



GOP COULD REIN IN

Trump, if it wanted to

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THE HILL TIMES

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CANADA'S POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPER

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NEWS

Fix Question Period, elect House committee chairs, and end hybrid House sittings, say some Grit and Tory MPs: 'Question Period is our marquee accountability mechanism'

BY ABBAS RANA

The House of Commons' internal mechanisms for holding the government to account are in urgent need of reform, say some Liberal and Conservative

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NEWS

Ottawa MPs Sudds, Fanjoy urge changes to return-to-office order for public servants, as MPs debate ending hybrid Parliament

BY MARLO GLASS

A second Ottawa-area MP is calling for "meaningful flexibility" to the federal government's return-to-office policy as politicians debate if it's time to

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HARPER, FROM BRAWLER to statesman

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CLIMATE CHANGE SHOULD BE THE BIG STORY

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NEWS

Canada faces 'an emergency of extraordinary proportions' with Trump, say foreign affairs and trade experts

U.S. President Donald Trump's recent rant on Truth Social about the bridge linking Windsor, Ont., to Detroit, Mich., augers badly for the upcoming review of North America's trade pact, say foreign affairs and trade experts.



Prime Minister Mark Carney, pictured on the Hill on Feb. 11, 2026, told U.S. President Donald Trump that the construction of the Gordie Howe International Bridge involved Canadian and American workers, as well as steel sourced from both countries. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

turn President Donald Trump's tariffs shows some signs of push-back against aggression towards Canada, say foreign affairs and trade experts.

"I think the old relationship ... which was based on trust, mutual

understanding and a reasonable desire to accommodate one another, is over. It's shattered. It's gone, and we are in a new world," said Lawrence Herman, an

Continued on page 20

NEWS

Liberals see path forward for budget bill, but Conservatives still have 'huge concerns' with cabinet's 'regulatory sandbox'

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

Despite a slow start in late 2025, Liberal members of the House Finance Committee say they finally see signs of progress towards passing the government's massive budget implementation bill, although opposition MPs continue to object to a clause in the legislation they argue would

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NEWS

Preparing for a possible early election, Conservatives closing first batch of 16 riding nominations this month: sources

BY ABBAS RANA

In preparation for a potential early election, the Conservative Party recently sent notices to 16 ridings in five provinces informing them that anyone interested in seeking the party's nomination should file their papers by Feb. 25, according to Conservative sources.

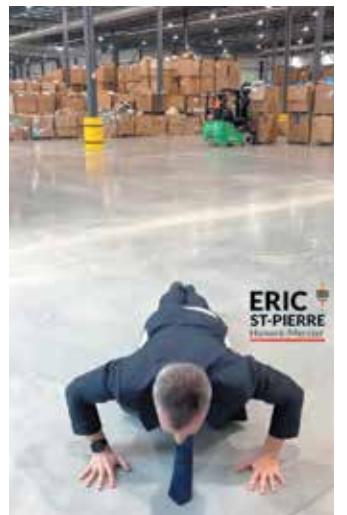
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Heard on the Hill



By Christina Leadlay

‘The goal isn’t perfection’: Grit MP St-Pierre rallies colleagues to do 2,000 push-ups over 23 days for mental health cause



Liberal MP Eric St-Pierre, left, is organizing a group of over a dozen MPs including Jake Sawatzky, centre, and Jaime Battiste, far right (pictured with Sawatzky) in the CMHA’s annual Push-Up Challenge to raise awareness for mental health. Screenshots courtesy of Instagram

More than a dozen parliamentarians have joined the ‘MPs for mental health’ group doing the Canadian Mental Health Association’s annual Push-Up Challenge.

The 16 Liberals, organized by Montreal-area MP Eric St-Pierre, each have a goal of doing 2,000 push-ups between Feb. 5-27 to help raise awareness for the 2,000 individuals who die by suicide annually, and to fundraise for better mental health supports. That’s 87 push-ups a day over 23 days. As of Feb. 12, the group has raised over \$1,200.

But if the idea of doing 2,000 push-ups—or even just two—isn’t appealing, St-Pierre has some advice.

“If you don’t like push-ups, modify them. Do them against a wall. Do them on your knees. Do squats, take a quick walk around

the office, jog in place—whatever works for your mobility and ability,” he told Heard on the Hill by email last week. “The goal isn’t perfection. It’s participation. The message is to stay active.”

This is St-Pierre’s first time doing this challenge.

“I’m used to long-distance running, so yes, this is a bit of a different rhythm for me,” he said. “An ultramarathon is about endurance over many hours. Push-ups are short, intense bursts. But in both cases, the principle is the same: consistency matters. Showing up every day matters.”

Among the Liberals he’s pushing in this challenge are Culture Minister Marc Miller, Women and Gender Equality Minister Rechie Valdez; parliamentary secretaries Jenna Sudds, Madeleine Chenette, Pauline Rochefort, Jaime Battiste,

Caroline Desrochers, and Brendan Hanley; and MPs Sima Acan, Fares Al Soud, Wade Chang, Kristina Tesser, John-Paul (JP) Danko, Élisabeth Brière, Jake Sawatzky, Jessica Fancy, and Marianne Dandurand.

St-Pierre told HOH he welcomes expanding the group across the aisle.

“Mental health is a non-partisan issue—it affects every family, every community, every region of this country. I would love to see MPs from all parties or even Senators join in,” he said. “I think there’s something powerful about elected officials coming together across party lines for something as fundamental as health and well-being.”

Said St-Pierre, “As MPs, our jobs are stressful and maintaining good physical health is important not only to ourselves, but also to our constituents and Canadians.”

Heritage Ottawa panel on ‘Demolition by Neglect’ on Feb. 18

Heritage Ottawa is hosting an online panel discussion in one week’s time on ‘Demolition by neglect: Preserving the past before it’s too late.’

Part of its annual Bob and Mary Anne Phillips Memorial

Lecture, this year’s event on Feb. 18 will feature four panelists looking at various causes of demolition by neglect—from wilful abandonment to costs of rehabilitation—and consider possible solutions. They will share exam-

ples of both positive and negative situations in Ottawa.

HOH has confirmed that 24 Sussex Drive is not among the list of examples, as it’s property of the National Capital Commission, not the City of Ottawa.

Justin Trudeau buys a new home in Montreal

Former prime minister Justin Trudeau has purchased a new property in Montreal.

TVA first reported on Feb. 10 that documents had been filed with Quebec Land Registry which confirm Trudeau’s “intention to purchase a luxury

property in the heart of Montreal” in French, adding that Trudeau’s current girlfriend Katy Perry’s “name does not currently appear in any of the documents consulted.”

Built in the 1930s, the property is a two-storey, 5,000-square

foot, single-family home, according to *The National Post* on Feb. 11.

The deed for the \$4.26-million home on Mount Royal’s northern flank was signed before a notary and registered at the Quebec land registry office on Feb. 9.

Press Gallery Dinner 2026 at SJAM this November



House Speaker Francis Scarpaglia, left, Maureen McTeer, CTV’s Vassy Kapelos, and former Conservative prime minister Joe Clark at the 2025 Press Gallery Dinner. *The Hill Times* photograph by Stuart Benson

This year’s annual Parliamentary Press Gallery dinner will return to the Sir John A. Macdonald building at the end of November, the gallery’s executive confirmed at its Dec. 8, 2025, meeting, the minutes of which were shared with press gallery members on Feb. 9.

The most recent dinner, on Nov. 29, 2025, was so popular that the executive had to book an overflow room at SJAM, as the main room could only accommodate 400 guests.

At the December meeting, the executive brainstormed ideas to prevent that situation from recurring by limiting ticket purchases to one member plus two guests,

as well as restricting life and honorary members and their guests to an overflow room.

It was noted that while “some members expressed a preference in returning to the [Canadian Museum of History],” where the dinner had been held prior to 2023, the executive said the “museum’s strict cancellation policy makes it an imprudent choice in a minority parliament,” the ticket price would increase to upwards of \$200 for the larger venue, and SJAM is a more “convenient location.”

The minutes also noted that incumbent gallery president **Mia Rabson** would not be reoffering at the annual general meeting on March 13.

Derek Guy unpicks politicians’ posture and tailoring

Canadian-born menswear writer **Derek Guy** recently compared the collar gap—or lack thereof—between Prime Minister **Mark Carney** and Conservative Leader **Pierre Poilievre**.

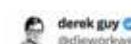
“Which of the two men is better dressed? How does each come off?” Guy asked his 1.4 million X followers on Feb. 5, posting recent clips of both men on the Hill.

“I think Carney is better dressed, partly because his clothes fit better. Notice that his jacket collar always hugs his neck, while Pierre Poilievre’s jacket collar never touches him,” Guy replied.

He offered two reasons for this: either “Poilievre has a bad tailor who doesn’t know how to make or adjust clothes” or he “has a good tailor, but he’s standing unnaturally,” which Guy thought to be more likely.

“To me, Carney looks more natural and relaxed, which translates to confidence. Poilievre often looks strangely upright, even when he’s sitting, which reveals that he’s quite self conscious.”

Ben Mulroney—son of former prime minister **Brian Mulroney**—was among the dozens of commentators on the thread, implying that a custom suit was out of Poilievre’s reach: “One man is sitting on (well-earned) earnings from the private sector that would make Scrooge McDuck green with envy and can afford bespoke... Everything. The other isn’t and can’t. And if your



I think Carney is better dressed, partly because his clothes fit better. Notice that his jacket collar always hugs his neck, while Pierre Poilievre’s jacket collar never touches him.

Why do Poilievre’s jackets fit like this?



12:23 AM - Feb 5, 2026 · 179.6K Views

Popular menswear writer Derek Guy wrote a long thread (pun intended) recently, comparing the tailoring on Prime Minister Mark Carney’s suits, left, versus Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre. Screenshot courtesy of X

point is that well-tailored suits make him look more like a leader... Well, that’s a level performative nothingness that I’m just really tired of.”

To which Guy replied: “I don’t know anything about either of these men, but I don’t think it’s true that Pierre Poilievre can’t afford a bespoke suit. I can show you,” and highlighted the subtle pick stitch along the edge of his lapel, proving the career politician’s suit was handmade, and not ready to wear.

“This sort of finishing is only seen on suits that cost at least four figures,” explained Guy.

“I don’t think clothes have anything to do with a person’s character or leadership skills. So, I’m not sure where you’re drawing this connection. I was simply remarking on how posture changes how clothes fit.”

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NEWS

PCO struggling to address access-to-info requests, and 'it is not getting better,' says watchdog

Information Commissioner Caroline Maynard says she has had to issue an increasing number of orders to the Privy Council Office over its failure to respond to requests, and that 'inventory keeps going up.'

BY ELEANOR WAND

The Privy Council Office is struggling to respond to access-to-information requests on time, and it's getting worse, says Canada's Information Commissioner Caroline Maynard, forcing her to order the office to respond to requests that have been stuck "for quite a long time."

"It is not getting better," Maynard told MPs at the House Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics Committee on Feb. 9, when asked if the Privy Council Office (PCO) is improving at responding to requests.

"There's a lot of complaints that we received that ... have been with the office of the PCO for quite a long time," Maynard said.

In recent years, Maynard's office has issued an increasing number of orders to the PCO, which supports Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) office and his cabinet. In 2021, there were no orders, then seven in 2022, 20 in 2023, 38 in 2024, and 44 in 2025. She confirmed the office represents the largest inventory of complaints, and with respect to the backlog, the "inventory keeps going up," she told the committee.

Those orders come from a 2019 amendment the Access to Information Act, which grants Maynard the authority to issue binding orders to government institutions that are failing to comply with access-to-information (ATI) requests under the act.

The act legally obligates institutions to abide by those orders, but if they apply for a court review, the order is then stayed until the court issues its ruling.

Other federal departments—most notably, Library and Archives Canada and the Department of National Defence (DND)—have struggled to accommodate ATI requests, too, causing them to rack up orders from Maynard's office.



Information Commissioner Caroline Maynard said that despite a 'good meeting' with the PCO clerk, his office hasn't made any noticeable changes to its lagging responses to requests. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

As of Oct. 28, 2025, Maynard has issued 1,033 orders under the act, 162 of which were to DND. Maynard issued 310 orders from the beginning of last year to Oct. 28.

But Maynard said while DND and Library and Archives Canada are improving, requiring her to issue orders to the departments less frequently, that's not the case with the PCO.

"While the Department of National Defence and Library and Archives Canada have received the most orders so far since 2019, in the case of both institutions, the number of orders I have been required to issue is declining," she told the committee in French.

"Unfortunately, the data shows the opposite trend with respect to the PCO," said Maynard, who was reappointed for another seven-year term as information commissioner in 2024.

The PCO has an "ideal opportunity to lead by example," she said, by improving its ATI responses.

Commissioner 'concerned' about public service cuts' impact on ATI responses

Maynard told the committee she had a "good meeting" with Privy Council Clerk PCO Michael Sabia, where he was "very receptive" to her suggestions.

But when asked by Conservative MP Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, Alta.) if she had "discerned any tangible improvements" since the meeting, Maynard told the committee the process with the PCO is "still very difficult."

Under the act, federal departments and institutions are legally

required to respond to an ATI request within 30 days. Requesters can submit complaints to the information commissioner if they fail to do so, which can result in Maynard ordering departments to respond.

But one of the issues the PCO is facing is requests for documents that are decades old, but have not been transferred to Library and Archives Canada, Maynard said, explaining that the transfer of documents is up to the discretion of each institution.

Maynard suggested that AI could be used to assist with triaging requests, which could improve responsiveness, when asked about the prospect by Liberal MP Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Que.).

"If we have an adequate information management system, and we add to that AI tools, in order to remove any duplication and target relevant information, it would assist in responding more quickly," she said in French.

Maynard said Transport Canada and Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada already use AI tools to assist with their ATI requests.

Maynard also raised concerns about the impact of the feds' public service cuts on federal institutions and departments' abilities to respond to ATI requests.

"I would say that I have the tools to do my job, but do institutions have the resources and the support? I can't say that," she said, when asked if she felt respected and supported in her position by Conservative MP Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, Que.).

"And with cuts that are coming up, I am concerned."

Though her office won't be impacted by the cuts, Maynard suggested other federal depart-



Privy Council Clerk Michael Sabia walks past reporters before the Liberal cabinet meeting in October 2025. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

ments' ATI departments are on the chopping block.

"I shouldn't be receiving more resources, it's really institutions that should not make those cuts to their access-to-information teams," Maynard said in French.

She told the committee that Library and Archives Canada is facing a \$15-million cut to its ATI department, which she called "one example among many others."

Maynard also pointed to a "culture" within government institutions of being "afraid of being questioned or criticized."

But, she said, reliable information being given to the public is a positive, as otherwise, Canadians will look for information else-

where, which could result in the spread of mis- or disinformation.

Treasury Board has it 'exactly backwards,' says Tory MP Cooper

A brief from the Treasury Board, which itself was uncovered thanks to an ATI request by freedom-of-information specialist Dean Beeby, suggests the feds "revisit" the information commissioner's order-making powers. The Treasury Board, which is the body responsible for setting ATI policies, indicates that Maynard has been using her powers too liberally, the brief says.

Cooper slammed the suggestion, saying the board and the government have it "exactly backwards."

"The problem is not that you are exercising order-making powers more frequently. The problem is a steady deterioration in the access-to-information system across government that has made it necessary for you to issue such orders to direct government departments and institutions to follow the law."

"I totally agree with your statement," Maynard said, explaining that she has sent two letters to the Treasury Board—once in June 2025, and once in January 2026—but she has had no communication with them in response.

Cooper called the lack of response "astounding."

Canada's access-to-information system has long been criticized for its loopholes and poor administration.

In 2023, DND falsely said it could not locate a document requested by the *Ottawa Citizen*, who were then leaked the document by those concerned about it being withheld.

DND has had long-standing issues with its compliance with ATI requests, and has gone to court with Maynard repeatedly over the past few years over the issue.

In May, DND told *The Hill Times* it lost a memo almost four-and-a-half years after it was requested. And, in February, the department said it was unable to create a plan to comply with Maynard's outstanding orders in response to a tabled House committee report on the subject.

But ahead of April's election, Carney committed to reviewing Ottawa's access-to-information system, though the pledge was not in his election platform.

The government is mandated to review the access-to-information system every five years, as per the act anyway. A review was launched on June 20, 2025, though details have yet to be released.

In May, Maynard penned an open letter to Carney welcoming the review, writing she had "observed a steady decline in the access-to-information system" since her appointment in 2018, "to the point where it no longer serves its intended purpose."

"There is a broad consensus that an overhaul of both the legislation and the system is urgently needed," she wrote.

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Canada can't wait out the current crisis in youth unemployment.

Proactive solutions are needed to secure our future economic stability

Canada can't wait out the current crisis in youth unemployment.

Transitioning students from education to the workforce is one of Canada's most pressing economic priorities. Currently, however, Canadian youth are missing out on the vital early career experience that would enable them to enter in-demand and emerging roles. In 2025, the unemployment rate for those under the age of 29 reached as high as 14.2%, its highest point in over a decade outside of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹

This downturn is not a passing phenomenon with only momentary impact. Failing to act will lead to a snowball effect in which the current crisis becomes future economic stagnation. Young Canadians currently struggling in the job market will struggle to afford housing, start businesses, and save for retirement—all due to the reduced earnings and delayed career progression triggered by this historic spike in youth unemployment.

Canada can't "wait out" this crisis. Policy makers, sector councils, and

educational institutions need to work together to close this gap by ensuring students have the support they need to transition from education to employment.

Doubling down on models that already work

According to a 2025 report from Burning Glass, students with at least one internship or placement prior to graduation are 48.5% less likely to be underemployed.² Creating meaningful entry-level opportunities for students, especially in green energy, health care, and digital services should therefore be a top priority.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) programs such as the Government of Canada's Student Work Placement Program (SWPP), in which students combine their formal studies with real-world work experience in related industries, offers students access to valuable work experience, opportunities to grow their networks, and greater confidence when entering the workforce.

Aligning training strategies to the labour market

More robust labour market information tools will help policymakers, sector councils,

and educators build a collective understanding of where vacancies and new opportunities are emerging and how skills are evolving. This information will better position Canada to address gaps in policies and programs.

Targeting mentorship opportunities to marginalized groups

Racialized youth, Indigenous communities, and those with disabilities are more likely to experience unemployment and underemployment. Targeted mentorship and transition programs will guard against these communities being left behind.

The youth employment crisis is a reflection of a misalignment between the needs of the labour market, education, and skill and training policy. That misalignment will not solve itself. As Magnet has seen in our experience delivering SWPP, programs and their supporting infrastructure need to be designed with intention and with the participation of all relevant stakeholders.

With SWPP—funded by the Government of Canada and delivered

by 18 sectoral partners across Canada—now having connected more than 250,000 Canadian post-secondary students to paid work experiences, and with many of those students transitioning into long-term employment, we are confident in the ability of Canada's leaders in workforce development to work together and solve complex challenges.

There is still more work to be done, but Canada has the tools and knowledge to secure a prosperous and inclusive future for the next generation.



1. Statistics Canada. (2025). Labour Force Survey. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca>

2. Leiden, Erik. "Talent Disrupted: College Graduates, Underemployment, and the Way Forward — The Burning Glass Institute." The Burning Glass Institute, 22 February 2025, <https://www.burningglassinstitute.org/research/underemployment>. Accessed 8 January 2026.

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NEWS

Canadian expats in the U.S. dominate international voting stats: data

Canadians living in the United States accounted for about 51 per cent of all expat votes cast in the 2025 federal election, followed by the United Kingdom at 10.4 per cent, and France at 4.7 per cent.

BY LAURA RYCKEWAERT

Last spring's election saw a record number of expat Canadians mail-in their ballots, and data from Elections Canada shows more than half of those ballots came from voters now living in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, France, Australia, and Germany.

The number of Canadians living abroad who cast ballots in federal elections has risen notably over the last 15 years. Just 6,332 such ballots were counted in the 2011 election, but that figure has since octupled, with a record 57,440 expat voters casting ballots in last year's federal election. While still a fraction—0.3 per cent—of total ballots cast, the rising trend is notable.

So, from where are those Canadians living abroad casting their ballots?

Spinning off a recent Order Paper question posed by Conservative MP Grant Jackson (Brandon-Souris, Man.) last November, and responded to on Jan. 26, regarding how many Canadians were on Elections Canada's international register of electors at the end of the 2021 election, *The Hill Times* requested similar data from the voting agency for the most recent election, as well as data on the expats who ended up actually voting in 2025.

Jackson is a member of the Procedure and House Affairs Committee, which studied special ballot voting last fall, with a focus on Canadians living abroad. He did not respond to an interview request from *The Hill Times*.

In order to receive a special ballot kit, Canadian expats have to register with Elections Canada. While all those on the register are sent ballots, it's up to them



Conservative MP Grant Jackson, centre, at a September 2025 caucus meeting. Jackson requested data on Canadians who were on Elections Canada's international register. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

to mail them back in time to be counted on election day.

In 2025, 101,690 individuals were on the international register, living in 173 different countries, 56.5 per cent of whom—from 152 countries—had votes counted. The election prior saw 55,696 Canadians register, and 27,035 (48.5 per cent) successfully return their ballots.

The top five countries from which expats cast their ballots were the same in both 2021 and 2025, albeit in slightly different orders outside the top two: the U.S. and the U.K.

In 2025, 49,462 Canadians living in America registered to vote, with 29,146 casting a ballot, representing about 51 per cent of all expat votes. By comparison, in 2021, 26,527 Canadians in the U.S. registered and 13,818 cast ballots, accounting for roughly the same proportion of overall expat votes.

While the U.K. came in a distant second, it saw a notable uptick in activity: 12,871 Canadians living there registered to vote in 2025—compared to around 6,000 in 2021—and 6,001 returned ballots (10.4 per cent of all expat votes), up from 2,108 the election prior.

Looking at returned ballots, France placed third in 2025, with

2,672 ballots returned (4.7 per cent of all expat votes) out of 4,113 issued, whereas in 2021, Germany came in third with 1,297 returned out of 2,246 issued.

While Australia was the source of the third-most registrations by Canadian voters last year—at 4,469—it came fourth in terms of ballots returned at 2,181 (3.8 per cent). The fifth-most ballots from abroad in 2025 came from Germany at 2,143 (3.7 per cent), where 3,814 had been registered.

Rounding out the top 10 source countries in 2025 were Switzerland (1,492 ballots returned), the Netherlands (1,089), Hong Kong (892), Japan (890), and Spain (696). In 2021, however, Hong Kong took the sixth spot with 611 ballots returned, followed by the Canadian Diplomatic and Military Mail Services (609), Japan (518), Switzerland (509), and the Netherlands (446).

In 2025, the top 20 list of source nations was closed out by Ireland (553), the United Arab Emirates (540), Mexico (475), Italy (462), Sweden (418), Belgium (403), China (396), Portugal (394), Singapore (382), followed by those returned by Canadian Diplomatic and Military Mail Services (341).

By comparison, in 2021, it was New Zealand (422), Sweden



A ballot box and sample ballot pictured at Chief Electoral Officer Stéphane Perrault's office in Gatineau, Que., on April 1, 2025. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

followed by Japan at 68.5 per cent, the Netherlands at 66.9 per cent, Singapore at 66.7 per cent, and France at 64.9 per cent.

The return rate for Canadians living in the U.S. in 2025 was 58.9 per cent, and for the U.K. it was 46.6 per cent.

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Canadian Expat Voting, 2021 and 2025

The following chart lists the total number of ballots issued and received in the 2021 and 2025 federal elections for the top 25 source countries where Canadians living abroad were registered with Elections Canada last year.

Source Country	Ballots Issued, 2025	Ballots Received, 2025	Ballots Issued, 2021	Ballots Received, 2021
1. United States	49,462	29,146	26,527	13,818
2. United Kingdom	12,871	6,001	6,000*	2,108
3. Australia	4,469	2,181	2,511	1,278
4. France	4,113	2,672	2,023	1,226
5. Germany	3,814	2,143	2,246	1,297
6. Switzerland	2,130	1,492	1,196	509
7. Netherlands	1,822	1,089	933	446
8. Hong Kong (China)	1,458	892	1,840	611
9. New Zealand	1,330	287	753	422
10. Japan	1,299	890	801	518
11. Spain	1,140	696	421	171
12. United Arab Emirates	1,024	540	580	228
13. Israel	962	318	320	122
14. Sweden	939	418	562	272
15. Ireland	896	553	358	163
16. Belgium	845	403	423	174
17. Italy	723	462	270	45
18. Mexico	710	475	339	224
19. China	688	396	520	227
20. Canadian Diplomatic and Military Mail Services	664	341	1,173	609
21. Denmark	622	219	300	143
22. Portugal	619	394	179	74
23. Singapore	573	382	363	213
24. Norway	492	279	326	82
25. South Korea	451	275	286	128

*This is a rough number. The House response included some distinct numbers for countries within the U.K.—based on how voters registered their location—and figures for Wales, the Isle of Man, Guernsey, and Jersey were unspecified as they were less than 10 each. Specified numbers within the U.K. totalled 5,994.

Source: Elections Canada

‘Back to the future’: Senators react to idea of turning Senate Building back into original train station for high-speed rail hub

David Jeanes, a retired engineer and former president of Transport Action Canada, says the Senate Building would be an ideal spot for a downtown Ottawa station, and says it could be linked to the rest of the line with a tunnel going under part of the Rideau Canal.



BY IREM KOCA

Senators say the possibility of transforming the current Senate

Building, once the grand old Ottawa Union Station and currently the Senate's temporary home, back into a train station for the planned high-

speed rail line could be a good idea. But they also say the building's Beaux-Arts architectural history and style must be preserved.

Referring to the Senate Building's original purpose as downtown Ottawa's train station between 1912 and 1966, Canadian Senators Group Senator Scott Tannas says turning it into a train station is 'not a crazy idea ... It would be back to the future.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Alto—the Crown corporation in charge of the \$60-billion to \$90-billion megaproject that will run from Toronto, Peterborough, Ottawa, Montreal, Laval, Trois Rivières, and Quebec City—confirmed that the Senate of Canada Building is “one of the options being examined” as a hub.

Alto is currently conducting public consultations, but the government won't decide until 2029 if it will fund the massive project. If the government approves it, then construction is expected to start in 2029 with the Ottawa-Montreal section, and it would be expected to open in 2037. Ottawa's current VIA Rail station, located southeast of downtown, is also being considered as a hub.

“The ongoing public consultations, along with discussions with multiple stakeholders and authorities, will help determine which location is optimal in order to meet longterm transportation needs over the next 50 to 60 years, minimize impacts on the surrounding environment and communities, and ensure strong, resilient connections to the existing and future local transit network,” Benoit Bourdeau, an Alto spokesperson, said in a Feb. 11 email.

Senator Daryl Fridhandler (Alberta), of the Progressive Senate Group, said he thought it sounded like a good idea.

“This is such a wonderful building that, as long as it's a wonderful station, then I'm

Continued on page 16

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Editorial

Editorial

MPs should revamp Question Period, give House Speaker more power, and should consider ending hybrid sittings

For decades, MPs have been complaining about Question Period, but it has gotten worse, and it's even more apparent today. Canadians are looking for substance, answers, leadership, hope—not cheap shots for the cameras. It's tiresome, tedious, and it damages the parliamentary institution.

First-term Liberal MP Corey Hogan says he wants to make Question Period more meaningful and substantive. He suggested that MPs asking questions and the responses received from the government benches be allowed to reach the two-minute mark—rather than the current slot of 35 seconds each—a few times a week.

Conservative MP Michael Chong, author of the Reform Act, also offered good suggestions on how to make the House more democratic, relevant, and powerful. He said the House Speaker's right of recognition in the House should be restored, allowing the Speaker to decide who gets recognized in the House instead of using lists provided by parties' House leaders and whips.

Chong also said the current system of "electing" House committee chairs really means that 21 or 22 of them are effectively appointed by the prime minister or the prime minister's designate and four by the official opposition leader. He suggests secret preferential ballot elections for committees, and suggests distributing the 25 chairs of the House committees in a way that is proportional to the recognized parties' standings in the House, which is done in other Westminster Parliaments.

Chong also said members on House committees should be elected by their

peers in caucus on a secret preferential ballot vote and said this could take place at the same time as the election for the House Speaker. Other Westminster Parliaments do this.

Chong said the House should take away the prime minister's power to make key appointments in the House of Commons, including appointing the clerk and the sergeant-at-arms, and said that power should be given to the elected House Speaker on the recommendation of a committee of MPs that has vetted candidates. He said the members of the powerful Commons Board of Internal Economy should not be appointed by the prime minister and instead should be elected by MPs on a secret ballot vote. Cabinet ministers and other officers of the House in all parties should not be eligible to vote for this.

As well, Chong said the House should end the hybrid Parliament, pointing out that Canada's Parliament is the only national legislature amongst Western liberal democracies to remain in hybrid mode. The U.K. ended its hybrid sittings in 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives ended theirs in 2023, and the Australian Parliament ended hybrid sittings in 2022. The French National Assembly never actually had hybrid sittings.

The House should seriously consider these reforms in order to make the Commons a more democratic place of substance—not just quips and digs—and motivate MPs to be more fully present—which includes appearing in person—in the House to engage in the debates that contribute to important policy-making decisions.

The Hill Times

EVERYTHING TRUMP SAID ABOUT THE GORDIE HOWE BRIDGE WAS WRONG:



Letters to the Editor

Eyre's suggestion that Canada 'keep its options open' on nuclear weapons is wildly counter-intuitive: Turcotte

It seems wildly counter-intuitive that, within weeks of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* moving the hands of the metaphorical "Doomsday Clock" ahead to 85 seconds to midnight from the original seven minutes to midnight set in 1947—due in large part to increased risk of nuclear catastrophe—retired Canadian General Wayne Eyre, former chief of defence staff, would suggest that Canada should "keep its options open" regarding the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Toronto-based journalist, Matt Gurney, in his column, "Eyre is right: our long-term security would be greatly enhanced by a credible, even small, Canadian nuclear force," (*The Hill Times*, Feb. 9) is even more definitive, his only concern: that the United States would object to Canada possessing nuclear weapons.

As a NATO-member state, Canada is subject to NATO's nuclear security doctrine. Still, for more than 55 years, successive Canadian governments have advocated for total nuclear disarmament as required by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Why? Because it is widely acknowledged in Canada and around the world that, so long as nuclear weapons exist, there is the very real possibility that they could end life on earth as we know it, if not completely—a risk that seems to increase by the day.

To quote Janice Stein of the Munk Centre, the effectiveness of the so-called "nuclear deterrent" is much exaggerated. Of note, India and Pakistan's many altercations, Israel's conflicts with several of its neighbours and the United Kingdom and Argentina squaring off over the Falkland Islands. Nuclear weapons did not prevent the U.S. being defeated in Vietnam or Afghanistan, or the ongoing heroic resistance by Ukraine against Russia.

which has the largest nuclear arsenal in the world. Nor are they likely to prevent retaliation by Iran if the U.S. and/or Israel launch a full-scale attack.

There is also great risk of the accidental detonation of a nuclear weapon that could easily cascade into nuclear war.

Indeed, there have been so many documented "close calls" with nuclear weapons, including nuclear warheads going missing for various periods, remote sensing equipment falsely indicating that a nation is under nuclear attack, plane crashes with nuclear payloads and numerous instances of human miscalculation, that Gareth Evans, former Australian foreign minister and co-chair of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament, concluded that "it has not been the result of good policy or management that the world has avoided nuclear catastrophe for (then) seven decades, but sheer dumb luck!"

AI and cyber warfare combined with the policy of "launch on warning" as nuclear-armed states expand their respective arsenals and introduce next-generation hypersonic missiles that are almost impossible to intercept, present a whole new nightmare scenario. As does the prospect of this technology falling into the hands of non-state actors.

The most effective way of protecting Canada and the wider world, and to preserve our fragile planet for future generations, would be to double down on our diplomatic efforts to eliminate these ultimate weapons of mass destruction. In the meantime, congratulations to our government for reasserting that Canada will not acquire them.

Earl Turcotte
 chairperson,
 Canadian Network to
 Abolish Nuclear Weapons

Politics



After years of veering ever closer to fascism, U.S. President Donald Trump has reached a new and dangerous stage, Michael Harris writes. *Photograph courtesy of the White House/Daniel Torok*

Republican Party can rein in U.S. President Trump—if it's brave enough

The party could check the president if it puts its house in order. That would mean abandoning the slavish support of anything Trump does and asserting that the party is bigger than any one person—even if he is the president.

Michael Harris



Harris

HALIFAX—After years of veering ever closer to fascism, United States President Donald Trump has reached a new and dangerous stage.

Despite his record of norm-breaking iconoclasm stretching back to his first term

in the White House, no one could have imagined that any American president, even one as contemptuous of the law as Trump, would have tried to put members of Congress from a rival political party in jail. But in Trump's ever more frightening descent into authoritarianism, that is exactly what he has tried to do.

After six Democrats appeared in a video reminding members of the U.S. military that they were obliged by law not to obey unlawful orders, Trump accused them of "sedition." He pointed out at the time that the penalty for sedition was execution.

That was a bridge too far, even for Trump. But Pam Bondi, his sycophantic attorney general, obliged her vengeful boss by attempting to indict the six Democrats.

Fortunately for U.S. democracy, a grand jury made up of regular Americans refused to indict Trump's political opponents.

Accurately citing the law and exercising First Amendment rights was not, apparently, their idea of sedition. Less than one per cent of the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) attempts to get indictments fail.

This wasn't the first time that Trump, with Bondi's help, tried

to weaponize the DOJ against his perceived political enemies, detractors, or rivals. He also tried to turn the department's guns on James Comey and Letitia James.

In Comey's case, although he was indicted for allegedly making a false statement to Congress, the case against the former FBI director was thrown out at trial.

That was because Trump's handpicked prosecutor, Lindsey Halligan, admitted that the full grand jury had not seen the indictment. The presiding judge also ruled that Halligan's appointment as prosecutor was improper.

Comey was fired as FBI director by Trump because he would not publicly say that Trump was not a target in Comey's investigation into Russian interference in a U.S. election.

In December 2025, a federal grand jury twice refused to indict James on trumped-up mortgage fraud charges. James was the New York attorney general who found the Trump Organization guilty of falsifying business records and tax fraud. As a result of the conviction on all counts, the company was fined millions of dollars.

The president's outrageous attempt to jail his political opponents, and exact revenge on those

who acted against him, should not be seen as Trump being Trump. It should be seen for what it is: a deadly attack on American democracy, and a disqualifying act for any sitting U.S. president.

It is important to bear in mind that Trump's attempt to indict six elected Democrats did not take place in a vacuum. This president has been chipping away at the U.S. Constitution in several ways.

In what should have been a wake-up call for those who tend to dismiss Trump's excesses as mere quirks of his character, he recently mused about whether the midterm elections set for this November were even necessary. He contended that things were going so well in the country that the vote wasn't needed.

The real reason he would like to skip the midterms is that the polling shows that Republicans are in danger of losing both the House of Representatives and the Senate in a blowout. If that happens, it is very likely that Trump would be impeached, as he himself has said.

And then there is Trump's utter disdain for the separation of powers between the judiciary, the legislative branch, and the executive branch, which is another one of the foundations of American democracy.

Trump has not only made a concerted effort to extend the powers of the executive branch, he has done it in part by usurping some of the authority of the other branches. Trump has held up projects already funded by the House, as if he has some discretionary power over its appropriations. He does not.

Trump has also acted as if he has the power to unilaterally use military force and perhaps even go to war, without congressional approval. The constitution expressly grants Congress—not the president—the power to declare war.

Yet, Trump's instinct is to act unilaterally or with the bare minimum of consultation with

Congress. That was proven in his use of the military to abduct Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

That same penchant for pushing his powers as commander-in-chief to the maximum is currently on display in his stand-off with Iran. With the minimum contact with Congress, Trump has dispatched two aircraft carriers to the waters off Iran.

No one knows whether he will use military force against Iran should negotiations for a nuclear deal fail. And if he does, no one knows whether Congress will have a say in the matter.

Is it possible to rein in Trump before he goes too far with his military adventurism and authoritarian agenda? That entirely depends on whether elected officials in the U.S. have the courage to impose some guardrails on this renegade president.

It is clear that the country has the power to protect itself, assuming it grasps the dangers posed by Trump to democracy. And it need not be the nuclear option of impeachment.

The Republican Party itself could check the president if it were to put its house in order. That would mean abandoning the slavish support of anything Trump does, and asserting that the GOP is bigger than any one person—even if he is the president.

So far the GOP, which controls both the House and Senate, has failed on that score. But there is reason to hope that will change. This past week, a handful of Republicans voted with Democrats against Trump's ruinous tariff policy against countries like Canada.

If they do more of that, and less kissing of the ring, there is a chance at least that they won't be heading over the electoral cliff come November.

Michael Harris is an award-winning author and journalist.

The Hill Times

COMMENT

U.S. President Trump's bridge outrage is latest example of how corrupt the American political system has become

Some might argue the president's grievances about the Gordie Howe International Bridge are simply an attempt to distract from the global discussion about his racist post featuring former president Barack Obama and Michelle Obama as monkeys.



OTTAWA—If you build it, they will come. Except if oppo-

nents are friends of United States President Donald Trump.

Trump's latest foray into Canadian politics is a false claim that a new bridge about to be opened at the Windsor-Detroit border should be delayed because no American steel was used in the construction, which is not true. He also stated that the bridge would not open unless the U.S. was compensated for everything it has given to Canada.

The irony of Trump's complaints is that the U.S. government refused to participate in the initial cost of the bridge construction, which was fully financed by the Government of Canada. It is hard pressed to make labour or content demands on the project.

The president's last-minute intervention is another example of how corrupt the American political system has become.

The Gordie Howe International Bridge has been in consideration for more than two decades.

The Ambassador Bridge, built in 1929, is North America's No. 1 international border crossing. It is privately owned, and multiple attempts to build a new bridge beginning at the turn of the century have been blocked by the

current owners, the American Moroun family.

Despite the obvious need for a second bridge, the Morouns' political influence and lawsuits delayed the process for years.

In a newspaper column in 2012, journalist David Frum characterized the dispute as a conflict between private and public infrastructure where the monopoly led by the Moroun family used influence in Washington, D.C., to derail a proposed public sector bridge for decades.

Finally, in frustration, the Canadian government agreed to fully fund the joint bridge on the condition that the investment be recouped through tolls.

The proposed bridge was ultimately named after Gordie Howe, the popular Canadian hockey player who spent most of his NHL career with the Detroit Red Wings. The bilateral agreement was signed by the Canadian and Michigan governments, and both parties are joint owners of the bridge scheduled to open early this year.

The construction has taken more than eight years, and the project was led by the "Building North America" consortium which was selected in July 2018 to

design, build, operate and maintain the bridge.

The \$6.4-billion cost of the project was fully financed by the Government of Canada, a fact that seemed to be missing from Trump's latest Truth Social grievance taking aim at the bridge's ownership structure and claiming that Canada has "treated the United States unfairly for decades."

Washington did not put out a penny for the project, so it is hard to claim that the U.S. has been treated unfairly.

Michigan politicians were quick to point out the second bridge will facilitate commerce and trade between the two countries. Governor Gretchen Whitmer weighed in to support the opening, saying that the bridge agreement was approved by her Republican predecessor.

The only people who seem to be benefitting from threats to stall the bridge opening are the family members who own the Ambassador Bridge.

As Frum pointed out in 2012, the move to block a second bridge is a perfect example of how public policy is stymied by private interests. In the end, it is the trade between the two countries that suffers.

That may fit with Trump's agenda as he is obviously not interested in a seamless transportation network between Canada and the U.S.

But it certainly hurts his own country's economic agenda, which is why Michigan politicians are all lining up in favour of opening the Gordie Howe bridge as soon as possible.

U.S. ambassador to Canada Pete Hoekstra has been assigned to manage the file for the president. Hoekstra is a former Michigan congressman.

Some might argue the bridge kerfuffle was simply an attempt by Trump to distract from the global discussion about his racist post featuring former president Barack Obama and Michelle Obama as monkeys.

The meme on Trump's personal account on Truth Social stayed online for 12 hours, with press secretary Karoline Leavitt characterizing reaction as "fake outrage." She claimed: "This is from an internet meme video depicting President Trump as the king of the jungle and Democrats as characters from the Lion King."

Even Republicans chimed in to attack the post, with U.S. Senator Tim Scott "praying it was fake because it's the most racist thing I have seen from this White House."

Other Republicans condemned the post, but the president insisted he did nothing wrong, and was not about to apologize.

In most jurisdictions, such a racist publication would likely spark calls for resignation.

In this case, presidential filters, accountability, and respect are non-existent. Trump celebrates racism and inflames hatred.

It is just another crazy week at the White House.

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

The Hill Times

Harper, from brawler to statesman

When Stephen Harper retired from politics, he put aside his brawler persona and took on the role of a wise elder statesman, whose portrait now hangs in Parliament. He's even getting positive media attention for his recent forceful comments on world affairs.



Gerry
Nicholls

Post Partisan Pundit

OAKVILLE, ONT.—Never in a million years did I ever think former prime minister Stephen Harper—known for his earnestness and blandness, and for the iron discipline with which he ruled his party—would be linked to a trivial term like "Harperpalooza."

Yet, apparently, the Conservatives did use that word to describe the events taking place in Ottawa recently to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Harper's government.

Yes, I know they're probably just trying to inject some levity into their festivities, and surely if anyone needs a little merriment right now, it's the Conservatives.

But to my mind, "Harperpalooza" just doesn't seem to fit Harper's personality or temperament.

Indeed, I think we need to keep in mind why Harper succeeded as a politician.

That's to say, he didn't succeed because he's charismatic or likable, or because he generated Harperpaloozian excitement.

Quite the opposite, in fact.

Harper was never cuddly. But he didn't need to be.

Harper was successful because he knew how to play the game; he knew how to mobilize his supporters, he knew how to identify and exploit his opponents' weaknesses, and he knew how to stick to his message.

On top of that, Harper possessed a keen and analytical intellect; he was a political chess master, always thinking two or three moves ahead.

In other words, he combined a sharp cerebral mind with a political streetfighter's cunning.

That's a rare combination in politics.

This is something I know about because I was there working with Harper when he developed his skills.

That was way back in the late 1990s, early 2000s, when Harper was president of the National Citizens Coalition (NCC), a scrappy conservative advocacy group known for its hard-hitting multi-media ad campaigns.

I was already an employee of the NCC when Harper came

aboard, and I was extremely happy that he joined our team.

Yet, in his early days at the NCC, Harper faced a steep learning curve.

Although he was a smart policy wonk, Harper at the time had no real experience in the nuts and bolts of how to lead an attack-dog political organization like the NCC.

So, for instance, as the group's president, Harper needed to learn how to boil down political messages so they could fit on a bumper sticker; he needed to understand the importance of appealing to emotions; and he needed to figure out how to push the right hot buttons to raise donations.

Basically, the NCC was like a boot camp where the future prime minister was trained in the finer points of political brawling, political marketing, and political messaging.

And Harper took these skills with him when he left the NCC to enter the federal political arena.

In fact, former Conservative Party marketing specialist Patrick

Muttart once said, "Throughout my time with him [Harper], he would personally reference [NCC] campaigns that he ran ... I don't think we've ever had a prime minister who had direct, personal experience being a marketer."

Mind you, when Harper retired from politics in 2016, he put aside his brawler persona and took on the role of a wise elder statesman, whose portrait now hangs in Parliament.

So, instead of engaging in battle with Liberals, he's having "fireside chats" with one-time ideological foe and fellow former prime minister Jean Chrétien.

He's even getting positive media attention for his recent forceful comments on world affairs.

All of this is leading people to rethink the legacy of Harper's time as prime minister, to look upon it more fondly.

That's fine.

But let's also keep in mind that Harper the Statesman was once Harper the Warrior.

Anyway, Happy Harperpalooza, everybody!

Gerry Nicholls is a communications consultant.

The Hill Times

Climate change should be the big story of 2026

Fossil-fuel production and use must be reduced by half by 2030. And with fear and fatigue—and in an increasingly insecure world—nobody even wants to think about this sword over our heads, and what we owe our future generations. Economic actors were already backing away before Donald Trump's corrupt negligence.

Bill Henderson

Opinion

GIBSONS, B.C.—“We are currently living through a paradigm shift in the speed, scale, and severity of risks driven by the climate-nature crisis. Yet many regulations and government actions are dangerously out of touch with reality,” said Laurie Laybourn, at the Strategic Climate Risks Initiative, to *The Guardian*.

The big story of 2026 should be that climate is an emergency requiring urgent emission reduction. Seriously, the only other story in the running is how much closer United States President Donald Trump is pushing us to a possible nuclear world war.

But, of course, climate change is getting to be less of a story everyday: it’s old and tedious, governments have more important things to do, the econosphere has more important things to do. Climate change is just dismissed—without any needed reason—by the most important country in the world where the Trump administration is partner with the fossil fuel industries trying to get as much coal, oil, and gas burned as possible (for as much personal and wider business profit as possible). Even before Trump’s second term, businesses and governments had begun pulling back from what could be characterized as a long and expensive attempted transition that hadn’t had much effect on emissions, at least globally where production of the fatal poison continues to rise.

As former *Washington Post* climate reporter Chris Mooney opined on Substack. “I continue to think this is more a zeitgeist thing, where there’s a broader shift away from considering climate change an urgent issue,” he wrote. “Nothing major about the science has changed, of course. But I think there is just fatigue, reflecting in part the domestic and global failures to show significant progress on the issue.”

The climate events and science have grown more dire, but instead of being the hub of activity, climate change—especially mitigation—has been put on a back burner. A surreal society-wide denial has



Environment and Climate Change Minister Julie Dabrusin, pictured on Dec. 1, 2025, at the House Environment Committee, has a low profile in the Carney government. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

us all hushed up because we can’t quit fossil fuels.

Nobody really wants to do without fossil fuels. Those who control our society (business leaders and the wealthy) certainly don’t want to burn less of it—that would make them poorer; government would be far more difficult if successful mitigation kept fossil fuels from powering the economy and generating wealth; we don’t want to lose our very fortunate lifestyles made possible by a fossil fuel economy. It’s the economy, stupid (like it used to be it’s the crops, stupid’ when we all lived in agrarian societies) and almost all of us are totally dependent and still reliant on fossil fuels for more than 80 per cent of energy.

The energy transition was supposedly a path to displacing fossil fuels without impairing our economy, our lifestyles, without diminishing our energy use, but energy transitions are additive—historically the new source of energy just added to the continuing increase in energy, not displacing the previous sources. Renewables are growing like topsy, but fossil fuel production and use continues to grow; emissions have not declined, have not even peaked.

“Structurally we are close to a peak, but we have been structurally close to a peak for 10 years,” said Glen Peters, from the Norwegian Centre for International Climate Research, one of the closest watchers of global emissions.

Renewables are great technology and a hopeful future, but we need urgent and deep emission reduction in an emergency climate situation that gets worse each passing moment—at least a reduction by half globally by 2030. But there isn’t a possible painless route—fossil-fuel production and use must be reduced by half by 2030. And with fear and fatigue—and in an increasingly insecure world—nobody even wants to think about this reality, this sword over our heads, and what we owe our kids and future generations. Economic actors were already backing away before Trump’s corrupt negligence.

We’ve raced past the 1.5C guardrail, and we are on pace with accelerating warming

to exceed a 2C rise in Global Mean Surface Temperature by 2050. Climate change is causing horrific deaths and destruction

already in more vulnerable parts of the world, and extreme weather is getting increasingly expensive even in privileged North America.

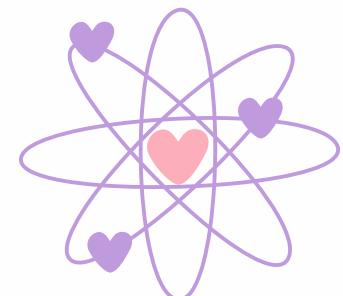
But far worse, accelerating warming already threatens to set off feedbacks or push natural systems (like an AMOC collapse—the possible future shutdown of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, a system of ocean currents that transports warm water northward) over tipping points. We should never be this close to such existential risks. Cutting emissions significantly this decade is essential in trying to achieve climate safety. And this must mean a direct regulated wind-down of fossil fuel production and use nationally and globally, and that’s just impossible, so nobody goes there and the biggest story of our day is ignored by everybody.

In his foreword to a must-read new report on recalibrating climate risk, Mark Campanale, CEO of Carbon Tracker, said: “The net result of flawed economic advice is widespread complacency amongst investors and policymakers. There’s a tendency in certain government departments to trivialise the impacts of climate on the economy so as to avoid making difficult choices today. This is a big problem—the consequences of delay are catastrophic.”

The Recalibrating Climate Risk report seems especially aimed at bankers, denizens of international finance, and leaders of government whose experience with managing complex systems and risk should have prepared them better: you should have been much more precautionary, it’s not just the economy that is at risk, stupid.

Bill Henderson is a long-time climate activist. Contact him at bhenderson@dccnet.com.

The Hill Times



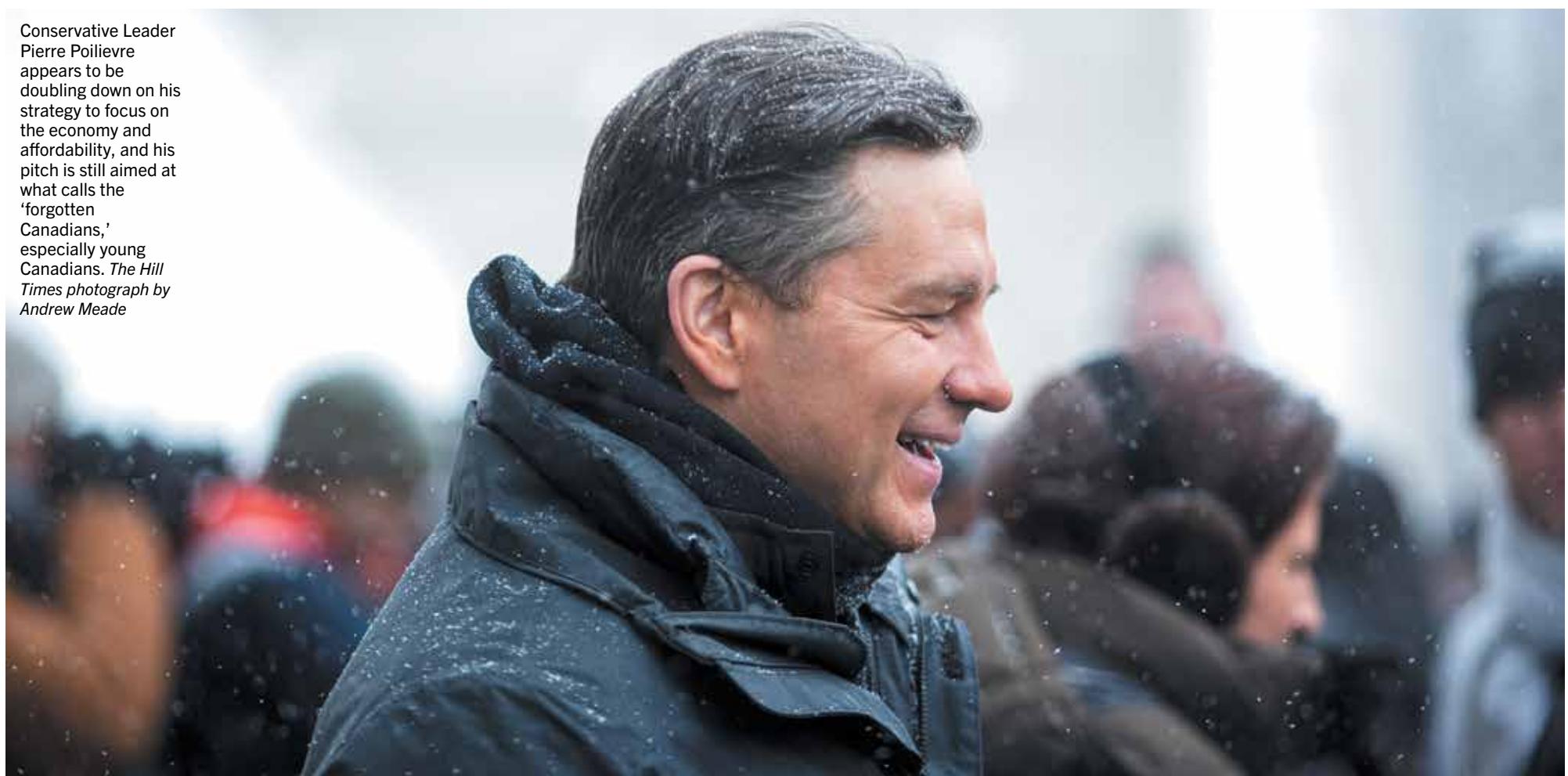
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OPINION

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre appears to be doubling down on his strategy to focus on the economy and affordability, and his pitch is still aimed at what calls the 'forgotten Canadians,' especially young Canadians. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Poilievre, the Super Bowl, and the cautionary tale of the Buffalo Bills

Pierre Poilievre will have to do much more than stand pat if he seriously plans on finally winning the Canadian political Super Bowl. Otherwise, he and his party may have to content themselves, like Buffalo Bills fans, with having come so close that one time.

Ken Polk

Opinion

OTTAWA—Another Super Bowl has come and gone. And while it may seem odd for non-football fans who were spared this mid-winter smash-mouth extravaganza, the star-crossed history of the National Football League's Buffalo Bills in the game may hold a cautionary tale for Pierre Poilievre and the Conservative Party as they plan for the next federal election—the

political equivalent of the Super Bowl for obsessives, like me.

The Buffalo Bills appeared in four consecutive Super Bowls in the 1990s. This was an awesome team, an offensive and defensive powerhouse, head and shoulders above almost every opponent they faced. Sadly, for the Bills and their fans, the only team they could not beat during this terrific run was the one they faced in the Super Bowl. So this run of football excellence has gone into NFL lore as a monument to futility.

Worse, it's not just that they lost four times; it was the way they lost that was so dispiriting. They lost their first Super Bowl by just one point, a true heartbreaker. They not only kept losing, but they were also crushed in every other game. So, in the end, the best Super Bowl memory left to Buffalo fans is that first heartbreaking loss.

Poilievre: the song remains the same

Which brings us to Poilievre.

The 87.4 per cent vote he received at last month's leadership review was very impressive. For those like your humble correspondent, who speculated about the possibility of so-called Red Tories or Ontario Premier Doug Ford damaging Poilievre enough to spark an overthrow, well, I suppose you could say we were, in this case, the Buffalo Bills of Conservative Party punditry.

The result demonstrated to anyone out there who does not

like Poilievre's style of politics that the Conservative base likes it a very great deal. Indeed, despite the defection of two MPs to the Liberal Party since the April 2025 election—each citing the leader's style as a reason for leaving—the party membership has doubled down on Poilievre.

Poilievre, in turn, doubled down on the formula he's applied since becoming Conservative leader in 2022. His focus is on the economy and affordability. His pitch is still aimed at what he calls the "forgotten Canadians"—especially young Canadians—who work hard, play by the rules, pay their taxes, and scrimp and save to build a better life but feel shut out by the dead weight of the federal government. Affordability remains Poilievre's watchword, with pledges to cut the price on everything from food to gas, from clothes to homes. He still wants to axe the carbon tax, and force through oil and gas pipelines. He still plans to slash deficits and fire bureaucrats. He will be tough on criminals and big on defence.

It is, in short, the same issue that saw him get within 20 seats of becoming prime minister of Canada last April.

Not surprisingly, there was no mention of United States President Donald Trump in Poilievre's speech. Here, too, Poilievre and his team have decided, as they did during the spring campaign, that Trump is a kind of "kryptonite" for Poilievre and a kind of political steroid for the Liberals.

Poilievre's Trump stand-in is his Canadian Sovereignty Act, which, in sum, gathers together a host of anti-Liberal 2025 policy pledges into a manifesto of nationalism and patriotism.

Can Poilievre win on the replay?

What really allowed Poilievre to dominate Canadian federal politics—until he didn't—was his identification of inflation and affordability as Canadians' primary post-pandemic concerns, planting his political flag there well ahead of the Liberals or the NDP. He lost an election he seemed destined to win. Nevertheless, he seems to be anticipating Prime Minister Mark Carney's failure to solve these problems as the key to victory the next time around. Rather than identifying the coming policy wave—as he did so well on inflation—Poilievre seems to be content to wait for Canadians to catch the old policy wave back to him. He needs only to stand still.

No doubt, unintentionally, he actually identified in his speech the political dilemma that he faces in trying to win on the replay: "It's funny to watch the Liberal rhetoric. First, they said, 'Conservatives have no policies. It's just slogans.' Then they said, 'Conservative policies are very scary.' And then they said, 'We agree with all the Conservative policies.' The best part of being Conservatives is that eventually

everyone admits that we were right all along."

This is a fairly direct admission by Poilievre that the Carney Liberals have moved to occupy economic policy terrain that had been ceded to Poilievre almost by default by the Justin Trudeau Liberals. If nothing else, the prime minister has made it clear his government will fight like heck for this terrain. So, the economic contrast that powered so much of Poilievre's rise in the polls is gone, or at the very least much less stark.

Which brings us back to the cautionary tale of the Buffalo Bills. They came so close to winning the first time around. They ran back to the same strategy year after year, certain that victory was just a matter of time. Only to fail each time.

This is the heartbreaking outcome that Poilievre seems ready to risk by appearing to be standing pat. Apart from what seems to be a warmed-over policy set and message, there's the fact that Trump is not going anywhere, at least until 2028. Then there is the demonstrated fact that Poilievre's style and substance has made him a human get-out-the-vote machine for the Liberals among progressive voters.

All of this suggests that Poilievre will have to do much more than stand pat if he seriously plans on finally winning the Canadian political Super Bowl. Otherwise, he and his party may have to content themselves, like Buffalo Bills fans, with having come so close that one time.

Ken Polk is a strategic adviser at Compass Rose. Previously, he served as chief speechwriter, deputy director of communications and legislative assistant to then-prime minister Jean Chrétien.

The Hill Times

Building a more innovative Canadian economy won't be easy, but it will be worth it



Although Prime Minister Mark Carney's government has embarked on a wide range of measures to transform the economy, including major nation-building projects and commitments on AI and data sovereignty, more changes are needed, writes David Crane. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

We are living through one of those periods in human history where change and the tensions from change can overwhelm. Coping with change—with creative destruction—can be hugely rewarding. But getting policy right is the challenge.

David Crane
Canada & the 21st Century

TORONTO—Prime Minister Mark Carney inherited an economy that had already been experiencing mediocre performance for some time. Our weak efforts in innovation, investment, and productivity continue.

But now he must also deal with an antagonistic United States whose tariffs and threats on the future of Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) are generating uncertainty that is discouraging investment and hiring; the rapid advance of artificial intelligence and its potentially disruptive impact across society; and the ongoing aging of the population

with the fiscal and other challenges this brings.

So, if you imagine this country's economy as a giant ocean vessel, how does Carney change course—which is his stated goal—and deliver a better future than we have seen in the recent past? In the case of a huge ocean liner, it takes more than a simple turn of the steering wheel to change course; it takes time, skill, diligence, and patience.

The same will be true if Canada is to shift direction—less dependence of the U.S. and much better productivity—and bring about a new economy that is capable of prospering in a world where a new geography of innovation, competition, and opportunity is emerging, and where global pressures including climate change present significant risks and opportunities in a green transition. We are moving to a multi-polar world, and this is already raising serious tensions such as in the competition between the U.S. and China for global influence. We can't escape the fallout.

Canada is far from alone in facing these challenges: geopolitical transformation, the risk of an escalating trade war, rapid technological change, aging populations and global risks from climate change, a potential world debt and financial crisis, and the possible failure of AI to deliver the expected productivity gains. They are shared by much of what we call the Western world.

In a speech earlier this month, Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey pointed to lessons from history that are pertinent to our current situation. First, with

“
WE REALLY NEED AN INDEPENDENT ECONOMIC STRATEGY COUNCIL, REPORTING TO PARLIAMENT, THAT MONITORS THE PROGRESS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY, INCLUDING THE IMPACT ON SPECIFIC SECTORS.

current slow growth, “we must focus on what is needed to raise potential growth rates, and thus on the role of innovation including obviously AI and robotics,” he said, adding that trade openness also contributes to growth.

The potential growth rate is in effect the speed limit of the economy, as in the level of economic growth that is compatible with low inflation. This speed limit is determined, basically, by the rate of labour force growth and by the rate of productivity improvement. Since labour-force growth is expected to be flat into the foreseeable future—in large part due to a desire to lower immigration—productivity will determine the rate at which the economy can grow without creating inflationary pressures.

In Canada's case, the economy's potential growth rate has been declining for some time, with high levels of immigration, rather than innovation-led productivity growth, accounting for the economic growth that we have experienced.

So, in the broadest sense, this is Canada's No. 1 economic challenge today—how to raise the potential growth rate of the economy—and the broadest measure of how well Carney's efforts to create a new economy are succeeding. What this means, he argues, is for some years more investment and less consumption.

It will take time for new investment to translate into higher living standards. But without the wealth creation from investment in innovation, Canada could stagnate in a zero-sum society where one person's or one's region's gain could only

come at another's expense or loss. Without wealth creation from society-wide innovation and productivity gains, we will lack the wealth to support education, health care, and the quality of life we aspire to. We will stagnate.

But change and the gains expected from innovation-driven change mean there will inevitably be much creative disruption as industries and jobs shift, and—in some cases—disappear altogether. Navigating through this will be difficult. AI is just one example. While there is still much debate over the potential impacts of AI on jobs, we can already see it in areas where AI is simply displacing simple task-based jobs, but not yet having a much deeper effect. But accounting firms and law firms (typically the source of well-paying white-collar jobs) are already seeing that AI undermines these businesses and their reliance on billable hours of work. AI can now do in nanoseconds tasks that humans might take all day to do. So, will accounting firms and law firms need far fewer people in the future?

The Carney government has embarked on a wide range of measures to transform the economy, including housing, the auto industry, major nation-building projects, tax incentives for investment and research and development, commitments on AI and data sovereignty, a “Buy Canada” procurement strategy, trade diversion to new markets, a defence industrial strategy, promises of a new climate-change policy, creation of support programs for businesses and retraining for workers affected by transition, and new funding programs to support innovation and investment.

More changes are needed. These include improved access to long-term capital to scale up our most promising new firms so they can achieve global competitiveness, much more attention to the valuation and ownership of data as an economic asset, an understanding of how we measure growth in a digital economy, and much more attention to what is needed for Canadian digital sovereignty.

But there's something else.

We really need some kind of independent economic strategy council, reporting to Parliament, that monitors the progress of the government's economic strategy, including the impact on specific sectors. It should also contribute to policy development and provide new ideas on how to meet Canada's aspirations as a prosperous and sovereign country. It would be a brain trust but would not need a huge bureaucratic staff. It would draw on expertise from our universities and businesses, depending on the type of expertise needed.

We are living through one of those periods in human history where change and the tensions from change can overwhelm. Coping with change—with creative destruction—can be hugely rewarding. But getting policy right is the challenge.

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The Hill Times

OPINION



United States President Donald Trump. The iron law that dismisses legal and moral restraint is not strength. It is desperation. That should concern everyone—particularly Canada. *Photograph courtesy of the White House/photographer Daniel Torok*

He came in like a wrecking ball, and he keeps on coming

Donald Trump's preferred methodology has always been chaos. Every day is a tariff day. Different targets, different sectors, relentless pressure until capitulation. It is exceedingly difficult to hold a country together while chaos is deliberately stoked at home and abroad to distract from chaos within.

John McKay

Opinion

SCARBOROUGH, ONT.—Stephen Miller, United States President Donald Trump's personal intellectual thug, has invoked what he calls "the iron laws of the world" to justify the administration doing what it wants, where it wants, and to whom it wants. *Peaky Blinders* couldn't have said it better. Miller's exact words were: "We live in a world that is governed by strength, that is governed by force, that is governed by power." He went on to assert that these principles have existed since the beginning of time.

Miller has missed one critical feature of iron laws: iron rusts. In physics and in geopolitics, it oxidizes. Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but inevitably. The iron law of iron is that over time it weakens, deteriorates, and flakes away.

The other problem with iron is that the object it strikes is often made of iron, too. The Greenlanders, the Danes, and even the Europeans—rarely united on anything—demonstrated iron resolve in response to Trump's bullyboy tactics. Iron on iron is not a pleasant sensation. In fact, it is jarring, producing little more than sparks

and damage, with no benefit to anyone.

Miller emphasized that "international niceties" are secondary to strength, force, and power in the real world. However, it is the niceties of international law that turn iron into steel. Steel is stronger, more durable, and far more resistant to corrosion. Miller might keep that in mind as he and his boss swing from one shiny object to another. For the past 80 years, the strength of the American empire has rested not on brute force, but on its support for international rules, norms, and institutions.

Ignoring international and domestic constraints may provide temporary impunity, but Newton's third law still applies: every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Blowing up NATO has left its remaining members scrambling to rearm. Until recently, the default assumption was to buy American. Instead, the bully's iron fist is now costing the U.S. billions of dollars in lost F-35s contracts and other defence procurements.

Tiny Denmark, which stood up to the bully, has publicly lamented that its F-35s are costly, maintenance heavy, have a lot of

downtime, and are a regrettable purchase. The longer Canada "reviews" its own F-35 contract, the less likely it is that the full purchase will ever be completed. When a once-reliable ally goes rogue, dependency on that ally for critical defence infrastructure becomes a strategic liability. U.S. Ambassador to Canada Pete Hoekstra, who casually threatens our sovereignty in our own airspace, may forever be remembered as the American ambassador that blew the multibillion-dollar F-35 deal.

Iron flakes from the outside, but it corrodes from within, as well. The flagrant abuse of truth and the rule of law by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents against American citizens is not merely appalling—it reflects a governing philosophy that believes niceties are for suckers. Abuse of power is not strength; it is weakness.

The deliberate division of citizens into blue and red, left and right, leaves everyone angrier, more confused, and increasingly contemptuous of the institutions that once held the country together. A citizenry at war with itself cannot sustain an empire—hegemonic or otherwise. When

citizens begin taking up arms against one another, whatever power the state imagines it possesses is already gone.

Mass shootings in the U.S. have become so routine that unless at least four people are killed, they barely register as news. Trump's criticism of the federal agents' killing of Alex Patti—an ICU nurse shot and killed by federal immigration enforcement agents during a protest in Minneapolis—for carrying a firearm raises the internal contradictions of American political life to a whole new level. Apparently, in Trump's mind, the right to bear arms does not extend to protests against unlawful federal action in Minnesota, but was perfectly acceptable to storm Congress and assault police officers while armed in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6, 2021.

The iron law that dismisses legal and moral restraint is not strength. It is desperation. That should concern everyone—particularly Canada.

Why should we care as the U.S. accelerates down this path of wanton self-destruction—one might even say a death spiral? Because Greenland is not the prize; it is the tease. The Canadian Arctic is the real objective to be obtained by any means necessary. Separatism has always had a small but persistent audience in Canada. What is new is the prospect of that movement being backed by a foreign government armed with vast resources and an industrial-scale disinformation machine. Taking control in the Arctic is much easier if Canadians are consumed by their own internal political divisions stoked by foreign interference. Divide and conquer is an age-old strategy, modernized by a false narrative propagated on a small number of gullible fools.

Money and false narratives can distort outcomes even when referendums are lost. The corrosive damage lies in the process itself. Before the Clarity Act, we used to joke about "referendums"—having referendums until you got the answer you wanted. The social and political exhaustion they generate is debilitating.

Fox & Friends launching a barrage of misinformation may repel many Canadians, but it will still find an audience—and that audience will be destabilized. Trump's preferred methodology has always been chaos. Every day is a tariff day. Different targets, different sectors, relentless pressure until capitulation. It is exceedingly difficult to hold a country together while chaos is deliberately stoked at home and abroad to distract from chaos within.

The strategy, such as it is, relies on internal conflict to deflect responsibility. If citizens are busy fighting one another, they are less likely to notice who lit the match. When that fails, the next shiny object and the next distraction becomes the focus.

John McKay is the former Liberal Member of Parliament for Scarborough-Guildwood, Ont., and is the former Canadian co-chair of the Canada-U.S. Inter-Parliamentary Group.

The Hill Times

Trudeau, Carney, Davos, and Liberal dexterity

Canadians like getting the world's attention because it counters the view that we are boring. Mark Carney's impact at Davos boosted Liberal popularity to 51 per cent in a Mainstreet poll. Speculation swirled that he might call an election to capitalize. He won't. Carney prefers governing to politicking on the hustings.

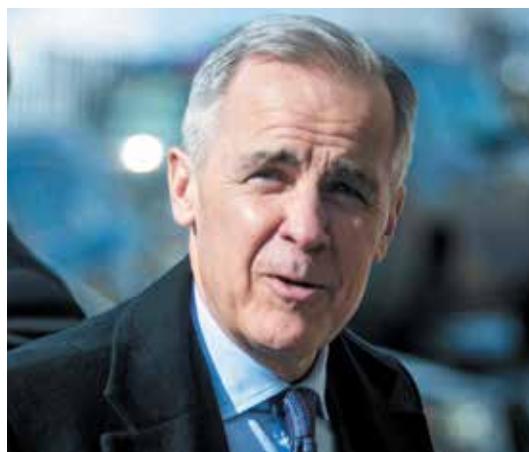
Nelson Wiseman



Opinion

TORONTO—The appearances of Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister Mark Carney, and United States President Donald Trump at Davos reveals much about them, but also about the remarkable success of the Liberals since party legend Wilfrid Laurier became prime minister in 1896.

Trudeau was the shiny new star at the World Economic



Prime Minister Mark Carney on Feb. 9, 2026. Ideological dexterity has been the key to Liberal success. Cabinet ministers who served Justin Trudeau serve Carney, even though in philosophy and policy orientation the two are worlds apart. It doesn't matter. The ministers have eagerly signed on to the new program, writes Nelson Wiseman. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Forum in 2016. He had just scored a come-from-behind election victory, and his name had celebrity status. He hobnobbed with Hollywood stars, dining with Leonardo DiCaprio, the now-disgraced Kevin Spacey, and Bono. In his address, Trudeau hailed the benefits of social diversity, connecting it to economic growth and improved productivity. At the time, Canada ranked lowest among G7 countries in economic productivity. A decade later, under Trudeau's stewardship, it still ranked lowest. Trudeau told his audience that while former prime minister Stephen Harper had wanted attendees to know Canada for its resources, he wanted them to know Canadians for their resourcefulness, diversity, and brain power.

Why Trudeau showed up at Davos this year with his pop-star girlfriend Katy Perry seems a bit of a mystery. He is no longer qualified as a mover and shaker of political geo-economics, and the international media

ignored him. He wasn't on the WEF's event agenda, but he did participate in an overlapping Davos event. The half-day Global Soft Power Summit, sponsored by a United Kingdom-based consultancy that deals with brand valuation and strategy, paid Trudeau to be the keynote speaker. Addressing the topic of soft power with bromides, he received polite applause.

Illustrating the resolve of Canadians to stand up for their country's sovereignty, Trudeau noted they consciously shop for Canadian products. However, he does not do so in his dating. This made his amusing anecdote all the funnier: when his American girlfriend ordered a "Jack [Daniels] and Coke" in Canada, he told his listeners, the waiter informed her that the establishment did not serve American alcohol.

Paeans of praise from many quarters greeted Carney's widely reported address. France's Emmanuel Macron and the European Union's Ursula von der Leyen echoed his analysis and

sentiments, and Carney got a rare standing ovation. When was the last time a Canadian had that at the WEF or the United Nations? (Hint: I believe it was 1955, and it wasn't for Lester Pearson). [Answer below].

"Trump Huffed and Puffed, but Carney Blew the House Down," read a *Washington Post* headline. *The Guardian* reprinted what it called his "rousing" speech. *Wall Street Journal* editorialists were not impressed. One called Carney's speech moralizing, another hypocritical, even though the paper has repeatedly criticized Trump's policy of tariffs *über alles*.

Adam Tooze, the 2019 winner of Canada's Gelber prize—"the world's most important award for non-fiction," according to *The Economist*—described Carney's speech as "by far the most weighty reaction" to the crisis Trump has unleashed. Tooze described Trump's meandering address to the WEF, which went everywhere and nowhere, as "indigestible vomit." Upstaged by Carney, Trump saved the prime minister from a delicate dance by excluding him from his make-believe Board of Peace after Carney had hedged and demurred about joining it.

Canadians like getting the world's attention because it counters the view that we are boring. Carney's impact at Davos boosted Liberal popularity to 51 per cent in a Mainstreet poll. Speculation swirled that he might call an election to capitalize on that. He won't. Campaigns are unpredictable, as Pearson found out in 1965, Harper in 2008, and Trudeau in 2021. They gambled and failed to parlay their minority

governments into majorities. Carney prefers governing to politicking on the hustings.

Carney's come-from-behind election victory last year, like Trudeau's a decade earlier, helps reveal why the Liberals are Canada's "natural governing party." They have won 26 of the 38 elections since 1896 and have governed for many more years than the Conservatives, making them the most successful centre party in the Western World.

Ideological dexterity has been the key to Liberal success. Unlike the Conservatives and the NDP who have relatively stable ideological principles, the Liberals blend principles liberally. Cabinet ministers who served Trudeau serve Carney, even though in philosophy and policy orientation the two are worlds apart. It doesn't matter. The ministers have eagerly signed on to the new program.

One of then-prime minister Pierre Trudeau's MPs, Pierre Gimaïel, articulated somewhat hyperbolically his party's philosophy: "If the development of individual Canadians is to be achieved through a strengthening [of] industry, the Liberal Party can move to the right. If in order to promote our development the Liberal Party thinks we have to be communistic, we shall be communistic. That is what it is all about to be a Liberal."

Answer to quiz: Paul Martin Sr. received a standing ovation for breaking a deadlock over the admission of 21 new applicants for UN membership.

Nelson Wiseman is professor emeritus of political science at the University of Toronto.

The Hill Times

OPINION

Building Canada's digital future

The global race for technological leadership is well underway. Canada cannot afford to be a spectator.

Delphine Adenot-Owusu



Nation-building projects in Canada have been at the centre of our political debate for the last few months as we navigate economic uncertainties. Ambitious projects range from energy infrastructure,

ports, high-speed rail, and others. But one of this country's most critical nation-building projects could enable innovation and will impact all 41 million of us and our daily lives.

Canada stands at the crossroads of a technological revolution that will shape our nation's prosperity for generations to come. As founding members of the Canadian Coalition for Digital Infrastructure, we see first-hand how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the global economy. These technologies are not merely options for Canada—they are imperatives if we are to secure our position as a global leader in the digital age.

The numbers tell a compelling story: our industry has already made substantial investments throughout Canada and plans to invest billions more in domestic

digital infrastructure over the next five years. Tens of thousands of Canadians already work in the data centre industry, and this number is set to grow substantially. Just as railways and ports drove this country's prosperity in previous generations, data centres and digital infrastructure are the foundation of our future economy and society.

Our nation has always prided itself on its resourcefulness and adaptability. Now, we must apply these traits to the realm of technology. At a time of economic uncertainty, AI and cloud computing offer unprecedented opportunities to enhance Canadian productivity, improve quality of life, drive economic growth, and solve complex problems across various sectors. From health care to manufacturing, from agriculture to finance, data centres are

the backbone that will power this transformation.

To fully harness these technologies, we need a coordinated approach that brings together cloud providers, data-centre developers and operators, equipment suppliers, industry stakeholders, and government policy makers. This is why our founding members joined forces to build a unified voice for Canada's digital infrastructure sector, and to shape the future of our digital nation.

All governments—federal, provincial, and municipal—have significant stakes in the opportunities of AI and digital innovation, and can be significant beneficiaries not just from the technology, but also the investment and job creation.

Our collective groups mandate is clear; that Canada's digital future hinges on the development

of world-class digital infrastructure as we enter this new era. Data centres are a key component of this infrastructure, and they will be fundamental to our national prosperity.

As we navigate this path, Canada has the opportunity to lead. Through strategic investments in digital infrastructure and targeted support for innovation, we can build a technological ecosystem that reflects Canada while driving economic growth.

The global race for technological leadership is well underway. Canada cannot afford to be a spectator. By supporting and developing world-class digital infrastructure, we can position ourselves at the forefront of the digital revolution. The time to act is now.

Delphine Adenot-Owusu is the director of government relations at Schneider Electric, and founding member of the Canadian Coalition for Digital Infrastructure. She wrote this piece on behalf of the founding members of the CCDI.

The Hill Times

NEWS

‘Back to the future’: Senators react to idea of turning Senate Building back into original train station for high-speed rail hub

Continued from page 7

willing to entertain it—not to knock all the great things that they’ve done. The artwork in here, the history all has to be preserved,” he said in the Senate foyer. “So to kind of reconfigure it for a station, no, but to preserve it going forward, [it’s] a great possibility.”

Canadian Senators Group Senator Scott Tannas (Alberta) said such a transformation would revive the building’s history as a train station.

“The Senate is occupying this building until [2031], then we’re scheduled to move back into the renovated Centre Block. I am not aware of any firm plans the government has for this building after we leave, so a train station in [2031] is not a crazy idea,” Tannas said. “It would be back to the future.”

Independent Ontario Senator Donna Dasko, who serves as the deputy chair of Senate Transport and Communications Committee, told *The Hill Times* that while she is “not opposed” to the current Senate Building being transformed into a train station if the building is preserved, but said her inclination would be to use it for another purpose.

“It’s an interesting idea. I wouldn’t rule it out, but when you look at the beautiful building we have here, I think there are better uses for this location than to turn it into a train station,” she said, adding that the building could instead become a museum, art gallery, or a youth hub.

Dasko said there is need for further information on how the project would be executed, and whether using the Senate Building as a station would be feasible.

The current Senate of Canada Building, located in downtown Ottawa at 2 Rideau St., was constructed between 1909 and 1912, and served as Ottawa’s central train station until 1966. It was converted into a government conference building a year later. The building underwent a major \$219-million rehabilitation, and has been the temporary home to the Senate since 2018. The ongoing Centre Block rehabilitation project is expected to be complete by 2030-31. Senators are expected to return to Centre Block on Parliament Hill when this renovation is completed.

Conservative Senator Larry Smith (Surrey, Que.) highlighted that, given the construction of the high-speed rail will likely take many years, whether or not the current Senate Building would be used is something to be decided in the future.



The foyer ceiling of the Senate of Canada Building is a glorious design. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Ontario Senator Donna Dasko says there could be better uses for the Senate building than a train station. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade



Referring to the Senate Building’s original purpose as Ottawa’s train station between 1912 and 1966, Canadian Senators Group Senator Scott Tannas said returning it to that purpose is ‘not a crazy idea. ... It would be back to the future.’ *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

“This has turned out to be a great facility for the Senate. I guess you have to tie this together with the construction over at the main block [Centre Block], and what will happen to the facility itself, in terms of the Senate? Will the Senate be there? Will it be here? Will this become a permanent station? So, there’s a lot of questions that have to be asked,” he said.

Ottawa Mayor Mark Sutcliffe has previously said he wants to see Alto’s new high-speed rail station in Ottawa located in the core. “I believe the people of Ottawa will be best served by a station that is located right downtown,”

A tunnel under Rideau Canal to the Senate Building

Meanwhile, one expert says the building could be a hub, connecting to other stations with a tunnel that could run under Ottawa’s five-foot-deep Rideau Canal.

David Jeanes, a former president of both public advocacy group Transport Action Canada and Heritage Ottawa where he’s a current board member, said the Senate Building would be a good spot for a downtown station, and

said it could be connected to the rest of the Alto line with a tunnel going under the Rideau Canal.

The Senate Building is a “unique” option due to its location, and would be a “very good business proposition” Jeanes said, as it’s adjacent to the iconic Fairmont Château Laurier hotel, the Rideau Centre, the ByWard Market, the Rideau Canal, Parliament Hill, and downtown Ottawa in general.

If Alto were to go ahead with the tunnel idea, the execution of it could be “fairly quick,” Jeanes said.

A retired engineer, Jeanes argued Alto’s high-speed rail could cross the Rideau River on a bridge and then tunnel from Lees Avenue, west of the Nicholas Street bridge in an almost straight line for 1.9 kilometres, under the Queensway and Colonel By Drive to reach the Senate Building. For the last 200 to 400 metres, the tunnel would widen under the Rideau Canal to allow space for four tracks and two platforms from the Mackenzie King Bridge to the Senate Building, which is about 368 metres.

When asked about whether a tunnel could be dug under the canal for the rail project, Alto’s Bourdeau said all locations under review are assessed based on their benefits and constraints.

“While it’s too early to speculate on specific construction methods in that area, it is important to note that the technical and financial constraints are significant,” said Bourdeau.

“If you do it with a tunnel-boring machine, you could probably

do it in about one to two years of tunnelling. That’s because it’s pretty straightforward. They’re basically building a straight tunnel with only one cavern, the station at the north end,” he said, adding there is a long-enough straight corridor from Rideau Street all the way to the canal’s first bend.

Jeanes said there could be a passenger station 40 feet under the canal that would extend from the current Senate Building. It would be a little shorter than the LRT’s Confederation Line, and have entrances from multiple directions and an entrance with a drop-on, drop-off area for vehicles on Rideau Street, but the trains and the platforms would actually be underground.

“That allows you to connect all the way down to the Hurdman area by tunneling under Colonel By Drive rather than excavating, so you don’t have to do major disruption in the UNESCO World Heritage [site of the Rideau Canal] if you tunnel. If you’re at least 15 to 20 metres underground, that’s a fairly straightforward tunneling prospect,” he explained.

While it’s difficult right now to give an accurate cost estimate, Jeanes said his guess is that bringing high-speed rail into downtown Ottawa would likely mean a couple more billion dollars. The high-speed rail project is currently expected to cost between \$60-billion and \$90-billion.

“You could have a pedestrian hub that could transform the heart of Ottawa into a much more pleasant place for people to get around among those locations,” Jeanes said, explaining that it would be feasible to have an underground pedestrian connection directly into the Rideau Centre—a major shopping mall—and into the Rogers Centre and even under the canal into the National Arts Centre, all in walking distance from each other.

Alto kicked off a three-month public consultation process in January 2026 where Canadians will help inform some project decisions, such as the selection of preferred station locations.

The idea of using the Senate Building as a station and potentially building a tunnel under the Rideau Canal to connect the line to the Senate was floated during Alto’s public consultations with a group of experts in January, Jeanes said, as part of a conversation around transforming the Senate Building into a downtown station. Other possibilities, such as using the Via Rail station on the east side of downtown Ottawa or using Hurdman station, which is connected to Ottawa’s LRT line.

Canada’s first high-speed rail network is expected to run approximately 1,000 kilometres from Toronto to Quebec City, reaching speeds of up to 300 km/hour, cutting travel times in half. The network will have a stop in Laval, Que. Further phases of the project will include stops in Toronto and Peterborough, Ont., and Trois-Rivières and Quebec City, Que.

The government says the project will boost GDP by up to \$35-billion, and create 51,000 new jobs over 10 years.

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The Hill Times

Liberals see path forward for budget bill, but Conservatives still have 'huge concerns' with cabinet's 'regulatory sandbox'

Conservatives have concerns about a clause buried in Bill C-15 that grants cabinet ministers the power to exempt any individual or firm from nearly any federal law—excluding the Criminal Code—for up to six years.

Justice Minister Sean Fraser was pressed about the 'regulatory sandbox' and exemption clause in Bill C-15 during a Finance Committee meeting on Feb. 9. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Protection Act; the Agriculture and Agri-Food Committee, which heard from Agriculture Minister Heath MacDonald (Malpeque, P.E.I.) about the bill's proposed amendments to the Farm Credit Act; and the Government Operations and Estimates Committee, which discussed clauses of the bill with Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali (Brampton-Chinguacousy Park, Ont.).

"[Bill C-15] has taken its time. We are now, I think, at a point where we can see that there is a possibility that we might pick up the pace," said Liberal MP Carlos Leitão (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Que.) when asked by *The Hill Times* on Feb. 12 for a response to criticism that the bill has experienced delays in the legislative process.

"I think there was no consensus on how important it was—it is—to get this done. I think now that consensus appears to be there ... albeit very conditional, but I see that that consensus exists now."

Bill C-15, the Budget 2025 Implementation Act, No. 1, is the Liberal omnibus legislation intended to implement measures from last year's federal budget. The more than 600-page document, currently being considered by various House and Senate committees, proposes many changes, including introducing an early retirement incentive as a way to reduce the size of the public service without directly cutting jobs; to rescind the digital services tax; and to repeal the Underused Housing Tax starting in the 2025 calendar year.

The bill was tabled on Nov. 4, 2025, with second reading completed in the House on Dec. 10. Various House committees have been discussing the bill this month, including meetings on Feb. 12 by the House Environment Committee, which heard from Environment Minister Julie Dabrusin (Toronto-Danforth, Ont.) about the bill's proposed changes to the Canadian Environmental

"I'm hopeful that we're going to move forward with this bill," said MacDonald. "I won't speculate on the reasons. I think it would have to do with the meeting between the prime minister and the leader of the opposition, but it's been a more positive outcome."

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre (Battle River—Crowfoot, Alta.) signalled there would be greater co-operation between the Liberals and the Conservatives, following a meeting between him and Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) in Ottawa on Feb. 4. Following the meeting, Poilievre told reporters his message to Carney was to work with the Conservatives to "fast-track results for an affordable, safe, self-reliant Canada," and that, in regard to the current trade war with the United States, the Conservatives are "here to work with the prime minister and with the government to knock down these unjust tariffs and fight for our workers."

Carney responded in a post on X that "we need Parliament to



move swiftly to deliver for Canadians," adding it's "an important time to be working together."

Conservative MP Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, Ont.), another House Finance Committee member, told *The Hill Times* on Feb. 12 that she's heard in the House that some members have accused the Conservatives of filibustering on Bill C-15—an accusation she rejects.

"That is not the truth," said Cobena. "There was a schedule that was agreed to at the beginning, and we've been following it as agreed to."

A major source of contention for Conservative MPs concerning Bill C-15 is a provision (division 5 of part 5) that would amend the Red Tape Reduction Act to, among other changes, grant cabinet ministers the power to exempt any individual or firm from nearly any federal law—excluding the Criminal Code—for up to six years.

"There are some provisions that I think ... are concerning. So, we're talking through those. We're providing some suggested changes that I think would make the bill more effective," said Cobena.

In a video posted to Facebook on Feb. 11, Cobena argued this clause would grant a federal minister "powers like those of a king" with the ability "to suspend 150 years of Canadian law quietly behind closed doors."

"[The Liberals are] calling it a 'regulatory sandbox,' but this is not a sandbox. A sandbox has boundaries. It has limits, and it has adult supervision. This doesn't," said Cobena in the video. "No serious democracy works this way, so today I am demanding this Liberal government change this bill."

In the video, Cobena listed several amendments she argues would fix the bill, including that a minister should have to appear before a committee and explain the scope and the purpose of the exemptions, and that some laws, such as the Conflict of Interest Act, should never be exempt "regardless of the excuse."

"Regulatory sandboxes can help Canada move forward, but power without limits is not innovation. It is a huge risk," she said in the video.

"Fix this bill. Add transparency. Add oversight. Respect Parliament. Do that and this could be good for Canada, but if you leave it as is, it sets a very dangerous precedent."

Regulatory sandbox 'a huge concern': Conservative MP Hallan

Justice Minister Sean Fraser (Central Nova, N.S.) was pressed about the "regulatory sandbox" and exemption clause in Bill C-15 during a House Finance Committee meeting on Feb. 9.

During the meeting, Conservative MP Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, Ont.) asked Fraser if he wanted the power to give cabinet ministers "licence to exempt individuals or corporations from basically any federal law except for the Criminal Code for up to six years."

Fraser responded that he didn't agree with that characterization of the bill.

The justice minister defended "regulatory sandboxes" as a way for Canada to catch up with most of the industrialized world by ensuring that "we have the ability to keep pace with changes to technologies" so that Canadian industries don't fall behind.

"What I see is not a blanket ability to say some of the laws don't apply to some people. For a time-limited purpose, for a specific reason, we might be able to test a new technology that doesn't comply with existing laws because the laws were written at a time the technology didn't exist," said Fraser during the meeting.

"In circumstances such as those, it creates an opportunity for the innovation economy to create good-paying jobs in Canada by having new tech be tested out outside of the rubric that was imagined before the technology existed, so we can actually bring new ideas, new technology, into the Canadian economy."

Conservative finance critic Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, Alta.)

also asked about the regulatory power during the meeting, and repeatedly asked for a yes-or-no response on whether the proposed power under the bill for a minister to grant exemptions to any law or regulation in Canada also includes the Conflict of Interest Act.

Fraser responded that he would have a "hard time seeing how that would apply in an innovation context." He argued that protections have already been placed in Bill C-15 to guard against the harms suggested by Hallan.

"The protections that were included in the bill—they do exist. There's [a] time limit. You have to specify the purpose. It has to be done in public. Those are very real protections," Fraser told the committee.

In an interview with *The Hill Times* on Feb. 9, Hallan described the regulatory sandbox as "a huge concern."

"We've asked multiple ministers multiple questions, and we haven't gotten a single answer. The one question that they won't answer is, does it include the Conflict of Interest Act? And not a single minister has answered that," he said.

"There was a very straightforward question on, does it include the Conflict of Interest Act? Yes or no? [The Liberals] wrote the bill. They've had drafters look at it. They've had all these other experts look at it, and they can't answer a simple question like that. It raises huge questions."

When asked about moving forward with Bill C-15 through the legislative process, Hallan said that the Conservatives would put forward amendments, and "then we'll have to see from there."

"I don't know how any party can, with full faith on behalf of Canadians, support, especially that division itself, with all these alarm bells going off from everyone," he said.

Organizations that have raised concerns in regard to Bill C-15 include the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). In an online post on Jan. 19, the CCPA called the regulatory sandbox "an extremely troubling clause."

"In theory, this new provision applies equally to all individuals and corporations, but history tells us that large corporations have disproportionate access to government officials and are able to get their way. The broad nature of this new provision means that corporations could be able to avoid everything from environmental regulations to conflict of interest laws, so long as they have a single minister on board," reads the CCPA post.

"So, why is Prime Minister Carney's government trying to push through such a policy in an omnibus bill? It is worth noting the direct financial interest he holds in the corporate sector's profitability, through the shares he holds in 567 (mostly American) corporations, as revealed by his ethics disclosure. At the end of 2024, he owned about \$9-million in Brookfield Asset Management stock options alone."

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NEWS

Ottawa MPs Suds, Fanjoy urge changes to return-to-office order for public servants, as MPs debate ending hybrid Parliament



Liberal MPs Jenna Suds, left, and Bruce Fanjoy represent Ottawa-area ridings with thousands of federal public servants. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

Liberal MP Jenna Suds has called for 'flexibility' after fellow local caucus colleague Bruce Fanjoy criticized requirements that public servants work in-office four days a week starting in July, and executives five days a week starting in May.



Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali, left, speaks with Conservative MP Kelly McCauley at the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee on Feb. 12. When pressed if parliamentarians should also work in-person instead of a hybrid format, Ali said 'not on a routine basis, but under certain circumstances.' *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

executives will return five days a week starting in May.

Speaking at the committee, Suds said she worked in the public service for 13 years, and "I understand the dedication and commitment it takes whether it's remote, virtual, or hybrid," she said.

"Going forward, I will continue to work with you, our government, and our [National Capital Region] colleagues," Suds said, adding she'll "continue to advocate for meaningful flexibility as this policy is implemented."

Ali said Canada is going through a "global shift" and that involved "changing the course of working."

Fanjoy broke with his party first in speaking out against the new policy, saying there is "little to no evidence that a one-size-fits-all RTO policy will improve productivity or service to Cana-

dians," he wrote in a statement posted online.

He also said the new policy "makes it harder to achieve the government's priorities of reducing the operating costs of government, improving affordability, and respecting the environment. Instead, it will cost both the government and citizens more and increase pollution."

All other Ottawa-area MPs have remained silent on the issue, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported.

Suds and Fanjoy represent ridings that are between approximately 25 and 35 kilometres away from Ottawa's downtown, respectively, where many federal offices are located. Rush-hour traffic routinely chokes Highway 417, the city's main east-west artery, and Ottawa's beleaguered transit system has long been criticized for falling short of reliability targets. Additionally, most

O-Train vehicles are currently out of commission due to an ongoing issue with their wheels.

Responding to reporters' questions about Fanjoy's stance, Ali said "I respect everyone's opinion, and we all have differences of opinions. That's fine with me."

Ali also said earlier in the week, "I respect our public service employees for their work. They are the core of delivering services to Canadians. So, I mean, this is something we brought forward and we'll see—we'll engage with union leaders and see how it goes. So we'll work together."

As public servants grapple with being ordered back into the office four days a week, some politicians say they should also be walking the walk.

When pressed if parliamentarians should also work in-person instead of in a hybrid format, Ali said "everything has a benefit,

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put an end to hybrid sessions of Parliament.

Treasury Board President Shafqat Ali (Brampton—Chinguacousy Park, Ont.) appeared at the House Government Operations and Estimates Committee (OGGO) on Feb. 12, where Liberal MP Jenna Suds (Kanata, Ont.) said her riding is home to "thousands of public servants who do incredible work, critical work, every day serving Canadians."

Earlier in the week, Ottawa-area MP Bruce Fanjoy (Carleton, Ont.) spoke out against the new return-to-office (RTO) requirements that were recently announced, with Treasury Board Secretariat officials saying public servants will work in-office four days a week starting in July, and

and pros and cons ... not on a routine basis, but under certain circumstances."

MPs debate hybrid Parliament

During a Feb. 6 debate on the House's procedures, Conservative MP Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills North, Ont.) said it's time to end hybrid Parliament sessions, which has been in place in some form since spring 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are the only national legislature amongst western Liberal democracies to remain in hybrid mode," Chong said in the House of Commons, noting the United Kingdom ended its hybrid sittings in July 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives ended hybrid sittings in January 2023, and Australia's parliament ended hybrid sittings in July 2022.

Chong added France's National Assembly never actually had hybrid mode, saying "the court declared it unconstitutional, mandating that members of the legislature appear in person throughout the pandemic time."

Meetings via videoconference began in April 2020, and shifted fully to a hybrid virtual format in September that year. Remote voting was adopted in February 2021, and the House permanently changed its rules to continue operating in a hybrid format in 2023, though the shift wasn't without issue, as virtual proceedings led to a spike in injuries for language interpreters that work on the Hill.

Liberal MP Corey Hogan (Calgary Confederation, Alta.) said that, as a father of three and a son of aging parents, he appreciates "the flexibility that hybrid sittings have allowed on those unique occasions when it was necessary."

Hogan said his father was recently hospitalized in the intensive care unit for 11 days, "and being able to be there at his bedside and do my work for Parliament from the hospital was really important to me," he said, suggesting a "modified hybrid Parliament" that would allow "in certain exigent circumstances, the use of hybrid sittings."

Bloc Québécois MP Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, Que.) agreed that hybrid Parliament needs to be "tweaked," with remote attendance "a little more of an exception than they are right now," including for family reasons, or health reasons, as approved by the party whip in order to ensure limited use.

"Hybrid Parliament does create some challenges, particularly in terms of interpretation resources. Not everyone is aware of that," he said. "It does indeed create significant challenges."

Perron said there's also an "issue" of members attending committee meetings remotely, which he also said should be allowed for health or family reasons.

"But if a member is participating remotely, they should not be in a public place or in a car," he said. "We have seen all kinds of foolish and ridiculous situations."

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Fix Question Period, elect House committee chairs, and end hybrid House sittings, say some Grit and Tory MPs: ‘Question Period is our marquee accountability mechanism’

But Liberal MP Kevin Lamoureux says the current rules do not need any change because they provide decorum and predictability in the House.

Continued from page 1

MPs. They say Question Period should be overhauled, committee chairs and members of the House of Commons Board of Internal Economy should be elected by secret ballot, and hybrid sittings should be brought to an end.

“Question Period is our marquee accountability mechanism,” said first-term Liberal MP Corey Hogan (Calgary Confederation, Alta.) in an interview with *The Hill Times*. “It’s how Parliament performs its duty to hold the government to account on a daily basis. Like, if something happens, the government in our system is responsive to the House or they’re supposed to be. And so we need thoughtful questions, we need thoughtful answers.”

Under the current rules, both questions and answers in Question Period are limited to 35 seconds each. Hogan argued that this format “forces us to be quippy, short, unsubstantive.”

“I don’t know how you make accountability out of that,” he added.

Hogan said this is the reason many Canadians consider Question Period to be “bad theatre,” and tune out altogether. As a result, the House is unable to effectively hold the government to account, which is a loss for Canadians at a time when the country is navigating complex challenges, including a trade war with the United States.

To make Question Period more meaningful and to receive more substantive responses from the prime minister and cabinet ministers, Hogan suggested that the House experiment a couple of times a week with extending both questions and government answers to two minutes each.

“Longer questions and answers do not guarantee substance, but they do increase the cost of dodging the question,” said Hogan in his Feb. 6 speech in the House.



Conservative MP Michael Chong, left, and Liberal MP Corey Hogan both want to see changes to how the House of Commons works. *The Hill Times* photographs by Andrew Meade

“They force consistency. They expose ignorance. They reward members who have a firm grasp on their files and penalize those who do not. More in-depth discourse is the most important change we can consider. We shape our systems, and then our systems shape us. If we allow Question Period to be shallow, we will become shallow. If we allow Question Period to be thoughtful, we will be thoughtful.”

Hogan told *The Hill Times* that he’s planning on submitting his ideas to reform Question Period to the Procedure and House Affairs Committee in the coming weeks.

Secret-ballot chair elections would strengthen committees: Conservative MP Chong

In response to Hogan’s speech, Conservative MP Michael Chong (Wellington-Halton Hills North, Ont.) also put forward his own ideas that same day on parliamentary reform. He began by stating that the leadership team of each party provides a list of names of MPs to speak, which deprives the speaker of using their discretion to recognize who should speak in the House.

He also said that committee chairs and members of the powerful Board of Internal Economy should be elected through a secret ballot, not by appointment by the leadership of all parties. The powerful Commons Board of Internal Economy, chaired by the House Speaker, oversees the governance of the House, including an annual budget of \$656-million and over-

sees all of the bylaws for MPs. In addition, Chong said that members of House committees should also be elected through MPs’ use of a preferential secret ballot.

Within the House, Chong said, senior procedural and administration officials like the House clerk and sergeant-at-arms should be appointed by the House Speaker on the recommendation of a committee that would vet these candidates. Currently, these appointments are made by the prime minister.

“In totality, the secret preferential ballot election of committee chairs and the secret preferential ballot election of committee members would strengthen the role of committees in this place and ensure that there is more accountability of the executive branch of government to the House and its committees,” said the eight-term MP.

As well, Chong called for the end of hybrid House sittings, arguing that Canada’s House of Commons is the only legislature among Western democracies to permanently make its proceedings hybrid following the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out that the United Kingdom ended its hybrid sittings in 2021, the United States House of Representatives ended theirs in 2023, and Australia’s Parliament ended hybrid sittings in 2022. The French National Assembly never adopted hybrid sittings.

Legislatures around the world started using the hybrid sittings during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. But prior to that, Canada’s MPs had to be present in the House to vote and participate in other parliamentary proceedings.

Now, they can vote using an app, and can attend House and committee proceedings remotely.

Chong also pointed out that compared to the U.S. and the U.K., the Canadian House of Commons sits fewer days each year. He said the U.S. House of Representative sits between 165 to 190 days per year, and the U.K. House of Commons sits between 146 and 162 days per year. This country’s House of Commons sits only 129 days a year and provincial legislatures even fewer than that. Chong suggested that the House should sit “through much of July and early August,” and start earlier in January.

“Checks and balances on power and how power is distributed in Parliament are an extremely important topic of debate,” said Chong in his speech.

“We have all seen what has happened in other democracies over the last number of years—the weakening of guardrails and the importance of guardrails in restraining executive power. Particularly in a Westminster parliamentary democracy, where the executive is not elected but appointed, and not only appointed but appointed out of this place, it is really important to have the rules and procedures in place to ensure that the legislature can hold the executive branch of government accountable,” Chong said.

Parl Sec Lamoureux cool to many proposed changes

But Liberal MP Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg South, Man.),

parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, said he does not believe that any change needs to be made to Question Period. He said the answers to questions from opposition parties depends a lot on the intent of the questioner. He said that the current environment in the legislature is highly partisan, and when opposition members frame their questions to score political points, ministers tend to respond in kind.

“If you have some MPs that want to look for specific answers—and a lot depends on what the motivation is—and if it’s a highly politicized motivation, you will likely get that sort of an answer,” Lamoureux told *The Hill Times*.

As for the discretion of the House Speaker to recognize MPs, Lamoureux said, the current rules provide a level of decorum and without that, there could be situations where three or four MPs could rise at the same time to ask questions.

At the same time, Lamoureux said, party leaders could enter the House not knowing whether they will be recognized by the Speaker to ask the first question or even the next two or three that follow. Even with the current rules, Lamoureux said, the House speaker has a lot of discretion and can recognize an MP to speak if they want to.

But Lamoureux said that he’s open to the idea of electing Board of Internal Economy members directly by their respective caucuses.

Lamoureux disagreed with the idea of abandoning hybrid sittings though he said he’s open to the idea that certain votes would be required to be held in person, such as those for the budget or the Throne Speech.

The House of Commons made changes in the House standing orders in 2023 making hybrid Parliaments permanent. The final vote tally on this vote was 173-137.

When the House decided to make hybrid sittings permanent, former Liberal cabinet minister Wayne Easter, who served as an MP between 1993 and 2021, told *The Hill Times* in 2023 that he disagreed with his former colleagues on this decision.

He said that the new work arrangement negatively affects all facets of an MP’s parliamentary work, including House debates, committee meetings, caucus meetings, and the daily Question Period. He argued that personal interactions amongst government and opposition MPs are critical to hold the government to account.

Easter said that without in-person sittings, MPs can’t exchange views, hold private discussions, or build alliances to make important decisions on how to vote in the House or in committees, the latter of which is a key way backbenchers hold the government to account. He said that if an MP is not willing to come to Ottawa full time, they should not run for Parliament.

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NEWS

Canada faces 'an emergency of extraordinary proportions' with Trump, say foreign affairs and trade experts

U.S. President Donald Trump's recent rant on Truth Social about the bridge linking Windsor, Ont., to Detroit, Mich., augers badly for the upcoming review of North America's trade pact, say foreign affairs and trade experts.

Continued from page 1

international trade lawyer with Cassidy Levy Kent, as well as a senior fellow with the C.D. Howe Institute.

"We are in an emergency of extraordinary proportions. Canada is facing a crisis of great significance, and we are threatened in very, very serious ways."

On Feb. 11, the U.S. House of Representatives voted—by a margin of 219 to 211, which included six Republicans—to rescind tariffs imposed against Canada last year. The resolution is unlikely to become law, however, because Trump has veto powers.

Herman agreed that the vote is largely symbolic, but added that it shows there's "a growing concern in the Republican Party over Trump's aggressive tariff policies and his trade war waged on Canada."

"That sentiment while it is ... a symbolic gesture, it is more than

that in the sense that it shows a weakening in the Republican base of these egregious tariff policies waged against Canada—a friendly co-operative that has been working closely with the United States for 150 years," said Herman.

In a Feb. 11 post on X, Ontario Premier Doug Ford called the U.S. House vote "an important victory with more work ahead."

Canada's overall relationship with the U.S. has "deteriorated significantly" under Trump, said Herman.

In a recent example of the strained bilateral relations, Trump claimed in a lengthy Feb. 9 post on Truth Social that Canada has treated the U.S. unfairly, and threatened to block the opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge—a new bridge linking Windsor, Ont., with Detroit, Mich.—unless the U.S. is "fully compensated."

In the post, Trump made several false or misleading claims, such as stating the bridge was built with "virtually no U.S. content," although Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) pointed out on Feb. 10 that the bridge's ownership is shared between the state of Michigan and the Canadian government, and that the construction involved Canadian and American workers, as well as steel sourced from both nations.

Trump also neglected to mention in the post that he endorsed the bridge early in his first presidency, when he issued a joint statement with then-prime minister Justin Trudeau in which they said they "look forward to the expeditious completion of the Gordie Howe International Bridge, which will serve as a vital

economic link between our two countries."

Herman told *The Hill Times* that Trump's post about the bridge is another example of the president's unpredictability. He said this development augurs very badly for the first joint review the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) on July 1.

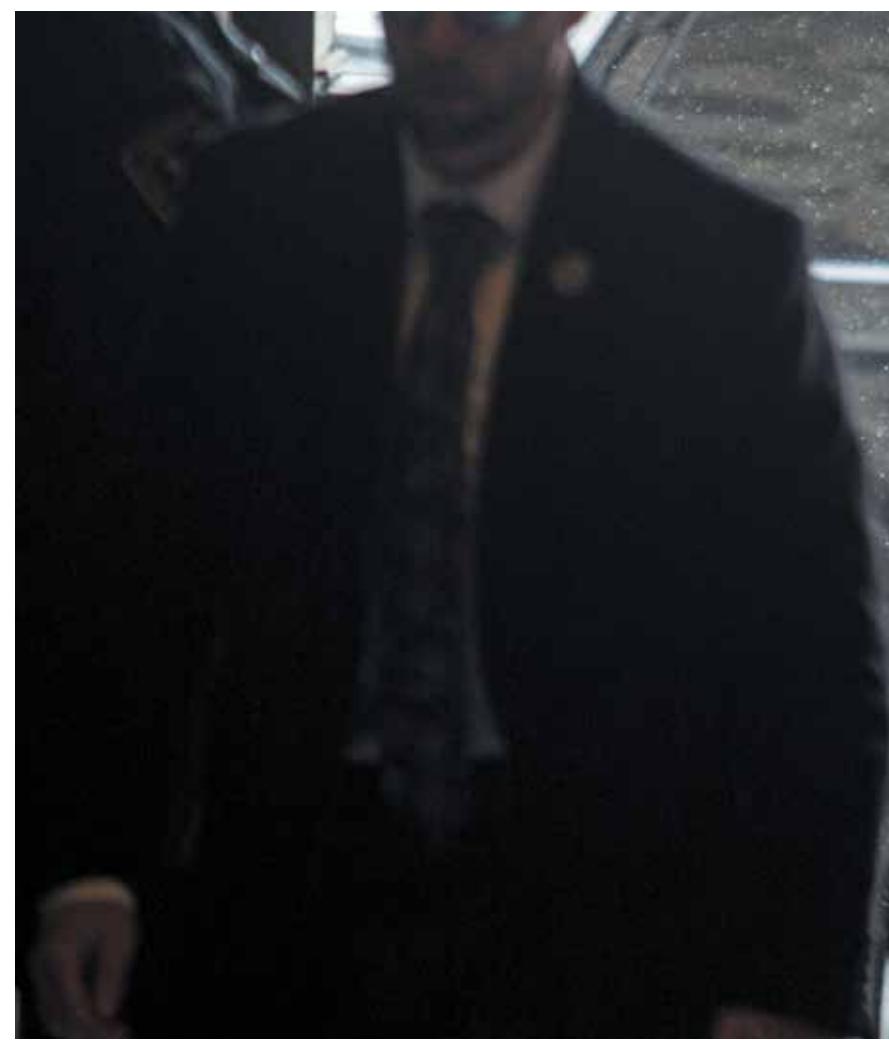
"It's an indication of an approach by the Trump administration that is very one-sided—that he will use whatever threats [or] blackmail he can use to try to squeeze concessions from Canada and from Mexico," he said.

"The physical consequences are tariff increases on Canadian automobiles, on steel and aluminum and other products—these tariffs have ... an incredibly negative effect, and it's caused a lot of pain in those industries. People have been laid off. Production lines have been closed down, and so those are the actual physical manifestations of Donald Trump's tariff wars."

Amid the ongoing trade war, Herman emphasized the need for Canada to strengthen its internal economy, which he said means improving productivity, increasing efficiency, and dismantling interprovincial trade barriers. He also stressed the importance of trade diversification so Canada is less dependent on the U.S.

Herman said political leaders need to decisively show "how unified we are as a country and avoid political gamesmanship," and said that "the cause of separatism has to be abandoned," referring to current separation talk in both Alberta and Quebec.

The Alberta Prosperity Project (APP), a pro-independence group, is currently seeking 177,732 sig-



natures—representing 10 per cent of eligible voters—to mandate a provincial referendum under the Citizen Initiative Act. The APP has set a goal on its website of Alberta becoming a sovereign nation by summer 2027.

In Quebec, that province's general election is scheduled for Oct. 5, 2026, although it may be called earlier. The Parti Québécois, led by Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, is currently leading in polls and has promised a referendum on sovereignty if elected to government.

'It's unlikely the relationship will ever go back to the pleasant days': Prof. Nossal

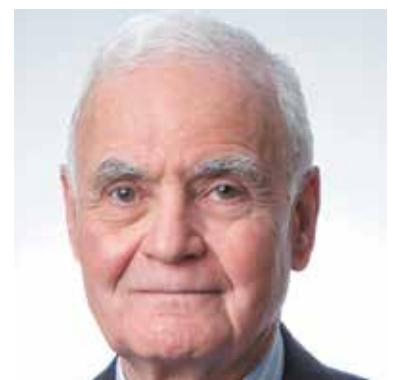
Kim Richard Nossal, professor emeritus in the department of political studies at Queen's University, told *The Hill Times* that the consequences of deteriorating relations with the U.S. won't be truly known until after the CUSMA review.

Bloomberg reported on Feb. 11 that Trump has been privately talking about exiting the North American trade pact.

"We won't really know what that will mean in real terms until the [CUSMA] is reviewed because right now, in a sense, we've been ... kind of lucky in the sense that we still are doing a ton of trade under more or less the old rules," he said.

"It won't really be until the president reveals what his intentions are for the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement ... and that is likely then to have the kind of impact, the real impact, that would allow you to say, 'Well, this is the real result of the disruption in the relationship.'

Nossal argued that Canada's relationship with the U.S. will



Lawrence Herman, an international trade lawyer with Cassidy Levy Kent and a senior fellow with the C.D. Howe Institute, says Canada's overall relationship with the U.S. has 'deteriorated significantly' under the Trump administration. *Photograph courtesy of the C.D. Howe Institute*

likely never be repaired as long as Trump is in the White House.

"I just don't think that the relationship is going to be in any sense repaired for as long as he is there. He just simply has too much of a sense of grievance as evidenced in that Truth Social post about the Gordie Howe bridge," he said.

"Even if Mr. Trump were to depart before 2028, it's unlikely that the relationship will, in fact, ever go back to the sort of the pleasant days when Canada was treated as a friend and a partner by the United States, by the administration in the United States."

Nossal argued that Trump's repeated threats in the last year of annexation, including comments that Canada could become America's 51st state in order to avoid steep tariffs, were unexpected.

"I think that the idea that there's going to be the need to defend ourselves from a military



Prime Minister Mark Carney, pictured on the Hill on Feb. 11, 2026, has said the old relationship with U.S. is over. Professor Kim Richard Nossal wants to see Carney "follow the logic of that observation," and to continue attempts to diversify trade partners. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

In response, Carney said he expected the U.S. to always "respect Canadian sovereignty," during a press conference in Ottawa on Jan. 29.

Graeme Thompson, a senior analyst with Eurasia Group's Global Macro team, told *The Hill Times* that he thinks Canada's current relations with the U.S. is the worst it has been in the last 100 years.

He said Canada's political leaders need to deal with the U.S. "realistically and with clear eyes" in "as constructive a way as is possible" because it remains in this country's national interest that bilateral relations are productive.

"[The U.S.] may not, at the moment, be as intimate and as friendly as they have been, and I'm sure they will be again in the future, but ... we have to accept the world as it is and not as we would like it to be. I think the countries that have shown the ability to deal with the United States effectively in the current circumstances are not going around unnecessarily provoking Washington, but they are standing firm when it is in their interest to do so," he said.

"Canada and United States are joined at the hip. They always will be, and one has to remember that whatever we're feeling about the bilateral relationship today ... that this will continue to define Canada's prosperity and its safety for decades to come, and so one should not take a short-sighted approach."

Eurasia Group released a forecast of the year's top political risks on Jan. 5, 2026, and evaluated Canada to be the country most vulnerable from the fallout of the "political revolution" currently underway in the U.S. The report warns that systematic efforts by Trump to "dismantle checks on his power and weaponize the machinery of government against his political enemies" will inevitably result in a reshaping of Canada-U.S. relations, the Canadian economy, and how this country engages with the rest of the world.

When asked about the possibility of chaos in the U.S. brought on by political turmoil, Thompson said, "One can never rule out the possibility of political violence in the United States," but also argued that the chance of sustained civil unrest in the country appear overstated.

"The United States has always been a volatile and noisy place politically, and, in all likelihood, the current political tensions and conflicts are going to stay within the bounds of politics," he said.

"If there was sustained unrest in the United States, it clearly would affect Canada, and the best thing for Canada to do would be ... keep its head down and not involve itself in the internal affairs of the United States, and do what is necessary, whether at the border internationally or in trade and investment, to defend and advance Canada's sovereignty and national interest."

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Prime Minister Mark Carney, left, told U.S. President Donald Trump that the construction of the Gordie Howe International Bridge involved both Canadian and American workers, as well as steel sourced from both countries. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade and courtesy of Wikimedia Commons



Perrin Beatty, a former federal Progressive Conservative cabinet minister, says, "Nobody could have anticipated ... that somebody of the nature of Donald Trump would come along." *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

attack by the United States is pretty minimal," said Nossal.

"What is problematic is to defend ourselves and our sovereignty and our autonomy ... rather than simply to become a vassal of the United States."

Nossal said he agrees with Carney's statement last March that the old relationship with U.S. is over. Nossal said his advice to Carney would be to "follow the logic of that observation," and to continue attempts to diversify trade partners.

"In other words, [Canada must] try and diversify as much and as quickly as possible, so that we no longer are so very vulnerable to access to the American market," he said.

"We are going to have to do things like beef up our own capacities to protect ourselves on things like food and drugs when the United States is not able to do it, to stop organizing ourselves

as though we were still a partner of the United States in defence terms."

'Trump senses division and he exploits it': Perrin Beatty

Perrin Beatty, a former federal Progressive Conservative cabinet minister, told *The Hill Times* that Canada is at a low point in its relations with the U.S.

"Since the 1980s, at least—and I would argue even before that—our relationship with the United States has been based on the premise that our interests were so symbiotic, so mutually reinforcing, that neither country would ever do anything deliberately to harm the other," said Beatty.

"Nobody could have anticipated, for example, at the time that we went into the free-trade agreement with the United States in 1988 that somebody of the

nature of Donald Trump would come along, and so the government simply didn't plan for something like that."

Beatty's more than two decades of experience in Parliament include serving as a cabinet minister across seven different portfolios such as Foreign Affairs, Treasury Board, and Defence.

When asked what advice he has for Canada's political leaders in the face of the deteriorating relationship with the U.S., Beatty—like Herman—emphasized national unity.

"We need to speak with one voice. Donald Trump senses division and he exploits it. We can expect that he's likely going to interfere in any referendum that's held in Alberta, if one is held later this year. He will look to exploit any differences that there are within Canada itself, either regional differences or political

differences or sectional differences of any other sort," he said.

"We need to speak with one voice—and strongly—and to recognize that our success depends upon our ability to put our citizenship ahead of our partisanship. We need to focus in the short term on damage control—how we ensure that, as long as Donald Trump remains president, the damage that he does to Canada's interest is as limited as possible, and we need to look for opportunities where we can actually make progress."

In a post on the APP website in late December that was updated on Feb. 3, the Alberta separatist group stated that its representatives have undertaken several "strategic trips" to Washington, D.C., to discuss provincial sovereignty, and to emphasize building partnerships with the U.S. APP co-founder Jeffrey Rath said in a post on X that he looks forward

NEWS

Preparing for a possible early election, Conservatives closing first batch of 16 riding nominations this month: sources

Conservative nomination applications for some ridings are due on Feb. 25. Those electoral districts 'should begin forming candidate nomination committees without delay,' states a memo from the party's headquarters, obtained by *The Hill Times*. And Elan Harper, Stephen Harper's sister-in-law, wants to run in Calgary Confederation.

Continued from page 1

Of these, nine are in Ontario, three in Nova Scotia, one in New Brunswick, two in British Columbia, and one in Alberta.

The notices were sent to the following ridings: Central Nova, N.S.; South Shore-St. Margarets, N.S.; Sydney-Glace Bay, N.S.; Madawaska-Restigouche, N.B.; Brampton-Chinguacousy Park, Ont.; Brampton North-Caledon, Ont.; Brampton East, Ont.; Brampton South, Ont.; Brampton Centre, Ont.; Mississauga East-Cooksville, Ont.; Scarborough Southwest, Ont.; Milton East-Halton Hills South, Ont.; St. Catharines, Ont.; Calgary Confederation, Alta.; New Westminster-Burnaby-Maillardville, B.C.; and Vancouver Centre, B.C.

"I am writing to advise you of the nomination closing notice in the electoral district of Milton East-Halton Hill South occurring on Wed., Feb. 25, 2026 at

5 p.m. Eastern Time," states the notice sent on Feb. 4 by Mike Crase, executive director of the party to riding association members.

"Anybody who wishes to be a nomination contestant must submit their completed candidate nomination application to Conservative Party of Canada Headquarters by 5 p.m. Eastern Time on Wed. Feb. 25, 2026."

The notice also said that anyone who wants to be eligible to vote in this nomination contest must be a member of the party and the electoral district association by Feb. 25.

Also on Feb. 4—the same day the party headquarters sent out nomination closing notices—the party's political operations department sent a memo to all riding presidents informing them about the start of the nomination process across the country and stating they should start preparing.

"Electoral districts that are 'open' for the purposes of Sec. 4 of the rules, should begin forming candidate nomination committees without delay," reads the memo that was obtained by *The Hill Times*.

"Details on the makeup of these committees can be found in Sec. 6 of the rules linked above. Individuals interested in pursuing the candidate nomination and requesting an application should be referred to your regional organizer."

The date and location of nomination elections for any of the 16 ridings were not announced by press time.

The Conservative Party's communications office was not available to comment for this story.

At the Conservative Party's recent Jan. 29-31 policy convention in Calgary, Alta., campaign director Steve Outhouse told *The Hill Times* that in a minority Parliament an election could happen at any time, and said the Conservatives are preparing just in case one is called in the spring. Outhouse said it appears to him that the Liberals are trying to find a reason to trigger a spring election.

Prime Minister Mark Carney's (Nepean, Ont.) Liberals

won 169 seats—three seats short of a majority—following the last election on April 28, 2025. The Conservatives, led by Pierre Poilievre (Battle River—Crowfoot, Alta.), won 144 seats, the Bloc Québécois 22, the NDP seven, and the Greens one.

The number of seats possessed by the Liberals and Conservatives has shifted since then. Chris d'Entremont (Acadie Annapolis, N.S.) and Michael Ma (Markham-Unionville, Ont.), originally elected as Conservatives, crossed the floor to join the Liberals late last year. Also, two Liberals—Chrystia Freeland and Bill Blair—have recently stepped down for other opportunities. Freeland is now an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, while Blair has been appointed as Canada's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom.

"Right now, the Liberals are looking for an excuse to call a spring election," said Outhouse last month. "They're going to try to manufacture a reason to do that. There have been certain talking heads and ministers out there already trying to lay the groundwork for that. We're going to be ready for it."

Outhouse said he's putting together his team and focusing on other components required for a successful campaign. He declined to share any specifics.

Online portal out; Harper's sister-in-law wants in

For the last election campaign, the Conservatives used an online portal for candidates to apply for the nominations, but they have now reverted to the traditional system where candidates are receiving applications by email and they submit their complete applications in PDF form, Conservative sources told *The Hill Times*.

The application process through the previous online portal system involved multiple steps, and party headquarters had full control over who could complete and submit an application. At any point in the process, access could be restricted, effectively preventing an individual from proceeding.



In preparation for a possible early election, Pierre Poilievre's Conservatives have started the process to nominate candidates across the country. As of last week, nominations were open in 16 ridings in five provinces. They will close on Feb. 25. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

nomination in a bid to challenge Liberal MP Corey Hogan in the riding. More candidates are expected to enter the race by Feb. 25.

Alberta is the bedrock of the Conservative Party base where they won 34 of the province's 37 seats in the last election. The Liberals won Calgary Confederation and Edmonton Centre, and the NDP carried the Edmonton Strathcona riding.

"Today, I'm announcing my intention to seek the Conservative Party nomination in the Calgary Confederation riding," said Elan Harper in declaring her candidacy on LinkedIn.

"I'm running because I believe Canada deserves a better government than the one they have. I believe deeply in the promise of a prosperous Canada, not just for today, but for the next generation, and achieving that promise requires disciplined fiscal leadership and serious, principled governance."

According to her LinkedIn profile, she worked in opposition leader Poilievre's office between 2023 and July 2025 as policy lead on finance, tax, energy, environment, completion and innovation. Currently, she works as a director focusing on Canadian business tax for Andersen in Canada, an accounting firm.

In making her case as the best possible candidate to grassroots Conservative Party members in the riding, Harper wrote that her bid is backed by a mix of corporate and political experience. She said that she has previously worked for both Poilievre and former prime minister Harper, and that she managed the campaign in Calgary Skyview, where the party secured a victory.

In the last election, Hogan faced former Alberta MLA Jason Nixon in the race. Nixon did not respond to requests for comment from *The Hill Times*. Hogan narrowly eked out a victory, winning by a margin of 1,248 or 1.82 per cent of the vote. The riding became open after three-term Conservative MP Len Webber chose not to seek re-election.

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Hill Climbers

By Laura Ryckewaert

One out, two in for Veterans Affairs Minister Jill McKnight



Veterans Affairs Minister Jill McKnight at the Royal Canadian Legion's poppy flag-raising event on Parliament Hill on Oct. 31, 2025. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Meanwhile, there are some updates to note in Defence Minister David McGuinty's office where Maya Ouferhat is now press secretary.

Veterans Affairs and Associate Defence Minister Jill McKnight has a new West and North regional affairs adviser on her team following Iqra Ishtiaq's recent departure.

Ishtiaq, who had joined McKnight's ministerial team not long after the April 2025 federal election, made her exit at the beginning of January.

Ishtiaq is a former constituency assistant to then-Delta, B.C., Liberal MP Carla Qualtrough who found her way to McKnight's office after spending last year's election helping the first-time MP and minister get elected to succeed Qualtrough as the MP for Delta. Post-election, Ishtiaq briefly worked in McKnight's riding office before being hired to her ministerial team.

Since hired to replace her in covering both the West and North regional desks for the minister is Nick Sushko.

Sushko walked a similar path to McKnight's ministerial office: he, too, was most recently working for her in her capacity as the MP for Delta, having spent the election as McKnight's deputy campaign manager, and is also a former constituency aide to Qualtrough. Prior to being hired by Qualtrough in 2022, Sushko had spent that summer as an intern in then-Liberal MP John Aldag's constituency office in Cloverdale-Langley City, B.C.

He's not the only new regional adviser on the veterans affairs minister's team since *Hill Climbers*' last check in.

Daniel-Alejandro Pereira Rengifo has also been hired as a regional affairs adviser for both Quebec and the Atlantic.

Pereira Rengifo joined McKnight's team last fall, fresh from a six-month run working as an associate for market research company Potloc in Montreal. He's also previously worked on business development for Lightspeed Commerce, a tech company that provides point-of-sale and e-commerce platforms, and Cision, both in Montreal.



Nick Sushko now covers the West and North regional desks for Minister McKnight. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*



Daniel-Alejandro Pereira Rengifo is another new regional adviser to Minister McKnight. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Originally, post-election, **Yasmin Veiga** had been hired to cover the Quebec and Atlantic desks for McKnight—having previously been a Quebec operations adviser to then-veterans affairs minister **Darren Fisher**, and a special assistant to then-minister **Ginette Petitpas Taylor**—but she exited early last fall to become a Quebec regional adviser to Agriculture Minister **Heath MacDonald**.

Also currently serving as a regional adviser to McKnight is **Abina Mohanarajah**, who is responsible for Ontario.

Riya Khanna is director of operations to the veterans minister, whose office is run by chief of staff **Dilys Fernandes**.

The now 11-member team also currently includes: **Michael Hamm**, director of policy; **Dana Shami**, policy



National Defence Minister David McGuinty, right, and Japanese Ambassador Kanji Yamanouchi at the Department of National Defence headquarters in Ottawa on Jan. 27 for the signing of the Canada-Japan Equipment and Technology Transfer Agreement. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

adviser; **Colin Lalonde**, director of parliamentary affairs; **Adam Rogers-Green**, director of communications; **Faith Ross**, executive assistant to the minister; and driver **Jacob Hiseman**.

A recent *Hill Times* breakdown of federal lobbying activity in 2025 found McKnight among the top most lobbied ministers last year, ranking fourth with 143 communications reports related to meetings with the minister filed since she took on her role last May. Energy and Natural Resources Minister **Tim Hodgson** had the most communication with lobbyists, with 273 reports, followed by Industry Minister **Mélanie Joly**, and Environment, Climate Change, and Nature Minister **Julie Dabrusin**.

Updates for Defence Minister McGuinty's team

Catching up with Defence Minister **David McGuinty**'s now 18-person shop, there are two staff still as yet unreported in these pages.

Late last year, **Maya Ouferhat** joined the team as press secretary to the minister.



Maya Ouferhat is press secretary to the defence minister. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

She spent the previous four years working for the Liberal research bureau (LRB). First landing in the LRB as a summer intern through the Liberal Party's Summer Leadership Program in 2021, she was subsequently hired as a special assistant for digital strategy and analytics. Ouferhat was subsequently twice promoted, most recently to manager of the digital strategy and analytics team in 2023.



Samuel Serviss is office manager and executive assistant to McGuinty's chief of staff. *Photograph courtesy of LinkedIn*

Samuel Serviss is office manager and executive assistant to McGuinty's chief of staff. **Ezechiel Nana**, regional adviser for Quebec; **Quinn Rinke**, West and North regional adviser; **Nicholas Hautamaki**, Atlantic regional adviser; **Gwendolyn Culver**, director of parliamentary affairs; **Audrey Aubut**, senior parliamentary affairs adviser; **Jean-Michel Tweed**, assistant to the parliamentary secretary, Liberal MP **Sherry Romanado**; and **Claire Fisher**, executive assistant to the minister.

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Ouferhat spent last spring's federal election working with the central Liberal campaign's communications team, tackling both organic and paid digital strategy.

Laurent de Casanove previously filled the role of press secretary and senior communications adviser to the defence minister—a job he'd started in under then-minister **Bill Blair**—but exited last fall to become director of communications to Government Transformation, Public Works, and Procurement Minister **Joël Lightbound**.

Ouferhat now works closely with McGuinty's director of communications, **Alice Hansen**, and communications adviser for social media and strategic communications, **Muntaha Ahmed**.

In a more belated update, **Samuel Serviss** is office manager and executive assistant to the minister's chief of staff, **Cory Pike**.

Though unmentioned in previous efforts to confirm McGuinty's team, **Hill Climbers** understands Serviss has been with the minister's office since September.

Serviss was most recently working in the construction industry, focused on operations, in Cambridge, U.K., but has previously filled a number of roles in the Canadian Armed Forces as part of the Army Primary Reserves. Over a decade with the CAF, he was twice deployed to Latvia—between 2019 and 2020, and again in 2022—and was an instructor with the Royal Canadian Armoured Corps School in Gagetown, N.B.

Serviss is also a former part-time senior military adviser with the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

McGuinty's team otherwise currently includes: **Radey Barrack**, director of policy; senior policy advisers **Hilary Hendriks** and **Conor Lewis**; **Renée Filiault**, senior adviser; **Andrew Green**, director of operations; **Alexa Kalsatos**, senior operations and Greater Toronto Area regional adviser; **Eze**

chiel Nana, regional adviser for Quebec; **Quinn Rinke**, West and North regional adviser; **Nicholas Hautamaki**, Atlantic regional adviser; **Gwendolyn Culver**, director of parliamentary affairs; **Audrey Aubut**, senior parliamentary affairs adviser; **Jean-Michel Tweed**, assistant to the parliamentary secretary, Liberal MP **Sherry Romanado**; and **Claire Fisher**, executive assistant to the minister.

Parliamentary Calendar



Joly to deliver keynote address at 10th Ontario Economic Report launch on Feb. 19 in Toronto



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 on Thursday, Feb. 19, at 11:30 a.m. in Toronto. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

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.

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, 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.

Ministers Olszewski and Valdez at Fundraiser—Emergency Management Minister Eleanor Olszewski and Minister for Women and Gender Equality Rechie Valdez will take part in a fundraising event hosted by the Edmonton Centre Federal Liberal Association. Wednesday, Feb. 18, at 6:30 p.m. MT at The Lingnan, 10582 104 Street NW, Edmonton. Details: liberal.ca.

Lecture: 'Demolition By Neglect'—Heritage Ottawa hosts its annual Bob and Mary Anne Phillips Memorial Lecture on 'Demolition By Neglect: Preserving the Past Before It's Too

Late.' Four panelists will look at various causes of demolition by neglect—from wilful abandonment to costs of rehabilitation—consider possible solutions, and share examples of both positive and negative situations in Ottawa. Wednesday, Feb. 18, at 7 p.m. ET happening online: heritageottawa.org.

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.

Black Public Servants Networking Mixer—The Black Employees Network at the Treasury Board Secretariat hosts a Black Public Servants Networking Mixer on the theme "Building Legacy, Shaping the Future" encouraging dialogue, relationship-building, mentorship and career development for Black employees and allies. Thursday, Feb. 19, at 5 p.m. ET at 240 Sparks St., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.

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.

Lecture: 'The Second Emancipation'—As part of the "On the Frontlines of Democracy" lecture series, the Toronto Public Library and Toronto Metropolitan University co-host renowned journalist and

scholar Howard W. French who will discuss "The Second Emancipation," exploring Pan-Africanism and anti-colonial movements of the 1960s and today. Thursday, Feb. 19, at 7 p.m. ET at the Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge St., Toronto. Details via Eventbrite.

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–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

Joint Forces Command; and Lisa Lambert, CEO of Quantum Industry Canada, among other participants. Tuesday, Feb. 24, at 11:30 a.m. ET at Arcadian Court, Simpson Tower, 8th floor, Toronto. Register: empireclubofcanada.com.

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. Thursday, Feb. 24, at 12 p.m. ET at 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-Maneuvered 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.

Book Talk: *Prime Ministers and Their Cabinets*—Stephen Azzi and Patrice Dutil will discuss the recently published book they edited, *Statecraft: Canadian Prime Ministers and Their Cabinets*, hosted by the Bill Graham Centre for Contemporary History. Historian Robert Bothwell will also take part. Wednesday, Feb. 25, at 4 p.m. ET at the Campbell Conference Facility, 1 Devonshire Place, Toronto. Details: billgrahamcentre.utoronto.ca.

THURSDAY, FEB. 26

Michaëlle Jean to Deliver Remarks—Former governor general Michaëlle Jean will take part in a French discussion with Toronto francophone youth, "La relève rencontre l'histoire," a Black History Month event hosted by Le Club canadien de Toronto. Thursday, Feb. 26, at 11:30 a.m. ET at The National Club, 303 Bay St., Toronto. Details: clubcanadien.ca.

Bombardier President and CEO to Deliver Remarks—Éric Martel, president and CEO of Bombardier, will deliver remarks on "Canadian Industrial Leadership and Global Dynamics" at a lunch event hosted by the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations. Thursday, Feb. 26, at 11:30 a.m. ET at Fairmont Le Reine-Elizabeth, 900 Blvd René-Lévesque O., Montreal. Register: corim.qc.ca.

Minister LeBlanc to Deliver Remarks—Canada-U.S. Trade Minister Dominic LeBlanc will deliver remarks at a lunch event hosted by the Canadian Club of Toronto. Thursday, Feb. 26, at 11:45 a.m. ET at an undisclosed location in Toronto. Register: canadianclub.org.

MP Kayabaga to Take Part in Panel—Deputy Government House Leader Arielle Kayabaga will take part in a panel, "Africa, the Caribbean and Canada: Unlocking Growth Across the New Trade Frontier," hosted by the Empire Club of Canada. Other participants include Nickolas Steele, former Grenadian politician and cabinet minister; Nimal Amitrigala, president of Grace Foods Canada; and Dexter John, CEO, Financial Services Regulatory Authority of Ontario. Thursday, Feb. 26, at 5:30 p.m. ET at a location to be announced. Register: empireclubofcanada.com.

FRIDAY, FEB. 27

Black History Month Closing Celebration—Elevate International hosts a Black History Month Closing Celebration honouring the legacy of Black people while recognizing and celebrating Black women's leadership. Participants will include heads of mission and community builders. Friday, Feb. 27, at 5:15 p.m. ET at Sir John A. Macdonald Building, 144 Wellington St., Ottawa. Details via Eventbrite.