columbia Premier **David Eby** will be Wells' feature

interview, and there will be a panel featuring former Conservative cabinet minister **James Moore**, former Global News reporter **Richard Zussman**, and *Beyond a Ballot* podcast co-host **Rachael Segal**. University of British Columbia professor **Suzanne Simard** will also join Wells to discuss her new book, *When the Forest Breathes: Renewal and Resilience in the Natural World*, which will be released just a few days after the show.

Vancouver Opera soprano **Chloé Hurst** and baritone **Aaron Durand** will provide the road show's musical rest stops.

Tickets are now available. cleadlay@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times

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NEWS

Scaffolding costs in the capital climb to \$20.2-million in 2025

Scaffolding is slowly taking over Centre Block's iconic south façade, as seen on Jan. 13. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Centre Block alone contributed almost \$14.7-million to the bottom line in 2025, and scaffolding in and around the building has cost some \$27.3-million overall since November 2022.

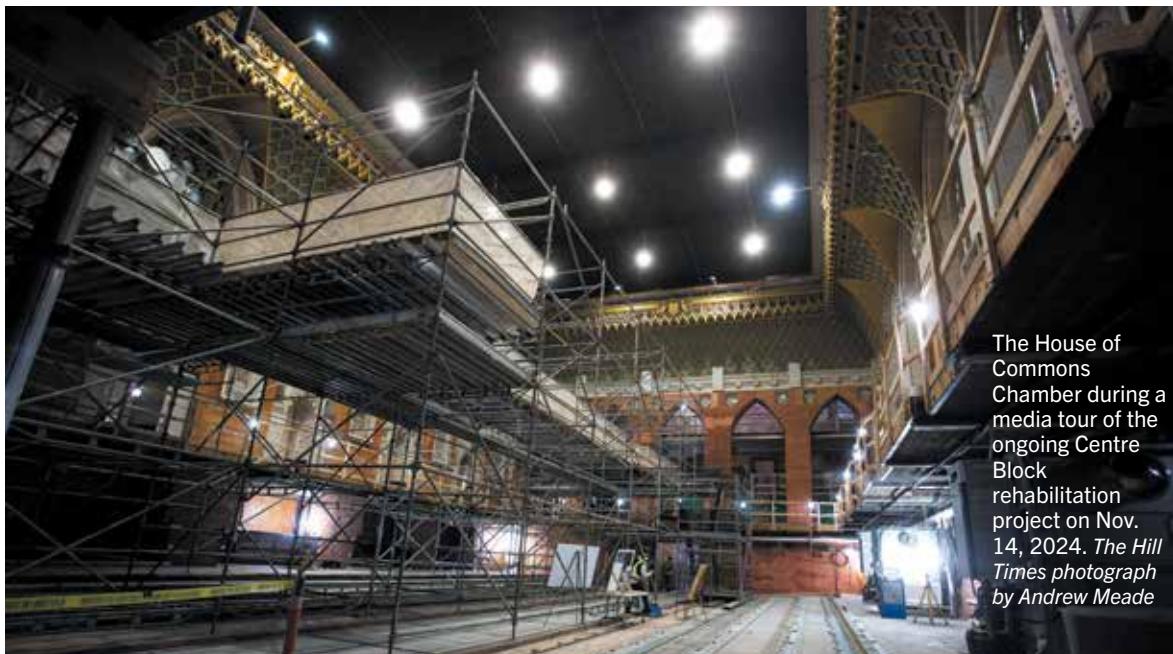
BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

As numerous renovation and construction projects in the National Capital Region steam ahead, federal spending on scaffolding purchases and rentals in the area has been on the rise, reaching a little more than \$20.21-million last year, up from \$14-million in 2024.

The vast majority of such spending falls under the umbrella of Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), which serves as the primary custodian of the federal government's real property portfolio, and accounted for \$20.18-million in scaffolding costs in 2025, an increase from \$13.95-million in 2024.

Scaffolding being used in and around Centre Block makes up the bulk of PSPC's reported expenses, with \$14.68-million spent on the equipment for the building in 2025, \$7.71-million in 2024, and \$4.44-million in 2023.

"Scaffolding is required inside and outside the Centre Block to facilitate construction activities such as masonry repairs, roof replacement, [and] rehabilitation



The House of Commons Chamber during a media tour of the ongoing Centre Block rehabilitation project on Nov. 14, 2024. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

of interior features such as the Senate and House of Commons Chamber ceilings," explained the department in an email.

[C]osts have risen over time commensurate with the advancement and increase of construction activities on-site. For example, in

2022, only the scaffolding for the north façade exterior was in place, whereas today, scaffolding covers a large portion of the building

Total spending on scaffolding, by department/agency

Only two federal departments and one agency reported spending on scaffolding purchases or rentals between Nov. 1, 2022, and Nov. 25, 2025. Given Public Services and Procurement Canada's responsibility as primary custodian of the federal real property portfolio, most departments deferred to it to provide answers related to buildings in their use.

Department/Agency	2022 (since Nov. 1)	2023	2024	2025	Total
National Research Council Canada	\$0	\$53,294	\$41,806	\$26,259	\$121,359
Natural Resources Canada	\$0	\$11,562	\$13,612	\$6,892	\$32,066
Public Services and Procurement Canada	\$4,033,593	\$8,357,043	\$13,951,836	\$20,179,433	\$46,521,905
Total	\$4,033,593	\$8,421,899	\$14,007,254	\$20,212,584	\$46,675,330

Source: House of Commons

and the roof. Costs for scaffolding will continue to be incurred as the project continues to progress."

The data was tabled in the House of Commons on Jan. 26 in response to an Order Paper question submitted by Conservative MP Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, Alta.) on Nov. 25, asking for a breakdown of total annual federal spending on scaffolding purchases or rentals "related to the renovation, rehabilitation, or construction of government buildings or properties in the National Capital Region" since Nov. 1, 2022.

Despite multiple attempts over two weeks, *The Hill Times* was not able to speak with Diotte by filing deadline about the numbers, and the focus of his question.

Altogether, since Nov. 1, 2022, a total of \$46.68-million has been spent renting or buying scaffolding for various buildings throughout the NCR, including \$8.42-million in 2023, and \$4.03-million in the last stretch of 2022.

Aside from PSPC, only one other department and one agency reported related costs, with other bodies deferring to PSPC to provide their response.

Natural Resources Canada reported a total of \$32,066 spent on scaffolding since November 2022 related to two buildings: the Canmet Building at 555 Booth St., and the Bell's Corners Complex at 1 Haanel Dr., both in Ottawa. And the National Research Council Canada—an agency under Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada—reported roughly \$121,359 in such spending overall for facilities tied to four Ottawa addresses: 1200 Montreal Rd., 100 Sussex Dr., 655 Levy Pvt., and 375 Levy Pvt.

Centre Block has been closed for construction since the end of 2018. Set to complete in 2031-32, the project has a current estimated budget of \$4.5-billion to \$5-billion overall for both the renovation and modernization of the historic, 100-year-old building, and construction of a new, three-storey underground Parliament Welcome Centre.

As noted by PSPC, scaffolding spending on the project will continue to increase, with the Centre Block's entire iconic south façade expected to be shrouded by the equipment by the end of this year—or by early 2027, depending on how things progress.

While Centre Block's renovation is the current focal point of construction efforts in and around Parliament Hill, it's far from the only building currently under the hammer.

Just across the street, the National Press Building at 150 Wellington St. has in recent years been covered by scaffolding to allow workers to first assess the condition of the building's envelope, and to undertake exterior renovations. In 2021, a contract valued at almost \$1.7-million was awarded to Robertson Martin Architects Incorporation to do building envelope work.

According to PSPC, almost \$1.2-million has been spent on scaffolding related to the National Press Building since 2022, at a cost of \$292,500 for each of the four years.

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NEWS

Opposition MPs press Liberals to intervene with Canadian companies' business with ICE

There are mechanisms the federal government could use to stop Canadian firms from contracting with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, but there's no political will to do so, critics say.

BY IREM KOCA

Opposition MPs are accusing the federal government of failing to take action to prevent Canadian companies supplying military equipment to the United States' Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and asking the Liberals to sanction any business with the American agency.

NDP MP and leadership candidate Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.) told *The Hill Times* in a Feb. 4 interview that the government has a role in stopping Canadian companies from doing business with ICE. She argued that while private companies make the actual deals, they are dependent on export permits that the federal government has the power to regulate.

"Let's be very, very clear: the federal government has the tools. There does not need to be a legislative framework for the government to stop sending military goods to ICE, or to the United Arab Emirates, or to Israel, or to any country that we know is using those weapons against innocent civilians, or in the perpetration of war crimes or genocide," she said.

"It is a political decision that could be stopped today. It is in the hands of the federal government."

ICE is a law-enforcement agency under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security responsible for interior immigration enforcement and deportations. Over the last month, under U.S. President Donald Trump's orders, the agency has launched nationwide operations that led to arrests, and widespread protests. Eight people have either been killed by federal agents or died while in ICE custody in 2026 so far.

Analyses of American government procurement databases found that more than a dozen Canadian companies have done

NDP MP and leadership candidate Heather McPherson says the Liberals' lack of response to the calls to stop Canadian companies from doing business with ICE is 'ridiculous.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



business with ICE. Several of those companies still have active contracts worth millions of dollars, such as a subsidiary of Canadian security company GardaWorld competing to secure a contract worth around US\$138-million in "emergency detention" services.

In a Jan. 28 letter, McPherson asked Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) to "take urgent steps to stop all Canadian government and private contracts" with ICE by denying export permits for military goods, cancelling federal subsidies to companies contracting with the agency, and exploring all available legal mechanisms including sanctions under the Special Economic Measures Act to prohibit such contracts.

When asked what the government's response has been to her letter, McPherson called it "ridiculous."

"The response has always been ridiculous. The Liberals are cowards. They should stop sending weapons to countries that are committing war crimes, and crimes against their own citizens. They have not done that. It's simply a matter of moral or political will."

McPherson, who previously served as the NDP's critic for foreign affairs, said the responsibility to take action ultimately lies with Foreign Minister Anita Anand (Oakville East, Ont.), who is responsible for the approval, suspension, and cancellation of any permits under the Export and Import Permits Act.

Neither Anand, International Trade Minister Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Ont.), nor his parliamentary secretary Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Ont.)

intended to be used as an ICE processing facility.

Green Party Leader Elizabeth May (Saanich-Gulf Islands, B.C.) said the federal government has a responsibility to prevent Canadian exports or sales that enable ICE in its activities, and suggested that Parliament develop a list—supported with a legal framework—barring Canadian companies from doing business with the agency, using the same mechanisms as the terrorist entity list.

"We could have it very quickly, if we wanted it," May told *The Hill Times* in a Feb. 5 interview.

"What we suggest is could we put together—and could Parliament consider—a category of agency of a foreign government which has a record of systematic abuse of human rights, extrajudicial killings that so shock the conscience of those who are committed to human rights and democracy that that agency could be on a list of 'we don't deal with them.'"

When asked what role the federal government has to stop Canadian companies from contracting with ICE or other international agencies, Conservative MP and international trade critic Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, Ont.) told *The Hill Times* "that would be a great question for the minister who approves export permits."

MPs have some ways to increase pressure, McPherson explained.

NDP MP Jenny Kwan's (Vancouver East, B.C.) Bill C-233—which she's dubbed "the No More Loopholes Act"—would amend the Export and Import Permits Act so that the U.S. is not exempt from Canada's arms export regulations. The private member's bill was introduced last September, and is currently at second reading in the House of Commons. Kwan recently said she is proposing revisions to the bill to prevent military equipment from being exported to the U.S. and then to other countries engaged in deadly conflicts.

May argued that the federal government has not taken any action so far due to fear of retaliation from the Trump administration, and that inaction, if it continues, would undermine Canadian identity.

"I am not unsympathetic to the quandary that many world governments are in as the U.S. president is erratic and dangerous ... and prone to retaliatory moves that hurt Canadians and hurt the Canadian economy," May said. "But I don't think we're going to make any ground trying to appease Mr. Trump."

"I understand that it is chaotic to negotiate with the Trump administration," McPherson echoed. "But we, as Canadians, cannot be complicit in fuelling the violence that we are seeing in the United States, that ICE is perpetrating against American citizens."

"If we don't stand up for human rights, if we don't believe in those human rights, all of those things that you heard Prime Minister Carney say in Davos don't mean anything if there's no action behind those words," McPherson said.

ikoca@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand is seen as the minister with ultimate responsibility to stop Canadian companies to contract with ICE. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Green Party Leader Elizabeth May says the government should impose sanctions on ICE. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

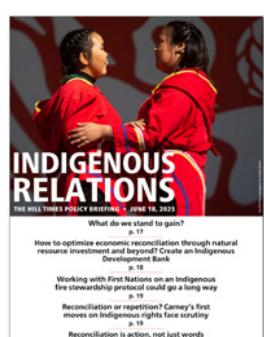
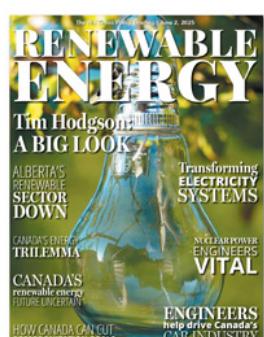
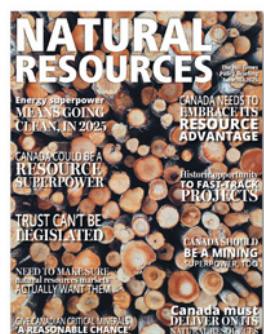
responded to *The Hill Times'* requests for a comment.

ICE has confirmed that it has committed to spending \$10-million to buy 20 armoured vehicles from Ontario-based defence manufacturer Roshel. Ontario Premier Doug Ford supported the contract, calling it "fantastic news." In response to calls from the Ontario NDP to step in and end contracts

with ICE, Ford said his government doesn't "direct companies to go sell military vehicles down south or around the world."

A Vancouver-based firm owned by billionaire Jim Pattison has backed down from the planned sale of his Virginia warehouse to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security amid intense scrutiny as the property was reportedly

POLICY BRIEFING CALENDAR



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Monday, Feb. 2	Innovation	Jan. 27, 2026
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Monday, Feb. 23	Transportation and Trade	Feb. 17, 2026
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Monday, March 9	Agriculture	March 3, 2026
Monday, March 16	Top 100 Lobbyists	March 10, 2026
Monday, March 23	Infrastructure and Innovation	March 17, 2026
Monday, March 30	100 Most Influential People In Politics	March 24, 2026
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Editorial

Editorial

Alberta MPs shouldn't just quietly wait for separatist issue to blow over

This week, *The Hill Times* reported on the issue of Alberta separatism, and attempted to speak to the province's federal representatives.

Alberta is the bedrock of the Conservative Party, whose members currently represent 34 of the province's 37 federal seats. *The Hill Times* reached out to all 34 Alberta Conservative MPs by email and/or phone, and approached some after their Feb. 4 caucus meeting. With the exception of a few, most declined to comment for the article published on Feb. 9.

Conservatives and pollsters told *The Hill Times* that the reason behind the silence was a desire not to give the issue oxygen. They also didn't want to inflame partisan wars. One MP, speaking on a not-for-attribution basis, said that none of their caucus colleagues were known to have signed the petition calling for a referendum on separation.

"We're going to get the question [on the referendum], it's going to fail, and then it's going to be put to rest," said the MP.

But not talking about it isn't making the issue go away. Are there grievances that could be addressed? Absolutely. And those can be acknowledged and advocated for while still publicly putting the emphasis on support for the federation. MPs are elected to represent their constituents, and to be their voice in Ottawa. But by putting themselves forward as elected representatives, Members of Parliament also cast themselves as leaders. And you can't lead by simply sticking your head in the sand and hoping the tricky issues pass you by.

Those who want what's best for the province and the country should be more vocal about where they stand, and what the potential repercussions are.

If they can speak up about federal natural resource and climate policies that they see as stymying investment in the Alberta resource sector, then it's baffling they wouldn't do the same for separatist talk that would guarantee an erosion in investor confidence. One only need look at how some major businesses moved their headquarters out of Quebec in the 1970s and '80s.

An Angus Reid Institute survey published on Feb. 9 suggests only 29 per cent of Albertans would support a schism from Canada. If a separation were to occur, the survey suggests that three quarters of respondents would pick up and move to a different part of the country.

There are some Alberta Conservative MPs like Garnett Genuis and Stephanie Kusie who have been clear and vocal about their support for a united Canada. More of their colleagues should follow their lead.

It shouldn't only fall to Albertan public figures who no longer hold political office, like former premier Jason Kenney or past prime minister Stephen Harper, to speak up for federalism.

The hesitance to do so simply because it's unpopular with one's political base is cowardly. "Country over party" shouldn't just be something required of people on the other side of the political aisle.

The Hill Times



Letters to the Editor

A climate disaster unfolds as Trump dismantles the science

The United States government is taking another catastrophic step in its relentless quest to stamp out climate-change science. Russell Vought, director of the White House's Office of Management and Budget, in his wrecking-ball position, has recently announced the destruction of the pre-eminent National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR). The excuse given for this nauseating vandalism is that NCAR is making "alarmist" statements about climate change. Damn right they are—the entire world needs to be much more alarmed. The science of climate change is clear, even if U.S. President Donald Trump's government calls it a hoax. The floods, fires, and hurricanes are happening just the same.

NCAR is a major contributor to the development of modern weather forecast models that are more important than ever as storms and floods become more extreme. Denial of climate change and eliminating the science that deals with it is like a suicide mission on the part of the deranged folks running the White House. The loss of NCAR will have a huge impact on Canada and the rest of the world.

NCAR is not just an important U.S. research centre, it is a very significant contributor to the international effort to understand weather, climate change, and other atmospheric phenomena. It is managed by the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) with about half of its funding coming from the U.S. National Science Foundation and the rest from more than 100 members of the UCAR consortium of colleges, universities, and foreign affiliates (including Canada) that contribute to the research and educational programs.

I experienced first-hand the value of the international co-operation fostered by NCAR. While spending two years as a visiting research professor at Denver Univer-

sity, I visited NCAR regularly to discuss science issues with the staff and visiting scientists. Later, I also participated in an NCAR air quality airborne research project by contributing an Environment Canada instrument I designed and developed.

Many of the best climate and atmospheric science researchers in Canada have advanced their knowledge during visiting research positions at NCAR. The NCAR management have deliberately limited the number of brilliant scientists that can join their faculty so that the knowledge and the research environment they have created there will be propagated to improve the capacity of research around the world.

NCAR has made leading contributions to improved forecasting, weather radar, climate, and atmospheric research, including measuring the chemistry of the stratosphere to understand the ozone layer, understanding the radiation balance that controls temperatures on Earth, and improving forecasting of the mega-storms that we are now seeing far too frequently.

Climate change, which the U.S. is largely responsible for due to their profligate use of fossil fuels in the development of their incredibly strong economy, is now affecting people everywhere. Climate-change science is essential to being able to prepare for weather changes to come. Without it, we are flying blind into certain disaster. Pretending climate change does not exist is not going to make it stop. The science is clear.

The continued denial of climate change and the propagation of disinformation from the fossil fuel industry, via the White House megaphone, to enrich the few—for now—is a death sentence for many Americans, and to even more people around the world.

Tom McElroy, PhD, FCMOS, FRSC
 Toronto, Ont.

Trump finally went too far for Stephen Harper

The former PM has devoted much of his post-political career to helping to empower right-wing political parties, but drew the line at threatening Canada's existence.

Les Whittington



Need to Know

OTTAWA—Stephen Harper came east to celebrate the 20th anniversary of something.

While he was at it, the former Conservative prime minister—whether by design or coincidence—took on the task for his party of covering for the current leader's blind spot on the United States President Donald Trump file.

He used his "Harperpalooza" appearances to drive home the idea that Trump spells the end of the era of beneficial Canada-U.S. co-operation. For the first time in modern history, Canada has a hostile neighbour on its hands, he said.

This is, of course, much sharper, direct language con-

cerning the megalomaniac in the White House than Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre has managed, particularly at the recent national party convention in Calgary. He never mentioned Trump by name in his nearly hour-long address to the delegates, many of whom support the Republican leader.

Indeed, beginning a year ago, Poilievre's inability to balance his attacks on the Liberals with a clear-cut denunciation of Trump's anti-Canadian obsession has been a major weakness in what the Conservative leader has on offer.

Maybe the new Conservative advisers around Poilievre seized on Harper's re-emergence on the national stage last week to deal with this omission by getting the former prime minister to unfurl a large anti-Trump flag over the party's public-facing edifice. Or maybe Harper just felt compelled to finally speak out.

In any case, it probably worked, at least to some extent, because Harper still draws a lot of water at a time when what passes for politics on Canada's right has descended into juvenile, populist rage-feasting.

Whether you love Harper or hate him, he exhibits a serious, well-argued approach to ideas and issues of a kind not found in Poilievre's repertoire.

However it came about, Harper's widely appreciated call for Canadians to rise above their

partisan differences to stave off a U.S.-driven catastrophe made the current Conservative leader look like the small-time ideological hawker he is.

To some extent, it was in that sense a bit of an echo of last year's political upheaval, when a newly arrived Prime Minister Mark Carney drew on his impressive reputation and stand-up-to-the-U.S. message to win an upset victory over the Poilievre-led Conservatives. Not surprisingly, seriousness registers with Canadians in a moment of crisis. And Harper's breakout week certainly seemed to provide a very welcome boost for a Conservative movement still reeling from last year's election.

There wasn't much mention in all this, incidentally, of the fact that Harper has devoted much of his post-political career to helping to empower right-wing political parties globally, including the kind of quasi-authoritarian, illiberal hard-right parties inspired by Trump's tactics and electoral success in the U.S.

Since 2018, Canada's former prime minister has chaired the International Democracy Union (IDU), an organization created in the 1980s by then-United Kingdom prime minister Margaret Thatcher and other prominent conservatives to provide "mutual support" for their political vehicles on an international basis.

Among its 60 or so members, the IDU includes Trump's



Former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper used his anniversary appearances to drive home the idea that the American president spells the end of the era of beneficial Canada-U.S. co-operation, writes Les Whittington. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

the two-term Republican president until last week.

In power from 2006 to 2015, Harper, like Trump, chopped social programs, reduced what the federal government could do for its citizens, and overhauled the tax structure, reducing corporate income taxes and cutting individual taxes in ways that disproportionately benefited the rich. Harper also tried to crush labour unions, something that had already been mostly accomplished in the U.S. pre-Trump.

All in all, one can't help but conclude that turning government into an instrument of the wealthy as Trump has done is one thing, but threatening Canada's existence and trying to rub out its economy evidently went too far for Harper.

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

Faster, higher, stronger—together

During the Olympics, sports fans can find space to recognize, celebrate, and suffer with competitors from other countries whose politics are not our cup of tea.

Tim Powers



Team Canada flagbearers Mikael Kingsbury, left, and Marielle Thompson enter the Milano Cortina Games on Feb. 6. The ongoing Winter Olympics serve as a healthy escape, writes Tim Powers. Screenshot courtesy of the CBC

Frankly, I'd rather escape into an afternoon of ski-mountaineering viewing or luge-relay watching than get pulled into whatever the American president decides to post on Truth Social. We all need a break from the merry-go-round of madness.

While the International Olympic Committee comes with its own politics and controversies, they generally take a back seat as the athletes come front and centre to remind us that competition may be brutally tough, but it doesn't destroy the soul. In fact, it can be inspirational, revelatory, and show us the best virtues of humanity.

It was just last week before the Games officially began that we saw the Finnish women's hockey team postpone its game against Canada because most of its team was battling norovirus. Canada didn't demand the Finns be forced to forfeit; instead, they found time this week to make up the game. Even in pursuit of an Olympic gold medal—the most prized in the world—sportsmanship can still be found.

Canadians of a certain age know that the Olympics have brought cheating in sport into the spotlight. But those warts aren't simply spun away or discarded. Best efforts are made to combat that, with violators subject to

significant penalty and a ban from sport. That sort of accountability is refreshing in and of itself. Imagine real accountability in the political arena, especially in the gladiatorial alternative universe that Trump wants to curate and dominate. We are still searching for that.

Global fans of the Olympics can find space to recognize, celebrate, and suffer with competitors from other countries whose politics are not our cup of tea. This past weekend, more than a few Canadians I know felt the agony and disappointment of American skiing legend Lindsey Vonn. Vonn, already a highly decorated athlete, returned to the Olympics at the age of 41 with a severely damaged knee to try to compete again. In her race on Feb. 7, she had a brutal wipeout and broke her leg. Her Games, and likely career, are now done for good. No one was saying she deserved it and good riddance; instead, it was the opposite. A fallen champion was lauded for showing us that a passion to pursue something you love knows no bounds.

It's true when Canada and the U.S. meet in both women's and men's hockey, national support

and divisions may rear their heads. Whatever the outcome, in either case, there will be a pronounced respect of their fellow competitors.

They may motivate themselves with rhetoric, but their ongoing reality will see them rejoining their professional teams where they will blend for common purpose. They will "hate" each other for 60 minutes on the ice, but once the competition is done will have a lifetime bond that sport produces. A divide happens over a game, but it is just that—sport is the great smoother.

While the Olympics is big business and a commercial opportunity, it has been carried forward because of the enduring power of sport to help inspire, unite, and drive us to be better. It provides a healthy escape, and a positive reminder that not only can we fiercely compete to be the best at something, but also marvel at and appreciate the accomplishments of others. That is the common ground of the Olympics, where a winner can take all but that doesn't mean that is all there is.

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

OTTAWA—After a dizzying beginning of the year that saw numerous global challenges play out in real time—yes, I'm looking at you here, United States President Donald Trump—it is delightful that as we settle into February, the Winter Olympics are happening in Italy.

Plain Speak



COMMENT

The curious case of China's disappearing generals

All six members of China's highest military body have been dismissed on suspicion of corruption, including last month the vice-chair, Zhang Youxia, one of President Xi Jinping's oldest friends. It's a stunning reshuffle of the senior ranks.

Gwynne Dyer



Global Affairs

LONDON, U.K.—Armies can be used against both foreigners abroad and citizens at home, but the two roles require quite different equipment and tactics. The same applies to their commanders: you need a different kind of general if you think that the primary task of their troops will be controlling dissent at home.

With that in mind, what has been happening in China is quite interesting. Slowly at first, but now in a rush, the senior command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been purged of its highest-ranking generals.

It's not like dictator Joseph Stalin's great purge of Soviet generals in 1937 to 1938, just before the Second World War, when at least 780 generals were shot. The Chinese generals are not being executed, although many are ending up in jail. Nobody outside the intelligence services knows what is happening to lower-ranking generals, but at the highest level, it is almost a clean sweep.

China's highest military body, the Central Military Commission (CMC), normally has seven members, with President Xi Jinping himself in the chair in his parallel role as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. (It is the party, not the state, that controls the armed forces.)

These six men should be loyal to Xi because he appointed every one of them after the 20th Party Congress four years ago. Yet, all six have been dismissed on suspicion of corruption, including last month the CMC's vice-chair, Zhang Youxia, one of Xi's oldest friends.

Xi and Zhang were childhood friends whose fathers had served together under Mao in the Liberation War, and they regarded each other as honorary brothers. Moreover, Zhang was the last serving officer in the PLA to have seen actual combat (in border clashes with Vietnam in 1979 and 1984).

Now they have all been accused of "serious violations of discipline and law" (the standard phrase for corruption) and removed from the CMC. Why?

The accusation of corruption is probably true for some of them, as it is for many or most PLA officers, but that would have been true already when they were appointed to the jobs. Something else must have changed.

In most dictatorships the first suspects will always be those who control troops and might try to make a military coup. However, that really seems unlikely in a country where the Communist Party has been in power for 77 years and almost every military officer is also a party member.

It's not that the party can never be overthrown. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union was removed from power by a non-violent popular revolt after 74 years, in 1991, so you could speculate that China is in the same zone now. But that's probably much too simplistic: history may rhyme, but it rarely repeats quite that accurately.

However, this is precisely the historical analogy lurking at the bottom of the psyche of most true-believing Communists (a rare breed) whom I have known in China. This rarely admitted spectre even drives a good deal of state policy in China—including, perhaps, this stunning reshuffle.

We know that the Chinese economy is in big, long-term trouble and that many young people are disaffected with the state ("lie flat"). Maybe China's rulers know more than we do about growing dissent, or maybe they are just imagining it—but if domestic repression is going to be necessary, then they need different people on the CMC.

It's only an hypothesis, but it is one possible explanation for why the real military people have been removed from the existing CMC. The Chinese Communist Party could do as thorough a job of suppressing dissent in the streets as Iran's Revolutionary Guard, no doubt, but it would probably require a change in China's current military leadership.

Speaking of which, have you noticed how many senior American generals have been removed from office in the past year? United States President Donald Trump has either fired or otherwise relieved at least 15 very senior officers, most of them three-stars and four-stars, and replaced them with men—all men—he considers more aligned with his values.

This happens a little bit in most administrations, but never on the scale seen in the last year. Moreover, Trump has said that in the future he will personally interview all prospective four-star nominees in every service.

It doesn't necessarily mean he's putting in the right people in case he needs to use the army to suppress large-scale domestic dissent at home in future, but an unfriendly observer could certainly construe it that way. There are definitely people around him who think that far ahead, although at this stage it would be just one contingency among many in their forward planning.

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

The Hill Times

Will we actually see the new Arctic vehicles on order?

The Canadian Army is looking to buy up to 170 Domestic Arctic Mobility Enhancement vehicles, but we've been down this road before.

Scott Taylor

Inside Defence



OTTAWA—With the recent Liberal government promises to dramatically boost defence spending, there has been renewed public interest in what equipment and weapon systems should be prioritized for purchase.

This increased scrutiny quickly lays bare the fact that almost the entire arsenal in all three major combat branches need urgent renewal.

For instance, the current debate over a choice of fighter jet to replace the CF-18 Hornets makes one realize the Royal Canadian Air Force has been operating the current fighter fleet for more than four decades.

The ongoing competition to acquire up to 12 diesel-electric attack submarines from either Korea or Germany highlights the fact that the Royal Canadian Navy struggles mightily to keep even one of our four old Victoria-class submarines operational.

On Jan. 31, *The Ottawa Citizen* reported that the Canadian Army is pushing ahead with a procurement project to acquire up to 170 Domestic Arctic Mobility Enhancement (DAME) vehicles.

The proposed timeline would see a request for proposal go out this year, and a contract issued by 2027. Actual delivery of the fleet of DAME vehicles would begin in 2032.

When discussed in April 2025, industry representatives were told by the Department of National Defence that the budget would be between \$100-million and \$249-million. However, that project price tag has mysteriously ballooned to an estimated \$500-million to \$1-billion on the DND website.

The specifications for the DAME project are that the vehicles have a crew of two, and be capable of carrying at least eight fully equipped soldiers. They need to have a range of 300 kilometres, and be able to operate without support for 72 hours.

Bidders will need to offer four separate variants of the DAME: a troop carrier, a command post, a cargo carrier, and an ambulance. Technically, the new DAME fleet will be replacing the Army's current Arctic-capable fleet of Bandvagn (BV) 206s.

Back in the early 1980s, Canada acquired 78 of these vehicles from Swedish manufacturer AB Hägglund & Söner.

As an all-terrain amphibious carrier designed for crossing wetlands and soft snow, the BV 206 is an excellent vehicle. Its

design is based on a split-cab, single-drive train system, which allows it to negotiate tough cross-country conditions without increasing the ground pressure beyond that of a walking man.

To achieve this, the BV 206 relies upon a light-weight fibreglass chassis, and extra-wide rubber tracks. The primary rationale for Canada buying the BV 206s was to operate them in the High Arctic, not so much in Canada but in Norway.

Back in the 1970s, at the height of the Cold War, Canada was pressured by NATO allies to a larger commitment to European security than the mechanized brigade and three fighter squadrons based in West Germany. The compromise solution was to create the Canadian Air-Sea Transportable (CAST) brigade.

In theory, in the event of a Soviet invasion of Norway, Canada would airlift a rapid-reaction force to northern Norway while Norwegian roll-on/roll-off transport ships would convey the bulk of the CAST brigade across the North Atlantic.

The core element of the CAST brigade was 5 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group based in Valcartier, Que. The RCAF also pledged to deploy a couple of squadrons of CF-5 fighters to the airfield at Bardufoss, in north Norway. It was an ambitious plan that failed miserably the few times that full-scale exercises were attempted.

To expedite the rapid deployment of the air-transported advance guard of the CAST brigade, the bulk of Canada's BV 206 fleet were pre-deployed in storage facilities in Norway.

Unfortunately, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Canada let the BV 206 fleet more or less lapse into oblivion. There are presently 47 of the original 78 still on the books, but only about 18 of those vehicles are still in running order.

The remainder of the BV 206 fleet were cannibalized for parts.

A little-remembered fact is that, at one point, Canada planned to build and operate a massive fleet of 800 of a Canadianized version of the BV 206. It was part of a major policy plan to create a "Total Force" mix of regular and reserve units.

At that juncture, the Canadian militia numbered around 20,000, and the plan was to grow that to 40,000 people. The BV 206, renamed the Northern Terrain Vehicle (NTV), was to be the transportation workhorse of this expanded militia.

Hägglunds of Sweden partnered with a Canadian company called Foremost Inc., and the 800 NTVs were to be built in Calgary. That all got scrubbed with the post-Cold War budget cuts by the Mulroney Conservatives in 1991.

The \$200-million budget for the NTV was cancelled, but not before the government forked out roughly \$45-million in cancellation costs to Hägglunds-Foremost, who had already begun construction on the assembly facility in Calgary.

Let's hope that this time around, the Canadian Army actually acquires a much-needed capability if we are serious about operating in the High Arctic.

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

The Hill Times

COMMENT

Hearings at National Assembly offer insight into Bill 1

The so-called Quebec ‘Constitution’ legislation doesn’t respect international law or the Canadian Constitution, and is a threat to the province’s English-speaking community.

Andrew Caddell

With All Due Respect



VICTORIA, B.C.—It was cold in Quebec City on Feb. 4, but provincial Justice Minister Simon Jolin-Barrette was on the “hot seat” at the National Assembly. I, and other members of the anglophone community, took him on at hearings studying the Coalition Avenir

Quebec’s Bill 1, the so-called Quebec “Constitution” legislation.

As you may recall, the controversial “law of laws” was tabled in the National Assembly on Oct. 9, 2025, without any prior consultation, which is standard practice. On first reading, the bill was rejected by all the opposition parties in the National Assembly.

The only prior study on the issue was by a “Consultative Committee” in November of 2024, led by nationalist law professor Guillaume Rousseau. Its mandate was to “recommend measures to protect and promote the collective rights of the Quebec nation.” It called for greater Quebec independence in language, secularism, culture, and on the international scene.

Bill 1 does all that, and more, in creating a society where French predominates over human rights. Marie-Hélène Lyonnais, a PhD candidate at University College London, said Bill 1 “reinforces the idea that the Québec nation is composed of first- and second-rate citizens, only the first category being deserving of full recognition and protection in Québec’s new constitution.”

This prompted the group I lead, the Task Force on Linguistic Policy, to present a brief in November and testify at hearings into Bill 1. In what seemed to be “Anglo Day,” our three-person delegation was joined by a professor from McGill, the Canadian Party of Quebec, an English arts network, and an English schools parents committee, all opposing Bill 1.

Our 4,000-word brief was difficult to condense into an eight-minute oral presentation, so I stuck to the key points: the bill doesn’t respect international law or the Canadian Constitution, and is a threat to Quebec’s English-speaking community.

We called for a chapter in the legislation on the enormous contributions of the non-francophone community. I pointed out the francophone Quebec narrative of Anglo Quebec emphasizes “exploitation, domination, and English bosses,” and not “the statesmen, doctors, and entrepreneurs who helped build Quebec.”

Several sections of Bill 1 are beyond the powers of the National Assembly, and we called for them to be removed. I closed

by citing former Quebec cabinet minister Cliff Lincoln, who told the National Assembly in the 1980s “rights are rights are rights.”

Justice minister Jolin-Barrette opened the question period by mispronouncing my name as “Cadwell.” He questioned my assertion Bill 1 should not include a right to self-determination, as according to the United Nations, only colonies or “oppressed people” qualify.

He asked if I had read the Quebec Court of Appeal judgment on the Henderson case, where an attempt to throw out Bill 99 (Quebec’s response to the federal Clarity Act) had failed. However, the 2021 decision outlined Quebec had a right to self-determination, but only within its own areas of competency. It seems obvious breaking up the country might have an impact outside Quebec’s jurisdiction.

He then suggested rights are not absolute. This prompted a discussion with my colleague Geoffrey Chambers, who pointed out a constitution is supposed to protect the rights of individuals, not the rights of the state. Our

lawyer, Michael Bergman, noted Bill 1 “operates at two speeds: one for the majority, and one for the minority.”

This was followed by questions from opposition members. Liberal André Albert Morin asked if we agreed with the consultation process. I said tabling the bill before a public consultation was “putting the cart before the horse.”

Bill 1 will incorporate the new language law, Bill 96. It refuses services to 500,000 Anglo Quebecers not educated primarily in English in Canada. Like many who were raised elsewhere, neither my father nor late son would have access to government services in English.

Afterwards, Jolin-Barrette confronted me, saying I was wrong. However, the Charter of the French Language says, “An agency of the civil administration may [only]...[provide] services in English to a person declared eligible to receive instruction in English.”

I posted on X the next day providing the facts, asking the minister for an apology.

I’m still waiting.

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

Driving accountability when AI has its hand on the wheel

In a world of co-pilots and chat bots, this public interest researcher feels the growing impacts of artificial intelligence.

Ken Rubin

Opinion



OTTAWA—I have been doggedly digging for data and diligently researching a wide variety of topics and issues for six decades, uncovering many stories.

But now, as we get into 2026, I am having to navigate artificial intelligence data offerings on a daily basis.

This is particularly the case in internet searches. The first thing I see is machine-created data, even on me.

Fortunately, scrolling down, there are still other materials to review, from official websites to stories, but unfortunately, also

misinformed snippets from never-ending social media posts.

My computer now even offers me an AI co-pilot as if I should have a new buddy along for the ride.

For example, I got 471 pages from an access-to-information reply that wanted—almost demanded on every page—to co-pilot, and help me read the text not exempted.

Gathering and distilling information has dramatically changed from the pre-computer era where a vast array of information could be sold to you through an Encyclopedia Britannica book set. Back then, I even wrote the entry for privacy under the long-disappeared Canadian Encyclopedia.

Those were the days—while working with a university team examining company towns—that I had to create punch cards for input into a computer program. This was a far cry from info instantaneously being extracted from a vast set of data centres.

That did not mean that technology was not already creeping into our lives.

As part of a National Capital Region civil liberty group, I and others looked at how our social insurance numbers were becoming a common identifier

for computer-matching and linking our personal information. We advocated that the use of SINs be restricted, though we never imagined things like facial recognition and Facebook friends.

Well before AI and digital identities came calling, I continued researching and writing about government and corporations using surveillance technologies.

That included musing about body implants tracking our lives, not realizing what was to come was AI digital “help” mates offering to act as our private thinkers, doctors, or companions.

It also included looking at marketplace rip-offs, though never knowing how big of a problem online marketing and tracking would become.

There are now increasing numbers of scam artists with criminal intent and influencers seeking to penetrate our likes and dislikes and wallets, and using AI to improve their reach.

Meanwhile, I am now seeing more AI-generated answers to my inquiries, still coupled with a steady stream of media, public relations, and access-to-information officers out there to spin or block access to data.

Further, official access-to-information systems are beginning to use tax-paid AI tools to help exempt even more data, refine sanitized talking points, and take control of the flow of information.

Recently, *The Ottawa Citizen* reported that three federal departments’ redaction systems were listed in a new AI holdings registry.

I’m quoted in that story as saying the AI-redaction tools being used are part of new wave of repressing data from the public.

Still hidden and not registered are many more federal agencies that use AI for processing access requests.

And further, the AI registry only captures a small fraction of how AI is being put to use across the federal government. Nor does the AI registry attach the costs and vendors associated with each listed activity, or whether, in each case, a backup initial algorithm assessment was done.

Ironically, some departmental officials are complaining about receiving AI-generated information requests, and wanting that practice—but not their use of AI—severely restricted.

Government AI use can include, without our knowing it, significant alterations, like put-

ting information into secret chats or making information disappear.

What motivates government AI use is not always made clear. Not highlighted, for example, is that the federal government is using AI to identify more places to cut public service operations rather than enhancing them.

The general problem we face is that AI-generated data can be manipulative, distorting, misleading, and incomplete—yet there is little accountability or transparency.

So, we need to fight back and be concerned about AI’s fast and uneven growth, and unregulated and secretive nature.

Yes, we could gain some benefits from AI.

But with AI companies’ astronomical growth, power, sometimes-shady and biased practices, and government secrecy and inaction, we are gambling with our society’s communications future.

With this AI onslaught, my advice is not to put aside critical thinking, to stop seeking out information hidden from view, or cut out your community engagement and probing.

I, for one, will continue researching and accessing data without being replaced or imitated or intimidated by a squad of AI bots.

To do my job, no AI bot—corporate, government, or otherwise—need apply.

Ken Rubin is an Ottawa-based investigative researcher reachable via kenrubin.ca.

The Hill Times

OPINION

Canada can do better than more defence dollars and the Golden Dome

The government could adopt and promote a broader common security framework for national and international defence.

Earl Turcotte



Opinion

Since assuming office, Prime Minister Mark Carney has made two of the most potentially consequential and profoundly disturbing announcements ever made by a Canadian prime minister—both with little or no consultation, nor evidence of the support of the Canadian electorate. The first, that Canada agrees with a 150-per-cent increase in defence spending by NATO states to five per cent of GDP by 2035 from the long-standing target of two per cent, which Canada will meet for the first time this year. The second, that Canada may participate in United States President Donald Trump's "Golden Dome" missile defence system, which will accelerate the arms race, lead to the weaponization of space, and increase the risk of nuclear war. In addition to being tragically ill-conceived, the resource implications of both endeavours appear excessive in the extreme.

According to the 2025 Annual Report of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military expenditures in 2024 rose to US\$2.718-trillion, a 9.4-per-cent increase over the previous year, and the steepest year-on-year increase since the Cold War. NATO military spending alone totalled US\$1.506-trillion, 55 per cent of the global total, almost five times that of China at US\$314-billion and more than 10 times that of Russia at US\$149-billion. That NATO must increase military spending by an additional 150 per cent over current levels to defend member states defies reason.

Consider the opportunity costs. Current global military expenditures are already 13 times the US\$214-billion the world dedicated to Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2024 according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—down six per cent from 2023, which the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates has already resulted in 1.8 million unnecessary deaths. OCHA anticipates that, when the numbers are in, ODA will have fallen by an additional nine per cent through 2025, and the downward trajectory will continue.

Trump's Golden Dome initiative—effectively reviving the Strategic Defence Initiative, or "Star Wars," announced by then-president Ronald Reagan in 1983—is conceived as a comprehensive ground- and space-based system to intercept and destroy incoming ballistic nuclear missiles, which is technology that was ultimately deemed not feasible.

Missile-delivery technology has only become more sophisticated since. Russia's Avangard, for example, has various counter measures to evade radar, is manoeuvrable during flight, and is purported to reach speeds of up to Mach 27, i.e. 32,400 km/h. The RS-28 SARMAT, appropriately nicknamed "Satan II," with similar features, has a range of 16,000 kilometres at lower altitudes, and up to 35,000 kilometres with a sub-orbital flight path. It literally can strike any point on Earth from any direction, including over the South Pole to attack North America's vulnerable southern border. Each missile can carry 16 independently targeted and manoeuvrable nuclear warheads, each with its own counter measures and a combined explosive yield of up to 12,000 megatons—800 times that of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in 1945.

Also of great concern are hypersonic missiles that can be launched in large numbers from nuclear-powered submarines that are almost impossible to detect, and can remain submerged off the coast of perceived adversaries for months at a time. Just one American Ohio-class sub can carry 192 strategic nuclear warheads with a combined explosive yield up to 6,000 times that of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Several other nuclear powers have similar capabilities.

The simple and terrifying fact is that it may be impossible to protect against a concerted attack with hypersonic, nuclear-armed missiles that can evade radar systems. The only truly effective defence against nuclear weapons is to eliminate them entirely, as has been done with chemical and biological weapons.

Carney's forthright and unapologetic remarks in Davos, Switzerland, were heard around the world. It's been suggested that they marked the beginning of a new era in geopolitical affairs: the rise of the middle powers.

That this prime minister can provide international leadership to resist those who wield raw power for their own purposes, and to help restore the rules-based international order is not in doubt. One wonders, however, how far he is prepared to go in challenging the status quo.

While still achieving a robust military capacity to defend our nation and to fulfil our legal and moral obligations to help combat aggression abroad, Canada could renounce the outrageously disproportionate new NATO defence spending target, and refuse to engage in Trump's Golden Dome initiative. Canada could adopt and promote a broader common security framework for national and international defence. One that also places a premium on diplomacy to prevent and resolve conflict, on international development to assist the forgotten millions who struggle daily for their very survival, more aggressive measures to combat climate change, and on bold action to rid the world of the scourge of nuclear weapons. In combination, these investments could generate far greater returns for Canadian and global security.

Earl Turcotte is chairperson of the Canadian Network to Abolish Nuclear Weapons.

The Hill Times

From neighbour to nation: why Canada must rethink defence

Defence spending has become a test of whether Canada is prepared to act like a nation in a harder, faster, more dangerous world.

Jennifer Stewart & Vernon White

Opinion

Canada is at an inflection point, and history will not wait for us to get comfortable with it.

For decades, we behaved like a good neighbour. Co-operative. Reliable. Close enough to global power to feel protected by it. But the world has changed, and neighbours no longer get the benefit of the doubt. Nations do.

That is why defence spending—long treated as a reluctant obligation—has become something much larger: a test of whether Canada is prepared to act like a nation in a harder, faster, more dangerous world.

The debate we are having right now, about moving from two per cent of GDP on defence toward a far-higher benchmark embraced by our allies, is not really about numbers. It is about posture. About intent. About whether Canada understands that sovereignty, prosperity, and security are no longer separate conversations.

Defence is still, at its core, about the men and women who serve in uniform. That will never change. But if we reduce defence to only that, we miss the point, and we lose the public. Defence today is about systems, supply chains, infrastructure, industry, and credibility. It is about whether a country can see threats coming, sustain itself through shocks, and contribute meaningfully to collective security rather than simply benefiting from it.

Put plainly: defence is how a country turns geography into sovereignty.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the Arctic. Climate change has transformed Canada's northern geography from a buffer into a frontline. Shipping lanes, undersea infrastructure, surveillance gaps, and foreign interest are no longer theoretical. When the minister of national defence says that the Arctic belongs to Canada, he is not making a rhetorical flourish. He is stating a responsibility. Sovereignty is not declared. It is exercised.

But this story cannot stop at borders and patrols. Defence is also an economic strategy. One that creates skilled jobs, anchors advanced manufacturing, drives innovation, and provides long-term certainty in an increasingly volatile global economy. Countries that invest seriously in defence do not just buy equipment; they build capacity. They develop people, protect intellectual property, and ensure that critical capabilities are not hostage to global disruption.

This is where Canada must broaden its thinking, and its language.

Prime Minister Mark Carney has warned that resilience is the defining economic challenge of our time. The ability to



Defence Minister David McGuinty. If we want Canadians to understand a significant increase in defence spending, we must stop asking them to accept it on faith, write Jennifer Stewart and Vernon White. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

withstand shocks—financial, geopolitical, and environmental—is what separates serious economies from fragile ones. Defence investment is resilience investment. It underwrites secure supply chains, supports domestic production, and ensures that Canada can make choices from a position of strength rather than urgency.

Seen this way, defence is not a cost to be justified. It is a foundation to be built.

And yet, we still talk about it as though it were a deviation from our values, rather than an expression of them. We frame it as exceptional, when it must become normal. We explain it in fragments, when it demands a coherent national story.

That story is this: Canada is moving from neighbour to nation.

A nation plans. It does not wait for crises to force its hand.

A nation invests at home so it can act abroad with credibility.

A nation understands that security and prosperity rise—or fall—together.

If we want Canadians to understand a significant increase in defence spending, we must stop asking them to accept it on faith. We must show them how it touches their lives: in jobs created, communities sustained, trade protected, and sovereignty preserved. We must explain that the price of preparedness is always lower than the cost of scrambling after the fact.

This is not about militarization. It is about modernization. It is not about fear. It is about seriousness.

The world is reorganizing around power, capability, and resolve. Canada can either shape that future alongside its allies or be shaped by it. The choice will not be made by speeches or summits alone. It will be made by whether we are willing to invest, explain, and lead.

That is what nations do.

And that is what Canada must now decide to be.

Jennifer Stewart is the founder and CEO of Syntax Strategic, where she also leads the firm's defence division. The Hon. Vernon White provides strategic counsel to Syntax's defence division, and is a former Canadian senator, former RCMP assistant commissioner, and former chief of police for the Durham and Ottawa Police Services.

The Hill Times



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and his party's approach is profoundly out of step with both the majority of Canadians, and our foundational commitment to human rights, writes Anna Murphy. *The Hill Times* photograph by Amir Said

Pierre Poilievre came to Calgary and Canadians should be paying attention

The direction affirmed by the Conservative Party under Leader Pierre Poilievre is one in which policies deny lived experience, erase identity, and frame the existence of some Canadians as a threat.

Anna Murphy

Opinion

The Conservative convention was not only an opportunity for party members to cast ballots in a leadership review; it was also a moment for Canadians to see clearly the values and policy direction being endorsed by the official opposition and by the man seeking to become our next prime minister, Pierre Poilievre.

While much of the coverage of the late January event focused on Poilievre's approval rating, many Canadians may have missed what also unfolded: the endorsement of misinformation, exclusion, and harmful populist ideologies through party policy resolutions.

The consequences of these policies are not hypothetical. They are already a heart-breaking and devastating reality in homes, schools, clinics, and neighbourhoods across Canada, most acutely in Alberta.

When a political movement, the party that forms Canada's official opposition, and a leader openly vying to be prime minister choose to weaponize falsehoods, reduce complex human realities to slogans, and elevate ignorance under the banner of "common sense," the result is real-world

harm. This approach is profoundly out of step with both the majority of Canadians, and our foundational commitment to human rights.

What should give every Canadian pause is that the message being sent is neither abstract, nor theoretical. It tells our neighbours—especially those who are already marginalized—that their lives, their identities, and their very existence are unwanted.

The direction affirmed by the Conservative Party under Poilievre is one in which policies deny lived experience, erase identity, and frame the existence of some Canadians as a threat. When leaders legitimize animosity and indifference, others feel licensed to act on it, and intolerance becomes emboldened.

Misinformation, particularly when amplified by those in power, becomes a tool of harm. It replaces evidence with ideology, transforms fear into policy, and creates conditions where discrimination feels justified, cruelty feels permissible, and silence becomes complicity.

The cost of this rhetoric is borne by real people: youth told their existence is a problem to be solved rather than a life to be protected; women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people made less safe by the deliberate pitting of communities against one another, as if Canadians must choose whose human rights matter. In reality, the protection and advancement of human rights for some safeguards the rights of all. Families are being forced to watch loved ones become casualties of a manufactured culture war driven by disingenuous politicians.

Canadians deserve to be clear-eyed about what was endorsed and what it signals.

At the convention, more than 90 per cent of delegates voted to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, framing the decision as a return to "meritocracy." This framing ignores the structural barriers that continue to shape access to opportunity in Canada, and dismisses the lived realities of those who have been historically excluded. It reduces inequity to a slogan and presents erasure as fairness.

On conversion therapy, a resolution opposing Canada's federal ban received the support of 52 per cent of delegates. It failed not because a majority rejected it, but because it did not meet the party's internal double-majority rule. Put plainly, a majority of delegates supported opposing a ban on a practice widely recognized as harmful. That fact alone should concern Canadians.

At the same time, previously adopted policies remain firmly in place.

Policy 92 calls for prohibiting gender-affirming medical care for minors under the age of 18, denying trans youth access to medically recognized care and substituting ideology for evidence-based health decisions made by families and medical professionals.

Policy 102 explicitly defines "woman" as a "female person," and restricts single-sex spaces and categories—bathrooms, shelters, prisons, sports, and scholarships—to biological females only. Adopted as part of a broader effort to counter what delegates described as "gender ideology," these measures function in practice to exclude, stigmatize, and endanger people whose existence does not conform to rigid definitions.

This direction is reinforced by leadership. Poilievre has stated that "female

spaces should be exclusively for females, not biological males," a position that aligns directly with these policies and with the direction endorsed by delegates at the convention.

Taken together, the message is unmistakable.

The rollback of DEI was overwhelmingly endorsed. Opposition to the conversion therapy ban was supported by a slim majority, and blocked only by procedure. Abortion was deliberately sidestepped. And restrictions on trans rights and inclusion are already embedded in party policy.

Canadians should be clear about what is at stake.

The alternative to speaking out is not neutrality; it is the slow normalization of harm.

When fear is legitimized, misinformation rewarded, and difference treated as a threat, the social fabric of our country weakens.

A healthy democracy does not fear difference; it recognizes it as a strength.

A free society does not punch down on the vulnerable; it is measured by how well it protects them.

And leadership worthy of public trust does not reach for the notwithstanding clause to dismantle Charter rights.

Silence in moments like this is not caution; it is complicity.

This is a moment that demands vigilance, courage, and clarity—because once misinformation hardens into policy, the damage is no longer rhetorical.

It is human.

Anna Murphy is a Calgary-based advocate for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, and an award-winning community builder. She was named to Avenue magazine's Top 40 Under 40 and received the Coronation Medal.

The Hill Times

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NEWS

Senate leaders pledge collaboration as Red Chamber reconvenes to 'more rapid' pace

Senators now have a series of government bills to study after a slow trickle of legislation left the House last fall, but leaders say a balance needs to be struck between speed and scrutiny.

BY ELEANOR WAND

Senate leaders say they're tackling the Carney government's ambitious legislative agenda collaboratively, downplaying suggestions that stricter deadlines could be imposed on the Chamber as they work to strike "the right balance" between speed and scrutinizing legislation.

"We have a group of leaders that are willing to collaborate and work together as best we can," Progressive Senate Group Leader Senator Brian Francis (Epekwitk, Mi'kma'ki, P.E.I.) told *The Hill Times* in a Feb. 4 interview.

"It's what Canadians expect ... to see a key focus on progress, working together."

The Upper Chamber reconvened on Feb. 3, and is currently conducting its pre-study of Bill C-15, the government's budget implementation bill, as well as having a host of other government legislation before its committees at various stages.

That legislation includes Bill C-12, the feds' border and immigration act, as well as Bill C-4, which would approve an income tax cut, change the consumer carbon tax, and apply a GST rebate for first time homebuyers.

Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) has previously pledged to move quickly on legislation. But the first-time MP and prime minister has only managed to pass five pieces of legislation into law since taking office—three of which are spending bills—with the minority government's bills held up in the House and slowly making their way to the Senate.

Back in December, Government House Leader Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Que.) attributed that slow-down to Conservative efforts to stall legislation before the House broke for the holidays, and to assist Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Battle River—Crowfoot, Alta.) with his leadership review. MacKinnon reiterated that assessment for Bill C-15 last week.

Though the Liberal ranks have gained two thanks to Tory floor



Senators Pierre Moreau, left, Lucie Moncion, Flordeliz Osler, and Brian Francis are the leaders of their respective groups. Osler says members of the Canadian Senators Group see the 'new' balance between moving quickly and analyzing legislation as a 'positive.' *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade and Sam Garcia

crossings late last year, with now 169 MPs following Bill Blair's resignation, they are three short a majority, and need votes from three opposition members to get legislation passed. House Speaker and Liberal MP Francis Scarpa (Lac-Saint-Louis, Que.) only votes in the event of a tie.

Senate Conservative Leader Leo Housakos (Wellington, Que.) was unavailable for an interview before deadline. The leader has grown the Conservative ranks in the Upper Chamber since taking over the post in May 2025, bringing in three new members, and suggesting the 13-person caucus could grow even further.

'Pace will be more rapid' in the Senate, says Sen. Moreau

Senator Pierre Moreau (The Laurentides, Que.), the govern-

ment's representative in the Upper Chamber, said this sitting will be busier than it was in the fall, and the flow of legislation passing through the Chamber should be faster.

He said Senators understand that "our security and our situation worldwide is changing, and Canada has to adapt to that to diversify the economy and to, at the same time, answer the urgent needs of Canadians."

"It's sure that the pace will be more rapid during this coming session," he explained.

But Senator Lucie Moncion (Ontario), facilitator of the Independent Senators Group (ISG), said the increased pace doesn't necessarily mean harsher deadlines will be imposed on the Senate.

"I would be cautious about framing this in terms of stricter deadlines," she said in a statement, highlighting the Senate's

independence, which she called "essential."

That independence ordinarily prevents the government from interfering with the Senate's timelines, unless a tool like time allocation is invoked.

"That said, Senators understand the urgency behind the government's legislative agenda," Moncion said. "The government can trust the Senate to deliver timely, responsible review without compromising the independence that strengthens our democratic institutions."

Francis said that there are some in the government representative's office (GRO) who "may be looking at speeding up the legislative process," but it is Senators' jobs "to make sure it's thoroughly analyzed."

Canadian Senators Group (CSG) Leader Flordeliz "Gigi" Osler (Manitoba) said the Chamber is working with "balancing" passing legislation and sufficiently scrutinizing the bills on their plate.

"The geopolitical context has changed, even compared to last year," she said, pointing to national security, sovereignty, and affordability as pressures on Canadians.

"We've heard calls recently from just [former] prime minister Stephen Harper calling for national unity. And I do get a sense within the Chamber that all groups are working well together and working in the best interests of Canadians."

At Harper's official portrait unveiling on Parliament Hill in Feb. 3, the three-term former Conservative prime minister recently called for Liberals and Conservatives to work together in the face of threats from United States President Donald Trump.

But Osler said that 19 CSG Senators see the balance of moving quickly as a "positive." Osler's predecessor Senator Scott Tannas (Alberta) previously told *The Hill Times* there was a "different tone" in the Senate with an air to getting things done.

"I think that new tone ... that Senator Tannas was describing last year is continuing," Osler said, explaining Senators "understand" the threats Canadians are facing.

Senate leaders focused on C-4 and C-12, says Osler

Osler is one of a slate of new leaders in the Red Chamber. She was elected as leader on Dec. 9, 2025, taking over from Tannas on Jan. 5.

The 42-member ISG, the largest group in the Senate, also elected new leadership on Dec. 10, with Moncion taking the reins from Senator Raymond Saint-Germain (De la Vallière, Que.), who reached the term-limit cap, having been involved with the group's leadership since 2017.

Francis, too, has only been leader of the 16-member PSG since May 15, 2025, and Housakos since May 14. Moreau has been with the GRO for less than a year, appointed in July after his predecessor reached the mandatory retirement age.

Moncion wrote that the new faces have made for "a positive and refreshing start to the session."

"The leadership table is one of the most diverse we've seen in some time, including strong gender balance, and that brings a wide range of experiences and perspectives," she said.

She said that the meetings between the leaders have been "very practical and constructive," with the Senators focused on managing the flow of legislation, positioning committees, and "striking the right balance" between legislation moving through the Chamber "efficiently" while studying it carefully.

Osler said that the leaders have been focused on C-4 and C-12, but she's working to try and "balance expediency" in getting them through the Senate.

"We understand the desire for government to have these bills seen quickly, but we do want to ensure that the Senate is able to fulfill our duty as the Chamber of sober second thought," she said.

Moreau told *The Hill Times* he expects C-4, the Making Life More Affordable for Canadians Act, to be adopted by the end of February and that he doesn't foresee "any pushback" within the Chamber, despite the legislation taking six months to pass from the House to the Senate, having first been introduced in the Lower Chamber on June 5, 2025.

"I don't want to rush things through the Senate," he said. "But I think that we have three weeks of work during February, and probably that by the end of the month, C-4 will have been through all the processing."

—with files from Riddhi Kachhela
ewand@hilltimes.com
The Hill Times



Government House Leader Steven MacKinnon said the Conservatives were stalling legislation in December, 2025. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

HEALTH



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HEALTH Policy Briefing

Canada must take lead in fighting health misinformation as vaccine hesitancy rises and U.S. pulls back from WHO, say sector experts

In the face of bad advice coming out of the U.S., Health Minister Marjorie Michel needs to discuss how to best promote facts with federal agencies and departments, according to Canadian Medical Association president Margot Burnell.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Health Minister Marjorie Michel has an opportunity to position Canada as a leader in countering misinformation amid a global disruption caused by the United States quitting the World Health Organization, and rising vaccine hesitancy, according to health sector experts.

"The [health] minister's, I think, responsibility is to advocate for the health of Canadians, and so every avenue that can be leveraged to do that is critically important," said Margot Burnell, president of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA). "To do that nationally, and to use colleagues and partners and stakeholders who align with that, I think, is also is critically important."

Burnell told *The Hill Times* that Canada faces "a very large concern" with regard to a rise in health misinformation currently spreading from south of the border. About 77 per cent of Canadians say they are concerned about an increase in the amount of false health information coming from the U.S., according to the results of a CMA-commissioned survey



Margot Burnell, president of the Canadian Medical Association, says the federal minister should be 'shining a light' on health issues. *Handout photograph*

conducted by Abacus Data and released on Feb. 10.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the U.S.'s secretary of health and human services, is a major source of false health information in the country. Among other claims, Kennedy has repeatedly and falsely linked vaccines to autism, while an analysis from a World Health Organization (WHO) global expert committee on vaccine safety—released in December 2025—found no causal link between vaccines and autism spectrum disorders. Kennedy has also argued in favour of using unproven COVID-19 treatments, such as the antiparasitic drug ivermectin and the antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine, and on Feb. 4, he falsely claimed that a Harvard doctor had cured schizophrenia using the keto diet—a high-fat, low-carbohydrate, and moderate-protein eating plan.

Health experts were quick to respond, with U.S. magazine *Scientific American* publishing an article on Feb. 6 saying that Kennedy's claims were "misleading and not backed by evidence."

In the face of a wave of misinformation coming out of the U.S.,

Burnell said that Canada's health minister needs to discuss how to best promote factual information with various health-related government agencies and departments, including the Public Health Agency of Canada and Health Canada.

Michel (Papineau, Que.) should be "shining a light" on health issues related to primary care access, vaccines, and mental health in a way similar to how she has already done with regard to data interoperability, argued Burnell.

Data interoperability refers to the secure access and integration of electronic data across organizational boundaries. To help facilitate digital links between healthcare providers in Canada, Bill S-5, the Connected Care for Canadians Act, was introduced in the Senate on Feb. 4. Michel called the legislation a "critical step towards a more connected health-care system that supports all Canadians," in a Health Canada press release on the same day.

"Timely and secure access to personal health information is critical to saving lives and improving care for Canadians,"



Health Minister Marjorie Michel called Bill S-5 a 'critical step towards a more connected health-care system that supports all Canadians,' in a press release on Feb. 4. *The Hill Times* photograph by Sam Garcia



Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., who announced the U.S.'s withdrawal from the World Health Organization on Jan. 26, is a major source of false health information in the country. *White House photograph by Abe McNatt*

said Michel in the press release. "The Connected Care for Canadians Act is about empowering Canadians to securely access their own health data, so patients and those involved in their care have the information they need to make the right decisions at the right time."

The Hill Times reached out Michel to ask about top health priorities in Canada and plans going forward, but did not receive a response before press time.

The U.S. officially withdrew from the WHO on Jan. 22, marking the first time the country has not been a member since the organization's founding nearly 80 years prior. In response, the WHO said it regrets the withdrawal, arguing the decision makes both the U.S. and the world less safe.

Timothy Caulfield, a professor in the Faculty of Law and the School of Public Health, and research director of the Health Law Institute at the University of Alberta, told *The Hill Times* that the U.S. pulling out of the WHO and the spread of misinformation by the American health secretary has "a huge impact on Canada" by creating confusion and distrust.

"Because our information environment is so chaotic, I think these kinds of comments just make it more difficult for people to get a sense of what the evidence actually says on a given topic," said Caulfield. "It just creates chaos and confusion, not just for the United States, but for the world, and we see vaccination hesitancy increasing in Canada. We see things like the measles outbreak happening in [Alberta], and really across Canada, and the rhetoric emanating from the United States, I think, is very relevant here."

Alberta has seen a rise in spread of the measles, with 2,066 confirmed cases between March 2025 and Feb. 9, 2026, according to the Government of Alberta. The provincial government advises that the best protection against measles is for everyone to be up to date with their immunizations, and that measles vaccines are provided free of charge for eligible populations through public health centres.

Caulfield said Canada needs to emerge as an international leader in countering health misinforma-

Continued on page 19

Canada can't afford to wait for leadership in pharmaceutical innovation

The new U.S. drug pricing approach forces a choice, but it doesn't limit our ambition. We need a new, coordinated solution for pharmaceutical innovation—one that's made by Canadians for Canadians.

By Dr. Bettina Hamelin



Middle powers don't become leaders by standing still—they lead by taking charge of their own destiny.

That was the clear message Prime Minister Carney delivered on the world stage in Davos, where he argued that countries like Canada don't have to accept terms set by others. We can chart our own path, shape our future, and compete with confidence if we make deliberate choices. That same leadership is urgently needed at home—particularly in pharmaceutical innovation.

Canada's access to new medicines is under serious threat. Canadians already wait longer than patients in other G7 countries to access innovative medicines. Now, the Trump administration's new drug pricing approach, known as most-favoured nation (MFN) pricing, risks widening that gap even further.

For Canadians waiting for a new cancer therapy, a treatment for a rare disease, or a first-in-class medicine, this isn't an abstract policy debate—it's personal. Delayed access can mean prolonged illness, more hospital stays, reduced quality of life—or worse. Medicines aren't optional add-ons to care. They're an essential pillar of a healthcare system that fuels a strong economy.

President Trump's new approach requires pharmaceutical companies to align U.S. drug prices with lower prices in a group of reference countries, including Canada. The U.S. contends that its higher prices unjustly subsidize global pharmaceutical innovation and enable countries like Canada to pay less. By some measures, U.S. per capita contributions toward new medicines are more than double Canada's. That imbalance has now become a line in the sand.

The intended effect is for Americans to pay less for new medicines, and for Canada and others to pay more for pharmaceutical innovation. So far, it's working. Major industry players have already pledged more than \$200 billion in pharmaceutical investments to expand domestic U.S. drug manufacturing and R&D, signaling a massive shift toward reshoring pharmaceutical supply chains south of the border.

At this pivotal moment, Canada faces a choice. We can continue to undervalue and underinvest in pharmaceutical innovation, while hoping global conditions bend in our favour. Or we can act decisively—on our own terms—to build a resilient, highly competitive life sciences ecosystem that delivers both health security, investments, and economic security.

For too long, Canada has taken pharmaceutical innovation for granted, rather than treating it as a strategic asset. Compared to peer countries, we invest less and take longer to approve and reimburse new medicines. Only 18 per cent of new medicines launched globally are available through Canada's public drug plans, compared to the OECD average of 28 per cent. Once available, Canadians wait an average of two years to access new medicines through public drug plans, following Health Canada approval, with wide inequities across provinces and territories.

That vulnerability is now being exposed. Today, it's the Trump administration's drug pricing approach. Tomorrow, it could be something else—another global policy shift, another economic shock, another reordering of investment priorities. Until Canada strengthens its own foundations—until our drug prices, access timelines, and investment environment are globally competitive—we will remain exposed to forces beyond our control.

The consequences of inaction are stark. Canada becomes a lower priority market for new medicines. Launches are delayed. Patients wait longer. Overburdened physicians and hospitals shoulder even more

strain as preventable complications increase. People stay sick longer, struggle to return to work, and are forced to place greater pressure on the primary care and hospital systems.

This scenario is neither acceptable nor inevitable. A 2025 study by Dr. Frank Lichtenberg at Columbia University found that sustained investment in innovative medicines reduced hospital days in Canada by 55 per cent in 2022—saving close to \$80 billion in hospital costs. Innovation doesn't just improve health outcomes; it makes the entire system more sustainable.

There is also a significant economic dimension. Canada's innovative pharmaceutical sector is an economic engine that supports more than 110,000 jobs across the country and contributes \$18.4 billion annually to the economy. Decisions about where to conduct clinical trials, where to invest in research and development, and where to launch new medicines are global and highly strategic. Companies look for markets that are predictable, timely, fair, and committed to innovation.

Canada has what it takes to be competitive. We have world-renowned scientific expertise, strong academic institutions, and ideal conditions for clinical trials. What we lack is a bold, coordinated, and forward-looking strategy that matches our potential.

Other countries are moving decisively in response to the new U.S. drug pricing approach. The U.K. has already reached a bilateral agreement with the U.S. Others are actively strengthening their life sciences ecosystems, modernizing access pathways, and signaling that innovation is welcome.

Canada cannot afford to "wait and see" what happens south of the border. Global drug pricing pressures are here to stay. The only durable solution is a made-in-Canada approach—one that protects patients, safeguards innovation, and positions us as a trusted partner in global health.

Collaboration between governments and industry is key. We must come together and act—now. Innovation Medicines Canada (IMC) calls on the federal government to:

- Commit to incremental increases in federal funding for new medicines;
- Provide incentives that accelerate access to new therapies across all provinces and territories; and
- Ensure the life sciences sector has a seat at the table during the upcoming review of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) and parallel bilateral discussions.

Industry stands ready to co-create and support these government solutions. The decisions we make in the coming months will shape our ability to care for Canadians—and compete globally—for years to come.

Prime Minister Carney has shown that Canada can lead with confidence on the global stage. We now need to replicate that leadership at home. Pharmaceutical innovation isn't a cost to be minimized; it's an investment in Canada's health security, economic resilience, and global competitiveness.

Middle powers don't become leaders by default. They become leaders by choosing to be. Canada has that choice—right now.

Dr. Bettina Hamelin is the President and CEO of Innovative Medicines Canada, the national association representing Canada's innovative pharmaceutical industry.

HEALTH Policy Briefing

A plan to strengthen health care and measure outcomes

Working together, we can examine existing Canada Health Transfers, and look at innovation in the system.

Liberal MP
Hedy Fry

Opinion

Much has been said recently about the state of the health-care system in Canada. In 2005, Canada ranked in the top four of all health-care systems. Sadly, according to the Commonwealth Fund, which ranks the health systems of the 11 richest countries, in 2021 we slid to 10th, just above the United States (which consistently ranks last). In 2024, we rose slightly to seventh place overall.

But general rank does not tell the whole story. The Commonwealth Fund uses five indicators to evaluate systems: access to care, care process, administrative efficiency, equity, and health outcomes. The United Kingdom, Australia, and the Netherlands rank consistently in the top three, though they spend the lowest per capita on health care. In care process and health outcomes, Canada is in the top five. But we have slid in access to care and administrative cost per capita, and now have the longest wait times for access and one of the costliest administrative systems.

So, what went wrong?

Canada has a dire shortage of health-care workers, which, to some extent, we can blame on COVID-19 burnout. Yet, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands were less affected because they put in place immediate, stringent vaccine, community, and border-restriction protocols that contained the spread of infection and diminished strain on their health-care systems. Health-care professionals are doing the best they can with the resources they are provided.

Only 81 per cent of Canadians have a family doctor according to the Canadian Medical Association. In the high-performing countries, 97 to 99 per cent of patients have a GP. Good primary care is essential to timely diagnosis and treatment, freeing emergency rooms for critical care only. Their multidisciplinary clinics, with different health workers, provide comprehensive primary care and chronic disease management all in one place. Good community care, long-term care, and home care in these countries free up hospitals and beds for acute care and surgical or critical interventions. Wait lists go down, and costs decrease.

Unfortunately, Canada faces a unique challenge. We have, in effect, 13 separate health-care systems. Provinces decide when and where care is delivered, and by whom. The federal government provides tax and cash transfers under the Canada Health Act, which guarantees accessibility, portability, and universality, regardless of ability to pay. The Act clearly spells out penalties for contravening those principles, but not since then-health minister Diane Marleau applied them successfully—due to



Canada faces a unique challenge in that we have, in effect, 13 separate health-care systems, writes Liberal MP Hedy Fry. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

a private eye clinic operating in Alberta in the 1990s—have they been implemented.

This unequal delivery of care across the country is evidenced by the C.D. Howe Institute, using Commonwealth Fund, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Health Organization, and Canadian Institute for Health Information data, which places Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia as top performers, and Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nunavut as needing improvement. As we break down the Commonwealth Fund data, we see that the costliest systems do not provide the best care, efficiencies, or outcomes. Therefore, throwing more money at the problem is not the answer.

Canadian medicare performed well for decades, but it faces new challenges. It is time to look at how the system can be managed differently.

Some small provinces, like P.E.I., have large senior populations. Geographically challenging regions, like Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut, have larger rural and isolated communities where access is a challenge. Let us level the playing field.

Working together, we can examine existing Canada Health Transfers that are solely per capita and factor in demographics and need—such as seniors, youth at risk, or geography, where distance increases the cost of care. We must look at innovation in the system, including increased use of artificial intelligence and technology to link isolated communities with tertiary care centres for diagnosis and acute care delivery. In Holland, incentives are in place to encourage health-care providers to keep some clinics open 24 hours, lifting the burden on emergency rooms.

Canada's ranking was also affected by inadequate provision of mental health supports, and limited access to prescription drugs and dental care. Our government has started on these programs, but there is a need to continue negotiations with provinces and territories so they can be pan-Canadian.

As we move to an independent, competitive economy, we must recognize that an essential component is a healthy, productive population.

The Honourable Dr. Hedy Fry, P.C., is MP for Vancouver Centre, B.C. Fry practiced family medicine in Vancouver for more than 20 years. During this time, she served as president of the Vancouver Medical Association, and the BC Medical Association. She is currently the longest-serving female MP in Canadian history, and is chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health.

The Hill Times

More doctors won't save us if we keep creating new patients

A sustainable health-care system must pair workforce reform with prevention, and nowhere is the prevention gap more obvious than with smoking and vaping.

Dawn Bowdish
& Jessica Buckley

Opinion



Canada's health-care crisis is usually described in familiar terms: long wait times, overcrowded emergency rooms, and not enough doctors and nurses. Governments respond with equally familiar promises: more hospital beds, more staff, more funding.

Of course, these investments are necessary. But they are no longer sufficient.

A sustainable health-care system must pair workforce reform with prevention. Otherwise, we will continue to pour resources



Strong federal action on vaping would signal a serious commitment to a healthier, more sustainable future, write Dawn Bowdish and Jessica Buckley. *Pexels* photograph by Ruslan Alekso

into treating illnesses that could have been avoided in the first place. Nowhere is this tension clearer than in respiratory health, and nowhere is the prevention gap more obvious than with smoking and vaping.

Canada's health-care workforce is under intense strain—staffing shortages, burnout, and moral distress are now routine realities for clinicians. Respiratory illnesses already place significant pressure on primary care doctors, respiratory therapists, emergency departments, and long-term care facilities. For many clinicians, this has normalized a form of "hallway medicine," with preventable Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease exacerbations managed in overcrowded settings and under constant timeline constraints.

Yet, too little attention is paid to preventing people from needing health-care services in the first place. Supporting health-care workers means both staffing them properly, and protecting them from an endless influx of preventable disease.

Vaping exposes this contradiction clearly.

Originally marketed as a harm-reduction tool for adult smokers, vaping has become a youth-driven public health challenge. In 2022, 14 per cent of Canadian youth aged 15 to 19 reported vaping in the past 30 days—more than double the rate just five years earlier. Many products are flavoured and high in nicotine, increasing their appeal and addiction risk for young people whose brains are still developing. Emerging evidence links vaping to respiratory and cardiovascular harm, nicotine dependence, and a higher likelihood of transitioning to cigarette smoking. Long-

term impacts are still being studied, but Canada's history with tobacco offers a stark warning.

Tobacco remains the leading cause of preventable death in Canada, responsible for more than 45,000 deaths, and more than \$16-billion in economic costs each year. Allowing vaping to follow a similar trajectory would be a preventable public policy failure.

This where federal leadership becomes critical.

While health-care delivery is largely provincial, prevention, surveillance, and regulation require national co-ordination. Today, provincial approaches to vaping vary widely, with inconsistent rules and uneven enforcement. Regulatory gaps are easily exploited by industry, leaving youth protections dependent on postal codes.

The National Lung Health Alliance, Canada's leading advocacy network for lung health, recently urged the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health to commission a comprehensive federal study on the health impacts of vaping. This study would strengthen national surveillance, assess health outcomes, evaluate existing regulations, and identify effective prevention strategies.

Most importantly, it would give policy-makers and health-care providers the evidence they need to act before today's youth become tomorrow's patients.

Prevention is not just public health policy. It is workforce policy. We cannot recruit our way out of a problem we continue to create.

Investing in prevention through research, regulation, and public education is one of the most cost-effective ways to sustain Canada's health-care system. It protects its workers from burnout, ensures that scarce resources are used where they are truly unavoidable, and improves quality of life for Canadians long before illness takes hold.

Supporting the mental health of health-care workers begins with supporting the care they provide. They need time and tools to talk with patients about prevention and cessation, but financial strain and packed schedules rarely allow for it.

Reforms in Canada's respiratory health sector must therefore focus on two tracks at once: improving timely access to care, and reducing the future burden of disease. This means supporting health-care professionals with adequate staffing and mental health resources, while at the same time reinforcing national prevention strategies for emerging threats like vaping.

Strong federal action on vaping would signal a serious commitment to a healthier, more sustainable future. It would acknowledge that prevention is not optional. It is foundational.

The real reform is not choosing between people and policy. It is recognizing that the health of one depends on the strength of the other.

Dr. Dawn Bowdish is director of the Firestone Institute for Respiratory Health.

Jessica Buckley is president and CEO of the Lung Health Foundation.

The Hill Times

Policy Briefing HEALTH

Canada must take lead in fighting health misinformation as vaccine hesitancy rises and U.S. pulls back from WHO, say sector experts

Continued from page 16

tion. To that end, Canada should "support and create entities that can be responsive to health misinformation as it emerges," he said.

"Let's support the creation of knowledge aggregation ... that benefits the public, the media, the policymakers, and clinicians, so when we see something absurd come from the United States ... we should have statements coming from Health Canada, and perhaps even a new entity that clearly articulates what the scientific consensus is in a way that's digestible for a range of communities," said Caulfield. "I think that could make a real difference. Evidence tells us that those kinds of statements really are beneficial, when they aggregate the scientific consensus in a digestible

and responsible manner. I think Canada can become a world leader in that space."

Ivy Bourgeault, director of the Canadian Health Workforce Network and a professor in the School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies at the University of Ottawa, told *The Hill Times* that "what is happening in the United States is destabilizing, globally." The U.S. withdrawing from the WHO will affect Canada and other countries through the loss of "important, critical intellectual capacity," she said.

Bourgeault said "the world is looking to Canada," following Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) recent speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. During his Jan. 20 remarks, Carney talked about the end of the "old order" and the need for middle pow-

ers to navigate a new, harsher geopolitical reality.

Bourgeault said she would welcome more leadership from Canadian representation to the WHO, and that an important step could be through standardizing data on the health workforce.

"What does the population need? How are they aging? Where are they located? How is their disease profile changing? We need [that] data to be able to say what's the workforce that we need to meet the needs of the population," she said. "Right now, a really important foundation has been laid for the standardization of patient-level data. We need to take the next step and standardize health workforce data, standardizing it across professions, across jurisdictions, and those two developments will enable us to build much more robust methods and tools for health workforce modeling and planning that includes all of the different [interest] holders."

Michelle McLean, president and CEO of HealthCareCAN, also told *The Hill Times* that Carney's Davos speech "really vaulted Canada into a leadership position in this new emerging world order."

"He spoke clearly and boldly about what is happening and what the world needs to do next. There was overwhelming international positive response, and it showed us that the world is looking for that kind of leadership, and they found it in Canada. And the reason I come back to that is, there are parallels to what's happening in health and what we saw at Davos," she said. "Canada may be a middle power, but our impact can actually be outsized. It can be maybe larger than our size would imply, and not just in inter-

national relations and diplomacy, but in health and health research."

McLean said that Canada may not have the spending power of the U.S., but argued this country can contribute to a new world order in health that's emerging as the U.S. pulls back from the world stage. This could be achieved through "strong, clear positions," and clear communication about health, she said.

"We can be really clear on the risks of what an isolationist approach to health presents, and the importance of global bodies like WHO. I think there's a role for Canada to be really clear, and we're known for having

world-leading health researchers, health-care leaders. The government's investing in bringing more here, and that's a really important signal for Canada to send," she said. "The message is, 'We believe in science, [and] we're investing in science and research,' and I think Canada can lead, frankly, in this regard."

McLean argued this messaging doesn't just lie at the feet of the federal health minister, but that it also requires co-ordination among provincial and territorial health ministers across Canada.

"We really need them to work together with health-system leaders ... to ensure that Canadians have the evidence and the information they need to keep their families safe and healthy, whether that's on vaccinations or other health issues. We know that United States, through some of its recent declarations, is creating some uncertainty and confusion," she said. "It's always important, but at this time particularly so for our [health] ministers, federally and provincially ... to really be sending strong, consistent messaging around evidence and information for Canadians."

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The Hill Times

Health misinformation spread in Canada



Image courtesy of Pexels.com

- About 64 per cent of Canadians say they encounter false, or misleading health information occasionally, often, or all the time.
- About 77 per cent of Canadians are concerned about an increase in the amount of health misinformation from the United States. Also, 74 per cent of Canadians say they are concerned about a decrease in available, accurate, good-quality health information from the U.S.
- Nearly all Canadians (89 per cent) go online for health and health-care information.
- Speed, not accuracy, is driving Canadians online for answers to health questions, with 80 per cent
- About 90 per cent of Canadians agree, either strongly or somewhat, that the government has a responsibility to address the spread of health-related misinformation on social media platforms.
- The increase in false health information online has made Canadians (69 per cent) skeptical of any health information they find online, even from sources they think they should trust.
- About 85 per cent of Canadians trust physicians to help them navigate health information.

—Source: Canadian Medical Association (CMA) and Abacus Data; 2026 CMA Health and Media Tracking Survey, released on Feb. 10



Timothy Caulfield, research director of the Health Law Institute at the University of Alberta, says vaccine hesitancy is increasing in Canada. Handout photograph



Ivy Bourgeault, director of the Canadian Health Workforce Network, says Canada can 'fill a void' on the world stage in regard to health. *Photograph courtesy of Ivy Bourgeault*

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Canada poised to eliminate cervical cancer

Ongoing focus on HPV vaccination and screening needed to reach Canada's goal of eliminating cervical cancer by 2040

We are at a crossroads on our way to this goal. Recent data from the Canadian Cancer Society indicates cervical cancer rates in Canada have plateaued since 2005, after declining for decades.

This is concerning. Cervical cancer claimed nearly 430 lives in Canada in 2025 despite being one of the few cancers that can be eliminated.

Cervical cancer is almost always caused by certain types of the human papillomavirus (HPV), and can be prevented through a combination of HPV vaccination and screening.

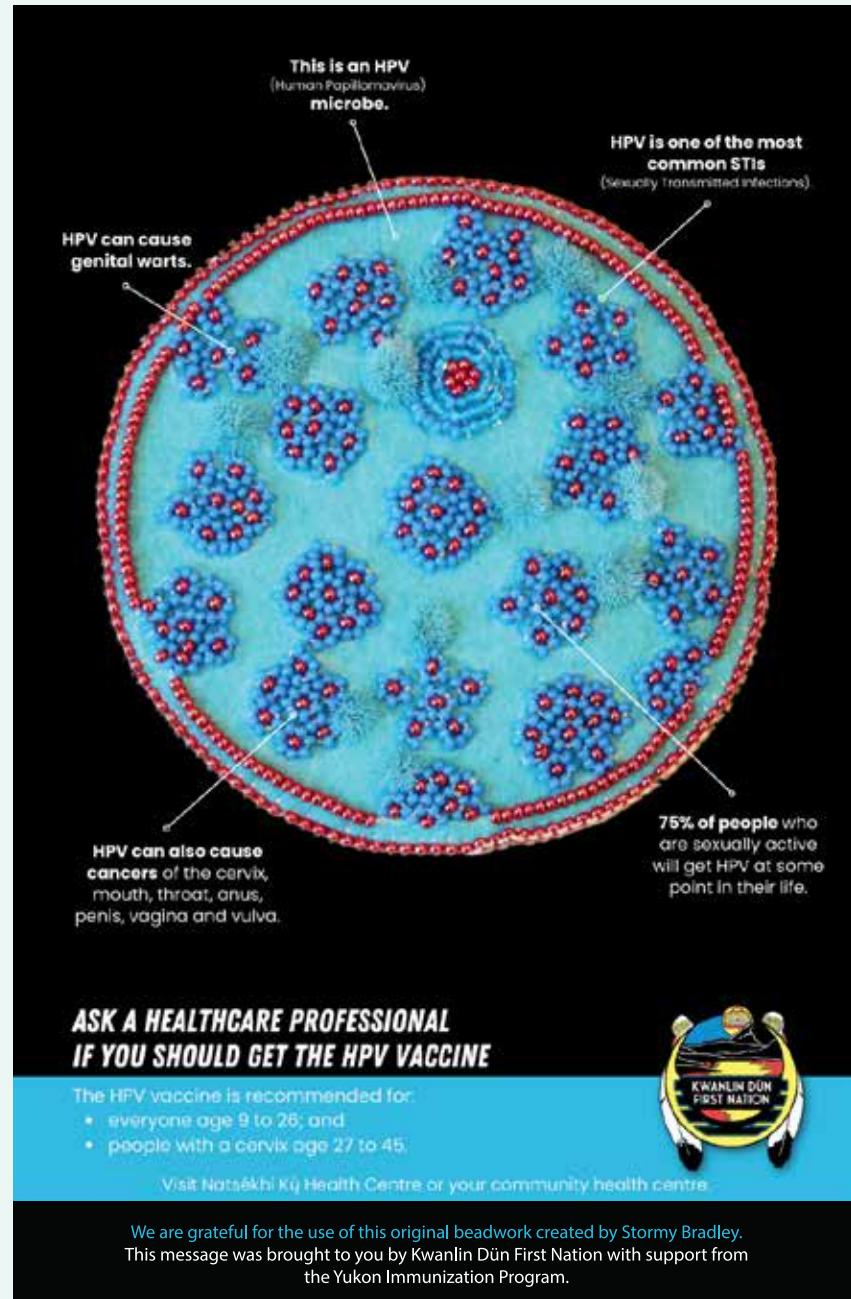
We have the tools for elimination

The Canadian Partnership Against Cancer (the Partnership) is leading the implementation of the *Action Plan for the Elimination of Cervical Cancer in Canada, 2020-2030*. Through the Action Plan, provinces and territories across the country are working to improve HPV vaccination uptake, and shift to a newer, more effective and often less invasive way to screen for cervical cancer.

A key element of the Action Plan is ensuring everyone – regardless of geography, income, race or other factors – can access screening and vaccination.

"The goal of eliminating cervical cancer is still within reach but we will only achieve it by focusing on populations that face the greatest barriers to HPV screening and vaccination. Actions like implementing HPV self-screening are key to advancing health equity and reconciliation, which are priorities of the Action Plan."

Dr. Craig Earle
CEO of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer



As a country, we need to continue to support and invest in this work

Recent modelling projections indicate that eliminating cervical cancer by 2040 will require sustained efforts to increase HPV vaccination and make HPV screening available across all provinces and territories by 2035.

The goal is still within reach – as long as policymakers, cancer and healthcare specialists, and community leaders work urgently and collaboratively to boost HPV vaccination and access to HPV screening across Canada.

Canada is making progress towards eliminating cervical cancer

Northwest Territories will be the first territory to establish an organized cervical screening program. HPV self-screening* will be the test of choice.

British Columbia is the first jurisdiction to offer HPV self-screening across the province.

Saskatchewan is one of five jurisdictions reporting HPV vaccination rates of over 80%.

An at-home HPV self-screening pilot in **Manitoba** enabled access to cervical screening for those who face specific barriers or had never participated in screening before.

Quebec plans to fully implement HPV screening by mid-2026.

Newfoundland and Labrador is the only jurisdiction in Canada to reach the target of 90% HPV vaccination coverage.

Prince Edward Island is on track to be the first province to eliminate cervical cancer in Canada through a combination of HPV screening and self-sampling, and a high HPV vaccination rate of over 80%.

In March 2025, **Ontario** launched HPV testing for cervical cancer screening within its province-wide program.

*Self-screening helps more people get checked for cervical cancer by letting them safely collect their own sample when and where it works for them, bringing care closer to home in culturally safer ways, and improving access and comfort for those without a regular provider or with past trauma.

"One of the big challenges in eliminating cervical cancer is reaching women who have traditionally been under-screened and under-vaccinated. Understanding and addressing barriers to access is crucial for screening and immunization programs to better meet the needs of diverse populations and reduce rates of cervical cancer."

Dr. Gina Ogilvie
Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Global Control of HPV-related diseases and prevention, University of British Columbia

"Canada needs to act now. If we can get vaccination coverage and HPV primary screening up to 90% across Canada, cervical cancer can be eliminated soon – as early as 2031. But if we stay on the path we're on, we risk not reaching our goal of elimination."

Dr. Darren Brenner
Molecular Cancer Epidemiologist, Departments of Oncology and Community Health Sciences, University of Calgary



Production of this advertisement has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada, through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. The views expressed represent those of the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer.

HEALTH Policy Briefing

Health care is a human right

Health Minister Marjorie Michel. The federal government should advance promised legislation on safe long-term care that would mandate adherence to national standards as a condition for receiving federal funding, writes Linda Silas. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



The federal government cannot let privatization erode access to the public system.

Linda Silas

Opinion

Canadians are rightly worried about access to health care. Long waits, delayed and cancelled surgeries, and difficulty finding primary health care are no longer isolated problems. They're a daily reality.

As Canada's population ages, and demand outpaces growth in the health workforce, access to care is becoming more fragile. Instead of strengthening the public system and investing in safe, public long-term care to meet the growing need, provincial governments are turning to private, for-profit delivery. This puts timely, equitable access at risk, and threatens the future of public health care in Canada.

It's time the federal government acts to safeguard our health system.

Nurses and health-care workers point to chronic understaffing and unsafe workloads as the most urgent challenges in health care in our country. Policy choices that funnel public dollars towards privatization compound these pressures.

The consequences are already being felt at the bedside.

Public employers can't compete with private nursing agency rates and conditions, leaving permanent positions unfilled. For-profit nursing agencies cost taxpayers billions annually. Yet this approach doesn't add lasting capacity, and nurses in the public system still face overwhelming patient loads and moral distress.

Many nurses are leaving the profession entirely due to sustained strain. More than one in three nurses in Canada say they are considering leaving their job or the profession because conditions in the public system have become untenable.

As staffing deteriorates, we will see longer waits, reduced services, and widening inequities in access to care—particularly in rural, remote, and underserved communities.

At the same time, provinces are expanding private delivery of care. The Ontario government, for example, announced plans to outsource 50 per cent of surgeries and diagnostic tests to private clinics. Similar proposals are emerging elsewhere across the country, including in Alberta where the government has expressed interest in introducing a Health Care Savings Account that would require people to pay out of pocket for care.

Cataract surgeries take place in private clinics in Nova Scotia, diagnostics are done in private clinics in Saskatchewan, and the extra-mural and Health Link programs in New Brunswick are run by a private, for-profit corporation.

This outsourcing still doesn't address capacity issues. The MRI wait list in Saskatchewan doubled from 2015 to 2019 despite govern-

ment efforts to extend hours and allow paid scans.

Across the country, patients increasingly must pay for upgraded products, block fees, tests, screenings, and more. Together, these changes signal a steady erosion of public health-care delivery and a growing threat of two-tier access.

The risks of privatization are especially stark in long-term care.

The pandemic exposed the deadly consequences of privatization in long-term care. During COVID-19, residents in for-profit long-term care homes were significantly more likely to contract the virus and die from it than residents in non-profit homes. Yet little has been done to address the risks in private long-term care.

Staffing levels are a key driver of patient outcomes. For-profit long-term care homes have 17-percent fewer staff than non-profit homes. Nurses are calling for safe staffing levels and for funds to go towards care, not profit.

The federal government should advance promised legislation on safe long-term care that would mandate adherence to national standards as a condition for receiving federal funding.

Transparency is also at risk. Private clinics often operate behind confidentiality agreements that obscure how much public money is being spent and what Canadians are getting in return.

Ottawa should establish conditional health funding agreements that require provinces and territories to demonstrate how federal dollars are being used to recruit, retain, and support permanent nurses in the public system. They should also prohibit the use of federal health funding for private health-care initiatives,

while funding provinces through the transition away from agency nursing.

The federal government must also assess whether provincial reliance on agencies is compatible with the Canada Health Act's principles of public administration and accessibility. Stronger compliance reviews and consequences when provinces allow private delivery to take hold are urgently needed.

The stakes could not be higher. International evidence shows that countries with higher levels of for-profit care have worse health outcomes, including higher mortality rates. When profit plays a bigger role in care, people fall through the cracks.

Canada's public health-care system was built on the promise that care should be available based on need, not ability to pay. That promise is now under threat.

Canada's public health-care system is worth protecting. The federal government spends hundreds of billions of dollars in health care each year, representing roughly 12 per cent of Canada's GDP. That investment must strengthen public care. If public investment is not prioritized now, Canadians risk losing the timely, equitable access to care that they value most. Losing access is more than losing a prized public institution, it can mean losing a life.

Funding decisions made now will determine whether Canadians will continue to have access to public health care in practice, not just in theory. Policymakers must choose to strengthen public health care now, before access is lost.

Linda Silas is the president of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

The Hill Times

Access to what?

The health minister expanded who can provide primary care—now we must define what services Canadians are entitled to receive.

Ivy Oandasan

Opinion



A year ago, then-health minister Mark Holland issued a landmark interpretation of the Canada Health Act (CHA). His "CHA Services Policy" will finally take effect this April, and declares that nurse practitioners, pharmacists, and midwives providing "physician-equivalent services" must be covered by public insurance. No patient charges allowed.

It's a bold move. But it has left a fundamental question unanswered: equivalent to what physician services, exactly?

The CHA promises Canadians access to "medically necessary" services. Yet, for more than 40 years, we have never defined what "medically necessary" means for primary care. The Act covers "physician services," but the scope of these "comprehensive" services has never been specified. In practice, "medically necessary" has become whatever a physician chose to bill for—an honourable system with no accountability to a defined standard.

This matters because 5.9 million Canadians lack access to a primary care provider, according to Dr. Tara Kiran's 2025 OurCare survey. But even those who have a provider have no guarantee of comprehensive services.

Access to what? We have never answered the question. It's time the federal government waded into these waters.

Holland's interpretation expanded coverage to team members—a necessary step as primary care evolves beyond what any single practitioner can provide. But we cannot fund teams for an undefined scope any more than we could hold individual physicians accountable for it.

If we want team-based care to deliver on the promise of comprehensive primary care, we need to define what comprehensive means.

The good news: we do not need to start from scratch.

We already have rigorous standards for certifying and training family physicians that describe the scope of comprehensive care they are prepared to provide—from chronic disease management to mental health, from health promotion and palliative care to women's health, from

Continued on page 26

Policy Briefing HEALTH

AI is already in our clinics, but Canada is failing to train the people who use it

Too many clinicians interact with AI tools without a clear understanding of how they work, what data they rely on, or where their limitations lie.

Samira Abbasgholizadeh-Rahimi

Opinion

Artificial intelligence is not coming to Canadian health care—it's already here. Across the country, AI-powered tools are actively shaping clinical workflows, from summarizing patient-doctor interactions and identifying high-risk patients, to triage and documentation assistance. Provincial ministries and health systems are investing into these solutions, pitching them as answers to clinician burnout, access bottlenecks, and inefficiencies that have slowed down our health-care system.

In Canadian primary care, more than 93 per cent of family physicians now use electronic medical records, and AI tools are increasingly built directly into these systems. One example is AI scribe technology, now deployed in several provinces, which has reduced documentation time by an estimated 70 to 90 per cent, freeing up hours each week for clinicians and improving patient satisfaction.

But clinical readiness has not kept pace with technology deployment. Too many clinicians interact with AI-powered tools without a clear understanding of how they work, what data they rely on, or where their limitations lie. Tools that influence diagnoses, risk stratification, or care pathways are often treated as black boxes. In some cases, clinicians are expected to trust the algorithm without the training to critically assess outputs, recognize bias, or challenge recommendations when they conflict with clinical judgment.

Despite AI's growing footprint in care delivery, most Canadian medical schools do not require structured training in AI competency. If AI appears in curricula at all, it is usually optional, brief, or limited to research electives rather than core education. Graduates enter practice with little exposure to how AI models are developed, validated, regulated, monitored for bias, or even integrated into clinical workflows. They then encounter these tools during clerkships or early careers without consistent guidance, oversight, or assessment. This informal, *ad hoc* learning is simply not good enough for a technology that is effectively making care decisions alongside clinicians.

A national survey of Canadian community nurses indicates more than half of the nurses report a poor understanding of AI, with nearly half uncomfortable with how



Despite AI's growing footprint in care delivery, most Canadian medical schools do not require structured training in AI competency, writes Samira A. Rahimi. Pexels photograph by Alex Knight

it is developed and deployed. More than three-quarters of nurses are worried about accountability when AI recommendations are wrong, and most believe they should be consulted in tool development and require formal AI training. This is a call for competence and preparedness.

Patients are an especially important missing voice in this conversation. While they express cautious openness to AI's potential to improve chronic disease monitoring, reduce unnecessary hospital visits, and support aging in place, many studies report limited understanding of what AI is actually doing within their care pathways. They often do not know when AI has influenced a diagnosis, what data the technology uses about them, or how consent and privacy are being managed.

Canada has no national standard for AI literacy across health-care professionals/trainees; no co-ordinated public awareness or engagement strategy; and insufficient mechanisms to evaluate real-world performance, safety, and equity of deployed AI tools. Many regulatory and oversight frameworks implicitly assume a level of understanding among users and patients that simply does not exist.

This matters because AI is being promoted as a built-in fix for the pressures on our health-care system. AI tools designed to improve efficiency, reduce burnout, and expand access can succeed, but only if the people using them understand how and when to use them, when not to, and how to safeguard against potential harms.

AI literacy must be treated as essential infrastructure for health care, not a nice-to-have add-on. Medical and dental schools, and professional colleges should embed AI competencies into their accreditation standards so clinicians learn how these tools work, when they help, and where they fall short. Health systems must also invest in ongoing education for existing staff, otherwise, adoption will be inconsistent.

Equally, patients' AI literacy deserves far more attention than it is currently receiving. They are being asked, often implicitly, to trust and interact with systems they may not understand at all. Without basic AI literacy, patients may misinterpret AI-generated advice, place undue confidence in automated recommendations, or avoid use of AI in their care altogether out of confusion or mistrust. They may not realize when AI is involved in their care, how their personal health data is being used, or what rights they have to question or opt out. This gap in understanding risks deepening inequities, particularly for older adults and people with limited digital access and literacy.

Governments and health systems should invest in clear, accessible public education, using plain language, culturally appropriate materials, and multiple formats to explain what AI does, what it does not do, and how it affects care decisions and privacy. Just as patients are taught how to take medications safely or navigate the health system, they must be supported to understand AI-enabled tools they are increasingly expected to use at home and in clinical settings.

Canada does not have a technology problem in health care, it has a competence and preparedness problem. The question is not whether AI will transform care, it already has. The choice now is whether we invest in training clinicians and patients or allow a widening gap between technological capability and human understanding to undermine trust, safety, and the very promise that AI is meant to deliver in health care.

Dr. Samira A. Rahimi, B.Eng., PhD, is a Canada Research Chair in AI and Advanced Digital Primary Health Care, and assistant professor at McGill University and Mila – Quebec AI Institute. She also serves as co-director of McGill's Collaborative for AI and Society, and research co-director of the General Practice Residency program at the Jewish General Hospital.

The Hill Times

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HEALTH Policy Briefing

One country, one standard of care



Pan-Canadian health data and risk-based screening are essential for equitable care.

Bukun Adegbembo

Opinion

A connected Canada requires harmonized health care. Too often, the type and level of health care that individuals living in Canada receive is based on where they live. This fragmented approach to prevention, treatment, and care happens both between and within provinces and territories, subjecting Canadians to what has been called “the postal code lottery.” Without pan-Canadian standards and approaches to health care, our system cannot deliver equitable care. With one in eight women in Canada expected to develop breast cancer in their lifetime, the need for a co-ordinated health data ecosystem, as well as prevention and care pathways is crucial.

At present, there is no standardized, national approach to how race, ethnicity, and Indigenous identity (REI) health data is collected, used, and managed. This means that Canada’s health data ecosystem has not been developed using a pan-Canadian approach that enables health data to guide health-care decisions and policies. Too much of the evidence guiding health-care policies and practices in Canada comes from non-domestic populations and data. While international evidence is valuable, it does not always reflect the diversity, geography, health system structure, or lived experiences of people in this country. Only Canadian data can do that. In absence of this information, it is difficult to fully understand who is being left behind, where gaps in care exist, or how risk and outcomes vary across populations. This is especially pertinent for underserved and Indigenous populations. Subsequently, policymakers cannot track trends, design targeted interventions, or allocate resources effectively.

People across the country who have been diagnosed with, or are living with, breast cancer want Canadian health data to guide domestic health-care decisions. They also want this guidance to be standardized nationally. It is important that Canada creates a robust health data ecosystem that enables health policies, decisions, and care that can be based on Canada’s population. It is equally important that

People across the country who have been diagnosed with, or are living with, breast cancer want Canadian health data to guide domestic health-care decisions, writes **Bukun Adegbembo**. *Unsplash photograph by National Cancer Institute*

provinces and territories work together in its development so that the standards and subsequent implementation are followed uniformly across the country.

Canada’s lack of national co-ordination is also evident in its approach to screening for individuals who are at increased or high risk of developing breast cancer. Current national screening guidelines are designed for people at average risk of developing breast cancer. This fails to address the fact that breast cancer risk exists along a spectrum, influenced by both modifiable and non-modifiable factors. As a result, those whose risk levels are higher than average (such as those with dense breasts or hereditary risk) are left without guidance that is consistent across the country.

As it stands, the guidelines and access to breast cancer screening in Canada that do take into account an individual’s risk level varies significantly between provinces and territories. For those at increased or high risk of developing breast cancer, this makes appropriate screening methods and frequency unclear, as well as access to early detection practices inequitable. Inconsistent guidance and access means that some people receive enhanced screening while others do not, not because of need, but because of where they live or how their risk is assessed.

Such inequities can contribute to delayed diagnoses and missed opportunities for prevention. Canada must adopt a risk-stratified approach to breast cancer screening that matches screening methods and intervals to an individual’s risk. These guidelines, based on risk pathways, must also be supported by Canadian research and adopted at a pan-Canadian level.

National, pan-Canadian standards for REI data collection and risk-based screening are essential to addressing care gaps, ensuring equity, improving early detection, and preventing breast cancer. Government support through investing in Canadian data, enabling co-ordinated research, and implementing consistent national approaches can ensure that no one in Canada is left behind.

It is time to strengthen Canada’s health-care system so that it reflects the diversity and needs of the people it serves.

Bukun Adegbembo, MSc, is a strategic operations, marketing, communications, and patient advocacy professional with more than five years of non-profit experience, and more than three years of executive leadership experience. She is the current director of operations with the Canadian Breast Cancer Network, Canada’s leading patient-directed breast cancer health charity that voices the views and concerns of breast cancer patients through the promotion of information sharing, education and advocacy activities.

The Hill Times

Push-ups for prevention

Canadians are getting a little sweaty this February to promote good mental health.

Marion Cooper

Opinion



As our athletes push the limits of human performance at the Olympics, Canadians across the country are cheering from couches and committee rooms, suddenly inspired to move—or at least briefly consider taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

This moment of national attention on physical activity offers a serious reminder: movement, social connection, and a sense of purpose are powerful contributors to mental health, and they matter just as much for those shaping public policy as for those winning medals.

Politics is demanding work, and like all Canadians, those in public life are not immune to stress, burnout, or mental health challenges. Long hours at desks or in transit, constant pressure, and time away from family take a toll. Our health-care system does important work when people are struggling, but it’s still largely designed to respond after people are already unwell, rather than helping to build and sustain good mental health in the first place.

Mental health promotion is a central pillar of a strong health system for reasons that are both human and economic.

Upstream supports reduce downstream demand

Nearly 2.5 million Canadians cannot access the mental health care they need, and many more cannot afford the high cost of care. When support is delayed or unavailable, quality of life suffers. In too many cases, lives are lost.

Mental health disorders are among the top five causes of disability for working-age adults in Canada. Good mental health strengthens Canada’s economic outlook because people remain attached to the workforce, return sooner after illness, and stay productive through difficult life transitions.

Yet, public spending on out-of-hospital, community-delivered mental health care remains chronically low compared to its burden of illness. If we are serious about our economic productivity and long-term sustainability, we must be equally serious about upstream supports that reduce downstream costs.

Mental health promotion works because it reaches people before problems escalate. It strengthens literacy, builds coping skills, normalizes help-seeking behaviour, and fosters resiliency, a healthy habit we all need to navigate life’s pressures.

This is the driving force behind the Canadian Mental Health Association’s annual Push-Up Challenge.



The Push-Up Challenge offers a powerful, flexible, and engaging example of what upstream mental health care can look like in practice, writes Marion Cooper. *Pexels photograph by Ketut Subiyanto*

Drop and give me 2,000!

Now in its third and largest year in Canada, this national mental health promotion initiative has more than 75,000 participants across the country committing to completing 2,000 push-ups throughout the month of February in honour of the approximately 2,000 lives lost to suicide each day worldwide.

The Challenge brings together three evidence-based elements of good mental health: daily movement, mental health literacy, and social connection. Each day, participants receive accessible mental health facts that connect the physical challenge to a broader understanding of mental health. This includes recognizing warning signs, debunking common myths, highlighting practical coping strategies, and reducing stigma around talking about mental health or asking for support.

This is mental health promotion at scale, and the science behind the approach is well established.

Movement improves mood, reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression, and lowers stress hormones. Even 15 minutes of moderate activity can provide a measurable boost to mental well-being. Physical activity can interrupt negative thought patterns, strengthen self-efficacy, and improve cognitive functioning. When paired with education and social connection, its impact multiplies.

Push for better

If Canada wants a healthier workforce, stronger communities, and lower long-term health costs, mental health promotion must be treated as a core public policy. The Push-Up Challenge offers a powerful, flexible, and engaging example of what upstream mental health care can look like in practice.

This February, thousands of Canadians will be doing push-ups for mental health. If your current workouts consist mainly of sprinting between meeting rooms or diving into elevators to avoid the media, consider expanding your regimen with the Push-Up Challenge. You may even end up taking the stairs willingly—a small victory that feels Olympic-level in its own right.

Marion Cooper is president and lead executive officer of the Canadian Mental Health Association, the most established and extensive community mental health organization in Canada.

The Hill Times

Policy Briefing HEALTH

Canada must respond to U.S. policy by increasing our support for pharmaceutical innovation

Changing our own drug system to better encourage investment and innovation is not an easy task, but it's a necessary one.

Liam MacDonald

Opinion

Despite an endless slew of headlines caused by the United States administration's drastic trade policy course changes over the past 12 months, one executive order from last May has largely flown under the radar. The White House has proposed benchmarking domestic drug prices to those of other developed countries to balance differences between U.S. and

international drug prices, a move dubbed the "most-favoured-lowest price." This proposal was repeated in recent a White House fact sheet and during a roundtable with American health executives.

The proposal may have flown under the radar, but its repercussions won't. Canada's pharmaceutical supply chain could be significantly disrupted, and it would be exponentially more difficult to attract pharmaceutical investment in Canada.

Contrary to most high-income countries that regulate drug prices, the U.S. largely leaves drug pricing up to market forces. As a result, list prices for brand-name medicines are significantly higher in the U.S. when compared to peer countries like Canada, regularly averaging four to five times the price.

The regulation of drug prices elsewhere is a long-standing trade policy irritant for the U.S. as it argues this asymmetry unfairly burdens Americans with the funding of global pharmaceutical innovation. Despite accounting for 38 per cent of the GDP of high-income Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development countries, the U.S. accounts for 60 per cent of spending on innovative medicines. On a per capita basis, the U.S. ranks far above most peer countries, spending 0.78 per cent of GDP per capita on innovative medicines, compared to just 0.34 per cent in the European Union and 0.32 per cent in Canada.

The most-favoured-lowest price theoretically rectifies the spending imbalance by pressuring foreign governments to increase their drug prices, thus allowing drug manufacturers to lower their prices in the U.S. market without taking major losses.

Canada, with our relatively low per capita spending on pharmaceuticals, is a natural target, but formulating an appropriate response to the U.S. policy is far from straightforward. To start, this issue will be addressed in the context of our broader trade negotiations with our largest trade partner. Resisting U.S. demands here could result in consequences elsewhere, and vice-versa. We can therefore expect this issue to be included in the negotiations for

the renewal of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement.

Changing our own drug system to better encourage investment and innovation is not an easy task. It is not well understood that our underfunding of pharmaceutical innovation has real and negative consequences for Canadians in the form of less choice and longer wait times for new medicines. Currently, Canadian patients on public plans wait more than two years on average to access new and potentially life-saving treatments—some of the longest wait times in the developed world—whereas patients in France and Germany wait less than a month. There is an opportunity to bolster funding for patient access to pharmaceuticals, while simultaneously addressing U.S. concerns for more balance. This parallels the U.S. push for so-called rebalancing around NATO, trade, and many other policy areas.

The executive order notes that any policy or practice judged discriminatory against U.S. interests, or that forces them to pay a disproportionate amount for global

pharmaceutical innovation, could fall under the magnifying lens. Beyond pure price regulation, this could encompass research and development funding, intellectual property (IP) protections, and the speed with which regulators and public insurance plans approve new drugs and make them available to patients.

These are areas where Canada has known shortcomings and where broad consensus can be achieved, avoiding endless and divisive debates. Aligning Canadian IP rules with the U.S. and EU, creating a fund for new medicines, and improving the notoriously long timelines for approving new medicines and making them available to patients on public plans would effectively increase our funding of pharmaceutical innovation and respond to U.S. concerns.

Canada's health system and innovative medicines sector are symbols of national identity and pride that we need to maintain and strengthen—but Canada could benefit from self-reflection on a question of encouraging more investment and innovation domestically. Though difficult questions may arise from the exercise, we should focus on how to make gains in our own economic imperatives in this trade war without jeopardizing pharmaceutical supply chains and patient access.

Liam MacDonald is director of policy and government relations at the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

The Hill Times

Securing sovereignty: why defending the care economy is a \$100-million bargain

By adopting new standards and social prescribing, Canada can turn an overstretched health system into a strategic reserve.

Kate Mulligan

Opinion

Last month in Davos, Prime Minister Mark Carney urged us to face the hard truths of a global landscape reshaped by great-power competition. His solution—heavy investment in "hard hat" infrastructure like minerals, energy, and finance—addresses the physical tools of sovereignty. But it omits a critical reality:

a nation's ability to withstand pressure is not only found in supply chains. It is rooted in our homes, neighbourhoods, and the care economy that keeps a society from buckling under stress. Our national resilience is at risk when we systematically undervalue the informal safety net: the work of caregivers, community organizations, and health-care workers that holds us together.

As a Canadian studying the differences between our health systems and those in the United States, I have seen the alternative up close. In the U.S., communities accustomed to the state's absence have responded with increasingly formalized mutual aid, from food deliveries to health-expense fundraisers. Born of desperation, this work shows the perhaps-surprising benefits of local self-determination for people and communities. Community aid happens in Canada, too, but it remains largely invisible in our policy. Instead, we lumber along with a 20th-century managerial welfare model that treats citizens

as passive recipients of clinical expertise.

Despite spending nearly \$400-billion annually on health care, we remain caught in a global trap: over-investing in the repair side of health while ignoring the community factors that determine most of our outcomes—strong relationships, adequate income, safe environments, and a modicum of control over our lives. These broader determinants were prioritized in the World Health Organization's Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, a landmark Canadian contribution to global health now in its 40th anniversary year. It is time we returned to the wisdom of our own exports.

A new consensus is emerging among unlikely players: health is not just a social good; it is a strategic reserve. The Federal Reserve Bank of New York argues that just as a central bank manages financial capital to weather shocks, an enabling state must value social capital. This means investing in what they call "missing markets":

the systematically undervalued labour of caregivers and community organizations. Research from the British Academy confirms the stakes: communities with robust social infrastructure—the bonds between local public spaces, civic volunteerism, and health care—consistently outperform those without when facing economic or geopolitical crises.

Canada's new Health Standards Organization (HSO) primary health-care standard was recently released for public review. It quietly points the way toward a shift in action by moving community empowerment and health promotion from discretionary extras to formal requirements for national accreditation for safety and quality. This bridges the gap between basic primary care (clinical visits) and primary health care, the WHO gold standard that links these clinics with local public health and empowered communities.

The standard builds this best practice through social prescribing: a formal referral system that connects patients with non-clinical supports like libraries, food programs, parks, and peer community health workers. It yields a \$4.43 return for every dollar reallocated by reducing health-care costs and increasing socioeconomic participation. Grassroots leaders are starting up social prescribing in every province across Canada—in libraries, seniors centres, hospitals, paramedicine, and primary care. It's time to make it a core

part of our systems for everyone, and adopting the new HSO standard is only the first step.

As set out in a recent CSA Group policy brief, Canada has a clear path forward. For \$100-million, less than 0.03 per cent of our health-care spending, we can hire community health workers for social prescribing across the country. We can update the Canada Health Act to recognize social prescribing as a reimbursable health-care intervention. We can shift social service funding from precarious grants to stable, multi-year core funding for community organizations. Finally, we must pair "hard hat" infrastructure projects—the mines, grids, and transit lines—with matched investments in social infrastructure, like child and youth resilience, student mental health, park programs, and connected cities. A new battery plant is of little use if its workers have no childcare, no mental health support, and no community cohesion.

Integrating social prescribing and community resilience into the bedrock of our policy is not merely a clinical upgrade; it is an economic and security imperative. Our health, and our sovereignty, depend on it.

Dr. Kate Mulligan is Canada's 2025-26 Commonwealth Harkness Fellow in Health Care Policy and Practice at Stanford University and the City University of New York.

The Hill Times

HEALTH Policy Briefing

Implementation matters: why Canada keeps leaving life-saving research on the shelf

If governments want research to improve lives, implementation must be funded, measured, and led—not assumed.

Melanie Barwick



Opinion

Canada is world-class at producing health research. We invest billions of dollars in discovery science, publish in top journals, and generate evidence that could save lives, improve care, and reduce system costs. We have a national and global impact. Yet, governments rarely track—let alone fund—what determines whether those investments ever change practice.

Programs that work in trials stall. Proven interventions fail to spread. Innovations celebrated in journals quietly disappear. The problem is not a lack of good ideas or effective innovations. It is a failure to implement them.

This is the gap that implementation science addresses—and why policymakers should care.

From 'what works' to 'what actually gets used'

Implementation science focuses on a deceptively simple

question: how do we ensure that what works on paper works in the real world?

It sits in the liminal space between research and practice, examining the capacities, workforce conditions, leadership, infrastructure, and community contexts that determine whether evidence-based innovations are adopted, scaled, and sustained equitably.

For decades, health research operated under an implicit assumption: if an innovation is effective, people and systems will naturally adopt it. Experience has shown otherwise. A seminal study from 2000 famously estimated a 15- to 17-year lag between discovery and routine practice. Today, the precise number matters less than the enduring reality it revealed: our systems are not designed to move evidence into use.

That lag has real consequences. Effective innovations remain unavailable. Inequities widen. Public investments yield only a fraction of their potential return.

Most research is never used

Research evidence influences decision-making in different ways. Sometimes it directly shapes policy or practice. More often, it subtly informs how people think about an issue. And occasionally, it is used to justify decisions that have already been made.

The uncomfortable reality is that much research is never meaningfully used at all. Most academic papers are never read beyond a small circle of researchers. Only a minority reach practitioners or policymakers who could apply them. This means

that large volumes of “implementation-ready” knowledge—interventions already shown to work—simply sit unused.

From a public policy perspective, this is not merely inefficient. It is an impact problem.

We study problems more than solutions

In health research, we are very good at documenting the size and causes of problems. We are reasonably good at testing whether interventions work. We are far less equipped to answer a third, equally important question: how do we implement these interventions in complex, real-world systems?

Implementation is highly context dependent. What works in one province, community, or health system may not work in another without tailoring. Implementation science generates this missing knowledge by studying how innovations interact with shifting organizational capacities, dynamic workforces, and real constraints.

Why this matters for governments

Implementation science is not academic navel-gazing. It is a practical discipline with direct relevance to personal and societal development and well-being.

When implemented well, evidence-based innovations reach people faster, achieve better outcomes, and are more likely to endure beyond short-term funding cycles. When implemented poorly, governments repeatedly



Implementation science is a practical discipline with direct relevance to personal and societal development and well-being, writes Melanie Barwick. *Pexels photograph by Chokniti Khongchum*

fund discoveries that never scale despite good intentions.

The COVID-19 pandemic made this painfully clear. Success depended not only on scientific discovery, but on effective, equitable, and sustainable implementation. There is a method to the madness—a structured, evidence-based, and explicit approach.

Without attention to implementation, even the best science cannot deliver value.

A needed shift in how we invest

If Canada wants a stronger return on its research investments, three shifts are needed.

First, federal and provincial funders must invest deliberately in implementation—not as an end-of-grant afterthought, but as a core research function.

Second, implementation expertise must be embedded earlier—alongside discovery and evaluation—rather than introduced only once systems struggle to adopt new practices.

Third, policy leaders, health-system executives, and professional bodies must treat implementation as essential infrastructure, on par with data systems or workforce planning.

This is not about slowing innovation but about ensuring that innovation delivers.

Turning knowledge into impact

Canada does not have a knowledge problem. We have an action problem.

Implementation science helps close that gap by shifting the focus from “What works?” to “How do we make what works, work here—for real people, in real systems?”

If governments want research to improve lives, implementation must be funded, measured, and led—not assumed.

Ignoring implementation means repeatedly paying for discovery without paying for delivery.

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The Hill Times

Access to what?

Continued from page 22

delivering babies to emergency medicine.

If the CHA uses “medically necessary physician services” as its anchor, could we start here? Could these training and certification standards serve as a foundation for defining what comprehensive primary care should include?

Given the broad scope of what family physicians are able to do, this is not about limiting scope.

Many health-care professionals have overlapping scopes of practice with physicians, but what varies is the depth of expertise. We have an opportunity to use an existing family physician com-

petency framework developed through a rigorous consensus as a starting point—one that can be used across all health professionals defining what breadth of comprehensive primary care they have been trained to provide and the depth of their expertise.

Imagine a national consensus process that brings together provinces, medical associations, health professional organizations, regulators, accreditors, and patient advocates to validate a “basket” of essential primary care services. A framework that guides provincial decision-making while respecting their jurisdiction. One that links defined services to population health outcomes—the

ultimate measure of whether primary care is working.

The policy window is open. Ontario’s Primary Care Act requires the province’s health minister to annually report on access; the federal government has invested billions in team-based care through bilateral agreements; and now the Health Standards Organization (HSO) has just launched its revised primary health-care standard for public review, which offers another opportunity to define what the public can expect, and what the system should be accountable for in delivering primary care regardless of funding model. The HSO primary health-care standard, like hospital standards, is optional for use and is voluntary, but is not tied to any accountability process.

So, we have principles and frameworks. We even have educa-

tion and practice standards—and a huge investment of money. Now we need alignment towards a common purpose.

Some will argue health is a provincial responsibility. But the federal government sets national standards and conditions for health transfers.

A consensus process convened at the FPT Primary Care Table with the Canadian Medical Association, its provincial medical organizations, and other health professional associations could produce a pan-Canadian framework that would guide provincial/territorial decision-making while respecting local adaptation—just as has been done with other national standards.

Others will worry about scope-of-practice battles among professions. But defining what services Canadians are entitled to receive is different from prescribing who must deliver

them and how. A defined scope actually enables team-based care by clarifying what the team must collectively provide within a practice context.

For decades we have promised Canadians access to medically necessary services without defining what that means in primary care. It is time to set this idea in motion: a framework that guides provinces and territories, enables accountability, and ultimately improves the health of Canadians.

The question is will governments have the courage to convene and lead the way.

Dr. Ivy Oandasan is a family physician, and full professor in the Department of Family and Community Medicine at the University of Toronto. She co-led the \$45.3-million Team Primary Care: Training for Transformation initiative.

The Hill Times

Policy Briefing HEALTH

Can Canada be truly sovereign without health independence?

Making life sciences a strategic national asset determines whether Canada leads or follows in the next era of global growth.

Gaby Bourbara

Opinion

The challenge facing economies worldwide is clear: how do we identify and cultivate new engines for growth, enhance national competitiveness, and secure vital investment in an increasingly fractured global environment? This question was a dominant theme emerging from discussions at the 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

For Canada—and the Canadian life sciences sector—this is a defining moment. A strong life sciences sector is not simply a point of national pride or a social good; it supports stronger communities and is critical economic infrastructure, as essential to our economic health and future prosperity as energy, technology, or natural resources.

As Prime Minister Mark Carney cautioned in Davos, “We are in the midst of a rupture, not a transition” in the global economic order we have long operated under. Ruptures are destabilizing—but they can also create opportunities to reset and reshape the playing field. Countries that move decisively now to anchor their economies in high-value, innovation-driven sectors will define the next era of growth. Life sciences is one of those sectors, and Canada is uniquely positioned to lead if we choose to act with intention.

This strength is not new. For decades, medical innovation has been an engine of economic return and societal resilience. Alongside better health outcomes, Canada’s life-sciences ecosystem attracts global investment and talent, fuels advanced scientific research and manufacturing, and creates high-skill jobs across the country. Few sectors align scientific excellence, economic strength, and social impact as powerfully as life sciences.

Past success is only part of the picture. Long before recent geopolitical shifts, the sector was contributing billions of dollars to Canada’s knowledge-based economy, and supporting more than 110,000 high-quality jobs annually. Today, rising geopolitical tensions and global supply chain volatility have turned strategic advantage into national necessity. We cannot ignore the recent pandemic’s lessons, and the vulnerabilities of foreign supply chains. Health sovereignty is an economic and security imperative—not simply a health-care issue.

As Canada has committed to strengthening defence, we must match that resolve in health security by building robust domestic capabilities in biopharmaceutical research and development (R&D), clinical trials, and advanced manufacturing. This is about resilience and competitiveness so Canada can shape—not simply



For decades, medical innovation has been an engine of economic return and societal resilience, writes Gaby Bourbara. *Pexels photograph by Edward Jenner*

react to—the future of health innovation. That strength must translate into results for Canadians, with faster and equitable access to next-generation medicines and more resilient health systems.

Canada is falling behind its peers on timely access to new innovative medicines. Studies show innovative medicines account for more than 70 per cent of life expectancy gains in advanced economies; yet Canadians wait an average of two years after regulatory approval for new medicines to be covered by public drug plans—twice as long as many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, and last among the G7. These delays translate into avoidable suffering, diminished quality of life, greater burden on health systems, and lost economic productivity. Canada cannot claim leadership in medical innovation while patients wait at the back of the line; empowering the life sciences sector must go hand in hand with ensuring patients benefit from breakthroughs without delay.

What would this look like in practice?

Treat health investment as core economic policy. When budgets prioritize prevention, and support innovation and timely access, the payoff is tangible: stronger communities, higher workforce participation, and a more competitive economy. This requires co-ordinated action between government and industry to strengthen domestic biopharmaceutical R&D and advanced manufacturing capacity, attract sustained investment, and ensure Canada’s policy environment is globally competitive.

This includes modernizing our intellectual property framework to incentivize long-term R&D within Canada; securing resilient domestic supply chains; strengthening data protection; bolstering global confidence in Canada’s life sciences policy to attract investment in this country; and expanding patient access initiatives, such as Ontario’s recently introduced Funding Accelerated for Specific Treatments program.

Making life sciences a strategic national asset determines whether Canada leads or follows in the next era of global growth. The opportunity is clear—and so is the risk of inaction. In a shifting global order, standing still is a choice to lose ground. The health, security, and prosperity of future generations will be shaped by the choices we make now. It is time for Canada to lead.

Gaby Bourbara is the president of AstraZeneca Canada.

The Hill Times

Canada on path to become a superaged country

To successfully address the pending demographic shift to a superaged society, we need to be nimble and bold.

Sharon Straus & Françoise Baylis

Opinion

Canada will join the ranks of superaged countries by 2030 with more than 20 per cent of the population aged 65 years and older.

This demographic shift—a direct result of increasing life expectancy and smaller families—presents the federal, provincial, and territorial governments with challenges in the health sector as the need for more complex and costly health-care increases.

Responsible governance demands action now to mitigate foreseeable harms. We highlight four priorities for healthy aging, which are immediately actionable and promise a return on investment; namely, a population approach to health and preventive care; adequate housing; a plan to address mis- and disinformation; and facilitating AI use in health care.

A population approach to health and preventive care

Meeting the health and social care needs of aging adults demands integration across health care, social care, public health, housing, transportation, and community services. In turn, this must be supported by aligned funding, data systems, and accountability structures. We must prioritize a population approach to health care including population modelling, seamless integrated care, and meaningful public and clinician engagement.

Of critical importance is the need to align federal transfer payments with prevention interventions to support embedded, multidisciplinary research to develop new scalable care models, and to use patient-important and system-relevant health outcomes to incentivize change.

Adequate housing and communities

Some older adults age in place and are cared for by family and friends. Women are more likely to be the informal caregivers of these older—sometimes frail—adults, which leads to increased morbidity related to caregiver stress. This is not a sustainable model, and affects our overall workforce in Canada.

Other older adults are living in communities that are not appropriate for their needs now or in future, leading to social isolation, depression, and pre-

ventable health decline. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges for older adults living in long-term care homes in Canada.

Added to this is the increasing number of older adults who are precariously housed or who are experiencing homelessness. Many of these individuals live with dementia and other comorbidities. They meet the criteria for long-term care home admission, but often do not have application access, or if they do have access they are declined or face years-long wait lists.

Policy action focused on adequate housing is urgently needed to recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work. Examples of novel housing models include dementia villages as well as dementia- and age-friendly communities.

Misinformation and disinformation

Effective health and social care depend on public trust in health information systems and sources. All information systems are now being disrupted by the rapid spread of mis- and disinformation, resulting in delays in seeking appropriate care, and avoidance of effective treatment. This speaks to the importance of fostering and maintaining trusting relationships between older adults and clinicians.

For now, scientists and clinicians remain among the most trusted health information sources. However, recent surveys suggest this trust is eroding. In Canada, a substantial proportion of individuals who seek health information independently appear to believe they are as knowledgeable as physicians. These individuals are 1.5 to two times more likely to follow advice from friends and family or social media that contradicts advice from their physician.

Clinicians, the general public, and policymakers need tools and strategies to counter mis- and disinformation. These tools include early surveillance of information in traditional and social media, as well as the development of a national AI literacy strategy for clinicians and the public.

AI integration in health care

For all of the above to be successful, access to data is imperative. Federal initiatives—including the AI Strategy Task Force, and the Digital Research Alliance of Canada—are relevant in this regard.

More generally, the federal government must support the development of appropriate national governance structures to both protect privacy and ensure access to health data across provinces and territories. Currently, the United States dominates the electronic patient record market in acute care in Canada, which means our data are at risk.

To successfully address the pending demographic shift to a superaged society, we need to be nimble and bold. There is now a tremendous opportunity for Canada to position itself as a global leader in healthy aging policy and innovation. *Carpe diem.*

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Françoise Baylis is distinguished research professor emerita at Dalhousie University, and president of the Royal Society of Canada. She is a member of the Order of Canada, and the Order of Nova Scotia. She is also a member of the governing board of the International Science Council.

The Hill Times

HEALTH Policy Briefing

Children's health care is the foundation of a healthy Canada

Right-sizing children's health care and advancing a National Children's Strategy is nation-building work.

Emily Gruenwoldt & Katharine Smart

Opinion

Across Canada, the start of a new year brings familiar signs of strain across our health-care systems. Emergency departments are overcrowded, wait times and costs are rising, and workforce shortages persist. Governments respond with new investments, yet the pressure remains. Despite increased spending, Canadians are no healthier.

This is not a failure of commitment or compassion. It is the predictable outcome of an illness-based health-care system.

Canada will never spend its way out of a model that is illness-based, as opposed to focused

on prevention. If we keep just responding to illness, demand will continue to outpace capacity. The only sustainable path forward is to improve population health—and that trajectory is shaped early in life.

If Canada is serious about stabilizing and sustaining health-care systems, we must start with children.

Over the past two years, Children's Healthcare Canada has engaged with child health leaders nationwide through a 20-episode podcast series. One consistent message emerged: the long-term health of Canadians—and the affordability of health care—depends on whether we invest intentionally and strategically in children and youth. Not later. Not incidentally. Now.

Childhood is a crucial period for shaping lifelong health. Early health is developmental and time-sensitive, with critical windows for diagnosis, treatment, and intervention that cannot be recovered once missed. Delays in care are not merely inconvenient; they can permanently alter health trajectories, educational attainment, and lifelong well-being. When children wait months or years for essential services, the costs are not deferred—they compound across decades.

Right-sizing children's health care begins with acknowledging several realities.

First, Canada's population of children is growing with more than 1.2 million additional children by 2040. Second, children's needs are increasingly complex, with rising rates of neurodevelopmental conditions, mental health challenges, and chronic illness within a highly diverse population.

Third, children are not small adults and they need tailored systems, spaces, equipment, medications, and workforce models.

Right-sizing does not mean building larger hospitals or adding unlimited downstream capacity—this has proven costly and ineffective. A right-sized system delivers the right care, in the right place, at the right time—well before illness occurs. Community-based developmental, rehabilitation, and mental health services, and strong primary care, home care, and regional outreach programs allow children to receive support earlier, while enabling tertiary and quaternary hospitals to focus on the most complex cases. When community capacity erodes, hospitals and emergency departments absorb pressures they were never designed to manage.

We know that when children experience illness or developmental delay, families' mental health, economic stability, and ability to remain in the workforce are threatened. Evidence consistently shows that when families are supported—through co-ordinated care, accommodation, meals, and respite—children's outcomes improve while system utilization decreases.

Equity must be embedded, so that geography, income, race, and circumstance stop being obstacles to obtaining care. National standards, improved data collection, and intentional system design are essential to ensuring equitable access for all children—not only those living near major urban centres.

Currently, responsibility for children's well-being is fragmented across jurisdictions and ministries, spanning health, mental health, education, disability, and social services. What Canadian children need is a National Children's Strategy to provide the structure needed to move beyond crisis management toward long-term sustainability. It would not replace provincial delivery of care. Rather, it would establish shared goals, common data, aligned investment priorities, and measurable outcomes.

Children's health isn't a niche policy issue; it is the basis of a sustainable health-care system. When children receive timely, co-ordinated care, the benefits extend far beyond families—reducing emergency department use, supporting parental workforce participation, lowering lifelong disability costs, and strengthening the economic resilience of the country.

Canada's health-care system is under extraordinary strain. Only by making people healthier will we be able to afford and sustain the system we value—and that begins in childhood.

Right-sizing children's health care—and advancing a National Children's Strategy—is nation-building work. The decisions we make today will shape not only the sustainability of our health-care system, but the health, resilience, and prosperity of the generation that will inherit it.

The question before us is not whether Canada can afford to invest in children, but whether we can afford not to.

Emily Gruenwoldt is CEO of Children's Healthcare Canada, a national, membership-based organization representing more than 50 members, including children's hospitals, health centres, and regional pediatric programs serving Canada's eight million children and youth.

Dr. Katharine Smart is a pediatrician, and past president of the Canadian Medical Association. She is well-known national voice on health system sustainability, workforce well-being, and patient-centred care.

The Hill Times

Canada's health-care crisis is fuelled by too little public spending, not too much

The federal government must substantially increase public health-care funding, financed by a fairer tax system that asks more from those who can most afford it.

Danyaal Raza

Opinion

Canada's health-care crisis isn't caused by spending too much on public care. It is caused by

spending too little. While Canadians struggle to find a family doctor and crowd emergency departments, the federal government is underfunding—even cutting—care, while reducing its capacity to invest. In the meantime, the growth of private health-care spending has exceeded public spending for the fourth time in five years.

Yet, pundits continue to fuel a familiar refrain: health-care costs are unsustainable, and the government cannot afford more. Canadians spend approximately 11.2 per cent of GDP on health care. This represents overall spending. About 7.9 per cent is public spending, while the rest, 3.4 per cent, is private. As a share of overall health-care spending, Canada spends approximately 70 per cent publicly and 30 per cent privately.

Comparing this to our peers provides important context. As a share of overall spending, Germany, France, the Netherlands,

and Norway spend 84 per cent or more publicly. As a percentage of GDP, Canada underspends at 7.9 per cent versus Germany and France, at 10.6 per cent and 9.7 per cent, respectively. The corollary also holds true: Canada has higher rates of private spending than others.

The problem is not too much public spending. It is too little.

This federal government continues to deepen this crisis. During last year's "elbows up" campaign, Prime Minister Mark Carney pledged \$1.4-billion for family medicine. The first federal budget allocated zero dollars. The College of Family Physicians has called this "a major setback for Canadian family medicine."

On pharmacare, despite interest from Newfoundland and Labrador's premier, legislators in New Brunswick, Ontario, and elsewhere, no new bilateral pharmacare deals have been announced.

The recent budget did include temporary infrastructure funding. Approximately \$1.7-billion annually for three years—this is enough to build the equivalent of two hospitals for a mid-to-large municipality—for the entire country.

The government's most recent health-care reforms are not investments, but cuts. Beginning May 1, refugees face new user fees for prescription drugs, psychological care, and other health-care services. As with the Harper-era cuts to refugee care in 2012, doctors are warning of worsened health outcomes and downstream consequences.

Simultaneously, the prime minister has reduced the federal government's fiscal capacity to make public investments. This includes a cancelled capital gains tax increase, and the end of the digital services tax. The fall 2025 budget brought further cuts to luxury taxes on private planes and yachts, as well as a new corporate "super deduction."

Prior to these changes, Canada already operated a comparatively low-tax environment. Canadian governments collect the equivalent of 33 per cent of GDP in taxes, compared with more than 40 per cent in Germany, and 47 per cent in France.

This policy of underinvestment in health care is occurring at a

time when income inequality is reaching record highs, and the wealthiest in Canada are increasingly paying for care to jump the queue. As these services expand, so does the diversion of health-care workers from underfunded public care, exacerbating ongoing shortages of health-care workers for the majority of Canadians who cannot or will not pay for access.

The path forward requires rejecting the false premise that Canada overspends on public health care. The evidence tells a different story. Our crisis stems not from excess, but from public underinvestment.

We are moving in the opposite direction: cutting services for the vulnerable, and reducing the government's fiscal capacity to invest in health. In the absence of proactive investments, care will increasingly be based on ability to pay, not medical need.

If the federal government is serious about addressing this crisis, it must do what the data demands: substantially increase public health-care funding, financed by a fairer tax system that asks more from those who can most afford it.

Dr. Danyaal Raza is an assistant professor at the University of Toronto's Temerty Faculty of Medicine, and a family physician.

The Hill Times

Liberal byelection candidates could either burst 'boys' club' bubble, or become 'two more of many' women on outside of PMO circle: strategists



Pollara's Dan Arnold called the selection of Begum and Martin 'phenomenal politics,' and says it demonstrates the confidence the pair have in the longevity of Carney's government. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Counsel Public Affairs' Kait LaForce says Begum and Martin are 'what the party needs,' and will serve to reinforce the already strong Liberal women's caucus. *Handout photograph*



NDP strategist Jordan Leichnitz says that unless Carney makes more room for their voices at the decision-making table, then two new progressive women will simply become 'two more of many' on the outside of the PMO 'boys' club.' *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Recruiting former Ontario NDP deputy leader Doly Begum and doctor Danielle Martin may be 'phenomenal politics,' but more will ride on whether they would get a greater voice at the table if elected.

Continued from **page 1**

Carney has yet to call either byelection, but Elections Canada says one can be held in University-Rosedale as of March 2, and in Scarborough Southwest as of March 23. Rules state that the votes must be held at least 36 days—but no more than 50 days—after they are announced.

While Arnold said he believes the "boys' club" perception is mostly confined to the Ottawa bubble, the same political observers and Liberal supporters who populate that bubble are also the people who will be paying attention to the choice of byelection candidate.

"Those are the same people who will see this as a meaningful, positive signal," Arnold said. "It's not the be-all-end-all, but

this feels like something that will shore up some of those internal concerns around gender."

Beyond the bubble, Arnold said that the choice of candidates will only reinforce the strong support Carney and the Liberals enjoy among women voters.

According to Abacus Data polling published on Jan. 30, Carney currently enjoys a net approval of 25 per cent among women voters, compared to a net negative of 14 per cent for Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Battle River-Crowfoot, Alta.), while the Liberal Party overall received 45 per cent of the vote intention among women, compared to 34 per cent for the Conservatives.

Among those certain to vote, Abacus projects the Liberals four points ahead of the Conservatives, at 44 per cent to 40 per cent, and reports a government approval rating of 54 per cent among those surveyed.

A Nanos Research poll published on Feb. 6 places the Liberals' support among women at just under 45 per cent, compared to 39.1 per cent overall; with the Conservatives receiving just 30 per cent of support from women respondents, compared to their 35.2 per cent overall support.

Former Liberal staffer Kait LaForce told *The Hill Times* that Begum and Martin are "exactly what the party needs" at a time when voters are looking for both credibility and substance.

Although Begum, as a deputy leader of another provincial party, made larger waves in the week since both candidacies were announced, Martin's background in both health policy and front-line care is "just as exciting" for LaForce, a senior account director at Counsel Public Affairs and a health-care advocate herself.

LaForce agreed that the decision to draft two "big-name" progressive women to Carney's team is a clear, deliberate decision to address the concerns over both Carney's feminist and left-wing bona fides, but said that shouldn't be seen as a mark against any of the 76 women already in his caucus, including the 13 sitting in his cabinet, but as reinforcements.

"There's always room in the caucus for the voices of two more women," LaForce said, adding that more important than their gender or resumé is how well the two understand the respective communities they are running to serve.

"They're both really exciting choices, and I think they're what the party needs at this moment," LaForce said.

Beyond what the choices say about Carney's progressive chops, both Begum and Martin's recruitment demonstrates their confidence in the longevity of Carney's government, said Arnold.

"Obviously, they believe Carney isn't a flash in the pan, and that there is opportunity in

the future to have a meaningful role within it," Arnold explained, adding that the opportunity to run in two high-profile ridings most likely helped to sweeten the deal.

Last fall, *The Hill Times* reported on speculation regarding ongoing attempts to recruit Begum, rumours the provincial NDP initially denied, but Liberal sources have also described Martin as a "big fish" that Trudeau had previously attempted to recruit.

Yet, while the choice of candidates won't have much impact on the parliamentary math, with both ridings viewed as safe Liberal seats, the interval until the byelections could be particularly difficult, especially if more dominoes continue to fall, Arnold said.

Hours after Begum's announcement, Liberal MP Nate Erskine Smith (Beaches-East York, Ont.) announced that he was entering the Ontario Liberal leadership race, and would seek the party nomination in Begum's now-vacant provincial riding, but that he would remain in the federal caucus unless and until he wins the nomination.

However, last week, Ontario Premier Doug Ford appeared in no rush to call a byelection to replace Begum.

Speaking with reporters on Feb. 4, Ford said he is "not too sure when" he will call the byelection, though he is required to do so within six months after the resignation.

Beyond Erskine-Smith's potential departure, there is also a fourth byelection on the horizon with the pending resignation of Conservative MP Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, Alta.), who announced last fall that he would leave the House sometime this spring.

Additionally, with consistent rumours of Liberal MP Jonathan Wilkinson's (North Vancouver-Capilano, B.C.) potential appointment as ambassador to the European Union, and an allegedly unhappy MP Steven Guilbeault (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, Que.) following his resignation from cabinet in protest of Carney's pipeline deal with Alberta, there could be as many as six byelections called within the next year.

Arnold said that depending on the candidates chosen in any other potential byelections, and whether a future federal NDP leader may be looking to run in any of them, could have a significant impact on the balance of power in Parliament.

Jordan Leichnitz, a former deputy chief of staff to then-NDP leader Thomas Mulcair, said that alongside the two Conservative floor crossers last fall, Begum's recruitment is a further sign of the overall mood of the country and Carney's ability to respond to it.

"I think the message that voters sent in the last election is that politicians need to find a way to work together in the face of [United States President] Donald Trump," Leichnitz said. "And it says something to voters that people from these varied spheres of politics are willing to work with Carney."

However, while Leichnitz also recognized the "strategic get" of two young, progressive women with impressive resumes, the question is whether they will actually have any impact or simply become "two more of many."

"Unless Carney listens to these women and starts focusing on policies they say they care about, then so what?" Leichnitz said, adding that both Begum and Martin will need to answer to voters on how they can join a party and government that has not yet demonstrated a dedication to the things they care about, pointing to the latter's founding of the Canadian Doctors for Medicare, whose board Martin chaired until 2013.

The following year, Martin gained international attention for her testimony defending Canada's health-care system before a U.S. Senate committee.

"We haven't seen this Liberal government talk about health care at all," Leichnitz said, adding that there has been little progress on either the Liberals' dental care or pharmacare programs since last year's election.

"There are a lot of qualified women in Carney's caucus and his cabinet, but it's still a very small, concentrated group of men in the PMO who are actually shaping his decisions," Leichnitz said. "Unless Carney is willing to give those women a seat at the table and more decision-making power, they're not making progress; they're just one more of many."

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NEWS

New in-office mandate could send more public servants out the door, union says

NDP MP Heather McPherson says introducing the new four-day, in-office mandate for the core public service during widespread job cuts is 'a bad choice' by the Liberal government.

Continued from page 1

an attempt by this government to make the workplace so dysfunctional that people quit while the employer claims they left voluntarily," Canadian Association of Public Employees president Nathan Prier told *The Hill Times* in a statement.

"We need a strong public sector more than ever given the crisis this country is in, but instead we're making public servants less productive and wasting tens of billions of dollars on real estate we don't need."

The Treasury Board Secretariat announced on Feb. 5 that executives in the core public administration will be required to work in-office full-time as of May 4. All other employees will be expected to be in-office four days per week as of July 6. Separate agencies within the public service are "strongly encouraged" to follow suit.

"The government has put forward ambitious plans to deliver on priorities for Canadians and to strengthen our country. Working together onsite is an essential foundation of the strong teams, collaboration, and culture needed during this pivotal moment and beyond," said the memo, posted publicly and signed by Bill Matthews, who is secretary of the Treasury Board, as well as Jacqueline Bogden, chief human resources officer, and Francis Trudel, associate chief human resources officer.

"We will be engaging with bargaining agents to seek their input on implementing this plan. These discussions will focus on important elements, such as the potential for allocation of assigned seating and occupational health and safety," the memo reads.

"Public Services and Procurement Canada will work closely with you to ensure that adequate office space is available for your employees."

More than 20,000 workforce adjustment notices have already been issued to public servants since mid-December, and more

The Treasury Board Secretariat, led by President Shafqat Ali, announced on Feb. 5 that executives in the core public administration will be required to work in-office full-time as of May 4, and all other staff four days per week as of July 6. Separate agencies within the public service are 'strongly encouraged' to follow suit. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



CAPE president Nathan Prier says the new in-office rules appear to be an attempt to make the public service 'so dysfunctional that people quit while the employer claims they left voluntarily.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



NDP MP Heather McPherson says introducing the new in-office mandate during widespread job cuts is 'a bad choice.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

than 16,358 roles for employees are expected to be cut, along with nearly 700 executive roles.

Speaking to reporters on Parliament Hill, NDP MP and leadership candidate Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.) said introducing the new in-office mandate during widespread job cuts is "a bad choice" by the government.

"It's one more hit on the public service, one more indication that Mark Carney doesn't care about the public servants running this country," McPherson said.

"I don't understand why the government thinks that they can continually pick away at our public service and not take care of workers that are running the insti-

tutions that Canadians depend upon in this country," she said.

One longtime public servant, Jean-Francois Claude, posted on social media that increasing in-office requirements in the midst of the workforce adjustment is "a leadership choice that raises clear psychological health and safety concerns under the Canada Labour Code."

The workforce adjustment process is already a stressor on staff, he wrote on LinkedIn, and "stacking major organizational stressors without mitigation or sequencing isn't neutral. It significantly increases the risk of psychological harm. That makes this a duty-of-care issue, not just a change-management one."

Funk said it's "certainly a concern" that office conditions could encourage lawyers to leave the public service, but "I wouldn't go so far as saying it's like a deliberate strategy," she said, adding "there are extreme negative impacts to our members."

'Serious concerns' about office-space issues, says PIPSC

Conservative MP Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, Alta.) is her party's critic for the Treasury Board. She said via email that Canadians expect public servants to be in-office "as is required."

But, she added that she's heard from public servants "from across the country who do not have adequate working conditions or office space" under the current return-to-office (RTO) mandate, which prescribes most employees be in-office three days a week and executives for four.

"Conservatives believe that our public service must deliver for Canadians and provide the services and programs that Canadians expect," Kusie said.

"It is up to this Liberal government to ensure all public servants have appropriate working conditions to fulfil RTO mandates at any level—Conservatives will continue to hold the Liberals accountable on this issue."

Sean O'Reilly, president of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, said since the three-day in-office mandate was announced in May 2024, the government "has yet to provide adequate office space" for bureaucrats.

"And in five months, they're going to have enough office space for four days a week? I find that hard to believe," he said in an interview.

"And I have serious concerns about the offices we're going to get because we already have health and safety issues with some of the offices... I don't know how they're going to do it. I truly don't."

O'Reilly said none of the unions were given any advanced notice that the in-office rules were changing, and he had been asking to sit down with Treasury Board officials since November when rumours began swirling around a new in-person mandate.

"We're going to continue to fight these mandates in every avenue we can," O'Reilly said, including filing policy grievances, individual grievances, and "really pushing back on the government and asking for the facts and evidence that they use to make these decisions."

The Public Service Alliance of Canada, one of the largest federal unions, said it will be "fighting this irresponsible decision every step of the way."

In a statement, the union said it is "prepared to take any legal action against changes to the in-office mandate. We negotiated an agreement on remote work and they continue to violate it. We will be taking a different approach this time. We will fight, and nothing is off the table."

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NEWS

HMCS Ville de Québec was the last Canadian warship to sail through the Taiwan Strait in September 2025 alongside Australia's HMAS Brisbane. DND photograph by MCpl Gabrielle DesRochers



Defence official says Canadian transiting of Taiwan Strait 'likely' to continue

Since the launch of the Indo-Pacific Strategy in late 2022, Canadian warships have sailed through the Taiwan Strait seven times.

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in the region was "regularized" as part of the 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy. Since the launch of the strategy, there have been seven crossings.

"If we need to transition through operation areas in the north and south [of the Pacific], we will likely continue to use the Taiwan straits as the venue," said Maj.-Gen. Travis Morehen, director general of international security policy.

China considers the Taiwan Strait as its own waters, and has vocally opposed international naval movements through the passage. Canada—like its allies—considers the waterway to be international waters, and thus doesn't provide advance notice when it moves through. Under the Indo-Pacific Strategy, Canada has signalled its opposition to "unilateral actions that threaten the status quo in the Taiwan Strait."



Maj.-Gen. Travis Morehen says the Taiwan Strait is the 'most direct route' to transition from the south and north Pacific. Screenshot courtesy of ParlVu

In response to Chinese military exercises around Taiwan earlier this year, Canada reaffirmed that opposition.

"The Taiwan Strait is indispensable to the security and prosperity of the international community. It is in the interest of all parties to maintain the peaceful and accessible nature of this waterway," Global Affairs Canada said on Jan. 1.

Canada and China have experienced a thaw in their relationship after years of discord after Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) became the first Canadian leader to visit the country since 2017 earlier this year.

The last Canadian crossing of the Taiwan Strait occurred in September 2025 when the Halifax-class frigate HMCS Ville de Québec was joined by Australia's

Hobart-class destroyer HMAS Brisbane in sailing the waterway.

At the time, a spokesperson for China's People's Liberation Army said the vessels were undertaking "trouble making and provocation," and that the crossings send "the wrong signals and increase security risks," according to a Reuters report.

The Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement at the time welcoming the crossing, adding that it "served to defend freedom, peace, and openness in the Taiwan Strait, and underscore[d] their staunch stance that the Taiwan Strait is international waters."

Morehen said that Canada would never deploy a vessel abroad just for the purpose of navigating through the Taiwan Strait, but rather it is done to

transit from one location to another—such as when going from the South Pacific to Japan and South Korea.

"That is the most direct route to be able to go through there. It's about 200 nautical miles, 13-hour transit," he said. "We don't conduct any other provocative activities when we're on that transit."

"We just sail at an economic speed through the Taiwan Strait so that we can get to the next operating area," he added.

Morehen said that during the 13 transits that Canada has conducted since 2018, there have been "no unprofessional or unsafe interactions" with the navies of China or Taiwan.

Global Affairs Canada's Eric Laporte, executive director for the regional security and defence relations division, said that transiting through the Taiwan Strait is "often times" used to move to a different operation theatre.

"But it's also to demonstrate under UNCLOS [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea] ... the ability to work and operate in international straits," he said. "Openness to maritime transit is key for trade."

Laporte told the Foreign Affairs Committee that the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa will often démarche Canadian officials or pull in diplomats in the Canadian Embassy in Beijing.

"At least we can talk and have those frank discussions which ... allows us to explain our position, but [also] allows the exchange of information," he said.

Morehen described Canada and China's military relationship as "positive, but limited."

Naval Commander Angus Topshee visited his counterpart in China in 2024 as part of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium.

Morehen described his interactions with Chinese defence officials as "courteous and respectful."

Transiting strait should continue, Taiwan rep says

Taiwan's top diplomat in Canada Harry Ho-jen Tseng told *The Hill Times* last month there is a "legitimate concern" that potential

pressure from Beijing on Canada could change its policy towards the strait.

"[China] is very famous for putting all kinds of coercion, [including] economic coercion," he said.

The Taiwanese representative said that Canada's moves through the strait aren't for the benefit of Taiwan, but are in Canada's own national security interests.

"[The] Taiwan Strait is in international waters, but China sees it as their jurisdictional water—a water that they think they can exercise their jurisdiction," Tseng said. "[Canada] wants to defy what they say by actions. You should continue to do that."

"I will be surprised if you stop doing that. I don't know what kind of signal you are sending to the world if you stop doing that," he added.

Former Canadian diplomat Charles Burton, who had multiple postings in the Canadian Embassy in Beijing, said that he doesn't anticipate that Canada would explicitly state that it no longer wishes to support freedom of navigation and exercises in the Taiwan Strait.

"But I think that could happen *de facto* if Canada continues to emphasize the Arctic defence and our commitment to Ukraine," he said. "There might be some kind of tacit understanding between Canada and China that Canada would no longer be so proactive in engaging in these exercises that China regards as infringements on China's sovereign rights in those waters."

Burton said he expects that Canada's defence resources will be prioritized elsewhere, remarking that the government may determine that it is not Canada's priority to engage in defence of Taiwan.

He said that Canada's current approach to China—including its strategic partnership with Beijing—is not encouraging when it comes to gauging Canada's desire to protect democracy around the world and in Taiwan.

China will likely want to see Canada as being more compliant with Beijing's critiques of Canada's participation in multilateral actions to underpin the international nature of the Taiwan Strait, Burton said.

"Canada might be inclined because it's concerned that if we don't abide by the Chinese demands then the memorandum of understanding won't be negotiated, and China could engage in further economic coercion against Canada," Burton said.

Canada and China signed multiple memorandums of understanding during Carney's visit to China last month, including on energy, crime, wood products, cultural exchanges, food safety, and animal and plant health.

"It strikes me as likely that the Chinese have more leverage over us in this regard and the Carney administration because of their non-values-based approach to their relations with foreign countries, and might be inclined to be less supportive of Taiwan and reduce the number of navigation exercises that we engage in," Burton said.

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‘Something new is needed’: Ottawa’s diplomatic corps still trying to grasp Carney’s worldview after Davos

‘Carney broke out of that binary between unacceptable subordination and self-destructive resistance, and he gave a third way,’ says South African envoy Rieaz Shaik.

Continued from page 1

assembled Ottawa’s diplomatic community on Feb. 2 to “outline” Canada’s foreign policy priorities following the speech that Carney (Nepean, Ont.) gave in Switzerland at the World Economic Forum in January.

Following that meeting, *The Hill Times* spoke with ambassadors and high commissioners representing countries on four continents, including members of the G7 and G20.

This newspaper heard markedly different interpretations of the prime minister’s remarks as some viewed the speech through the lens of a sharp new direction for Canada’s place in the world, while others saw the remarks as outlining a less substantial change.

Throughout the globe, some have viewed the speech as a repudiation of the threats emanating from United States President Donald Trump and his administration.

The speech has evoked a great deal of interest within the diplomatic corps. For some, they are talking about nothing else. There have been many discussions and dinners convened as diplomats try to determine what it means for their country.

South African High Commissioner Rieaz Shaik told *The Hill Times* he lauded Carney’s speech, but noted it now puts Canada in an “incredibly difficult position” as the world looks to this country to lead on the call for middle powers to unite.

“There’s an expectation that Canada must lead on it. There’s an expectation that Canada now will engage in a series of interactions to construct this middle-power alliance,” he said during a Feb. 7 phone interview.

Shaik said this can be “incredibly unfair” on Canada, remarking that all middle powers should be reaching out to understand Carney’s thinking, as well as that of Global Affairs Canada.

Shaik said that would be the “correct approach” for countries to take, but said that there is an expectation—which he described as an “unfair expectation”—that Canada would lead on the issue.

Ottawa-based diplomats have differing interpretations of what Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, spelled out as a new direction for Canada. Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand recently gathered the diplomatic corps to ‘outline’ Canada’s foreign policy priorities. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



In his Jan. 20 speech, Carney proclaimed that “middle powers must act together because if you are not at the table, you are on the menu.” He spoke of the “fading” rules-based international order, and of reducing “leverage that enables coercion.”

Shaik described Carney’s address as a “defining” and “pivotal” speech that will “determine the parameters of foreign policy debate for the next few years.”

“Finally, there’s a leader in the Western world that understands what we from the Global South have been saying all along: that the rules-based international order created an order for some and disorder for others,” he said.

“I broke down in tears to say, ‘God, finally, somebody understands what we’ve been saying for so long’—that is a liberating moment,” he said.

Shaik said that since Carney’s speech, he has been working long hours as Pretoria has looked to the South African High Commission to provide a detailed analysis of the remarks.

He said that there has been a realization that “strategic ambiguity” that combines “stoic silence” and “appeasement” is not sufficient for the moment.

“That approach to dealing with what is coming out of the United States can no longer work,” he said. “Carney chose the Davos moment to signal that the approaches to date in managing every country’s affairs with the United States are no longer sustainable and something new is needed.”

He said that the approach Carney has taken to foster middle powers to work together to shape the global order in a more equitable way took “tremendous courage.”

Shaik said that up until Carney’s speech, the world was caught between two unappealing options.

“Carney broke out of that binary between unacceptable subordination and self-destructive



South African High Commissioner Rieaz Shaik described Carney’s Davos speech as a ‘liberating moment.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

resistance, and he gave a third way,” he said.

The top South African diplomat in Canada said that it would be a “wasted moment” if countries don’t exercise their own agency and co-ordination capacity to engage with Canada and have a dialogue.

He said that dialogue is not anti-American or anti-Trump, but rather deciding what each country’s place in the world will be amid the Trump administration’s path of being a “rule maker” in advancing its own interests.

“What do we do in that context? Without taking an antagonistic approach, but a self-preservation approach,” he said. “We cannot accept that the rest of the world should diminish in order for the United States to succeed.”

He said that Carney’s view of principled pragmatism can also be viewed through South Africa’s approach of “active non-alignment.”

The European view

French Ambassador to Canada Michel Miraillet said that Ottawa is “on the way” to playing a new role in the international arena, but what exactly that role is has yet to be seen.

He described a coalition of middle powers as “an interesting concept.”

“And then after that, how do you implement that? This is another issue—it’s sometimes difficult to pull a few provinces together in Canada—to bring countries that consider themselves middle powers ... is another challenge.”

He said that there is a “wait-and-see” element to how Canada’s changing approach is implemented.

Miraillet said that it’s not just up to the Europeans to attract Canadians, but for Ottawa to change its mindset and to build a “bigger bridge” with Europe.

He said there will be a need for “conceptual developments,” but noted that he feels that a lot of countries and governments are interested in the idea.

He said the middle-power coalitions are likely going to be different based on the interest—from energy to artificial intelligence—of that grouping.

Miraillet said the building of links between Europe and Canada will “highly rely” on the work coming from Global Affairs Canada. He said this won’t be done in the short term, but is a process that will take months or years, remarking that the foreign ministry will need “all their staff” for that work.

“The Europeans are more than open to that kind of new relationship, but it will take time,” he said.

Italian Ambassador to Canada Alessandro Cattaneo said that Carney’s speech “reinforced the idea” that the Canadian voice is one that is “more outstanding” and “more important” to be heard across the trans-Atlantic community.

He said the tools are already in place to take the next steps, citing Canada’s trade deal with the European Union.

“I personally believe that we don’t need to invent anything more than [what] we already have,” he said, noting Carney

has indicated that work needs to continue with the U.S. and the trans-Atlantic community.

Asked if he sees Carney’s vision as a change in approach to foreign policy, Cattaneo said it’s up to a prime minister to position the speech in his own strategy.

“We tend to stick to our own principles and ideas, but the way we elaborate—the way we articulate those ideas—depends on the specific juncture where we are,” Cattaneo told *The Hill Times* during a Feb. 9 interview at the Italian Embassy. “There are elements of this speech that are articulated in some ways because of the specific moment when the speech is pronounced.”

He said that going forward, there is a need to bet on collective success, adding that includes the success of the G7, as well as NATO.

“Those groupings—the G7 and NATO—will still remain our bedrock for the future,” he said, remarking that there is a need to be “cool headed” and to be “optimistic.”

Diversification welcomed, but questions linger about overhauling world order

Pakistani High Commissioner Muhammad Saleem said it is in the interest of the whole world to make the current system work.

“The world cannot afford to go into disarray,” he told *The Hill Times* during a Feb. 8 interview at his Rockcliffe Park residence. “International rules remain relevant, and are much needed today as they were yesterday.”

“We cannot afford for these systems to collapse. We cannot afford these systems to be altogether discarded,” he said.

He said that any shortcomings have to be fixed through co-operation of the entirety of the international community, including superpowers, middle powers, and smaller economies.

Saleem said that Carney has highlighted that the system is under stress, remarking that the world community needs to come together and keep the system going.

He indicated that Canada’s approach isn’t a sea change, but one where Canada is approaching diversification with “some more urgency” compared to past efforts.

Colombian Ambassador Carlos Arturo Morales López said he heard Carney outlining Canada as seeking to position itself as a leading force as it articulates a new multilateral vision in contrast to the unilateralism of great powers.

He said that the new approach includes asking Canada to look to the Americas in its diversification push.

If you are trying to diversify your relations, you will find in Latin America that even though we have quite challenging issues and struggle with many problems, that it offers a huge possibility in terms of economic trade and enhancing the political relationship,” he said.

Morales López said that there needs to be “double efforts” to enhance relationships between Canada and Latin America.

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NEWS

'All the fundamentals are there': Conservatives bank unity and cash, but need to buy time and 'hope' for a renewed NDP, say politicos

Strategists say the Tories' massive war chest and support for its leader will keep the party in a strong position ahead of any potential election, but may require a rejuvenated NDP to weaken the Liberals' left flank for the current electoral math to work in its favour.

Continued from page 1

and the hope of a rejuvenated NDP eating into the government's left flank, say observers.

"All of the fundamentals are there for the Conservatives to win," said Jordan Paquet, a former staffer to then-prime minister Stephen Harper, pointing to the 87.4 per cent support Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's (Battle River-Crowfoot, Alta.) received at the party's national policy convention on Jan. 30, and the sizeable war chest left over after the election thanks to another record-smashing 2025 fundraising haul.

According to financial data released by Elections Canada on Jan. 30, the Conservative Party raised another \$47.79-million

from more than 327,000 individual contributions in 2025, driven by a massive \$28.1-million first-quarter total and a final-quarter total of \$6.4-million. The Conservatives' first-quarter total is nearly on par with the Liberals' entire 12-month total of \$29.7-million from 390,355 individual contributions.

The Conservatives' 2025 total also represents a nearly 14.5-per-

cent increase from the previous party record of \$41.7-million in 2024, and nearly double the \$26.5-million it raised during the 2021 election year.

While the Liberals trailed with their yearly fundraising, both parties' fourth-quarter totals represent the closest margin between the two since the final three months of 2021. The Liberals' yearly fundraising also represents



a 60-per-cent increase in fundraising compared to 2021, and nearly doubled the \$15.2-million it raised in 2024. It also received a smaller number of individual contributions in the fourth quarter of this year—40,676 compared to the

Conservatives' 42,023—and a lower average contribution of \$76 in 2025, compared to the Conservatives' \$146.

During the 2025 general election, the Conservatives spent more than \$35.4-million, outspending the Liberals' total campaign expenses of \$34.2-million by more than \$1.2-million. The Conservatives also outspent the Liberals on campaign advertising—\$22.7-million compared to the Liberals' \$21.3-million—as well as their leaders' tour, expensing just over \$7.2-million on Poilievre's cross-country election travel, compared to the just over \$6-million the Liberals spent on Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) movements.

In the year before the election, the Conservatives outspent the Liberals on advertising by more than seven to one, according to the parties' 2024 financial returns. That year, the Conservatives spent roughly one-third of their \$50-million annual expenses on advertising—\$16.5-million—which was nearly double the \$8.5-million it spent in 2023. Nearly half of that spending—\$7.8-million—was allocated to television ads, up from \$5.8-million the previous year, and an additional \$7.1-million was spent on "other" advertising, including print and digital ads, a more than \$5-million increase from the prior year.

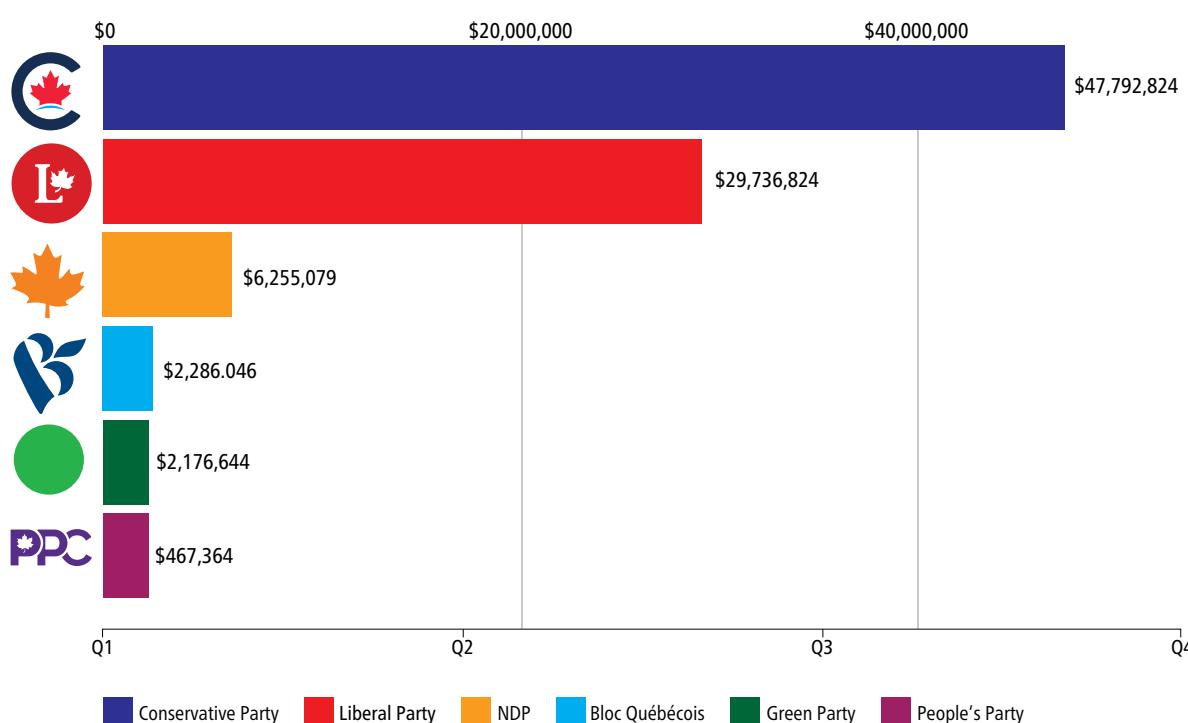
In comparison, the Liberals spent just \$2.3-million on advertising in 2024, the bulk of which—just shy of \$2-million—was allocated to the party's digital ads, with the remaining split between television (\$305,691), and radio advertising (\$3,915).

Conservative strategist Ashton Arsenault told *The Hill Times* that the Tories' "reliable donor base and a healthy war chest" is an enviable position for any party. The money will allow the party to continue its high level of campaigning on all fronts, and will have "zero trouble communicating with Canadians wherever they consume their content," Arsenault said.

As for what the Conservatives' message should be going forward,

Federal Party Four-Quarter Fundraising, 2025

Federal party fundraising totals, Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2025



Source: Elections Canada

Totals are rounded to the nearest dollar and exclude transfers from riding associations, candidates, and nomination contestants.

Federal parties' quarterly fundraising, 2025

	Q1	Contributions	Q2	Contributions	Q3	Contributions	Q4	Contributions	Total \$	Total Contributions	Average Donation
Conservative Party of Canada	\$28,120,173	148,676	\$9,023,799	82,681	\$4,233,717	53,725	\$6,414,559	42,023	\$47,792,248	327,105	\$146
Liberal Party of Canada	\$13,175,970	156,489	\$7,607,902	116,125	\$2,958,143	77,064	\$5,994,809	40,676	\$29,736,824	390,354	\$76
New Democratic Party	\$1,825,456	37,538	\$1,911,294	38,149	\$878,605	30,677	\$1,639,725	14,542	\$6,255,079	120,906	\$52
Green Party of Canada	\$804,730	5,181	\$1,087,870	14,512	\$393,446	N/A	\$1,055,997	N/A	\$3,342,043	19,693	\$170
Bloc Québécois	\$746,737	3,590	\$674,591	4,502	\$103,524	956	\$651,792	4,520	\$2,176,644	13,568	\$160

Source: Elections Canada



Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, pictured with his wife Anaïda in Calgary on Jan. 30, has 'all of the fundamentals' he needs to win, but is equally dependent on how well the Liberal coalition holds together. *The Hill Times* photograph by Amir Said

Arsenault, a former ministerial staffer in Harper's government, said the party will need a "two-fold" strategy that both contrasts and distinguishes it from the Liberals, while offering a "hopeful" message on the issues Canadians care about.

Arsenault said that whether the issue is crime, trade, national unity, or progress on affordability, Poilievre needs to highlight where Canada "can and should be in contrast to where we are today."

"We saw a bit of this in Poilievre's speech in Calgary, but I would expect this trend to continue," Arsenault said, adding that the longer progress is stalled on Carney's agenda, the more potent Poilievre's contrast will become.

Paquet, now a vice-president at Bluesky Strategy Group, also advised Poilievre to remain "steady on" his current course, and reject the Liberals' suggestion that winning two percentage points more of the popular vote requires the opposition's total acquiescence.

"More than eight million Canadians voted for the Conservatives, and they deserve a voice, too," Paquet said, adding that Poilievre and his caucus have nonetheless offered "olive branches" of co-operation when national unity or economic stability is at stake.

However, co-operation does not mean "a blank cheque," Paquet said, noting that just because the Liberals say a piece of legislation is important does not mean it deserves unanimous consent or to sail past scrutiny at committee.

Paquet also pushed back on the idea that Poilievre has not done enough to present himself and his caucus as a government in waiting, noting the eight million Canadians who have already voted for that government, compared to the 8.5 million who voted for the Liberals.

"Canadians do see that in him," Paquet said, adding that if not for the NDP's collapse to the Liberals' benefit, similar vote results for the Conservatives "would have been enough for a massive majority in any other election."

Yet, while the Liberals' lead in the polls has seemingly only increased since the last election, with Mainstreet Research and Leger both indicating Carney's government approaching 50 per cent in their most recent polls and 338Canada reporting an average five-point lead—43 per cent to 38 per cent—Paquet said that "no government remains popular forever."

"If Carney doesn't start delivering the goods on his agenda, Canadians' patience will start to wear thin, and it will be up

to the Liberals to keep their coalition together," Paquet said.

NDP strategist Will Shelling agreed that the Conservatives' best chance of success requires weakening the Liberals' poll position while maintaining their own, and that making the current math equal a win requires subtracting support from the government's left flank.

"For the Conservatives to win, they kind of require the Liberal Party to be weakened as a result of a stronger NDP," explained Shelling, an account director with Counsel Public Affairs.

Shelling said that for the Conservatives' 2025 vote share to have resulted in a majority, the NDP would have needed to secure somewhere around 20 seats. However, he noted that the Conservatives "cannibalized" more of the NDP-held ridings in the last election.

Of the 26 NDP-held ridings heading into last year's general election, seven seats flipped to the Liberals and 10 flipped to the Conservatives, with each winning five of the NDP's then 13 ridings in British Columbia.

However, given the current electoral landscape and the NDP still being without a leader, the second variable the Conservatives will need to rely on is time, Shelling said, noting that if the speculation of a snap election this year is accurate, the best result the Conservatives may be able to hope for is to hold the Liberals to a minority.

Shelling said that Poilievre may have as much interest in the outcome of the NDP's ongoing leadership race as his own leadership review.

"If we had the election right now, I think the best the Conservatives could hope for is a similar result to 2025," Shelling said. "But if we're having this conversation in May and if whoever the NDP's new leader is can demonstrate the party can be a winning product, that would be a much different scenario."

The winner of the NDP's leadership race will be announced at the party's convention on March 29.

Whoever the NDP's future leader is, Shelling said he predicts a spike in energy and fundraising for the party compared to last year, as much of it is currently being spent on the race or being directed toward more successful provincial parties.

According to Elections Canada, the NDP capped off 2025 with a fourth-quarter total of \$1.6-million, for a yearly total of \$6.25-million in fundraising from just over 120,900 individual contributions, averaging \$52 per contribution.

In comparison, leadership frontrunner Avi Lewis has raised \$778,869 between September—when the race began—and Dec. 31, 2025, followed by MP Heather McPherson's (Edmonton Strathcona, Alta.) \$415,490 for the same period.

As of Feb. 2, a spokesperson for Lewis' campaign told *The Hill Times* that the former journalist and filmmaker had raised \$1,090,539.

The other three leadership candidates are trailing well behind Lewis, according to the numbers available as of the end of 2025. But with the \$231,094 raised by Rob Ashton, the president of the International Longshore Workers Union; the \$142,129 raised by Tanille Johnston, a B.C. city councillor and social worker; and environmentalist farmer Tony McQuail's \$95,093, the five candidates' combined total well surpasses the party's fourth-quarter total.

Post-leadership, Shelling said he expects much of that energy and money to return to the federal party, but only if the new leader can demonstrate the NDP is a "winning product."

"The new leader needs to make a compelling argument to progressives that their money is safe with the party, and can be used to win back those ridings and more," Shelling explained.

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Scaffolding costs in the capital climb to \$20.2-million in 2025

Continued from page 4

Nearby, the Confederation Building at 229 Wellington St. has been the source of \$563,747 in spending on scaffolding. The building is home to about 160 MP offices, and while its full renovation is still years away, some work—including roof replacement and window repairs—has been bumped up out of necessity.

Second to Centre Block is scaffolding spending related to the West Memorial Building's still ongoing renovation, which totalled almost \$5.78-million between November 2022 and 2025. While costs have scaled back since the peak of \$2.92-million incurred in 2022, last year saw \$888,601 spent on scaffolding for the building located at 344 Wellington St., which is being fit-up to serve as the interim home of the Supreme Court of Canada.

The West Memorial Building's renovation has total budget of roughly \$671-million, and has been underway since 2020. Work is currently focused on interior finishes and landscaping as the project begins to wind down ahead of the Supreme Court's official move-in this summer, which, while still being finalized, is expected to begin in July or August, according to PSPC.

As the Supreme Court of Canada Building readies for its long-awaited renovation, scaffolding has also been erected there for advance exterior repair, maintenance, and investigative work, with \$865,729 spent on the equipment in 2023, and \$1.15-million in 2024.

A start date, timeline, and cost estimate for the Supreme Court's overhaul has yet to be announced, but it's expected to last for roughly 10 years, and the renovation of both buildings has been pegged at more than \$1-billion.

The Alexandra Bridge connecting Ottawa to Gatineau is federal property, and was the cause of \$3.42-million in scaffolding costs since November 2022—ranking third among the spending reported by PSPC.

The 120-year-old bridge will soon be replaced, but in the meantime, repairs and investigative work have been underway, requiring the use of scaffolding. The design for its replacement was unveiled last year, and approvals continue to move ahead, with the National Capital Commission giving the green light to its overall schematic design last month. Construction of the new bridge is expected to begin in 2028, and continue through to 2032.

Also topping the \$2-million mark during the period in question was scaffolding related to renovations at Place du Portage, Phase III, across the river in Gatineau, Que., which totalled \$2.53-million altogether, and at the Lester B. Pearson Building at 125 Sussex Dr., in Ottawa, which totalled almost \$2.49-million.

The Place du Portage is home to a range of federal public servants, and renovations to Phase III of the complex are expected to wrap up this year. Related scaffolding expenses peaked last year at \$1.19-million, with \$840,617 incurred in 2024, \$299,772 in 2023, and \$208,891 in 2022.

The national headquarters of Global Affairs Canada, renovations to the Lester B. Pearson Building have been ongoing for years, with work currently focused on its Tower C, and are overall estimated at \$700-million. Spending on scaffolding reached a height of \$1.24-million for this project last year, compared to \$76,854 in 2024, \$436,604 in 2023, and \$112,925 in 2022.

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A worker moves pylons on Bay Street at the West Memorial Building in Ottawa on Sept. 7, 2022. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Party Central



By Stuart Benson

The 'Harper Era Tour' wraps at Rogers Centre in Ottawa

Over 1,500 Conservatives from across Canada and around the world painted the Rogers Centre blue with a glitzy black-tie gala on Feb. 4 to cap off the final day of 'Harper-palooza' celebrating 20 years of Canada's 22nd prime minister.

The final night of the "Harper Era Tour" wrapped up in Ottawa on Feb. 4 with a packed Rogers Centre gala featuring more than 1,000 Conservatives—drawing big names from across Canada and the Commonwealth—to mark the 20th anniversary of Canada's 22nd prime minister.

Capping off three days of what has been affectionately dubbed "Harper-palooza," the week kicked off with Harper receiving a special gold medal from the Royal Canadian Geographical Society on Feb. 2, as well as a friendly fireside chat with former prime minister **Jean Chrétien**.

On Tuesday, Harper was joined by current Prime Minister **Mark Carney**, former Conservative cabinet ministers including **Peter MacKay** and **John Baird**; Premiers **Scott Moe** and **Doug Ford**; and NHL Commissioner **Gary Bettman** at the Sir John A. Macdonald Building for the unveiling of his official prime ministerial portrait, courtesy of portraitist **Phil Richards**, who included plenty of Easter eggs for eagle-eyed politicos to pour over and analyze.

While a black-tie gala with the press gallery in attendance isn't exactly the kind of party that you'd expect to be organized in Harper's honour, the press gallery was still able to enjoy the usual Tory hospitality on Wednesday night from the back of the Rogers Centre's Canada Hall.

Apologies to the night's host, former Harper PMO staffer and current LCBO VP **Aaron Campbell**, for stealing his joke, but **Party Central** overheard *The Toronto Star's* **Althia Raj** make basically the same joke 30 minutes beforehand, so this reporter will let you two haggle over copyright. However, Campbell also made a handful of jokes regarding specific trends in the sexuality of several former staffers and cabinet ministers that **Party Central** is absolutely not going to touch.

Once the media had been securely corralled and the guests invited to their seats by Harper & Associates' chief of staff **Anna Tomala** and Wellington Advocacy's **Andrea van Vugt**, Campbell's opening routine ran the gamut of inside jokes, roasts, and the "Harper Era Tour" of fond memories, from

the unification of the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives, to Harper's leadership on the world stage, the 2008 financial crisis, and everything in between.

Campbell also offered an unseized opportunity for a "public airing of grievances" in case anyone wanted to give Rubicon Strategy's **Kory Teneycke** a piece of their mind.

While sightlines were limited from inside the media pen behind the cameras and table-clearing stations, as well as the constant clanging of metal dome lids and cutlery, **Party Central** still managed to spot a handful of notable attendees with the help of Campbell's shoutouts from the stage, or as they stopped nearby for drinks at the bar between courses.

Alongside nearly the entire current Conservative caucus—**Party Central** lost count around 50—and former Harper-era parliamentarians and cabinet ministers, including Baird, MacKay, **Jason Kenney**, and former interim leader **Rona Ambrose**, as well as hundreds of staffers, campaign organizers, and strategists from the past two decades, like **Kate Harrison**, **Dimitri Soudas**, **Jim Armour**, **Jenni Byrne**, **Yaroslav Baran**, **Dave Forestell**, **Patrick Harris**, **Jill Walker**, and plenty of Quebec staffers who are still holding out the flame of hope that, one day, the party "can finally win 30 seats" in the province.

Alongside the big names in Canadian conservatism, Harper was also toasted by his contemporaries across the pond(s), including Australia's former prime minister **Tony Abbott**, and Ireland's 13th Taoiseach **Enda Kenny**, who told Harper that, like all great leaders, he has and should ever-remain like **Albert Einstein's** "curious children, before the great mystery into which we were born."

Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre**—accompanied by his wife, **Anaida**—also spoke fondly of his "mentor," whom he recalled first meeting at a local bar and grill in South Calgary, where he would "engage in debate about the issues of our time." You know, the classic Calgary night out.

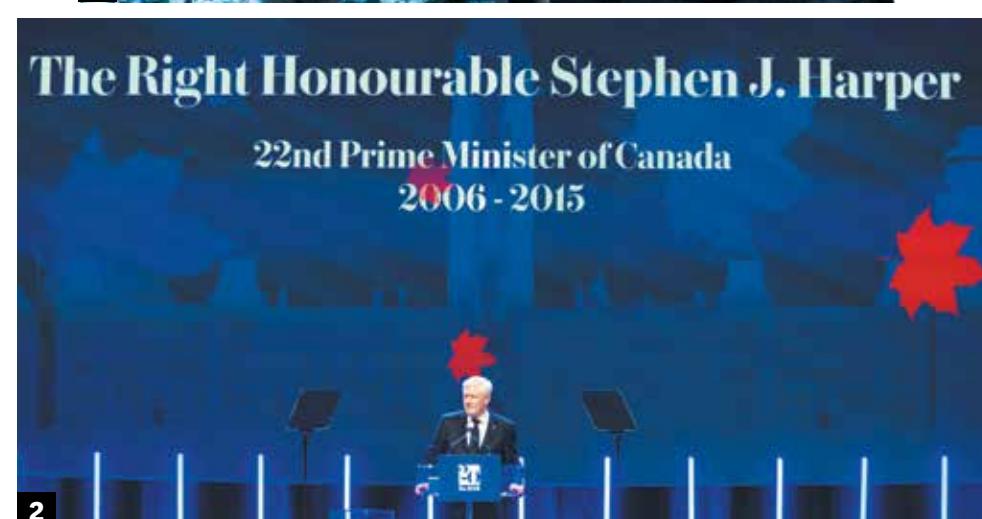
"He made the mistake of giving me, then a teenager, his phone number, and I would call him at the National Citizens Coalition," Poilievre said, adding that, to his surprise, Harper would return every call to a "no-name nobody," but more importantly, "remember photographically everything I had said on the previous annoying call."

After a quick intermission to allow for plates to be cleared, so as to ensure the noise wouldn't interrupt the "Big 22" as they had during the beginning of Poilievre's speech, Harper took to the stage with a refreshing promptness and fidelity to the promised 8:30 p.m. call time, accompanied by thunderous applause and **Collective Soul's** *Better Now*.

While Harper opened by joking that so much had changed in Ottawa that he was



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The Hill Times photographs
by Andrew Meade

1. Former prime minister Stephen Harper receives a medal from Royal Canadian Geographic Society Board President Lois Mitchell in Ottawa on Feb. 2. 2. Harper speaks at a gala at the Rogers Centre in Ottawa on Feb. 4. The event celebrated the 20 years since he first took up residency in the PMO. 3. Harper speaks at the unveiling of his official portrait in Ottawa on Feb. 3. 4. Former Harper PMO staffer and current LCBO VP Aaron Campbell warms up the crowd ahead of the night's special guest speakers, but will have to save the public airing of grievances until the 30th anniversary. 5. Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, Harper, and House of Commons speaker Francis Scarpaleggia attend the official portrait unveiling ceremony for Harper in Ottawa on Feb. 3. 6. Former prime ministers Jean Chrétien, left, and Harper demonstrate proper form when delivering Chrétien's patented finisher, 'the Shawinigan Handshake' on Feb. 2. 7. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre raises a toast to his 'mentor' and former leader, Harper.

PARTY CENTRAL

Continued from **page 36**

now being waved at "with all five fingers," no longer being regularly flipped the bird was not the only thing Harper spoke nostalgically about. After thanking his wife, **Laureen Harper**, and family, Harper reflected on his time as prime minister and lauded it as "the first durable conservative coalition since Sir John A. Macdonald." He also offered a ray of hope for the future to attendees agonizing through the 12th consecutive year of Liberal governance.

"There are no permanent governments in a democracy. That means that anything can be built upon. It means that anything can be undone, and it also means that eventually anything can be restored," Harper told the crowd, noting that "after 2015, many of the gains we made for our country were either reversed or squandered, leaving Canada so much weaker and more divided."

Harper also broke his partial silence on "what has transpired" since U.S. President **Donald Trump** returned to office in early 2025, saying it has presented Canada with a "challenge unique in our lifetimes."

Harper said that while Canadians have been "understandably shocked, bewildered, and angry" in response to a "hostile United States ... that has openly questioned Canadian sovereignty ... broken trade commitments ... and that regularly issues further threats against us," he said that Canada must "focus not on emotion, but on policy."

"The question for Canada is not how we feel about what the U.S. is doing; it is how we will adapt," Harper said, advising that he does not believe it is a "safe assumption" that "things will go back to the way they were in due course."

However, despite his chiding of the American administration and calling for the reciprocation of U.S. tariffs, Harper said the "national conversation must be



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mature enough to acknowledge that many of the difficulties we now face as a country cannot be blamed on [Trump]," but "bad decisions by our own government," which garnered one of the loudest standing ovations of the speech.

A historian, Harper also pushed back on the claim that the current period is truly "unprecedented," suggesting "the moment we face bears an uncanny relationship to 1866."

"First, elements of the U.S. government openly declared a desire to annex Canada. And second, the U.S. government cancelled the free trade agreement," Harper said, but added that those circumstances "helped lead to the greatest event in our history, the Confederation of 1867."

"Friends, the moment in history we now face can do one of two things. It can lead us to blame Trump for all our ills and to make excuses for the failures of the last decade," Harper said. "Or it can lead us to finally, truly do what is necessary to attain our full potential as a country, to become more competitive at home and better connected in the world, and to leave Canada the most secure, wealthiest, and freest country on the planet."

After Harper's speech, guests were treated to one final tribute video, with assembled cameos from former U.S. president **George W.** and his brother

"Jeb!" Bush, former British PMs **Tony Blair** and **David Cameron**, former U.S. Senator **Mitt Romney**, and Italian Prime Minister **Giorgia Meloni**.

As guests filed out and the media were herded from the room, **Party Central** sources say the Shore Club in the Westin Hotel next door was packed for the official/unofficial afterparty, with spillover into the Métropolitain Brasserie, though a select few reportedly snagged an exclusive spot with Teneycke in the Château Laurier's Prime Minister Suite.



The Hill Times photographs by Andrew Meade & Stuart Benson

1. James Kusie, left, MP Stephanie Kusie, and Pendulum Group's Yaroslav Baran. 2. Ireland's 13th Taoiseach Enda Kenny, left, and Australia's former prime minister Tony Abbott both made the trip across their respective ponds to honour their Canadian Conservative contemporary. 3. Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre chatted with guests after Harper's speech. 4. Lisa Raitt, left, and MPs Chris Warkentin and Steven Bonk. 5. Kyle Simunovic, left, and Vanessa Schneider. 6. Samantha Thompson, left, and Candice Bergen.

Black History Month turns 30

With the whitest of apologies to Canada's Black community, **Party Central** was unable to attend this year's official Government of Canada reception marking Canada's 30th Black History Month—that is, 30 years since February was designated the official month, to be clear.

Fortunately, *The Hill Times*' managing editor **Charelle Evelyn** and photographer **Sam Garcia** covered for this reporter to gather photos and identify notable attendees.

Alongside speeches from Carney—his first there as PM, though he was apparently in attendance at last year's afterparty as he geared up for his run for Liberal leader—and Ministers **Marjorie Michel** and the "pastiest" man in the room, **Marc Miller**, and Parliament's first Black House Speaker, Liberal MP **Greg Fergus**, the special guest this year was Canada's reason for the season, former Liberal MP **Jean Augustine**, the first Black woman elected to the House and who sponsored the motion to create a federally recognized Black History Month in 1995.

Also spotted in attendance were cabinet ministers **Gary Anandasangaree**, **Shafiqat Ali**, **Rebecca Alty**, **Patty Hajdu**, **Lena Metlege Diab**, and **Evan Solomon**; Liberal MPs **Tatiana Auguste**, **Steven Guilbeault**, and **Ahmed Hussen**; Senators **Sharon Burey**, **Bernadette Clement**, **Wanda Thomas Bernard**, and **Tony Ince**; and Saint Kitts and Nevis High Commissioner **Samuel Berridge**.

As a final note, keep an eye on your inboxes as **Party Central** is mixing up something new.

—With files from Charelle Evelyn
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The Hill Times



The Hill Times photographs by Sam Garcia

1. Liberal MP Greg Fergus. 2. Dr. Jean Augustine. 3. Dalhousie University Chancellor Rustum Southwell, left, and High Commissioner of Saint Kitts and Nevis Samuel Berridge. 4. Canadian Identity Minister Marc Miller, left, and High Commissioner of Jamaica Marsha Coore Lobban. 5. Health Minister Marjorie Michel. 6. Prime Minister Mark Carney.

Hill Climbers

By Laura Ryckewaert



Issues manager added to Minister Anand's boosted 20-person team

Gavin Menzies is in place as director of operations to the minister, while Nadia Hadj Mohamed continues as deputy director of policy.

Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand recently welcomed a new issues manager to her team, bringing the minister's office to 20 staff in all.

Issues manager **Rachel Sutton** started with Anand's office last month, after roughly eight months working for Finance Minister **François-Philippe Champagne**. Sutton had joined Champagne's team post-election as a deputy director of operations, returning to the Hill after about a year and a half away, which she spent working as a senior policy analyst with the Pembina Institute.

A former policy adviser with the City of Toronto, Sutton landed her first job on the Hill at the end of 2021 as a special assistant to then-women and gender equality minister **Marci Ien**. She's since also been a policy and Ontario and Atlantic regional adviser to Champagne as then-innovation minister.

Most members of Anand's now 20-member team have gone unmentioned in these pages to date. So, it's time for a long overdue rundown of the minister's office.

Seven staff have already been covered by **Hill Climbers**: chief of staff **Taras Zalusky**, director of policy **Jasmine Gill**, senior policy adviser **Matthew Trnkus**, policy and operations adviser **Aram Shoujounian**, director of parliamentary affairs **Zachariah Downey**, director of communications **James Fitz-Morris**, and press secretary **Myah Tomasi**.

Supporting Gill is deputy director of policy **Nadia Hadj Mohamed**, who held the same title in the office under then-minister **Mélanie Joly**.



Rachel Sutton is now an issues manager to Anand. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Hadj Mohamed first joined the foreign affairs team as a policy adviser under then-minister **Chrystia Freeland** in 2019. She was promoted to senior policy adviser under then-minister **Marc Garneau** in 2021, and again to deputy director last year under then-minister **Joly**.

Hadj Mohamed is also a past policy adviser to then-international development ministers **Marie-Claude Bibeau** and **Maryam Monsef**, and a former assistant to then-Liberal senators **Roméo Dallaire** and **Joseph Day**.

Along with Trnkus and Shoujounian, also currently tackling policy for Anand are senior policy advisers **Léo Newman** and **Ajay Nandalall**, and policy adviser **Isabelle Buchanan**.

Prior to joining the foreign affairs team this past summer, Newman was last on the Hill in 2022 as a senior policy adviser to Anand as then-national defence minister.

A former communications specialist with home health-care service company Nurse Next Door in Vancouver, Newman held a number of roles on the Hill between 2016 and 2022. Starting as a special assistant to then-innovation minister **Navdeep Bains**, Newman went on to be a parliamentary and West, North, and Ontario regional adviser to then-justice ministers **Jody Wilson-Raybould** and **David Lametti**, and later a senior policy adviser to then-health minister **Patty Hajdu**.

New to the Hill, Nandalall was most recently a policy and strategy consultant with Linwood Advisory, and has previously tackled AI/machine learning governance and strategy for both Layer 6, a software com-



Ajay Nandalall is a senior policy adviser. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

pany in Toronto, and earlier for TD Bank. He worked for the bank for roughly nine and a half years in all, over which time his titles also included manager of environmental and social risk management, manager of enterprise risk governance, and more. Nandalall also

has some experience working in the provincial public service as a project management and communications consultant with the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General.

Up until this past fall, Buchanan was busy as a senior policy adviser to Immigration Minister **Lena Diab**.

Buchanan had been working for the federal immigration minister since following then-minister **Marc Miller** to the portfolio in 2023, having earlier been a communications assistant in Miller's office as then-Crown-Indigenous relations minister, which she joined fresh out of university in the summer of 2022.

Gavin Menzies is back in the political fray as director of operations to Anand. He's spent the last four years, roughly, as chief of staff to the chairman and CEO of Power Sustainable in Montreal, but for about two years before that—between the start of 2020 and the end of 2021—Menzies was director of tour in then-prime minister **Justin Trudeau's** office.

A Canadian Armed Forces veteran and longtime political aide, Menzies' CV includes time spent as a special assistant for



Senior policy adviser Léo Newman. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

tour in the offices of then-PMs **Jean Chrétien** and **Paul Martin**, as tour manager to then-Liberal leader **Stéphane Dion**, and as executive assistant to then-leader **Michael Ignatieff**, then-MP **Bob Rae**, and briefly to then-Ontario premier **Kathleen Wynne** and then-New Brunswick Liberal leader **Brian Gallant**.

Youssef Ameir is in place as a senior operations and intelligence adviser, while **Danny Moufti** is a senior operations adviser.

Ameir is a former senior associate for corporate sustainability with PwC Canada, and has been involved in NATO Youth Canada as part of its global policy and national defence and strategic alliances committees.

Moufti previously worked in the ministers' regional office in Kitchener, Ont., one of 16 such offices across Canada that support all of cabinet with a mix of public servants and political staff (Moufti was the latter).

He's also a former constituency aide to then-Liberal MPs **Valerie Bradford** and **Marwan Tabbara**, who both successively represented Kitchener South-Hespeler, Ont., in the House of Commons (a seat now held by Conservative MP **Matt Strauss**). Moufti is a former chairperson of the local Liberal riding association, with which he remains involved as a director at large. He has also briefly worked as a human resources assistant with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, and—less briefly—for BWXT Canada.

Working closely with director Downey is senior parliamentary affairs adviser **Owen McAdams**. McAdams is a former assistant to Anand as the MP for the then-named riding of Oakville, Ont. After roughly a year and a half in Anand's Hill



Gavin Menzies is director of operations. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Danny Moufti is a senior operations adviser. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

office, McAdams landed a job as a regional adviser for the Greater Toronto Area to then-Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario minister **Filomena Tassi** in 2023, where he worked up until last year, ending under then-minister **Ruby Sahota**.

Jumping to the communications team, Fitz-Morris and Tomasi are joined by strategic communications adviser **Jessica Daigneault**.

Daigneault graduated from the University of Ottawa with a master's degree in security and defence studies last year, and while in school worked for a Member of Parliament. Her CV includes a past internship with the Privy Council Office, and a co-op placement as a junior analyst with the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Borna Najafi joined Anand's

team last fall as an executive assistant, and is a former government relations intern with Crestview Strategy in Ottawa.

He, too, graduated with a master's degree in security and defence from uOttawa last year, and his online CV notes past internships with Veterans Affairs Canada, and Public Services and Procurement Canada, among other things.

In place as assistant to Anand's parliamentary secretary—Liberal MP **Mona Fortier**—is **Catherine Despatie**. A former Hill intern through the Parliamentary Internship Programme, Despatie most

recently was a program lead with the Public Policy Forum. She's previously interned with both the Canadian Embassy in Madrid, Spain, and with Fairtrade Canada, among other past experience.

Finally, rounding out the foreign affairs team is Anand's ministerial driver **Serge Laramée**, who's previously been driver to Fortier as then-associate finance minister.

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Strategic communications adviser Jessica Daigneault. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Catherine Despatie is assistant to the parliamentary secretary. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Owen McAdams is a former assistant to Anand as the MP for the then-named riding of Oakville, Ont. After roughly a year and a half in Anand's Hill



Parliamentary Calendar

Former Trudeau chief of staff Katie Telford sits down to discuss being 'the right hand' in Ottawa on Feb. 12



WEDNESDAY, FEB. 11

Black History Month—It's Black History Month, and the Government of Canada is calling this year's theme, '30 Years of Black History Month: Honouring Black Brilliance Across Generations—From Nation Builders to Tomorrow's Visionaries.'

House Schedule—The House of Commons 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.

NAWL Talk on Guaranteed Livable Income—The National Association of Women and the Law hosts a policy discussion with parliamentarians on how a guaranteed livable income can function as a preventative, dignity-affirming policy tool to reduce poverty, enhance safety, and promote economic security for women and gender-diverse people. Wednesday, Feb. 11 from 8:30-9:30 a.m. ET in the Senate. Details: Forest.Malin@nawl.ca.

Thomas Feeney Memorial Lecture—The University of Ottawa hosts the 2026 Thomas Feeney Memorial Lecture featuring Glenn Joyal, chief justice of the Court of King's Bench of Manitoba, who will speak on "The Paradox of Judicial Independence: A Framework for Exploring Issues in Judicial Ethics, Judicial Freedom, and Judicial Conduct." Wednesday, Feb. 11, at 5 p.m. ET at Fauteux Hall, University of Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 11—THURSDAY, FEB. 12

Italian Ambassador to Visit

B.C.—Italy's Ambassador to Canada Alessandro Cattaneo will visit British Columbia from Feb. 11-12. He is expected to meet with Italian researchers at Vancouver's TRIUMF research institute, and deliver remarks at the "Canada-Italy Green Building Forum." In Victoria, Cattaneo will meet with Lieutenant Governor Wendy Coccia, Premier David Eby, and attend the Throne Speech for the opening of the legislature.

THURSDAY, FEB. 12

CCSPA Government Breakfast Reception—The Canadian Consumer

Specialty Products Association hosts its annual Government Breakfast Reception. All parliamentarians are welcome. Thursday, Feb. 12, at 7:30 a.m. ET at the Westin Hotel Ottawa, 11 Colonel By Dr. RSVP: coombss@ccspa.org.

Panel: 'Parliamentary Outlook'—The Government Relations Institute of Canada hosts a panel discussion, "Parliamentary Outlook: Strategic Considerations," featuring former NDP MP Matthew Dubé, now vice-president, Proof Strategies; former Liberal senior staffer Cyndi Jenkins, now vice-president of public affairs, Burson; and former Conservative senior staffer David Murray, now senior VP at One Persuasion. Thursday, Feb. 12, at 8 a.m. ET at Constitution Square, 2nd floor, 340 Albert St., Ottawa. Details: gric-irgc.ca.

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.

Katie Telford to Deliver Remarks—Katie Telford, former chief of staff to then-prime minister Justin Trudeau, will chat with Australian author Phoebe Saintilan-Stocks, author of *The Right Hand*, at an event hosted by the Australian High Commission, Library and Archives Canada, and the University of Ottawa. Thursday, Feb. 12, at 6 p.m. ET at Library and Archives Canada, 365 Wellington St., Ottawa. Register via Eventbrite.

FRIDAY, FEB. 13

Mayor's Breakfast with Rick Hillier—Former chief of defence staff retired General Rick Hillier is the special guest at the Mayor's Breakfast where he will speak about his current role as honorary chair of the National Defence Innovation Hub Task Force for Canada's Capital Region. Friday, Feb. 13, at 7 a.m. ET at Ottawa City Hall, 110 Laurier Ave. W. Details: ottawabot.ca.

Minister Joly to Deliver Remarks—Industry Minister Mélanie Joly will deliver remarks in French on the major industrial strategies hosted by the

Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal. Friday, Feb. 13, at 8 a.m. ET at a location to be announced in downtown Montreal. Register: ccmm.ca.

Webinar: 'America First Goes Hemispheric'—McGill University hosts a webinar, "America First Goes Hemispheric: Trump's Foreign Policy and Canada's Strategic Dilemmas," featuring Vincent Rigby, former national security adviser to then-prime minister Justin Trudeau; McGill professor Maria Popova; and Cambridge University professor Carsten-Andreas Schulz. Friday, Feb. 13, at 12 p.m. ET happening online. Register via Eventbrite.

'Women Shaping Germany'—The Embassy of Germany hosts a celebration of "Women Shaping Germany" featuring *Women in Divided Germany*, an exhibit by media and cultural scientist Clara Marz. Friday, Feb. 13, at 4:30 p.m. at 337, St. Patrick's Building, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Dr., Ottawa. Details: events.carleton.ca.

FRIDAY, FEB. 13—SUNDAY, FEB. 15

Munich Security Conference—The 62nd Munich Security Conference, the leading forum for international security policy, will take place at the Hotel Bayerischer Hof in Munich, Germany, from Friday, Feb. 13, to Sunday, Feb. 15. Details: securityconference.org.

SATURDAY, FEB. 14

Minister Ali to Attend Fundraiser—Treasury Board President Shafiqat Ali will take part in a fundraiser hosted by the Brampton-Chinguacousy Park Federal Liberal Association. Saturday, Feb. 14, at 6 p.m. ET at the Capitol Banquet Hall, 6435 Dixie Rd., Mississauga, Ont. Details: liberal.ca.

SUNDAY, FEB. 15

Flag Day—On this day in 1965, then-prime minister Lester B. Pearson inaugurated our current Canadian Flag.

TUESDAY, FEB. 17

Minister MacKinnon to Attend Fundraiser—Minister of Transport and Government House Leader Steven MacKinnon will take part in a party fundraiser hosted by the Kildonan-St. Paul and Winnipeg Centre federal Liberal associations. Tuesday, Feb. 17, at 6 p.m. CT, at Promenade Brasserie,

Maillardville Federal Liberal Association. Thursday, Feb. 19, at 6:30 p.m. PT, at location to be confirmed in New Westminster, B.C. Details: liberal.ca.

FRIDAY, FEB. 20

Seminar: 'Opening Parliament'—The Canadian Study of Parliament Group hosts a seminar, "Opening Parliament," looking at how institutions can facilitate both citizen engagement within them and the study of how they operate. Friday, Feb. 20, at 8:30 a.m. ET at 111 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.

Minister Robertson to Deliver Remarks

Housing Minister Gregor Robertson will offer insights on how the federal government is advancing housing and infrastructure initiatives to meet community needs and drive inclusive economic growth at an event hosted by the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. Friday, Feb. 20, at 11:30 a.m. PT at the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver, 900 W. Georgia St., Vancouver. Details: boardoftrade.com.

SATURDAY, FEB. 21

Welcome Home Ralph Goodale—The Regina-Lewvan, Regina-Wascana, and Regina-Qu'Appelle federal Liberal riding associations host a welcome home event for former Liberal MP Ralph Goodale who has wrapped up his posting as Canada's high commissioner to the United Kingdom. Saturday, Feb. 21, at 4:30 p.m. CT at 200 Lakeshore Dr., Regina, Sask. Details: liberal.ca.

Lunar New Year Event with MP Klassen

Liberal MP Ernie Klassen will take part in a Lunar New Year celebration hosted by the South Surrey-White Rock Federal Liberal Association. Saturday, Feb. 21, at 6 p.m. PT at Ming Yang Seafood Restaurant, 3238 King George Blvd., Surrey, B.C. Details: liberal.ca.

MONDAY, FEB. 23

Sec State Fuhr to Deliver Remarks

Secretary of State for Defence Procurement Stephen Fuhr will deliver remarks titled, "A New Era of Defence Investment in Canada," hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Monday, Feb. 23, at 7:30 a.m. ET at Le Westin Montréal, 270 Saint-Antoine St. W., Montreal. Details: corim.qc.ca.

Minister MacKinnon to Deliver Remarks

Transport Minister Steven MacKinnon will take part in a fireside chat hosted by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. Wednesday, Feb. 18, at 11:30 a.m. MT at the Hyatt Regency Calgary, 700 Centre St. S., Calgary. Details: calgarychamber.com.

30 Provencher Blvd., Winnipeg, Man. Details: liberal.ca.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 18

Minister Diab to Deliver Remarks

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Minister Lena Metlege Diab will deliver remarks at a lunch event hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Wednesday, Feb. 18, at 11:45 a.m. ET. RSVP for location address. Details: canadianclub.org.

Minister MacKinnon to Deliver Remarks

Transport Minister Steven MacKinnon will take part in a fireside chat hosted by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. Wednesday, Feb. 18, at 11:30 a.m. MT at the Hyatt Regency Calgary, 700 Centre St. S., Calgary. Details: calgarychamber.com.

THURSDAY, FEB. 19

Minister Joly to Deliver Remarks

Industry Minister Mélanie Joly will deliver a keynote address at an event for the launch of the 10th Ontario Economic Report hosted by the Empire Club of Canada and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Thursday, Feb. 19, at 11:30 a.m. ET happening in person in Toronto and online: empireclubofcanada.com.

Sugar Shack Supper with MP Lapointe

Liberal MP Linda Lapointe will take part in a sugar shack supper hosted by the Rivière-des-Mille-Îles Federal Liberal Association. Thursday, Feb. 19, at 5 p.m. ET in Saint-Eustache, Que. Details: liberal.ca.

Gwynne Dyer to Deliver Remarks

Freelance columnist Gwynne Dyer, whose writing appears in *The Hill Times*, will deliver remarks entitled "WAR — The Great Forgetting" hosted by Algonquin College's Pembroke Campus. Thursday, Feb. 19, at 7 p.m. ET at Algonquin College Pembroke Campus, Frank Nighbor Street, Pembroke, Ont. Details via Eventbrite.

Second NDP Leadership Debate

Global Public Affairs' Hannah Thibedeau will moderate the second debate between the five candidates vying to lead the federal New Democratic Party. Thursday, Feb. 19 at 5 p.m. PT in B.C.'s Lower Mainland. Details: ndp.ca.

An Evening with Minister Alty

Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Rebecca Alty will join Liberal MP Jake Sawatzky for an evening event hosted by the New Westminster-Burnaby—

TUESDAY, FEB. 24

Chief Justice Wagner to Deliver Remarks

Rescheduled from Jan. 27, Chief Justice Richard Wagner will take part in a roundtable luncheon, titled "An Independent Judiciary for a Strong Economy," hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Feb. 24, 110 Yonge St., Suite 800, Toronto. Register: cdhowe.org.

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 25

Canada's Ambassador to Ukraine to Deliver Remarks

Canada's Ambassador to Ukraine Natalia Cmoc will deliver remarks virtually on "Ukraine and the West: Canada's Role in a Pivotal Year," hosted by the C.D. Howe Institute. Wednesday, Feb. 25, happening online: cdhowe.org.

Book Talk: *The Beaver and the Dragon*

The University of Ottawa host talk on Charles Burton's latest book, *The Beaver and the Dragon: How China Out-Manoeuvred Canada's Diplomacy, Security, and Sovereignty*, a collection of essays, written in real time across four Canadian governments from 2009 to 2025, expose the illusions of engagement and the emergence of an authoritarian power that seeks to dominate the 21st century. Wednesday, Feb. 25, at 12 p.m. ET at the University of Ottawa, FSS 4006, 120 University Priv., Ottawa. Details: cips-cepi.ca.

POLICY BRIEFING

TRANSPORTATION AND TRADE

Publication date:

Monday, February 23, 2026

Advertising deadline:

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

Regulatory barriers between provinces and territories create frictions that are equivalent to an average ad valorem tariff of about nine per cent, according to a report by the International Monetary Fund released on Jan. 21. What progress has been made in eliminating internal trade barriers in Canada? What challenges remain?

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How can the federal government help ensure Indigenous peoples in Canada benefit from opportunities involving international trade and investment? What role do Indigenous businesses have in trade?

What are the challenges in adapting transportation infrastructure to contend with climate change and extreme weather? What progress has been made? What regions are most vulnerable?

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